

Masturbation : Ancient Indian Perspectives



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Abstract

Masturbation is a sexual act practiced by one on oneself in order to achieve sexual satisfaction. Moderate masturbation can actually render positive effects like reducing stress and anxiety. Masturbation improves cardiovascular health and lowers the risk of type-2 diabetes and elevates mood. Masturbation in young men often is performed when there is a psychological need for emotional fulfillment. But this can set a pattern that carries over into adulthood and may lead to chronic excessive masturbation. This excessive masturbation and the resulting problems can create further psychological problems. One should maintain a balance between suppressing sexual urges and excessive masturbation.

Introduction

Ayurveda and the modern science are of the view that masturbation is a natural urge and a sexual act. It should neither be suppressed nor should one get addicted to it. It should be practiced in

a controlled manner. But, Indian philosophies including yoga contradict it and advocate for celibacy.

‘The Manu Smriti’ or ‘Laws of Manu’ is a very ancient text which has been the source for Hindu laws and social customs for thousands of years. It says that desire is never extinguished by the enjoyment of desired objects; it only grows stronger like a fire fed with clarified butter. If one person should obtain all those sensual enjoyments and another should renounce them all, the renunciation of all pleasure is far better than the attainment of them. Those organs which are strongly attached to sensual pleasures cannot so effectually be restrained by abstinence from enjoyments as by true knowledge[1].

View of Ayurveda

Masturbation (Hasta maithuna) like all natural urges, should not be suppressed, according to Ayurveda. However, over-indulgence in masturbation in combination with unhealthy aspects of our personality can become a cause of increased suffering; over a lifetime masturbation can be a leaky faucet through which our limited life force essence (Ojas) and our mental, emotional and physical resources, can drain.

Emotional pain and masturbation

Using masturbation as escape from, or distorting it with emotional pain, is (mithyāyoga) wrong utilization, according to Ayurveda. Masturbating addictively is (atiyoga) excessive utilization. These are major behavioural causes of endogenous diseases as stated in the Charaka Samhitā, as they confuse and disrupt the balance of our internal natural resources.

Dhātu Kshaya, Mithyāyoga (wrong utilization) and Atiyoga (excessive utilization)

can precipitate loss of libido, a condition from which recovery is difficult, due to the subtlety and complexity of the resources involved. Even though we feel like our libido has an infinite supply (due to the intensity of our desire and attachment), this is actually not the case, especially as we age. As yoga warns that the number of our breaths is limited, Ayurveda teaches us that libido and sexual resources are in fact finite.

Vājīkarana therapy and Rasāyana therapy are methods Ayurveda provides that reverse the deep shut-off of energy and subsequent spread of numbness, which depletes our libido, and the Dhātus. The Dhātus are key physiological entities which comprise both metabolic energy, and its products. Once their depletion and stagnancy (Dhātu Kshaya) occurs, a complete lifestyle change is guaranteed either by the rigors of the healing process or by the suffering created by illnesses.

In Ayurveda text Charak Samhita, Sutrasthana, Chapter 7, Sutra 3-4, there is description of “Non-Suppression of Natural Urges” in detail. One should not suppress the natural urges relating to urine, faeces, semen, flatus, vomiting, sneezing, eructation, yawning, hunger, thirst, tears, sleep and breathing caused by over exertion. For living a normal healthy life, it is necessary that the needs of these natural urges are satisfied instantaneously.

In Charak Samhita, Chikitsasthana, Chapter 2, Sutra 39, it is mentioned that there is no fragrance in a bud. Fragrance appears only when the flower blossoms. Similar phenomenon takes place in the case of semen of the living beings. As the boy becomes adolescent the desire to masturbate arises which is quite natural [1].

In Sutra 40, it is mentioned that person desirous of longevity should not enter into sexual activities before the age of sixteen years. Similarly in Sutra 41 & 42 it is mentioned that a young boy of tender age does not possess all the tissue

elements in their matured form. If it enters into sex act, his body gets dried up like a pond having little water. While describing the undesirability of sex act for a young boy, the illustration of a pond has been cited. This indicates that he has the power to regain semen after some time [1].

In Charak Samhita, Chikitsasthana, Chapter 2, Sutra 41 & 42 it is mentioned that the entire sugarcane plant is pervaded with its juice. Ghee is available in the whole of curd and oil is available in all parts of the sesame seed. Similarly semen pervades the entire body which has the sensation of touch. As water comes out of a wet cloth when squeezed, similarly, the semen trickles out from its site during sex act (chesta) and because of passionate attachment (sankalpa) and physical pressure (pidana). To explain the process of ejaculation of semen, the illustration of a cloth has been cited. Water comes out of the wet cloth by squeezing. By this process the cloth itself remain intact and it does not get worn out. Similarly, by ejaculation of semen, the body of the man does not get decayed [2].

View of Yoga

Yoga is of the view that sexual desire is the most powerful among all desires which should be controlled.

A quote from the Yogavasishtha (5.52.21) says -

कुरङ्गालिपतङ्गेभमीनासूतवेकैकशो हताः ।

सर्वैर्युक्तैरनर्थैस्तु व्यापत्स्यान् कुतः सुखम् ।

Meaning: The deer, elephant, moth, fishes, and bees die through their attraction to their senses of sound, touch, form, taste and odor respectively. But if human beings are afflicted with all the five senses combined together, then where is true bliss to them? During sexual activities people are attracted to all their senses of sound, touch,

form, taste and odor. So sexual desire is the most powerful desires and should be controlled. True bliss can never be achieved by doing sexual activities [3, 4].

Since man has intense sexual desire the Manusmriti (2.215) says -

मात्रा स्वप्ना दुहित्रा वा न विविक्तासनो भवेत् ।

बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामो विव्दांसमपि कर्षति ॥

Meaning: A man should never sleep on the same bed or sit on the same seat along with his mother, sister or daughter because attraction of the sense organs is so strong that it could drive even a great scholar towards them [5,6].

सुगंधो योगिनो देहे जायते बिंदुधारणात् ॥

यावद् बिंदुः स्थिरो देहे तावत्कालमयं कुतः ॥१॥

एवं संरक्षयेद् बिंदुं मृत्युं जयति योगवित् ॥

मरणं बिंदुपातेन जीवनं बिंदुधारणात् ॥२॥ - योगप्रदीपिका

Meaning: If the semen remains constant then strength of the body builds up, steadiness is achieved and there is no fear in life. Hence yogis conserve semen and win over death. Seminal loss means death and its conservation is the best possible way of attaining immortality [7,8].

There is a saying that one will acquire control over sexual desire by experiencing sexual pleasure. This is unreasonable.

न जातु कामः कामानामुपभोगेन शाम्यति ।

हविषा कृष्णवर्तमेव भूय एवाभिवर्धते ॥ - श्रीमद्भागवत ९.१९.१४

Meaning: According to this quote, from Shrimadbhagvat (9:19:14) if one continues to obtain gratification instead of the desire decreasing, it keeps increasing just like a fire which burns even more brilliantly after pouring clarified butter (ghee) into it [9].

Brahmacharya is derived from two words Brahman towards Brahman and charya, to walk. Thus it means going from happiness towards

bliss, because Brahman is blissful. In the literal sense celibacy is applicable to all seekers, but conventionally it refers to a seeker who does spiritual practice avoiding the experience of sexual pleasure, since adolescence.

When defining brahmacharya a quote states that 'ब्रह्मचर्याणां सर्वावस्थासु मनोवाक्कायकर्मभिः सर्वत्र मैथुनत्यागः ।'

Meaning: the sacrifice of intercourse in all states of the body, mind and speech is known as celibacy.

स्मरणं कीर्तनं केली श्रवणं गुह्यभाषणम् ।

संकल्पोऽध्यवसायश्च क्रियानिष्पत्ति एव च ।

एतद् मैथुनं अष्टांगं प्रवदन्ति मनैषिणाः ।

Meaning: 1. Thinking of a woman, 2. Description of her qualities, 3. Playing games with her, 4. Listening to her talk, 5. Speaking to her when alone, 6. Wishing to acquire her, 7. Trying to acquire her and 8. Actual intercourse are the eight types of sexual intercourse.

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥ – श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता (२.५९)

Meaning: A man who does not eat is liberated from all desires except the sexual desire. However after acquiring spiritual knowledge of The Supreme Brahman, the attraction for all desires including sexual desire disappears [9].

Swami Vivekananda, Swami Shivananda, etc. have expressed concepts like 'seminal loss means death'. Without considering in which context they were said, in India two to three generations have accepted these statements as established facts and this has caused considerable loss to them. Doctors all over the world unanimously emphasize that loss of semen during intercourse, masturbation or in nocturnal emissions does not cause any harm and research has proved that seminal ejaculation is harmless. In spite of this being so, how could Swami Vivekananda or Swami

Shivananda make such wrong statements? This is a doubt which many young people harbour. If one tries to understand the context of this statement, it will be clear that neither the doctor nor the Swamis are wrong. This statement was not directed towards the average person. It was meant for seekers of spiritual progress. The intention behind making the statement was to wipe off the existing impression or to prevent the development of the impression that 'ejaculation means happiness' in the subconscious mind of a seeker following the path of Yoga. Such statements are meant to create aversion in the mind according to psychology. Only seekers should contemplate on these statements in this context [10].

Views of modern science

Masturbation is actually a sexual act practiced by one on himself in order to achieve sexual satisfaction. Masturbation refers to the sexual stimulation of a person's genitals, usually to the point of orgasm. The stimulation can be performed manually, by use of objects or tools, or by some combination of these methods. Masturbation is a common form of autoeroticism, providing sexual pleasure or orgasm in the absence of a partner.

Positive effects of masturbation

Moderate masturbation can actually render positive effects like reducing stress and anxiety and promoting the production of 'endorphin' hormone. Endorphin is considered 'feel good hormone' as it brightens up the mood of an individual. Thus, increased amount of endorphin would mean lively mood and high spirits. Besides, this particular hormone is also said to be beneficial for a man's prostate.

Masturbation helps prevent cervical

infections and helps relieve urinary tract infections which would otherwise have occurred due to sexual union. It is associated with improved cardiovascular health and lower risk of type-2 diabetes. It can help work against insomnia naturally, through hormonal and tension release. Orgasm increases pelvic floor strength.

It improves our mood, relieves stress, and strengthens our relationship with ourselves and also strengthens sexual relationship with partner.

Negative effects of masturbation

Excessive masturbation creates a problem when one reaches a point where he does not have any sperms to ejaculate and thus, blood takes over. It affects orgasm too. Psychologically, it leads to the issue of obsessive compulsive disorder of masturbating all the time. The adverse effect on a relationship and the corresponding spouse is rather obvious.

Over masturbation can cause many kinds of physical and mental problems. Prostatitis is of course the most directly noticeable problem. Pain is felt in prostate or testicles or lower back.

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Even pelvis can hurt. One may experience one/many problems like depression, fatigue, chronic fatigue, hair loss in male, low back pain, eye floaters, fuzzy vision, memory problems, absent mindedness and lack of concentration due to excess masturbation.

Masturbation in young men often is performed when there is a psychological need for emotional fulfillment. This can set a pattern that carries over into adulthood and lead to chronic excessive masturbation. This excessive masturbation and the resulting problems can create further psychological problems. Basically, the boys and men use sex as a drug and get trapped in its addiction [11].

Conclusion

Masturbation is a natural phenomenon, normal physiology in human being which should not be mistaken as a sin and should not be suppressed in any way. It is a natural urge and is a form of sexual act. But excessive masturbation should not be practiced as it has many harmful effects on both the body and the mind.

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