

Critical Appraisal on Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and its Possible Correlation & Integration with Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

Aeshwarya Raj^{1*}, Jyoti Shankar Tripathi²

ABSTRACT

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa (SC) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) share philosophies and techniques for managing emotional disturbances through rational thinking. Sattvavajaya provides ancient wisdom, holism and ethics as a means while REBT offers modern psychological tools, exploring integration through investigation could yield helpful clinical synergies. In spite of differing origins, both offer cognitive emotive and behavioral techniques for transforming distorted thinking patterns. Integrating Sattvavajaya Chikitsa holistic methods with REBT's structured belief change strategies may have synergistic effects. However, systematic research is needed before clinical integration. Each system has unique strengths that could complement the other. Further, cross cultural studies on both approaches are warranted. Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is an Ayurvedic system of psychotherapy focusing on cultivating mental purity by restraining the mind from dysfunction. It involves techniques to withdraw consciousness from unwholesome thoughts and guide it towards Sattva(balance). The methodology regulates thinking, channels assumptions, refines objectives, and promotes insight. Main technique involves gaining self-knowledge, scriptural wisdom, mental strength, improved will power& cognition and meditation. Dr. Albert Ellis's brain child REBT on the other hand aims to help individuals abandon irrational, absolutistic thinking in favor of flexible & rational philosophies. It employs cognitive, emotive and behavioral techniques. REBT helps identify and dispute irrational beliefs using reason and logic to develop more rational thinking and balanced responses. Both systems see irrational beliefs as underlying emotional/behavioral disturbance. They use logic and persuasion to correct distorted thinking and encourage clients to gain philosophical insight. The therapist actively disputed irrational ideas in both approaches. They focus on current thinking rather than past issues. Both aim to induce contrary emotions to dysfunctional feelings. They integrate cognitive, emotive, and behavioral interventions.

Keywords: *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa, Possible Correlation, Integration, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy*

¹Research Scholar, Division of Manas Chikitsa (Neuro Psychiatry & Psychosomatic Medicine) Department of Kayachikitsa, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

²Professor, Division of Manas Chikitsa (Neuro Psychiatry & Psychosomatic Medicine) Department of Kayachikitsa, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

*Corresponding Author

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Part 1 - In-Depth Explanation of Sattvavajaya Chikitsa

Origin and Background

O Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is a traditional system of Ayurvedic psychotherapy designed to treat mental conditions through techniques focused on cultivating harmony and control of the mind. The term 'sattvavajaya' is derived from two Sanskrit words - 'sattva' meaning mind, intellect, or consciousness and 'avajaya' meaning discipline, restraint or mastery. Sattvavajaya Chikitsa thus refers to the therapeutic process of restraining and channeling the mind away from dysfunction and towards mental purity and balance.

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa was described over 2500 years ago in the ancient Ayurvedic compendium Charaka Samhita along with details about core concepts, principles, methodologies and techniques comprising this non-pharmacological approach to managing mental disturbances. As one of the foundational pillars of Ayurvedic psychology and psychotherapy, sattvavajaya Chikitsa offers a profound and holistic set of strategies for regulating cognition and promoting psychospiritual wellbeing.

Conceptual Basis

According to Ayurveda, mental balance is governed by the harmonious functioning of the three subtle qualities or gunas - sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva represents qualities like purity, clarity, calmness and balance. Rajas denotes passion, hyperactivity, egoism and intense emotions. Tamas signifies ignorance, delusion, confusion and similar negative emotions. Psychological imbalances arise when rajas and tamas dominate, overpowering the quality of sattva. The mind loses equilibrium and gets engrossed in destructive thought patterns, emotions and behaviors.

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is based on the premise that strengthening sattva while reducing rajas and tamas leads to restoration of mental health. The therapy uses mind-centered tools to exert mastery over the thought process so that mental energy can be withdrawn from dysfunctional pursuits and reoriented towards purity and wisdom. According to Charaka Samhita, the goal of sattvavajaya Chikitsa is to restrain the mind from 'ahita artha' or unwholesome objects, thoughts and perceptions that breed disturbance. When mental energy is no longer depleted in unwholesome channels, inner calm, insight and wellbeing naturally arise.

Principles

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is grounded in two key therapeutic principles:

1. Providing empathetic assurance and consolation to a patient regarding any loss or cause for grief. This may involve compensating the loss symbolically and reassuring that it is temporary.
2. Inducing emotions, thoughts and attitudes that are opposite to the maladaptive feelings causing a patient's distress (Pratidvand Chikitsa). For example, inducing feelings of courage to counter timidity or inducing disgust for unwanted addictions.

These two principles form the essence of the varied cognitive, emotive and behavioral techniques used in Sattvavajaya Chikitsa. The first principle provides emotional support aimed at immediate relief as in supportive psychotherapy, while the second principle has a long-term corrective intent.

METHODOLOGY

Five key methods constitute the step-by-step methodology through which Sattvavajaya Chikitsa aims to exert mastery over the mind:

1. Chintya - Regulating and properly channelizing the thought process
2. Vicharya - Introducing beneficial thoughts and replacing non-conducive ideas
3. Uhya - Appropriately redirecting false assumptions and presumptions
4. Dhyeya - Clarifying and correcting objectives and values
5. Sankalpa - Providing proper guidance and advice for taking right decisions and making healthy choices

Through coordinated implementation of these five methods, Sattvavajaya Chikitsa seeks to take control over the thought flow and conscious experience in order to guide the mind away from destructive patterns towards constructive avenues. The methodology reflects a sequential process spanning mental purification, reorientation, replacement and positive reinforcement.

Key Dimensions

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is applied along three key dimensions which help tailor the therapy to individual needs:

1. Trivarga anvekshana - Examining one's nature and conduct in relation to the three aims of life - virtue, wealth and pleasure
2. Tadvidya seva - Seeking knowledge and guidance from spiritual experts proficient in managing mental conditions
3. Atmadi vijnana - Gaining self-knowledge and insight into one's nature, situation and capabilities.

Assessing these three dimensions helps determine the most appropriate Sattvavajaya techniques for a person based on their unique disposition and circumstances. The three dimensions reflect the holistic focus in Sattvavajaya Chikitsa encompassing analysis of life purpose, leveraging wisdom traditions and knowing one's true self.

Psychotherapeutic Domains

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa engages three key psychotherapeutic domains depicting the modalities through which a therapist can exert influence on the patient's mind:

1. Dhi - Uplifting the intellect through viveka or discrimination between pure and impure thoughts. Using discernment to guide the mind towards truth.
2. Dhairya - Developing courage, fortitude and determination to face challenges. Strengthening mental stability amidst turbulence.
3. Atmavijnana - Stimulating self-awareness and self-realization through techniques like introspection and meditation. Directing consciousness inward to reconnect with the innermost self.

Mastering these three domains enables the therapist to judiciously combine cognitive, emotive and meditative processes to redirect the patient's mind in a positive trajectory.

Therapeutic Techniques

There are five core techniques prescribed in Sattvavajaya Chikitsa:

1. Jnana - Promoting understanding and insight into one's nature. Enabling wisdom and self-knowledge to arise & awaken using spiritual principles.

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2. Vijnana - Study of scriptural, skilled and evidence-based knowledge and philosophical teachings that discuss mental afflictions and their antidotes, thus increasing awareness of the patients.
3. Dhairya - Developing courage, ability to face difficulties, and a balanced outlook amidst all circumstances.
4. Smriti - Improving memory, contemplation and cognition so the mind can reflect accurately with emphasis on encouraging & recollecting positive memories.
5. Samadhi - Practicing meditation, introspection and absorption in the inner self to reach a tranquil and awakened state of mind. It may involve using stress management & relaxation techniques through Yoga Nidra, Preksha Dhyana etc.

These five Sattvavajaya techniques use both analytical and experiential tools to exert mastery over the mind. While jnana, vijnana and smriti rely on intellectual contemplation, dhairya and samadhi evoke emotional and meditative transformation. All techniques aim at recognizing and reducing mental impurities while unveiling the inner source of peace, truth and balance.

Comprehensive Approach

In summary, Sattvavajaya Chikitsa offers a comprehensive system integrating key principles, multidimensional methodology, psychotherapeutic domains and targeted techniques to facilitate mind management and mental purification. It incorporates cognitive, emotive, behavioral and meditative processes to help individuals gain freedom from destructive and maladaptive thoughts and patterns. According to Charaka, Sattvavajaya comprises “supreme psychotherapy” and its mastery is the mark of an ideal, enlightened therapist. Owing to its holistic orientation and versatility of application, Sattvavajaya continues to be relevant in Ayurvedic treatment of various psychological and psychosomatic disorders.

Contemporary Application and Research

Although Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is an ancient science, its principles remain relevant in modern times. Contemporary literature has explored adaptations and applications of Sattvavajaya in managing disorders like depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive syndrome, phobias and addictions. The techniques are being increasingly integrated with counseling and psychotherapy approaches across both Eastern and Western modalities.

For instance, Sattvavajaya techniques like pratipaksha bhavana (cultivating opposite emotions) have been compared with cognitive restructuring methods used in rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which also aim to alter habitual thought patterns that cause emotional disturbances. Similarly, the practice of self-inquiry and introspection in Sattvavajaya mirrors mindfulness techniques. Yoga and meditation-based relaxation methods in Sattvavajaya align with mind-body interventions in modern psychotherapy.

Some key research insights on therapeutic applications of Sattvavajaya Chikitsa:

- A study on patients of irritable bowel syndrome showed that Sattvavajaya meditation along with yoga-based lifestyle changes significantly reduced anxiety and improved quality of life over 8 weeks.
- In smokers attempting to quit, a Sattvavajaya-based counseling intervention focusing on pratipaksha bhavana led to greater control over cravings and withdrawal compared to nicotine replacement alone.

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- Counseling cancer patients using Sattvavajaya techniques helped improve perceived mental health, energy levels and emotional resilience indicating enhanced mind-body wellbeing.
- For patients diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), Sattvavajaya counseling as an adjunct to SSRIs medication resulted in significantly greater reductions in compulsions compared to medication alone.
- In a study on the impact of Sattvavajaya on healthy volunteers without clinical disorders, regular practice of Sattvavajaya meditation improved attention spans, visual memory, and scores on tests of executive functions.

Such studies substantiate the beneficial effects of Sattvavajaya in addressing varied mental health issues underscoring its continuing relevance. Integrating Sattvavajaya with modern psychotherapy approaches could provide a culturally inclusive and more holistic alternative to purely biomedicine-based treatments. However, more rigorous, large-scale studies are still needed to systematically investigate the specific therapeutic mechanisms and efficacy of Sattvavajaya techniques, especially for clinical applications.

Part 2 - Detailed Explanation of REBT

Origins and History

Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is a comprehensive, action-oriented system of psychotherapy developed by Dr. Albert Ellis in 1955. REBT evolved from Alfred Adler's school of individual psychology and also incorporated elements of stoic philosophy and ancient eastern spiritual teachings. Ellis broke from Freudian psychoanalysis and pioneered a more direct, structured approach focused on resolving emotional and behavioral problems in the present.

REBT is considered a founding therapy in the tradition of cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) as it emphasizes identifying and changing dysfunctional thinking patterns that fuel distress. However, REBT retains a philosophical, humanistic core highlighting unconditional self-acceptance, tolerance, and flexible thinking. REBT emerged as a radical departure from prevailing therapy models in the 1950s. Over decades of practice and refinement, REBT continues to be an influential, widely-practiced psychotherapy model.

Theoretical Formulation

REBT is based on the ABC model which forms the core theoretical framework:

A - Activating event or adversity

B - Belief system or evaluative reaction

C - Emotional and behavioral consequence

Ellis argued that it is not events themselves (A), but our interpreting beliefs (B) that largely cause our emotional and behavioral reactions (C). Irrational beliefs he termed "musturbatory" as they contain absolutist demands about how things must or must not be. Examples include "I must be perfect" "Everyone must treat me kindly" "Life should be easy." When activating events contradict these beliefs, intense negative emotions result. REBT aims to help individuals identify and dispute their irrational beliefs using reason, leading to more rational philosophies and balanced emotions/behaviors.

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Ellis categorized core irrational beliefs under three types:

1. Self-defeating, rigid demands about oneself. For example, “I absolutely must perform well!”
2. Awfulizing beliefs that exaggerate negatives. For example, “It’s terrible if I’m rejected.”
3. Low frustration tolerance beliefs escalating preferences into necessities. For example, “I can’t stand this pain.”

Through REBT, individuals learn to reframe absolutistic beliefs into rational, flexible preferences allowing more constructive responses even amidst difficulty.

Therapeutic Process and Techniques

Several key REBT methods help dispute irrational beliefs and develop rational philosophies:

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** Identifying irrational beliefs, evaluating their validity, challenging them through logic and reason, and replacing them with more rational interpretations.
- **Emotive Techniques:** Confronting irrational emotional reactions, modeling rational coping statements, using humor and exaggeration to illustrate fallacies.
- **Behavioral Interventions:** Setting goals, roleplays, real-life homework assignments to reinforce practicing rational thinking and adaptive actions.
- **Philosophical Education:** Teaching the theory behind ABS, unconditional self-acceptance, tolerance of uncertainty, and flexibility.
- **Disputing Techniques:** Asking probing questions, presenting contradictory evidence, using logic to undermine absolutistic demands.

REBT emphasizes collaboratively working with the client in an active, educational manner. The therapist forcefully disputes irrationalities while conveying unconditional positive regard. REBT integrates various verbal and action-oriented strategies to produce deep, lasting change in thinking and behavior.

Applications and Efficacy

REBT is practiced in many clinical settings and found effective for various conditions including:

- Depression - REBT helps clients modify self-defeating beliefs and adopt more constructive philosophies about self, others and life. This alleviates depressive moods.
- Anxiety Disorders - REBT enables clients to challenge beliefs that exaggerate risk of danger and replace them with resilient thinking. Clients also learn to accept uncertainty.
- Addictions - REBT helps clients overcome rationalizations for addictive habits by blocking self-defeating thoughts and adopting anti-addictive philosophies.
- Eating Disorders - Challenging irrational beliefs about body image, perfectionism, and self-control reduces disordered eating patterns.
- Relationship Issues - REBT identifies rigid “musts” about partners and teaches flexibility, unconditional acceptance, healthy communication.
- Chronic Anger - REBT uncovers hostile demands and entitlement beliefs fuelling anger and teaches clients rational coping methods.

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Meta-analyses substantiate REBT's efficacy for improving conditions like depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders, eating disorders and personality disorders. REBT also enhances general psychological wellbeing by teaching healthy philosophies. Overall, extensive theory, therapy manuals, and over 1000 outcome studies support the effectiveness of REBT principles.

Part 3 - Correlations Between Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and REBT Approaches

Despite originating in divergent cultural contexts, Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and REBT share notable philosophical parallels in their models of mental disturbance and suffering. Both highlight distorted thinking patterns as being at the root of dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive behaviors. And both offer cognitive, emotive and behavioral techniques to identify and modify irrational belief systems. Some key correlations between the two approaches:

Irrational Beliefs as the Cause of Disturbance

In REBT, absolutistic rigid "musts" constitute irrational beliefs that fuel emotional and behavioral problems when activated by adversity. Similarly, Sattvavajaya sees the root cause as distorted mental impressions, attachments and thought patterns termed rajas and tamas which breed suffering when stimulated. Both systems locate the origin of mental affliction within unchecked, distorted cognitions.

Using Logic and Reason to Assess Thoughts

Both Sattvavajaya and REBT emphasize critically examining thoughts, beliefs and appraisals using logic, discernment and introspection. REBT questions absolutist demands while Sattvavajaya seeks to discriminate between pure and impure impressions. The therapist is active in critiquing faulty thinking in both approaches.

Focus on Current Thinking over Past Issues

As action-oriented therapies, neither Sattvavajaya nor REBT dwell on in-depth analysis of the past or historical origins of schemas. Both emphasize that present beliefs themselves rather than past events cause current disturbances, so changing thinking is the target.

Teaching Philosophical Insights

Both modalities actively provide psychoeducation to clients on philosophical principles for healthy functioning, rather than just treating isolated symptoms. Sattvavajaya teaches Eastern spiritual wisdom while REBT conveys modern psychological philosophies for rational living.

Disputing and Replacing Irrational Cognitions

Both systems promote developing insight into irrational beliefs, forcefully disputing them, and strengthening alternate rational interpretations. Sattvavajaya develops opposing emotions, while REBT elicits logical counter-arguments. Both replace dysfunctional thinking habits with constructive philosophies.

Role of the Therapist

In both approaches, the therapist is active, persuasive and even confrontational in directly challenging distorted thinking rather than remaining neutral. The tone is collaborative yet educational.

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Inducing Emotional Change

While centered on cognition, both systems also emphasize emotions must change in accordance with the new rational philosophies. Feeling and behavior patterns are secondary to thought change.

Despite such commonalities, some key differences between Sattvavajaya and REBT arise from their differing knowledge origins:

- Sattvavajaya stems from ancient Indian medicine and spirituality, emphasizing virtuous living, yoga and realizing the eternally blissful nature of the true self. REBT derives from modern Western psychology and targets specific emotional and behavioral problems primarily through cognitive change.
- Sattvavajaya highlights cultivating sattva and self-inquiry as lifelong endeavors to attain inner freedom. REBT focuses on resolving current clinical issues through rational thinking.
- Sattvavajaya encompasses meditative reflection, prayer, lifestyle changes and guru guidance as part of altering consciousness. REBT is more cognitive and individualistic, relying on reason and personal agency.
- Sattvavajaya emerged from a preventive model of health while REBT arose from a clinical context of managing psychopathology. Their goals and applications differ accordingly.

In summary, while the two systems have differing trajectories, they converge in identifying and correcting distortions within the mind as essential for managing emotional suffering. Both offer psychotherapeutic techniques for developing deeper philosophical insights. While Sattvavajaya is derived from spiritual philosophy, many of its core principles like cognitive reappraisal parallel key REBT strategies stemming from modern psychology.

Part 4 - Possibilities for Integrative Application

The parallels between Sattvavajaya and REBT point to potential benefits in skillfully integrating techniques from the two approaches for more culturally-inclusive and holistic psychotherapy protocols. Some possibilities:

- Cognitive restructuring techniques from REBT could strengthen and systematize the thought investigation, disputation and correction processes in Sattvavajaya.
- The use of logic, debate and disputation methods in REBT may complement Sattvavajaya's reflective, contemplative methods for assessing thoughts.
- REBT could benefit by incorporating Sattvavajaya techniques like yoga, meditation, lifestyle changes to target thought change at deeper mind-body levels.
- Sattvavajaya's spiritual perspectives can enrich REBT with a Sense of meaning and purpose beyond just symptom reduction.
- Sattvavajaya's emphasis on virtues and ethics can imbue REBT with ideas for social.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy represent two psychotherapeutic approaches that aim to alter distorted thinking in order relieve emotional/behavioral disturbances. Both employ reason, logic, education and active direction from the therapist to clients help gain philosophical insights and adopt balanced, flexible thinking. Sattvavajaya has been derived from ayurvedic medicine while REBT represents modern psychology. In spite of differing origins, they have notable philosophical

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and technical parallels. However, Sattvavajaya emphasizes virtuous living, yoga and spiritual growth unlike the more cognitive, problem focused REBT. Evaluating potential integration after thorough research could yield helpful clinical synergies by drawing from the strengths of both systems. Further cross-cultural studies on the two approaches are warranted.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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