



# From PM to Jadeja, city goes mad over yoga, mud baths

SREELATHA MENON  
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FROM Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to cricketer Ajay Jadeja, the list of people attending yoga classes, mud baths, oil massages and ayurvedic therapies is impressive.

The clientele for naturopathy, ayurveda and yoga is rapidly expanding with more and more of the Capital's heavyweights patronising these alternative health therapies. Take dhara. It involves pouring 2 litres of oil on the head over one hour and pizhichil, pouring oil all over the body for an hour, followed by a massage.

There are those who come during weekends or holidays just for a refreshing body massage and there are those who come seeking relief from stubborn spondylitis, arthritis, obesity, depression and hypertension.

One such centre of "alternative healing" is the Bapu Nature Cure Centre at Patparganj. Overcrowded during weekends, at least 60 persons come in every day for a massage. While vehicles of VIPs in the Delhi government are regularly seen collecting massage workers from the centre for home service, MLA Meera Bharadwaj drops in whenever she is free, for a mud pack or a steam bath to treat arthritis-related problems. Bharadwaj says that she has benefited immensely from naturopathy.

Swami Dharmananda, who begins training about 150 people at the break of dawn each day at

the Adhyatma Sadhna Kendra in Chattarpur, gave Vajpayee regular lessons in yoga and meditation recently. The training lasted for the three winter months and today, says his foster daughter Namita Bhattacharya, Vajpayee is doing his exercises on his own. "The disabling pain in his knee is also better," she says.

Vice-President Krishan Kant is a regular at the CGHS Ayurveda Hospital in Lodhi Road and former President S.D. Sharma's wife Vimla Sharma is also a regular there.

As far as ayurveda goes, the other popular haunts are the ayurveda clinic in Holy Family Hospital and the Ayurveda Ashram at Safdarjung Enclave. At the latter venue at least three former Prime Ministers — including L.K. Gujral, Chandrashekhar and Narasimha Rao — have been visitors off and on, for treating arthritis and spondylitis-related complaints with pizhichil, elakizhi (sponging with a pack of medicinal leaves and powder), vasthi (medicinal enema).

According to Sudha Asokan, who started the clinic with two massage cots in 1990, most people come in for treatment of slipped disc and obesity. For obesity, the clinic offers a special powder massage, says Asokan, who has now expanded from one clinic in Chanakypuri to another in Safdarjung enclave.

Among her clients are dancers Leela Samson and Bharti Shivaji, who seek relief from body pain

and also Phoolan Devi, who came after being beaten up in a clash. She stayed admitted for two weeks and went back happy, recalls Asokan.

But apart from the very traditional ayurvedic and naturopathic massages there are the string of massage centres run by Blossom Kochchar and their clients are air-hostesses from various eastern airlines as also harried and tired working women who come for Blossom's scented oil massages.

Said a worker at the Blossom's clinic in Dhaula Kuan: "The air-hostesses ask for the massage that can put them to sleep. They all come here tired and sad but return relaxed and fresh."

Despite the charges. It is only Rs 500 per massage, says the woman at Blossom's. The ayurvedic massages which are sought after by cricketers like Ajay Jadeja and Chetan Sharma are the most expensive, between Rs 700 to Rs 800 for a single massage, while yoga and naturopathy are less expensive. A massage at Bapu Nature Cure costs Rs 100 while yoga and meditation are taught free by the Jain monks at the Sadhna Kendra.

Not only are the alternatives getting popular, they are also finding acceptance in allopathy as a complementary rather than an opposing factor. While hospitals like Batra and Escorts have started their own ayurveda departments, the AIIMS refers patients with cardiac problems to the Sadhna Kendra.

