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Review Article

YOGA IS A COMPLETE THERAPY IN MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is being natural and spontaneous. It is a state of harmony in every aspect of life whether it is physical, mental, emotional or spiritual and this brings a transformation from stress to happiness, not just at an individual level but at the level of society as well. Yoga is beneficial for the health in ways that modern science is just beginning to understand. Even though it has been applied with therapeutic intention for thousands of years, Yoga Therapy is only just now emerging as a discipline in itself. More health care practitioners are starting to include yogic techniques in their approach to healing and more yoga teachers give a therapeutic intention to their teaching. People who have never tried yoga before are starting to consider including Yoga in their treatment plan. As science begins to document the importance of understanding the interrelation of all existing things; it looks to Yoga with an intrigued eye, for Yoga speaks Unity in every word. As yoga techniques are researched and new data is gathered, it becomes easier for science and the medical establishment to understand and accept the benefits of Yoga Therapy. Yet there is still not one consensual definition of the discipline. In order to arrive to an adequate definition and to come up with proper standards for Yoga Therapy, it is crucial at this early stage to properly address some delicate professional and ethical issues. At the same time it is important to educate the general public about Yoga Therapy's benefits and careful use.

Keywords: Yoga, Therapy, Modern Era.

INTRODUCTION

On December 11, 2014, the 193-member U.N. General Assembly approved by consensus, a resolution establishing June 21 as 'International Day of Yoga'. The first International Day of Yoga was observed world over on June 21, 2015. The ministry of AYUSH made the necessary arrangements in India. About 35985 people, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a large number of dignitaries from 84 nations, performed 21 Yoga asanas (postures) for 35 minutes at Rajpath in New Delhi. The day devoted to Yoga was observed by millions across the world. The event at Rajpath established two Guinness world records awarded to Ministry of Ayush received by Ayush Minister Shripad Yesso Naik:- Largest Yoga Class (35985 people), Nationalities Participating (84 nations)². It's widely known that Yoga can enhance your physical and emotional well being, but when Yoga is practiced with a therapeutic intention in the form of Yoga Therapy, it can help prevent and aid recovery from physical and mental ailments. Yoga has long been practiced with therapeutic intentions as way of transforming both the body and the mind. Yoga is an Indian physical, mental, and spiritual practice or

discipline. There is a broad variety of schools, practices and goals in Hinduism, Buddhism (including Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism) and Jainism³. The best-known are Hatha yoga and Raja yoga. The origins of Yoga have been speculated to date back to pre-Vedic Indian traditions, but most likely developed around the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, in ancient India's ascetic circles, which are also credited with the early sramana movements. The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* from first half of 1st millennium CE is one of a key surviving major text on Yoga. Hatha yoga texts emerged around 11th century CE, and in its origins was related to Tantrism⁴. Yoga gurus from India later introduced yoga to the west following the success of Swami Vivekananda in the late 19th and early 20th century. In the 1980s, yoga became popular as a system of physical exercise across the Western world. Yoga in Indian traditions, however, is more than physical exercise, it has a meditative and spiritual core. Many studies have tried to determine the effectiveness of yoga as a complementary intervention for cancer, schizophrenia, asthma, and heart disease. The results of these studies have been mixed and inconclusive, with cancer studies suggesting

none to unclear effectiveness, and others suggesting yoga may reduce risk factors and aid in a patient's psychological healing process.

Yoga in Modern Era:

Yoga came to the attention of an educated western public in the mid-19th century along with other topics of Indian philosophy. In the context of this budding interest, N. C. Paul published his *Treatise on Yoga Philosophy* in 1851. The first Hindu teacher to actively advocate and disseminate aspects of yoga to a western audience, Swami Vivekananda, toured Europe and the United States in the 1890s. The reception which Swami Vivekananda received built on the active interest of intellectuals, in particular the New England Transcendentalists, among them R. W. Emerson (1803-1882), who drew on German Romanticism and the interest of philosophers and scholars like G. F. W. Hegel (1770-1831), the brothers August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Max Mueller (1823-1900), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and others who had (to varying degrees) interests in things Indian. Theosophists also had a large influence on the American public's view of Yoga. Esoteric views current at the end of the 19th century provided a further basis for the reception of Vedanta and of Yoga with its theory and practice of correspondence between the spiritual and the physical. The reception of Yoga and of Vedanta thus entwined with each other and with the (mostly Neoplatonism-based) currents of religious and philosophical reform and transformation throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. M. Eliade, himself rooted in the Romanian currents of these traditions, brought a new element into the reception of Yoga with the strong emphasis on Tantric Yoga in his seminal book: *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. With the introduction of the Tantra traditions and philosophy of Yoga, the conception of the "transcendent" to be attained by Yogic practice shifted from experiencing the "transcendent" ("Atman-Brahman" in Advaitic theory) in the mind to the body itself. The modern scientific study of yoga began with the works of N. C. Paul and Major D. Basu in the late 19th century, and then continued in the 20th century with Sri Yogendra (1897-1989) and Swami Kuvalayananda. Western medical researchers came to Swami Kuvalayananda's Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Center, starting in 1928, to study Yoga as a science. The West, in the early 21st century typically associates the term "yoga" with Hatha yoga and its asanas (postures) or as a form of exercise. During the 1910s and 1920s in the USA, yoga suffered a period of bad

publicity due largely to the backlash against immigration, a rise in puritanical values, and a number of scandals. In the 1930s and 1940s yoga began to gain more public acceptance as a result of celebrity endorsement. In the 1950s the United States saw another period of paranoia against yoga, but by the 1960s, western interest in Hindu spirituality reached its peak, giving rise to a great number of Neo-Hindu schools specifically advocated to a western public. During this period, most of the influential Indian teachers of yoga came from two lineages, those of Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963) and of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989). Teachers of Hatha yoga who were active in the west in this period included B.K.S. Iyengar (1918-2014), K. Pattabhi Jois (1915-2009), Swami Vishnu-devananda (1927-1993), and Swami Satchidananda (1914-2002). Yogi Bhajan brought Kundalini Yoga to the United States in 1969. Comprehensive, classical teachings of Ashtanga Yoga, Samkhya Samkhya, the subtle body theory, Fitness Asanas, and tantric elements were included in the yoga teachers training by Baba Hari Dass (1923-), in the United States and Canada. A second "yoga boom" followed in the 1980s, as Dean Ornish, a follower of Swami Satchidananda, connected yoga to heart health, legitimizing yoga as a purely physical system of health exercises outside of counter-culture or esotericism circles, and unconnected to any religious denomination. Numerous asanas seemed modern in origin, and strongly overlapped with 19th and early-20th century Western exercise traditions. In December 2006, Swami Ramdev claimed to improve the condition of patients suffering with AIDS through yoga and ayurvedic drugs sold by his Divya Yoga Mandir Trust⁵. He also went on to suggest that sex education should be replaced by yoga education, as his way to AIDS awareness and prevention. He told reporters that "Sex education in schools needs to be replaced by yoga education"⁶. As a consequence of these public statements he was sent a cease and desist order by the Indian Union Health Ministry to avoid making such claims in the future, and the civil society threatened legal action. In response, Ramdev modified his statement, saying that the claims were not directly his but those of patients who practised yoga.

A group of people practicing yoga in 2012.

Since 2001, the popularity of yoga in the USA has risen constantly. The number of people who practiced some form of yoga has grown from 4 million (in 2001) to 20 million (in 2011).

"Yoga has become a universal language of spiritual exercise in the United States, crossing many lines of religion and cultures,... Every day, millions of people practice yoga to improve their health and overall well-being. That's why we're encouraging everyone to take part in PALA (Presidential Active Lifestyle Award), so show your support for yoga and answer the challenge. - Barack Obama"

As of 2013 some schools in the United States oppose the practice of yoga inside educational facilities, saying it promotes Hinduism in violation of the Establishment Clause. The American College of Sports Medicine supports the integration of yoga into the exercise regimens of healthy individuals as long as properly-trained professionals deliver instruction. The College cites yoga's promotion of "profound

mental, physical and spiritual awareness" and its benefits as a form of stretching, and as an enhancer of breath control and of core strength.

WHAT IS YOGA THERAPY?

Yoga therapy, derived from the Yoga tradition of Patanjali and the Ayurvedic system of health care refers to the adaptation and application of Yoga techniques and practices to help

individuals facing health challenges at any level manage their condition, reduce symptoms, restore balance, increase vitality, and improve attitude. Yoga is beneficial for the health in ways that modern science is just beginning to understand. Even though it has been applied with therapeutic intention for thousands of years, Yoga Therapy is only just now emerging as a discipline in itself. More health care practitioners are starting to include yogic techniques in their approach to healing -- and more yoga teachers give a therapeutic intention to their teaching. People who have never tried yoga before are starting to consider including Yoga in their treatment plan. As science begins to document the importance of understanding the interrelation of all existing things, it looks to Yoga with an intrigued eye, for Yoga speaks Unity in every word. As yoga techniques are researched and new data is gathered, it becomes easier for science and the medical establishment to understand and accept the benefits of Yoga Therapy. Yet there is still not one consensual definition of the discipline. In order to arrive to an adequate definition and to come up with proper standards for Yoga Therapy, it is crucial at this early stage to properly address some delicate professional and ethical issues. At the same time, it is important to educate the general public about Yoga Therapy's benefits and careful use.

YOGA AS EXERCISE OR THERAPY

A survey released in December 2008 by the US National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine found that hatha yoga was the sixth most commonly used alternative therapy in the United States during 2007, with 6.1 percent of the population participating. While much of the medical community views the results of Hatha Yoga research to be significant, others argue that there were many flaws that undermine results. Much of the research on Hatha Yoga has been in the form of preliminary studies or clinical trials of low methodological quality, including small sample sizes, inadequate blinding, lack of randomization, and high risk of bias. As of 2011, evidence suggests that Hatha Yoga may be at least as effective at improving health outcomes as other forms of mild physical exercise when added to standard care. What is found most concerning regarding the legitimacy of Hatha Yoga as a method of healing is the current lack of specificity and standardization regarding the practice of Hatha Yoga. One recent study examined the difficulties of implementing Hatha Yoga-based therapies and methods of healing without any detailed, standardized and vetted descriptions of the asanas promoted as being beneficial for healing. This research calls for the creation of supported intervention practices that could be distributed and applied for use in clinical practice for patients⁸. Nauli, the crown of Hathayoga practices stimulates the digestive fire, improve digestion, produces happiness and destroys all disease and disorders of the humours. Freed from obesity, disorders of Kapha and other Malas etc. Pranayam a practice cures disease like piles and anal fistula, besides all diseases, sins, both small and great⁹.

Hatha Yoga and Specific Mental Health Conditions

- **Anxiety and depression-** A 2010 literature review of the research on the use of Hatha Yoga for treating depression said that preliminary research suggests that Hatha Yoga may be effective in the management of depression. Both

the exercise and the mindfulness meditation components may be helpful. However the review cautioned that "Although results from these trials are encouraging, they should be viewed as very preliminary because the trials, as a group, suffered from substantial methodological limitations¹⁰."

- **Dementia-** There is some evidence that exercise programs may help people with dementia perform their daily activities¹¹.
- **Back pain-** There is evidence that Hatha Yoga may be effective in the management of chronic, but not acute, low back pain. The results of another study on the efficacy of Hatha Yoga therapy for chronic low back pain showed that at around 24 weeks the Hatha Yoga group had statistically significant reductions in functional disability, pain intensity, and depression compared to a standard 6-months medical treatment. It was also concluded from this study that there was a significant trend in the Hatha Yoga group decreasing their use of pain medication compared that of the control group¹².
- **Blood pressure-** Although some evidence exists to suggest Hatha Yoga might help people with high blood pressure, overall this evidence is too weak for any recommendation to be made, and little is known of the safety implications of such an approach¹³.
- **Cancer-** Practice of Hatha Yoga may improve quality-of-life measures in cancer patients. It is unclear what aspect(s) may be beneficial or what populations should be targeted. Hatha Yoga practice as part of cancer treatment has also shown improvement in biomarkers such as TNF-alpha, Interleukin 6 and IL-1beta. A stronger effect on biomarkers as well as quality-of-life measures is associated with more frequent Hatha Yoga practice¹⁴.
- **Pediatric conditions-** A 2009 systematic review concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support the use of Hatha Yoga for any indication in the pediatric population. No adverse events were reported, and most trials were positive but of low methodological quality¹⁵.
- **Rheumatic disease-** Only weak evidence exists to support the use of Hatha Yoga as a complementary therapy for helping people with rheumatic diseases, and little is known of the safety of such use¹⁶.
- **Sports Related Physical Health-** Increasingly Hatha Yoga is used to train sports-persons and athletes, to maximize performance, improve conditioning, and minimize injury. Hatha Yoga is used extensively within British soccer to minimize injury, with Manchester United star Ryan Giggs one of the most high-profile players to publicly incorporate it in his training regime¹⁷.

Mind-body connection:

The therapeutic benefits of yoga have been discussed by van der Kolk, who explains that because regulation of physical movement is a fundamental priority of the nervous system, focusing on and developing an awareness of physical movement can lead to improved synchrony between mind and body. This is beneficial, he says, especially for those suffering from psychological conditions such as depression and PTSD (the focus of van der Kolk's work), because an improved

sense of connectedness between mind and body give rise to enhanced control and understanding of their "inner sensations" and state of being. Yoga is a core component of the Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program. Drawing from recent research on the mental and physical benefits of practicing yoga, positive psychologists have begun to look deeper into the possibilities of utilizing yoga to improve life for people even in the absence of disease.¹⁸

Potential benefits for adults:

While much of the medical community regards the results of yoga research as significant, others point to many flaws which undermine results. Much of the research on yoga has taken the form of preliminary studies or clinical trials of low methodological quality, including small sample sizes, inadequate blinding, lack of randomization, and high risk of bias. Long-term yoga users in the United States have reported musculoskeletal and mental health improvements, as well as reduced symptoms of asthma in asthmatics. There is evidence to suggest that regular yoga practice increases brain GABA levels, and yoga has been shown to improve mood and anxiety more than some other metabolically-matched exercises, such as walking. The three main focuses of Hatha yoga (exercise, breathing, and meditation) make it beneficial to those suffering from heart disease. Overall, studies of the effects of yoga on heart disease suggest that yoga may reduce high blood-pressure, improve symptoms of heart failure, enhance cardiac rehabilitation, and lower cardiovascular risk factors. For chronic low back pain, specialist Yoga for Healthy Lower Backs has been found 30% more beneficial than usual care alone in a UK clinical trial. Other smaller studies support this finding. The *Yoga for Healthy Lower Backs* programme is the dominant treatment for society (both cheaper and more effective than usual care alone) due to 8.5 fewer days off work each year. A research group from Boston University School of Medicine also tested yoga's effects on lower-back pain. Over twelve weeks, one group of volunteers practiced yoga while the control group continued with standard treatment for back pain. The reported pain for yoga participants decreased by one third, while the standard treatment group had only a five percent drop. Yoga participants also had a drop of 80% in the use of pain medication¹⁹. There has been an emergence of studies investigating yoga as a complementary intervention for cancer patients. Yoga is used for treatment of cancer patients to decrease depression, insomnia, pain, and fatigue and to increase anxiety control. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs include yoga as a mind-body technique to reduce stress. A study found that after seven weeks the group treated with yoga reported significantly less mood disturbance and reduced stress compared to the control group. Another study found that MBSR had showed positive effects on sleep anxiety, quality of life, and spiritual growth in cancer patients. Yoga has also been studied as a treatment for schizophrenia. Some encouraging, but inconclusive, evidence suggests that yoga as a complementary treatment may help alleviate symptoms of schizophrenia and improve health-related quality of life. Implementation of the Kundalini Yoga Lifestyle has shown to help substance abuse addicts increase their quality of life according to psychological questionnaires like the Behavior and Symptom Identification Scale and the Quality of

Recovery Index. Yoga has been shown in a study to have some cognitive functioning (executive functioning, including inhibitory control) acute benefit.²⁰

Physical injuries (**Sports injury**)²¹:

A small percentage of yoga practitioners each year suffer physical injuries analogous to sports injuries; therefore, caution and common sense are recommended. Yoga has been criticized for being potentially dangerous and being a cause for a range of serious medical conditions including thoracic outlet syndrome, degenerative arthritis of the cervical spine, spinal stenosis, retinal tears, damage to the common fibular nerve, "Yoga foot drop," etc.²². An exposé of these problems by William Broad published in January, 2012 in *The New York Times Magazine* resulted in controversy within the international yoga community. Broad, a science writer, yoga practitioner, and author of *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards*, had suffered a back injury while performing a yoga posture. Torn muscles, knee injuries, and headaches are common ailments which may result from yoga practice. An extensive survey of yoga practitioners in Australia showed that about 20% had suffered some physical injury while practicing yoga. In the previous 12 months 4.6% of the respondents had suffered an injury producing prolonged pain or requiring medical treatment. Headstands, shoulder stands, lotus and half lotus (seated cross-legged position), forward bends, backward bends, and handstands produced the greatest number of injuries. Some yoga practitioners do not recommend certain yoga exercises for women during menstruation, for pregnant women, or for nursing mothers. However, meditation, breathing exercises, and certain postures which are safe and beneficial for women in these categories are encouraged. Among the main reasons that experts cite for causing negative effects from yoga are beginners' competitiveness and instructors' lack of qualification. As the demand for yoga classes grows, many people get certified to become yoga instructors, often with relatively little training. Not every newly certified instructor can evaluate the condition of every new trainee in their class and recommend refraining from doing certain poses or using appropriate props to avoid injuries. In turn, a beginning yoga student can overestimate the abilities of their body and strive to do advanced poses before their body is flexible or strong enough to perform them. Vertebral artery dissection, a tear in the arteries in the neck which provide blood to the brain can result from rotation of the neck while the neck is extended. This can occur in a variety of contexts, but is an event which could occur in some yoga practices. This is a very serious condition which can result in a stroke²³. Acetabular labral tears, damage to the structure joining the femur and the hip, have been reported to have resulted from yoga practice.

Pediatrics: It is claimed that yoga can be an excellent training for children and adolescents, both as a form of physical exercise and for breathing, focus, mindfulness, and stress relief: Many school districts have considered incorporating yoga into their P.E. programs. The Encinitas, California school district gained a San Diego Superior Court Judge's approval to use yoga in P.E., holding against the parents who claimed the practice was intrinsically religious and hence should not be part of a state funded program²⁴.

CONCLUSION

The applications of Yoga Therapy range anywhere from maintaining health, to recovering from illness - in some cases, even those considered incurable. The first stage of healing involves the movement of vital forces in the system. Practitioners of many Eastern forms of medicine believe that every illness involves a certain level of energy blockage. By promoting the flow of prana, or vital force, yoga combats those blockages, restoring the basic condition for health. Common applications for Yoga Therapy also serve structural problems such as spine misalignments or joint function. Deeper applications may even aid more intractable problems such as AIDS and cancer. By combining different techniques such as massage, stretching or alterations of the circulatory patterns, yoga promotes specific changes in muscles, joints and organs altering the vital functions of the body. A good example would be the way Yoga Therapy can help overcome panic attacks. By practicing a balancing breathing technique, a sense of control is gained, combating the fear and anxiety produced by its loss. Additionally, by practicing Tratak, a specific technique that involves eye movement, the pituitary gland is reset via the optic nerve, influencing the 'fight or flight' reaction so intimately related with the syndrome. On a psychological level, the introspection promoted by yoga is essential to the self-knowledge process that fuels psychic transformation. The different relaxation techniques allow the troubled mind to calm and decrease its activity while promoting stability. Yoga considers the psyche to be spread in different centers along the body (chakras). Each related to a nervous plexus, an endocrine gland, an organ or group of organs and specific psychic qualities. By acting upon the chakras, yoga brings light to any psychic blockages, making them available to the conscious mind. The modern western correlate of this scheme is in the core of psychoneuroimmunology, a branch of psychology that studies the interaction between the nervous, endocrine and immune systems, explaining some of the subtle mechanisms of psychosomatic medicine. The fact that the different branches of science are now acknowledging that everything in the universe works together with absolute, intimate and exquisite interrelationship is part of the basis of the increasing success and respect that Yoga Therapy is gaining among main stream medical practitioners. As more clinicians use these techniques either for themselves or for their patients, and as more masters design specific applications of yoga, the spectrum of Yoga Therapy grows exponentially. More than following just one style or one branch of yoga, Yoga Therapy feeds from virtually all styles and branches, combining the tools that each one of them bring in the design of a yoga sadhana, or a routine that addresses the given condition. Even though different Yoga Therapists follow different procedures to establish the sadhana, a pretty general scheme would first determine the condition to be treated, and then an evaluation of person's general abilities. Then the appropriate techniques can be chosen from the various disciplines which best serve the therapeutic process.

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