

Popularizing Yoga: Challenges Ahead

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"Yoga guarantees wellness as well as fitness. Yoga is not merely an exercise but a way to attain peace through physical, mental and spiritual well being"

- **Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi**

On 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga (IDY) by resolution 69/131 recognizing its universal appeal. The key objective of IDY is to increase worldwide awareness about the numerous benefits of practicing yoga. Today, Yoga is practiced in various forms across the globe and continues to grow in popularity. Ministry of AYUSH has put-forth concerted efforts to popularize Yoga so that its health benefits reach the masses. More significantly, our Hon'ble Prime Minister himself is an epitome of Yoga and his pioneering role in promoting Yoga as India's heritage, have conveyed the people of India that we are the inheritors and who preserved the legacy of Yoga tradition.

In traditional Siddha System of Medicine, '*Yogam*' (Yoga) is one of the rejuvenation (*Kayakarpam*) techniques that prevents and reverse several disease processes. *Yogam* is a significant component having a psychosomatic-spiritual discipline that helps to accomplish a harmony between our mind, body, and soul which can change our perspective on life. The term '*Yogam*' means 'union' and Siddhars have defined *Yogam* as an art which has power over the mind by preventing it from distraction through sense organs and unites it with the divinity after realizing the eternal bliss. In another words, Yoga is defined as "a perfect scientific art that unites the mind with the God or the Truth".

Many Siddhars have dealt with *Yogam* and its concepts, in particular; *Siddhar Thirumoolar* has foretold the eight limbs of Yoga. They are: ethics, self-discipline, physical posture, breath control, sensory transcendence, mental focus, meditation, and the final state of ecstasy. However, the public are more attracted toward the simpler component of Yoga postures.

Considering the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), Yoga reduces the risk of life-threatening NCDs such as hypertension, stroke, heart attack and diabetes which has been demonstrated in a number of studies in India and other countries. Key intrapersonal resources cultivated through yoga are mindfulness and self-compassion. Many researchers have demonstrated the integral role of mindfulness in deriving health benefits from contemplative practices, including yoga practice. Nevertheless, a review article on clinical trials on Yoga done in India has inferred that the experiments done in India are 25 times more likely to get positive conclusions than other countries. Hence, it is the need of the hour to carry out systematic clinical trials to validate the power of Yoga. Even though, meta-analyses and systematic reviews on Yoga guarantee its utility, the lacunae in research pertaining to Yoga should be overcome by rigorous scientific validation.

It is pertinent to mention that Post graduation in Siddha Yoga Medicine (*Siddhar*

Yoka Maruttuvam), M.D (Siddha) is being offered in institutions affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Dr. M.G.R Medical University, Chennai with due approval from the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM), New Delhi from the year 2017. This has created prospect for the young researchers to do quality research on Yoga.

Last but not the least, let us pledge to make Yoga an integral part of our daily lives and also inspire others to do the same, for a better and healthier future.