

Chapter 13

Yoga as an Intervention for Promoting Subjective Well-Being

Bal Krishna Upadhyay

Subjective Well-Being and Yoga Tradition

Mind is an important part of human psychology wherein many thoughts are buried deep in the unconscious or subconscious. These thoughts reflect on the behaviour of humans and play vital role in promoting well-being and mental health. In today's stress-filled life, more and more people are suffering from stress-borne diseases. This has essentially happened because of mismatched synchronization of mind and body state. It has been established that 'one's body works according to one's mind', and when mind is not healthy it leads to unhealthy body. This ultimately affects the state of well-being experienced by an individual. Yoga as a science is devoted to the integration of mind and body so as to help attaining the highest degree of happiness embodied into a healthy body.

The field of subjective well-being (SWB) has grown substantially in the past three decades, especially with the introduction of positive psychology. There is increasing evidence about the health-enhancing role of SWB (e.g., Cummins 2000; Diener 1984, 2000; Seligman 2002). The concept of SWB as Diener et al. (1997) define refers to people's evaluation of their lives. Haas (1999) has viewed it as a generic term encompassing all aspects of life. Currently, SWB includes life satisfaction, affective experience and subjective responses to the objective conditions. Further, it has also been noted that SWB is a function of the degree of congruence between individual's wishes, needs and environmental demands and opportunities (Jadhav and Havalappanavar 2009). The current view holds that SWB is a function of three variables: life satisfaction, lack of negative mental states and the presence of positive mood and emotion (Thomas 2008).

B. K. Upadhyay (✉)

Faculty of Human Resource Management, Indian Institute of Forest Management,
Nehru Nagar, Bhopal 462003, Madhya Pradesh, India
e-mail: bkupadhyay@yahoo.com

The idea of well-being in the Indian tradition is embedded in the concept of *anand* (bliss) that finds place in the various texts. The Taittiriya Upanishad presents *anand* as the original state of human consciousness or the *atman* (the transcendental self). The *panchakosha*¹ (the five sheaths) doctrine draws attention of the varying levels of qualitatively distinct experiences of *anand*. These five *koshas* are as follows: *annamaya kosha* (related to the satisfaction of sensual pleasures by the acts of satisfying bodily needs of hunger, sleep, sex and fear; *pranmaya kosha* (awareness of duality of *atman* and body), *manomaya kosha* (related to effective functions of *harsh*, *ullaas*, and *santosh*—excitement, feelings of pleasantness, and being pleased), *vijnaanmaya kosha* (related to wisdom encompassing intuition and intellect) and the *anandmaya kosha* (related to being *anandmaya* pervaded by bliss) (commentary by Sankara on Taittiriya Upanishad in Sastri (translator) 1923). Each *kosha* is like a curtain that covers the original state of being. Step by step unfolding of these sheaths leads to the state of *anand*—the knowledge that ‘I am bliss’. Attaining this state of *anand* is the ultimate state of well-being.

The yogic tradition in India follows the teachings of purifying the self, the *atman* and the body to attain the ultimate form of well-being, unfolding the *anandmaya kosha*—the opening of eternal bliss where the person realizes that ‘I am bliss’. This implies that a hierarchy of veils has to be lifted and the person has to climb up the ladders one by one to reach the level where ultimate form of well-being is situated.

The first three steps, moving from down to up, in the hierarchy (see Fig. 13.1), that is, *annamaya*, *pranmaya* and *manomaya koshas* is comparatively easier to experience and attain, but the *vijnaanmaya* and *anandmaya koshas* are comparatively difficult to attain.

- i. ***Annamaya Kosha***: *Annamaya kosha* is the satiation of the engagements of *indriyas* (sense organs) and assumes that all forms of existence is food to something and forms the base for survival of biological being. All creatures are born out of food and die to become part of food in the ‘food chain’. Learning, knowing and removing this sheath of ignorance will lead to the second step up the ladder (from Taittiriya Upanishad with commentary of Sankara, in Sastri (translator) 1923, pp 104–107).
- ii. ***Pranmaya kosha***: This second layer relates to the vital life force, which is identified by and is dependent on breathing. The physical manifestation of *prana* (vital life force) is breath and as long as it remains in the person, life exists. By gaining control on the *prana*, one may remove the sheath surrounding it and move on to the next layer (see Sastri, translator 1923).
- iii. ***Manomaya kosha***: The mind sheath is composed of *manas* (mind, thought, will, wish). The mind along with the five sensory organs is said to constitute the *Manomaya kosha*. The *manas*, exists only in individual forms of beings and it is the cause of diversity. Man’s bondage as well as liberation is said to

¹Complete discussion on *panchakosha* can be found in the verses of Anand Valli’s of Taittiriya Upanishad with commentary of Sankara.



Fig. 13.1 Hierarchy of attaining ultimate well-being or anand by removing the lower sheaths

be caused by the mind, hence, man needs to move beyond this kosha to attain ultimate liberation.

मनएवमनुष्याणांकारणंबन्धमोक्षयोः ।
बन्धायविषयासक्तंमुक्त्यैनिर्विषयंस्मृतम् ॥

(For man, mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation. Mind absorbed in sense objects is the cause of bondage, and mind detached from the sense objects is the cause of liberation...Amritabindu Upanishad verse2)

The Manomaya kosha receives its inputs from all the sensory organs and interprets them in various form such as, good, bad and chooses the one most appropriate.

- iv. **Vijnaanmaya kosha:** To reach the Vijnaanmaya kosha or Gyanmaya kosha (the wisdom sheath) one has to detach from the impurity of bondage of all sense organs. This kosha is characterized by knowledge, ethics, reason, yoga, and *manhas* (power to perceive and reason). Nothing is impossible for a man

who has removed all the previous sheaths to reach this kosha. The individual at this level is aware and interprets the experience of bliss such as 'I have experienced bliss'. However, the knowledge gained is still not permanent hence the truth has yet not been attained but without entering this state of vijnaanmaya one cannot move towards experiencing the true self or the atman.

- v. **Anandmaya kosha:** Vijnaanmaya kosha envelops the deepest, hidden layer of the realm (unconsciousness) that is the kosha called anandmaya kosha, the ultimate form of well-being. Man reaching the anandmaya kosha gains the capacity to realize the empirical and the spiritual, the conscious and unconscious, the changing and the eternal, the time and the timeless (see Deussen 1980; translation by Bedekar and Palsule). The individual gains self knowledge, realizes the essence and understands that bliss is him and not other. He attains knowledge about elements of the universe and hence attains the ultimate form of well-being, the *satchitta-anand*, and liberates from all the sufferings, desires, life and death. Nothing remains but only bliss.

To reach the highest step of liberation or to gain the ultimate understanding of true self (the atman) and become anandmaya one has to remove the sheaths of *dukkh* (misery), *klesh* (obstacles), and all barriers of mind, time, body, space and dimensions, which is the part of the four sheaths at the lower levels, as discussed. Thus, understanding the true form of SWB in Indian context is to understand the *panchakoshas* and how to detach from all the lower forms of koshas so as to unveil the anand koshas and become bliss himself attaining the anant (the unlimited).

Yoga as an Intervention to Attain Anand (Subjective Well-Being)

There are many ways apart from contemporary medical advances which have been used very effectively to promote human well-being. Yoga is one such technique considered to be one of the most important, effective and valuable tools available for man to overcome various physical and psychological problems and instill the feeling of happiness. Kuvalyananda and Vinekar (1971) has observed that yoga helps in nurturing positive attitudes and reconditioning neuromuscular systems. Thus, it seems that yoga helps the entire human body to enhance the capacity to withstand greater stress and strain and aims at an integrated and harmonious development of all the potentialities of a person.

Yoga, on the other hand, is also the method of attaining spiritual riches and superiority. The term yoga is made from the word *Yuj*, which means the act of joining. In spiritualism this word is used to explain the unity of the soul and supreme soul. The detachment of soul from the supreme soul results in all sorts of problems and sinful actions, disharmony, crime, immorality, etc. Maharshi Patanjali defines yoga as:

योगःश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ।2।

(Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (*chitta*) from taking various forms (*vrittis*)- (*Patanjali Yoga Pradeep, sadhan pad 1:2*)

Verma (1994) has operationally defined yoga as a group of techniques and methods consisting of certain exercises e.g., physical and postural exercises, cleansing exercises and breathing exercises, which have a potential to add to our physical and mental health—both positive and negative. Mental health, on the other hand, refers to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of human beings. It has both negative and positive connotation in terms of mental disease or ill health and the presence of well-being together with yogic exercises contributing to the treatment of mental and medical patients.

If we look at the various definitions provided, it seems that yoga is a group of exercise techniques that strengthen one physically and mentally. But it is not just a group of exercises. Yoga, as a method, is the way of attaining spiritual riches and superiority. This brings good changes in the entire life of a person. Yoga devotion begins with the body and body is the basis for all activities of the world. It is the body that experiences the *sukha* (bliss, happiness), *dukha* (sorrow), *raga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversions), all forms of *klesha* (afflictions), etc. which has its origin in desires and expectations. These elements of experiences are the various forms of sheaths, which prevent an individual to attain the state of happiness or bliss at large or to simply put it affects the subjective well-being of a person.

Yoga, as a technique, has been known and tested to be important in enhancing cognitive and affective abilities. Thus, yoga may become a vital tool for enhancing the positive evaluation of life.

Yoga and SWB: Some Research and Trends

In contrast to Patanjali's classical yoga, the many schools of post-classical yoga are non-dualistic, that is, they pursue their soteriological programme on the basis of the recognition that 'All is One' (Feuerstein 1998). Various forms of yoga have come up in different ages in form of Vedic yoga, pre-classical yoga, classical yoga and post-classical yoga. However, yogic approaches to health achieved its peak through Hatha Yoga ('Forceful Yoga') and Raj Yoga or Astang Yoga.

It is not the objective of the present work to distinguish between the various forms of yoga, however, understanding of the two most important forms of yoga tradition, Raj Yoga and Hatha Yoga, is felt. While Raj Yoga specializes into leading the practitioner to higher self actualization or realization of the true self, Hatha Yoga specializes in making the body, the home of the atman, healthy and strong. The object of Hatha Yoga is more inclined towards the physical than psychological.² Swami Vivekananda (1923) suggested taking advantage of the

²See Swami Vivekananda (1923) for more on distinction between Raj Yoga and Hatha Yoga.

techniques of Hatha Yoga, especially the physical purification processes, through which only one can try unveiling the pranmaya kosha and open the manomaya kosha. Thus, practice of Hatha Yoga provides an entry path to the realization of anand kosha. The discussion ahead is based on the combination of Raj Yoga and Hatha Yoga, along with other forms of yogic traditions.

Hatha Yoga specializes in exploring the body's potential for the transformative processes of yogic consciousness technology (Feuerstein 1998). Hatha Yoga is more related to psychosomatic aspect that includes many physical purification techniques supported by a large number of asanas (postures) that exercises the body in various ways providing different benefits, all together. It has always had a close relationship with India's native naturopathic system called Ayurveda, which is profoundly holistic and for this reason has become quite fashionable in the West.

One of the other traditional orientations of yoga is the Viniyoga practiced and propagated by the school of T. Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) and his son Desikachar. Yoga has also been used as a therapy to support traditional Indian medicine for thousands of years. However, yoga therapy in its present form is a new but a growing discipline which has been created by the integration of traditional yoga and contemporary medicine.

Yoga as an Intervention

Contemporary modern society is observing serious changes in the way they live, that is, their lifestyle have changed due to influence of modern electronic gadgets and machines that were not available for the older generation. The American Psychological Association (2012) has reported increase in cases of reported stress in America. However, similar data is not readily available for other countries, but it is assumed that experience of stress has increased the world over. In addition, desire to attain more materialistic pleasures are being observed, in various forms. Working with deadlines and time pressure has made adult population vulnerable to stress which is known to be the major cause of ill health. Rise in stress-induced physical and mental disorders are high, especially virtual dukh and klesh due to overuse of new electronic gadgets. Besides, adults now complain of having no time to exercise that makes them visit medical practitioners on a regular basis so as to get symptomatic relief emerging out in various forms. The recent World Happiness Report 2015 (Helliwell et al. 2015) has also indicated that with increase in age life evaluation decreases. This reveals that SWB among adults, irrespective of gender, is lower than the younger generation.

It has been noted and observed by many scientists and researchers that practice of yoga and meditation brings positive changes in the psychological well-being, overall health and happiness (Malathi et al. 2000). Yoga has been described as a holistic approach to health of which the body, mind and spirit are integral and interdependent part (Bhushan 1998). It has been further noticed that while yoga is still considered as a gentle form of exercise and relaxation, some are drawn towards

it for its teachings at a deeper, spiritual level. This change comes from the belief that yoga, when adopted as a spiritual path, can underpin one's entire approach to life (Thomas 2008).

In one of his highly influential article on SWB, Diener (1984) proposed that SWB has three distinct components: life satisfaction (LS), positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). Diener et al. (1999) also included satisfaction in specific life domains (e.g., satisfaction with health) in the definition of SWB. When we analyse these components of SWB and the satisfaction in specific life domain, it is found that a positive frame of mind has an inverse effect and reduce health risk and yoga has a mediating effect in enhancing the positives of SWB. In the same line, Upadhyay (2002) proposes certain yogic techniques that help in reducing the symptoms of hypertension and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) and enable patients to manage their medical conditions effectively. She has also established that yogic postures can be helpful in reinstating the vital life energy, the prana, while the effects of certain asanas and pranayams may act as a booster to the experiences of positive life evaluations.

The affect component of SWB relates to the positive and negative affect, i.e., emotions, moods and feelings. An emotion is a prime determinant of the sense of subjective well-being and appears to play a central role in many human activities (Santrock 2005). Bhatt (2011) in his study has revealed that there is significant reduction in negative emotions/affect when individuals are exposed to yogic asanas and pranayam. In this regard, it seems that yogic practices allows for greater bonding, better mental or psychological flexibility and working out conflicts with less competition. The findings of Bhatt have also suggested that Yoga reduces the effects of negative affect and is related to improved mental and physical health (Bhatt 2011), hence adding to the feeling of SWB. Besides, Narasimhan et al. (2011) have reviewed and reported that the benefits of reduction in negative emotions improves quality of life in healthy people with increased immunity (Dillon et al. 1985), better pulmonary functions (Kubzansky et al. 2002) and increased lifespan (Danner et al. 2001).

Studies involving short-term Iyengar Yoga (10 h) has shown improvement in self-reported acute mood states of depression trait anxiety, negative mood and fatigue in young adults (e.g., see Woolery et al. 2004). West et al. (2004) have compared African dance and Hatha Yoga and have reported a reduced perceived stress and negative affect with both these practices but higher reduction in cortisol levels in the Hatha Yoga group. Furthermore, the utility of yoga in improving mood and the differential effects has been reported to be related to its positive influence on physiological states of arousal (West et al. 2004) through establishing stable autonomic balance (Vempati and Telles 2002). Thus, yoga induces a positive mind state, that is, it helps in inducing healthy feeling, feeling happier, more content and more at ease and hence, yoga is related to subjective wellbeing positively.

It has thus been established that yogic experiences helps boost the individual's overall subjective well-being. However, it is reminded that practice of yoga is required to be conducted in proper guidance of a trained teacher. Also, the choice of specific technique (*asanas*, and *pranayam*) is very important. to test the hypothesis

that yogic practices helps in creating more positive feeling and enhanced experience of physical and mental wellbeing among adult CHD participants, Upadhyay (2002) developed a package for individuals suffering from hypertension and CHD. The yoga package consisted of *Pawan muktaasan* (warming up exercise), pranayam and asanas.

Pawan muktaasan is a series of warming up exercises that has to be done prior to the start of any yogic procedure, as a warming up exercise. It is related to the ayurvedic concept of *tridoshas*, viz., vata (the air), pitta (the fire), kapha (water of life). The wind fans the fire (pitta) and the fire purifies the water of life (kapha) (Frawley 1922). Pawan muktaasan series allows change that leads to renewal and rejuvenation making the practitioner happier and healthy. Similarly, yogasanas are the exercise for the whole body and is the best method to keep the body active, healthy and disease free. The practice of yoga begins with the process of controlling the mind. Patanjali has explained this in one dictum. Yoga controls all the conditions of the mind that forms the greater part of sheaths, which prevents an individual from attaining the ultimate state of happiness. Regular yogasanas help in curing almost all types of diseases and strengthens the nerves and muscles. Where yogasana purifies the mind pranayam purifies the vital life source, the prana. It provides and regulates the additional energy required to work in a positive state of mind. Pranayam controls the playfulness of the mind and its regular practice makes the mind happy preventing any kind of disequilibria in the body.

Using the above package on a sample of 126 adult participants suffering from hypertension and CHD, Upadhyay (2002) concluded that the above yogic postures and techniques are helpful in promoting positive physical and mental well-being leading to enhanced evaluation of life and more positive affect. In the same line, Setterlind (1983) has reported that regular practice of meditation brings a positive change in the well-being of the individual. This entails that yogic meditation may help in increasing of psychological well-being. Besides, Malathi et al. (2000) have observed a significant improvement in 9 of the 11 factors of subjective well-being in healthy volunteers at the end of four months of yoga practice. Kumar (2004) has noticed a remarkable positive shift in a postgraduate student's anxiety and subjective well-being as a result of Yoga Nidra practice on daily basis.

It is now known that yoga has been linked to more advantages than disadvantages. Practices of yoga varies in this contemporary world in terms that it has become a tool for helping people gain better health and most modern meditation techniques aim to train attention and awareness to help bring thoughts under control. Studies show how helpful a regular meditation practice can be for relieving pain, anxiety and stress. In one of the interviews arranged with Dr. Katie Guttenberg for ABC News reports (2013) claims that there are more than 200 schools of yoga taught throughout the world and all of them aim to connect the mind and body through careful breathing and bodily movements. Guttenberg (2013) further reports that studies with meditation find that regularly practice of downward dogs (*adhomukhasvanasan*) and warrior poses (*virabhadrasan*) can help manage stress and anxiety developing out of the various activities that one indulges in one's daily life. There's increasing evidence that yoga can help fight cancer-related fatigue (Blank et al. 2010; Carson et al. 2009),

manage high blood pressure (Ross and Thomas 2010; Upadhyay 2002) and ease chronic pain, especially joint pain (Wren et al. 2011).

Comparison of yoga with regular modern form of exercises have revealed that both interventions make subjects feel better, but yoga seems to do better at relieving physical symptoms and perceptions of stress (Oken et al. 2004). It seems that yogic benefits extend not only to physiological and psychological health but is also significant in enhancing the biochemical profile by indicating an anti-stress and antioxidant effect which are important in the prevention of degenerative diseases (Santha et al. 1981; Udupa et al. 1975).

By and by, researches, as discussed, evince that yogasanas and pranayam are useful in worldly life to sustain the health of both physical and vital body. With a healthy body one is better able to undertake spiritual practice leading towards attainment of the purpose of life. Adoption of a yogic lifestyle has been found to be moderately related to measures of SWB (Thomas 2008). Thomas has evinced that people undertaking fulltime yoga studies in colleges and universities reveal higher self-ratings of yogic lifestyle than those attending a weekly yoga class and adoption of a yogic lifestyle is more strongly related to higher levels of life satisfaction in the domains of spirituality, health and community.

By and large, these findings suggest that positive evaluation of life may promote the feeling of subjective well-being and yoga is one such method. The researches further indicate that practice of yoga may impact emotions positively while decreasing the experience of stress and anxiety. Since, yoga is a combination of both physical and mental exercises, it helps in aligning one's mind with the body which helps in creating a better synchronization between the two. Thus, it is clear that yogic practices help not only in building a healthy body but also developing a positive outlook to one's life, hence enhance the experience of SWB in a person. Good physical health and a positive outlook towards life is the first step towards unveiling the veils of ignorance (unveiling of the five sheaths of panchakosha).

Conclusions and Ways Ahead

Yogic exercises are based on the principles of nature and accordingly it helps a person to cure him/herself. Yogic tradition in Indian philosophy is built towards unveiling the panchakoshas so as to experience ultimate liberation or anand. It encourages the practitioner to move towards more simple and easy lifestyle from a complex one. This transition from a complex to simple lifestyle enhances the positive evaluation of subjective well-being in the form of more satisfaction with life, gaining awareness of all elements, developing positive emotions and enhancing the feeling of happiness. Thus, literatures in this field of enquiry seem to indicate that subjective well-being is well related to disciplined yogic lifestyle. A disciplined yogic lifestyle may lead towards uncovering the sheaths of ignorance and move higher up in the steps of panchakosha (annamaya kosha to anandmaya kosha).

Besides, findings available depicts that research on this ancient form of healing (yoga) is being conducted in large numbers, however, they seem to be more confined towards more physiological and or psychological ailments. The related terms like well-being and anand still requires to be integrated in yoga research so that a proper linkage can be drawn between various forms of yogic exercises and dimensions of subjective well-being. Researchers also need to draw their attention to the underpinnings of yoga and its effects on self-esteem. In spite of few researches conducted on how yogic exercises relate to enhancement of positive evaluation of the components of subjective well-being, there still remains a gap. Future researchers may like to undertake studies to indicate how yogic practices can be related to man's happiness and how well it can be used in reducing virtual dukha and klesha so as to increase the individual's subjective well-being.

With the increase in new forms of sufferings like virtual dukha and klesha, the field of yoga and its impact on physiological and psychological well-being are open for the researchers. Whatever, knowledge we have about this system of mental and physical healing is still in infancy. It is not a complete answer to all problems and disorders; however, there may be times when this system is combined with any other healing system to bring the desired results, both in physical as well as psychological domains. The yogic tradition of India has immense potential to lead the understanding on the subject matter of subjective well-being. The only requirement is to prepare to search and learn what is embedded in various ancient texts of one of the world's oldest civilization, India.

अहंनिर्विकल्पोनिराकाररूपो।विभुत्वाच्चसर्वत्रसर्वेन्द्रियाणां।

सदामेसमत्वंनमुक्तिर्नबंधाचिदानंदरूपशिवोहंशिवोहं॥ 6 ॥

...I am untouched by the senses, I am neither Mukti nor knowable; I am without form, without limit, beyond space, beyond time; I am in everything; I am the basis of the universe; everywhere am I. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute— I am He, I am He (*Shivoham, Shivoham*) (Sri pad Adi Shankaracharya, '*Nirvana Shatakam*').

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