



Short Communication

Mind and Mental Health in the view of Ayurved

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Abstract

The present day concept of medicine is truly all embracing and much unlike what the popular mind conceives of it: as just the care and restoration of a sick person. It comprehends such diverse topics as counselling in marriage against the risks of heredity, prophylactic measures which also include social and environmental hygiene, the advice and training of the mentally retarded and so on. All the measures of the ever advancing front of Health Care are relevant here. When we realise this much breadth of the current understanding of Medicine, the usual interest a modern researcher in Medicines takes in such a reputed, ancient and all sufficient system as Ayurveda seems to be narrow. The poverty of such an attitude and the need to delve deep if not explore further here, is best illustrated from what we find on Mind and Mental health in Ayurveda.

Keywords: Ayurveda, mind, mental health, etc.

Introduction: The discovery of brain as being the seat of mind in modern science is very recent, about two hundred years at the most. Though Aristotle saw brain, he felt it to be a reservoir of useless fluids. For the Greek, the seats of mind were the diaphragm whose visible movements on the surface were an index of the changes in the mind. The term (schizo-phrene) means a split-mind, literally means a split-diaphragm an etymological reminder of the notion of diaphragm being the seat of mind. Against such a historical background, it is astonishing to note that Bhela, probably contemporary to Caraka, clearly states that mind is situated between the top of the head and the palate, and sitting there only stationarily, it is able to understand the world through its senses.

A speciality of Ayurveda in which it radically differs from modern Medicine is that it consider mind as but an organ of the self, It starts with the statement that purusa viz. The individual human being is a co inherence samavaya of soul (atman) mind (manas) sense organ (indriyas) and body (sarira). Mind is also an organ that a person or his self has. This however differs from the other organs in that it is both an organ of action (karma) and cognition (jnana) and is overpowering to all the other (sarvendriyaparam) The latter act only when mind exists or directs them. As Brhadaranyaka puts it "if the mind is elsewhere, I do not see, I do not hear" self is essentially a witness or a Saksi of all that the body does along with the mind. It is interesting to note that the an idea somewhat similar to this occurs in modern science only in a recent book, **Self and Brain**, a work of a noble laureate in neurophysiology and a renowned philosopher (Eccles and Popper). These authors take pains to out that self is what supervise in a person and the brain is but an organ of it much as Ayurveda would have, when it refers as mere Saksi or a witness¹.

Mind in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, mind and body are never treated separately. They were consider as always interacting and constituting an integral whole viz. the individual person. This again however is only a recent development in modern Medicine, where we now have a vigorous discipline of Psychosomatic Medicine. Among the six Darsanas that constitute the works in Sanskrit devoted to philosophy as well as all scientific thinking in ancient India, it is Yogavasista that is specifically relevant to mind, its activities and methods of control. The two texts here viz. Yoga sutra and Yogavasista will still yield fresh insights and fruits commensurate with the scientific labour one can bestow.

Mind in yoga and samkhya Pilosophy

Yoga is the restraint of mental of operation. By not taking the word "all", the Cognitive-spiritual-Absorption also is called Yoga². The mind is, in fact, possessed of the three Energies; because it has the qualities of illumination, activity, and inertia. The mental essence (intellect), which is indeed of the form of illumination, being commingled with the active and inert Energies (Rajas and Tamas) becomes fond of power and sense-objects- The same simply being intermixed with the inert Energy (Tamas) comes to the state of the want of its merit, absence of its knowledge, absence of its non-attachment and power. The same with veil of ignorance destroyed and illuminated from all sides, being intermixed with the mere Active knowledge, non-attachment and power. The same, being free from the least impurity of the Active-Energy (Rasas), becomes self-establish and being the only revelation of the distinction between the Essence (intellect) and the Purusa, approaches the state of meditation known as the cloud virtue.

The terms used in many of these works in connection with mind are of much relevance to modern psychology. “Manasastu Cintyamarthah” Caraka would say. Manas or mind is: what thinks, it is its very nature to think. Its field of roaming about is: what the senses feed it. Therefore, if you would like to control it, do not let it roam this way and allow the senses to control it. Detach it from the senses and you control it yourself, instead. “citta calati samsarah niscala moksa ucyate” when citta or the actively thinking mind, starts moving about, samasara this world (of senses and the illusion) commences; if it stops doing so, that would be liberation and the end of illusion. “mana eva karanam bandha moksayah” mind alone is the reason for either bondage or liberation. It is up to you to choose what you desire, of these two slavery to the senses or the mastery of oneself. If you do not control the mind; there is no striving after the improvement of the self, no recognition of it at all and no question of a spiritual life. Discovery of the self is what you yourself have to accomplish; all other may just aid you. Caraka would answer the question of who does not get disease by pointing out that he who has his mind under control (satwam vidheyam) is such a person.

Yogavarista gives a list of many alternative names to mind; these would be of great scientific interest. When mind takes a decision (or chose among the alternative as modern psychologists would say) it is Intellect (buddhi). When it assumes self-centredness, it is Ego (ahamkara); broods intensely over an object, it is thinking (citta); immerses itself in contemplation in rather concrete terms, It is conceptualisation (kalpana); calls back the past, it is recollection (smrti); forgets all else and goes after one thing alone, infatuation (vyasana); distorts the ultimate truth, it is impurity (mala); attributes its own limited self to the ultimate truth or Brhma , it is Illusion (maya) .It is nature (prakrti) as it is this that constitutes the first cause of the world at least as the individual is concerned. It is life (jiva) itself, or, it is this that is alive –referring to the consciousness that is most important aspect of all living body and not the body itself. When we consider its subtle body of existence, it is puryastaka At death, it is that goes out of the body, the representative body (lingasarira) or the transgressive body (ativahaka sarira). This mind creates its own world and therefore some would call it a creator (brahma). Others would call it as virat. (Stupendously large, all pervading) and Isa (the lord).

Mind, intellect, ego and thinking – the combine of these four together is called the internal Action (antahkarana)³. It is this combine that is the regulating factor in all that a person does, thinks and feels. Making a concept and breaking it or choosing alternative (samkalpa-vikalpa) is the activity of the mind. We can call this the operative facet of the mind while the combine of the antahkarana prescribes the limitations and the potentialities. Caraka would say that mind has two primordial characteristics: subtlety (anutva) and singleness (ekatva). It is

inert (jada) by itself but is stimulated by self to activity while self is caitanyavan, sentient, but actionless niskriya. The most astoundingly modern statement Caraka and other Ayurveda authors would make is : that the mind is something material, dravyatmaka ; it is made up of the five primordial pancabhutas just like any other material entity and its birth is the food that one takes.

The elusive nature of the mind, its non-materiality so much so that its sentience vitality stand in great contrast to the insentient nature of the matter or in other words, the profound problem of vitalism versus materialism, mind opposed to matter, the incontrovertibility of one to the other – these constitute questions of deep significance in western science and medicine and from the basis of cortesian pragmatism – a great tenet of modern thinking. This problem simply does not exist in Ayurveda. For, it starts with the assertion that mind is just matter, only very subtle. It is only recently that modern science is presuming that it is probably necessary to call mind also as material though the details of how sentience could arise in matter is as unsolvable a problem as how life arose in an inorganic (and ignorant) molecule.

Conclusion

Since mind is but an organ of the body just like others, one has to use it as one wants. So that one is bound to please it as it desires, through its indulgence in the senses. Instead, it is the business of the mind to please us and be subservient to what is desirable and proper, or to chose what is sreyah benedictory and not merely preyah, what is just pleasing, as Kathopansad would say controlling of one’s mind is thus a normal and natural duty of a person. Psychologists of the mental disease would profit much from a study of many such tenets of Ayurveda. The value of the scientific ethicality that would ensue by their acceptance and the great gift this can assure to the health of the society as a whole are both incalculable and very much needed now.

References

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