
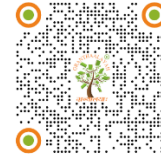


Original Article

## EMOTIONAL REGULATION THROUGH YOGA AND MEDITATION IN INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

The control of emotions is one of the most important topics of modern psychology as it determines stress and resilience, social functioning, and susceptibility to mental illnesses. In recent models, emotion regulation is defined as the mechanisms by which individuals control the kind of emotions that they experience, when they experience them, and how they experience or express those emotions. Such models also differentiate rather adaptive tactics like cognitive reappraisal and more expensive tactics like expressive suppression. Indian psychology considers the same issue based on a wider and older framework. Instead of depending on the view of emotion as an independent mental event, it connects affective disturbance with desire, attachment, ego-involvement (ahamkara), ignorance (avidya), and the interaction of the three gunas sattva, rajas and tamas. The yoga and meditation in this model are not only ways of relaxation to the person but rather coordinated methods of changing the individual via morals, poses, control of breathing, control of senses, training of attention and reflection. The paper is a narrative review of the classical Indian psychological concepts versus modern scientific discoveries about yoga, pranayama, and meditation. The student, community, and clinical evidence indicate better stress, anxiety, negative affect, self-compassion, adaptive coping, emotional maturity, and cognitive reappraisal, and mechanistically supported by interoception, decentering, autonomic regulation, and neural response supporting emotional salience research. Meanwhile, the literature itself is still heterogeneous in terms of methods, and yoga is not, in general, superior to all the active controls. This paper maintains that Indian psychology has a unique and useful contribution to make the regulation of emotions can never be a matter of holding feelings back but is rather a matter of transforming oneself by means of self-control consciousness.

**Keywords:** Indian Psychology, Emotion Control, Yoga, Meditation, Pranayama, Gunas, Patanjali, Mindfulness, Self-Control, Mental Health

### INTRODUCTION

The aspect of emotion regulation has gained remarkable significance in the current psychology. Modern reviews identify it as efforts to modify feelings in self or others and the process model of regulation structures regulation into steps that include identifying in need of regulation, strategy, implementation and measurement of success. In that literature, cognitive reappraisal is typically adaptive profile than expressive suppression; reappraisal involves a shift of meaning of a situation preceding the full expression of the emotional response, whereas suppression involves significant inhibition of external expression and, in some cases, keeping the inner response intact, at physiological and social costs.

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The same human problem has been discussed in Indian psychology which operates in a broader frame. It does not tend to manage emotion as a single variable to be dealt with later on. Rather, it makes emotional turbulence to be associated with desire, attachment, false self-identification, and imbalance within the overall framework of personality. In the synthesis of the Indian view, which has been made by Dharitri Ramaprasad, emotions are regarded as the alterations of the desire and attachment based on the contact of ego to the outer world. The view of Patanjali makes suffering to be in ignorance of the real self and Bhagavad Gita makes emotional life to be pegged on the three gunas. More importantly, the Indian perspective considers the control of the emotional experience and expression as a part of right living.

The thesis of the paper is that yoga and meditation hold a privileged position in Indian psychology since they provide a full structure of emotional regulation. They never use cognition only, or physiology only, or behavior only, to treat emotion. Instead, they concurrently train the things of lifestyle, morals, body, breath, attention, awareness, and self-understanding. What comes out of this is a psychologically complex and more and more empirically valid model of emotional regulation.

## REVIEW APPROACH

It is a narrative review article. It is a combination of classical Indian thought of psychology and modern peer-reviewed research of yoga, pranayama, and meditation. Preference is assigned to the conceptual articles on Indian psychology, randomized and quasi-experimental intervention studies, systematic reviews and mechanistic studies employing psychophysiological or neural measures. It is not intended to be a comprehensive systematic review, but rather to build a conceptually consistent description of the way yoga and meditation control emotions in the Indian psychological tradition and the way it relates to existing evidence.

## INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY OF EMOTION: DESIRE TO SELF-TRANSFORMATION

The unique characteristic of Indian psychology is that the emotion is included in the overall organization of the person. Ramaprasad points out that Indian literature does not tend to be much more categorical about emotion than the modern psychology. Rather, the meaning of affective life is perceived in the context of ego, thinking, drive, and the inner self. Emotions are considered springs of action, conditioned by the connection between ahamkara and the world and strongly structured according to the polarity, sukha and dukha: pleasure and pain. Emotion is in this perspective not just a physical response or a mental judgment but is a way of engagement of the individual.

This framing alters the definition of emotional regulation. In most modern contexts, emotion control is a problem of distress minimization and/or performance enhancement. Regulation in the Indian psychology is nearer to purification, clarification, and deconditioning. Uncontrollable emotion is not merely excess feeling, but it is feeling mixed, inextricably, with desire, dread, repulsion, arrogance, envy, and false identification with oneself. Ramaprasad explains that when one fails to get what he wants, it causes anger, sorrow, jealousy, and suffering, and when one gets, it causes greed, fear of losing it, arrogance, and additional disturbance. There is no randomness in emotional instability. Attachment and ego-involvement are its follow up.

This process is particularly important to the gunas theory which offers a very valuable language of psychology. In the story of Ramaprasad, sattva has been associated with cheerfulness, joy, forgiveness, and equanimity; rajas with grief, greed, hatred, agitation, and non-satisfaction, and tamas with fatigue, indolence, delusion, and non-discrimination. This framework is relevant as shown in later empirical studies. A cross-sectional survey of Indian university students established that sattva was linked with increased life satisfaction and reduced perceived stress, whereas the rajas and tamas were linked with reduced life satisfaction and increased stress.

To be more precise, a 2022 study of emotion regulation, which was conducted based on yogic personality, established that sattva group exhibited healthier regulatory functioning when compared to rajas and tamas groups. The participants with elevated sattva demonstrated a greater mindfulness, reduced anxiety, positive implicit associations between emotion-regulation and less pupil dilation depending on emotional condition. The authors concluded that sattva guna helps to have healthy emotion regulation and live healthier emotionally. That matters since it indicates that the guna model is not merely philosophically beautiful; it seems to be quantifiable and psychologically significant in contemporary studies.

Other Indian yoga studies associate this trait scheme with the wider psychological functioning. An experiment on the nature of integral yoga had established that sattva was positively associated with emotional intelligence and had implied that sattvic personality is associated with increased self-control. Compared to yoga, work involving physical activity also found out that yoga was able to raise sattva and decrease tamas, and it was accompanied by improved self-esteem. Collectively, these works imply that Indian psychology cannot be seen as a description of the category of emotions only. It provides a model of development where the emotional regulation is linked to the nurturing of more concrete, more stable, and less ego-centered personality.

Another subtlety is in the Indian aesthetic, the Indian approach to thinking: it is not necessary to inoculate the emotions to establish a healthy emotional level. The rasa and witness-consciousness exposition of Ramaprasad implies that one will be able to feel even strong affect without feeling overwhelmed with it since the ego is not so involved into the occurrence. This, she explains as

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a state of being almost a witness, saksi. In modern terms, this is like a process of decentering: emotion is seen, familiar, and processed without instant combination with the terms me and mine.

### **SELF-REGULATORY DISCIPLINES: YOGA AND MEDITATION**

Yoga represents the Indian psychological remedy of emotional disturbance. The 2020 Indian psychiatric clinical guidelines present Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali in the form of a summary of eightfold path: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. The guidelines also differentiate the first five as a form of self-regulation as it applies to the outside world and the remaining three as practices as it applies to the inner world. This fact is the only indication of why yoga is most appropriately regarded as a wholesome regulatory system as opposed to an exercise program.

This view is reflected in the modern review "Dhyana yoga, the path of meditative being" which is an extension of the concept. It characterizes yogic meditative practices as means to control physiological and psychological activities not only based on posture or breathing but also based on ethical conduct and meditative consciousness. It lays stress on two classical principles abhyasa (sustained practice) and vairagya (detachment). These are psychologically relevant. Abhyasa keeps the mind focused and used to it, and vairagya helps to loosen the ego of the person-doer so that even practice becomes another instrument of self-inflation or emotional reactivity.

In the yoga school, meditation is not a sudden state but is a development process. An overview of meditation in yoga literature (2019) notes that there are four conditions applicable to this process: cancalata (random thought), ekagrata (non-meditative focus), dharana (focused meditation), and dhyana (meditation per se). The observation of the same review defines meditation as a self-regulated mental process which involves deep relaxation and heightened internalized attention. This definition is particularly applicable to psychology, since meditation is described as something trainable as opposed to the mystical passivity.

Psychologically, each of the limbs of yoga may be understood as the control of emotion on a higher level. Yama and niyama influence behavior thus minimizing impulsiveness and repetitive interpersonal triggers. Asana and pranayama control arousal and tension of the body. Pratyahara lessens overstimulation through the compulsive dependence on sensory things. Dharana is used to stabilize attention, and dhyana is used to develop sustained non-reactive awareness. Partially this mapping is interpretive, however this mapping is substantially backed by the structure of Ashtanga Yoga, as well as the contemporary research linking yoga to self-awareness, autonomic regulation and decentering.

### **EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN YOGA AND MEDITATION**

The fact that yoga seems to be effective at various levels of the emotional process is one of the reasons why it would be such an useful addition to the existing body of emotion-regulation research. The framework by Gross identifies the following families of strategies, including situation selection, attentional deployment, cognitive change and response modulation. On all the four, yoga can be mapped. Training of the ethical discipline and moderation of lifestyle affect whether to enter or avoid a given situation; pratyahara and dharana affect the attentional deployment; contemplative insight and vairagya affect cognitive change; breath regulation and relaxation practice directly affect the modulation of physiological responses. This is not to say that Patanjali foresaw modern affective science as it is today referred to. It implies that the system of yoga can be interpreted as a multi-level regulating model which can be explained by the modern theory.

This interpretation is backed up by mechanistic evidence. Tolbanos-Roche and Menon used the S-ART model of self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence to the yoga practice among Indian and Spanish samples. They studied 362 practitioners and non-practitioners and concluded that yoga practitioners demonstrated good interoceptive awareness and decentering, and reported stronger self-regulatory capacities. In Indian practitioners, a longer duration of uninterrupted practice of yoga (more than a year) was associated with improved interoception and decentering. Such results are significant since emotion management is not often simply a matter of having different thoughts about things; it is also a process of having a more accurate sense of the body, being able to notice internal shifts promptly, and disidentifying oneself with feelings.

Short term interventions also seem to be effective. In 2024, a systematic review of the literature on a single session of yoga, meditation, and breathing sessions identified 28 eligible studies with 31 interventions and 2,574 participants. The 28 studies out of the 21 found outcomes that were in favor of the intervention. Physiological stress reactivity was also less in 71% of studies that measured it and psychological stress reactivity in 65% of studies. This indicates that short periods of exposure to the elements of yogic can be used to down-regulate stress systems and can be applied in both acute emotion regulation as well as habit formation.

Regulation of breath appears to be particularly significant as a bottom-up regulation mechanism. When the practice of Bhastrika pranayama was provided at random and controlled in a trial, the negative effect and state anxiety were significantly lowered in four weeks. Functional imaging indicated a change in the brain areas that process emotions which include the amygdala, anterior cingulate cortex, anterior insula and prefrontal cortex. Changes in anxiety were tied to changes in connectivity between ventrolateral prefrontal cortex and right anterior insula. Such results are very applicable to the Indian psychology as they form an interface

between a traditional breath-based practice and the modern models of affective regulation, salience processing and autonomic control.

Prolonged practice could as well modify how the emotion is handled prior to full development of conscious reaction. In a fMRI study, yoga students who had been subjected to emotional stimuli exhibited distinctive activity in the superior parietal lobule and supramarginal gyrus, which are related to attentional awareness and lesser egocentric prejudice, whereas recreational athletes exhibited the activation related more to cognitive reappraisal. The yoga group was another group where the HRV profile was different indicating that neurovisceral regulation was different. In a different research, long-term meditators of Sahaja Yoga meditated with ERPs attenuated in mid-latency response to positive and negative emotive images and the authors interpreted this to mean that they had better frontal top-down control of rapid automatic salience detection. Collectively, these results indicate that yoga and meditation can reconstruct emotional processing at early pre-reflective stages, as well as by conscious coping afterwards.

The correlation with the typical emotion-regulation-strategies is even more evident in the intervention-studies. Studies of a yoga meditation program at a college-based setting (MEMT) discovered that changes in cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression were significant after only two weeks with significant increase in self-compassion, mindfulness and positive affect. This is notable since it connects a yogic intervention to the most stressed variables of the Gross tradition. It goes also in favor of the Indian statement that the remedy of the control of the emotions lies not in the repression of the feeling, but in the conversion of attention, consciousness, and self-relation.

### EMPIRICAL DATA IN LEARNING AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The adolescent literature and student literature are particularly topical since emotional instability, identity formation, peer pressures, and impulsiveness are intensified in adolescence and studenthood. In high school students a randomized controlled trial established a significant effect of a 16-week yoga intervention in emotion regulation over physical education with group effect of  $F(1,32) = 7.50, p = .01$ . The mediation by mindful attention, self-compassion, or body awareness was not expected, yet the research still offered direct data that yoga could positively contribute to regulatory capacity in normal educational environments.

The same findings are observed in Indian samples. In the already mentioned MEMT study, 72 college students used 45 minutes of yoga-based meditation method each day over two weeks and significantly improved their cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion, mindfulness and positive affect with negative affect and expressive suppression declines. In yet another school-based Indian study, a 15-day yoga-pranayama intervention had a great impact in enhancing mindfulness and negative emotion regulation among pre-university students, and post hoc analyses, found mindfulness to be associated with lesser aggression. In a different study of Dynamic Suryanamaskar among Indian male students, perceived stress reductions and emotional intelligence improvement were significant after 12 weeks. Combined with other results, these findings indicate that yoga-based interventions are not calming per se; it seems that they reinforce core emotional skills in youth.

The conclusion is enhanced by a very big Indian trial. Harish Ranjana et al. used a cluster randomized controlled trial and targeted 2,000 adolescents in 24 schools in Chennai and New Delhi. The yoga program involved pranayama, asana, meditation and relaxation in 17 sessions. The yoga group compared to a healthy-lifestyle education group showed considerable reductions in scores of adolescent stresses, salivary cortisol, and increases in attention and concentration. The size of this research is significant as it shifts the sphere to the non-small convenience samples and indicates that yoga can be applied at the population level in schooling systems.

Current efforts have demonstrated that yoga programs based on meditation have the potential to enhance adaptive regulation within the community. A quasi-experimental study using school-based Sahaja Yoga Meditation showed significant positive effects on self-esteem and adaptive coping as well as negative effects on maladaptive coping and problematic internet use in adolescents, in 2026, in northern India. A month-long yoga intervention delivered to Indian armed forces personnel in a randomized controlled trial in 2025 reported that yoga-based intervention enhanced significantly psychological immunity, life satisfaction, self-confidence, total adjustment, emotional maturity and psychological well-being. These are not all the results termed emotion regulation, but the results are closely interconnected with the way people evaluate, assimilate and react to stress and emotion.

### CLINICAL AND AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Clinical studies indicate that yoga and meditation can also serve as complementary emotion-regulation therapies in conditions, whereby stress, negative affect, rumination, rigidity or autonomic imbalance are eminent. A randomized controlled trial systematic review of yoga, stress and mood found that yoga practice has been linked to increased control of the sympathetic nervous, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, depressive and anxiety symptoms. A 2023 systematic review and meta-analysis also found that interventions based on yoga had an advantage over control conditions in both anxiety disorders and, following sensitivity analyses, depressive disorders, with respect to the reduction of anxiety and, respectively, depression symptoms. Such reviews cannot establish a specific mechanism, but they indicate the assumption that yoga influences biological and psychological systems that are involved in the control of the emotional system.

This trend is backed by more targeted trials. The add-on program of integrated yoga to standard care in a randomized controlled study of adult patients with clinical depression induced substantial changes in depressive symptoms, resilience, physical health, and negative affect in 8 weeks. This is remarkable since in most cases, depression is characterized by inflexible negative evaluation, affective resistance, less self-compassion, and minimal attentional regulations. The fact that yoga had a better effect on the symptoms and positive psychological resources is parallel to the Indian concept of regulation not only being the reduction of symptoms but enhancing the adaptive capacities of the person.

Similar promise in Indian meditation research indicates the same in the case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. In a clinical trial examination comparing Rajyoga meditation with first-line treatment, the average medication errors recorded 49.76% decrease in Y-BOCS symptoms in the meditation compared to 18.09% in the non-meditative control group after three months. OCD is not commonly addressed as the issue of alone emotion regulation; however, the disorder encompasses distress intolerance, compulsive response pattern, threat salience, and inability to disengage intrusive mental material. The enhancement evinced by Rajyoga is thus very applicable to a regulatory interpretation.

Other researchers propose positive effect in psychosomatic and stress sensitive disorder. A randomized trial of yoga Nidra in menstrual incontinent women reported that it had significant changes in anxiety and depression with positive changes in positive well-being, vitality, and general health. The Indian psychiatric advice is also in favor of yoga as an addition and preventive measure especially in depression and anxiety and perceives pranayama, asanas and meditation as low-risk lifestyle measures to individuals in mental distress. This is important since it shows that Indian psychology is not merely a philosophical asset anymore; it is also starting to shape up evidence-based mental health practice.

## DISCUSSION

The literature examined in this paper has indicated that the psychology of the Indians has provided a broader and deeper explanation of emotional regulation as compared to some of its narrow skills-based models. It is not, in this tradition, that people feel too strongly. The underlying issue is that emotion is merged with craving, aversion, fear, ego-involvement as well as disturbed personality. Yoga and meditation thus are not intended to be goal-directed towards emotional flattening, but at disentangling, clarification, and change. No numbness is their desired result but *sattva*: clarity, steadiness, equanimity and conscious responsiveness.

This view overlaps modern psychology in several significant ways. The witness position explained in the Indian thought is like decentering. *Vairagya* is the growth of aloofness that is comparable to lower attachment to emotional arousal. The regulation of physiological arousal by breath practices is consistent with the response-oriented regulation. Meditative interventions enhance reappraisal, mindfulness, and compassion with oneself, which, again, has consistently shown positive results in the current emotion science. The results of the S-ART on interoception and decentering are the most effective linkage point of the Indian theory of contemplation and modern models of self-regulation.

Simultaneously, romanticisation of the evidence should not take place. Active comparison conditions do not always have to be subordinate to yoga. One randomized trial in *gunas* and general health found that physical exercise was more effective than yoga in certain areas like anxiety/insomnia and severe depression, although yoga was more effective on *sattva*. A recent cross-sectional comparison also reported lower stress in recreational participants of sports compared to adolescent Hatha yoga practitioners, but it is not meaningful because of significant confounds in age expression and duration of activity. These discoveries are wholesome clues of the fact that yoga is not magic, but strong, and movement, social situation and program structure are all that count.

It is not, of course, the most powerful to conclude that yoga always beats all the alternatives. It is, the Indian psychology provides a distinctively integrative view of the regulation of emotions, which connects ethics, body, breath, attention, meaning, and selfhood. The latter model is worthy of being given center stage in the psychological theory and practice of mental health.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are still critical methodological issues that are present in the yoga literature. A 2023 review in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry found issues such as randomization, blinding, instructor effects, adherence, effects sustainability, heterogeneous of techniques, variable treatment duration, omission of key ingredients, cultural consideration, and the challenge of researching a multidimensional practice using reductionist designs. These issues are directly relevant to the current issue. Yoga can refer to an integrated course, breathing, postures, mantra-based meditation, or programs based on mindfulness, as well as spiritual-discursive interventions. The problem cannot be known unless it is designed carefully as to what is controlling emotion.

The future research must hence take four directions. To start with, it must compare elements (posture, breath, attention, mantra, and ethical reflection) and not think that they have comparable effects. Second, it must have those measures that are significant to modern and Indian psychology, which include decentering, interoception, *guna* balance, self-compassion, and ecological measures of emotional reactivity. Third, it ought to employ extended follow-up time and multisite studies to investigate the permanence and

applicability. Fourth, it must explore the impact of yoga on everyday emotional functioning in families, schools, workplaces, and clinical care and not just lab results. There is sufficient evidence in the field that supports this more specific second step.

## CONCLUSION

Yoga and meditation as an emotional control are not marginal concepts in Indian psychology; it is one of the major attainments. Indian philosophy identifies emotional disturbance in desire, attachment, ego-involvement, and imbalance between the gunas and answers it with a disciplined course of self-control which involves ethical behavior, bodily training, breath control, attentional control, meditative awareness, and detachment. Modern evidence is moving towards the support of this model. In student, community and clinical groups, yoga and meditation have been linked to improved reappraisal, reduced suppression, reduced stress and anxiety, enhanced adaptive coping, increased emotional maturity and objective variations in neural and physiological systems engaged in affective processing. But in conceptual terms, what Indian psychology has contributed most of all is a wake-up call: it is the understanding that the supreme mode of emotional control is not by means, but by liberation.

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