

RIMYI 50th Anniversary Celebration

Five IYASE members teamed up to attend the final two weeks of the 50th Anniversary celebration at Pune. Carolyn Leech shared highlights included asanas in the RIMYI practice hall, 54 hours of yoga with eminent RIMYI teachers and the unique 50th Anniversary programs. Read about her memories and insights.

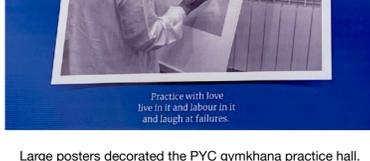


50th Anniversary attendees from Iyengar Yoga Center of Chestnut Hill, TN teacher mentoring program. (bottom row, left to right) Kathryn Wroth, Aretha McKinney, Beth Pugh. (top row, left to right) Rebecca Simmons, Carolyn Leech

Five special programs were hosted in 2024 and 2025 to celebrate the golden anniversary of Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune. We attended the final program January 6-18. For four of us, it was our first trip to India. For our mentor Aretha McKinney, her eighth.

There was a celebratory air. People had journeyed from all over the world to attend. The amazing RIMYI planning team created a spectacular event. In the practice hall, giant overhead posters were hung featuring Gurujii, Geeta and Prashant teaching at RIMYI, along with yoga sutras. All 279 participants wouldn't fit into the RIMYI space, so the program was hosted at PYC Hindu Gymkhana, a ten-minute rickshaw ride away.

During the two-week program, we were enlightened by many teachers from RIMYI delivering classes and segments. There were numerous discussions about the early days of RIMYI.



Large posters decorated the PYC gymkhana practice hall.

The hospitality provided by the RIMYI team was outstanding. Abhijata and others took extra time to make all of us feel welcome, including hosting several question/answer sessions to understand needs and interests of participants. Delicious chai and snacks were offered at the end of each day of the program.

The RIMYI Experience

At the Institute, each participant received a lovely striped prop bag with their passport



Our prop bags featured our photo. It became easier to find ours among the 279 others.

photo on it. This turned out to be helpful: 279 identical prop bags were stored on the practice hall windowsills and racks overnight for two weeks. Two shoulderstand foams, two Pune blankets, one wooden block, one double buckle belt and one traditional belt were packed into the prop bag. We were expected to bring our own yoga mat or buy one at the RIMYI bookstore.



RIMYI primary practice hall. At times, the windows were opened and the fans turned on. Mornings were in the 60s and afternoons in the 80s.

The afternoon before our yoga intensive started, we were allowed into RIMYI for open practice. It was amazing to be in the practice hall I had only seen in videos. There were very large photos way up high at the back of our practice hall suggesting poses. It was lovely to use their props to undo the stiffness from travel. At the end of the hour, we left the practice hall, thrilled to have had the experience of practicing there.

Later, we observed classes from the back of the practice hall. The hall filled with 50 beautiful, energetic children. They were kept moving throughout the whole class. No savasana for them!

The Two-Week Yoga Intensive Experience

On the day our yoga intensive started, Abhijata, knowing many of us would be jet-lagged, offered us yoga poses to help.

The group at the RIMYI 50th Anniversary Celebration was mostly yoga teachers: 38 from USA, 52 from the UK, and people from all over the world. There was one participant in her 20s and the rest were 30 or older.

I am especially thankful to one classmate. Tamara Hockney has an amazing memory of what happens in a class. She documented our 54-hour yoga intensive. Tamara freely shared her blog. <https://www.yoga-glos.co.uk/post/10th-january-2025-day-5-50th-birthday-celebrations>

The Classes

We learned and observed as Prashant, Abhijata, Raya and Srineet taught. Prashant told us about PPC – purpose, process, consequence. Raya took multiple sessions to tell us about the medical classes at RIMYI, where students receive evaluation of what is needed and then a customized yoga sequences developed. Helpers use the props to implement the sequence.

Prashant led many morning sessions. His voice was so familiar, after attending his Saturday morning philosophy sessions on the IYNAUS website.

He told us, "When you age, your yoga changes. Gurujii lost the ability to do many poses but continued his investigation with breath, body, mind, spirit. Don't be focused on asana mechanics and miss the other dynamics"

We had one class featuring a recording by Geetaji, with Abhijata stopping the recording and adding her thoughts and instructions to clarify what Geetaji was telling us to do. So helpful!

The Final Weekend Celebration

I had to leave to return to the USA before the last weekend, but I am told on the final Saturday, the RIMYI children's class gave a special theatrical presentation, explaining how many of the asanas got their names. I heard it was charming. Their program was recorded and stored on the RIMYI youtube site. Prashant gave a keynote address.

On Sunday, Institute Day, the broader yoga community from far and wide gather at RIMYI for a grand celebration. Long-time students reflected on their association with RIMYI. Abhijata conducted a special Moot Court, simulating the proceedings in front of "Judge Prashantiji". Abhijata presented the convincing argument that Iyengar yoga is powerful and effective, from the gross to the subtle. After court adjourned, RIMYI provided lunch for the many local students and out-of-town guests.



Program for the Moot Court with Abhijata on trial.

Reflections...and Looking Ahead

I brought home so many wonderful memories and lessons.

In Pune, Prashant told us to observe if the breath was going east and west. Or north and south. Could we make sounds on the exhale or sounds on the inhale, like the "double e or sweet? I use this wonderful visualization often.

My mentor Aretha McKinney points out that when you attend an Iyengar yoga class on Zoom, you touch one part of the elephant but when you travel to Pune, there are so



The USA contingent. Do you recognize any of these beautiful faces?

many more parts of the elephant to touch and explore. It is a much deeper and richer experience that soaks into your body, mind and spirit. I am so grateful to have explored more of the elephant during those two weeks at the auspicious RIMYI 50th Anniversary Celebration!

The experience has invigorated my passion for personal growth through Iyengar Yoga.

Carolyn Leech
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