Ayurveda and Modern Psychology
Dr. Suniti Ahuja
Associate Professor, Department of English,
D.A.V Centenary College,
NH -3 NIT, Faridabad, Haryana, INDIA.

Abstract: The ancient system of Ayurveda, Science of Life, offers a holistic approach to mental health which integrates the mind, body and soul. Health is defined as svasthya-a state of total biological equilibrium, in which the sensory, mental, emotional and spiritual elements are harmoniously balanced.

Man has been evolving and living on this planet for thousands year ago. What is the secret of this long survival on this planet earth? The basic secret of our long survival is the inherent “Wisdom of the Human Body.” This is aided and abetted by our environment, which has an important role to keep the humankind happy and healthy.

Modern medicine, with all its gadgets, has been there only for the last four to five decades, but man survived thousands of years before that without any of those gimmicks. Modern Medicine is very similar to the fire-fighting system. When the house is already on fire, with some parts of the house destroyed, the fire fighters try to quench the fire with water hoses. With several amazing advancements in medical science, it is not able to control the increasing graph of untimely death in hospitals due to enormous diseases. On the same path of medical advancements, the types of diseases are also increasing.

These situations are able to attract the attention of human society towards holistic healing. Having realized the importance of holistic healing, many have now become interested in our ancient wisdom of humankind that supplements the wisdom of the human body for survival. So, these days the systems of ancient healing are going very popular day-by-day. Modern Psychology which is closely related to the theory of Ayurveda is playing very crucial role in the process of healing.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Modern Psychology

I. Introduction

Ayurveda is one of the world's oldest holistic (whole-body) healing systems. It developed thousands of years ago in India. Ayurveda is one of the great gifts of the sages of ancient India to mankind. It is one of the oldest scientific medical systems in the world, with a long record of clinical experience. It is not only a system of medicine in the conventional sense of curing diseases but also a way of life that teaches us how to maintain and protect health. It shows us both how to cure disease and how to promote longevity. Ayurveda treats man as a “whole” – which is a combination of body, mind and soul.

Ayurveda is innately a psychological as much as it is a physical system of medicine. Its scope of practice includes both physical (Sharirika) and mental (Manasika) diseases. Therefore, we cannot really understand Ayurveda without looking at its view of the mind and consciousness.

The examination of the mind and psychological diseases in Ayurveda is potentially as complex as its examination of the body and physical diseases. It is not just a sidelight to be looked at in passing. It requires its own expertise, attention and application, just as any other branch of Ayurveda and its therapeutic methods. While one doesn’t have to be a trained psychologist in order to deal with the psychological aspect of Ayurveda, any more than one has to be a medical doctor to deal with its physical aspects, one does have to do some study of the mind and how it works.

II. Relation of Ayurveda and Modern Psychology

The word “Ayu” means all aspects of life from birth to death. The word “Veda” means knowledge or learning. Hence Ayurveda indicates the science by which life in its totality is understood. It is a way of life that describes the diet, medicine and behavior that are beneficial or harmful for life.

It is based on the belief that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, and spirit. The primary focus of Ayurvedic medicine is to promote good health, rather than fight disease. But treatments may be recommended for specific health problems.

According to Ayurvedic theory, everything in the universe -- living or nonliving -- is connected. Good health is achieved when your mind, body, and spirit are in harmony with the universe. A disruption of this harmony can
lead to poor health and sickness. Anything that affects our physical, spiritual, or emotional well-being can cause us to be out of balance with the universe. Some things that can cause a disruption include:

- Genetic or birth defects
- Injuries
- Climate and seasonal changes
- Age
- Emotions

How our body works to keep us healthy and our unique physical and psychological characteristics combine to form our body's constitution, or prakriti. Our prakriti is believed to stay the same for our entire life. However, how we digest food and eliminate waste can influence it.

Every person is made of a combination of five basic elements found in the universe:

- Space
- Air
- Fire
- Water
- Earth

These elements combine in the human body to form three life forces or energies, called doshas. They control how our body works. The three doshas are:

- Vata dosha (space and air)
- Pitta dosha (fire and water)
- Kapha dosha (water and earth)

Everyone inherits a unique mix of the three doshas. One dosha is usually more dominant. Each dosha controls a different body function. It is believed that our chances of getting sick are linked to the balance of our doshas.

III. Vata Dosha

Vata dosha (space and air) is thought to be the most powerful of all three doshas. It controls very basic body functions, such as how cells divide. It also controls our:

- Mind
- Breathing
- Blood flow
- Heart function
- Ability to get rid of body waste through the intestines

Things that can disrupt this dosha are:

- Eating dry fruit
- Eating too soon after a previous meal
- Fear
- Grief
- Staying up too late

If vata dosha is our main life force, we are more likely to develop:

- Anxiety
- Asthma
- Heart disease
- Nervous system disorders
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Skin problems

IV. Pitta Dosha

The pitta dosha (fire and water) controls:

- Digestion
- Ability to break down foods (metabolism)
- Certain hormones linked to appetite

Things that can disrupt this dosha are:

- Eating sour foods
- Eating spicy foods
- Fatigue
- Spending too much time in the sun

If pitta dosha is our main life force, we are more likely to develop:

- Anger and negative emotions
- Crohn's disease
• Heart disease
• Heartburn a few hours after eating
• High blood pressure
• Infections

V. Kapha Dosha

The kapha dosha (water and earth) controls:
• Muscle growth
• Body strength and stability
• Weight
• Immune system

Things that can disrupt this dosha are:
• Daytime sleeping
• Eating after your stomach is full
• Eating or drinking items that have too much salt or water
• Eating too many sweet foods
• Greed

If kapha dosha is our main life force, we are more likely to develop:
• Asthma and other breathing disorders
• Cancer
• Diabetes
• Nausea after eating
• Obesity

Ayurvedic Treatment

Treatment depends on our unique prakriti, our primary dosha, and the balance between all three of them.

A main goal of Ayurvedic medicine is to cleanse our body of undigested food called ama, which can stick to the inside of your body and make you sick. This cleansing process is called panchakarma. It is used to reduce any symptoms and reestablish harmony and balance.

Panchakarma may include:
• Blood purification (either by removing blood from the body or with special teas)
• Massage
• Medical oils given through the nose
• Methods to make you vomit
• Use of enemas, laxatives, or purgatives to cleanse your intestines

Other treatments may also be recommended to:
• Restore balance
• Improve spiritual healing
• Boost your immunity
• Reduce symptoms

The treatments may include:
• Aromatherapy
• Breathing exercises
• Diet changes
• Herbs, vitamins, minerals, and metals
• Plant-based oils and spices
• Lifestyle changes
• Meditation
• Stretching
• Yoga

Without recognizing the psychology of doshas, gunas and karmas, we will not be able to think about ayurvedic practice. In this scheme, the mind has the main role, the body is just the place where these imbalances get lodged, manifest or cause diseases.

Ayurveda, particularly in the West today, is largely becoming a counseling based system of medicine. Much of its work consists of educating the patient how to change their life-style to prevent disease from arising and to optimize their health, as well as to treat specific diseases. While this may center outwardly on dietary, herbal and exercise recommendations, it requires an understanding of the psychology of people. Otherwise we will not have the proper rapport with the patient to ensure right communication and compliance with treatment recommendations.
In addition, the West today has a lot more psychological than physical suffering. Modern medicine has been relatively effective in alleviating many acute diseases, but emotional suffering has increased owing to various factors of our modern life out of harmony with nature. Mental-psychological conditions like depression are almost epidemic today. Even children are commonly suffering from conditions like Attention deficit disorder (ADD) or hyperactivity. The current drug-based medicine is developing special designer medications to treat these conditions, though such powerful drugs are also problematical and involve many side affects. Ayurveda can provide a good alternative to this treating of the mind and psychology mainly through drugs. This cultural disturbed psychology requires that Ayurvedic practitioners have the psychological tools to deal with it.

VI. Conclusion
Ayurveda usually employs the Samkhya-Vedanta model of the mind, which is divided as the fourfold internal instrument (antahkarana chatushtya).

- Chitta – Conditioned consciousness
- Buddhi – Intelligent judgment
- Manas – Mind, capacity of imagination
- Ahamkara – Ego

These Sanskrit terms do not have exact English equivalents and have some variation in their usage. In Yoga terminology, chitta is often a general term for the mind as a whole, with manas standing for the sensory mind. In Vedantic terminology, manas more commonly assumes the role as meaning the mind as a whole, with chitta meaning more the memory bank. Generally, chitta is the general field of mental disturbances (vrittis or kleshas of Yoga) that need to be calmed or removed. Buddhi is the higher discriminating intelligence that we must develop in order to remove these disturbances and gain such peace of mind. Manas is the outer mental and sensory activity that keeps these disturbances in motion and needs to be controlled. Ahamkara is the factor of ego or self-will which keeps this process in motion.

This means that ways of calming the chitta, developing the buddhi, controlling the manas and reducing ahamkara are essential to any Ayurvedic approach to the mind.

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