

PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PHILOSOPHY

Psychotherapy is "the application of specialised techniques to the treatment of mental disorders or to the problems of everyday adjustment".¹ It, in its different shapes, has been in practice from time immemorial. But its need is much more dire in modern age than ever. This modern world has given us several boons; but in return, has snatched tranquillity, peace of mind, and spiritual bliss. To Erich Fromm, "With all his knowledge about matter, he (modern man) is ignorant with regard to the most important and fundamental questions of human existence: what man is, how he ought to live, and how the tremendous energies within man can be released and used productively."²

According to Fulton J. Sheen, "The modern man is no longer a unity, but a confused bundle of complexès and nerves. He is so dissociated, so alienated from himself that he sees himself less as a personality than as a battlefield where a civil war rages between a thousand and one conflicting loyalties... If the frustrated soul is educated, it has a smattering of uncorrelated bits of information with no unifying philosophy."³

Iqbal, in the East, to quote one out of many examples, is very much conscious of the modern man's plight. To him, the modern man "wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, ... has ceased to live soulfully, i.e., from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life weariness."⁴ The modern man, therefore, is rightly defined by some writer as 'complexed, stressed and frustrated'.

As a result of this state of affairs a good number of psychotherapists, through the application of different

psychotherapeutic techniques, have come forward to get man rid of abnormal or unhealthy personalities and psychic maladies. Hence the birth of many a school of psychotherapy like Psychoanalysis, Behaviour Therapy, Humanistic Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, and so on with different branches and sections.

Without discussing individually or collectively the limitations and useful contributions of such schools, which I have elaborately discussed in my recently published book: *A Critique of Western Psychology and Psychotherapy and Iqbal's Approach*⁵, I move over to take cognisance of the role of philosophy in the field of psychotherapy. One aspect, however, may be kept in mind that philosophy takes view of life in entirety as compared with the schools of psychotherapy. To elaborate, philosophy "takes into account all branches and aspects of human knowledge and experience. The inspiration of the artist, the vision of the mystic, the social urge of the reformer, the emotions of the lover, and the moral intuition of the plain man, all are grist of the philosopher's mill. He must also take into consideration the conclusions and discoveries of the scientist."⁶ On the contrary the schools of psychotherapy are lopsided. They deal with one or the other aspects of human personality and not personality on the whole. For instance, to Freud, sex instinct is dominating force in human personality. He bases everything on sex. He can rightly be called sex oriented psychologist. Andrew Salter pointedly remarks about him "Soldiers worrying about death. Mothers worrying about children. Men worried about success and failure. Freud sexualizes all."⁷ Behaviourism emphasises only objectivity. All modes of investigation, except those which can be tested experimentally, are discarded. In the zeal of emphasising overt behaviour learning theorists have laid more stress on the process of learning than on personality structure.⁸ The present narrow approach of psychotherapy appears more conspicuous when one finds the stance of each school of psychotherapy as departmental affair. The psychotherapists have divided themselves in different camps and do not give way to one another's findings, no matter how much these may be useful. Morris I. Stein rightly says that there are several different orientations, approaches and techniques and each is confined to its own group, usually diametrically different

from the others. But where they do not differ so much they involve duplication of work and wastage of energy, as they go about re-discovering each other's principles and techniques.⁹

Curative side: Philosophy of life makes man mentally healthy. "The life of a person who is matured mentally is integrated around a philosophy of life."¹⁰ On the contrary, a man with mental disorder lacks aim in life and misconceives the values, and possesses confused concepts and unmatured attitude towards life. It has great potentials to change persons. Through philosophy morbid personalities are changed. "When Philosophy of Man (his nature, his goals, his potentialities, his fulfilment) changes, then everything changes. Not only the philosophy of politics, of economics, of ethics and values, of interpersonal relations and of history itself change, but also the philosophy of education, the theory of how to help men becomes what they can and deeply need to become."¹¹ Philosophy helps tremendously in this regard. To a thinker "ends and purposes, whether they exist as conscious or subconscious tendencies, form the warp and woof of conscious experience... In fact, they constitute the forward push of our life, and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be. To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be."¹² Again, philosophy gives values. Human beings "do not live only by bread, vitamins, and technological discoveries. They live by values and realities which are above time and are worth knowing for their own sake."¹³ Also, philosophy helps man construct his beliefs with due deliberation and analysis which are the integral part of personality. "This capacity to believe is the most significant and fundamental human faculty, and the most important thing about a man is what he believes in the depth of his being. This is the thing that makes him what he is; the thing that organises him and feeds him; the thing that keeps him going in the face of untoward circumstances; the thing that gives him resistance and drive. Let neutrality, confusion, indifference or scepticism enter this inner glance, and the very springs of life will cease to flow. Men will quit, lose heart, yield, give up, become bitter or cynical, become

sunk in bleakness or emptiness, commit suicide, turn to criminality or retreat into a realm of phantasy."¹⁴

It is pertinent to note that philosophy and religion are not poles asunder. "In its deeper movement thought... is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are merely moments."¹⁵ To Dr. Maruf this is the place where thought and intuition become identical."¹⁶ Iqbal rightly says that philosophy and religion are complementary to each other. "They spring up from the same root and complement each other... Both seek visions of the same reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life."¹⁷

Next, philosophy constructs normal behaviour by creating realistic attitude towards life. Normal life makes man live in the actual world. He does not live in a world of unreality or wishful thinking. He develops balanced interpersonal relations with other human beings. "A realistic attitude toward one's personal problems, toward one's relationships with other people and toward the world is a condition of mental health."¹⁸

Further, philosophy gives clear thinking and clarifies concepts which lead to take right action. "A wrong concept misleads the understanding; a wrong deed degrades the whole man, and may eventually demolish the structure of human ego."¹⁹

It is heartening to note that some psychologists and psychotherapists have felt the need of philosophical thinking. But no complete and independent school of therapy as such has come into practice.

To Rollo May, "... there is growing recognition of the relationship between mental illness and one's philosophy of life and death."²⁰ Allport believes that no body can be understood in entirety by separating himself from his philosophy. He says, "The philosophy of the person is inseparable from the psychology of the person."²¹ Abraham Maslow, who bases his concept of self-actualised person on his philosophy of human nature, believes

in the curative values of a philosophy of life. He says, "The state of being without a system or a framework of values is psychopathogenic, we are learning The value-illness as which results from valuelessness are called, variously anhedonia, apathy, amorality, hopelessness, cynicism, etc., and can become somatic illness as well."²²

Even behaviourism, which was strictly based upon scientific method, has changed its position. "Because of the earlier struggle to gain recognition as a science, psychologists, particularly of behaviourist orientation, are suspicious of recent efforts by personality theorists to defy strict scientific methodology and reassert the philosophical character of psychology."²³ Lazarus says, "The bulk of therapeutic endeavours may be said to centre around the correction of misconceptions. The people who consult us tend to view innocuous events as extremely noxious, and may disregard objectively noxious situations."²⁴

Again, Victor Frankl, the father of logotherapy, has based his school of psychotherapy on certain philosophical assumptions. In contrast to many other therapists, however, logotherapy is based on an implicit philosophy of life. More specifically, it is based on three fundamental assumptions which form a chain of interconnected links: (1) Freedom of Will; (2) Will to Meaning; (3) Meaning of Life"²⁵. He says, "... psychotherapy can only have an unconditional belief in the meaning of life, every life, if it starts with the right kind of philosophy, it chooses the right philosophy."²⁶

Besides the over all impact of philosophy on modern psychotherapy may not be lost sight of. Moriss I. Stein openly admits that the philosophical orientations of our time have a great impact upon the contemporary development in psychotherapy. "The papers of Rollo May, Carl Rogers, and Otto Will bear the witness of having the philosophical influence of the modern movement of Existentialism. The influence of George Herbert Mead on Otto Will's approach and of transactional theory of Dewey and Bentley on Grinker's thinking are quite obvious."²⁷ It may also be noted that value of philosophy is getting recognition

even in the field of medicine. Professor Fransworth of Harvard University remarks that "medicine is now confronted with the task of enlarging its function... Physicians must of necessity indulge in philosophy."²⁸

Preventive Value

But still lot of work is needed to make philosophy a real foundation of psychotherapy. Especially on its preventive side, no emphasis worth the name has been given by the psychotherapists. They seem to be concerned with the curative side. But psychotherapy is too good to be limited to the sick." Here philosophy can render a valuable service.

The irony of modern society is that first it creates different complexes, mental maladies, and maladjustments because of different conflicts, frustrations, confused thinking, lack of meaning in life, wrong attitudes and unhealthy ways of life; and then it comes forward with remedies through psychiatry and psychotherapy. But such remedies do not ensure a real well-being of a person. The importance of preventive measures should duly be realised. To my mind, most of the psychological problems of modern age will not arise if we reconstruct ourselves with sound philosophical assumptions. This will help save human personality from disintegration. For instance, many psychological problems can be removed if love to humanity is given due place in our heart and man creates harmonious relationship with his fellow men. A. Reza Arasteh rightly says: "In the human situation love is a therapeutic means which prevents neurosis, greed, rivalry, and eliminate jealousy. In fact, true love does not stand in opposition to hate, as is generally thought, but absorbs it."²⁹ Further, if attitude towards life is changed and *faqr* is adopted in true sense many psychological problems, which are the result of our 'gold hunger' die before they raise heads. True *faqr* is a way of living which is the result of a particular attitude towards economic and social aspects of life, irrespective of poverty or riches. It is neither a segregation from community nor a way to passivity. It is full of struggle and action.³⁰ It is probably in the context of such views that Reza Arasteh limelighted Erich Fromm's remarks about

Rumi's thought thus: "The principles that Rumi practised, are viewed by Erich Fromm as a necessary requirement for the development of a healthy and mature character."³¹

The value of preventive measures is enhanced to a great extent when we understand that even if one is successfully and easily cured one does not attain developed personality or mature character, because the absence of disease does not ensure such results. This is a fact which is acknowledged by prominent psychotherapists themselves. For instance, Erich Fromm does not believe that well-being is the absence of illness, nor does he limit the purpose of psychoanalysis to "the liberation of the human being from his neurotic symptoms, inhibitions and abnormalities of character", as did Freud. Rather Fromm deduces his concept of well-being from the state of a matured and healthy man, that is, the presence of joy"³².

Thus the psychotherapists must consider the utility of philosophy as a part and parcel of their treatment. They must help the client reconstruct his beliefs and values, reorientate his attitude towards life and universe. In the East such thinking is not new. Treatment of sufis, yogis and other mystics is based on religious philosophy and higher thinking. I visualise that the day is not far off when philosophy will be widely recognised as an independent and one of the most effective schools of healing.

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