

## Indian traditional treatment for psychiatric disorders

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### Abstract

Indian traditional healing treatment for psychiatric disorders can be traced back to thousands of years. Although the modern generations have made their way much ahead in scientific research and other treatment strategies, the significance of the traditional Indian method of treatment does subsist till this day. The experts in the western world are in agreement about the effectiveness of this system. Modern studies in mental health indicate that it is almost impossible to find a man or woman with perfectly healthy mind, some abnormality, some disorder or some deficit is always present. Since there is more knowledge about physiology than about psychology, the physical diseases get easily and quickly detected, than the psychological ones. For this reason it becomes essential to detect and tackle mental diseases from the very initial stage or to adopt a lifestyle which does not allow these psychological problems to come up at all. The Indian traditional treatment for psychiatric illness can help and if properly understood and researched it can spread new hope for suffering humanity. It can lead to moral health and wholesome lifestyle and a unique and novel method for diagnose and cure for psychiatric conditions.

**Keywords:** Traditional, healing, treatment, psychiatric disorders, mental health

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### Introduction

The health and wellness of an individual are reliant on the integrated effects of mind, body, and spirit. This triad is precariously set within a backdrop of the environment, and our earth. The traditional healing modalities focus more on balance in the context of environmental respect. For thousands of years our ancestors have known the secrets of long life. It is time to appropriately learn from age-old societies and their healing traditions for they do have answers we are seeking in sustainability and harmony, environmental stewardship and planetary respect, and holistic health. In ancient times, people always learned from nature: our earth, the sunlight, the fire, and the wind and worshipped them. Spirituality and healing have always been a combined tradition. These belief systems and practices are passed on from one generation to another and traditional healing method sets us on a path that can lead only to a better sense of self within the context of the universe. We propose a collaboration that develops mutually beneficial learning partnerships combining modern medical knowledge with the wisdom of traditional healers around the world (Freawley, 2001) [3].

### Indian traditional concept of mental illness

The descriptions of various mental illnesses in ancient Indian texts are probably the oldest such accounts. Three well-known Ayurvedic manuscripts: the Charaka Samhita by Charaka, the Sushruta Samhita by Sushruta, and Ashtanga Sangraha of Vagbhatt, have established the roots of modern Indian medicine. The ancient Indian scripture, Atharva-Veda, mentions that mental illness may result from divine curses. Great epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata made several references to disordered states of mind and means of coping with them. In kalyuga Buddha, and Jain tirthankaras also gives its own way (Dash, 2001) [2].

### Indian traditional treatment overall analysis

The Indian conceptualisation of mental health can be understood from the major works among the major available sources like Vedas, Upanishads, Religious-medical texts, Yoga and rituals. The Western approach to mental illness appears to be primarily concerned with the complicated, minute details of brain chemistry in its quest to understand the logistics of mental disease. The Western tendency is to concentrate on specific aspects of sensory impressions and brain lobes and the effect of various forms of multiple neurotransmitters and hormones within the body. Ayurveda is much more concerned with the bigger, simpler picture of humoral and energetic imbalances, which it sees as a physical manifestation of karma that allows for the teaching of spiritual lessons. Ancient Indian Sage and clinician Charaka, perhaps, speculated that the avoidance of disease and conservation of health is even more simple by saying: "The person of a strong mind who does not indulge in meat and wine; who eats only healthy food, remains clean (both physically and mentally) and does not become affected by either Ninja or Agantu unmada". Scientific research on transcendental meditation programme has shown effectiveness of meditation on reducing neuroticism, improving learning, improving academic achievements, prevention of alcohol and drug abuse. Role of yoga in stress and sleep management, improving performance in sports and executives is being stressed recently. Indian traditional healing technique like 'Preksha dhyana', which is a combination of meditation and relaxation technique, has been found useful in improvement of concentration, memory and anxiety reduction. Some Ayurvedic preparations have some role in dealing with anxiety and depression like anxiolytics and antidepressants. Medicinal plants like 'Vacha' (Latin: *Acorus Calamus*) and 'Jyotishmati' (Latin: *Cleastrus Paniculatus*) were found useful in treatment of depression. Bhagavadgita forms part of the Bhishma Parva

of the Mahabharata written by Vedavyasa in 3101 B. C. A symbolic representation of a common human conflict and approaches to its solution are succinctly described in this book in a dialog form.

### **Psychotherapy and Bhagavad Gita**

The theme involves the war between 'Kauravas' and 'Pandavas', who are cousins, for the usurpation of the kingdom, Arjuna, the commander-in-chief of the 'Pandavas' is faced with an intense psychological turmoil when placed in the predicament of having to kill his own kith and kin in the opposite camp- an immoral act according to him. Amidst the warring forces, he suddenly becomes anxious, confesses to confusion and negative self-evaluation and admits of physical and psychological symptoms (his limbs quailed, mouth dried, body shook and hair stood on end) which threatens his very survival. He pleads that he is incompetent to face the challenge and seeks to avoid it. Thus we have here an example of faulty coping strategy in the face of stress. What follows in the Bhagavadgita is the response of his friend and mentor Krishna, to Arjuna's distress.

### **Krishna as a cognitive therapist**

The stress Arjuna faced, as Ramachandra Rao has analysed, was due to an unrealistic cognitive appraisal of himself (viz., the righteous and valiant warrior), the object (viz., the war) and the threat (viz., morality i.e. of the act he was doing). By anticipation of outcome in a negative way, his task oriented behaviour was vitiated and led him to inaction. Krishna resorted to correct his cognitive inadequacy by providing a new framework for the coping behaviour, where the task performance is made independent of the anticipation of the outcome. He focussed Arjuna's attention on the value of his perception of himself in his role status and of the objective environment. He taught that non-anticipation does not necessarily mean inaction, but may actually induce more effective action. Thus, it was not proper of Arjuna, Krishna explained, to abstain from fighting against enemies on account of doubt or result.

### **'Sthitaprajna' - a person with positive mental health**

Who can act effectively in a conflict free way? Before proceeding further, Krishna describes such a person whom he calls 'Sthitaprajna'. He is one who is unruffled by grief, desire or anger alike, has control over his senses and whose happiness wells up from within, being non-contingent upon external gratification.

### **Steps in cognitive re-structuring: 'Jnana', 'Karma' & 'Bhakti'**

Bhagavad Gita provides a specific therapeutic package for distressing problems in which anxiety is of fundamental importance. 'Jnana' or cognitive appraisal, 'Karma' or appropriate action and 'Bhakti' or faith are the most important of them.

#### **1. 'Jnana' or cognitive appraisal**

The first task in facing any situation is 'Jnana' or accurate cognitive appraisal, according to Bhagavad Gita Krishna uses the term 'Jnana' in a deeper sense, i.e. to understand not only immediate situation but for a deeper knowledge of the ontogenic and phylogenic nature of the universe and man's

place in it. Man is spiritual in nature and his spirit / soul or 'Atman' does not come under the category of any substance, attribute or even an action. Krishna, further appraises Arjuna that the soul passes through childhood, youth and old age and also into another body just as an old cloth is replaced by a new one such an understanding makes experiential existence appear as a void. Problems arise only when an individual mistakes himself as the enjoyer or sufferer. In fact, it is the body (body includes ego also) that undergoes these experiences and not the self. Thus the first way to overcome these sufferings is to know one's spiritual nature.

#### **2. 'Karma' being and not becoming as appropriate action**

'Karma' or appropriate action is another mean for facing problems. Appropriate action is determined, according to Bhagavad Gita, by one's 'Varna' or endowment and 'Asrama' or state of growth. Four 'Varnas' (viz., 'Brahmin' or priest class, 'Kshatriya' or warrior class, 'Vaishya' or business community and 'Shudra' or labourer) and four 'Asramas' (viz., 'Brahmacharya' or learning stage, 'grihastha' or householder stage, 'Vana prastha' or retirement from household and 'Sanyasa' or complete renunciation from the worldly affairs) are the two dimensions constituting Hindu Social organisation and determines each person's action within this social fabric.

#### **One should therefore**

- 1) Derive one's gratification from doing his duty and not from its outcome viz., 'Nishkama karma',
- 2) Perform his task perfectly viz., 'Karmasu Kaushalam and
- 3) Dedicate action for Society's Welfare viz., 'Yajnartha Karma'. These three aspects of action are technically termed as 'Karmayoga' in Bhagavadgita. So, Krishna advises Arjuna to overcome his improper refusal of his duty to fight which has come to him by his birth (warrior class), upbringing and temperament.
- 4) Other approaches The Bhagavadgita also refers to other important approaches to better positive mental health. These include 'Pranayama' or deep breathing exercises, 'Pariprashna' or discussion, 'Saddha' or devotion, 'Ekagramana' or meditation and 'Yuktahara-Vihara' or good nutrition and relaxation.

#### **Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita to Current Psychological Medicine**

From the above, it is apparent that the Bhagavadgita is replete with concepts of relevance to psychotherapy in the present day psychiatric context, but these concepts must be viewed with reservation. Obviously, the severely depressed, the confused demented or the hallucinated schizophrenic may not reap much benefit from the Bhagavadgita. The message of the Bhagavadgita however, appeals to the vast, multitude of less severely disturbed people, plunged in competition, frustration and meaninglessness. The Bhagavadgita's concept of 'Jnana' in wider sense i.e., the understanding of the universal nature of the spiritual self in contrast to the individual ego experiencing pleasure and pain, can be definitely helpful in reducing the impact of life's events as personal stresses. The Bhagavadgita's concept of immortality of the soul is especially soothing for one who is grief stricken with a loss of a loved one. Similarly, the emotional disturbances associated with the advent of adolescence and old age become more tolerable in light of the Bhagavadgita's concept of these as inevitable phases of the life

cycle. The principle of 'Nishkamakarma' is appropriate for anxiety states related to action with uncertain outcome, and helps the person to function effectively in this achievement oriented world, where rewards may not be always certain. Bhagavadgita's explanation on 'Bhakti' gives prominence to the identification of the individual soul with the supreme soul through complete dedication and surrender. In fact, the active religious life of common Hindus today is grounded in the 'Bhakti' and thus, the various rituals such as 'Japa', 'Homa', 'Archana', 'Mudra', 'Seva' and 'Vandana' can be developed as therapeutic tools. Apart from providing a conceptual framework conducive to freedom from psychological conflicts, Bhagavadgita also provides a cookbook approach to positive mental health, using the principles of yoga, the steps of self-disciplining in food and habit and the code of conduct (Yuktaharavihara), physical training through postures (Asanas), autonomic training through deep breathing exercises (Pranayama) and the various stages of meditation (Ekagraman). They constitute a truly effective approach to integration of the mind and body. Clearly, the Bhagavadgita has a lot to offer as a psychotherapeutic paradigm in the Indian context. Much work needs to be done in application of these principles to, and evaluation of their utility in specific clinical situations.

#### Personality development in yoga

Yoga is an art-a technique of personality development. It widens the mental perspectives, gives ego strength and control over the lower sensations and passions, resolving unconscious complexes and elevating the conscious to new heights.

The personality development in yoga is done through systematic steps, which are-

- Purification of body,
- A strict moral code of conduct,
- Control of senses by the mind,
- Control of ego over buddhi, manas, and senses,
- Purification of unconsciousness by sublimating the complexes,
- Widening the consciousness by concentration and meditation

#### Kundalini yoga

Kundalini yoga refers to arousal of the serpent power. The tantric text describes interesting tantrika anatomy in the context of kundalini. The vital energy i.e., the prana flows throughout the body through a number of channels called nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna are the principal nadis. These nadis function in relation to six principal chakras through which specific physical, mental, and autonomic functions take place in body. The *muladhara chakra* is the seat of the potential form of *kundalini* while the *sahasrara chakra* is the seat of the energy form of kundalini sakti. The effort of uniting these two forms of kundalini sakti leads to arousal of kundalini and its ascent from *muladhara* towards *sahasrara chakra* stepwise. When such *kundalini sakti* reaches near the successive chakras, the practitioner of *kundalini yoga* starts experiencing the respective levels of the intellect (buddhi). Such an experience is known as *kundalini yoga* where the serpent power is aroused in an individual, which leads to expression of virtues. Ordinarily the *ida*, *pingala*, and *susumna nadis* circulate vital energy i.e., prana in the body. *Pingala* is also known as *surya* (sun) nadi which is related

with the right nostril. *Ida* is called *candra* (moon) *nadi* which is perceived through the left nostril. These two functions alternatively. *Ida* and *pingala* are connected below with *muladhara chakra* and they encircle around the *susumna* while proceeding above to merge with the left and right nostril respectively. The *susumna nadi* starting from *muladhara chakra* pervades centre of the head. The *brahma nadi* is present in the *Antah kala* of the *susumna*. The prana i.e., the *kundalini sakti* when aroused.

#### Transcendental Meditation

Maharishi Mahesh yogi founded a brief form of yoga, which can be called "instant yoga". This seeks to move away from the long and traditional path of yoga and make it brief and easy for the fast moving life of today. In this the mind is lead away from all worldly bondages towards the unlimited endless consciousness. According to Mahesh yogi Transcendental meditation expands consciousness, develops creative intelligence, and clears the power of observation and perception. It gives "unbounded peace" and man develops in natural way (Katz, 1976).

#### Indian Traditional Treatment in Various Psychiatric Disorders

##### Schizophrenia

##### a) Ayurvedic medicine and schizophrenia

In Ayurveda, Psychosis is known as "Unmaad". Most physicians treat this disease according to the presentation of symptoms. Patients who are excited or agitated are given "counter-irritant" treatment in the form of nasal drops. Vacha (*Acorus Calamus*) in the powder or oil form, shigru (*moringa oleifera*) seed powder, Maricha (*Piper Nigrum*), are some of the medicines are used, combined with "Puran Ghrita". After the patient is subdued other medicines are used. These include Sarpagandha (*Rauwolfia serpentina*), jatamansi (*Nardostachys Jatamansi*), Ashwagandha, Brahmi, Ajwain, Raupya Bhasma, Suvarna Bhasma and Puran Ghrita. Different medicated ghrutas (ghee) are used orally, such as Kalyanak Ghruta, Panchagavya Ghruta, Brahmi Ghruta and Jatamansi Ghruta. Some physicians advocate the use of "Panchakarma" procedures like induced vomiting, induced purgation and medicated enemas. Treatment also differs according to the predominance of the "dosha" involved. Acute psychotic episodes are often triggered by stressful events.

##### b) Yoga and schizophrenia

If a person can learn to reduce feelings of anxiety through yoga, the general level of background stress is also reduced. The person with schizophrenia often exhibits the extreme example of a rajasic state, being agitated, restless and disturbed. A very grounding and centring yoga sadhana could channel these energies towards a calmer and more controlled mood. At times, the person can also swing into a very tamasic state of depression, passivity and lethargy. Practices that are extroverting and energizing could lighten this mental and physical sluggishness.

#### Affective disorders

Ayurvedic treatments focus on getting the vata energy in balance. As bipolar disorder involves alternating periods of depression and mania, treatments attempt to alleviate symptoms of both of these imbalances. Depression treatments

include increasing physical activity, in an effort to increase joy and energy flow; implementing a light, flavorful and nutritious diet; Aromatherapy; colour therapy; and pranayama, or breathwork. The herb 'Rauwolfia' has been used in traditional Ayurvedic practices to manage symptoms of mania and may be beneficial for patients resistant to lithium, a mood-stabilizing medication conventionally prescribed for managing bipolar disorder

### **Neurosis**

Some research says that regular yoga practice (at least once weekly) helps to decrease levels of depression significantly. Twice weekly yoga practice for two months showed a significant decrease in levels of depression as well as levels of both state and trait anxiety. Hatha yoga encourages an increased awareness of breath, internal centering, relaxation, and meditation. These strategies helped participants experience significantly lower stress and anxiety levels in addition to higher quality of life scores. 2005 systematic review of the research on Yoga and anxiety presented encouraging results, particularly with anxiety-related disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder. Research has shown yoga to be beneficial in the treatment of depression, anxiety disorders and sleeping problems. Recent studies found that yoga may elevate levels of an important brain chemical, gamma-aminobutyric (GABA), improving symptoms of these disorders (Andra, 1976 & Ross, 1976) <sup>[1, 6]</sup>.

### **Substance Addiction**

#### **a) Yoga for Substance addiction**

Medical experts are theorizing that yoga may actually break the addictive cycle. Yoga therapy works in contrast to most therapies for addiction, which isolate either the psychological or physiological element, by treating the body and mind simultaneously. The peaceful poses of yoga rest both our brain and body. It is here that our energy can be harnessed toward changing unhealthy habits. Substance dependency is a self-destructive process that weakens and unbalances the individual physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yoga is a three-fold process that can rebuild these aspects of self, serving to counteract further progression of the disease. Yoga and meditation can be effective in helping the patient regain his/her vital center of energy, satisfaction and stability while making positive changes in their lives. Emphasis is placed on how the application of yoga in conjunction with treatment can accelerate the rehabilitative process (Shaffi, 1976) <sup>[7]</sup>.

#### **b) Strengthening Nervous System**

Drug addicts often become confused, as their intelligence level deteriorates because of continued use of drug or addictive substance. Consequently, they end up losing their sense of discrimination. In order to promote intelligence, ayurveda recommends the use of herbs such as *Brahmi* (Bacopa monnieri), *Yashtimadhu* (Glycyrrhiza Glabra), *Guduchi* (Tinospora Cordifolia), and *Shankhpushpi* (Convolvulus pluricaulis). These herbs also improve memory, concentration and comprehension.

### **Vipassana Meditation for Substance Dependence**

Addiction means addiction to a certain vibration that has been created by the drug use and the subsequent chemical processes in the body. The addiction has gone to the deepest

level in the mind, and there is every likelihood to fit becoming rooted in the deep unconscious. As vipassana reaches the unconscious level of the mind by working with the sensation, it can remove the roots of addiction. The deepest level of the mind is constantly in contact with the bodily sensations. As we develop awareness of the sensations and observe them with equanimity, the addiction in the subconscious level is automatically removed (Iyer, K.S.1989) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Critical Analysis of Indian Traditional Treatment in Relation to Mental Disorders**

#### **Advantages**

The side effects are minimal when compared to other forms of medicine, as natural substances can't really do your body much harm. Ayurvedic therapy has proved time and again it helps people relax and calm down, and face the challenges of everyday life better. Through establishing a strong mind-body connection, these treatments are thought to create solace, inspiration, and reconnection. Traditional medicine uses only natural substances derived from plants, fruits, vegetables and natural minerals. It is believed that these reduce stress, improve mental clarity and contribute to a positive outlook. Other studies have further demonstrated the psychological benefits of these in relation to mood enhancement. Traditional treatment like yoga helps to increase strength, flexibility, coordination, and range of motion.

#### **Disadvantages**

Popularity of traditional systems of medicine declined because of the fear of adulteration and toxic substances mixed with the formulae available in the market. There has been a misconception of 'Booth-Vidya' (Psychiatry in ayurveda) as possession, and giving false treatment to people in the name of traditional treatment. Traditional treatments like ayurveda are sometimes very expensive. The treatment duration is very time consuming and slow in acting on the symptoms. The herbs required for the treatment are sometimes very rare and difficult to get. There is a lack of professionals in these fields. And there is a need for a strict regime to be maintained to get actual effects

#### **Conclusion**

The developments in the realm of the science and technology, particularly in the field of electronics, have revolutionized human life. It seems here are material problems all around. In fact, this apparent progress is superficial, underneath the mind of man is under great stress, even in developed and affluent societies. The problems of conflicts arising out of racial, ethnic, sectarian and caste prejudices, poverty, ignorance, ill health, drugs, the mean acts of terrorism and the erosion of moral values cast a deep shadow on the future of human civilization. Is there a way out? The answer is a clear and unequivocal 'yes'. The problems are man-made. Man will have to change his attitude and his perceptions. Indian traditional healing method of Ayurveda and Yoga deals with the human mind, the human psyche. There is clear evidence of people changing, getting transformed, and coming out of anger, avarice and conceit. People addicted to drugs and intoxicants have come out of their misery. The cruel have become kind and the rowdy disciplined. There has been substantial improvement in the efficiency of people and in their interpersonal relations, students have done better in their studies,

professionals have become effective, several studies made on Yoga and Ayurveda bear ample testimony to its efficacy. The concepts of traditional treatment in India have been accumulated throughout ages. Treatments like yoga and ayurveda have not only been surviving this modern era but as well as been growing in their field in India as well as in other nations. The ultimate goal of traditional treatments is to create a state of holistic health for the individual, to create, consequently, a healthy society and environment with its herbal health remedies. It is seen that the need for these treatments have been increasing in many countries, 70–95% of the population depend on these traditional medicines for primary care and the 'WHO' has also put impasses on improving the quality of treatment and to maintaining a good treatment standard in every nation (WHO, 2011) [9].

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