

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2010

Need for continued and integrated care



That's why physical and mental health problem needs integrated and coordinated health care from the same health centre. This year's theme emphasises the importance of this issue. This can only be achieved by integration of mental health services in primary health care facilities in our country.

Patients with mental diseases are stigmatised in our country, causing isolation and deprivation of basic human rights like opportunity for health services, which is a constitutional right of every person. So, creation of public awareness in mental health and diseases is the key for implementing mental health services. The World Federation of Mental Health started global awareness campaign on mental health in 1992.

The level of awareness and knowledge of mental health in our society is frustrating. Even educated people cannot differentiate between a psychiatrist and a psychologist (the former is a doctor, the other is not). There is also a negative propaganda about psychotropic medication. But, like many other life saving drugs, the medications are marketed after a long series of drug trials (Randomized Control Trial). For most of the psychiatric disorders these drugs are essential.

Psychological treatments are also valuable for management of psychiatric disorders. The modalities of treatment should be evidence based and scientifically proven. There is no scope for personal bias or choice of treatment, but a patient has the right to choose from different therapeutic options.

WHO stated that 60% of deaths around the world are attributable to heart diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory illness. A person who suffers from this type of physical illness has increased risk of developing mental disorders like depression and anxiety. The prevalence of depression among diabetic and heart patients is 20%, and 25-39% in cancer patients.

The presence of mental illness makes the treatment of physical illness more expensive, troublesome and time consuming. Most patients do not get psychiatric treatment. A recent study stated that diabetic patients with depression achieve poor blood glucose control due to physical inactivity, alcoholism and drug addiction, negative life style and loneliness.

Depression, like obesity, smoking physical inactivity etc., is also a known risk factor for heart diseases and increases mortality rate

from heart diseases. For this reason, the American Heart Association has recommended depression screening for every heart patient. This double affliction makes management of health problems difficult, and increases morbidity and mortality. So, integration of mental health services in primary health care is very important.

A national survey on mental health in adults, conducted by National Institute of Mental Health (2003-05), revealed that prevalence of mental disorders is 16.1%. For this huge number of patients there are only 123 psychiatrists. The ratio is 0.07 psychiatrist per 100,000 population which is absurd, while the ratio for developed country is 10 psychiatrists per 100,000 people. If the current trend continues, more than 100 years are not sufficient to provide adequate numbers of psychiatrist. So integration of mental health services in primary health care is now a timely need.

For effective implementation of this strategy, people's participation should be ensured in the community based mental health activities in all levels -- upazilla, district, division and tertiary care level. Training of general doctors (4,500 doctors so far trained), upgrading of psychiatry in undergraduate medical curriculum and incorporation of mental health issues in school level textbooks are important steps for achieving the desired goal. Electronic and print media can play a pivotal role in creating awareness among public regarding mental health.

Very recently, Bangladesh received the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) award in health for reducing child mortality rate. For achieving success in developmental activities people's health should be ensured. But without paying due attention to mental health people's health cannot be improved.

For this reason, better investment in mental health services is necessary. Allocation of at least 5% of health budget should be provided for mental health, but is only 0.4% at present. Mental Health Act is yet to be passed. On this auspicious day we hope that government will take necessary steps to enact Mental Health Act to protect human rights of mental patients, which will definitely brighten our image in the international arena.

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ZILLUR RAHMAN KHAN RATAN

We celebrate world mental health on October 10 every year with lots of enthusiasm to create awareness among people about mental health and illness. Mental health is a neglected issue in our country, like in many other developing countries, because of negative attitude and lack of awareness of mental diseases.

Back in 1948, World Health Organization (WHO) stated that health was incomplete without mental health. Even half a century after that, mental health has not become the essential component of health. In the face of all

opposition, mental health service has become more dynamic, though it has not achieved the desired target. Time has come to re-evaluate mental health policy, strategy and action plans.

This year's theme of the day is "Mental Health and Chronic Physical Illness- Need for Continued and Integrated Care." Physical and mental health problems go hand in hand. Persons with physical illnesses like heart diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory illness suffer more from depression and anxiety disorders than healthy persons. In the same way, chronic mental patients are at greater risk of developing physical illnesses like heart diseases and diabetes.

History and its captives in India



This faithless claim of exclusivity runs antithetical to the vital force of hitherto dominant Indic style -- where the quality of being sacred has a very distributed geography. All these are the birth-sites of Lord Ram. In Thailand exists the old imperial capital city of Ayudhya or Ayuthaya. It is as potently the city of Ram as any other. No order of precedence here. Indeed, it is a matter of faith, not chronology. Hence, the presence of so many sites of Ram's birth points to a largely non-exclusive belief.

It is with this background in mind that one has to view the large currency this exclusive claim has gained with time. The pantheon of values that is the legacy of the European Enlightenment has long dominated the minds of certain sections of our society. Scientific rationality is the holiest of these values.

This domination inevitably has victims. One such victim is the communitarian consciousness of the past, that is passed on and amended from generation to generation. Recollections of the past, fables and grandmothers' tales, jati-puranas, gathas and legends, carry within them the imprint of long time-range mechanisms of survival, of healing from trauma, of long-held aspirations and fears, of close encounters. This is being replaced by an immutable archival view of the past.

We have come to know this as history -- objective, sharp and, if one may add, unethical, pitiless and enslaving. It is frozen, out there -- it simply needs to be unearthed, excavated, deciphered, dusted off and archived. Irrespective of whether it is a story of progress or not, it closes the possibilities of the past, nonetheless. The needs of present people cannot open it up as they wish, but only as history allows.

Such is the grip of historicity and scientific rationality among certain sections that matters of faith, the ballast of certitude in uncertain times, are now being cynically evaluated. The Ayodhya legal case centres around the question what was "really" there -- the real of course being pillars, columns, dirt, dust, radio-carbon dating and excavations. From the "real" will flow the "objective" truth establishing the "authentic" claim.

This insistence on authentic exclusivity has affected religion also. History, the new god with all its heartlessness, stands, scalpel in hand, in front of faith. The decentering of the mind this produces in man has no insurance. One is left alone to fend for its consequences. Man has fantastic creative potentialities to tide over alienation. My fear is that such potential is not endless.

The present debate can be seen as another step in a long process of desecralisation where scientific rationality as an ideology has cast its

long shadow on religion, transforming it, attempting to cure it of all its promise and mystery. To survive this modernist siege, the religions themselves lay transformed -- more masculine, cynical and frenzied; less faith, less creativity. The politico-religious bloc that often claims to speak for Hindus in general has all the markers of this thrust.

This bloc does not only consist of those who are officially with the BJP or its comradely associates. It also includes parts of the migrating, "aspirational", middle class. Significant sections of this group, without access to the intimate rootedness of local faith and continuities of ancestral rituals, are spirited cheerleaders of that dream of 19th century vintage -- a homogenised Hinduism.

They form the core of that peculiar species that now exists in certain Indian metros -- people who are not Telugu Reddys or Bengali Mahishyas -- they are simply Indians. Such pan-Indic formulations of Hinduism are a grave challenge to the Indic faith systems. It is a mortal danger to the religious osmosis that has enriched our softly bounded identities.

With its plural possibilities, the million gods and goddesses protect the billion small people. These people refuse to stand united to dump powerful local deities like Dharma Thakur and Ola Bibi, to let their own divine forces die a slow, impoverished death. For some this refusal is the rub, for some it is the only possibility.

Possibility of what? In an atmosphere in which the historical mindset reduces the past to a partly illuminated, linear archive of objective detail, imagination of the future is also severely impoverished. A linear, closed past restricts possibilities of the future.

By refusing to buy history as the only way of looking at the past, by countering the homogenising tendencies that history unleashes, by refusing to be sapped out of the uniqueness of its encounters, communities amongst themselves hold out the possibility of keeping the past open, alive, responsive.

In the Indic context, people often conceive their aspired future ideal as an image of the past (for example, Ramrajya or when 2 annas could get a maund of rice). This also holds within itself the promise that the myriad open and plural pasts that populate the mindscapes of India are producing open and plural futures, right now.

In a world of increasing dominance through homogenisation, unfettered by historicity, imaginations of (im)possible futures can take wings right here. The Ayodhya debate shows how unimaginative we have become.

Garga Chatterjee is a research scholar in Psychology at Harvard University.

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GARGA CHATTERJEE

The Babri mosque was built in Ayodhya, in present day Uttar Pradesh in India in 1527. Some claim that the Central Asian invader and the first Turkic emperor of Northern India had this mosque built by demolishing a pre-existing temple, one that stood on the birth-site of Lord Ram.

On December 6, 1992, a large group of communal Hindu activists, egged on by leaders of India's second largest political formation of the time, demolished this mosque. The Ayodhya question and the debate surrounding it show how much certain parts of Indic society are now prisoners of a historical mode of thinking.

There has been a change in the way crucial sectors of India conceptualise the past. A clandestine transformation of the nature of consciousness about the past has important implications about our imaginations of the future. It involves, in this case, the possibility that the very soul of our peoples -- a plural soul -- will undergo degeneration.

Communities living in close proximity trigger anxieties of self-demarcation like the "Islamic" in India against the "Hindu" back-

drop. They also figure out ways of mutual tolerance. Such tolerance is often not one of brotherly love but these, nonetheless, co-exist without being at each other throats untiringly. A crucial enabler is time -- time that heals, muddles, blurs and creates memories. This is the stuff of past consciousness that permeates the present in all its imaginative creativity -- creating cross-faith interactions and encounters that put scripture peddlers of "pure" religion to shame.

The disputed piece of land in Ayodhya has two major contenders, ostensibly representing Hindu and Muslim interests and sentiments (though there are minor contenders too like the Buddhists and Jains). However, there are other, uncomfortable contenders of a different sort, too.

There are at least six other sites with structures, in and around Ayodhya, unencumbered by mosques on top of them, which are believed by numerous Hindus to be the birthsite of Ram. Hence, the claim that the real Ram Janmabhoomi is exactly where the Babri Masjid stood necessarily involves dismissing the claims of these other contenders to Ram Janmabhoomi-hood and to inherent sacredness.

TRIBUTE

Syed Mohammad Ali: Lawyer, scholar, good man

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

Syed Mohammad Ali, MBE, barrister-at-law, saw his life drawing to a close on Wednesday of last week. You could look back at his age -- he was all of seventy-seven -- and you could tell yourself that he had arrived at a point where mortality would as a rule of nature catch up with him. And yet you would not do that, for in Ali there was that spark which gives some men their vigour, the intellectual vitality that informs their being.

He had come forth with the first phase of his memoirs and was on his way to beginning work on the second. Had he lived, had the sum total of his life come to us through the printed word, we could well have recreated for ourselves a world of which Ali was a part, an era which might have touched us all, just.

The most important part of the story here is that Syed Mohammad Ali was part of a generation that saw great occurrences rounding the bend of history, an era of men and women always ready and willing to give of themselves to the world.

His father, the well-known politician and orator Syed Badrudduja, had decided, even before Ali was born, that he would name his son after Mohammad Ali Jauhar. It is said that on the day he was born, his father's well-wishers asked him: "Has Mohammad Ali come into life?" A beaming Badrudduja nodded a yes.

As a child, Ali sat on Rabindranath Tagore's lap. As a young man, he once piled question upon question on Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, so much so that the latter asked him about his background. Ali told him. Suhrawardy smiled. Syed Badrudduja's son, yes. That explained the questions.

There was an intellectual flame that burned in him. He was, if anyone could spare a moment to observe him in his early youth, destined to be either a scholar or a politician. His record marks in Islamic History and Culture from Calcutta University would soon lead to his move to what was then East Pakistan in the early 1950s.

Ali identified with the Language Movement of 1952 and even suffered a spate of incarceration for his reluctance to compromise on an issue he shared with other young men. Come the 1960s. And Ali would find himself in Britain, busy preparing for a legal career. The sheer energy in him propelled him into the classroom as much as it did into activities outside it.

As president of the Pakistan Youth Federation in the United Kingdom, Ali brought intellect and class into his dealings with people. In the early 1970s, back in Dhaka, he shared in the sentiments of other Bengalis that Pakistan perhaps had outlived its utility in East Bengal.

As March 1971 powered ahead with the strident, purposeful calls for an end to military rule, Ali wrote the scathing editorials in *The People* newspaper that the soldiers certainly did not miss. On March 25, the Pakistan army torched the offices of *The People*.

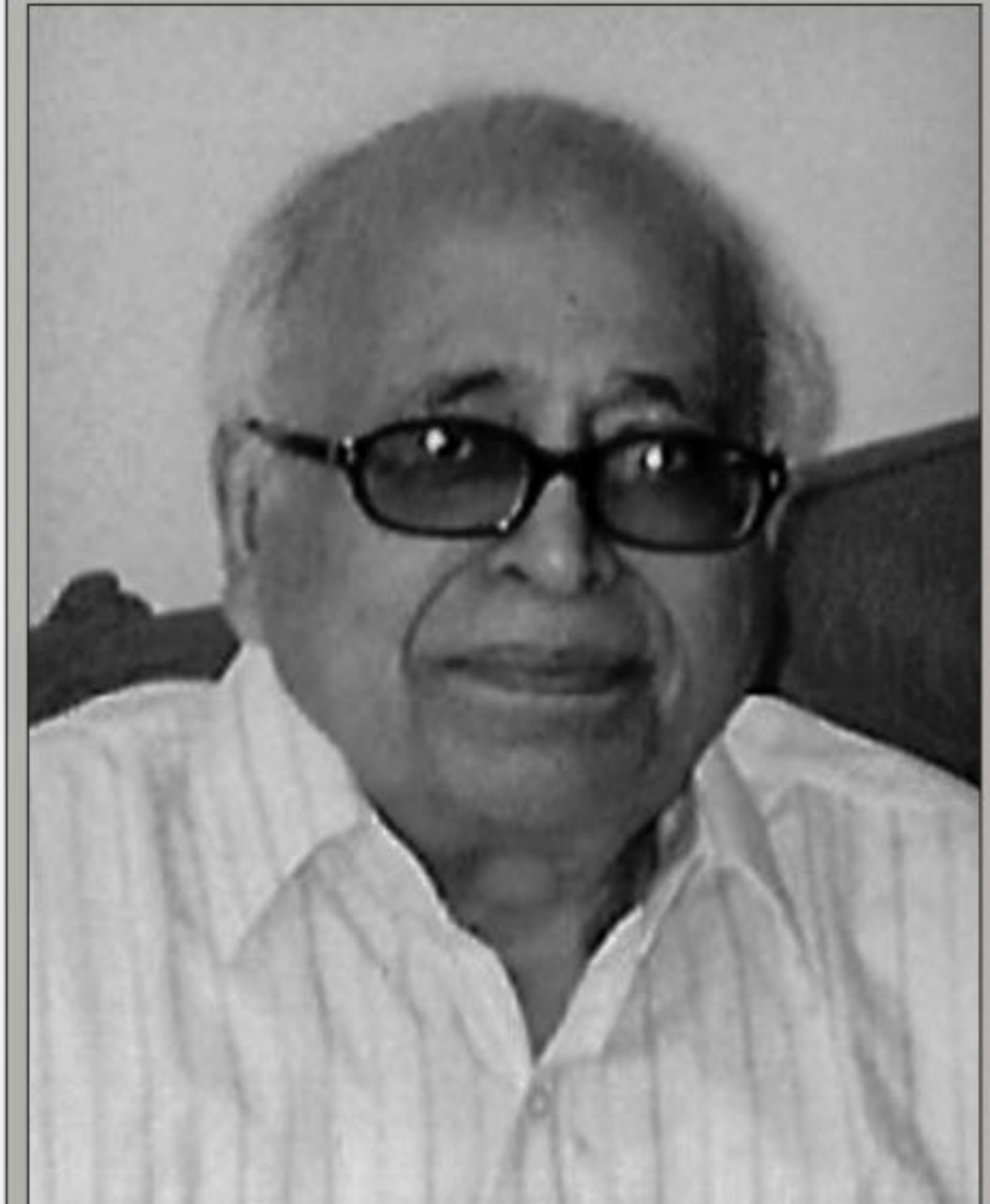
Syed Mohammad Ali could well have carved a niche for himself in Bangladesh's politics. That he did not do so and yet remained in touch with the changing fortunes of the country from distant London was a sign of the essential political being he was and would be till the end. His friends, all lawyers, all of whom had studied for the Bar with him, would rise to prominence in Bangladesh. Ali made his choice.

In Britain, it was the Labour Party that appealed to him. He had no sympathy for the Tories; and if he had any reservations about New Labour, he kept them to himself. Had the times been different, he would probably be in the House of Commons. That he could seek elective office and indeed come by it was proved by his election as a local councillor. The majority of those who voted for him were whites. His appeal was across the board.

Syed Mohammad Ali was founder-president of the South London Bangladesh Welfare Association. He served as chairperson of the National Council of Bangladeshi Organisations in the UK. He was a disciplined man. A deep religiosity, soaked in liberality, underlined his moral values. His conversations, substantiated by a profundity of knowledge brought on by avid reading, gave him star quality in a social ambience. There was a raconteur in him, one who could weave the sombre into the humorous, and the other way round, in patterns of erudition.

In death, Syed Mohammad Ali leaves us all diminished. And yet he informs us of the beauty of living in energy and then passing on, after we have put our books and our papers in order on the old familiar shelves.

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