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RESEARCHARTICLE

YOGA AND GERONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The Problem of Gerontology (i.e., problems that we face when we start grow older) is keenly related to some of our sickness that is psychological rather than physiological. We know that, earthly engagements (e.g., some men and women overcome the problem of old age having more association, societal attachments, and engaging themselves in such works and entertainments) are very synthetic in nature in their approach because they terminate in themselves when time exhausts. For example, an old man joined an evening party with more music, much chaos, more loving association, but when he returns home, a vanity, a deep silence swallows that moonlit night, the man falls in a deep anxiety, and he starts spending the rest of the night thinking of “the end of life” being alone either in his palace, or in his one single room. In this connection, I would say that yoga has an interesting role to play that a man learns to live a joyful life, never feels alone even in a critical situation. So, if we want to overcome any bad situation and a negative psychological condition of our being, we should adopt yoga as primary as life to a living one. As we know that, Desire, Greed, and Expectations are all same things that cause sufferings in man. In our old age, we should be very much conscious about such negativism. And yoga, as I mentioned above, may help us to be free from expectations, dependence, bad-desires and such kind of things that bind a man with sorrowfulness. In yoga, there are simple things – such as kriyas, asanas, and mudras, if we practice them on regular basis, that originally helps us to live a truthful, stable life dwelling in the spirit of pure humanism. Although aging comes, though we have natural bindings as well as attachments we shall never fall in frustration and related egoism. Yogic practices could develop a sense of self-realization, self-esteem, self-sufficiency, that is highly beneficial for every one of any age-group to live a HEALTHY life which has also a positive impact on our society to reform it with good habits and culture. In my paper, I shall focus on some yogic practices (i.e., asanas, kriyas and mudras) to introduce YOGA as a natural equipment that one may adopt for one’s whole life to live it happily.

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INTRODUCTION

Gerontology is defined as the study of the problems of aging from a broader perspective. Not only our medical issues, but all the various problems faced by seniors and the elderly. It includes the study of one’s psychological behavior, medical issues and genetic changes that grow and differ as our entire system pass through a natural process of aging. Aging although affects our physicality, psychologically we become sicker and fuller of crisis. We can very well experience our physical changes that gradually indicates our end of life, thinking of which one may die psychologically, prematurely before the time comes. It makes man worried and go in a sorrowful silence. This thing is not good to uphold during the time of aging; it causes stress, depression in a man and he naturally fails to finish his life with a kind of joy in him. Many men and women overcome the problem of old age having more association, more fun, societal attachments, and engaging themselves in works and entertainments.

They do these to avoid loneliness, dependence, and a vanity an old man suffers due to a kind of helplessness that no one can escape – THE END OF LIFE (i.e., Death). But, unless they are psychologically so stable, these engagements become synthetic, they terminate in vain when time exhausts, and after they come home, to their palace, a deep silence swallows that moonlit night, let them fall in cry in silence, anxiety, and they start spending the rest of the night thinking of “their end of life”. In this connection, yoga has an important role it plays to lead a man to live it happily, with ever hopefulness. interesting role to play to boost up an old man with joy and ever hopefulness. As a matter of fact, we shall see a man, even when he is made compelled to live in his one single bed in his one single room, the apparent ‘lonely’ man happily learns to manage that kind of helplessness with proper understanding of “every moment living and every moment dying”. To achieve such kind of understanding with self-realization, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency, we all require yoga as a natural

equipment that naturally build up a kind of personality to fight each negative situation with pure positivism. In this paper, I have focused on some yogic practices, asanas, kriyas, and mudras to show that, not medication, or counselling from outside practitioners, but YOGA alone can make all people of all age groups to overcome all critical situation they face in their everyday life. Everyone becomes his best counsellor. Kriyas, asanas, and mudras, if we practice them on regular basis, that could help us to be free from stress, depression, and sufferings that we grow in ourselves due to having attachments, and aging. Yogic practices develop a sense of self-sufficiency in us that causes a kind of satisfaction and stability, and we overcome every negativism of life. These are beneficial to live a HEALTHY life which also has a positive impact on our society. Society reforms with good habits and culture and cumulatively produces GOOD HEALTH for society, finally, GLOBAL GOOD of all.

Gerontology in brief: It is the scientific study of old age, the process of aging, and the particular problems of old people. It also deals with the study of social, cultural, psychological, cognitive, and biological aspects of aging. The word 'Gerontology' was first coined by Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov in 1903, from Greek word - γέρων, *geron*, i.e., "old man" and λογία, or *logia* refers to "study of". Unlike geriatrics such kind of study is not only confined in the branch of medicine that specializes in the treatment of existing disease of older adults; rather gerontologists include researchers and practitioners in the fields of biology, nursing, medicine, criminology, dentistry, social work, physical science, architecture, geography, pharmacy, public health, housing, and anthropology.¹¹ So we see that, the study of gerontology has a number of sub-fields. We also see that it includes issues relating to government policy making such as government planning and the operation of nursing homes, investigating the effects of an aging population on society, and the design of residential spaces for older people that facilitate the development of a sense of place or home. The problem is that, the world is forecast to undergo rapid population aging in the next several decades. As we all know that, such study has a life course perspective, and we also aware of the fact that, aging occurs from birth to death, it must involve social, psychological, and biological processes. It has an ongoing periodic effect on human psyche. Therefore, we should take care of anyone's psychological changes that occur and pass through aging consequently till the end of life.

Yoga and Gerontology: We see, that the study of gerontology includes social, and psychological issues of older adults. Some of them require undergo with treatments, medicines, some require counselling, advice, and physical assistance to overcome the issues. The important thing we may notice that, the study if done to reset the existing psychological pattern of everyone that is caused due to so many misunderstanding about life, relationships, desire etc., then it could be more helpful to solve the problem, an old man usually suffers at his stage. Without extraordinary medications, or counselling, only YOGA may help all of us to reset our psychological issues with extreme positivism. If everyone starts practicing YOGA from the very beginning of his/her socialization he/she would learn to face every critical situation with stability, and peaceful attitude with no stress, and such negative psychological issues. Moreover, a social reformation may start to construct due to such mass awareness in our society.

What Yoga does to our system: Yogic practices help to reconstruct our system with true spirit of humanism. It is true that we all are born animal, so animal desire, lust, aggression for survival etc., usually occupy our current brain state and related works. Yoga helps us to balance this in a proper way. Yoga builds up a Regulatory System on its own, that helps us to think, work, and deal in a controlled manner. It helps our system balancing the disorder of bat-pitta-cough (air-earth-water combination), which is the key to obtain a disease-free life. Yoga brings in strong immunity as well as flexibility to our system. So, we may hope that those psycho-physical issues that usually occur in older adults will not so effective on behalf of the blessings of YOGA. Now, I am introducing some kriyas (yogic activities), asanas (physical posture), and mudra (gesture formed on mind, body, and hand) in the following sections:

Exercising Breathing awareness: This practice should be followed by everyone of every age group to become stress free, calm and energetic. Before practicing pranayama (breath control technique) one should be very well aware of his/her breathing pattern, i.e., how it goes inside, and how it comes out side through our nostrils. This is such an easy practice, maintaining which our BP rate can be normalized at its average rate, thyroid issues, as well as blood sugar issues can be dissolved using this simpler technique. In Hatha Yoga, Breathing Awareness has been given first priority to be practiced by everyone before going for pranayama, and other yogic kriyas, such as – *recaka*, *puraka*, *kumbhaka* (i.e., exhalation of breath, retention of breath, and inhalation of breath in a certain way) and other breath control techniques like bandhas or locks. These things cannot be performed in a proper way unless we have a better understanding of our breathing, how it works, where it travels between. So, breathing awareness exercise is important in this regard. It also helps a person to enjoy the benefits of MEDITATION. It may let a man to go deep in meditateness only through such simple technique. It requires no difficult posture, no other discipline to follow. In our work, on our way to office, on our way home, we can try to follow our breathing conclusively. It can be done best on *shabhasana* or crops pose,¹¹ i.e., on a lying posture.

Jalandhar Bandha (chin lock or throat lock):^{iv} Inhale slowly, raise your head up, be erect on spine, hold your breath in chest, at this situation slowly head down, try to touch your throat with your chin. Hold your breath in chest, and try to maintain this kriya as per your capacity. When you suffer, slowly head up, and exhale slowly. Try to practice the kriya at least once a day (morning or evening) on an empty stomach. This kriya makes our process of aging slower. It helps to reduce obesity and weight gaining. After regular practice one may begin to enjoy a kind of lightness in his/her system that is enjoyable and quite peaceful for himself/herself.

Suryabhedipranayama (right nostril breathing):^v This pranayama can be practiced in two ways: only through right nostril (stopping the way of left nostril with ring finger and little finger). Breath in through right nostril, and breath out through right nostril. Left nostril is closed. Rapid exercising of this makes us warmer in a chilled weather. It can be practiced with retention of breath. We inhale through right nostril, hold breath in chest, then after a while exhale through right nostril. Left nostril is closed. Another way of practicing this pranayama is – inhale through right nostril closing our left nostril, hold breath in chest, head down, try to touch your throat with chin

(i.e., to maintain *jalandhara bandha* or chin lock), when we suffer let our head rise up, and exhale slowly through left nostril. It makes one cycle. If necessary, a few normal breaths can be taken between rounds while the hands are relaxed on the knees, eyes are closed concentrating on the space in front of the closed eyes. Then again start through right nostril, hold your breath, and exhale through left nostril. Practice seven cycle daily, at least once a day on empty stomach. This pranayama is well known by name *suryabhedhi* pranayama. It makes our system disease-free, free from parasites, free from digestive disorders, constipations, makes us energetic, and youthful. It helps to awaken our energy channels underlie our subtle body. This practice helps us to overcome throat-related issues. Even it sweetens our vocal and musical voice.

Nadi Sodhana Kriya (cleansing technique of energy channels of our subtle body): A Rapid Breathing Exercising Technique that starts through left nostril and ends in left nostril and makes one cycle of each practice. Deep inhale through left nostril (very consciously, cautiously, in a rapid manner) full your diaphragm, then without any rest, exhale in the same way (consciously, cautiously, in a rapid manner) through right nostril. Then again inhale through right nostril, full your diaphragm with air, and without any rest exhale the breath through left nostril. It makes one cycle. Start to practice this with three cycles everyday once on empty stomach. When you feel ease then try to increase the number at least up to seven.^{vi} It reduces stress, obesity, weight, other endocrine issues, and finally cleanse our energy channels for spiritual awakening.

Kapalbhati (skull shining activity/ frontal brain cleansing technique):^{vii} Although not for all, it can be practiced by some of those with less obesity and lightness on their limb. It is a kind of rapid breathing exercising technique, using our belly muscle, with passive inhalation and active exhalation. It should not be practiced by those with ulcers in stomach, high BP, Hypertension, heart disease, and surgery in abdominal region. Although, who have not such conditions, may also not be allowed to perform *kapalbhati*. It is done to awaken our vital energy to rise up and travel towards the head region (*sahasrar chakra*). After completion certain stages on the path of yoga, one should perform *kapalbhati*. It is both a cleansing technique and a pranayama kriya. It stops stress, brightens our face, makes us joyful, and lighter on limb. Thyroid issues, tonsillitis, throat issues go away due to *kapalbhati* kriya. It helps to our vital energy prana to dwell into head region and energize our brain cell to rejuvenate with better thinking and working abilities.*

*It is to be remembered that these practices should be done on a sitting posture, e.g., *padmasana*, *sukhasana*, *siddhasana*, *swastikasana*, *orvajrasana*). But those who have knee issues, who cannot sit on knee, they may practice them sitting on a chair keeping spine erect on its base.

Actual benefits from above mentioned kriyas: we see that, these kriyas are basically working on our endocrine system. So naturally they cure and balance our hormonal issues in a natural way. They keep up our psycho-physical symmetry on its own.

So, we start to think and work in a balanced as well as in a stable manner. So, as we grow older, our psychological disorders never occur, we never get distressed, depressed, and hopeless even when we are facing negativism surrounding us. Similarly, when we practice *viparitkarani mudra*, *pashini mudra*, *shambhabi mudra*, these all work on balancing our three main layers of existence – physical body, psychological body, and energy body. If sincerely work on these kriyas, asanas, mudras on daily basis once or twice a day, we can manage all negative issues relating to aging.

Observation: The fact is that the problem of gerontology when concerning issues related to older adults is not a sudden matter grows in older people. Due to selfish consideration, due to self-centeredness, and other psychological disorders, all these we start to accumulate from our younger age. It happens on a recurring mode in our personality, and “fortunately”, we learn to live a “lone” life with no “companion”. This is what we deserved most as a direct principle of living to obtain pleasure and to avoid pain. But such selfishness turns unfortunate when we grow older and wish to have at least one companion with us. The fact is that, such problems sustain and we die “alone”. These things can be avoided, and we can enjoy a real truthful life with companion everywhere with us, if we learn to live a selfless life with true spirit of humanity. It really causes no sufferings and problems, what we call “gerontology”, “depression”, “frustration” in our entire livelihood. And YOGA is such a kind spiritual aspect of human life, the means of enjoying a stress-free truthful life, that we all should adopt indubitably. It is the only means that alone can provide a man a pure, disease-free, ever balanced state of existence which we all deserve. Self-restraints start to grow automatically in us, with which we can go for a complete renunciation from earthly aspects of living. Life then becomes a divine one. We all should remember that – A controlled life successfully grows the crop, whereas an uncontrolled one falls in failure.

ⁱHarris D K (1988). *Dictionary of Gerontology*. New York. Green Wood Press. P. 80. ISBN 9780313252877

ⁱⁱHooyman N R. Kiyak H A. (2011). *Social Gerontology: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (9th Ed.). Boston Pearson Education. ISBN: 978-0205763139.

ⁱⁱⁱMuktibodhananda Swami (2006). *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Light on Hatha Yoga). Yoga Publication Trust. Munger. Bihar. P. 166.

^{iv}Ibid. p. 302

^vIbid. p. 237-238

^{vi}Ibid. p. 167-169

^{vii}Ibid. p. 220

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