

AYURVEDIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DEPRESSION: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Persistent sorrow and disinterest are hallmarks of depression, a severe mood disorder that affects a person's feelings, thoughts, and day-to-day functioning. A number of biochemical, genetic, environmental, and psychological factors—including brain chemistry, family history, stressful life experiences, and specific medical conditions—combine to cause it. Because of social pressure and embarrassment, most people do not want to admit it. However, individuals are gradually coming to terms with the difficulties associated with mental health and learning to accept them. *Vishada* and *Avasada* are two illnesses listed in Ayurvedic literature that closely resemble depression. According to *Vishado Rogavardhanam*, which Acharaya Charak quotes, it is the primary cause that exacerbates any illness. Depression's psychopathology may even reach the somatic level. Given the numerous connections, it is crucial to comprehend the pathology of depression using fundamental Ayurvedic concepts like *Sharirika Dosha* (bodily humour), *Manasika Dosha* (psychological attributes), *Satwa Bala* (strength of mind), *Agni* (biological fire), *Dhathu* (tissues supporting the body), *Srotas* (channels or pathways of the body), and *Ojas* (vital essence of life). Psychotherapy, medicine, and lifestyle modifications including exercise are frequently used in combination as treatments. A greater knowledge of depression can aid in its effective prevention and treatment, lessen the stigma attached to the illness, and encourage more people to get treatment.

KEYWORDS: Depression *Dosha imbalance*, *Manas doshas*, *Achara Rasayana*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Depression, or depressive disorder, is a prevalent mental illness. It entails a prolonged loss of enjoyment or interest in activities, as well as a melancholy mood. Regular mood swings and sentiments about daily living are not the same as depression. All facets of life, including ties to friends, family, and the community, may be impacted. It may be the cause of or contribute to

issues at work and school. Anyone can experience depression. Depression is more common in people who have experienced abuse, significant losses, or other stressful situations. Compared to men, women are more prone to experience depression.^[1] Emotions, or *Manasika Bhava*, are fundamental human emotions. However, a person may be experiencing mental illness if their feelings, thoughts, or behaviour frequently cause them

distress or interfere with their lives and the lives of those around them. Every outstanding text on Ayurveda describes both the psychological repercussions and the physical diseases at the same time. The Ayurvedic texts discuss the mind and its diseases, particularly with regard to *Bootha Vidya*. This emphasises the topic's therapeutic significance and the necessity for specialisation. Nowadays, it is essential to look into and evaluate a treatment's actual effects in every field of expertise using the validation of scientific research. This is applicable to all contemporary supplementary and alternative medical systems. Ayurveda recognised mental diseases thousands of years ago, and they are still relevant today. Numerous studies have been conducted on depression, and it has a strong correlation with *Vishada*, *Avasada*, *Manodhukhaja* or *Adhija Unmada*, and *Kaphaja Unmada*.

2. CONCEPTUAL STUDY

➤ WHAT IS DEPRESSION

Everyone experiences occasional sadness or depression, but these emotions often go away with time. Different is depression, often known as clinical depression or severe depressive disorder. It may result in severe symptoms that impact your mood, thoughts, and ability to perform daily tasks like eating, sleeping, and working. Anybody can be affected by this sickness, regardless of their age, colour, income, culture, or level of education.^[2]

➤ PREVALENCE RATE

Major depressive disorder (DD) was the third most common cause of disability in 2015, and the prevalence of depression has been increasing globally. The prevalence of depressive episodes and DD is estimated to be between 3.2% and 4.7% worldwide. According to the WHO-World Mental Health Survey, the prevalence of mood disorders varied by country from 0.8% to 9.6%, with a global pooled period prevalence of 5.4%. Unipolar depression is expected to rank as the second most common cause of illness worldwide by 2030. Depression has a significant influence on individuals, families, and society due to its cause and consequence association with numerous non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Depression is one of the most common mental diseases in primary care settings. The crude prevalence rate of mood disorders in India is estimated to be between 0.5 and 78 per 1000 individuals, and about one-third of patients who seek treatment in medical institutions may exhibit depressive symptoms. Numerous study populations have been the subject of prior epidemiological research on depression in India, which has been conducted at different times and with different methodology, sample sizes, sampling strategies, study equipment, and case definitions. As a result, precise state and national estimates of the prevalence of depression are lacking in the country.^[3]

➤ Symptoms and patterns^[4]

A person has a depressed mood (sad, angry, empty) during a depressive episode. They can experience a decline in enjoyment or enthusiasm for activities.

Regular mood swings are not the same as a depressed episode. For at least two weeks, they last for the most of the day, almost every day.

Other symptoms are also present, which may include

- poor concentration
- feelings of excessive guilt or low self-worth
- hopelessness about the future
- thoughts about dying or suicide
- disrupted sleep
- changes in appetite or weight
- feeling very tired or low in energy.

3. AYURVEDA PERSPECTIVE OF DEPRESSION

Ayurveda is a medical system that emphasises disease prevention while being individualised in its diagnosis and treatment of ailments. Ayurveda defines health as a condition of optimal functioning on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level rather than the conventional paradigm of the absence of disease. According to Suśruta, one of the traditional Ayurvedic authorities, health is the following:

“Health is the state of having balanced doshas (biological energies which maintain one's physiology and psychology), balanced digestion, balanced tissues, and proper expulsion of wastes. It is a state of peace/contentment in the soul, senses and mind.”

Because of this definition of health, Ayurveda adopts a completely holistic perspective of the individual, examining "physical health, mental stability, spiritual well-being, social welfare, environmental considerations, dietary and lifestyle habits, daily living trends, and seasonal variations in lifestyle, as well as treating and managing specific disease."^[5] The foundation of Ayurveda is the idea that we are a miniature version of the five elements that make up our surroundings: earth, water, fire, air, and space. These five components are classified into three bio-energetic humours, or "doshas," in the human body. These doshas are known as *vata* (air and space), *pitta* (fire and water), and *kapha* (earth and water). Each of the three doshas is present in an individual and controls distinct bodily activities. A predetermined ratio (*prakruti*) of these three *doshas* is generated at birth, which might be linked to a state of homeostasis, depending on the genetic characteristics and health of one's parents. These doshas can rise or fall in response to changes in one's surroundings, which might alter one's health and perhaps result in pathological alterations (known as *vikruti*). Consequently, each dosha is linked to psychophysiological traits that, depending on an individual's state of balance, might be either pathogenic or health-promoting.^[6]

3.1. Depression and Sharirika Dosh

According to Ayurveda, there is a dominating humour in every illness. Most of the traditional signs of depression result from the vitiation of Vata, the humour that governs all physical and mental activities. Among the five forms

of Vata, Prana Vata is the controller and stimulator of manas. *Manodharana*, or mental control, is another characteristic of Prana Vata. Therefore, humour will be tainted when mental, emotional, and motor functions are compromised. The disease's presentation is also caused by Udana Vata, which is beneficial for motivation, energy, and memory. The involvement of Vata can be described in mild to moderate depression, which is characterised by agitation, anxiety, and weight loss. Kapha, the humour that supports and lubricates the body and mind, is thought to be the cause of very few symptoms.^[7]

3.2. Depression and Manasika Dosha

The two Manasika Doshas are Rajas (activity) and Tamas (inactivity). In general, Manasika Dosha vitiates the mind and results in a number of psychiatric disorders. Tamas is the major dosha in depression because it is typified by apathy, ignorance, and laziness. The afflicted suffer from inertia, lethargy, and excessive sleep; they always appear depressed, nihilistic, and hostile to moral living. Madhyama and Avara Satwa comprised most of the themes, indicating that depression is a condition of Tamo dominance over Rajas. Psychiatric diseases and Satwa are clearly correlated, even in therapeutic practice.^[8]

3.3. Depression and Satwa Bala

A healthy life results from the union of *Shareera* (body), *Indriya* (sensory organs), *Satwa* (mind), and *Atma* (supreme soul). This demonstrates how an organism's physiology and intellect are connected. People can be divided into *Ashigher*, *Madhyama* (middle), and *Avara* (inferior) psychic capacities based on the *Satwa Bala* (power of the keeping in mind). People with *Madhyama* and *Avara Satwa* are more likely to suffer from mental diseases. In the same context, Acharya Charaka asserts that a minor illness can become serious due to a weak mind.^[9]

3.4. Depression and Agni

In addition to its digesting properties, *agni* is in charge of all physiological changes and metabolism. The *Agni*'s functions are directly impacted by psychological qualities such as fear, fury, dejection, greed, and excessive thinking. Even when food is consumed in the right amount and at the right time, it is not digested when one is mentally disturbed. Reduced food consumption may have negative effects on the brain and sensory organs. Reduced *Utsaha* (enthusiasm), a function of *Agni*, is the cause of depressive symptoms like loss of interest and low energy.^[10]

3.5. Depression and Dhathu

When the body's humours, tissues, waste products, and sense organs, as well as the supreme soul, are in balance, health results. Thus, *Dosha* and *Agni* have a link with *Dhathu* in terms of the intellect. Since an impeded *Agni* cannot metabolise, the body's fluids, or *Dhathu Rasa*, which is the initial product of metabolism, are created

incorrectly. As a result, the entire metabolic process is hampered and additional *Dhathu*, including blood, muscle tissue, fat, bones, bone marrow, and semen, are depleted. The seat of mind is *Hridaya*, and *Rasavaha*.^[11]

3.6. Depression and Srotos

Any deterioration in one can lead to an imbalance in the other. *Rasavaha Srotho Dushti* is brought on by *Chinthyana* *Ati Chinthana*, or excessive thinking. Clinical signs of *Rasa Dhathu* depletion include restlessness, difficulty concentrating, intolerance to hearing, palpitations, aches and pains, and fatigue even from light work.^[12]

3.7. 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*. Through these routes, the vitiated dosha becomes dislodged and the manifestation spreads. Since the human body is composed of multiple channels of this type 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.^[13]

3.8. Depression and Ojus

The result of correct *Dhathwagni Vyapara* (metabolism) is *Ojus*. *Ojus*, which is found in *Hridaya*, combines with *Rasa*, circulates through the vessels, and carries out the *Tarpana* (feeding) of the entire body. *Ojus* is the essence of all *Dhathu*. It is possible to understand the relationship between *Ojus* and mind because of their similar location.^[14] Weakness and depression Many psychological symptoms of *Ojus* are comparable to those of depression, including a dread complex, persistent weakness, anxiety, loss of complexion, cheerlessness, emaciation, etc.

4. DISCUSSION

A persistent, episodic condition, depression is characterised by vegetative symptoms, disruptions in mood, interest, and cognition. It significantly affects the patients' physical, mental, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being, which in turn affects their quality of life. *Vishada* and *avasada*, which stand for mild depressive episodes, are comparable to *Kaphaja Unmada*. *Kaphaja Unmada*, which involves kapha-dominant *vata* and *tama dosha*, was the Ayurveda diagnostic.^[15] This can happen first as *Manas Dosha* involvement, with physical involvement coming second, or sometimes *Sharirik Dhosa* involvement comes first, followed by *Manas Dhosa* involvement. If *Sharirik Dhosa* is the main cause of the involvement, medication is the principal treatment for any future mental damage. *Samprapti* is a phenomenon that occurs from *Dosha* vitiation to *Roga Pradurbhava*. *Manasa Vikara* typically progresses from mild general behavioural symptoms to significant changes in *Budhi*, *Dhriti*, and *Smriti*.

5. CONCLUSION

People of all ages, from all backgrounds, and in all nations are impacted by depression. It causes mental distress, hinders one's ability to carry out even basic duties, and occasionally has distressing consequences for social interactions at home and in society. Suicide is the worst possible outcome of depression. It results from the body's essential elements—*Tridosha*, *Triguna*, *Rasadhathu*, *Manovaha Srotos*, *Satwa*, *Agni*, and *Ojus*—being out of balance. The disease can be linked to *Avasada*, *Vishada*, *Manodhukhaja Unmada*, and *Kaphaja Unmada* based on its aetiology and pathogenesis, and it can be treated appropriately taking into account all relevant aspects. Thus, an Ayurvedic understanding of the illness will give sufferers support, optimism, and a sense of value. Ayurveda's comprehensive approach to positivity helps to elevate the psyche.

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