

Rediscovering the Comprehensive Contribution of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi in the Contemporary Psychology

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Abstract. During the Golden Age spanning the 7th - 13th century, Muslims gained renown for their expertise in various scientific disciplines, encompassing both pure and social sciences. Significant advancements were made in fields such as sociology, psychology, history, and political science. It's noteworthy that, despite the absence of specific nomenclature for individual fields of study, Muslim scholars played pivotal roles in shaping and progressing these social sciences during that era. Following the wane of the Golden Age of Islam, the contributions of Muslim scholars across various knowledge domains became less prominent. The aftermath of this decline has resulted in a persistent state where Muslims find themselves constrained, akin to being in a metaphorical lizard's hole, largely influenced by the colonization of their minds. Muslim psychologists tend to adopt contemporary psychology and its theories without subjecting them to critical analysis. The secular paradigm of psychology, influenced by globalization, colonialization, and Americanization, persists in its original form. In the 20th century, the originator of Modern Islamic Psychology, Prof. Dr Malik Badri, played a crucial role in enlightening Muslim scholars about Islamic Psychology, emphasizing its cultural sensitivity. During this period, Muslim psychologists such as Malik Badri and Dr Rania Awaad delved into the examination of the contributions made by early medieval Muslim scholars to the field of Psychology. This paper aims to investigate the pioneering contributions of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi in the realm of contemporary Psychology. Al-Balkhi is recognized as a significant figure in various branches of modern Psychology, including Psychophysiology, Cognitive Psychology, Environmental Psychology, Clinical Psychology, and Positive Psychology. To address the objectives of this paper, a qualitative research method will be employed.

Keywords: contemporary psychology, modern psychologists, muslim, paradigm, social sciences

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Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, a polymath born in 850 CE in Shamistiyān, holds a significant but often overlooked place in the annals of history, particularly in the realm of psychology. Flourishing during the Islamic Golden Age, al-Balkhi's multifaceted contributions span various disciplines, including medicine, philosophy, astronomy, and poetry. Despite the scarcity of his works in modern libraries, his influence reverberates through time. This paper aims to shed light on al-Balkhi's pioneering contributions to psychology, focusing on his groundbreaking insights in cognitive psychology, psychosomatic medicine, and psychotherapy. Through an exploration of his seminal work such as "Masalih al-Abdan Wa al-Anfus" (Sustenance for Bodies and Souls) delve into his conceptualizations of mental health, depression, and emotional disorders, which laid the foundation for contemporary psychological theories and psychotherapeutic techniques. Furthermore, this paper examines al-Balkhi's prescient understanding of the interconnectedness between the mind and body, as well as his critique of the prevailing medical practices of his time. By analysing his ideas on environmental psychology and emotional first aid, we highlight his holistic approach to healthcare, emphasizing the importance of integrating physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Despite being overshadowed by Western ideologies and colonial influences, al-Balkhi's legacy endures as a testament to the rich intellectual

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heritage of the Islamic world. Through a re-evaluation of his works and their relevance to contemporary psychology, this paper seeks to rectify the historical oversight and recognize al-Balkhi as a visionary pioneer whose insights continue to resonate in the modern era.

Life and Works of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi

Abu Zayd Ahmed Ibn Sahl Balkhi's life and contributions offer a fascinating glimpse into the intellectual richness of the Islamic Golden Age. Born in 850 CE in Shamistiyān, in the Province of Balkh, Greater Khorasan, he flourished as a polymath across various disciplines. His migration to Baghdad during the era marked by the death of Al-Kindi allowed him to delve into philosophy, astronomy, and the natural sciences. Despite the unfortunate scarcity of his works in modern libraries, Abu Zayd's influence extended widely. His notable works such as "Suwar al-Aqalim" {Pictures of the Regions} and "Masalih al-Abdan Wa al-Anfus" highlighted his prowess in fields ranging from medicine and psychology to theology and poetry. His pioneering contributions to cognitive psychology and the establishment of the "Al-Balkhi school of Terrestrial mapping" further solidified his legacy. While described as introverted, Abu Zayd engaged with esteemed peers like Abu Bakr al-Razi and Abu al-Faraj, Ibn Hindi, leaving a lasting impression with his Arabic poetry described as "a shower of gems" by his student Al-Wazir.

Despite the dearth of biographical literature, historical accounts shed light on Abu Zayd's shifting theological perspectives influenced by the tumultuous events in Baghdad. The rise of the Qarmatians and theological debates led to a re-evaluation of his beliefs, ultimately leading him back to the Sunni school of thought. His subsequent work, "Kitab al-Nazam al-Quran," reflects this ideological journey. After completing his education in Baghdad, Abu Zayd returned to Balkh, where he served as secretary to Prince Ahmad ibn Sahl Ibn Hisham al-Marawazi. Today, his legacy endures through surviving works like "Masalih al-Abdan al-Anfus," preserved in prestigious libraries like the Ayasofya Library in Istanbul (Hodayun SHAHPESANDY, MD, MSc., PhD and , Rosemary MOHAMMED-ALI, MD, 2014).

Al-Balkhi: A Pioneer Figure in Cognitive Psychology

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's pioneering contributions to psychology, particularly in the realm of cognitive therapy, remain relevant even in modern times. He proposed ideas that foreshadowed concepts like psychopathology and diagnosing psychological disorders such as depression, stress, and phobias. Considered one of the world's first cognitive psychologists, he discussed the use of cognitive therapy in treating various psychological disorders, including different types of depression. Al-Balkhi emphasized the interrelation between mind and body, highlighting and the psychosomatic concept wherein disruptions in one affect the other. He argued that faulty thinking leads to emotional pathological habits and subsequent psychological disorders. His approach to therapy, resembling modern rational cognitive therapy, focused on correcting faulty thinking patterns. In treating endogenous depression, Al-Balkhi stressed therapeutic congruency and acknowledged the importance of medical intervention when the etiology is organic. For reactive depression, he recommended a comprehensive program of both external (e.g., persuasive talk, preaching) and internal (e.g., cognitive development) therapies. Al-Balkhi's approach to treating sadness (huzn) involved both external and internal therapies, resembling the administration of medication to the physically ill alongside the development of inner thoughts and

cognition to eliminate depressive thought patterns. Overall, Al-Balkhi's insights into cognitive therapy and psychosomatic medicine laid the groundwork for modern psychological approaches, demonstrating the enduring relevance of his contributions in the field of psychology (Badri, 2013).

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring, introduced by Aaron T. Beck in the 20th century, is a structured therapeutic approach aimed at helping individuals identify, evaluate, and modify faulty thoughts, evaluations, and beliefs that contribute to their psychological distress. It involves collaboration between the therapist and the individual to challenge and change negative thought patterns, ultimately promoting more adaptive thinking and behaviour. This approach is integral to cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and is widely used in contemporary psychology to address various mental health issues (Kim Mueser, Jennifer D Gottlieb, Susan Gingerich).

It's unfortunate that the contributions of scholars like Abu Zayd al-Balkhi in the field of cognitive psychology are often overlooked in contemporary times due to factors like globalization and colonization. However, within the Islamic approach, which places a central focus on the heart, al-Balkhi's work holds significant relevance.

Despite predating contemporary cognitive-behavioural therapy by over a millennium, al-Balkhi's insights into phenomena and processes akin to modern psychology are noteworthy. His emphasis on addressing psychopathological diagnoses and aligning cognitions with values that reflect principles that are parallel those of CBT. Al-Balkhi's recognition of the importance of integrating worship into the healing process further underscores the holistic approach to mental health within the Islamic tradition. In both al-Balkhi's work and contemporary CBT, restructuring maladaptive thoughts plays a pivotal role in fostering constructive outcomes in patients' treatment journeys. His pioneering contributions highlight the rich intellectual heritage within the Islamic world and serve as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging diverse cultural perspectives in the study and practice of psychology (Al-Karam, 2018).

Al-Balkhi on the Concept of Ishtibakh (Interwoven)

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's concept of Ishtibakh highlights the interconnectedness between the body and soul, emphasizing that disturbances in one affect the other. He argued that when the body is unwell, it loses its functionality, impacting the individual's ability to engage in activities. Similarly, when the soul is afflicted, it also affects the body, hindering its enjoyment of various aspects of life. Al-Balkhi criticized the approach of doctors who solely treated physical ailments with medical procedures, likening it to viewing humans as mere machines. He stressed the importance of recognizing the holistic nature of human beings, acknowledging that both mental and physical aspects can become unwell and require distinct forms of treatment. This perspective underscores the need for integrated approaches to healthcare that address the interconnectedness of mind and body for optimal well-being (Jarman Arroisi & Novita Najwa Himaya, n.d.). Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's groundbreaking work in "Masalih al-Abdan wa-al-Anfus" delved into the interrelationship between the mind and body, highlighting that instability in one can quickly lead to disequilibrium in the other. His pioneering exploration of this concept laid the foundation for the field of psychosomatic medicine, which focuses on the interaction between psychological factors and bodily processes in health and disease. Additionally, al-Balkhi's insights into

the interconnectedness of mental and physical phenomena earned him recognition as a pioneer in fields such as psychophysiology and neuroscience, as his work anticipated modern understanding of how mental states influence bodily functions and vice versa. (Mohamed, 2012).

Concept of Mental Health

According to World Health Organisation, mental health is defined as the “State of well-being in which the individual realizes his own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. This is the latest definition given by W.H.O. nine hundred years back al-Balkhi talked about the concept of Mental health, he states that strong and compatible connection between mind and body is important for maintaining Mental health. Abu Zayd al- Balkhi states that when the natural equilibrium in our body changes due to which it loses its cognitive functions which results distortion of social aspect of life, that is regarded as the main aspects of mental health. Further, when the soul is inflicted, the body lose its capacity to enjoy pleasurable movements of life. Psychosomatic concept was given Al-Balkhi but later on this term was introduced by Johann Heinroth in 1818, and he is considered as the pioneer of Psychosomatic medicine (Martin, 1978). Al-Balkhi says that “psychological illness causes bodily pain”. Historically, al-Balkhi is an overlooked figure in modern psychology. Haly Abass, a Persian Physician, he later on discussed this concept in his works. This concept was not still in the consciousness of Western Psychology, Until Sigmund Freud discussed in his works (Mobayed, 2017).

Concept of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders and Modern Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM- 5)

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's contributions to the understanding and treatment of emotional disorders were groundbreaking and ahead of his time. He was the first Muslim scholar to differentiate between psychosis and neurosis, and he elaborately discussed four types of emotional disorders: anger & aggression, fear and anxiety, sadness & depression, and obsession. Al-Balkhi pioneered modern exposure therapy, which he called "Reyadat al-Nafs" (On disciplining the soul) and systematic desensitization. He believed that systematically exposing individuals to feared stimuli reduces fear sensitivity and diminishes fear responses over time. He also recognized the impact of intrusive thoughts on daily life and developed treatment approaches focusing on external and internal methods to address obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Furthermore, al-Balkhi introduced the theory of opposites, similar to the concept of reciprocal inhibition proposed by Joseph Wolpe in modern psychology. Additionally, he incorporated music therapy into the treatment of depression, showcasing his holistic approach to mental health care. Al-Balkhi's innovative techniques and holistic understanding of emotional disorders laid the foundation for modern psychological therapies (Ansari & Iqbal, 2023). Abu Zayd al-Balkhi is also known for his contribution in the field of Psychotherapy and he formulated the therapeutic techniques for the treatment of OCD which are reflected in the field of contemporary Psychology. He formulated following steps how to frame the treatment of OCD: (1) Lack of companionship and segregation should be abstained and prevented because it irritates the human consciousness. This proves that social affiliation and group focused therapy which had provided its effectiveness in the recent years of 20th century in the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorders; (2) To get engaged and attached with the worthy works keeps away a person from harmful effects of leisure

time. Moderation and centrism approach formulated by Islam was also recommended and even advised by the scientists of mental health at the same time; (3) To use the personnel whom are Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi advised using those who loves the patient and trusting in their opinion to stop symptoms. (Nabil R. Mohamed, Morsey Sh. Elswedy, Somaia M. Elsayed, Afaf Z. Rajab, 2018). Here we can say that Abu Zayd al- Balkhi was one of the medieval Muslim scholars who propounded concept OCD and therapeutic techniques how to treat it.

Emergence of Environmental Psychology from the Work of al-Balkhi

Environmental Psychology came into existence in 20th century. This term was coined by Hellpach in 1960. Environmental Psychology is defined as the branch of Psychology that which studied about the interplay between the environment and individual. This domain studied about the impact of environment on human behaviour. (Steg & Van den Berg, 2012). Abu Zayd al- Balkhi was a polymath who also discussed about the impact of environment on human, but unfortunately, he is not recognized as a pioneer in the field of Environmental Psychology, due to domination of western ideologies his contribution is overlooked in the West. According to Abu Zayd al- Balkhi body loses its capacity to enjoyment pleasurable moment of life, when it got influenced from external factors like, harsh and severe cold or heat. External factors include such as fearful entities or insulting words. Abu Zayd al-Balkhi says that reactive depression is caused by external factors such stressful life events. But he is a one the recognized personality of medieval times recognized for his contribution in the field of Islamic Psychology. Dr. Malik Badri and Dr. Rania Awad explored his contribution in the field of Islamic psychology. Abu Zayd al- Balkhi discussed in his book entitled as *Masalih al-Abdun Wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance Of bodies and Souls) about the impact of environment on human behaviour (Badri, 2013).

Concept of Depression and Its Types

According to Abu Zayd al-Balkhi depression is a state of anxiety that can be described as the unmitigated sadness. Ar-Razi defines sadness as a brain turmoil that occurs due to the loss of something loved. Abu Zayd al-Balkhi discussed the causes and solutions of depression. He is regarded as the first Muslim Psychologist who discussed about the cognition which helped in the treatment of depression. Al-Balkhi classified depression into three categories. The category of depression is Huzn or sadness that is common with everyone its frequency is common, but it couldn't affect normal activities of a man. It is this type of depression that is referred to in the most modern classification of psychiatric symptoms. However, what makes al-Balkhi's discovery remarkable is the differentiation between the second and third categories of depression since his perceptive clinical understanding allows Al-Balkhi to see the difference between endogenous (internally derived) and reactive depression. According to Abu Zayd al Balkhi, he states that just like fear and anxiety are caused by the future expectation and threats same as the depression and sadness are caused by the losing something he loves or attachment to someone. Dr. Uthman Najati who is also consider as the forefather of Modern Islamic Psychology also quotes Al-Kindi and Al-Balkhi regarding the cause and definition of depression as reflected in contemporary Psychology. Endogenous depression is type of depression that which is caused by the metabolic abnormalities and disturbances in internal biochemistry of a human. That is why that in the past endogenous depression was known as the Psychotic depression which is now known as the Major

depression. So, we can say that Abu Zayd was also known about the modern Branch of Psychiatry known as neuroscience. Second type of depression Known as the reactive depression as described by the Al- Balkhi caused by the environmental factors like unnatural thoughts about the real events of past life, in contemporary we can say it neurotic depression. Here the people are not out of touch with reality and even they are not needed to be hospitalized. This conception of depression as endogenous and reactive is supported not only by recent clinical observations and biochemical and hereditary (genetically decreased from parents to children) observations but also by experimental studies in which patients of both types are asked to respond to tests and questionnaires. Treatment of depression echoed the idea of psychotherapy. Abu Zayd al- Balkhi used preventative approach in the treatment of depression. The concept of preventative approach as reflected in modern psychology, its credit goes to Abu Zayd al- Balkhi. (Arroisi & Himaya, n.d.). Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was the first who differentiated between Psychosis and neurosis. He also says that the rational and spiritual therapies can be utilized to cure these types of disorders (Malik, 2023).

Joseph Wolphe's Concept of Reciprocal Inhibition and Its Roots in the Works of Balkhi

This phenomenon was firstly struck in the field of Physiology where the reflex of one group of muscles and concurrently stimulates opposite muscles. This therapeutic technique was used in systematic desensitization technique used for the treatment of anxiety provoking disorders. Systematic desensitization rooted from the concept of reciprocal inhibition. However, it was not until 1954 when Joseph Wolphe, a behaviour psychologist used reciprocal inhibition in treating neurosis and anxiety. Systematic sensitisation with relation technique is also known as the reciprocal inhibition (Lovina Bater, Sara Sytsma Jordan, 2017). Balkhi used this technique for the treatment of Phobias. Abu Zayd al- Balkhi talked about this reciprocal inhibition in his work Masalih al- Abdun Wa- al- Anfus thousand years ago and this term was reintroduced by Joseph Wolphe in 20th century. So, Abu Zayd al- Balkhi is overlooked for his contribution in Modern Psychology as a pioneer of some concepts in Psychology, Psychopathology, Cognitive Psychology (Imran, 2020). This approach is called "*al-laj bi al-did*" which is similar to the term "reciprocal inhibition" introduced by Joseph Wolpe in 1969 (Haque, 2004).

Concept of Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of strengths and virtues of man is called positive psychology. Further positive psychology delves into to explore positive thing in man that helps him to motivate against the challenges in life we call it as positive Psychology. In contemporary psychology, positive psychology traces back to Martin E.P. Seligman's presidential address to American Psychological Association. After this presidential address this field started to grow in the form of publications. This field of Psychology emerged in 20th century (Linley, et al., 2006). But due to colonization the contribution of Muslim become blurred and faded. This field of Psychology was discussed by Abu Zayd al- Balkhi in his work entitled as Masalih al- Abdun wa -al Anfus (Sustenance of Body and Soul). The popular positive psychology movement recognizes this, as did al- Balkhi when he recommended that one should keep positive thoughts on hand to use when needed, just as one might keep medicines in a medicine cabinet. In his work he discussed that positive thought are first aid in curing mental problems (Al-Karam, 2018).

In short, we can say that Abu Zayd al- Balkhi was pioneer of Positive Psychology instead of Martin E.P. Seligman because Zayd al- Balkhi talked about this in 9th century. To be unbiased we can say that Muslim scholars like Abu Zayd al- Balkhi are overlooked in contemporary Psychology for their original contribution in the field of Psychology.

Concept of Emotional First Aid

Emotional first aid is defined as the therapeutic technique that aims to take care of emotional injuries when they occur, so they don't become more damaging in the long run is called emotional first aid. This term was coined by American Clinical psychologist Guy Winch (Winch, 2014). So, as to concern about EFA Abu Zayd al- Balkhi talked about emotional first aid in his work entitled as the Masalih- al- Abdun Wa-al Anfus. He had profound contribution in the field of Psychoeducation in the medieval times. Balkhi, more than a millennium ago, thought of the psychoeducation, prevention of mental disorders and identification of early signs of relapse of mental illness. He says: "The world is abode of anxiety, sadness and calamity. So, it is only normal for man to expect, in spite of his efforts, the onslaught of misfortune to disturb the calmness of his soul. One may live for long time without complaining of bodily pains, but it is unlikely that one will pass a day without experiencing something that causes anger, anxiety, sadness or gloom. And it is for this reason that man should do his utmost to protect his soul from emotionally disturbing events. Since the body can be treated either internally through prevention (diet) and externally, i.e. use of medication, the soul can also be treated through internal and external means. One suffering from psychological disturbance can fight his symptoms internally by developing thoughts that neutralise the symptoms and desensitize their provocation. The tranquil thoughts should not only be generated during the illness; but also, during times of psychological health. This, could be used as a source of first aid in the absence of a physician" (Shahpesandy & Mohammed-Ali, 2014).

Al-Balkhi's Critique on Doctors

Abu Zayd al- Balkhi discussed in his work entitled as "Sustenance of Body and Soul". In his work he discussed about the connection between mind and body. He says that both of them are mutually correlated with each other. This concept of mind-body was discovered by al- Balkhi which later on confirmed by Modern Psychology. He writes in his book, "when the body becomes ill...it will prevent...learning and other (mental activities), or performing duties in a proper manner. And when the soul is afflicted, the body will lose its natural ability to enjoy pleasure and will find its life becoming distressed and disturbed". Abu Zayd al-Balkhi criticized those Doctors and Physician who would put lot of emphasis on the only on the physical health and overlook metaphysical aspect of human. He argued, "Since the construction of man is both from soul and body. So, that the existence of man is impossible and cannot be healthy without the Ishtibak (interweaving) of soul and body" (Imran, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the life and works of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi offer a profound insight into the intellectual richness of the Islamic Golden Age. His pioneering contributions to fields such as cognitive psychology, psychosomatic medicine, and psychotherapy demonstrate a remarkable understanding of the interconnectedness between mind and body, which continues to resonate in contemporary

psychology. Despite being overlooked in modern times, Abu Zayd's insights into mental health, emotional first aid, and positive psychology were ahead of his time, laying the groundwork for future developments in the field. His holistic approach to healthcare, integrating both rational and spiritual therapies, remains a testament to the enduring relevance of his contributions. As we reflect on his legacy, it is essential to recognize the importance of acknowledging diverse cultural perspectives in the study and practice of psychology, ensuring that pioneers like Abu Zayd al-Balkhi are rightfully honoured for their invaluable contributions to human understanding and well-being.

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