A REVIEW OF AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF HEART

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ABSTRACT

The concept of hrdaya (heart) as the seat of mana (psyche) occupied a prominent position in Ayurveda. In amarkosha the words chitta, hrdaya and mana have been used in the same sense. In Ayurveda also the words mana, sattva and cheta are synonymous. Hrdaya and mastishaka (brain) are two well acknowledged essential organs. Shira (head) is associated with indriya (cognitive organs) and pranavaha strotas (vital centres and their connected paths) and the hrdaya (heart) is related with the mana (psyche), buddhi (intellect) chetna (consciousness) and mahabhuta (protoelements). Sadhaka pitta residing in hrdaya also regulates its functioning. The higher psychological faculties and emotional states are essentially credited to sadhaka pitta. The pathogenesis of mental diseases owes astonishing association of heart with them. On the other hand Acharya Sushruta also documented brain as the seat of psychological functions. Shira (brain) is particularly recognised due to it being the seat of indriyas. Acharya Bhela observed mana as controller of all the senses and chitta as the cause of various aspects of intellect. The chitta is regarded as an aspect of mana and has been stated to enable the buddhi to discriminate between good and bad. Therefore Bhela assigned the sensory and motor functions to brain while emotional activities are consigned to chitta located in heart. Yet few other references also situate mana in whole body signifying the intimate relation of mind with the whole body. Thus it seems that the term mana is considered in broad prospective including all the nervous activities along with psychological functions. It’s one aspect chitta residing in heart is responsible for the emotional aspect of a human being. Yet the great spiritual knowledge is attained in brain.

Keywords: hrdaya, manas, Shira, Sadhaka pitta, chitta

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of new trends in the development of medical field it looks that the terms hrdaya and manas have often been mixed up and these terms usually represent mastishaka (brain) in the context of mental and psychic activities.

This debate of brain versus heart regarding the site of psyche and consciousness is very old in east and the west. Plato considered the brain and spinal cord as the conductors of vital forces while Aristotle opined that heart is the chief source of
consciousness. In the times of Atreya and Agnivesh the beginning of this controversy was observed as is evident in the symposium of “development of first part in embryo” in which Kumashira bhardwaj expressed his opinion on first development of shira (head) due to it being the site of all senses while Kankayan of Bahleeka opined the hrdaya being the first organ to develop since it is the seat of chetna (consciousness). Vedic literature also reveals the interrelation and importance of both the organs. It also observed the psychic importance of hrdaya (1). Chhandogya upanishada clearly indicated the heart as the centre of consciousness and psyche. Upto the period of Vagbhatta 500A.D. and chakrapani (11th century A.D.) Arundatta (15th century), heart remained the seat of consciousness and psyche. Even well known Indian books e.g. gita also had the same approach. Thus in ancient Indian literature there are no definite evidences from which it can be concluded that there had been a lot controversy on the subject.

But with the advancement of modern achievements in the field of biochemistry and physiology a tendency has developed in the modern psychology to explain all human behaviour in the framework of nervous system. Current Ayurveda scholars are also inclining towards the view of using the word hrdaya in the sense of brain in context to psychological descriptions of hrdaya in Ayurveda (2). Though there is need to testify the ayurveda principles on the parameters of modern medical research to make it evidence based science, yet the impartial consideration to maintain the original ayurveda facts reveals their approach as scientific. As the ancient Ayurveda scholars were very well acquainted with the two distinct entities i.e. brain and heart and their anatomical location in the body, hence clear concept of Ayurveda of consigning psychic performances to hrdaya cannot be ignored.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Critically analyse the concept of psychological deliberations of heart from Ayurveda perspective and modern sciences.

LITERARY REVIEW

Ayurvedic Review: In Ayurveda hrdaya and mastishaka have been well recognised as two separate vital organs of body (3). The importance of head or brain has been particularly recognised due to it being the seat of indriyas (4). Acharya Charaka directly mentioned the relation of shira (head) with indriya (cognitive organs) and pranavaha strotas (vital centres and their connected paths) and the relation of heart with the mana (psyche), buddhi (intellect) chetna (consciousness) and mahabhuta (proto-elements) (5). Acharya Sushruta claimed the position of heart in the thoracic region near amashaya dwara (stomach opening) (6). It is related to rasa, rakta and is the seat of major blood vessels. All these facts conclude that the word hrdaya in ayurveda definitely relates to heart of modern times. Upper most chief organ of all sense organs is shiras (brain) (7). Hrdaya is regarded as the seat of buddhi and its proper functioning is regulated by sadhaka pitta (8). The mana and buddhi are greatly reciprocally related to each other e.g. in gyanotpatti krama (gaining the knowledge) Charaka says that buddhi vyapaara (accomplishments of intellect) occurs after manovyapaara (psychic actions) for attaining the deterministic knowledge (9). Sadhaka pitta which is deemed to be essentially responsible for the higher mental faculties and emotional states is located in hrdaya. The various psychological functions performed by saadhaka pitta are bhaya (fear), shouraya (courage), krodha (anger), harsha (ex-
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Sushruta assigns it the function to achieve one’s aspiration. Its mode of action has been explained by Dalhan as it dispels the kapha and tama of hrdaya and thus enables the mana to perceive the things clearly. Acharya Vagbhatta expounds the buddhi (intelligence), medha (memory and intellect), abhimana (ego) as attributes to sadhaka pitta which is residing in heart (hrdaya). Thus emotions are shown to be deeply related to and dependent on heart.

The pathogenesis of mental diseases depicts the association of heart with them. The morbid dosha lodged in dhamani affecting hrdaya cause disturbance in its function and the person is affected with stupor and derangement of mind. In the pathogenesis of unmada (insanity), dosha in the body of alpasattva (feeble minded) get morbid, vitiate hrdaya and become localised in manovahi srotas and derange the function of chitta (psyche) of the person.

The purely psychological disorder atatvabhinivesha in which irritated dosha get localised in hrdaya and vitiate manovahi siras hence the person formulates wrong judgements concerning true and false, the wholesome and unwholesome. Thus hrdaya has been shown to be immensely related to psychic derangements and to the pathogenesis of mental diseases.

The supporting references to consider brain as the seat of psychological functions are also there e. g. Acharya Sushruta opined that mental ailments unmada, bhaya, chittanasha may happen due to defects in the five simanta of shiras. Acharya Bhela observed that mana is enclosed between shira and taalu and it is the controller of all indriya and receives the objects of senses. The power of all indriya is derived from mana. But Bhela’s distinguishing ability among mana, chitta and buddhi is for this distinct attitude that he regards mana as entirely different from chitta and believes it the cause of all cognitive functions and situated in brain. The chitta is observed as the cause of all the activities, feelings, judgements and the heart is regarded as its site. ‘Buddhi’ the deterministic understanding and judgement was put a function of chitta. Thus even assigning the seat of mana to mastishaka the activities of mana are limited to indriya and rest of more important important functions of psyche like intellect have been assigned to chitta which is located in hrdaya. Moreover the role of emotional well being in the treatment of heart diseases depicts their interrelation.

Modern Review:
Various views of modern psychologists also put doubt in assigning the psychological functions to brain e. g. K. S. Hausey considers the neurological explanations of psychological explanations on cerebral localisation and reflex pathways as inadequate. A. H. Maslaw mentioned, “we know that the fundamental psychological atum is not a muscle twitch nor a muscle reflex nor an elementary sensation, nor a neuron nor even an observable overt behaviour. Psychology’s recognition of the body’s influence on the mind coincides with a recent focus on the role of the heart in our social psychology. It turns out that the heart is not only critical for survival, but also for how people related to one another. In particular, heart rate variability (HRV), variation in the heart’s beat-to-beat interval, plays a key role in social behaviours ranging from decision-making, regu-
lating one’s emotions, coping with stress, and even academic engagement (19).

A thorough appraisal of modern works on emotions and their psychosomatic explanations also lets us know the interaction of psyche and the circulatory system. Braun in his publication ‘HERZ AND ANGST’ stresses the necessity of a thorough study of the relation between heart and mental life. He introduced in his work the concept of cardiac psyche of which the essential mark is anxiety. Heart is specified the organ of anxiety comparable to eyes as the sense organ for sight (20).

Wmepdocles the leading member of the medical centre at Agrigentum taught that the blood was the medium of thought and the degree of intelligence depended on the composition of blood. Thus for him heart was the central organ of intellect and the seat of mental disorder (21). It was observed that since circulation performed by heart was the function the cessation of which means cessation of life, therefore heart has become one of the most important organs for expression. It is for the reason that heart has close relation with emotional life (22). There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest a link between heart and mind still there is need to explore these issues further. The independent nature of heart for its activity particularly from nervous tissue inclines to think in ascribing the heart as the site of consciousness (23) e. g. a specialised cluster of myocardial conducting cells the sinoatrial node (SA node) has the highest inherent rate of depolarization & it initiates the sinus rhythm or normal electrical pattern followed by contraction of heart (24).

Great blood vessels emanating from heart (ojovaha / mahaphala) carry mental stimulus with them to different parts of body as is evident from the dominant psychological alterations in deficiency of oja (25). Depression has been linked with increased ischaemic heart disease (IHD) risk and death following myocardial infarction (heart attack). Three major clinical trials have shown that cardiac morbidity and, to a certain extent, even mortality can be reduced by interventions which have a psychosocial component (26).

According to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, memory, attention and concentration somewhat declined immediately after the bypass surgery and similar decline was observed five years after because of two obvious explanations i.e. either a bypass may affect the brain blood flow or the heart lung pump used during the surgery may cause mental impairment. So, we know there is heart-mind connection through blood circulation. While some experts might find it outside the mainstream of scientific thought, researchers based at the HeartMath Institute, claim that the heart plays a role in the functioning of human intelligence, emotions and personality (27).

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda hrdaya and mastishaka well acknowledged as two separate essential organs are involved in the manifestation of psychological disorders e. g. brain’s involvement in psychological diseases is testified by the principles of purification of shira as well along with purification of hrdaya, indriya and koshatha (28). Acharya Bhela also observed influence of mastishaka on heart (29). Sushruta also clearly mentioned the involvement of brain in mental ailments. Thus it becomes evident in Ayurveda that though great stress has been laid on relation of psyche and hrdaya yet the involvement of brain is also given due recognition. Reason for giving heart the importance over brain is due to it being the site of consciousness and psyche and
the dependency of other body organs on it (30).

Thus the primary site of mana is heart and to perform gyanotpatti karma (knowledge from senses) it reaches the brain through blood. The functional relation between heart and brain is well accepted in atharvaveda (31) And the unhindered circulation is mandatory for the successful performance of all bodily functions. Bhagvada Geeta also stress to hold the mana in heart so as to restrict its movement to brain so that it could be free from objects perception for attaining meditative stage (32).

Acharya Bhela also opined that supreme salvation is achieved in the area of shrigatata i.e. in brain (33). Thus the prime location of mind and intellect is in heart and supreme knowledge of salvation is attained in brain.

However few other references also signify mana in whole body i.e. there is intimate relation of mind with the whole body (34). Charaka regards that the skin (sparshanendriya) pervades all the senses and mana is inherent to it (35) which shows the innate relationship between the mana and peripheral nervous system. Thus it seems that Ayurveda considers nervous system as functions of sensory and motor but psychic and emotional factors are assigned to heart.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that in Ayurveda most of the psychic functions are attributed to hrdaya and its role in the pathogenesis of psychic disorders is also profoundly deliberated. Performance of emotional functions by heart is attributed to sadhaka pitta and buddhi residing in heart. Even today’s psychologists are also not agreed in the view of allocating the psychological activities within the field of neurons. While laying stress on hrdaya ancient scholars have recognised the importance of mastishaka in the pathogenesis of psychic diseases as well. Acharya Bhela’s view of locating mana to mastishaka and limiting its activities to indriya and assigning important functions of psyche like intellect to chitta (also a synonym of mana) located in hrdaya also establishes the heart and brain relationship. Thus it appears that Ayurveda does not assign the total psychological functions to hrdaya. The inherent relation of mana with whole body extensive tackle sense establishes its relation with the whole body also. Hence mana is related to heart, brain and whole body. Therefore the innate relation between manas with nervous system gets proved to a certain extent. The whole story depicts the term mana to be representative of all the nervous activities along with psychological functions. It’s one aspect chitta residing in heart is behind the emotional state of a human being. In Bhagvad Gita also holding this very chitta within its place i.e. in heart and thus avoiding its reach to shira (place of senses) results in attainment of true meditative state and acquirement of supreme spiritual knowledge in brain.

REFERENCES


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