ABSTRACT

All the orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy have one goal in view, the liberation of the soul through perfection. The method is by Yoga.
- Swami Vivekananda

Yoga is an ancient discipline designed to bring balance and health to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual. It is long popular practice in India that has become increasingly more common in Western society. “Yoga” means union of our individual consciousness with the Universal Divine Consciousness in a super-conscious state known as Samadhi. The first book of humankind, Rig-Veda, mentions about yogic meditation by the wise, while Yajurveda exhorts us to practice yoga for enhancing mental health, physical strength, and prosperity. Upanishads are replete with yogic concepts. In addition, yoga-related terms like pranayama and samadhi occur repeatedly in Bhagavad-Gita. Ancient Indian Rishis understood that performing Raja-yoga (procedure of concentration to liberate soul or atma from the bondage of maya into paramatma) always needs a healthy body – “Sharirmandaam, khalu dhrama sadhanam.” So they developed “Hatha yoga,” which includes asana, mudra, pranayama, etc. “Gharaanda samhita” said there were 84 lakh asanas from which 16 000 were best and only about 300 are popular. “Hathayoga-pradipika” again differentiates all asanas into four basic classes – sidhurasana, padmasana, svanasana, and vadhurasana. Besides, asana may be of two types – dhyanasana (a posture keeps spinal cord free and center of gravity shifts to other part like ribs) and shashthasana (to get healthy body).

Many features and practices of Yoga deal with psychological disorders and for promoting psychological wellness. First, Yoga can induce harmony in mind-body functioning. Second, being experientially-rooted; it can be adopted considerably with much ease in comparison to the existing psychological practices. Third, since training and taking the service of yoga therapist is cost effective it has promising potential to address mental health concerns of the people. According to an estimate in India alone, by using yoga for treatment of mental illnesses in India, approximately $145 billion month may be saved which are spent to meet medication cost, doctor’s fee, and travelling cost to meet the doctor. There are indirect savings also which accrue owing to loss of wages, disability, absenteeism and unimaginable substance abuse. Fourth, it can also alleviate multiple physical, emotional and social sufferings holistically. It may be noted that efficacy of any psychological therapy is multiply determined by factors either in the environment or in the attributes of the client or therapist but not by highly acclaimed theory-based techniques. Gradually demand for personalized, eclectic, and intuitive therapeutic approaches is on rise.

Keywords-- Yoga, Rig-veda, Mudra, Sadhanam

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga is currently blooming worldwide. It is being practiced by citizens of all the continents of the world. Indeed Yoga has become widely known and has been used for treatment of chronic health conditions, and management of the symptoms related to acute physical ailments. But, does it yield mental health benefits too? Can it replace traditional psychotherapy? Can it manage mental health conditions of patients suffering with serious physical ailments? Does Yoga constitute something more than maintaining body postures, breathing practices and meditation for promotion of psychological health? Can the great feats performed by the famous Yoga practitioners be empirically validated through scientific studies? These are some questions which have often been less attended. Although, governmental and nongovernmental organizations are gearing up for implementing Yoga in schools and other settings for improving health. However, the mental health service is still being perceived as dependent on deficiency-oriented models of treatment.

In the Indian tradition, Yoga was conceived as a pathway towards attainment of joy in life, freedom from sorrows, mental balance and peace. Since antiquity, the seekers of self-realization (often called as Rishis or Yogis) have been using yogic practices for restoring mind-body balance in order to make them capable for attaining spiritual realization. The ultimate states of human mental health development have been described using different
terms. For example, Buddhists use notion of ‘Nirvana’, Samkhya I system uses ‘Moksha’, Vedantists use ‘Atmasakshaaatkar’ etc. But all these notions converge in their meanings that it involves liberation from suffering. Sage Patanjali, who collated, coordinated and systematized the system of Yoga, declared the main objective of Yoga as regulation of mind in the first aphorism of famous Yoga Sutra (Yogah ChitvrittiiNirodhhah). Bhagavad Gita, which elaborates comprehensive typologies of Yoga, also states the need of Yoga for removing sorrow and increasing bliss in life. Hath Yoga, a yogic tradition focusing on physical modus-operandi for realizing deeper states of consciousness, emphasizes on postures, breathing patterns, energy locks and contemplation to enhance energy and vitality.

In Indian religions, yoga (from the Sanskrit word meaning “yoking” or “joining”) is “the means or techniques for transforming consciousness and attaining liberation (moksha) from karma and rebirth (samsara).” It is “a practice by means of which a spiritual seeker strives, (1) to control nature to make the soul fit for union with the Over soul (the true Self or Atman-Brahman or “God”), and (2) to attain union with God and thus the liberation of the soul from the rounds of rebirth and death.” Yoga is popularly understood to be a program of physical exercises (asana) and breathing exercises (pranayama).

Yoga began in India as early as 3000 B.C. according to archeological evidence. It emerged in the later hymns of the ancient Hindu texts (Upanishads or Vedanta) (600–500 B.C.). It is mentioned in the classic Indian poem Mahabharata (400 B.C. - 400 A.D.) and discussed in the most famous part of that poem, the Bhagavad Gita. Yoga was systemized by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras (300–200 B.C.). Patanjali defined the purpose of yoga as knowledge of the true “Self” (God) and outlined eight steps for direct experience of “Self.”

**II. HYPERTENSION**

It is well known that many antihypertensive agents have been associated with numerous undesirable side effects. In addition to medication, moderately intense aerobic exercise is well known to lower blood pressure. Interestingly, it has been very convincingly demonstrated that even a short period of regular yogic practice at 1 h/day is as effective as medical therapy in controlling blood pressure in hypertensive subjects. Yoga, together with relaxation, biofeedback, transcendental meditation, and psychotherapy, has been found to have a convincing antihypertensive effect. The mechanism of yoga-induced blood pressure reduction may be attributed to its beneficial effects on the autonomic neurological function. The practice of yogic postures has been shown to restore baroreflex sensitivity. Yogic asanas that are equivalent to head-up or head-down tilt were discovered to be particularly beneficial in this regard. Yoga has proven efficacy in managing secondary cardiac complications due to chronic hypertension.

**III. SERUM LIPID PROFILE AND BODY WEIGHT**

Obesity and increased body weight are strong risk factors for ischemic heart disease and hypertension. Yoga has been found to be particularly helpful in the management of obesity. A randomized controlled study revealed that practicing yoga for a year helped significant improvements in the ideal body weight and body density.

**IV. CARDIO RESPIRATORY EFFICIENCY AND PHYSICAL FITNESS**

Yoga training of 6 weeks duration attenuates the sweating response to step test and produces a marked increase in respiratory pressures and endurance in 40 mmHg test in both male and female subjects. 12 weeks of yoga practice results in a significant increase in maximum expiratory pressure, maximum inspiratory pressure, breath holding time after expiration, breath holding time after inspiration, and hand grip strength. 6 weeks of pranayama breathing course resulted in improved ventilatory functions in the form of lowered respiratory rate, and increases in the forced vital capacity, forced expiratory volume at the end of first second, maximum voluntary ventilation, peak expiratory flow rate, and prolongation of breath holding time. 10 weeks of yoga practice. An increase in inspiratory and expiratory pressures suggests that yoga training improves the strength of expiratory and as inspiratory muscles. Respiratory muscles are like skeletal muscles. Yoga practices for 6 months by seniors (65–85 years) resulted in significant improvement in quality of life and physical measures compared to walking exercise and wait-list control groups.

**V. DIABETES MELLITUS**

Yoga has been shown to be a simple and economical therapeutic modality that may be considered as a beneficial adjuvant for non insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) patients. In a group of diabetics who practiced yoga regularly, there was a significant reduction in the frequency of hyperglycemia and area index total under the oral glucose tolerance test curve. This experimental study showed that there was also a decrease in the need for oral hypoglycemic to maintain adequate blood sugar control in the population that practiced yoga.

**VI. NEUROHORMONAL ACTIVITY**

Increased intrinsic neurohormonal activity has been associated with increased predisposition to ischemic
heart disease. This may explain how general stress in life contributes to increased risk of myocardial disease. Level of adverse neurohormonal activity can be quantitated by the measurement of specific markers in serum and urine. It has been described that regular practitioners of yoga asanas showed a significant reduction in the markers of intrinsic neurohormonal activity such as urinary excretion of catecholamines, aldosterone, as well as serum testosterone and luteinizing hormone levels. In an experimental study, they also showed an increase in the urinary excretion of cortisol. Yoga-based guided relaxation helped in the reduction of sympathetic activity with a reduction in heart rate, skin conductance, oxygen consumption, and increase in breath volume - the clinical signs of neurohormonal activity, thus facilitating protection against ischemic heart disease and myocardial infarction.

VII. REPRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONS AND PREGNANCY

Yoga practices including physical postures, breathing, and meditation practiced by pregnant women 1 h daily resulted in an increase in birth weight, decrease in preterm labor, and decrease in IUGR either in isolation or associated with PIH, with no increased complications. Yoga in their second trimester reported significant reductions in physical pain from baseline to post intervention. Women in their third trimester showed greater reductions in perceived stress and trait anxiety.

VIII. YOGA AND MINOR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Anxiety, stress and depression usually pervade in our lives. We often consider them as minor problems, but if they remain unresolved and unmanaged, they can lead to major psychological disorders. Evidence indicates that yoga is superior in its favorable effects for mitigating the effects of anxiety, stress and depression. Yoga may have immense utility for quietening arousal, tension, sadness, feelings of guilt, suicidal ideation and further the sense of harmony, balance, tranquility and deep relaxation at neurobiological level of functioning. Practice of postures can raise distress-tolerance level and reduce emotional eating tendencies in stressful situations. None of the entertainment activities including laughing, socializing, playing enjoyable game or shopping can calm our mental state to a greater extent than yoga because all these engagements need certain degree of stimulation of nervous system. Even walking has been reported not to induce greater effects on our emotional functioning and anxiety level than Yoga. Yoga reduces automatic reactive tendency and increases pro activity in difficult situations impelling anger or fear. If life style corrections get coupled with yoga practice, it may reduce anxiety and depression in persons suffering with gastrointestinal disorder. By reducing stress responses including blood pressure, level of stress hormone cortisol, it can be used as potential alternative to pharmacological approach for patients with stress and anxiety. Yoga can be appropriate as a stress management approach not only to reduce emotional negativity but also to reduce the burden of stressed produced diseases. Irritations which are part of daily life can be reduced through the practice of Yoga. In the patients suffering from life threatening illnesses also, it can reduce fatigue and insomnia.

IX. YOGA & MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEMS

Traditionally, treatment of major psychological disorders in hospitals and clinics depended upon a pharmacological approach. Although medicine-based cure provides instant relief but simultaneously it exposes the patients to several negative side-effects including inflammation and oxidative stress etc. Contrastingly, Yoga, without any potential side-effects, offers promising possibility for treating multiple psychological disorders. Several Yoga-based interventions have been developed for relief in symptoms of major depressive and anxiety disorders, autism spectrum disorders and eating disorders. Although there is little evidence, yet available research suggests that the practice of yoga can help managing self-objectification, and disordered eating attitudes. It can help patients to reduce symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. If used alone or adjunctively with medication, it can bring improvement in several symptoms of psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia (hallucination, delusion, motivation, affective flattering and ADHD) Yoga can be used for improving cognitive competencies including attention-span, memory and viso-motor speed among patients suffering with depression. In autistic children, practice of Yoga can improve sense of self, cognitive skills and social communicative behaviors.

X. CHALLENGES FOR YOGA RESEARCH”

The tradition of Yoga consists of immense variety of behavioral, cognitive and emotional practices. It is like a vast sea which can subsume almost any practice blended with intention, awareness and relaxation. Now the question before us is how can we empirically evaluate the effects of Yoga? Should we use it as a whole system or stand-alone practice? Yoga emphasizes on the control and emancipation from multiple physical & psychological difficulties through cultivation of awareness and insight about self by one self. Therefore a question arises as to what extent scientifically proclaimed neutral observation
of the effects of yogic practices can actually provide glimpse of the benefits of doing Yoga for mental & physical health. Yoga is based on the basic idea of holism and continuity of existence. Therefore, to understand and investigate possible explanations, we need to undertake scrutiny of mainstream research tradition as following on relevance of Yoga for different types of mind & body concerns.

XI. CONCLUSION

Yoga can empower individuals’ positively to take charge of their own psychological wellness. It can offer immense help in sustaining wellness, addressing concerns related with increasing suicidal tendencies due to examination anxiety, deal with frustration and conflicts in society and to opt career choices with full awareness of one’s own abilities and potentials. It reduces stress and anxiety, improves autonomic and higher neural center functioning. It is fair to conclude that yoga can be beneficial in the prevention and cure of diseases.

REFERENCES