

Role of Yoga in Improving Mental Health of Citizens of India During the Out-Break of Covid -19 Pandemic

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Abstract - The outbreak of Corona Virus Disease 19 (COVID-19) pandemic is exceptional and unique in numerous ways. It has raised a question mark on the health care system of the country with a death toll of 12237, 160384 active cases and 194324 cured and discharged till date. At this moment, every one of us is forced to stay indoors and work distantly around the clock in order to maintain the social distancing so as to protect us from this pandemic. This physical barrier is known as a lockdown. All this has resulted in reducing our social activities which have created a feeling of trapped or loneliness since we are detached from our loved ones. This lockdown has made us sad, depressed, disheartened, worried, stressed, nervous and fearful affecting and destroying our mental health so badly that it has even reported the cases of suicide. Mental health is a vital facet of an individual. It has a tremendous impact on our personal and professional life. Hence, requires immense attention during this lockdown period so as to fight against this Corona Virus. There is a direct relationship between our body and mind. We can stay safe and healthy during this pandemic only if manage to keep ourselves mentally fit and strong.

Yoga is a vital instrument which can help individuals to boost immunity and improve their respiratory health. Yoga and meditation together have a potential to build an extra positive health. Both can help in preventing and healing from COVID-19. Even the Government of India through its Ministry of AYUSH, has too stressed on yoga and meditation and issued a very practical and functional recommendations in this perspective. Yoga provides us empowerment and authorizes us to take charge of our own life, consequently encouraging holistic health for every human being on this planet. This paper discusses the growing concern of anxiety, fear and nervousness caused due to corona virus in deteriorating the mental health of citizens of the country and thus, highlighting the role of yoga and meditation in this direction to boost immunity and respiratory health to fight against this pandemic.

Keywords - Anxiety, Corona Virus, Fear, Lock-down, Mental health, Pandemic, Yoga

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INTRODUCTION

India is a nation loaded with tremendous culture and traditions. We reflect unity in diversity. We have people from different culture, religion, and background. In a calendar year we celebrate a lot of festivals, events, rituals and ceremonies that can't be counted on fingers. All these practices are celebrated with great pomp and show. We Indians don't know any physical barrier or distance, because we are wholeheartedly connected with each other. This is an integral part of our culture which knows no boundaries and limitations. These are the platforms for creating and spreading happiness, joy and bliss.

But, the present situation of the country has ruined all our dreams. India with a huge population of 1.380 Billion is facing a tough situation. Currently India has 367,264 cases of COVID-19 and more than 12000 deaths.

The outbreak of COVID -19 Pandemic has completely changed the lives of the people. It has brought tremendous change in our daily routine, i.e., the way we eat, meet, talk, walk or interact. It has invited a new term called social distancing which asks us to maintain a distance of 2 meters and thus, prohibits us to meet, hug, talk, work, celebrate festivals, and organize social gatherings,

etc. in order to prevent the spread of infection in the environment caused due to corona virus. The sudden declaration of lockdown by the Government on 24th March 2020, even worsen the situation. People were asked to stay at home and remain wherever they are, irrespective of whatever problem they are encountering. It was like a “Janta-curfew” which locked people in their homes. Previously, it was only for 21 days, but the sudden rise in positive cases of COVID-19 further increased this lockdown which worsens the situation. Reduction in social activities created the feeling of isolation which invited anxiety and depression. Although, some relaxation has been provided by the Government now but, the fear of corona virus is still in the minds of people as this virus attack knows no gender, caste, religion, region or status.

The epidemic of corona virus has bought a radical change in our traditions, culture, eating habits, and the approach of celebrating events such as marriages, festivals, and other social gatherings. All these changes have affected us so badly that, it has directly influenced our mental health. This is a huge alteration which people have never encountered in this country throughout the century. We were not at all prepared for this sudden and shocking transformation. Thus, every one of us expressed resistance to this drastic change. People exhibit resistance to something only when it affects their routine and as we know that, routine is associated with our mindset hence, it has severely damaged the mental health of the people. People are suffering from anxiety, fear, stress, nervousness, worries and insomnia. Even some states reported the cases of suicide too. In this direction once again our culture can help us to fight this pandemic. We should focus on our old and rich culture of Ayurveda and Yoga, which we have left and forgotten years back. It should be revived and once more bought back into practice.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of the present study are

- To study the impact of outbreak of COVID-19 on the mental health of citizens of India.
- To study the significance of Yoga in improving the mental health of Indian people caused due to COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory study has been done to study the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Indians. Information from journals, published

articles, newspapers and websites was taken to accomplish this task. A thorough study of the work done by eminent writers was done to get a clear understanding of the topic. All the data included is the secondary base and proper references have been given wherever necessary.

IMPACT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON MENTAL HEALTH OF CITIZENS OF INDIA

Presently, our country is seized in the grip of COVID -19 Pandemic. Every citizen of our country irrespective of their caste, creed, race, sex, religion, region or status has been directly or indirectly affected by this lockdown kind of situation for the last few months. Due to this novel corona virus attack some lost their near and dear ones, some lost their means of earning bread and butter while some went into depression because of feelings of isolation and loneliness. We have lost the precious lives of more than 12000 brothers and sisters till now, which may further increase in the coming days. This has put a question mark on the health care system of the country.

In the last few months India witnessed the spike in cases of suicides. The possible reason found behind this was the panic of infection, isolation, restriction on freedom of movement and non availability of alcohol during the lockdown. According to a survey undertaken by the Indian Psychiatry Society (IPS), Covid-19 lockdown resulted in a 20% rise in mental illness. It has affected 01 out of 05 Indians. The major cause of mental illness reported was job insecurity and a big loss in business. In order to understand the impact of COVID-19 in a better manner we can refer the following data and cases of deaths, suicides and mental disorders in the country during the lockdown period:

- 338 deaths in India from March 24, 2020 till May 2, 2020 were associated with lockdown, according to a study conducted by Thejesh GN, by various public interest technologists such as, Kanika Sharma and Aman at Jindal Global School of Law.
- 80 people committed suicide due to panic of being tested positive and fear of being in isolation.
- 51 migrants were killed in accidents on their way back to home.
- Deaths associated with withdrawal signs and symptoms were 45.
- 38 lost their lives as they were indulged in crime of violating rules or either denied medical care.

- 36 people died because of starvation and financial distress.
- 24 deaths were associated with exhaustion suffered by migrant laborers travelling long distances on foot.
- 12 deaths reported were linked with lockdown-related crimes or waiting in line for ration.
- 11 persons were killed in state violence or police violence.
- 07 people ended their life by consuming aftershave and sanitizer lotions since; they were unable to deal with their medical condition.
- Many migrant workers residing in quarantine facilities died by taking their life fearing infection and social stigma of being attached to the illness.
- A 24-year-old suspected Covid-19 patient ended his life in Pune, Maharashtra by jumping from the third floor of the hospital building. It was found in an investigation that, the man was under fear, stress and facing psychological issues and thus committed the act.
- A 26 year old Ranchi based student committed suicide as she was missing her parents and failed to return home due to lockdown.
- In Punjab's Mansa district, a 17 year old school girl hanged herself as her father could not afford a smart phone to attend online classes. Since schools and colleges in India are shut due to lockdown, arrangement has been made for online classes to compensate this loss.
- A 50 year old Covid-19 woman committed suicide inside hospital lavatory by hanging herself in Tripura.
- In the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, a 56 year old man ended his life near his mother's grave, fearing he might spread the infection of COVID-19 to his family members.
- One more dreadful incident took place in Dwarka, New Delhi, where a 56-year-old IRS officer killed himself by drinking an acid kind substance since he was afraid that, he may infect his wife and three children.
- In Nagpur, Maharashtra, a rickshaw puller set himself on fire as he was unable to

arrange alcohol for him during lockdown.

From above data it can be concluded that the victims of mental disorder belonged to different age groups, sex, location, community and status. The anxiety of COVID-19 has left no strata of the society untouched. Suicide deaths are snowballing like anything. India is struggling hard to control this pandemic.

The nonstop flow of depressing news from print media, electronic media and social media has even aggravated the situation. Restriction on social gatherings for instance, meeting friends, relatives and family members, non celebration of events and festivals, limitation on travelling, being locked up in homes, depressing news from different sources and fear of getting infected by the virus, all these factors have given birth to fear and anxiety. This anxiety stimulates the sympathetic nervous system which increases rate of breathing, raises blood pressure, invites stress in muscles and results in lack of concentration. These symptoms invite stress and consequently, disturb the individual mentally.

Since, human beings are social animals and can't live in isolation like other organisms. They need someone to share their feelings and emotions to overcome their real life problems. And if they don't find anyone to share their thoughts, they move into depression and take even severe steps such as suicide. All these have invited sleepless nights and now people are suffering from a disease called insomnia or sleeping disorder. It has created an atmosphere of anxiety, fear, loneliness and stress. These negative emotions emerge within an individual when he/she encounters some threat to their lives and directly affects their mental well-being. It is very difficult to identify this damage because the injury is internal and non-observable. But, its side-effects are large as compared to any external injury which can be cured very easily by any medicine or surgery.

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is the most excellent forms of physical, mental and spiritual practice. The term yoga has its origin in Sanskrit language from the phrase "yuj" which refers to linking, joining, connecting or balancing something. Actually, Yoga is an influential means to an end, i.e., "Moksha." Moksha is defined as freedom from the bondage of selfish desires. According to the modern yogi B.K.S. Iyengar, "Yoga is an art, a science and a philosophy. It touches the life of man at every level, physical, mental, and spiritual. It is a practical method for making one's life purposeful, useful and noble". In other words, it preaches that, the ultimate aim or achievement of human kind is ceaseless peace, harmony and moksha i.e. free from the bondage of selfish desires of sensory pleasure.

Our honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has acknowledged Yoga by defining as, "Yoga is a symbol of universal aspiration for health and well being. It is health assurance in zero budget". It is suggested to be the best traditional path of overcoming fear, anxiety, distress and depression. It is a simple and easy technique of making oneself mentally fit and strong to face the tougher and worse situation what citizens of India are encountering now. It can be applied in offering psychological counseling to those who are both infected and undergoing treatment or those who are under fear of getting infected by COVID-19. This can be made accessible to every person of the society irrespective of their status since; it is cheap, affordable and bears zero cost of implementation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF YOGA IN IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

Yoga promotes holistic health for an individual by facilitating him to take charge of his own life. It has the power to cure mental issues. It is a complete exercise which integrates our body, mind and soul. We can fight against this enemy called COVID-19 pandemic from inside by conquering anxiety and by increasing our immunity. Yoga and meditation have far reaching impact in boosting immunity. Here are some useful Asanas and practices from Yoga based on traditional and scientific foundation advised for overcoming fear and anxiety.

- ❖ In the current circumstances of lockdown and social distancing, the Yama-Niyama principles can play a vital role in self-control. It has the ability to purify our thoughts. Mindful practice of Pranayama, Dhyanam and Asana helps in controlling our overflowing emotions. It underlines the spiritual thoughts of "Karma Yoga and Nishkama Karma" meaning selfless work that can help the deprived or weaker section of society.
- ❖ Pranava Pranayama and Pranava Dhyanam are other such yoga practices that bring peace and relaxation to an individual from within. It improves and enhances the performance of our lungs.
- ❖ Meditation plays a vital role in minimizing the virus-specific markers that causes irritation or inflammation. Yoga and meditation collectively can be helpful in preventing and recovering from COVID-19.
- ❖ Bhramari Pranayama is known to improve immunity by increasing Nitric Oxide that has been identified as the most important element of the immune system. Humming sound produce during Bhramari increases Nasal Nitric Oxide, as per the research

published by the reputed American Journal, ATS.

- ❖ Surya Namaskar or Sun Salutation is one best technique for boosting immunity. It is a chain or sequence of 12 powerful asanas. It stimulates breathing along with the movements of all the muscles, organs and systems of the body. It besides develops immunity by improving spinal flexibility.
- ❖ Bhairava Mudra and Abhaya Mudra are known for boosting self-confidence to face this pandemic kind of challenge with new strength and energy.
- ❖ As we know that, corona virus directly affects our lungs in this regard; Kapalbhati can be useful in improving defensive reflexes and pushing healthy function of our respiratory system.
- ❖ According to Dr Manoj Kutteri, wellness director at Atmantan Wellness Centre, stretching poses performed while doing Yoga helps in reducing tension in muscles and joints. This relaxes our sympathetic system; manage blood and pressure minimizes anxiety.
- ❖ Yog Nidra is further most useful in the current period. It is a condition of pleasant sleep or natural relaxation. It lessens anxiety or stress, improves memory performance, as well as physical health.
- ❖ Japa of some significant spiritual mantras while doing yoga has been found exceptionally functional in relaxing our mind and body. For instance, Chanting of Omkhar mantra has been found to be beneficial as it calms down the limbic over activity. Recitation of the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra allows an individual in overcoming fear or anxiety. These mantras directly connect us with our soul and hence assist us in beating anxiety or stress.

CONCLUSION

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has badly disrupted the mental health of Indians throughout the country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. It is extremely difficult even for experts to quantify the extent of deterioration it has caused to the mental well beings of individuals. The lockdown kind of situation, social distancing, fear of loss of job, cases of suicide, etc. have raised a question mark on the policy makers in the country what, if the same situation continues for a long period of time? Are we mentally prepared for the same? Does the

condition of the country will improve one day? It is really a tough task to answer such questions. The only way to come out of this terrifying circumstance is to make us mentally and physically strong and enhance our immunity to fight against this demon called COVID-19. Consequently, we must think in a different way and adopt creative steps to keep our mind and body healthy and fit to fight against this enemy called corona virus.

In order to achieve this goal, we should go back 5000 years back and re-focus on our old rich heritage of Yoga and meditation. Yoga stimulates our thoughts and emotions which directly affect our immune system. Anxiety, stress, fear and loneliness are such negative feelings which weaken our immune system on the other hand; yoga and meditation generate such positive feelings which are known to boost our immunity to fight against infection caused due to corona virus. They are the spiritual tools that create the sense of self-confidence and empowerment from inside. Pranayama and dhyanam helps an individual to take charge of his own life, control his overflowing senses and emotions, makes him cool and calm in panic kind of situation. The asanas and chanting of mantras relax our body; mind and soul. It assists an individual to connect himself/herself with the supernatural power or God and fight against demons and consequently promote holistic health for an individual.

We should consider the fact that, "Prevention is better than Cure" and in this regard Yoga is one such preventive measure which can prevent us from this COVID-19 pandemic. It should be rediscovered and promoted publicly through diverse channels of communication such as in print media, electronic media and social media for spreading awareness. It is very simple, affordable and can be learnt easily. The Government of India is also working in this direction for its large scale implementation through its Ministry of Ayush. It has already issued very practical and useful guidelines in this context, launched and uploaded on its website and inviting proposals for more research in this regard. Not only people of India but, everyone on this globe will be benefited from our rich traditional practices and can protect themselves and their family members from this anxiety or fear of corona virus.

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