



COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH: AN APPROACH FOR MANAGEMENT THROUGH AYURVEDA AND YOGA

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemics have cast their dark shadow in almost every sphere of human life. Mental health is no more exception. COVID- 19 has affected the mental health of many in the country and all over the globe. The virulent virus has claimed over 1.79 million lives across the world to date while in India 1,48,000 people have died due to it. In India, total positive cases detected 10.2 million and out of them, 9.83 million were recovered till date (30/12/2020). The pandemic has changed the way of life for which after staying confined indoors due to the prolonged lockdown to halt the spread of the virus, adjusting to the new lifestyle in the unlocked place and that has resulted in the spectrum of illness issues ranging from depression to the fatal step- suicide. The WHO, together with partners, is providing guidance and advice during the COVID-19 pandemic. In India Ministry of health and family welfare, AYUSH ministry with several interdisciplinary AYUSH Research and Development taskforce initiating, coordinating, and monitoring against COVID-19. An approach of Ayurveda and Yoga may help to strengthen host immunity and provide an effective, accessible, and affordable means of prophylaxis of COVID-19. In this regard the *Rasayana* therapy, *Medhya* drugs as mentioned in *Brihatrayee*. The *Satvavajaya chikitsa* depicted in *Sutrasthana* of *Charak Samhita* and *Yogic* therapy also may play an enormous role in prevention as well as to reduce the mental disorders occurring to the sufferers and common people during this time of fighting with the controlling of COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords : *COVID-19, Prophylaxis, Rasayana therapy, Brihatrayee, Satvavajaya chikitsa, Yogic Therapy*

INTRODUCTION

The word pandemic, derived from the Greek word Pan-demos (pan means All and demos means people, denotes a sudden outbreak of an illness over widespread regions.^[1] Diseases are not new to this world and so are pandemics. History has witnessed pandemics from the time of the Greek civilization, 424 BC, to very recent times, viz. the Athenian Plague, the Black death, the Spanish flue, Cholera pandemic, the smallpox pandemic and then HIV pandemic, SARS 2003, MARS 2012, Swine flu 2009, Ebola 2014-16 and Zika 2015-16. All of them affecting and killing millions around the globe at

various times. The 21st Century is now witnessing the latest pandemic of COVID-19.^[2]

Covid-19 affects both the physical and psychological health of people with a profound impact on the mental health of people. The novel SARS-Cov-2 virus or coronavirus had made a serious threat to public health globally. The continuity of its effect and the consequences has already been felt in the society from outbreak to epidemic and then pandemic, Covid-19 has equally affected our social life. To control the infection and reduce the number of cases, the governments of different countries have implemented nation-wide

lock-down. The Government of India has also implemented different phases of nationwide lockdown where schools, colleges, educational institutes and universities have remained completely closed. ^[2]

Affect of lockdown in families : A family can be dysfunctional due to various reasons for lockdown. Physical and mental illness can be a major cause of dysfunction in a family. Physical illness alone does not cause family dysfunction; however, it can make life much harder for everyone concerned. Parents sometimes rely on their children in some work, if one child is ill, the other child may feel neglected. As parents focus all their energy on helping that one child. Stress is an unavoidable part of life. While low levels of stress can have a positive impact on people and push them to achieve their goals but excessive stress can jeopardize a family's security and well-being. On the other hand, stress and depression also propels some people to addictions like drugs, alcohol, gambling can lead to co-dependency, spending an excessive amount of time, energy and other resources on the addictive individual. When addiction is severe, it can drain a family's financial and emotional resources. Poor communication may be the single-most telling characteristic of a disturbed family. Virtually, any problem can be managed with open, honest, healthy communication. Many children tend to stay away from home and spend time out to ease their stress. However, the lockdown is taking away that choice from their reach, now they are locked up 24x7 inside a stressful environment. At this stage mental support from friends, keeping in touch near and dear once is essential for the mental and physical well-being of these children. ^[3]

Reports of the International Agencies : A UNICEF report has revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic in India and lockdown has "impacted" 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary education, besides 28 million children who were undergoing pre-school education in Anganwadi centers. ^[4]

According to the report, at least 650 million South Asian children have been affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pointing out the revelations in India's perspective on the education and learning of a child, the UN report said, "In India, school closures have impacted 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary education. It has impacted about 28 million children who were attending pre-school education in Anganwadi centers. This is in addition to more than six million girls and boys who were already out of school prior to the COVID-19 crisis." The COVID-19 pandemic is undermining nutrition with the worst consequences being borne by young children. In India, despite the commendable change in improved child nutrition indicators, an estimated 20 million children under five years of age are suffering from wasting, over 40 million children are chronically malnourished and more than half of Indian women aged 15-49 years are anemic. The pandemic has further exposed the fragility of children, less by the virus itself but much more by the indirect and long-term fallout ^[4].

WHO declared Covid-19 as a pandemic in 11 March, 2020 ^[5]. Professor John Reilly of Strathclyde's, School of Psychological Sciences and Health said the measures against Covid-19 are in place for a good reason, but this reduction in physical activity could be seen as an unintended consequence. It has been found that

children are much less active on the non-school days of weekends and holidays. During these days they are missing out not only in education but also in inactivity. As schools can actively promote a health-conscious schedule including physical activity, a school closer and home confinement lead to a loss which otherwise a promoting effect. The paradox is how the daily activities of a school going child are going to be compensated by staying at home. The children who are overweight and obese are going to be the worst affected. Since these children were confined through this lockdown, ate one additional meal per day slept extra time and added an hour in front of T.V. and computer screens, an irreversible consequence might arise which may contribute to adulthood obesity and diseases. The WHO recommends 30 minutes per day of physical activity for healthy adults and one hour per day for children. ^[6] ^[7]

The brain is the master organ of the body, responsible for the intellectual, emotional and psychological functions. It perceives the information around us and then reacts for the adaptation and survival of the individual. But if the stress (threat) is very high and continues prolonged duration, thereby burdening our psychological resources and productivity. Then the individual going to suffer from a mental illness. There may be an emergence of varied mental symptoms, such as anxiety, excessive anger, despair, apprehension, sadness, grief, guilt, fear of contamination, confusion, feelings of insecurity, thoughts of helplessness and hopelessness, suicidal intent, boredom and loneliness, feelings of detachment, sleep disturbance, behavioral changes viz. hoarding of food and protective

equipment, undue attention to unsubstantiated facts in news and social media, excessively indulging in maladaptive behaviors such as substance abuse, online gaming, watching pornography, etc.

Certain social situations in pandemics can secondarily affect the mental health of the individual like an increase in domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, elderly abuse, poverty, economic recession, unemployment, decrease in social cohesion, stigma and discrimination ^[8]. In these situations, the victimize people might need psychological attention. Specially aged people, patients with psychiatric illness, patients in isolation or ICU diagnosed with Covid-19, patients in self-isolation or home-quarantine, people at risk extremes of ages, health workers, administrative officials, patients with chronic illness and their caregivers, media personnel, people stranded in faraway places, etc.

Creating awareness, educating masses on new terms like lockdown, quarantine, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, respiratory hygiene control over social media posts have already been enforced since the beginning of the pandemic. ^[9]

Management through Ayurveda and Yoga : Ayurveda and Yoga can certainly play a primary role in the management of coronavirus disease especially in the line of prevention and to reduce stress-related disorders ^[10]. It is to be mentioned that as a result of the emergence of coronavirus disease, the 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), initially seen in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a situation of socio-economic crisis and psychological distress rapidly occurred worldwide. The father of Indian medicine

sage Charaka described the pandemic like situation as “JANAPAD DHWANGSA” when the population of a community suffers from a disease having similar signs and symptoms without any definite cause and resulting death of a huge population [11]. According to author Charaka, this situation usually caused by –

- 1) *Dushita Vayu* (Polluted or contaminated air)
- 2) *Dushita Jala* (Polluted or contaminated water)
- 3) *Dushita Desha* (soil pollution) and
- 4) *Dushita Kala* (ill effect of the season) [11]

The Covid-19 viral disease affects the nose throat and chest giving the symptoms of influenza-like problems eg. Sneezing, nasal discharge, cough, fever and if it does not check by medication or applying preventive measures finally the virus severely affects the lung [12]. Considering it as a dreaded disease almost all countries of the world adopted strict inhibitory methods like lockdown, the closing of all shopping mall, educational institutions, group entertainment, etc. for which as fear from the Covid-19 even normal person also now being disturbed physically and mentally. Till now though the disease fatality gradually reducing and prohibitory measures have been relaxed temporarily to some extent but people of all nations are in fear from this type of new disease threatening the 21st century’s world and new panic creat from the latest instance of occurring of this disease in the UK [13].

In India, a consensus document is developed by expert committees from All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), Delhi, Institute of Post Graduate Training and Research in Ayurved (IPGTRA), Jamnagar and National Institute of Ayurveda (NIA), Jaipur, Central Council for Research in

Ayurveda (CCRAS), Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN), other national research organizations. This protocol is for the management of mild to moderate and even to severe Covid-19 patients may be advised for taking treatment options. [14] [15]

General and Physical measures:

- 1) Follow physical distancing, respiratory and hygiene with wearing of a mask.
- 2) Gargle with warm water with common salt or with a pinch of turmeric and salt, triphala kwath i.e., decoction of dried fruits of ‘amlaki’ (*Phyllanthus Emblica*), ‘silikha’ (*Terminalia Chebula*), and ‘bibhitaki’ (*Terminalia Bellirica*), or yastimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza Glabra*).
- 3) Nasal instillation (application of medicated oil either ‘anu taila’ or ‘shadabindu taila’ or plain oil like sesame, coconut, etc). Cows ghee may be applied in one or two drops once or twice a day.
- 4) Steam inhalation with ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi*) or pudina (*Mentha*) or eucalyptus oil once a day.
- 5) Adequate sleep of daily 8 hours.
- 6) Moderate physical exercise.
- 7) Balanced and nutritious diet.
- 8) Seek psycho-social support from peers, community health workers, counselors. If required seek mental health support service. [15]

Rasayana, a specialty of Ayurveda, deals with measures for rejuvenation. *Rasayana* therapy comprises lifestyle, diet, and medicine that have properties to enhance growth, memory, retard aging, induce tissue regeneration, and stimulate immunity [16]. Due to its effects on improving immunity, *Rasayana* therapy may have direct relevance to the prophylaxis and management of SARS-CoV-2 infection. The botanicals used in *Rasayana* therapy are effective in immune

modulation and restoration of immune hemostasis.

Rasayana like *Amalaki* (*Emblica officinalis*), *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cardifolia*), *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*), *Tulsi* (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*), *Sankhpuspi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) and *Jatamansi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), *Munakka* (*Vitis Vinifera*), Ghee, Milk and milk productive substances are mostly acted in the body as *Rasayana*.^[16]

Psychotherapy in Ayurvedic Classics : Major treatment modalities explained for different diseases in Ayurveda are: *Daivavyapshrya*, *Yuktivyapshrya*, and *Satvavajya*. *Daivavyapshrya* is recommended in mental disorders induced by *Agantuja* factors (external). *Yuktivyapshrya* includes *aushadha* and *ahara* (medicines and diet). *Satvavajaya-chikitsa* means to restrain the mind from desires from the objects which disturbs the state of mind. Here, it is said that how the mind plays an important role in causing the diseases^[17]. In the 19th century, William Sweester was the 1st to coin the term 'Mental Hygiene'^[18]. Further, the American Psychiatric association defined mental hygiene as "the art of pressurizing the mind against all incidents and influences calculated to deteriorate its qualities, impair its energies, or derange its movements^[18]". These all aspects were broadly covered under *Satvavajaya chikitsa* told in Ayurveda."

Satvavajaya chikitsa, is a treatment by self-control. Charaka defines it's a mind-controlling therapy in which stress has been laid restraining of mind from unwholesome objects by *Manonigraha* and *Astanga Yoga* (*Yoga* techniques)^[17]. Psycho- behavioral therapy incorporating

the principles of assurance therapy (Ashvasana), replacement of emotions, and psycho-shock therapy.

Yoga plays a greats role in mental disorders as it is primarily meant for the removal of *chittavritti* that is to control the factors responsible for fluctuating mind. Yogic practice includes body postures or exercises (*yogasana*), breathing practice (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*). Out of many ways of meditation, Transcendental Meditation has been scientifically and statistically proved to be immensely helpful for mental health care. Mental stress affects autonomic and endocrine functions. The sympathetic nervous system is usually stimulated in stressful conditions with a resultant rise in Blood pressure and Heart rate. The stressful impulses mediating through the Hypothalamic- Pituitary axis could bring about hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system. Yogic practices have been found very useful in resolving emotional conflicts and neurotic tendencies^[19]. Yoga reduces the level of anxiety scores and a significant reduction of total neuroticism, anxiety, and general hostility. An individual can achieve more emotional balance and improvement in total memory^[19].

The line of treatment should be to retard the hyperactive state of mind. Yogic practices to be started from the loosening of limbs and joints as prescribed in the common yoga protocol by the Ministry of Ayush for IDY^[20]. Then *kriyas* like *jalaneti*, *sutraneti*, *kapalbhati* (mild strokes) may be helpful. *Suryanamaskara* and simple yogic postures including *pranayam* like *nadisuddhi*, *ujjayi*, *sitali/sitakari*, and *bhramari* much more beneficial^[21]. Recent study also says that mainly six *ashanas* viz. downfacing

postures (*parvatasana*), cobra pose (*bhujangasana*), seated spinal twist (*vakrasana*), eagle pose (*garudasana*), bridge pose (*setubandha asana*), and legs up the wall said to be beneficial for relieving stress and also to prevent Covid-19 [22].

DISCUSSION :

The authors of Ayurveda define health in a proper way, specially Shusruta's definition is much more scientific which was recognized by WHO for the inclusion of mental health. The National Clinical Management Protocol based on Ayurveda and Yoga suggests the use of medicines such as Guduchi Ghana vati (Samshamani vati or Giloy vati having Aqueous extract of *Tinospora cordifolia* IP) or the powder of *Tinospora cordifolia* Ashwagandha, Guduchi Ghanavati [22]. The rasayan like Chyavanprasha is seen as prophylactic care for a high-risk population. The prophylactic measures like consumption of hot water, hot food, and herbal drinks, gargling with medicated solutions, and steam inhalation will certainly block the entry of coronavirus. For overall health proper diet, sleep for adequate time, suitable conversation with the family members, works to be performing at home or office and also following the ethical codes and conduct mentioned in achar rasayana in Charaka Samhita benefited the people. Mental relaxation is possible by Yogic practice, pranayama, and Dhyana, and also using Rasayana drugs or formulations which will help in promoting the body's immunity.

CONCLUSION :

Most of the Indian people using different herbal formulations and following the advice circulated by the Ministry of health and family welfare and AYUSH. All over the world countries of Europe including

the USA recognized the Yoga system to be helpful for physical and mental health during this Covid 19 pandemic crisis.

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Source of support: Nil Conflict of interest:

None Declared

Cite this Article as : [Sarma Anil Kumar :COVID-19 and Mental Health: An Approach for Management Through Ayurveda and Yoga] www.ijaar.in : IJAAR VOLUME IV ISSUE XI NOV-DEC 2020 Page No 1337-1343