

Spiritual Psychiatries: Mental Health Practices in India and UK

Natalie Tobert

CreateSpace (Apr 29, 2014)

Softcover \$24.50 (412pp)

978-1-4949-6225-8

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Spiritual Psychiatries: Mental Health Practices in India and UK, by Natalie Tobert, is a well-researched look at the complementary nature of Eastern and Western approaches to mental health. Tobert, a medical anthropologist, uses qualitative research to compare and contrast Eastern and Western mindsets about mental health, focusing specifically on India and the UK. The result is a culturally open approach that is applicable to nations around the world.

Tobert curates ideas with wisdom and without judgment—a fine line for any researcher, but especially for one in such an emotionally and idealistically charged field. The book builds on ideas in a measured, orderly fashion. Part 1 presents Tobert's observational study in Kolkata, India. In the second section, she explores treatment strategies used by a diverse group of practitioners throughout southern India—spanning pharmacology, homeopathy, and religion. Part 3 digs into causative factors behind mental illness, from substance abuse and biological factors to past lives and the occult, again based on practitioner interviews. In part 4, Tobert takes an in-depth look at Indian philosophies of health, psychology, and existence. In the final section, she examines how and to what extent Eastern thought is transferable to Western practice.

The volume's conclusions call for diversity in all levels of the mental health conversation. As cultural differences are vast and sometimes unseen (the book uses an apt iceberg illustration), solutions and applications are not simple—though they are quite powerful. She recommends a more comprehensive education for Western practitioners. Tobert sees her research as a fulfillment of the goals of Western medicine rather than a change in course: “In the UK the current government had a vision for seamless collaborative mental healthcare, but this was not necessarily what happened in practice.”

The text is well organized on the chapter level as well as on the whole. Each chapter ends with a summary, and there are frequent tables and flow charts to make the information easy to digest and apply. Other visual elements include crisp, clear line drawings (many of which are maps) and photographs. The photos are generally small and would be more striking in full color, but they're not critical to understanding the ideas presented.

With its intellectual tone and methodical content, the book is well suited to its audience: those involved in all aspects of Western medicine—from the doctor's office to the floor of the legislature—and particularly those working with immigrant populations. The volume will also appeal to patients and family members with a vested interest in mental health care who feel limited by a Western-only approach.

The title accurately depicts the complementary nature of seemingly contrasting ideas—spirituality and traditional scientific thought. Adding the subtitle to the cover would further clarify what the book is about. *Spiritual Psychiatries* crosses cultures for the goal of wholeness and healing.

MELISSA WUSKE (June 9, 2014)

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