

Yoga as a career path: exploring strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats through swot analysis

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Abstract:

Yoga aims to calm the fluctuations of the mind through various practices, leading to spiritual elevation. Traditionally, this system was intended to achieve *ekāgratā* or *samādhi* but is now perceived as a discipline for physical fitness and overall well-being. Is pursuing a career in a discipline that people previously regarded as *mokṣaśāstra* viable? Considering a career in yoga is an intriguing possibility that necessitates careful thought and strategic planning. It is essential to assess internal resources, such as strengths and weaknesses, and external factors, like opportunities and threats, through a SWOT analysis to establish yoga as a rewarding Vocation.

This paper explores the strengths and numerous opportunities available in the field. A wide range of opportunities are available in academia, research, wellness tourism and other allied fields, each presenting distinct appeal and avenues for growth. It is equally important to thoroughly assess the weaknesses, potential challenges, or threats of pursuing a career in yoga before committing to this field.

Keywords: Opportunities, Strengths, Threats, Weaknesses, Yoga career.

Introduction:

What is 'Yoga'?

Yoga is a multi-dimensional, subtle science aimed at harmonising the body and mind, culminating in spiritual upliftment. Influencing the psycho-physiological dimension, the *bahiraṅga* and *āntaraṅga* *sādhana* purify the body systems and balance the mind.

What is 'Career'?

The dictionary meaning of the word 'Career' is a profession that requires training and is pursued as a lifelong vocation (Merriam-webster, 2024). In addition to formal training, continuous

learning and ongoing skills upgrades are necessary to be successful in any career.

Yoga then and now

Traditionally, the goal of yoga was to attenuate the *vṛtti*-s and achieve *samādhi* or *mokṣa*. However, 21st-century individuals view yoga as a fitness trend or health regime for maintaining a healthy body and a stress-free mind. Therefore, more people are turning to yoga to reap the benefits of this ancient practice.

Yoga as a Career

Taking up yoga as a career would have raised eyebrows a few decades ago. Some viewed it as an inadequately compensated profession, while others believed yoga

should be taught selflessly, without fees. How feasible is it to make a successful career in the discipline once considered mokṣa-śāstra? Therefore, it is important to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of choosing yoga as a career by conducting a comprehensive SWOT analysis.

Career Options in Yoga

A career in yoga extends far beyond teaching group and private classes. The field offers diverse opportunities, such as becoming a yoga therapist, sports championship coach, academician, continuing education provider, YCB and NET training provider, content creator, blogger, counsellor, entrepreneur, retreat organiser, designer, and yoga props and accessories manufacturer. Conducting a SWOT analysis can help individuals determine the best fit among these options.

SWOT analysis

Albert Humphrey of the Stanford Research Institute is widely recognised as the creator of SWOT analysis, although the exact origins of this technique remain unclear. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Strengths and weaknesses are controllable internal factors or resources, whereas opportunities are uncontrollable external factors.

SWOT Analysis of Yoga Career

While deciding what career path to choose, people often follow the path chosen by many. Clashing family, friends, and colleagues' viewpoints make career choices difficult. (Bhuyan, 2010). While SWOT analysis is a managerial tool, it can be valuable in guiding career choices. It is better to invest a little of one's time in analysing the SWOT of a yoga career than lifetime regret. Choosing the right career is a critical decision that can impact one's chances of success and satisfaction in the chosen career. Whether starting afresh or looking for a career transition, this

technique can help foster multi-factorial awareness when pursuing a career in yoga.

Strengths of a Yoga Career

A career in yoga is about transforming passion into a profession, which can be a considerable strength. However, having a deep love for yoga alone is not sufficient. One should have the desired intelligence, interest, aptitude, and skills to excel in the profession. Yoga is a path less travelled than traditional career choices. Hence, this can become a unique career with a variety of options. It is a path to healing oneself and others. Immersing oneself in yoga can lead to heightened awareness that can be beneficial for flourishing in personal and professional life. It is known to be a noble career that spreads ancient wisdom to the world and makes this world a better place to live. It is important to consider individual aptitude and preferences when selecting the most suitable option.

Yoga helps in women's empowerment. Homemakers can look after their families, manage household chores, and create a substantial income by conducting online or offsite classes. The COVID-19 pandemic has removed the geographical restrictions that were once a limiting factor. Catering to global clients is now possible for yoga teachers. Without needing a physical studio, teachers can now earn income by conducting online sessions, free from the concerns of monthly studio rentals. Self-employed teachers do not require fancy infrastructure or expensive instruments if freelancing. One meets like-minded individuals and can build a community of inclusivity, positivity, and support with fellow yoga professionals.

A career in yoga offers long-term prospects as there is no retirement age. After retiring from institutions or government departments, individuals can continue to practice and teach yoga. Those aspiring to establish themselves in the yoga industry can tap into a broad market, catering to novice and advanced

practitioners or those seeking physical and emotional healing through yoga therapy and counselling. Yoga professionals now have social media as their strength to reach a wider audience. Social media presence helps communicate one's style, expertise, and specialisation to a broader spectrum of potential students or clients. Social media marketing helps potential students find the right teachers to learn from (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016).

Weaknesses of Yoga Career

The primary drawback of the yoga profession is the low pay in the initial stages. However, it can evolve into a rewarding career with faith and perseverance to pursue this unconventional path. Another drawback is the lack of standardised qualifications. While those with graduate and post-graduate degrees have an advantage at the university level, there are no consistent criteria elsewhere. Some individuals establish themselves through non-affiliated yoga courses. There are no minimum qualification requirements or rules for starting a yoga centre. Individuals with advanced degrees such as master's and PhDs face challenges securing positions as assistant professors in colleges and universities due to limited vacancies. As a result, many PhD holders cannot realise their dream of pursuing a career in academia. (Why doing a PhD is often a waste of time, 2016)

During the COVID pandemic, there was a boom in the yoga teaching profession due to online Teacher training courses leading to cutthroat competition and market saturation. It isn't easy to survive and generate substantial income only by conducting classes at the neighbouring studios. To make it a full-fledged career and earn a sizeable income, teachers should create a niche to get visibility and attract more clients. (Zuberi, 2018). Poor participant retention rate coupled with fixed studio rental expenses is problematic, sufficient to put yoga trainers at financial risk due to uncertain revenue (Ippoliti &

Smith, 2016). The money a yoga teacher makes is proportional to the classes he/she takes (Albuquerque & Prasad, 2017). Therefore, yoga teachers follow unsustainable teaching schedules to meet the expenses and generate a decent livelihood, leading to burnout, boredom, and little or no time left for self-practice and self-upgradation (Ippoliti & Smith, 2016).

The challenges are similar for the Yoga Teacher Training Institute owners who are concerned with attracting a steady stream of national and international students to sustain their centres and cover operational costs. Yoga schools offer 21-day yoga teacher training courses (TTCs) that cram the curriculum with superficial teachings on various subjects, including yoga philosophy, anatomy, and physiology. As a result, there is hardly any time left to provide graduates with practical knowledge and necessary skills to launch them as productive yoga teachers. As a result, many underqualified teachers struggle to establish themselves in the saturated yoga market (Nawaz, 2018). Many well-trained yoga instructors struggle to demonstrate the genuineness and authenticity of their knowledge in this unregulated industry. Not only yoga instructors but also independent yoga researchers often struggle to secure funding for their research due to a lack of awareness about government funding schemes.

Many yoga teachers and bloggers struggle to keep up with emerging technology. Lack of financial resources to market oneself across social media platforms poses an issue. Self-employed yoga professionals often feel overwhelmed, managing all aspects of their business alone. Sometimes, the pressure of marketing oneself is so overwhelming that it hampers their teaching abilities and is often incredibly stressful for yoga trainers.

Opportunities for a Yoga Career

Yoga offers a wide array of opportunities to explore. One can pursue careers in academia, research and development, teacher training, spiritual tourism, content creation, and yoga sports. In recent years, the government of India and the AYUSH ministry have introduced initiatives for the yoga fraternity. Press Information Bureau, Government of India published a report recognising yoga as a competitive sport in a joint press conference by the Ministry of AYUSH and Youth Affairs & Sports held in New Delhi on 17th December 2020. According to the union minister of state (IC) for AYUSH Shri Shripad Naik, the integration of novel methods and advances in technology into yogāsana sports will help yoga athletes and officials pursue successful and satisfying careers in the sector. The proposed establishment of a Yogāsana League aims to provide performers, experts, and professionals with a career and position in society, thereby producing Sports Stars among Yogāsana athletes and providing them with job opportunities (Formal recognition of Yogasana as a competitive sport, 2020).

The government of India's International Day of Yoga initiative is instrumental in popularising yoga across the globe. This popularity of yoga has seen a rise in foreigners travelling to India in search of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Yoga and spiritual tourism are other booming sectors that generate foreign revenue and career opportunities. Yoga retreat centres in North and South India provide holistic experiences to those searching for inner peace (Mishra, 2017). Working as a yoga retreat provider, wellness centre manager and coach are some interesting areas to consider when deciding on an unconventional career in yoga.

In terms of wellness tourism, India is ranked fifth out of ten destinations in Asia-Pacific and twelfth out of twenty worldwide, according to the Medical

Tourism Index 2020–21. Between 2020–2027, Medical Value Travel (MVT) in India is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.1%. The government's National Strategy & Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism has introduced several programmes encouraging Ayurveda, Yoga, and other Indian medical systems in the international market. This will help advance India's emergence as a centre for Medical Value Travel (Medical Value Travel (MVT), n.d.). The 'Heal in India, heal by India' initiative will bring more people to India for medical tourism and help foreign visitors conveniently access Ayurvedic and yoga centres (James et al., 2022). This initiative holds promise for contributing to the development of a self-reliant India – 'Ātmanirbhar Bhārat' and offers significant potential for establishing a successful career in Yoga (Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

The New Education Policy (NEP) has taken welcoming steps to introduce the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in schools and higher education curricula. Yoga is an integral part of IKS. Therefore, institutions and yoga experts have several opportunities to work together to support the successful integration of IKS with modern knowledge systems (Indian Knowledge Systems, n.d.).

The Central Council of Research for Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN) conducts scientific research in the fundamental and applied aspects of yoga and naturopathy. It also promotes research towards prevention, causation, and disease remedies to develop yoga as a therapeutic modality and establish its credibility (Sharma P. , 2023). Yoga experts interested in yoga's scientific and experimental aspects possess great chances to expand their careers in research and academia. The Ministry of Science and Technology has introduced the SATYAM program in 2015. It aims to promote scientific research on the benefits of yoga

and meditation for physical, mental, and cognitive health in healthy individuals and patients with disorders (Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation, n.d.). Such government initiatives help yoga professionals widen their horizons and look for out-of-the-box opportunities. AYUSH ministry is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Skill Development and Enterprise to train and provide employment opportunities to qualified yoga professionals (Sharma P. , 2023).

Plenty of opportunities are waiting for exploration in the field of philosophic-literary research. Establishments like Kaivalyadhama and the Lonavala Yoga Institute dedicate extensive efforts to preserve and decode the yet-unresearched yoga manuscripts. Those with a robust interest in yoga philosophy and literature can find many opportunities here. There are ample options available for interdisciplinary research. Research like yoga for sports personnel, Yoga and Ayurveda or Yoga and Naturopathy can help one delve deeper into allied disciplines and generate interesting theories or therapeutic modules helpful to the masses. Several nations and organisations have signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the AYUSH ministry to support cooperative research initiatives, exchange programmes, and yoga-focused workshops. The ministry supports research initiatives in traditional and contemporary medicine. (Ministry of Ayush offerings, n.d.).

AYUSH ministry's Voluntary certification scheme (YCB) successfully provides credibility to teachers, therapists, and yoga centres. Yoga professionals with decent experience in the field can evolve as yoga training providers or establish an institute with like-minded yoga professionals to reach a broader client base. One can establish a Yoga Teacher Training Center or become a continuing education provider. With the increasing interest of the youth in yoga, there is an excellent

opportunity to impart life skills. Also, trained yoga therapists can work in hospitals or independently.

There is immense potential in making a career in Corporate Yoga. Employee health is a priority for the profit-driven corporate sector to increase productivity and well-being. There is a need for trained yoga professionals to help these corporate employees achieve sound physical, mental, and emotional health through yogic practices. According to the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness economy will grow at an average annual rate of 8.6%, reaching \$8.5 trillion by 2027. After the pandemic, mindful movement has the fastest rate of growth (+16.8% overall increase from 2019–2022), as millions of people have started practising yoga as a fitness and stress-relieving modality (Wellness industry statistics & facts, n.d.). Therefore, there is enormous scope in making yoga a successful career.

Apart from yoga teaching and therapy, there is a vast scope for yoga wear, accessories designers, and manufacturers. The yoga community is growing. Hence, the demand for accessories and equipment like yoga props and mats is rising. Startups have a huge market to target by introducing 'Make in India' products and catering to Indian and overseas yoga practitioners. (Sharma P. , 2023). A unique career awaits those interested in product and merchandise design and manufacturing yoga products. Also, there is a growing demand for yoga instructional material. There is a dearth of quality material for YCB and NET examinations. Those with in-depth knowledge and a firm hold on various theoretical aspects of yoga stand a chance to introduce quality study material and can provide training to these aspirants.

Threats to Yoga Career

The commercialisation of yoga is becoming a significant concern. Greed to climb the success ladder is a reason for

compromised ethics. People are compromising Yama-niyama (yoga ethics) for monetary gains. Adhering to the ethics described in the classical text and being true to the tradition can help one flourish in the field. Another problem is sensationalising yoga to lure more clients. Social media portrayals of yoga have become more idealised, showing the typical practitioner as a physically fit young woman in fancy yoga attire. Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube posts and reels portray yoga as an advanced, highly performative physical art or sport (Hinz et al., 2021). This portrayal becomes intimidating for those thinking of joining yoga and can be bothersome for genuine trainers who want to make their living by teaching yoga. Western influence on Postural Yoga is a significant threat that reduces yoga to mere physical practice by distorting the fundamentals of traditional yoga to achieve popularity and financial gains (Swamy & Agoramoorthy, 2022).

Yoga is often viewed as therapeutic, but improper practice can lead to injuries, as highlighted by Fishman et al. (2009). Unlike any other sports, the risk of injury in yoga sports championships is a serious concern, impacting athletes and potentially harming their careers. Athletes' drive to improve and maintain reputations can push them to their limits, increasing injury risk. Additionally, untrained individuals from gymnastics or acrobatics backgrounds often participate in competitions, posing threats to trained yoga athletes.

The spiritual essence of yoga may be diluted because of its inclusion as a sport, growing commercialisation and commodification, and attempts to limit its experiential elements to scientific frameworks. The absence of spirituality in yoga becomes a significant threat to the integrity of the discipline, particularly for

those aiming to professionalise within the field. It is indisputable that a materialistic mind may find it challenging to meditate. Pursuing material goals through the expansion of yoga businesses contradicts the concept of 'Santoṣa' in Yoga.

AI-powered yoga is another emerging danger to the conventional human-led yoga industry. Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered systems precisely recognise and track yoga poses using computer vision and machine learning, giving real-time feedback. This development raises questions regarding the survival of yoga's spiritual core beyond physical postures and the future of yoga careers. Moreover, this type of yoga lacks the essential value of human instruction (Sharma, 2024). 'AI-powered yoga' has the potential to displace many yoga instructors if it gains popularity.

Conclusion

Thus, it is crucial to analyse the various aspects of a career in yoga using a thorough SWOT analysis. A detailed examination shows that the strengths and opportunities in this career outweigh the weaknesses and threats. Conducting a SWOT analysis can help in making informed decisions. Making the right choice can lead to progress and achieving career success. However, the definition of 'career success' varies from person to person. It can mean happiness, satisfaction, financial stability, or a good lifestyle. Success in a yoga career depends on three parameters: acquiring the necessary education and skills, finding a 'right' yoga job that aligns with one's skills, interests, talents, and aptitude, and growing in that chosen role.

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