



AN OVERVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH – IN THE CONTEXT OF ANCIENT INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

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Abstract : The present study aims to gain insight into mental health from the ancient Indian perspective. The study focuses on foundational principles in mental health with respect to ancient literature. An attempt is also made to explore the diverse application-based practices on mental well-being that were prevalent in those times. The study also plays a prominent role in the context of the current scenario of rising Mental Health issues in this modern era.

IndexTerms - Mental Health, Ancient Scriptures, Religion, Spirituality.

1.INTRODUCTION

‘SANATAN’, the prominent word rooted in our ancient Indian culture are derived from combination of ‘two Sanskrit words namely, ‘SAN’ (ancient) and ‘ADHYATAN’ (new), derived from Vedas and Upanishads. It is considered as the sacred system evolved with deep rooted practices to connote the ethical, moral and useful practices in the modern arena also.

In relation to this, one can observe that the seeds of knowledge are both ancient and modern in the diverse aspects of India. In this context, Mental Health deserves special attention, because it is one of the oldest examples of research conducted in our ancient India. The presence of psychological knowledge and expertise can be traced to more than 3000 years ago. ⁽¹⁾

World Health Organization describes mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and can contribute to her or his community (WHO, 2014). Although it reveals a positive direction from the common definition of mental health, it also projects the absence of mental illness as the common condition for the Mental well-being of the people²

2.NEED OF THE STUDY.

The present study aims to gain insight into mental health from the ancient Indian perspective. The study focuses on foundational principles in mental health with respect to ancient literature. An attempt is also made to explore the diverse application-based practices on mental well-being that were prevalent in those times. The study also plays a prominent role in the context of the current scenario of rising Mental Health issues in this modern era.

3.Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the sphere of Mental Health in ancient India.
2. To understand the methods used in the identification of symptoms of psychological issues.
3. To explore the application-based techniques to address the Mental Health issues.

4. EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH ON MENTAL HEALTH:

Concept of Mental Illness: According to Vedas description, the Psychic states are described as instincts, impulses and emotions. Thus, imbalances in rajas and Tamas could lead to Insanity. The imbalance of Trigunas (The Satva, Rajas and Tamas) and Tridosas (The three humors in the body vat, pitta and kapha) gave clue to the psychopathology.

A person in good mental health performs personal, family, social, and professional responsibilities in a rational manner and meets the family's material, spiritual, and emotional needs with sincerity and honesty, according to their role functions, abilities and limitations

5. Data and Sources of Data

For this study secondary data has been collected from various reliable sources of Literature and authenticated publications from ancient scriptures to validate the need for the study.

6. Review of Literature:

The main objective of this Research is to explore the scenario of Mental Health in ancient India.

Verma LP (1965) Unmad was the term for psychosis. Mental disorders were named after Gods & devils. The terminology & clinical picture does not correlate well with the modern terms. However approximate & loose correlation is as follows - Endogenous disorders were provoked by humour or tridoshas. They are a) Vatonmad - similar to schizophrenia, b) Pittonmad - mania, c) Kaphonmad - depression, and d) Tridoshanmad - Depression. Exogenous disorders resembling schizophrenia were - Bhujang graha vyadhi, Rakshasa graha vyadhi, Pishachha graha vyadhi, asura graha vyadhi etc. Those resembling mania were - Daiva graha vyadhi, Yaksha graha vyadhi & Gandharva graha vyadhi. Pitru graha vyadhi resembled depression ³

Carey, G. (1997). Religion and psychiatry have had an uneasy relationship, with both sides erecting barriers. Accepting the fact that religion can both cause problems and offer solutions is equally important. Psychiatrists frequently shy away from talking about religious topics with their patients out of concern for upsetting their sensibilities. Nevertheless, a long-term psychological remedy frequently includes helping patients better comprehend their spiritual difficulties and expand their spiritual toolkit. Good psychotherapists understand that changes in a person's life, particularly their spiritual health, frequently result in better psychotherapy outcomes. ⁴

Shamasundar, C. (2008). In any culture's enduring traditions, ancient ideas have always had an impact on knowledge advancement, particularly in the area of psychology. According to ancient Indian scriptures, an ideal person is expected to manage their life in spite of adversities of any nature. A person in good mental health takes care of their legitimate responsibilities in the personal, family, social, and professional spheres, providing for their own and their family's material, spiritual, and emotional needs with sincerity and honesty, hope and assurance, and contentment in accordance with their role functions, their abilities and limitations, the situation at hand, and righteous means.⁵

Bauer, G. F., & Hämmig, O. (2014). Human life is a right mix of positive and negative emotions; hence, gauging mental health only in the positive light is rather incomplete. Mental health is understood in three different dimensions- emotional well-being, psychological well-being and physical well-being.⁶

C. G. Jung (2020) One of the most influential figures in the history of art therapy is Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Jung believed that the unconscious mind could be accessed through images, symbols, and dreams, and he saw artistic expression as a key pathway to uncovering these hidden thoughts and feelings. Jung's approach, known as analytical psychology, emphasized the use of art to explore the unconscious mind, heal emotional wounds, and achieve self-awareness.⁷

According to World Health Organisation (2022) Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes. It includes mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being, but this is not always or necessarily the case.⁸

Bhati R, Mandal M, Singh T (2025) In today's fast-paced world, mental health issues are rising due to lifestyle changes, social media use, workplace burnout, and geopolitical events. Despite the urgent need to address the concern, mental health remains stigmatized, inaccessible, and undertreated. Contemporary mental health focuses more on symptoms rather than overall mental well-being. The holistic nature of ancient Indian mental health concepts and paradigms includes elements that contemporary mental health literature has overlooked. Indian texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Ayurveda make significant mention of mental health and provide applications of the psychological remedies to real-world circumstances.⁹

Akriti Srivastava (2025) By working to bring the conscious, unconscious and subconscious into expressive and tangible forms, the creative processes involved in art therapy have been praised for their ability to encourage personal growth, mindfulness, and self-discovery.¹⁰

7.EVOLUTION OF MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES IN ANCIENT INDIA:

The historical roots of Indigenous techniques with respect to Mental Health in India can be illustrated into 3 streams.

- (1) Mystic-metaphysical traditions including the Buddhist, Yogic and Bhakti traditions;
- (2) Medical tradition including the Hindu, Unani and British (western) traditions;
- (3) Recent trends including psychoanalytical psychotherapies, cognitive behavioral therapies, with their Indian modifications.

The Bhagwat Geeta and Ramayana, which are epics in the Indian context and postulate the religiosity, philosophy and inspiration of human living, have sparked interest among mental health professionals in the context of therapeutic intervention for mental health disorders and enhancing well-being.¹¹

The Bhagavad Gita explains numerous psychotherapies and psychotherapy ideas and is based on a conversation that took place between Lord Krishna and Arjuna at the start of the Mahabharata war in Kurukshetra.¹²

When managing a patient with psychological discomfort or illness, counselling or psychotherapy is crucial and a crucial part of psychiatric therapies. The Bhagavad Gita has been examined and suggested by eminent Indian psychologists and psychiatrists as a source and model for creating psychotherapy principles appropriate for the Indian setting.¹³

The Bhagwat Gita shows how the mind can progress from a pitiful state of anxiety and depression to sophisticated thinking. The exchange between Krishna and Arjuna serves as an example of knowledge of illumination, Arjuna's perception of wisdom, and experience of the knowledge as therapeutic skills. The patient must possess the traits necessary to give quick outcomes after CBT sessions, just as the Arjun completely surrendered to the Krishna .¹⁴

We can learn valuable lessons from the Ramayana about human nature, ethical standards, and man's connection with God. It has a wealth of therapeutic knowledge and can be used effectively in psychotherapy. The use of examples from the Ramayana is helpful, especially for patients who are religiously inclined, less well-educated patients, and non-westernised patients. It is also useful for westernised patients who are religiously inclined and are under severe stress.¹⁵

Nevertheless, a long-term psychological remedy frequently includes helping patients better comprehend their spiritual difficulties and expand their spiritual toolkit. Good psychotherapists understand that changes in a person's life, particularly their spiritual health, frequently result in better psychotherapy outcomes .¹⁶

It can be used in patients with dysthymia, neurotic and stress-related disorders and problems, adjustment challenges, personality issues, maladaptive coping mechanisms, marital conflict and relationship difficulties, bereavement, academic, occupational, and stage of life problems, according to a thorough literature review.

8.CLASSIFICATION OF MENTAL DISORDERS

I. Atharveda: It mentions six Severe Disorders that are mentioned below:

1. Unmad: It includes symptoms such as- Incoherent and irrelevant talk, violent disturbed mind, excited, crying loudly etc.
2. Grahi: symptoms such as- dancing, loving fragrance etc. that causes mental abnormality or disease can be observed.
3. Apasmar: Convulsions becoming unconscious
4. Bhaya: Phobias of Agni (pyrophobia),yama (death),varuni (hydro phobia),vayu (air),enemy and persecution.
5. Manaspap The patients hear voices not coming from any physical sources outside, but arising from his own mind. The voices are unpleasant, their words are of persecutory nature, and the patient shows apathy.Modern psycho-pathology describes the symptoms of schizophrenia paranoid type in a similar way.
6. Pap-Bhawana: 'Pap' means adopting the behavior destructive to one's own self. Inferiority complex prevails and physiologically ill in the form of the different diseases, calamities and distress.

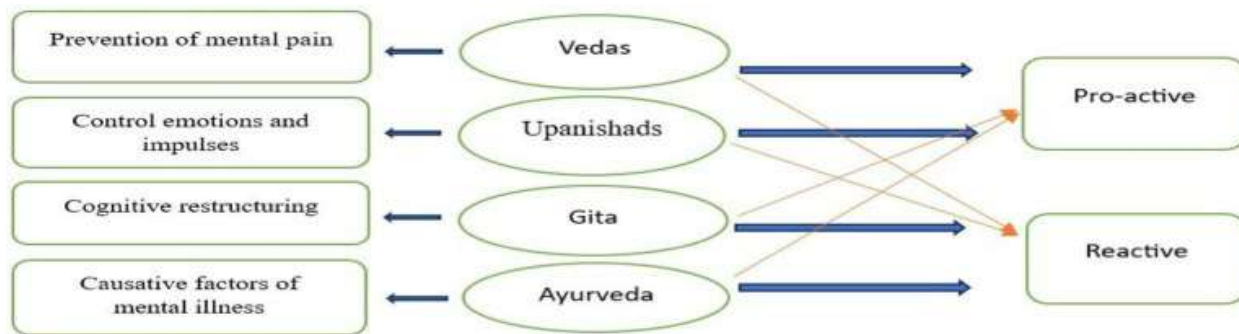
II. Najabuddin Unhamnad: He was a physician who described 7 types of mental disorders which are-

- Sauda-a-Tabee- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to schizophrenia,
- Muree-sauda- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to depression.
- Malikholia- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to delirium.
- Haziyan- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to paranoid state.
- Ishq- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to delusion of love.
- Nisyn- Symptoms of this mental disorder are similar to Organic causes.

▪ Janoon- When symptoms of Sauda-a-Tabee become chronic was called janoon. Treatment-

According to the ancient system, diagnosis was based on cause (nidana), premonitory indications (purva- rupa), symptoms (rupa), therapeutic tests (upashaya) and natural history of the development of the disease (samprapti). According to Sushruta, the physician (chikitshak), the drug (dravya), the attendants or the nursing personnel (upasthata), and the patient (rogi) are the four pillars on which rests the success of the therapy.

FIGURE 1 Linkage of mental health concepts to ancient Indian texts and catergorisation into proactive and reactive approaches.



(Source: Hati R, Mandal M, Singh T. “Ancient Indian perspectives and practices of mental well-being”. *Frontier Psychology*.;16:1616802. 2025 Jun 3.)

Therefore, it could be inferred that the Vedas and Upanishads place more emphasis on proactive mental health techniques that lessen emotional distress. Gita guides emotional transformation by fusing Cognitive Restructuring with both Proactive and Reactive approaches. Ayurveda is primarily a reactive system that focuses on identifying and treating mental health conditions.

The ageless wisdom found in Indian scriptures is becoming more and more applicable to contemporary mental health procedures. A thorough, all-encompassing approach to mental health and emotional resilience is provided by these ageless self-help techniques from Indian texts, which are backed by both traditional knowledge and contemporary studies.

Evidence for the benefits of Vedic mantras, practices of Upanishads, techniques in Bhagavad Gita, and ayurvedic remedies on anxiety, stress, depression, and cognitive function suggests that they could be used in addition to other treatments to improve mental health. While the available research is encouraging, more thorough investigations are required to properly determine the effectiveness and mechanisms of these early interventions. By using larger, more diverse samples and standardized intervention protocols, future research should strive to address the methodological limitations of previous studies. A more thorough understanding of the effects of various ancient Indian mental health practices can be obtained by incorporating objective physiological and neurological measures.

Table: 1: Table showing the Ancient Source of Literature on Mental Health and related Outcomes

Ancient Source	Outcomes based on Ancient Literature and Research
Vedic tradition	mind, body, and spirit are said to be aligned
Mantra chanting	mindfulness, soothe the neurological system, and control breathing patterns.
Vibrational theory,	treatment of stress, anxiety, depression, and general mental health issues.
Upanishads,	lower stress, improve emotional control, and enhance cognitive function.
Atma Vichara, or self-inquiry,	to contemplate their intrinsic essence beyond the confines of material existence

Dama	control of breath and the practice of mindfulness
Bhagavad Gita	effectively manage thoughts, emotions, and desires
Charak Samhita (1,400 BC) and the Sushrut Samhita (1,500 BC).	improving Sattva and achieving a balance between Rajas and Tamas are necessary for mental well-being
Ayurveda	improving Sattva and achieving a balance between Rajas and Tamas are necessary for mental well-being
Breathing exercises	activation of brain areas such as the amygdala, thalamus, insula, and cingulate cortex,

9.ANCIENT INDIAN THERAPIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH:

Meditation:

The Indian Rishis attributed great importance to the need for the development of the inner faculties of a human being. They discovered various methods of revitalizing the body.

The rishis also preach that every person must meditate on God at least three times a day and they associate these times with the three times of the Sun. When one gets up from sleep, he must pay homage to his deity or the rising Sun respect the mid-day Sun and the setting Sun to express his gratitude to his Creator for the successful completion of his day's work.¹⁷

Diet:

Vedic diet and nutrition may help some people to cope with stress by managing their symptoms and promote recovery. Some herbal remedies, vitamin such as vitamin B, C, E may give a boost in your immune systems. Food or supplements that contain antioxidants such as berries, mangosteen, quercetin etc. will help you to fight for the free radicals that generated from your body as a result of stress.

Ancient Research also proves that meditation programs were better in treating a broad range of mental health disorders including anxiety, stress, depression, obsessive-compulsive, affective, bipolar maniac-depressive, psychotic, phobic and somatoform disorders etc.

Music:

Soothing or listening devotional music can help you to relax and feel good. Choose the music that has good vibration that would make you feel good and happy. explain that the Madhyamavati, Kafi Rag, Darbari, Kharahara Priya, Natabhairav, Dwijavanthi, Shanmukhapriya, Hameerkalyan etc. ragas very help full pece of mind ad stress control. And various ragas in Hindustani and Karnataka treating persons with special needs in mental and physical health, Hence, music therapists, counsellors and psychotherapists should continue to investigate the beneficial effects of music therapy.¹⁸

Classical Dance:

Dance is combine performance of Yoga, Mudras and Music. In Bharata Natyam, the Classical Dance of India, approximately fifty-five root mudras (hand/finger gestures), 24 types of Asamyuta Hastas in Kuchipudi, 28 types of mudras in Kathak, 470 mudras of kathakali, 24 of mohiniattam are used to clearly communicate specific ideas, events, actions, It has a wide range of physical and mental benefits explained that the positive effects for physical health as well as mental and emotional wellbeing. Dance therapy is based on the idea that body and mind are co-relational.¹⁹

Yoga:

Yoga is an ancient art that is defined as the union of the soul with God. The practice is at least 3000 years, It is "a path of personal spiritual development that utilizes meditation to bring enlightenment, self-realization, and, ultimately, the attainment of God and bliss". Originally, the ultimate goal of yoga was called Samadhi, or self-realization

Patanjal defined: Yogas Citta Vrtti Nirodhah, Patanjali is father of yoga around the sixth century B.C. appeared in the massive epic

- Karma yoga: The yoga of action
- Bhakti yoga: The yoga of devotion, note Krishna had also specified devotion itself was action similar to above.

· Jnana yoga: The yoga of knowledge.

Patanjali introduced -Ashtanga or Power yoga - a more demanding workout where you constantly move from one posture to another (“flow”).

The dimensions of yoga are

- Pranayama (breathing)
- Asana (postures)
- Yama (restraint)
- Niyama (healthy observances)
- Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal)
- Dharana (concentration)
- Dhyana (meditation)
- Samadhi (higher consciousness)²⁰

Mantras:

Vedic Mantra Treatment is based on chanting these mantras and awakens the body's natural healing mechanisms. Mantras inspire positive and penetrating thoughts and enlighten the emotional and deeper levels of consciousness. 'Mananat- trayate iti Mantrah' - By the Manana (constant thinking or recollection), Vedas, Agamas and Upanishads are explain various mantras and slokas like Dhakshina murthy slokam, Saraswathy slokam, Ganapathy slokam, Hyagreeva slokam etc... and

“Ohm” – 7.83Hz

Gam – 14hz

Hleem – 20Hz

Hreem – 26Hz

Kleem – 33Hz

Krowm – 39Hz

Sreem – 45Hz

Mental Power - Om hrim mannas chetnayee phat

Om Namah Narayane Aye

Om Namah Bhagwate Vasdevaye Namaha

Om Namah Shivāyā

Improves concentration and steadiness, Perform it with positivity, cheerfulness, honesty and healing in the body is achieved the benefits of mantra chanting in mental health and wellness.²¹

Color Therapy and Visualization:

Colors affect moods and emotions. Therapists believe that each organ and body system has its own characteristic vibrational energy, and disorders can be healed by applying color of the corresponding vibrational energy, either to the whole body or to the organ concerned. Seven ‘chakras’ in our body are associated with the seven colours of the rainbow. By internally visualizing these colors, one can burst the stress - related problems. Following are the colors related to each chakra²²

Root or Muladhara Chakra ---->Red

Swadishtana or Hara Chakra---->Orange

Manipura or Solar Plexes----->Yellow

Heart or Anahata Chakra----->Green

Throat or Vishuddhi Chakra---->Blue

Third Eye or Ajna Chakra----->Indigo

Sahasrara or Crown Chakra---->Violet

Massage Therapy:

This therapy by gradual pressing and releasing the muscles, muscles get loosened which lead to physical relaxation. The therapy includes the use of herbal oils like Coconut, Jaborandi, Arnica, Camphor, Aswagandha, Brahmi, Bringaraj and sandal wood etc... lotions are easily relief to stress and stimulate pressure points. The philosophy in this form of therapy is a 'sound mind in a sound body'. During a massage, a person is asked to close the eyes and feel the tension release. Massage therapy tunes up the body muscles and in turn the mind²³

This paper analyzes the relevance of our ancient Indian scriptures for managing stress in contemporary society, particularly in promoting mental well-being and offering effective stress management strategies. By embracing the principles outlined in ageless wisdom scriptures, individuals can cultivate resilience, balance, and a healthy lifestyle, ultimately leading to a stress-free and harmonious existence.

Our Ancient Indian Scriptures is not confined to old people or philosophers or managers or to Hindus only, it is relevant for everyone and at every stage of life.

CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS:

This study observed that a Holistic approach to mental health is provided by these ageless self-help techniques from Indian texts, which are backed by both traditional knowledge and contemporary studies.

The current research and literature reveal that National **Mental Health Survey (NMHS)** by **NIMHANS** found that **10.6% of adults in India** suffer from mental disorders. The **lifetime prevalence** of mental disorders in India is **13.7%**. National studies reveal that **15%** of India's adult population experiences mental health issues requiring intervention. **Urban areas** have a higher prevalence (13.5%) compared to rural (6.9%).

Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted that Mental well-being encompasses all our mental-emotional, social, cognitive, and physical capabilities. This can also be construed as the mind's composite health. It emphasised a whole of community approach to tackling mental health problems and stated that it is about time to find viable, impactful preventive strategies and interventions. India's demographic dividend is riding on skills, education, physical health and, above all, mental health of its youth.

Treatment Gap

70% to 92% of people with mental disorders do not receive proper treatment due to lack of awareness, stigma, and shortage of professionals. According to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry India has **0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people**, whereas WHO recommends **at least 3 per 100,000**.

The last two decades have seen a tremendous explosion in the research base of the neurosciences, Mental Health, epidemiology and therapeutics. It was found difficult for contemporary practitioners to meet the challenges that confronted mental health professionals in the period following India's independence. However, it is important to remember that the foundations for the current knowledge base were laid during ancient India itself.

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