Chapter-5

Critical Evaluation and Conclusion

Health is the real wealth one can cherish in his whole life. To be young always is the enchanting experience of human beings. Healthy people are the moving spirit of any country. But people of the new millennium are increasingly inflicted with several diseases. New diseases have started engulfing the people of modern day endangering their very existence.

Modern medical technology has been conducive to better health, with the passing of time, it has also contributed to a sedentary lifestyle in large segments of the population. In ‘Ideal living’ conditions people are physically powerful, mentally strong, and emotionally calm. This is due to a better life style, the one, which our ancestors followed with blissful benefits. In ideal living conditions and in pre modernization era people used to have freshly cooked food, fruits, grains, cereals constituted bulk of their diet. There was no adulteration of food, there was no pollution of the atmosphere and people were physically more active. However, ‘Modern living’ is characterized by sedentary lifestyle i.e. poor dietary habits, lack of physical activity, and pollution of the atmosphere all around and stress. It is not that disease did not prevail those days but style of living in itself was not a detrimental factor as far as physical health is concerned. In modern living however, the vary style of living is a major cause of disease and disability.
Preliminary findings from a World Health Organization (WHO) study on risk factors suggest that sedentary lifestyle is one of the ten leading causes of death and disability in the world.

In traditional lifestyle people had healthier food habits and were physically more active. Modernization and advancement in the field of science & technology has made life fast and more comfortable on the one hand, however, on the other it has made men physically less active. Lack of physical exercise is a common phenomenon in modern era and particularly in urban areas. The typical office jobs in urban areas do not involve much physical activity.

The results of lack of physical activity are increased levels of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Being physically active increases energy levels, helps to reduce stress and lowers unhealthy levels of cholesterol and blood pressure. Physical activity improves glucose metabolism, reduces body fat, control body weight, lowers blood pressure, improve musculo-skeletal health and reduce symptoms of depression. The blood distribution system is powered by the heart. The lymphatic system is powered by body movement. Therefore, metabolic waste products cannot be completely cleared unless one is physically active. Physical activity also improves mental health. However, exercise alone is not sufficient. Balancing physical activity with food intake is the key to maintain good health.

A good diet is central to overall good health. Use of fast/junk foods, smoking, and consumption of alcohol, pan masala, gutka etc. are typical of modern living. Most people today do not eat nearly enough vegetables and fruits and rely heavily on manufactured foods that do not support good health. Irregular
timings of eating i.e. remaining awake and taking dinner at late in the night is also a common feature of modern living. In ideal living conditions people are away from this type of food habits and thus are spared from it's negative effects. The unhealthy food habits compounded with lack of proper physical activity of modern living thus is giving rise to host of illness including obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular problems, cancers and many other psychosomatic disorders.

Modern living contrary to ideal living condition is characterized by pollution of the atmosphere all around. Number of industries & vehicles has increased many folds over the past few decades. Use of pesticides to increase crop productivity, has degraded the land. The food available is contaminated. The air we breathe, water we drink, food we consume all are polluted beyond the prescribed norms of healthy living. These directly and indirectly are affecting our health and most of the time is acting as a silent killer. Air pollution is a major environmental health problem today. Air pollutants that are inhaled have serious impact on human health affecting the lungs and the respiratory system. Negative effects of environmental toxicity include decreased immune function, nervous system problems, depression, irritability, fatigue, and memory loss. Over exposure to noise and light, a common phenomenon in modern living, is also adding to the already stressed life.

Modern living is typically characterized by restlessness, stress and associated mental problems. The World Health Organization has called stress a “modern day epidemic, affecting every person in every nation, regardless of race or class.” Most of the people today have some kind of deep-rooted complex, fear, phobia or conflict. Most of us have very limited and perhaps naive concepts
regarding the meaning and scope of mental problems. In fact mind
loses its equilibrium when any external or internal problem strains
it harshly. Consequently, its functioning gets disturbed and its
harmony begins to diminish, slowly or rapidly. The person so
affected for a long period, becomes mentally sick. The individual's
thought, action, manner, behaviour and outlook become
imbalanced. Various factors of modern living conditions are
responsible for the stressed conditions of man today and related
mental problems. Stress affects our mental health and in turn
physical health. Stress lead to psychosomatic disorders, which is
the root cause of many of the diseases of modern living.

Population explosion compounded with diminishing resources has
led to cut-throat competition in education, jobs, business, health
& sanitation facilities, drinking water, traffic, i.e. to say in all
spheres of life. Ethics, morality of leaders and society as whole are
on the decline and has resulted in growing intolerance among
people of all ages. The society today is divided on the basis of
caste, creed & religion. Regionalism has surpassed nationalism and
conflicts, violence, deaths of innocents have become a day-to-day
phenomena. Nuclear family setup, on-the-job pressure, fierce
competition in school, inadequate infrastructure facilities and civic
amenities in rural as well as urban areas combined together with
increased expectations have lead to a high stress conditions of the
society as a whole.

Addictions like gambling and drug abuse account for a rising
number of suicides now a days, more than half of which can be
traced to mental health problems. Much of the increase in suicide
in recent years has been among young people, males especially. It
has become the second most common cause of death, after
accidents, among people under 35.
Increased pace of industrialization and consequent urban drift has given rise to overcrowding of urban settlements, emergence of pavement dwellers and slum dwellings, unemployment and poverty. The growth of violence, individual as well as collective especially towards the women and the girl child has already assumed a national dimension. The negative influence of the electronic media has caused increase in problems like vagrancy, juvenile delinquency, kidnapping etc. All these factors have caused a rift in the social and traditional fabric of the country by the break down of the joint family system and loosening of traditional forms of checks and balances, which hitherto regulated social behaviour. These factors on the one hand have exposed the vulnerable groups to the increasing incidence of destitution, exploitation, deprivation, neglect and on the other hand to various forms of physical and mental abuse, new forms of social deviance, anti social behaviour and a drift into crimogenic culture.

Poverty is a condition of chronic deprivation and need at the family level. Poverty is a major concern of humankind, because poverty everywhere reduces human beings to a low level of existence. It not only affects physical health but also to a great extent the mental well being of the people. Poor people lack access to enough land and income to meet basic needs. A lack of basic needs results in physical weak-ness and poor health. Poor health decreases the ability of the poor to work and put them deeper into poverty again.

Communal tension, mass violence and terrorism are another social problems that call for urgent attention. In the past it was a rare urban phenomenon but it is now spreading to rural areas as well. Over the last decade, innocent citizens of many countries increasingly have been the targets of mass violence and terrorism.
These have resulted in thousands of fatalities and many more people whose lives have been changed forever. Number of victims of rape, sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, hate crimes and homicide are on the rise. It takes a lot of time and effort to recover from the trauma and mental stress.

Apart from the various advantages of technological revolution in the field of mass communication, the electronic media has given rise to some disadvantages as well. Man has become a prisoner of market forces and advertisements. His capacity to choose has diminished. Over exposure to television viewing has lead to growing intolerance and poor attention span among children and affect their school performance. Easy access to pronographic web sites in the Internet is also distracting school going children and young adults and affecting their personality growth.

Various aspects of modern living as described above have led to a number of psychosomatic disorders. In ideal living conditions people were free from stress and did not have psychological complications reflecting on their health. However, in modern living people are subject to stress in all spheres of life, which is the root cause of psychosomatic disorders.

Psychosomatic disorder refers to a mind and body relationship. All illnesses can be considered to be psychosomatic i.e., they inevitably involve the mind's reaction (psyche) to a physical (soma) illness. Psychogenic disease is a disease associated with emotional stress which by itself lowers the body's immune system. Achieving a balance between stress and relaxation can help improve physical and mental health. While stress may be impossible to avoid there are techniques in yoga that can help us deal with stress.
Out of the many healing systems available, such as yoga, allopathy, homoeopathy, ayurveda, acupuncture, naturopathy etc. that can be adopted for avoiding or preventing the physical and mental health problems of modern living, yoga is the best.

Yoga is aimed to unite the mind, the body and the Spirit. Scientists today ascertain that the intrinsic organic health of a human being is of prime importance along with the outer development of the body. To maintain the purity of blood and elimination of toxins, both outer and inner cleanliness is indispensable. Yoga has a strengthening effect on the nervous system through its non-tiring physiological activities that bring about poise of body and mind. Unlike the normal workouts that concentrate more on the inflation of the muscles, Yoga takes care of every little part of the anatomy. Yoga has an all-pervading effect on the physical and mental functioning of the body.

Yoga is skill in action (yogah karmasu kaushalam). This is not intended to mean action in just the narrow sense of physical movement. For, besides exercises for improving the 'skill' of our body, yoga also comprises techniques that transform our intellect, mind and emotions and provides a complete philosophy for living. Yoga is a way of life. It is a science of holistic living.

Sri Aurobindo, a great expounder and interpreter of yoga in modern age regarded yoga as a methodical effort toward self-perfection through developing our latent potential at the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels. The most fundamental step we can take towards expanding the limits of our consciousness is to gain mastery over our mind.
Modern medicine has countered with symptom-suppressing treatments which do little to tackle the root cause of the problem and thus health has come to be regarded as a static state in which disease is absent. However, good health in the true sense should be regarded as a dynamic growth process in which we feel truly well on both the physical and mental levels with a positive sense of well-being.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) the state of health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. WHO also suggests a fourth dimension—spiritual well-being. It is clear from this definition that health and ill-health are not two discrete entities as commonly understood but health should be conceived as a continuous function indicating the state of well-being.

Yoga has a lot to offer in the 21st century. It gives us the means to complement medical technology with a holistic system of healthcare that addresses the problems of the mind and Spirit as well as those of the body. Patanjali, who wrote the classic text on yoga i.e. yoga sutra nearly 3000 years ago described it as 'a science of the mind.' And it is through teaching us to control our mind, our desires, and our reactions to stress, that yoga can fundamentally help us. Yoga is an intelligent, skilful means for making the mind quiet, rather than a brutal, mechanical technique for stopping it. Yoga develops our ability to maintain inner peace at all times, in all our actions and thereby achieve physical and mental health.

The approach of yoga is based on the holistic concept of human beings: the five 'sheaths' (koshas) to existence, of which the physical frame is only the first. The second is the vital body that is
made up of prāna, the life energy that flows through us in invisible channels known as nāḍīs. The third is the mind (our emotions and thoughts), the fourth is the higher intellect (perfect thought and knowledge), and the final sheath is the 'abode of bliss.' The bliss sheath is thought to consist of the positive energy that is associated with the divine. It is from this sheath that the inner peace essential to true happiness emanates.

Disease is seen to arise through imbalance in any of the three lower sheaths of existence. In the physical, pranic, and mind sheaths. Ego consciousness which is centred around the self, predominates and so harmony in these sheaths can be easily disturbed. The fourth and fifth sheaths are permeated by a wider, universal consciousness and cannot be perturbed. When we are truly healthy, the positive energy in the highest sheath percolates freely through the lower ones and brings total harmony and balance to all our faculties. But though the harmony of the higher sheaths is constant, the free movement of bliss can be blocked by imbalances in the lower sheaths.

Yoga contains elements that reduces problems at every level—āsanās that relax and tone our muscles and massage our internal organs, prānāyāma that slows our breathing and regulates the flow of prana, relaxation and meditation that act to calm our mind, and emotion-culturing produces equanimity. For just as negative influences spread disruption, positive action has repercussions as well. The different types of yoga practice augment each other and are more effective when done together. When we do the asanas and stretch our muscles, muscular tension is released and we are able to relax easily. Likewise, when we relax the mind and release suppressed emotions, we tend to become less tense on physical
level. Every element of yoga brings benefits throughout and also acts to amplify the effect of the other types of practices.

Yoga is both preventive as well as curative. Preventive for most and curative for many of the ailments caused by modern sedentary living patterns. Daily practice of a complete yoga can restore our natural balance and harmony, bringing positively good health to all parts of our life—physical, mental and spiritual.

The therapeutic potential of yoga has largely been investigated for stress related psychosomatic ailments. But with the recent interest in 'psycho-neuro-immunology' (the effect of the psyche on the immune system), there is also a possibility that yoga can modify the course of infectious diseases by improving our immune system.

Yoga can treat all types of mental disorders from which stem a large array of ailments. It can be used to treat diabetes, constipation, asthma, high blood pressure, sexual malfunctions, anxiety, arthritis, backache, rheumatism, colds, coughs, epilepsy, varicose veins, piles, flatulence, migraine, sciatica, sinusitis, slipped disc, gastric ulcers, indigestion, insomnia, eczema and a multitude of other diseases. There are many authenticated cases of people who now have perfect health, having once suffered from some disease and removed it through regular yoga practices.

Yoga simultaneously influences both the body and the mind. It is for this reason that yoga is so effective in treating a wide range of diseases. Yoga aims to bring about total harmony between one's fundamental drives, emotions, feelings, intellect, will and one's interpersonal and social relationships. It brings about a positive attitude in life.
Problems of Modern Living and Need of Yoga

In the present era of 21st century the world population is rising exponentially and so are the proportion of physical and mental disorders. It is meaningless and inconsequential to tell people that they are already in a state of perfection. Their own experience and unhappiness tells them otherwise. In this context, yoga is going to be of great help not only to the individuals but also to the nation or world as a whole. Out of many benefits of yoga as a healing system, one important benefit is that it is least expensive. Thus, suppose if entire population of a country starts practicing yoga regularly, not only that the health expenses of a nation is reduced and the money thus saved, is available for development or alleviation of poverty etc., but also the physically and mentally fit citizens are able to contribute more towards growth of the nation or world as a whole.

According to Swami Satyananada Saraswati "yoga will not replace the modern culture but it will make them more beautiful, more useful and more substantial. If we are fortunate to live in the 21st century we will see that the destiny of nations and the philosophy of mankind will be regulated by the central philosophy of yoga. Yoga is the greatest gift that can be given to mankind today. IT IS THE GIFT OF PEACE".