

MENTAL ILLNESS AND SOUL LOSS

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ABSTRACT

Pathology should not be only understood from the conscious aspect of a person's life but also the unconscious underpinnings should be explored in order to fully understand the nature and causes of mental health problems. The present paper emphasizes the concept of 'loss of soul' in understanding mental health and it occurs commonly in primitive cultures. It delineates that a greater unity of psyche and soma ensures the well-being of man but a discord between the two would lead to various symptoms of psychopathology. It further examines how the primitive cultures have embodied both the aspects to gain a fuller meaning into the diagnosis and treatment of so called 'neurosis', specific to their culture. The present theoretical paper is an exposition to the primitive notion of mental health and of the loss of soul in psychological understanding and terminology.

Keyword :- *soul loss, mental health, primitive culture*

SOUL LOSS

The concept of *psyche*, in spite of its acceptance in the discipline of psychology especially with the establishment of Transpersonal psychology, is yet to find space in research on mental health. Mental health, it is primarily emphasized, has its roots in the unconscious. Secondly, focus of many studies is founded upon established religious and philosophies in Transpersonal psychology, and less attempt is made to peruse on primitive notions of mental health. The present theoretical paper is an exposition to the primitive notion of mental health and of the loss of soul in psychological understanding and terminology

Theories and models of mental health should consider man in totality and incorporate the dynamism of *psyche* because the condition or status of soul—manifesting in dreams—is the actuality of the dreamer. Merely conscious aspect of the individual is the 'pseudo self' no matter how much one is socially approved and accepted. In Maslow's theory the 'manifest self' is in some way unreal or false when someone does not or fail to actualize his 'real self'. The pseudo self within the Humanistic psychology of Horney (1950), Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1968) is equated with the social self, and evidently, on the other extreme, with the (instinctive) 'id' of Freud. Straying far away from the instinctual roots into the chaotic world of the collective unconscious and having the least access to the inner self is indicative of "Soul Loss".

When all behavioral patterns can be traced back to the personal unconscious and personal unconscious is predominated by the collective unconscious, the issue of mental health should answer to the age-old mind-body problem, dissolving the dichotomy into the unity of *psyche* and *soma*. The establishment of Psychoanalysis (and other psychodynamic theories and practices) has led to the finding that most psychological disorders are not necessarily accompanied by a disease (as we understand the term 'disease' with medical orientation) or some physical or biochemical abnormalities in the brain or in any part of the body. The tradition of thought, which Depth psychology discovered and is still pursuing, is that the problematic symptoms are the manifestation of the soul. Physical body is the base or medium through which the experience of reality enters man's life, even one's

feeling of groundedness in the wide universe and one's substantial connection with the spiritual being. As William Blake points out in 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell' that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five senses, ..." (Capra 1989). It is the discord between psyche and soma which is the principal problem of man and "that all our problem—all diseases are result of maladjustment to our spiritual being" (Jung...). That, however, does not mean that a true devotee would never have any medical problems. By disease it meant (psychological) 'sickness of soul.'

Though ' "psyche" is by no means identical with our consciousness and its content' (Jung 1964) *psyche* embodies *soma*, and to reject *psyche-soma* unity and the inverted view of body as a mere shadow of the soul, the unconscious, is to express misoneism—a fear of the new and the unknown. Atheism, first, and secondly the denial of the unconscious—soul—and misoneism is the loss of soul.

LOSS OF SOUL

Consciousness, we unconsciously maintain, is our normal self, which is highly questionable because the line that divides consciousness and the unconscious is very feeble and faint.

'Consciousness is a very recent acquisition of nature, and it is still in the "experimental" state. It is frail, menaced by specific dangers, and easily injured... Beyond doubt even in what we call a high level of civilization, human consciousness has not yet achieved a reasonable degree of continuity. It is still vulnerable and liable to fragmentation' (Jung 1964).

The primitive notion of the loss of soul is today known as the dissociation (Jung 1964), causing a neurosis. R. L. Stevenson's fiction Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a classic presentation of the case. Yet another explanation for the loss of soul could be amnesia. Even in the case of reincarnation the individual fails to identify himself with his present or bodily life, and searches for his past life in the present; he searches for his own soul.

If memory contributes to the greatest degree to the normality of consciousness, the same also betrays for the most part many times in everyday life.

Since human consciousness has not yet attained solidity, its instability easily dissociates in everyday life when we forget, daydream, fantasize, doubt, suspect, breakup and breakdown, are confused, become absent-minded, get distracted, become numb, lose temper, make silly mistakes, willfully go blind, deny, become blank, sleep etc., and in its relatively permanent occurrence becomes the cause of much disgust and distress, or in some intense cases a pathological cause of neurosis.

Fragmentation of consciousness, however, has a valuable characteristic, as Jung (1964) points out, for it is man's capacity to isolate parts of his consciousness to perform more than one task. Conscious splitting-off to suppress one part of *psyche* could be productive at work but its unconscious operation without one's conscious decision, consent, intention and knowledge is a problem and/or a pathology, or the loss of soul; a severe mental health problem which cannot be completely understood by conscious-clinical paradigm.

Clinical rationalization of the loss of soul makes the matter intelligible only to a little degree. The primitive notion of the loss of soul is far more complex and mystical than a mere noticeable disruption of conscious life.

Since in primitive tribes disease is considered to be an external entity existing independent of the body, the pathological cause of the loss of soul is also an external agent. Thus intrusion or insertion of an object—magical and harmful—into the patient's body or possession by an evil spirit of the dead or by the Devil is considered to be the "theft of the soul" (Eliade 1989), or as Clements' Primitive Concepts of Disease points out the "rape of soul" (Eliade 1989) which cause disease or abnormality.

Whatever the phrase used for explanation by the primitive people of Central and North Asia, the basic understanding is that disease or abnormality is due to "soul having strayed away or been stolen, and treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume its place in the patient's body" (Eliade 1989).

Soul straying away from the body, or normal consciousness, is also because of "being bodily abducted by the spirits" (Eliade 1989). The primitive phenomenon of body-soul abduction has its modern counterpart in

abduction by aliens or UFOs, which is not necessarily an experience of pathology but could be enlisted as one form of Transpersonal experience. Or it could also be treated as one form of the altered state of consciousness.

On the sublime side of human experience, loss of soul could be equated with the 'mystical participation' (termed coined by French ethnologist Lucian Levi-Bruhl) wherein the individual loses his identity in the image of the incarnating animal, bird, nature-spirit, or god. The possessed one (the chosen one) loses his soul to merge with the divine spirit. It is a positive dissociation, and a part of tribal life.

However, the notion of loss of soul generally has negative connotation. It is what the Tangkhul Nagas of the Northeast India call *Mangla Sakazat* referring to certain illness, which a medical doctor cannot diagnose. *Mangla* being the Tangkhul word for soul. Yet another notion closely related is *Mangla Takatung*, the fall of the spirit.

Mangla Takatung, spirit-fall, is when a person falls sick with significant loss of appetite and rapid deterioration of health. If the person knows where and when it has occurred then he calls back the spirit by performing rituals in *Harshang* (village outskirts)—an important place for the village folk for resting after coming from the fieldwork and a place to catch up with each other; it's a place indicating the realm of human existence; a place that serves as a boundary between their dwelling place and the other world. *Khanong* (village doctor) is called for treatment whose qualification as an expert herbalist, is synthesized with his spiritual and powers to have visions. That is the prominent feature in all traditional healing practices. A medical doctor for us is somebody who is from science background and has passed the medical college. Medicine man is someone who is not only a qualified herbalist by virtue and practice but is also a priest, and a village priest is someone who is also a seer. So a disease is viewed both as the ailment of the body and the loss of soul. It is in accordance with our superficial or deep understanding of human phenomena that we initiate and feel the need to have men who can heal the body, or men of profound wisdom who can heal both body and soul.

On the one hand the loss of soul is a clinical problem, and on the other it is a transpersonal experience. Between the two extremes of life is the normal life of the soul captivated by the shadow realities (of Plato's Cave), sin and materialism, all of which in summary is an intellectual and spiritual crisis and problem leading to the loss of soul.

While living we avoid going crazy or mad because we fear losing one's soul, and in the fatal and threatening moments of life and at the hour of death we know we do not want to, but soul will one day be lost. We make all the attempts to be our best selves and to have all that it takes to live life to the fullest, yet unconsciously we keep losing the soul in the eternal battle between the spirit and the flesh wherein it is the body that always wins and the soul always loses.

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