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Understanding the pathophysiology of Depression by Ayurveda Basic Principles

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ABSTRACT

Depression is a serious mental health concern that will touch most people's life directly or indirectly affecting 350 million people worldwide. Most people do not want to acknowledge it due to societal pressures and awkwardness. But slowly, people are accepting the challenges related to mental health and learning to be okay with it. In Ayurvedic classics *Vishada* and *Avasada* are the two mentioned conditions which have close resemblance with depression. *Acharaya Charak* quote *Vishado Rogavardhanam* i.e., it is the most foremost factor to worsen the condition of any disease. Psychopathology of depression may even extend up to somatic level. As there are multiple correlations, understanding the pathology of depression by means of Ayurveda basic principles such as *Sharirika Dosh*a (bodily humor), *Manasika Dosh*a (attributes of psyche), *Satwa Bala* (strength of mind), *Agni* (biological fire), *Dhathu* (tissues sustaining the body), *Srotas* (channels or pathways of the body) and *Ojas* (vital essence of life) is essential. A better understanding of depression can help in effective prevention and treatment and will help reduce the stigma associated with the condition, and lead to more people seeking help.

Key words: *Vishada, Avasada, Satwa Bala, Dhathu, Srotas*

INTRODUCTION

Manasika Bhava (Emotions) are basic feelings of human life. But when a person's emotions, thoughts or behavior frequently trouble them or disrupts their lives and those around them, they may be suffering from mental illness. Depression is a common illness worldwide, with an estimated 3.8% of the population affected, including 5.0% among adults and 5.7% among adults older than 60 years. Approximately 280 million

people in the world have depression. When it comes to matters of health, Ayurveda prioritizes the mind and its diseases. Every great work on Ayurveda simultaneously describes the physical ailments and their psychological effects. The mind and its disorders are studied in the Ayurveda scriptures, especially in relation to *Bootha Vidya*. This highlights the need for specialization and the therapeutic significance of the topic. In contemporary times, it is imperative to investigate and assess the true impact of a treatment in every area of expertise through the confirmation of scientific study. This holds true for all complementary and alternative medical systems in the modern day. Thousands of years ago, Ayurveda identified mental illnesses are also pertinent in the modern era.

Depression is such an area where many studies have been done and it is very well correlated with *Vishada, Avasada, Manodhukhaja* or *Adhija Unmada* and *Kaphaja Unmada*. According to WHO, depression is expected to account for more lost years of healthy life than other disease by 2030 except for HIV/AIDS.^[1]

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Depression and Sharirika Dosh

Every ailment has a predominant humour, according to *Ayurveda*. The humour that controls all bodily and mental processes, *Vata*, is vitiated, and this leads to the majority of the classic symptoms of depression. *Prana Vata* is the motivator and controller of *manas*² among the five types of *Vata*. Another property of *Prana Vata* is *Manodharana* (control of mind). So, when intellectual, emotional, and motor activities are affected, there will be vitiation of the humor. *Udana Vata* which is helpful in energy, memory and motivation is also responsible for manifestation of the disease. In mild and moderate depression where there is agitation, anxiety and loss of weight, the role of *Vata* can be explained. Few symptoms are noticed to be due to *Kapha*, the humor which sustains and lubricates the body and mind.

Doshic predominance of symptoms

Symptoms of depression	Dosha
Sadness of mood	Vata
Lack of pleasure	Vata
Sleep disturbances	Vata
Appetite changes	Kapha
Easy fatigability	Vata
Psychomotor retardation	Kapha
Guilty feeling	Vata
Poor concentration	Vata
Suicidal ideation	Vata

Depression and Manasika Dosh

Rajas (attributes activity) and *Tamas* (attributes inactivity) are the two *Manasika Dosh*. *Manasika Dosh* generally vitiates the mind and causes various psychological conditions. In depression predominant dosha is *Tamas* as it is characterized by inactivity, ignorance, and apathy. The affected always look dejected, nihilistic and averse to virtuous living; suffer

from inertia, lethargy and excessive sleep.^[3] So depression is a condition of *Tamo* predominance over *Rajas* that *Madhyama* and *Avara Satwa* comprised the majority of the themes. Even in clinical practice, there is a clear correlation between psychiatric disorders and *Satwa*.

Depression and Satwa Bala

The conjunction of *Shareera* (body), *Indriya* (sense organs), *Satwa* (mind) and *Atma* (supreme soul) leads to healthy life.^[4] This establishes the connection between the mind and body in an organism. Based on the *Satwa Bala* (power of the keeping in mind), people can be categorized *Ashigher*, *Madhyama* (middle), and lower, *Avara* (inferior) psychic capacity.^[5] Mental illnesses are more common in those who have *Madhyama* and *Avara Satwa*. Within the same context, *Acharya Charaka* states that a weak mind can turn a slight disease into a serious one.^[6]

Depression and Agni

Agni is responsible for all bodily transformations and metabolism in addition to its digestive qualities. The psychological traits of fear, rage, dejection, greed, and excessive thinking, among others, directly affect the *Agni's* functions. A food taken even in proper time and right quantity does not get digested in disturbed state of mind.^[7] The brain and sensory organs may suffer from a decreased food intake. In case of depression, the symptoms like loss of interest and reduced level of energy are due to reduced *Utsaha* (enthusiasm) which is a function of *Agni*.^[8]

Depression and Dhatu

Health is the result of the supreme soul, sensory organs, mind, and body humours, tissues, and waste products being in an equilibrium state.^[9] So, *Dosha* and *Agni*, there is relationship with *Dhatu* towards mind. An impaired *Agni* is not capable of metabolism and thus the foremost *Dhatu Rasa* (the fluids of body- first result of metabolism) is improperly formed. This results in the hampering of whole process of metabolism and depletion of further *Dhatu* such as blood, muscle tissue, fat, bones, bone marrow and semen. *Hridaya* is the seat of mind and *Rasavaha*

Srotos (channels carrying *Rasa Dhathu*). Any vitiation of one can cause imbalance the other. *Chinthyana* *Ati Chinthana* (excessive thinking) causes *Rasavaha Srotho Dushti*. Depletion of *Rasa Dhathu*^[10] is characterized by clinical symptoms such as restlessness, loss of focus, sound intolerance, palpitation, pains and aches, and weariness even with mild work.

Depression and *Srotas*

In depression, the initial etiology affects the mind. So, the involvement of *Manovaha Srotas*, the channels related to the mind in pathogenesis is crucial as in *Unmada*.^[11] Through these routes, the vitiated dosha becomes dislodged and the manifestation spreads. Since the human body is composed of multiple channels of this type^[12] the concept of *Manovaha Srotos* might be interpreted as the psycho-neuro-body axis, or the link between the mind and body. When someone is insane, the other person will be influenced.

Depression and *Ojus*

Ojus is the end product of proper *Dhathwagni Vyapara* (metabolism). *Ojus* constitutes the essence of all *Dhathu*^[13] *Ojus* being located in *Hridaya*, combines with *Rasa* and circulates through the vessels and performs the *Tarpana* (nourishment) of the entire body. Because of its shared location, the relationship between *Ojus* and mind can be understood. Depression and weaker *Ojus* share many psychological symptoms, such as a fear complex, persistent weakness, anxiety, loss of complexion, cheerlessness, emaciation etc. are similar to that of depression

DISCUSSION

Mental disease is adequately categorized in detail in *Ayurveda*. *Manasa Vikara* is considered to be impairment of general mental functions the presence of weak psyche (*Alpa Stwa*), vitiation of *Sharirik* and *Manas Dhosas* (*Raj & Tam*) and also by vitiation of *Manovah Srotas* this may occur firstly as involvement of *Manas Dosha* while physical involvement is secondary or sometimes the primary involvement is *Sharirik Dhosa* and subsequently *Manas Dhosa* get involvement). If the primary involvement is because of *Sharirik Dhosa* and for subsequent mental impairment

the treatment is mainly with the drugs. *Samprapti* is a phenomenon from vitiation of *Dosha* till the *Roga Pradurbhava*. *Manasa Vikara* usually runs a sequential process from minor general behavioral symptoms to the marked alteration of *Budhi*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*.

CONCLUSION

Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life in all countries. It results in mental suffering and impairs a person's capacity to perform even simple tasks, sometimes having upsetting effects on interpersonal interactions in the home and in society. The worst-case scenario for depression is suicide. It is a consequence of derangement of vital factors of the body such as *Tridosha*, *Triguna*, *Rasadhathu*, *Manovaha Srotos*, *Satwa*, *Agni* and *Ojus*. According to etiology and pathogenesis the disease can be correlated to *Avasada*, *Vishada*, *Manodhukhaja Unmada* and *Kaphaja Unmada* and can be treated accordingly seeing all factors. So, understanding the disease in *Ayurvedic* approach will provide patients with help, hope and feel worth. Positive attitude by holistic approach of *Ayurveda* aids in uplifting mind.

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