

Concept of Psychiatry in Ayurveda

P.B.Behere¹, A.Jain², R.Yadav³ and A.P.Behere⁴

¹Vice-Chancellor & Professor of Psychiatry, D.Y.Patil University, Kolhapur-416006, Maharashtra, India

²Senior Resident, Dept. of Psychiatry, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram-442004, Maharashtra, India

³Elmhurst Hospital Center, Ichan School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, USA.

⁴Pediatric Psychiatrist, Helen De Vas Children's Hospital, Spectrum Health, Grand Rapids, MI, Clinical Assistant Professor, Michigan State University, USA

Corresponding author email: pbbehre@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Psychiatry in Ayurveda is very well described. In Charak Samhita chapter on mental illness describes about classifications, nosology, treatment and prognosis. *Sattvavajaya* therapy mentioned in Charak Samhita is used as a new concept of psychotherapy in Ayurveda. A concept has come out known as psycho veda. This article relates modern psychiatry and its concepts in Ayurveda.

Key words: Ayurveda, Unmaad, Dhatu, Sattvavajaya therapy.

Without mental well-being, the definition of health remains incomplete. The fact that health is an outcome of a happy soul, a pure body and a peaceful mind, was well recognised even by the most ancient and traditional system of Medicine in India, the Ayurveda (Ayu = life and veda=knowledge). The scope of Ayurveda has never been confined to bodily or physical illness but it lucidly covers areas of spiritual and mental health¹. The Vedas give description of the *Atman* or "soul" and the Mind or "*manas*" as its functional unit. The Ayurveda mentions about three *gunas* of the mind; *satwa* (balance), *raja* (arrogance) and *tama* (indolence) which together are referred to as the "Tridoshas."²

An imbalance of *rajas* and *tamas* has been implicated as the root cause of mental illness according to Ayurveda. Accumulated *doshas* are believed to create emotional toxins in the mind and may lead to various mental diseases like insomnia, neuroses and depression. If left unaddressed, permanent disorders such as '*unmaad*' and '*apasmara*' or epilepsy may result².

In Charak Samhita mental illness is very well described in chapter of Unmaad²

Unmaad: *Unmaad* or insanity can be understood as an abnormality of *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *samjna* (knowledge of senses), *jnana* (correct understanding), *smriti* (memory), *bhakti* (desires), *sila* (moral conduct), *chesta* (activities of body and mind) and *achara* (conduct, behaviour)². *Unmaad* is described in two categories endogenous and exogenous.

Four types of endogenous *unmaad* have been described- *vataja*, *pittaja*, *kaphaja* and *sannipattaja*.

- a) In *vataja unmaad*, the patient moves from place to place constantly, there may be abnormal movement of eyes, lips, lower jaw, fingers, hand and feet without any reason, uncontrollable speaking constantly, dancing in inappropriate places, decorating oneself with things that are not decorative, greediness, emaciation and roughness. These features are similar to those of mania, a disorder of mood described in modern Psychiatry³.
- b) *Pittaja unmaad* includes irritability, anger, excitement at inappropriate places, hitting own

and others bodies with sharp weapons, stone, whip, baton or fist and a desire for shade and cold water³.

- c) *Kaphaja unmaad* is characterised by psychomotor retardation, poor eating, poor personal care, excessive sleepiness, preference for isolation, hypersalivation and nasal discharge and decreased eye movements³.
- d) *Sannipataja unmaad* includes insanity caused by all *doshas* together.

Exogenous Unmaad

Interestingly, there is yet another type of insanity described in the Charaka Samhita, known as *agantuja unmaad* or exogenous insanity for which wrong actions such as insulting gods, sages and elders are considered attributable. The mode of onset of this type of illness has been described as angry look of the gods, being cursed by sages, and being possessed by yakshas³.

Dhat Syndromes

Sushruta Samhita as well as Charaka Samhita have given much importance to *Dhatu* which means 'the elixir that constitutes the body'. Seven types of *Dhatu*s have been described of which semen is considered the most important. The *Dhat* Syndrome is a culture bound clinical condition confined to India in which a patient remains preoccupied with the thought that he is losing semen excessively in urine, resulting in an array of problems including generalised weakness, hypochondriasis, decreased concentration, sadness of mood and sexual dysfunction^{4,5}.

Pre morbid Personality

The Charaka Samhita (ancient Indian literature) has given description of premorbid personality traits of persons prone to develop *unmaada* or insanity. Some of these include persons who are fearful always, whose mind is disordered by more of *rajas* and *tamas*, who partake food which is dirty, improperly cooked and unsuitable, who perform

activities of the body in the wrong manner and those who are greatly affected by lust, anger, greed and pleasure³.

Etiology

Among the etiological factors, we find mention of factors like stress, sudden shock, exertion and physical illnesses. It clearly states that those whose body has become emaciated greatly and become weak by the effect of severe (protracted) diseases are more prone to develop mental illnesses. This concept is similar to modern psychiatry which gives due importance to organic cause for mental diseases³.

Etiopathogenesis

Thus premorbid personality combined with environmental and biological factors have been used to explain the etiopathogenesis of psychiatric disorders which is much in keeping with the modern medicine.

Prodromal Symptoms

The premonitory symptoms or prodromal symptoms have been described elaborately. These include feeling of emptiness of the head, turbidity of the eyes, noise in the ears, oppression in the region of the heart, too much indulgence in thinking, always feeling discomfort in upper portion of the body and movement of eyes in the wrong manner³.

Treatment

Regarding the treatment modalities, there are three principle categories of approach to patient care as described in Ayurvedic classics

Non Pharmacological

Daivavyapashraya - means a therapy that depends on the divine and is beyond the purview of reasoning or scientific knowledge. It can be understood as spiritual therapy. Includes magicoreligious practices such as *mantra* (incantations), *manidharan* (precious stones), *homah* (sacrifice), *upavasa* (fasting), and so on².

Yuktivyapasraya-based on reasoning and scientific outlook.

Sattvavajaya - means “conquest of the mind”. It is actually a form of mind control therapy which is applicable in all kinds of illnesses but particularly relevant to mental illnesses⁶.

We are well aware that Psychotherapy has pervaded the Indian culture since ages however in a form less conspicuous as a treatment modality and more so as a practice interwoven with social customs and rituals. The Bhagvadgita is a rich elaboration of psychotherapeutic techniques which compels a person to analyse the pros and cons of his or her every action⁷.

Sattvavajaya as described in Ayurveda, is based on three principles-

- 1) Replacement of negative emotions with positive ones such as malice (*ghrina*) by love, anger (*krodha*) by composure, greed (*lobha*) by content, ignorance (*agyan*) by knowledge, jealousy (*irsya*) by affection, fear (*bhaya*) by valor. Advices are given on right conduct. The endeavour to replace emotions is something that makes *Sattvavajaya* therapy unique in its own right.
- 2) Assurance to the patient that the lost objects or persons shall be eventually regained.
- 3) Psycho shock therapy⁸

Sattvavajaya is of immense help to mentally ill patients as it helps to regulate their thought process (*cintya*), polishes their objectives (*dhyeya*), channelling their presumptions (*uhya*) and helping them take appropriate decisions (*samkalpa*)⁸

Thus we realise that there is no basic difference between *sattvavajaya* and the contemporary modern psychotherapy as both are involved in protecting the mind from harmful sense objects. An integration of the modern psychotherapy and the ancient principles of Ayurveda is being referred to

as Psycho Veda and holds tremendous potential in unfolding the knowledge of the natural forces that determine the experience of every human being as a cosmic whole⁹.

Pharmacological Treatment

The treatment of mental disorders is done by procedures known as *panchkarma*, *aushadh* (drugs) and diet regimens. Among the treatment modalities for mental disorders, there is mention of a wide variety of techniques including *sveda*(sedation), *vamana* (emesis), *asthapana* (decoction enema), *anuvāsana* (lubrication enema), *pariseka* (pouring liquids on the body), *bandhana* (tying with ropes), *avarodhana* (restraining), *apatarpana* (undernourishment), *sira vedha* (venous puncture to let out blood), *vismarana* (inducing fearfulness), *vitrasana* (threatening), *dhuma* (inhalation of medicinal smoke), *pradhamana* (nasal insufflation) and so on².

Last but not the least, even Ayurveda acknowledges the fact that every human being or ‘*Purush*’ has a unique nature referred to as his/her ‘*Prakruti*’, which is determined by the *tridoshas*. It is this unique constitution that decides the suitability (*satmya*) of an individual for therapy and the expected outcome or prognosis².

Finally in Ayurveda, mental illness is properly described and it is true as well in today’s context.

References

1. Behere, Prakash B., et al. Ayurvedic concepts related to psychotherapy. Indian J. Psychiatry, 2013; 2, 55: S310.
2. Charak Samhita in Yadav S. Publisher. Mumbai: SBP Nirnay Sagar
3. Charaksamhita in Shukla TV publisher, Varanasi: Choukhamba Prakashan;
4. Behere PB, Natraj GS. Dhat syndrome: The

Behere PB et.al. : Concept of Psychiatry in Ayurveda

- phenomenology of a culture bound sex neurosis of the orient. Indian J Psychiatry. 1984;26:76-8.
5. Dwevedi V., editor. Sushrutsamhita, Choukhamba Prakashan, Varanasi.
 6. Nespor K, Singh RH. The experiences with ayurvedic psychotherapy 'satvavajaya' in europe. Anc Sci Life. 1986;5:154-5.
 7. Linda Bretherton, Integrating Psychotherapy With Ayurveda in a creating game, www.creating game.com
 8. Murthy AR, Singh RH. The concept of psychotherapy in ayurveda with special reference to satvavajaya. Anc Sci Life. 1987;6:255-61.
 9. Jean M. Ayurvedic Psychotherapy: Transposed Signs. Langford: Parodied Selves;

Source of Support : Nil
Conflict of Interest : None