

ORIGIN OF HOLISTIC WELLNESS IN IKS

Dr. Hetal Doshi, Dr. Satyajeet Deshpande

Assistant Professor, Prin. M. C. Shah Commerce College, Ahmadabad.
Email: hetaldoshi123@yahoo.com

Associate Professor, Department of Studies in Economics and Planning,
Central University of Gujarat, Vadodara
Email: economicsdeshpande@gmail.com

Abstract

The pursuit of happiness and mental wellness has gone beyond boundaries since last couple of decades. It seems that everyone is an authority on happiness. Thousands of theories, lakhs of practical experiments and many modern perspectives and yet happiness and holistic wellness seem far and beyond reach. The modern ways of finding calmness and happiness range from sleep therapy, fitness holidays, wellness retreats and guided meditation to dynamic bathing, cryo-therapy and infrared saunas. But are these ways new to India and its rich knowledge system? The present research paper tries to find out the alternatives to all these mental and physical health tips presented in IKS. The paper tries to summarize five best discoveries in wellness theories in modern time and how these discoveries have their roots somewhere in IKS. The paper attempts to give evidences from IKS for each tall claim of holistic wellness of human lives.

Keywords: IKS, holistic wellness, meditation, yoga, music, mindfulness

INTRODUCTION

Indian Knowledge System, in its thousands of years of history, gets its strong foundation reflected in Indian culture, philosophy, spirituality and education. And the beautiful part of IKS is that these knowledge systems, including Yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, ved, Upanishads and other systems are as applicable in this modern time as it was before. The National Educational Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) recommends the incorporation of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the curriculum at all levels of education. The NEP identifies the rich heritage of India and eternal Indian Knowledge's directing principle for the present day living. By studying the multi-faceted and interconnected aspects of Indian Civilization, NEP emphasizes the integration of IKS into academics. By doing so, it tries to make our young generation acquainted with the rich Indian heritage in all spheres of knowledge.

FIVE GREAT DISCOVERIES REGARDING HEALTH IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

1. Intermittent Fasting

It is a form of voluntary fasting wherein the person chooses the time-schedule between the eating window and fasting window. Intermittent fasting is convincingly popular today. Many people use it to lose weight more easily, simplify their days, and be more productive. The 16:8 fasting practice is among the most popular ways to fast. It involves a 16-hour fasting period each day, followed by eight hours of eating.

Wikipedia writes, "Intermittent fasting has been studied to find whether it can reduce the risk of diet-related diseases, such as metabolic syndrome. A 2019 review concluded that intermittent fasting may help with obesity, insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, hypertension, and inflammation. Therapeutic intermittent fasts for the treatment of obesity have been investigated since at least 1915, with a renewed interest in the medical community in the 1960s after Bloom and his colleagues published an "enthusiastic report". Intermittent fasts, or "short-term starvation periods", ranged from 1 to 14 days in these early studies."¹

Evidence from IKS

People in India are accustomed to fasting on some days of week such as Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It is believed that full day fast i.e. upvaas [24 hours of fasting] and half day fast i.e. ekaasnu [12 hours of fasting] are meant for cleansing the toxins from our body. People keep fasting in religious festivals like navratri, mahashivratri and Ram-navmi. They also fast on the eleventh day of the lunar cycle i.e. ekadashi and fifteenth day i.e. purnima. [full moon day]. So intermittent fasting has been profoundly embedded in the historical food habits of India. Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine promotes fasting and its health benefits.

2. Fitness Studio and Gym

Stephen Tharett writes in the second installment of the series on the history of fitness " Joseph Pilates opened his first fitness studio dedicated to the practice of "Contrology" in 1926. The studio, located in the vicinity of the New York Ballet, originally catered to dancers but later emerged as a popular and effective training modality

for circus performers, actors and athletes. The founding studio operated for 50 years and many of today's Pilates studio chains owe their existence to the original New York studio.”²

Evidence from IKS

The idea of physical fitness belongs to India and it has references in our ancient texts. For full realization of the self, the physical perfection was mandated. Vani P. Bahva writes in her famous article, *Journey of Indian Fitness*, “Much like Greek mythology, Indian Gods and Goddesses, royalty and nobility (including women) had to be well trained in the physical disciplines to attain strength and valour. Archery, wrestling, weight lifting, chariot racing, swimming, sword fighting (fencing as we now know it), ball games, equitation (equestrian) etc were common and find ample mention in our ancient texts. Not to mention Yogic practices. Hindu Yogis needed to demonstrate supreme endurance in their practice and not all were emaciated beings. They were often well versed in the art of self defense, given their isolated sojourns far and wide.” (February 4, 2016, 11:35 PM IST Vani B Pahwa in Fitness Shastra, Lifestyle, TOI)³

3. Mindfulness and Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman, a very famous president of the US's largest and most prestigious body of psychologists – the American Psychological Association (APA) introduced Positive Psychology a new branch of psychology focusing on the study of positive emotions, character strengths, and building a flourishing life. Before it, psychology had focused on the problems people faced, what was wrong in their lives, and how it contributed to their depression, anxiety, and lack of mental wellbeing (Seligman, 2011).

While he wasn't dismissing the rest of psychology—sometimes referred to as the 'disease model'—he wanted to better understand what makes a life worth living. In his research, he found out that human beings have three psychological needs;

- To feel positive emotion,
- Engage in activities that give life meaning and purpose, and
- Have positive relationships with others.

Martin Seligman gave a famous PERMA model which is illustrated below.

- Positive emotions refer to the experience of positive feelings and emotions, such as satisfaction, awe, joy, and contentment
- Engagement relates to our experience of flow and being consumed in an activity and environment
- Relationships refer to the quality and quantity of social connections inside and outside our immediate group
- Meaning brings importance to having a sense of purpose or meaning in life.
- Accomplishment is based on the experience of achievement and progression toward goals.

Evidence from IKS

Meditation, which has now been practiced in West as a remedy to many physical and mental ailments have deep roots in Indian Knowledge System. In Dhammapad [collection of 423 verses as uttered by **Gautama Buddha**], there is a couplet reflecting the core of mindfulness technique.

इदं पुरे चित्तमचारि चारिकं, येनिच्छकं यत्थकामं यथासुखं।

तदज्जहं निग्गहेस्सामि योनिसो, हत्थिप्पभिन्नं विय अङ्कुसग्गहो॥

-This mind that wanders wherever it wishes, wherever it desires, wherever it sees pleasure, I will first make it steadfast.

I will train it thoroughly like a mahout with a goad, trains a wild elephant.

-Dhammapada 326

Gautam Buddha is known to be the founder of Anapanasati meditation practice. This practice concerns mindfulness of inhalation and exhalation, as a part of paying attention to one's body in quietude. In the Buddhist Review, Tricycle, Kevin Griffin wrote, “Mindfulness practice gradually taught me how to feel. It also taught me some coping methods that weren't about fixing myself or figuring myself out but were about a direct knowing, a present–moment touching of my emotions. With my teachers' guidance, I intuitively felt my way into a process that I now see is essentially based on the Buddha's *Satipatthana Sutta* (the four foundations of mindfulness). Here he detailed the practice of mindfulness under four headings: mindfulness of body (sense realm), mindfulness of feeling tone or *vedana* (reactive impressions of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), mindfulness of mental states, and mindfulness of dhammas (impersonal phenomena).” [Feb 28, 2022]⁵

4. Medicinal values of some herbs and plants

People in recent time have increased faith in alternative medicines. **Alternative medicine** is a term that describes medical treatments that are used instead of traditional (mainstream) therapies. Some people also refer to it as “integrative,” or “complementary” medicine. More than half of adults in the United States say they use some form of alternative medicine. Jose Francisco Islas writes, “In recent times, Neem-derived extracts have been shown to work from anywhere from **insect repellent**, to supplements to lower inflammation,

diabetic control, and even to combat cancer.” [An overview of Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and its potential impact on health, Journal of Functional Foods Volume 74, November 2020, 104171]⁶

Evidence from IKS

It is a well-known fact that India has a large diversity of medical plants like Kalonji (*Nigella sativa*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), Methi (*Trigonella foenum*), ajwain (*Thymus vulgaris*), peepal (*Ocimum sanctum*) and many more. These plants are used for curing the diseases like Arthritis, bronchitis, cough, diabetes, Asthma, cardiac pains, Syphilis, bronchitis, stomachic, Constipation, rheumatism, inflammation, jaundice, hepatic obstruction, pain, cold, cough, etc. Ancient India has rich legacy of growing neem, Black Pepper, Cardamom, Saffron, Turmeric, Sandalwood, Silk etc. and these prized ingredients were sought after and taken across the seas to Europe for centuries. It is a well-known historical fact that Britishers came to India in disguise of doing business of these prized ingredients which can be used for fortifying the health and wellness.

5. Therapeutic Impact of Music

The Westerners recognized the impact of music therapy in 1940. They have many researches on the positive effect of music on individuals and their cognitive behavior. Lori F. Gooding writes, “Music therapy is a flexible treatment modality, able to promote wellness, facilitate symptom management, and improve the quality of life of those with mental illnesses. Qualified, credentialed music therapists use active and passive music therapy interventions to target specific objectives like improving mood, increasing compliance and motivation, and enhancing emotional expression. Data suggest that music therapy intervention results in clinical improvement in individuals with a range of mental health needs, and these benefits are seen among individuals with varying diagnoses, ages, and ethnicities. The data also suggest that music therapy is cost effective, has little adverse effects, and is well received by those with mental illnesses.” [Music Therapy in Mental Health Treatment, Music Therapy: Research and Evidence Based Practice, 2018, Elsevier, Pages 4-61]⁷

Evidence from IKS

Ancient India has a rich legacy of classical music which is said to have therapeutic values and it can treat physical as well as mental diseases. Indian philosophies articulate that the entire universe is originated from sounds and vibrations. Dr. Vikas Gandhe and Dr. Mansi Tare wrote a research paper ‘*THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF ANCIENT INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC*’ and they concluded that various ragas help intensely in the treatment of mental and physical diseases. This table is taken from their said article.

Sr No.	Raga	Diseases
1.	Megh Malhar	Tuberculosis
2.	Sohani and Jaijaiwanti	Chronic Headache
3.	Puriya and Bhimpalasi	Hypertension
4.	Todi and khamaj	Acidity and Diabetes
5.	Darbari	Depression
6.	Bageshri	Insomnia and helps getting deep sleep
7.	Malkhaunsa	Low Blood Pressure
8.	Miya Malhar	Asthma and Sunstroke
9.	Puriya Dhanashri	High Blood-Pressure
10.	Yaman Kalyan	Relieves Stress, and Anxiety
11.	Jaunpuri	Constipation
12.	Bhairavi	Strengthen emotions and provides peace
13.	Marva	Helps with Malaria
14.	Asawari	Skin Disorders
15.	Shiv Ranjani	Helps improving Sadness
16.	Bairagi	Increases Memory
17.	Bilawal	Improves mental balance
18.	Shyam Kalyan	Boost confidence
19.	Darbari and Sarang	Helps a lot with Cardiac Patient

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6. Cow- Cuddling as a Healing Therapy

In Western Countries, this practice of cow-hugging is gaining momentum as a wellness trend. It is believed that cow-cuddling fosters a sense of positivity and optimism. Dutch people have coined a term for this practice- Koe Knuffelen which literally means ‘embracing cow’. It has been profusely practiced in countries like Netherland, Switzerland, UK, Australia and the United States. This practice gives innumerable advantages like solace and relaxation. It reduces stress and anxiety.

Evidence from IKS

Though cow cuddling as a therapy is said to be originated in Netherlands, India is not unfamiliar with this practice. We have references of Kamdhenu cow and nandi [bull] in our holy scriptures. Hindus consider cow as a sacred animal and worship her. By serving the cows, it is believed that one can attain great spiritual knowledge and worth. Lord Krishna's love for cows shows his modesty, dedication and love towards all living beings.

CONCLUSION

It is a popular fallacy that whatever westerns are practicing has full-proof and research-based elements whereas easterners are lacking the scientific nerves for research. The wisdom lies in getting influenced by both West and East and implement whatever is best in both. Our colonial mindset is stubborn to believe in the age-old health practices that India has been practicing. We tend to believe them when they have been endorsed by the West. Traditional knowledge has the potential to become panacea for almost all our health hazards. The responsibility of spreading it maximum lies with the educators and government. And by inculcating IKS in UG and PG curriculum, the government has done commendable work. Now it is upon the educators that how do they deliver it to the generation z and alpha generation.

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