

Yoga and Healthcare in India: An Analytical Study with Special Reference to Constitutional Provisions

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Introduction

Yoga is an ancient Indian system of exercise which encompasses the harmonisation of the body, mind and spirit through the use of postures (asanas), breath (pranayama), meditation and ethical principles. Practiced for thousands of years, yoga was codified in the Yoga Sutra by Patanjali and is now a vital part of the health care systems around the world.

Yoga is not just a body exercise but a way of life which helps to ensure good health and well-being in India. Indian healthcare is plagued by many issues such as high healthcare expenses, escalating diagnosis of non-communicable diseases, mental health issues and inequitable access to healthcare facilities. Yoga in this context has become a valuable complementary health care modality. Research has proven that yoga can prevent and control diseases like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression and cardiovascular diseases when practiced regularly. Thus, yoga has become part of preventive and therapeutic health care programs increasingly all over the Nation.

India's constitution is built, and has a solid basis to support the promotion of health and well-being. The Constitution does not explicitly declare health as a fundamental right but, as per judicial interpretation, Article 21 is interpreted as covering the right to dignity of life and the right to health. The yoga promotion is very much in line with the goals of the constitution that focus on promoting health, social welfare and maintaining cultural heritage in India.

In India, Yoga is one of the components of healthcare.

Yoga plays a significant role in health care because of its holistic approach of prevention instead of cure. While modern medicine is based on treating diseases after they have occurred, yoga is based on maintaining physical and mental balance and thus decreasing the risk of disease. Yoga regularly practiced helps promote flexibility, cardiovascular health, immunity and psychological resilience. Mental health is a significant issue that is present in modern society today. Millions of people suffer from stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. Yoga practices like meditation, pranayama and mindfulness exercises help to lower the levels of stress hormones and emotional stability. Yoga is thus becoming a popular complementary healthcare approach for mental wellness, with numerous healthcare institutions suggesting its use.

Yoga is a great asset of health care for the Indian government. The establishment of the Ministry of AYUSH has helped to promote the yoga with other traditional systems of medicine. Yoga-based interventions are now being integrated into various health care and educational institutions as well as community health programs for enhancing public health outcomes.

The Promotion of Yoga is Based on the Constitution of India.

Yoga promotion in India is well entrenched in the constitutional philosophy of holistic development of their citizens: physical, mental and social health. Though the Constitution of India does not mention Yoga explicitly, the provisions with respect to healthcare, welfare, human dignity and preservation of culture has granted a solid constitutional base to promote and develop Yoga as an alternative approach to holistic healthcare. The idea of a healthy life is now a part of the Right

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to Life as guaranteed in Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which gives every individual the right to live with dignity and health. In addition, the Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 38, 39, 41, 42 and 47) impose an obligation on the State to promote public health, and to improve the standard of living and social welfare. Yoga plays a vital role in fulfilling these constitutional goals in its ability to prevent diseases, reduce stress, maintain mental health and promote balanced living. Further, Article 51A(f) has laid down a fundamental duty for citizens to protect and cherish the rich cultural heritage of India including Yoga. As yoga gets more and more acknowledged by the government, educational programs, healthcare policies and the celebration of the International Day of Yoga demonstrates the commitment that was made in the Constitution of Yoga to public health and national well-being. The constitution of India, therefore, directly and indirectly supports the promotion of yoga as a valuable tool to create a healthy and harmonious society.

Article 21: Right to a Healthy Environment

According to Art 21, no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. However, this right has been broadly interpreted by the judiciary and encompasses the rights to health, medical assistance and a healthy environment. Yoga which promotes physical and mental health, is in line with the constitutional goal of protecting life and health. The Supreme Court has time and again recognized that health is an integral part of a decent life. Thus, the action of the government for the promotion of yoga can be seen as an attempt to perform its constitutional duty as stated in Article 21.

Article 47 - The State shall ensure that the public health is improved.

The State is mandated to improve the standard of living of the citizens, improve public health and raise the level of nutrition through Article 47 of the Directive Principles of State Policy. These are benefits of yoga, as it directly helps achieve these objectives by promoting healthy lifestyle and prevention of diseases. Considering the

constitutional demand in Article 47, which gives ample grounds for introducing yoga in the national health policies and public health programmes.

Articles 38 and 39

The State has to advance social welfare and establish a social order conducive to justice, according to Article 38. Article 39 highlights the importance of worker and citizen health, and the strength of workers. Through yoga, the physical and mental well-being is improved which leads to fulfilment of the constitutional objectives and is also beneficial for the national productivity and welfare.

Articles 41 and 42

Article 41 stipulates that the State shall render public aid in the event of sickness and disability, and Article 42 that the conditions of work are humane and that the State will provide relief for women during pregnancy. Yoga based wellness programs help in achieving these goals through better workplace health, stress reduction and overall well-being.

The protection of environment (Article 48A)

It is a State obligation to uphold and enhance the environment as provided by Article 48A. The classical Yoga philosophy is that people should seek harmony with nature. This holistic solution is in addition to the constitutional measures for protecting the environment and sustainable living.

Article 51A(f) is a Fundamental Duty that states that the state shall ensure protection and preservation of the cultural heritage.

Under Article 51A (f) it is the responsibility of every citizen to uphold and protect the rich heritage of the country. The practice of yoga is well known as a part of Indian culture and philosophy. Thus, the practice and promotion of yoga aids in the performance of this duty outlined in the Constitution.

Judicial Recognition of Health Rights and Relevance to Yoga

The judiciary in India has been very instrumental in declaring health as a fundamental part of the

right to life assured by Article 21 of the Constitution. In several landmark decisions, the Supreme Court has consistently recognized that the right to life is not just the right to live, but living with human dignity, good health and access to healthcare facilities. In the case of *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* (AIR 1984 SC 802) the Court stated that the right to life of a person with dignity also involves the right to health and the strength of the workers. In a similar manner in *Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India* (AIR 1995 SC 922) the Court held that the right to health and medical care is a fundamental right under Article 21. It was also reiterated in *State of Punjab v. Mohinder Singh Chawla* (AIR 1997 SC 1225) that the maintenance of health is essential for having a meaningful life. These judicial statements have enlarged what the Constitution means when it comes to health and that the State must take steps that are aimed at promoting the public's health. Yoga in this context is relevant in the context of prevention and promotion of health. Yoga improves overall fitness, physical stability, mental balance and emotional well-being which in turn helps to fulfil the right to health as enshrined in the constitution and aids the vision of the judiciary to ensure a healthy and dignified life to all the citizens of the country.

The judiciary has been vital in the development of the meaning of health in constitutional law. Supreme Court has included health as a fundamental component of the right to life in *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*, *Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India* and *State of Punjab v. Mohinder Singh Chawla*. The judicial decisions create a mandate for the State to provide opportunities for good health. Yoga encourages preventive healthcare, mental well-being and physical fitness, which is in tune with constitutional jurisprudence in the domain of health rights.

Government Initiatives to Promote Yoga

The Government of India has taken several steps and initiatives to promote yoga within the healthcare policy. Today, June 21, is the International Day of Yoga (IDY) observed by the United Nations (UN) to promote Yoga and raise

awareness about the importance of practicing Yoga. Under the Ministry of AYUSH, there are different programs related to yoga education, research, training and its incorporation in health care. Yoga centers are created within hospitals, schools, universities, prisons and workplaces. Yoga is being studied by research institutes for its disease-preventing and disease-managing scientific advantages. These activities demonstrate the State's efforts towards the promotion of public health, while maintaining the rich heritage of Indian culture.

However, there are some problems that need to be addressed regarding this. Yoga needs to be scientifically standardized, trained teachers, awareness of the populace and its incorporation with the conventional medical systems needs to be developed. In addition, there is a need to further increase the evidence-based research to make the credibility of yoga more evident in clinical settings. Furthermore, provision of yoga health care services is not uniform, especially in the rural and low income areas. To achieve this, the benefits of Yoga can be maximized if it has proper policy implementation, sufficient financial support, and institutional support in all sections of the society.

Conclusion

Yoga has a special place in the realm of healthcare, culture and constitutional governance in India. Yoga, as a complete lifestyle of physical, mental and spiritual health, can be a tremendous asset in the solution to the current healthcare problems especially those related to lifestyle diseases, mental stress and preventive health management. The constitution of India gives a strong normative direction to encourage health and promote cultural heritage in terms of the article 21, Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties. Judicial interpretations have also reinforced the constitutional protection and recognition of health as an integral part of human dignity and quality of life. This incorporation of yoga into India's healthcare system is a forward-thinking measure that blends ancient wisdom with contemporary public health goals. There have been various government initiatives, institutional support and increasing public awareness at national level which have improved the contribution of yoga to national

health policies. However, continued efforts are needed for the scientific validation, professional training, access and implementation.

Yoga is not just a traditional activity, it is a constitutional and healthcare resource, which can play a role to achieve healthful, balanced and productive society. Its advancement promotes individual welfare and the constitutional ideals of India which include social welfare, public health and holistic human development.

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