Review Article

DIMENSIONS OF SATTVAVAJAYA CHIKITSA (AYURVEDIC-PSYCHOTHERAPY) AND THEIR CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

J.S. Tripathi
Dept. of Kayachikitsa, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi-221005.
E-mail : drjstripathi@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda has considered the mental and physical diseases as two separate specialized subjects only in certain contexts. However, no line of demarcation has been drawn between the physical and mental diseases and a flexible psychosomatic approach has been put forward. The treatment of different psychological illnesses, as described in Ayurveda, reveals that the psychological, spiritual and pharmacological methods have been used side by side to root out the disease. The psychotherapeutic approach to the management has been described under Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā. The present paper will review the ancient classical concepts of Sattvāvajaya and its basic tenets and throws light on its contemporary relevance and clinical applications.

Annals Ayurvedic Med. 2012: 1 (1 & 2) 31-38

Key Words: Sattvavajaya Chikitsa, Psychotherapy, Manas,

INTRODUCTION

Human race is facing unprecedented challenges as we approach the next millennium. We are seeking new ways to address the demands of modern life as its unrelenting flow of information demands our attention. Although in many ways, we have greater opportunities for a rich and fulfilling life than ever before, it is clear that we need to evolve new strategies if we are to survive and thrive as individuals and as a species.

The western culture is dynamic, vibrant, and eagerly embraces change. We are enthusiastic for anything which is new and enables us to cross technological and philosophical boundaries that were unimaginable a century ago. Yet, this fascination with change has produced a toll on our society. Many people feel uprooted, disconnected from the great traditions that have provided guidance and nourishment to human beings for thousands of years, for which Ayurvedic psychotherapy has potential to provide a strong psychological support in the crisis situations (1).

Psychotherapy is a generic term covering the entire spectrum of psychological treatment methods. These range from designed manoeuvres of the therapist-patient relationship to in doctrinarians fashioned to change value systems, to tactics aimed at intra-psychic processes, and to conditioning techniques that attempt to alter neural mechanisms. The repertoire of strategies are thus many fold, and formats are varied, e.g. individuals, couples, and groups. They are all nevertheless, dependents upon the establishment of adequate communication, verbal and non-verbal. Excluded are such modalities as somatic therapies (drugs, convulsive therapy, surgery, etc.) and ‘trial action therapies such as occupational therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, psychodrama, etc. which are though psychotherapeutic in effect, are not strictly speaking, forms of psychotherapy (2).

“Psychotherapy is the treatment, by psychological means, of problem of an emotional nature in which a trained person deliberately establishes a professional relationship with the patient with the object of removing, modifying, or retarding existing symptoms, mediating disturbed patterns of behaviour, and promoting positive personality growth and development”. This definition of Psychotherapy given by Wolberg seems to be one of the most comprehensive definitions.

Mind (Manas) is an important component of the Ayu (life) in addition to the other three components - Šārīra (physical body), Indriya (sense organs) and the Ātmā (Soul) (Ca. Su. 1/42). The existence of Manas (mind) has been accepted by both, the ancient as well as the modern schools of science and philosophy. Manas i.e. the mind serves as an important instrument in the process of perception. It also plays an important role in the spiritual life. However, the existence of Ātmā in the form, as described in ancient Indian traditions is not acceptable in modern science and philosophy.
SATTVĀVAJAYA - THE AYURVEDIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā in Ayurveda refers to one of the three broadbased approaches to therapy. It is specifically indicated for the treatment of mental illnesses. Charaka defines it as a method of restraining or withdrawal of the mind from unwholesome objects (Arthas)3 (Ca. Su. 11/54). Sattvāvajaya is aimed at the control of mind i.e. one should keep himself established in his oneself after knowing the real nature of the Soul and attaining the height of spiritual wisdom4 (Ca. Sa. 3/31).

Sattvāvajaya in principles is full-fledged Psychotherapy, which has been described in Ayurvedic literature. Caraka was the first scholar to use the word “sattvāvajaya”. His definition gives lot of scope for expansion and applied consideration.

"Sattvāvajaya Punah Ahitebhyo Arthebhyo Manognigraḥ". (Ch. Su. 11/54)

Thus, the term Sattvāvajaya implies to that modality which is therapeutic for mental or emotional stresses and disturbances. This is secured best by restraining the mind from desire for unwholesome objects, directing it towards wholesome objects and the cultivation of Jnāna, Vijnāna, Dhairyā, Smṛti and Samādhi. All these measures help in developing control over the Manas or mind, which is always unstable.

It is said that the body is like a chariot, the senses are like horses, and mind is like the reins; only by holding firmly to the reins one can keep control. If we do not control the five senses, horses will drag us away5. Sattvāvajaya therapy (directed towards these) enables one to have control over himself. “Chittam Indriya Sarthi”. In this way it is similar to the discipline of yoga, which is defined as “Yogastu citta vṛtti nirodhaḥ” (Yoga Su. 1/2). One can explain the term Sattvāvajaya with the help of the following model6- (Figure 1)

Figure 1: An Explanatory Model for Sattvāvajaya

Diagram:

- Restraining mind from desire of unwholesome objects
- Directing the mind towards wholesome objects
- Promotion of India Vijnāna, Dhairyā, Smṛti, Samādhi

"Manaso Jñāna, Vijnāna, Dhairyā, Smṛti, Samādhibhiḥ"3. (Ch. Su. 1/58)
"Dhī. Dhairyatmādi Vijnānam Manodoṣauṣadham Param." (As.Hr.Sha.1)
There are three types of therapy spiritual, rational and psychological for the treatment of mental disorders.

Praśāmyatydoshaiḥ Purvo Daiva yuktivyapāśrayai

Mānaso Jñāna Vijnānam dhairyam smṛti samādhībhihāṁ (Ch. Su. 1/58)
The former ones i.e. the physical disorders are specifically treated by the remedial measures of divine and rational nature while the mental diseases are treated with the help of promoting spiritual knowledge, specific knowledge, mental restraint, memory, concentration and other similar yogic practices as a part of Ayurvedic Psychotherapy (3).

Dimensions of Sattvāvajaya

I. Trivarga Anveksana :
The wise person should adopt the mental faculties which are causing mental disorders and should strive for abstaining from unwholesome virtue (Dharma), wealth and sensory pleasure (Artha) and enjoyment/desires (Kāma) and for pursuing wholesome ones, constantly keeping an eye to wholesome and otherwise. No mental happiness or unhappiness can occur in this world without these three. Hence, this should be practiced - efforts should be made to remain in touch with the experts of mental illnesses - the psychiatrist and to know about Ātmā (self), Deśa (place), Kāla (time), Śakti (strength) and capacity properly.

Mānasam prāti Bhaisjyam Trivargasyanavavekshanam
Tadvidyasevā seva Vijnānam ātmādinām Ca
Saruasāhin (Ch. Su. 11/47)
Dhi Dhairyatmādi Vijnānam Manodośaudhām
Paramān (A.S. Su. I)

The therapy of mental disorders is done following the Trivargas i.e. the three categories (virtue, wealth and enjoyment), company of the experts and around specific knowledge and knowledge of self (spiritual knowledge) etc. (3).

II. Psycho-supportive Techniques :
Ācārya Caraka has described several psychological supportive techniques, which all come under the purview of the broadbased Sattvāvajaya cikitsā of Ayurveda. He advocates Āśwāsana (reassurance and explanation), Suhrītvākya (guidance and suggestion), Dharmārtha vākya (education of individual and family), Īśā vināśana (verbal shock: milieu therapy), Adbhuta dārsana (showing extra ordinary things), Tādāna (physical shock), Trāśana (mental shock), Santwana (rehabilitation and reassurance), which are also known as psychological intervention (7).

Ayurvedic Psychotherapy also utilizes the knowledge and principles regarding functioning of mind described in Indian scriptures, like Upaniṣad, Bhagwat Gecēa, Buddhist Literature, Ayurveda etc (6). If something favourable happens, we feel pleasure; if something unwanted comes, we feel pain. But such pleasure and pain are only momentary. When in both these circumstances, we are able to keep the mind steady and stable (Sthitu pragya), we gain lasting concentration, which is a barrier to Psychogenic onslaught as well as somatic disturbances. In the modern world, a variety of stressors lead to over straining of the mind and body, where the Sattvavajaya measures are the only logical way to protect us from the stress related disorders (8).

III. Promotion of Jnāna (Cognition)

Jnāna (cognition) in this particular reference is used for the spiritual knowledge for all practical purposes. The methods for improving Prajnā (cognition) and its components like Dhī (intellect), Dhṛiti (controlling power) and Smṛti (recollection and recall) are considered as a component of Sattvavajaya Cikitsā.

It aims at correcting the maladaptive methods of thinking in the light of understanding the phenomenon of life and its happenings in terms of spirituality, thus providing relief from symptoms. Some important techniques / steps in promoting Jnāna are- recognizing and correcting negative automatic thoughts, teaching reattribution techniques, increasing objectivity in perspectives keeping spiritual understanding of life, identifying and testing maladaptive assumption, and decentering, and it may also include such behavioural techniques as activity scheduling, homework assignments, graded task assignment, behavioural rehearsal, role playing and diversion techniques and teaching problem solving skills (11).

There are good numbers of patients who do not know, what is good or bad or even if they know, they
are unable to take decision under certain situations or prevailing life circumstances. The patients are given guidance to take decision with the help of guideline of Dharma and Artha, available in classical literature and thus, they can help themselves. The patients should know the pros and cons of their disease state and healthy state. The family is guided positively to support the patient and his needs. All the family members are to be informed about the nature and course of the disease, precautions to be taken for good management of the disease. They are further educated to behave properly with the patient whatever the situation is.

Dharma Artha Vakya involves correcting the depressive negative cognitions (ideations) e.g. hopelessness, worthlessness, helplessness and pessimistic ideas, and replacing them by new cognitive, emotional (Pratidvanda Cikitsā) and behavioral responses.

IV. Promotion of Vijnāna

The word Vijnāna consists of – vi + jna + lyut, which refers to worldly knowledge (laukika Jnāna). It includes the science and art of living perfectly in this earthly world. It consists of the knowledge of scriptures and texts describing activities of the physical world, social and personal conducts, knowledge of the activities and interrelationship of body and mind, dietary rules, do’s and don’ts in certain disease states. Thus, all the logical knowledge about the physical and biological events described in the contemporary sciences is actually the part of Vijnāna, the relevant portions of which are gradually introduced in the patient’s psyche in order to clarify his doubts and provide deeper insights into his problems. This immediately relieves the patient’s apprehensions and pacifies his disturbed mind.

Thus Vijnāna is understood to be referring to specific and skilled knowledge based on systematic information about worldly phenomenon. The promotion of Vijnāna in reference to Saśtvāvajya also includes the development and uses of behavioural techniques for treating psychosomatic and psychiatric disease.

Jnāna turns into Vijnāna when it gets processed and passes the criteria of scientific principles including formulation of hypothesis, analysis of the facts, repeated and reproducible observation leading to practical usability. Ultimately we get the approved Jnāna called Vijnāna (Jnānam tadarth niscita).

Vijnāna is the systematic understanding of Nature and its activities. It includes the world of the living and non-living, outside and inside us. It also includes the mind and how it reacts with the outside world. How does the mind ‘see’ ‘hear’, ‘feel’? How do the sensory messages travel inside the human body, how it is recorded and remembered. This understanding is based on cause and effect relationship as seen through our mind.

How is produced fire? If we know the properties of all the resource material, then we can understand what material should be taken and how to process them, so that the fire is produced. Vijnāna is deeper understanding of Nature and its phenomenon. If we understand the qualities and properties of material, we can use those properties to fulfill our needs.

If we know how the body works and how the mind and body interact, further if we know how the outside world interacts with the body, then we can understand what should be done to rectify and correct any problem that had arisen because of faulty interaction or to prevent those problems and miseries.

Understanding these intricate mechanisms we would be able to find the ways to make the mind happy in true sense. This was the thinking of our ancient Acāryas and they searched these mechanisms for gaining happiness. They called it Guṇa Dharma or properties. This Dharma was not sectarian; It was applicable to all, and for all times. It included the science of the outside material world. But, the ancient Acāryas were more interested in knowing about the science of the mind and body. So, the Vijnāna refers to the understanding of natural phenomenon in systematic way, knowing which we can live in tune with the Nature and be happy.

Vijnāna in broader sense also includes social skills training, which are widely used for many neurotic conditions including depression. Disturbed behaviour is seen as a consequence of insufficient reinforcement, which can result from deficits in social skills. Social skills training, therefore, attempts to correct the behavioural deficits including the inability of patients to obtain social
reinforcement from others and the tendency of inducing a negative affect in others (11).

**Use of supportive equipments for promoting Vijnāna**

Biofeedback is the use of an instrument (usually electronic) which provides immediate feedback to the patient regarding his physiological activities normally not available to the conscious mind e.g. EKG, EEG, pulse rate, blood pressure, EMG, galvanic skin response (GSR). The feedback helps the patient, apparently to control these responses. Relaxation is easily achieved by this method (11).

A simpler form (relaxometer) uses only one parameter, the GSR. Other uses of biofeedback include treatment of enuresis, migraine headaches, tension headache, idiopathic hypertension, incontinence, cardiac arrhythmias, uncontrolled generalised tonic clonic seizures and also for neuromuscular rehabilitation12. These methods should be used in combination with other methods for promotion of Vijnāna.

V. Promotion of Samādhi like state (Yogic psychotherapy)

_Samādhi_ is the ultimate stage in the practice of Yoga, which is a state of unwavering concentration. Promoting _Samādhi_ in a diseased state is trying to minimize the mental fluctuations, reduce the wavering, ultimately leading to focused and tranquilized mind. It is achieved through the application of various yogic techniques.

Yogic relaxation is a part of psychotherapy. According to Patanjali, Yoga is the hindering of the modifications of the thinking principle - “_Yogastu citta vṛttī nirodhaḥ._” (Pa.Yo. Su. 1/2)

According to Ayurvedic Principles - _Sattva, Raja_ and _Tama_ are three basic _Gunas_ of the _Manas_ (mind) by virtue of which an individual presents with _Sāttvika, Rājsika_ and _Tāmsika_ type of _Manas Prakriti_, according to the predominance of these _Gunas_. The _Trīguṇas_ are responsible for each and every psychological event in an individual. _Sattva_ is responsible for spiritual pleasure, correct knowledge and light (_Prakāśa_), _Raja_ is responsible for functional entity of an individual and _Tama_ for inertia and darkness. (Gita 14:5,19).

The Five _Citta Vṛtīs_ are (1) _Pramāṇa_ (Right Cognition) which includes valid states of perception, inference and belief in valid testimony; (2) _Viparyaya_ (Error) is the knowledge of the unreal as in doubt, (3) _Vikalpa_ (Fiction) is the existence of abstract imagination on basis of language symbols (4) _Nidrā_ (Deep Sleep) is the mental state which has for its objective substratum the feeling of emptiness and (5) _Smṛti_ (Memory), which is the recollection of the object through the impressions left behind by the previous experience8.

The five _Citta Bhūmis_ have been described by Vyās Bhāṣya of _Patanjali_ Yoga _Sutra_ as mentioned below -

1. _Kṣipta_ (craving): In which the mind is greatly attached by the objects of senses.
2. _Mūḍha_ (forgetful): In which there is a tendency towards, vice, ignorance, excessive sleep and the life.
3. _Vikṣipta_ (distracted) : which makes for virtue, knowledge etc.
4. _Ekāgra_ (concentrated) : where the mind is purged of impurities and there is prolonged concentration.
5. _Niruddha_ (restrained) : where all mental functions cease and the mind is left in its original unmodified state of calmness and tranquility.

The last two states are found in mentally sound and healthy persons. The remaining three represent inferior mental states (Singh R.H.; 1986). The various psychiatric illnesses originate in _Mūḍha_ and _Kṣipta_ states of mind. The _Kṣipta, Mūḍha, Vikṣipta, Ekāgra_ and _Niruddha_ states represent the performance of Rajas, Tamas, Rajas-tamas, Sattva and only _Sattva_ Guṇa, respectively. The state of complete cessation (Niruddha - _Samādhi_ of these _Vṛtīs_ has been considered to be the state of Yoga (Yoga _Sutra_ l/2).

Mind is the fulcrum of human personality. Yogic techniques like meditative Asanas are helpful in developing personality. Personality is divided into five levels which is mentioned above as _Citta bhūmi_. On the basis of their state of mind people are advised to follow Yoga. Through proper Yogic techniques all of them slowly, but steadily develop their mental stamina and arrive at a state of concentration like the Niruddha _Citta_.
Yogic relaxation is the means of getting free from stress, which is supposed to be a major causative factor of mental illnesses, various types of relaxation procedures have been advised for the purpose.

VI. Pratyātmā Cikitsā (Individual Psychotherapy)

Ayurveda emphasized that every individual is different in its psychosomatic constitution (Deha Prakriti), Psychic personality (Man as Prakriti), Deśa (habitat), Kāla (time), Vaya (age), Pratyatma Jeevana Vritta (Individual life situations). Therefore, every individual patient should be dealt as a separate individual and treatment decisions should be taken after considering all these factors, which make the individual, unique and specific. Charaka has specifically and the term Purusam-purusam viksaya to emphasize the individualistic therapy in treatment of diseases in general and psychological problems in particular.

It is a systematic and standardized treatment approach to relationship and life problems. It has now been adopted for treatment of longer duration and for different populations.

Pratyatma Cikitsā is based on the assumption that the precipitating cause of many mental illnesses usually occurs in an interpersonal context. It focuses on improving the quality of the current interpersonal functioning of the patient by diagnosing and educating the patient about the particular mental illness and identifying problems associated with the onset of disorder. It generally focuses on the patients immediate social context, and attempts to intervene in the symptoms formation and social functioning problems associated with mental illness rather than on enduring aspects of personality.

VII. Pratidvanda Cikitsā (Replacement of Emotions)

Replacement of opposite emotions (viz. Kāma for Krodha) is one of the approaches of psychotherapy (Sattvavajaya) in Ayurveda. In the case of mental derangements resulting from an excess of desires, grief, delight, envy or greed, should be allayed by bringing the influence of opposite ones (contrast), to bear on the prevailing one and neutralize it (3).

Kama shoka bhaya krodha, harshesyalobha Sambhavan,
Parasper Pratidvandvaibhireva Shamam nayet mihh
(C. Chi. 9/86)

Thus, the Kāma (desires) emotional factors are allayed by bringing in the influence of Krodha (anger); Śoka is tackled by Harṣa (pleasures) and like wise.

VIII. Aśwasana (Reassurance)

Reassurance relieves fears, boosts self confidence and promotes hope in a patient under the Aśwasana Cikitsā. The nature of the disease should be explained to the patients freely and frankly, so that the patient develops insight into the disease (13). Further he should be educated about the necessity of medication and taking treatment. Education about the disease should also include the reasons for relapse of the disease, so that they could be prevented by adopting appropriate measures. It is also equally effective and applicable for treating physical diseases and their exacerbations.

IX. Suhṛt Vākya (Friendly Advice and Guidance)

Advice is given to the patient by his well wishers, friends or relatives on whom he has the maximum faith. The focus is given on such fundamental matters as budgeting, personal hygiene and nutrition. Efforts are made to persuade the person to give up the unhealthy habits and replace them with healthy ones(7). The Physician should explain the fundamental nature of the disturbance, importance of changed attitudes and positive thinking based on an improved philosophy of life. Suggestion usually be given in conditions where there are more than two alternatives for a given situation and the person finds himself helpless to decide for or against a particular alternative (14). He is helped to take the specific decision after analyzing the prevailing situations and circumstances.

X. Ishta Vinaśana (Changing the thought process)

This is a method of Verbal psychological shock therapy which includes changing the situation and environment of the patient. In this method, such a type
Tripathi J.S. : Ayurvedic Psychotherapy

of information is given to the patient, which can change the internal thought process and activities. It helps to bring back the normalcy in patient’s behaviour \(^{(15)}\).

The behaviour of the patients becomes normal. They should also be rehabilitated at their level of intelligence and stamina, this will help them to live long and well.

XI. Psychoshock Therapy (Mano Kṣobha Cikitsā)

Psychoshock therapy has been described elaborately in Ayurveda. This important method of treatment has also been considered under Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā by Murthy A.R.V. and Singh R.H.16 (1987). For managing acute episodes of mental ailments, Ayurveda describes a number of methods of psychoshock therapy to restore the patient’s psyche.

Intimidation or threatening (Trāṣāna) terrorization, coaxing, exhilaration (Harsāna), gratification, frightening and astonishing (Viṃśāpana) are the causative of forgetfulness (Viṃśārana) and are the main ways to change the ideas and bring back the mind to its original state from delusionary and psychotic state \(^{(16)}\).

Elaborate descriptions have been suggested regarding the methods of giving psychoshock. Mental shock should be given to the patients by announcing the news of loss of his dearly loved objects. These may correct the mind by showing marvels. The patient may be applied mustard oil over the body with tied hands and feet and made to lie openly in the Sun on his back or he may be touched by cowage or lightly branded with hot irons or scalded with boiling water or oil. (C. S. Ci. 9/80). They may be terrorized by means of snakes with removed fangs or by trained lions and elephants or foremen with weapons in their hands or men, impersonating as the king’s officers dragging him out securely bound, intimidating him with threats of immediate execution by order of the king \(^{(15)}\). These methods will produce physical pain and mental shock, which may reverse the mind set and restore tranquility and normalcy to the deranged mind. It is based on the presumption that if the patient is put in a state of shock, by the fear of death, he regains his past memory and is thus cured. In principle, this is very similar to the shock therapy as practiced in modern psychiatry under Electroconvulsive Treatment (ECT)\(^{(10,16)}\).

Thus, Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā of Ayurveda is the fundamental approach of Ayurveda for treating psychiatric and psychosomatic problems, which can be placed on broader footings, also for the cure of physical diseases, as most of the diseases are associated with some form of stress and all the patients need supportive therapies like assurance etc. This therapy involves several dimensions, many of them have been discussed in this article, but many references are available in Ayurvedic classics and ancient Indian literature which need to be explored further and practically utilized to provide new leads in the psychiatric practice today. It has potential to provide a new dimension to the therapeutic approach for treating psychiatric and psychosomatic problems and also to redefine the art and science of psychotherapy. It will be an original contribution to the science of healing the mind.

REFERENCES:


5. David Frawley; Ayurveda and the mind; The Healing of Consciousness; Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Private Limited; Delhi.


7. Shukla Punam Rani (2000): Supportive Psychotherapy in stress related diseases report submitted to teachers’ reorientation training programme held at Department of Kayachikitsa, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU.


14. Carlo Monosanto; Sattvavajay Chikitsa learning from the soul; 2008; caribbean integral Institute (CII).

15. Verma Vandana, Murthy KN and Tripathi JS (2010); A comparative study of Indian and western approaches to psychotherapy in certain neurotic disorders, Ph.D.Thesis, Deptt. of Kayachikitsa, IMS, BHU, Varanasi, Dec..


Source of support: Nil
Conflict of Interest: None declared