

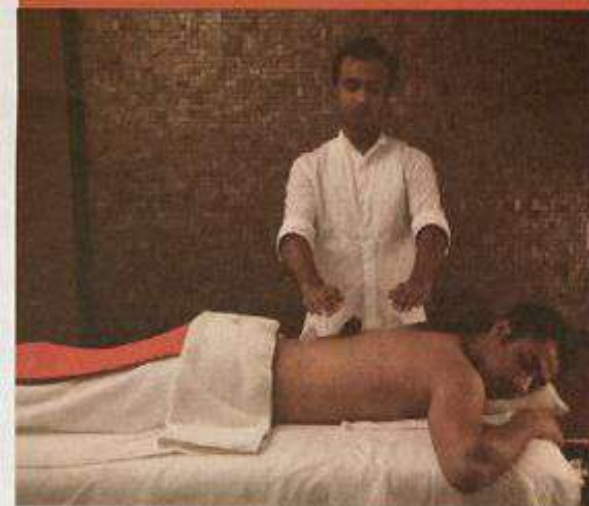
# Introducing the Concept of Spa Culture in Kenya: Enter Neal Dodhia



Neal Dodhia, 28 is a holistic healer cum counsellor and a spa consultant. He owns Aikya Spa in Kolkata, India. Expensive and lack of professionalism are the two reasons he attributes to the languid development of spa culture in Kenya. After acquiring abundant experience and knowledge in spa culture and spiritual healing, Neal, who recently moved back to Kenya, hopes to change the way people look at spa treatments intermingled with spiritual healing in Kenya.

His deep involvement with setting up and consulting for several spas and health centres internationally, have obliged him in holding seminars and conducting workshops on spirituality. In his spare time, Neal experiments with natural ingredients to make natural scrubs and packs for use with his signature therapies.

By Ravneet Sehmi



## Who is Neal Dodhia?

I was born and brought up in Nakuru, Kenya. I am someone who wants to help people and show them the right way to enjoy life fully; I am someone who is in search of the true life.

## You talk about this true life, what is it?

The true meaning of life, for me, is living every moment in the state of bliss and happiness and really following what the teachings of the universe are and keeping in a positive environment.

## Neal, you talk of positivity and an environment that is positive. Is this something that can be a constant in today's hectic pace of lifestyle?

Yes it is possible. *Ravneet*. I have always been in search of spirituality and have been in the path of the light. I explore more about myself and who I am and discover what the purpose of life is. It was with this purpose that I have come to realise positivity and its state and I want to help others find it.

## When was this and how did it happen?

This is about nine years ago when I first went to India. I explored different aspects of myself because there (in India) I was free as opposed to Kenya, where I was in my comfort zone.

## Was India your first go at alternative therapies?

No. When I was 17, just before going to India, I took up a Reiki course here. It was around this time that I met Pierra Verri, a pilates instructor and a healer, with her guidance I got to discover so many things that I was not aware of. I attended her seminars. Then I travelled to India all by myself, and at that age, it became quite lonely there. My knowledge was what guided me through it all.

## What was that like?

Bombay being a crazy city, already posed a challenge for me. After much thought, I harnessed my knowledge as my strength.

## Why did you go to India?

I went to do a course in fashion designing. I was not happy staying there, so after six months, I returned home. In the time I was back, I became a wedding planner, who brought in elements of creativity into my work. But something remained amiss and I found myself in India once again after some months.

## That's interesting. What did you get up to in India?

I took up a basic course in spa management. Here I learnt how to connect spiritual healing with spa therapies. Then a French company approached me and I joined them as a therapist. So I have treated a lot of celebrities and business tycoons and I enjoyed it because it's a passion for me.

## You mentioned celebrities. Care to share some names?

*Ravneet*, I am afraid I cannot reveal these names, because of their celebrity status. I am compelled to keep my client and healer confidentiality.

## That's fine. You own Aikya Spa in Kolkata, India. How did that come about?

Healing comes in many forms. The more I thought about it, spa consultancy and healing went hand in hand and that's when Aikya came to life. Aikya is my own concept of a spa which I set up with one of my colleagues in India, Rishi Anand.

## Why the name Aikya?

It means 'oneness' and 'harmony' and that is what I wanted for my clients. At Aikya, the treatment starts from the time you walk in. It is an experience where your body, mind and soul have been taken care of.

## How do you achieve this?

Immediately the person walks into the spa, they are greeted by sweet scents, warm colours, an appealing decor, different textures to touch and a lot of warmth. This is meant to activate the soul consciousness with you. I train my staff to bring in the spiritual aspect into the business.

## How has this whole experience changed you, if at all?

I have learnt so much about myself. I know my potential and my weaknesses. For example, I used to be very shy but now I express myself confidently. Spirituality has given me guidance on how to help people in their situations. It has brought me to a level playing field and that's where we all need to be. Another example, I am the co-founder of the company but when the house keeper was not there, I never hesitated to be the house keeper.

## Tell me what is this special set of skills that you have? What have you specialised in?

I don't just treat the body or give a massage. There is a lot more. I have to be in a different kind of mental state as a therapist. I have to be very open, receptive and connect with the universe. So we don't just work with the body and the muscle, we treat the mind and the soul.

## What are some of the massages you offer?

Hot Stone therapy, Taiwanese technical reflexology, Swedish massage, Lomi Lomi massage, Thai massage, Bamboo treatment and facials to name a few.

## Would you call holistic alternative a complimentary therapy?

Well it is and it is not.

## So if someone suffers from an illness, and they are on medicine, how do you treat them?

I don't really tell them to stop their medication at once because we are dealing with the mind and the soul. So we will start by gradually weaning them off in stages and eventually they will be able to stop.

## What kind of illnesses can you heal?

Digestive problems like gastric problems, constipation, weight loss programs and even major illnesses like diabetes and cancer. It is not just physical, it's the emotional side so, the minute you start clearing the physical and the emotional side, the physical will change. The spa is not just a place you come and do a massage; it's something much more than that.

## Coming to that point, the spa culture in Kenya has not really taken off to levels like India and other developed nations. Why?

Yes, because, first of all, there are good places but unfortunately the visions and right attitude remain lacking. They are also very expensive. I want to introduce the spa culture as I know it from India and it will be highly received.

## Let me take you back to when you were in India, why did you decide to come back?

Spiritualism is the only answer I have for that, I follow what my spiritual guidance is. And I feel coming back is like connecting with my roots. It was my calling. I love the energy of Kenya, it has so much freshness. I see great potential in this country.

## So if you were to start something for your own, would it be more affordable?

I will make it affordable and valuable. I really believe in touching people's lives. There is a lot of stress and havoc in people's minds. And the few places available that can help relax these people, do not maintain a culture of professionalism.