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Concept Of Mental Health In Pali Suttas

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Abstract

The world around us is always facing suffering, poverty, conflict, discrimination and misery. The Buddha's teaching is a hope for happiness, prosperity, peace, equanimity and contentment. In modern times man has invented and discovered lots of things and services for getting sensual pleasure. He has tendency to indulge in it and becoming more greedy, hateful and distressed. His mind is becoming monkey mind and full of cravings so he is creating and facing so many mental health issues. The objective of this study is to show the way to come out from mental distress through the teaching of the Buddha. We all know that the Buddha was the greatest social reformer, psychologist and psychotherapist in his time. The Buddha did not teach about false views, any religious rites or rituals to come out from suffering but he gave us noble truths of mind and universe. The Buddha heals so many people in his life time and provides them true knowledge of supreme bliss of Nibbana. Actually, Buddhism is an education for mental culture and insight, not a religion for practicing mere rites, rituals and ceremonies in the social life. Culture is needed if it is helping us to develop ourselves in the practice of Dhamma, otherwise it may turn in religious dogmas and superstitions. By studying the Pali Suttas and modern knowledge of medical science and psychology, we can understand that still the Buddhist concept of mental health and liberation from suffering is felt valid and suitable in modern time. The title finds out that some Pali Suttas contain psychological aspect of man and provide proper therapeutic modalities to heal problems of mental and behavioral disorders. Modern psychology not only developed in the field of understanding mental activities but is treating mental and behavioral disorders. It also studied the positive mental states and provides techniques to develop them. In Buddhism, mind, behavior and activities are classified in wholesome and unwholesome actions and told about result of them. But still we have not developed systematic, rational and scientific healing modalities to heal mental and behavioral disorders for achieving mental health and positive psychological stages. We yet could not sanction and dignify Buddha's teaching in the field of psychotherapy. Buddhist meditation retreats and practicing morality became a part of Buddhist way of life or culture. Nevertheless, we should do some scientific research of the Suttas and present healing modalities to treat mental and behavioral disorders to make humanity mentally and physical healthy. The title finds out information through the study of Pali Sutta and Abhidhamma literature. This information would be helpful for further research and development on this subject.

Keywords: Consciousness, mind, mental health, psychology, psychotherapy

Introduction

The Buddha's teachings basically give importance to liberation of mind from suffering and mental afflictions. That is why the Buddha never taught any religious rites or rituals and ceremonies to entertain man in the name of cessation of suffering and getting happiness from such kind of religious dogmas. When we study Buddhist literature, we find materials of mental culture and insight for purifying mind and behavior so that we can live happy, peaceful and moral life in the society. In Dhammapada, **Kisagotamivattu**, one discussion shows mental distress and method of removal of it. While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha uttered verse, with reference to Kisagotami, the daughter of a rich man from Savatthi. Kisagotami came to the Buddha as she was stricken with grief due to the death of her only son. To her the Buddha said, "Kisagotami, you think you are the only one who has lost a son. Death comes to all beings; before their desires are satiated Death takes them away."¹ Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows: "The man who dotes on his children and his herds of cattle, whose mind longs for and is attached to sensual pleasures, is carried away by Death even as a sleeping village is swept away by a great flood."² At the end of the discourse Kisagotami attained Sotapatti Fruition.

This is one of the best examples in Pali Sutta of mental suffering and method of removal of it. In daily life man experiences suffering, fear, worry, lamentation, grief, anxiety, depression and other kind of mental disturbances, these are called suffering of mind in Buddhism. They have causes of mental afflictions like greed, attachment, hatred, lust, jealousy, delusion etc.

Four kinds of major mental suffering are mentioned in the Pali Sutta³

1. Due to separation of dear one, liked thing, place, event, service feels suffering.
2. Due to contact of disliked one, thing, place, event, service feels suffering.
3. Due to whatever we do wish, want not get in time or in form feels suffering.
4. Due to attachment of form, sensations, perceptions, mental formation and consciousness feels suffering.

Because of these mental acts following suffering⁴ comes up –

1. Sorrows (*Soka*), by thinking, by recalling the event, place of person feels internal suffering.
2. Lamentations (*Parideva*), because of internal suffering he/she cries a loud, sheds tears.
3. Pains (*Dukkha*), because of this he/she physical pain and weakness.
4. Distresses (*Domanassa*), because of this he/she mental pain and stress.
5. Despairs (*Upayasa*), is hopelessness, depression, fear, worry and wandering thoughts etc.

If these mental sufferings continue for long time it turns into mental and behavior disorders and in psychosomatic diseases. In brief one can face eleven kinds of mental suffering in the human body, as aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I say, with birth, aging & death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs.⁵ When someone feels this kind of mental suffering severe and deeply he/she can tend to suicide. Basic nature of mental suffering is thus.

In modern time, the World Health Organization published the data of mental and behavioral disorders like anxiety and depression. After seeing data we can understand its severity and problem before humanity. In 2015, anxiety disorder related people are in the world are 24.6 million, YLD.⁶ In 2019, 301 million peoples of the world are suffering by anxiety disorder; it includes 58 million are children and

¹ Dhammapada, Verse 114

² Dhammapada, Verse 287

³ Dhammacakkapavvatana Sutta, Mahavagga Pali

⁴ Saccavibhanga Sutta, No. 141, Majjhima Nikaya Pali,

⁵ Adittapariyaya Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya Pali

⁶ Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders, Global Health Estimate, 2017, WHO/MSD/MER/20172, pdf Page 14 (YLD – One YLD represents the equivalent of one full year of healthy life lost due to disability or ill health.)

young also.⁷ In 2015, depression related people are in the world are 50 million, YLD.⁸ In 2019, 280 million peoples of the world are suffering by depression, it includes 23 million are children and young also.⁹ One research showed that, in India 197.3 million people have need mental health treatment. In them 45.7 million people are suffered by depression and 44.9 million are suffered by anxiety disorder.¹⁰ This data are related only anxiety and depression related mental health problem only. Other mental and behavior disorders also present in the world. Modern psychiatry and psychotherapy provide them proper treatment to heal them from these kinds of mental problems.

Like modern psychology, Buddhism also should provide some therapeutic modalities to heal such mental and behavior disorders. Pali Suttas have ample of examples of it but have need to design it in a style of treatment modality or psychotherapy. Who is suffering from mental or behavior disorder, he never practice Dhamma willingly but he/she needs proper help from a professional person who has skills and knowledge of such treatment. The Buddha's knowledge should be used for this purpose is a hope for future.

Concept of Mind (Consciousness) in Pali Sutta

Mind is called in Pali Sutta as *Citta, Mana, Manasa, hadaya, manayatana, manindriya, manovinnanadhatu*.¹¹ In Pali Sutta, consciousness is six fold - 1. Eye Consciousness 2. Ear Consciousness 3. Nose Consciousness 4. Tongue Consciousness 5. Body Consciousness and 6. (Mind) intellect consciousness.¹² The definition of consciousness is –

1. *Arammanam Vijanati ti Vinnanam* to know the sense-object is consciousness.
2. *Arammanam Cinteti ti Cittam* to think about sense-object is consciousness.¹³

According to this definition of mind, the function of it is to know and think about sense - object. For example, through an eye, taking information of form and knowing it as a form is eye consciousness. This function is happen to all six senses also. Consciousness is a process, a function. It is not situated in any part of the body. So the Buddha said in Dhammapada, *Guhasayo* mind stays in the body.¹⁴ Modern human physiologist also gives definition of mind, as below –

1. A state of alertness in which a person is fully aware of his or her thoughts, surroundings, and intentions.¹⁵
2. Consciousness is the state of being characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, and thought: Mind.¹⁶
3. Consciousness is the process of creating a model of the world using multiple feedback loops in various parameters (e.g. in temperature, space, time and in relation to others), in order to accomplish a goal (e.g., find mates, food, shelter).¹⁷

Definition of Mind in Pali Suttas and in Physiology is same in meaning. Mind has not Automatic function or located in any part of the body but it is dependent originated. Without cause and condition mind cannot originate and function.¹⁸ So mind related mental formation and afflictions also

⁷ WHO, Mental Disorders, 8 June, 2022, Page 2, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

⁸ Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders, Global Health Estimate, 2017, WHO/MSD/MER/20172, pdf Page 13

⁹ WHO, Mental Disorders, 8 June, 2022, Page 2, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

¹⁰ Mental Health in India: A Perspective, Virander S. Chauhan, Dr. Sukriti Chauhan, The Indian Express, New Delhi, 11 Feb, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/mental-health-in-india-a-perspective-anxiety-depression-stress-7764309/>

¹¹ Dhammasangani Pali, Cittakanda

¹² Vibhanga Sutta, Nidana Samyutta, Samyutta Nikaya Pali

¹³ Manual of Abhidhamma, Ven. Narada Thera, Page 24 (pdf, buddhanet.net)

¹⁴ Dhammapada, Cittavagga, Verse 37

¹⁵ BAM's A-Z Family Medical Encyclopedia, DK Sixth Ed, Dec-2014, Page – 190

¹⁶ Merriam Webster Dictionary

¹⁷ The future of the Mind, Michio Kaku, Penguin Books, UK, 2014, page 43

¹⁸ Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya Pali

originated and function with some causes and conditions. By removing these causes and conditions one can be free from mental and behavior disorders.

Mental and behavioral disorders and treatment in Pali Sutta

When Nakulapita was gone to visit the Buddha; He bowed before the Buddha and sat aside. The Buddha said to him that, O householder, may be your body is unhealthy but your mind should be healthy.¹⁹ On one occasion the Buddha told to the Monks that, there is illness of the body and illness of the mind. It is possible to find those who have been free of physical illness for 100 years, but it is impossible to find those free of illness of the mind even for an instant unless they are an *Arahant*. The major illnesses of the mind affecting the unenlightened are: Lack of contentment with possessions; Thirst for fame and acceptance; Putting forth effort to procure fame, acceptance and wealth, and; Visits supporters and restrains the calls of nature with the sole aim of procuring fame, acceptance and wealth.²⁰ On one occasion the Buddha told to the Monks about method of getting mental health, as - Monks, doctors give a purgative for warding off diseases caused by bile, diseases caused by phlegm, diseases caused by the internal wind property. There is a purging there; I don't say that there's not, but it sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. So I will teach you the noble purgative that always succeeds and never fails, a purgative whereby beings subject to birth are freed from birth; beings subject to aging are freed from aging; beings subject to death are freed from death; beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress & despair are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress & despair. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.²¹

These are some references in Pali Suttas what give importance to the mental health. The following sentences are reference to it. The Buddha said that, No other thing do I know, O monks that brings so much suffering as an undeveloped and uncultivated mind. An undeveloped and uncultivated mind truly brings suffering. No other thing do I know O monks that bring so much happiness as a developed and cultivated mind. A developed and cultivated mind truly brings happiness.²²

The Buddha told about Attachment, hatred and delusion what are the causes of mental and behavior disorders. In modern psychology, Separation Anxiety Disorder is related to an attachment; Aggressive Behavior is related to anger and hatred; Delusional Disorder is related to delusion. Depression and Anxiety Disorders are related to *Soka* and *Domanassa*. Fear and Phobias are related to *Bhaya*. Alcohol related Disorders, Substance induced Disorder and Tobacco related Disorder is related to breaking the fifth precept from *Pancaseel*. Misconduct of body, speech and mind is unwholesome in Buddhism and it is called Conduct disorder in modern psychology. These are some examples of mental and behavioral disorders what is compared with the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha taught us *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna* or *Ariya Atthangika Magga* to cease all kinds of mental and behavioral disorders. It is in brief as below -

On one occasion Ven. Sariputta was staying in Magadha in Nalaka Village. Then Jambukhadika the wanderer went to Ven. Sariputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After this exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Sariputta: "Stress, stress,' it is said, my friend Sariputta. Which type of stress [are they referring to]?"

"There are these three forms of stressfulness, my friend: the stressfulness of pain, the stressfulness of fabrication, the stressfulness of change. These are the three forms of stressfulness."

"But is there a path; is there a practice for the full comprehension of these forms of stressfulness?"

"Yes, there is a path; there is a practice for the full comprehension of these forms of stressfulness."

¹⁹ Nakulapita Sutta, Skandha Samyutta, Samyutta Nikaya Pali

²⁰ Roga Sutta, Chatukka Nipata, Anguttara Nikaya Pali

²¹ Virecana Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Dasaka Nipata, Thanisaro Bhikkhu, Access to Insight (Webpage)

²² Anguttara Nikaya Anthology, Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society, Srilanka, 2007, Page 1

"Then what is the path, what is the practice for the full comprehension of these forms of stressfulness?"

"Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path, my friend — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the path, this is the practice for the full comprehension of these forms of stressfulness."

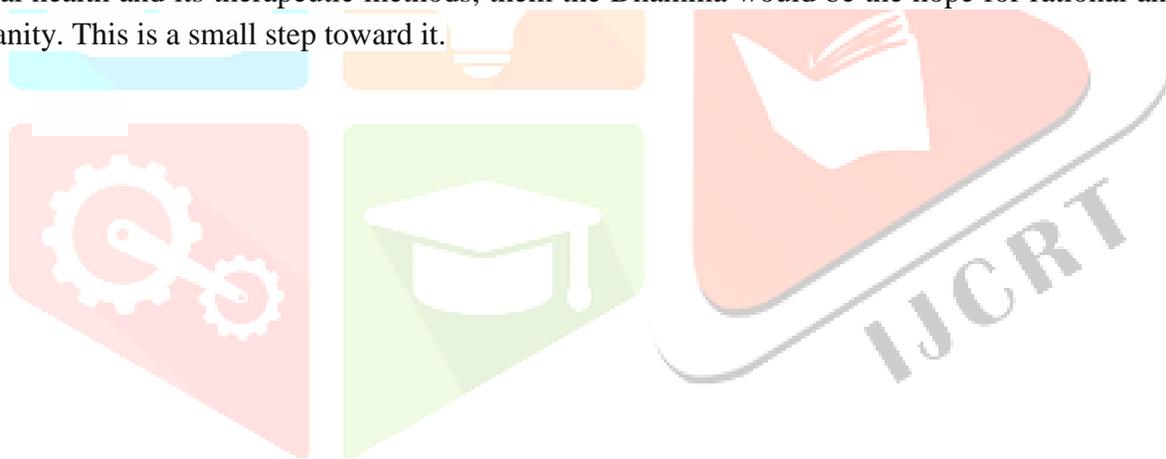
"It's an auspicious path, my friend, an auspicious practice for the full comprehension of these forms of stressfulness — enough for the sake of heedfulness."²³

If the modern psychotherapy is dealing with such problems so the teachings of the Buddha can deal with such disorders too. In short, we can say that, the mind is difficult to control; swiftly and lightly, it moves and lands wherever it pleases. It is good to tame the mind, for a well-tamed mind brings happiness.²⁴

This is a brief information about Mental and behavioral disorders and treatment in Pali Sutta

Conclusion

In this research paper I have presented some Pali Suttas what are related to mental health. Actually this subject is vast and practical because the mental disorders are not imaginary but as real as physical problems. The Buddha not only gives Dhamma talks to enlighten people but removal of suffering in their life. In modern time medical science and psychology is developing an area of physical and mental treatments. Buddhism has ample knowledge of it but we should study the Dhamma with the aspect of mental health and its therapeutic methods, then the Dhamma would be the hope for rational and scientific humanity. This is a small step toward it.



²³ Dukkha Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya, Jambhukhadaka Samyutta, Thanisaro Bhikkhu, Access to Insight (Webpage)

²⁴ Dhammapada, Citta Vagga, Verse 35