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A comparison between the symptoms of schizophrenia and experiences of spiritual growth

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Abstract

The main objective of the study is to compare the symptoms of schizophrenia and symptoms of spiritual growth. The study was done by compiling symptoms of schizophrenia and characteristic features of spiritual growth as indicated by psychiatric textbooks and classical spiritual texts from Ayurveda, the Bhagavad-Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and Yoga-vasiṣṭha. The study was done to see the similarities and differences between the symptoms of schizophrenia and the experiences of spiritual growth as described in scriptures. This study found that there are similarities in positive symptoms (like delusions of some kinds, hallucinations) and some experiences of spiritual growth. In schizophrenia, a person will not have the freedom to come out of it. However, in spiritual growth, a person will have the freedom to come out of it. In schizophrenia, a person enters an active phase without her awareness. In spiritual growth, a person enters symptomatic phases with her awareness intact. In schizophrenia, negative symptoms are predominantly present, but in spiritual growth, negative symptoms are not typically present. In spiritual growth, tranquility of the mind is the criterion. In schizophrenia, tranquility of the mind will be absent

Introduction

The relationship between spiritual experience and schizophrenia (psychosis) is a significant issue. Psychologists and psychiatrists are looking at similarities and differences between experiences, hoping to shed light on natural processes and treatment of psychosis. Many studies are available in this area. A study done to see the relationship between mystical experience and episodes of acute psychosis is available.¹ Buckley (1981) revealed that the appearance of a powerful sense of noise, a heightening of perception, feelings of communion with divine entities, and exclamatory experiences may be common to both schizophrenia and spiritual growth. The psychological descriptions

seen in acute psychosis is not a component of the accounts of mystical experiences. Auditory hallucinations are less common than visual hallucinations in mystical experiences and one subtype of schizophrenia is less distinct from mystical experiences. Here the term “acute” describes brief psychotic episodes with a very short onset of symptoms. And a study done to design a diagnostic category ‘Mystical Experience with Psychotic Features (MEPF)’ within DSM-3 guidelines is also available.² It describes the presence of a psychotic state during an essentially religious experience. This study further explains criteria of MEPF that overlap with mystical experiences generally- an ecstatic mood, sense of newly-gained knowledge, perceptual alterations, delusions, and conceptual disorganization.

Another study was conducted to see the similarities and differences in schizophrenic and mystical experiences by administering the Woodier questionnaire to 52 schizophrenic patients.³ It revealed the fact that 52% of schizophrenic respondents reported having mystical experiences, supported the idea that the schizophrenic population perceive themselves as having mystical experiences at least as often as individuals in non-schizophrenic populations. This study reveals that schizophrenics who claim to have had mystical experiences are similar to other schizophrenic individuals in that they,

1. Do not feel any greater control over their experiences than other schizophrenics.
2. Do not experience any more improvement in their relationships than other schizophrenics do.

Schizophrenic patients who experience mystical states differ from other schizophrenic individuals in that they report a greater range of effective experiences and are more likely to have experienced joyful states of consciousness. Furthermore, they are more likely to see their experiences as valid and meaningful.

The main objective of the study was to compare the symptoms of schizophrenia and the experiences of spiritual growth. This study was done by compiling the experiences described in the texts of the Bhagavad-Gita, Patanjali's Yoga sutra, and the Yoga-vaçiştha. These spiritual classics explain the criteria to assess spiritual growth like *jivanmukta lakṣaṇas*, *sthita prajña lakṣaṇas* and *samadhi*. This study further compares the symptoms of schizophrenia and *sthitaprajña lakṣaṇa*.

Symptoms of schizophrenia

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)⁴ describes schizophrenia as a mental disturbance that lasts for at least six months and includes at least one month of active-phase symptoms (two or more) of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and other negative symptoms. The essential features of schizophrenia are an admixture of characteristically positive and negative symptoms that have been present for a significant period of time.

Characteristic symptoms may be conceptualized as falling in to two broad categories:

1. Positive
2. Negative

Positive symptoms include: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior. Delusions are the erroneous beliefs that casually involve misinterpretations of perceptions and experiences. Their content may include a variety of themes, such as, persecution (others are against him), self-reference (others talk about him), and grandiosity (in relation to one's worth regarding power or knowledge). Hallucinations are the perceptions occurring without external stimulation. Hallucinations may occur in any sensory modality (e.g. auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory and tactile). However, auditory hallucinations are by far the most common characteristics of schizophrenia. Auditory hallucinations are usually experienced as voices.

Negative symptoms include: affective flattening, alogia, avolition, and anhedonia. In affective flattening, a patient's range of emotional expressiveness is clearly diminished. In alogia, a patient will have a diminution of thoughts, which is reflected in decreased fluency and productivity of speech. In avolition, a person shows little interest in participating in work or social activities. Anhedonia is characterized by the loss of interest and pleasure.

In addition to this lack of insight (subjective awareness of pathological nature of psychiatric symptoms and behavioral disturbances) and impairment of judgment (capacity to draw direct conclusions from the material acquired by experience) are the main characteristic features of schizophrenia. Inappropriate affect, thought insertion, thought broadcasting, depersonalization, derealization, irritability, and deterioration from previous levels of functioning (work, self-care) are the associated symptoms of schizophrenia.⁵

Symptoms of schizophrenia according to ancient texts

Caraka⁶, a great Rishi, who described the mental illness first among the authors of Ayurveda classics, explains the general symptoms of schizophrenia as follows:

*unmädaàpunarmanobuddhismâtisaijjäjänabhaktiçélaceñöäacäravibhramaà
vidyät*

Cloudiness of mind, intellect, consciousness, memory, insight, behavior, and activities.

*dhé vibhramaù satvapariplavaçca paryäkulä drñöiradhératä ca
abaddhaväktvaà hradayaà ca çünyaà sämänyamunmädagadasya liègam*

Cloudiness of intellect, confusion, not having concentration, irrelevant talking, and reduced memory are the general symptoms.

*sa müðhacetä na sukhaà na duùkhaà
näcäradharmo kuteva çäntim*

A person will have a stupid mind, will not experience happiness or sorrow, will not follow customs, virtues of society, and will not have tranquility of mind.

In Bhagavad-Gita⁷ Sri Kriṣṇa explains indirectly the symptoms of schizophrenia as follows:

*dhyäyato viñayän puàsaù saìgasteñüpajäyate saìgät saìjäyate kämaükämät
krodho'bhijäyatekrodhädbhavatisammohaùsammohätsmrtivibhramaùsmrtibhràçä
dbuddhinäçobuddhinäçäd praëaçyati*

In one who dwells longingly to sense objects, an inclination towards them is generated. Inclination develops into desire, desire turns into anger. Anger generates delusion, delusion results in loss of memory, loss of memory brings about destruction of intellect, and this spells ruin to a man.

Patanjali explains the symptoms of *citta viksepa* in yoga-sutra⁸ which are similar to the symptoms of schizophrenia.

*vyādhistyāna saāçaya pramādāla syāviratibhrānti darçanālabdha bhūmika
tvānavasthitatvāni cittavikñēepāste' ntarāyā*

Mental distress or anxiety, idleness, doubt, loss of attention, concentration, and faithlessness, uninterrupted wandering, seeing situations which are not present, and unsteadiness of mind are symptoms of *citta viksepa*. Grief, sorrow, restraining of body parts, and increased breathing are associated symptoms.

Experiences of spiritual growth in the path of jñana yoga

Jñana yoga is the path of knowledge (intellect). Sri kriṣṇa says in Bhagavad-Gita that the experiences of spiritual growth on the path of jñana yoga are as follows:

*prajahātiyadākāmān sarvān pārthamanogatān
ātmanyevātmanā tuñōaù sthitprajīa-staducyate*

When all the desires of the heart have been abandoned and the spirit finds joyous satisfaction in herself, then one is spoken of as a person of steady wisdom and spiritually mature.

*dukheñvanudvigna manāù sukheñu vigataspāhaù
vétarāgabhayakrodhaù sthitadhi-rmunirucyate*

A person whose mind is not agitated by grief or happiness, who is free from desire, who is devoid of attachments, fear and anger- such a person is called a sage of steady wisdom.

*rāgadveñaviyuktaistu viñayānindriyaiçcaran ātmavaçyairvidheyātmā
prasādamadhigacchati*

A man of disciplined mind, who has his senses under his control and who has neither attraction nor aversion for sense objects attains tranquility though he may be moving amidst objects of sense.

prasāde sarvaduùkhānām hānirasyoopajāyate

prasannacetaso hyaçu budhdiù paryavatiñöate

On attaining tranquility, one's sorrows come to an end. For soon does the intellect of a tranquil person become steady.

The *yogavaçistha* text explains characteristics of one who is liberated while still living:

yasmät nodvijate looko lookät nodvijate ca yaù

harñāmarñabhayonmuktaù sa jévanmukta ucyate (3:29)

Of whom the world is not afraid and who is not afraid of world, is free from execution, anger and fear, he is said to be liberated while living.

yaù sacitto'pi niçcittaù sa jévanmukta ucyate

A person though possessed the mind, but devoid of thinking he is said to be liberated while living.

The text discusses the steps of spiritual growth and experience:

deñakālopapannāni vacanānyabhibhāñate

tadä'sau prathamäà präptaù çubhecchävayabhümikām

When a person reaches the first stage of *subeccha*, he speaks words reputable to the place and time.

çäntäçeñaviçeñäàçaiù nidräluriva lakñyate (30:35-36)

When the person attains the fifth stage abiding in mere non-duality with all distinctions and divisions extinguished, he is seen as asleep.

Experiences of spiritual growth in the path of bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga is the path of emotional culturing. Narada explains the experiences of spiritual growth in the path of bhakti yoga as follows:

yallabdhvä pumän siddho bhavati amäto bhavati täpto bhavati (närada bhakti sutra 4)

The bhakti yogin becomes mature, free from desire, and tranquil.

Sri křiṣṇa says in Bhagavad-Gita,

yasmännodvijate loko lokännodvjate ca yaù

harñämarñabhayodvegairmuktoyaù sa ca me priyaù

Who causes fear to none whom none can frighten. One who is free from agitations of moods caused by euphoria, anger, and excitement is said to be spiritually grown.

yo na hrñyati na dveñöi na çocati na käaikñyati

çubhäçubhaparityägi bhaktimän yaù sa me priyaù

A person who is free from elation, anger, sorrow or craving, and neither seeks the pleasant nor shuns the unpleasant, is spiritually grown.

tulyanindästutirmauni santuñöo yena kenacit

aniketaù sthiramatirbhaktimänme priyo narau (Bhagavad-Gita 12:19)

He who is alike to friends and enemies, alike in honor and dishonor, alike in heat and cold, alike in praise and blame – unattached, tranquil, and of steady mind is said to be spiritually grown.

Experiences of spiritual growth in the path of rāja yoga

Raja yoga is the path of will power. It has eight steps. Samadhi is the final step.

Patanjali explains the experiences of spiritual growth in the path of raja yoga:

tadevamātranirbhāsaà svarūpaçünyamiva samādhi (patanjali yoga sūtra 3:3)

Samadhi is a state where objects appear without the consciousness of one's own-self.

vitarka vicāra ānandāsmiṭā'nugamāt samprajīātaū (patanjali yoga sūtra 1:17)

Samadhi is associated with reasoning, reflection, bliss and a sense of individuality.

yogino yatacittasya yuijato yogamātmanau (bhagvad-gita 6:19)

A yogi's mind that is well under control is united with Atman.

yadā viniyataà cittamātmanyevāvatiñōate

In this state, the movements of citta (mind) are restrained.

praçāntamanasaà hyenaà yoginaà sukhamuttamam

A person who is spiritually grown will have tranquility of mind. She experiences the ultimate happiness.

A comparison between the symptoms of schizophrenia and experiences of spiritual growth

When we compare symptoms, delusions are common in schizophrenia (DSM IV), but absent in spiritual growth. By one's own imagination the fool gets deluded, but not a wiseman, says the *yoga vasiṣṭa*. Becoming free from delusion is the main criteria of spiritual growth. Hallucinations, primarily in the form of auditory hallucinations, are additional characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia (DSM IV), but in spiritual growth,

visual hallucinations can be seen as symptoms of growth especially when a person moves to a state of samadhi (the object only shines). The DSM IV suggests that hallucinations that occur while falling asleep (hypnogogic) or waking up (hypnopompic) are within the range of normal experience. Hallucinations may also be a normal part of religious experience. Here, we can't consider experiences of samadhi as visual hallucinations, according to these explanations. In samadhi, a person loses his own form. He will not be in clear sensorial. In the fifth step of spiritual growth where a person merely abides in non-duality (like samadhi) he is seen as asleep. He will be in a dream state as he grows spiritually.

Disorganized speech and disorganized behavior are features of schizophrenia, but are not characteristic of spiritual growth. Avolition is a feature of schizophrenia, but in a person who is spiritually mature, goal-directed behavior is seen clearly. Inappropriate affect is a feature of schizophrenia. In spiritual growth, inappropriate affect is not seen. Cloudiness of mind and intellect is symptomatic of schizophrenia according to Ayurveda, but mind and intellect becomes steady when a person matures on a spiritual path.

Smṛti vibhrama refers to when a person remembers unnecessary things and this is a symptom of schizophrenia according to Ayurveda. On the path of spiritual growth, a person's memory becomes absolutely free from past impressions.

Bhakti vibhrama is a state of attachment (when a person is attached to irrelevant things), and this too, is a symptom of schizophrenia according to Ayurveda. On the path of spiritual growth, a person is non-attached. In schizophrenia, *cila vibhrama* is altered, behavior is seen, but on the path of spiritual growth, altered behavior is not seen. In schizophrenia (altered morals) *achara vibhrama* is seen. On the path of spiritual growth a

person more astutely follows morals. In schizophrenia irrelevant talking is observed. On the spiritual path, a person will talk only about the truth of the present. In schizophrenia, anger is often present. On the path of spiritual growth, anger will be minimized or non-existent. In schizophrenia there will not be tranquility of mind, but on the path of spiritual growth, there will be an abundance of tranquility. In schizophrenia there will be *citta viksepa*, but on the path of spiritual growth, *citta viksepa* are overcome. Lack of insight and impaired judgment are characteristic features of schizophrenia, but on the path of spiritual growth, insight and sound judgment are ever-present.

Table of comparison between the symptoms of schizophrenia and spiritual growth

Symptoms	Schizophrenia	Spiritual Growth
Lack of insight	Seen	Not seen.
Lack of judgment	Seen	Not seen
Delusions (bizarre)	Seen	Not seen
Delusions of persecution	Seen	Not seen
Delusions of control	Seen	Not seen
Delusions of reference	Seen	Not seen
Delusions of grandiosity	Seen	Can be seen.
Religious delusion	Seen	Can be seen.
Thought insertion	Seen	Not seen
Illogical thinking	Seen	Not seen
Loosening of associations	Seen	Can be seen
Neologisms	Seen	Not seen

Thought blocking	Seen	Can be seen
Perseveration	Seen	Not seen
Auditory hallucinations	Common	Not common
Visual hallucinations	Seen	Can be seen
Tactile, gustatory, and olfactory hallucinations	Seen	Not seen
Depersonalization	Seen	Not seen
Derealization	Seen	Not seen
Illusion	Seen	Not seen
Blunted affect	Seen	Not seen
Flat affect	Seen	Not seen
Inappropriate affect	Seen	Not seen
Irritability	Seen	Not seen
Loss of self esteem	Seen	Not seen
Loss of ego boundaries	Seen	Not seen
Lack of interest	Seen	Not seen
Lack of initiative	Seen	Not seen
Lack of drive	Seen	Not seen
Lack of ambition	Seen	Not seen
Decreased relationship with external world	Seen	Can be seen
Catatonic excitement	Seen	Not seen
Catatonic stupor	Seen	Not seen
Catatonic rigidity	Seen	Not seen
Catatonic posturing	Seen	Not seen

Catatonic negativism	Seen	Not seen
Mannerisms and grimacing	Seen	Not seen
Waxy flexibility	Seen	Not seen
Automatic obedience	Seen	Not seen
Stereotypy	Seen	Not seen
Deterioration from previous level of functioning	Seen	Not seen
Alogia	Seen	Not seen
<i>Mano vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Buddhi vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Saññajñāna vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Smṛti vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Bhakti vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Sila vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Ceṣṭa vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
<i>Achara Vibhrama</i>	Seen	Not seen
Irrelevant talking	Seen	Not seen
<i>Paryakula</i> (confusion)	Seen	Not seen
Lack of concentration	Seen	Not seen
Doesn't experience <i>sukha, dukha</i>	Seen	Not seen
Doesn't follow morals of society	Seen	Not seen
Mental distress	Seen	Not seen
Suspiciousness	Seen	Not seen

Slothful	Seen	Not seen
Uninterrupted wandering	Seen	Not seen
Unsteadiness of mind	Seen	Not seen
Anger	Seen	Not seen
Fear	Seen	Not seen
Violence	Seen	Not seen
Tranquility	Not seen	Seen
Steadfast intellect	Not seen	Seen
Vision of reality	Not seen	Seen
Awareness about self	Not seen	Seen
Devoid of anger, fear	Not seen	Seen
Steadfast mind	Not seen	Seen
Nonattachment	Not seen	Seen
Flight of thought	Seen	Not seen
Mood swings	Seen	Not seen
Depression	Seen	Not seen

Summary and conclusions

The main objective of this study was to compare the symptoms of schizophrenia and the experiences of spiritual growth. This study was done by compiling the symptoms of schizophrenia, and the characteristic features of a spiritually mature individual as described in the texts of the Bhagavad-Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, and Yoga –vaçiştha.

This study found that there are similarities in positive symptoms of schizophrenia and some of the experiences of spiritual growth, but it was noticed that schizophrenic

symptoms are often present without the patient's knowledge of them. In spiritual growth, however, experiences are commensurate with the awareness and insight of a person. In schizophrenia there is distortion of reality, while in spiritual growth there is a heightened vision of actual reality and truth. In schizophrenia negative symptoms are prominently present. In spiritual growth negative symptoms are usually absent. In schizophrenia there is a lack of insight and judgment. On the path of spiritual growth, insight reaches its climax as judgment flowers into compassion and true love. In spiritual growth, a person will have the freedom to come out of her state. In schizophrenia, the person will not have the freedom to come out of her diseased state of mind. The definition of delusion changes according psychiatric and spiritual models of mental phenomena. In psychiatry, delusion often refers to erroneous beliefs. In a spiritual context, as seen in the ancient text Yoga –vaçiṣṭha, the whole world is a delusion of the mind.

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