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OVERCOMING PSYCHIATRIC DISTURBANCES: A NOTE

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Abstract:

Psychiatric disturbances affect most people in this world. Medical care is not enough to overcome these problems. What is required is the restoration of the mental health and the overall health of the patient concerned. To this effect, however, the Western approach is found to be inadequate. Instead, the Indian psychological approach to mental health and health is said to be optimal. This paper highlights, briefly though, these issues with special focus on Ayurveda and Yoga as part and parcel of the Indian psychological approach.

KEY WORDS:

Psychiatric disturbances, Mental health, Health, Western psychology, Indian psychology, Ayurveda, Yoga

INTRODUCTION

1. PSYCHIATRIC DISTURBANCES

Mental health is a topical issue. In fact, its significance is exemplified by the initiative of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in October 2013 in the name of Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020.

In the modern world we are living in, most people are afflicted with some disease or the other; and most of these diseased people are afflicted with psychiatric disturbances or personality disorders. The interesting fact, as Swami Akhilananda (1950) points out, is that majority of diseases are psychosomatic or psychogenic, namely, originating in mental disturbance and tension. Some examples in this regard are peptic ulcer, hypertension (high blood pressure), asthma, certain kinds of heart symptoms, etc. These diseases are psychiatric disturbances of the type classified as 'neuroses' as they affect the nervous system.

Psychiatric disturbances classified as 'psychoses' create persons disorganized in their mental life and human relationships. They suffer from schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depressive psychosis, involuntary melancholia, and so forth. There are also psycho-neurotic diseases that create abnormal personalities based on emotional disorders which affect the nerve functions. These diseases stem from maladjustment, insecurity, inordinate ambition, anxiety, fear, frustration, and other tensions.

2. CURE FOR THESE DISEASES

It is now crystal clear that no permanent cure is possible for psychiatric disturbances or mental disorders without restoring the mental health and overall health of the patient, even though medical care is helpful. This raises the question as to what is mental health in particular and what is health in general.

3. MENTAL HEALTH AND HEALTH

At the WHO website, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of overall health as contained in its constitution: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

There is really no serious dispute about accepting the above definitions of mental health and health as optimal. However the problem we really face is with respect to operationalising these definitions in terms of eliminating personality disorders through acquiring not only a comprehensive understanding of their etiological basis but also on that basis suggesting therapeutic practices. This indeed is the crux of the matter.

4. WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

Western psychology based psychiatry, social work and clinical psychology have come a long way from treating "mental disease" through medical approach to treating it with psychotherapy that addresses mental tension due to ineffective, unfulfilled ambitions and conflict in the mind by taking into account the interconnections between biological, psychological and sociological processes underlying them.

However, the western approach is still considered a rather narrow view of the cause of mental disorders. It largely attributes mental disorders to biological frustrations and fails to explain the basis for it in terms of moral frustrations. It fails to take a broad viewpoint of the human mental states by subordinating biological urges of man to the master urge for abiding joy and thereby suggest methods of stabilizing the mind and techniques of developing dynamic functioning of the willpower. It is said to be lacking something which can be given only by the religious psychology of India for the understanding of the total personality and the goal of life which is attainment of "super-consciousness" or "samadhi" or "nirvana". The western approach has not given us either an efficient method for treating personality disorders or a new philosophy of life or theory of education which enables us to prevent them (Swami Akhilananda, 1950).

These limitations are overcome in the Indian ancient wisdom based on the inseparable connection between religion, philosophy and psychology with which body, mind and spirit are integrated.

5. INDIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

There is now growing consensus with the view that the Indian psychological approach is the optimal way out of the problematic of the inadequacies of the Western approach. Indian psychology is a development of the aspirations and hopes of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, based on age-long experiences transmitted in their cultural traditions. Indian psychology lays great emphasis on the study of religious or spiritual experiences and the development of methods by which to attain them. It also provides understanding of the different states of consciousness and therefore is able to make a definitive therapeutic contribution in psychological problems. It brings out a holistic understanding of the development of personality by integrating body, mind and spirit which is of vital importance to a successful and happy life.

This note specially focuses on Ayurveda and Yoga as two complementary holistic therapeutic disciplines to address all kinds of diseases on the basis of integrated Indian religious, philosophical and psychological traditions. We draw from Cornelissen et al. (2011), Choudhri et al. (2008), Shamasundar (2008), and Ravi Shankar (2008).

Ayurveda and Yoga

Ayurveda (Science of Life) defines mental health as a state of mental, intellectual and spiritual well-being. The concept of health in Ayurveda encompasses not only the physical and mental aspects but also the spiritual aspect, which is missing in the modern or Western psychological discourse.

Its focus is on prevention through correct diet, exercise, meditation and cultivation of the right attitude. It offers a complex array of therapeutic techniques and natural medicines to restore balance and harmony.

The three pillars of life, according to Ayurveda, are Manas (mind), Atma (soul) and Sareera (body). The mind-body connection is very important in Ayurveda. Physical imbalances can disturb mental state while mental illness leads to disruption of body functions. For example, a person's knee injury is purely physiological; however, only physiotherapy can give her recovery if only she is psychologically strong. Similarly, aggressiveness is usually attributed to mental disorder; however, it can be caused due to

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inefficient metabolism due to physiological reason like eating too much wrong foods.

Ayurveda theory of health is based on tridosha (primary life forces or biological humours). The five elements (panchabhuta) combine in pairs to constitute the three doshas—vata (ether and air), pitta (water and fire) and kapha (water and earth). The combination of these doshas inherited at birth indicates an individual's unique constitution. The dynamic balance of tridoshas creates health.

According to Ayurveda, Vata (air and space), Pitta (fire and water) and Kapha (water and earth) are the three main psychobiological expressions of Nature, individually and cosmically.

Vata dosha is more light, dry, dispersing, subtle, cold, mobile, minute and changeable, and therefore is associated with conditions such as worries, anxieties, fears, phobias, terrors, delusions, compulsions, irrelevant talk, monologue or dialogue with self, attention deficit, bi-polar disease, social anxiety and auditory hallucinations. Vata governs all nervous system functions.

Pitta dosha, being hot, sharp, penetrating, sour, intense and spreading, is responsible for comparison, control, criticism, jealousy, frustration, obsession, territorialism, anger, rage, violence, suicide, murder and visual hallucinations. Pitta is more associated with digestive and hormonal functions.

Kapha dosha is more cool, slow, heavy, static, inert, smooth, gross, soft and immobile, and is therefore is more associated with sadness, melancholia, prolonged crying, stubbornness, dark depression, hiding, hoarding, catatonia, overeating and kinesthetic hallucinations. Kapha mainly governs adipose, blood sugar and cardiac circulation.

An individual has all these three life energies in him, but in varying proportions. This unique body-mind constitution is very much like the genetic make up of a person. When vata dosha is high it results in anxiety, restlessness and insomnia. Excess of pitta factor causes irritability and the person's behavior will be judgemental. Vitiating of Kapha dosha results in depression, possessiveness and greed.

The three gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) are connected to tridosha in Ayurveda: "The three gunas together are responsible for the existential, experiential, evaluative and transactional dimensions, each of which may serve as a motivational source of stress." The ideal state of mind is sattvic, marked by equanimity. An agitated mind is in the rajasic state, while the lethargic and gloomy mind is in the grips of tamas.

The sloka 14.22 in Bhagavad Gita says:

"Prakasham cha pravruttim cha moham evacha Pandava
Na dvesti sampravruttni na nivruttni kankshati"

This means, when sattva becomes dominant, knowledge flows, when rajas becomes dominant, activity grows. If the rajas is associated more with sattva, the activity will be more meaningful, but if it is associated with tamas, then restlessness will start—desires and restlessness.

The guiding principle of Ayurveda is that the mind exerts the deepest influence on the body, and freedom from sickness depends upon contacting our own awareness, bringing it into balance and extending that balance to the body.

Primary psychological conditions caused purely by mental disorders are kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobh (greed), moha (delusion), irshva (jealousy), mana (pride), mada (euphoria), shoka (sorrow, grief), chinta (anxiety), udvega (neurosis), and bhaya (fear). Holding on to these negative emotions and past experiences are considered as toxins affecting mind termed as ama. This is the first classification of mental disorders.

The psychiatric conditions caused by a combination of physical and mental (psycho-physical) disorders are unmade (psychosis), apasmara (convulsive disorder), apatantraka (hysteria), atattvabhinvesha (obsession), bhrama (illusion, vertigo), tandra (drowsiness), klama (neurasthenia), mada-murchha-sanyasa (loss of sensory perception leading to coma), madatyaya (alcoholism), gadodyega (hypochondriasis). This is the second classification of mental disorders.

The third classification consists of prakriti or personality disorders. There are sixteen manasa prakriti (psychological personality) representing sixteen types of behavioural traits.

Other conditions are buddhimandya or mental retardation of varying degrees, jara-janya-manasa vikara (psychiatric problems of the aged or gerontological disorders), and manodaihika vyadhis or psychosomatic diseases where the cause of disease is mental but the manifestation is somatic.

Ayurveda aims to restore the balanced functioning of the doshas of mind, body and emotions for restoring the connection of every part of life to the bliss consciousness or super consciousness which is our true nature. In this regard there are various techniques such as panchakarma, various herbs and various medicines which can be noted in the relevant texts about them.

Meditation is often referred to as the first and last medicine of Ayurveda. It can be practiced by a child and until one's last day of life. Meditation is neither religion nor doctrine, but rather one's own

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personal process of self-realization. 'Handicap' is no bar to meditation. Meditation is the self-enquiry that leads to philosophy and is the means and end of human contentment.

Meditation is to rise above the mind's actions and reactions to the inner stillness of the 'all-knowing'. The path of yoga or the union of the soul with the oversoul was described by Patanjali, a great sage, as having pre-requisite steps. When healing ourselves of mental disturbances, first we learn to observe avoidance of negative influences and choosing of uplifting influences, thus generating healthy nervous systems. Then begins a process of purifying and strengthening the body to prepare it for remaining still in meditation. Meditation then leads to the liberation from all sufferings and delusions.

Yoga is usually misunderstood to mean a set of physical exercises in the name of "asanas". No doubt yoga exercises establish harmony within oneself and in society. But yoga is more than that. According to Patanjali Yoga Sutras, it is the control or restraint of the processes of consciousness. Upon attainment of complete restraint of these processes the self is said to be restored to its original state devoid of the experience of the misery due to mental illnesses. Yoga offers an eight fold path in this regard. It consists of yama (restraint), niyama (observances), asana (posture), pranayam (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), dharana (attention) and dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (super consciousness).

The whole pursuit of Yoga school in Indian Psychology is to discipline the mind in order to attain higher states of consciousness for self-realisation. To put it differently, it seeks to make us centred by shifting our focus from the experience to the experience. All experiences are on the circumference and they keep on changing and the unchanging experience is at the centre and that is the 'self'.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna says to Sri Krishna:

"Mind is very restless, forceful and strong, O Krishna, it is more difficult to control the mind than to control the wind..."

To which Sri Krishna replies by saying that mind management is possible only by constant practice and cultivating the dispassionate perspective of life (vairagya).

Yoga is a system of integrating body, mind and spirit to generate the ideal personality and as such it supplements the way Ayurveda does the same.

6.CONCLUSION

Mental health and overall health can be defined even much better than that of WHO, following Sushruta, as follows:

"Samadoshah samagnishcha, samadhatu malakriyah, prasannatmendriya manah, svastha ity abhidhiyate."

This means that: "The one whose 'doshas' are balanced, whose metabolism is balanced, whose tissues and eliminations are normal, and whose senses and mind are centered in the Self, is considered healthy and remains full of bliss."

Ayurveda and Yoga as therapeutic disciplines based on Indian psychological, philosophical and religious traditions have the necessary and sufficient methods of achieving the above definitions of mental health and health not in a piecemeal manner but as a way of life.

However, people still prefer quick-fix medical solutions. In so doing, they miss the point that conventional psychiatric practices based on symptom suppression and drugs cause serious side-effects which in turn add to mental ill-health. For someone to accept Ayurveda and Yoga, or Indian psychology in general, one must go by the mantra that short term pain (of following Ayurveda and Yoga) leads to long term gain, and short term gain (of quick fix solutions) gives long term pain. Most people in the world are still not accepting this mantra. The sooner they accept it the better it is for their own well-being and for the sustenance of human life on planet earth.

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