

## "I think their role is absolutely vital"

Dr. Sayed Manjurul Islam

Professor

Department of English

University of Dhaka

**Q. What is the state of mental health of the people of Bangladesh, and what is your opinion about it?**

A. Newspaper reports, research findings and expert opinions suggest that about 10% of our people suffer from mental health problems that may range from acute psychological disorders to milder forms of disorders. This is by and large the case with most other countries, even those which are more developed than us. But the problem is, the general attitude to mental health in our country is extremely negative, sometimes even hostile. People with mental health problems are marginalized in any health care system. They are seen as 'problem's', and often blamed for their problems. In rural areas, such people are routinely mistreated, abused and even tortured. This is very unfortunate.

**Q. Should mental health patients be cared for? What is your opinion about it?**

A. As we take care of any of our health problem, we should also take care of mental health problems. In the latter case, sustained care and patience are two important requirements, particularly with younger patients and those who are thrown into challenging situations by their mental health problems. Our health policies and programmes should give a great deal of attention to the issues of mental health. Many problems disappear if early and specialized treatment is provided for. In many other cases, specialized care is necessary over a period of time. Unfortunately however, facilities for treating mental health patients are extremely poor in our country, and the general attitude towards mental health shows a mixture of ignorance, superstition and resentment.

**Q. What role do you think the clinical psychologists can play in the mental health care system?**

A. I think their role is absolutely vital. Many forms of mental health problems need specialized treatment and care, and only clinical psychologists (CP) can provide that. But Bangladesh, with close to 14 million people suffering from one form of mental health problem or the other, has only a few dozen clinical psychologists. It needs at least 6000! When shall we have the other 5900 plus CPs.?

**Q. What is your opinion of Clinical Psychology?**

A. I believe it is a specialized branch of life sciences whose domain is not only mental health, but the whole nexus between mind and body whose fine tuning ensures our total well being. Clinical Psychology also deals with factors that affect mental health whose operation may lie outside the body—such as traumatic events, abusive social environment and so on. I believe it is a comprehensive science that treats its subjects in a holistic rather than isolated manner.

This is of course, a layman's view!

**Q. Say something for the readers of *The Clinical Psychologist*.**

A. I'll only repeat a line I heard a long while ago in a different context: 'A mind is a terrible thing to waste.' It is indeed the most precious thing we have, and one that exists in a fine balance with our body. Any abuse may disturb that balance. Engage your mind in creative and beautiful pursuits. Enrich it. Cultivate it. And above all, have faith in it.

### About writer

Dr. Sayed Manjurul Islam, Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka, is a renowned writer, poet and columnist of our country.