

The Interrelationship Between Ayurvedic Sattvavajaya Chikitsa & Psychotherapeutic Dimensions of Yoga and Preksha Meditation

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Abstract:

Yoga and Ayurveda are basically allied disciplines and their role in holistic health care has been well documented. Though their role in the treatment of various common mental illnesses is well known the non-pharmacological method of psychotherapy as separate and fully dedicated Satvavajaya chikitsa in Ayurveda is less discussed and people are less aware of its existence. Similarly, Yoga is commonly understood as a discipline comprising physical postures(Asanas), breathing techniques (Pranayama), and certain meditative techniques. The big treasure of philosophical principles of yoga and their psychotherapeutic potential are less explored, which is the need of the hour. The present article has analyzed the meeting points related to psychotherapies inherent in the two disciplines and elaborately discusses their interrelationship.

Keywords: Psychotherapy, Satvavajaya chikitsa, Mental health, Preksha Meditation, Samadhi

Introduction:

The Development of Psychology in India

Psychology in India developed into a science while studying the methods of attaining the ultimate spiritual goal of life, namely a fully integrated personality in the state of 'Samadhi'. Sages developed a highly rational and scientific method to control the human mind. The Bhagwat Gita can be considered an excellent work on Applied Psychology. The Sankhya and the Yoga systems of thought analyze the human mind and its functions in a highly scientific manner. The greatest of ancient psychologists was Patanjali, who can be considered the father of Indian Psychology. The Patanjali School deserves special consideration because it was perhaps the boldest and the most scientific and most rational attempt in the field of Applied Psychology.

Mental health

Mental health is “*A State of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.*”

(WHO 2001a, p.1)

Mental health is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community. It is not only the absence of mental illness but also a level of functioning in which we are comfortable with our lifestyle and ourselves.

Importance of Mental Health

There is no health without mental health. It is more than the absence of mental illness. It is determined by socio-economic and environmental factors and linked to behavior. It can be enhanced by effective public health intervention. Inter-sectoral linkage is key for mental health promotion. The Promotion of Mental health is everybody’s business. *(From Promoting Mental Health, a summary report of WHO)*

Characteristics of a mentally healthy person

- ❖ A mentally healthy person is free from internal conflicts.
- ❖ He is well adjusted i.e. he is able to get along well with others.
- ❖ He searches for identity.
- ❖ He has a strong sense of self-esteem.
- ❖ He knows himself, his needs, problems, and goals.
- ❖ He has good self-control and balances rationality and emotionality.
- ❖ He faces problems and tries to solve them i.e. coping with stress and anxiety.
- ❖ Healthy mind in Indian Psychology is different from the same in western Psychology.
- ❖ A mentally healthy person in Indian spiritual tradition is one who is not easily disturbed, one who looks at pain and pleasure with an even mind, and one who has attained an equanimity of mind and attitude towards life.
- ❖ The Bhagavad Gita calls such a mentally healthy person by four different names, -*Yogi, Bhakta, Sthitapranja, and Gunatita.*

Psychopathology: Indian Viewpoint

A highly systematic analysis of how a perfectly normal person becomes abnormal due to over-ambition and attachment is available in Bhagavad Geeta .” Attachment to objects, is born when one ponders on them. Of attachment is born desire, and of desire, wrath”, “From wrath arises delusion; from delusion, failure of memory.

-Due to failure of memory, the intelligence perishes, and from its loss, total destruction of the individual ensues.”

- Bhagwat Gita-II-62,63.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is a generic term covering the entire spectrum of psychological treatment methods. These range from designed maneuvers of the therapist-patient relationship to doctrinarians fashioned to change value systems to tactics aimed at intra-psychic processes, and to conditioning techniques that attempt to alter neural mechanisms. The repertoire of strategies is thus manifold, and formats are varied, e.g. individuals, couples, and groups. They are all nevertheless, dependent upon the establishment of adequate communication, verbal and non-verbal. Excluded are such modalities as somatic therapies (drugs, convulsive therapy, surgery, etc.) and ‘trial action therapies such as occupational therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, psychodrama, etc. which are though psychotherapeutic in effect, are not strictly speaking, forms of psychotherapy.

“Psychotherapy is the treatment, by psychological means, of a problem of an emotional nature in which a trained person deliberately establishes a professional relationship with the patient with the object of removing, modifying, or retarding existing symptoms, mediating disturbed patterns of behavior, and promoting positive personality growth and development”. This definition of Psychotherapy given by Wolberg seems to be one of the most comprehensive definitions.

Sattvavajaya: The Ayurvedic Psychotherapy

Sattvavajaya is full-fledged Psychotherapy, which has been described in Ayurvedic literature. Charak was the first person to use the word "Sattvavajaya". His definition gives a lot of scope for expansion.

"Sattvavajayah Punah AhitebhyoArthebhyo Manognigrah".

(ch.su. 11/54)

“Manaso Gyana, Vigyana, Dhairya, Smriti, Samadhibhi”.

(ch. Su1/58)

“Dhi. Dhairyatmadi Vigyanam Manodoshaushadham Param .

(As.Hr.sha.1).

Thus, the term Sattvavajaya implies to that which is therapeutic for mental or emotional stresses and disturbances. This is secured best by restraining the mind from desire for unwholesome objects and directing it towards wholesome objects and the cultivation of Gyana, Vigyana, Dhairya, Smriti and Samadhi in the patient. All these measures help in developing control over the manas or mind , which is always unstable.

The meeting Point between Sattvavajaya Chikitsa & Yoga-

Samadhi has been described as the fifth technique of providing Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and it has also been described as the ultimate stage in the practice of Astang Yoga , which is a state of unwavering concentration . Promoting samadhi in a diseased state is trying to minimize the mental fluctuations, reduce the waverings ultimately leading to focused and tranquilized mind . It is achieved through the application of various yogic techniques .

Yogic relaxation is a part of psychotherapy. According to Patanjali , Yoga (concentration) is the complete cessation / hindering of the modifications of the thinking principle.

“Yogastu chittavrittinirodhah.” (Pa.Yo. Su. 1/2)

According to Ayurvedic Principles - Sattva, Raja and Tama are three basic gunas of the manas (mind) by virtue of which an individual presents with Sattvika, Rajsika and Tamsika type of manasprakriti, according to predominance of these gunas. The trigunas are responsible for each and every psychological event in an individual. Sattva is responsible for spiritual pleasure, correct knowledge and light (Prakasa) ,Raja is responsible for functional entity of an individual and Tama for inertia and darkness. (Gita 14:5,19).

Yogic approach to the functioning of Mind

The Five **ChittaVrittis** are- (a) Pramana (Right Cognition) includes valid states of perception, inference and belief in valid testimony; (b) Viparyaya (Error) is the knowledge of the unreal as in doubt (c) Vikalpa (Fiction) is the existence of abstract imagination on basis of language symbols (d) Nidra (Deep Sleep) is the mental state which has for its objective substratum

the feeling of emptiness and (e)Smriti (Memory), which is the recollection of the object through the impressions left behind by the previous experience.

Chitta Bhumi (Different levels of mind)

The five Chitta Bhumis have been described by Vyas Bhasya of Patanjali Yoga Darsana as mentioned below -

Ksipta (craving): In which the mind is greatly attached by the objects of senses.

Mudha (forgetful): In which there is a tendency towards, vice, ignorance, excessive sleep and the life.

Viksipta (distracted) : which makes for virtue, knowledge etc.

Ekagra (concentrated) : where the mind is purged of impurities and there is prolonged concentration.

Niruddha (restrained) : where all mental functions cease and the mind is left in its original unmodified state of calmness and tranquility.

Last two states are found in mentally sound and healthy persons. The remaining three represent inferior mental states (Singh R.H.; 1986). The various psychiatric illnesses originate in Mudha and Ksipta state of mind. The Ksipta, Mudha, Vikspta, Ekagra and Niruddha states represent the performance of Rajas, Tamas, Rajas-tamas, Sattva and only Sattva Guna, respectively. The state of complete cessation (Niruddha - Samadhi) of these vrttis has been considered to be the state of Yoga (Yoga Sutra 1/2).

Mind is the basis of human personality, Yogic techniques like meditative asanas are helpful in developing personality. Personality is divided into five levels which is mentioned above as Chitta bhumi. On the basis of their state of mind people are advised to follow Yoga. Through proper Yogic techniques all of them slowly, but steadily develop their mental stamina and arrive at a state of concentration like the Niruddha Chitta (Samadhi). Practice of yoga reduces the stress i.e. by the practice of Yoga one can attain the Moksa (salvation), process of increasing Sattva and decreasing rajas and tama leading to Karma Ksaya (loss of deeds) is the way of attaining moksa (Ca. Sa. 1/137, 14/2)

Yogic Relaxation is means of getting free from stress, which is supposed to be a major causative factor of mental illnesses, various types of relaxation procedure have been advised.

Components of Satvavajaya Chikitsa



Sattvavajaya in principles is full-fledged Psychotherapy, which has been described in Ayurvedic literature. "Manaso Jnana, Vijnana, Dhairya, Smriti, Samadhibhiih ". (Ch. Su. 1/58) ". Dhi Dhairyatmadi Vijnanam Manodosausadham Param. (As.Hr.Sha.1) Thus, the term Sattvavajaya implies to that modality which is therapeutic for mental or emotional stresses and disturbances. This is secured best by restraining the mind from desire for unwholesome objects, directing it towards wholesome objects and the cultivation of Jnan, Vijan, Dhairya, Smrti and Samadhi. All these measures help in developing control over the Manas or mind, which is always unstable. It has said that disturbance comes through two different aspects of mind which are highly responsible for the psychological disturbances i.e. objects of mind and senses .These objects of senses are taste ,(gustatory),tactile,visual ,auditory & olfactory .The objects of mind are thinking in its various forms like chintya (Thinking), Vichara (deliberation), Dhyeya ,sankalpa and the perceptions of different forms.

Sources of Psychotherapeutic Material in the Yogic literature

The philosophy of selfless action (karma yoga), the Bhaktiyoga, the Rajayoga etc. are superb psychological methods to overcome doubt, anxiety, depression, illusion, etc. The Yogic practices of meditation, contemplation etc. have tremendous potential as sources of new methods and ideas in counseling and psychotherapy.

The study of noble books (Swadhyaya) unconsciously develops certain high ideas and ideals that prevents anxiety and depression .

Glimpses of Psychotherapeutic Potential of Yoga

Conflict, Anxiety, and stress

The state of conflict is characterized by a condition of unpleasant emotional tension. The individual feels torn between two opposing lines of conduct, neither of which is possible on account of the resistance offered by the other. Conflict involves a lot of emotional tension and accompanying indecision and paralysis of action.

Solution –

- The possibility of conflict can be reduced if the individual can mentally detach himself from the consequences of his actions and painful experiences.
- Over-identification with some painful experience is an important cause of conflict and anxiety.
- The Principle of mental detachment from the fruits of our actions can be applied as a preventive and therapeutic factor in cases of conflict anxiety and tension.

Effect of Positive Thinking (Following of Yama and Niyam)

- Positive and pleasant feelings and thoughts - cast positive effects on human health.
 - Negative, tense, and pessimistic feelings and ideas - negative effects and make the person sick.
 - Anxiety quickly demoralizes the whole body, -lays it open to the entrance of disease,
 - Impure thoughts, even if not physically indulged, will sooner shatter the nervous system.
- Thoughts of malice, envy, and disappointment, despondency - rob the person of its health and grace

Samadhi:

Samadhi is the fifth technique of Sattvavajaya chikitsa and it is also the ultimate and the eighth stage of the Ashtang Yoga. This striking similarity points to the fact that starting from first component of Yama to the last component of Yoga Viz. Samadhi can be used as Psychotherapeutic component of Sattvavajaya chikitsa . Samadhi refers to Concentration of Chitta or Pragna on a single object with a view to stopping all dispersiveness.

During meditation, where there is only consciousness of the object and no concurrent consciousness of mind. At lower states of meditation, the object's deeper reality shows itself slowly. During this state, self-consciousness of mind disappears, so that the object (mana) and subject (soul) become one. Once Samaadhi has been attained one can still live practical life, things remain the same but the background changes, and your vision is completely purified. It overcomes suffering and achieves everlasting happiness by removal of vitiated Raja-Tama Gunas. Therefore the five vital Vatas, 11 Indriyas including Mana, other like Ahankar, Buddhi work properly which can improve the level of neurotransmitters with hormones and enhancing Satva-Guna of Mana. Relieving the symptoms in which the Patients experiences guilt despite having done nothing worrying, alteration of sleep/wake cycle. So, it can be said that Vigyan is better than Gyan, Dhairya is better than Vigyan, Smriti is better than Dhairya, Smaadhi is better than Smriti. Gyan>Vigyan>Dhairya>Smriti> Samadhi Hence, all these five steps of Chikitsa help in normalisation of mental symptoms with physiological functions by balancing Doshas or hormonal level or neurotransmitters of body. So, there is no doubt or any wrong statement, if it is said that Ayurveda has many methods as comparison to modern and other one thing is that, depression can be treated without medications.

Application and advantages of Meditative practices

- Meditation is a deeply restful mental exercise. Experiments have shown that, during meditation blood pressure drops, skin resistance to electricity increases, and lactate concentration in the blood declines, all demonstrating a lowering of anxiety levels.
- Meditation decreases oxygen consumption (this shows relaxation and more efficient respiration).
- It relaxes the sympathetic nervous system, resulting in lower levels of 'stress hormones'
- It slows down brain rhythms to the alpha level, indicating relaxed awareness and the absence of stress.
- It slows down the heart rate.
- It decreases carbon dioxide production.

All these factors combined bring down the level of tension, anxiety, conflict, and stress in a patient.

Preksha Meditation

Preksha meditation is effective for the promotion of the positive health of body-mind and emotional aspects as well as useful for spiritual upliftment. Many of present-day researchers including eminent doctors have concluded that mediation is extremely useful as a complementary therapy. Meditation is helpful in the healing from diseases and sustenance of life. It has a curative effect and it protects from several psychosomatic disorders which are caused by mental stress and tension.

The word Preksha has been derived from the root iksha, which means “to see”. When the prefix “Pra” is added, it becomes Pra+iksha =Prekha which means ‘to perceive carefully and profoundly’. Here, ‘seeing’ does not mean external vision, but careful concentration on subtle consciousness by mental insight. PrekshaDhyan is the system of meditation engaging one’s mind fully in the perception of subtle internal and innate phenomena of consciousness.

Preksha Meditation leads to overall transformation in the personality thereby it brings about positive changes in the behavior and attitude of individuals. Although, the Preksha Meditation is rooted in to oriental Indian science and Jain literature but it has been developed by incorporating recent scientific methods. The basic objective of this meditation technique is to purify the mental state of an individual. In the present world, the mind is constantly filling the negative emotional aspects and being bombarded by negative thoughts, emotions, and passions from the outside. For spiritual upliftment, mental peace, and stress management it is essential to irradiate allthese negative emotional states. With the regular practice of Preksha Meditation peace of mind gradually develops in the practitioner. Simultaneously he develops equanimity of mind and well-being.

Negative emotions like envy, anger, greed, etc. not only cause psychological upset but also act as the causative factor for various psychosomatic diseases and social distress.

With regular practice of Preksha meditation, one experiences flow of positive emotions, replacing aggression, anxiety, depression, it helps discovering hidden layers of delusion, lift the veil covering our soul and help us realize the power and wonders inside us helps us to be more creative, fearless, compassionate and Loving. Through determination, diligence and sincere pursuit of spiritual practice, we can overcome negative and harmful emotions and experience the positivism, inside bliss inside us.

Conclusion

Ayurveda has considered mental and physical diseases as two separate specialized subjects. However, no clear line of demarcation has been drawn between mental and physical illness and a flexible psychosomatic approach has been worked out. Psychological diseases have now posed a serious challenge to human existence particularly in Western countries where materialism has reached a saturation point. The attempts made so far in this direction by psychologists and psychiatrists have not so far borne the desirable effects. Ayurveda is known for its philosophical bases and hence its approach to this

problem is quite different. Though there is no systematic account of its contribution to the subject of mental health of psycho-pathology and psycho-therapeutical, Ayurveda has a lot of contributions to the field of psychotherapy, the Ayurvedic approach is the first of its kind and if developed can really prove much useful.

The above-discussed psycho-therapeutic approaches, practices, and techniques are just a glimpse from the vast resource of psycho-therapeutic materials available in Yogic literature. They are immensely effective and useful not only for the prevention and management of mental disorders but for the complete transformation of the personality and development of the individual. There is a need for a scientific and pragmatic approach toward yogic practices and a willingness to apply the teachings of our spiritual heritage in treating mental diseases.

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