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The Role Of Bhramari Pranayama In The Management Of Mental Health

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Abstract:

Mental health reflects an individual's emotional balance, behavioral insight, cognitive processes, and decision-making capabilities. The modern lifestyle has negatively impacted individuals' mental health, consequently affecting their daily behavior and routines as a result individuals suffer from mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression which includes people of every age group. According to estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO), by the year 2020, approximately 20% of India's population is expected to suffer from mental disorders, and depression is the second-leading cause of disease burden globally.^[1] Today, mental health stands as the greatest challenge facing the world, for even now, mental disorders are not recognized as actual diseases; instead, they are viewed merely as a form of mental weakness on the part of the individual. Previous researches indicate that mental disorders are considered a primary contributing factor to heart disease. The objective of this article is to examine the impact of bhramari pranayama on mental health, drawing upon findings from prior research and the study of classical yogic texts. Yoga plays a pivotal role in enhancing mental well-being, as this practice exerts a positive influence on an individual's holistic health. Bhramari pranayama is a specific breathing technique that positively influences an individual's thoughts and emotions. The consistent practice of bhramari pranayama helps alleviate mental disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Various texts on Yoga also mention the positive impact of the regular practice of Bhramari Pranayama on mental health. Based on the findings derived from numerous studies, it is evident that the vibrations generated by Bhramari Pranayama exert a positive influence on the mind and the nervous system, thereby enhancing an individual's mental health.

Keywords:- Bhramari Pranayama, Mental Health, Stress, Depression

Mental Health:-

The modern busy lifestyle, irregular daily routine, and desire to become the best of each other has transformed human behavior from simplicity to complexity. In the present era, the problems and obstacles encountered in an individual's life are increasing significantly compared to ancient times.

Currently, everyone desires to achieve greater success than others; consequently, individuals across all age groups are being adversely affected, both physically and mentally. Generally, mental health is understood as the absence of any mental illness. According to the Mental Health Foundation (MHF, 2008), mental health reflects an individual's positive outlook and experiences regarding their own life and self. It is also influenced by how an individual behaves or how they resolve a problem when confronted with adverse circumstances. ^[2] **Psychologists Horwitz and Scheid**, while defining mental health, have stated "Mental health encompasses several dimensions—self-esteem, an awareness of one's inner strengths, the capacity to maintain meaningful and high-quality relationships, and psychological well-being." ^[3] According to the World Health Organization, mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders, but rather a state in which an individual recognizes their own capabilities, is able to cope with the daily stresses of life, and can contribute to their community. ^[4] In simple words this can be said, mental health can be described as a state of mind in which an individual makes or is capable of making rational decisions, even in the face of adverse circumstances. It is a crucial dimension of human life that directly influences every aspect of an individual's activities, thoughts, behavior, and emotions.

Factors Influencing Mental Health:-

The brain is the center point of the human body and all work is accomplished by a person as per the instructions of the brain or mind because mind is more important than body. The mind holds greater significance than the body, for while any physical abnormality is easily discernible, any form of mental aberration gives rise to psychological disorders. Defining the mind, Maharishi Charaka renowned authority on ayurveda stated that contemplation, thought, reasoning, meditation, determination, control over the senses, and self-control are all functions of the mind.^[5] Mental health is an integral dimension of an individual's holistic well-being, influenced both directly and indirectly by biological, psychological, social, environmental, cultural, and lifestyle-related factors.

Physical Illness:- There is a close relationship between physical health and mental health which affect each other directly and indirectly. A balanced mind impacts not only an individual's behavior but also physiological processes such as digestion, blood pressure and hormonal regulation. Psychologist Hurlock (2005) has also confirmed that physical disease, defect or imaginary disease definitely affects a person's mental health.^[6] Generally, it has been observed that when an individual is not afflicted by physical diseases or ailments, the likelihood of them remaining mentally healthy is higher.^[7]

Genetics: - At the time of birth, some qualities, defects, physical or mental abilities come to a person genetically, from birth itself, certain qualities, flaws, and physical or mental capabilities are inherited by an individual which has a direct impact on the life of the person. Psychology acknowledges the fact that if an individual's parents or ancestors have suffered from a mental disorder, there is a heightened probability that the individual will also be affected. Although not all mental illnesses are hereditary, the likelihood of certain conditions such as anxiety, stress, depression or schizophrenia occurring across generations is frequently observed due to the influence of genetics. Furthermore, hormonal imbalance is also considered a contributing factor responsible for the prevalence of mental disorders.

Family:- A person receives the first education of his life from his family. A person's personality, behavior and development first of all depend on his family environment. By living in an ideal family a person acquires adaptability, emotional expression, social behavior, morality and values which also leads to his physical and mental development.

Negative Environment: An individual's mental health remains excellent in an organized and positive environment, on the contrary an unethical and disorganized environment has an adverse effect on a person's mental health. Psychologist Fairs (1980) in his research interviewed 40 such people who were mentally healthy earlier but later after coming in contact with unethical and negative environment, they developed feelings of inferiority, self-condemnation, lack of self-confidence.^[9] The interview revealed that their mental condition deteriorated due to socially and morally bad environment.

Pranayama:-

Pranayama is an integral part of the science of Yoga. In the context of Pranayama, Prana signifies breath or vital life force, while "ayama denotes" control or expansion; In other words, Pranayama is a process through which the inherent vital force is expanded throughout the entire body. "The three stages of Pranayama are Puraka, Kumbhaka and Rechaka where Puraka stimulates respiration in the form of positive inhalation; Rechaka expels negative and toxic elements pervading the body and Kumbhaka distributes energy throughout the entire physical system."^[10] Generally, rhythmic and slow breathing indicates a relaxed state of both body and mind, whereas irregular and rapid breathing signifies a tense state of the body and mind. In the Hathayoga text Hathapradeepika, acknowledging the significance of breath in life, it is stated –

"Chale Vaate Chalan Chittam Nishchale Nishchalam Bhavet"

That is, as long as the breath is active, the mind also remains restless. When the breath becomes stable, the mind automatically becomes stable, hence pranayama should be practiced □^[11]

Through the practice of Pranayama—utilizing the proper sequence and correct techniques—the vital life force (Prana-vayu) is stabilized and regulated. Describing the distinct attributes of pranayama, Manu Maharaj has stated: "Just as impurities and defects are eliminated from metals such as gold when subjected to the heat of fire, in precisely the same way, the impurities of the senses and the mind are dispelled through the practice of Pranayama."^[12] The benefits derived from the practice of Pranayama are not limited solely to the subtle body (Sukshma Sharira) but extend equally to the gross physical body (Sthula Sharira). All bodily systems including the nervous system and circulatory functions are positively influenced by the practice of Pranayama. As a result, not only the body but also the mind remains balanced. In Yoga Darshan, while explaining the result of the practice of pranayama, it is said - "*Tatah kshiyate prakashvarnam dharanasu cha yogya manas:*" that is, through pranayama, the veil of ignorance and distress gets weakened and the mind becomes capable of Dharna □^[13] It is said in Yoga Darshan that man gets birth (jati), age (ayu) and pleasure or pain (bhog) on the basis of his karma. The life span of any short breathing creature is comparatively less than that of those who take long breaths, therefore, special emphasis has been placed on the utility of Pranayama in yogic texts. Indeed, it is also stated in the Hathapradeepika- "*Pranayamen yukten sarvarogakshayon bhavet ayuktabhiasyogen sarva rogasya sambhava:*"

In other words, practicing Pranayama through the appropriate method leads to the eradication of all diseases, whereas incorrect practice can give rise to various ailments.

The Impact of Bhramari Pranayama on Mental Health:-

Bhramari Pranayama is a breathing exercise in which exhalation is performed through controlled breathing while simultaneously producing a sound (humming) resembling that of a bumblebee. The term Bhramari generally refers to a bumblebee; It has been named "Bhramari" because it produces a sound resembling that of a bumblebee. Bhramari Pranayama features prominently among the eight Kumbhakas (breath-retention techniques) described in Hatha Yoga texts; Which is primarily helpful in immediately alleviating the effects of anxiety, stress, depression, respiratory, nervous, and autonomic system levels, as well as at the mental level.^[14] An article authored by M.K. Taneja notes that the practice of Bhramari Pranayama increases the production of nitric oxide by up to 15 times. Nitric oxide is a molecule naturally produced within the body; it aids in reducing tension in blood vessels, strengthening the lungs, and enhancing oxygen levels.^[15] Bhramari Pranayama is a simple yet effective practice for the brain, generating vibrations throughout the entire cerebral region. Consequently, the cerebral cortex transmits impulses to the hypothalamus, thereby influencing both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.^[16] The vibrations generated by Bhramari activate minute cells within the brain, ensuring adequate blood circulation and maintaining a stress-free state. Furthermore, it proves beneficial in addressing issues such as anger, anxiety and insomnia.^[17] A previous study revealed that just five minutes of Bhramari Pranayama practice led to significant changes in participants heart rates and blood pressure, attributed to the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. This led to the

conclusion that Bhramari Pranayama stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, resulting in a reduction in stress-inducing hormones.^[18] Another study observed that the practice of Bhramari induced changes in EEG waves specifically Alpha waves (associated with states of peace and relaxation), Gamma waves (linked to higher mental functions), and Theta waves (related to mental states such as learning, stress reduction, memory, and intuition).^[19] In the yoga texts, Pranayama is described as a potent and effective tool for enhancing Prana energy (vital life force). Bhramari Pranayama is a particularly beneficial practice for establishing mental peace and emotional balance. The sound generated by Bhramari exerts a positive influence on the mind and the nervous system, thereby keeping the mind calm and focused.^[20]

Prior Research and Review:

Suprabha Srivastava et al. guided students aged 16 to 20 at Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya were guided through the practice of Bhramari Pranayama for 20 days. This study was subsequently conducted to examine the impact of Bhramari Pranayama on the students mental health, In which an improvement in the students' mental state was observed.^[21]

Abhishek Kumar and Venkatesh selected school students using a random sampling method, Subsequently, their baseline data was collected using the PSQI (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index) and PSS (Perceived Stress Scale) questionnaires. After this, they were made to practice Bhramari Pranayama for 6 weeks and then their data was taken again. Based on an assessment of the data obtained both before and after the administration of a questionnaire, it was observed that the practice of Bhramari Pranayama led to improvements in the students' sleep quality and a reduction in their stress levels.^[22]

Rajkishore et al. conducted an experimental study involving two groups: the first group consisted of individuals who were already regular practitioners of Bhramari Pranayama, while the second group comprised new practitioners. Both groups were instructed to practice Bhramari Pranayama 15–20 times, and their EEG waves were recorded using a 128-channel BIOSEMI system at RIKEN, Japan. Based on the observed changes in the EEG waves, the study concluded that Bhramari Pranayama is effective in addressing various psychological issues, such as stress and anxiety.^[23]

Dishani et al. conducted a study within the AYUSH Department of a tertiary care hospital in Eastern India to investigate methods for anger management. Eighty security personnel were divided into two groups: a control group of 40 individuals and an experimental group of 40 individuals. Subsequently, the experimental group practiced Bhramari and Nadi Shodhana Pranayama for two weeks. To measure anger levels, the researchers developed a specific questionnaire; based on the results obtained from this instrument, the study demonstrated that the practice of Bhramari and Nadi Shodhana Pranayama had a positive impact on anger control, with the experimental group exhibiting a significant reduction in anger levels.^[24]

Shivani Nautiyal et al. investigated the impact of yoga on enhancing the cognitive abilities of medical students. The study involved 150 students from S.G.R.R. University, who were divided into experimental and control groups. Subsequently, for a period of 90 days, the experimental group practiced mantra chanting, Nadi Shodhana, and Bhramari Pranayama for 45 minutes daily. Cognitive

abilities were assessed using psychological tests. The findings indicated that the practice of yoga led to improvements in the students attention span, memory retention and overall cognitive function.^[25]

Saroj et al. conducted a study examining the effects of Bhramari Pranayama practice on stress and depression, involving 90 samples, the participants practiced Bhramari Pranayama for a period of eight weeks. Their stress and depression were tested by DASS-21 in which it was found that the practice of Bhramari Pranayama brought positive changes in their stress and depression levels.^[26]

Conclusion:

The practice of Bhramari Pranayama has a positive effect on all aspects of physical, mental and spiritual health. A mentally healthy person remains cheerful, self-confident, stable, and composed; conversely, a mentally unhealthy person remains beset by anxiety, anger, stress, depression, irritability, despair, and negative emotions. Data from previous researches and scientific evidences show that A reduction in mental stress has been observed through the regular practice of Bhramari Pranayama. In yogic scriptures as well, Bhramari Pranayama is described as an effective practice for achieving mental stability and concentration. This practice is said to be beneficial not only for cultivating mental stability but also for alleviating psychological disorders. Studies based on modern research indicate that Bhramari Pranayama plays a direct role in regulating the heart, blood pressure, nervous system, hormones, and emotional balance.

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