

ANALYSIS ON ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL ('INDIGENOUS') AND WESTERN-BASED THINKING IN THE CLASSICAL AND MODERN BURMESE ELITES' DISCOURSE CONCERNING MADNESS

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INTRODUCTION

This article will analyze aspects of Burmese thinking and discourse on the subject of madness. It will first attempt to obtain a glimpse of traditional or 'indigenous' thinking on the subject of madness as a 'disease'. Excerpts from the statements that are made in a traditional medical text book about the 'madness disease' (the text used the mainly Pali term *Onmar da*) will be reproduced in translation and among others, the classification system of the diseases, the causes of and the remedies for the 'madness disease' in that traditional Burmese medical text book will be analyzed and commented upon.

This is done mainly for the purpose of gauging traditional Burmese medical thinking on the subject and for the purpose of contrasting the observations that are made in the traditional text book with the contents of an educative 'primer' on mental disorders, also written in the Burmese language by a Western trained Burmese medical doctor in the late 1960s. The interstices (if any) between the indigenous and Western based medical thinking especially those of the earlier centuries will be discussed.

Michel Foucault's theories and critiques regarding the Western discourse about madness could perhaps be considered 'dissident' or alternative thinking about the subject of madness. Though it is not the intention of this article to even perfunctorily engage in a commentary about Foucault's theories a brief foray will be made in the second section of this article as to whether Foucault's critique as regards the development of the (mental) asylum can be discerned in the pre-colonial Burmese context.

The third section of this article will discuss some of the modern Burmese elites discourse about madness and mental patients that are made by a Burmese psychiatrist and a Burmese (non-psychiatrist) writer. Excerpts of the essential theme in books written will be analyzed. The (mainly) medical perspectives (in two books of collections of articles) and (mainly) literary slant (in a novel about a female mental patient and her doctor/therapist treating her) in the writings of the two Burmese authors will also be reviewed.

The fourth section will discuss why the dissident theories or views regarding madness/mental illness made by Michel Foucault and Thomas Szasz have not 'seeped' into modern elite Burmese discourse. Possible reasons for non-coverage and non-discussion (in terms of publications and articles) of the issues raised by Foucault and Szasz among the modern Burmese elites will be discussed.

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