

## Holistic Approach in Psychiatry - Indian View

**Volume: 09      Issue: 02      July 1991      Page: 101-104**

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J P Balodhi, - *Department of Clinical Psychology, National Institute of Mental Health & Neuro Sciences, Bangalore 560 029, India*

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### *Abstract*

In recent years, Holistic Approach in Psychiatry has become more popular, Holistic approach In medicine including Psychiatry connotes both an approach to the whole person in his or her total environment and a variety of therapeutic and health promoting strategies. In the present paper ancient Indian approach to Psychiatry in a holistic way is described. References from Vedic, Ayurvedic and Yogic texts are collected and interpreted in the present context.

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Key words -

**Holistic approach,  
Ayurveda,  
Yoga,  
Rites and Rituals**

A new advancement in medical sciences particularly in Psychiatry has emerged in recent years. It is partly due to the fact that diagnosis and treatment terms alone is not considered in total health care. Emotional and environmental influences are being taken into account. Thus, physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual aspects of health and ill-health of patient assessed together for the treatment as it was found that these aspects are interdependent and interrelated to each other. This total health care approach is termed as Holistic approach. Psychiatrists have been generally more sympathetic to the holistic approach and often claim it their own. Lipowski [1] for, traced the lineage of the holistic in psychiatry from White's definition of psychiatry as the medical speciality which 'approaches the problem of whole individual', to George Engel's contemporary formulation of psychiatry as "biopsychosocial" discipline.

This concept in medicine is analogous to that in physics. While discussing on the principle of relativity, Einstein [2] advocated that reality, what so ever, cannot be understood in an isolated form. Capra [3] described this law in physics as 'tao of physics' which explains that various models of sub-atomic physics express again and again in different ways the same insight that the constituents of matter and the basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. Anyway, the purpose of citing this holistic approach in this paper is to affirm its scientific and empirical basis.

Interestingly enough, Indian thought in general and ancient Indian medicine (Ayurveda) in particular always advocated the total/holistic approach in medicine including psychiatry. Now, we discuss Indian holistic approach to psychiatry found in her classical ancient texts and being practiced even now in rural India.

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**Psychiatry: A soul seeking science in India**

India is a vast country of many religions, many languages and many cultures . Her civilization is perhaps the oldest one that emerged out of the many cultural influences of thousands of years. That may be the reason why medicine in India is viewed not only as a health care system but as a science of the whole life. Like any other branch of knowledge, which they technically called Shastra, medicine is also meant to contribute and fulfil the four objectives of life .viz., Dharma (right living), Artha (well living), Kama (satisfied living) and Moksha (self realised living).

Mental illness, according to Indian classical medical texts (Ayurveda and Unani) is a disturbed state of mind (Prajnaparadha) - a cultural construction of reality, and any method viz herbal, psychological, meditative and ritual that expels this confusion (loss of self) is the subject matter of psychiatry (Bhut Vidya) [4].

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## **Concepts of mental illness in rural India and development of the science of Indian medicine**

Folk concepts of illness which are carried through generations are vague and vary considerably in the different parts of India according to their sub-cultural variations. But the common belief in village life is that every living creature on this earth is allotted a particular time when he has to suffer or enjoy according to his previous 'Karmas' (actions). The various causes for mental illness as understood by village folk may be classified into two broad categories

- (1) supernatural, paranormal and
- (2) physical [5].

Treatment for mental illness according to folk belief always needs more than one therapy. Generally, spiritual, occult and medicinal treatment are administered together in rural India.

Spiritual treatment comprises of exorcism, counter magic, use of talisman, "chanted" ring, sacred ash, prayers and offerings in temples. This treatment is offered by traditional healers called 'Mantravadi' - a person who has undergone training to incant the sacred verses through which evil spirit is exorcised [6]. Occult treatment is basically carried through various rituals performed in temples. There are many temples of fame in India where mentally ill are treated with rituals, exercises, diet, isolation, offerings to the temple, 'rolling' around the temple in the yard and idol worship [7]. Third aspect of treatment is folk medicine. This includes various 'Ghratas', (clarified butter) and herbal preparations from *Rauwolfia serpentina* .

These concepts of mental illness and their treatments are derived from and influenced by Hindu mythology and religion. The ancient texts dealing with these topics are Vedas, Brahmanas, the Puranas, Tantras and Ramayan and Mahabharath epics. Atharva Veda is the first source of information regarding mental illnesses and their treatment. Mental illnesses in this text are attributed to malicious influence of spirits, demons, sorcerers and enemies that inhabit the world around the patients [8].

Systematization of all these concepts resulted into a formal medical science called 'Ayurveda' or science of life in and around 600 B.C. Charaka [9] (400 B.C.), Susruta [10]. (300 B.C.) and Bhela [11] (500 B.C.) are the pioneers of this system. Charaka had chalked out the scheme of life before attempting the notion of diseases and their treatment. He defined life as a configuration of body, the senses, the mind and the spirit [12]. Body is made of cells (srotas) which exude every moment [13]. Three humors called Vata (wind), Pitta (bile) and Kapha (phlegm) maintain these cells and disorder in

their combination results into a disease. Mind is a supra-sense, a sort of coordinator between cognitive and conative functions having atonement with dimension generating consciousness [14]. Mental illness is due to disintegration among body, mind and senses which ultimately disturb the self. Consequently, unsettled state of mind, awareness, perception, knowledge, memory, behaviour and conduct takes place [15]. Method of treatment, thus, according to Charaka, should not be physical, psychological or pharmacological alone but a combination of all these three. Physical treatment consists of

- (1) cleaning nasal passage (nasy),
- (2) vomiting (vaman),
- (3) purgation (virechan),
- (4) enema (nirodha vasti) and others like massage, special diet, etc. [16].

Simultaneously, herbs like Evovulus alsinoider (Shankhapushpi), Centella asiatics (Manduka-parani) and Bacopamonnieri (Nira-brahmi) are also advised to be administered.

Psychological means involve many Magico - religious rites and rituals. Like chanting of sacred words (mantra), the touch of precious stone (mani), benediction (mangala), sacrifice (bali) and sub-mission to God (Pranipat) along with terrorising (shocking), offering gift exhilaration, and pacifying patient [17]. This ancient Indian system of medicine is still dominating the field of medicine in India [18]. A detailed research work on holistic approach in Ayurveda was carried out by Kutumbiah [19]. According to an estimate available in 1983-84, there are 2,40,000 Ayurvedic registered practitioners, 12,000 dispensaries, 1,452 Ayurvedic Hospitals and 100 post-graduate colleges teaching Ayurveda in India [20].

Yoga is another Indian holistic system of treatment. The term 'Yoga' itself means 'Unison' or comprehensive approach to health. The system of yoga has been practised in India for centuries. However, it is believed that Patanjali systematised it in 200 A.D. in his Yoga Sutra. The aim of yoga, according to Patanjali is self growth or transedence Tada drashtur Swarupe Avasthanam) [21]. However, clinicians have been utilising yogic techniques with neurotic clients [22]. Patanjali has enumerated nine pathological conditions which obstruct self growth (resulting into mental illness).

They are

- (1) Vyadhi or somatic disturbance
- (2) Styana or gloominess,
- (3) Samshaya or doubt,
- (4) Pramada or procrastination,
- (5) Alasya or sloth,
- (6) Avirati or craving
- (7) Bhrantidarshana or hallucination,
- (8) Alabdhabhumikattva or failure to attend with concentration and
- (9) Anavastha or instability [23].

These pathological conditions generate five afflictions, namely:

- (1) Avidya or lack of information in a state of excess entropy of system,
- (2) Asmita or egoism,
- (3) Raga or attachment,
- (4) Dwesha or antipathy and
- (5) Abhinivesha or fear of death [23].

Coster [24] had compared these afflictions with the primary anxiety and insecurity in the light of

psychoanalysis.

Patanjali's approach to overcome these pathologies and afflictions is eightfold - a holistic one consisting of human conduct and behaviour (Yama and Niyama), Postures (Asana), deep breathing exercises (Pranayama), sense control (Pratyahara) and progressive meditation (dharana, dhyana and samadhi) [25].

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## Conclusion

Hindu (Indian) society is a world of sharing; within his village, a man belongs to his family, his caste, his community and his Gods. Therefore, illness is accepted as an integral part of the whole community. Psychiatric illness especially is considered as the fault of the whole community and if one individual is subject to it this time, some other will be a victim another time. The cause of such understanding may be attributed to India's old social and traditional customs, joint family system, poverty, poor education, inadequate nutrition and religion (neurosis as due to above factors).

The treatment method adopted by folk healers show almost good results. It may have the effect because of strong suggestions made during rituals. In addition to ritual, patient is put under strict dietary habits, observing moral and ethical rules, physical exercises like massage, oil bath etc. There is, of course, awareness now about allopathic treatment as mental patients coming from rural areas want to be treated on the line of physical treatment. For example, they want to get X-ray to be done to their head, they want their physical tests fully carried out. It will be thus, useful if the system of allopathy in India takes folk concepts, Ayurvedic/Unani medicine and India's social perception into account and help the patient in a holistic way.

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