

Role of Yogic Sukshma Vyayama in Mental Health

¹Deepa Sajjansingh Rathore, ²Dr. Yuvraj Singh Khangarot,

¹Yoga Expert, ²Professor and Head

¹ Department of Swasthavritta, ²Department of Yoga and Science of Living

¹Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, Institute of National Importance, Jamnagar, Gujarat, India

²Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, Ladnun, Rajasthan, India

Abstract: According to the World Health Organization, Mental Health is an integral and essential component of Overall Health, and Mental Health conditions are among the leading causes of disability worldwide. In 2021, it was estimated that 1 in 7 people globally and 11 in 100 people in India were living with a mental disorder. According to a Lancet study (2020), Mental health disorders account for 5.2% of the global disease burden, underscoring the need for accessible, preventive and integrative therapeutic approaches. Yoga have gained increasing recognition for its positive influence on Mental Health. *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama*, a system of subtle *Yogic* movements remains under-researched despite its widespread contemporary application in health and disease management. The aim of the study is to explore the role of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* in mental health and identify the existing research gaps. Different yogic texts, scientific research articles, and electronic databases were referred and interpreted to understand its role in mental health. The search terms used were ‘Mental Health’ ‘Yogic Sukshma Vyayama’, ‘Sukshma Vyayama’, ‘Yogic Exercise’, ‘Pawanmuktasana series’, ‘Chalan Kriya’ using the Boolean operators ‘AND’ and ‘OR’. *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* contributes positively to the maintenance of Mental Health. Practices such as Pawanmuktasana Series–I (also known as Sukshma Vyayama), described in Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha by Swami Satyanand Saraswati are found effective in reducing neuromuscular tension, enhancing parasympathetic activity and promoting mental calmness. Additionally, cognitively focused *Sukshma Vyayamas* described by Swami Dharendra Brahmachari stimulate higher cognitive centers, promoting clarity of thought, sustained attention and emotional resilience. *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* holds substantial potential as a supportive and preventive *Yogic* practice for mental health promotion. Well-designed clinical trials are needed to clarify its psychological effects, underlying mechanisms and role in integrative mental health care.

Keywords: Mental Health, *Pawanmuktasana* series, Subtle Movements, *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary lifestyles characterized by chronic stress, irregular sleep patterns, sedentary behaviour, unhealthy dietary habits, excessive cognitive workload and continuous digital stimulation have significantly contributed to the rising burden of mental health disorders. These factors disrupt the balanced functioning of the nervous system and undermine mind–body harmony, often manifesting as disturbances in mental health.

World Health Organization recognizes Mental Health as an integral and essential component of overall health. Despite this recognition, mental health conditions remain among the leading causes of disability worldwide, contributing substantially to morbidity, reduced quality of life and socioeconomic burden. Global estimates indicate that in 2021, approximately one in seven people worldwide were living with a mental disorder, while in India, the prevalence was estimated at 11 per 100 individuals, reflecting a significant public health concern. Furthermore, mental health disorders account for 5.2% of the global disease burden, underscoring their pervasive impact across populations and health systems (Bureau, 2025). These statistics point to an urgent need for effective, accessible and preventive mental healthcare strategies.

From a *Yogic* perspective, mental disturbances arise due to impaired flow of *prana*, the vital life force that sustains physical and psychological processes. The major psychological benefits of *Yoga* are to calm the mind, to attune people to the environment, to enhance concentration and mental clarity, to reduce stress and anxiety, to encourage positive thoughts and self-acceptance and to promote flexibility followed by the spiritual benefits

in which the awakening the spirit, building of healthy spiritual awareness, promotion of interdependence between mind, body and spirit, enhancing the concept of oneness of all things and connecting personal energy to divine energy are incorporated (Tiwari, 2016).

Many researches have demonstrated the mental health benefits of comprehensive *Yoga* interventions involving *Sukshma Vyayama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama* and meditation. Among various *Yogic* practices, *Sukshma Vyayama* holds a unique position due to its subtle nature, simplicity and accessibility. These practices consist of gentle, rhythmic movements coordinated with breath and mindful awareness, making them suitable for individuals of all ages and health conditions, including those experiencing psychological distress (Brahmachari) (Dhargave, et al., 2021).

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

A substantial body of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of *Yoga* in improving mental health outcomes. Studies by Lazar demonstrate that *Yogic* practices influence resonance circuitry, leading to increased cortical thickness in the medial prefrontal cortex and the insula, particularly in the right hemisphere (Lazar, 2006). These neuroanatomical changes are associated with enhanced empathy, interoception and attunement to both self and others, as well as the integration of logical and intuitive processing (Kreiman, Koch, & Fried, 2000). Additionally, *Yoga* practices have been shown to reduce vulnerability to stress in healthy adults (Baldwin, 1999) and to exert significant therapeutic effects on anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and stress-related conditions through modulation of stress-response systems and neural mechanisms (Kamraju, 2023).

Yogic practices have also been shown to benefit patients with cardiovascular disease associated with insulin resistance in diabetes, improve sleep quality and alleviate migraines (Innes, Bourguignon, & Taylor, 2005) (Cohen, Warneke, Fouladi, Rodriguez, & Reich, 2004) (Khalsa, 2004) (John, Sharma, Sharma, & Kankane, 2007). In clinical populations, *Yoga* practices have been associated with reductions in depression and anxiety, mediated in part by increased Gamma-Amino-Butyric-Acid (GABA) levels and by improved stress regulation through effects on the amygdala (Streeter, 2007). *Yoga* has also been reported to influence hypothalamic functioning and stress-response systems responsible for regulating blood pressure, blood glucose, heart rate and respiration. Through their impact on the relaxation response, *Yogic* practices further influence the anterior cingulate cortex and hippocampus, supporting processes such as effective decision-making, empathy, emotional regulation and memory.

Although *Yoga* has gained global acceptance as a complementary approach to mental health care, most studies emphasize comprehensive *Yoga* programs that include *Asana*, *Pranayama*, and meditation. The independent effects of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* as a standalone practice remain underexplored. Existing studies often treat it as a preparatory technique rather than a therapeutic modality, leaving its specific contribution to mental health insufficiently examined. This gap highlights the need for a focused examination of *Sukshma Vyayama* through both *Yogic* literature and available empirical evidence.

III. Objectives of the Study:

- To understand the concept of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama*.
- To explore the potential role of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* in promoting mental health.
- To identify research gaps and limitations in existing studies.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and qualitative research design grounded in a literary review. The methodology relies exclusively on secondary sources to ensure reliability and conceptual depth. To evaluate existing knowledge relevant to the study, different *Yogic* texts, scientific research articles and electronic databases were systematically referred to and interpreted. A comprehensive search was conducted across

reputed academic databases, including peer-reviewed journals, review papers and clinical studies published up to 2025.

Search terms such as “*Mental Health*,” “*Yogic Sukshma Vyayama*,” “*Sukshma Vyayama*,” “*Yogic Exercise*,” “*Pawanmuktasana series*,” and “*Chalan Kriya*” were used in various combinations with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to maximize coverage. This methodological approach facilitated the identification and synthesis of relevant literature, enabling a nuanced understanding of the role of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* in mental health.

V. OBSERVATION AND RESULT

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (WHO, n.d.). Modern lifestyles characterized by chronic stress, irregular routines, poor sleep, and excessive mental workload contribute to emotional instability, anxiety, depression, and reduced resilience.

In *Yogic* philosophy, mental health is associated with the balanced functioning of *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahamkara* (ego), and *chitta* (consciousness). Mental disturbances arise when *Pranic* flow is obstructed. *Yoga* offers a holistic framework for mental health by addressing both physiological and psychological dimensions. Gentle practices such as *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* aim to stabilize the nervous system, regulate prana and cultivate mental awareness, thereby promoting relaxation and emotional balance.

The term *Sukshma* means subtle and *Vyayama* denotes exercise or movement. *Sukshma Vyayama* thus refers to subtle exercises designed to remove blockages in the body and mind. *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* were originally developed by Maharishi Karthikeyaji Maharaj of the Himalayan lineage, whose teachings were later transmitted and widely disseminated by Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, thereby bringing this practice into modern *Yogic* discourse. Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, in his *Yogic* teachings, emphasize these as a foundational practice to prepare practitioners for higher *Yogic* techniques. Practices based on the same conceptual framework are described in Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha by Swami Satyananda Saraswati as the *Pawanmuktasana* group-I. The term *pawan* means wind/prana, *mukta* means release and *asana* means pose. Thus, *Pawanmuktasana* refers to a group of posture or practices designed to release energetic blockages and facilitate the free flow of energy within the body and mind.

❖ *Padanguli Naman* (Toe Bending): Sitting in the base position with legs outstretched and feet together. Place your hands slightly behind the buttocks for support. Gently move the toes of both feet backward and forward while keeping feet upright and ankles relaxed.

❖ *Goolf Naman* (Ankle Bending): While sitting in base position, bend both feet at the ankle joints, stretching forward toward the floor and pulling back toward the knees.

❖ *Goolf Chakra* (Ankle Rotation): While sitting in base position, rotate both feet clockwise and anti-clockwise from ankle joints.

❖ *Goolf Ghoornan* (Ankle Crank): While sitting, place the right foot on the opposite thigh, hold the right foot with left hand and rotate it clockwise and anti-clockwise manner. Practice with other side.

❖ *Janufalak Akarshan* (Kneecap Contraction): Remain in base position, contract the muscles around the knee, drawing the kneecap toward the thigh and then release.

❖ *Janu Naman* (Knee Bending): Bend the right knee and clasp hands under the right thigh. Raise the right leg straight while pulling up the kneecap, lower the leg and bend it back toward the chest, bringing the heel near the groin and relax the leg. Repeat with the other leg.

❖ *Janu Chakra* (Knee Rotation): Bend the knee and clasp hands under the thigh. Rotate it in large circular motions clockwise and anticlockwise.

❖ *Ardha Titali* (Half Butterfly): Bend the right leg and placing the foot on the left thigh. Hold the toes with

the opposite hand, gently lift the knee toward the chest and then ease it down. Repeat on the other side.

❖ *Shroni Chakra* (Hip Rotation): In Ardha Titali position, rotate the knee in a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction. Repeat with the other leg.

❖ *Poorna Titali* (Full Butterfly): Bring both soles together by bend the knees and make heels close to the perineum. Stage 1: Clasp feet and gently lift and lower the knees. Stage 2: Place hands on knees and gently push down and then letting knees rise naturally.

❖ *Mushtika Bandhana* (Hand Clenching): Extend arms forward at shoulder level. Open fingers wide and then clench into fists with thumbs inside.

❖ *Manibandha Naman* (Wrist Bending): Stretch arms forward at shoulder level. Bend wrists forward and backward without moving fingers or knuckles.

❖ *Manibandha Chakra* (Wrist Rotation): With fists loosely clenched, rotate wrists clockwise and anti-clockwise.

❖ *Kehuni Naman* (Elbow Bending): Keep arms Stretched forward. Bend elbows to touch fingers to shoulders and then straighten.

❖ *Kehuni Chakra* (Elbow Rotation): Support upper arm with opposite hand, rotate lower arm in a smooth circle. Repeat from other sides.

❖ *Skandha Chakra* (Shoulder Rotation): Place fingers on shoulders, rotate elbows in a large circle in clockwise and anti-clockwise.

❖ *Greeva Sanchalana* (Neck Movements):

- Forward/Backward: Move neck forward and backward.
- Side Bending: Tilt head toward each shoulder without raising shoulders.
- Side twisting: Move the chin sideways in shoulder level.
- Circular Rotation: Rotate the neck in a smooth and relaxed manner in clockwise and anti-clockwise direction.

Among the 48 *Sukshma Vyayama* practices outlined by Dharendra Brahmachari, the first five are specifically aimed at enhancing mental faculties. These exercises are performed by standing erect with feet together and hands by the sides of the body.

❖ *Prarthana*: Stand erect with feet together and eyes closed. Join the palms with thumbs on the throat-cavity (sternal notch) and forearms pressed against the chest. Concentrate on the Supreme Being. Maintain forearm pressure until mental focus is achieved then relax.

❖ *Uchcharana-Sthala-Tatha-Vishuddha-Chakra-Shuddhi*: Stand erect and tilt the head slightly backward, keeping eyes wide open and mouth closed. The chin should be about 2½ inches above the sternal notch, aligned with the eyes. Arms hang naturally by the sides. Concentrate on the vocal cords while performing rapid and forceful nasal inhalation and exhalation with bellows effect.

❖ *Buddhi-Tatha-Dhruti-Shakti-Vikasaka*: Stand erect with feet together and mouth closed. Tilt the head back as far as possible with eyes wide open. Focus on the crown of the head while performing rapid nasal bellows breathing.

❖ *Smarana-Shakti-Vikasaka*: Stand erect with feet together and maintain a normal head position. Focus on a point, five feet away in front of the toes and concentrate on the Brahmarandra, just beneath the anterior fontanelle and perform rapid nasal bellows breathing.

❖ *Medha Shakti Vikasaka*: Stand erect with feet together and close eyes. Lower the chin to rest on the sternal notch, concentrating on the depression at the back of the neck, considered the center of intellectual vigour in

Yogic science and perform rapid and forceful bellows breathing with equal emphasis on inhalation and exhalation.

VI. DISCUSSION

The present study highlights *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* as a subtle yet effective practice for mental health promotion. Gentle and rhythmic movements of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* (*Pawanmuktasana* group-1) given by Swami Satyanand Saraswati, relieve joint stiffness and neuromuscular tension, making these practices especially suitable for individuals with chronic illness, physical limitations or heightened psychological stress. From a *Yogic* perspective, the removal of energy blockages at the joint level enhances coordination, self-awareness and emotional stability, thereby supporting mental resilience. When practiced correctly, these practices not only relax the muscles of the body but also generate calming neural feedback to the brain, support mental relaxation and contribute to the regulation of autonomic nervous activity, hormonal functions and the functioning of internal organs, thereby promoting mental relaxation. Through the integration of breath synchronization and mindful awareness, the attentive faculty of the mind is activated and prevented from drifting toward tension and stress. Consequently, the nature of these practices is predominantly mental rather than purely physical.

The five *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* practices described by Swami Dharendra Brahmachari emphasize cognitive and psychological development through subtle neuromuscular and *pranic* stimulation. Practices like *Uccharana-Sthala-Tatha-Vishuddha-Chakra-Shuddhi* emphasize internal awareness and subtle energy activation, supporting expressive clarity and confidence. Furthermore, Practices such as *Buddhi-Tatha-Dhruti-Shakti-Vikasaka*, *Smarana Shakti-Vikasaka*, and *Medha-Shakti-Vikasaka* are believed to enhance concentration, memory, intellectual clarity and mental endurance. These effects may be understood in modern terms as improved attentional control, reduced mental fatigue and enhanced cognitive efficiency. The stimulation of *Manovaha* and *Pranavaha Srotas* through regulated movement and breath awareness likely contributes to improved neural integration and emotional regulation.

According to Ayurveda, *Vyayama* (exercise) is not merely a physical discipline but a holistic regulator of mind and body, fostering *Laghutva* or lightness of consciousness. Through muscular relaxation and improved circulation, it generates mental freshness, alleviating stress and fatigue. Enhanced oxygenation and neural activation sharpen concentration and memory, thereby elevating cognitive efficiency. By restoring autonomic balance, *Vyayama* reduces emotional reactivity, cultivating calmness and stability. Its role in *Meda Kshaya* or the reduction of excess adipose tissue facilitates clearance of the *srotas*, ensuring proper nourishment of the mind and mitigating anxiety and depression. On the subtle plane, it harmonizes the *guna-dosha* dynamics of *manas*, reducing *Kapha* and thereby diminishing *tamas* and *rajas*, while augmenting *sattva guna* to promote a positive mental state. Simultaneously, improved *prana* flow activates the *manovaha srotas*, stabilizing mental processes and fostering positivity. From the perspective of *Agni*, *Vyayama* deepens digestive fire, ensuring the formation of pure *Ahara rasa*, which nourishes the mind and sustains psychological balance. Thus, *Yogic sukshma vyayama* emerges as a comprehensive modality for mental health, integrating physiological, cognitive, emotional and spiritual dimensions within the Ayurvedic framework also.

VII. CONCLUSION

Yogic Sukshma Vyayama is a subtle yet effective *Yogic* practice with significant potential for mental health promotion. Through gentle movements, regulated breathing and focused awareness, it supports *Pranic* regulation, autonomic balance and cognitive-emotional stability. The practices drawn from *Pawanmuktasana* group -1 by Swami Satyanand Saraswati and *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* by Swami Dharendra Brahmachari are especially suitable for individuals experiencing stress, mental fatigue or physical limitations. Although *Yogic* literature supports its mental health benefits, there is a lack of controlled studies examining *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* as an independent intervention. Future empirical research is therefore essential to validate its specific role in mental health care. Nonetheless, *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* offers a safe, accessible and holistic approach to mental well-being.

VII. LIMITATION AND GAPS

The present study, while offering valuable insights into the potential role of *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* in mental health promotion, is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and literary review rather than direct empirical investigation. Existing evidence on these practices remains fragmented, with few controlled studies and no standardized use of psychological or physiological measures to validate outcomes. The absence of long-term data and population-specific trials further restricts the generalization of findings. Moreover, *Yogic Sukshma Vyayama* has not yet been systematically examined as an independent intervention within clinical mental health research, leaving a significant gap between *Yogic* textual claims and contemporary scientific validation.

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