



Effect of Gayatri Mantra on Mental Health: A Critical Review

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Abstract: The man with good Mental Health realizes his abilities to cope with everyday stresses of life, sustain the harmony between oneself and others, and positively contributes to society. In present era the Mental Health issues are staggering and accounted high to the world's disease burden. Mantra Yoga is a major branch of Yoga affecting all aspects of life viz. body, mind, and soul. The Gayatri Mantra is one of the most effective and powerful Mantras mentioned in the Indian Vedic scriptures. It has great significance in Mental Health promotion by enlightening the deeper levels of consciousness and dealing with life's Mental Health issues. Many researches have reported the beneficial effects of Gayatri Mantra chanting in reducing depression, anxiety, stress, anger, negative emotions, and Rajas & Tamas Guna. It also improves the various dimensions of mental skills like relaxation ability, imagery ability, concentration and self-confidence ability, self-concept, anxiety management, worry management, positive emotions, and Sattva Guna. It significantly affects the autonomic nervous system and brain waves directly affecting attention and memory levels. Gayatri Mantra is a cost-effective spiritual practice to promote Mental Health, quality of life, and release from miseries of phenomenal world to ease the path of salvation. The aim of this paper is to elaborate the textual and scientific review of Gayatri Mantra and its effect on Mental Health.

Keywords: Gayatri Mantra, Mantra Chanting, Mantra Therapy, Mantra Yoga, Mental Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

A healthy mental state is an integral part of good Health. According to WHO: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."^[1] Mental Health is more than the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. It is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his abilities, cope with the everyday stresses of life, works productively, and contributes to society. Furthermore, it is essential to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living, and enjoy life.^[2] Without good Mental Health it is impossible to imagine a good life span. In present era The Mental Health Problems are staggering and accounted for about 15 percent of the world's disease burden.^[3] One in every eight people around the world suffers from mental disorders, the anxiety and depressive disorders are most common among them.^[4] In India, the number of Mental Health problems are very high. The World Health Organization estimates that there are, 2443 disability-adjusted life years per 10000 population.^[5] It depends on the individual psychological and biological factors. Therefore, the situation requires raising awareness and mobilizing efforts to support the Mental Health of individuals at global level.

The Mantra is a very powerful tool that has long been used by human beings to maintain good Mental Health with a completely holistic approach and spiritual progress. It directly affects various dimensions of life viz. Body, Mind, and Soul.

Many Mantras has been mentioned in Indian Vedic Scriptures, The Gayatri Mantra is one of them. It is the oldest available, most significant, effective, and powerful divine Mantra found in the Rigveda and Yajurveda, explained by Maharshi Vishwamitra. It has been chanted as the Divine, symbolized as the Sun, on behalf of whole humanity for the gifts of righteousness and enlightened intelligence.^[6] Gayatri Mantra has great

significance in Mental Health promotion by enlightening the deeper level of consciousness. A good deal of scientific researches on Gayatri Mantra has picked up pace in recent days, and many of them have reported the beneficial effects of Gayatri Mantra on Mental Health.

2. THE GAYATRI MANTRA

The 'Mantra' word comes from two syllables, the root 'Man' means "to constant thinking or recollection," and 'Tra' from 'Trai' means "to protect or free" from the bondage of the phenomenal world/troubles and release oneself from miseries arising from ignorance and cycles of birth and death.^[7] Chanting is quieting the mind using words or phrases called Mantras.^[8] Repeated chanting of Mantra develops inner awareness.^[9] It is an instrument of mind meant for Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa.^[10]

The Word 'Gayatri' is a combination of two syllables: 'Gaya,' which signifies indispensable energies, and 'trâyate or tri,' which refers to one who secures, grants deliverance, and awards freedom.^[11] Mantras addressed to 'the Universal Being or the Absolute and ultimately attune our entire consciousness.'^[12,13] The individual who chants the Gayatri Mantra is protected by Goddess Gayatri.^[14]

The Original Gayatri Mantra mentioned in Rigveda (3.62.10) and Yajurveda (3.35) is "tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt." recited with three Mahavyahartis mentioned in Yajurveda (36.3) as "bhūr bhuvah svah tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt."

The complete, Gayatri Mantra is:

*Om bhūr bhuvah svah
tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt*

This complete Gayatri Mantra consists of twenty-four letters, each providing a subtle conscious energy field and magnetic field around our body. It has three divisions: the first division consists of pranava (Om) and the mahavyahriti (Bhūr, Bhuvah, Svah), representing the three world planes (earth, heaven, and the spaces in between). The second part is "Tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi" and the third part is "Dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt." It means that "O, the brahman, the divine vital energy, destroyer of worldly sorrows, blissful, greatest being, luminous, destroyer of our sins, symbol of divinity, supreme soul, may we imbibe your qualities in our self, please guide us towards the path of divinity."^[15]

The supernatural impact of the Gayatri Mantra in physical life is due to some specific syllables of the Mantra.^[16] Vocal rendition of the different syllables impresses positively upon the 24 crucial points in our bodies.^[17] It creates resonance in nadis of body. Because of magnetic force or electromagnetic waves around the body, it attracts the vital current of the deity Sun. It is thought to have a positive influence on intelligence.^[18] Gayatri Mantra is a very powerful Vedic prayer for universal good, showing reverence to the formless Brahman, here referred as Savita devta.

3. METHOD OF CHANTING

The mystical power of Mantras is widely recognized, and its activation can be achieved through correct chanting. Whenever the Mantra is correctly chanted, a sound vibration is produced within. Length and rhythm play an important part in producing this sound vibration. A specific chanting style of Mantra, called Chanda, is used to maintain the proper rhyme. It is about the rhythmic syllable arrangements in poetic meters. There are various types of Chanda based on several sections and letters it contains. Commonly used Chanda's are Gayatri, Anushtup, Trishtubh, Jagati, etc. Gayatri Chanda has three padas, and it contains five halts or stops, namely 'Om'; 'bhūr bhuvah svah'; 'tat savitur vareṇyam'; 'bhargo devasya dhīmahi'; and 'dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt'. We should stop a little at every halt during its chanting.^[19] Vedas recognize four levels of manifestation of the sound vibration: Baikhari, Madhyama, Pashyanti, and Para. These levels change the intensity and frequency of sound.

Proper pronunciation of vowels and consonants is very important for any Mantra chanting. This is necessary to convey the intended meaning, otherwise it becomes a verbal thunderbolt and may cause harm to the person who is chanting.^[8] It is said that if Mantras are not practiced properly or narrated improperly, they may not be effective. This is why it is said that Mantras should not be translated into other languages because the effectiveness of a Mantra depends upon the power inherent in its sound structure.^[20]

Complete attention and involvement are also very important in Mantra Chanting. It states that one's dormant spiritual tendencies are unleashed by concentrating on the Gayatri Mantra.^[21] Mantras are energy-based sounds; hence, Vedic Mantra treatment is a great solution to treat physical and mental illnesses. This

treatment is done naturally without using medicines or therapies, but it is most important to chant them systematically.

4. RESEARCHES RELATED TO EFFECT OF GAYATRI MANTRA

4.1. Effect on Depression

"Depression is a mood or emotional state that is marked by feelings of low self-worth or guilt and a reduced ability to enjoy life."^[22] It is a major cause of disability around the world and contributes greatly to the global burden of disease. It is estimated that 5% of adults worldwide suffer from the depression.^[23] A Research shown that Gayatri Mantra Chanting as meditation and other yogic practices like Loosening Exercises, Suyanamaskara, Breathing Practices, Asana, and Pranayama are effective interventions for the prevention and management of Depression in hypothyroidism.^[24]

It is also helpful for students. In top-ranking colleges, students often feel pressured and complain of Depression. Mantras could help ease their stress. With Gayatri Mantra chanting a significant improvement in the individual's overall happiness and mental clarity was observed.^[25] The use of Mantras in culminating Depression is well evident by the zero per cent suicidal rate in spiritually active persons.^[13]

4.2. Effect on Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental disorders in world today. It is a typical response that occurs when someone faces a stressor that is not overcome and will cause physical and psychosocial problems. People with anxiety disorders often experience fear and worry that are both intense and exaggerated. About 4% of the world's population has anxiety problems.^[26] A Research shown that Mindfulness with the Gayatri Mantra could decrease anxiety in elderly Hindus, it is used as an alternative therapy to prevent the recurrence of anxiety in the elderly.^[27] Gayatri Mantra also had a significant effect on memory, anxiety, and Mental Health. Regular chanting and listening to the Gayatri Mantra will improve memory, health, and quality of life, Anxiety and mental state.^[7,28]

4.3. Effect on Stress

Stress can be defined as "a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation". A natural human response prompts us to address challenges and threats. It is more persistent than ever because of modern life's accelerating pace and rapid change.^[29] Strong evidence has been found that practicing Mantra meditation effectively relieves Stress.^[30] A Research showed a decrease in stress levels in hypertensive patients after being given Gayatri Mantra meditation.^[27]

4.4. Effect on Anger

"Anger is a negatively toned emotion, subjectively experienced as an aroused state of antagonism toward someone or something perceived as the source of an aversive event."^[31] In a Research it was found that chanting the Gayatri Mantra for 15 minutes helps reduce state anger, trait anger, and anger expression, increases inward control of anger, and improves the psycho-physiological state.^[32]

4.5. Effect on Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is the attempt to influence emotions in ourselves or others.^[33] Chanting Mantras helps cope with negative or stressful emotions. Chanting or praying of Mantra induces strong Brain activity and gives a response to stimuli with negative valence. Repetitive Mantra chanting may structurally lateralize a network of Brain areas involved in biased memory function. Results suggest that Mantra chanting helps to form a positive effect to compensate for negative emotions.^[34]

4.6. Effect on Mental Skills

Mental skills are tools for the mind. The regular chanting of the Gayatri Mantra shall improve mental skills like learning power, concentration, prosperity, eternal power, peace, and quality of life.^[7] Significant improvement in the mental skills assessed in the twelve-week study using Bull's mental skill inventory, which had various dimensions of relaxation, imagination, anxiety, worry management, concentration, and self-confidence.^[35]

4.7. Effect on Brain

Mantras have a healing effect on the body, mind, and spirit by bringing chemical changes in the brain, thereby relaxing the brainwaves, detoxifying the mind, and cleansing the cellular toxins by acting upon synaptic channels. The phonetics of Sanskrit strike the palate at multiple reflex points, stimulating energy in numerous meridians that awaken the inactive parts of the brain and enhance the circulation and flow of energy throughout the body.^[13] A Research shown that listening to the Gayatri Mantra activates the right insula, right temporal lobe, left inferior parietal lobule, bilateral superior temporal gyri, lateral globus pallidus, and culmen of the cerebellum. The listening to Gayatri Mantra increases the domination of gamma waves in brain.^[17] and It was also found that Gayatri Mantra chanting influence the energy generated on limbic areas, amygdala, hippocampus, and thalamus.^[36] It also affects the cognition and hemodynamics of the brain.^[37] Another study shows that Gayatri Mantra stimulates the brain cells, resulting in their activation and ultimately leading to better concentration.^[38]

4.8. Effect on Memory and Attention

Memory is a fundamental aspect of cognition. It is “the mental process of retaining and retrieving information for later use.” Attention is “the mechanism by which incoming information is ranked and passed on for further processing.” Memory and attention play an important role in good Mental Health.^[39] A Research shown that subjects with Gayatri Mantra chanting significantly improve attention and memory domains.^[7,28]

A comparative study evaluated that the influence of Gayatri Mantra was significantly higher than Poem chanting in the net score of attention in females.^[40] Vedic chanting is thought to enhance attention and recallability. Chanting further increases blood supply to the brain areas concerned with memory, thus increasing memory organizability. Studies have demonstrated medial frontal gyrus activation attributed to increased concentration and visuospatial attention during the chanting of Mantras. Activation of the left lateral middle frontal gyrus, right angular gyrus, and right supramarginal gyrus has also been noted, contributing to visuospatial attention.^[41] It is said that Gayatri Mantra chanting will improve the power of intellect and it also significantly affects attention, memory, learning power, prosperity, eternal power, peace, mental state and quality of life.^[40,28]

4.9. Effect on Manas Prakriti (Psychic constitution of the body)

The Manas Prakriti pertains to the mind and mental activities of the person. It is mainly classified into three types, i.e., Sattvik, Rajas and Tamas Prakriti. Sattvik type of prakriti is best because of the predominance of Sattva, which is considered eternally pure and is not likely to vitiate or get vitiated. Rajas and Tamas prakriti are considered as Manas Doshas.^[42] Improvement of sattva guna and reduction in rajas and tamas guna was observed through the chanting of Gayatri Mantra.^[43]

5. Conclusion

The Gayatri Mantra is an effective and powerful mantra mentioned in Indian Vedic Scriptures. It helps to strengthen various dimensions of mental skills, self-concept, positive emotions, and sattva guna. Various studies support that chanting of Gayatri Mantra alleviates stress, anger, anxiety, depression, negative emotions, rajas and tamas guna. Mantra chanting connects oneself with a deeper inner self, to give a sense of calm and balanced state of mind, good Mental Health, quality of life, and overall well-being. For good Mental Health, the world is moving towards Yoga and Spiritual therapies. This purpose could be achieved through correct and systematic chanting of the Mantra, and especially Gayatri Mantra.

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