



A student practices how to get back on her kayak in case it capsizes

IS THIS HOW THE ESKIMOS...

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Mornings at Mumbai's Chowpatty beach can easily pass for an advertisement for adrenaline. Pure. Unadulterated. And 100% satisfaction guaranteed. Joggers huff past on the promenade, while volleyball enthusiasts cheer their favourite teams on in the inside. In the distance, fishermen emerge from the water with the same confidence Ursula Andress exuded all those years ago, in her legendary orange bikini.

Water. Sport. Two words that don't bode well for me. But ever ready to try out new experiences, there I was — strapped up for my first lesson in kayaking. It was easy to spot Rajiv Bhatia of Rae Sport, who was surrounded by a bunch of youngsters ready to do some serious paddling and maneuvering in their neon-coloured kayaks. Sport is a passion for Rajiv, who is an agent of plastic polymers during the week and watersports enthusiast on weekends. Along with wife Reha, who introduced him to the sport during a vacation in Boston, they decided to open Rae

Sports.

READY, STEADY, KAYAK

After a few, brief instructions on shore, about the correct way to hold and steer the paddle, it was time to hit the water. Rajiv felt a two-person kayak would be the best for a beginner, and being the more experienced paddler, he sat inside the second cockpit (seating space for paddler). One push of the kayak and we were off!

His instructions were steady, and very specific — "Hold the paddle in front of you, first to the right, and then to the left. Dip the right side in the water, push the water back with it, lift the paddle, and then dip the left side in the water, push the water with the paddle and then lift the paddle out of the water." This felt easy. I began to get the hang of it. Or so I thought. Now to master that minor detail called technique.

PEACE AT LAST

By the time I reminded myself to raise my head to look up at the horizon, we had left the shore far behind. Cuffe Parade beck-

oned us with its shiny skyscrapers to our left and Walkeshwar to our right. Peacefully bobbing in our yellow, green and pink kayaks felt like a meditative experience for our little group of kayakers. It was a triumphant moment.

The students who were with us for their sessions were mostly girls, under the age of 15; they were to learn how to capsize their kayaks. "This is important, as students need to overcome their fear of drowning if their kayak actually overturns," said Rajiv. Fear seemed the farthest thing from any of the student kayakers' minds, apparent in their eagerness to be the first to jump into the water. Shouts of "Me! Me!" showered the air as one student at a time dived into the water and then confidently clambered back onto the kayak, following instructions from the trainers.

BACK TO REALITY

Before we knew it, it was time to head back to the shore. I was back in the game, ready to re-claim the crown of the water warrior. As I furiously pushed the paddle, first one side and then the other, I was sure that we would reach the shore before the others. It took just one glance over my shoulder to realise that we were exactly where we were five minutes ago, as Rajiv, busy issuing instructions to the rest of the group, was not paddling. As we headed back to the shore, this time for real, in part due to my newly acquired paddling skills, or so I reassured myself, it was not without a great sense of accomplishment. It didn't matter that it was 10 am and the sun was beginning to beat down on us. What made all the difference was that I was one step closer to acquiring a new survival skill.

