

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL ISOLATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

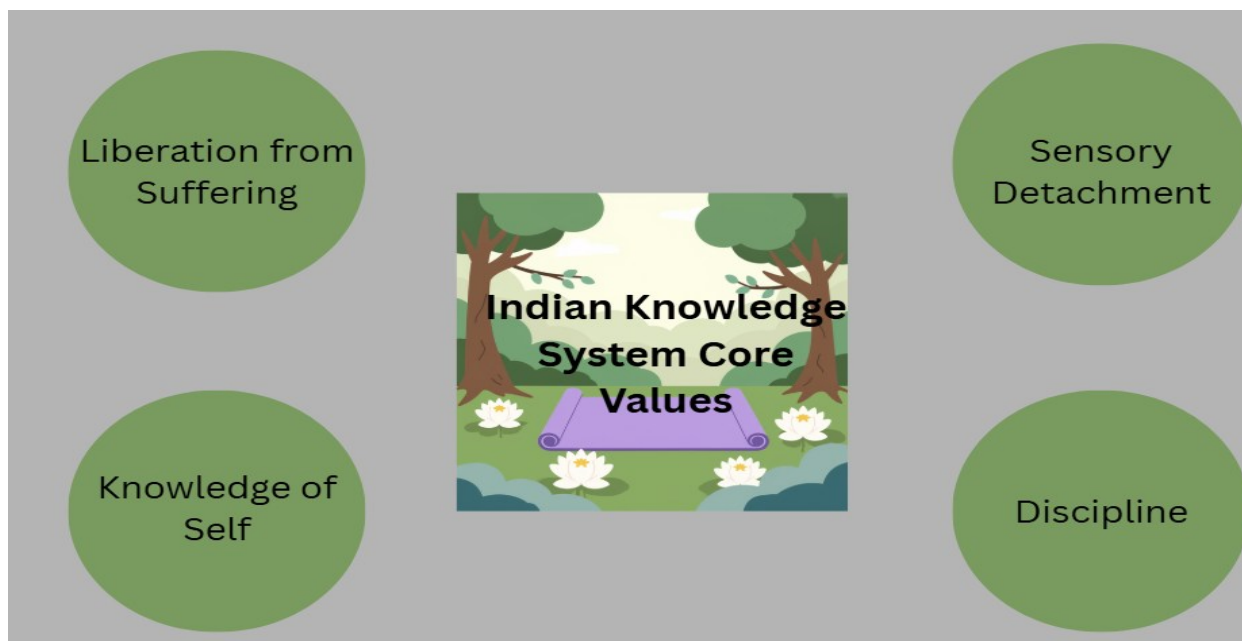
According to Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta “Knowledge is great purifier of and liberator of Self”. When it comes to the Indian Knowledge system there are three terms connected in discussion of Indian Based Knowledge - Darshana, Jyana and Vidya. Darshana, the philosophy, is the system, the point of view that leads to Jyana, knowledge. And when knowledge is gathered, that leads to Vidya, discipline [2]. The main objective of this article is to throw light on the forgotten mental health aspects of ancient Indian Knowledge System and dire need for incorporation of the Ancient Wisdom to the young generation in dealing with the Social Isolation and after effects of ISOLATION. Paper focuses on the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda and Yoga for the better life. Also focuses as how this knowledge system is still relevant.

Keywords: Ashtanga Yoga, Indian Knowledge System, Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta, Social Isolation, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Indian Knowledge System

Indian Knowledge system, also known as Bhartiya Jyana Parampara. According to B. Mahadeven, Indian Knowledge System, (henceforth will be referred as IKS) is generic phrase that covers everything about India. Literature, cultural & social practices, historical evidences, and other such knowledge falls under IKS, in all Indian languages, dialects is a huge asset to India. IKS has three words in it, Indian, Knowledge and System. By the term “Indian”, we mean the indigenous sources of knowledge generated by Indian Society. Second word Knowledge, it primarily arises in the form of the wisdom of the knowledge seekers. Knowledge is obtained by the insights gained by personal experiences, with life situations and coming up with the solutions. And finally, System, by system in IKS, we mean a structured methodology which assesses the corpus of available knowledge. So, the available knowledge should be collected, grouped and should be arranged logically, in any system.[3]



There are many ways to define the IKS, we can define by taking the knowledge based on Vedas, Upavedas, **Yoga**, Vastu, Shilpa Shastra, Ayurveda, Buddhism, or other approach is to select psychology, Indian art, dance, Architecture etc. to define IKS, as these all comes under the IKS.

Knowledge by large is a matter of Mind and constituted in mind.

In Indian framework, knowledge (Jyana) is the mean to attain Freedom of individual, Liberation from Dukkha, sufferings. Knowledge in our tradition is not merely information but self-inquiry, being a good human being, to promote happiness to self and to the surrounding.

Ayurveda is an ancient science of life, is a crucial part of IKS. The importance and relevance of Ayurveda cannot be denied in today's time. The term Ayurveda is composed of two words – Ayu and veda. Ayu denotes the subject matter and Veda, the knowledge of the subject. The emphasis of effects of mind on the body in Ayurveda is so great that one finds a very important role for the mind in causation of all the diseases.

Prasanna Atma Indriya manah swastha ityabhidhiyate

Happiness of soul, senses and the mind would ensure good health for all times.

According to Charaka Samhita, "Health is the best source of virtue, wealth, gratification and emancipation while diseases are destroyers of this (source), welfare and life itself". (Cha.Su.1/15)

And Ayurveda defines Disease as nothing but the vitiation of the dosas and their equilibrium state can be termed as health.[1] Due to the irregular diet, dietetics, and activities, dosas gets vitiated at first and then signs and symptoms of the disease condition will be seen, and it is called as Nijarogas in ayurveda. Ayurveda also says, "Both the body and the mind are the receptacles of the diseases".

तेषां कायमनोभेदादधिष्ठानमपि द्विधा।

Ayurveda, Yoga are integral part of IKS, the enquiry of self and emancipation for dukkha is the aim of both knowledge system. Ayurveda is an ancient science which is not limited to physical body, but gives equal importance to the mind and to senses. *Acharya Vagbhata* told his commentary that an individual should control his senses and negative thoughts in mind like greed, irritability, anger, competition, and attachment.

धारयेत्तु सदा वेगान हितैषी प्रेत्य चेह चा।

लोभेष्याद्वेषमात्सर्यं रागादीना जितेन्द्रिया। अ.ह.सु.४/२४

Patanjali's yoga sutras, another very important philosophy of Indian Knowledge System, start with the sutras "Yogaanushasanam" and "Yogaschachittavrittinirodha" emphasized about discipline and then in very second sutra the emphasis is given on restraining the modifications arising in mind. "The practices outlined in the eightfold path (Aṣṭāṅga Yoga)—including yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, dhāraṇā, and dhyāna—contribute to personality refinement, stress reduction, and improved mental well-being. Patanjali's yogic framework fosters holistic personality development by integrating ethical discipline, physical regulation, and mental concentration, thereby enhancing psychological balance and inner harmony". (Kumari, N., Maurya, S., & Negi, K. 2023). While general yoga practices often focus on physical health and flexibility, Ashtanga Yoga provides a holistic methodology for attaining self-realization and psychological resilience (Iyengar, 2001).

Yoga offers many techniques to deal with the mental health problems of youth. The very first step of Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali suggests "Dealing with the wavy Mind".

According to Ashtanga Hridayam, an important text on Ayurveda, describes qualities of manas (mind) as Sattva, rajas and tamas and called these gunas as "Mahagunas". Out of the trigunas, sattva guna being good, is conducive to health, but rajas and tamas are considered as the two dosas of the mind causes the psychological disorders. Rajas – Quality of mind that drives you to take actions, shows attachments to the worldly things while Tamas – That leads to lethargy. [1]
रजस्तश्च मनसो द्वि च दोषावुदाहृतौ॥२१॥

1.2 Social Isolation

According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. It is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community

Biordi and Nicholson (2013) defines social isolation as: "The distancing of an individual, psychologically or physically, or both, from his or her network of desired or needed relationships with other persons." Nicholson defines social isolation as: "a state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships".

The Individual who is Socially Isolated is dull, lethargic and less enthusiastic for the life. Such tendencies are called "Tamasic" or "Rajasic" in nature by Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta, which is the lowest state of mind. The person who is Tamasic is considered in "Pramada" meaning negligent and is attached to the worldly pleasures. Bhagwad Geeta defines the Rajasic person as an individual who is greedy.

Socially Isolated individual has no control over his senses and often dwell into negativity, Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta explains such wandering senses, which carries away the discriminating power of person, just as a strong wind sweeps away a boat on the water.

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।

तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नाविमिवाम्भसि ॥ 2 :67 ॥

1.3 Mental Challenges of Youth.

The youth of India is defined as the generation between 18-29 years. With the technological upgradation, the world is coming closure. Youth view the problems of world as his problems but are physically absent. The more the social media is taking over, the more depressed and anxious the youth are becoming. Most of the time they are in the virtual world and they react immediately without a second thought on the social platform. In such cases the face-to-face reactions are reduced to a considerable extent and hence they shy away for in face-to-face interaction. Humans are social beings and the social interaction is one of the important factors, when it comes to healthy mind and body. Therefore, the first major problem with the youth is, they are virtually more active but physically absent with almost zero closed interactions. This leads to Emotional Changes: like Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and excessive worry or fear.

Secondly, the stress induced by jobs/college project works, more working hours, are main reasons that youth are becoming more socially isolated and whenever they find time, they just involve themselves in social networking sites or social media. Due to this Behavioral Changes are observed as withdrawal from social activities or relationships and significant changes in sleeping or eating habits.

Third major problem of youth is Substance use, Alcohol, smoking. Youth are collectively drinking, gatherings at pubs, thinking that they are connecting but the real emotional connections is lacking and ultimately feeling of loneliness enters in the mind.

Fourth problem again is related to the use of gadgets and AI tools, the youth are avoiding the interactions with the people around and relying more on the chatbots for the personal problems, even for the physical ailment, they think AI chatbots are more reliable and keeps the secret intact, resulting depressive state of mind.

And due to substance use and over indulgence in virtual activities, Cognitive Changes such as difficulty in concentrating or making decisions and frequent thoughts of self-harm or harming others are observed. Attention deficit is also one of the major problems of the children in India.

With the continual use of the gadgets at a very early age, the mental development is affected badly. India has seen the extensive rise in the mental cases in last few years and it is predicted to go up if the immediate steps are not taken by the authorities and at the school/college levels.

Recently, in USA one 16 years old asked way to commit suicide to chatbot, without the knowledge of his parents. Also, recent incident in India took place wherein three young girls committed suicide due the pressure created by the online Korean Gaming.

1.4 Mental Challenges of Socially Isolated Person

- Poorer cognitive function (shankar et al., 2013),
- Cognitive decline (lara et al., 2019)
- Increases dementia (biddle et al., 2019; penninkilampi et al., 2018)
- Memory decline over time (read et al., 2020).
- Connected with suicidal tendencies
- More prone to Substance use

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the article is to throw light on the forgotten mental health aspects of ancient Indian Knowledge System and dire need for incorporation of the Ancient Wisdom to the young generation in dealing with the Social Isolation and after effects of ISOLATION.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression have shown a significant rise among children and adolescents over the past decade, with prevalence rates increasing even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic further intensified risk factors including social isolation, excessive screen time, academic stress, and family instability, thereby exacerbating psychological distress among young people (Bazzano et al., 2022).

National data shows most of youth experience anxiety and depressive symptoms, and not treated timely. Bazzano et al., 2022, explores that Early intervention and preventive strategies should be emphasized in youth mental health research. School-based programs are considered very effective as they improve accessibility, and provide students with coping mechanisms before a fully developed clinical disorder. Yoga and mindfulness programs (YMP) look promising for the mind-body interventions. These approaches integrate breathing techniques, physical postures, relaxation, and awareness practices aimed at enhancing emotional regulation and stress management.

Systematic reviews cited by Bazzano et al. (2022) report that yoga interventions demonstrate moderate effectiveness in reducing symptoms of anxiety and, to a lesser extent, depression among children and adolescents. Also, yoga-based programs are associated with improvements in resilience, coping capacity, and overall emotional well-being. By strengthening adaptive coping skills, yoga and mindfulness may lessen the negative psychological consequences of stressors commonly experienced during adolescence, including loneliness and social disconnection.[10]

One of the random controlled trials recently conducted in New Delhi, India suggests that incorporation of Patanjali Yoga sutra in daily routine of the young individuals may be an effective method for enhancement of personality development. The experiment carried on and showed that “the yoga group showed **significant improvement in personality dimensions** such as emotional stability, self-confidence, and social adjustment compared to the control group.” The study suggests that Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra practices can foster holistic personality growth from Tamasic to sattvic, and has benefits beyond physical health. (Kumari, N., Maurya, S., & Negi, K. 2023)

Many studies show and explore that social interactions are also very important when it comes to the mental health. The article “Ashtanga Yoga and Positive Mental Health” explores how Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali contributes to positive mental health by fostering emotional balance, stress reduction, and holistic well-being. Yama (ethical discipline) and Niyama (personal discipline) encourage moral grounding and self-regulation. Asana (postures) and Pranayama (breath control) improve physical health and regulate the nervous system. Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (concentration), and Dhyana (meditation) cultivate mindfulness and emotional resilience.

Samadhi (absorption) represents the ultimate state of mental clarity and peace. Regular practice of Ashtanga Yoga reduces stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. It enhances emotional stability, self-awareness, and coping mechanisms. Evidence suggests improvements in quality of life, social functioning, and spiritual well-being. Ashtanga Yoga is presented as a comprehensive mental health intervention, integrating physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. It is particularly effective in modern contexts where stress and lifestyle disorders are prevalent.

Social relationships play a crucial role in mental health, and yoga practice contributes to stronger interpersonal connections in multiple ways. Emotional regulation is essential for healthy relationships, and yoga practice enhances the ability to manage emotions effectively. Through breath control and mindfulness, individuals learn to respond to social conflicts with greater patience and empathy rather than reacting impulsively (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020). Research has shown that yoga practitioners report lower levels of hostility, aggression, and emotional volatility, leading to improved relationships with family, friends, and colleagues (Gaiswinkler & Unterrainer, 2016).

In the study “Influence of yogic breathing in increasing social connectedness among Indian adults” conducted in 2024. Total 473 individuals participated in the study, the main aim was to examine the benefits of Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) to enhance the social connectedness of the individuals. This study was conducted after the onset of COVID-19 when loneliness was quickly becoming the main problem among the adults of India. A 40 days programme showed the positive results and concluded that Yogic breathing can be a powerful tool to enhance social bonds and connectivity, particularly where isolation is prevalent. “The study suggested a positive connection between the SKY practice and subsequent improvement in social connectedness. The reduction in stress levels post SKY program as indicated in the study may be a reason of enhanced social connectedness.” (Kanchibhotla, D., Harsora, P., & Subramanian, S. 2024).

RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Integration of IKS to deal with Social Isolation

The emphasis of Indian Knowledge system, especially the Darshana or Yoga Philosophy is always on Self-awareness and personal practices. The second most important aspect, Darshana stresses is on the liberation; liberation from all form of suffering. While in Social Isolation, gradually the individuals feel lonely and hopelessness surrounds the person. Yoga empowers individual to participate in healing, developing self-awareness.

According to The Katha Upanishad:

“उत्तमं ज्ञानं प्राप्य वरातन्बोधि” (Katha Upanishad 1.3.14) “Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones.” When an individual come across such teaching wherein it is emphasized to take one’s own responsibility, the person transforms from the dull state to more enthusiastic state.

“The Geeta also opens with the very significant verse: “Arise, O Prince! Give up this faint-heartedness, this weakness! Stand up and fight!”[11] The weakness of mind can arise even to Gods but the Indian Knowledge System deals well with the problems of mind. Cowardness, or dullness of mind was never accepted in Indian tradition. Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta suggest, with the constant practice and detachment, the waves of mind can be controlled.

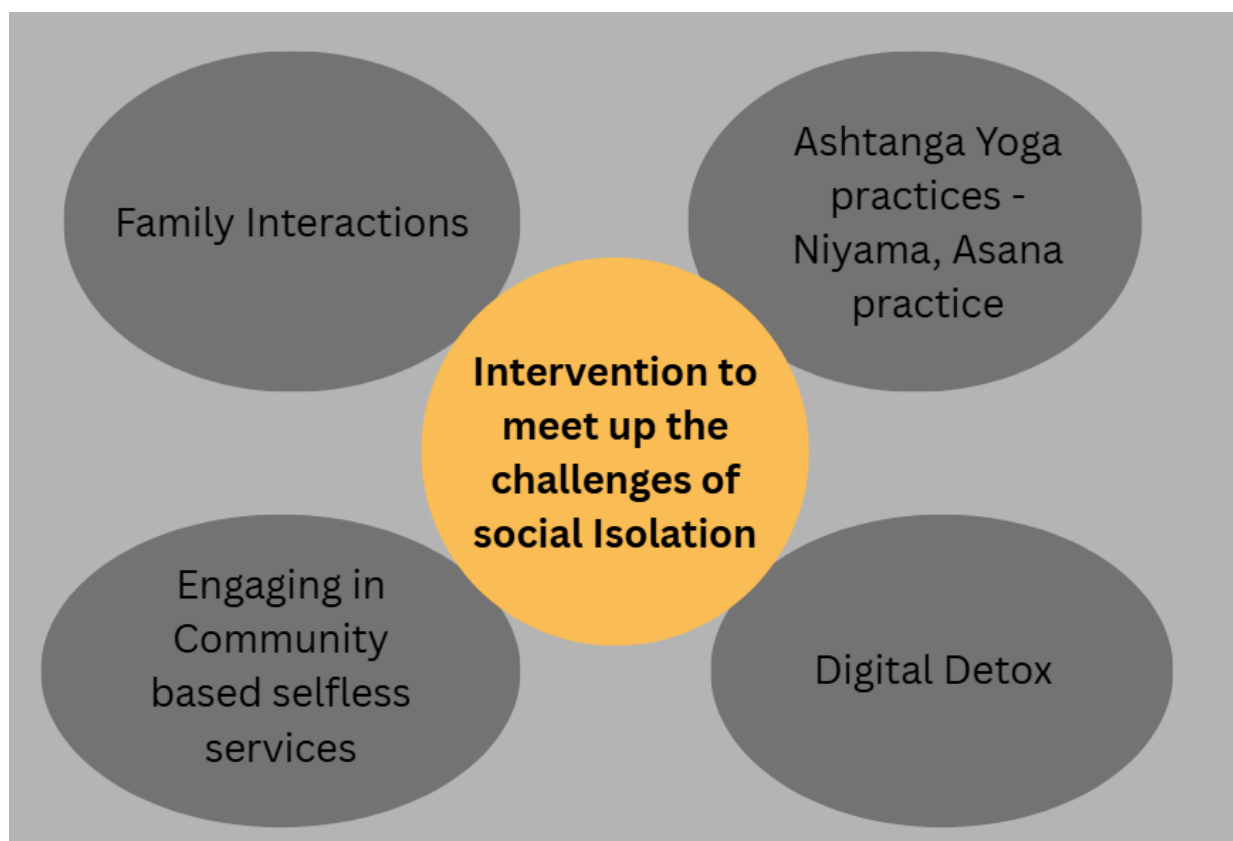
असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् |

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते || 6: 35 ||

Patanjali also suggest Abhyasa and Vairagya to control the waves of mind “Abhyasa Vairagyabhyamtannirodhah (1:12)”. Any practice should be done consistently without any attachments, he suggests. A determined patience is required if somethings need to be achieved. The socially isolated person’s personality is viewed as “Tamasic” in nature, lethargic and dull, but with the constant practice of Ashtanga Yoga, whether it is Self-Discipline (Niyama) or Asana practice for the beginner, needs consistency. Such practice can change the Tamasic state to Rajasic and finally to Sattvic state. Patanjali says, when the modifications of mind are restrained with the constant practice, the true potential of an individual can be seen “Tadadrashtuhsvarupevasthanam”. Positive mental health is seen as a state within an individual in which he/she realizes his/her full potential as well as abilities, the way in which one can cope up with situations and with normal stresses of daily routine, and one’s ability of contributing fruitfully in one’s community.

DISCUSSION

The main problem in this technological era is, individuals are confined to their homes and not connected with the family, or natural environment, and hence are more prone to physical and mental illnesses. The lesser the social interactions, the less happy is an individual, raising the concerns at psychological levels. Indian Knowledge system, especially the knowledge from Ayurveda, Ashtanga Yoga and Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta are more relevant in modern world. Reading and understanding such texts will itself provide liberation from the mental illnesses. Yoga, especially Karma Yoga (Selfless services) along with the different art system of India can be helpful to meet up the challenges of the Social Isolation and effects of social isolation on mental health. Community based Yoga programs like the “Sudarshan Kriya Yoga” (SKY) helped individuals to connect more and hence such programs should be encouraged at the all levels. Karma Yoga, in the form of selfless services to the less privileged people should be encouraged in the school.



CONCLUSION

The importance of Indian Knowledge system cannot be denied in this fast pace but lonely world. Only the wisdom of Yoga (whether Ashtanga Yoga or Karma Yoga) and Ayurveda of Indian Knowledge System can provide psychosocial benefits to meet up the mental challenges of social isolation. Yoga communities provide a supportive and nonjudgmental environment, reducing feelings of loneliness and increasing social support networks (Dale et al., 2019). Participating in Yoga classes on the regular basis enhances the community engagement, hence should be promoted at family levels, in schools/colleges and for the working individuals. On the individual level, practice of digital detox, voluntarily involving in Community based selfless services (form of Karma Yoga- Action without any desires), reading ancient texts and understanding the age-old valuable knowledge given to us on regular basis is recommended.

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