

Unveiling the Relationship between Cultural Practices & Well-Being among Brahmin Students

K Nigesh¹, Saranya T.S^{2*}

ABSTRACT

The present paper reports a study entitled 'Cultural Practices and Well-being among Tamil Brahmin Students'. India has a rich culture and heritage. That too the Vedic culture of India is something note worthy. The aims of the research include unfolding the rich cultural heritage of Vedic Brahmins belonging to Tamil community and to see how this rich tradition influences their general well-being and intelligence. Culture represents the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Hofstede,1997). Culture is the backbone of every society. Culture has either a direct or indirect influence on all the activities of the society. It ranges from day to day activities to deeper traits. The practices, rituals and even habits of the society are largely dependent upon the culture. The subjects of the study, Tamil Brahmins stay in separate settlements called AGRAHARAMS and follow a typical lifestyle. Some of them still follow a socially secluded life, restricting themselves within the walls of their cultural practices. The sample consists of 90 subjects, belonging to Tamil Brahmin community and it is divided into three groups 1) 30 people with regular practices 2) 30 people with occasional practices and 3) 30 people with no practice at all. The following tools are used to collect the data 1) cultural practices checklist (prepared by the researchers) 2) PGI General Wellbeing Measure by R.Anitha and P. Sareena. The parametric statistics was applied to analyze the obtained data. Well-being is generally considered as a subjective feeling of contentment, happiness, and satisfaction with life's experiences. The results show that there is a significant correlation between the cultural practices existing among Tamil Brahmins and their well-being. The study throws light upon the influence of various cultural practices on well-being. It also helps to know how much cultural practices decide the wellbeing of persons living in the particular society. The study reminds us of our rich cultural practices and how the learning of Vedas could be embedded into the present education system to improve the general well-being of

¹ Clinical psychologist, CDMRP, Calicut University, Malappuram District, Thenhipalam, Kerala, India

² Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, India

*Responding Author

Received: June 20, 2017; Revision Received: July 5, 2017; Accepted: July 20, 2017

the students. The paper thus presents not just psychological perspectives, but anthropological and sociological factors as well.

Keywords: *Students, Culture & Well-Being.*

Culture is an important factor which influences many of the psychological traits. Nature-nurture debate is as old as the history of psychology. The word culture comes from the Latin word *collegere*, meaning “to cultivate”. Even though culture is a term widely used in anthropology the term’s significance in psychology is not small. Culture is considered to be group-specific behavior that is acquired, at least in part, from social influences (McGrew, 2004). Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Hofstede, 1997). It is evident that cultural practices influence various psychological factors; be it intelligence, well-being or emotional intelligence.

The study mainly focused on the cultural practices of Tamil Brahmins, a group which is well known for their typical cultural practices and rituals. Tamil Brahmins are south Indian Brahmins who reside in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. They belong to two groups, Iyers, and Iyengars. The former are Saivaites and latter are Vaishnavites. They are predominantly Smarthas or followers of Smriti texts. The term Iyer came from the Tamil word Ayya which is a Prakrit Version of the Sanskrit word Arya. Iyer rituals comprise rites as described in Hindu scriptures such as Apstamba Sutra attributed to Apastamba. The most important rites are the shod as a sanskaras or the 17 essential Samskara. Although many rites and rituals that were practiced in ancient times are no longer followed, some traditions are continued to this day. Iyers are initiated into rituals at the time of birth. In ancient times, rituals in the life of a Brahmin child started at the time of his/her birth, i.e. when the baby was being separated from mother’s umbilical cord. This ceremony is called Jatakarma. However, this practice is no longer observed. Starting from Jatakarma a Tamil Brahmin child is exposed to various ritualistic practices. These practices include Sanskrit education, Veda Chanting, Sandya vandanam, learning of mantra and so on. Moreover, they follow a highly ritualistic systematic life including early morning wake up, pure vegetarian diet etc. Review of literature says that cultural factors influence intelligence to some extent (Ingold, 2000) previous studies mainly tried to focus on the influence of cultural practices on the physiology of the brain. Even they have found that age old ritualistic practices had led to some changes in the neural networks of the brain. Cultural practices guide the day to day interaction of its inmates with the social and spiritual surroundings. These interactions are the locus of inter-psychological processes (Hutchins E, 2008).

Culturally constituted inter-psychological processes change through historical time. They are also targets for internalization as intra-psychological processes. Intra-psychological processes set the selective pressures for the evolution of biological cognitive systems. Therefore, rather than imagining that ‘some relatively small neural (or neural/bodily) difference was the spark

Unveiling the Relationship between Cultural Practices & Well-Being among Brahmin Students

that lit a kind of intellectual forest fire' (Clark 2001), it is equally probable that a series of small changes in cultural practices gave rise to new high-level inter-psychological processes, which in turn shaped certain intra-psychological processes, and these, in turn, favoured certain small neural or neural/bodily differences over other neural or neural/bodily differences (Hutchins, 2008).

Well-being is a very popular concept in health psychology. Several types of research have focussed on the influence of various factors like lifestyle, coping strategies etc on well-being (Meland, 1996). Another term which is used along with well being is the quality of life. Well, Being is an umbrella concept that refers to all aspects of a person's life, including physical health; psychological well-being; social well-being; financial well-being; family relationships; friendships; work; leisure; and the like. Like Quality of life, happiness is another term which is used interchangeably with well-being. One definition of happiness is the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his or her life as favorable (Veenhoven 1991, 1993). Psychologists draw a distinction between the wellbeing of life as a whole and the well-being associated with a single area of life: these they term "context-free" and "context-specific". These researchers view it as natural that a concept such as happiness should be studied in part by asking people how they feel. Adopting multifaceted and holistic notions of health has encouraged a focus on wellness alongside illness. It also has highlighted the relevance of studying and improving experiences of well-being.

The link between health and well-being is stated perhaps most clearly in the World Health Organization's (WHO) description of human health: "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Ramsey and Smith, 2002). Well-being is a function of the degree of congruence between individual's wishes, needs and his environmental demands and opportunities. Wellbeing was defined by Diener, Eunkook, and Shigehiro (1997) as "how people evaluate their lives". From this perspective of the internal experience of the person, subjective well-being is considered to be a function of three variables: life satisfaction, lack of negative mental states and the presence of positive mood and emotion. Its components are both cognitive and affective. Review of literature shows that cultural practices can have a direct influence on well-being (Panelli, 2007). The present study was conducted to see the influence of century's long cultural practices on the well-being of Tamil Brahmin students.

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were formulated,

H1: There will be a significant difference in well-being among the three groups.

H2: Group with regular practice will have the highest well-being among the three groups.

H3: Group with no practice will have the lowest well-being score among the three groups.

METHOD

Sample

The present study was carried out on 90 Tamil Brahmin males aged between 18-25. Thirty participants had regular practices (who scored more than 7 in the checklist), 30 had occasional practices (between 5 and 7 in the checklist) and 30 had less or no practice at all (less than 4). The subjects were given a briefing of the study before the study was conducted and no paid participation was there.

Tools

1. **Cultural Practices Checklist;** this was constructed by authors. This checklist included 10 items. The items are as follows, early morning wake up, pure vegetarian diet, Sanskrit education, learning of mantra, learning of tantra, sandyavandanam, worshipping, chanting, others like music, yoga, and Ayurveda. Based on the results of the checklist 30 people were selected from each group. Namely, group with regular practices, occasional practices, and no practice were considered
2. **Well-being scale:** P G I Well-being scale by Anitha and Sareena. It has 20 items which measure the well-being of the person in the present and previous month.

RESULTS

The data was subjected statistical analysis. Statistical analysis was carried out using spss 16.0 version. Descriptive statistics Mean and SD were used; ANOVA was used to check the significant difference among the means of all the groups.

Table I: SD, F ratio for the variable well-being for different groups.

Variables	Groups	Mean	Std.deviation	N	Df	F	Sig.
Wellbeing	Regular practice	17.70	2.46	30	2	32.59	0.00
	No practice	13.27	2.37	30			
	Moderate practice	16.33	1.58	30			
	Total	15.77	2.84	90			

Table II: showing the post hoc tests of significance

Tukey HSD					
Dependent Variable	(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
wellbeing	practicing	not practicing	4.433*	.566	.000
		moderately	1.355	.570	.051
	not practicing	practicing	-4.433*	.566	.000
		moderately	-3.078*	.570	.000
	moderately	practicing	-1.355	.570	.051
		not practicing	3.078*	.570	.000

*Significant at .05 level

DISCUSSION

The major findings of the study were,

- There was a significant difference among various groups in wellbeing.
- well-being is highest for moderately practicing group
- Not practicing group found to be lower than the other two groups in wellbeing
- The study accepted hypothesis 1,2 & 3

The present study found a significant relationship between cultural practices and well-being among the three groups. According to the study, a group with regular practices has the highest well-being score. This result was much expected since the group with regular practices lead a more serene and blissful life with regular practices such as yoga, music, systematic life, pure vegetarian diet, Vedic chanting and so on. Especially yoga has a direct influence on the well-being of a person. Yoga relaxes the mind making the person happier, thereby directly contributing to the well-being (Sharma, 2008). Mantra Chanting also has similar effects. Mantras are very powerful and most of the sounds in mantras are meaningless. But when chanted in a particular frequency it can bring about enormous power to the person, a sense of well-being and bliss (Rajhan, 2009) Vedic chanting also has similar effects.

Vedic Chanting can bring a new lease to life by increasing attention and concentration (Gahligi, 2006). A Pure Vegetarian diet can control emotions and bring down the level of anger (Wolfe, 2008) When compared to the first group the other two groups are not fully indulged in these rituals. Above all the first group lead a 'Gurukul' kind of life away from external distraction and tensions, whereas the other two groups have to face daily tensions at least to some extent. Another reason which could be attributed to the increased well-being is that the first group lead a life which is totally devoted to God. Research shows that staunch belief in God can alleviate many problems (William, 1999).

In summary, this study doesn't intend to say that the ritualistic practice among Tamil Brahmins is the only factor that contributes to the Well-being of the group. Several studies on the effects of Vedic learning had found that it has a direct influence on the concentration and increased attention span (Ghaligi,2006) Especially Vedic chanting results in sustained attention and improvement in memory(Nagendra,2006). There may be some limitation to the studies like sample size, control sample, and others. Therefore, caution is needed in generalizing the results of this study.

CONCLUSION

Man cannot be separated from his culture. The regular practices of rituals and customs of a group make them more confirm to feelings of the group. These feelings in turn creates a sense of self-worth and acceptance among individuals. The sense of acceptance and self-worth is an important dimension of well-being. Thus, any practices that increase self-worth, acceptance and support function can increase the well-being of an individual.

Limitation

- The sample size is 90 out of which only 30 individuals regularly involve in cultural practices.
- Only one culture is taken into consideration. Different results should have yielded from different communities.
- Several other dimensions like Intelligence, Stress Coping, Mental Health etc. should have taken into consideration.

Acknowledgments

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interests: The author declared no conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson & Hilgard (2004), *Introduction to Modern Psychology* (14th ed.), Eastern Press, Bangalore.
- Christopher, J.C. (1999) Situating psychological well-being: exploring the cultural roots of its theory and research. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 77:141–152
- Coombes, B. (2006) Defending community? Indigeneity, self-determination and Environmental Specificity, *Eco Health Journal*, vol. 5(2), pp177-180.
- Dowsett, N. C. et al., (1997), *Yoga and education: integral education series* 2nd ed. Sri Aurobindo Society Pondicherry
- Ghaligi, S., & Nagendra H,(2006), Effect of Vedic chanting on memory and sustained attention, *Indian journal of traditional knowledge*, vol5(2),pp177-180
- Ghurye, G. S. (1991). *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- Hanky, A. (2006), Studies of Advanced Stages of Meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist and Vedic Traditions. I: A Comparison of General Changes, *Evid Based Complement Alternative Med.* 2006 December; 3(4): 513–521.
- Harshananda, S. (2008), *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, R K Mutt, Bangalore.
- Larson, J. (1993) The measurement of social well-being. *Social Indicators Research* 28:285–296
- Larson, R.J., Diener, E., & Emmoms, R.A., An evaluation of subjective well-being measures. *Social Indicators Research* 1985; 17: 1–7.
- Malathi, A., Damodaran, A., Shah, N., Patil, N. & Maratha, S. Effect of Yogic practices on Subjective well-being. *Ind J Physiol Pharmacology* 2000; 44(2): 202–206
- Meland, E. et.al (2005), *Lifestyle intervention in general practice: Effects on psychological well-being and patient satisfaction*
- Miskiman, D. E., (1972), *Performance on a learning task by subjects who practice the transcendental meditation technique*. Scientific research on the Transcendental Meditation program West Germany, Maharshi European Research University Press.
- Paneli, R. et al (2007), *Placing Well-Being: A Maori Case Study of Cultural*

Unveiling the Relationship between Cultural Practices & Well-Being among Brahmin Students

- Rangan, R. et al (2009), *Effect of yogic education system and modern education system on memory*, Vol (2), Pp-55-61.
- Jadhav, S. G. et al (2009), Effect of Yoga Intervention on Anxiety and Subjective Well-being. *Journal of Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 35, No.1, 27-31.
- Sharma, R. et al (2008), Effect of yoga based lifestyle intervention on subjective well-being, *Indian Journal for physiological pharmacology*.35(1),29-45.
- Udapa, K. N., Singh, R.H., & Yadav, R.A., Certain studies on psychological and biochemical response to the practice of Hatha Yoga in young normal volunteers. *Ind J Med Res* 1973; 61(2): 237–244.
- Williams, D.D. (1999) Scientific Research of Prayer: Can the Power of Prayer Be Proven? *slim Report*, vol. 8 #4
- Wood, C., (1993) Mood change and perceptions of vitality: a comparison of the effects of relaxation, visualization, and Yoga. *JR Soc Med*

How to cite this article: Nigesh K, & Saranya T S (2017). Unveiling the Relationship between Cultural Practices & Well-Being among Brahmin Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 4, (4), DIP:18.01.019/20170404, DOI:10.25215/0404.019