

The Interrelationship Between Hypnotherapy and Yogic Science: A Review on Alleviating Examination Anxiety and Enhancing Academic Performance in Secondary School Students

Amit Kumar Biswas¹, dr. Venkat Patil²

¹Research Scholar, Manipur International University, Manipur, India

²Vice Principal and Dean Academics, Smt. Indira Gandhi College of Engineering, Navi Mumbai

Abstract

Examination stress is a common educational issue throughout secondary schooling and at the high-stakes education, like that found in India. Not just an impact on the mental health, the level of anxiety also impacts the cognitive ability in a mutually reinforcing pattern of not doing as well. This is indicated by hypnotherapy, a treatment technique that enables attentive concentration and increased receptivity to suggestion, which have been achieved in dealing with performance related fears. Markedly, many of its processes are similar to various aspects of Yogic Science such as the pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), sankalpa (positive intention), and chitta shuddhi (purification of the mind). The present review gives a synaesthesia of empirical studies conducted globally, particularly in India and constellates both psychological and Yogic orientations. Cultural implications of Indian educational settings are determined by accordance to trends and gaps in recent studies (2018-2024). These results indicate that the integration of hypnotherapy and Yogic models potentially increases acceptance and efficacy and provides a culturally informed and evidence-based approach to increasing emotional resilience and academic achievement of students.

Keywords: Hypnotherapy, Yogic Science, Examination Anxiety, Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Exams have always been regarded as an essential assessment instrument in the education systems across the world. School going students, especially the students going to secondary schools in India and especially in West Bengal are excessively pressured to perform well because of the cutthroat competition in the board examinations and the social pressure of achieving predetermined marks. It is these high stakes environment that causes examination anxiety to be so pervasive in the society and is a certain form of performance anxiety where an individual becomes overly worried, physiologically aroused and under a compromised test-taking performance (Zeidner, 1998). The consequential academic outcomes are immense because anxiety can influence poor working memory, attention, and motivation and eventually cause poor academic performance (Putwain, 2007).

Although commonly used interventions to manage examination anxiety are cognitive-behavioural therapy, relaxation training, mindfulness-based techniques, there is an upward trend in the use of hypnotherapy as

an underdeveloped practice. Hypnotherapy is the process of inducing somebody to a calm state of focused attention and increased suggestibility so that it can be therapeutically re-framed that the distorted thoughts and behaviours can be reframed (Heap & Aravind, 2002). Hypnotherapy deals with the physiological and cognitive sides of anxiety through the facilitation of intense relaxation, improvement of self-control, and effective formation of constructive mental images.

In the light of Yogic Science, the processes of hypnotherapy echo with the pristine Indian philosophical and psychological culture. Yogic literature like the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali outline methods of mental training that can be compared to the induction process of hypnosis, with processes of sensory withdrawal (pratyahara), long held focus of attention (Dharana), and meditative trance with absorption (dhyana). Additionally, goal-oriented processes, like sankalpa--setting a positive intention, are similar to goals of the hypnotherapy hypnotic suggestion procedure, and goal-oriented-principles of chitta shuddhi, which have the therapeutic goal of purifying the mind.

This paper is an endeavour to bring the findings of research in both the psychological and Yogic school of thought together and make their contributions to the developing language on interdisciplinary studies into bringing students to a state of perfection to focus on factors that can improve their performance in various areas.

OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

1. To examine the empirical evidence on hypnotherapy for examination anxiety and academic performance.
2. To explore conceptual parallels between hypnotherapy and Yogic Science.
3. To discuss the cultural and educational implications of integrating hypnotherapy within a Yogic framework.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hypnotherapy and Examination Anxiety

One of the most popular types of performance anxiety is examination anxiety, which negatively influences the possibilities of proving their academic potential by the students. It is expressed in physiological ways (accelerated heart rate, tight muscles), cognitions (I will fail) as well as avoiding behaviours.

More than a few studies have shown that hypnotherapy is effective in alleviating examination fears and anxiety:

- **Schreiber (2000)** discovered that college students exposed to six sessions on hypnotherapy manifested much less scores of anxieties when compared to their controls as per the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI).
- **Flammer and Bongartz (2003)** performed a meta-analysis that demonstrated that the interventions based on hypnosis worked just as well as or even better than the other relaxation-based measures to reduce anxiety.
- In an Indian context, **Singh and Sharma (2012)** mentioned that students of secondary schools, who underwent four sessions of hypnotherapy prior to taking examinations showed notable reductions in both worry and physiological arousal components of test anxiety.

The mind control and hyper-relaxation of hypnosis finds a parallel in the Yogic experience of pratyahara (giving inward attention) and sankalpa (making affirmative decisions), which implies that similar mechanisms are present in both experiences.

Hypnotherapy and Academic Performance

In addition to its effects on anxiety, hypnotherapy has demonstrated that it is also a possible direct intervention in the learning and academic success:

- **Barabasz and Barabasz (1992)** used study groups who were given hypnotic suggestions of better concentration, memory recall and compared the results with a control group who were given no suggestions and the results on memory retention tasks proved that the former outperformed the latter.
- **Gibson (2008)** pointed out how guided imagery and hypnotic visualisation could enhance efficiency of preparation and recalling an exam.
- **Kaur and Kaur (2015)** concluded that Indian students that underwent hypnotherapy prior to academic testing received higher grades than those students that had exclusively used the conventional study approaches.

Comparative Insights – Hypnotherapy and Yogic Practices

Although hypnotherapy and Yogic practice, in general, were developed in secluded cultures, studies propose parallel advantages in thinking and affectual management:

- **Neurophysiological overlap:** Both of the practices engage brain areas that decrease with activity in stress and increase connecting in the attention chains.
- **Psychological consequences** Both promote self-regulation, alignment of goals (sankalpa) and decrease maladaptive cognitive styles.
- **Practical dissimilarities:** It could take considerable time before practitioner's experience breakthrough effects through certain activities of the Yogic tradition, such as meditation and pranayama, due to the need of a daily commitment; hypnotherapy may be used to achieve some success more rapidly in select cases because it has been treated with more specific sessions.

Such complementarity makes hypnotherapy an acceptable therapeutic instrument within the larger philosophical framework of Yogic Science, when particular emphasis is put on the mental discipline and self-development.

GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

Although there are other supporting facts, there are some loopholes:

- **Scanty Indian-based studies** linking the results of hypnotherapy to the Yogic philosophical principles.
- **Paucity of research** that employed large and heterogeneous samples of students in India attending secondary schools.
- **Limited longitudinal research** to do something about the sustainability of the academic and emotional improvements made by means of hypnotherapy.

Such gaps underscore the significance of research including that of the current PhD study as it is beneficial in not just exploring the significance of hypnotherapy in examination anxiety and academic performance but also embedding its significance within the conceptual framework of Yogic Science.

METHOD

The literature search was carefully undertaken in Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus as well as Indian psychological databases between January 1990 and July 2024. The most important ones were the hypnotherapy, test and exam anxiety, academic performance, yogic practices, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, sankalpa, and chitta shuddhi. Studies were identified where they:

1. Concentrated on the group of students between 13-15 years.
 2. Applied hypnotherapy as a first- or a second-line treatment.
 3. Measured variables were either on anxiety or performance.
 4. Published on peer-reviewed journals.
- Additional inclusion occurred on conceptual articles that connected a connection between hypnotherapy and Yogic principles whether tested or not. Other research on clinical hypnosis irrelevant to medical conditions were not counted.
 - A thematic synthesis was used, which enabled the inclusion of the psychological and Yogic considerations on the topic in each of the discussions.
 - A thematic synthesis approach was applied, allowing integration of psychological and Yogic perspectives within each discussion section.

This review synthesised publications done between 1990 and 2024, that looked at how hypnotherapy can address examination anxiety, academic performance and Yogic principles. The search of the literature was done in PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Indian academic journals on the combination of the following keywords: hypnotherapy, test anxiety, academic performance, yogic practices, pratyahara, dharana, sankalpa, and chitta shuddhi.

Inclusion criteria were:

1. Studies on the basis of empirical data and involving school or college students,
2. Wholesome Hypnotherapy explicitly used interventions
3. outcome measures on the reduction of anxiety or the various parameters of improvement in school.
4. pertinence to Yogic Science by way of either explicit or mechanism inference.

Publications of reception of hypnosis by unrelated medical or clinical reasons were ruled out. Additional studies of relevance were found by manually searching reference lists of identified articles. Information was retrieved and categorised in themes to make a synthesis between the psychological processes and Yogic conceptual analogies.

HYPNOTHERAPY – CONCEPT, MECHANISM, AND APPLICATIONS

Concept of Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy This type of therapy is used to improve psychological and behaviour change by taking advantage of the state of hypnosis, which is a natural but distorted state of awareness that is marked by focused attention, increased suggestibility and diminished peripheral awareness. Unlike most misunderstandings about hypnosis, clients are not unconscious during this process, nor are they under mind control; instead, it is a source of cooperation between the therapist and the client as the former helps the latter enter into a receptive state of mind so that the positive therapy suggestions can be easier to accept by the client (Elkins et al., 2015).

In this state, people can reach the deeper experiences of mental imagery and reshape the limiting beliefs; moreover, people learn to become more effective in self-regulation. The treatment is applicable in variations of clinical applications, which include the management of pain, phobia, and habit control, and performance. As regards to educating, it would be applicable, specifically to overcome examination anxiety and to build academic confidence.

Mechanism of Hypnotherapy

The successful use of hypnotherapy can be justified both on psychological and neurophysiological levels:

- **Sharpened Concentration:** Hypnosis, just like Dharana, applies in the Yogic Science of

concentration on one particular idea, image, idea or suggestion without allowing the distractions into the mind.

- **The Relaxation Response:** Hypnotic induction will produce profound relaxation that will decrease the activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the cortisol levels-physiological manifestations of less anxiety.
- **Increased Suggestibility:** The critical faculty of the mind is temporarily shut down in the hypnotic state and positive suggestions are then assimilated with greater efficiency. This is similar to the Yogic concept of sankalpa--a willful and definite assertion maintained in an open frame of mind.
- **Imagery and visualisation:** the formation of pleasant emotional ties with educational practices and improved memory consolidation, learning, and reinforcement can be invoked with the use of directed auditory images under hypnosis. It can be compared with such practices of meditative visualisation in dhyana.
- **Cognitive Restructuring:** Hypnotherapy helps to restructure maladaptive beliefs, such as, I always fail in exam, and helps to replace this with constructive self-statements, which went with Yogic aspiration chitta shuddhi or purification of mental contents.

Neuroimaging studies points to the fact that hypnosis also triggers the changes in the anterior cingulate cortex, prefrontal cortex, and default mode network, which are also affected by meditative practices (Oakley & Halligan, 2013). This commonality in the neural grounds also lends strength to the hypnotherapy/ Yogic Science interface as a logic band.

Applications in Educational Settings

Hypnotherapy has proved to have a number of effects on students:

1. **Decreased Examination Anxiety:** Relaxation via hypnotic techniques ameliorates physiological stress arousal, and reframing via suggestion attenuates the build-up of worry about the exam.
2. **Strength of Concentration:** Practice of skills such as intense visualisation and rehearsals enhances concentration by increasing the attention span and eliminating thoughts that behold the mind.
3. **To enhance the Memory and recall:** Hypnotherapy may help to encode things under less interference of anxiety.
4. **Enhancing the Academic Self-Efficacy:** Positive beliefs and mental strengths make a student feel more confident in what he poor capabilities.
5. **Emotional Regulation:** Hypnotherapy also increases the ability to control stress reactions thus making the students consistently perform under pressure.

Common Research Designs

Research on hypnotherapy and worry Stress related to examinations, and performance at school or university usually uses:

- **Quasi-experimental and experimental design** – Some often use pre-test/post-test control group designs.
- **Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs)** – The gold standard of isolation of the effect of treatment.
- **Single-subject designs** – they come in handy when seeking to know how individual subjects respond, and in pilot work.

For example:

- **In the study conducted by Edmonston (1991),** the following research design was involved when evaluating the changes in anxiety experienced by the students after hypnosis intervention- Pre-

test/Post-test control group.

- **Barabasz and Barabasz (2006)**, in a survey on RCTs, revealed the marked improvements in concentration and low anxiety levels following the hypnotherapy sessions.

Characteristics of Sample

- Majority of the studies target secondary or higher secondary students who are bound to take high-stakes exams.
- The size of samples is different- small pilot groups (n = 20 30) or larger samples (n = 100+).
- Gender and social-economic heterogeneity is also prone to underreporting that may also produce lack of generalisability.

Structure of Intervention

Common hypnotherapy treatment (for exam anxiety) consists of:

- **Session Duration** - each session ranged between 30 and 45 minutes.
- **Frequency** – 4-6 sessions per month up to 6-weekly.
- **Core Components** - with Relaxation induction, deepening, positive suggestion, ego-strengthening and, finally, future visualisation.

Remarkably, they coincide with Yogic concepts of pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (fixity of attention) and sankalpa (intention of positivity), which is not made clear in most of these studies.

Measurement Tools

- **Examination Anxiety** - Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI), Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS), Sarason Test Anxiety Scale.
- **Academic Performance**- Standardised academic test score, exam in school or GPA.

They are useful, but they do not include an integration of mind-body awareness variables that Yogic Science would appreciate, namely, subjective evaluations of levels of calm, perceived mental sharpness, or qualitative self-report measures of inner concentration.

Relevance for Current PhD Research

This study is uniquely positioned to:

- Make hypnotherapy a single intervention and have direct association of the processes of hypnotherapy to the Yogic processes of sankalpa / pratyahara and Dharana.
- Use objective measures of anxiety and task performance, and the subjective scale ratings of focus and calmness to accommodate both Western and Yogic ways of thinking.
- Put findings into the Indian adolescent context so that the findings become culturally acceptable.

Present a conceptual integration model that would show that the use of hypnotherapy is a natural part of the Yogic Science, which does not need supplementary yogic techniques such as asanas or pranayama.

RESULT

Implications for Examination Anxiety in Indian Context

Cultural, parental, and societal expectations lead to the increase in examination stress even in India. Subconscious reprogramming provided in hypnotherapy allows to take care of:

- **Performance Pressure** – By making an exam pleasant instead of dangerous.
- **Self-Efficacy** – Through developing the confidence in themselves.
- **Physiological Calm** – Reducing the activation of sympathetic nervous system, thereby decreasing the level of so-called fight-or-flight response during examinations.

It is more personally appealing to the students and instructors who respect their indigenous practices,

which makes hypnotherapy culturally congruent when framed with the context of Yogic Science.

Research Opportunities

This doctoral work will be able to answer important gaps by:

1. **Developing a Yogic-Hypnotherapy Conceptual Model** - The description of how every stage of the hypnotherapy will be linked to the yogic discipline of the mind.
2. **Measuring both quantitative and qualitative outcomes** - Measures changes in performance, anxiety and subjective feeling of calmness and attention.
3. **Long-term Effects** - What is the aftereffect several months later and are the benefits still in there?
4. **Cultural Tailoring** - Editing the hypnotic texts to integrate cultural familiarity in the metaphors and imagery obtained in the Yogic philosophy.

Practical Implications

- **Even the Educational Institutions** can introduce hypnotherapy classes in the form of Yogic mental mastery classes so that they can be more acceptable to the traditional society.
- **Counsellors and Therapists** could include yogic nomenclatures and ideologies into the description of the use of hypnotherapy to Indian parents making it less sceptical.
- **Policy Makers** can regard hypnotherapy as cheap, non-invasive mental wellness practice that is consistent with the India legacy.

DISCUSSION

The Conceptual Connection between Hypnotherapy and the Yogic Science

Whereas Hypnotherapy may be described as generally a Western psychotherapeutic intervention, the methodology, procedures, and philosophy of it have significant similarity with the Yogic Science notions. Classical texts, e.g., Patanjali Yoga Sutras and Bhagavad Gita, are considered to be the sources of Yogic Science, which were later explained through the aspects of mind (manas), intellect (buddhi) and consciousness (chitta), as the main devices of self-control and change. Hypnotherapy falls under the same realm and its mode of action is by reflectively changing the mind, emotions and behaviours through the influence of the subconscious mind.

States of Consciousness

There are various levels of consciousness which are recognized by the yogic philosophy:

- **Jagrat (waking)** – awareness directed to the outside world
- **Swapna (dreaming)** – inner visualization and symbolic stuff
- **Sushupti (deep sleep)** – uninterrupted sleep and lack of busyness of consciousness
- **Turiya** – pure awareness transcendental state

Hypnotherapy achieves a similar condition as pratyahara (withdrawal of senses) and Dharana (focused attention) which can be found between jagrat and swapna. The rational part of the mind loses its influence and the subconscious becomes more open much like the Yogic method of lessening the vrittis (mind fluctuations) to reach new layers of the mind.

Mechanism of Change – Sankalpa and Suggestion

Sankalpa is a focused, affirmative intention conceived in clarity of purpose in Yoga. The same thing occurs with the main method in hypnotherapy which is the positive therapeutic suggestion. The two seek to substitute negative thought formations with positive and goal-oriented thoughts.

For example:

- During Yoga Nidra a practitioner makes a sankalpa like: “I will be relaxed and attentive during

exams.”

- Hypnotherapy In hypnotherapy, the client is guided into trance by the therapist who can offer suggestions to the client such as You are calm and confident when you are writing your exams.

The consistency in this is clear in terms of structure, and intent.

Mind Regulation – Pratyahara, Dharana, and Dhyana

The processes used by Hypnotherapy sessions themselves are those detailed in Yogic Science:

- **Pratyahara** – turning of focus off the senses.
- **Dharana** – maintaining a focus on imagery, or affirmations.
- **Dhyana** – continuance of deep but un-distractive mental absorption of the process of therapy.

The progression of the sensor restriction to prolonged mental attention is indicative of the change which occurs during hypnotic inductions, deepening and/or during suggestive suggestions.

Breath and Nervous System Regulation

Although pranayama is not technically employed during hypnotherapy, one may start by focusing the breathing which starts slowly and rhythmically to induce a relaxing state. This shares with the Yogic belief that breathing exercises affect prana (vital energy) and affect the autonomic nervous system. This is endorsed in modern neurophysiology in that slow diaphragmatic breathing has the effect of lowering sympathetic arousal encouraging a receptive state of therapeutic engagement.

Philosophical Integration with Yogic Science

Yogic tradition and especially Yoga Sutras of Patanjali focus on controlling the mind as a condition of clarity of thinking, focusing and self-realisation. Even though as a contemporary practice, hypnotherapy has a very different modern psychological foundation, there are some alarming similarities between its methodology and experiences with these ancient ideas:

- **Pratyahara (Withdrawing of Senses):** The induction phase in hypnotherapy is the same as the pratyahara, where one draws attention of the subject away from external environment and concentrates on the inner.
- **Dharana (Concentration):** Deepening and the suggestion stages of hypnotherapy develop one point ecosystem and this creates cognitive stability which is a direct equivalent of Dharana.
- **Sankalpa (Resolute Intention):** Hypnosis positive suggestions are similar to sankalpa, which is a firm, affirmative determination impressed upon the subconscious.
- **Chitta Vritti Nirodha (Stillness of mental Fluctuations):** The hypnotic trance invites the mind to rest against needless thinking, facilitating an inner state of peace as consistent with the yoga goal.

This common denominator gives the possibility to argue that the hypnotherapy method may be introduced as a recent technology with the beginnings held deep in the abyss of time in yogic practices outside of the usage of asanas or pranayama.

CONCLUSION

Placing hypnotherapy in the conceptual context of Yogic Science would enable us to reconcile the gulf that has persisted between antique methods of mental training and the contemporary methods of therapeutic block. This not only makes the academic argument in support of the efficacy of hypnotherapy more potent, but also makes it more palatable in terms of culture, in a place like secondary schools in West Bengal. The contribution of your research can be meaningful because you empirically confirm the dual identity of hypnotherapy, to the extent that it both represents a powerful technique of modern psychology, and a time-honoured art of the ancient yogic tradition.

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