

Psychosomatic Management through Yoga

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Abstract

Social unrest and consequentially stress related health problems have increased over few decades and more so the psychosomatic disorders in society. People have been trying to overcome the problem with sedatives, tranquilizers and other related drugs but without much relief. In last few decades meaningful research have been done to explore relationship of body and mind and on the impact of yoga on body as well as mind. The results have been inspiring and it has been established beyond doubt that regular practice of yoga under proper guidance, over a period of time does have positive influence on the neuro-physiological system of our body and can serve as an alternative tool to conventional medicine in alleviation or containment of various psychosomatic disorders.

According to Maharshi Patanjali, *panchaklesha* (*avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha and abhinivesha*) are the root cause of psychosomatic disorders which can be overcome by the process of gaining control over the mind. Yoga techniques such as *asanas, pranayama, yoganidra* and meditation help in managing *psychosomatic* ailments and promoting positive health. The integrated approach of yoga not only deals with the physical aspect of our being, but also uses techniques to operate on all the *panchakosha* (five sheaths) i.e., *annamaya* (physical), *pranamaya* (pranic), *manomaya* (mental), *vijnanamaya* (psychic) and *anandamaya* (blissful) of our personality. Yoga opens up the possibility of consciously altering psychophysiological activity, thereby establishing harmony and balance in all levels of the personality, from physical to subtle.

Key words: Psychosomatic, *panchaklesha, panchakosha, pranayama, meditation.*

Introduction:

Psycho means mind (Psyche) and Soma means body. The term psychosomatic disorder means a physical discomfort due to mental and emotional causes. J.C.H. Heinroth (1818), a German Psychiatrist used the term psychosomatic. Later in 1945 British Psychologist James L., Halliday formalised this theory. Our modern sedentary lifestyle, food habit feeling of insecurity, competition, anxiety etc. are responsible for psychosomatic diseases. Psychosomatic disturbance first produces disturbance in cerebral cortex by various external and internal stimuli and also through endocrinal glands which produce psychological stress.

Both disarrange the autonomic, metabolic and homeostasis function of the body. Uncontrolled emotions like fear, anger suppressed desire, feeling insulted etc., act as stressors. Yoga is a scientific system of self discovery, self maintenance and self cure.

In yogic perspective different causes of psychosomatic disorders may be classified as;

- 1. Mental causes-** The essence of disturbance is in mind. In the form of ego related problem, emotional reactions, tension, over indulgence etc.
- 2. Pranic Causes-** Disturbance in the energy system of the body.

- 3. Physical causes-** Infection, Environmental Factors, adulteration of food, genetic defects, aging process, lifestyle etc.

Four distinct phases in development of psychosomatic disorders may be;

- 1. Psychic Phase-** In this phase we allow tension within psychic level through lack of awareness or sensual pleasure. We become hyperactive, irritable, mild tremor, fear, anxiety. We can say that in this phase our central nervous system over activated.
- 2. Psycho-somatic Phase-** If psychic phase continue for long time a certain generalised changes occur like high B.P., palpitations etc. This phase is known as psychosomatic phase. This is the gross part of the mind (conscious mind). In this phase we are aware of changes in our body and mind both.
- 3. Somatic-Phase-** The organ of the body is going to be effected in this phase. The hereditary and environmental factors will decide which organ will be affected.
- 4. Organic Phase-** Full fledged onset of disease in the target organ, e.g., heart disease, asthma, thyroidism etc. in this stage one needs physical as well as mental treatment.

Psychosomatic disorders according to Maharshi Vasistha;

Maharshi Vasistha described the discomfort or pain that has impact on the body, as the secondary disease (*vyadhis*) whereas the desire lust that affects the mind is termed as primary disease (*adhis*). Due to absence of transcendental knowledge we develop ego and desire and started performing bad and selfish *karmas*. The primary disease has two divisions (i) *Samanya* (ordinary) and (ii) *Sara* (essential).

Smanyadhija are the ordinary stress caused due to interaction with the world. This type of disease can be cured with suitable techniques where as *Saradhija* are the essential stress responsible for the cycle of birth and death. This type of *adhis* can be cured by self realisation (*atmgyan*).

The secondary disease (*Anadhijavyadhi*) which means non-stress borne disease includes infection, physical trauma etc. and can be cured by mantras, prayer and medicine.

Psychosomatic disorders according to Maharshi Patanjali;

Maharishi Patanjali described *Klesha* as the root cause of pain. These *kleshas* are Ignorance (*Avidya*), the 'I'-feeling (*Asmita*), Liking (*Raga*), Dislike (*Dweshha*) and fear of death (*Abhiniveshan*). *Klesha* is a kind of physical and mental suffering. *Avidya* is the origin of *asmita*, *raga*, *dweshha* and *abhiniveshan*. These five *kleshas* have four stages- (i) dormant, (ii) thin, (iii) scattered and (iv) expressed. At the beginning, the *kleshas* are in dormant phase like psychic phase when one is not aware of their sub-conscious conflict but slowly they become active. These *kleshas* can be reduced by involution when they are subtle (*Te pratiprasavaheyah suksmah*). They can also be reduced through meditation. The restless and aggressive mind can be made peaceful through meditation.

Psychosomatic disorders according to Gunas;

According to Gunas, the yogic philosophy says that all matter comes from *prakriti*. This *prakriti* has three main *gunas* or qualities. Everything in nature has these three *gunas*. All functions of body mind and world are dependent on the interplay of the three *gunas*. These three *gunas* are- (i) *Sattva* (Purity), (ii) *Rajas* (Activity) and (iii) *Tamas* (Darkness). When *sattva* predominates in personality, mind

remains quite calm and focussed. When *rajas* predominate, the mind becomes dissipated and restless. This is the *kshipta* state of mind. But, when *tamas* predominate, mind becomes dull and tensed. These *gunas* affect our emotional, psychological and energetical state of our body and mind. However, consciously we can alter the level of *gunas* in our body and mind. Our personality is for certain, influenced by the combination of all the three *gunas*. The fluctuation within mind due to *gunas* can be controlled through different yoga practices such as *hathayoga*, *dhyana* and *mantra-chanting* etc. The aim should be to develop the state of *sattva*. The *sattva guna* represents harmony, balance, happiness free from any type of negative thoughts, self control and bliss. One quality is always more dominant than the other. Predominating *gunas* will affect how we perceive the world around us, which in turn will affect our behaviour, action and attitude.

Psychosomatic disorders according to Koshas;

Yogic Therapy has been deep rooted in Vedas, Upanishads and other texts which harmonise the disturbance at each of the *koshas* and manage the psychosomatic elements. The five *koshas* are (i) *Manomaya*, (ii) *Pranamaya*, (iii) *Annamaya*, (iv) *Vijnanamaya* and (v) *Anandamaya*. All layers are interconnected with each other. *Manomaya Kosha* is the sheet of empirical knowledge. It has the capacity to externalise and internalise the awareness. Any type of stress first percolates into the *manomaya kosha* and develops *avidya* (ignorance). From here imbalance starts occurring at *pranamaya* and *annamaya kosha*. This *manomaya kosha* is composed of mind (consciousness). In Sanskrit, the mind is known as *Manas* and has three dimensions, Conscious, Sub-Conscious and Un-Conscious. The basic function

of mind is cognition i.e., to understand, discriminate, perceive, accept, reject, etc. It is at the level of *manomaya kosha* that the *Chatustaya Antahkaran* (*Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkara and Smriti*) is activated. Through *Rajyoga* techniques we can balance the *koshas*.

Management of psychosomatic disorders;

It has been observed that many psychosomatic disorders are controlled best with the help of yogic practices because yoga first works at mental level. In patanjali yoga-sutra the second sutra define yoga in a classical way. “*Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodhah*”. To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga. Here *chitta* represents all the three dimension of consciousness (Conscious, Sub-Conscious and Un-Conscious). So in this *sutra* maharshi define yoga as blocking of the arising patterns of awareness and not the awareness itself.

To control the psychosomatic elements one has to work at mental level and removal of mental conflicts is the main aim of yoga. All the conscious and subconscious problems must be eradicated. These problems must be removed in order to increase awareness, peace, happiness etc.

Famous psychiatrist Jung has pointed out that the main cause of mental problem is the lack of motivating force in everyone's life (lack of meaning). Daily multitudinous activities in life that make people forget the actual existing problems. After some time, everything seems pointless and the result is negative emotions which result in the physical and mental breakdown. To know and understand the real nature and relationship with existence, the problem of lack of meaning in life, will automatically drop away and dissolve and as one experiences higher awareness and knowledge.

There are many other problems which lie above the normal perceptions e.g., feeling of inferiority, dissatisfaction

with present status, skin colour, stereo type thoughts, etc. all these problems will have to be removed systematically and bring mental peace in life. One should accept himself and do that what comes naturally according to one's personality.

There are many aspects of yoga e.g., *Astanga yoga* technique comprises of *yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahar, dharna, dhyana and samadhi*. These eight types of practices mentioned in different yogic literature are an integral part of all yogic techniques and can be practised in combination with other forms of yoga.

Yama and Niyama; For the management of psychosomatic disorders, *yama* and *niyama* are the foundation stones for a good personality. It works like a seed. Keep nurturing them and the seeds will sprout. Through these *yamas* and *niyamas* one can control every temptation. The *yamas* (restraints) and *niyamas* (observance) are essentially a yogic code of conduct. It affects the frame of mind and helps one to overcome mental conflicts and dissipation.

Asana: yoga says each person is made of three aspects, body mind and consciousness. The posture which are mentioned in our scriptures in the form of *asanas* influence all these three aspects and harmonise as a whole body and mind and are not separate entities. The gross form of mind is body and the subtle form of the body is mind. So the *asanas* connect both and harmonises them. Mental problems and tensions as well as unhealthy body are the causes of many diseases. But our body has auto-therapeutic powers. *Asanas* bring both body and mind into the best possible conditions. Each and every types of *asanas* gradually coordinate and harmonise the different body system (respiration, digestion, endocrinal, nervous) etc. These *asanas* also influence our *annamaya, pranamaya*

and *manomaya koshas*. We practice *asanas* with breath and awareness. This awareness will increase our sensitivity to our own body. While moving the body in *asanas* we also try to concentrate and merge with physical postures. So we come to know the strength, weakness, nature of ourselves. *Asanas* also influence *prana* and open the pranic blockage and influence *pancha-prana*. This energy body is intimately connected to the mind. "*Tato dvandvannabhigatah*". This is the result of the practice of *asanas*, a balance in all such reciprocal functions. Maintain mental and physical equilibrium. It prepares the body for meditation without any discomfort. It helps in reconditioning of psychophysical mechanism of the body.

Pranayam: Pranayam is a process by which mind is controlled by voluntary regulation. Practice of pranayam requires a conscious control over the breathing. The emotions and the mental activities are related to the nervous system. Any type of disturbance in this field can change our breathing. This means if we try to manipulate our breathing voluntarily we tackle the life force which is deeply connected with the mind (nervous activity). When the mind is at a standstill no thoughts processes or emotional disturbance is possible. Thus by controlling the breathing we would be able to control different emotions and as a result the temperament, moods, desires and natural instinct of mind (*vritti*) would also be controlled automatically.

In recent years scientists have admitted the role of pranayama in the treatment of psychosomatic diseases. Hatha yoga claims to cure all these diseases when pranayama is practiced properly. During pranayama the breathing is consciously made slow, deeper and rhythmic. This brings about noticeable relaxation, tranquillity, balance and sense of well being to the mind. In this situation once

ego consciousness which is a sheet of all instinct and desire is checked and controlled and therefore cannot interfere with the mind as usual. When the ego controlled behaviour patterns can also change. Thus the practice of pranayam also contribute in transforming the total personality. This lead one to further stage like pratyahar, dharna, dhyan.

Dhyan: Mental benefits of meditation is to manage stress, reduce anxiety and cultivate peace of mind. Meditation increased awareness, clarity, compassion and a sense of calmness. Stress stimulates the sympathetic nervous system causing a surge of natural stress hormones (epinephrine and cortisol) in the blood stream which can negatively affect the body. Too much epinephrine can increase the risk of heart-attack and mental stroke; too much cortisol can increase blood sugar level, suppress the immune system and constrict blood vessels. But through the practice of meditation parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated causing the body to stop releasing stress hormone. It also builds new positive neurological connections to the part of brain responsible for promoting traits like focus and decision making. Research shows that grey matter- the area of brain responsible for emotional regulation, planning and problem solving as well as cortical thickness responsible for learning and memory both increase with regular meditations. Maharshi Patanjali described dhyan as un-interrupted flow (mind) towards the object is meditation. The mind is no doubt extremely turbulent. Through proper meditation we subdue it perfectly and train one to keep mind off the un-necessary things and concentrate on what one need to do.

There are different types of yoga which can directly affect our mind. Like *gyan yoga*, *mantra yoga* etc. *Gyan yoga* means to develop intuitive ability. This

is a *yoga* of self enquiry to become aware of intuitive ability which help in removing all those blockage which are the causes of pain and diseases. The mind is emptied of pre-conceived ideas, beliefs and then one started self analysing. Through self enquiry and self analysis one develops strong will power. This power can control all the psychic dissipation.

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of various research-works on the impact of yoga on containing health problems, it has been established beyond doubt that regular and guided practice of yoga can certainly help to manage psychosomatic disorders in a positive way.

In order to manage and contain the different psychosomatic disorders, one need to first understand the root cause of the stress in one's life leading to the health or mental problem one is facing and then to find out at which phase, is the problem. Accordingly one can chalk-out a schedule and practice judiciously the different techniques of yoga to contain the problem. Recent studies have revealed that the central nervous system, particularly the hypothalamus, plays a crucial role in controlling hormone secretions and managing the autonomic nervous system which have great influence on functions of the body. Most of the psychosomatic problems occur due to unresolved mental conflicts such as fear, anxiety, anger, non-acceptance, false idea about one-self, etc., which lead to a disturbed state of mind, ultimately resulting in disturbed physiological functions of the body. Yoga opens up the possibility of consciously altering psycho-physiological activity, thereby establishing harmony and balance in all levels of the personality, from physical to subtle.

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