

A BRIEF HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION TO YOGA SPORT

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Yoga is an art and science that developed from the core of **Sanathana Dharma**. The Yogic life is the living of a unified holistic concept that assures positive health, happiness, longevity and spiritual evolution. The goals of the Yogi are the sustained struggle against past conditioning, an attempt to control one's inner environment in order to focus inward. Yoga is isometric, pitting one part of the body against the other and the Yogi strives to be "more perfect today, than he/she was yesterday". It is practically impossible for classical Yogasanas, Pranayamas and other Yoga practices to harm the practitioner when they are performed in the proper manner.

Though the world of sports and that of Yoga lie on nearly opposite poles, they have a lot to offer one another. They can stimulate, strengthen and benefit the practitioners of either science to a great extent when approached properly and with an understanding of their respective merits and limitations. **Yogasana competitions can be an effective link between Yoga and sports**. It is now necessary for the practitioners of Yoga and sports to understand the benefits of their close association with one another and create the needed framework in which both can complement each another more effectively. **The association between these two sciences can provide humankind with a disciplined, strong, efficient and healthy body and mind for further evolution towards the Divine.**

Yoga in its wholistic sense can never be competitive, and there exists no objective measurement by which one person can be declared more yogic than another. Therefore the term "competitive Yoga" is a paradox and has no real meaning. However the proficiency of the Sadhaka can be compared with that of another in the performance of **Yogasanas, Kriyas, Mudras, Pranayamas and Shat Karmas**.

Yogasana competitions are a 'fact' in today's Yoga world and are mushrooming up in all directions. When conducted efficiently and when the competitors approach them with the right Yogic attitude of 'Nishkama Karma', (i.e., selfless action), then Yogasana competitions have a lot to offer. They stimulate the young minds and give them an outlet for their competitive spirit, drive and energy. Youngsters learn to take a 'win' with the same equanimity (Samabhava) as a 'loss'. They learn to accept that on any given day someone else may be better than themselves. They learn to accept the 'highs' with the 'lows' and realize that proper planning, dedicated and disciplined practice, and enthusiastic participation are more important than the result. The youngsters are stimulated to intense practice and thus develop amazing body skills, which they may not develop otherwise. The Yogic attitude, "If you win, you win and if you lose, you also win because you learn" can be inculcated as a healthy positive life attitude.

Yogasana competitions provide a meeting point for youngsters to meet and interact positively with others having similar interests. Formation of a group of similar minded Yoga Sadhakas can reinforce the individual's practice whenever it slackens due to any reason. **Positive 'peer pressure'** creates a back up to counter any inertia that may hinder the practitioner in their Sadhana. Due to competition, the Sadhaka is shaken out of the complacency that tends to

creep in when the practice of Yoga becomes a habit as monotonous as brushing of teeth in the morning. They make sure they don't miss their practice and put in extra energy and time to keep in shape. The competitive edge sharpens and focuses the body awareness, thus fostering greater accuracy and perfection that in turn stimulates the real Yogic growth.

Spectators and lay observers at these competitions get stimulated to take up the practice of Yoga and this draws them as well as the participants into a deeper Sadhana. The basic idea of **Yoga receives wide general publicity** and this can 'open doors' for many who are ignorant of this ancient art and science of mind and body. Thus we can see how Yogasana competitions, when put in the framework of competitive sport can restore the competitions to their original purpose, which was to produce a **'healthy mind in a healthy body'**.

To prevent Yogasana Competitions from falling into the trap of other sports, it is important that those in-charge of such competitions must stand firm on moral and ethical issues. Competitors must sign a statement that they are vegetarian, non-smoking, non-drinking and non-drug users. They must have a basic knowledge of Yoga theory and marks should be allotted for Yoga deportment and character. They must be regular practitioners who are attached to either Yogashrams or accredited Yoga groups. When all these considerations are taken into account, then 'Yoga Sport' can be a beacon light for other sports in terms of living the Yogic and sporting ideals. Thus Yoga Sport can add as well as benefit from the association with the sporting world and be a proper link between the two worlds of Yoga and sports.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF YOGA SPORT:

Yogasana competitions are part and parcel of the modern Yoga world and various national and international organizations are involved in the development and propagation of the ideals of Yoga Sport.

In India we have the **INDIAN YOGA FEDERATION** and the **YOGA FEDERATION OF INDIA** that have been conducting Yogasana competitions in various age groups for the past **four decades** in all states of our country. We also have the **Yoga Confederation of India** and the **South Indian Yoga Federation** that are relatively more recent in their inception. The **Asian Union of Yoga** is also working for the propagation of Yoga Sport in the Asian countries.

Pondicherry Yogasana Association (PYA) founded by **Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri** has been in the forefront of the **Yoga Sport** movement and Swamiji is hailed as one of the **founding fathers** of this concept. Since **1975** the PYA has held Annual Pondy State Yogasana Championships and after the revival of the association's activities 2001, the **17th and 18th Pondy State Yogasana Championships** were held at the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research in **November 2002 and 2003**.

The **19th Pondicherry State and 1st Tamil Nadu State Invitation YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2004** was organised by the PYA in November 2004 and **600** competitors from Pondicherry and all over Tamil Nadu participated in this championship. Nearly **750 medals** and **1500 merit certificates** were won by the worthy winners in **8 events** such as common group, front bending, back bending, twisting, standing and hand balancing Yogasanas spread over **6 age groups** ranging from the below 5 years to the above 40 years categories.

20TH PONDICHERRY STATE AND 2ND TAMIL NADU STATE YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2005 :The logistics of the event were staggering: more than 500

contestants ranging in age from three to 78 years, representing every nook and cranny of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry; 200 separate competitive events in six age categories; 600 medals and 1200 merit prizes awarded; four competitions held simultaneously on four different stages from 8 am to 10 pm on August 14; prize distribution within two hours of the event's completions. A large auditorium hall buzzing with the excited, happy chattering of hundreds of children and adults alike. These were the spectacular circumstances of the 20th Pondicherry State and 2nd Tamil Nadu State Yoga Sport Championship staged August 13, 14 and 15th in Pondicherry. Thirty teams from all over Tamil Nadu including Neyveli, Tanjore, Trichy, Erode, Coimbatore, Chennai, Madurai, Karur, Vilupuram, Cuddalore and Chidambaram as well as wide areas of Pondicherry attended the championship in full strength. More than 200 competitions were held for the participants from 8 am to 10 pm on the 14th August in six categories of Yoga Asanas: common group, forward bending, hand balancing, twisting, standing and back bending events. 600 medals and 1200 merit certificates were awarded for male and female categories separately in six different age groups. Students of SADAY, a school for mentally challenged special children presented a heart warming Yoga demonstration on the occasion along with Lalith Kumar, a visually and mentally challenged special youth from Chidambaram.

21ST PONDICHERRY AND 3RD TAMIL NADU YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2006: Nearly 600 contestants ranging in age from three to 70 years, representing every nook and cranny of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry took part in the 21st PONDICHERRY STATE and 3rd TAMIL NADU INVITATION YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2006 held at Pondicherry from the 17-19th November 2006. The competition that had 200 separate competitive events in seven age categories with 1000 prizes and merit certificates was organised by the **Pondicherry Yogasana Association** which is the official body for Yoga Sport in Pondicherry.

22ND PONDICHERRY AND 4TH TAMIL NADU YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP: Nearly 500 contestants ranging in age from two to 70 years, representing 19 institutions of Pondicherry took part in the 22nd PONDICHERRY STATE YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2007 held at Subulakshmi Mahal in Muthialpet on the 17th and 18th of November 2007. **R V Krithika** and **Mohana Padmanabhan** bagged the Senior Championship Awards for female and male competitors respectively while **Poonkuzhali** and **A. Kandavel** won the Junior Championship Awards in the girls and boys categories respectively.

23rd PONDICHERRY STATE YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP: The 23rd Pondicherry State Yoga Sport Championship was conducted in a grand manner in December 2008 at Naveena Gardens Hall. More than 600 participants took part this year and their expertise in both Yoga Asanas and Yoga theory were tested. This year the competition was conducted simultaneously on four stages with 50 jury members and 20 volunteers performing their roles willingly and untiringly despite the huge workload. A special event was held for special children of SADAY school (both with the physical and mental handicaps) for the second consecutive year. More than 30 special children gave a very moving performance and prizes were distributed immediately after their competition with four levels being awarded prizes in junior and senior categories for male and female. The **Champion of Champions** trophy for this year was awarded to **M. Swaroopa Ramanan** in the male category and **S. Devasena (S. Soumiya)** in the female category. The competition came to an end with the valedictory function chaired by Thiru Om Shakthi Sekar, MLA, with Thiru T.P. Santhaseelan, Kalaimamani Pulavar I. Pattabiramane, Yogacharini Dr. Nalini Devi and Dr. Sugatham of SADAY in attendance.

24th PONDICHERRY STATE YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP: The 24th Puducherry State Yoga Sport Championship was conducted in a grand manner in November 2009 at the Subulakshmi Mahal. Nearly 700 participants took part in this event despite the heavy rain that lashed Puducherry this week. Expertise and proficiency of the competitors was tested in both their performance of the various types of Yoga Asanas as well as knowledge of Yoga philosophy, psychology and history. Ammaji who is President of the Puducherry Yogasana Association inaugurated the championship with Guru Puja to the founder Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj. The competitions were conducted simultaneously on four stages with 75 jury members and 25 volunteers performing their roles willingly and untiringly despite the huge workload. There were 46 different separate categories for both male and female competitors ranging from pre-school toddlers to mature college level students. A special event was held for children of the SADAY School for special children. 40 of these special children who have mental and physical handicaps participated and not only performed the Asanas but also expressed the definitions of Yoga in the most sweet and charming manner. Yogachemmal Meena Ramanathan has been doing yeoman service for these kids and the loving bond they share is something that moves one to tears. The sight of these children expressing the definitions of Yoga would have surely even moved Lord Krishna and Maharishi Patanjali. The climax of the event was the grand CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS competition where the first prize winners from all the categories competed against each other in a spectacular show of Yoga Asana skill as well as expression of their admirable knowledge of Yoga theory. Champion of Champions trophy for this year was bagged by M. SIDDARDHAN in the male category and S. SABARISHREE in the female category. Both these youngsters are students of Yoganjali Natyalayam, the premier institute for Yoga and the Classical Indian Fine Arts that has been producing innumerable champions over the past 16 years with the blessings of Swamiji and Ammaji. Dr A GNANAM, Former Vice Chancellor of Puducherry University was awarded the title of KARMA YOGA SHIRONMANI in recognition of his illustrious and selfless service for the cause of higher education in India. Shri PARAMAKEDOU received the MOOLIGAI MARUTTUVA CHEMMAL award for his service through Herbal medicine in Puducherry. YOGA CHEMMAL awards for the year 2009 were bestowed upon Thiru R Chandrasekar, Thiru S Tamilsengolan, Thiru G Dayanidy, Thiru T Sathish Kumar, Thiru V Gnanavelu, Smt V Suseela, Thiru Venkatachalapathy and Selvi G Kanimozhi in recognition of their achievements and efforts for the cause of Yoga. Three new DVDs on Yoga by Dr Ananda were released by Dr A Gnanam on the occasion. These DVDs are on Advanced Pranayamas, Yoga for Pelvic Health and Yoga for Sleeping disorders. These are part of the extensive project of Ananda Ashram at ICYER, Puducherry (www.icyer.com) of putting out various videos related to applications of Gitananda Yoga in association with SUPER AUDIO, Chennai (www.musicandchants.com) who is a partner of UNESCO'S Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity. Mr. E. Srinivassan of Yatra Multimedia, Auroville who has directed the DVDs was honoured on the occasion. Students of Yognat presented a spectacular Team Yoga tableau to bring the curtain down on another grand success with the blessings of Swamiji and Ammaji who continue to inspire us all to do our best for the cause of Yoga and Indian Culture.

25th PONDICHERRY STATE YOGA SPORT CHAMPIONSHIP 2010: A special milestone was achieved by the Pondicherry Yogasana Association when it organized the 'Silver Jubilee', Pondicherry State Yoga Sport Championship on 27-28 November 2010 at Sri Subulakshmi Mahal. The much awaited event was very special for it was the resultant flowering of the pioneering Yoga Seva of Swamiji manifesting through the yeoman service of our beloved and most respected Ammaji. All credit for such a grand success lies at the lotus feet of our beloved Ammaji who continues to stimulate all of us to do our best for Yoga.

The competitions were conducted on three different stages and the audience comprising of the parents, participating students and teachers as well as Yoga enthusiasts kept moving around and enjoying the grand spectacle. More than 600 participants took part and were divided into various age and gender-based categories so that the competition was amongst equals in age and gender. Each group had separate prizes for male and female competitors who could participate in the general competition where they did three compulsory and two own choice Asanas or in the special category where they performed five Asanas of their choice from a list of 50 Asanas belonging to the front bending, back bending, twisting, hand balancing and non-hand balancing varieties. There was also a demonstration event held for children under the age of 5 years to stimulate them to adopt the Yoga life. There was also a special free Yoga session conducted by Shri Mohanakrishnan and Smt. Lalitha Shanmugam to benefit parents and visitors who had come with the participants with so many expressing their appreciation of this novel idea of involving parents and relatives this way. Apart from all these groups another special group consisted of the 35 mentally-challenged special children, from the SADAY School for Children with Special Needs run by the dedicated Dr. Sugatham. More than 20 dyslexic children with various learning disabilities also participated in a special event from the Bridges School. Smt Meena has been working with these Divine children for the past five years teaching them Yoga on a regular basis. Dr. R. Balaji has also joined in this Yoga Seva by teaching dyslexic children. This is a very special and significant event, a trendsetter to encourage the enthusiasm of such mentally and physically challenged children of Pondicherry who stand to gain so much through Yoga. All the competitive events got over the same evening with the cooperation and support of all the jury members and the dedicated volunteers who worked in tandem to have everything go forward as smoothly as possible. The theory exam was conducted in the evening and the children had to write a paper on Yoga philosophy, theory and psychology as well as technical aspects based on the Primer of Yoga Theory compiled by Dr. Ananda. Students had to be proficient in both the physical as well as theoretical aspects of Yoga in order to succeed. At the end of a grueling and hard fought event, Master A.S.ANIRUDH and Miss DEBOLINA PAL emerged as the well deserving “Champion of Champions” in male and female categories respectively. They both received glittering trophies in the valedictory and prize distribution ceremony held in the afternoon on the second day. More than 200 winners in each of the 32 age group and gender categories were really pleased to lay their eager hands on these awards that were a fitting reward for all the hard work put in by them. All jury members and volunteers who had contributed towards the grand success of the event were honoured with shawls and special mementos, exquisite wall clocks with Swamiji’s photo celebrating the silver jubilee event of PYA. It truly represents the manifestation of Swamiji’s dreams of taking the message of Yoga to all sections of our society in an inspiring and enlightening manner.

In order to create interest in the art and science of Yoga, the PYA has organised Swami Gitananda Best Yoga Youth Award competitions since 2000. In this competition the competitors are tested not only in their Asana skill but also in their Yogic thinking and exposition in addition to other aspects of the art and science of Yoga.

EIGHTH SWAMI GITANANDA BEST CHILD AND YOUTH AWARDS: The Pondicherry Yogasana Association organized the SWAMI GITANANDA BEST YOUTH & CHILD AWARDS 2007 competitions during December 2007 and January 2008 at the Yoganjali Natyalayam premises in Pondicherry. More than a hundred children and youth participated in this event that was held for the EIGHTH year running. This year the youth category included students who were studying in class seven and above while those below the

seventh standard participated in the child events. The Honorable Former Minister of Education, Thiru SP SIVAKUMAR was the Chief Guest of the Awards Ceremony and praised the amazing grace and skill of the young students who put on an excellent show of Yoga, dance and drama. He also inaugurated the Pondicherry Yoga Registry that is aimed at giving opportunities to the qualified and experienced yoga teachers of Pondicherry. The Special Guest of the evening Dr GNANAM who is an internationally acclaimed educationalist and former vice chancellor of many universities praised the efforts of Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani and Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani in bringing out the creative and spiritual best of their students. He also released three new books authored by Dr Ananda. **S Geethalakala** was declared winner of the **Swami Gitananda Best Youth Award 2007** while **S Vidyashankari** won the **Swami Gitananda Best Child Award 2007**. Both received their glittering trophies for the eminent guests of the evening.

NINTH SWAMI GITANANDA BEST CHILD AND YOUTH AWARDS 2008: The “Swami Gitananda Best Child and Youth Competition” which was conducted for the ninth consecutive year has been ingeniously devised and evolved through the years into a creative educational exercise by Ammaji and Dr Ananda with the support of faculty members and senior students of Yognat. **S Manju Priya** won the BEST YOUTH AWARD while S Devasena and S Sivasankar were 1st and 2nd runner up respectively. The BEST CHILD AWARD was bagged by **E Priyangaa** while Dhivya Priya Bhavanani and Debolina Pal bagged the 1st and 2nd runner up awards respectively. The inaugural **Senior World Citizen Yoga Award** was presented to Yogacharini **Natalia Aronov (Arshavkaya) - Tasha** of Russia / Germany for her sincere and dedicated living of a truly yogic life at the age of seventy years. The various competitions had been held over several weekends in December and January. As in the past few years a team of 10 members had participated from Cuddalore under the guidance of their Yoga teacher Mrs Prema and HARIPRASAD of the Team was declared OUTSTANDING YOUTH and awarded for his proficiency and efforts in Yoga. Dr. Ananda organised the event with support of Sri C Shanmugam, Selvi Reena D Joseph, Sri G Dayanidy, Sri R Balaji and Smt Meena Ramanathan. The dedication of the executive committee members of PYA and senior students of Yognat helped to conduct the events in a very efficient manner.

TENTH SWAMI GITANANDA BEST CHILD AND YOUTH AWARDS 2009: For the tenth year young people of Puducherry received an opportunity to exercise their *Yogic muscles* by participating in the **Swami Gitananda Yoga and Child Awards 2009 Competitions**. More than 150 young ones showed their Yogic skill in action through seven kinds of individual events and four team events. The categories were: *Yoga Art Designing, Yoga Art, Fancy Yoga Skit, Fancy Yoga Novelty, Yoga Novelty, Alert Yoga, Dumb Charades Individual. The team events were: Team Quiz, Team Crossword, Team Dumb Charades and Rhythmic Yoga Demo.* The person who collected the most points from these various competitions was declared winner. **Best Youth Award went to S. Divakar.** First Runner Up went to **S. Sivasankar** and Second Runner Up went to **S. Devasena.** **Best Child Award went to Debolina Pal.** First Runner Up went to **P. Preethika** and Second Runner Up went to **Dhivya Priya Bhavanani.** The competitions were spread out over a time frame of two months, December 2009 and January 2010 and events were held each weekend. A tremendous amount of organizational effort was made by senior students of Yoganjali Natyalayam in promoting all the events. The direction of the competition was handed over by Dr. Ananda to the young couple, Shri G. Dayanidy and Smt Reena, both now young professionals but still offering their selfless service to Yoganjali Natyalayam, giving back what they were given. Dayanidy had won the Youth Award in 2004 and Reena had won the Youth Award in 2005. Prizes were distributed at a gala function attended by hundreds on

February 21st at Yoganjali Natyalayam. On that occasion special awards were also made to outstanding personalities in recognition of Yogic Social Services. Presentation of **Swami Gitananda Global Yoga Senior Citizen Award** was made to **Yogacharini LALITHA DEVI of New York, USA** and Presentation of **Karma Yoga Shironmani Award** was made to **Thiru K. VENKATRAMAN, MD, Dinamalar Newspaper.**

11th SWAMI GITANANDA BEST CHILD AND YOUTH AWARDS 2010: For the eleventh year young people of Pondicherry received an opportunity to exercise their Yogic muscles by participating in the Swami Gitananda Yoga and Child Awards 2010 Competitions. More than 100 young ones showed their Yogic skill in action through seven kinds of individual events and three team events. The categories were: Yoga Art Designing, Yoga Fancy Dress, Yoga Novelty and Surprise Yoga Event while team events included Team Quiz, Team Dumb Charades and Yoga Demo Work. The award and prize distribution ceremony was held on 13 March 2011 at Yoganjali Natyalayam, Pondicherry. The chief guest was Prof. Dr. M Ramadass, Former Member of Parliament and current Director Studies and Dean School of Management, Pondicherry University. S. SABARISHREE won Best Youth Award while DHIVYA PRIYA BHAVANANI bagged the Best Child Award for the Year 2010. Krishna Kumar and A.S. Anirudh bagged 1st and 2nd Runner Up Awards respectively in Youth category while P. Preethika and S. Surega bagged 1st and 2nd Runner Up Awards respectively in Child category. Yogacharini CATHY DAVIS of the UK was honored with the commemorative title award of “YOGA CHEMMAL” for her service for the cause of Yoga. The competitions were spread out over a time frame of two months and multiple events were held each weekend in December 2010 and January 2011. A tremendous amount of organizational effort was made by senior students of Yoganjali Natyalayam in promoting all the events. Dr. Ananda supervised the event under the guidance of Ammaji. Shri G. Dayanidy and Smt. Reena Dayanidy, both now young professionals but still offering their selfless service to Yoganjali Natyalayam, organized all the events in an excellent manner in cooperation with other senior students and faculty members of Yognat. The aim of the Swami Gitananda Youth and Child Awards Competition is to stimulate the youth of India to take up the study of the wholistic concept of Yoga. This ensures their present and future health, happiness and well being, and enables them to avoid the pitfalls of modern living, that is, various bad habits like drug addiction and alcoholism etc. Furthermore, the Project aims to educate the public as to the true meaning of Yoga.

PYA has also introduced **Yoga Theory** aspects into all Yogasana Competitions and this has exposed competitors to the great science of Yoga in addition to developing their skill in Yogasanas. PYA has been the pioneer in introducing awards for Yogic personality as well as Yogic behavior in competitions conducted by the PYA.

The **Pondicherry Government** has held an **International Yogasana Competition** every year since 1992 during the **International Yoga Festival** conducted by the **Tourism Department** and this draws hundreds of contestants from numerous states of India as well as many foreign countries. PYA has been in the forefront of supporting the Tourism Department in organizing the Yogasana Competitions and the **General Secretary Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani** has COORDINATED these International Yoga competitions since 2001.

15TH INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL 2008: As in the past many years since the first festival in 1993, our President and General Secretary were invited speakers and consultants at this year's festival. Dr. Ananda also organized the Yoga theory exam as well as

the Yoga Viva for the championship round and the eminent dignitaries from all over the world very well appreciated this unique aspect of the Yoga Sport in Pondicherry. Dr. Ananda also compiled a special booklet of Yoga practices and VCD that was released on the occasion. Many faculty members of Yognat were selected as Juries for this year's festival and also taught at the "Feel for Yoga" classes conducted at six venues in Pondicherry during the festival days.

16TH INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL 2009: Ammaji and Dr Ananda were invited speakers and consultants at the 16th Annual Yoga Festival that has seen the efforts of Swamiji and Ammaji to make Pondicherry a truly Yoga destination come true. As usual Dr. Ananda organized the Yoga theory exam as well as Yoga Viva for the championship round and eminent dignitaries from all over the world appreciated this unique and important aspect of Yoga Sport in Pondicherry. Many faculty members of Yognat were selected as Juries for this year's festival and also lectured on various topics at the festival. Smt Meena Ramanathan coordinated the lecture sessions in an able and pleasant manner. In the extremely competitive categories G Dayanidy and M Siddharthan won first places and participated in the championship round while J Sanghavi and Debolina Pal also won prizes in their categories.

17TH INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL 2010: 17th International Annual Yoga Festival held in January 2010 by the Government of Puducherry, Department of Tourism, was a grand success. With more than 1000 delegates from all over India and nearly twenty countries, many proclaimed the festival to be "**The Best Ever!**" Ammaji and Dr. Ananda served as unofficial advisers for the event. Dr. Ananda was the "backbone" of many events, especially the highly competitive Yoga Sports (Yoga Asana) Competition. **S Sabharisree, M Siddhardan** and **G Dayanidy** brought name and fame to Yognat and Puducherry with their great success. The Yoganjali Natyalayam Cultural Troupe enthralled the audience with a spectacular evening's performance on 5th January while teacher trainees at ICYER were Invited Speakers in the Lecture Sessions. The Yoga Festival was begun in 1993 under the direct stimulus and patronage of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri and it has been held for seventeen years without break. It is the only Government-sponsored Yoga Festival in the world.

18TH INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL 2011: The tranquil, spiritual shores of Pondicherry were the kshetra, the field on which was played out the magnificent success of the 18th International Yoga Festival organised by the Tourism Directorate of the Government of Pondicherry from 4-7 January 2011. This was the 18th edition of this annual event held every year since 1993 when Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi and Shri MP Pundit launched the first edition under the patronage of Thiru V Vaithiyalingam, the then Chief Minister of Pondicherry and Sri Har Swaroop Singh the then Lt Governor. Such a festival is unique for it is the longest and maybe only such directly Government sponsored and organised International Yoga Festival anywhere in the world where all traditions are represented and various facets of Yoga brought to light under the same umbrella. This year was the most successful one in the festival's history with more than 1100 delegates participating in discourses, workshops, lecture demonstrations and Yogasana championship. The highlight of the cultural evenings was the 'Muruga Muruga' dance drama presented by Yognat. Ms Kumari Selja, Union Minister for Tourism inaugurated the festival in the presence of Thiru V Narayanasamy, Union Minister of State for Culture. Other dignitaries present on the occasion included the Lt Governor of Pondicherry Dr. Iqbal Singh and the Chief Minister Thiru V Vaithiyalingam. Both the Union Minister Thiru V Narayanasamy and Chief Minister paid rich tributes to Swamiji and Ammaji for their unparalleled service for the cause of Yoga in Pondicherry and the Chief minister announced that his government is considering setting up a Yoga University in response to the requests

for the same that have poured in from all parts of the globe. The dynamic former minister of education and tourism, Thiru S P Sivakumar reiterated his plea that the Government of India must honour Ammaji with an apt National Award at the earliest. During the festival, workshops were conducted on different traditions of Yoga allowing Yoga enthusiasts a glimpse of the important highlights of each tradition thus realising the 'Unity in Diversity' of such illustrious, living traditions of Yoga. On the first day the Gitananda tradition was represented by Ammaji, Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani.

The Yogasana Championship is always a tedious affair and hundreds of competitors vie for the top honours. In categories ranging from 10-15 years till 50 and above, they display their skill in various Yogasanas such as forward bending, back bending, hand and leg balancing and twisting postures. They also take a written theory examination and public viva-voce that tests their knowledge of the Yoga theory thus making sure that those who win have both the practical and theoretical awareness of Yoga. This is another unique aspect of the Pondicherry Festival for most other such competitions are a mere test of ones flexibility only. This year was historical as **AS ANIRUDH** of Yoganjali Natyalayam bagged the **CHAMPION OF CHAMPION AWARD** thus bringing name and fame to Pondicherry after 11 long years since **M NIRAIMATHI** had won the female championship award. Other stars of Yognat who made it to the final round by virtue of winning first place in their respective categories included Sri G DAYANIDY, M SIDDARTHAN and G SURENDRAN while S SABRAISHREE bagged second place in her highly competitive category. This was a record of sorts for never have so many students from one institute been part of the final rounds in this festival! On behalf of ICYER, Yoganjali Natyalayam, Pondicherry Yogasana Association and the Worldwide Gitananda Yoga Family we offer our sincere thanks and congratulations to the Director, officials and staff of the Tourism Department for their great service for the cause of Yoga and our Indian culture.

The **INTERNATIONAL YOGA FEDERATION** based in South America has held **International Yoga Championships** nearly every year in various countries around the world. The **FIRST INTERNATIONAL YOGA CHAMPIONSHIP** was held in **1989** at Pondicherry under the guidance of **YOGA MAHARISHI DR SWAMI GITANANDA GIRI** and **more than 20 International Yoga Championships** have been held since then.

Indian Universities have also taken up this concept of Yoga competitions in their **Inter University Championships** and every year there is an All India **Inter University Yoga Championship**. Pondicherry University team has participated in this competition on numerous occasions and won various prizes.

Vivekananda Kendra Yogas (sVYASA) at Bangalore has conducted the National and International **HIMALAYA YOGA OLYMPIAD** for the past decade. This was also introduced in Pondicherry in 2001 by the PYA.

Various organizations and state Yoga associations are holding Yoga competitions in their respective states and West Bengal, Haryana, Karnataka, Andra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are in the forefront of this movement.

Thus we can see how the concept of YOGA SPORT is very well entrenched at both the national and international levels and is an effective tool to attract the youth towards the great art and science of Yoga.