

Yogic therapy best for mental ills

By Gautam Chattopadhyay

WRINKLES on the forehead of a young man were counting high. He was tense, as he felt his heart was sinking, a pain alarmed him, as numbness was spreading from his left arm to the heart region. He complained of "electrical sensation" and pain in head and abdomen. He was anxious about his family. This 25-year-old man (let us call him Shankar) had undergone two years of medication without much results, until he was referred to the behaviour therapy unit of Dr R. M. L. Hospital (Willingdon) where he was treated with yogic therapy, phased in four schedules followed in sequences. Eleven asanas, including Savasana one Mudra and four Pranayamas were the overall structure of the schedules.

Dr R. N. Naug, a noted behaviour therapist, who treated Shankar, said the patient was apprehensive, lest exercise may damage his heart, but in view of all clinical investigations being normal, he agreed to practise the schedules on trial basis. With improvement

in symptoms of 'electrical sensations' at the end of the first month, he continued with the therapy and became symptom-free after two months.

Likewise, many a person in our society is encompassed with complex phenomenon and every individual is reacting under situations leading to a deep sense of anxiety neurosis, hypochondriosis or other types of mental disorders. More often medical treatment with drugs and types of physical forms of psychiatric treatment fail to show results. On therapeutic angle, yoga gives a positive outlet. Broadly psychoneuroses and psychosomatic ailments like anxiety, hysteria, neurosthena, neurocirculatory asthenia, asthma are treated with yogic therapy with 75 per cent results. Yoga, a 2,500-year-old exercise, is a system of psycho-biological discipline and self-actualisation. It lived through ages as the oldest technique of physical and mental cure and now being fruitfully pondered over by behaviour therapists of the world.

Dr. J. C. Malhotra of Hastings State

Hospital (USA) said as the World Congress of psychiatry about yogic therapy that it brings about relaxation without the noxious effects of the long-continued use of alcohol, tea, coffee or smoking, or tranquillisers. Its approach to man is holistic — Diet, breathing, exercise, postures, religion philosophy, love, work all receive due attention. It is one of the oldest known "total push" therapies.

The word "yoga" means union between "jivatma and paramatma (individual soul and universal soul)". It is a science that teaches the way of acquiring the occult knowledge and is called Yoga Shastra. Amongst many yogas, "Hatha" yoga is prominent as therapeutic technique. It is conducive to health and longevity. The practice of Hatha Yoga regulates the action of heart, lungs and brain. Furthermore it promotes digestion and circulation of blood and kidney, liver and other internal viscera work efficiently.

Flanders Dunbar opined that breath control and emotional control are inseparably related. "Pranayama" is

practised to control breathing and is an integral part of Yoga. Pranayama is exercised as it tends to produce calmer, deeper, and slower breathing, resulting in steadiness of mind.

Classic Yoga began with the ushering in of Sankhya dialect. It says that knowledge cannot by itself lead man to Mukti (emancipation). It prepares the ground, and emancipation must be conquered by sheer force. In this regard Dr. Naug explained that Yoga techniques are based on a formal system of psychobiological disciplines. In Yoga therapeutic procedure physiological techniques are followed by psychological ones. Through yogic exercise bioemotional circuits can be controlled. He explained that "One can gain nothing without acting and without practising the liemotive of Yoga".

Yogic physical exercises are unlike the Western technique of physical culture and does not make a pretence of merely developing the superficial muscles of the body. It helps to tone up muscles of the body. It tunes all the involuntary organs of the body which help the process of digestion, evacuation, circulation, respiratory functions. Yoga is mainly concerned with the tuning up of the invisible activities of the body including the mind which regulates the whole body through the intricate nervous system.

In yogic asanas, the concentration of the mind is almost involuntary. To achieve the final yogic posture asana certain muscular movements have to be made which automatically fix the mind on them. Yogic asanas are not gymnastic exercises, in which the trunk and the limbs are made to move rhythmically, but they are special postures and their chief benefit lies in retaining them for a certain period and thereafter the benefit is derived.

Dr Naug summarised the whole process of yogic therapy as he stated "asanas and pranayamas" are aimed at re-education, re-conditioning and habit training which are fundamentals of behaviour therapy".

Furthermore, Dr Naug cited some case studies wherein the patients suffered neurotic disorders and were cured through yogic therapy. In the course of therapy, 11 asanas were included. And those techniques were adopted from authentic sources of Yoga and writings of Sivandana, Yogendra and Rele. Dr Naug said "... four schedules were made after a detailed study of main exercises and keeping in view the practical limitations of the patients in a hospital situation for learning and practice of the schedules". About food habit, moderation was adopted in order not deprive the patients their favourite food, but restrictions were put in the cases of over-eating.

Amongst the many cases referred to the behaviour therapy unit, one 43-year-old Yashpal was suffering from severe weakness and debility, and complained of pain and aches all over the body. For five years he was treated