

The Transformative Impact of the International Day of Yoga

The International Day of Yoga (IDY) is one of India's most significant traditional and cultural gifts, first celebrated on June 21st, 2015, across the world. Responding to the proposal made by the Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, the UN General Assembly declared June 21st as the International Day of Yoga in December 2014. The vision was to connect the world as one family (*Vasudaiva kutumbakam*) through Yoga based lifestyle to create a healthy and peaceful planet earth.

The celebrations started with a bang in 2015, with millions participating in Yoga Day worldwide.^[1] It inspired several people to practice Yoga regularly after attending the first IDY on June 21st. According to a survey by the Indian government, the number of people doing Yoga increased significantly after IDY in 2015. In India, 85 lakh people practised Yoga on June 21st, and over 35 per cent of the participants continued to practice Yoga even after the event ended. However, this number increased substantially by 2019, taking the tally to 9 crores and by 2020 to 12.06 crores.^[2] However, these numbers almost doubled (22.13 crores) in 2022, making IDY probably the most significant event in the country. Apart from creating awareness, IDY also successfully promoted Yoga as a healthy lifestyle choice.

Studies have shown that regular yoga practice can reduce stress, improve flexibility and balance.^[3] By promoting Yoga through IDY, more people are exposed to these health benefits and encouraged to incorporate Yoga into their daily lives. Hence, celebrating IDY has brought a transformative impact in various fields.

Impact on Awareness of Yoga and Standardization of Yoga Training and Practice

Yoga has come a long way from being traditional self-discipline in India to becoming a global phenomenon. With the growing research evidence and increased awareness through social media and digital platforms, Yoga has transcended geographical boundaries and reached people worldwide. One hundred ninety-two countries celebrating the first International Day of Yoga in 2015 show its popularity. Though there are no documented estimates for the number of people engaging in IDY celebrations globally annually, it is observed that over 400 million people will have participated in the IDY celebration in 2022 globally. While the USA has a good record in individual and institutional participation in IDY, several smaller European, Asian and African countries also got involved. The impact is very positive, with several people in each country practising Yoga for wellness and health benefits increasing by 2-7% annually. The active engagement of the

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the office of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, in every country, with the support of the AYUSH ministry, has significantly impacted.

The preparation and promotion of the IDY Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) is probably the most crucial contribution of the Government of India as part of IDY celebrations. Knowing the immense diversity in the practice of Yoga, the Ministry of AYUSH, in consultation with the experts in the field of Yoga, successfully created the CYP, and it has become the first such globally accepted Yoga protocol today.

For the first time, an official Yoga Certification Board (YCB) was established in the year 2018 under the aegis of Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY), Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, to certify Yoga teachers as well as to accredit institutions offering Yoga training.^[4] In addition, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), Government of India, has approved the establishment of an Inter-University Center for Yogic Sciences (IUCYS) in 2018. The IUCYS aimed to further the regulatory requirements for Yoga training at a professional level and promote research and dissemination.

IDY has also brought significant policymakers and global healthcare bodies together to create standards for Yoga training, simplify the process of yoga therapy delivery and promote Yoga research. The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of AYUSH and consultation with major Yoga institutions, has developed a new mobile app (mYoga) to facilitate better awareness and educate people to access both traditional and scientific information and to utilize therapeutic benefits of Yoga.^[5] WHO also initiated developing a Benchmark document for standards in Yoga training, considering the increasing popularity of Yoga and various aspects concerning safety. Similar to other Benchmark documents, this document would focus on the minimum standards for Yoga training.^[6]

The Ministry of HRD, Government of India, through the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), also attempted to create a manual for global Yoga-based programs and institutional accreditation. The first-ever global summit on Yoga accreditation initiated by NAAC was held at UN headquarters in New York in conjunction with the permanent mission of India to the United Nations and Asia Pacific Quality Network. This historical event succeeded in bringing together the policymakers, technical experts and representatives of academic institutions in the field of Yoga from several countries across the world.^[7]

Impact on Yoga Education

IDY has been instrumental in bringing a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of Yoga globally. It is encouraging to see many Schools and Universities introducing Yoga into their education system, making it an important subject to be studied both theoretically and practically. This process has led to the development of high-quality Yoga teacher training programs, including certification courses, Yoga based higher education programs, including UG, PG and Doctoral programs. Professionalizing Yoga education has resulted in standardized and innovative teaching methods emphasizing safety and ethics, rigorous evaluation systems, and regulated certification.^[2]

Indian Scenario

Yoga has become part of school education through the efforts of the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT). There are 1252 Central Schools (*Kendriya Vidyalayas*), 10,22,386 State Schools and 26,52,35,830 Private Schools in India, and most have implemented yoga education as a part of their curriculum.^[8] Eleven Central Universities have started Yoga departments in India, and over 50 other Universities have started either a Certificate, Diploma or UG/PG programs in Yoga after 2015.

Also, several dedicated Yoga Universities have reported a significant surge in students opting for Yoga-based higher education programs after IDY-2015.

India is also the first country to start an integrated Under Graduate Medical program in Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences. The increased number of new Yoga and Naturopathy Medical Colleges after IDY-2015 (by 40%) demonstrates the significant demand for and acceptance of Yoga and Naturopathy as an integrative medical science.

Global Scenario

The impact of IDY was not limited to Yoga education within India but also across the world. The first ever full-fledged Yoga University (Vivekananda Yoga University, California) outside India started its Master's program in 2019. Several American Universities have started Master's programs in Yoga, which include Maryland University, Loyola Marymount University and Naropa University. Apart from the USA, China (Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming) United Kingdom (SOAS University of London), and Australia (International College of Queen's Land) have started yoga programs. The popularity of Yoga based higher education has also spread to several countries in Asia, Europe and Africa.

Impact on the Yoga Industry

The impact of IDY on the yoga industry has been nothing short of a revolution. With its focus on accessibility and inclusivity, IDY has opened the world of Yoga to a broader

audience. The ripple effects of IDY can be felt throughout the entire yoga industry. From the proliferation of new studios and teachers to the development of innovative new products and services, IDY has sparked a wave of creativity and growth that shows no signs of slowing down. After IDY 2015, the Government of India established 150 Swami Vivekanand District Yoga Health Centers and 12500 AYUSH Health and Wellness centres across India.^[2] Even during covid, the emergence of tele yoga has contributed to a 300% increase in the number of individuals practising Yoga within and outside India. Yoga therapy also has become famous for post-covid rehabilitation. The Department of AYUSH, in collaboration with NIMHANS and S-VYASA University, developed Tele Yoga Advisory, which is expected to become a guideline shortly.

To strengthen the good industrial practice, The Bureau of Indian Standards under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs also created standards for Yoga accessories for the first time. The accessories used for Yoga-based cleansing techniques, such as *Jalaneti and Sutraneli* (nasal cleansing techniques), have been standardized for future industrial use.

Apart from being a wellness strategy, Yoga also facilitated the creation of start-ups focusing on Yoga accessories (such as Yoga apparel, Yoga mats, Yoga props, etc.) and Yoga services (Yoga studios, therapy centres, lifestyle centres etc.). With the global Yoga industry crossing \$100 billion in revenue, Yoga-based start-ups are expected to increase significantly in the next decade.

Yoga/Meditation based Mobile applications, Specialized Yoga Mats, Specialty Yoga Therapy and Integrative Medicine centres/Mind Body Medicine centres within Conventional Medical Hospitals have also increased substantially. Vivekananda Health Global, a chain of integrative Medicine clinics that started as a start-up in Bengaluru with centres across India, has become a global chain with branches in China, South Korea, and the USA. YogiFy, a smart Yoga mat inventor, also blended Technology into Yoga accessories. RESET, an exclusive Yoga and lifestyle-based fitness chain, has developed a Mobile App for customized Yoga therapy. Several other start-ups were created during the Covid pandemic with Yoga as a premium service and also introduced Yogic diet and counselling to combat lifestyle disorders.

Impact on Yoga Tourism

The IDY has significantly impacted the global tourism industry, particularly in India. The number of foreign nationals visiting Yoga institutions in India has increased dramatically. Except for the period of Covid, Yoga tourism is in ascending mode. Rishikesh, Mysore, Coimbatore, Bengaluru, and Haridwar have attracted a global audience. Bali in Indonesia, Bangkok, and parts of Europe and selected places in the USA are also becoming tourist destinations for Yoga training and retreats.

IDY has also helped the promotion and popularization of Yoga as a form of physical activity, mind-body intervention, lifestyle medicine and a tool for rehabilitation, attracting millions of tourists from countries around the world.^[9-11] Through various initiatives and events organized by governments, Yoga associations, and tourism boards, IDY has created a platform for yoga enthusiasts and professionals to connect, share knowledge, and explore new destinations. As a result, many countries have seen a surge in yoga-related tourism, with travellers seeking authentic experiences, wellness retreats, and opportunities to learn from renowned yoga teachers.^[11] The number of foreign tourists coming for Yoga training has increased by more than 37.4% since IDY-2015.^[2]

Impact on School Children

The impact of Yoga on schoolchildren is immense. It not only helps them to stay physically fit but also enhances their mental well-being. Yoga improves children's ability to focus and concentrate, improving their memory and academic performance.^[12] Additionally, it teaches them valuable life skills such as discipline, self-control, and stress management.^[13,14] The impact of IDY is significant as Yoga has been integrated into school curriculum. With the increased performance-related pressure on school children, the levels of stress and anxiety go up drastically, resulting in health issues, particularly their mental health. Starting as an event on IDY, many schools have made the practice of Yoga compulsory to have a positive impact of Yoga on the behaviour of school children. IDY also created awareness about using Yoga in children with special needs. Since Yoga induces a sense of calmness and reduces aggression and hyperactivity, it can be especially beneficial for children who struggle with behavioural issues, including Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Impact on Sports and Introduction of Yogasana in Sports

The impact of IDY on sports has been remarkable. The practice of Yogasana has been introduced to athletes and sports enthusiasts alike, providing them with a new way to enhance their physical and mental abilities. Yoga has numerous benefits, including increased flexibility, strength, balance, and focus.^[3] By incorporating Yogasana into their training regimen, athletes have reported improved performance and reduced risk of injury.^[15,16] In addition to individual athletes, several sports teams have adopted *Yogasana* as part of their training program. Adopting Yoga in sports has led to better team dynamics, improved communication, and a greater sense of unity among team members.

IDY also popularised Yogasanas as probable components of a competitive sport in India. For the first time, Yogasanas have been included as a sport in Khelo India games and National games. Attracted by this event, several

Universities and colleges also started training their students in Yogasanas. India has taken the lead in establishing National Yogasana Sports Federation and World Yogasana Sports Federation, which are going to standardize and introduce Yogasana based competitions at national and International levels and have expressed their desire to take Yogasana as a competitive sport to the Olympics.

Impact on Foreign and Cultural Relationships

The International Day of Yoga (IDY) has significantly revolutionized India's cultural relations with other countries. ICCR has been conducting IDY programs since 2015 in several countries through its cultural centres and also started knowledge dissemination through an annual International seminar as part of IDY. The first seminar was held in the USA (New York), while the second was in London (UK). These seminars facilitated bringing Yoga gurus and scientists on the same platform. Further to Covid, the Seminar in Seoul (South Korea) helped in connecting Asia, the UK, Europe and America, bringing policymakers, Yoga practitioners, researchers and Yoga enthusiasts together for learning and sharing of knowledge.

Beyond its impact on physical and mental health, IDY has also played a vital role in fostering positive foreign relationships. By bringing together people from all over the world to celebrate this ancient practice, it has created a platform for cultural exchange and understanding. Through IDY, individuals have connected with others who share their passion for Yoga, regardless of nationality or background. This has led to a deeper appreciation for different cultures and traditions and a greater sense of global community. As more and more people participate in IDY each year, the impact on foreign relationships will grow exponentially.

Implementing Yoga in the Corporate World

Yoga has helped change the corporate culture, which was a challenge for years. Companies such as Google, Nike, and Apple have offered on-site yoga classes or meditation sessions, providing quiet spaces for employees to practice mindfulness and promoting work-life balance through flexible scheduling and remote work options. By following their lead and committing to a culture of well-being, companies can create a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce. Companies can create a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce by encouraging employees to incorporate yoga and mindfulness practices into their daily routines. The benefits of Yoga for corporate bodies are numerous. Studies have shown that regular yoga and mindfulness practices can reduce stress levels, improve focus and concentration, and increase employee happiness and job satisfaction.^[17]

Impact on Yoga Research

It is evident from the number of publications on Yoga after IDY-2015 that Yoga research has become part of mainstream

research today. There has been an exponential increase in publications (63.8%) on Yoga after 2015 compared to before (1948-2014).^[18,19] There is also a proportional increase in the number of Premier Medical and Academic Institutions contributing to Yoga research. Yoga, as part of Complementary and Integrative Medicine research, is emerging as a new trend. Studies on Yoga based Lifestyle modification in managing Non-Communicable-Diseases appears to be the primary focus for the near future.

In conclusion, IDY plays a pivotal role in unifying various Institutions and Individuals worldwide, irrespective of race, region or religion, as one global family. Its transformative impact is palpable, emerging as a positive force for global peace and harmony.

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