

# Evidence of Ancient Indian text in Mental Health and Its use for Modern Social Work Practice

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“if mind and mercury can be controlled, impossible becomes possible. Only mind can control the mind and for this lot of patience and practice are required”.

- Hathyoga Pradipika

“The world today is facing a serious crisis of emotions. People think destructive emotions are a natural part of the mind. Advice from ancient Indian psychology can show us they are not and that we can tackle and eliminate them. We need to ask ourselves how to find happiness. It’s not in money and power. We need to discover not only what disturbers our minds, but also what the antidotes to these factors are”

-Dalai Lama

## Introduction

India’s religious and cultural traditions are known as ‘SANATAN’. Which is a combination of ‘SAN’ (ancient) and ‘ADHYATAN’ (new). Santana has evolved since time and beyond. With its roots ancient, it is equally relevant, meaningful and useful in present times.

Similarly, the treasures of knowledge seeded in the diverse aspects of India are very ancient and rich on one hand and very modern on the other. The work done in India in the field of mental health is one of the oldest examples of research done in the direction. Historical accounts have traced the presence of psychological expertise and treatment of mental illnesses more than 3000 years ago. Whereas the Freud version of Psychiatry in the west started around 1880 AD although he has the repute of being the father of psychiatry, his theories are less than 200 years old.

While chanting the ancient prayers, one asks for the blessings of treatment of ‘Aadhi’(Mental Illness) prior to ‘Vyadhi’(Physical Illness). Asking for mental wellness before physical wellbeing proves the fact that having mental wellbeing was way more important than the latter.

*Charak Samhita*, the foundational text on *Ayurveda*, was written around 2<sup>nd</sup> BC. The creator of the epic ‘*Charaka*’ mentions in the *shloka* that *mann* and the body are both the

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A physical illness in the course of time may turn into a mental illness and vice versa. It's the symptoms seen first makes us decide whether the illness is physical or psychological.

The definition of health (being healthy) according to *Ayurveda* is also positive. It's not negative by saying that the absence of illness or disease is a good health but a person is healthy whose *dosh*, *dhatu* and *agni* are in a balanced state and whose *atman* (soul), mind, subject of senses are in a blissful state. So unless having a healthy mind, the person is not considered healthy.

*Kathopanishad* has also described the role of each component in one's life to understand the relationship between *Atman*(soul), *Mans*(Mind), *Buddhi* (Intelligence), *Indriyas* (Sense organs). One should look at the following similarities: Our body is *Ratha* (Chariot) and soul is the king, Intelligence (*Buddhi*) is a *sarathi* that drives the chariot. Mind is a *Paragrah* (whip), *Indriyas* (sense organs) are the horses. In short, if whip is not used properly, it cannot control the senses which then lead to disease or disorder.

If we get deeper in the history, *Vedas*, which are considered over 3500 years old, have mentioned *Unmad* (psychosis and insanity) as a deluded state of mind. *Rigveda* and *Yajurveda* suggests that prayer through *mantras* (Rhymes) can lead to formation of noble thoughts in the mind, which than help prevent mental pain or depression. The *Rigveda* also discusses the speed of mind, curiosity for methods of mental happiness, prayers for mental happiness, methods of increasing intelligence and power of mind in healing.

*Yajurveda* and *Atharveda* conceptualize mind as the basis of consciousness, inner flame of knowledge, cite of knowledge and an instrument of hypnotism the *Vedas* also provide detailed descriptions of preservation of will power, emotions, inspiration and consciousness.

The texts also describe emotional states like grief, envy, pleasure, hostility, attachment, laziness etc.

*Vedas* speak about mental peace and *vedant* is completely based on the development of man and Personality. They are also the world's first texts written on the subject. *Vedant* speaks about different states of the mind. *Jagrut* (awakened), *Swapn* (Dreaming state), *Sushrupti* (Deep Sleep), *Turiy* ,*Samadhi* (Super Consciousness).

*Vedant* doesn't only talk about the problem of *mann* but it also recognizes it as the source of incredible possibilities and great development. Not only that, from the development of *mann*, it also talks about going beyond its possibilities. It tries to find the ultimate ability of men in which he can break the boundaries of *mann* as a distinctive quality.

Literally, *mann* and human life are in the core of every ancient Indian text. They are more scientific in nature than religious. The creation of some of the most important texts was done to remove the obstacles and complexities of *mann*.

Two such texts present the oldest in the world yet modern form of counseling in front of us. They provide the right counseling to a *mann* suffering from depression, doubt, hopelessness, indecisiveness, delusion etc. These texts improve a person to enable him and strengthen his inner self without depending on other sources including medication. Their emphasis is to show how one can come out on his own from the diseases created by the structure or nature of *mann*. These texts are:

**1)Yogavashishtha**

**2) Shrimad Bhagavad Geeta**

Created in a conversational/verbal style, they clearly focus on psyche. Among thousands of texts, the *sanatan* tradition has given these two the highest importance, since *Bharat* has always believed that a healthy *mann* makes a healthy man.

Being a very ancient civilization, India was busy solving the most complex problems of *mann* as well as its development, while the civilizations in other parts of the world was struggling to find food and livelihood. It is also a proven fact that the older and developed nation’s civilization is, the more complex its *mann* and its problems will be. These complexities later turn into mental disorders, the statistics of mental health in the developed countries as well as developing world show how mental illnesses are also developing at the same pace.

Looking closely at India’s prosperous mental health system, one finds that it encompasses from smaller formulas to a vast scientific mental health system .A rich system that tells from how to keep *mann* healthy to curing an unhealthy *mann* has always been present in India ...A system that not only first found out the mental illnesses but also provided its solutions.

Psychosomatic concept of diseases was first mentioned in the *Yogvashishtha*. According to *Vashishtha*, mind has a potential to create anything. It can achieve what it wants. He further gives the connection physical problems and mental conditions. Mental problems (*adhi*) give birth to physical illness (*vyadhi*).The one at peace within himself behold the truth, when the mind is not at peace, the world appears to be a confusion full of uncertainties.

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When a man constantly thinks about the object it leads to attachment. From attachment is born desire and from desire is born anger. From anger comes delusion, from delusion comes

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*Antahakaran Chatushthya- Mann, Budhi ,Chitta , Ahankar and trigun nature-satva,rajo and tamo.* In the western psychology the types of personality or models are given by Sheldon, Kretshner, Hippocrates and Carl Jung. While in India the classification of personality types are *Tridosh* or *Trigun* which is made of both internal and external characters.

Study and examination of the mind (mental health) in Indian psychotherapy is potentially as complex as its examination of the body and physical diseases. It is not just a side light to be looked at in passing. It requires its own expertise, attention and application, just as any other branch of medical science and its therapeutic methods.

The study of the human mind according to *Ayurveda* is very scientific. It studies each person's mind in *Trivarg Anveshan* or the three dimensional study. All physical and mental disorders are treated by studying group of three aspects i.e. *Tridosh, Trigun, three Pursharth* and three parts of a personality; body, life force, consciousness.

**Conclusion-** Every nation, just like its citizens has a unique overall personality, nature, life style, values, brain and *Mann* . In order to work on a person, understanding his self, nature and needs is very important. Similarly in the context of social work in India, while working on mental health, it's vital to perceive the significance of the uniqueness of India's *Mann*. Being a time honored civilization; India has successfully understood and recognized its needs. Like other aspects, psychiatry has been given high importance and has been developed efficiently in the past 5000 years.

The current western psychiatry is incapable in fulfilling the needs of Indian psyche since the two are completely distinct culturally, socially and in their family values. Working in this field requires understanding of these differences. According to the laws of counseling, if the counselor and client come from different cultural backgrounds, it is very likely to fail. Whereas we are talking about the whole mental science, we must realize the fact that even if we use current western psychiatry, thousands of year old Indian mental science should not be ignored, not only because it's very scientific but also because it is fully developed in all its aspects.

All of its theories have gone through a series of experiments and are time tested. Just like a non scientific and illogical way of treatment must be denied, at the same time it's very important to make sure that a science that has evolved over the last thousands of years is not left behind just because its old or because it has come from a different cultural identity...something that has happened with Indian psychiatry unfortunately. We Indians have a deep heritage and legacy of immense amount of experimented study. It is the need of the hour to take it further.

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