

The power of mind over our health: An ayurvedic perspective

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ABSTRACT – Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine offers a holistic approach to mental health that integrates body, mind and spirit. Mental health is described in Atharva veda and in subsequent treatises by Charak, Sushrut and Vagbhata, containing the details of etiology, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of diseases in humans and animals.

At the same time, the whole world is searching for solutions to the internal conflicts in the field of mental health. The ayurvedic theory of mental health is based on the combination of the three gunas, tridosha and panchamahabhuta. The combination of three doshas and the three gunas inherited at birth indicates an individual's prakriti. A dynamic balance of three above elements creates good mental health.

The definition of health given in ayurveda is comprehensive and includes mental well being as an important component, mental health and psychosomatic illnesses were introduced to modern science in 1908. Even WHO reformed this definition of health decades ago and introduced mental health as an important aspect of health.

Charak Samhita advocates many preventive measures to save from various mental disorders – sadvritta, aachar rasayan, ritucharya & dincharya and various ausadhis. So it is clear that mental health and related disorders were well treated in ayurveda and if the principles explained in ancient texts were followed correctly many diseases can be prevented.

Keywords – Ayurveda, manas dosha, mental health, triguna, tridosha.

I. INTRODUCTION –

Ayurved is an exclusive science that not only improves physical health but also mental health in the 3rd century B.C (Charak kala). In Sushrut Samhita the complete definition of swastha (health) is given¹:

“Samadosha, samagnischa samadhatumala kriyaha

prasanna atmenindriya manaha swasthya ityabhidheeyate”

That is vata, pitta, kapha, jatharagni, ras-raktadi 7 dhatu, mala vinn-mutradi – everything has to be in perfect balance in the body. Health can be achieved when all of these physiological parameters are in balance with a healthy mind, intellect and all senses.

Mana is one of the nine primordial elements (karana dravya).² The mind and its objects, the intellect and the soul are spiritual elements and qualities (adhyatma dravya guna samgraha).³ It acts as a motor and sensory organ.⁴ It is a sixth sense organ with super sensual powers.⁵ Ayurveda has duly recognized the individuality of manas (mind) and sharir (body) and their inseparable and interdependent relationship in the living body.

Mana is responsible for the creation of life related to the body, senses and soul.⁶ Mana makes the soul conscious, aware of its surroundings and responsible for the perception of feelings.⁷ Sattva (mana), atma (soul) and sharir (body) are referred to as the 3 main pillars of life (tridanda). They combine into the purusha (living beings).⁸ Ayurvedic management aims to cure this purusha. Pointing out the influence of manas even in infancy. Ayurveda states that the foetus develops steadily with the help of the reproductive factor, the primary factors are Prithvi, aap, teja, vayu, and akasa the subtle mind and sap of food taken by mother.⁹

The statement that “ manifestation of manas occurs at the fifth month of pregnancy indicates the co-existence of mind and body.¹⁰ Emphasizing the direct effect of manas on certain physiological functions, it is said that anger and fear can cause sweating¹¹, likewise grief and anger are also among the reasons for breast milk loss.¹² The Indian personality perspective deals with the three dimensional classification of the gunas (

sattva, rajas and tamas) regarding the physical, mental and spiritual elements of personality.¹³

The guna theory originates from the Indian sankhya school of philosophy which states that the entire physical universe or “prakriti” consists of three compounds : sattva, rajas and tamas. The world health organisation defines “health” as a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹⁴ This study was conducted to evaluate trigun and quality of life.

Synonyms :- The Sanskrit words sattva, chitta, chetas are synonyms for mana (mind).¹⁵

Sattva means reality, truth, perfection, purity, sattva means psychic power.

Chitta means reflection, thinking, observing and discovering. Chitta is used to refer to the mana’s ability to think or examine itself.

The word chetas means consciousness, insight, intelligence, brilliance. It is used to denote the union of mind with consciousness. The awakened state of mind united with consciousness can be called chetas.

These three words are used to indicate different psychological functions. This also points to the involvement of mental abilities in the pathogenesis of disease. For example diseases such as epilepsy (apasmara) and insanity (unmada) occurs in people of weak mental faculty (alpa sattva).

Etymology and definition :- The word ‘manas’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘mana’ which means “to know” or “to understand” (“jnana bodhane va”)¹⁶. The word “jnane” means knowledge, awareness, conscious, being involved in or becoming familiar with something. The word ‘bodhane’ denotes awakening, understanding, enlightenment, information. These two words indicates the functions of mana and its role in daily life in maintaining the balance of cognitive faculties.

Qualities (guna) and impurities (dosha) of mind :- Sattva (purity) is the only quality of mana. Rajas (initiator or action) and tamas (regulator or ignorance) affect the mind¹⁷.

Sattva enlightens the mind with true knowledge. Rajas is the initiator of all activities. Tamas is a regulator or inhibitor of all mental activities. These three factors are responsible for the normal or abnormal state of mind. In the normal state, sattva predominates and the other two are recessive. Hyperactivity is due to the dominance of the raja. The decrease in activity was due to tamas dominance. Therefore, the equilibrium of these three components is important for the normal functions of mind¹⁸.

Table 1.1

Ayurvedic theory	Structural theory	Topographic theory
Sattva	Super ego	Conscious
Rajas	Ego	Fore conscious
Tamas	ID	Unconscious

Interdependence of body and mind :- Body and mind are connected & interdependent. The body follows the mind and vice-versa.¹⁹ These two sites are for happiness and misery²⁰. Every somatic disorders affects the mind and mental disorders affects the body. The mind can also be affected by exogenous disease²¹. therefore, body and mind can not be separated. A holistic approach to maintain good health and treating disease is essential. The

bodily doshas such as vata, pitta, and kapha fulfill various physiological functions. Therefore, they have a direct effect on the psyche.

Vata is considered as a primary dosha affecting mental activity. It is the controller, motivator, and regulator of all mental activities²². The doshas, their normal psychological function and their pathological effects are listed in the table below :-

Table 1.2

Dosha	Sub-type	Physiological function	Gross function ²³	Pathological impact
Vata	Prana	Sensation	Enthusiasm (utsaha), pleasure (harsha)	Fear (bhaya), depression (vishada), grief (shoka), insomnia (anidra), stress (aayasa), anxiety, worry (chinta)
Vata	Udana	Memory		
Vata	Vyana	Movement		
Pitta	Sadhaka	Motivation, determination, and accomplishment	Valor (shaurya), blissful state (prasada), intelligence (medha)	Anger (krodh)
Kapha	Tarpaka	Nourishment	Steadiness or stability (sthairya), knowledge (gyan), forgiveness (kshama), self-control (dhriti), satisfaction and content or lack of greed (alaulya).	Laziness (alasya), heaviness (gaurav), ignorance or lack of knowledge (agyan), hypersomnia (atinidra), drowsiness or stupor (tandra).

Categories of mental strength :- Ayurveda presents an elaborative description of psychic traits or personalities, based on the dominance of sattva, rajas and tamas. Psychic personalities are classified into three types. The characteristics of each type are given below²⁴:-

- ✓ **Sattva dominance constitution :-** A person with dominant of sattva is kind, gentle, tolerant, courageous, sincere, religious, intelligent, and free. He has a good memory.
- ✓ **Rajas dominance constitution :-** A person with rajasic control of psyche is usually impatient, constantly, dissatisfied, truthless, selfish, restless, has excess anger, pride and other emotions, is hyperactive.
- ✓ **Tamas dominance constitution :-** A person with a dominance of tamas in the psyche is characterised by ignorance, low intelligence, bad character, irreligious, hypoactivity, excessive sleepiness.

The dominance of sattva, rajas, and tamas leads to different behavioural patterns and temperaments.

Psycho-somatic and psychiatric disorders :- The disorders in which only mind is involved are as below²⁵ :-

1. Anger (krodh)
2. Confusion (moha)
3. Desires or lust (kama)
4. Greed (lobha)
5. Pride or ego (maana)
6. Envy (irshya)

7. Grief (shoka)
8. Fear (bhaya)
9. Anxiety (chittodvega)
10. Exhilaration (harsha)
11. Depression (vishada)
12. Affliction (dainya)

Causes :- All of the above mental disorders are caused by different type of desire (iccha) and hate (dvesha). Rajas and tamas are responsible for these mental disorders. Pragyaparadha (intellectual error) is the root cause of all disorders²⁶.

Dosha specific mental disorders²⁷ :-

Due to vata dosha vitiation :-

- ✚ Ashabda shravana (auditory hallucination).
- ✚ Tama darshan (fainting)
- ✚ Vishada (depression)
- ✚ Atipralapa (delirium)
- ✚ Aswapna (insomnia)
- ✚ Anavasthita chitta (unstable mind)

Due to kapha dosha vitiation :-

- ✚ Nidradhikya (hypersomnia)
- ✚ Tandra (stupor)

Some major mental illnesses involve both mental and physical doshas in their pathogenesis :-

1. Psychosis (unmada)
2. Epilepsy (apasmara)
3. Atattvabhinivesha
4. Intoxication (mada)
5. Syncope (murccha)

6. Coma (sanyasa)
7. Alcoholism (madatyaya)
8. Seizure (apatanaka)

Management of preserving and protecting mental health :-

It depends on two things :-

1. Growth and development of the mind as a whole through proper nourishment of body and mind.
2. Preservation of harmony of all factors mentioned in the way of life.

These goals can be achieved through application the principle of prevention and treatment of mental disorders as below²⁸ :-

1. Gyan (spiritual knowledge)
2. Vigyan (scientific knowledge)
3. Dhairya (courage or patience)
4. Smriti (memory)
5. Samadhi (meditation)

They are various measures for controlling and regulating the mental mechanisms.

Three types of treatment :-

In the broad based classification of ayurvedic treatments. Three main types of therapies are used²⁹ :-

1. **Daivavyapashraya chikitsa (spiritual therapy)** – spiritual therapy involves non-pharmacological means used to treat specific medical conditions. It includes mantra, aushadhi, mani (wearing of gems), bali (auspicious offering), upahara (gift), homa (oblations), niyama (observance of scriptural rules), prayaschitta (atonement), upavasa (fasting), obeisance of god, pranipatagamana (pilgrimage) etc.
2. **Yuktivyapashraya chikitsa (rational therapy)** – it provides rationale for medications, therapies and nutritional protocols.
3. **Sattvavajaya chikitsa** – it includes therapies for controlling the mind from Harmful objects.

The following measures are taken to prevent disease and promote mental health. These can

be classified into materialistic (dravyabhuta) and immaterialistic (adravyabhuta) remedies.

Materialistic treatment (dravyabhuta chikitsa) –

(A) Proper nutrition for the growth and development of the mind – Food not only nourishes the body, but also has a profound effect on the mind. Many recently published studies point to the influence of diet on mental health. Mosr research is focused on anti-oxidants, nutraceuticals and their effects on brain function while it is important on a physical level, nourishing the soul and mind is just as important as it is for the body.

The influence of food on the nourishment of the five sheath of the body is mentioned in yogic texts. All food first nourishes the nutritive, material and physical covering (annamaya kosha) than it nourishes the sheath of life and energy covering (pranamaya kosha) than sheath or covering of mind (manomaya kosha) intellect (vigyan maya kosha) and bliss (anandamaya kosha) are nourished in sequence, leading to the blissful state of atma or spiritual self. The purest part (Prasad) of food ultimately nourishes the soul failure to do so will lead to mental illness.

Diet as etiological factor – Health and disease originate from diet³⁰. Incompatible, unhygienic food, unclean deformed, contaminated, poisoned foods leads to various psychotic and convulsive disorders³¹.

(B) Rasayan (rejuvenating medicines) – A group of herbs that support intellectual function and memory (medhya rasayan) are used to improve mental health. Guduchi (tinosphora cordifolia) juice, yashtimadhu (glycerrhiza glabra) powder with milk, sankhapushpi (convolvulus glabra) paste and mandukparni (centella asiatica) promote intelligence and memory³².

These herbs are useful as stress relievers, memory enhances, anxiolytics, anti-depressant and anti-aging medications for mental disorders.

List of commonly used herbs in psychiatric disorders –

Table 1.3

S.No.	Herb name	Latin name	Common name
1.	Brahmi	Bacopa monnieri	Bacopa, Indian pennywort
2.	Vacha	Acorus calamus linn.	Sweet flag, acorus
3.	Jatamansi	Nordostachis jatamansi	Spikenard
4.	Jyotishmati	Celastrus panniculatus	Staff tree
5.	Ashwagandha	Withania somnifera	Indian ginseng

6.	Kushmanda	Benincasa hispida	White gourd melon
7.	Sarpagandha	Rauwolfia serpentine	Benth
8.	Tagar	Valeriana wallichii	Indian valerian

(C) Panchakarma (purification therapies) -

Purification therapies improves clarity of the senses, mind and intellect³³. They are indicated for the treatment of all mental and psychosomatic disorders based on the state of the doshas.

(D) Therapeutic massage (abhyanga) -

Therapeutic massage (abhyanga) has beneficial effects in slowing down the aging process, pacifying vitiated vata dosha and increasing relaxation of the mind, stabilizing it in order to adopt with stress³⁴. Recent studies show the beneficial effects of massage on stress reduction³⁵.

(E) Oil dripping method (shirodhara) -

The effect of pouring medicated oil on the forehead (shirodhara) are well studied. Standardized shirodhara induces a state of waking calm, similar to the relaxation response in meditation. The clinical benefits observed with shirodhara neurosis, hypertension and stress aggravation due to chronic degenerative disorders³⁶.

Therefore, herbs and therapies with rejuvenating properties can be used to promote, maintain and restore positive mental health.

Im-materialistic treatments (adravyabhuta chikitsa) -

Im-materialistic measures focus on improving positive mental health without any substance use. The practices of the ideal code of conduct (sadvritta) and achara rasayan are beneficial. Some scientific studies are listed below :

(A) Meditation – Meditation is most powerful therapy for mental health. It is an exercise of consciousness to expand beyond day-to-day experiences. Reduces stress, increase creativity and inner performance. The meditation process goes beyond the mind to the deepest level of the inner self. It connects with the soul (aatma). Research has confirmed that many health benefits associated with the practices of meditation. These include reducing stress, reducing anxiety, reducing depression, reducing pain (both physical & mental), improving memory and increasing productivity.

(B) Mantra therapy / Music therapy / Faith therapy –

The mantra (chanting of sacred hymns) works through sound vibrations. Sharma H.et.Al, demonstrated effectiveness of the ‘primordial sounds’ in his research at ohio state university on increasing the growth of cancer cells³⁷. Pratap G. critically analyzed the effects of mantras on positive mental health³⁸.

(C) Vyayama (exercise) –

Exercise improves physical fitness and metabolism, brings mental stability, lightness, strength, endurance and reducing dosha (especially kapha)³⁹. Sedentary lifestyle (avyayama) has the opposite effects on the body and mind, increasing kapha dosha and tamas. In the study, more than 90% of depressed patients did not do exercise at all⁴⁰. Recent studies have shown that exercise generate new neurons in the hippocampus, an area of the brain responsible for some aspects of memory. Improve learning and memory tasks⁴¹.

(D) Sleep (nidra) –

Sleep is important for good health and is considered one of the three pillars of life. Sleep depends upon the natural retirement of mind and sense organs owing to fatigue⁴². Sleep is essential for the proper functioning of the nervous system. It has been observed that adequate quality and quantity of sleep are necessary for good mental health.

(E) Rejuvenation behavior therapy (aachar rasayan) -

Ayurveda embodies a good code of conduct and conduct for rejuvenating physical and mental health. These included the following practices: Being truthful, without anger, peaceful, abstaining from madya and women, relaxed, calm and speaking softly. purusha is committed to meditation and purity, persevering, heedful of alms, penance, worship, loving and compassionate, alert, and sleeps well. Eat ghee with milk every day, considering the measure of place and time. He is polite, simple, with senses well turned to spirituality. He is in the company of the elderly, positivist, reserved and devoted to the holy books⁴³.

Importance of mental tranquility in the preservation of health - The mind plays an important role in digestion and metabolism (Agni). A positive mental attitude and mental focus on food are essential for good digestion⁴⁴. A negative mental attitude negatively affects the health of the digestive system and leads to the production of toxic metabolites (ama) even when meals are of sufficient quality and quantity⁴⁵. Research suggests that mental health is closely related to digestive health. Emotions such as stress, anxiety, and mood swings can trigger stomach problems, and gastrointestinal disorders affect mental health.

Reproductive health and sexual pleasure depend on your state of mind. Good mood has an aphrodisiac effect⁴⁶. A calm and happy state of mind is the first and most important factor⁴⁷. Recent research suggests that psychological interventions aimed at reducing psychological stress significantly increase pregnancy rates. Positive mental health can prevent illness. Depressed mental states increase the susceptibility and severity of illness⁴⁸. Psychological state can directly affect immunity through the neuroendocrine axis. Mental trauma can affect recovery from existing illnesses. People with heart disease⁴⁹ and cerebrovascular disease such as coma⁵⁰ must be protected from any kind of mental trauma. Death can occur from depletion of mental strength in serious illness⁵¹.

It is observed that depression is common in people with chronic illnesses. These include Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune diseases (including SLE, rheumatoid arthritis, and psoriasis), cancer, coronary heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, hypothyroidism, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and stroke. Depressed mental states can affect recovery from these illnesses. It is essential to treat depression in such conditions.

II. CONCLUSION –

It is essential to understand the mind and its mechanisms in relation to health and disease. Positive mental health can be achieved and maintained through knowledge of physical and psychophysical well-being, following a proper diet, taking mind-boosting herbs and memory (medhya rasayana). Ayurvedic therapies such as therapeutic massage (abhyanga), oil drops on the head (shirodhara) and purification therapy (panchakarma) are effective in preventing and controlling mental illnesses. A daily routine (dinacharya), which includes exercise, meditation,

good sleep habits, seasonal adaptation, and limiting negative psychological emotions, is very helpful. These are important factors for a healthy mind and maintaining mental health. This article describes the concept of mind in Ayurveda and its role in health care.

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