

REVIEW ARTICLE

Talk Therapy and Indic Traditions

Gopal V. Tadepalli

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Gopal V. Tadepalli. Talk Therapy and Indic Traditions. RFP Ind Jr of Med Psy. 2025; 8(2): 57-62.

ABSTRACT

Psychologists and psychiatrists play vital roles in mental health care. Psychology evolved from philosophical inquiries into the mind to a formal field of study, marked by systematic investigations into behavioural and cognitive processes. Psychiatry is a branch of medicine focused on diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental health disorders.

Talk therapy is a form of mental health treatment used both by psychologists and psychiatrists to address the emotional, behavioural, and psychological issues. In addition, licensed counsellors, social workers, and psychiatric nurses are among the professionals who offer talk therapy.

There are different types of talking therapy such as one-to-one, in a group, online, over the phone, with family, or with partner.

Bhuta Vidya is the branch of traditional medicine that addresses mental and psychosomatic disorders attributed to “bhutas” [spirits or supernatural causes]. Modern medicine often describes it to encompass conditions arising from unknown or complex factors. The equivalent of Bhuta Vidya in this view tends to be **Psychiatry or Neuropsychiatry and Psychological problems**.

Talk therapy is common to both traditional and modern medical practices in psychology and psychiatry. This paper is a study report on associated Indic traditions.

KEYWORDS

• Talk Therapy • Psychology • Psychiatry • Bhuta Vidya • Behavior • Cognition

AUTHOR'S AFFILIATION:

Retired Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering & Retired Director, Centre for Applied Research in Indic Technologies, College of Engineering, Guindy Campus, Anna University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Gopal V. Tadepalli, Retired Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering & Retired Director, Centre for Applied Research in Indic Technologies, College of Engineering, Guindy Campus, Anna University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: gopal@annauniv.edu

➤ Received: 07-11-2025 ➤ Accepted: 02-12-2025



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the Red Flower Publication and Open Access pages (<https://www.rfppl.co.in>)

INTRODUCTION

Soothsayer is a person who predicts the future by magical, intuitive, or more rational means. Sooth is an archaic word meaning “truth” or “reality”.

Soothsaying relies on mystical, intuitive, or symbolic tools [e.g., tarot cards, palm reading, astrology] to predict future events or reveal hidden information.

The Sanskrit terms “madhuhan”, “vipaJcanaka”, “vipaJcika”, “siddhAdesha”, “vaipaJcamika” and “mahajjanin” mean “soothsayer” in English.

Soothsaying is empirical. The method relies on beliefs in supernatural forces, omens, and signs to gain insight into future events or the hidden causes of present misfortunes such as spiritual origin of an illness.

The Sanskrit root “vid” means to know, understand, find, or exist. Jyotirvid, which literally means “one who knows” (vid) about the “heavenly bodies” (jyoti) is the best equivalent of “Soothsayer”. The concept of vid evolved into “wisdom” in English and relates to the word “witch” through the concept of a “possessor of knowledge”.

Science comes from the Latin verb “sciō, scire” meaning “to know”. Prescience which means foreknowledge of events, is from “prae-” and “scire” to make praescire, meaning “to know beforehand.” Prae- is an archaic form of “pre-”.

Prognostic can mean “prophecy” while prognosis is used often in medical contexts to refer to the prospect of a patient’s recovery.

Talking through problems to someone outside of the situation may help finding a solution to the problem. Talk therapy builds further to ease the symptoms of a mental health condition. Experts advise *talking* after a crisis regardless of the crisis being small, big, personal, or national. Talking using own words is one of the natural, built-in, therapeutic capacities.

The Word [logos in Greek; *verbum* in Latin] is an exclusive attribute of a rational animal such as the human, who shares non-verbal language with other animal species. The Word docket and confers meaning to things and actions.

“Man does not come to live as a man, but insofar as he has in himself something divine”
– Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

It is not by chance that the personification of the psychological and social efficacy of the spoken word reached a divine condition even among the Greeks. Peithó was the Greek goddess of persuasive speech.

In ancient Greece there is evidence of the use of the word with a healing intention. Such a word can be in the form of an *incantation* that is of imperative nature based on the specifics of what is to be repaired or avoided. It can be a *spell* with the efficacy depending not only on the formula used and the power of who pronounces it but also on the divine potencies who listen to it.

The narratives in the form of words are frequently influenced by cultural beliefs and experiences. So are their interpretations by listener. The narrator listener interactions gain the status of a therapy when the listener is a certified medical practitioner. It is currently an empirical method with a perception of therapy when the listener is a soothsayer.

The common characteristics that make a therapy are:

1. An emotionally intense relationship of trust.
2. An underlying theory or explanation.
3. Provision of new information.
4. Strengthening the expectations of receiving help.
5. On of success experiences.
6. Facilitation of emotional arousal, necessary for changing.

The effectiveness of the therapy depends on the nurturing of hope which is a powerful ingredient that ultimately results from the personal qualities of the narrator and the listener who can either be a medical practitioner or a soothsayer.

The listener gives a name to a set of words to the morbid mental condition of the narrator and thus dominates at least a part of the reality. The narrator then feels relieved in his uncertainty to comply with certain practices to undertake thus beginning the therapeutic endeavour.

There are several empirical studies on the impact of the words used and the aspects of the way they are spoken. Social media, Fitness Apps, E-Commerce Apps and several Health and Wellness Apps are all examples of the way

persuasive technologies change individual attitudes or behaviours.

Indic Traditions

Mental disorders have been represented across Indic scriptures. The epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharatha**⁹ are replete with several case studies.

The methods in the western medical practice emphasize singularity, self-sufficiency, and independence.

Indic traditions position the values, intimacy, family unity, and security making it a collectivist society. Mental illness is due to:

1. internal factors such as Vata, Pitta and Kapha.
2. external factors, such as fear or ill influence of Gods or Demons.

Time tested methods for healing include religious discourses by sages. This is the foundation for "Talk Therapy" in Indic traditions.

Ayurveda has the following three healing modalities.

1. **Yuktivyapashray Chikitsa**: Rationalization through mind-body unification. The methods include Achara [Household Spiritual Practices] Ahara [Food], Vyavahara [Life - Style Oriented Practices] and Oushada [with specified materials such as herbs and other special preparations]
2. **Daivyapashray Chikitsa**: Faith Healing.
3. **Satvavajay Chikitsa**: Nonpharmacological approach through Yoga and Meditation for controlling the mind.

Spiritual knowledge, Philosophy, Fortitude, Remembrance, and Concentration are the cornerstones for healing.

Bhuta Vidya in Ayurveda which includes many psychotherapeutic abilities for the safe and long-lasting treatment of the following mental illnesses using the *Daivyapashray Chikitsa* [Faith Healing].

1. The Amanushaj Vyadhi

The Amanushaj Vyadhi [paranormal disorders] happen on human beings due to the medium of human being. Hence the focus on collectivist society. The primary causes of these disorders are:

Puja Vidha [Adoration] in the form of rituals, adoration, worshiping.

Krida Vidha [Amusing] in the form of some type of intercourses and romanticism seeking lonely places.

Himsa Vidha [Abusing] in the form of tongue damage, making noisy sounds and tears welling in the eyes.

There are three major types of adoration given below.

- a. **Daiva Justah** - the adoring towards divinity
- b. **Yaksha Justah** - the adoring towards logicity.
- c. **Pitra Justah** - the adoring towards ancestors.

There are three major types of amusing given below.

- a. **Gandharvonmada** - the amusing for romanticism
- b. **Bhutonmada or Grahonmada** - the amusing for fanaticism
- c. **Bhujangonmada** - the amusing for hedonism.

"Sushruta Samhita"^{4,5} has the description of eight types of bhutonmada [deva, asura, gandharva, yaksha, pitru, naga, rakshasa, and pishachi]. "Charaka Samhita" has descriptions of eleven types of bhutonmadas [deva, rushi, guru, vruddha, siddha, pitru, gandharva, yaksha, rakshasa, brahma rakshasa, and pishachi].

Eighteen types of bhutonmada [deva, asura, rushi, guru, vruddha, siddha, pitru, gandharva, yaksha, rakshasa, sarpa, brahma rakshasa, pishacha, kushmanda, nishada, preta, maukirana, and vetala] are explained in Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridaya.

Vishesha [special] or Upa [subtype] Grahonmadas are the subtypes or minor grahnomada's and the description of 16 types is found only in "Ashtanga Sangraha".

There are three types of abusing given below.

- a. **Danava Graha: Daiva Satru** - the abusing that stems from hostility.
- b. **Raksasa Graha: Yaksha Satru** - the abusing for retaliation.
- c. **Pishacha Graha: Pitra Satru** - the abusing for scarcity specifically in conjunction with the "Pitra" [Ancestral].

In this context, “Graha” means “to seize or to possess” and “Satru” mean “Enemy”.

2. Apasmaraj Vyadhi

The Apasmaraj Vyadhi [Epileptic Disorders] includes Apasmara i.e loss of memory, senselessness and not able to recognise the things. Healing based on internal factors mentioned above is feasible up to a limited degree. It is a collectivistic society approach that is strongly advocated by Ayurveda rather than an individual specific approach currently practised by modern medicine.

3. Umnadaj Vyadhi

The Umnadaj Vyadhi [Mental Disorders] that includes any one or all of the conditions such as confusion in the mind, in the intelligence, in the senses, in the memory, in the adoration, in the character, in the bodily movements and behaviour. The causes may due to all the internal factors [Sannipatajah], wounds and other traumatic conditions [Agantuja] and toxics [Vishjanya].

Bhuta Vidya advocates the following long lasting healing methods.

a. Daivavyapashrayam Chikitsa: Faith Healing which includes the notions of Karma or *Pragnaparadha* with many god-oriented practices that are classified as religion. The practices are consequences of bad deeds done in the present or past life.

b. Mani Chikitsa: Using precious stones and gems.

c. Mantra Chikitsa: Saman Chants and Prayers which can also be musical.

d. Oshadhi Chikitsa: Offerings such as Arpana [to the God], Tarpana [to the Ancestors] and Aatidhya [hospitality accorded to fellow human beings].

e. Manglika Karma: Rituals.

f. Bali: sacrifice.

g. Uphara: donation.

h. Homa: the fire ceremony.

i. Niyama: to follow the rituals, rules and regulations.

j. Prayasschita: the confession.

k. Upavasa: fasting and chastity.

l. Svastyayana: prayers.

m. Gamanadi: pilgrimage.

n. Pranipata: To have honour for the elders.

o. Vastu: the construction of a dwelling with a focus on healing.

Talk Therapy⁸ of the Soothsayers punctuates the Daivyapashray Chikitsa. In the modern medical parlance, these therapies roughly match the following methods.

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:** Practices to heal Depression, Anxiety, Substance Use, and eating disorders.
- **Dialectical Behaviour Therapy:** Practices to heal Stress, Loss of Focus in the Present, Emotional and Interpersonal Concerns.
- **Exposure Therapy:** Exposing to the fears that are real or perceived in a controlled manner.
- **Interpersonal Therapy:** Focus is on current relationships and interpersonal events.
- **Mentalization Based Therapy:** Helps to make sense of our thoughts, beliefs, desires and feelings.
- **Psychodynamic Therapy:** Focus on psychological interpretation of mental and emotional processes.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing:** Recovery from panic, trauma, distressing life experiences.
- **Internal Family Systems Therapy:** Collectivist Society approach rather than driving down to an individual.

3. Pramana Vidya

Pramana Vidya [the science of valid knowledge or epistemology] provides the fundamental scientific and logical framework for Ayurveda. Indic traditions utilize *Pramanas* [means of acquiring knowledge] as essential tool for systematic investigation, diagnosis [known as *Pariksha*].

Charaka Samhitha specifies the following four pramanas.¹

1. **Pratyaksha** [Direct Perception/Evidence].
2. **Anumana** [Inference/Logical Deduction].
3. **Aptopadesha** [Authoritative Testimony/Scriptural Evidence].
4. **Yukti** [Logical Reasoning/Rational Planning].

Aptopadesha has a special place in healing and forms the foundation for talk therapy.

Pramana Vidya avers:

“Aaptastu Yadartha Vaktha”

Meaning:

Authentic advices are the direct and authentic source of knowledge.

“Trividhe Tasmin Njanasamudaye Purvam Aptopadesath Njanam ”

Meaning

“Among the three kinds of knowledge, the first [is] knowledge through the advice of an authentic [Apta] person”.

Apta invariably administers the talk therapy that heals. Aptas are masters in a particular field of discourse and are competent to make conclusions and inventions. Some of the qualities of Apta are:

- Free from mental impurities [Rajas and Tamas] through powerful dedication and knowledge.
- Have pure , projected and error free knowledge.
- Deliver doubtless statements.
- Always speak truth, because they are devoid of mental impurities.
- Aptas are otherwise called the Learned [Sista and the Enlightened or Vibuddha].

Pramana Vidya is crucial to Ayurveda for the following reasons:

- Ensures Validity
- Systematic Diagnosis
- Evidence-Based Approach
- Holistic Assessment

Apta Vakya is the Verbal Testimony that is an authentic statement. “Apta Vakya” is governed by the following definitions.

“Vakyam Pada Samoohaha”

Meaning

Vakya [sentence] is a collection of Pada [Words]

“Saktham Padam”

Meaning

Pada [Word] is that which possesses power for expressing a meaning.

“Asmath Padadayamartho Bodhavyam Ithi Iswara Sangethaha Sakthihi”

Meaning

Shakti [Power] is the convention of God by which word expresses a particular meaning.

A Vaidya [Therapist] always makes the correct word meaning pairs manifest. A Vaidya should be well versed in the scientific principles and theories before starting their application in human beings. Acharyas laid different theories and principles after ample experimentations & observations, without adopting them as primary source of knowledge one can never advance in their application.

A Vaidya uses the Aptopadesa to know:

- **Nidana:** General causative factors of diseases
- **Yoni:** Specific causative factors of diseases
- **Adhishtana:** Site of diseases
- **Lakshana:** Complete symptoms of diseases

The talk therapy then administered will induce the effect of curds. However, the entire methodology is more empirical. It is a systematic approach to knowledge that relies on direct observation and experimentation to test and validate theories.

Empirical evidence is a cornerstone of science. However, it can be influenced by errors in data collection, fail to capture full complexity, or be insufficient for phenomena like consciousness or irreversible processes. A “full science” requires integrating empirical evidence with other methods and theories to create a more complete understanding.

The entirety of “Bhuta Vidya” in Indic traditions and associated talk therapy is applied within modern day psychiatry and psychology in a limited scope as determined by the “full science”. There is a lot of task ahead to comprehend the “Bhuta vidya” in modern medicine. In any case, Science, particularly research into health and medicine has seldom been 100% definitive. A considerable aspect of healing is arts. “Talk Therapy” in Indic traditions has a good measure of arts.

4. Ethics of Talk Therapy

The ethical awareness and personal values of the therapist ought to be in accordance to the principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity. The framework is not purely rule-based but relational and contextual. The core principles are given below.

- **Autonomy:** Healing based on informed consent and independence of the narrator
- **Beneficence:** Always extending the benefit of doubt to the narrator
- **Fidelity:** Faithfulness that includes appropriate references for the "Aptopadesha".
- **Veracity:** Truthfulness through avoidance of misleading statements and disclosure of authentic credentials for an "Apta".
- **Nonmaleficence:** Respecting the acceptable limits for the narrator – listener interactions.
- **Justice:** Impartiality towards all narrators
- **Respect for Persons and Privacy Concerns:**

"...should be: serious without being overbearing [...], difficult in contradiction, penetrating and conversational in the concordances, moderate towards all, silent in the face of confusion, resolute and firm in the face of silence, well disposed to take advantage of the opportunity...; and they will speak declaring with their statements, as far as possible, everything that has been demonstrated, using good speech... and fortified by the good reputation that results from it." - Lain Entralgo P., "Healing through words in classical antiquity", Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, pp 215 – 218, 1970 Original Spanish: La curación por la palabra en la antigüedad clásica, Madrid: Revista de Occidente S.A., 1958.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper is to provide a perspective on the current state of the research related to certain spiritual practices and review the methodological issues that confront this research field. There are many types of spiritual practices that might be studied including prayer and meditation, as well as unusual practices such as mediumistic trance states, speaking in tongues, and drug-induced experiences.

The modern terms that roughly match the mental illnesses indicated in this paper are "Schizophrenia", "Hebephrenia", "Oculogyric Crisis", "Catatonic Schizophrenia", "Catatonia", "Dementia", "Mood Disorders with Psychosis", "Bipolar Disorder with Psychosis" and "Bipolar Psychosis". Mania is a core symptom of

conditions like bipolar disorder and can lead to psychosis when it is severe.

The author reports that without any loss of generality the Indic traditions yield the necessary effectiveness of using talk therapy for many forms of "mental illnesses".

REFERENCES

1. Aaradhana P. Pasarkar and Pradyumna M. Pasarkar, "Ayurveda Concept Of Pramana And Its Utility In Ancient Practices", World Journal of Pharmaceutical And Medical Research, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp 216-218, 2024.
2. Amarnath K. Menon, Bhoot Vidya, a Ghost Science?, India Today Insight, Jan 3, 2020.
3. Gurpegui M, "The Healing Power of Talk Therapy", Actas Espanolas De Psiquiatria, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp 145-147, 2023.
4. Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, Sushruta Samhita, Calcutta, 1918.
5. Khagen Basumatary, L. Sujalata Devi, Chumi Bhatta and Loukrakpam Victoria Devi, "A Brief Mention of Bhoot Vidya (Psychotherapy) In Susruta Samhita By Acharya Susruta", International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research, Vol 6, Issue 5, May 2018.
6. Khagen Basumatary, Jyoti Choudhary and Nikita Sarkar, "Concept Of Psychology In Ayurveda System", World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, Volume 14, Issue 13, pp 195-203, 2025.
7. Niwlikar, B. A, "5 Important Ethical Considerations in Psychotherapies". Careershodh, November 3, 2025.
8. Lisa Quigley, "Common Types of Talk Therapy", Not 9 to 5, January 19, 2022.
9. Maherra Khambaty and Rajesh M. Parikh, "Cultural Aspects of Anxiety Disorders in India", Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience - Vol 19 . No. 2 . 2017.
10. Mamidi P and Gupta K, "Vishesha or Upa Grahonmadas: Various Psychiatric and Neuropsychiatric Conditions", International Journal of Yoga - Philosophy, Psychology and Parapsychology | Volume 9, Issue 1, pp 23-31, January-June 2021.
11. Suman Lata, Vidushi Tyagi and Parmod, "The Bhootvidya - The unrevealed branch of Ayurveda", Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences, Vol. 8, Issue 8, August 2023.