Author's response—I

SHRIDHAR SHARMA*

Sir,

Dr Debasis Chatterjee raises four points, regarding my commentary on Amit Ranjan Basu’s article on ‘Historicizing Indian Psychiatry’,1 while doing so, he misses some of the basic issues. I would briefly reply the same:

1. One of the basic observation in my article was that the early establishment of mental hospitals in the Indian subcontinent reflected the need and demand of ‘European patients’ and to manage and treat Englishmen and Indian Sepoyees employed by the British East India Company. The location of the first hospitals, were in proximity where the battles were fought.

2. Secondly, his view that ‘Indian civilization and Ayurveda’ is not antedated but ‘post-Alexander’ and is a product of Greek civilization is possibly based on the source of his information and probably based on colonialistic viewpoint. The study of history is not simply a restoration of the past events but is also its proper evaluation in a most objective manner. This is a challenging task, as there is no authentic source book of ancient Indian civilization. We greatly depend on the observations written by western writers, guided by different approaches, viz. (a) the orientalist viewpoint, (b) the administrative perceptions, and (c) the missionary writers approach, and also (d) by communist writers’ perception. Any objective reconstruction of the history of civilization may take different paths and different conclusions. This viewpoint is beautifully illustrated by the two radically different forms taken by two group of writers are: one, the History of mankind published by UNESCO and second the series published by the Columbia University Press under the title Introduction to Oriental Civilizations.

The Ayurveda is believed to be upveda or a branch of Atharvaveda, in this we find ample references to the medicine, principles of treatment and descriptions of the different parts and organs of the human body, and the time is calculated as one to two thousand years before Christ. The exact time of Atreya and Sushruta who contributed richly to Ayurveda can not be definitely fixed in the absence of necessary evidence but there is a general inference that Atreya belonged to the 6th or 7th centuries. These periods are agreed to, as there is material available for fixing the time of Lord Buddha, who was born in 557 BC and in the literature of that time there is reference to two great Indian universities one at Kasi and another in Takshashila where Ayurveda was taught. This helps us to fix the time of Ayurveda.

3. Thirdly, there is rich evidence regarding the multitude of psychotherapeutic theories and practices, in vogue in ancient India. Due to paucity of space, I would mention only about Mantra vidya. Mantra vidya is a major, self-sufficient and independent method of Indian psychotherapy and it is one of the oldest methods. Mantra is related to manas or mind. Mantra may be in the form of coherent words or single letters, arranged in a certain order it is not only a conjoined word but a particular sound body of consciousness with a definite meaning and energy in itself. According to some, it is the sound body, a power charged with the intense vibrations of the spiritual personality of the creator or the seer of the mantra. This therapy is in usage since vedic times and is a valuable tool, which is practiced widely in India.

Mantra are of two types
• Vedic mantra and
• Tantric mantra

The vedic mantras are older and derived from vedas are longer and have a meaning while tantric mantras are of later origin and are used for japa (repetition) and for keeping with oneself in the form of yantra.

4. Similarly, various techniques of ‘suggestion’ were used in
ancient India, when mesmerism was popular in Europe, it was an Indian priest Abba de Faria, a Hindu Brahmin from Goa, who later converted to Christianity and challenged Mesmer and explained the mechanism of ‘mesmerism’ on the doctrine of suggestion. Dr Egas Moniz, a nobel laureate has written a biography on Abba de Faria. Much later, an English doctor James Esdale, who operated with the help of hypnosis in one of the hospitals in Calcutta. Similarly the practice of introspection and autosuggestion techniques were in practice. It is well documented that Buddha did various meditative practices and underwent ascetic austerities and practiced the highest contemplation before giving his first sermons in Sarnath. The practice of introspection and autosuggestion techniques are still followed in Japan, such as Nakian therapy, a type of psychotherapy based on introspection and self-reflection or Buddhism Principles.

5. The philosophy of yoga, propounded by Patanjali 500 BC, clearly mentions about the spiritual component and selfrealization and individual salvation. The concept of spirituality is certainly not a post-colonial construct.

REFERENCES
1. Sharma S. Psychiatry, colonialism and Indian civilization: A historical appraisal. Indian J Psychiatry 2006;48:109–12.
2. Basu AR. Historicizing Indian Psychiatry [Viewpoint]. Indian J Psychiatry 2005;47:126–9.
3. Nakamuri Kei. The History of Psychotherapy in Japan. Int Medical Journal 2006;13:13.

Shridhar Sharma* Professor Emeritus
National Academy of Medical Sciences and Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences, Delhi;
e-mail: sharma.shridhar@gmail.com