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The Significance of 'Manas' in Ayurveda for Mental Wellness

Dr. Bhawani Singh ^{1*}, CS Pandey ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Ayurveda Samhita & Siddhant, Dr. Vijay Ayurvedic Medical College Hospital & Research Centre, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Prof. Head, Department of Siddhant Darshan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU, Uttar Pradesh, India

* Corresponding Author: **Dr. Bhawani Singh**

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Abstract

The present work seeks to bring together all the available Ayurvedic knowledge on manas and manovikara treatment in a systematic and organized manner that will be beneficial for practitioners and easy to comprehend. This includes defining manas, delineating its qualities and functions, discussing psychosomatics, classifying mental disorders, treating mental illness, preventing mental illness, examining mental illness, and other relevant information.

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Introduction

Ayurveda uses the principles of good physical and mental health to preserve and promote health as well as prevent and cure ailments. Even in the time of Caraka (500 B.C.), psychological medicine or the management of mental diseases was a specialty. ^[i] Caraka proposes that mental health treatments have to be administered by a professional with expertise in mental health. In response to this assertion, Chakrapani (11 A.D.) adopts the term "manasaroga bhesaja veti" (Knowers of treatment for mental diseases) ^[iii].

Instead, only if they are thoroughly compiled with consideration for our current needs will the fragmented aphoristic material connected to manas and manasavikara found in Ayurvedic treatises prove to be highly helpful in comprehending manas and managing mental diseases. It is also a truth that Ayurvedic doctors have been treating mental illnesses for centuries with the aid of these antiquated literary accounts.

Ayurveda and Psychosomatics

Ayurveda has appropriately acknowledged the uniqueness of the manas (psyche) and sarera (body), as well as their unbreakable and mutually dependent bond inside a living organism. The following descriptions, which can be found in Ayurvedic classics, support this claim.

It is stated that "life is the united state of body, senses, mind, and soul" while defining "Ayu." ^[iii] In addition, expecting parents are counselled to consider the type of body, colour, and mental attributes they would like their child to have in order to validate their desire.

According to Ayurveda, "the foetus grows steadily with the help of the reproductive element, the five photoelements namely, prthvi, Ap, Teja Vayu and Akasa, the subtle mind and sap of food taken by mother," indicating the influence of manas even at the embryonic stage. ^[iv]

The coexistence of the mind and body is indicated by the statement that "manifestation of manas occurs during 5th month of pregnancy in the foetal body." ^[v]

It is stated that fear and anger can induce diaphoresis, indicating the direct impact of manas on specific physiological functions.

Similarly, grief and anger are counted among the causes of the loss of breast milk. Describing the role of manas in the digestion of food consumed, Ayurveda advises that food should be consumed with rapt attention. Defying this, is liable to allow the food go wrong way or injure the health or the food is not properly placed in the stomach and there is no appreciation of either the good or bad qualities of food taken. Further, indicating the need of mental poise for drug action Ayurveda says that no one who has not rid oneself of the evils of both mind and body beginning with the gross ones, can ever expect to reap the benefits resulting from vitalization therapy.^[vi]

One of the three bio entities known as the tridoshas—Vayu, Pitta, and Kapha^[vii]—which are generally more closely associated with shareera, is said to be the controller and prompter of manas. Additionally, it is said that an excited Vayu depresses the mind and causes delirium, fear, grief, stupefaction, and a sense of helplessness.

These explanations lead one to the conclusion that Ayurveda may have been the first healthcare system to develop definite ideas regarding psychosomatics.

Manas Swarupa: (Concept of Manas)

“That entity which is responsible for thinking is known as manas,” claims Caraka. It is said to have originated from the combination of Tejasa Ahankara and Vaikarika and was inherited from the previous birth. On its own, it is acetana (inactive), but atma (soul) gives it cetana (activity)^[viii]. It is called a dravya (substance). Although beyond sensory perceptions, it is called so since it has got both action and quality, coexistent within itself. It is linked to both the karmendriya (motor centers) and jnanendriya (sensory centers). It is known as Ubhayatmaka (combined psychomotor entity) for this reason.

Manovijnana (understanding of mind)

Manas is understood by its actions which are, indriyabhigraha (sensory and motor perceptions and control), svasyanigraha (self-control), uha (speculation), and vicarya (thinking). Its objectives are chintya (considered), vicarya (distinguished from), uha (speculated upon), dhyeya (aiming for), and sankalpya (determined)^[ix].

Manoguna, or qualities of mind

Manoguna, or qualities of mind, consists of two fundamental qualities: ekatva, or unitary nature, and anutva, or atomic nature^[x]. However, it is challenging to comprehend these attributes clearly and directly. As a result, manas is defined as consisting of three additional operational qualities: stave, rajasa, and tamasa. Their significance in the formation of three distinct mental reaction patterns helps to explain these. For instance, self-control, knowledge discrimination ability, exposition power, etc. are the means by which satwa or kalyana bhaga is understood. The understanding of rajasa, also known as rosha bhaga, includes self-adoration, authoritarianism, violence, and despotic envy. Tamasa, also known as moha bhaga, is characterized by lack of interest, sleep etc.

Manasthana, or the location of mind

Manas is believed to be active throughout the body, with the exception of hair, nail tips, and similar structures. It is said that the hard palate, or talu, and the siras, or head, are its centers of control.^[xi] According to another saying, Siras is the seat of all senses. Since manas governs the senses, siras must be taken into account in order to comprehend manas. Similarly, it is also said that the heart, or Hridaya, is the seat of Chethana or Atmana. Studying manas will also require taking into account hridaya, since manas is always connected to atma and various emotions affect blood circulation in general.

Gyanotpatti Krama (knowledge generation mechanism)

Manas denotes the existence and nonexistence of cognition. When the sequential relationship between manas with atma (soul), indriya (sense organ), and indriyatha (sensory objectives) is established, knowledge arises^[xii].

The Pathogenesis of Mental Disorders (Manasaroga Samprapti)

In Ayurveda, all mental disorders are generally attributed to alpasatwa (weak mind), manovahasrota (channels conveying manas/conveyors of manas), manasadosha (rajas and tamasa), and tridosha (Vata, pitta, and Kapha). The most significant element, alpasatwa, is suggestive of a premorbid personality. In Ubhayatmaka vikara, such as unmade apasmara, etc., saririka dosa is more prevalent than in manasavikara, such as in kama, krodha, abhyasuya, etc. Manadosa in the latter group will likewise be more vitiated than in the former.^[xiii]

Manoroga Nidana (Mental Disorder Etiology)

In general, mental disorders are thought to be caused by unwholesome food, volitional transgression, and emotional disturbances^[xiv].

Lakshana of Manasaroga (Mental Disorder Symptoms)

The scriptures provide a detailed description of the symptoms and signs of Ubhayatmaka vikara, such as unmada, apasmara, mada, murcha, etc. However, there are no specific symptoms known for nanatmaja manasavikara, manasavikara, or kevalamanasa vikara. This could be as a result of the terms used to describe these conditions having a clear understanding of them. For instance, Krodha, Soka, Udvega, and so on. However, if each of these conditions were examined and studied independently, it would be a worthwhile exercise. It would then be feasible to identify and document any additional psycho-physical indicators or symptoms associated with each of these conditions.

Manasavikaranutpadana (mental illness prevention)

Ayurveda places appropriate emphasis on a number of actions that should be taken in order to promote mental health, prevent health problems, and preserve and promote health. This is in line with its beliefs regarding the preservation, promotion, and prevention of illnesses. In the classic Ayurvedic texts, these measures are clearly explained in the chapters on dinacarya (daily routine), ritucarya (seasonal regimen), sadvritta (code of virtues), roganutpadana (disease prevention), and annapanavidhi (food and drink regulations).^[xv]

According to Ayurveda, avoiding giving in to negative emotions such as greed, grief, fear, anger, jealousy, impudence, vanity, and so on is essential for mental health. Furthermore, it states that the benefits of sound mental health are conferred upon those who speak the truth, abstain from excessive alcohol and meat consumption, harm no one, refrain from overstressing themselves, are fair in their speech, are always compassionate, and eat a balanced diet. ^[xvi]

In this case, it would be more appropriate to view the Ayurvedic view-points as a “socio-moral value system,” which, if adopted with adjustments to meet our needs while staying true to the essence of these ideas, would be extremely helpful in preventing many mental illnesses and advancing human potential on the mentally or psychologically. ^[xvii]

In addition, it would have a significant positive impact on the prevention and treatment of numerous psychosomatic illnesses, including diabetes, bronchitis, peptic ulcers, high blood pressure, and eczema.

The goals of all these actions are to promote mental equilibrium and relaxation, which are fundamental requirements for a healthy mind. They are especially pertinent to the times we live in, when we must constantly

fight against “strain” and “stress” in order to survive.

In summary, Vagbhata says that a person who introspects every day and responds to other beings and their environment from dawn to dusk will change his behaviour, never experience grief, and experience eternal happiness. ^[xviii]

Conclusion

In the realm of Ayurveda, the concept of ‘Manas’ serves as a profound foundation in understanding mental well-being and preventing disorders. As explored throughout this article, the intricate interplay between mind, body, and spirit underscores the holistic approach Ayurveda embodies. By recognizing the significance of Manas in maintaining equilibrium and fostering mental health, we unveil a powerful framework for prevention. Integrating ancient wisdom with modern insights, this understanding offers us pathways to cultivate balance, harmony, and resilience. Embracing the holistic principles of Ayurveda, acknowledging the role of Manas, and nurturing mental well-being not only enriches individual lives but also heralds a transformative journey toward a healthier, harmonious society.

ⁱ <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/ecaraka/>

ⁱⁱ Charak Samhita with Chakrapani teeka, Choukhambha publication, Varanasi

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/ecaraka/>

^{iv} <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/esushruta/>

^v <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/esushruta/>

^{vi} <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/ecaraka/>

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^{xvii} <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/ecaraka/>

^{xviii} Astang Hridayam, sutrasthanam, Chapter 2, Choukhambha publication, Varanasi