

THE CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF MEDHA AND MANAS IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Right from the days of *Vedic* hymns, the interest of the sages has been in understanding and in controlling the mental processes. The great *Gāyatri Mantra* is a prayer offered to the sun, the illuminator of the Universe, to stimulate and enlighten the mind. Another great *Vedic* hymn desires that man's resolves should be auspicious. Mind and intellect are among the phenomena on which man always failed to derive into a definite conclusion. Now it is the need of era to interpret and conclude those ancient concepts of *Medhā* and *Manas* in terms of modern medical and psychological sciences. The changes in the life styles and circumstances have changed the face of the modern man. For the successful survival of man in this competitive world there is a need for promotion of mental health and management of various

psychological and psychosomatic problems. Āyurveda being a holistic medical science considers *Śarira* and *Manas* both as *Rogādhisthāna* or seat of disease. Same way definition of *Swastha* emphasizes on spiritual, psychological and physical well being of metaphysical faculty in which *Manas* is regulator and most important factor.

KEYWORDS: Medha, Manas, Ayurveda, Mind soul, Health.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Ayu' stands for the inseparable concomitance of the *Śarīra* (body), *Indriya* (sense organs), *Sattva* (Mind) and *Ātmā* (soul). *Manas* is considered as the most important factor from "*Tridanāda Puruṣa*" for which Āyurveda is propagated. *Medhā* affects the happiness or misery of the 'Ayu' and is essential for fulfillment of the motive of Āyurved. It prevents an individual from indulging into *Prajñāparādha*. Longevity without *Medhā* is a kind of burden on society and for man too. That's why promotion of *Medhā* is desired and necessity of everyone. In *Samhitākāla* which was the golden period of Āyurved, *Ācāryas* have given much emphasis to promotion of *Medhā*. *Gurus* in that time used to give their *Śiṣyas* varieties of *Dravyas* to make them sharp and intelligent (*Medhāvī*). At present, each person and scientist is busy with such experiments to achieve high intellect and powerful mind. The drugs promoting *Medhā* (intellect) are termed as 'Medhya' drugs. Ayurvedic System of Medicine has mentioned several naturally occurring medicinal plants under the category 'Medhya'. By virtue of inducing mental upliftment as major influence several medicinal plants mentioned as '*Rasāyana Drugs*' in Ayurveda are primarily claimed as 'Medhya'. Further there is a special class of some *Rasāyana* drugs called '*Medhya Rasāyana*' which is supposed to be having specific influence on higher brain functions. "A healthy mind resides in the healthy Body". The mental health of the individual plays a significant role in the well being of a person. WHO also defines health as 'physical, mental and social well being.' During the past two decades interest and research in the field of mental health and mental disorders have grown rapidly. A recent study conducted by WHO has predicted that in terms of disease burden; by the year 2020 (that is in the next seventeen years) depressive illness will become the no.2 disease in the world overriding diabetes, cancer, arthritis etc. The concept of *Manas* is widely described in various *Samhitās* of Āyurveda. It includes both the angles *Prākṛta* and *Vikṛta*, which can be correlated with psychology and psychiatry of this era. The modern concept of *Manas* is somewhat different from the ancient concept but the major part is going parallel. According to Āyurveda, *Manas* is said to be *Antahkaranā* while in other doctrines *Manas*, *Buddhi* and *Ahamkāra* are described as *Trividha Antahkaranā*. Thus, it can be easily understood that Ayurvedic concept of *Manas* include *Buddhi* and *Ahamkāra* too. *Caraka* postulated various synonyms of 'Buddhi' in which 'Medhā' is one. *Bhagavad Gītā* is a holy text of *Hindus* in which elaborative description of human psychology is available; in short it can be firmly said that it is a complete psychology. According to *Bhagavad Gītā* the senses and the objects constantly blast the *Manas*. Here it is said that the self is like the lord of the chariot and the body is his chariot. The intellect is the charioteer

and the *Manas* the reins. The senses they say are the horses; the objects of the senses are the roads. The senses (horses) are to be controlled by the *Buddhi* (the charioteer) through the reins, the *Manas*. The *Manas* restrained or unrestrained by the *Buddhi* leads to the region of vivid joy or the cycle of birth and rebirth (*Samāśāra*) respectively.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Conceptual material

For this study, the basic and conceptual materials have been collected from the Āyurvedic classics viz Brāhatrayī and Laghutrayī mainly the, Caraka Samhitā and Suśruta Samhitā and other classics with the available commentaries as well as various reference books to be reviewed. Parts of modern medical literature, modern psychiatry and psychological literature, seminar proceedings, journals etc. have been compiled and analyzed.

Historical background

Analysis of above quotation reflects that the quest of attaining *Medhā* is not today's gift but its roots are found since *Vedic* era. It was performed in different ways like, in the form of prayer or entreaty, usage of certain drugs etc. In *Rigveda*, the speed of mind, curiosity for methods of mental happiness, prayers for mental happiness and methods of increasing *Medhā* (intelligence) have been described. In *Yajurved*, *Varūṇa*, *Agni*, *Prajāpati*, *Indra* and *Vāyu Devtā* are prayed to bliss with *Medhā*. Then after *Purāṇas* also proceed it. In *Garūḍa Purāṇa* *Brāhmī Ghrīta* (9 *Dravyas*) has been called as *Smṛti* and *Medhākara*. Its procedure and contains has also been mentioned in this quotation. It is clearly indicating the importance of *Medhā* and similar psychic faculties since that time.

Paribhāṣā (Definition)

Amarkośa has explained *Medhā* which retains the *Dhī* (*Buddhi*).

In *Śabdakalpadrūmā* means one type of *Buddhi* which has the power of retaining the knowledge for a long period. Due to *Medhā* a person will be able to obtain the knowledge of existing objects and hence person becomes learned. In Monnier William's dictionary the *Medhā* is understood by the meaning mental vigour or power, intelligence or prudence, wisdom, retention of knowledge for long period residue of which cannot be further expressed in proper time. Practically the word '*Medhā*' is used to denote high intellect. The word '*Medhāvī*' is used for the person who is the knower of various *Śāstras* (literature) and having

Pratyutpanna mati. Sometimes '*Medhā*' is also used for extraordinary recollection power. But according to Āyurveda, it shows just one phase of the memorizing process. Ācārya Dīkṣanā defines '*Medhā*' very clearly as the capacity to retain various texts. In nutshell it can be concluded that *Medhā* is the faculty of *Buddhi* which has the power to retain (grasp) the experiences or knowledge and when needed it recalls that retained knowledge as it is.

Paryāyas (Synonyms) of medhā

From the *Vedic* era the word *Medhā* is being used. Other words which bear almost similar meaning to it have also postulated in various classics.

In *Aitareya Upaniṣada* *Medhā* has been depicted as synonym of *Paramātmā*.

Here *Medhā* means the ability to retain the experiences

Buddhi 2. Manīsā 3. Mati 4. Prajñā 5. Upalabdhi 6. Pratipat 7. Cetanā 8. Jñapti 9. Śemusā
Dhisānā 11. Samvitti 12. Chit 13. Preksā 14. Dhī 15. Vijñāna 16. Pratibhā 17.
Drasatī 18. Smṛti

All these words are having different composition of letters and meanings from one another. But still they are used as a synonym in broad sense. In Āyurveda, *Dhī*, *Smṛti*, *Buddhi* are used commonly. So it is necessary to know these faculties also before explaining or understanding *Medhā* in totality.

Buddhi

A careful screening of the literature prevailing since the time immemorial reveals that, the term '*Buddhi*' has been in frequent use. However, sometimes it has remained a matter of philosophical thinking whereas sometimes it constituted a part of the intellectual domain. The intellectual concept of '*Buddhi*' has again remained a point of great importance and various aphorisms have been in tradition of Indian literature. It would be worth mentioning that for different virtues of individual different deities were considered as the controlling authorities of the concerned virtues. For example, *Kubera* was the controlling authority of the finance and the wealth, *Aśvini* were the controlling authorities of medical science. In the same way, Goddess *Saraswati* was symbolized as the controller of the intellect. Even then, *Gāyatri* was also supposed to provide an individual with the intellect and in *Vedas* and *Upaniṣada* some hymns related with the *Gāyatri* are available at the same time (*Śuklayajurvedīya Rudra Ashtādhyāi* 9/2). *Rudra* is prayed to provide with super intellect and other intellectual

faculties. (*Rudra-asādhyaī* 8/7) *Indra* has been also prayed to bless an individual with the provision of intellect. Though the topic is mainly related with *Medhā* but no direct reference is available regarding the evolution of it. While on the other hand in all *Hindu* Philosophies references are available regarding the process of origin of the universe in which *Buddhi* (*Mahat*) is the first evolute. As *Medhā* is used as synonym of *Buddhi* at many places, the evolution of *Buddhi* can be understood as of *Medhā* too.

Evolution of the buddhi (Mahat)

When describing the evolution of the universe different theories were postulated by the different schools of thought. The *Prakṛti* as described by the Indian sciences is the sole source of the creation of the universe **Mahat** – After the *Samyoga*, *Prakṛti* loses its *Trigunā sāmyāvasthā* & also *Avyaktāvasthā* to release manifold *Trigunāvaisāmyayukta tatvās*. Out of which *Mahat tatva* is the first one, it is also called as *Buddhitatva*. The term *Mahat* signifies all pervasive nature of *Buddhi tatva*. *Buddhi* is eternal and not eternal both. It is the main psychical instrument. It is the principal organ which controls the two other internal organs '*Ahamkāra* and *Manas*' (mind) and also the external sense organs. The importance of *Buddhi* can be proved because it directly brings about the experiences of the self while other senses transfer their experiences through the mediation of *Buddhi*. It is alone the receptor of all subconscious impressions. The intellect being a principal organ pervades all the sense organs and always produces the result in the form of knowledge. The importance of intellect can be inferred from the possibility of recollection which is of the nature of meditation, the highest of all mental functions. But without the help of external sense organs intellect can never function as an instrument. The intellect is only motivated to work for the experiences and enjoyment of the self. The main functions of intellect are as certainment and resolution. It also collects past experiences and memories. (*Sāṃkhya Kārikā*-23, *Sāṃkhya Sūtra* 2/13, *Sāṃkhya Bhāṣya* 8/12, *Science and Philosophy of Indian Medicine*) The philosophical aspect is not much related to the present dissertation work so it is not dealt here in detail and directly come to the aspect of *Buddhi*, which is a part of the intellectual domain.

Inter relationship of buddhi, Medhā and Smṛiti

After critical examination of *Buddhi*, *Medhā* and *Smṛiti* it could be pointed out that these are the steps of same process. One is incomplete without the rest. The process of recollection takes place properly only and only after the *Buddhi*, *Medhā* and *Smṛiti* unites. So in this

sense they are undifferentiated. This could be understood well by comparing the cognition process with computer. In this computerized world everybody is familiar with the utility and need of computer. The important data is first entered, stored and after some days, months or even after many years also it can be recollected just as it was stored. Human brain is also a one kind of computer. Only difference is that computer can not think itself because it is *Acetana*, while human being is *Cetana* (conscious) with the presence of *Ātmā* (soul) and all the actions performed by the conjugation of *Manas*. In computer, datas are first inputed externally then it interprets this data and converts it into binary digits 0 and 1 (computer language) for storage. Then it stores this data on Hard disk, CDs, Pen drives etc. storage devices. Then by time, as per the need this stored data gets recollected again by converting it in to general language. Here computer is able to put forward only those facts which has been entered and safely stored. Almost similar process of Memory conducts by human brain. For the cognition sense objects conjoins with senses and senses with *Manas*. *Buddhi vyāpāra* (discrimination) follows just after it. *Buddhi* works on it by reasoning and logic and reacts accordingly. If there is no action to be taken then they gained knowledge gets stored for further use. Retention of cognition takes place under the area of *Medhā* (storage device). When any stimulant comes against, those stored experience comes in mind. Recollection happens with the help of *Smṛti*.

Thus, in humans also if the knowledge or experiences are not encoded and retained properly then all the efforts of recalling would be in vain. So, *Smṛti* needs systematic interpretation and retention. In this way *Smṛti* produces when encoding, retention and recollection of the experiences unites. In which *Buddhi* helps in encoding, *Medhā* in retention and *Smṛti* facilitates recollection. In short encoding is must in *Smṛti*, only those subject could be recalled which has been encoded before. The same way if retained knowledge is not recollected it is of no use. After this description, it can be traced out that though *Buddhi*, *Medhā* and *Smṛti* are having different meanings and functions they cannot work independently. But they work together and seem similar most of the times. Above discussion shows that *Medhā* is a broad term which comprises the mental faculties like *Buddhi* and *Smṛti* also, which are again interrelated with each other and accordingly the *Medhā* can be subdivided into the following faculties.

- 1) *Viveka śakti* (Power of discrimination)
- 2) *Grahaṇa śakti* (Power of grasping)
- 3) *Dhāraṇa śakti* (Power of retention)

4) *Smaraṇa śakti* (power of recollection)

Role of medhā in Health and Disease

Since there is very close relationship between *Medhā* and *Manas*, any derangement in *Manas* will also lead to deranged *Medhā*. While narrating the “*Linga of Puruṣa*” *Caraka* has pointed out that *Īchā* (desire), *Dveṣa* (hatred), *Sukha* (happiness), *Duhkha* (misery), *Prayatna* (effort), *Cetā* (consciousness), *Dhṛti* (stability), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Smṛti* (memory) and *Ahmākāra* (ego) are the indicators of *Puruṣa* and it can be witnessed only in a living person. (Ca.Sa.1/70-73). While giving the definition of *Swāsthya*, *Suśruta* has stressed on three characteristics which are relevant in the present context they are *Prasanna Ātmā*, *Prasanna Manas* and *Prasanna Indriya*.

Medhya Diets and Regimens in samhitās

Suśruta has described a separate chapter “*Medhāyuskāmiya Rasāyana cikitsā*” which clearly indicates the importance of *Medhā* in that period also. In this chapter he has mentioned various *Medhya Yogas*. At the end of this chapter *Medhākara Gaṇa* has been mentioned. Constant study, discussions (on philosophical and scientific topics), discussions in other subjects and residence with professors or men learned in the respective branches of knowledge, are the best means for improving memory and expanding one's intellect. These are some *Āhāra-Ausādha* having *Medhya* properties mentioned in *Brhatṭrayī*.

Abhayā Phala Kāśmarya Phala Mātulunga

Rasona Vāstuka Śatāvārī

Bhallātaka Kṣīra palāṇḍu Tāla Phala

Yava Gaganāmbu Kṣīra

Navanīta Ghrīta Mahāghrīta

Taila Erandā taila Yavatiktā taila

Tikta Rasa Gomutra Kuśmāṇḍaka

Kūrma Mayura Mamśa Sarpa Mamśa

Krakara Mamśa Tittira Mamśa

The Brain and Nervous system

The nervous system is broken down into two major systems: Central Nervous System and Peripheral Nervous System. The **Central Nervous System** consists of the brain and the spinal cord. The **Cerebral Cortex**, which is involved in a variety of higher cognitive,

emotional, sensory, and motor functions, is more developed in humans than any other animal. It is what seen when pictures a human brain, the gray matter with a multitude of folds covering the **cerebrum**. The brain is divided into two symmetrical hemispheres: **left** (language, the 'rational' half of the brain, associated with analytical thinking and logical abilities) and **right** (more involved with musical and artistic abilities). The brain is also divided into four lobes:

- **Frontal** – (Motor cortex) motor behavior, expressive language, higher level cognitive processes, and orientation to person, place, time, and situation.
- **Parietal** – (Somato sensory Cortex) involved in the processing of touch, pressure, temperature, and pain.
- **Occipital** – (Visual cortex) interpretation of visual information.
- **Temporal** – (Auditory cortex) receptive language (understanding language), as well as memory and emotion.

Typically the brain and spinal cord act together, but there are some actions, such as those associated with pain, where the spinal cord acts even before the information enters the brain for processing. The spinal cord consists of the **Brainstem** which is involved in life sustaining functions. Damage to the brainstem is very often fatal. Other parts of the brainstem include the **Medulla Oblongata**, which controls heartbeat, breathing, blood pressure, digestion; **Reticular Activating System** (Reticular Formation), involved in arousal and attention, sleep and wakefulness, and control of reflexes;

- **Pons** – Regulates states of arousal, including sleep and dreaming.
- **Cerebellum** – Balance, smooth movement, and posture
- **Thalamus** – "*Central switching station*" – relays incoming sensory information (except olfactory) to the brain
- **Hypothalamus** – Controls the autonomic nervous system, and therefore maintains the body's homeostasis, controls body temperature, metabolism, and appetite. Translate extreme emotions into physical responses.
- **Limbic System** – Controls emotional expression, particularly the emotional component of behavior, memory and motivation.
- **Amygdala** – Attaches emotional significance to information and mediates both defensive and aggressive behavior.

- **Hippocampus** – Involved more in memory, and the transfer of information from short-term to long-term memory.

The **Peripheral Nervous System** is divided into two sub-systems.

Somatic nervous system – primary function is to regulate the actions of the skeletal muscles, often thought of as mediating voluntary activity. The other sub-system, called the **Autonomic Nervous System**, regulates primarily involuntary activity such as heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, and digestion. Although these activities are considered involuntary, they can be altered either through specific events or through changing our perceptions about a specific experience. This system is further broken down into two complimentary systems: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous Systems. The **Sympathetic Nervous System** controls what has been called the "*Fight or Flight*" phenomenon because of its control over the necessary bodily changes needed when a person is faced with a situation where he may need to defend himself or escape. In order to return everything to normal, the **Parasympathetic Nervous System** kicks in. This system is slow acting, unlike its counterpart, and may take several minutes or even longer to get the body back to where it was before the scare. These two subsystems are at work constantly shifting the body to more prepared states and more relaxed states. Every time a potentially threatening experience occurs (e.g., someone slams on their breaks in front of him, one hear a noise in his house at night, one hear a loud bang, a stranger taps on the shoulder unexpectedly), the body reacts. The constant shifting of control between these two systems keeps the body ready for the current situation.

Neurotransmitters

A Neuron is a specialized nerve cell that receives, processes, and transmits information to other cells in the body. There are a fixed number of neurons, which means they do not regenerate. About 10,000 neurons die every day, but since it starts out with between ten and 100 billion (Hooper & Teresi, 1987), only loses about 2% over the lifetime. Information comes into the neuron through the Dendrites from other neurons. It then continues to the Cell Body – (soma) which is the main part of the neuron, which contains the nucleus and maintains the life sustaining functions of the neuron. The soma processes information and then passes it along the Axon. At the end of the axon are bulb-like structures called Terminal Buttons that pass the information on to glands, muscles, or other neurons.

(Anatomy of a Neuron)

Information is carried by biochemical substances called **neurotransmitters**. The terminal buttons and the dendrites of other neurons do not touch, but instead pass the information containing neurotransmitters through a Synapse. Once the neurotransmitter leaves the axon, and passes through the synapse, it is caught on the dendrite by what are termed Receptor Sites. Neurotransmitters have been studied quite a bit in relation to psychology and human behavior. What a person has found is that several neurotransmitters play a role in the way he behave, learn, the way he feel, and sleep. And, some play a role in mental illnesses. The following are those neurotransmitters which play a significant role in our mental health.

Acetylcholine – Involved in *voluntary* movement, Learning, *Memory* and Sleep

- Too much acetylcholine is associated with depression, and too little in the hippocampus has been associated with *dementia*.

Dopamine – correlated with movement, *attention*, and learning

- Too much dopamine has been associated with schizophrenia, and too little is associated with some forms of depression as well as the muscular rigidity and tremors found in Parkinson's disease.

Norepinephrine – associated with eating, alertness

- Too little norepinephrine has been associated with depression, while an excess has been associated with schizophrenia.

Epinephrine – involved in energy, and glucose metabolism

- Too little epinephrine has been associated with depression.

Serotonin – plays a role in mood, sleep, appetite, and impulsive and aggressive Behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The section of Discussion is the very important part of the study. The discussion deals with a logical reasoning of the facts to establish the relation between the *Kāraṇa* and the *Kārya*. The discussion has been done on every chapter of the conceptual study, the reason behind the selection Probable mode of action of *Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā* has been discussed thoroughly. At the same time the unbiased reasoning for the achievements and the failures has been done.

CONCLUSION

All the above said points are summarized and concluded in the section of Conclusion on the basis of available ancient Ayurvedic and modern literatures of the present studies. On the

completion of any work the achievements as well as the drawbacks have to be narrated. These can be placed under the umbrella of the Conclusions or the *Nisṅkarsṅa*. Under the *Pancāvayava Vākya* viz *Pratijñā*, *Hetu*, *Drṅsṅtṅānta*, *Upanaya* and the *Nigamana* of the *Anumāna pramāṅa*, the *Nigamana* is the Conclusion. Thus, any research work is to be completed by giving a final word/ conclusion which reflects the work accomplished as well as paves the way for the further works. The conclusions based on the proper discussions lead us to assess and evaluate the whole work done in a short time. The conclusions of this present work can be enumerated as:

- In Āyurvedic classics the word '*Medhā*' has been used mainly in 2 ways viz. (1) *Grahaṅa Śakti* (grasping power) and *Dhāraṅa Śakti* (retention power). *Buddhi*, *Smṅti*, *Dhī* etc. words have also been used as the synonyms of *Medhā*. Ācārya Caraka has mentioned to examine the *Medhā* by inference of *Grahaṅa Śakti*. The subject is critically analyzed by reasoning and logic and then is understood by *Dhī*. This whole process can be taken as '*Grahaṅa*' that can be considered as grasping, which is the first stage of the Memory process.
- *Buddhi* is described as *Jñāna*. *Cakṅubuddhi*, *Srotrabuddhi* etc. five kinds of perceptions (*Buddhi*) is said to be produced by five *Indriyas* (sense organs).
- *Medhā* is the faculty of *Buddhi* and *Buddhi* is the *Guṅa* of *Ātmā*, both are present in each and every object of the Universe, whether *Cetana* or *Acetana*, but for its manifestation essentially requires to be associated with *Manas*. Hence is said to have evolved only in the sixth month of Foetal life. The perception (*Buddhi*) produced by *Indriyas* is determinative but still it is *Kṅśanṅika* (transient). Repetition or regular practice (*Abhyāsa*) of the subject converts this *Buddhi* into *Medhā*.

In modern medical science, *Buddhi* is generally known as intellect and it is said that the foundation of an intelligent citizen is laid during the early childhood of an individual.

- *Abhiruci*, *Pranṅidhāna*, *Abhyāsa*, *Samṅbandha* etc. are some factor that affects the *Medhā*.
- *Sādhaka Pitta* is responsible for the manifestation of good quality of *Medhā*.
- The *Dosṅas*, *Dhātus* and *Ojas* which appears to influence the *Medhā*, actually affects the *Śarīra* and *Srotas* through which the *Medhā* is manifested. Hence excellence of *Dhātus* will show a positive impact on the functioning of *Medhā*.
- *Pitta* and *Sattva Guṅa* dominant persons are possessed with sharp intellect due to the *Tikṅśnṅa Guṅa* of *Pitta*. *Pitta* is *Sattva Guṅa* dominant and *Sattva Guṅa* is *Ākāśa*

Mahābūta Pradhāna and *Apratighātatva* is the *Guṇa* of *Ākāśa* hence whole process runs without any obstruction which results in good *Medhā*.

- *Vāta Prakṛti* persons have quick grasping ability but weak recalling while *Pitta Prakṛti* persons are called as *Medhāvī*.
- *Medhā* preserves the *Samśkāras* (experiences) of the previous lives and travels along with the *Manas* in every birth.
- In the *Āyurved* classics *Medhā* is a faculty of *Buddhi* or is a specific psychic ability which is responsible for encoding and retaining a large amount of knowledge.
- The change in the *Medhā* according to *Vayah* is again specific to each individual and depends on many other factors eg. environmental, dietary etc. Hence based on these factors the chronology of the status of *Buddhi* may change. eg. a person having *Manda Buddhi* at the age of 20 or 21 yrs. may go to improve his *Buddhi* at an age of 40 yrs. due to changes in the other factors.
- Decline of *Medhā* starts after 40 years hence it should be nourished by extraneous supplements to maintain its normal functioning at this age.
- *Darśanas* as well as *Āyurved* accepted *Manas* to be *Nitya*.

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