
Tradition Meets Transformation: Yoga and Mental Resilience in the Age of Polycrisis

Medhya Mourya*

*Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, U.P.

DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21204589

Published on: 30/06/2026

Abstract:

Yoga is beyond the religion; it is a way of living that focused on promoting a healthy mind and body. It aims to improve the three aspects of human existence that is physical, mental, and spiritual. Yoga works to create harmony and balance among these aspects. Mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorder or disabilities as highlighted by the world health organisation. In India, where yoga has deep culture roots, it emerged as promising accessible and cost-effective approach for mental health. In recent years, with the growing challenges of mental health across the world, the role of yoga has attracted significant attention. Globally, yoga is become popular for its positive impact in the age of Polycrisis. Polycrisis refers to the interplay of multiple crises such as climate change, pandemics, economic instability, and social inequality. These crises amplify stress, anxiety, trauma, and other problems related to mental health in complex way that requires systematic and holistic approaches to intervention.

This research paper aims to discuss the effects of yoga on mental health by tracing its ancient roots and its present integration for modern mental health challenges in the era of Polycrisis. Additionally, this paper examines the current initiatives and programmes run globally to promote mental health through yoga. This paper also highlights the need of yoga to address the mental health crisis in contemporary society. This paper is useful for learners, policy-makers, educators and health professionals; they can take insights the importance of yoga for the integration of mental health strategies and mental well-being.

Key Words: Yoga, Mental Health, Polycrisis, Impact of Yoga on Mental Health.

Introduction:

In the contemporary age of Global health and mental wellness practices, there exists a deep connection between the ancient Indian knowledge systems and modern trends. World Health Organization actively work in this area to advance the spiritual, mental, and social well-being of human life on a global scale. Globally, the mental health crisis is increased by the polycrisis, which

has led to expand the interest in complementary therapies such as yoga. Polycrisis can be marked by economic instability, climate change, and the rapid decreasing of mental health across societies. Yoga is the universal solution to the mental health that goes beyond the cultural boundaries. It focuses on mindfulness, emotional regulation, and physiological balance of every individual to improve mental health in the era of polycrisis.

Objectives:

The paper aims to explore the role of yoga in enhancing mental health, discuss its contemporary applications in addressing challenges of the modern Polycrisis era, and to assess its relevance in shaping the strategies for the holistic mental well-being.

Methodology:

This study includes a secondary data-based approach, synthesising insights from a comprehensive review of published academic papers, research articles, policy reports, and global initiatives on yoga and mental health.

Polycrisis and Mental Health: The current landscape

The term “Polycrisis” was introduced in 1999 by Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern. It was used to show the interconnected problems and crisis affecting the planet. Mark swelling later used this term to explain how global political and economic crises enhance each other. In the 2010s, European leaders applied this term to migration and financial challenges. Polycrisis is gaining attention among international organizations like the World health Organization (WHO, 2023) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2024), both of which identify it as an important threat to human health. A recent UNICEF report (2024) explores how polycrisis affects youth, particularly by increasing their vulnerabilities, which also examining its link to rising protests.

Now the concept of “Polycrisis” known as the interconnection of various global crises, overlapping challenges of political instability, climate change, economic inequality, and good health of human life. It has become increasingly important in discussions of mental health. In this context, yoga is a holistic approach to well-being. It provides a promising solution both in India and at global level. Due to the global and national implications of polycrisis, it is important to develop impactful policies for lessen the risk of mental health. The traditional Indian practices have been gaining attention at global level in current time because it addresses the mental health challenges exacerbated by these global crises. Yoga’s emphasis on mindfulness and self-awareness enhances the capacity to manage emotional and psychological distress, making it an effective tool in reducing the negative

impacts of anxiety and depression (Gangadhar, B. N., & Varambally, S., 2012). However, while yoga's benefits are promising, research on its mechanism and long-term effects are still in its early stages, thus it needs more researches to understand its influences on the mental health outcomes.

Origin of Yoga in India:

Yoga originated more than five millennia ago, with its root in the rituals and hymns of the Vedas, especially in the Rigveda. Yoga is a 3000 years old holistic practice and work as a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) said by the National Institutes of Health. The word "yoga" is originated from the Sanskrit word which means "union" or "yoke," symbolizing the connection among body, mind, and soul. The practice of yoga builds strength, resilience, and virtues like self-control, compassion, and overall well-being. During the Vedic period (1500-500BCE), yoga developed through the texts like the 'Upanishads' and the 'Bhagavad Gita'. Upanishads introduced ideas like Brahman, the ultimate reality, and yoga as a path to self-realisation (Pant, M. K. & Mishra, P., 2023). In the 'Shrimad Bhagavad Gita' Raja yoga is explained as a meditation technique for spiritual growth and stress relief. Raja yoga includes the deep reflection on spiritual ideas and also known as the "King of yogas". For example, in the Rajayoga, chanting mantras is not about repeating words but understanding their meaning to shift from body-awareness to soul-awareness (Bansiya, M., 2023).

In the second century BCE, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras described yoga as mastering the mind through focus and inner calm. This ancient text presents yoga as a practical science for the benefit of relaxation and awareness. It outlines the 8 limbs of yoga, called Ashtanga Yoga. Ashtanga yoga includes ethical values, physical postures, breath control, sense withdrawal, focus, and the last meditation. Yogis believed that yoga helps to release repressed emotions from the mind and gradually eliminates them (Jadhav, S., & Havalappanavar, R., 2009). The archaeological discoveries at ancient sites like the famous civilization Mohenjo-daro and Harappa have revealed seals and artefacts; it shows many figures in yogic postures. These all findings show the root of yoga that it was practiced in our culture and society in ancient time. In 19th and early 20th centuries, many famous Indian leaders like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda worked to restore and promote traditional Indian philosophies. This revival was related to India's fight for national identity, sparking renewed interest in yoga and indigenous knowledge of India (Hiremath, L. et al., 2024). Thus, the whole history of yoga is that it dated back to Indus valley civilization to the modern time. Innovations in communication and media in the 20th century helped yoga to reach a broader audience, with lots of training programs easily available worldwide. Today, yoga is totally blends tradition with modern practices, presenting physical, mental and spiritual benefits to people across cultures.

The evolution of yoga as a global practice for Mental Health Intervention:

Yoga has had a great sociocultural impact with its traditional practice into the diverse cultures worldwide. As it meets to the modern transformation of communication and media, its impact on everyone continues to shape perspectives and interactions globally in this era of polycrisis. Yoga becomes a cornerstone for the global health and wellness trends. It is known for reducing stress, improving flexibility, and promoting mindfulness. This transformation shows the growing societal focus on preventive healthcare and self-care (Chauhan, D. & Bansal, S., nd.). Yoga also influences the brain, many people turn to the ancient yoga culture as an alternative or important therapy due to medication side effects, or personal preference (Park, C. L., & Slattery, J. M., 2021). Researches support its effectiveness in reducing symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety. It improves mental activities like perception, memory, and positive thinking with enhancing the overall personality traits. It improves attentiveness, reduces response time, and visual-auditory reaction times. Task-requiring selective attention, focus, and other responses show marked improvement with consistent yoga and its role for the mental health and physical well-being.

It also transforms the attitudes toward health including physical and mental well-being. The worldwide importance of yoga has encouraged the cultural exchange and adaptation of good routine for the welfare of the human society. Every Practitioner from various backgrounds across the world has personalized the yoga practice to align with their unique cultural contexts. It is also economically beneficial that it broadened its field as an industry. The market of yoga-related products, accessories has expanded to meet the global demand.

Practices and components of yoga:

Yoga, including practices like asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing exercises), and meditation (dhyana), has positive benefits for the mental health and overall wellbeing. These all practices integrate the mind, body, and soul, for the holistic therapeutic approach to human health.

1. **Breathing exercises:** Breathing exercises, performed in a comfortable sitting position (e.g., padmasana, vajrasana), enhance respiratory function and mental calmness. Pranayama helps manage conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) by reducing hyperventilation, and anxiety, while improving lung function and respiratory muscle endurance (Singh, A. P., 2017). Regular diaphragmatic breathing or Shitali pranayama has improves the daily activity levels. These benefits extend to reducing blood pressure in hypertension patients, with trials noting a significant reduction in both systolic and diastolic pressures (Singh et al., 2018).

2. **Meditation (Dhyana):** Meditation improves mindfulness by encouraging non-judgmental awareness of internal experiences. Practices of Sambhavi Mahamudra Kriya, combining deep breathing and meditation for 21 minutes daily over six weeks reduce stress and enhance general wellbeing. Meditation's calming effects make it an effective add-on therapy for depression, mental disorders, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.
3. **Yoga Postures (Asanas):** Physical postures in yoga provide relaxation, improve focus, and aid in emotional regulation. Asanas also contribute to physiological benefits such as improved peak oxygen intake and reduced inflammatory markers in heart failure patients. Yoga therapies enhance quality of life and promote mental resilience that is useful for improving chronic conditions (Kumar et al., 2021).

Yoga practices thus focus on a complementary approach to mental health treatment by reducing stress, fostering mindfulness, and improving physical health. They act as effective add-on therapies for severe mental illnesses and enhance overall quality of life.

Benefits of yoga for mental-health in the age of global polycisis:

Yoga has been practiced to promote harmony between the mind, body, and spirit. Today, scientific research supports its many mental health benefits. Yoga includes physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana). Together, these practices of yoga improve mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, enhancing emotional regulation of feelings, and increasing overall well-being.

➤ Reduction in anxiety, stress, and depression:

One of the well-documented benefits of yoga is its ability to reduce stress. Yoga promotes relaxation by calming the nervous system. Breathing exercises like pranayama maintain the heart rate and reduce levels of stress hormones like cortisol (Sharma, et al., 2020). Deep breathing also improves oxygen flow which help the body feel calm and refreshed all time. Meditation is a key part of yoga, reduces overthinking and mental clutter. Researches show that regular meditation decrease anxiety by increasing awareness of the present moment (Rao et al., 2020). This reduces the tendency to worry about the past or future. It also decreases symptoms of depression by encouraging positive thinking and self-acceptance (Singh et al., 2018). It also balances the nervous system that regulates the body's stress response. Yoga helps the body recover from stress by activating the nervous system. Over time, this builds greater resistance to stress and anxiety triggers.

Chronic stress negatively affects the immune system and contributes to various physical and mental health issues. Stress for a long time can weaken the body's defence mechanism, making individuals more susceptible to illnesses and emotional challenges. Anxiety disorders, among the most common psychiatric conditions, impose significant social and economic costs globally.

➤ **Improvement in emotional regulation and resilience:**

Yoga strengthens emotional regulation, which is the ability to manage emotions in a healthy way. Yoga teaches individuals to observe their emotions without judgement through mindfulness. This reduces emotional reactivity and helps people respond calmly to difficult situations (Mahammad, S. R., 2024). Yoga also improves mental resilience, the ability to recover from setbacks. Practicing yoga builds mental toughness by encouraging persistence, self-discipline, and patience. Holding a difficult pose successfully or pushing through discomfort strengthens the ability to handle emotional difficulties.

➤ **Enhancing proactivity and reducing reactivity:**

Yoga minimises involuntary reactive behaviours by increasing sensitivity and developing proactive responses in stressful situations. This makes it beneficial in mitigating frustration and anxiety. It combined with changes in lifestyle due to lots of problem in personal, social, and academic life by polycrisis. Yoga helps to reduce anxiety, depression, and related symptoms in teenagers. Practicing yoga in groups enhances teamwork and develops a sense of community. Group yoga session promote collectivism, making them a potential alternative to pharmacological treatments for depression and anxiety by positively influencing stress responses such as blood pressure and cortisol levels.

Yoga also enhances concentration, memory, and mental clarity, which improves cognitive flexibility for tackling daily challenges. By providing a deep mind-body connection, yoga cultivates emotional awareness, allowing practitioners to tune into their sensations, thoughts, and feelings with greater precision. This mindfulness practice encourages self-compassion and self-acceptance, helping individuals build resilience and develop a healthier self-image in a world of competition and comparison.

Prominent Global Initiatives and Programs Promoting Yoga:

Yoga has emerged as a remarkable practice for mental and physical well-being. Around the globe, initiatives have been implemented to integrate yoga into mental health strategies, acknowledging its ability to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression while developing resilience and mindfulness. Here

are some global and Indian programs, healthcare integration, and educational initiatives promoting yoga as a tool for mental health: -

- **Integration of Yoga in Healthcare Systems: Research and Implementation:** Yoga's therapeutic benefits are supported by extensive research. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) in United States has conducted studies demonstrating yoga's effectiveness in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yoga is increasingly included in mental health treatment protocols globally, combining traditional medical approaches with holistic practices. Several healthcare systems worldwide incorporate yoga into treatment plans. For example, hospitals in United States, Europe, and Australia offer therapy of yoga for patient's physical illnesses and mental health conditions. Programs such as "Yoga in Medicine" train healthcare professionals to integrate yoga into patient care. In India, government hospitals and clinics under the Ministry of AYUSH provide yoga sessions, shows its accessibility and affordability as a mental health tool.
- **Integration of Yoga in Educational Settings:** Yoga is increasingly being introduced in schools to promote emotional and mental well-being among students. Programs like International Kids' Yoga Day encourage yoga practice in classrooms for stress management and concentration. Countries like the United States and the United Kingdom have adopted yoga modules as part of their school curriculums, aiming to reduce stress and improve academic performance. Educational institutions and organizations should organise specific training to implement yoga in classrooms for teachers. Programs like "Yoga in Education" emphasise mindfulness, emotional regulation, and physical health, equipping educators with tools to create supportive learning environments. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has integrated yoga into its curriculum to enhance students' holistic development.
- **Ministry of AYUSH Initiatives:** The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) actively promotes yoga through various programs and campaigns. The Ministry organises nationwide events, workshops, and research initiatives focused on yoga's mental health benefits. It also collaborates with international bodies to propagate yoga as a global health practice. The "Yoga for Wellness" program under the Ministry emphasises yoga's role in enhancing physical and mental resilience.
- **Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY):** MDNIY, under the Ministry of AYUSH, is a leading institute dedicated to yoga education and research. It serves as a WHO Collaborating Centre in Traditional Medicine and conducts training programs, seminars, and research projects

on yoga's mental health benefits. The institute also provides yoga certification courses for professionals, promoting evidence-based practices in mental health care.

- **International Day of Yoga (IDY):** The United Nations proclaimed June 21st as the International Day of Yoga (IDY) in 2014. This initiative was introduced by India to show yoga's universal appeal and benefits. IDY celebrates yoga practice for individual and societal well-being (Manjunath, N. K., 2023). Themes for IDY promote yoga's relevance to mental health; for example, the 2023 theme, "Yoga for Humanity," showcased its role in promoting emotional resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a polycrisis for the world. On this day, millions participate in yoga sessions, workshops, and community events globally, raising awareness about its therapeutic effects.
- **World Health Organization (WHO) Perspective on Yoga:** The World Health Organization acknowledges yoga as an integral practice for enhancing mental and physical health. South-East Asia Regional Office of WHO (SEARO) actively promotes yoga as a complementary intervention for mental health care. WHO report "Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030" includes yoga as a recommended practice related to mental health challenges. It also collaborates with yoga institutes to conduct studies and workshops on yoga's role in alleviating mental health conditions in era of polycrisis.
- **International Yoga Festival:** The International Yoga Festival, held annually in Rishikesh, India, attracts participants from over 100 countries. This week-long event includes workshops, classes, and discussions on yoga's role in promoting mental well-being. The festival gives a platform for global collaboration, sharing knowledge about yoga's mental health applications. Globally, institutions like the NCCIH and universities in Europe and Asia conduct research on yoga's effectiveness in mental health care. Collaborative studies between Indian and international institutions have grown the development of standardised yoga protocols for mental health issues. These studies show role of yoga for controlling stress hormones, enhancing mindfulness, and improving quality of life.

Conclusion:

The above discussion presents that yoga is a powerful tool to improve mental health. It reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, enhancing emotional regulation, and promoting overall well-being. It includes physical postures, breathing techniques, meditation and creates a balanced state of mind and body. Regular practice can transform mental health, and give both immediate relief and long-term resilience. Whether practiced individually or in group settings, it provides a holistic approach to mental health and a better quality of life.

The inclusion of yoga into mental health strategies demonstrates its growing recognition as an effective tool. Through global and local initiatives, healthcare integration, and educational programs, yoga continues to change the lives by addressing mental health challenges. By promoting yoga through initiatives tailored to underserved populations and including it in mental health policies, the global community can harness its benefits on a larger scale. With sustained efforts, yoga can play an important role in addressing the global mental health crisis and enhancing a healthier, more resilient world.

References:

- Bansiya, M. (2023). Effects of yoga on mental health: A comprehensive study with reference to India. *Swadeshi Research Foundation*, 10 (10).
- Chauhan, D. & Bansal, S. (nd.). Bridging traditional and trends: Exploring Indian knowledge systems and yoga in the modern era. *Srijana journal*, 54 (7).
- Gangadhar, B. N., & Varambally, S. (2012). Yoga and psychiatry. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(3), 226-230.
- Hiremath, L., Gandhi, N. V., Sarode, N., Prasad, P. (2024). The holistic journey of yoga in modern society. *International journal of engineering applied sciences and technology*, 8 (10).
- International Yoga Festival. (n. d.). Retrieved from <https://internationalyogafestival.org>
- Jadhav, S., & Havalappanavar, R. (2009). Yoga-based interventions and mental well-being. *Journal of Yoga and Physical Therapy*, 7(1), 10-20.
- Mahammad, S. R. (2024). Ancient wisdom to modern wellness: The relevance of yoga today. *International research journal*, 1 (91). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14177561>
- Manjunath, N. K. (2023). The transformative impact of the international day of yoga. DOI:10.4103/ijoy_ijoy_106_23. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10424276/>
- Ministry of AYUSH. (n. d.). *Yoga Portal*. Retrieved from <https://yoga.ayush.gov.in>
- Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga. (n. d.). Yoga for Mental Health. Retrieved from <https://yoga.ayush.gov.in/WHOCC/Books6/Yoga%20for%20Mental%20Health.pdf>
- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. (n. d.). Yoga: Effectiveness and Safety. Retrieved from <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-effectiveness-and-safety>
- Panth, M. K. & Mishra, P. (2023). Yoga and mental health. *International journal of creative research thoughts (IJCRT)*, 11 (6).
- Park, C. L., & Slattery, J. M. (2021). Yoga as an integrative therapy for mental health concerns. *Psychiatry International*, 2(4), 386-401.

-
- Rao, M., Patel, M., & Bhat, A. (2020). Stress Reduction through Sambhavi Mahamudra Kriya: A Six-Week Controlled Study. *Journal of Meditation Science*, 5(4), 98–104.
- Sharma, V., Kumar, N., & Gupta, R. (2020). Role of Pranayama in Respiratory Disorders: A Comprehensive Review. *Journal of Complementary Therapies*, 32(2), 123–130.
- Shroff, f. (2017). Yoga and mental health: A review. *Journal of physiotherapy & physical rehabilitation*. DOI: 10.4172/2573-0312.1000132
- Singh, A. P. (2017). Yoga for mental health: Opportunities and challenges. *MOJ Yoga & Physical Therapy*. DOI: 10.15406/mojypt.2017.02.00009
- Singh, P., Verma, S., & Mishra, R. (2018). Impact of Yogic Breathing on Blood Pressure in Hypertension Patients: A Meta-analysis. *Indian Journal of Yoga*, 14(3), 45–50.
- United Nations Children’s Fund. (2024). Children and Youth in a Polycrisis World: Vulnerability and Resistance. *New York: UNICEF*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org
- World Health Organization. (2023). World Health Report 2023: Health in a Polycrisis World. *Geneva: WHO*. Retrieved from www.who.int