

Spirituality and Yoga: Drivers of Spiritual Tourism – A Contemporary Approach

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Abstract

Research works on emergence of spirituality and yoga points out to the growing importance and awareness regarding contextual relationship of spirituality, yoga and tourism. The majority of recent researches on yoga and spiritual form of tourism have intended the inclusion of spiritual aspects of yoga in developing spiritual tourism.

Today's fast paced life and competitive environment has apparently increased the interest of being healthy. Not only good mental and physical but spiritual health is also considered to be a crucial element of success. No matter the industry and place (personal & professional), people have become more fascinated with yoga worldwide. Furthermore, the active pursuits of yoga contributes to balance mind-body-soul and lead to the spiritual manifestations like self-awareness, connection with inner soul and external world, contentment, peace of mind, happiness and experiencing the super natural power or "energy". Being the birthplace of yoga, India receives millions of tourist traveling to satisfy their spiritual quest. "Traveling to any destination with the purpose of attaining or practicing spirituality is termed as spiritual tourism". Spirituality is a broad concept, having no definite definition and has been interpreted differently by different researchers. There is no specific or single approach to attain spirituality and no scale to measure the affinity of spirituality. However yoga is perceived to be a way-out to practice and achieve spirituality under the guidance of Yoga-Master. As, yoga is complementing spiritual tourism as a push factor for the consumer and pull factor for the destination, there is an urge to integrate yoga in spiritual tourism development.

The aim of this paper is to understand the conceptual relationship among yoga-spirituality-tourism and investigate the yoga benefaction in spiritual tourism. This qualitative research is based on comprehensive literature review. The empirical studies on the topic yoga, spirituality, yoga tourism and spiritual tourism prove that yoga is associated with spirituality and the availability of yoga services at any destination enhance the scope of spiritual tourism. The research concluded that the yoga may play a major role in developing and promoting spiritual tourism.

Keywords: yoga, spirituality, spiritual tourism, health.

Introduction:

Today's fast paced life and cut throat competitive environment leading to adverse health condition because of acute or chronic stress. The global advancement has made the

life a war zone where people have been battling for the social acceptance. "The present-day stress, societal changes, and hectic life make the quest for mental and

physical well-being”(Nair and Solanki, 2022). As per *World Health Organization* (WHO), “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

The trend shows that people have become more conscious about holistic health, as good physical, mental and spiritual health has always been considered an important element of success that led to the apparent increase in the interest of being healthy. Consequently the real happiness, purpose and meaning of life become a paramount reason for exploring the spiritual knowledge along with physical fitness. This quest of spiritual knowledge engages people in traveling different place and paved the way for emergence of spiritual tourism. UNWTO defined tourism as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes”.

In spiritual tourism, where spirituality is a purpose, yoga emerged as a tool/activity to achieve that purpose. This old age (above 5000 years) yoga has gain popularity in past few decades, globally. The active pursuit of yoga contributes to balance mind-body-soul and lead to the spiritual manifestations. “In light of broader transformations in the way people are searching for transcendence in life, travel has become an important practice in the emerging spiritual marketplace (Cheer et al., 2017; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005).” Since, yoga is complementing spiritual tourism as a push factor for the consumer and pull factor for the destination, there is an urge to integrate yoga in spiritual tourism development.

Many researches on different aspects of yoga and spiritual tourism has been done and majority of recent researches intended the inclusion of spiritual aspects of yoga in developing spiritual tourism. The vague and amorphous definition, overlapping conceptual and theoretical framework have paved the way for further research. This study will

explore the cause and effect factors in both context i.e, yoga and spiritual tourism. Specifically, this research is to understand the relationship among yoga, spirituality and spiritual tourism that could help in developing conceptual model in reference to the below research objective.

Objective of the study:

To identify the cause and effect factors in contemporary era.

To highlight the relationship between spirituality and yoga.

To connect marketing and tourism with yoga.

Research Methodology:

The literature review examined the relationship of yoga with spirituality in the broader context of spiritual tourism. In order to understand the spiritual aspect of yoga in tourism, spirituality, yoga and spiritual tourism related literature are reviewed. Different models have been applied to explain the need and importance of yoga not only for physical and spiritual health (major motivation factor in tourism) but for the spiritual tourism product development and marketing. This work is purely based on secondary sources.

Findings and Discussion:

Cause & effect factors motivating yoga practice:

In everyday life people have many frames to fit in and many deadlines to achieve. One has different needs and desires that must be satisfied, which results in satisfaction or disappointment, regardless of the environment (including family, office, society, relatives, and more). Disappointments and expectation result in further stress and imbalance in the main domains of human life including physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual and spiritual.

The stress causing factors are presented in cause and effect model (figure1), by using

fishbone diagram (also known as Ishikawa cause and effect). Author has used this visualization tool invented by Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa, a Japanese quality control expert to identify and categorize the potential causes of a problem “stress”. Each of the branches in diagram provides the reason of creating stress and together they form a complete picture of individual’s expectations and satisfaction

level. Consequently, both increase and decrease in expectation or satisfaction leads to stress and physical, mental and emotional imbalance. These stress and imbalances in health & life are the paramount reasons, which people may overcome by practicing yoga and spiritual.

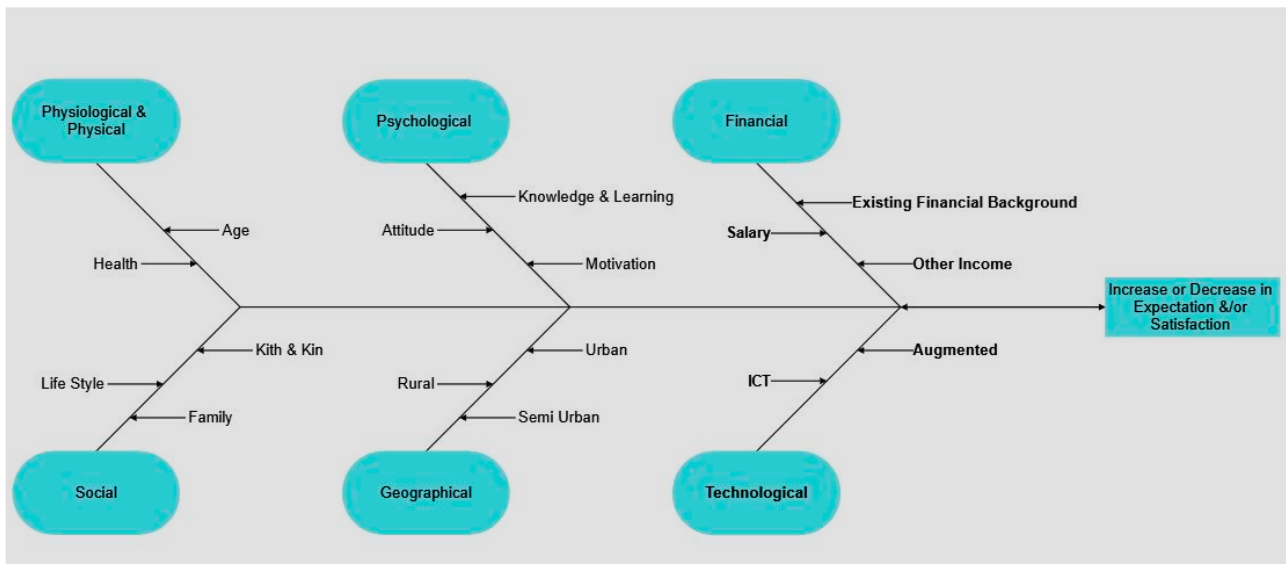


Figure 1. Cause and Effect Model

The influence or outcomes of practicing yoga (Fig. 2) has experienced great interest and relevance in daily life.

One can achieve a good, healthy and satisfied life (personal and professional) through practicing yoga, as it has been considered a best alternative wellness activity or means to achieve physical, emotional and mental well-being (Wadekar, 2020; Nair & Solanki, 2022; Ambili, 2016; Ponder & Holladay, 2013; Dillette et al., 2019). Yoga’s significance is also recognized as advancing individual economic well-being (Prakash, 2015). *Ponder & Holladay* researched on transformative power of yoga and stated “Yoga builds consciousness, openness and spiritual connections, and allows for an experience conducive to heightened awareness, knowledge and activism.”

Studies show that practicing yoga has multiple positive effects on all aspects of human life. In terms of its physical aspects the different style and type of yoga (such as; asanas and pranayama) improves the body flexibility, strength and balance as well as reduce stress and calm the mind. While in terms of its mental and spiritual aspects, yoga encourage mindfulness (Sharma et al., 2020), self reflection, helping to reduce anxiety and stress, self awareness and promote the greater understanding of self (i.e, inner) and outer world. “It has a profound impact on the quality of life of people who are under stress, disease, and various illnesses, as well as causing social problems” (Rungsimanop et al., 2021; Sawangmek, 2015).

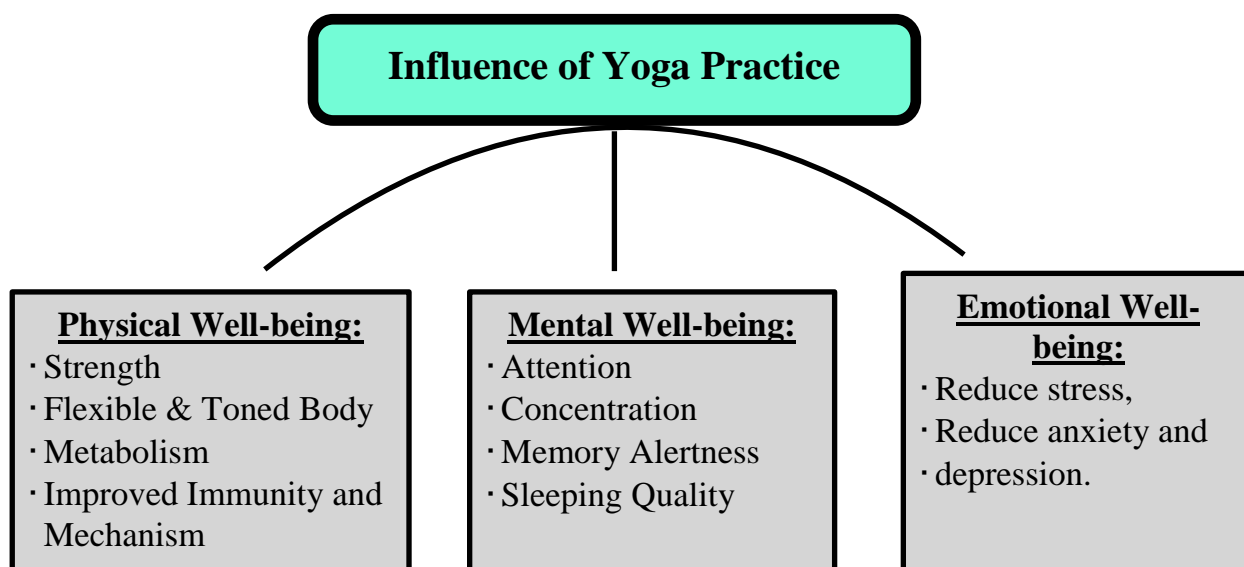


Figure 2. Impact of practicing voga.

According to Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (2020) “Yoga is a symbol of universal aspiration for health and wellbeing. It is health assurance in zero budget”(yoga.ayush.gov.in).

Recognizing the significance of good health and mental peace, people are spending considerable amount of time and money in the pursuit of happier and healthier life. This personalized quest of spirituality or being healthy has evidently changed the tourism paradigms in contemporary era, as tourists are beginning to seek more balanced vacation through the pursuit of yoga centered travel opportunities (Bowers and Cheer 2017). This changing tourism phenomena accompanied by a diversification of product/destination choice and tourist’s motivation as well.

Spirituality and Yoga Relationship:

Spirituality is a very personal experience of self transformation and transcendence which cannot be expressed and let other understand at all. This old age practice ‘spirituality’ has gained immense importance among contemporary era in last few decades which grew the curiosity among researchers. There

have been many researches on different aspects of spirituality and every researcher has come with his own definition (Ratnakar and Nair, 2012). According to Joseph et al. (2017), spirituality should be understood as “a more general, unstructured, personalized, and naturally occurring phenomenon, where a person seeks closeness and/or connectedness between him/herself and a higher power or purpose.”

Other authors define spirituality in terms of “search of universal truth (woods and Ironson,1999), “centrality of relationship among self, other and God” (Morrison,1990; Fish and Shelly,1988; Conrad,1985, Hungelmann et al., 1985 & Oldnall, 1996), inner strength/innerness and wholeness (Burkhardt, 1989 and Howden,1992), “social movement towards subjectivity” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), and connectedness (Khasgiwale, 2014). Heidari et al., (2018) perceived this spirituality as a “a set of ideas connected to religious traditions, focus on a philosophy of the self, inner peace, holism, (inter)connectedness, intent, search/quest, experience orientation, non-theistic cosmology, peacefulness/tolerance, and related positive value commitments”.

However, Božek et al., (2020) suggest a positive association of spirituality and health behaviors with well-being (especially subjective well-being).

Even though the spirituality is to experience the supreme natural power or “energy” and relationship with ‘God’ it is not a religion (Mansouri, Keshavarzi, 2014). It can involve religious beliefs and practices but it can also exist independently of organized religion. While many definition of spirituality revealed the relationship with ‘God’ and “does not reject the notion of some form of God associated with deity and religious systems, but it may include the less sacred and more realistic concept that the God around whom his life revolves may be his work, physical activity or even himself ” (Forman et al.,1997; Stoll, 1979). “Spirituality differs from religion as the latter is rather linked with specific rituals, institutional dependencies, and social relationships, whereas the former is more about personal experience of what is unseen and recognized as greater than ourselves” (Tovar-Murray, 2011). Catherine Jane Rogers has written and quoted in her conference paper: “Historically, spirituality was not distinguished from religiousness” (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, p 550), but more recently, studies across Europe, Britain, Australia and North America show a growing trend to make this distinction, where young people who claimed they were not religious

still claimed to be spiritual (Zinnbauer et al., Hay & Socha, 2005).

Thus the above different interpretation and meaning elucidated, spirituality is not a static concept but a dynamic, broader and complex construct evolving over time. It is a deeply personal experience that people try or use different means to achieve it as what works for one person may not work for another. Different element or dimension of spirituality, extracted from existing studies presented in Fig.3.

Some common way that people strive for spirituality include: practice (engaging in prayer, meditation, yoga), Self reflection and introspection, connecting with nature, service to others, Seeking knowledge (spirituality, religion, philosophy and personal growth) and Community (of like-minded individuals). There is no specific or single approach to attain it and no single scale to measure the affinity of spirituality (Madekar and Gokhale, 2020; Lun and Bond, 2013). Furthermore, among several means and way of attaining spirituality, different yoga asanas has the highest potential as yoga is not just about fitness or exercise; it is about changing one’s lifestyle and personality (Sukumar, 2018). “Yoga” is a physical exercise and body posture or technique, practice to unite the mind, body and spirit. The aim of practice is to bring about a state of physical and mental well-being, spiritual liberation and inner peace.

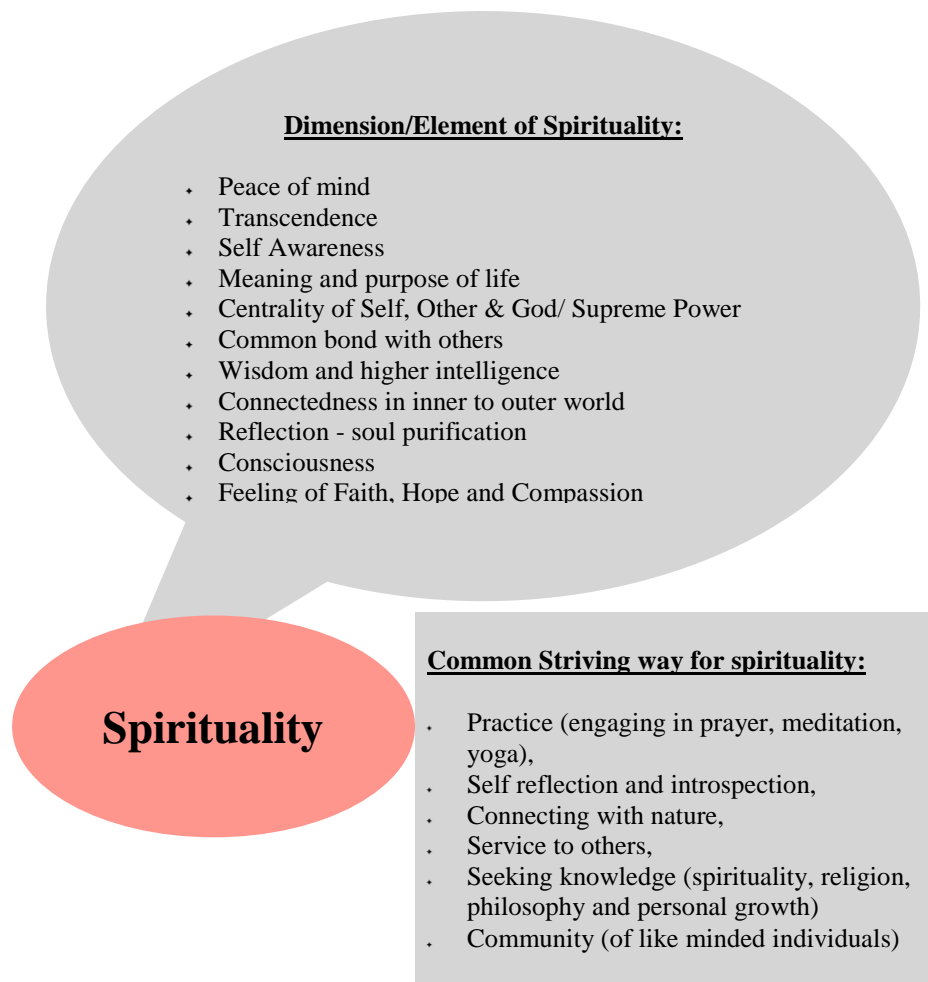


Figure 3. Different dimension or element of spirituality and common ways, extracted from previous studies.

“Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. The word ‘Yoga’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘Yuj’, meaning ‘to join’ or ‘to yoke’ or ‘to unite’. As per Yogic scriptures the practice of Yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with that of the Universal Consciousness, indicating a perfect harmony between the mind and body, Man & Nature” (yoga.ayush.gov.in).

Griera (2017), researched on the transformative power of eight limbs of yoga stated “Yoga practice may improve various aspects of spiritual well-being and spiritual intelligence and can evoke divine and transcendent experiences”. Barbara Csala et al. (2021), opined that both yoga practice and spirituality are associated with beneficial

mental health outcomes. “It is not a religion but is meant for individual growth and for physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual balance” (Iyengar 1989). Thus, in the practice of yoga, physical movements and spiritual accounts are inextricably linked. “Yoga pursuits lead to the manifestation of mindfulness and happiness in people actively practicing it” (Sharma et al., 2020).

To connect marketing and tourism with yoga: OR Yoga in Spiritual Tourism:

Travel has always been considered a best way to escape from daily routines since time immemorial. It provides opportunity to explore, experiment and rejuvenate oneself as well as satisfy own quest. The act and process of spending time away from their usual

residence or home for the pursuit of recreation, relaxation and pleasure is called tourism.

The motive and purpose of travel could range from very general to very specific. When the reason of travel is very specific (like adventure, wellness, medical, nature and more) it prefixed with the word “tourism” and new form of tourism emerged. Likewise, yoga tourism and spiritual tourism are emerged as special interest tourism (Rungsimanop and Ashton, 2021; Ali- Knight and Ensor, 2017; Smith and Puczko, 2009) and also as a form of Cultural and Spiritual Tourism (Bandyopadhyay & Nair, 2019; Koncul, 2012; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Smith & Puczko, 2009). It grew out of ancient Indian culture and has been practiced for more than 5,000 years (Lehto et.al., 2006). Abdul Halim et al., (2021) define “Spiritual tourism is a journey to find the purpose of life and it is a life exploration that goes beyond the self”. According to Sharpley and Jepson (2011), “spirituality is the postmodern transformation of religion, demands harmony between the individual and their environment, and tourism is an ideal platform for enthusiasts searching for meaning to experience spirituality and religiosity”.

From the above literature and contemporary stand point, spiritual tourism is related to the individual spirituality that is a tourist may visit different places/destination engaging in activities to satisfy one’s spiritual quest. Since, yoga is one of the best means to achieve different dimensions of spirituality, people travel to those destinations offering best yoga related facilities and trained masters in natural surrounds. “The desire to travel is influenced by the choices of yoga opportunities at the destination, as well as by external community factors, such food, culture and art” (Florida, 2002). Pawan Gupta (2019) stated “today’s stressful life has forced the modern day traveler to look for alternative holiday options where they cannot only rejuvenate their mind, body and soul but also carry home positive and life changing experience”.

Dissatisfaction and high expectation of contemporary society led to the change in consumer choice which appears to have become more specific and holistic in nature. The modern trend extends the idea of travel to include alternate activities (like; yoga, meditation, spa and therapies & treatments) influencing one’s holistic wellbeing lead to solace in life.

Moreover, due to these changes in consumer demand, it has become increasingly evident for stakeholders and service providers to understand the linkage of yoga-spirituality-tourism and its practical implications in branding and promoting product for spiritual tourism needs to be addressed. Any destination (either developed or developing) having potential to influence or fulfill the need of spiritually oriented tourist could be developed as a spiritual tourism destination. Evidence suggests that destination endowed with rich natural, geographical and religious resources positioned itself as a competitive yoga destination such as; Rishikesh, Kerala, Puducherry, Varanasi, Mysore etc. in the global market. It is worth mentioning that the development of yoga and spiritual activities as a tourism product will help in product differentiation. However, to promote a destination with abundant local resources for wellness tourism in an international market, the region needs to develop a strong and recognizable brand (Romao et. al., 2021).

The proposed reasons, value and positive outcome of wellness activities (yoga and spirituality) shows the viability of incorporating same at any destination at any level of product. The customer or tourist choose a product based on their perceived value of it and wellness activity can be placed or developed as augmented product at any destination without disturbing the image of core product/destination. Therefore, while planning and marketing spirituality and yoga as a tourism product stakeholders and service provider have to think through Kotler’s level of product. According to Philip Kotler’s Product Level Model, customers have

different levels of needs ranging from functional/core needs to emotional needs and products are just means to satisfy that varying

need or wants. Based on above study and models, author has developed a product level model for yoga & spiritual tourism (Fig.4).



Figure 4. Product Level Model

Conclusion:

This study conflates the theoretical discussion of spirituality, yoga and spiritual tourism and articulates the linkage of these three. Spirituality and yoga, both, can play a big part in someone's overall happiness and wellbeing and can take many different forms such as practicing/cultivating mindfulness, yoga, meditation and travel or spending time in nature and more.

While encompassing large and diverse studies conducted in various geographical location for spirituality, yoga and spiritual tourism

body and spirit has been identified as a main role player in tourist motivation. Practicing yoga is largely alien with other factors (such as; spirituality and meditation, well-being and more) of spiritual tourism. Evidence suggests that yoga, meditation or other spiritual activities would give more satisfactory results in natural surrounding/setup.

Therefore, yoga and spirituality emerged as a driver of spiritual tourism in present contemporary society where people have become more conscious about holistic health. To curate the transformational experiences of tourists, service providers are experimenting

with creative ideas and strategically incorporating wellness activity in tourism product offerings.

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