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INTEGRATION OF MIND, BODY, AND SOUL: A CONCEPTUAL GUIDANCE TO A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

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Abstract:

The current conceptual paper focuses on the integration of the mind body and soul and its relation to well-being from a conceptual perspective. Over the last decade, mental health problems in both developed and developing countries are in an alarming rate. Mental health defines as a productive condition in which internal stability allows the person to utilize their capacity to match society's values via basic cognitive and social skills, feeling expression, empathy, and flexibility. This paper explains an overview of the mind, body and soul framework using Tamil ancient scriptural text through a qualitative methodology of hermeneutics theory interpretation. Finding involves in-depth inquiry and analysis of Thirukkural, its practice and the literature in terms of its context and content for interpretation with regards to mind, body, soul in a holistic manner. Future directions in integrative research are proposed based on the scriptural text of Thirukkural.

Keywords:

Mind-Body-Soul; Integrated Health; Eastern Context; Complimentary Medicine.

Introduction

Philosophy refers to the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline. Philosophy is also seen as a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour. Holism is the philosophy of understanding people by addressing all factor associated with them. There are many interpretations to the term holism which is spoken of frequently and used in many disciplines (Patterson, 2001). Over the last decade, mental health problems in both developed and developing countries are in an alarming

rate. Mental health defines as a productive condition in which internal stability allows the person to utilize their capacity to match society's values via basic cognitive and social skills, feeling expression, empathy, and flexibility (Galderisi, S. et al., 2015). Though holism theory was coined in 1929, this concept of holism has been long used in ancient non-Western societies and cultures such as that in the Tamil Siddas' tradition, which is a branch of Indian tantric system, where holism is being practiced. According to Mitchel (2013), a holistic approach to non-westerners was about embracing mankind with an interconnecting focus between the mind, body, and soul aspects which differs from the mainstream western culture perspective. Fosarelli, (2002) mentioned that the mind refers to processes of mental, while the body is said to include the biological, chemical, and physical aspect of a person. One reason why it is so important to consider the entire being is that the whole possess emergent properties. These qualities or characteristics that are present in the whole cannot be observed by merely looking at bits and pieces (Michaelson, Pickett, King, Davison, 2016). Thus, the degree of internal equilibrium varies according to the individual harmonious state of body and mind.

A Brief Background On The Integration Of Mind Body And Soul

Mind body and soul integration as a way of addressing mental health, for a healthy lifestyle was once believed as a forbidden matter for scientific exploration due to its spiritual element in it. Currently, it became a prominent topic well discussed in various research areas like health, social, and behavioural sciences. This integration is the multi modalities of acceptance in healing an individual (Lee et al., 2009). Integration of Mind body and soul is an incorporated of complementary therapy practices as well as traditional medicine practices. Both are used not as separate entities but rather in conjunction with one another (Lee et al., 2009). Spirituality was an influential resilience and was seen as a sustaining force for multiple race and ethnic groups that helped them face inequalities and hardships mentally, emotionally and at the same time indirectly give physical strength. Therefore, studies correlating mind body and soul concepts were explored and lifestyle associated matters accelerated in recent decades. As a result, significant systematic research investigated religious and spiritual aspects in physical health, whereas only a few studies examine the integration of mind body and soul in mental health leading to healthy lifestyle. Although studies bridging spirituality and health are remarkable, the extent of the research to endorse integration of the mind body and soul involvement in human health is still far behind due to its sceptical resistance. Therefore, looking at an overview of the mind, body and soul within the scholarly ancient Tamil scriptural text Thirukkural will be a starting point for future directions in integrative research based on Thirukkural.

Thirukkural, Ancient Tamil Literature

Thirukkural is known as a highly ethical text (Muniapan & Rajantheran, 2011) enlightening Tamil literature delivered by man to man in the *post-sangam* period of the 31st century BC. Thirukkural written by Thiruvalluvar, who also known as *Deivappulavar* or *Poyyappulavar*. The term *thiru* represents holy or sacred, and *Kural* means shortened or condensed (Chandran, 2017). This literature text contains 133 chapters with ten couplets or *kurals* in each chapter resulting in 1330 couplets. The categorization of sections and chapters in Thirukkural was done much later by other scholars after the emergence of Thirukkural. Based on the categorization, the couplet resembles a fourfold life goals composed of righteous living (*dharma/aram*), materials living (*porul*), love and passion (*inbam*), and release from the rebirth cycle (*mukthi/veedu*) (Nagarajan, 2005). Thirukkural just narrated the first three goals since the fourth goal can be achieved by leading life based on the three highly ethical principles set by Thirukkural. All three parts of thirukkural emphasize every aspect of human life and provide ethical and moral content beyond boundaries.

Qualitative Interpretive Methodology

According to Oliver (2015), hermeneutics is a discipline that sets itself upon the task of specifying and justifying *a methodology of interpretation*, originally of texts, but by extension of many other interpretation It has also been called the science or art of interpretation.

Dyer, (2010), mentioned that hermeneutics refers to the practice and theory of interpretation. It involves understanding and interpretation that could be justified. It describes a theory of understanding and explains diverse methodologies for interpreting texts, objects, and concepts. Hermeneutics places its concerns in making data collected to be communicable and intelligible. Hermeneutics stretches up across from history epochs, methods and all the disciplines in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences (Oliver, 2015).

Integration Of Mind Body And Soul Through Thirukkural

Mental Health

Mental health comprises of an individual's reactions, psychological aspects, and societal well-being. It touches on how a person feel, think, and act. It also aids in deciding how stress is handled, how an individual relate to others, and how healthy choices are being made (Svalastog et. al., 2017). Mental health is crucial at all stages of life. It is a central and important component of health. The World Health Organisation, (2022) constitution states that mental health is more than just the absence of mental ailment or disabilities. It is important to note that an individual's mental health can change over time, depending on many factors. Kural verse 111 highlights that a person should consider his reactions carefully with equal regards among the 3 divisions of men namely friends, enemies, and strangers. A person should be able to think and act accordingly and evaluate the strength and weakness from all three divisions. Once this is done the individual is able have a clarity in the mind and his reactions will not be based on partiality (Mani, 2019). In Kural verse 113 Thirukkural warns readers that in an event, though there are acquisitions that can be advantages and bring gain, one may be tempted to possess them. However, if that gain is a product of partiality, then that gain or acquisition should be avoided. The clarity of mind should be present under both circumstances which are losses and gains as they are part and parcel of life, Kural verse 115. Acceptance of this brings an individual to reality.

There are ten categories of mental health disorders identified such as depression (common cold) (Hasan et al., 2020), anxiety (Hasan et al., 2020), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Pehlivanidis et al., 2020), bipolar disorder (McIntyre et al., 2020), Schizophrenia (Geretsegger et al., 2017), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia, addiction and substance abuse, eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating), and borderline personality disorder. Every disease associated with body or mind is considered to have psychological and spiritual components interlaced with it (Kang, 2010). Thus, intervention composed integration of aspects within the mind body and soul is crucial for an individual to maintain a balance and healthy lifestyle. Thirunavukkarasu, (2011) proposed a utilitarian concept of mental health. Fundamental to this thought is the conceptualisation of the living entity whose health is called 'mental health'. Mental health is described as a state of well-being where every individual realises their own potential, have the ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to the community (Thirunavukkarasu, 2011).

The perception of mind is not unknown to the early Tamils and their civilization. The divine poet Thiruvalluvar who wrote Thirukkural refers to it in verse 457 (Mani, 2019) where he mentioned the mind and its mental faculties are very vital for an individual's progress. Kural verse 131 states that the way an individual carries himself makes a great influence on his presence. Propriety of conduct leads to eminence. It should therefore be preserved more than life. Hence the clarity of mind is vital.

Physical Health

A state of being free from injury or illness is referred to as physical health. Components that cover physical health would be healthy diet, nutrition, healthy weight, personal hygiene, sleep and etc. Optimisation of physical health can be looked into four main phases. The first phase the cause of the ailment, followed by the nutritional discipline aspect, treatment of the ailments and finally the pillars of treatment (WHO 2022).

In conventional medicine, physical health plays an important part in an individual's overall wellbeing. A long-term health problem would be a chronic physical illness that will not go away for example diabetes, asthma, arthritis. Physical illnesses which are chronic can be managed, but they cannot be cured in accordance with this practice system. However, in homeopathy, it is believed that physical illness or disease is often associated with mind and emotional (soul) components derived from social environment. Samuel Hahnemann the German physician who was the father of homeopathy emphasised in his *Organon of Medicine* that in homeopathy, treatment is given to an individual for physical ailments treating the whole patient rather than isolated symptoms (O'Reilly 1996). According to O'Reilly (1996), 'Like cure's like' is the common principle used in this treatment where it uses minute doses of naturally derived medicine to stimulate the patient's own life force. Hence a homeopathic practitioner's diagnosis includes physical symptoms such as feverishness, current emotions derived from social surroundings and psychological state such as anxiety and restlessness, and the person's constitution which is the general type of a person for example a sulphur, or phosphorus individual is considered in the treatment plan (O'Reilly 1996).

Similarly, according to siddhar Thirumoolar's concept of food, it is a clear practice that proper food diet acts as medicine. The dietary intake places an important role in siddhar medicine in maintaining the balanced in mankind. Similarly, Thiruvalluvar spoke on food metabolism in kural 947. Kural 947 stating that if a person tends to eat beyond his body's capacity to metabolise the energy consumed, then it is noted that the individual is prone to develop all types of diseases. This can lead to an imbalance in one's physical health which as a consequence can affect the mind of a person.

Social Health

According to the constitutional definition of World Health Organisation, social health is a state of wellbeing, a positive height of health (WHO, 2022). It is a person's capability to handle and react based on diverse social environments. A person being socially healthy refers to an increased gradation of happiness that comprises a sense of belonging and concerns for others. Healthy relationship engages good communication, and civic mind-ness. Whereas being alone, self-centred, and violent will contribute to ill effects on health causing stress and depression which are a threat to the person and others. Social seclusion and social exclusion, both are causes of poor chances of survival with reduced degree in quality of life, depression, and increased risk for chronic diseases. These in turn can lead to poor mental and physical health as well.

According to Magyar, ed. al. (2019), there namely five dimensions of social health and wellbeing which are social acceptance, social actualisation, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration.

Social Integration denotes to the emotion of being chunk of a society. It mirrors the regularity of an individual with the others alongside with the sense of fitting. Lack of social integrational tends to lead to estrangement from a society and the feeling of rejection is felt by the individual. At all times humbleness needs to be established. The world has the eternal God as their first. This is emphasized to address the soul, self, or the I element in us to be humble as it is established that there is another force who is superior to the self. Further humbleness and humility are presented in verse three of Thirukkural where it denotes that an individual who reunites and become oneness with the almighty who occupies the mind, shall flourish at the highest planes of the worlds.

However, social contribution tends to refer to the feeling of a person's value in a society. It mirrors self-obligation of an individual towards others to see if the behaviour of the individual affects the society as a whole (Kayalvizhy, 2021). To contribute socially, an individual must feel liable to give something prized to the world. If the individual is not able to do so, then person may feel estranged from the society (Keyes, 1998). Another element in social health is to investigate social coherence which is a state where a group or a person interacts with one another. Interaction among these individuals contributes a rise to new skills, ability, and ideas to maintain rationality when faced with undesired and stressful life events. On the other hand, social actualisation refers to positive comfort level with others. There is openness to new visions, skills, efforts, and experiences to grow persistently. Individuals who can visualise this potential in themselves are considered to be socially healthy. This is because the individual realises that they have capabilities to make society a healthier, and better and in return, the individual's will be the recipients of the social evolution. Final element would be social acceptance, where it reflects the ability of a person to acknowledge the virtuous and tolerate the negative within the society to be able to fit in the community where an individual might act like others around him (Magyar, ed. al. 2019). Individuals demonstrate this behaviour to experience comfort and to be contented in society.

A person with good understanding of self (soul) and who accepts both positive and negative in self is acknowledged to have a good mental and social health. Thus, it can be said that self-acceptance is essential for social recognition of a community. According to Thirukkural verse 140, people who don't know how to live integrated and agreeable in the world are still considered ignorant though they may have learnt many things. One should keep in mind that even in places that retaliation is possible, bear with reproach even when retaliation is possible. It would be even better if one can forget it. Forget and forgive creates a balance within the self. These are the two key elements in maintaining a healthy mind, body and soul. If this is not done, in the long run, one will not be able to cope with the stress faced due to selfishness and vengeance. It is further highlighted in verse 127- that one may keep anything unguarded. But guarding the tongue is vital. Otherwise, one will be caught with errors in their speech and the consequences that will bring misery. Most of the misunderstanding and disputes are caused by miscommunication and unintentional words. One must initiate useful communication and not merely speak wasteful words that generates wasteful thoughts.

Since ancient scriptures passed through each generation by oral method and later parts were only recorded, the question may arise if these traditional mind concepts apply to the modern

world. To answer this, the most recent Tamil literature text of Thirukkural brings to the mental health frame as it explains essential qualities of humankind like pure mind (*kural* 34), health (*kural* 942), and personality (*kural* 280). From the above analysis, a set of hypotheses as mentioned in below part propose to re-evaluate the Thirukkural in psychology.

Hypotheses:

1. The higher the integration of Mind-Body-Soul, the higher the adaptation of healthy lifestyle.
2. The higher Thirukkural virtues being incorporated, the higher the likelihood for a healthy lifestyle.

Findings

Finding involves in-depth inquiry and analysis of Thirukkural, its practice and the literature in terms of its context and content for interpretation with regards to mind, body, soul in a holistic manner. The findings are integrated and concluded accordingly. This step involves adopting the context, facts and interpretations from the study and presenting the subject matter for contemporary readers.

Future Directions

Currently, the researcher involves in Thirukkural interpretation. Each Thirukkural couplet will be thoroughly checked for content accuracy. The researcher expected to find out the hidden meaning of the couplets on integration of mind body and soul with regards to mental health issues. The sequel paper from this manuscript tends to focus on the connection between Thirukkural on mental health issues. From the findings, the researcher may be able to come out with a new framework for handling mental health problems using Thirukkural. This study is an initial attempt to understand Thirukkural connectivity toward a healthy lifestyle.

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