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psychiatry in literature

On Worry

Aruna Rose Mary Kapanee

Bhartrihari an Indian philosopher, poet and grammarian who lived around the fifth century CE and wrote in the Old Indo-Aryan language of Sanskrit, compared the words 'chinta' meaning 'worry, anxiety', with 'chita' meaning 'funeral pyre'. 'Chinta' is distinct from its corresponding word 'chintana', which means 'thinking, reflecting'. 'Chita' is made of wood and is used in traditional Hindu rites to burn dead bodies. When Sanskrit is written in the Devanagari script, the spelling of the two words 'chinta' and 'chita' is similar except for an 'anusvara', which is a single dot above a letter, that differentiates the two words. Bhartrihari's literary works included 'Subhashita', which literally means 'good speech', and are Sanskrit epigrammatic verse that convey wisdom and instruction. In one of his 'Subhashitas', he writes that whereas the difference between the words 'chinta' and 'chita' lies in a dot; the funeral pyre sets ablaze the dead, while worry burns and renders lifeless the living. In a similar vein, pathological worry has been indicated through research to be associated with a range of mental disorders including – anxiety, eating and alcohol use-disorders; as well as with an increased risk for developing certain physical illnesses such as gastrointestinal and heart disease.

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