

# A Qualitative Analysis of The Experience Of Mood Disorder Patients With Spiritual Silence Practices

Shweta Srivastava<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Visiting Faculty, University of Lucknow

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The proposed research is designed to explore the effect and effectiveness of Spiritual Silence Practices (Hinduism & Buddhism Perspective) as an intervention tool for improving emotional and physical health of patients of mood disorders. Content analysis is done on the interview conducted on 30 randomly selected participants for in-depth exploration of their subjective experiences. The participants showed elevation of their mood, changes in their physical health, felt more connected to themselves and showed metacognitive ability that resulted in volitional control over their thoughts and judgements. The results of the study provided with remarkable insights into the ingenious Indigenous practices that are part of the culture advised for overall health and wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Silence, Content Analysis, Maun, Metacognition, Turiyavastha

## INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Silence is accepted as a spiritual practice of observing silence under specific conditions that is propounded for its various spiritual and mental benefits. Silence is considered as the necessary ingredient in reaching the Ultimate Source of Knowledge in all kinds of Spiritual sadhana in Vedic sciences. Indian psychology provides the platform to address its various psychological benefits through rigorous studies. Spiritual silence is interpreted in many ways in Vedic literature. In Rig Ved VII. 104.1.10.11, it is considered as Asat, which is essentially a platform from where sounds are considered to have emerged. (Brown, 1941) It also serves as a background against which various sounds can be interpreted. And this is why Asat is transcendental in nature and can help in interpreting sounds. In Kena Upanishad, silence is also understood as a transcendental space but it between the knower and knowing where all the seeker goes through an arduous process of projecting thoughts till Silence is achieved and truth is revealed. (Aurobindo, 2001) Hence, it can be implied that sounds and chaos in the form of thoughts come from Silence and in the state of Silence, knowledge or truth can be acquired. Ayurveda and many therapeutic forms of Yoga uses Spiritual Silence or Maun to heal the mind and revitalize the body. In fact, it is considered as the ultimate method to rejuvenate and heal the mind-body balance (Shashtri, 2023).

There are various stages that the practitioner goes through in the consciousness during Spiritual Silence. The first stage is the conscious stage which is much like a waking state of being aware of the body and the surroundings. Next the dream state comes into being which is called as Unmani where one transitions to a pleasurable space of dreaminess. This eventually leads to Taijasya where one starts to actively dream about likes, desires and aversions actively playing within. The Aladani state starts to uncover the thought patterns and conditionings from where once the practitioner transitions without attachment, he/she moves to Prajna. This state has deeper patterns that are ingrained in the consciousness of the practitioner. Once this level is transcended, one attains Samadhi, where the practitioner who was observing and the practitioner who was being observed and the object become one. This again leads to the Ultimate stage called Turiya where one attains Stillness (Vivekananda, 1958).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The impact of silence on the brain especially when there is absence of sound has been found to have intensified the concentration and arousal along with a deeper level of relaxation. (Bernardi, 2006). Similar study on mice when sounds were stopped found that they achieved deep relaxation followed by a set of brain signals.

(Wehr, 2010). Not only that silence is known to stimulate neurogenesis in the hippocampus of mice after 2 hours of silence observation (Kirste et.al., 2015). Hippocampus is associated with memory and issues like dementia and depression, which is why this study instilled some hopes in therapeutic direction. Furthermore, in a study conducted on Khema practitioner illuminated another set of insights where metacognition was observed due to mindfulness-based silence. The silence was found to have led to monitoring of the thoughts and emotions and later gave the volitional control to the practitioner to indulge in them. There were noticeable changes in the ventral striatal activity which depicted experiences of joy in the fMRI scans (Hagerty, 2013). In the same vein, another study showed that the default mode network (DMN) activity of the brain during silence practice stimulates self-referential evaluation and processing of the thoughts and emotions in a passive state as and when they start to reemerge (Herwig et al., 2012).

Vipassana practitioners who were in Maun for 10 days were studied in research which led to significant insights into their psychological distress reduction. Their depression levels, inferiority feelings, impulsive thoughts and anxiety had reduced which was not attributed to the practice instructions rather to the non-judgmental space where the practitioners could evaluate their mental contents (Ostafin et.al, 2006). A similar study on incarcerated participants indicated reduction in alcohol and substance abuse along with betterment in psychological symptoms (Bowen et. al., 2006).

**Research Gap:** - The extensive research review has indicated that there have been few attempts at delving into the psychological benefits of Spiritual Silence, but it has not been considered as an intervention tool for diagnosed patients with mood disorders. This study seeks to elucidate on the benefits to the mental and emotional state of diagnosed patients with mood disorder and the proposed Maun as an intervention tool.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a non-experimental and observational research with random sampling of 30 patients with mood disorder. Conversational English along with Hindi as spoken language was used to administer the interview questionnaire and their answers were recorded.

### Operational definition

**Maun/ Spiritual silence:** It is the practice of not speaking and not communicating with the external world and being indulged in spiritual practices like Pranayam, Asanas, Meditation, Naad yoga etc. (for minimum 5 days).

**Mood disorders:** According diagnostic manuals (DSM and ICD) mood disorders consists of symptoms of fluctuations in the mood with varying degrees of morbidity. For the current research paper patients with Depressive Disorders and Bipolar disorders (As per DSM 5) have been included in the study.

### Procedure:

The patients of Mood disorders were clinically assessed using M.I.N.I. International Neuropsychiatric Interview and then they randomly assigned to 10 days Spiritual Silence retreat. In the retreat there were strict observance of Silence with no communication allowed. The patients were not allowed to take medications. Phones were not allowed as well. Their routine included a set of yoga kriyas and Satvik food, nature walking and early rising to sleeping early at night. This continued for 10 days and after a week, the interview schedule was administered for content analysis.

### Tools administered:

1. **M.I.N.I. International Neuropsychiatric Interview** (For Diagnosis of Mood Disorders)  
This is a short-structured interview that helps in diagnosis according to ICD 10. It takes 15 minutes to administer. This tool is used to diagnose the participants for Mood Disorders.
2. **Questionnaire for qualitative analysis-**
  1. Have you felt that state when you are neither sleeping nor dreaming or in awoken state? Which we call TURIYAVASTHA.
  2. After being silent for few days what kind of changes are you feeling?
  3. Do you feel this spiritual silence has given you strength to accept yourself, people and situations around you?
  4. What changes do you notice in your level of happiness before and after this silence process?
  5. To what extent do you feel your life situations are under your control?

6. What changes are you noticing in the level of emotional balance before and after the silence course?
7. What kind of bodily changes are you noticing after the course?
8. Do you want to experience it again? Why?
9. Do you feel now you can forgive and forget anyone or any situation after the course?
10. Do you feel your life is moving in the direction of best?

### Content Analysis process

The interview questionnaire tried to explore the subjective experiences of participants regarding their emotional, mental and physical state that were reported before and after Silence practice. Their experiences with Turiyavastha and how it impacted their perspective about themselves, and others have been considered. For this the answers were coded for initial codes to sort and search for answers like “calm”, “contented” etc. The next step was to do line-by-line searching for greater codes that discussed the intensity, duration and other descriptions of the events that took place in their consciousness. After three rounds of line-by-line searching. The codes were categorized into Mental State, Emotional State, Physical state and Before and After. The final categories lead to themes of Self-reflection skills, Orientation towards self and others etc as shown in the table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING PROCEDURE**

Initial codes	Code Categorization	Themes
relaxing and helped me become calm. contentment, detached form, settled and calm. my mind is relaxed Emotional balance, become calm and relaxed Headache reduced, Body fresh, healthier, Active,	Mental State  Emotional State	Grounding and settlement “connected with a new kind of energy which makes you feel better.” Sense of agency I am able to choose my actions and so I have some confidence now.
Energized, Light sleep cycle improved, lungs become lighter, body weight lighter, body rejuvenated,  I can laugh open-heartedly now. Earlier even happiness was shadowed with sadness not turning mad and exploiting any of my emotions. extreme but now I am more settled and calmer	Physical State          Before and After	you correct yourself.”  <b>Metacognition</b>  “I can monitor my thoughts.”  “You self-realize Then you correct yourself. “Drashta bhav (You become observer of your emotions)” <b>Self-reflection skills and self-acceptance</b> I am able to feel my emotions without being guilty or shameful about it. <b>Connected to self</b>  I felt connected to myself”  <b>Orientation towards self and others</b> becoming a person who can understand what people go through. <b>Positive changes</b>

**Table 1:** The Coding, Categorization and Theme identification of Interview answers in short

### RESULT INTERPRETATION

The content analysis initial codes were descriptive in nature along with movement codes that depicted the intensity of their thought processes with words like ‘toofan’ that were mentioned to have become ‘calm’. The before and after categories show a theme of changes in the intensity of thoughts as well as its impact on the mood. Participants have described their thoughts and judgements about self as ‘doesn’t bother’ and ‘acceptance’ when they elucidate on how feeling the joy or happiness made them let go of their incessant thoughts. Participants mention being able to monitor their thoughts with ‘drashta bhav’ i.e. as an observer. The common themes that

emerged were of positive changes and changes perspective towards self, others and life in general. They showed optimism about future and showed the ability to let go of the past. Their description of 'Silence' had been more mental than physical which brought them 'calm'. Few participants reported changes in their body weight and alleviation of digestive issues. One participant suggested that Silence brings the same sense of pleasurable detachment as that of anti-depressants. The difference being that thought monitoring is not possible under the influence of medication while Silence practice gives the incentive to exercise metacognition and self-reflect as no communicative activity is allowed. Participants report positive shift in their ability to express as their emotional balance has been achieved and others mention feeling 'energized' as if 'glucose has been fed after a battle' etc. The few who described Turiyavastha, the Stillness state which is the Ultimate state of Silence, mentioned it as the mind becoming 'blank', 'joyful', 'collected' and others. Two participants mentioned changes in their dietary preference post Silence practice. One participant who had comorbid binge eating issue mentioned realizing that her 'lack consciousness' is the reason behind her problem. She had overcome impulse to feed her 'lack' and body positive. Apart from feeling 'stress free', 'relieved' and having 'no negativity', participants have been able to accept themselves due to the surge of good feelings without doing any activity. They claim being able to forgive themselves and others because they can stay detached from their judgements and can gain peace by simply doing nothing. This state of happiness and peace however has been mentioned to be temporary and regular practice of Silence is believed to reinstate it.

## DISCUSSION

The Spiritual practices are not considered conventional in psychotherapy even though the Indigenous practices have been traditional part of mental, spiritual and physical health since ages. Even though mind-body dynamics are regulated using Yoga asans, pranayams and bandhas, Spiritual Silence has not been considered as an intervention tool due to the prevalence of Western influence in psychology. Spiritual silence is integral to all Yogic sadhana (Shashtri, 2023) and still it is not considered conventional. The few researchers have attempted to expound the glory of Indigenous psychology and techniques where they showed that Yogic meditations are beneficial for cognitive functions (Brunner et al., 2017). Asans and Yoga have shown to be effective in relieving stress and elevate the mood, reducing anxiety and leading to alleviation in depressive symptoms (Lau et al., 2015). Alongside active forms of Yoga, Vipassana includes Silence as an active ingredient which is why it has attracted attention from many researchers. The current study also shows how mood is elevated, metacognition and self- reflection has been learnt during this practice. This result is in tandem with previous research on Khema Practitioner (Hagerty, 2013). The content analysis has not been previously attempted on Silence practice and its impact on several aspects of human life. This study however faced some challenges due to language preferred by the participants to answer the questions. The Hindi speaking participants were more fluent and used rich metaphors to explain complex experiences while the English speaking participants could not express the depth of their experience. They were expecting more questions so as to give them the opportunity to express more. The Hindi speaking participants on the contrary explained how benefits of Silence can only be phenomenologically explained and words are deficit in its feat to explain anything close to Silence. The researcher found that all the participants craved to experience it again as it doesn't last. With the proposal to consider Spiritual Silence as an intervention tool, there are this study can point to the affirmative insights. 1- There is definitive changes in the mood of the participants as they mention having greater sense of agency and volitional control over their thoughts. 2- Their self-perception and orientation towards others is shifting from negative to acceptance. 3- They feel more connected to themselves and are not dependent on the validation from outside. This helps in self-acceptance translating to emotional balance and body positivity. Despite these glowing results, it is to be noted that Silence practice observed stringent rules of non-communication which may hamper the daily operational routine of patients if it is used as an intervention tool. Although Maun is observed on specific days as religious practice in many religions including Sanatan Dharma, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism. The technologically advanced society may have to reconsider its stance on psycho- socio-spiritual aspects of health and sustenance.

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