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INDIGENOUS PRACTICES IN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY: YOGA AND MEDITATION

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ABSTRACT

The term indigenous means something that originated from a native land or a country, thus Indigenous Health Practices are those that emerged from local communities/societies/culture etc., to promote or cure people's health. There are many indigenous practices which are used globally like Yoga, meditation, raiki, unani medicine, ayurveda and many more. This research paper is focused on the Yoga and Meditation practices that contribute to the field of health psychology. For achieving this aim various articles, research papers and books have been reviewed. Yoga and Meditation are techniques accepted worldwide due to their enormous benefits. Yoga is a technique that combines breath and body movements to bring strength and stability to our mind-body. Most 'asanas' or poses of yoga trigger the release of "feel good" or mood-boosting chemicals such as dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine and also help to balance hormones. There are various forms of Yoga. Meditation helps in achieving a higher level of awareness which helps in achieving the higher form of consciousness. Technique to do meditation is concentrating on specific sound, breath or object. Mantra Meditation, Trataka, Chakra Meditation, Third Eye Meditation, Kundalini Meditation, Breathing and Vipassana, are the most popular meditation practices. Yoga and meditation both are found to be significantly helpful in curtailing mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and overthinking and enable individuals to maintain a balanced life.

Keywords: Indigenous Practice, Yoga, Meditation

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INTRODUCTION

Health Psychology and indigenous health practices always aim for holistic wellbeing. This paper discusses the role of Indigenous practices like Yoga and meditation in health psychology with the help of supported evidence and also the challenges faced by these health practices in todays situation.

Indigenous health practices can be defined as "the local knowledge regarding health that is unique to a society or a culture that is passed generally by words or rituals, from generation to generation. Across the globe, many ancient health practices have been carried out for generations and helped people of different cultures. The expansion of urbanization and increasing modernization of humans are trying their best for their survival according to their pretentious lifestyle. In this lifestyle individuals are not getting the time for their health. Individuals are getting stressors which are impacting them directly or indirectly to their physical and psychological health and to overcome this they are getting diverted to these health practices. After a long time, people again started their journey towards their cultural roots, and have started taking an interest in their native health practices and governments of all countries are trying to resurrect the native health systems. The most popular indigenous health practices that are used for mental health across the World are:

- *Ayurveda* which deals with the cures and curbs mental ailments through natural medicines
- *Yoga* that includes body postures, mind-body relaxations to control hormones that sustain mental health
- *Meditation* is defined as the process where individual through focused attention get rid of dysfunction thoughts
- *Pranic Healing* believes prana or life force energy can heal any mental illness
- *Reiki* is a technique where a trained practitioner uses hand movement to balance energy of the body for mental health
- *Crystal Therapy* is where a therapist places a crystal on a body part of a client and unblocks, balance or directs the energy where needed when a person faces mental issues
- *Acupuncture* believes that stagnation of energy causes mental imbalances and uses needles to insert in the skin of body part where energy is stagnant
- *Aromatherapy* uses organic compound or essential oils to elevate mental state or mood
- *Unani Medicine* helps the body to regain its natural balance between humor, such as blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm to fight with health issues including mental illnesses.

As per the objectives of this paper here only two indigenous practices are discussed, that is Yoga and Meditation.

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YOGA

"Yogas chiita vritti nirodha" (yoga is the neutralization of the tornados of feeling.)"

-Patanjali

Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj", (pronounced as "yug") which means "to join" or "to unite". In this process it involves the combination of the mind, body and soul. Yoga is a 'way of life,' characterized by well-being, harmony and bliss. The holistic approach of yoga comprises physical, emotional, ethical, and mental discipline with the realization of enlightenment. It helps in training the mental process that prevents psychological disorders and enhances overall well-being. Yoga is found to originate in ancient philosophy, physical, mental and spiritual practices.

It is believed that the beginning of Yoga starts with the emergence of civilization, long before the origin of religion. Yoga is an ancient practice that originated around 3000 B.C. In the excavation of the Indus Valley it was found that the vedas also contain some references of Yoga practices. The stone-carved figures depicting yoga poses and practices were found. According to mythology, Shiva is considered the first master of yoga. He passed his knowledge to Sapta rishis or "seven sages". The seven sages then spread the knowledge to different parts of the world. However, after a long time, Maharshi Patanjali systemized and unified the existing yoga practices. Now Yoga has evolved in many modern forms like power yoga, aerial yoga which are gaining popularity worldwide.

Here some of the branches of traditional yoga are discussed below:

- **Hatha yoga:** Hatha Yoga is derived from the syllable 'ha' indicates pranic (vital) force regulating the physical body and 'tha' indicates the chitta (mental) force. It balances both mind and body. It includes Yogasana (body poses), Six Shatkarmas (physical body and mental detox Techniques), Bandhas and Mudras (emotional and physiological energy release techniques), Pranayama (pranic breathing practices).
- **Raja yoga:** Raja Yoga maintains personality and human behaviour through the application of the Yamas (limitations) and Niyamas (self-restraints), physical health through Asanas, increases concentration by pratyahara (sensory withdrawal) and Dharana (focus), fosters creativity and consciousness through Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (dissolving of ego).
- **Karma Yoga:** Karma Yoga is doing the work without getting any incentive or reward. One should have non-attachment with work and any outcome. The beginning stage is difficult when the human ego resists dropping the thought of the fruits of his efforts. However, once he masters this.
- **Jnana yoga:** Jnana Yoga is the process where individuals turn away from all irrational thoughts, go for self-enquiry and self-realization and attain higher wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom are the keys to balancing life.

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- **Bhakti yoga:** Bhakti yoga is for devotion and faith. Individuals can have devotion in any particular person or object. When people suppress their emotions, it creates mental imbalances. Bhakti yoga helps them to release suppressed emotions and purify the subconscious mind. Persistent deliberation of God, a person or an object of devotion decreases the ego of an individual, instills love, and reduces the pain of life.
- **Tantra yoga:** Tantra is a form of non-dualism, and 'one-ness' is an important part of this branch. Tantra focuses on the mind, body and life and follows chakras, yantras, nadis, kundalini and invocation of deities as practices. The practitioner of tantra expands experiences of life and mind beyond ordinary limitations.

Yoga practices affect the anatomy of the brain. Yoga practices are associated with anatomical changes in the frontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, hippocampus and insula. According to research, yoga practice exhibited a positive association with units of brain structures (i. e. GM density, GM volume, and cortical thickness), (Gothe et al., 2019). Yoga activates the vagus nerves which improves the balances in the activity done by PNS and GABA systems (Streeter et al., 2012). Yoga practices are wide-ranging in nature, consist of psychological, spiritual and biological mechanisms and have no negative impact on people's life. Davidson et al. (2003) stated that yoga prompts brain changes through stimulation in the left rather than the right prefrontal cortex. Desai et al., 2015 stated that yoga has significant effects on brainwave functioning by actively stimulating the alpha, beta and theta brainwaves that have been related to enhancing cognitive processes, mood, and anxiety. Furthermore, yogic practices decrease amygdala stimulation and reduce adverse emotion in reaction to emotional catastrophe visions.

MEDITATION

Meditation is the process where an individual concentrates on any object or any thought or follows a certain way to achieve focused attention which promotes his well-being and strengthens the relationship between mind and body. In India meditation originated from Vedas and Upnishads. Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad (14 century BCE) documented around seventy generations of meditation masters and disciples of that time. During the ancient era meditation was a technique or tool to transcend or break free from human consciousness limitation and connect to universal forces. However, it was also taught to common people apart from Yogis to live a conscious life. The Sanatan practice of meditation comprises both the meditating masters meditating in caves and Sages (rishis) of the Ashramas. Thus, meditation is mainly rooted in India and it has various techniques and lineages. The most famous techniques are Mantra Meditation, Trataka, Chakra meditation, Third Eye meditation, Kundalini Meditation and Breathing.

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In India, there was a time when for a long period people forgot the essence of meditation and were running behind only idol worshipping or doing Karmkand. Then in the 6th century Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) resurrected the path of enlightenment and left his royal status and family. He learned from the best gurus but could not be satisfied and then discovered his own techniques of meditation. Buddha spent most of his life teaching people meditation and because of his disciple's endeavours Buddhism spread all over the Asian continent and many cults emerged.

Some famous techniques of meditation-

- **Guided Meditation-** Guided meditation is where a person gets instruction from a trained guide to start meditation. It is a good way for a beginner and a person who faces difficulty in doing meditation to want to focus attention.
- **Mantra Meditation-** Mantra Meditation is based on the power of sound vibration and syllables. Every culture or religion uses any sort of chanting that is known as divine to them. In meditation, individuals chant this mantra and endeavour to attain a focus and higher consciousness.
- **Chakra Meditation-** Chakra meditation is based on the Indian tantric system, which believes that our body contains seven chakras that balance the human body- mind and personality. Sahasrara chakra (Crown chakra), Anja (Third eye chakra), Visuddha Chakra (Throat Chakra), Anahata Chakra (Heart Chakra), Manipura Chakra (Solar plexus chakra), Svadhisthana Chakra (Sacral chakra), Muladhara Chakra (Root chakra), during meditation, starts with the root chakra and end with the crown chakra.
- **Vipassana Meditation-** Vipassana means "insight" or "clear seeing". It teaches us to see the mind-body and the whole world around us clearly. It believes that things are unsatisfying (dukkha), unstable (anicca), and not under control (anatta).
- **Mindfulness Meditation-** This Technique is used to concentrate on the present moment and pay attention to the images and thoughts, sensations and emotions without any judgment.

Meditation changes brain structure. Meditation increases grey matter density in the hippocampus that aids in learning and memory, other frontal regions of the brain and anterior insula and cortical thickness that benefits cognitive function, self-awareness and attention (Boynton, 2020). The Temporal parietal junction (TPJ) becomes more active and is responsible for empathy, the amygdala shrinks which reduces feelings of fear, anxiety and stress. Meditation strengthens pons which are involved in many functions such as sleep, facial expressions, and physical functioning (Mendel et al., 2022).

YOGA AND MEDITATION IN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Both Yoga and meditation helps in physical and mental wellbeing. These practices help in stress reduction, emotional regulation, behavioral modification and emotional resilience. these practices can be used as complementary therapies for various chronic illnesses, anxiety, depression and stress

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management.

Yoga enhances the quality of life. Advanced yoga practitioners exhibit a greater level of mindfulness and spiritual well-being and lesser clinical indications like depression compared to those who are temporally involved in yoga (Gaiswinkler & Unterrainer, 2016). Bansal et al. (2013) assessed the impact of yoga intervention programs on the psychological well-being of students facing stress, anxiety and depression and found improvement in their well-being. Mental well-being and health-related quality of life are associated with healthy ageing. Tulloch et al. (2018) found that yoga interventions improve health-related quality of life and mental well-being in individuals aged 60+ years.

Yoga promotes balanced cognitive functioning. A study on 100 students in the 17-23 age group, given yoga training for 12 weeks revealed that practising yoga significantly improves concentration, attention and memory and these variations may be seen through higher concentration and reduction of distractive thoughts and personality development (PP et al., 2018). Uthaman & Uthaman (2017) found that Yoga practices enhance cognitive performance related to cognitive skills such as short-term memory, working memory, visual information processing, attention, and advanced cognitive process flexibility and speed.

Yoga practices have moderate effects on mental disorders. According to Jindani et al. (2015), Kundalini yoga can be an alternative intervention for PTSD. They gave 8 sessions on kundalini yoga to 80 individuals suffering from PTSD and participants exhibited significant alterations in measures of sleep, resilience, positive affect, anxiety and perceived stress. Yoga practices are beneficial for cognitive function among Schizophrenia patients (Bhatia et al., 2014). Yoga can be used as an intervention in schools to fight the academic and behavioural challenges of children with ADHD (Shanjuvigasini et al., 2022).

Meditation uplifts psychological well-being. Krygier et al. (2013) studied the impact of a ten-day meditation program on mental well-being and found that participants significantly progressed in all psychometric domains of well-being, as well as positive affect and life satisfaction. Chetelat et al. (2018) found that meditation training in old age reduces stress, regulates emotions and attention and benefits brain health and well-being. Galante et al., (2014) stated that Kindness-based meditation is beneficial for an individual's well-being and social interaction, in their study Kindness-based meditation was moderately effective in improving mindfulness, kindness and self-compassion and decreasing depression,

Meditation improves cognitive functions. A study on 45 healthy college students who were given a 30-day intervention on Shavasana and Meditation in supine posture. Participants showed major enhancement in spatial, verbal and associate memory scores on the Wechsler Memory Scale (Bhogal et al., 2016). Focused attention meditation and open monitoring meditation have a long-term impact on brain behaviour and attention span (Lutz et al., 2008). Mindfulness meditation affects cognitive

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processes and decreases ruminative thinking and dysfunctional beliefs (Ramel et al., 2004).

Meditation reduces mental issues. Elder et al., (2014) studied the transcendental meditation's effect on employee depression, stress and burnout with a 4-month intervention and found a significant reduction in perceived depression, stress and burnout. A study by Haider et al. (2021) revealed that for veterans who were resistant to trauma-focused therapies, meditation-based therapy can be a promising approach for managing PTSD. Hanstede et al., (2008) suggested that mindfulness intervention can be an alternative therapy for OCD, they tested the effects of mindfulness on participants with OCD symptoms and it reduced symptoms.

It is studied that Yoga led to significant reductions in post traumatic stress disorder symptoms in trauma survivors (Van der Kolk et al., 2014). It also helps in improving mood and quality of life in individuals with depression (Uebelacker et al., 2010). In a randomized controlled trial it was found that mindfulness meditation reduced perceived stress in health care professionals (Sahni et al., 2022).

Mediation helps in reducing anxiety symptoms (Balasubramaniam et al., 2012). It was shown with the help of meta analysis that yoga lower cortisol levels, which is indicated by the reduced stress (Pascoe et al., 2017). Cramer et al. (2013) shows that in treating depression yoga plays an effective technique.

A BRIEF COMPARISON OF YOGA AND MEDITATION

Aspects	Yoga	Meditation
Definition	It is a physical mental and spiritual practices which involves full body in various postures, breath control and also the mindfulness.	It is a mental process which aims at awareness, attention and consciousness.
Aim	Its purpose is to increase physical flexibility and strength, and more important spiritual growth.	It helps in achieving peace, emotional balance and also increases the awareness of our inner and outer surroundings.
Technique	Physical movements, postures and stretches which are called Asanas.	It involves sitting still and calmly and includes mental practice.
Benefits	It improves the body strength and flexibility, physical and mental health and overall wellbeing of an individual. It reduces the cortisol level. It enhances	It enhances cognitive function, emotional regulation and stress reduction and promotes emotional resilience. It helps in inner peace, achieving self awareness and enlightenment.

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	mood, reducing anxiety and depression. It helps in self realization, and connects individuals deeper with higher consciousness.	
Types	Hatha, Vinyasa, Ashtanga, Kundalini	Mindfulness, Zen, Vipassana and many more

The comparison between Yoga and Meditation shows that both help in fostering mental and emotional well-being. Yoga involves physical movement and meditation involves consciousness and in result both help in holistic body mind practices.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES FACED BY THE YOGA AND MEDITATION

In today's modern life the integration of Yoga and meditation are facing several challenges, in spite of the fact that both these practices are very much beneficial for the mental, physical, spiritual well being.

- Tech Society and fast paced lifestyles are making it difficult for people to maintain the healthy practices in their lifestyles.
- Distractions are so common in every aspect for the youth especially social media distractions that people are not enjoying the health practices and they are engaged full time in these distractions.
- Proper time management habits are lacking among the youth population so they are unable to make proper use of their time to engage in these healthy practices.
- There are some misconceptions or cognitive barriers about these practices. Individuals assume that yoga and meditation are more sort of religious practices, which leads to resistance.
- The western adaptations in society force sometimes to cut the connection with the philosophical roots and traditions which results in less authenticity.
- Some individuals lack patience so they find it difficult to understand the benefits and think that these practices do not give the faster results which other fitness regimes can give.
- There are also several benefits of Yoga and mindfulness when integrated with the other healthcare services, but as their effectiveness is less in large scale studies, it's getting difficult in mixing with the mainstream and also because of the lack of guidelines.
- These practices are nowadays so much commercialized, there are so costly customized sets, high costs of sessions, certified instructors and many more required settings so individuals prefer other sorts of physical settings like gym, aerobics etc.

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CONCLUSION

Many studies have proven that yoga and meditation are essential for good well-being and uplift the quality of life. All government bodies of health in different countries recognise yoga and meditation for holistic betterment of health because not only for mental health but for physical health, on our personality and relationship. These two Indian native techniques have a significant impact. 21 June is celebrated as the Yoga day to promote yoga worldwide. Yoga and meditation, while curing mental illness, also encourage cognitive processes such as memory, attention, visual processing, higher thinking process and other complex processes. These cognitive processes are helpful for all kinds of age groups, children can learn and perform better in the academic field, adults can cope better in the workplace, and older people can lessen the impact of aging.

Different researchers tried to explain the changes in the brain and body after yoga and meditation through different research but only covered a few aspects of it. Still, there is more to cover about the proper mechanism of yoga and meditation. Furthermore, the effects of different techniques and types should be researched.

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