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Indian Philosophy, Spirituality and Well-being: An Analysis

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to show how spirituality, the essence of Indian Philosophy, can act as a potential tool in bringing well-being in a man. Spiritualism, which is opposed to materialism, holds that man consists of body, mind and spirit and many medical practitioners also believe this. World Health Organization too incorporates spirituality as an aspect of sound health. Spirit is the source of energy, wisdom and divinity which deals with the meaning and direction of life. If man cannot realize the meaning and purpose of his/her life, he/she gets depressed. Moreover, the excessive desire for material pleasures of today's man begets stress, the root cause of many diseases both mental and physical that impede his/her well-being. Thus, to have well-being, all these three aspects of a man, viz. physical, mental and spiritual should be developed and cared for equally. Research studies show there is positive connection between spirituality and health as a whole which is essential for well-being. Spirituality can endow a man with holistic values such as non-violence, truth, non-possessiveness, contentment, detachment etc. as well as make people endowed with the power of discrimination between real and non-real needed for the

practice of detachment. All these values are key factors behind real happiness and peace required for sound physical, mental and spiritual health which is the essential and sufficient condition for well-being.

Keywords: Indian Philosophy, Spirituality, Physical Health, Mental Health, Well-being.

1. Introduction

Science and technology are two great achievement of this era and both have dramatically changed our life. We are being advanced in various spheres of our life by acquiring lot of knowledge, and we know knowledge brings power. But, in reality we see people instigated by the lure of power, are misusing their knowledge. Such knowledge-power nexus is responsible for various misdeeds in our society. Furthermore, people throughout the globe, cannot be advanced or powerful equally. We see some nations are advanced by means of science and technological developments and their dominance over the rest is quite devastating resulting violence in its various forms. Every day we hear news from various media about violence, mistrust etc. which are posing a grave threat to the peace and even human existence.

We everybody experiences at least three things-old age, disease and death along with other miseries and pains such as selfishness, greed, hatred, conflicts etc. So, our life is full of miseries and pains. In recent times we see a large chunk of modern mind is full of materialistic and selfish thoughts. They are getting frustrated more and more due to their insatiable desires for material pleasures. Such tendency of possessiveness increases longing to possess land, crop, wealth even negative ideas that makes a man greedy and consumerist and the person always tries to find happiness from outside and consequently face helplessness and disappointment. Not only that, such unlimited desire gives birth to stress, the root cause of many dreaded diseases both physical and mental. In this way, modern men not only suffering

from various physical diseases, but due to excessive and endless desire, they are not getting mental peace also and thereby their well-being is being affected badly. But if we want to realize the truth, we must withdraw senses from the outside world and direct them inwards. It is spirituality that can help us to control our senses needed for self-realization because the core of spiritualism is to 'know the self'. Our problem cannot be solved without spiritual realization. Thus, for self realization practice some kind of spirituality, which is heart of Indian Philosophy, is essential. This article is an attempt to show the importance as well as necessity of spirituality contained in Indian Philosophy in order to have well-being of a human being.

We know materialists generally believe that man consists of body and mind. On the contrary, spiritualists think man is not like any other living beings, man is also a spirit. Man is not only a combination of body and mind, but a tripartite of body, mind and spirit. So, spirit is an integral part of man's very constitution. Many in the medical profession are now starting to discover that health is far more than a physical and mental matter; it involves body, mind and more that indicates spirit¹. In the definition of health given by World Health Organization, we find there the aspect of spirituality is. According to this organization, a healthy individual is that who is fully well physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. So, spirituality is an important factor of health without which sound health both physical and mental and thereby the well-being as a whole of a man cannot be achieved.

2. Definition of Spirituality

When we talk about spirituality and well-being, first of all we should know the meaning of these two terms. But the word 'spirituality' is an abstract and multidimensional and thus very difficult to define it. In fact, there is no definition of this word, accepted by all. Nevertheless,

we may have some ideas about spirituality from its characteristic features. Very often, though people associate this word with religion and thereby use both these words interchangeably, but both are not synonymous. Spirituality is greater and comprehensive than religion. It is stated that religion needs spirituality but not the vice-versa. Spirituality involves acts of compassion, selflessness, peace, altruism, tranquility, quest for meaning and purpose in life, transcendence, connectedness with the divine and other holistic values, infinite bliss and delight. Swami Vivekananda once said: “Sense happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (jñāna) is the goal of life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So, the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will achieve bliss. All these things of this world are but the shadows, the manifestation in the third or fourth degree of the real knowledge and bliss”ⁱⁱ.

3. Definition of Well-being

We generally understand by the word well-being, as a state of good physical, mental and spiritual development of a human being. Psychology defines well-being as “a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of stress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life”ⁱⁱⁱ. Thus, well-being includes sound physical and mental health as well as meaning or purpose of life that only spirituality can provide. Body, mind and spirit these three integral parts of a man are so intertwined that if one is affected, the other two parts must also be affected. It is important therefore, a patient should be treated as a ‘whole person’, considering his physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of life, because we know ‘wholeness’ is a state of completeness of an individual which includes body, mind and spirit in a harmonious way and is inevitable for well-being.

4. Indian Philosophy and Spirituality

In Indian Philosophy, ignorance is considered as the root cause of all kinds of sufferings. It is true knowledge or rather realization that can destroy ignorance and brings liberation and in this case spirituality can guide us in order to have such true realization. Almost all Indian Philosophical systems put enormous emphasis on spiritualism. In *Jainism*, *Buddhism* and *Yoga* traditions, we see the concept of five values, viz., *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) and *brahmacharya* (continence) helps to practice spiritualism. The concept of *ahimsā* projected in Indian Philosophy, includes both abstention from all kinds of violence in three modes viz., words, thoughts and deeds as well as spreading virtues like love, compassion, unselfishness etc., *Satya* denotes abstention from falsehood, exaggeration, pretense, equivocation etc. that can distort the actual reality. *Asteya* refers to refrain from stealing and misappropriation. *Brahmacharya* teaches to restrain from sensual pleasures and *aparigraha* restrains oneself from unlimited possessiveness.

All these values are key factors behind real happiness and well-being. *Ahimsā*, *satya* and *asteya* can prevent negativities, mistrust and misappropriation respectively that have positive impacts on physical, mental and thereby well-being of an individual. *Aparigraha* teaches how to control greed, anger, delusion, pride and other negative qualities and thereby can bring psychological flexibility, even mindedness, calmness, tranquillity and peace. It helps one to overcome stress, tension, anxiety, worry, fear, jealousy etc which are the root causes of all dreaded diseases and thus helps to control these ailments.

Again, for cessation of sufferings and thereby attain peace, we should know what is real and what is unreal and spirituality endows us with the power of discrimination between real and unreal. If we are able to discriminate between real and unreal, we accept real and discard

unreal. In this way we detach ourselves from the unreal which is the cause of sufferings and thereby achieve mental peace. We see *Sāṃkhy* and *Vedānta*, two famous Indian Philosophical schools, stress on discrimination immensely between real and unreal in order to practice detachment. All these qualities can be achieved by spiritual practice only.

In *Yoga* Philosophy, there are other spiritual concepts like *niyama* (observance), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (breath regulation) and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dhāranā* (contemplation), *dhyāna* (fixed attention) and *samādhi* (concentration) and all of them play vital role in maintaining well-being. *Niyama* consists of five virtues among which *śauca* (purity), *santoṣa* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity) and *īśvarapraṇidhāna* (surrender to God) have crucial role on well-being. *Śauca* means purification of mind. It eliminates impurities of mind and thereby is able to keep mind free from all types of ill and improper thought, emotion and other disorders and thus is conducive to sound health both physical and mental. *Santoṣa*, *Tapas* and *īśvarapraṇidhāna* or offer real happiness by removing the root cause of our persistent unhappiness which is incessant desires. Thus, they help us to keep mind in the state of equilibrium and calm that can control or prevent many mental diseases. *Āsana*, can improve the flexibility, strength and capacity of physical body while *prāṇāyāma* and *pratyāhāra* enhances mental strength as well as retain tranquillity by suppressing detrimental emotional states such as anger, fear, aggression etc. *Dhāranā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* concentrate on mind, helping to maintain a calm and peaceful state and thereby serving as effective methods for alleviating stress, anxiety, depression and various mental health issues, ultimately enhancing immune system.

5. Spirituality as a Medical Tool

Now-a-days, spirituality is being used throughout the world as a medical tool in the treatment of critically ill patients. It provides mental and inspirational support to the patients and

therefore, is being recognized as an important component in the treatment and care of seriously and terminally ill patients. Researchers have found that there is positive association between spirituality and health, epidemiological studies have also proved the same^{iv}. A study by the researchers at Brandeis University and the University at Buffalo yielded such positive results that encouraged a researcher who thinks physicians should relate spirituality to families confronting life-threatening illness such a cancer. A psychologist of the Bowling Green State University confirmed that, “researching is showing that spiritual dimensions brought into therapy can add something distinctive to health and well-being^v. In the seventeenth century, Georg Ernst Stahl, professor of medicine at Halle University, considered that “the spiritual part of a man was as important as the physical in causing, treating and curing disease^{vi}. It has been found that spiritual Augmented Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (SACBT) is much more beneficial in reducing depressive symptoms and minimizing the risk of relapse than those of non-spiritual conventional therapies. Psychiatrists now have started to believe that spirituality is an important factor in their patients’ life with effective results and hence it is being incorporated into their intervention. For example, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London, has a special group on psychiatry and spirituality. The American College for Graduate Medical Education incorporated the spiritual factor along with other factors in the Special Requirements for Residency Training in Psychiatry for its significant effects on both physical and mental development throughout life i.e., infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Recently, *yoga* which is an ancient Indian practice and teaches mostly spirituality through the practice of its eight limbs mentioned above, is an important aspect of life and the present-day recognition of the importance of *yoga* which brings not only on mental peace, but plays important role on health care also. In fact, it is recognized globally as a therapeutic tool and its ability to heal both physical and mental illness is accepted widely. The National Institutes

of Health accepted *yoga* as a type of Complementary and Alternative Medicine^{vii}. Research shows that regular practice of *yoga* can alleviate stress, anxiety, depression and chronic pain while also enhancing quality of life and overall well-being^{viii}. We know as stress causes many feared diseases like cancer, heart disease, stroke^{ix} etc. and as the practice of *yoga* is able to reduce, prevent and manage stress and stress related diseases^x, so it can be useful to reduce, prevent these difficult health diseases also. Researchers showed practice of *yoga* decreases post chemotherapy induced nausea related problems^{xi} and adverse treatment effects and enhances energy level and quality of life of cancer patients^{xii}. Researchers also claimed there is connection between regular practice of *yoga* and its positive impacts on strength, flexibility, compassion, mental calmness and well-being^{xiii}. Timothy McCall, an MD who defines *yoga* as “a systematic technology to improve the body, understand the mind, and free the spirit”^{xiv} and claims that a growing number of scientific evidence showing that *yoga* embodies tremendous therapeutic value^{xv}. He thinks practice of *yoga* increases blood flow, red blood cells and haemoglobin level that supply more oxygen in the body cell and thereby improve their functions^{xvi}. Scientists have found that the low gaba levels (amino acid) which are associated with depression and other widespread anxiety disorders are much higher in those who practice *Yoga*. Scientists of the Boston University claimed that those who practiced *Yoga* reported lower levels of anxiety and increases in their mood^{xvii}. *Yoga* is helpful to decrease pain in people suffering from arthritis, Carpel Tunnel syndrome, back pain and other chronic illness^{xviii}. *Yoga* improves sleep quality by reducing insomnia^{xix}. Again, constant practice of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *dhāranā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* can boost mental and physical stability. Thus, *yoga* plays vital role in maintaining good physical and mental health and thereby wellbeing of a human being.

6. Conclusion

Thus, we find spiritualism can endow man with some values without which no healthy, meaningful and peaceful life is possible. Hence, spiritual life is the highest form of human life. We know all round development is the main goal of imparting education which is not possible without spiritual education. Many thinkers are in favour of incorporating spirituality in the syllabi of higher educational institutions because this gives meaning, direction and purpose in life. Spiritual dimension is the one dimension of the multidimensional world and life which helps to understand and interpret the world and life. So, student should be educated in this vital dimension irrespective of discipline of science, arts and commerce etc. One research finding revealed that out of 112232 students of 236 colleges and Universities, 80 percent of the students reported that they have interest in spirituality^{xx}.

To conclude, it may be said that science and technology can improve the outer side of our life, but to get peace, tranquility, meaning of life and above all well-being, this spiritual realization is very much needed. Not only that, it is spirituality that helps one to get a better understanding of the basic question of life and existence which is very important today when there is so much unrest in the world. Modern era has brought revolution in man's life, which must be reduced into a pseudo revolution unless and until the divine spirit is manifested. Outer and inner- both sides of a man should be developed equally for a balanced, strong and peaceful life. Hence, like material development, we need spiritual development equally which can bring well-being in a man and herein lies the importance of Indian Philosophy as its core business is to spread and foster spirituality.

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