



The relevance of yoga in developing holistic health and holistic community

Tiwari Indu and Negi C. Singh ✉

Received: 09.10.2019

Accepted: 24.10.2019

Abstract

The word “yoga” is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* meaning “to join”. It means the union of body, mind and soul. Yoga is also known as a spiritual science of self-realisation. The Indian sage Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutra, defines yoga as a practice to control the afflictions of the mind. Yoga goes beyond religion, beliefs, ethnicity, gender and health conditions. It is not a philosophy or ideology but rather an experiential practice which works on our cognition. Asanas, pranayama, dhyana etc. allow the practitioner to sense their state of existence. Health can be measured in many ways and is often broken down into a variety of numbers and diagnoses that don't often provide the best picture of what a truly healthy body and mind looks like. While modern-day western medicine has brought many wonderful and life saving advancements, one of the downfalls of western medicine is the often siloed approach to health, which looks at the body in sections of individual symptoms and pieces rather than, the whole system it really is. This is why holistic health is so important, because to truly achieve optimal wellness in the physical, mental, and spiritual sense we have to be viewing and supporting the body as the incredible system it is.

Key Words: *Patanjali, Ethnicity, Health Conditions, Western Medicine, Holistic Health*

Introduction

In this modern era, we have all the material comforts due to advancements in technology; this rapid progress and technological development has changed the life style of the people, which in turn seems to pose many challenges. Today, one's life style has changed in all aspects, viz., physical, mental & social. Mankind suffered from infectious & contagious diseases before 19th century. Thanks to all advances in modern medicine, this has helped us to get these infectious & contagious diseases under control. These are now replaced by psychosomatic ailments which are assuming epidemic proportions. Scientists are recognizing that the modern lifestyle has a major contribution for this. The modern medical science is recognizing its limitations in treating these psychosomatic ailments as evidenced by low success rates in the treatment, side effects of the medicine & continuing increase in the incidence of these life style problems. So, people are looking for some

alternate remedy for their problems for effective management of their problems. In the past few years there is tremendous scope for the Complimentary & Alternative Medicines (CAM). Recent researches have shown that mind, the psyche plays a prime role in most of the psychosomatic diseases. The biomedical approach of modern medicine has looked at only (Physical) superficial aspect of one's existence, which in turn seems to have limited its treatment success (Bouchard *et al.*, 1994). Vedas the treasure house of ancient Indian science, which includes Yoga & Ayurveda, may play an important role in treating these diseases with their holistic/ integrated approach. These two systems play a prime role in the expanded version of CAM. This science is more than 5000 years old. These are the major tools to achieve Chaturtha purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha) which is a prime goal of all human being. In the classics they very beautifully explains that, we need long healthy life span to achieve chaturvidha purusharthas, ayurveda helps to achieve long healthy life span & yoga is to achieve a higher goal like Moksha(Liberation). As Yoga is known to calm down the mind, so in the

Author's Address

Department of Botany Govt. PG Autonomous College, Rishikesh.

Department of Commerce Govt. PG Autonomous College, Rishikesh

E-mail.: negics7@rediffmail.com



modern era it has become an important tool to treat these psychosomatic diseases. Even though it is known for higher goal like Moksha, its need of the hour to successful conquering the challenges of these psychosomatic diseases (Bhavanani, 2016). Through yoga, one can understand this root cause and take measures to establish peace and harmony. "Health is a state of well-being at physical, mental, social and spiritual levels and not merely an absence of illness or infirmity". This is the definition of Health as defined by World Health Organization (WHO). Prior to this latest definition the World Health Organization adopted only three components e.g. Physical, Mental and Social. The "spiritual" role played in making a healthy body was very newly recognized by this International Authority only after knowing the efficacy of yoga as a science in totality, so to say, an integrated and holistic science. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes, health is an all-round personality development; at the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels. It is a process by which the limitations and imperfections can be washed away resulting in a superhuman race (Grad, 2002). The new facilities of deeper perceptions of the world beyond the five senses emerge in this phase of superman existence. Further growth leads to man to unfold ever deeper layers of consciousness and widen the spectrum of his knowledge to move towards divinity or perfection. Yoga is a systematic conscious process for accelerating the growth of human being from his animal level and ultimately to divinity. It is a systematic methodology for all-round personality development on the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual components of man. Thus, Yoga in its general methodology for the growth of man to divine heights includes techniques useful for therapeutic applications in making man healthier. Yoga way of life is characterized by peace and tranquility, harmony and health, love and happiness, precision and efficiency.

A yoga practice consists of physical postures, pranayama, and meditation. Certain postures should be practiced every day, particularly the ones that affect the spine, systems and glands of the body. These fundamental poses are maintenance exercises that keep the spine and joints supple, the ductless glands secreting their chemicals properly, and the body calm, yet, energized. There is a certain calm

confidence that regular asana practice brings to the mind. A basic regime is enough to improve the immune system by simply tuning up the body. Removing toxins is paramount to the purifying aspects of yoga. There are soucha, cleansing practices that a dedicated yogi uses to clean his eyes, ears, intestines, stomach, and sinuses. Deep breathing stretches and tones the entire respiratory system. It rids the body of toxic gases and brings oxygen into the body, building healthy tissues.

Asanas are divided into groups which exhibit certain characteristics and affect the practitioner in a certain way. A series of asanas can open up new movement patterns that a yogi had never experienced before (Bhavanani, 2016). A new pose can find some strength or flexibility that he has never had, too. Generally speaking, standing poses build strength and flexibility. Inversions and backbends are invigorating, while forward bends and prone poses are introspective. Twists keep the spine healthy and sitting poses strengthen the lower back and open the hips. Prone and supportive poses are restorative. Sitting postures are also useful when practicing breathing techniques. These exercises clear out and strengthen the respiratory system. Cleaning and toning all of the organs and muscles, and optimizing the blood flow to the connective tissue and nervous system makes the yoga practitioner feel good and relaxed.

All aspects of yoga must be actively pursued, otherwise the energy flow stagnates, and its purifying power is blocked. Yoga aligns the muscles and bones and balances the body's chemistry to combat disease. Pranayama and asana exercises are considered the physical practices of yoga. Their job is to clean and strengthen each person's physical state, so, his mind and emotions calm and he learns how to grow spiritually. Breathing exercises coordinate the breathing process, so, harmony develops between the asanas and the breathing. Breath control directly affects the emotions and soothes the central nervous system. Pranayama directly affects the mind. Meditation serves to purify the mind.

Mr. Iyengar divides the body into three parts in "Yoga, the Path to Holistic Health", the anatomical, the physiological, and the psychological; and all three aspects of the body need to work together to practice asanas fully. Pranayama moves, distributes and stores prana in the body. Controlling the breath



cleans the nerves or nadis so prana can move through the sushumna. Alternate nostril breathing helps the process and the mind is able to concentrate, meditate and become more one pointed. Pranayama clears the way for the prana to move and keep the nervous system healthy. The mind stills when the breath calms and grows strong. Prana is the “charged”, or living element within all living things.

Patanjali presented the Yoga Sutras hundreds of years ago. This text provided real problem solving techniques, so, man could improve his quality of life. Patanjali stated that mankind was in turmoil because he viewed himself as a separate entity and worried about the future and about the past. He believed that the non concentrated and restless mind created excess stress in the body, which created the perfect fuel to feed disease. Fear, loathing and anger are aggressive emotions that poison the body and mind. Patanjali came up with a code of conduct, now known as the Eight Limbs of yoga, to obtain happiness within the body and mind. His teachings explained how to replace old behaviour patterns to ease suffering by steadily focusing the mind and remaining detached from outcomes, actions, thoughts and things.

The eight limbs are: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Yama and Niyama are moral codes that relate to how we behave toward ourselves and society. There are 5 Yamas that are meant to purify human nature, in English, they are: compassion, truthfulness, non-stealing, sense control, and non attachment. There are also 5 Niyamas that are personal purifying laws. These are: purity of thought, contentment, discipline of the body, self study (reflection), and celebration of a higher entity. Asana and Pranayama are purifying physical limbs, which prepare the yogi for meditation.

Mr. Iyengar describes pranayama as the percolation of the breath through the body. The final four limbs deal with meditation. Pratyahara is detachment and sense withdrawal. Dharana is one pointed concentration. Dhyana is meditation on the Divine. Samadhi is final union with the Divine and release from suffering. Desire, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy are six obstacles that need to be overcome in order for the yogi to reach Samadhi.

Relevance of Yoga

Yoga is not a religion; it is a way of living that aims towards 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'.

Man is a physical, mental and spiritual being; yoga helps promote a balanced development of all the three. Other forms of physical exercises, like aerobics, assure only physical well-being. They have little to do with the development of the spiritual or astral body.

Yogic exercises recharge the body with cosmic energy and facilitate:

- Attainment of perfect equilibrium and harmony
- Promotes self- healing.
- Removes negative blocks from the mind and toxins from the body
- Enhances personal power
- Increases self-awareness
- Helps in attention, focus and concentration, especially important for children
- Reduces stress and tension in the physical body by activating the parasympathetic nervous system

The aspirant feels rejuvenated and energized. Thus, yoga bestows upon every aspirant the powers to control body and mind.

Yoga: The benefits

The art of practicing yoga helps in controlling an individual's mind, body and soul. It brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve a peaceful body and mind; it helps manage stress and anxiety and keeps you relaxing. It also helps in increasing flexibility, muscle strength and body tone. It improves respiration, energy and vitality. Practicing yoga might seem like just stretching, but it can do much more for your body from the way you feel, look and move.

Yoga asanas build strength, flexibility and confidence. Regular practice of yoga can help lose weight, relieve stress, improve immunity and maintain a healthier lifestyle. In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested United Nations to celebrate June 21 as the International Yoga Day as it is the summer solstice; the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere.

"Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. This tradition is 5000 years old. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between



man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with you, the world and the nature (Bhushan, 2008).

The Holistic development of health and community

To live a healthy life it is important to do healthy things and follow a healthy lifestyle. The modern world is facing a pandemic of lifestyle disorders that require changes to be made consciously by individuals themselves. Yoga places great importance on a proper and healthy lifestyle whose main components are:

- **Aachar:** Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercise and recommends asana, pranayama and kriyas on a regular basis. Cardio-respiratory health is one of the main by-products of such healthy activities.
- **Vichar:** Right thoughts and right attitude towards life is vital for well being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following the moral restraints and ethical observances (*yama-niyama*). As Mahatma Gandhi said, “there is enough in this world for everyone’s need but not enough for any one person’s greed”.
- **Ahar:** Yoga emphasises need for a healthy, nourishing diet that has an adequate intake of fresh water along with a well balanced intake of fresh food, green salads, sprouts, unrefined cereals and fresh fruits. It is important to be aware of the need for a *satwic* diet, prepared and served with love and affection.
- **Vihar:** Proper recreational activities to relax body and mind are essential for good health. This includes proper relaxation, maintaining quietude of action-speech-thoughts and group activities wherein one loses the sense of individuality. Karma Yoga is an excellent method for losing the sense of individuality and gaining a sense of universality.

According to Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director ICYER at Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry, Yoga has a step-by-step method for producing and maintaining perfect health at all levels of existence. She explains that social behaviour is first optimized through an understanding and control of the lower animal nature (*pancha yama*) and development and enhancement of the higher human nature (*pancha*

niyama). The body is then strengthened, disciplined, purified, sensitized, lightened, energized and made obedient to the higher will through *asana*. Universal *pranic* energy that flows through body-mind-emotions-spirit continuum is intensified and controlled through *pranayama* using breath control as a method to attain controlled expansion of the vital cosmic energy. The externally oriented senses are explored, refined, sharpened and made acute, until finally the individual can detach themselves from sensory impressions at will through *pratyahara*. The restless mind is then purified, cleansed, focused and strengthened through concentration (*dharana*). If these six steps are thoroughly understood and practiced then the seventh, *dhyana* or meditation (a state of union of the mind with the object of contemplation) is possible. Intense meditation produces *samadhi*, or the enstatic feeling of Union, Oneness with the Universe. This is the perfect state of integration or harmonious health.

Yoga is a holistic science of life, which deals with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Various aspects of Yoga help in the prevention and management of stress thus enabling us to live as healthy a life as possible in a dynamic state of wellbeing (Nagarathna and Nagendra, 2011). Various *yogic* concepts have guided man towards shaping his life and the interpersonal relationships in his social life.

- **Vasudeva kudumbakam:** The whole world is one family. This is an excellent concept which helps one to understand that division on the basis of class, creed, religion and geographical distribution are all ‘man made’ obstructions towards oneness. One can then look upon all as his own and can bond with everyone irrespective of any barrier.
- **Pancha kosha:** The concept of our five sheaths or bodies helps us to understand how all our actions, emotions and even thoughts can influence our surroundings and that “No man is an island”. The concept of “*nara*” or psychic disassociation helps us to be aware of why things happen to us and others in our daily life.
- **Chaturvidha purusharthas :** The four legitimate goals of life tell us how we can set legitimate goals in this life and work towards attaining them in the right way, following our *dharma* to attain *artha* (material



prosperity), *kama* (emotional prosperity) and finally the attainment to the real goal of our life, *moksha* (spiritual prosperity).

- **Chatur ashrama:** This concept of the four different stages in life helps us to know how, what and when to perform the various activities in our life. *Brahmacharya* is the period from birth till 27 years and is the period for study, conserving the creative impulse and channelling it towards elevating spiritual pursuits. *Grahashta* is the period of responsibility, spanning the period from 27 to 54 years in which we learn to care about others in the family and the social network, fulfilling our *Dharma* towards both the young and the old. *Vanaprasta* or retirement is the period after 54 years when one's life can be played over again and again in the mind with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction having not to worry about anything at all. *Sanyasa* is the period of life when after performing our duties to the best of our ability for 81 years and after having attained perfection in life we renounce everything for the divine (Nagarathna and Nagendra, 2006).
- **Panchaklesha:** *Avidya* (ignorance), *asmita* (ego), *raaga* (attraction), *dwesha* (repulsion) and *abhinivesha* (urge to live at any cost) are the five *kleshas* or mental afflictions with which we are born into this human life. Through yoga we can understand how these control our life and see their effects on our behaviour. These '*kleshas*' hinder our personal and social life and must be destroyed through *patanjali's kriya yoga*, which consists of *tapas*, *swadhyaya* and *iswara pranidhana* (*atman prasadanam*).
- **Nishkama karma:** Selfless action and the performance of our duty without any motive are qualities extolled by the *Bhagavad Gita*. Performing one's duty for the sake of the duty itself and not with any other motive helps us to develop detachment (*vairagya*) which is a quality vital for a good life (Vivekananda, 2006).
- **Karmasu Koushalam:** 'Skill in action' is Yoga says Yogeshwar Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. 'To do our best and leave the rest' is how Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj used to describe it. Even if we don't practice the other

aspects of yoga, we can be 'living' Yoga, by performing all our duties skill fully and to the best of our ability. A great artist, doctor, worker, singer or sportsman can be a Yogi by performing their duty to perfection, without care for the rewards of the action, even if they do not practice any *asanas* or *pranayamas*.

- **Samatvam:** 'Yoga is equanimity' says the *Bhagavad Gita*. Development of a wholistic personality neither affected by praise nor blame through development of *vairagya* (detachment) leads to the state of "*stitha prajna*" or "*sama bhava*". This is a state of mind which is equally predisposed to all that happens, be it good or bad. Such a human is a boon to society and a pleasure to live and work with.
- **Vairagya:** The concept of *vairagya* (detachment) when understood and cultivated makes us dispassionate to the *dwandwas* (the pairs of opposites) such as praise-blame, hot-cold or pleasant-unpleasant.

Conclusion

Yoga as a "Way of Life": The regular practice of Yoga as a 'Way of Life' helps to reduce the levels of physical, mental and emotional stress. This lays emphasis on Right Thought, Right Action, Right Reaction and Right Attitude. The *pancha yama* consisting of *ahimsa* (non violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (proper channeling of creative impulse) and *aparigraha* (non covetedness) are the "do not's" in a *Yoga Sadhaka's* life. Do not kill, do not be untruthful, do not steal, do not waste your god given creativity and do not covet that which does not belong to you. These guide us to say a big "NO" to our lower self and the lower impulses of violence etc. When we apply these to our life we can definitely have better personal and social relationships as social beings. The *pancha niyama* consisting of *saucha* (cleanliness), *santhosha* (contentment), *tapas* (leading a disciplined life of austerity), *swadhyaya* (introspectional self analysis), and *ishwar pranidhana* (developing a sense of gratitude to the divine self) guide us with "Do'S", do be clean, do be contented, do be disciplined, do self – study (introspection) and do be thankful to the divine for all of his blessings. They help us to say a big



“YES” to our higher self and the higher impulses. Definitely a person with such qualities is a God-send to humanity. Even when we are unable to live the *yama* and *niyama* completely, even the attempt by us to do so will bear fruit and make each one of us a better person and help us to be of value to those around us and a valuable person to live within our family and society. These are values which need to be introduced to the youth in order to make them aware and conscious of these wonderful concepts of daily living which are qualities to be imbibed with joy and not learnt with fear or compulsion. The art and science of Yoga has infinite possibilities for providing answers to most health problems troubling modern humankind. However we often misunderstand this science and want it to be a miracle pill. A pill that we take only once, and want all the problems to vanish into thin air! Yoga is a wholistic science and must be learnt and practiced with a holistic view. “Health and happiness are your birthright, claim them and develop them to your maximum potential”. This message of Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj is a firm reminder that the goal of human existence is not health and happiness but is *moksha* (liberation).

Most people today are so busy trying to find health and happiness that they forget why they are here in the first place. Yoga helps us regain our birthrights and attain the goal of human life.

References

- Bhavanani, A. B. Health and Well Being: A Yogic Perspective. <https://moayush.wordpress.com/2016/06/20/health-and-well-being-a-yogic-perspective>.
- Bhushan, L. I. 2008. Yogic lifestyle and subjective wellbeing. *Yama & Niyama: The path of ethical discipline*. May 1998. yogamag.net/archives/2008/bfeb08/life.shtml.
- Bouchard, C., Shephard, R.J., Stephens, T., 1994. (Eds.) *Physical activity, fitness, and health*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics 1994.
- Grad, F.P. 2002. The preamble of the constitution of the world health organization. *Bull World Health Organ*; 80(12): 981-84.
- Nagarathna, R. and Nagendra, H.R. 2006. *Integrated Approach To Yoga Therapy*. Swami Vivekananda Yoga Prakashan, 2nd ed.
- Nagarathna, R. and Nagendra, H.R. 2011. *Yoga for promotion of positive health*. Swami Vivekananda Yoga Prakashana.
- Vivekananda, 2006. *Raja Yoga or Conquering the Internal Nature*. Advaita Ashrama (reprint of 1923).

