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Yoga perspective on personal excellence and well-being

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ABSTRACT

The discussions on conceptualization, operationalization, measures, and means of well-being (WB) and personal excellence (PE) are dynamic and debatable. Therefore, this study aims to coin a perspective of PE based on the *Patanjali Yoga Sūtra* (PYS). For this, professional, psychological, philosophical, and yogic perspectives of WB and PE are analyzed to derive a viable yogic framework for PE. The WB and the consciousness-based constructs of PE are discussed in terms of psychic tensions (PTs) (nescience, egoism, attachment, aversion, and love for life), yogic hindrances (YHs) (illness, apathy, doubt, procrastination, laziness, over somatosensory indulgence, delusion, inability, and unstable progress), psychosomatic impairments (pain, despair, tremors, arrhythmic breath), and yogic aids (wellness, intrinsic motivation, faith, role punctuality, physical activity, sensory control, clarity, competence, and sustainable progress). The PYS operationalizes PE as the dynamic level of WB and self-awareness until one attains *Dharma-megha Samādhi* (super consciousness). Lastly, Ashtanga Yoga (AY) is discussed as a universal principle, process, and practice for thinning PTs, vanishing YHs, empowering holistic WB, awakening extrasensory potentials, advancing self-awareness, and PE. This study will be a pioneering base for further observational and interventional studies to develop measures and personalized protocols for PE.

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1. Introduction

Although various philosophies, psychological and management systems, and spiritual scholars have tried to describe processes and means to attain personal excellence (PE), the quest for well-being (WB) and excellence remains dynamic and debatable. The misuse/overuse of technological advancements [1], globalization of work culture environs [2], corporate scandals and heists [3,4], the outburst of the global pandemic [5], fast-track life and cutting-edge market competitions [6], skyrocketed job stress [7], work-life conflicts [8], unhealthy behaviors and diet, the increasing trend of chronic illnesses [9], poor psychosocial work environments and ongoing ecological pollution [10] are directly connected to morbidity and premature mortality of the well-versed workforce and the downfall of personal and organizational excellence (OE).

This paper outlines the professional, psychological, philosophical, and yogic perspectives of WB and PE coined by selected

modern management thinkers, psychologists, philosophers, yoga scientists, and Patanjali. Finally, the authors have elaborated on the yogic concept, hurdles, supportive factors, process, and practices for PE based on *Patanjali Yoga Sūtra* (PYS).

PE is described as a continuous self-improvement process that requires recognizing behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes to nurture an individual's talents [11]. A person committed to PE is self-directed in making his gifts and talents thrive with self-discipline, integrity, compassion, loyalty, and perseverance, and is willing to put in the required efforts to maximize one's potential [12]. Emotional intelligence (EI) based PE Map (PEM) developed by Hemmet et al. (2007) asserted that the EI skill set is a sufficient prerequisite for self-satisfaction and PE [14]. Topper (2009) prioritized twelve rules for self-leadership and PE [15]. The servant leadership style focuses on rational, relational, emotional, and spiritual aspects of leaders and followers to engage them through voluntary service orientation, authentic self, covenantal relationship, moral responsibility, spiritual practice, and transforming influence [16]. Sanghi (2007) described six domains of skill sets—(a) managerial, (b) communication, (c) group mobilization, (d) environment management, (e) self-enhancement, and (f) career planning [17] as the prerequisites for PE and OE. Some success literature emphasized focus,

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commitment, optimism, confidence, distraction control, and learning attitude as the key elements of PE [18]. Stephen R. Covey advocated that due valuation and mobilization of overall dimensions of individual existence—biological needs, talent, passion, and vision leads to holistic WB, PE, and OE [19]. Abram Maslow's theory of motivation also consistently sets a hierarchy of needs—physiological, safety/security, belongingness/social, esteem, and self-actualization to achieve the primitive and the highest WB [20]. Carl Gustav Jung, however, advocates that collective unconsciousness and its innate and inherited archetypes (the persona—imprinted images, pictures, symbols, or behavioral and personality patterns of universal meanings), the shadow, the anima, and the self, determine one's affective, cognitive, and behavioral performance and possibly PE [21].

The two widely known concepts of happiness—hedonic and eudaimonic [22] have been well discussed in many happiness and WB-related literature. Greek philosopher Aristippus posited that the idea of hedonic happiness—maximum somatosensory enjoyment is the way to perfect WB and the motivation needed for PE. The presence of positive emotions, absence of negative emotions, and life satisfaction mainly determine hedonic WB [23]. In contrast, Aristotle postulated the eudaimonic idea of true WB as the expression of true nature and self-potential [24] that is determined by autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, the purpose of life, and self-acceptance, which are also the established constructs of eudaimonic WB [25]. Veda confirms that optimal somatosensory and mental pleasures, material gains, dutifulness, and liberation from the psychic field are the subsequent interdependent stages of transient and perfect WB and PE [26]. Aristotle and Maslow agree that the ultimate goal of human life is to develop and mobilize true potential [20,27,28]. PYS conforms to self-realization (*Kaivalya*) as the culmination of ultimate PE.

Interestingly, the seven spiritual laws of Yoga coined by Deepak Chopra are very close to the yogic perspective of PE. The law of pure potentiality refers to the psychic power to connect with the true self, being untouched and uninfluenced by external circumstances. The law of giving and receiving is about acknowledging the constant and mutual sharing of resources between physical beings and the physical world to be grateful at both ends of the transaction. The law of *Karma* or cause and effect asserts that happenings in the present result from past choices (mostly made unconsciously). The law of least effort focuses on synchronizing effort with the natural rhythm through acceptance without forcing oneself and following the natural laws. The law of intention and desire recognizes the potential of attention and intention to generate mental contents that can be consciously changed to influence and transform one's environment. The law of detachment states relinquishing the attachment with any desired object to avoid pain when it is not acquired. Dr. Chopra further adds that attachment brings insecurities that inevitably manifest into pain. Therefore, it is required to cultivate a firm belief in one's true self, devoid of attachments and identifications. Lastly, the law of *Dharma* or purpose in life is about discovering the means to express one's idiosyncratic talents and potentials. Such a method/means of expression is called one's *Dharma* if it is in harmony with one's distinguished gifts and talents. The set of seven spiritual laws and its practical module relies on the yogic principles and practices discussed in PYS [29]. This Yoga system presumes that real WB—bliss and ultimate PE are outcomes of realizing the true self and its unlimited potentials—omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immortality, and eternity.

In the context of this writing, the two key constructs—well-being and consciousness have been revisited and redefined. WB refers to the status of holistic health and the subjective extent of

somatosensory pleasure, bio-energetic thrill, mental peace, self-awareness, and transcendental bliss associated with penta-dimensions of human existence—body, bioenergy, mind, intellect, and spirit [30]. The term consciousness operationally indicates the level of uninterrupted self-awareness unaffected by cognitive distortions regarding impermanent, impure, painful, and non-self-things evolved from primordial nature/undifferentiated matter—*Prakriti*. Nature is the universal material substratum out of which all phenomena, other than the self, emerge and evolve. These phenomena of creating a world of diversity are physical transformations of the three qualities (*Guna*) of primordial nature. The three qualities—*Sattva* (transparency, buoyancy), *Rajas* (energy, activity), and *Tamas* (inertia, obstruction) are principles or forces rather than building blocks [31].

PYS authored by Sage Patanjali in the light of *Sāmkhya's* metaphysics projects PE as a dynamic psycho-behavioral and spiritual phenomenon of an individual that is based on the level of WB and awareness/consciousness which can be developed continuously through Yoga practices until one reaches the *Dharmamegha Samādhi* (DS—the ultimate super-consciousness)(PYS 4/30) [32,33]. Patanjali coined the explicit, experiential, and universal Yoga principles, processes, and practices for achieving ultimate PE—DS, where one gets timeless freedom from psychic waves and recycling chains of birth and rebirth. In Patanjali's exposition, the key term, psyche is the rubric of mind, intellect, and ego. The five PTs—ignorance of the truth (*Avidyā*), egoism (*Asmitā*), attachment (*Rāga*), aversion (*Dveṣa*), and fear of death (*Abhiniveśa*) induce ill-being and pain (PYS 2/3). Ignorance of reality—the root of four other PTs, may exist in the dormant (deeply rooted subconscious mental contents), slight (insignificant tensions), scattered (tensions leading to neuroses, phobias, and depression), or manifest stage (conscious tensions as daily interactions) (PYS 2/4) [33]. Ignorance of one's real nature invariably results in tension, ill-being, and limited potential as the barriers to ultimate PE. PYS argues that limited affective, cognitive, and conative power—*Avidyā*, manifests as egoism, attachment, hatred, and fear of death. The five PTs induce nine YHs—illness, apathy, doubt, procrastination, laziness, over-somatosensory indulgences, delusion, incompetence, and unstable progress accompanied by four symptoms of psychosomatic impairment—pain, despair, tremors, and arrhythmic breath. Psychic imprints of prior emotive, mental, and somatic functions determine the intensity of the PTs and vice versa.

Thus, most scholars agree that self-development is a dynamic, continuous, and personalized process for realizing the self and its real nature/potential. Self-management through yogic living empowers WB and the self-awareness needed for PE. The yogic idea of PE extensively taught over thousands of years in ancient, medieval, and contemporary sage traditions without its operationalization, generalization, and innovation, needs a contemporary scientific description. Therefore, the current study attempts to coin the PYS-based perspective of PE for developing its model, self-report measure, and protocol. The authors believe that the process and practices of PE discussed herein need to be operationalized to overcome ill-being, unleash unlimited potentials, advance self-awareness, and achieve everlasting bliss (the highest WB) that everyone intends to experience. The yogic perspective of PE proposed herein shall be a base for developing measures and protocols for PE.

2. Yoga perspective on personal excellence

The PYS mainly discusses the anatomy, physiology, morbidity, and management of the afflicted psyche by presenting the straightforward concept, process, and outcomes of an eightfold set of Yoga practices based on *Sāmkhya* metaphysics [32]. PE operationally stands for the level of human consciousness and WB that

can be elevated by Ashtanga Yoga (AY) practice until one attains ultimate super consciousness—*Dharmamegha Samādhi* (DS). DS is the highest stage of *Samādhi* where the Yogi abandons the desire for enlightenment leading to the permanent removal of complete *kārmic* impressions and traces of psychic tensions (PTs) (PYS 4/29) [33]. The PYS 4/30, ततः क्लेशनिवृत्तिः asserts that persistent in-depth meditation culminates into preliminary stages of *Samādhi* that gradually uproot five psychic tensions, archetypes, and nine Yogic Hindrances (YHs) [33]. Carl Jung posits that access to collective unconsciousness manifests into paranormal learning, powers, and true potentials needed for ultimate PE and perfect WB. In contrast, Patanjali says that ultimate PE, everlasting bliss, and true knowledge are the outcomes of self-realization beyond collective unconsciousness. In the context of the dissolution of psychic predispositions, Jung argues that psychic archetypes just come by birth/from ancestors. Psychic predispositions in collective unconsciousness shape external stimuli to get real perceptual knowledge and an ego-less state is just a philosophical idea of psychological impossibility. Further, he argues that collective unconsciousness is the storehouse for real knowledge, not the self [34]. Patanjali asserts that psychic predispositions (*Samskāra*) are the consequences of past lives' deeds and ancestral inheritances. Moreover, self-realization needs the complete removal of psychic archetypes and the false notion of intellect as self—ego. The yogic claim of realizing the omniscient self by vanishing the existence of the unconscious mind and ego is flatly rejected by Jung, claiming that complete exploration and dissolution of the unconscious is impossible [35,36]. Thus, the divergence between Patanjali and Jung seems on the modes of accumulating psychic contents, outcomes of accessing and purifying unconsciousness, and the notion of ego.

The root and manifestations of hurdles that surface during subsequent stages of Yoga must be overcome by maintaining faithful continuity in practice and detachment over psychosomatic and worldly achievements/successes to advance PE. Five PTs, nine psychosomatic impairments, and their four symptoms that dampen the process of PE are presented as *Kleśa* (PTs), *Yoga Antarāya* (YHs), and *Vikṣepa*. PTs are directly related to YHs accompanied by four psychosomatic symptoms but are inversely associated with the level of WB and consciousness—PE.

The PYS 2/3 states PTs as the primary hurdles to PE [33]. The five PTs (*Avidyā*, *Asmitā*, *Rāga*, *Dveṣa*, and *Abhiniveśa*) induce all worldly ups and downs. PYS 4/30 further asserts that PTs interfere with somatosensory control, concentration, meditation, psychic refinement, and the pursuit of PE—*Samādhi* [32]. Unlike YHs, PTs are not the manifestations and signs or symptoms of psychosomatic impairments but the distorted cognitions that affect the nature and intensity of deeds (*Karma*). Vyasa's commentary on PTs explains them as the latent and internal cause of suffering. The authors attempt to operationalize the concept of each PT hereunder.

2.1. Psychic tensions

अवदियासमतिरागद्वेषाभनिवेशाः क्लेशाः (PYS 2/3).

2.1.1. Avidyā (nescience)

Avidyā, the precursor to other four PTs, is the absence/dearth of the highest knowledge to discriminate between perishable and imperishable, pure and impure, pleasing and painful, and pure self and non-self at individual and universal domains. Its level can be estimated by measuring these four characteristics of an individual [33]. Naturally, born things die, and formed things change, but we get disappointed by these episodes due to ignorance. The *Vidyā* (real knowledge) clarifies that all worldly things exist within the limits of time and space. The firm notion of this reality eases one to cope with the distress induced by bereavement, attachment,

jealousness, professional failures, financial losses, relationship traumas, and misidentified self. The efforts of keeping mind and body intact without real knowledge and self-identity falsify the mortal as the eternal. The opposite of the *Avidyā* is the highest wisdom of discriminating existential realities of self and universe, pure and impure, ill-being and well-being, perishable and imperishable. This higher wisdom induces a sustainable yogic attitude and detachment to be freed from the dynamic fields of three strands—*Sat* (purity, stability, and knowledge), *Raj* (unstable and egoistic nature), and *Tam* (inertia, apathy, laziness, and procrastination) of *Prakriti*.

2.1.2. Asmitā (egoism)

The first product of *Avidyā* is the perception of intellect as the real self. This false notion of self, relationships, or associations formed with a state, condition, or any external entity and I-ness deviates from real self-identity. Misidentifying the self with numerous associations such as physique, psyche, religion, or other perishable and changeable objects induces suffering. *Asmitā* can only be dissolved by discriminative wisdom.

2.1.3. Rāga (attachment)

Rāga is the worldly attachment developed by pleasure and memories associated with the object of experience. Pain perceived as pleasure induces *rāga* as a product of *asmitā*. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā* elucidates that attachment to any perishable thing comes from long-term thinking on somatosensory/psychic objects [37]. The attached state of mind may delve into over-indulgence that impairs the right cognition, memory, and real personality [38].

2.1.4. Dveṣa (aversion)

Dveṣa is the aversion accompanied by pain. Like *rāga*, it also gets strengthened by the memory of the experienced object. *Dveṣa* is another product of *asmitā*, an aversive association with a thing. *Dveṣa* arises from unfulfilled attachment and at the face of dislikes. Such a psychic state might transform into intense hatred and vengeance toward the person associated with pain/sorrow. Commentators advocate that *rāga* and *dveṣa* can be attenuated by neither accepting nor rejecting an entity. The practice of opposite attitudes—dispassion for *rāga* and amity for *dveṣa* mitigate/minimize them [38].

2.1.5. Abhiniveśa

It is the fear of death or the love for life. One loves to live to pacify attachment and aversion. Also, the fear of death is attributed to the experience with the nature of death [32]. Pragmatically, fear of death is the fear of the end. Therefore, a tendency to prevent the termination of an object worth possessing, such as body, assets, power, and learning experiences, is called *Abhiniveśa*.

The PYS 1/30 lists the nine YHs in achieving or excelling in any endeavor. They are *Vyādhi* (illness), *Styāna* (apathy), *Samśaya* (doubt), *Pramāda* (procrastination), *Ālasya* (laziness), *Avirati* (over somatosensory indulgence), *Bhrāntidarśana* (delusion), *Alabdhabhūmikātvā* (inability to succeed), and *Anavasthitatva* (unstable progress) [32,33].

The intricate links among five PTs, nine YHs, four psychosomatic symptoms, the opposite constructs of YHs, and eight yogic limbs are depicted in Fig. 1.

2.2. Yogic hindrances

व्याधसित्यानसंशयलस्यावरितभिरान्तलिब्ध-भूमकित्वानवस्थितत्वानी
वक्षिपास्तेऽन्तरायाः न्तलिब्ध-भूमकित्वासे (PYS 1/30).

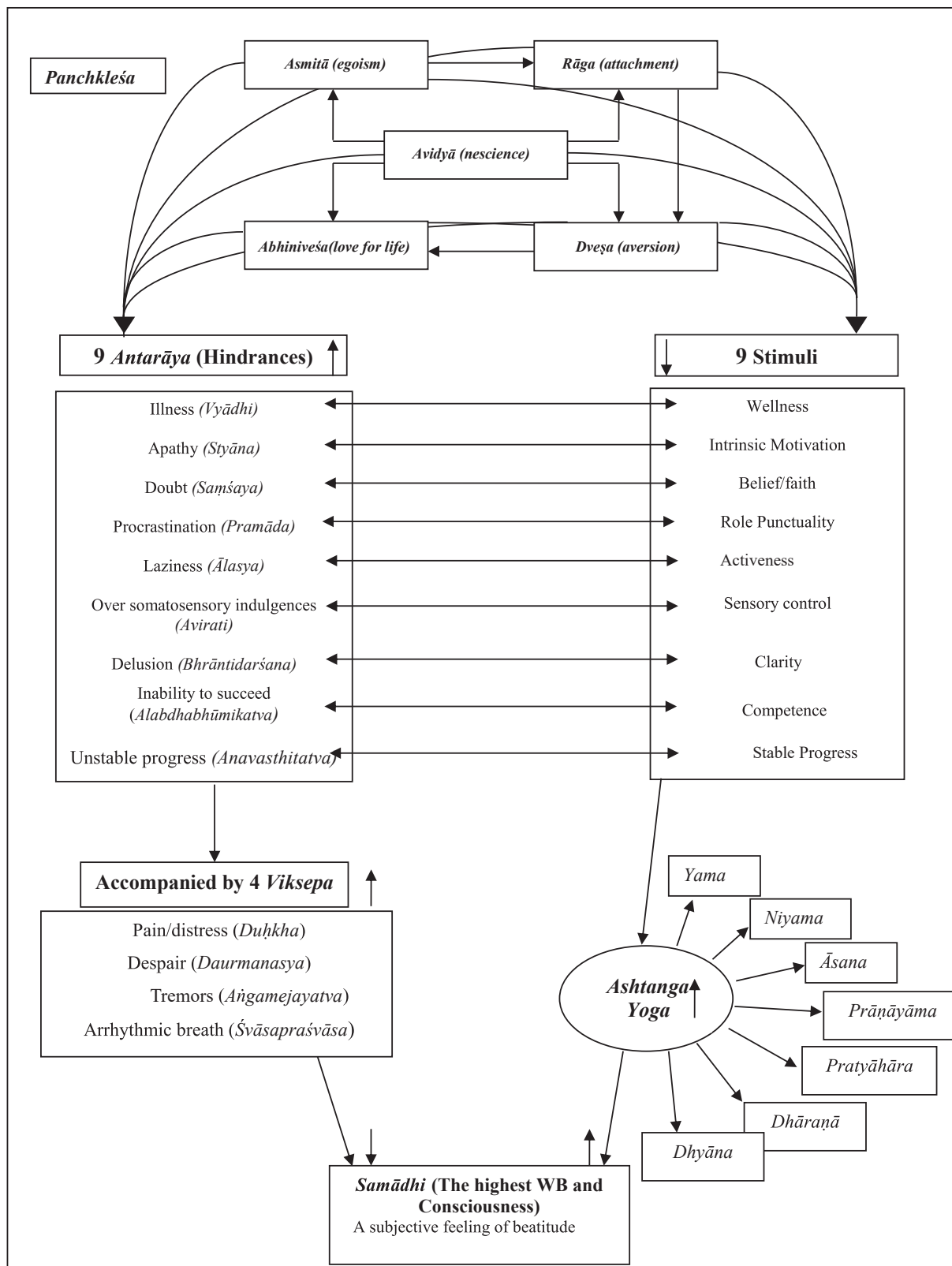


Fig. 1. Yogic theory of personal excellence.

2.2.1. Vyādhi

Vyādhi refers to the illness caused by imbalanced Dhātus (seven food essences—digested food absorbed by the gut that enters into the hepatic portal circulation, blood, muscle, adipose

tissue, bone, bone marrow, and reproductive fluid), Pan-chamahābhūta (ether, air, fire, fluid, and earth) and Karana (five each sensory and motor organs) [39]. The noted naturopath, Henry Lindlahr consistently defines illness as the violation of

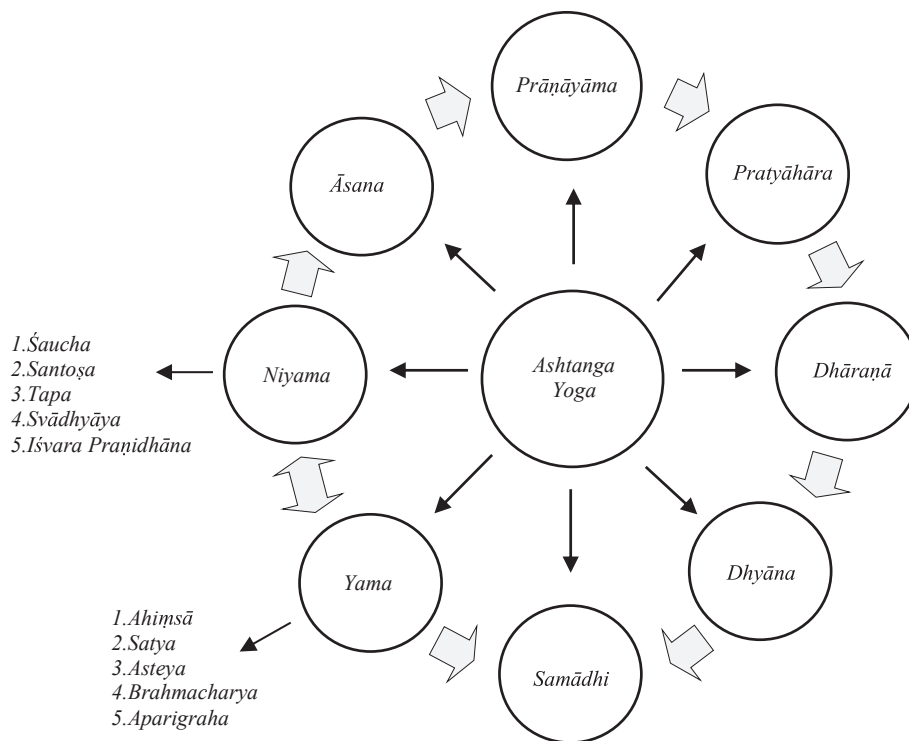


Fig. 2. Ashtanga Yoga: Process and practice for advancing PE.

nature's laws resulting in abnormal or inharmonious vibrations of the elements and forces in all dimensions of human existence, barring accidental or surgical injury, genetic and environmental factors. Violating nature's laws leads to compromised immunity, accumulation of wastes, morbid matter, and poisons, and abnormal composition of body fluids as the primary causes of illnesses [40]. From a yogic perspective, illness results from somatic, psychic, or psychosomatic constipation. The illness interferes with realizing the fullest human potential—physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and economic, and maintaining a work-life balance [41].

In contrast to illness, wellness is the prerequisite for PE. WHO defines wellness as the optimal state of health of an individual and group to realize the fullest physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and economic potential and work-life balance [42]. Wellness can be promoted through lifestyle choices and interventions like Yoga characterized by personal responsibility, moderation, and maximum personal enhancement of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health [43]. Yoga is an effective means of promoting holistic WB—physiological, mental, social, and spiritual [44].

2.2.2. Styāna

It stands for apathy as a loss of interest or concern and motivation resulting in significantly reduced goal-directed behavior. In contrast to apathy, a person needs intrinsic motivation, a defined personal vision, and a passion for doing the activity for inherent satisfaction. An intrinsically motivated person acts for the fun or challenges, not for external products, pressures, or rewards [45]. Some studies accounted for Yoga and mindfulness practices as effective interventions to improve cognitive functioning and apathetic behaviors [46]. A survey report has revealed that after prolonged yoga practice, the primary motive for better health transforms into a spiritual motivation [47].

2.2.3. Saṃśaya

Doubt may repeatedly occur when deciding between two or more equally strong propositions. In the Yoga system, *Saṃśaya* may be related to principles, and practices of yoga and mentor's competence and intention, existence of divine power, and supreme governance due to ignorance. In the worldly plane, doubt may be related to academic choice, career options, business vision and mission, emotional and professional relationships, cultural ideology, lifestyle, fame, and success [48]. This state of mind lacks faith, concentration, passion, energy, and interest needed to pursue any work [49]. Conversely, a person must bear faith/trust in spiritual/yogic principles and practices, mentor, supreme governor, relationships, academic learning and their positive consequences, support system, and settings to advance PE.

2.2.4. Pramāda

It is the insincerity/carelessness towards the goal leading to procrastination, delayed start, slow work pace, and end of any intended task. Procrastination is delaying or putting off jobs until the last minute or even after deadlines. Some researchers define procrastination as a form of self-regulation failure characterized by the unreasonable delay of tasks despite knowing the potential adverse consequences [50]. It is a widely prevalent problematic trait reported by people from all professions and age groups [51]. For PE, procrastination must be improved with regularity and punctuality in managing self, professional and personal dealings, and socio-spiritual activities. Mindfulness [52] and regular physical activity [53] are linked with reduced procrastination. Thus, psychosomatic yoga practices known to improve physical health, mindfulness, and psychological health may mitigate procrastination.

2.2.5. Ālasya

It is laziness, showing reluctance in doing due physical activities. It is one of the potential risk factors for globally prevalent chronic

illnesses, poor quality of life, premature mortality, declined productivity, and substantial compromise in the global economy [54]. The fitness principle recommends at least 30-min exercise five days a week to maintain weight, mitigate stress, prevent various illnesses, develop muscular strength and endurance, delay aging and promote wellness, fun, and joy in life. Moderate to intense exercise of at least 150 min per week is recommended for physical fitness and a focused mind [55].

2.2.6. Avirati

It is the over-somatosensory indulgence that impedes the pursuit of any significant work. The sensory indulgence could be of any kind—auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile inputs, in the form of listening to music, use of gadgets and perfumes, flavored eating, and sex. The misuse/ no use/ overuse of senses to gratify instinctual urges is not recommended for sound health and WB and advancing PE. The inability to delay gratification or a lack of self-control requires a high-level cognitive function involving the prefrontal cortex region of the brain [56], which again necessitates activating higher cognitive resources and practicing self-regulation with awareness to overcome compulsive behaviors [57]. A study found that practicing Yoga and meditation relieves overindulgence in such pleasurable activities [58].

2.2.7. Bhrāntidarśana

It is an erroneous perception of self, the universe, external/internal stimuli, yogic wisdom, modern knowledge, worldly episodes, and others' personality. Misconstruing the yogic principles or practices and holding myths about their outcomes impede PE [59]. *Bhrāntidarśana* extends to confusing cognitive signals about setting vision, short and long-term goals, and making action plans to achieve them. This unclarity may impair self-management, career choice, and relationships. Conversely, clarity about the meaning and purpose of self and universe, one's lifestyle choices, goals and roles, and strategies to reach them dramatically minimize stress and unhappiness. This also helps overcome despair, distress, inner disharmony, and discontent at the individual level [38].

2.2.8. Alabdhabhūmikatva

It is the inability to succeed. In the Yogic system, it is the inability to attain the higher states of consciousness due to the psychic morbidities/distractions induced by the predominance of *Rajas* and *Tamas Guna*. Viably, it is the inability to achieve a targeted goal due to a lack of cognitive, affective, technical, and social skills, compromised psychosomatic immunity, poor psychosocial environment, monetary and logistic support, and settings. PYS 1/14 asserts that the impeded ability can be mitigated through long-term and constant practice and learning to achieve the desired situation [33]. Optimal self-management, robust psychosomatic immunity, and professional competencies are the opposite constructs of the inability.

2.2.9. Anavasthitatva

The instability—a lack of balance and steadiness to maintain the achieved worldly and psychic status is *Anavasthitatva* [60]. This occurs due to the misuse/overuse/no use of the acquired power, prosperity, and knowledge. It implies that improper mobilization of any achieved assets hampers sustainable success and further progress. Yogis must be aware of the paranormal accomplishments and their proper mobilization for further psychic rectification and collective welfare [38]. The potential causes of instability can be detected by careful introspection over the worthiness of set goals, limits of mobilized power, monetary assets, knowledge, technology, logistic and environmental settings, and the wellness profile of an individual. The Yogic method of introspection is analogous to the

modern managerial concept of strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analysis [61].

दुःखदौर्मनस्यंगमेजयत्वश्वासप्रश्वासा वकिषेपसहभुवः (PYS 1/31).

Asserts that four symptoms of psychosomatic impairments (*Vikṣepa*)—pain/distress (*Duḥkha*), despair (*Daurmanasya*), tremors (*Aṅgamejayatva*), and arrhythmic breathing (*Śvāsapraśvāsa*) are the consequences of YHs [32,62]. This depicts the yogic perspective of understanding etiology, signs and symptoms, and prevention/management strategy of psychosomatic or somatopsychic illnesses. The interrelationship between YHs and their accompanying psychosomatic symptoms may be a novel ground to redefine the intricacies among psychic, neuroendocrine, and immune systems.

3. Ashtanga Yoga: The avenue to personal excellence

Sage Patanjali had coined personalized differences in terms of temperaments, inclinations, attitudes, and behaviors predominated by one or more of four human personalities—emotive, intuitive, active, and volitional. He recommends *Bhakti Yoga* for emotionally inclined ones (PYS 1/23, 2/1, 2/23, 2/45), *Jnana Yoga* for those with intuitive nature (PYS 1/27–29, 2/20–21), *Karma Yoga* for those with dynamic nature and finally *Ashtanga Yoga* (AY) for those with strong will power as a means to self-realization [33]. The explanation of *Karma Yoga* is reflected by many aphorisms related to *Yama* (social code), *Niyama* (personal code), and *Bhakti Yoga*. Thus, Patanjali's AY system is a royal yogic path accommodating *Bhakti*, *Jnana*, *Karma*, and *Hatha* Yoga. Yoga is the discipline for instilling the conscious mind (surface thoughts, emotions, sensations, and perceptions) for subsequent entry into the subconscious mind (dreams, memories, and mental tendencies) and unconscious mind (deep sleep, cosmic and collective mental tendencies, and memories) and finally to go beyond psychic field and phenomena for self-realization [21,36,63,64]. Thus, the inner voyage of realizing the self and its true potential traverses an individual's instinctive, intellectual, intuitive, and psychic realms.

The royal path of AY (*Yama*: social code, *Niyama*: personal code, *Āsana*: pose, *Prāṇāyāma*: breath regulation, *Pratyāhāra*: sensory introversion, *Dhāraṇā*: concentration, *Dhyāna*: meditation, and *Samādhi*: super consciousness) was devised for transcending one from ignorance to reality, elevating human consciousness, and WB, and achieving ultimate PE. The first limb, *Yama*, is the practice set of five behaviors for social adaptation and adjustments—*Ahimsā*, *Satya*, *Asteya*, *Brahmacharya*, and *Aparigraha*.

Ahimsā stands for practicing non-violence in all ways and for all beings by considering oneself as a part of a more extensive system intertwined with the environment. Embracing this inclusivity and compassion for human existence guides one to conduct rightfully by dropping the idea of harming self and others reflected by one's non-violent words and actions. *Satya* (truth) is the speech and mind conforming exactly to what is seen, inferred, and heard i.e., reality. It is a speech that does not harm others and if it is meant to deceive someone or cover reality or is transmitted ambiguously, it is called untruth [65]. PYS 2/36 asserts that Yogi's resolution culminates into outcomes without discharging the role after having perfection over *Satya*. *Asteya* is honesty, living with integrity, and giving up the idea of deceiving or manipulating [29].

In the broad sense, *Brahmacharya* is living with the attitude and traits of a supreme being. Operationally, it is the practice of conserving semen by abstaining from the eight types of sex—*Darshan* (looking at someone with a passion), *Sparshan* (touching the object of pleasure), *Keli* (playful activities), *Kirtan* (praising the opposite sex), *Guhya-Bhāshan* (private conversations), *Sankalpa* (resolve to get involved in the sexual act), *Adhyavasaya* (being in proximity of the opposite sex with the desire of gratification) and *Kriyanivritti* (intercourse) [66]. *Aparigraha* (non-

possessiveness) denotes the idea of completeness in self and overcoming the fear of losing the outside things. It occurs as the notion of inner fullness and dominates the possession of worldly objects [29]. Thus, *Yama* is the key practice for improving the feeling of interconnectedness, oneness, empathy, and universal concern. Its practices indicate social behaviors needed for optimal interpersonal relationships, interactions, and environmental adaption.

The second limb, *Niyama*, is the rubric of self-codes—*Śauca*, *Santoṣa*, *Tapa*, *Svādhyāya*, and *Īśvara Praṇidhāna* for rectifying physique, and psyche, hence boosting bio-psycho-spiritual immunity. *Śauca* is the practice of intaking nutritious foods and purifying the physique and psyche. *Santoṣa* is the outcome of internal purity and highest acumen and can be operationalized as the acceptance of ideas or actions or consequences or possessions brought up with the evolutionary changes that support the WB of all animate things. As per PYS 2/43, *Tapa* is the discipline to purify/rectify the body and senses for their perfection. *Tapa* is an untiring attempt to bear indomitable resolution for yoga, courage to carry forward, and patience to cope with indispensable adversities in due course. *Svādhyāya* is psychic restructuring via meditation, *Mantra* recitation, interactions with elevated figures, and routine study of spiritual/yogic texts to realize real self-identity. *Īśvara Praṇidhāna* refers to unshakable hope in the supreme being, and the surrender of every action and possession to divinity [38]. Only firm *Yama* and *Niyama* suffice to expand self-awareness, vanish PTs, prevent YHs, and stop the cycle of births-rebirths with associated pros and cons.

The third limb, *Āsana*, is the process and practice for inducing somatic stability, mental steadiness, psychosomatic fitness, and happiness [33]. The conscious somatic manipulation synchronized with breath regulation and mental awareness is called the *Āsana*. Classically, its practice is mandated for effortless focus on an infinite field to overcome psychosomatic pains/conflicts ततो द्वन्द्वानभघितः (PYS 2/48). From the modern perspective, Yoga postures are the key physical exercises needed for physical fitness as the means for advanced Yoga/ spiritual practices.

The fourth limb, *Prāṇāyāma*, stands for mastering the uncontrolled currents of inhalation and exhalation (breath control) and thereafter the cessation of both inhalation and exhalation (PYS 2/49) [65]. This is practiced by conscious regulation over the natural breath. From a modern perspective, breath regulation practice has shown promising results in optimizing neuro-endocrine secretions that determine psycho-physiological functions and health.

The fifth limb, *Pratyāhāra* is sensory introversion i.e., withdrawing of mind from the object of the senses. The withdrawal from the sensory objects/psychic introversion ceases the outflow of *Prāṇic*/bio-energy through the somatic organs/senses to enjoy tactile, gustatory, olfactory, auditory, visual, and sexual stimuli and extroverted psychic distractions resulting in bio-energy conservation and boosted immunity, mental concentration, and willpower.

Dhāraṇā is the process and practice of building one-pointedness/sustained concentration on any internal or external object as the preparatory stage of meditation [33]. This practice is depicted by the cycle of focused-attention by cultivating awareness, witnessing the wandering mind, detecting the shift of focus, and reorienting it on the object of *Dhāraṇā*. This reduces the number of mind-wandering episodes and increases sustained attention [67].

Dhāraṇā advances into the intense and prolonged concentration known as *Dhyāna*. The practice of *Dhyāna* leads to the realization of timeless discriminative wisdom/real knowledge (*Vidyā*) to adjudicate real and unreal, darkness and light, perishable and imperishable, joy and pain, non-self and self. This mental and cognitive status leads to stable and steady detachment from worldly ups and downs. Separation from all gross and subtle fields, contents, processes, and influences of *Prakṛiti* through in-depth meditation

practice naturally results in the subsequent stages of *Samādhi* (super consciousness). The varying stages of super consciousness that manifest between *Vitarkānugata* to DS are the different forms of consciousness and WB that appear before the complete escape of the *Puruṣa* (self) from the influential field of *Prakṛiti*—no-self (nature). Meditation washes mental contents, optimizes neuro-endocrine secretions, brain waves, immunity, and cardiopulmonary rhythms; mitigates stress, and induces inner harmony, happiness, and fulfillment [68,69]. Meditation is an effective means for empowering an individual's bio-psycho-spiritual health, wellness, and faculties (rational, creative, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence).

4. Discussion

The conceptualization, operationalization, and measure of hedonic and eudaimonic WB are well discussed and debated in scientific literature. The idea of hedonic WB revolves around somatosensory pleasures, material gains, and fame by ignoring the self and its true potential. The eudaimonic concept of WB only focuses on the process of self-development and self-actualization to realize real potential. Other operational theories, models, procedures, and practices of WB/PE rely on the hedonic approach. One of the existing models on PE overestimates EI as the primary basis of five systems—belief, support, guidance, balance, and power, needed for high professional achievements by underestimating self-related constructs [14]. Topper's (2009) twelve rules of self-leadership also target developing and mobilizing an individual's affective, cognitive, conative, ethical, and professional attitudes and skills to improve PE. The servant leadership model for personal and organizational excellence condemns looking at human resources merely as a unit of production. Moreover, it argues that for excellence and sustainable progress of an organization, ethical, relational, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the employees and followers must be prioritized. Only holistic, ethical, and value-laden leadership can prevent corporate damages, scandals, emotional fatigue, job stress, and other destructive consequences of abusive leadership [16]. Another model of PE developed by Sanghi (2007) focuses on understanding, developing, and utilizing cognitive, affective, conative, communicative, environmental, and social knowledge and skills for self-development and professional excellence. Covey's idea of perceiving and treating every individual from the holistic paradigm of doing, thinking, feeling, and being is somewhat consistent with the integral yogic concept of WB [70]. However, this approach is also more inclined towards achieving sustainable professional/business excellence rather than developing detachment, self-awareness, and everlasting bliss. Maslow's theory of motivation considers self-actualization as the top human achievement [28] but is silent in presenting a systematic practical approach to self-realization. Jung's idea of collective unconsciousness revolves around its archetypes to realize the fullest self-potential and reach ultimate PE [64]. It tells nothing about principles, processes, and practices to go beyond the limits of collective unconsciousness and ego for complete freedom from chains of births and rebirths and realize super consciousness. Hemmet posits PE as the life-long process of positive development beyond oneself [13]. The existing PE and WB models revolve around developing and positively manipulating emotive, cognitive, creative, technical, social, communicative, and conative abilities to achieve professional success and psychosomatic harmony. As per PYS, everlasting WB cannot rely on impermanent emotional pacification, mental satisfaction/happiness, and somatosensory pleasures. The permanent entity *Puruṣa* (pure consciousness) is distinct from the ego, wisdom/knowledge, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that are subject to change with different stimuli. In contrast to the

hedonistic idea of seeking somatosensory pleasures through wish fulfillment [22], PYS presumes that somatosensory pleasures are disguised sufferings. Things perceived pleasing may bring anxiety, insecurities, frustration, and anger in the long run. Somatosensory pleasures and immediate gratifications often transform into pains. Limiting oneself to the physique or psyche and perceiving them as self is a confined cognition. The PYS advises the cultivation of the right perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors by concentration/meditation over AUM, detached ones, self, and universal realities. Additionally, PYS claims that the continuous practice of in-depth meditation unveils the psychic predispositions from past lives and helps realize the existential realities of self and universe.

The Yogic perspective of PE emphasizes willful development and optimal mobilization of spiritual, affective, cognitive, conative, and professional abilities/qualities. Unlike the western perspectives/paradigms of PE, the yogic perspective recommends a set of supportive aids/determinants—robust psychosomatic immunity, optimal biopsychosociospiritual health, rhythmic breath, deep intrinsic role motivation, faith on mentor and his/her teachings and surrounding entities, time management, routine physical activity, optimal somatosensory indulgences, clarity, competence, and stable achievements, of PE to go through practices of AY [33]. Substantial scientific research has recommended yogic principles and practices for immune modulation, health promotion, disease prevention, age reversal, healing, psyche rectification, awakening of paranormal powers, and psychosocial, organizational, and ecological harmony [36,68,71–73].

From the yogic viewpoint, the authors finally hypothesize that PE is the level of WB and self-awareness/consciousness of an individual that is inversely related to five PTs, nine YHs, and four psychosomatic symptoms and directly related to opposite constructs of YHs (nine yogic aids/stimuli as depicted in Fig. 1). The bio-psycho-spiritual and behavioral AY practices are recommended for thinning PTs, preventing YHs, and psychosomatic symptoms to cope with life stresses, optimizing health, and inducing detachment, the highest WB, and ultimate consciousness—DS. Faithful continuity of AY practice subsides hurdles to PE—PTs and YHs (illness, apathy, doubt, procrastination, laziness, over-somatosensory indulgence, delusion, incompetence, and unstable progress) leading to the harmonious interplay among being, feeling, thinking, and doing. Inner harmony induces talent that manifests as creativity and innovation. Creativity and innovation lead to skillfulness and excellence in action [37].

The yogic concepts presented in this framework are contextual and viable to address the contemporary hurdles of PE and OE. Therefore, leaders of organizations like Aetna, Whole Foods Market, and others have revised their leadership, managerial, and wellness practices in accordance with yogic principles [74,75]. The authors firmly believe that the proposed viable yogic framework of PE shall add value to perspectives of WB and PE discussed in western psychology, and organizational behavior and optimize distorted perceptions about personal, familial, social, professional, spiritual, and ecological events/problems.

5. Conclusion

Most of the existing theories on personal excellence emphasize understanding, developing, and utilizing optimal cognitive, affective, conative, communicative, environmental, and social knowledge and skills for self-development and professional excellence rather than advancing extrasensory potentials and self-awareness for complete freedom. In contrast, *Patanjali Yoga Sūtra* coins personal excellence in different levels of well-being and consciousness and focuses on spontaneous psychosomatic rectification to go beyond the somatosensory, subconscious, and unconscious

experiential limits of the ever-changing realms for complete freedom and ultimate self-development/personal excellence. The yogic hindrances induced by psychic tensions lead to psychosomatic impairments, somatosensory, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dysfunctions. Personal excellence is the level of well-being and human consciousness to be developed gradually by thinning psychic tensions and minimizing yogic hindrances via Ashtanga Yoga in all personality types—emotive, intuitive, dynamic, and volitional. Based on these yogic principles, processes, and practices of personal excellence primarily discussed in *Patanjali Yoga Sūtra*, the authors are committed to building a viable model, measure, and protocol of personal excellence in subsequent steps of this study.

6. Limitations and recommendations

The perspective of personal excellence proposed herein is derived from the *Patanjali Yoga Sūtra* and discussed in light of facts and hypotheses generated from the narrative review and authors' reflection and interpretation. Therefore, the authors recommend further qualitative and quantitative studies to validate the proposed yogic framework of PE and develop its measure and protocol.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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