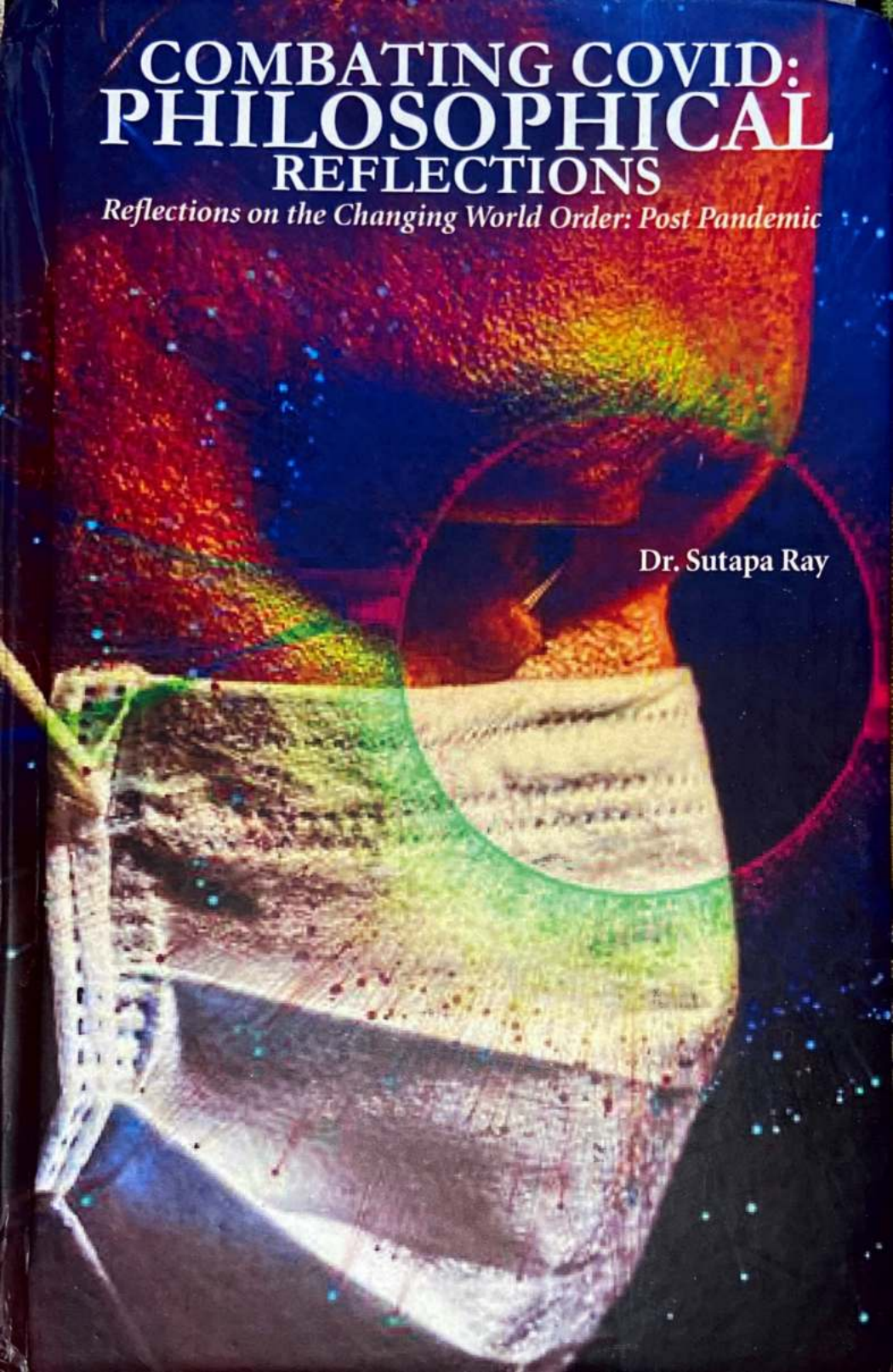


COMBATING COVID: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

Reflections on the Changing World Order: Post Pandemic

Dr. Sutapa Ray



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5

YOGA AND MEDITATION HELP THE INDIVIDUAL TO COMBAT WITH CHRONIC COVID CRISIS

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Abstract

Yoga and Meditation help the individual to combat with chronic COVID crisis. A group of 120 (male and female) individuals of 20 years to above 61 years has been selected as subject. A General Information Schedule and Perceived Stress Scale were administered to them. The findings revealed that the individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation at regular basis reduced stress of chronic COVID crisis successfully than the individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation at irregular basis or not interested to practice Yoga and Meditation. The individual who are practicing yoga and Meditation helped them to control and calm their mind, increased awareness, morally strong, more thoughtful and discriminative and to combat with stress in chronic crisis situation. On the other hand, the individual who are engaged in different occupation, showed different attitude towards handling COVID related stress. Government employee's specially female reduced stress successfully than the individual who are engaged in other job, because in case of Government job, security of the job is ensured and not much financial crisis which helped them to combat with chronic situation. Businesspersons showed more stress in this crisis due to uncertainty of business and economic problem.

Keywords: COVID crisis, Job Insecurity, Pandemic, Yoga & Meditation

INTRODUCTION

The COVID -19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented situation across the world, bringing entire humanity to a standstill. Some of the world's leading military and economic powerhouse have found themselves almost on the brink of a collapse in front of a microscopic little virus.

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The COVID-19 pandemic also known as the Coronavirus pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic of Coronavirus disease 2019. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by severe acute

Respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS – COV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan Hubei China, and has resulted in an organic pandemic (Huang et al., 2020) and this view was also supported by Wang et al., 2020. As of 27th October 2020, about 43,912,980 cases have been reported across 188 countries and territories, resulting around 1,166,465 deaths.

The virus is primarily spread between people during close contact, most often via small droplets produced by coughing, sneezing, and talking. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020 and a pandemic on 11th March 2020 (Anderson et al., 2020). Local transmission of the disease has occurred in most countries. COVID-19 is a new disease and many of the details of its spread are still under investigation. It spreads easily between people through contaminated droplets that fall to the floors or surfaces and also transmitted if people touch contaminated surfaces and then their eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands. Transmission can also occur through aerosols, smaller droplets that are able to stay suspended in the air for longer periods (Stedny et al., 2020). People also transmit the virus without showing any symptoms. (Asymptomatic transmission). Review found that 40-45% of infected people are asymptomatic (Velavan and Meyer 2020). Social and physical distancing strategies aim to reduce contact of infected persons with large groups by closing schools, colleges and work places, lockdowns, restricting travel, and cancelling large gatherings. Distancing guidelines also include that people stay at least 6 feet (1.8m) apart.

The pandemic has caused global social and economic disruption including the largest global recession since the Great Depression and global famines affecting 265 million people. It has led to the postponement or cancellation of sporting, religious, political and cultural events, widespread supply shortages exacerbated by panic buying. Schools, colleges, universities have been closed either on a nationwide or local basis in 161 countries, affecting approximately 98.6 percent of the world's student population.

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In COVID-19 pandemic situation, feeling afraid, nervousness and upset is normal. The way people react to the news can be influenced by how media is presented. The media can fuel anxiety by contentiously reporting on the "spread" of an illness like Coronavirus. This can increase feelings of panic. Mental health conditions like depression and anxiety disorders can appear or become worsened during times of uncertainty. How people respond to stress during the COVID-19 pandemic can depend on their background, social support from their family and friends, financial situation, health and emotional background and many other factors.

Stress has the ability to impact negatively in our life. It can cause physical condition such as headache, digestive issues and sleep disturbances. It can also cause psychological and emotional strains including confusion. According to the American Psychological Association, untreated chronic stress or stress that's constant and lasts over an extended period of time, can result in high blood pressure or a weakened immune system. It can also contribute to the development of heart disease, fatigue and persistent thoughts about one or more stressors.

As the world faces one of its worst pandemic, there has been a renewed focus on building one's immunity, which improves overall health, and wellbeing. While eating right is one way to do it, another time-tested way is to practice Yoga and Meditation said to be a natural immunity booster, yoga serves the dual purpose of helping keep stress a bay in this uncertain time. Talking about the benefits of yoga and meditation especially in current situation with uncertainty, yoga is a holistic approach with long term impact in overall health. It helps relieve muscle tension and calm stress. Not only for this critical time, yoga and meditation are also important for after pandemic. The new normal situation will be completely different from COVID crisis. In this situation, people will face different changes in their lives, like new set up of schools and colleges, service places, business and self-employment. To combat with these changes yoga and meditation will help the person to prevent physical and psychological illness, controlling and disciplining the mind, improved immunity and enhanced cognitive function.

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ORIGINS OF YOGA

A mere mention of the word 'Yoga' in our day today conversations evokes all sorts of different images in the popular mind. In order to have an unbiased and comprehensive understanding of this traditional, ancient form of living, need to dwell upon the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the origin of Yoga, besides its importance in building healthy lives and relationships in today's mechanistic and technology driven world.

The word 'Yoga' has been derived from the Sanskrit root Yuj, meaning a union or communion i.e. the true union of our will with the will of God. Hence, Yoga is the union of the soul with the eternal truth, a state of unadulterated bliss arising from the conquest of dualities. Yoga helps sharpen the power of discernment, there by leading the individual towards a better understanding of the true nature of the soul which cannot completely be comprehended by the senses or the intellect alone (Ishwar, 2010). In the Atharva Veda, there are innumerable references of 'prana' and the eight chakras of the human body. The first use of the term 'Yoga' as equivalent and synonymous of its modern usage appeared Upanishads – the most important spiritual and philosophical treasure house of ancient Hindu mystic thought (Dhavamony, 1982). There are 20 Yoga Upanishads out of the 108 Upanishads. In Indian thought, it is believed that everything is permeated by the Supreme Universal Spirit (Parmatma) of which the individual human spirit (Jivatma) is a part. The system of Yoga is so called because it teaches the means by which the Jivatma can be united to, or be in communion with the Parmatma, and thus secure Moksha. In other words the art of 'Yoga', which is as old as the Vedas, enables one to attain a pure state of consciousness in order to realize the Inner self. 'Yoga' became a distinctive and organized system of knowledge with the publication of the Yoga Sutras, written by Patanjali. It was in the 19th century that Yoga as a distinct form of knowledge system was revived by Swami Vivekananda, as a corollary to his revivalist Vedic discourse. During this time, Theosophists and Indophiles in the West had started embracing this new culture import from India. Since the 1920s, the arrival of Indian Yogis in the West provided a further impetus for a wholesome espousal of Indian physical

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exercise and meditative practice. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga represents that state of the mind which results from a detachment with motion and serenity at rest. It demands the performance of duties in cooperation with society. As Krishna says to Arjuna in Mahabharata, 'Samatvam Yoga Uchyate' meaning equanimity in the mind is a state of Yoga. The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna gives deep insights into Yoga-Bhava or adopting a 'Yogic Attitude' when faced with any human crisis. The period between 1920-1960 saw prominent Yoga Gurus like Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh who inspired scores of young sanyasins around the world to set up Yoga Vedanta centers in nearly every country across the world. Sri Aurobindo, another noted scholar and poet, wrote numerous analyses and commentaries on the ancient Sanskrit texts which contain valuable insight on the philosophy of Yoga.

One of the Six schools of Philosophy, Yoga represents a divine path through which human beings can acquire the potential to function in more effective, organic and integrated manner in harmony with nature. Patanjali had defined Yoga as Yogas chittavritti nirodhah, which means controlling and disciplining the mind, the intellect and the ego for self-realization through eight different steps, popularly described as Astanga Yoga. The most basic form of Yoga till this day is BhutaShuddhi i.e. cleansing five elements (PanchaBhootaSthalam) of which all life in the Universe is made – Earth (Bhoomi), Fire (Agni), Water (Jal), Air (Vayu), and Sky /Space (Patal). This determines several aspects of the individual, from health and longevity to psychological balance, spiritual growth and mystical capability. Yoga is a technique ideally suited to prevent physical and mental illness and also to protect the body by developing an inevitable sense of self reliance and assurance (Oken et al., 2004). Long-term practice of Yoga has a tremendous effect on a person's character humility and simplicity takes over pride and egoism, and the approach to life becomes more positive and accepting. It makes one morally and mentally strong, more thoughtful and discriminative, which helps him/her acquire intellectual clarity and eventually reach a contemplative state of mind. Yoga equips one to attain calm and poise, and face all the joys and sorrows of life with equanimity. At the same time, it is also a science which aims at attaining a state of equilibrium between body and the mind in a skillful and

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systematic manner. Hence, as a distinct school of Indian philosophy, Yoga has both a spiritual/philosophical and physical dimension to it.

MEDITATION

Mindful Meditation is the psychological process of purposefully bring one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment, which one develops through the practice of Meditation (Perez et al., 2000). Mindful Meditation can have immense health benefits including improved immune function, reduced blood pressure and enhanced cognitive function (Shonin et al., 2016). Meditation has been practiced since 1500 BCE antiquity in numerous religious traditions, often as part of the path towards enlightenment and self realization. The earliest records of meditation (Dhyana) come from the Hindu traditions has a long tradition of being a practice in Hinduism. Meditation may be used with the aim of reducing stress, anxiety, depression, pain and increasing peace, perception, self concept and well being. The English word of Meditation is derived from old French Meditacioun in turn from Latin meditatio from a verb meditari , meaning "to think, contemplate, devise, ponder". Apart from its historical usage, the term Meditation was introduced as a translation for Eastern spiritual practices, referred to as Dhyana in Hinduism and Buddhism and which comes from the Sanskrit root dhyai, meaning to complete or meditate. Goleman (1988). "The need for the meditator to retain his attention, whether through concentration of mindfulness is the single invariant ingredient in – every meditation system" (Bond et al., 2009) identified criteria for defining a practice as meditation "for use in a comprehensive systematic review of the therapeutic use of meditation."

There are many schools and styles of Meditation with Hinduism. Yoga and Dhyana are practiced to realize union of one's eternal self or soul, one's atman. Advaita Vedanta this is equated with the omnipresent and non-dual Brahman. Buddhist meditation refers to the meditative practices associated with the region and philosophy of Buddhism. Core Meditation techniques have been preserved in ancient Buddhist texts and have proliferated and diversified through teacher-student transmissions. Buddhists pursue meditation as a part of the path towards awakening and nirvana. Christian meditation is a term for a

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form of prayer in which a structured attempt is made to get in touch with and deliberately reflect upon the revelation of God. New age meditations are often influenced by Eastern philosophy, mysticism, yoga, Hinduism, and Buddhism, yet may contain

some degree of Western influence. New age meditation as practiced by the early hippies is regarded for its techniques of blanking out the mind and releasing oneself from conscious thinking. The US National Centre for complementary and Integrative Health states that "Meditation is a mind and body practice that has a long history of use for increasing calmness and physical relaxation, improving psychological balance, coping with illness and enhancing overall health and well-being.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation regularly to combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis successfully.

Hypothesis 2: Individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation irregularly do not combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis successfully.

Hypothesis 3: Individual who are not practicing Yoga and Meditation do not combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis.

Hypothesis 4: Yoga and Meditation help the individual to combat with occupation related stress of chronic COVID crisis.

SUBJECTS AND STUDY AREA

A group 120 individuals (male and female) from Kolkata city were selected as subjects in this investigation.

Kolkata is the Capital of the Indian state of West-Bengal. It is located in eastern India on the east bank of the river Hooghly. The city is noted for its revolutionary history ranging from Indian struggle for independence. The Kolkata city is an example of an urban hot bed of the developing nations. Most of the people are Bengalese but here also lived other castes of people. Total area of Kolkata is 185 sq. km.

Considering the above reason, the present study has been designed to conduct an investigation with a view to explore Yoga and Meditation help the individual to combat with chronic COVID crisis.

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THE PERTINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUBJECTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- a. Age – 20 years – Above 61 years
- b. Sex – Male and female subjects have been chosen for this investigation
- c. Education - Higher secondary(10+2) or equivalent
- d. Occupation – Govt. service, corporate service, business, Housewife, student and Retired person
- e. Family income group - Middle socio economic status
- f. Duration of stay – At least 5 years at the same place
- g. Practicing of Yoga and Meditation – Regular, irregular and not practicing.

TOOLS

Two tools were used by the investigator for the present investigation

1. General information schedule

Incorporates item like name, address, age, sex, education, occupation, monthly income, family type, duration of stay at the same place and habit of practicing yoga etc.

2. Perceived Stress Scale Questionnaire

Consist 10 items, which ask thoughts and feelings of the individual during last month. It is most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. In each case individual will be asked to indicate by circling how often they felt or thought a certain way.

ADMINISTRATION SCORING AND STATISTICAL TREATMENT:

General Information Schedule and Perceived Stress Scale were administered to a group of 120 individuals at Kolkata city by giving proper instructions.

General Information Schedule involves mainly quantitative data, the frequencies of each of responses were determined after tabulation all the responses of the individuals.

In case of perceived Stress Scale respective scoring key was used to score the data.

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In order to depict the General Information of the individuals at Kolkata city in terms of practicing Yoga and Meditation, age, sex, education, job, monthly income, family type and duration of stay at the same place etc. Descriptive statistics like mode value and percentages were calculated separately.

Perceived Stress Scale- scores were calculated for five categories like Never, Almost never, Sometimes, Fairly often and Very often. For items numbers 1,2,3,6,9,10 scores will be 4=4, 3=3, 2=2, 1=1 and 0=0 and for items number 4,5,7,8 scores will be reverse and then summated all scaling items. After that range were calculated for male and female group separately and interpret the result.

DISCUSSION

In general characteristics data inserted in Table -1 depicted the character features of the individual both male and female at Kolkata city in terms of yoga and meditation practicing, education, occupation, monthly income, family type and duration of stay at the same place etc.

Table-1

	General Information schedule											
	Regular practicing				Irregular practicing				not practicing			
	M		F		M		F		M		F	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yoga and Meditation	20	40	30	60	10	33.33	20	66.7	20	50	20	50
Education												
Madhyamik or board	0	0	2	6.67	2	20	0	0	2	10	1	5
H.S or (10+2)	4	20	8	26.67	4	40	4	20	4	20	5	25
Graduation	10	50	12	40	2	20	10	50	8	40	9	45
P.G and above	6	30	8	26.67	2	20	6	30	6	30	5	25
Occupation												
Govt.job	5	25	8	26.67	2	20	6	30	4	20	4	20

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Corporate job	7	35	6	20	2	20	4	20	6	30	4	20
Business	2	10	1	3.33	2	20	0	0	6	30	2	10
Housewife	0	0	6	20	0	0	6	30	0	0	7	35
student	4	20	4	13.33	2	20	4	20	0	0	2	10
Retired person	2	10	5	16.67	2	20	0	0	4	20	1	5
Monthly income												
10,000-20,000	2	10	4	13.33	1	10	6	30	0	0	8	40
21,000-30,000	3	15	10	33.33	2	20	6	30	6	30	8	40
31,000-40,000	5	25	8	26.67	3	30	5	25	8	40	2	10
41,000-50,000	7	35	6	20	4	40	2	10	4	20	2	10
Above 50,000	3	15	2	6.67	0	0	1	5	2	10	0	0
Family type												
Nuclear	14	70	22	73.33	6	60	17	85	18	90	15	75
joint	6	30	8	26.67	4	40	3	15	2	10	5	25
Duration of stay												
Below 10 years	6	30	7	23.33	4	40	6	30	4	20	2	10
10years-15years	8	40	10	33.33	2	20	6	30	8	40	8	40
16years-20 years	3	15	8	26.67	3	30	4	20	6	30	7	35
Above 20 years	3	15	5	16.67	1	10	4	20	2	10	3	15

Data inserted in Table-2 reveals that the practicing of Yoga and Meditation both male and female individual at regular basis, irregular basis and did not show any interest about practicing. Individuals who are

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practicing Yoga and Meditation regularly showed reduce stress of COVID-19 pandemic successfully. Women showed more better adjustment than men towards handling the stressful situation, because they have controlled and disciplined their mind, psychological balance (Javnbakhat et al.,2009) and also supported by Duan-Porter et al.,2016. Long-term practices of Yoga increases body awareness, relieves stress, reduce muscle tension, strain and inflammation, sharpens attention and concentration, calm and centers the nervous system (Goyel et al., 2014). Yoga's positive benefits on mental health have made an important practice tool of psychotherapy (American Psychological Association).

Yoga has a tremendous effect on a person's character. The approach of life becomes more positive and accepting. It makes one morally and mentally strong, more thoughtful and discriminative, which helps him/her acquire intellectual clarity and eventually reach a contemplative state of mind. Yoga and Meditation are also a science of equilibrium between body and mind. On the other hand who(the individual) are practicing Yoga and Meditation irregularly and also who were not interested about Yoga and Meditation practicing, showed more stress in this COVID pandemic crisis situation. They felt uncontrollability and unpredictability to one's life and they did not control the stressful situation successfully. Because who are practicing Yoga and Meditation at irregular basis did not control their mind, psychological balance, body awareness and also they did not reduce muscle tension and strain properly. They did not get benefit from Yoga and Meditation as comparison to the person who have practiced it for long time.

Thus the **Hypothesis-1** which postulates individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation regularly to combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis successfully, has accepted in this study. **Hypothesis -2** states individual who are practicing Yoga and Meditation irregularly do not combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis successfully has been retained in this investigation. **Hypothesis -3** which postulates Individual who are not practicing Yoga and Meditation do not combat with stress of chronic COVID crisis has accepted in this study because individual who were not interested about Yoga and Meditation showed more stress, uncontrollability and psychological imbalance in their attitude to handle the crisis of COVID pandemic situation.

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Table -2

Category	Gender	Number	Mean	SD	Range	Score	Result
Regular practicing	Male	20	12.1	5.9	6.2-18	8.95	Average
Yoga and Meditation							
	Female	30	13.7	6.6	7.1-20.3	6.9	Below average
Irregular practicing	Male	10	12.1	5.9	6.2-18	18.6	Slightly above average
Yoga and Meditation							
	Female	20	13.7	6.6	7.1-20.3	22	Above average
Not practicing	Male	20	12.1	5.9	6.2-18	26	Above average
Yoga and Meditation							
	Female	20	13.7	6.6	7.1-20.3	25.9	Above average

Data inserted in Table -3& 4 indicates that individual who are engaged in different occupation showed different attitude towards handling stress successfully. Individual engaged in different occupation who are practicing Yoga and Meditation at regular basis showed more body awareness, controlled, calm and stress free attitude in the COVID crisis pandemic situation. Government employees cope the situation better than the employees of corporate job and the businessperson, because of the job security and lack of monetary problem. Business person specially male who are practicing Yoga and Meditation regularly shown stress because of their uncertainty of job but they tried to control chronic crisis with the help of Yoga and Meditation. Homemakers who have practiced Yoga and Meditation for long term, they have reduced

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the stress successfully in this crisis and kept their body well immune, calm and controlled (Iyenger, 1997). Students for both gender (male and female) who have practiced Yoga regularly kept stress, anxiety and depression under their control and cope with the situation successfully (Shohani et al., 2018) and supported by Rahnama et al., 2011. In case of retired persons women shown more controlled and balanced mind towards chronic COVID crisis in comparison with men.

According to physiological thought in the time of Mahabharata where conversation between Krishna and Arjuna gave deep insights into Yoga-bhava or adapting 'Yogic attitude' when faced with any human crisis. School of Indian philosophy, represent Yoga a divine path through which human beings can acquire more effective, organic and integrated manner in harmony with nature. It has both a spiritual/philosophical and physical dimension.

However, in case where individuals are not interested about practicing Yoga and Meditation at regular basis, they shown imbalanced mind, lack of body awareness, anxiety, depression and fatigue. They did not control the COVID pandemic crisis successfully. In case of corporate job, the uncertainty of the job, huge job pressure and monetary problem created stress, depression, high blood pressure and other physical difficulties in comparison to the Government employees who did not feel uncertainty of job. In case of business, people increased tension due to several lockdowns, uncertainty of the situation and severe monetary problem. Homemaker should not handle their tension and showed stress because of increased household activities. They felt anxiety, depression and other physical problems like high blood pressure, headache, digestive problem due to bad immune system. Some students specially female students felt tension about their examinations and online classes in this crisis and developed different health issues in comparison of the students who are practicing Yoga and Meditation at regular basis. Retired (both male and female) persons also felt stress because, many have high blood pressure, heart diseases and other co-morbid diseases. Older persons thought they could not survive if they have faced any problem because of their age and different physical problems. They had also faced mental problems like, high anxiety and depression.

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Thus Hypothesis – 4 which postulates Yoga and Meditation help the individual to combat with occupation related stress of chronic COVID crisis is accepted in this investigation.

Table -3 Practice of Yoga & Meditation (Male)

Category	Total	Male	Regular practicing			Irregular practicing			Not practicing		
			Number	Score	Result	Number	Score	Result	Number	Score	Result
Govt. Job	29	11	5	6	Below average	2	12	Average	4	16.5	Average
Corporate job	29	15	7	14.6	average	2	19.2	Above average	6	21.6	Above average
Business	13	10	2	18.1	Above average	2	20.8	Above average	6	25	Above average
Housewife	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student	16	6	4	5.4	Below average	2	16.8	Average	0	0	0
Retired person	14	8	2	8.2	average	2	18.9	Above average	4	23.2	Above average

Table -4 Practice of Yoga & Meditation (Female)

Category	Total	Female	Regular practicing			Irregular practicing			Not practicing		
			Number	Score	Result	Number	Score	Result	Number	Score	Result
Govt. Job	29	18	8	6.8	Below average	6	11	Average	4	17.6	Average
Corporate job	29	14	6	11	Average	4	20.9	Above average	4	21.8	Above average
Business	13	3	1	15.8	Average	0	0	0	2	22.3	Above average
Housewife	19	19	6	6.2	Below average	6	20.8	Above average	7	22.9	Above average
Student	16	10	4	5.2	Below average	4	20.6	Above average	2	21	Above average
Retired person	14	6	5	6.9	Below average	0	0	0	1	22.8	Above average

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CONCLUSION

Regular practicing of Yoga and Meditation have significant positive effect on human life. It does not only help to keep human being fit physically, but also helps to maintain good mental health. Yoga and Meditation have great weapon during the stressful period like COVID-19 pandemic to keep human being fit and mentally positive.

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