

YOGA AS A CAREER CHOICE FOR WOMEN- A KKHSOU STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Yoga has been practiced for centuries and continues even in contemporary times. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) has been providing learning opportunities for those who are desirous of higher education but are not able to due to various reasons. The University offers both Diploma and PG Diploma programme in Yoga. While the increasing female enrolment trend reveals the growing interest in the programme, it is important to look into their aspirations when it comes to making a career in Yoga. The paper explores the prospects and challenges that Yoga offers as a career choice for women through the narratives of the learners.

Keywords: Yoga, Women Empowerment, ODL Institution, KKHSOU

INTRODUCTION

With globalization and its effect on health, 'wellness' has assumed new interest and attention. In India, A new dimension has been added to Yoga with its inclusion as sport. India declared Yoga as a competitive sport in 2015.

The work 'yoga' has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' meaning 'to join' or 'to unite'. It refers to the total integration of the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspect of human personality. Patanjali defines yoga as complete suppression of all mental modes or processes. Health and wellbeing has always been an integral part of human life and human society has always strived to achieve mental and physical well-being. Various studies confirm that regular practice of yoga helps a person to overcome fear, anxiety, stress, etc to a large extent. Continuous practice also increases the body's physiological response to exercise. Yoga has increasingly been promoted by yoga educators as well the media as a method to address many health concerns or a way to enjoy a healthy mental and physical state. The four major Schools or Streams of yoga are – Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. Yama and Niyama are the fundamental practices of Yoga.

The popularity of Yoga among the youths is seen to have increased manifold. As Devi (2017) mentions that 'with yoga becoming part of corporate training and leisure holiday', there is a significant growth of Yoga instructors who aim to 'capitalizing on the emerging multi-billion market'. At the same time, the annual International Yoga Day celebrations on June 21st have helped to create an awareness and interest in Yoga.

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), is a leading Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in the Northeastern region of India, providing opportunities for those aspiring of higher education. Since the time of its establishment in 2006 and currently

offering higher education through more than 250 study centres spread across the state of Assam, KKHSOU aims to fulfill its motto- "Education Beyond Barriers".

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to explore the interest of women learners in Yoga programme under KKHSOU and their perspective on taking up Yoga as a profession. At the same time, the study also looks at the challenges that emerges with the vocational aspect of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature and based on both primary as well as secondary sources. Data from primary source comprises of the responses gathered through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire prepared for the survey focused on gathering information on the demography of the selected sample as well as on the socio-economic status by enquiring about the age, area of residence, relationship status and employment status and income group, as these tend to have an impact on the respondent's decision to take admission the Yoga programme and opting it as a career option. The researchers also tried to examine what benefits were reaped by the respondents after completing the said programme from KKHSOU. The women were enquired about their preferences on choosing Yoga as a career and what inspired them. They also responded on their willingness to practice Yoga as a sport. Departmental Reports from the University were also consulted. Secondary sources considered for the study were research papers and reports published in Government websites and newspapers.

SAMPLING METHOD

Purposive Sampling method was used for the study as the focus was on women learners. 10 female learners who successfully completed the PG Diploma and Diploma Programmes of KKHSOU were chosen for the study.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

As the research is a case study (institutional case study), an online survey was conducted among the learners who successfully completed the Programme, to collect the data. Interviews over telephone were taken for a more intimate conversation.

YOGA IN ODL INSTITUTIONS: KKHSOU AS A CASE STUDY

KKHSOU, which is a premier ODL institute in the north east region, currently offers the two Semester PGDY programme in Yoga including Diploma in Yoga (Kayayogi), for those interested candidates who have a Graduate degree and are desirous of pursuing Yoga as a field of study. This programme aims to promote positive health and rehabilitation through Yoga. At the academic front, its focus lies in creating awareness, and at the same time it also emphasizes on imparting skills.

The programme consists of theoretical papers (prepared in the form of Self Learning Materials), where the fundamentals of Yoga are taught and for practical courses, learners are taught through audio-visual displays that are recorded. Learners can download the same from the University website. Face to face counseling sessions (both theoretical and practical) are regularly conducted at the Study Centres, including the University model Study Centre located at the City Campus of KKHSOU. Recognized Yoga instructors are

engaged in the counseling sessions for the practical instructions on the Yoga poses and other additional guidance.

The PG Dipoma in Yoga programme was first launched in the University in 2015-16. The programme has a considerable number of learners. The enrolment trend is stated below-

Table 1: Enrolment Trend

Year	PGDY (Total enrolment)
2015	115
2016	346
2017	NA
2018	256
2019	397
2020	258
2021	122

If we look into the pattern of female enrolment (Table 2), it is evident that half of the learners are women. This enrolment trend indicates the growing interest of Yoga among women.

Table 2: Female enrolment trend (PGDY)

Year	PGDY (female enrolment)
2015	NA
2016	174
2017	NA
2018	156
2019	224
2020	157
2021	88

FINDINGS

Responses from pass out learners (females specifically) from the PGDY programmes have been analysed here to explore the opinion of the learners for taking up Yoga as a career choice. Their responses shed light on the importance of Yoga as well as its potentiality and challenges.

In the study conducted by Deka and Roy (2020), it was found that 43% of female passed out learners found employment opportunities as compared to men (57%). It was also found that major percentage of the employment was located in urban areas (73%).

The participants were all in the age group of 25 and above. They were all employed and their profession varied from Government job to working with private MNCs or self-employed. A few of the participants were Yoga practitioners and held workshop. Interestingly majority of the respondents were based in urban areas.

With regard to taking up Yoga as a career in the field of wellness, all the participants gave a positive response. In terms of potentiality, one of the respondents Pratiksha remarked, *'One can become a yoga teacher for different age groups. Yoga teacher in school is also very important'*.

As for taking up Yoga as sport, the opinions varied. One enthusiastic participant stated, *'Sure, if I ever get a chance to participate in any competition, I would happily participate. It will be a great opportunity for me'*.

However, the same participant also mentioned,

'But I think women would be more comfortable in learning yoga from a female practitioner. Women may feel free to ask questions related to women health to another woman'.

Laxmi is another respondent, who herself has been working as a Yoga practitioner for the last 15 years and was a Yoga judge. She stated that while Yoga offered many career prospects, she herself would not join any competitive sport as Yoga.

A few respondents also mentioned the struggle to keep a balance between their role as a working woman and a family person. One of the respondents, who is also a Yoga practitioner, mentions 'timing towards my child' as a challenging issue.

This brings into light the structural limitations to which a woman is bound through patriarchy when it comes to making career choices. For most of the respondents, choosing Yoga as a career, both in wellness or as sport, was demanding and hence beyond them. Participating in a competition offered a 'safe' opportunity than taking it up as a career in sports. The female bonding or sisterhood becomes the safety net for woman when it comes to building a career and the dearth of women practitioners makes it a less obvious choice for many.

Yogacharya Subhasish Kar, Founder and President of the Indian Yoga Culture & Yoga Therapy Centre, remarked on the wide possibilities of Yoga for women. In a telephonic interview, he was vocal of the new opportunities that would be created with the inclusion of Yoga as a sport and in general.

SUMMARY

The paper brings into light that a career in Yoga (wellness aspect) is desirable to majority of the respondents, but Yoga as a sport (vocational aspect) did not have many takers among the female respondents. Yoga as a sport is still an issue of debate, yet there is enough awareness among the female respondents regarding the same. Despite the challenges in this field, like pay parity, where female Yoga practitioners do not earn as much as their male counterparts (Deka & Roy, 2020) and competitiveness, the respondents were hopeful of the future prospects.

The respondents are aware of the demand for Yoga practitioners in the wellness sector and hence they chose the PGDY programme under KKHSOU. KKHSOU provides counselling sessions where the learners are imparted theoretical practical knowledge of *asanas* under the supervision of Yoga professionals. Counselling sessions (theoretical and practical) are held on Sundays for the learners.

Distance education has a large impact on women from the vocational point of view. The flexible nature of imparting education in the ODL system proves to be convenient for the

female learners to pursue any career related programmes of their choice at their own time and place. ODL offers a wide range of choices to the women learners in terms of programmes that are skill or industry based to boost their career aspirations.

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