

MENTAL HEALTH AND ILLNESS: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE**Amit Kumar Rai¹, Deepshikha²**¹Medical Officer, Ch. Brahm Prakash Ayurved Charak Sansthan, Khera Dabar,
New Delhi, India²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Kaumarbhritya, Uttarakhand Ayurved University Campus,
Gurukul Kangri, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India**ABSTRACT**

One in four people in world experience mental or neurological disorder at some point of life. Ayurveda being a holistic science of life incorporates mental and spiritual equilibrium as an important component of health. A review of Ayurvedic classics reveal that psychiatry finds prominent place even in the ancient classical practice of ayurveda. Practice of *sadvritta*, *achara rasayan*, *yama* and *niyam* comprise strong preventive tools. Management of mental disorders in ayurveda is multidimensional comprising of *Daivavyapasrya chikitsa*, *Yuktivyapasrya chikitsa* including external therapies like *Shirodhara*, *Shirobasti*, *Shiroabhyanga*, *Shirolepa*, *nasya*, *anjana*, psychotherapy, drugs, dietetics, yoga and appropriate lifestyle.

Keywords: Psychiatry in ayurveda, *Manas roga*, Mental health in Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is essentially a science of life, health and cure based on the eternal laws of nature. According to Ayurveda, individual life entity or 'ayu' is four dimensional comprising of physical, mental, sensorial and spiritual attributes. Ayurveda describes health as a state of physical, mental, social and spiritual equilibrium. Thus, Ayurveda is not only limited to body or physical entity but also gives comprehensive knowledge about mental, spiritual and social health.

The human being is the combination of mind, soul and body. In fact, these three entity are like a tripod and the world is sustained by their combination.^[1] The human being is provided not only with a set of sensorial apparatus, the *gyanendriya*, but with a highly dynamic *manas* or mind. According to Ayurveda the mind is highly active and derives its consciousness from the soul or 'atma'.

The three gunas namely *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are considered as three dimensions of *manas*. The *satva* is the state of pure mind with absolute balance when both the extreme qualities of mind namely *rajas* and *tamas* cease or merge. The *rajas* represent activity and dynamism while the *tamas* denotes inertia and darkness. It is believed that all mental illnesses are because of the disorders of *rajas* and *tamas*. *Satva* is never the cause of illness. This is the reason why *rajas* and *tamas* are also called *manas doshas*. When there is proper coordination between these three factors, mental health is perfect. When the person becomes ignorant of what he does i.e. *pragyaparadha*, it may lead to psychological imbalance and ultimately mental illness.

Ayurveda describes three broad categories of mental personality or *prakriti* having predominance of *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*

respectively. These three categories are further subdivided into sixteen mental traits. These sixteen personality traits are characterised with unique features which may also predispose specific mental diseases.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STAMINA

Mental health is a state of mental, sensorial, intellectual and spiritual well being. Due to genetic reasons or due to general upbringing, different persons display different level of mental strength or stamina. Mental stamina can be classified into *avara*, *madhyama* and *pravara*.^[2] *Pravara* is the best of all three, as a person of this nature tolerates and adjusts to pain or odd situation well. They have the will power to withstand any difficulty. Individuals who belong to *avara* category cannot tolerate traumatic situations. They have poor tolerance and adjustment. *Madhyam* is the in between condition in which the person easily adjusts when assured about.

MENTAL HYGIENE

Sadvritta and *Achara rasayana* along with restraintment of *mansika dharniya vega* are the practices described for the promotion of mental health in Charak Samhita.

- *Sadvritta*^[3] are the rules of good conduct which if observed can help in achieving healthy state i.e. state of biological balance along with sensorial, mental and spiritual wellbeing. So, it can be said that the rules of *sadvritta* introduced are for personal, mental, ethical and social good conduct. Practice of *sadvritta* helps in prevailing *satva guna* over *rajas* and *tamas* thereby leading to good mental health. *Sadvritta* helps in appropriating the influence of environmental factors and continuous interaction of mind and body with each other. It is similar to *yama* and *niyama* described under *Astang Yoga*.

- Besides *sadvritta*, an equally comprehensive description of mental hygiene practices as *Achara rasayana*^[4] is there in *chikitsa sthana* of Charak samhita. The practice of conducts described as *Achara rasayana* provides all benefits of *rasayana* like improved nutritional status, longevity, immunity, mental health and power.
- Acharya Charak also describe the different kind of vicious mental urges in the form of *dharniya vega*^[5] such as *lobha*, *shoka*, *bhaya*, *krodha*, *ahamkara*, *irshya*, *raga* etc. These urges must be restrained in the interest of personal and social health as they lead to various mental conflicts causing mental ill health of the individual alongside its untoward impact on family and society.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN MENTAL ILLNESS

Eight psychological factors as described in Charak Samhita *Nidana Sthana*^[6] are considered to be centrally affected in all psychiatric disorders in varying degrees. They are:

- *Mana* (emotion, mood, affect)
- *Buddhi* (thought and decision)
- *Sangya-gyana* (orientation)
- *Smriti* (memory and learning)
- *Bhakti* (desire)
- *Sheel* (habits)
- *Chesta* (psychomotor function)
- *Achara* (conduct and behaviour)

This clearly indicates that the description of psychopathology in Ayurveda is in a very systematic manner in terms of these eight factors.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Ayurveda describes *asatmendriyarthasamyoga*, *pragyaparadha* and *parinama* or *kala* as three fundamental aetiological factors of mental diseases. These factors cause vitiation of both *sharirika* and *ma-*

nas dosha followed by infliction of *manas* (psyche). The mental illness is generally characterised by a wide range of pattern of altered behaviour with certain associated symptoms and signs.

A wide range of psychiatric conditions have been described in classical Ayurvedic texts. These descriptions include the aetiopathogenesis as well as behavioural alterations present in different psychiatric diseases along with their classifications. The common psychiatric diseases described in Ayurveda are *unmada* (psychosis), *apasmara* (convulsive disorders), *atattvabhinivesa* (obsessive disorder), *apatanttraka* (hysteria), *chittodvega* (anxiety disorders), *manovasada* (depression), *mada* (alcoholism & drug abuse), *murccha* and *sanyasa* (conditions associated with altered consciousness). *Unmada* is the prominent psychiatric illness described in ayurvedic classical texts which correlates broadly with psychosis. A separate category of *unmada roga* described by Acharya Charak as *agantuja unmada* and by Acharya Sushruta as *bhutonmada* may be the description of different forms of psychiatric syndromes or sets of behavioural alterations named symbolically after the name of different *grahas* (paranormal factors) because of the similarity with their mythological descriptions. The important psychiatric conditions described in Ayurvedic classical texts may be classified as follows:

- Psychiatric illness caused by involvement of both *sharira* as well as *manas dosha* such as *unmada*, *apasmara*, *atattvabhinivesa*, *apatanttraka*, *bhrama*, *mada-murccha-sanyasa* etc.
- Psychiatric syndromes named symbolically after the name of different *grahas* like *Agantuja unmada* or *bhutonmada*.
- Psychological conditions caused purely by *manasa doshas* i.e. *rajas* and *tamas*.

viz. *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *shoka* (grief), *chinta* (anxiety), *irsya* (jealousy), *mada* (euphoria), *udvega* (neurosis), *bhaya* (fear) etc.^[7]

- Psychosomatic diseases where the cause of disease is *manasika* (mental) and manifestation is *sharirika* (somatic) like *shokatisara* etc.
- Personality disorders: There are sixteen *manasa prakriti* which represent sixteen types of behavioural traits. When such behaviour trait override the range of normalcy, it may be considered as personality disorders warranting psychiatric care.^[8]

PSYCHIATRIC EXAMINATION

The clinical examination in Ayurveda has two aspects viz. *rogi-pariksha* and *roga-pariksha*. The *rogi-pariksha* is done by *dasavidha pariksa*^[9] which includes *prakriti* (constitution), *vikriti* (morbidness), *sara* (quality of tissues), *samhanana* (built), *pramana* (anthropometry), *satmya* (adaptability), *satva* (mental stamina), *ahara shakti* (digestive power), *vyayama shakti* (physical strength) and *vaya* (age). Physical examination of the patient also include *astavidha pariksha* viz. *nadi* (pulse), *mutra* (urine), *mala* (stool), *jihva* (tongue), *shabda* (voice), *sparsa* (skin), *drik* (eye) and *akriti* (facies). Systemic examination is done by *sadanga pariksa* i.e. examination of head-neck, trunk and the four limbs along with 13 *srotas* or channels distributed over the *sadanga*. The *srotas* examination must also include the examination of *manovaha srtas* in case of psychiatric conditions. Clinical examination also includes *prasna pariksa* or interrogation with the patient. In psychiatric examination, the physician pays special attention to the environment of the patient, his hereditary and genetic background, his original personality make up (in terms of

tridosha and *triguna*), his mental stamina (*pravara*, *madhyama*, *avara*) and his life style followed by the alterations in the above mentioned eight psychological factors.^[10]

AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT

The management of a mental illness in Ayurveda is done through three broad spectrum of treatment namely *Dai-vavyapasraya chikitsa* (divine therapy), *Yuktivyapasraya chikitsa* (biological therapy) and *Satvavajaya* (psychotherapy).

- *Daivavyapasraya chikitsa*^[11] is primarily indicated for prevention and treatment of mental illness like *agantuja unmada*. It includes the use of *mantra*, *japa*, prayer, other religious activities, wearing of precious stones etc. This treatment is carried out in consideration of the astrological factors, *grahas* and *nakshatras*. These measures not only have psychological effect, but also may have influence on higher physics and consciousness.
- *Yuktivyapasraya chikitsa*^[12] is the rational therapeutic approach which consists of two major components complementing each other viz. *Samsodhana* (purification) and *Samsamana* (palliation). The patient is subjected to biopurificatory therapy like *snehana*, *vamana*, *virechana*, *basti*, *nasya* in order to cleanse the channels of the body. It is followed by palliative treatment with the help of *ausadhi* (drugs), *anna* (dietetics) and *vihara* (exercise and appropriate life style). *Yuktivyapasraya chikitsa* is given to bring about equilibrium of *doshas* and *dhatu*s with restoration of memory, intelligence, consciousness and orientation.
- External therapies like *Shirodhara*, *Shirobasti*, *Shiroabhyanga*, *Shirolepa* etc. are also found to be effective in psychiatric illness. Sometimes strong

nasya and *anjana* etc. may also be required to administer if not much improvement is seen in the disturbed psyche of patient.

- The drugs used in the treatment are mostly *ghrita* preparations like *kalyanaka ghrita*, *mahakalayanaka ghrita*, *mahapaisachika ghrita*, *panchgavya ghrita*, *purana ghrita*, etc. along with *medhya* drugs or *medhya rasayana* like *brahmi*, *vacha*, *jatamansi*, *shankhapuspi* etc. in the form of *svarasa* or *churna*. The *medhya* drugs are believed to act as brain tonics, adaptogens and anxiolytics affording a better mental health leading in turn to alleviation of the behavioural alterations. The *vajikarana* drugs like *kapikacchu*, *ashwagandha* and similar others are also found to be effective in the treatment of various mental illnesses. Herbomineral preparations like *Smritisagar rasa*, *Chaturbhujra rasa*, *Unmadagajankusa rasa*, *bhutabhairav rasa* etc. are also indicated in the management of psychiatric disorders. *Saraswatarista*, *Ashwagandharista* and *Mansyadi kwatha* may also be advised along with these medicines.
- Ayurvedic psychotherapy popularly known as *satvavajaya*^[13] refers to psychological and psychodynamic methods to divert the psyche of an individual towards wholesome objects. This helps in the restoration of normal state of various psychological factors like intelligence, memory etc. It is practised incorporating the principles of assurance therapy (*asvasana*) along with replacement of emotions like anger by composure, greed by content, ignorance by knowledge, jealousy by affection etc.
- Psychoshock therapy is required in patients of disturbed psyche characterized

by stupor, marked psychomotor retardation, depressive delusions or hallucinations, or life-threatening physical exhaustion associated with mania where desired improvement is not seen with the above mentioned treatment modalities. It works on the principle of inducing physical and mental shock and fear thereby changing the disturbed psyche and thought process of the patient.^[14] But it is not advised in *agantuja unmada* condition.

- Surgical intervention like *Raktamokshana*^[15] is also prescribed for psychiatric illness like *unmada*, *apasmara* in ayurvedic texts.
- *Satvic* diet consisting of fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, ghrta etc. are advised to prevent mental illness. Spicy, salty fried food, fermented food, frozen food, meat, alcohol should be avoided. Intake of *viruddha ahara* (diet in which wrong ingredients are mixed together) can also lead to mental illness by causing aggravation of *doshas*.
- The patient should avoid the aetiological factors causing mental illness like negative emotions. A change in place and environment can bring about positive changes in cases of disturbed psyche. The patient should be in the company of supportive people who infuse positive energy to the patient's surroundings.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Ayurvedic psychiatry in terms of conceptual and literary understanding consists of clinical conditions where the disease and its treatment is based on fundamental principles of Ayurveda as in case of *unmada*, *apasmara* etc. as well as psychiatric problems like *bhutonmada* where the disease and its

treatment is based on paranormal factors like the doctrine of *karma*, *graha*, *bhuta* etc. Thus psychiatry finds prominent place even in the ancient classical practice of ayurvedic medicine. The entire Ayurvedic management is more health oriented than disease oriented. Thus there is a big scope of utilising ayurvedic approach and therapeutics as an adjunct to the disease oriented therapy of modern psychiatry to afford a full treatment.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Dr. AMIT KUMAR RAI

Medical Officer, Ch. Brahm Prakash
Ayurved Charak Sansthan, Khera Dabar,
New Delhi, India.

Email: dr.amitrai1983@gmail.com

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