

Ancient Indian Yoga ; Its Relevance In Modern Medical Science and Holistic Well Being - A Philosophical Approach

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Abstract: *The ancient Indian knowledge system of Yoga, as described in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, offers a time-tested path for physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. In the present era of materialism, excessive focus on desire and wealth has led to emotional instability, stress, depression, and an increase in suicide rates. This research explores the philosophical foundation of Yoga, various traditional systems, its therapeutic dimensions in modern medical science, and relevance as an alternative medical system.*

Keywords: Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras ,Equanimity, Mental Health, Cortisol Reduction ,Meditation, Karma Yoga, Spiritual Health

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern world is excessively inclined toward Artha and Kama, causing moral degradation and mental imbalance. In ancient Indian culture, the four pursuits of life—Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire), and Moksha (liberation)—were given equal importance. This imbalance results in stress, emotional disorders, and rising suicide tendencies. If this is not resolved in time, the world population will become a victim of depression.

To address these issues, it is essential to internalize the yogic knowledge enshrined in ancient texts and adopt practices from Ashtanga Yoga (Patanjali) and Samatva Yoga (Bhagavad Gita). These systems harmonize body, mind, and spirit, offering a holistic path to well-being.

1. Concept and History of Yoga

The term Yoga originates from the Sanskrit root yuj, meaning "to unite." Yoga is the union of individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Yoga is "Chitta Vritti Nirodhah"—the cessation of mental modifications.

Historical Context -

Yoga's roots extend over 10,000 years. Evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization (Moheno-Daro and Harappa) shows depictions of yogic postures. Mythologically, Lord Shiva is revered as the first yogi (Adi Yogi) and Parvati as his first disciple.

The tradition states that there were 84 lakh (8.4 million) asanas, but over time, 84 primary asanas have been identified and taught. Maharshi Gherand taught 32 asanas to King Charkapali for physical stability. Some texts mention 36 asanas.

Ancient Tradition of Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita is mentioned as -
Sri Krishna says, -

"इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहव्ययम् ।

विवस्वान्मनवे प्राह मनुरिक्ष्वाकवः॥१॥

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Translation-

I told this indestructible Yoga to the Sun; the Sun told it to his son Vaivasvata Manu and Manu told it to his son King Ikshvaku. The saintly kings know this to be a tradition.

Further shri Krishna also mentioned - Arjuna! This Yoga, which was received through tradition, was known by the kings, but after that this Yoga became extinct on this earth for a long time. You are my devotee and dear friend, that is why I have told you this ancient Yoga today because it is a very great secret, that is, it is a subject to be kept secret.

II. CLASSIFICATION OF YOGA

2.1. Ashtanga Yoga (Patanjali)

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras – which codifies the philosophy and practice of yoga into eight limbs (Ashtanga Yoga).

Patanjali's eightfold path includes:

Yama (ethical restraints): Yamas are ethical principles that guide behaviour toward others and the world. They form the moral foundation of yoga practice. There are five Yamas:

- Ahimsa (Non-violence)
- Satya (Truthfulness)
- Asteya (Non-stealing)
- Brahmacharya (Celibacy or moderation)
- Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness)

Niyama (personal observances): Niyamas are practices that relate to self-discipline and inner development. The five Niyamas are:

- Shaucha (Purity)
- Santosha (Acceptance)
- Tapas (discipline)
- Svadhyaya (Self-reflection)
- Ishvarapranidhana (Surrender to higher consciousness)

Asana (posture): Asana refers to the practice of physical postures. In the Yoga shastra, it primarily means a steady and comfortable seat conducive to meditation. However, in modern yoga, it has expanded to include a wide variety of postures aimed at physical health and flexibility. The classical focus remains on stillness and endurance.

Pranayama (breath control): Pranayama is the control of the vital life force (prana) through the regulation of breath. Pranayama is not just about supplying extra oxygen to the lungs; it is a technique that activates and regulates life force, taking the body beyond its limitations.

It consists of

- inhalation (puraka),
- retention (kumbhaka), and
- exhalation (rechaka).

It purifies the mind and body, balances the nervous system, and prepares the practitioner for meditation.

Kumbhak is the most crucial aspect of pranayama.

Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses): Pratyahara means turning the senses inward by detaching from external objects. It is a bridge between the external (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama) and internal (dharana, dhyana, samadhi) limbs of yoga.

Dharana (concentration): Dharana is focused concentration on a single object, sound, or idea. The mind is trained to remain still and undistracted. Common practices include focusing on a mantra, a visual object like a flame, or the breath.

Dhyana (meditation): Dhyana is the uninterrupted flow of concentration. It is deeper than dharana and leads to heightened awareness and insight. The meditator and the object of meditation become increasingly unified.

Samadhi (absorption): Samadhi is the ultimate goal of yoga. It is a state of super consciousness where the meditator transcends ego and duality, experiencing unity with the universal spirit (Brahman or Puruṣa). In this state, there is complete stillness, awareness, and liberation.

These limbs guide one from moral discipline to spiritual liberation (Kaivalya).

2.2. Types of Yoga in Upanishads

The Yoga Tattva Upanishad describes four paths:

- Mantra Yoga
- Laya Yoga
- Hatha Yoga
- Raja Yoga

Patanjali's system is classified as Raja Yoga, focusing on mental control and spiritual realization.

2.3. Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita

Lord Krishna speaks of Yoga as an eternal tradition passed from the Sun God (Vivasvan) to King Ikshvaku. He defines Yoga in multiple ways:

"Yogaḥ karmasu kaushalam" – Yoga is excellence in action.

"Samatvam yoga uchyate" – Yoga is equanimity.

Hence, Proficiency in work and attaining equanimity is Yoga.

Again, the fickleness of the mind is a huge hurdle in the path of the state of yoga which leads to the accomplishment of efficiency in actions. Arjuna, raising this psychological problem, has said, "O Shri Krishna! This mind is very fickle, churning in nature, very strong and powerful. That is why I consider it very difficult to control it like stopping the wind."

Yogeshwar Shri Krishna is very careful in controlling this psychological problem. Presenting a practical solution to the problem he says:

"O son of Kunti, Arjuna! It can be controlled by practice and detachment.

So, the person who has brought his mind under and has 'equanimity' towards all living beings, does not hate anyone, has the same feelings in happiness and sorrow, is not disturbed by profit and loss, victory, and defeat, such a high mental state is called 'Brahmi state'. In the language of psychology, a completely adjustable personality, a balanced and healthy person. And they can be attained through yoga

III. THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF YOGA

3.1. Physical Benefits

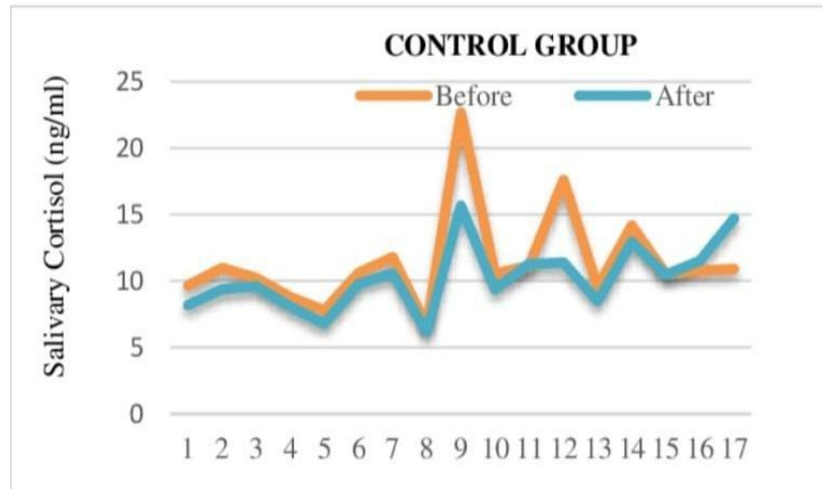
As per the Gheranda Samhita, the primary aim of asanas is to relieve physical and mental afflictions. Yoga harmonizes the nervous system, boosts organ efficiency, and treats musculoskeletal and digestive disorders. Modern medicine increasingly incorporates Yoga in managing:

- Spondylitis by Makar asana (Crocodile Pose), Balasana (Child's Pose),
- Slipped disc by Cobra Pose (Bhujangasana) and Cat-Cow Pose
- Eye strain by Palming, blinking

Metabolic issues (bile, phlegm, rheumatism) by breathing techniques and meditation,

3.2. Mental Health and Depression

Yoga's role in addressing psychosomatic illnesses—such as Parkinson's, memory loss, anxiety, hypertension, and coronary heart disease—is well documented. It helps regulate cortisol (stress hormone) levels, as shown in clinical studies the cortisol level before and after yoga practice (ResearchGate, 2020).



If it is said that man is a slave of hormone glands it will not be an exaggeration. It is noteworthy that in a state of stress, the brain becomes active and sends a message to the hypothalamus, which is near the pituitary gland. The hypothalamus releases a substance called Corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF). This substance is released by the pituitary gland. informs the gland and induces it to secrete another chemical substance called Adrenocorticotrophic Hormone ACTH. It reaches the adrenal cortex directly through blood vessels and secretes the chemical substance Adrenal Corticosteroids which affect the brain and body and causes mental and physical stress. In measuring the level of stress, the amount of this substance in the blood is being detected. Those whose hormone glands are controlled or who have gained control through yoga practice are healthy.

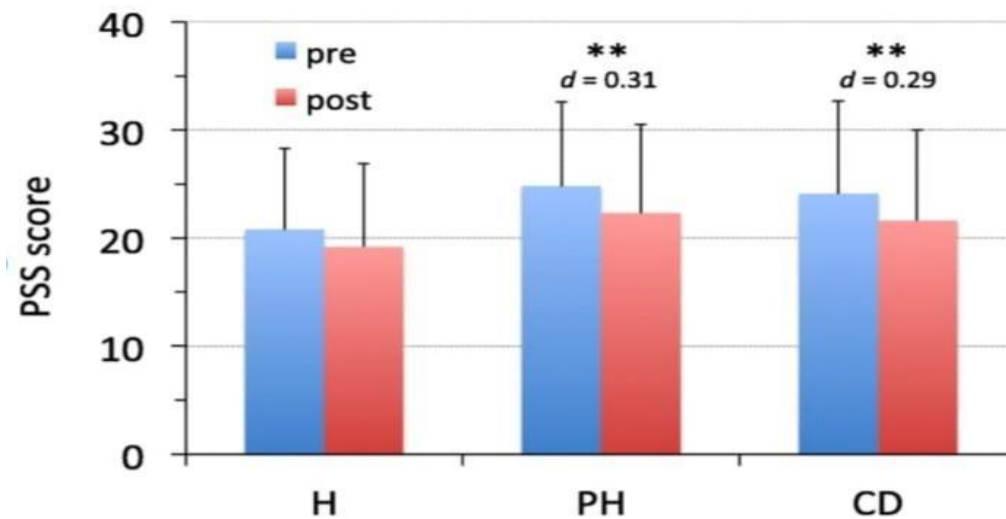
A psychiatric patient in USA found in his self-assessment that > "Medicine works instantly, but healing from within is long-lasting."

It is noteworthy that in the 1950s, for the first time, a drug was used to treat depression. In the 1960s, the drugs for depression came in the form of Benzodiazepines, a group of tranquilizers, which came in the market under the trade names Librium and Valium, but the side effects were very high. A drug from this group Alprazolam came into existence which was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and got quick response but it too had side effects.

All the above-mentioned tranquilizers suppressed the intense behaviour of depression. Again, with the passage of time came the era of Antidepressants Medicine, one group of these was Tricyclic drugs which contained Imipramine and Clomipramine, which had positive effect on 2/3rd people but had many side effects also like dryness in mouth, semi-drunk feeling, blurred vision, dizziness or epilepsy, vertigo. A question came before the doctors that are depression medicines useful in stress management? American doctors said that for permanent solution of depression and stress the combined use of psychological and biological treatment is more useful.

In 2001, 2002, American psychiatrists [Di Tomasso and Gosch, 2002; [Sammons and Schmidt, (2001)] found in their research that many medicines are given daily and indefinitely which have short-and long-term side effects, so it would be better to encourage psychotherapy and reduce the use of medicines. Following chart shows difference in stress level pre and post yoga practice-(Source -Researchgate)

Chart Source- ResearchGate



Effects of yoga on perceived stress as assessed by the PSS. The PSS scores were compared before (pre) and after (post) practicing yoga for three months in a healthy group (H, n = 64), a poor health group (PH, n = 111), and a chronic disease group (CD, n = 130). Data from participants that had missing values were excluded from analysis. ** P < 0.01 (pre vs post, paired t-test). PSS: Perceived Stress Scale; H: healthy participants; PH: participants in poor health; CD: participants with chronic diseases. The bar represents standard deviation. d: effect size between pre and post (Cohen's d).

How depression and anxiety can be fatal not only for that individual but for public is described in below case study Germanwings Flight 9525 case



D-AIPX, the aircraft involved, pictured here in June 2014

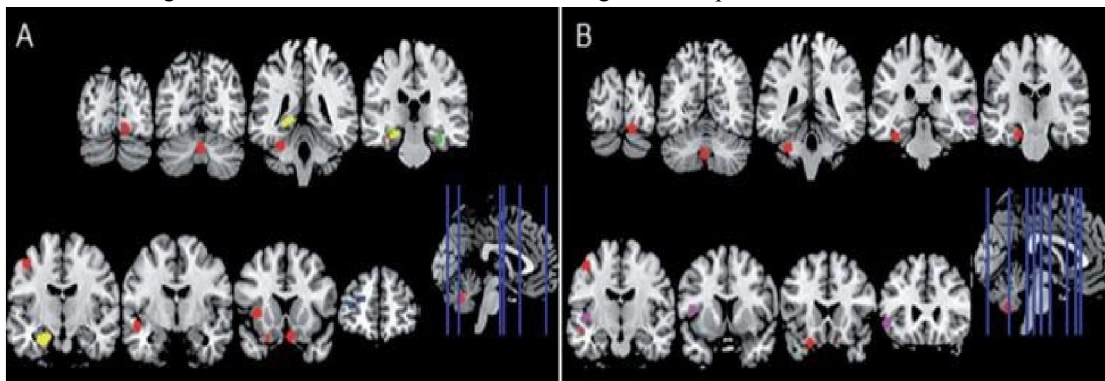
Germanwings Flight 9525, a March 2015 crash in the French Alps, was a tragic event in which the co-pilot, Andreas Lubitz, deliberately crashed the plane, killing all 150 people of various nationalities (Germany 72, Spain 51, Argentina 3, Kazakhstan 3, United States 3, Australia 2, Colombia 2, Iran 2, Japan 2, United Kingdom 2, Venezuela 2, Belgium 1, Denmark 1, Ivory Coast 1, Mexico 1, Morocco 1, Netherlands 1) on board. The co-pilot had been suffering from a mental illness, and the investigation revealed that he had locked the pilot out of the cockpit before initiating the descent. The case raised significant concerns about pilot mental health and safety protocols

According to – DW (Deutsche Welle) news article-

French and German investigators concluded that co-pilot Andreas Lubitz intentionally crashed the Airbus A320 into a French mountain on March 24, 2015, killing all 150 passengers on board the Düsseldorf-bound flight from Barcelona. (Source- DW news article).



This case tells us that how a depression can be that much dangerous that it can take life of 150 people. So, we should make mandatory yoga practices in all important public institutes like aviation, railways, and police etc. as a preventive, so that their mental health can be balanced and these accidents does not occur in future. It seems that the practice of meditation, pranayama, and Yog asanas in medicine has given such instant relief that's why whole West is turning towards it but we are still not able to recognize its importance.



Red, Yellow, and Green: Gray matter volume (Froeliger et al., 2012b; Gothe et al., 2018; Hariprasad et al., 2013 respectively)
Blue: Cortical thickness (Afonso et al., 2017)
Pink: Gray matter density (Santaella et al., 2019)

Red and Pink: Gray matter volume with years of yoga practice (Froeliger et al., 2012b; Villemure et al., 2015, respectively)

Brain regions showing A) structural differences in yoga-practitioners compared to non-practitioners or B) a dose-dependent relationship between years of yoga practice and brain structure among practitioners. Yoga practitioners exhibited greater cortical thickness, gray matter (GM) volume, and GM density than non-practitioners in a variety of regions. Among yoga-practitioners, a positive relationship between the years of yoga practice and GM volume was also observed in a number of areas. (Source-National library of medicine, USA.)

3.3. Cardiac Health

Stress-induced secretion of catecholamines (epinephrine, norepinephrine) Both of these increase arterial damage of the heart, resulting in heart attack. Yoga lowers these through breath regulation and emotional control. Cortisol graphs (ResearchGate) confirm a significant reduction post-Yoga.

IV. SOCIAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

A yogi with Samatva (equanimity) sees all beings as equal, naturally abstaining from violence, hatred, and corruption. Modern criminology classifies criminal behaviour as a mental disorder. In this context, Yoga offers rehabilitation. The Mexican government, for instance, has introduced Yoga in prisons to transform inmates (Prisoners Reforms and Rehabilitation Portal, 2022).

Gita's remedy for lust and anger (born of Rajo Guna): Through Karma Yoga (selfless action) and Vairagya (detachment), one attains a balanced mind free of negativity.

V. SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS

Yoga culminates in self-realization and liberation (Moksha). The Bhagavad Gita declares:

"This is the Brahmic state, O Partha. One who attains it is never deluded and, even at death, reaches Brahmananda."

The state of a Sthiti Pragya (steady wisdom) leads to:

Inner peace

Universal love (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam)

Transcendental joy

VI. CONCLUSION

Yoga offers a profound, integrative approach to health and spirituality. It holds vast potential as an alternative medical system, particularly in the treatment of:

- Anxiety and depression
- Cardiac disorders
- Hormonal imbalances and many more.

India's ancient yogic wisdom, if revived and institutionalized, can heal modern society—

The world humanity suffering from anxiety, depression, frustration, despair will get a ray of hope. Through simple practice of Gita's Swadharma, Nishkam Karma Yoga, Ptanjali astang yoga and liberation or self-perfection is automatically attained without any other means, just as when the sun rises, light spreads automatically and no separate effort is required.

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