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THE IMPACT OF BHANGRA PARTICIPATION ON THE HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT:

Bhangra is the most popular folk dance of Punjab and Punjabi Community. It is able to make a global presence due to its energetic and vigorous movements and so it is considered as a way of life by many participants and they believed that it is a magic wand which can make them more strong, confident, healthy and popular. In this study, an attempt was made to study the impact of bhangra participation on the overall health and well-being of its participants. With the help of structured interviews, opinions of the students were collected and with the help of analysis of these responses, the results are presented in this study. Besides this, the study also takes into consideration the previous studies and research articles related to the topic. The participants reported that bhangra changes their life style in many ways. They receive respect and appreciation from their friends and family due to cultural roots of this folk dance. It boosts their self-confidence by improving their overall well-being. It has been observed in different studies that bhangra improves cardio-vascular health, muscle strength, flexibility, stress, anxiety issues, weight etc. The dances improve overall well-being of students if they practiced it daily. India's demographic dividend needs more physical activity so that they can realise their full potential and contribute to the overall development of our country. So, the folk-dance participation in schools as well as in colleges can save our youth from the negative impact of social and psychological experiences.

KEYWORDS:

FOLK DANCE, HEALTH, MUSIC, MUSCLE STRENGTH, PUNJABI COMMUNITY, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, YOUTH FESTIVALS, WELL-BEING.

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1. BACKGROUND

Human beings, in this present era, are facing many challenges such as physical health issues, issues related to mental and emotional well-being, smartphone addiction, drug addiction, various types of violence/hate among different groups of people, cyber-bullying, and many such evils. It is imperative that governments, societies, educational institutions, and others give urgent attention to all of these issues. Hence, the role of educational institutions, along with other community organizations, is critical to shape the future of our youth by structuring the education according to the needs of the present day society and its problems. The curriculum and co-curricular activities in educational institutions should be designed in a way that aids in the holistic development of students. Among the various co-curricular activities, the cultural activities such as folk-dance competitions are being organized in various educational institutions from time to time. And it has been found that the students who took part in these activities are generally healthy, disciplined, mentally strong, emotionally mature, and free from other prevalent evils. This paper is an attempt to highlight the critical importance of Bhangra for the overall well-being of college students in Punjab with the help of interviews of the participants and a review of related literature.

Bhangra is traditional Punjabi Folk Dance, but at present it has been celebrated and used in multiple ways starting from the Bhangra competitions in educational institutes to 'YouTube' channels using it as an aerobic exercise to stay fit and motivate others to do it to retain good health. The youth festivals and folk-dance competitions in educational institutions have certain rules and regulation for this folk dance and these rules are generally similar to the traditional version of this dance. However, Bhangra has been used in Bollywood and Pollywood movies, but the

form used in such movies is far away from its traditional version. Besides these, Bhangra is used as an aerobic exercise and many social media influences promote it for the overall health of the individuals. However, this paper is only focused on the benefits of bhangra on college students and its impact on the health of students and their overall well-being.

Bhangra is quite a comprehensive term which can be explained in a number of ways. It is the most popular folk dance of Punjab and has been customized in a number of ways. In general, Bhangra is a term coined for a lively, vigorous, energetic and musical dance performed by a group of dancers, dressed in a traditional and colourful attire and this dance is accompanied by 'dhol' and 'boliyan'. It has been assumed that the word is derived from the word *bhang.* And many online dictionaries and even some individuals consider that bhangra name is given to this dance due to the harvesting of *bhang.* But this view is totally wrong as bhang (hemp) was never cultivated by Punjabis. This was a harvest dance for the main crop of Punjab that was wheat, but the name was given mainly to indicate the joyful and energetic movements of this dance. As it is considered that after consuming bhang one feels quite joyful so mainly due to this reason, bhangra name is given to this dance.

Bhangra, in its traditional sense, is a rural dance started by the Sikh and Muslim peasants of common Punjab under British India. It has certain rules and regulations and these are still preserved by the Punjabi community. The Punjabi community under the influence of migration and western culture has modified this traditional folk dance in many forms. It can be said that globalization has its influence on this folk dance. Even the famous film industries such as Bollywood and Pollywood have made certain changes in this folk dance according the modern music influence. All these music and dance forms are included under the umbrella term of this folk dance. In a concluded view, *Bhangra is an amazing art form of Punjabis, in which dancers perform different kinds of facial expression and rhythmic body movement to express their inner feelings, emotions, joy and happiness.* In its traditional sense, bhangra is a male dance, but nowadays even girls perform bhangra and in some cases the teams consist of both males and females. Like any other physical activity, this dance form is quite effective for the maintenance of good health, if practiced daily, and besides this it also plays a critical role in the overall well-being of the participants. This paper is an attempt to highlights the various benefits of bhangra on the overall health of its participants.

2. INTRODUCTION

Health is a comprehensive term which includes physical, mental and emotional well-being. Now-a-days, the world is facing problems of drug abuse, obesity, unhealthy eating, physical inactivity and many other diseases. These health problems caused numerous untimely deaths across the world. But these problems became a major challenge in India as most of the population of our country is young. Almost all the countries are facing challenges such as physical health issues, issues related to mental and emotional well-being, smartphone addiction, drug addiction, various types of violence/hate among different groups of people, cyber-bullying and many such evils. All these issues need urgent attention from the governments, societies, educational institutions and others so that the people can effectively help in the overall growth and development of a nation. The overall health, education and economic levels of people determine the Human Development Index (HDI) of any country and depending upon the HDI value, the countries have been placed in different levels such as very high, high, medium and low. Despite aggressive economic performance by Indian economy, we lag behind many countries in terms of HDI value due to their better performance in health and education sector. So, as a nation we need to focus on the health and education of our youth.

India has maximum population of young people in the world and this demographic dividend of India can be used for the overall development of the country if these people have perfect health, education, skills and attitude. The Indian Government remains quite proactive for shaping better future for its younger population and so from time to time, many education plans and policies have been implemented for the better development of the young minds. The recent National Policy on Education, 2020 put critical emphasis on the holistic development of the students by incorporating physical activity along with academics in curriculum. And so, the role of educational institutions, along with other community organizations, is critical to shape the future of our demographic dividend. The curriculum and co-curricular activities in the educational institutions need to be framed in such a way that these help the students for their holistic development. Among the various co-curricular activities, the cultural activities especially those that need vigorous and rhythmic physical movements are quite effective in the overall development of the students. It has been confirmed through various studies that folk dances such as Bhangra play an important role in the better physical, mental and emotional development of the participants.

3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, interview is used as a research method to collect the data from the students. A structured interview was conducted to get answers from the participants. The participants, who were participating in youth festivals from the last two years, have been selected randomly from different colleges from Punjab. More than 40 participants were selected and their answers have been analysed to get a broader perspective. Besides these, the critical review of related studies has been conducted to support the perspective gained through participants interviews. The studies related to the benefits of dance are easily available, but the studies related to bhangra and its benefits are limited. So, the studies related to classical dance, traditional dance, folk dance and dance are included to support the interviewee's answers. The various search terms were used to find out the related studies and these

include 'dance and its benefits' 'bhangra and its benefits', 'analysis of the impact of folk dances on the overall health of students., 'modernisation of bhangra and its impact on the participants', 'physical benefits of bhangra', 'youth festivals and their impact on the youth' 'classical dance and its impact' etc. The findings of these studies have been collaborated with the interviewee's answers and these are summarised under the benefits of bhangra for the overall health of college students in Punjab. Besides these the various social media posts highlighting the overall benefits of bhangra were also included in this study. Various full text articles, few book articles and some newspaper articles were analysed for this study.

4. BENEFITS OF BHANGRA FOR YOUTH

It has been found that the bhangra offers a number of benefits for the overall well-being of its participants and at the same time it changes the environment of the educational institutions in which it has been performed. From the analysis of interviewee's answers and from the review of the related studies, the main benefits of the Bhangra have been organized in five major headings and these are listed below:

I. IMPROVES THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS

It has been reported that the bhangra is quite beneficial for the physical health of its participants. Bhangra is powerful dance and need good body structure and also effective body movements. So, the participants need to do rigorous and rhythmic dancing daily for two or three hours and few months prior to their performance in the youth festivals. Besides dancing, participants also do running, stair case workouts and many other vigorous physical activities to remain fit for the performance. It has been reported by maximum number of participants that their overall health, in terms of fitness level, sleep quality, stable appetite and happiness level, has improved. The participants also shared that their physical capability increased after continuous practice of bhangra for a month and they felt that they were able to perform high energy demanding bhangra moves with ease. The participants also mentioned that they remained calm and peaceful during stressful situations as compared to their peers who were non-dancers. The various studies related to dance also established that fact that dance or any structured body movements offer potential positive effects for the physical health of the participants.

II. HELPS IN THE MAINTENANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

It is well established fact that physical activity of any kind improves the mental health of the individuals. The students observed that they felt more relaxed and had an increased state of well-being after a month of bhangra practice. Various studies also highlighted the fact that the dancers become mentally more fit and this fitness made them more popular among their peers and friends. So, the bhangra dancers gain more self-esteem and self-discipline. During the process of bhangra practice, students need to remember different steps and body movements and at the same time they have to collaborate with other team members in their rigorous performance of these steps and movements. So, they gain more mental clarity with each practice session. This mental clarity helps them in academic studies and also improves their mindset to face the real-life challenges and problems in an easy way. From the review of related literature, it has been observed that dance of any kind helps to release hormones responsible for the feeling of well-being and it also helps the students in their educational development. Dance of any kind during early stages of development helps the students in their academic learning and promoting concentration in studies. Some of the studies analysed the impact of dance on the convergent thinking of students and found that convergent thinking ability of children improved with longitudinal dance practice.

III. STRENGTHENS EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

It has been believed that when people are experiencing extreme emotions of happiness or sadness, then the words failed to communicate their true inner feelings. So, people used different kinds of body movements to express their joy or happiness in the form of rhythmic movements. Every culture or society has developed and refined dances according their needs, joys and celebrations. The college students reported that they felt more happier, joyful and relaxed after the daily practice of bhangra. During the interviews, the participants shared that they get more respect in their family and relatives due to their association with the dance and mostly the elders from the family like grandparents feel proud that their grand kids are keeping their traditions alive by participating in their traditional dance. This feeling made them proud of themselves and they felt more emotionally connected with their family members. The music and rhythm in the bhangra also made them more socially connected with their traditions and community. The participants also observed that the continuous practice made them clearer in conveying their emotions to others and so have a potential positive effect on their emotional well-being. It has been also reported through previous studies that emotional distress, stress, depression and anxiety symptoms in children reduced with consistent dance practice.

IV. HEALS MANY HEALTH ISSUES

The participants also happily shared that their minor health issues like extra weight, pimples on the face, skin related issues, stiffness in the joints, stress etc. got healed after joining bhangra practice. The dancers reported that after few days of practice, their weight started to reduce and they are able to maintain this healthy weight with their normal diet. Various studies on the impact of dance on the health of the participants also confirmed the observations of these students. A newspaper articles also shared an incident that a woman suffering from Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) started doing bhangra to heal her situation. The studies on dance as therapy also confirmed the observations of the college students and highlighted that now-a-days psychologists are also recommending dance classes to manage chronic stress and anxiety. The major problem of today's world is physical inactivity and

all the health issues arise from this. So, the bhangra offers a vigorous and powerful routine that aids in weight management. It has been reported in a study that day time fatigue of girls reduced after 8 months of dance practice and this in turn helps in their sleep quality and overall well-being. The sleep cycle of these girls improved with consistent dance practice.

V. INCREASES MUSCULAR STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY

Bhangra is a high energy dance and regular practice makes the muscles of the body quite strong. This dance uses both upper and lower limbs of the body and with regular practice, the muscles of the body become stronger. Bhangra utilized the whole body and so the dancers were able to expand their body movements with continued practice. The participants reported that in the beginning of the practice, they found it difficult to do various movements like lifting, jumping, arm movements, kicking etc. required during this dance. However, with the routine practice, their muscular strength increased and they used to do dynamic and rigorous movements with ease. And they also reported that with the passage of time, they were able to hold different postures effectively. The sideways leg extensions in Bhangra also improved the strength and flexibility of hip muscles of the participants. The previous studies also established that fact that dancing improves coordination, strength and flexibility besides other health benefits. It has been observed that the dance, as therapy, played an important role in the motor development of children and adolescents. One of the studies also observed that flexibility in dancers is more as compared to non-dancers. Other study confirmed that musculoskeletal strength gained through continuous dancing also improved the overall physical health of the children.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bhangra is considered as a way of life by many participants and they considered that it is a magic wand which can make them more strong, confident, healthy and popular. The participants reported that bhangra changes their life style in many ways. They receive respect and appreciation from their friends and family due to cultural roots of this folk dance. It boosts their self-confidence by improving their overall well-being. It has been observed in different studies that bhangra improves cardio-vascular health, muscle strength, flexibility, stress, anxiety issues etc. Various studies also confirmed that the dance of any kind aids in weight management and also helps in physical, physiological and psychological health improvement. The dances improve overall well-being of students if they practiced it daily. Our demographic dividend needs more physical activity so that they can realise their full potential and folk-dance participation in schools as well as in colleges can save our youth from the negative impact of social and psychological experiences. Besides this, the healthy and educated youth can contribute effectively to the overall growth and development of our country. However, it has been observed that the studies on the benefits of the Bhangra on the health of its participants are very limited. So, there is dire need to study the impact of bhangra, as well as other folk dances, on its participants in Punjab and abroad.

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