



FROM VEDIC PHILOSOPHY TO MODERN WELLNESS: THE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNEY OF YOGA

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Abstract

One of the most ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions of the world Yoga was simultaneously born in ancient India as a great system of self-realization and unification with the divine. Yoga originated as a disciplined way, including ethical guidelines, physical poses, and control of breathing and meditation to end the suffering (moksha) cycle. Yoga has its foundations in the Vedic texts (c. 1500-500 BCE) and was systematized in the texts of the Vedas by Patanjali (circa 400 CE), making yoga a disciplined practice with precepts of ethics, physical postures, breath control, and meditations. The article follows the amazing interdisciplinary evolution of yoga beginning with its Vedic philosophical roots up to the classical, medieval, and colonial periods of transformation up to the present day when yoga is a global wellness trend. Traditionally, yoga is a development of Tantric yoga and Hatha yoga, and it was rediscovered in the 20th century by such representatives of yoga as Swami Vivekananda, T. Krishnamacharya, and B.K.S. Iyengar who made it easily accessible to the contemporary society. Today, yoga has moved beyond its spiritual roots, and has been applied in a variety of disciplines: it is correlated with mindfulness-based therapy in mental health, empirically shown to have positive effects on cardiovascular health, chronic pain, and stress reduction, it is found in cultural studies as indicative of globalization, commodification, and authenticity issues. This interdisciplinary study shows yoga as a living and breathing liaison between ancient knowledge and modern science, conforming to the modern demands without abandoning the fundamental concepts, such as ahimsa (non-violence) and self-knowledge. On one hand, the evidence-based effectiveness of yoga in the promotion of holistic well-being is highlighted by key findings, and on the other hand, there is the issue of commercialization. The article reaches the conclusion that long-term interdisciplinary studies, involving historical study, neuroscientific investigation, and cultural analysis are the key to maintaining the richness of yoga and its further implementation in the context of public health, mental health programs, and sustainable living in the world.

Key Words: Yoga, Vedic Philosophy, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Hatha Yoga, Modern Wellness, Interdisciplinary Approach, Mindfulness, Health Benefits, Cultural Evolution

Introduction

Yoga is one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy which has its roots in ancient India where it became an advanced system of spiritual liberation and self-realization (Feuerstein, 2008). The origins of yogic ideas can be found in the Rig Veda (c.1500-1200 BCE), among the most ancient sacred texts, that speaks about practices of breath control and meditation to unite the individual self (atman) with the universal consciousness (brahman) (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017). These Vedic references developed with the Upanishads (c. 800-200 BCE), which further expanded on meditations as a way of reaching moksha (liberation through rebirth). The philosophical model came to be codified in the yoga of texts of Patanjali (c. 400 CE), a text that consists of 196 aphorisms describing the eight limbs (ashtanga) of yoga: ethical restraints (yama), observances (niyama), postures (asana), breath control (pranayama), withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and absorption (samadhi) (Bryant, 2009). His writing with an

extensive focus on Samkhya dualism made yoga a disciplined approach to calming mind (chitta vritti nirodha) and made ethical living, disciplined physicality, and contemplation the methods of transcendence.

Yoga has traditionally been an esoteric spiritual practice of ascetics and sages, and the objectives were focused on metaphysical enquiry, instead of physical fitness (Singleton, 2010). But in the 20th century, yoga experienced radical change to become an international health craze. The earlier influences, like Swami Vivekananda, who presented yoga to the West in the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions and then successors like Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, B.K.S. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois, made yoga more palatable to modern society by focusing on postures (asana) and affordability (De Michelis, 2004).

This change was coupled with globalization, commercialization, and acculturation into Western culture of fitness, leading to a multibillion-dollar industry of stress reduction, flexibility, and mental health (Jain, 2015).

Nowadays, yoga is commonly no longer associated with its philosophical basis, repackaged as a secular program of bodily exercises, which leads to controversies of cultural appropriation and loss of spirituality.

The main issue covered in this article is that yoga has changed since it is a deep spiritual practice with its origins in the Vedic philosophy into an activity of a global wellness system, which has shifted more into physical gains rather than ethical and metaphysical aspects.

This metamorphosis is indicative of the wider authenticity/ adjustment/appropriation conflicts of the post colonization world.

The main research questions will be to follow the historical path of yoga and its roots in ancient Vedic culture to classical, medieval and modern times; to understand the interdisciplinary intersections of yoga with psychology (e.g., mindfulness and stress reduction), medicine (e.g. evidence-based benefits of hypertension and anxiety), and cultural studies (e.g. globalization and commodification and their implications on holistic health).

This research is relevant in terms of the connection between ancient knowledge and modern science since it provides a more objective evidence-based understanding of the possibility of yoga to facilitate overall well-being when facing increased mental health demands (Cramer et al., 2018; Hagins et al., 2013).

Through interdisciplinary research, which combines historical studies and empirical findings, it promotes the application of culturally sensitive practices in yoga that do not compromise its richness and increase its use in world health.

Historical and Philosophical Foundations

A. Vedic Origins

Yoga originates in the Vedic tradition of ancient India where yoga was a spiritual practice that sought to reach the union of the individual self and the universal consciousness.

The first sources referencing the principles of yoga are in the Rig Veda (c. 1500-1200 BCE), one of the oldest sacred texts, which makes the allusions to the practices related to the control of breath and meditation to connect the individual self (atman) and the cosmic reality (brahman) (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017).

These concepts evolved in the Upanishads (c. 800-200 BCE), a body of philosophical writings that replaced the sacrificial Vedic rituals with inward meditation.

The most important of these Upanishads, including the Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya, explain prana (vital breath) as one of the main life forces and outline meditative practices in achieving the identity of atman and brahman (Feuerstein, 2008).

Perhaps one of the most well-known examples of the use of the chariot as a metaphor of self-control, is the Katha Upanishad, in which the body is the chariot, intellect the charioteer, mind the reins, senses the horses, and the self the rider, with the emphasis on the need to practice introspection through discipline to be able to free oneself of the birth-and-death cycle (moksha) (Bryant, 2009).



Figure 1 the cyclical process of achieving self-control and liberation.

Moksha, or enlightenment, end of suffering and samsara, became the ultimate goal, which was reached by knowledge (jnana) and discipline. Proto-yogic practices, such as breath-control (pranayama) and withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara) are also described in early Upanishads as one of the ways of stilling the mind and reaching higher states of awareness (De Michelis, 2004). These ideas touch upon ethics and metaphysics and present yoga as the interdisciplinary way that combines moral behaviour, philosophical investigation, and experience. Yoga in this case is not so much about the physical, but rather a metaphysical means of overcoming duality, and this meshes more with the general Vedic ethics of harmony and self-knowledge.

B. Evolution Through Classical and Medieval Periods

The classical formulation of yoga took place in the Yoga Sutras, by Patanjali (circa 400 CE), in which yoga was systematized into eight limbs (ashtanga): yama (ethical restraints), niyama (observances), asana (poses), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (sensory withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (absorption) (Bryant, 2009). Yoga is the term used by Patanjali to refer to the term cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (chitta vritti nirodha) and is based on the dualism of purusha (consciousness) and prakriti (matter) of the Samkhya philosophy. The eight limbs offer a gradual guide to moral life, bodily training and intellectual command resulting in kaivalya (isolation of consciousness). Although the word asana refers to a comfortable and stable seat to sit on during meditation, there was almost no postural practice as it is today.

During the medieval era, yoga was developed under the influences of Tantric, Hatha and Bhakti philosophies, focusing on physical practices to change the spiritual state. Tantra developed in the 5th century CE, combining philosophy of non-dualism with ritual and energy methods, and having an impact on the Hatha Yoga concentration on the subtle body (sukshma sharira), channels (nadis) and centres of energy (chakras) (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017). Hatha Yoga, translated as forceful union, which was geared towards physical immortality and enlightenment by purifying the body to awaken the kundalini energy.

The important writings are the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Svātmarama of the 15th century who compiled the previous teachings of the Natha tradition (joining Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath) as well as the instructions in asanas, pranayama, mudras (gestures) and bandhas (locks) to raise kundalini and achieve raja yoga (Birch, 2011). A seven-limbed path, with purification (shatkarma), postures (32 asanas), and meditative absorption, is described in the Gheranda Samhita of the late 17th century and presents the body as a temple to be made strong enough to achieve divine realisation. Bhakti traditions introduced devotional features, which combined yoga with submission to a personal god. Such adaptations disseminated yoga throughout India, early examples being such as Tibet and southeast Asia with the wandering ascetics, and the practices of the culture were integrated.

C. Colonial and Modern Revival

The British colonialism (18th -20th centuries) had immense influence on the way yoga was perceived and practiced. Before this, early colonial writings and Orientalism tended to see yogis as exotic, lazy fakirs, charlatans, who were Hatha practitioners, linked to superstition and marginality (Singleton, 2010). This opinion was used to legitimize suppression, since wandering ascetics could be considered a danger to order. Orientalism according to Said criticism glamorized ancient literature and disregarded living traditions, which created a textual bias in which philosophical yoga was superior to physical practices (De Michelis, 2004).

However, colonialism brought about the rebirth and modernization. Indian nationalists reacted to this by renaming yoga as a scientifically beneficial practice in order to dispel physical weakness stereotypes. The modern postural yoga has had its origins in the early 20th century under the influence of the global physical culture movements (e.g., the European gymnastics and bodybuilding) (Singleton, 2010).

Swami Vivekananda introduced Raja Yoga to the western world at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions, introducing yoga as a philosophy and meditation but marginalizing the use of postures and making yoga a universal spirituality that is compatible with modernity.

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989), which he sometimes called the father of modern yoga, was able to combine traditional Hatha with Western gymnastics in his school at Mysore and created dynamic sequences that stressed health and strength.

These adaptations were put into practice by his students: B.K.S. Iyengar perfected correct positioning and therapeutic aids, releasing *Light on Yoga* (1966), a standard all over the world; Pattabhi Jois introduced flowing sequences of Ashtanga Vinyasa (Newcombe, 2019). This move transformed yoga into a wellness that is made available to non-asceticism, esoteric but commoditized, and disseminated through studios, books, and media.

The process of yoga is indicative of interdisciplinary strength: Vedic metaphysics to Tantric embodiment, colonial recalibration, and contemporary globalization, with both the traditional purpose of self-control and the need to fit into cultural realities.

Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Yoga

A. Yoga and Psychology

The combination of yoga with contemporary psychology has placed the practice as a mental health management tool to be used as a complement, especially through the co-existence of the practice with mindfulness-based interventions. The intervention of meditation (dhyana) and breath regulation (pranayama) are conceptually related to mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and cognitive behavioural therapies, focusing on the current moment awareness and emotional regulation (Pascoe et al., 2017). This interaction aids in integrating yoga into treatment procedures, improving the ability to bounce back to psychological stressors.

There is empirical data pointing out the usefulness of yoga in stress management and emotional control. Yoga asanas, which are commonly accompanied by mindfulness, have also been linked to better sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis regulation, decrease in cortisol, and increased heart rate variability (Pascoe et al., 2017). Such physiological adjustments form the basis of psychological gains, which include enhanced emotional balance and reduction of stressor responsiveness.

The major research findings indicate the effectiveness of yoga in the treatment of anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A meta-analysis and systematic review established yoga to be associated with significant self-reported PTSD symptoms (SMD = -0.51; 95% CI [-0.68, -0.35]) and depressive symptoms at immediate (SMD = -0.39; 95% CI = [-0.56, -0.22]) and long-term (SMD = -0.44; 95% CI = [-0.74, -0.13]) outcomes (Taylor et al., 2020). Otherwise, mindfulness yoga programs have demonstrated themselves in major depressive disorder, with meta-analyses occurring in moderate decreases in depressive symptoms relative to controls (Wu et al., 2023). In the case of conditions associated with traumas, yoga has similar results as those of mindfulness interventions, and the pooled effects of yoga on the reduction of PTSD symptoms have a $g = 0.46$ (Taylor et al., 2020). These results highlight the importance of yoga as a convenient, supplementary treatment in psychological practice.

B. Yoga in Medicine and Health Sciences

Yoga has significant physiological effects: it has an effect on the cardiovascular system, flexibility, and immune system, as well as complex physical and meditative practices. Its frequent use increases cardiovascular measures, such as decreased blood pressure and lipid profiles, and increases musculoskeletal flexibility and inflammatory responses.

Yoga has strong evidence using clinical trials and meta-analyses to support its role in the management of chronic conditions. In the case of hypertension, yoga practices have a significant effect on systolic (SMD -0.48) and diastolic blood pressure (SMD -0.39), especially when breathing and relaxation exercises are applied (Nalbant et al., 2022). Efficacy is also confirmed by meta-analyses in chronic pain, and the effect size of reducing pain intensity and enhancing function is moderate (Cramer et al., 2013). Yoga in cardiovascular disease conditions is a supplement to rehabilitation that reduces the risks of cardiovascular diseases, including hypertension and dyslipidaemia (Raghuram et al., 2022).

Overlapping neuroscience Interdisciplinary neuroscience demonstrates structural and functional changes to the brain. The functional MRI research suggests that yoga and meditation result in core grey matter growth in areas such as the hippocampus and insula, executive functioning

improvement through prefrontal cortex activation, and a change in default mode network connectivity, which is related to the ability to better regulate emotions and ruminate less (Gothe et al., 2019). These changes are similar to the changes in long-term meditators indicating that neuroplasticity is one of the possible mechanisms of yoga health benefits.

C. Cultural and Sociological Approaches.

The commodification of yoga in the world has seen this aspect become a commodified aspect of Western fitness culture, as seen in yoga studios, mobile apps, and branded merchandise. This is an indication of neoliberal consumerism, in which yoga has become a consumer-friendly product, with the emphasis on physical appearance, rather than philosophical nuances (Jaina 2015).

Controversies about cultural appropriation indicate clashes of authenticity and accommodation. According to critics, Western postural yoga water-downs Vedic origins, exoticizing and commercializing sacred traditions and silencing South Asian voices (Antony, 2018).

The advocates conceive globalization as hybridity, whereby it is manifested in the forms that are accessible and which are able to develop culturally (Coskuner-Balli & Ertimur, 2017). However, the issue of commodification brings the question of equity since, in most cases, premium yoga is offered to high-income and mostly White populations.

Modern yoga groups have sociological aspects (semi-women-dominated) and accessibility and inclusivity problems. Although body positivity is the message of commercial yoga, it might continue to promote exclusion in the form of its cost and idealized image, thus raising the expectations of trauma-sensitive and diverse representations (Barkataki, 2020).

D. Environmental and Ethical Interdisciplinary Ties

The ethical code of yoga, especially ahimsa (non-violence), is connected with the environmental philosophy where the concepts of non-harm are applied to the whole ecological system. This principle promotes sustainable life because it will reduce the damage to the planet, encourage the unity with nature (Chapman, 2021).

It is increasingly being associated with yoga-related sustainability, with aparigraha (non-possessiveness) being used to curb consumerism and saucha (purity) to promote clean environments promoted by practitioners. Eco-yoga programs encourage mindful consumption, including taking natural mats or practicing outside to be more ecologically aware (Bushell, 2024).

The practice of yoga in the workplace is a part of the wellness programs in the field of public health policy to alleviate stress and improve the ability to withstand the burden of work (Klatt et al., 2020). Corporate integrations prove to be cost effective, such as reduced absenteeism and enhanced productivity and yoga becomes a preventive measure in educational and job health promotions (Giotto et al., 2023). The interdisciplinary expanse of yoga links the ancient morality with the modern troubles, bringing the wholesome paradigm of personal and planetary health.

Conclusion

The history of yoga as the shift of the ancient Vedic philosophy to a foundation of contemporary wellness is a good example of the power of tradition and adaptation.

Developed during the Vedic era as a metaphysical science to achieve the unity between the self (atman) and the Brahman, yoga was codified by Patanjali as an ethical and meditative way to liberation (moksha). It absorbed Tantric energetics, Hatha physicality, and Bhakti devotion through classical, medieval, and colonial periods, working around the misrepresentations of Orientalism. The 20th century revitalization of yoga by Swami Vivekananda, Krishnamacharya, Iyengar, and others made yoga universal and focused on it as a means of postural and health-related benefits. Nowadays, yoga is applied as a secular wellness practice that can be justified by empirical studies in the fields of psychology, medicine, and neuroscience, but it is frequently decontextualized in the process of commercialization and cultural controversies (Singleton, 2010; Jain, 2015).

This transformation is an indication of the power of yoga: the fundamentals of mindfulness, non-violence (ahimsa), and self-awareness still apply, and the ancient knowledge is connected to modern demands to reduce stress, increase cognitive and physical resilience, and maintain physiological health (Cramer et al., 2018; Pascoe et al., 2017). The interdisciplinary integration has shed light on mechanisms i.e. neuroplasticity, autonomic regulation and immune modulation, which have proven the effectiveness of yoga in the in-depth ways, extending its use to public health, workplace wellness and the ecological ethics.

In the future, the directions require stricter interdisciplinary studies. Longitudinal randomized controlled trials are needed to investigate dose-response relationships, comparative effectiveness with other interventions and long-term effects on epigenetic markers and brain aging (Gothe et al., 2019). Non-randomized protocols with ethical (yama/niyama) and philosophical elements may lead to even better effects than the ones of exercise. Practice ethics are required in order to touch upon such issues as commodification, teacher training standards, and trauma-informed strategies to guarantee safety and inclusiveness (Barkataki, 2020). Cultural sensitivity is the highest priority, and partnerships with South Asian academicians and professionals will stop the impersonation process, establishing the representation of authenticity and fair access to yoga practices on the international level (Antony, 2018).

Finally, yoga is a great mediator of ancient knowledge and modern science, providing an avenue of the holistic development of humans in the world that has become very fragmented. With its respect to philosophical richness and the adoption of evidence-based adaptations, yoga could help establish wellness of individuals, harmony of society, and sustainability of the planet- we should not forget that the best place to start a union is by looking at the connections between individuals and their environment.

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