I was shocked out of my wits as I read the monthly column by a ‘Media Celebrity Yoga Teacher’ of Mumbai in the leading glossy, commercial, alternative medicine and health magazine of India.

She was writing on Prana and Pranayama and in the first paragraph was trying to be candidly honest in confessing that she had always thought Pranayama was only breath control till recently when she learned that it was the expansion of Prana the life force!!! She seemed overjoyed with this ‘new’ discovery of hers without realizing the deeper implications of her Avidya (ignorance).

Where was she all these days? Didn’t her Yoga teachers / Gurus ever mention this to her? Or maybe she was not ready for that ‘non materialistic’ aspect of Yoga as she was too busy ‘running the race’ for the most popular Yoga teacher in India! How was she teaching Pranayama all these years with this limited ignorant view? If this was her understanding of Pranayama, than were Asanas just another form of stretching and meditation just learning to sleep sitting up!

A well known saying reminds us that, “the higher we go the farther we fall”. As teachers we are expected to set the standard and the term Yogacharya itself means, ‘one who teaches by example’. If a prominent Yoga teacher’s level of ignorance of ‘Real Yoga’ is such, then what to speak of the general public?

How can I blame her alone for this level of ignorance when at one of the leading Yoga centres down south, I was stunned to hear the resident Swami talk with dismay of his interaction with Yoga teacher trainees the day before where they had displayed blissful ignorance of the five Yamas and Niyamas!! What were those students learning if they didn’t even know this fundamental aspect of Yoga? Were they too busy learning Anatomy and Physiology, dietetics, therapy techniques for this and that and other subjects that the learning of Yoga was washed away in the deluge of subjects studied in the university pattern?

How can I forget the Yoga teacher of a reputed school in Pondicherry who told me with frankness, ”I don’t bother trying to follow the Yama-Niyama as I know that I can never follow them to perfection. So, rather than fail trying, I would rather just work on Asanas etc!” perhaps he also never heard of the Kyudo master Hideharu Onuma who said, “To not try for perfection is to be less than human”.

Recently I happened to watch the final practical exam of a Diploma in Yoga course conducted by a college. It was humiliating to see that the students of the one year course didn’t know the difference between Utkat Asana (the squatting posture) and Ushtra Asana (the camel posture)! Dhanurasana (the bow posture) and Trikona Asana (the triangle posture) were similarly confused by many of the examinees. Of more than a dozen questions asked, only one was partially answered, yet due to institutional reasons such candidates were not failed in their practicals!!! What are they going to teach in the name of Yoga? Better be a good plumber than a bad Yoga teacher I told one of them who was also working part-time as a plumber! Yoga teachers and Gurus are nowadays graded on how many students they have and how big an institution they have managed to build! Teaching thousands in a class is the way to attract media publicity and who cares what happens to the poor participants who have no clue to the practices at all. Herd mentality is such that most participants are there just because it is a status symbol. All they want is the chance to say later with conceit “I was at that mega camp conducted by so and so and so, were you not spiritual enough to be there??”

Another University with good intention teaches Yoga in mass scale and you have nearly 300 students attending their exams on the same day! Which examiner can evaluate the performance of Shat Karmas, Asanas or Pranayamas of the student in such a situation? What quality will be churned out ultimately in this mass production factory?

I used to think that two week and one month ‘short’ teachers training courses were bad enough but now we have institutions giving away certificates in Yoga just for the money. Pay the exorbitant fees and collect your certificate, irrespective of whether you know head or tail about Yoga!! In a recent interview, the interviewer
truthfully reported that this prominent Yoga teacher of many years standing was now being helped by his son-in-law in his (hold your breath) "BUSINESS"!!!
YES! A BUSINESS! THAT IS WHAT YOGA TEACHING HAS BECOME TODAY IN INDIA, THE MOTHERLAND OF YOGA.