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Quranic Content: Role of Divine Literature in Stress Management

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Abstract: It is believed that hunger; greed, love, sex, rejection, revenge, tribal loyalty, fear and anger are some of the basic instincts found in human beings. When people experience fatigue, discrimination, heavy workload, sleeplessness, irritability, physical and mental exhaustion they suffer from stress. Literature has also depicted stress as a recurrent theme in novels, short stories, dramas, poetry, etc. The Holy Scriptures have guided us to control such negative emotions for leading a peacefully successful and balanced life. We are living in a digital age which has marvelously facilitated human lives but also contributed to several factors of stress. It is observed that psychological pressures, financial constraints, lack of basic facilities, severe disappointment, weak upbringing, negative environmental effects and poor academic performance have caused extreme stress in our lives. Studies underscore that literature has brought a very positive effect on stressors and help people release their tensions. The current study focuses on the role of literature in stress management. Interpretive method is used to analyze the relevant data. The findings suggest that if we properly act upon verses of the Holy Quran as divine literature we can not only alleviate and control outpouring of anger but also lead a stress free life and bring about very positive and healthy environment around us.

Keywords: Literature, Quranic content, stress management, mankind

Introduction

It is stated that the man of present times is extremely worried and increasingly upset due to social, political, cultural and religious problems of his age. He is immensely frustrated because of the unpleasant and unwanted conditions of his surroundings. Extreme poverty, broken relationships, uncontrolled inflation, growing population, limited resources, waves of extremism, big desires and low quality of life are some of the key factors which have led young generation towards severe disappointment, regular fights, shouting, growing intolerance, stress and other negative elements which are very harmful for socially acceptable environment. It is believed that the above horrible conditions breed a large number of extremists, fanatics, gangsters to disturb a peaceful society. It is has seriously damaged the fabric of our development, peace and pacification. This all happens due to the unavailability of entertainment, regular get-together, absence of celebration, handling symptoms of stress, etc. Moreover, people have put aside study of literature which provides them with great delight, freshness of ideas, concept of tolerance and cure for stressful life style. It is also pointed out one reason of the above given factors may be that we have ignored teachings of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him), perfect guidelines for resounding success here and on the Day of judgment.

It is mentioned that the Holy Quran, constitution of Allah Almighty, like other Holy Scriptures is programmed to properly guide mankind to avoid conflicts, enmity and live in peaceful manners. A large number of verses from different chapters of the holy book present a clear set of

arguments in favor of the subject point of view. This study is a novel type of research on the subject in English language. The present study particularly focuses on Surah Al-Baqrah, the second surah of the Holy Quran which is spread to 286 verses. This study can be useful for cultivating a pleasant and peaceful society based on teachings of the divine literature.

Literature Review

In terms of review of relevant literature, the current study is constructed on various studies of stress and its effects, role of literature and Quranic content as divine literature. The section of literature review is followed by research questions.

Stress and its effects

With the advancement of science and technology, man has no doubt, availed himself of comfortable and luxury life style but at the same time he has been gripped by severe stress levels. Describing feelings of stress, Waters (1) believes "Stress is our psychological and physiological reaction to an event or condition that is considered a threat or challenge. We most commonly refer to stress as a feeling of [emotional pressure and strain](#) when we feel unable to cope or are overwhelmed by something" (as cited in her blog). Waters is of the view that stress is concerned with psychological and physiological domains. It is experienced when we are loaded with pressure. In this connection, Legg (2) mentioning scientific reasons of stress, discusses that "it triggers a particular biological response". Whenever anyone goes through the stage of stress his body reacts by releasing

"chemicals and hormones" which trigger natural response to an aggressive situation. It is observed that in the last few years, stress in adults is dramatically growing and Covid-19 pandemic is also one of the reasons to it which caused havoc in the world. Moreover, Babatunde (3) asserts "stress sources are consequently known to produce dire organizational and extra-organizational outcomes such as low morale, poor performance, career uncertainty, absenteeism, health problems, work-life conflict, turnover and other reverses that undermine competitive objectives of business". He has portrayed above given main factors which caused serious levels of stress and it is quite unable for the persons concerned to perform well under these hard circumstances. Moreover, Hannigan (4) states that stress can cause burnout, ill-health, high workforce turnover and reduced efficiency and performance. He concludes that mental health work is stress-provoking. It is stated that long duration of stress has severe bad effects on human performance. Various studies suggest that financial constraints, death of a loved one, joblessness, traumatic events (natural disasters and car accidents) workplace problems, emotional well-being struggle are key elements of outburst of stress.

Role of Literature

Since the commencement of the universe, literature is considered as a presentation of life. The subject matter of literature is taken from affairs of real life. The significance of literature is appreciated all over the world. It is stated that study of literature has provided a source of delight, courage and optimism to face challenges of life. Many a warrior,

politicians, cricketers, wrestlers, journalists, archeologists, historians and scientists have been enjoying literature for years as a delightful hobby. Ayaz himself a towering poet of Pakistan, in his posthumously published book, *Shaikh Ayaz ai'n Sahafat* (5) writes that Dr Salimuzzaman Siddiqui, a renowned scientist of Pakistan and contributor of more than 300 research papers, loved art and literature. He was every inch a humble person who kept reading literature as the main objective of his happiness. Whenever he got busy and exhausted he sought shelter in books of literature. In this context, Yadav (6) suggested that with unsustainable development, growing materialism, increasing mechanization, grasping techno-savvy sensibility, choking emotionlessness, poisoning intolerance, misguiding cynicism and illusive-pleasure-seeking mentality in the globalized and commercialized modern world we have lost the faith in Nature, humanity and social identity. It provides tools to find out the constant happiness and eternal wellness. Literature also plays a vital role to understand where the real happiness lies and what the perfect wellness is. As far as yoga is concerned, it takes us into the inner psyche from the outer identity through the process of self-realization while literature motivates us to develop into the higher reality from the outward experiences via the employment of the imitative aestheticism. He intended to scrutinize the lessons through happiness and wellness, whether physical or mental as it is, induced by English literature with special reference of William Shakespeare in respect of his approach towards human life, his understanding of human problems and his efforts to provide possible solutions.

Jha (7) stated that with the pursuers of aesthetic theory of literature, the sole aim of literature is to delight, to give pleasure and nothing more. Poetry is a thing of beauty of form, beauty of thought, and beauty of emotions. No wonder then, it is a source of delight both for the poets and readers. It is a curious and prevalent opinion that literature, like all art, is a mere play of imagination, pleasing enough, like a new novel, but without any serious or practical importance. The researcher has found the importance of poetry in our day –to –day life is crucial because it always helps us to lead a happy and peaceful life and good literature moves from delight to wisdom. In addition to the above studies, Kim (8) found out whether reading aloud the book is helpful for stress reduction and the stress reduction effect according to the reading aloud duration. The experimental method was measured before and after reading aloud the book and compared to Standard Deviation N-N Interval (SDNN), and the SDNN change was measured during reading aloud several times to confirm the relationship between reading aloud the book and stress reduction. Through these experimental results, the author confirmed that reading aloud the book is a very helpful method for stress reduction in modern people, and the longer the reading aloud time is, the more helpful it is for stress reduction.

Literature is not only an instrument of human happiness; but it also educates individuals to cultivate and develop core values of socialization, love, care, ethics, unity, peace and tolerance. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, a marvelous Sufi saint and poet, centuries ago, in his sublime poetry discussed the concept of unity and globalization.

Quranic Content as a Divine Literature

It is observed that religious, moral and social aspects and elements of reforms enshrined in the Holy Quran can be understood as literary aspects of the divine text. Moreover, verses of different surahs have been revealed with rhyming patterns which are easy to remember and have got appealing impact on our hearts. The third argument can be perceived with its didactic significance. The Quranic content is prepared to guide mankind to become morally good and get rid of social evils which are rapidly deteriorating the world. Parables/ religious stories of Adam and Eve, Jesus Christ, Hazrat Musa A.S, Hazrat Ibrahim A. S and other apostles, and disobedience of Lucifer, Pharaoh teach lessons of great instructions to people of all ages.

Keeping in view the above arguments, it could be said that Quran is a holy book of divine literature that not only reforms our lives but also prohibits us from going astray as its sole purpose is genuine betterment of mankind.

In addition to the above point of view, Soomro, in his masterpiece, *Shah and Quran* ⁽⁹⁾ argues that the Holy Quran is a word of Allah, revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad Mustafa for the benefit, beneficence and betterment of humanity. Whenever mankind forgets, ignores or violates the Divine instructions it falls prey to vice, sin, depravity and profligacy to its own detriment and decay. It then goes deep down to the lowly depths of degradation, depression and despondency.

Jasra ⁽¹⁰⁾ argues, "The greatest impact on the lives of mankind came from divine literature..... It was the impact of

Holy Quran and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that the companions of the Holy Prophet became brave, kindhearted, and God-fearing. Their hearts were enlightened with the divine guidance, Thus, divine literature has profound impact on the minds of humans uptill now and it will continue to have that impact till the existence of life on Earth" (p.364). Jasra has historically depicted the noble mission of the Holy Quran as a divine literature. He is of the view that before the advent of Islam, Arabs were living in deep darkness; it was perfect teachings of the holy book and character of the Holy Prophet who brought them from darkness to the world of illumination. In connection with Jasra, Blatherwick &Toorawa ⁽¹¹⁾ investigated that the Qur'anic speech is confined to the mystery of its heavenly origins. The study's core hermeneutic task, is to investigate how a text develops meaning, is primarily a theological activity, and it is a critical endeavor to uncover the religious meaning of the text. Through the projection of an essentially Islamic hermeneutics of proclamation, the author has used theoretical shift from textuality assumptions to the hermeneutical possibilities of voice re-enacts traditional Islamic views that considered the Qur'an as both the eternal and temporal voice of God. The investigation of such a new hermeneutics concluded that it should lead to a reassessment of literary problems. As such, the Qur'an can provide a novel method to resolving the issue of crossings in contemporary debates over approaches to World Literature. Moreover, Iqbal ⁽¹²⁾ examined that there is no question that the Quran contains the core teachings of Islam. Muslims were influenced by the Quran to adopt the immaterial. In any situation, we would come to the same conclusion that

the Quran's literary relevance in the community in which it was written could not be overstated. In this context, Mir ⁽¹³⁾ stated that like the Bible, the Quran is often regarded as a literary masterpiece. It presents extraordinarily works of theology.

Like all holy books of various religions, The Quran was revealed to guide man of the world to be a good human being, protector of natural phenomena and helping to the weak and helpless but he instead of, a kind soul and benefactor, under the web of greed and massive wealth, power and self forgot the genuine path to God and constantly violated commandments of Allah Almighty and followed ways and means of Satan, an open enemy to human beings, who caused expel to Adam and Eve from all divine blessings of Paradise. Resultantly, the man of today is misled, goes to astray, and lives in the state of fear, anxiety, disappointment, tension, conflicts and whimsfully desires for peace of mind.

Akhtar ⁽¹⁴⁾ stated that “Islam is a religion of peace and security. Allah (SWT) sent Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) as a Prophet to preach monotheism to the people and to reform the moral habits of the ignorant. In the beginning, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) had to face several obstacles. Even the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was forced to migrate to Makkah, but the polytheists remained uneasy. They couldn't stand the Muslims in Madinah living in peace and order. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) acted wisely and triumphed over all of his challenges so that peace and order can be restored in society, and people can live with harmony and peace. On the occasion of the conquering of Makkah, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) compassionately forgave all of his foes, including

the Muslims' most vehement enemies. With his knowledge, mercy, and gentleness, the Prophet (PBUH) vanquished all of his foes, bringing peace not only to Arabia but to the entire globe”. It is because the Holy Prophet (PBUH) acted upon divine literature and preached the same to non-Muslims. His method of preaching was based on love, tolerance, humility, peace and harmony that is why even his stiff opponent praised his pious character. This study is set to find out answers to the following research questions objectively.

Research Questions

Q1. In what ways, does the Quranic content, reflect as divine literature?

Q2. How can selected verses of Surah Al-Baqra help mankind to handle stress?

Research Methodology

The current study is qualitative in nature and interpretive method of literary research is used to formulate this research paper. This section covers research methodology, data collection procedure and data analysis, etc. In this context, Silverman ⁽¹⁵⁾ states that “interpretive method is also called hermeneutics. It is an approach concerned with interpretation” (p.378).

Data Collection Procedure

First of all the entire text of the relevant surah, which is second in the order of sequence, was thoroughly recited and understood. Afterwards, the selected verses were outlined and selected for the objective analysis. According to the experts of religious studies, this surah is the longest

surah of the Quran which comprises of 286 verses and occurs in the first chapter.

Data Analysis

As far as analysis is concerned, this section presents Quranic text along with English translation. English translation is followed by simple interpretation. Data analysis is carried out of the selected verses which suit to the subject of the paper.

كُلُوا وَشَرِبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ¹⁶

“Eat and drink of that which Allah hath provided, and do not act corruptly, making mischief (violence) in the earth”

Interpretation:

Allah Almighty says eat, drink and fulfill all your needs from “permissible and pure provision” the rich resources provided by Him on the surface of the earth. We should never steal and violate any bounties. We should refrain from committing any disputes and crimes. If we do so we will create a troubled society. By acting upon this verse we can play our healthy role in testablishing a tension free society and live happily.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ¹⁷

“And remember We took a covenant from the Children of Israel (to this effect): Worship none but Allah; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak gently to the people”

Interpretation:

In this verse Allah Almighty addresses to mankind that you should not worship any entity other than Allah and show politeness and kindness to parents, relatives and orphans. Here God urges to

communicate with people in a soft tone. If we honor and truly love our parents, show kindness to relatives and fatherless children and speak fair to people, there will be no burden of anger and poison of stress on our minds and hearts. If we follow teachings of the holy book and practically act upon life of the Holy Prophet, we can collectively get rid of germs of ego, long-standing disputes and social isolation which can help us in leading a better life.

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ¹⁸

“So remember Me, I shall remember you. And always be thankful to Me and never be ungrateful to Me”

Interpretation:

In the subject verse, Allah Almighty guides mankind that if you keep mentioning me (doing My Zikir) I will keep showering uncountable blessings upon you and do not show any ingratitude. The above verse presents a complete philosophy that if we desire to achieve enviable social status and sound reputation; we should follow what Allah has indicated in this noble text of the Quran. Masoomen said the act of thankfulness flourishes the process of bounties. It is meant that ingratitude and unkindness is a discouraging kind of action. By following this piece of pious text, we can gather a large amount of blessings and bounties and with this exemplary service to Allah, we can alleviate anger and stress.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ¹⁹

“O you, who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient”

Interpretation:

The above verse has clearly indicated that whenever people face hardships and difficulties they should be patient and look toward to Allah, there is no helper except Him. When we look forward to people for temporary help and pin hopes on them but

their refusal can damage us psychologically and throw us into the deep ocean of stress. That is why the Quran, in this regard, draws our attention that only patience and prayer can terminate all ills. And Allah is with those who act upon patience, a great reward for believers.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْشُدُونَ²⁰

“And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he cries unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright”

Interpretation:

Verse number (186) of the subject surah is about the power of prayer (dua) that how prayer works to change one’s failure into success. Dua is a form of conversation between Allah and his creation, especially offspring of Adam and Eve. Abul-Fadal (21) in his compiled book *Muhammad (PBUH) in the Hadees* mentioned “dua has the unique ability to change destiny”(p.184). Dua can be termed a weapon of miracles. The above verse makes mention of peoples’ questions about Allah and trust in Him.

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْلُوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ²²

“And eat not up your property among yourselves in vanity, nor seek by it to gain the hearing of the judges that ye may knowingly devour a portion of the property of others wrongfully”

Interpretation:

The Holy Quran rules out clearly about protection of humans and maintain human dignity. Human rights are rights

allotted to mankind by the Creator and the state but unfortunately some savage type of people eat up their rights and bring violence. Here, the book of Allah strictly prohibits confiscating property of others. When we carry out such unlawful acts to satisfy our ego and cause troubles to others, these actions bring about fights, bloodshed, violence and absence of peace. Resultantly, we lose peace of mind and go astray to the hell of unending stress. By following this sublime verse of the Quran, we can lead a peaceful life as well progress outstandingly.

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أذى، وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ²³

“A kind word with forgiveness is better than almsgiving followed by injury. Allah is Absolute, Clement”

Interpretation:

The Holy Quran, through this universally acknowledged philosophy of brotherhood, urges us that forgiving people with kindness is much better than performing charity and hurting their hearts. Here undivided attention is cemented on forgiveness and softness of communication as these two factors play a pivotal role in establishing friendly relations among people. Majority of people, on the contrary, do not perform such act, that is why Allah has emphasized this point of view. In addition to, the Messenger of Allah, in his last sermon proclaimed. “Forgiveness is better than revenge”

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۗ وَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَالِكُمْ ۖ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظَلَمُونَ²⁴

“And if ye do not, then be warned of war (against you) from Allah and His messenger. And if ye repent, then ye have your principal (without interest). Wrong not, and ye shall not be wronged”

Interpretation:

This particular verse is about social evil of interest (loan). It has devastated hundreds of families. The poor borrow money on interest and they have to pay a heavy amount upon it. Their families are in constant trouble. These psychological tensions bring about stiff stress. Sometimes the grief-stricken individuals sell out their property to meet their requirements. In some case reported in different newspapers, the victims committed suicides. In this context, Allah Almighty said that those who carry out this extremely wrongful act they are directly at war with Allah and his apostle. Moreover, God has also outlined way out that if you sincerely repent Allah is forgiving.

Findings

In this long surah Allah Almighty discusses various subjects like plan and creation of Hazrat Adam, establishing prayers, observing fasts, institution of marriage, mention of divorce, prohibition of indulging in interest, sticking to glorious path of God, changing of prayer direction from Jerusalem to Mecca and other Islamic rules for a successful life. Moreover, much mention is made of Harzrat Musa A.S and his nation. Every single verse of holy book is full of wisdom which is set to illuminate our hearts and remove darkness from minds. In addition to the above facts, literary language is excellently used in the said surah. After a careful recitation and deeper understanding it is revealed that many similes and other literary devices have been applied to convey Quranic message gracefully to the global audiences irrespective of caste, colour, religion and linguistic boundaries.

Conclusion

It is observed that since the revelation of holy book upon the last prophet of Almighty, Quran has been a guiding force not a

dividing force. Being a word of Allah Almighty, it has immeasurable power to change destiny of millions of individuals all over the world. It is replete with divine miracles, moral and religious parables. Unfortunately, the young generation of today running after immoral, destructive, irreligious ways and means of life is approaching fast to moral deterioration. Our ideals are western cultures, modern fashion, Indian movies and influence of media. Apart from it, we have been blindly following so-called emotional orators whose sole philosophy is to amass wealth and fool people especially Muslims. We have completely detached ourselves from genuine path of religious teachings that is why every home is burning with fire of intolerance, growing impatience. Children are disobeying their parents and emotionally blackmail them. Resultantly, isolation, social illness, psychological pressure, unending anger gave birth to stress, a rapid indication of human decline.

The study concludes that if we truly follow verses of surah Al-Baqra we can develop a strong sense of tolerance, power of patience to handle menace of growing stress which is considered a lethal human disease. After learning Quran by heart and understand its true essence, we can clearly cultivate humility in our behavior which is an enemy of anger and stress. If we communicate politely with people and show kindness to parents and demonstrate sympathy with orphans as enshrined in the holy book, we can play our better part in the construction of a peaceful society devoid of conflicts, disputes, enmity and bloodshed. The Holy Quran, at several places, has discussed human rights and other values. Tolerance can solve several misunderstandings, brawls and resentment. The Messenger of Allah said, "Be tolerant and you will receive tolerance". This study attempts to establish a deeper connection between religion and literature and sets the way that how divine literature can help people to remove long-standing misunderstanding, hatred and other negative emotions and live a

peacefully blessed life as divine literature teaches us to be polite, humble, pure, clean, honest and balanced in our all dealings of life. By following above-mentioned genuine ways we can attempt to build a decent, polite, genuine society as envisioned by the Holy Quran.

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