CONSTITUTING THE OUTLINES OF A PHILOSOPHY OF AYURVEDA: MAINLY ON MENTAL HEALTH IMPORT

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SUMMARY

The antiquity of achievements of Hindus in the field of Mental health is explained. The chief points discussed in this article are: (1) The exact sense in which the school of ancient Indian Medicine (Ayurveda) is to be understood, (2) The interpretation of some of the fundamental philosophical issues governing the laws of mental sciences and (3) The relevance of such laws to modern scientific world. However, the present article limits its scope to Charaka Samhita - the most fundamental book on Ayurveda only.

Introduction

Before the advent of formal system of medicine in India (Ayurveda) there had been, priestly, magical and empirical concepts of medicine in general, and physical and mental illnesses were not so much demarcated. Rigveda is the first available document of Indian Literature in which mythological and religious meaning is attached to mental health and illness (Balodhi 1984). This treaty is followed by Atharva-veda, wherein one finds the concept of mental health in terms of 'Atharvan' or bless from Gods and that of mental illness as 'Angirasa' or curse of Gods (Sharma 1973). In another study Atharvavedic concept on Mental illness was viewed as an act of possession by a demon or devine agent, sorcery and witches, an effect of an evil eyecast on individual and a curse of defied souls of departed ancestors (Balodhi and Chowdhuri 1986). The literature of the post Vedie period, namely the 'Brahamnas', the 'Tantras', the 'Ramayana', the 'Mahabharata' and the 'Puranas' contain innumerable references to mental health and illness. These concepts must have been flourished for several centuries and a mass of such thoughts, would have accumulated. It was the inherent heterogenity of this material that led to its systematization. It is, now, difficult to ascertain the chronology, names and details of persons who might have contributed to medicine and its systematization. The oldest available books now are 'Charaka Samhita' (400 BC), 'Susruta Samhita' (300 BC), 'Bhela Samhita' (500 BC) and 'Kashyapa Samhita' (200 BC).

Over the last few decades, there has been growing recognition of these texts for both clinical practice and research in the field of Psychiatry (Verma 1965; Venkoba Rao 1975; Ramu and Venkataraman 1979; Ramachandra Rao 1983). However, there are divergent views of these authors so far as the interpretation of the texts is concerned. This difficulty seems to be mainly due to non-availability of a study of basic philosophy of Ayurveda.

This article attempts to give an outline of the philosophy of Ayurveda with special reference to mental health. Present article limits its scope to Charaka Samhita - the most ancient and fundamental book on Indian Medicine.

Ayurveda - the science of life

In India, all schools of thought including Ayurveda are styled as 'Shastra' or system and a system must fulfil the following criteria to reach the desired objective. Firstly, there should be a common body of doctrines namely 'Sutra' or aphorism, 'Bhashya' or explanation, 'Tika' or commentary in a system so far as methodology of writing is
concerned (Balodhi 1983). Then a system should precisely define its scope, purpose and outlines. And, lastly, it should also follow a particular line of faith in reality. Charaka Samhita is no exception to this rule. It is a sort of explanation (Bhashya) of Agnivesha’s original work that might have been reviewed and redacted many times before Charaka’s classical work. He has divided his thesis into eight sections or eight subject matters in 120 chapters which was the prevalent rule in those days to write any medical text (Table 1).

| Sl.No. | Subject matter                  | No of Chapters |
|-------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1.    | General principles (Sutra Sthana)| 30             |
| 2.    | Pathology (Nidan Sthana)        | 8              |
| 3.    | Specific determination (Viman Sthana) | 8      |
| 4.    | Human Embodiment (Sharer Sthana)| 8              |
| 5.    | Sensory prognosis (Indriya Sthana) | 12             |
| 6.    | Therapeutics (Chikista Sthana)  | 30             |
| 7.    | Success in therapy (Siddha Sthana) | 12             |
| 8.    | Pharmacuetics (Kalpa Sthana)    | 12             |
|       | Total                           | 120            |

As above table shows, Charaka had covered a wide range of human life consisting of anatomical, physiological, social, ethical and spiritual aspects for understanding its disease and health.

To begin with, Charaka first outlined the scheme of life in which he traces the four fundamental motives or biological instincts. They are: (1) Life preservation through virtues (Dharma) (2) Wordly desire of acquiring riches (Artha) (3) Sexual and sensual desire (Kama) and (4) aspiration of self realization (Moksha). These four objectives of human life can be achieved only if there is good health (Ch.Su. 1.15) and good health depends on the right knowledge of the process and development of human life which is technically called ‘Ayurveda’. ‘Ayurveda’ is a configuration of body, the senses, the mind and the spirit (Ch.Su. 1.42) and science of ‘Ayurveda’ deals with the principles of life viz. the good and bad life, the happy and unhappy life, what is congenial to and not congenial to life and longevity of life (Ch. Su. 1.41).

Body as an aggregate of Cells

It is interesting to note that in 4th Century B.C., Charaka announced that the body is made of cells (Srotas) and they ooze every moment (Ch. Vi. 5-3).

The cells are multiplied by division (Ch. Vi. 5-5). ‘Vayu’ (bio-energy), ‘Karma’ (Previous life action) and ‘Swabhava’ (nature) conduct the division of cells. Charaka has recognised the following changes in cell. They are: reproduction, metabolism, growth, anabolism, catabolism and death (Ch. Vi. 5-3). All these cells are somatic in nature and may be numerous in shape, i.e., they may be small, big, long, flat and bifurcated (Ch. Vi. 5-25). An aggregate form of these somatic cells make ‘Dhatus’ (from the root ‘Dha’-to hold). ‘Dhatus’ are Chyle (Rasa); blood (Rakta); Flesh (Mamsa); Fat (Meda); Bone (Asthi); Marrow (Majja); Semen (Shukra) and Vital Fluid (Ojas). Health depends upon the proper functioning of these ‘Dhatus’ (Ch. Vi. 5-6(2).

Senses, though Charaka categorized as different entities, mainly due to their different nature and functions are made of matter only in its finer state while the ‘Manas’ or mind is considered the finest state in the hierarchy of evolution of matter.

Mind as essence of life

Charaka has defined mind as ‘Ateendriya’ or super sense, ‘Satva’ or essence and ‘Chetah’ or consciousness. Its functions depend upon its objects and consciousness in the same axis and it is the cause of the activity of all other sense organs (Ch. Su. 8.4). Charaka has explained the existence of
mind from a purely common sense point of view viz., the presence of cognition as well as the absence of cognition constitute an indication of the mind. Thus, even if the spirit, the senses and sense objects are apposite and mind is elsewhere, Charaka says, there is no cognition but with the mind present, there is cognition. Mind is said to have two properties - atomic dimension and individual unity (Ch. Sh. 1.18, 19). Mind cognizes material objects because they are cognizable due to their nature of being thought about, considered, speculated about, mediated upon and imagined (Ch. Sh. 1.20). The functions of mind are direction of the senses (indriyabhigrah), control of itself (Manonigrah), reasoning (Ooh) and deliberation (Vichara) (Ch. Sh. 1.21). This subject - object interaction is possible through the bio-energy which Charaka termed as 'Vayu' (Ch. Su. 12-18). Sense organs are capable of perceiving their respective objects at the instance of mind (Ch. Su. 8.7).

Spirit the cause of consciousness

Charaka has discussed self in a very practical way. According to him, self is active and that by its activity the mind moves; and it is by the operation of mind that the senses move. The self is conscious, but this consciousness does not belong to the self in itself, it is attained only by its connection with the senses through 'manas' (Ch. Su. 1.47). Pleasure, pain and the movements involved in thought process are attributed to 'manas', which derives its activity from the self. So this view is different from those of the orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy.

Somato - Psychic principles in health & disease:

From the above, it is apparent that Charaka recognized the interdependence and inseparable relationship of body with mind. So the harmonious or concordant interaction between the two is the cause of well being (Ch. Su. 1.55). While the erroneous, inadequate or excessive interaction between body and mind due to many factors including periodic climate change (Kala); Psychic repercussion (Buddhi) and transgression of the bounds of moderation and agreeability relatively to one's nature and capacity (Indriyarth) are bound to lead to Psychosomatic strain and discordance resulting in disease (Ch. Su. 1.54). Equilibrium of the body elements (dhatusamya) is considered the sign of health (Ch. Su. 1.53, 9.4). While physiological functions of the body in health and disease are explained in Charaka Samhita by referring them to the operation of an already existing theory 'Tridosha Siddhanta' or a theory of three humours viz, 'Vata' (Wind), 'Pitta' (bile) and 'Kapha' (Phlegm), the Psychological functions were covered under the 'Triguna theory' i.e. 'Sattva' (essence) rajas (passion) and 'Tamas' (delusion) (Ch. Su. 1.54).

In another passage, a somewhat different statement is found in which all psychological problems/illnesses are attributed to confusion of intelligence or volitional transgression (Prajna aparadha 1.102), Jealousy, grief, fear, anger, vanity, hatred and other Psychiatric disorders are all due to 'Prajna aparadha' (Ch. Sh. 7.83). In short, physical illnesses according to philosophy of Ayurveda are due to imbalance in the function of life sustaining factors, and the mental illnesses are due to the error of judgement (Cf. 'Moha' or 'Avidya' concepts of traditional Hindu philosophy). Thus, Charaka was more on the look out for the root cause of disease than mere sign and symptoms. For the treatment of mental illness in general, Charaka suggested three kinds of therapy namely, Divine Therapy (Daivya Vyapasraya), drug (Yukti Vyapasraya) and Psychotherapy (Sattava vijaya). Divine therapy includes various methods of rites and rituals like incantation (Mantra), wearing sacred thread, precious
gems, sacrifice etc. Herbal medicine, medicated ghee etc. were also discovered for treatment. In Psychotherapy, Charaka has suggested many Psychological ways like intimidation, terrorization, gifts, exhilaration, pacification, frightening and astounding to patient (Ch.Ch. 9.31). To promote the mental health, Charaka has described certain rules of good conduct or 'Sadvrutta'. These include respecting Gods, elders, teachers and priests, keeping body clean by various hygienic means and mind through self control, (Ch.Sh. 1.8).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Charaka’s appearance was an important event in the history of Indian Medicine. The classical work 'Charaka Samhita' is originally expounded by Atriya Punarvasu, compiled by the great sage Agnivesha and redacted by Charaka with extensive alterations and revisions. With the result, the name of the author of original text is lost and rather the test is named after Charaka.

With regard to exact sense in which Ayurveda and its content is to be understood, Charaka has given the definitions for each topic. Any definition as John Wisdom (1931) points out can be used in two senses, namely interpretation and analysis. While the former is derivative in nature, the latter is of great philosophical importance. All definitions given for various topics by Charaka should be viewed more on his philosophical background rather merely interpreting the words he used in his definitions. For example, analysing Charaka's definition of Ayurveda as “a branch of knowledge which deals with good and bad of life, the happy and unhappy life and what is congenial and not congenial to life and longevity”, one finds that Charaka has recognised a very wide sense in which it may be regarded as underlying all the contents of human life inclusive of all kinds of physical and psychological variety. Further analysing the definition, it is evident that he has emphasized on two factors for Ayurveda namely (1) what is congenial to life and (2) the longevity, which in fact, are not two different poles of life, rather they are the two aspects of the one and the same thing depending on each other viz., there cannot be longevity without taking into account what is congenial to life. In other words, Charaka’s view on life is dependent on the correlated variation of interconnected determinables. These determinables as he pointed out in next sutra are: (1) body; (2) the senses; (3) the mind and (4) the consciousness. Therefore there is no special law—quite independent and isolated to govern the each faculty of life; they all fall under more general laws and form a single interconnected system which is termed as ‘Ayu’ or life.

Charaka’s concept of body and mind also cannot be appreciated unless the basic principles of his philosophy are known. Generally, Ayurveda is understood not to be deterred by Samkhya Philosophy - a philosophy of dualism - from holding that the universe is an ordered and self determining whole and that mind is fundamentally different from matter. But to compare Charaka’s view with that of Samkhya’s dualism seems to be an act of overgeneralization. Philosophically speaking, three alternative theories can be postulated with respect to dualism or matter-mind relationship. These are: (1) Interactionism; (2) Parallelism and (3) Materialism. First two theories assume the existence of two kinds of substances as interaction and parallel course of action is possible only when there are two different entities. The third theory i.e., materialism implies a mechanistic view of organism which assumes that bodily events themselves generate mental events also as distinct from partially determining changes in a pre-existing mental substance. Charaka’s line of thought seems to be attached to
this concept to some extent as he suggests that each mind is existentially dependent on its body and is not an independent substance which interacts with its body or runs a parallel course to the body. Charaka has, thus, thoughtfully used the term 'Ateendriya' or Supra-sensory for mind, as matter according to him is graded in a gross (Bhoota), fine (Indriya) and superfine (Manas or mind) quality each is said essential to the whole of experience. Charaka's commentator Chakrapani takes an inadequate view of the body and a largely mistaken and superficial view of the mind when he translates 'Ateendriya' (mind) word for 'extra sense'. This meaning of mind is bound to be philosophically unsatisfactory like that of the discovery of modern physics. In physics, the unity of substances is that of a single spatial system without giving any scope for third factor which can unite them. Similarly, if mind is taken as extra-sense, it cannot interact with another substance unless it is united by some other kind of tie.

In an expressive and closely woven argument Charaka has chalked out the scheme of basic innate traits in an organism in order to avoid certain doubts like how, if the mechanistic view is taken for granted, there are different mental functions in different organisms? Three 'Gunas' i.e., Physical (Tamas); Physiological (Rajas) and Psychological (Sattva) which are viewed as dull, passionate and good respectively depending upon the trait that predominates. Similarly, the organisation of body through seven 'Dhatu's and three supportive elements of body are grasped clearly in their united and integrated whole as mutually checking and balancing forces. Once the balance is lost, the pathology starts. Therefore, the determinants of health and disease are conceptualized holistically, and multifactoral. The philosophical notion of Ayurveda, its scheme of ethical and religious therapy should not be viewed as absurd and primitive, which came into existence through chance, subjective experience or dogmas but one which has been found to be a dynamic and meaningful part of living culture quite able to sustain in spite of the basic difference from the pattern posed by Western culture in to-days medical field.

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