

ENHANCING PHYSICAL HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE THROUGH SAHAJ MARG RAJ YOGA MEDITATION PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The present research work was aimed to study the impact of Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga meditation system on the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the practitioners of the Sahaj Marg. A group of 20 participants were chosen for the study, who were regular practitioners of this meditation system for last one year and were able to cope up with challenging situation, untoward stressful life events, the shattering experiences, painful happenings, chronic diseases, stress and anxiety. It included males and females participants, who were either graduates or above and belonged to upper middle socio-economic status. The age range was between 35 to 45 years. They were administered the questionnaires to measure physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence and a brief interview schedule to reveal out the most peculiar life events, experiences and challenges faced by these disciples. The t-test was employed to differentiate between the pre and post testing data of the physical health, mental health and emotional intelligence of the participants. The results indicated that the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation enhanced the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the participants.

The present research work was aimed to study the impact of Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga meditation system on the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the participants over a period of one year. Sahaj Marg is the ancient system of raja yoga - the yoga of mind. It is the king among yogas as it seeks to lead to self-realization through regulation, refinement and eventual divinisation of the mind. The ancient system of raja yoga of Saint Patanjali (195-142 B.C) narrated eight steps. They were: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi (a moral and ethical life, right posture, breath control, withdrawal of senses from their outgoing tendencies, and focussing the mind within oneself). Sahaj Marg follows the modified and simplified form of the ancient Raja yoga system of meditation of Saint Patanjali to suit the lifestyles of modern human beings.

The system goes by the name of Sahaj Marg (the natural or the simple way) because it integrates one's physical, mental and spiritual aspects without employing any pressure or force. It does not call for austerities, self-denial, penance, external renunciation, celibacy, etc. People must live full and natural lives without any extremes. It is a process which progressively dilutes and dissolves one's ego and pride. Sahaj Marg does not teach to run away from the worldly life, but teaches a person to cope up with the material existence by possessing a sense of detachment because if one neglects the material and worldly existence, the spiritual existence gets negatively affected. A sound balance is to be achieved between both the existences to lead a meaningful life in both the spheres.

Neki (1975) describes the 'sahaja' state as a psychological health ideal suggesting a positive, robust and fully functional state of health. The process of change starts within a practitioner with regular practice which results in lightness of mind, state of inner composure, absence of mental tensions, anxieties and insecurities making the mind purified. The obstructions put up by ego in the form of negative attitudes, attachments, aversions, pride and prejudice, anger, etc., get dissolved by regular practice of meditation system. With regular practice, the heart is cleaned of various impurities which are accumulated as a result of past ego-based thoughts and actions and positive human qualities start developing. Wulliemier (1996) integrated and applied the principles of a spiritual psychology to daily life by adopting Sahaj Marg Maxims which teaches to lead a balanced life and brings positive changes for the welfare of the society and its citizens.

A study by Manocha, Gordon, Black, Malhi, & Seidler, (2009) indicated the potential of raj yoga meditation as an effective mental health promotion and prevention strategy. They also found that meditation reduces sympathetic activation and increases parasympathetic activation of the ANS, i.e., it reduces physiological arousal, respiratory rate (RR), heart rate (HR), blood pressure (BP), electro-dermal activity (EDA) and increases skin temperature (ST). The breathing and pulse rate, as well as the blood pressure, come down perceptibly. This state of complete physical relaxation during meditation conserves physical energy and continues even after the several hours of the meditation, if a practitioner is regular in practice. In this system, the mind is purified and regulated progressively, many practitioners who suffer from physical ailments as a result of mental stress show considerable improvement. They meditate to remove the grossness prevailing in oneself which strengthens the heart and other biological systems. During meditation, a practitioner finds the consciousness shifted from the body and senses to the Divine within and this ease out the pressure of the physical system. Rai (1988) studied the effects of Sahaja yoga

meditation on chronic illnesses such as epilepsy and asthma. He found that regular practice of this technique reduced the frequency, severity and duration of his patients' epileptic seizures. Moreover, when he taught another group a mimicking exercise, which resembled but was actually not the real technique, the same improvement did not occur. The results were very encouraging for both minor diseases and chronic diseases.

Many problems that used to arise as a result of egotism and *samskaras* stop coming up *through cleaning*. The result of this cleaning is felt in the condition of the mind. Practice, therefore, strengthens to face life's problems commendably as one starts accepting them as blessings rather than running away or fearing from it. Itliong-Maximo(2006), found a positive relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and Stress Management. Frew (1974) studied that employees who learned the Transcendental Meditation program showed improved job performance in comparison to control participants. This provides with the need and effectiveness of meditation in today's competitive world for reducing work related stress. It can be a tool for self-appraisal and self-enhancement as suggested by Kotwal (2007) who found that meditation is an effective measure for self-development and self-management.

The objective of the study was to explore the impact of Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga meditation system on the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the practitioners over a time span of one year. It was hypothesized that the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga Meditation system would enhance the physical health, psychological health and the emotional intelligence of the participants.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were selected by employing purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 20 those cases which were undergoing chronic physical ailments and crisis life situation during the span of last 5 years. The age range of the participants was 35-45 years. The minimum educational level of the participants was graduation and they belonged to upper middle socio-economic status. They were assessed twice- once before starting the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga Meditation system and secondly, after a period of 1 year of practice.

Measures

The following measures were administered individually by contacting the participants personally.

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I. Cornell Medical Index Health Questionnaire (CMIHQ) was developed by Wig, Pershad and Verma (1983) which measures physical health and psychological health. There were 18 sections out of which 12 were for physical distress and 6 were for psychological distress. The physical distress sections had 144 items and psychological health section had 51 items making a total of 195 items.

II. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) was developed by Hyde, Pethe and Dhar (2002) for measuring emotional intelligence. There were 10 factors: self awareness, empathy, self-motivation, emotional stability, managing relation, integrity, self development, value orientation, commitment and altruistic behavior. The total numbers of items are 34.

III. A brief interview was also administered to reveal the inner most emotions, feeling, episodes, traumatic experiences & stressful events in the life of the participants which happened in the duration of last 5 years in the pre-test condition and the changes in their experiences, perception and thought processes while practicing Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation system in the post test condition. There were 10 questions which interrogated their previous experiences of distress and changes in their physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence and their perception and cognition after one year practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation

PROCEDURE

The participants were contacted personally and were made comfortable. Pre and post testing was employed to evaluate the effects of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation system. Firstly, the participants, who were suffering from chronic physical problems, stressful life events or other critical crisis situations since five years were contacted. Their physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence were assessed. They practiced Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga Meditation system for a year after the primary assessment. Their physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence were again assessed after one year of practice. The mean values were drawn and t-test was employed to find significant difference between their physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence before and after the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga system.

RESULTS

Table-1: Showing the mean values and t-score of the participants on physical & psychological distress assessed by CMIHQ.

	Mean Values		t-scores
	Pre Test	Post Test	
Physical Distress	27.4	17.85	6.2**
Psychological Distress	8.55	4.6	7.4*

*significant at 0.05 level

**significant at 0.01 level

insignificant

Table-2: showing the mean values and t-scores on 10 factors of Emotional Intelligence Scale of the participants.

Sr. No.	Factors of emotional intelligence	Pre-Test Mean Values	Post-Test Mean Values	t-test
1.	Self awareness	15.55	18.1	3.98**
2.	Empathy	17.95	21.05	6.1**
3.	Self-motivation	22.55	24.75	1.19*
4.	Emotional stability	15.3	17.35	10.5**
5.	Managing relation	15.75	18.25	3.97**
6.	Integrity	11.5	13.9	8.9**
7.	Self development	7.65	9.35	5.5**
8.	Value orientation	7.55	9.6	6.4**
9.	Commitment	7.75	8.95	7.1**
10.	Altruistic behavoiur	7.05	8.7	4.5**
	Aggregate	128.6	150	6.26**

*significant at 0.05 level

**significant at 0.01 level

insignificant

DISCUSSION

The present study was an attempt to find out the effects of Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga Meditation System on the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of its practitioners over a period of one year. The physical health, psychological health and emotional intel

ligence of the participants were assessed once before they had started the practice of Sahaj marg Raj Yoga Meditation and secondly, after they had practiced the mediation system for one year. The objective was to find whether the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation system would effect the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the participants.

It is evident through the results that the SMRYMS had considerable impact on the physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence of the practitioners. As shown in table-1, the pre test mean value of all the participants for physical distress was 27.4 and post test mean value was 17.85. The t-test score of 6.2 represents that the difference was significant at 0.01 level. Their physical distress reduced after one year practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation, which means that the participants showed improvement in their physical health. It also gets support from the study carried by Lyubimov (1999), who found that during the Transcendental Meditation program, sensory components of the brain responded to somato-sensory stimuli which are distributed across the cortex, showing greater participation of the whole brain.

The pre test mean value for psychological distress was 8.5 and post test mean value was 4.6 which means that the psychological health of the participants was enhanced, representing the effectiveness of the regular practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation, which enabled them to alter their apperception, problem-solving approach and finally their cognitive world. This has also been reported by Aftanas and Golocheikine (2001) that the practice of Sahaj Yoga Meditation not only regulates the brain electrophysiology and mood but also regulates the anatomical and biochemical functions for the physical wellbeing though is delayed because of the vast number of several environmental confounders obscuring it. The t-test score was calculated as 7.4, which is significant at 0.01 level. The data represents that the psychological health of the participants was enhanced with the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation. This result is in line with the findings of Manocha and others (2009), who observed positive relationship between Sahaja Yoga meditation (SYM) practices and psychological health.

As represented by table-2, the post test mean value for all the participants was higher than the pre test mean values on all the factors of emotional intelligence and this difference was found significant, which means that the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga Meditation enhanced their emotional intelligence. This notion is again supported by the aggregate significant t-test score of 6.26 which was significant at 0.01 level. As supported by the study carried over by Itliong-Maximo (2006), who found a positive relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and Stress Management, between religious commitment and spiritual intelligence, between emotion-focused coping and SQ and between problem-focused coping and SQ. This stresses the significant and positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Spiritual Intelligence.

In addition to it, a brief interview revealed that though most of these participants suffering from the challenging situation as untoward stressful life events, the shattering experiences, or chronic physical health problems like arthritis, cardiac problems, severe sinusitis, disability, vasectomy, fatigability, etc when they started the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga Meditation, it had an immediate and positive effect on their psychological health. Otherwise, it was not easy for them to deal with these problems as these were painful, distressing, depressive and stressful.

The physical distress was higher in the pretest assessment (as shown by mean values in table 1) than the post test assessment of the participants. In the interview schedule, almost all of them reported the slow improvement in their physical health after starting the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation. Case no-2 was diagnosed with third stage of uterus cancer. With regular practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation for one year, there were an extraordinary improvement in her health and after one year there was no sign of the carcinogenic cells.

All the participants exhibited higher emotional intelligence after the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation. They reported in the interview that after being a regular practitioner of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation for a year, they felt relaxed, serene, composed, emotionally & mentally stable, pure, liberated, had clarity of thoughts and showed positive cognitive restructured vision. All mental tensions, anxieties, negative traits, attitudes, attachments, aversions, pride and prejudice, anger, etc., got dissolved in the inner world through regular practice as Murthy (1988) found difference in the form of better functioning of neuro-physiological aspects of the participants following Sahaj Marg in comparison to the participants not following Sahaj marg. The higher emotional intelligence mean in the post test for

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all the factors showed that the participants were self-aware, empathetic, self-motivated, emotionally stable, committed, able to manage relationships, had integrity, scope for self-development, value orientation and altruistic behavior.

The state of constant relaxation is achieved when an individual practices Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation regularly. It is supported by the finding that students quickly master the process of transcending during practice of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique after few months, and frontal coherence systematically becomes a part of daily activity after meditation. The state of restful alertness increases and becomes the ground for all experience throughout the day. (Gaylord, Orme-Johnson & Travis ; 1989).

There are some special cases which need to be discussed due to their peculiarities- Cases no- 3, 11 & 12 suffered from sudden economic set back & are still struggling to cope up from it. Their psychological and physical health is good with high level of emotional intelligence. Cases-4, 5, 10, 15 & 18 are females who were harassed in marital life. Their psychological health and physical health got affected but the emotional balance is extraordinarily high. Case-15 lost her husband very early and is taking care of her children by herself. Her physical health is very poor but has good psychological health and high emotional intelligence. Case-8 and 13 were drug-addicts. With the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation, their addictions are now completely removed and are leading normal life without any psychological or medical help. Case-17 is suffering from polio of legs since childhood, still showed good psychological health & higher emotional balance. Case-16 has severe arthritis since a long time which has affected the physical and psychological health but could not affect the emotional intelligence and balance of the person. This participant has high emotionally stability.

With the practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation, these practitioners felt tremendous change in their perception towards their problems and were happier even when living with such odds. There was an enhancement in their coping skills. In many cases, the conditions were so severe that the participants could lose their sense of reality, mental balance or could have been admitted in hospital for physical or psychological health problems. This has been substantiated by the study conducted by Kabat-Zinn (1982), who found that the practitioners showed a pronounced shift in activity to the left frontal lobe due to meditation, i.e. they were calmer and happier than before. Also supported by the latest research by Lyubomirsky, Schkade and Sheldon (2005) in which it was found that people who practice a religion or have spiritual beliefs, are healthier and happier than those who do not. Studies demonstrated that participants who meditated for a short time showed increased

alpha waves (the relaxed brain waves), decreased anxiety and depression. This study also showed that people who regularly engage in meditation and physical exercise are healthier and happier than those who do not.

These practitioners faced or are still facing many odds in their life but they are happier with good mental health and higher emotional stability than before. Their physical health, psychological health and emotional intelligence were enhanced with regular practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation.

The practice of Sahaj Marg Raj Yoga meditation could be helpful for the welfare of the ones suffering from physical distress, psychological distress and emotional problems.

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