



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

33

Yoga as a Sustainable Lifestyle for Social and Ecological Harmony-A Heartfulness Perspective

Rathod Mridula Raghunath

Research Scholar

Heartfulness Research Centre, SMSF, Mysore

Dr. Rajeshwari Hegde

Research Supervisor, Heartfulness Research Centre (Recognized by University of
Mysore), Mysuru,

Professor and Head, Department of Electronics and Communication Engg., BMS
college of Engg., Bangalore

Abstract:

In the current era, both man and nature are struggling for balance and harmony because of social fragmentation, hatred, jealousy, greed, and lack of love and respect leading to ecological degradation. Human life has to combat several issues at personal, social, national and international levels. Furthermore, animals and plants are also facing the danger of extinction, keeping our mother Earth at risk. This will lead to long lasting impact on human health, affecting physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Hence need for sustainable lifestyle has become imperative. The potential of Yogic lifestyle, as a holistic approach to fostering social and ecological harmony as advocated by ancient Indian Rishis and supported by modern scientific research can become beacon for the suffering humanity and mother Earth.



Keeping mind calm and clear, filling the heart with positive attributes such as love, compassion, empathy, sympathy leading to harmonious interpersonal relationships and a reverential interaction with environment is possible through meditation practices rooted in ancient tradition of Raja Yoga. This paper explores how Yogic lifestyle can contribute to enhanced social bonds, an eco-friendlier way of living and heartfulness practice as the tool to cultivating awareness and evolution of consciousness, a significant step towards achieving a balanced and sustainable existence, addressing both social and ecological challenges.

1. Introduction:

"Harmony with Nature" refers to a principle of amicable and holistic co-existence between humanity and nature. Social harmony and ecological interaction are complementary to each other. Social harmony is the premise of good ecological harmony, and ecological harmony is the basic condition of social harmony. Loss of biodiversity, desertification, climate change and the disruption of a number of natural cycles are among the costs of our disregard for Nature and the integrity of its ecosystems and life-supporting processes. Today, despite advancements in science and technology and so many developments, disgust, malice, terror and disharmony exist among people, communities, societies and countries. Our planet has been continuously changing over the course of its existence and increasing entropy is beginning to have a magnified effect on us in recent decades.

Though there is increasing awareness of proper means to be adopted to keep check, as today's man is straying away from the divine inner world, it is resulting in the subsequent degradation of outer world on Earth. The greed and individual requirements of a human being is creating polluted environment including air, water and mother earth. Our inner environment is totally polluted today, resulting in all the problems regarding the outer environment. Creating a clean inner environment will automatically result in a clean outer environment (Rewatkar, 2014). As homo sapiens, our most valuable asset is our mind. Individuals can only contribute to sustainable development when their minds are healthy. When we have identified that the malfunctioning of mind, greed, selfishness, non-sensitivity towards others, passion towards wrong things, ignorance, imbalance, unjustified desires are the root cause of lack of harmony between



man and nature which has caused so much damage to mother Earth, getting rid of these would be the foremost requirement in restoring the balance and saving our planet and hence humanity.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the 'Related work' on Yoga and Sustainable development. Section 3 deals with 'Social and Ecological Harmony and Sustainability'. Section 4 deals with the 'Yoga for sustainable living and social and ecological harmony'. Section 5 deals with the 'Role of Heartfulness in bringing Harmony and Sustainability'. The paper is concluded in section 6.

2. Related work:

According to Heartfulness Global Guide Dr. Kamlesh D. Patel, though many of us would like to change the world through external means, such as politics, government policies, social causes and grassroots movements, as the society is made up of individuals, unless an individual changes himself/herself, it is difficult to bring transformation outside. When the inner world of an individual is transformed, person moves from selfishness to selflessness, he is more balanced, contented and that brings about permanent changes in his attitude towards everything leading to transformation in the external world (Patel & Pollock, 2018).

“The techniques involved in the practice of yoga like asanas, breathing exercises and experiencing the true state of our being help yoga practitioners to reconnect to the deep continuity that permeates every aspect of life till they realize the truth that this body, breath and mind are not distinct from the world but the part of the world they live in. This makes them empowered to act and adjust their behavior to help the environment and community,” says Dr. Deepak Mittal, Founder, Divine Soul Yoga (Mittal, 2021). According to Russell Comstock, fundamentally yoga promotes awareness of one's sense of connection, unity, and interdependence with everyone and everything on this planet. As friends and family members practice yoga regularly, we often observe them making healthier choices in their lives as well, whether it's paying more attention to what they eat or altering their lifestyle to accommodate healthier activities. It is through this realization of shared energy that we are able to learn respect for other living beings and understand that all living beings are entitled to live on this planet equally. The principles and tools of Yoga provide us with a set of guidelines to enable



us deal with ourselves and the world around us with increased awareness. In communities and societies, it can be a toolkit for guiding sustainable living leading to global change through appropriate management of inner needs and desires. Thus by practically applying the principles of yoga on an individual level we can hope for large-scale positive change in our relationship with our planet (*The Link between Yoga & Sustainability*, 2016).

3. Social and Ecological Harmony and Sustainability:

The concept of harmony in the context of humans, their societies, and the environment refers to all people living together peacefully without exploitation of one person by another and of every living organism on the Earth, the plants, the animals and the entire eco-system. At the same time, in the society each individual should be able to reach his full human potential, everyone must feel secure, safe, happy, and fulfilled as human beings. The idea of sustainable development encompasses both human development and the ability of natural systems to provide natural resources and ecosystem services that society and the economy rely on. It is essential to maintain the integrity and stability of natural systems without degrading living conditions or resources. In order for sustainable development to occur, the four pillars of human, social, economic and environmental sustainability need to be interconnected (Sustainable Development Commission, 2019) (UNESCO, 2022).

In the modern context, though the idea of the ecological crisis being a social crisis was first expressed by Murray Bookchin, who coined the idea of 'social ecology', this realization is not new to our ancient rishis and saints. There are several references in ancient Vedas on ecological balance, environmental protection, weather cycles, rainfall phenomena etc. Vedic literature guides us for the protection and conservation of our environment. There are number of shlokas guiding us about environmental ethics. Vedic period man followed these ethics in routine life. To mention few shlokas:



1. माता भूमिः पुत्रोऽहं पृथिव्याः । (Atharvaveda 12.1.12)

Meaning: Earth is my mother and I am her child (*Hymn to Goddess Earth, from Atharva Veda, n.d.*).

2. This Vedic prayer invokes divine intervention to bliss and protect the environment. To protect environment the Rig Veda says

मधु वाता ऋतायते मधुक्षरन्ति सिन्धवः । माधीर्नः सन्त्वौषधीः ॥

मधु नक्तमुतोषसि मधुमत्पार्थिवं रजः । मधुद्यौरस्तु न पिता ॥

मधुमान्नो वनस्पतिर्मधुमाँ अस्तु सूर्यः । माधीर्गावो भवन्तु नः ॥ (Rigveda, 1/90/6,7,8)

Meaning: Sweetly blow the winds. The streams scatter sweetness. May the herbs bring us sweetness. The nights and dawns fill us with sweetness. The dust of the earth is full of sweetness. May heaven itself, like a father, bring us sweetness. The ancient forest trees are full of sweetness. May the sun itself shower sweetness on us. May sweetness flow toward us from all directions (Bhavaprana, 2013).

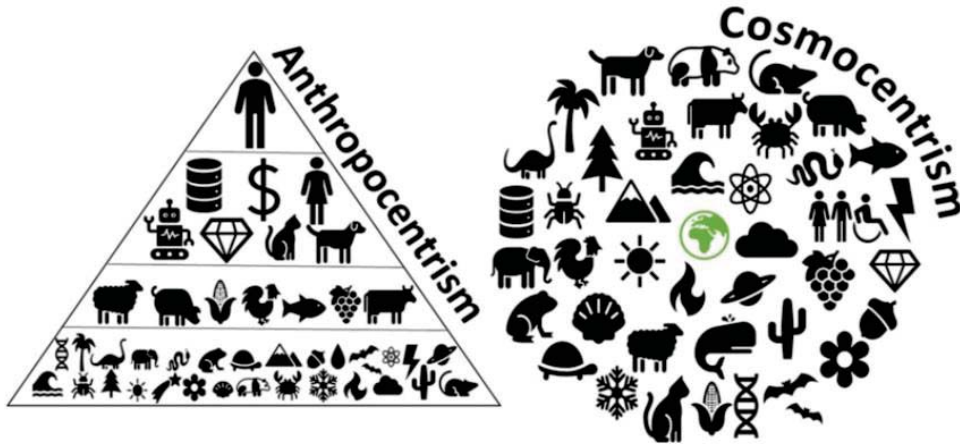


Figure 1: An adaptation of the Ego vs. Eco, graphic shared amongst Earth Jurisprudence communities (Lawyers for Nature, 2022)



4. Yoga for sustainable living and social and ecological harmony:

The word 'Yoga' originates from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj', meaning 'to yoke', 'to unite'. Yoga promotes the union of individual consciousness with Universal Consciousness, paving the way for perfect harmony between body, mind and soul. The practice cultivates a sense of unity between the body, mind and surrounding environment, which encourages conscious behavior and acts toward other humans, animals, nature, and the planet Earth (Daaji, 2019). Currently, the entire world is concerned about the implications of global warming and climate change. Yoga can help individuals cultivate an internal and external perspective that is comprehensive and holistic. Unless the individuals are in tune with their inner self, the dream of social and ecological harmony and sustainable development is merely a dream. It cultivates the mental clarity necessary to appraise problems with a constructive attitude and to help society. With enhanced awareness of trinity and its interdependence with our environment and mother Earth, individuals begin to adopt environmentally beneficial and sustainable decisions, such as using less plastic, walking, cycling, using public transport against individual vehicles, advocating for clean air and water for all, conservation of bio-diversity, overall optimized use of resources, and respect and love for fellow human beings, plants and animals. All of this can contribute to the fight against climate change, and nourishment of social and ecological harmony.

Through research it is observed that meditation promotes productivity, improves communication and relationships and helps organizations align their missions and values.

Practice of meditation unlocks our potential to face challenges in life with greater clarity, confidence and conviction. It is in our shared external environment that we can make the best decisions when we are most present in our internal world. The practice of meditation on Heart would help us to cultivate heart based qualities such as compassion, love and empathy for others, there by bringing the entire humanity together. A heartfelt citizen living with utmost awareness will consume only to satisfy his needs and hence at sustainable rate. The observation towards the inner self will be crucial for our inner as well as external world and the harmony on our planet. Regular meditation offers improved heart health, reduces stress, boosts immune function and offers an enhanced state of well-being (Daaji, 2019).



Author P.Y Deshpande in his book 'Authentic Yoga' based on Yoga Sutras of sage Patanjali says that meditation leaves the mind clean and crystal clear, has the potential to bring the birth of new mind called dhyana citta - mind born of meditation. This qualitatively new and a wholly radical mind (dhyana citta) is a mind eternally wide awake, alert and sensitive to anything and everything. When the mind is still and crystal clear, it generates a feeling of friendliness that knows no frontiers. It embraces the whole world, human and non-human. (Deśapāṇḍe, 2021).

The below shloka from Shrimad Bhagvadgeeta, says the Yogi who is united in identity with the all-pervading, infinite consciousness, whose vision everywhere is even, beholds the Self existing in all beings and all beings as assumed in the Self.

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।
ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥ २९ ॥ [Geeta Ch. 6 Shloka 29]

Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta sings the glory of yogi – the one on the path of yoga. It mentions the characteristics of such a person as with stable mind, steady wisdom and living in moderation - Sthitaprajya. (Ch-2, Verses 54 to 66). Meditative practice as the way to arrive at the state of Sthitaprajnata is one of the potent messages of Geeta (*Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 2010).

Yogic Life-Style: What is Yogic Life style. In simple words, life-style that promotes disciplined way of life, taking proper care of body, mind and soul, using the senses for their intended purpose in moderate ways is Yogic Life-style. With Yogic life style one gives equal importance to one's material as well as spiritual aspects of existence. Patanjali's Astanga Yoga can be well taken as guidelines for Yogic life-style.

Yama, Niyama, Asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyanasamadhayoastavangani

-Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, Part-II, Sutra 29 (Madhvācārya & Beloved, 2007)

Yama, Niyama, Asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi are the eight aspects of Yoga. Rishi Patanjali says, when viveka (discerning intelligence) emerges in man, an altogether new style of life comes into being, which is called the yogic way of living (yoganganusthana). This eightfold yogic way of living has potential to bring about radical



transformation in man. Before the real viveka is awakened in man, he is dominated by conditioned worldview born of adviya-khyati and hence today's man is ever entangled in tensions, confusion, conflict and ever-mounting chaos that threaten man and life. As one lives his daily life in the light of viveka-khyati, inspired by eight-fold way of living, the whole human system starts casting away the impurities and it becomes more and more pure in its perception and action, illuminating the human life.

5. Role of Heartfulness in bringing Harmony and Sustainability:

5.1 Through inner transformation: Yoga is a vast science of physical body, subtle bodies and the soul exploring the levels of consciousness, giving us solution to create harmony within ourselves and with the external world. At the core of Heartfulness is the Heart based meditative practice leading to heart based life style. To change the world we have to change ourselves first. Yoga helps us realize our true potential as well as understand our limits, where to stop. Heartfulness Global Guide Dr. Kamlesh D. Patel says: To dispel the ignorance, we have to be awakened from within, alert from within, our consciousness has to be sharpened. Through meditation only we can calm our heart, regulate our mind and wait for greater wisdom to prevail from within. Every action has a thought behind it and if this thought is misguided, the action that follows would be misguided too. So regulation of mind through the practice of Raj Yoga is the way towards human perfection. Yoga is a complete lifestyle which gives our life a goal, a direction, a discipline. On following such a course life becomes bright and beneficial and a day will then surely come when together we are capable of changing the direction humanity is taking (Patel, 2019).

This is exactly what Heartfulness offers to the world that any willing aspirant by practicing meditation with Yogic Transmission can transform oneself to witness the glory of his existence and when many such individuals opt for the discipline of Yoga, there would be an egregore which will lift the collective consciousness of humanity as a whole and make our Earth a beautiful place to live. In Heartfulness meditation, Yogic Transmission (Pranahuti), Prana the life force, the essence of existence is offered (ahuti) to a seeker of Yoga by a yogi of caliber who is connected to the Infinite Source. Transmission helps us to be free from the shackles of



the past impressions that condition the mind. Heartfulness meditation is supported by the complementary practice of cleaning. Cleaning purifies the chit allowing the seeker to transcend the conditioned mind and the realm of pure perception of Reality. The ten maxims of Heartfulness are the ten universal lifestyle guidelines that address the needs of the first five limbs of Patanjali's Astanga Yoga – Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama and Pratyahara – in day-to-day life. These ten simple guidelines along with practice enable the first five limbs to be lived naturally as an external manifestation of the inner changes brought about by the last three practices of Astanga Yoga – Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. An established practitioner becomes adapt in remaining in tune with his inner higher self, 24 by 7, with ever increasing identification with the eternal presence within.

Practice leads to lifestyle, the inner change starts reflecting outwardly in day to day life. It enables our consciousness to expand and evolve from mundane consciousness to divine consciousness and we move from me to we, selfishness to selflessness, passion to compassion, imbalance to balance, desire to contentment and much more. Such an individual would not do anything or take decisions that would harm his fellow beings and the overall environment. As our consciousness expands we become more aware of our place in the world [14].

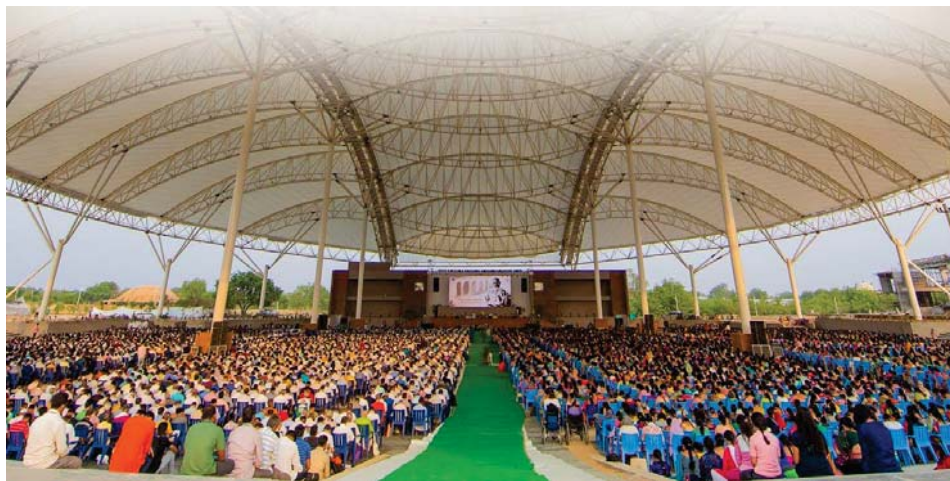


Figure 2: Kanha Shantivanam group meditation



As shown in figure 3, Over 60,000 people (in two batches) gather at Kanha Shantivanam, the world's largest meditation centre in Hyderabad, four times a year for group meditation. Regardless of religion, position, economic background, etc., it brings people together from all over the world, thereby creating universal brotherhood.

5.2 Initiatives by Heartfulness Institute at Kanha Shanti Vanam in order to foster ecological harmony (Kanha Santhi Vanam, n.d.).

i.Green Kanha Initiative: Green Kanha is an environmental initiative by the Heartfulness Institute committed to nurturing India's endangered species and mega-biodiversity. The institute adopts advanced technologies with scientific planning to create an ex-situ conservation center that is replete with splendid green spaces.

ii.Forests by Heartfulness and Protection and Translocation of Trees: It is an ecological movement that aims to create spaces where humans coexist in harmony with Nature.

iii.Natural Farms and Farming: The farms at Kanha Shanti Vanam use natural farming methods for operations and maintenance. Agricultural innovations like the methods of Beejamrutham, Jeevavamrutam, Mulching, and WAPHSA, help in managing the overall quality of soil for long periods.



Figure 3: Transformation of barren land to Greenery



iv. Hydroponics: There are 7 Hydroponics farms that grow vegetation at any time of the season. This type of farming enables food security and variety without using fungicides and pesticides. This farming method is a very efficient way of farming especially in drought affected areas.

Heartfulness Tree Conservation Center, Heartyculture Nursery are few more to name.

6. Conclusion:

In addition to the external means, such as government policies, social causes and grassroots movements, to bring about social and ecological harmony, as the society is made up of individuals, individual transformation is at the root. And this is possible only when man takes the path of Yoga, regulates his mind with the regular practice of meditation. The regular practice brings about the transformation from inside out and that's why it is permanent. We care to contribute for the harmony of our home, of the neighborhood and eventually of the whole world. Here comes the significant role of Heartfulness practices which includes Introspection/Meditation, Rejuvenation/Purification and Connecting with the higher Self within/Prayer. The set of practices refine the mind so that it becomes an instrument for our growth. The approach is from inside out and hence lasting. The only thing we need is interest, enthusiasm and willingness. After purifying and simplifying the mind and heart, we are really able to expand our consciousness, realize our full human potential and live a life of purpose. Practice leads to lifestyle, the inner change is reflected outwardly in day to day life, we become better people – kinder, more compassionate, and more giving. A day will then surely come when together we are capable of changing the direction humanity is taking.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no competing interests related to “Yoga as a Sustainable Lifestyle for Social and Ecological harmony-A Heartfulness Perspective”

Acknowledgement:

Authors would like to express heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Kamlesh D.Patel, global guide of Heartfulness institute for his constant support and encouragement. Authors would also like to acknowledge the generous support of all the colleagues and staff at Heartfulness Research Centre, Mysore and all the staff at Dept. of Philosophy, UoM, Mysore.



References:

Bhavaprana. (2013, May 1). *Global Ecology and Vedanta: Part 1* | Vedanta Society of Southern California. <https://vedanta.org/2013/monthly-readings/global-ecology-and-vedanta/>

Daaji. (2019). *Yogic psychology*. Heartfulness Magazine. <https://heartfulness.org/magazine/-yogic-psychology-4>

Deśapāṇḍe, P. Y. (2021). *The Authentic Yoga*. Heartfulness Education Trust under license from Nirmala Deshpande Sansthan, Panipat, Haryana, India.

Hymn to Goddess Earth, from Atharva Veda. (n.d.). Wwww.greenhearted.org. <https://www.greenhearted.org/hymn-to-goddess-earth-from-atharva-veda.html>

Kanha Santhi Vanam. (n.d.). Kanha Santhi Vanam. <https://heartfulness.org/kanha/green-initiatives/>

Lawyers for Nature. (2022, July 6). *Being for Nature: Introducing Social Ecology*. Lawyers for Nature; Lawyers for Nature. <https://www.lawyersfornature.com/being-for-nature-introducing-social-ecology/>

Madhvācārya, Y., & Beloved, M. (2007). *YOGA SŪTRAS of Patañjali*. <https://www.gita-society.com/wp-content/uploads/PDF/Patanjali-yogasutra.IGS.pdf>

Mittal, D. (2021, August 7). *Dr. Deepak Mittal - Divine Soul Yoga*. Divine Soul Yoga. <https://www.divinesoulyoga.nl/team/dr-deepak-mittal/>

Patel, K. D. (2019). *Designing destiny: the heartfulness way*. Westland Publications Private Limited.

Patel, K. D., & Pollock, J. (2018). *The Heartfulness Way*. New Harbinger Publications.

Rewatkar, V. K. (2014). *Mediation for Healthy Environment and Sustainable Development*. http://files.cluster2.hostgator.co.in/hostgator84521/file/60.sp_ijlsci_091_204-206.pdf

Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā. (2010). Geeta Press, Gorakhpur.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

Sustainable Development Commission. (2019, April 17). *What is Sustainable Development*.

Adoption UK Charity. <https://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html>

The Link Between Yoga & Sustainability. (2016). METTA EARTH. <https://mettaearth.org/the-link-between-yoga-sustainability/>

UNESCO. (2022). *Education for sustainable development* | UNESCO. www.unesco.org.
<https://www.unesco.org/en/education/sustainable-development>