



Descriptive Study on Suryanamaskar in Yoga – A Study with Special Reference among Children

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a panacea to the myriad problems of childhood. The purity of an infant starts diminishing as the child grows with the experiences around, pressures of becoming a successful professional superseding that of becoming a better human being, the life styles of the modern world, eating fast and processed food, genetics; all these factors plus the confusion of adolescence, puts the child's mind through a lot of turmoil. If not corrected, it could lead to mental and physical disorders. The paper thus attempts to show how the regular practice of Suryanamaskara, right from early childhood and during adolescence can help create a physically, mentally and spiritually sound individual, who can live amicably in the society. Early identification of the state of mind of the child can help early correction. The paper attempts to prove how this ancient yogic practice of the rishis is the best, most scientific tool even in this contemporary world to give back the childhood to our children.

Keywords: Suryanamaskar, Yoga, Children.

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Introduction

Our childhood is like a garden, an enchanted place full of vibrant colours, fragrances, pure air and the dawn, redolent than ever again. The values and morals, skills and talents that we imbibe during childhood and adolescence are the stepping stones, defining the life ahead. What is assimilated in childhood is expressed in adolescence. Love, care, a sense of security and company of good friends during childhood is what shapes a man's personality, building a strong foundation which can withstand all vagaries of life. But in today's busy, closed, highly competitive and much smaller world, children are deprived of the pleasures of childhood. From early childhood, children carry the burden of a wide syllabus, parental and peer pressure to excel in all facets – education as well as extra-curricular activities. Young children, who probably do not even understand the meaning of stress, are today victims of stress, which manifests into many physical and mental disorders.

This change in life-style has shortened the span on childhood. World health organization (WHO) defines adolescence as a period between 10 to 19 years but it is now seen at an early age of 8 to 9 years. The fast food culture, excessive consumption of meat, processed foods and other genetic changes shorten the span of adolescence. Adolescence is a period of physical, mental,

emotional and intellectual changes. This period is labeled as puberty (the period of physical growth) and adolescence (the period of mental growth).

Physical Growth and Evolution in Children

Constitution, genetics and the food habits are the factors influencing the physical growth of boys and girls. Apart from this, internally, the various hormones secreted by the endocrine glands play a vital role in controlling the biological growth. The hormones produce energy and balances function of the various organs, thus ensuring stable physical development. The major endocrine glands are Pituitary gland, Thyroid gland, Pineal gland (Parathyroid gland), Thymus, Pancreas and Adrenal gland which ensure effective and accurate body functions. In girls, it is estrogen and progesterone hormones that transform her into a woman while in boys, it is the testosterone which metamorphoses them from boyhood to manhood. Understandably, with so many physical and mental changes occurring within, adolescence is a turbulent time. Adjusting to the new physicality and growing awareness of one's sexuality leaves the child perplexed. As they realize their own individuality, they become assertive, becoming rebels with their own set of ideologies, breaking barriers and dreams of parents. And this is the crucial period when unless controlled or led onto the right path, the entire education and future life could be annihilated.

Children and the School

An adolescent spends the most effective and complex period of his life in the school; it is what they

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learn there that shapes them into an individual. With more emphasis on developing a career, little or no attention is paid to the physical, mental, social and spiritual development of the child. Thus with no tools given to cope with sheer physical burden of the syllabus and the aspiration of parents, children crumble mentally, leading to depression and personality disorders and it is at this confusing but crucial juncture of childhood and adolescence that the practice of Suryanamaskara comes into prominence. Regular practice of Suryanamaskara co-ordinates the functioning of Annamaya kosha related to the physical development, Pranamaya kosha related to the energy and activeness, Manomaya kosha related to emotional stability, Vignanamaya kosha related to foresight and Anandamaya kosha related to meaningfulness and happiness in life. Suryanamaskara thus helps a child evolve into a healthy and sound individual, ready to handle any crisis in life.

Suryanamaskara helps improve the power of concentration, leading to enhanced faculties in the brain such as comprehension, imagination, creativity, leadership qualities and the power to make the right choices in life. It would be no exaggeration to say that through Suryanamaskara children will acquire all the aspects of good health as defined by WHO.

Total Health through Suryanamaskara

“Health - is a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” WHO.

The ‘physical’ aspect of Suryanamaskara

When a baby is born, its cells having inherent power to maintain the purity but when exposed to impurities, the power is broken, making the child prone to infections. This weakens the body as he grows into adolescence, the constant threat of diseases makes the entire constitution fragile. 40% of one’s weight and 25% of height is formed at adolescence. Thus it is imperative to lay the edifice of good habits and sound health right from early childhood. Suryanamaskara is not just a physical exercise but a much stronger mental and spiritual work out. Let us take a look at the benefits:

Physical Benefits of Suryanamaskara

- Accelerates the physical growth
- Increases resistance power of the body
- Helps develop physical capabilities; bones and muscles are strengthened
- Enhances the physical beauty
- Controls body weight
- Synchronises functions of the internal glands/hormones
- Accelerates the process of digestion and helps to form good toilet habits

The “Mind” and Suryanamaskara:

Mind is the subtle body – we cannot see it physically but we see it through our thoughts, feelings

and emotions. This microcosm is formed while in the womb of the mother, taking shape through the consciousness of the parents. Like a pure body, the mind of a baby is pure and innocent; it is what the parents teach, what the child observes, its negative and positive experiences, the genetic dispositions and the society around it which forms the mental make-up.

Yogasastha has broken the mind into three phases: Satwa, Rajas and Tamas.

Satwagunam: “Sat” is goodness and “gunam” is character. People with Satwaguna are pious and spiritual, have only positive energies, are healthy with gentle behavior.

Rajogunam: “Raja” denotes ego, all things royal. People with Rajoguna are talkative, critical, and boastful but play a vital role in transforming the world.

Tamogunam: “Tama” denotes darkness and inertia. People with Tamogunam are lazy, coward, ignorant and insensitive.

Identification of these three states of mind in children help correction where required. It is usually seen that in children, Rajogunam is prominent. Through practice of Suryanamaskara, systematic breathing and the holy chanting of Suryanama, a mind change can be initiated, leading them to Satwagunam. Systematic breathing helps smoothen functioning of the five senses, the pranakosa and the manokosa.

Mental benefits of Suryanamaskara

- Increases Satwaguna
- Helps attain a calm and active state of mind
- Increases concentration and memory power
- Ability to control the mind
- Renders creativity and leadership qualities
- Mind is concentrated without any infatuation
- Insecurities of adolescence such as anxiety, fear and sadness slowly disappear

“Society” and Suryanamaskara

The peer pressure and a need to assert their own individuality, children often lose sight of their social life – they behave in a way which they and their friends think is right. An age of rebellion, it is during adolescence that they nurture selfish behaviours, becoming all about “I-Me-Myself”. It is here that practice of Suryanamaskara can help. If made a part of school curriculum, it becomes acceptable to do Suryanamaskara as all do. The attention to breathing and fine tuning of the asanas mould them into disciplined individual, with a sense of mindfulness. This helps them connect to the society they live in, leading to good conduct.

Social Benefits of Suryanamaskara:

- Helps attain a social consciousness
- Face the challenges in the life with a presence of mind
- Find virtues in fellow beings and form friend groups based on love

- Children become active – physically and mentally
- Their lives are disciplined
- They exhibit leadership qualities
- They comprehend and convert the negative social energies into positive ones

The “Spirit” and Suryanamaskara

The soul represents the presence of God and this grace of soul is fully present in an infant, right from the moment it begins life in the womb. The experiences and the practice that he receives from his surroundings help him to retain this grace till he reaches Paramathma at the end. Whenever he loses this grace of the soul, negative thoughts and feelings overpower him, shrouding his soul in a dark veil. Divine virtues like love, mercy and benevolence are wiped out and are substituted with envy, avarice, hatred and other derogatory anti-spiritual forces. Regular practice of suryanamaskara at the adolescence age helps children retain this grace, keeping their inner tranquil intact. When Anandamayakosa starts functioning, spiritual health is heightened and the grace of the soul can be retained till the end of life.

Spiritual Gains of Suryanamaskara

- Spiritual consciousness is attained.
- Godliness is increased
- Approach life with an optimistic attitude
- Develops creativity
- Realizes that God is manifested in every creatures in the world
- Satwagunam is increased

The Do's and Don't's of Suryanamaskara practice for children:

- Always practice under the surveillance of a teacher, avoid self-study
- Practice in stages as flexibility improves and always with a positive attitude
- Gain in-depth knowledge on the seven Yogasanas incorporated in Suryanamaskara viz: Pranmasanam, Hastha Udhanasanam, Padahasthasanam, Aswa sanchalanasanam, Parvathasanam, Ashtanganamaskarasana and Bhujangasanam.
- There should be deep concentration and meditation during the practice
- There should be perfect spiritual and mental consciousness
- Let the children practice it in groups
- It should be made a part of their daily ritual. Practice it 12 to 24 times daily.
- Before the practice, study the theory and the benefits of Suryanamaskara, with a faith that benefits will be accrued

- Best practice is at sunrise - chant the Surya Mantra, imagining the sun at the position of your heart during the Suryanamaskara practice.
- Savasana at the end of Suryanamaskara is a must.

Conclusion

The body and mind of children are store houses of unlimited energies. It would be no exaggeration to say that Suryanamaskara, perfected by the great rishis with their meditation and studies can even stimulate the latent sensory powers of children. Daily practice of Suryanamaskara in school along with studies, will give children a healthy body, clear mind and a confident personality. If we lay the foundation for a healthy life through Suryanamaskara, it will help build a physically and mentally strong and spiritually vibrant individual. The modern man at the zenith of his physical glory has already identified the spiritual power behind the natural forces; the most important one being the life giving Sun. It is not only a source of physical energy but also a spiritual force innate in every man. Suryanamaskara is the simplest way to harness this great spiritual force.

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