

THE ROLE OF BIOLOGICAL FIRE (AGNI), INNATE PSYCHIC STRENGTH (SATWA) AND VITAL ESSENCE (OJUS) IN MANIFESTATION OF DEPRESSIVE DISORDER

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ABSTRACT:

Depression is a common psychiatric condition. It has many implications in personal, interpersonal, social, behavioral and cultural domains of the affected. In Ayurveda the disease is understood as *kaphaja unmada*. It can be better analyzed by considering the role of *agni*, *rasa*, *satwa* and *ojus* in its manifestation and symptomatology. *Agni*, the biological fire is responsible for many activities in psychological parlance. *Agni* is responsible for enthusiasm, cheerfulness etc. which is lacking in depressed. *Satwa*, the innate psychic strength is a decisive factor for development psychic morbidity. *Avara satwa* is most prone to develop depressive features in crisis situations. *Ojus*, the vital essence get weakened on wrong psychic drives and further leads to psychic disorders. The reduction in *ojus* makes the individual fearful always.

Key Words: Depression, *Agni*, *Rasa*, *Satwa*, *Ojus*, Mind, Psychiatry, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION:

Depression is a mental disorder that is pervasive in the world and is a significant contributor to the global burden of disease and affects people in all communities. In 2012, depression is estimated to affect 350 million people. The World Mental Health Survey conducted in 17 countries found that on average about 1 in 20 people reported having an episode of depression in 2011. Depressive disorders often start at a young age; they reduce people's functioning and often are recurring^[1]. The term depression is used with different meaning in different occasions. It may be either a symptom when the individual feel by him or a sign when observed by others as looks depressed. It becomes a diagnosable disorder when it characterizes through a sufficient length with specific symptoms and signs which substantially interferes with the person's normal functioning in day to day life or causes severe distress or both. Depressed mood, loss of interest, increased fatigability and loss of self esteem are usually considered as the most typical symptoms of Acute Depression^{[2][3]}. It is important to distinguish Depressive disorder from everyday 'blues' or sadness. Normal grief followed with the death of a loved one is not Depression. Even though such state may experience short lived symptoms of Depression but usually continues to function almost normally and will recover without any management.^[4]

Depression is the most common disorder in the field of Psychiatry. In the current practice, Depression is more often seen in general practice too. It is obvious from the records that, it is the marked disease for making an individual's life more miserable. As per WHO 2001, it is the 4th cause for DALY (Disability Adjusted Life Years). Moreover, it is predicted that Depression will be the 2nd cause for DALY by the year of 2020^[5]. The age -adjusted suicide rates for patients with mood disorders have been estimated to be 400 per 100,00 for male patients and 180 per 100,000 female

patients.^[6] In fact, most of the suicides are turning out with a strong history of major Depressive disorder. Depression is a risk factor for a number of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and many physical health conditions increase the risk for depression.^[7] There is a sufficiently powerful link between depression and morbidities like cardiovascular diseases including angina, myocardial infarction and stroke^{[8][9]} and type II diabetes.^[10] There is good evidence that maternal depression is associated with sub-optimal breastfeeding.^{[11][12]} These findings are suggestive of the fact that depression like any other mental illness has a strong link between somatic factors. It is further worthy to trace the role of biological factors like *agni* etc. in development of mental illness like depression.

Depression in Ayurveda:

Ayurveda is an integrative system of life and health with greater importance on mental health. This radiant approach to life and health involves a multidimensional mind- body – soul relationship. It defines health as the equilibrium of *dosha*, *dhatu*, *mala*, and *agni* along with normally functioning sense organs, soul, and mind. It also observed that the improper (excessive, reduced, wrong) functioning of three major stressors ie; time, intellect, sensorial inputs that are the basic cause for any disease in Ayurveda.

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In Ayurveda, mind and body are the two substrata for manifestation of disease.^[13] Both mind and body have its own vitiating factors called *dosha*. Hence, it can be found two separate set of etiological factors for vitiating mind and body. However, it is interesting to locate both the factors are symbiotically influencing each other. So Mind and body are said to be inseparable. They interact and influence to develop a very large group of disorders.

When the features of Depression are comparing with Ayurvedic terms, many of the symptoms will resemble with *kaphaja unmada*^[14], *vishada*^[15], *Adhija unmada*^[16] and *graham*^[17]. An exact correlation is therefore, difficult to replicate since the range of influence is noticed from mind to body with an extended psychopathology up to somatic level. So, to find out what exactly the pathology of Depression, it is necessary to probe the basic concepts of Ayurveda.

Depressive Disorder as such cannot be correlated with any of the Ayurvedic titles. But understanding the psychopathology of Depression under the shelter of *agni*, *satva*, *rasa dhatu*, and *ojus* level will be more consistent so far the symptoms and treatment are concerned.

There are mainly five factors to be considered in relation with the progress of Depressive features.

1. The Importance of *Satva* as a prime factor
2. *Agni* and mind
3. *Ahara* and mind
4. Role of *Rasa dhatu*
5. Mind and *Ojus*

Importance of *Satva*:

Satva, *atma* and *sharira* together called tridanda (three pillars) of life in Ayurveda^[18]. The word *satva* denotes mind. *Satva* is mainly three types viz, *Pravara* (superior), *madhyama*(medial) and *avara* (inferior). Based on the qualities, each person posses either *pravara*, *madhyama*, or *avara satva*. The person with *pravara satva* will have a strong and stable mind. But, those who have *madhyama* or *avara satva*, are always prone to the affliction of so called mental disorders. Factors influencing *satva* may be classified mainly into two, i e, genetic and developmental.

Genetic factors:

In contradiction with western Psychology, Ayurveda beholds the configuration of mind in the early stages of pregnancy itself. Many references can be seen in relation with the mental activity of the fetus which is manifested as *douhrida* (desires pregnant woman). Avoiding the *douhrida* will lead to the manifestations of developmental deformities and congenital anomalies.^[19] *Satvajabhava* (mental possession) is one among the six factors which determines the manifestation of human mind in early gestation period^[20]. The features like *bhakthi* (devotion), *sheela* (behavior), *sauca*(cleanliness), *dvesha* (hatred), *smrti*(memory), *moha* (desire), *matsarya* (competitiveness), *saurya*(valour), *bhaya* (fearfulness), *krodha* (anger), *utsaha* (enthusiasm) etc are comes under these characteristics. Apart from this, *saralakshana* (features of tissue excellence) explain the classical blue print of a human trait. *Satvasarata* (psychological superiority) is characterized by good memory, dedication, gratitude, knowledge, hygiene, enthusiasm and

good self control^[21]. People who endowed with *satva sara* are seldom prone to mental disorders like depression.

Developmental factors:

In additional to the congenital factors developing environment and activities of the individual has strong influence in toning the psyche. The reasons which regulate the harmony of life are infinite. External stresses will disturb people's day to day life. Some can well adjust with the problem but some may fell beaten. *Prnjaparadha* is nothing but involving unwholesome activities with lack of self control^[22]. It is told that *pranjaparadha* leads to vitiating of all the three humors. So malpractice of sinful deeds will eventually turns to the depletion of mental strength leading to impairment in *satva*. A further chance of guilty consciousness is more in *pranjaparadha* which may reduce the self esteem of the individual and contribute to depression.

As stated earlier person with *pravarasatva* (strong mind) are least prone to any mental illness. Caraka clearly says that all possessive disorders, dissociate disorders, and conversion disorders are due to the presence of a weak mind^[23]. Person with a good mental vigor never get haunted with ghosts, demons, and evil spirits. Accordingly, when the *satva* is disturbed, there are pervading chances for development of psychopathology. For e.g., while enumerating the causes of *unmada*, Caraka says that, those who are coward, depressed, possessed with unwanted thoughts are more prone to get insanity^[24]. Once the *satva* is distressed it will start getting on to the body. Since the mind and body is inter related, whatever happens to the mind will be reflected in body.

Importance of *Agni*:

Agni is the root for all basic functions of body. The features like life, lustrousness, energy, enthusiasm etc depends on *agni* only^[25]. It is important to consider *Agni* in designing any treatment protocol in Ayurvedic per view. In case of Depression too, the symptoms like loss of interest and reduced level of energy are similar to the reduced function of *utsaha* (enthusiasm), a cardinal feature of *agni*.

Effects of *Agni* on mind:

Agni plays a major role in balancing the *dosha* in equilibrium. Once *agni* is deranged, it will start disturbing the body as well as mind. In classics, there are some diseases dealt as most related with *agni*, like *grahani*, *arsas*, *atisaara* etc. Among the all disorders, psychological features are equally explained in parlance with physical symptoms. In the context of *atisara*, symptoms like *nidralu* (hypersomnia), *alasya* (laziness) are explained^[26]. Once *agni* get vitiating, it may lead to *ama*, the toxic indigestion which show certain psychological symptom in premonitory stage itself like *arati* (restlessness), *akshanti* (intolerability) to wise words, *dvesha* (hatred) etc.^[27] If the person is already *alpasatva*, this may lead to the disturbance in mental activity. Or even though the psyche is strong; the continuous derangement in *agni* will yield to some psychological manifestation in chronic mainstay. Features like *manovikara* in *udavarta*^[28] (~ chronic obstinate constipation), loss of sexual desire in *grahani*^[29] etc. are few examples.

Effect of Mind on *Agni*:

The disturbed mind also influences *Agni*. As a result of fear, the afflicted mind along with *pitta* will produce the diarrhea of *bhayaja* origin^[30]. An irrational fear makes a rational

disorder is an excellent example showing how the mind can derange the *agni*. In another context Caraka explains that the features like *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *moha* (confusion) etc will hamper the digestion to evolve *ama*, the previous explained toxic indigestion. He concretizes the statement by pointing that, the quantity and quality will never access a good digestion if the mind is obsessed with *cinta* (unwanted thinking), *shoka* (sorrow), *bhaya* (fearfulness) and *krodha* (anger)^[31]. These references highlight the reciprocal relationship between mind and *agni*. Loss of appetite and reduced food consumption etc are commonly seen in depressive disorders.

The importance of *Aahara*:

In Caandogyopanishat, *manas* is described as 'Annamayam' *hi soumya manah* i.e. mind is the byproduct of food. It claims that, the properly ingested food will sub serve the *dhatu*, *mamsa* and *manas*. A proper relationship between *ahaara* and *manas* is described in this text. It further argues that *manas* is one among the sixteen *kala* (tissue) to be nourished with *ahara*. If the *ahara* is not in quantity the development of all *kala* will be in vein. The *sukshmamsha* (subtlest) of *ahara* will nourish the mind. A lucid uncontaminated food can import a healthy mind. In Bhagavat Gita, three kinds of food has been explained, viz, *saatvika*, *rajasika*, *tamasika*. If the food is pure, it will give clarity to mind too^[32]. It is the superior factor which converts food into energy. According to Prasnopanishad, *agni* is considered as the engine room for making the sense organs more active and mind become more clear. Apart from the quality, the quantity may also derange the mental functioning. Caraka says the continuous intake of *hina matra*, will block the *buddhi* and *indriya*^[33]. A proper intake of good diet will ease the normal development of *satva*.

Involvement of *Rasadhatu*:

Rasa is the first *dhatu* to be formed from a properly digested *ahara*. The proper formation of *rasa* depends on the *agni* and mind. Derangement in anyone of the above will hamper the production and function of this *dhatu*. If the *rasa dhatu* is formed properly, it will enhance the appropriate formation of subsequent *dhatu* too. The increased use of *guru*(heavy), *sheeta*(cold), *atisnigdha*(oily), *atimaatra*(large quantity) *ahara* will afflict the formation of *rasa dhatu*. The same way, excessive unwanted thinking is one of the main reasons in its vitiation^[34]. When *rasa* is vitiated, it will affect the *hrdaya* in which it dwells. Once *hrdaya* is involved, the mind, and *ojus* will get also afflicted since it is the *sthana* (abode) of mind and *ojus*. In 8/2-3 of Chikitsasthana of Bhelasamhita, it is pointed out that *chitta* is the seat of *buddhi* that locates in *hrdaya*^[35]. So, from the above references, it is clear that the seat of mind is deeply related with *rasa dhatu*. The inappropriate formation of *rasa* will disturb the mental activity. Moreover, if the person is *alpasatva* or possessing vulnerable mind, he will start losing the concentration and enthusiasm consequently.

According to *Indu*, the function *tushti* (satisfaction) of *rasadhatu* is nothing but *manah` tushti* (mental satisfaction)^[36]. Also, in the features of deranged *rasa*, loss of concentration is a cardinal one^[37]. Losing concentration and enthusiasm are primary features of Depressive disorder. So, the derangement in the first *dhatu* is responsible for the

disturbances in the mental activity. It clarifies the role of *rasa dhatu* in the manifestation of Depression.

Ojus and Mind:

The concept of *Ojus* is unique to *Ayurveda*. Even though *Ayurveda* has categorically stated that the body is made up of the humors, tissues and wastes, it could be found that the seers of *Ayurveda* later introduced another factor that is very vital for the maintenance of life, termed *Ojus*. The relation with *ojus* and mind is remarkable. Both *ojus* and mind are seated in heart and both were pervading all over the body. *Ojus* is exhausted by mental emotions such as anger and grief. When *ojus* is depleted, the person becomes fearful and worried with impairment in sensory functions^[38].

Psychopathology:

At this juncture, the Depressive features may either start from the mind and transit to body or from body, then progresses to mind. In the former level, due to affliction with stressors, the proper functioning of *agni* gets impaired and leads to both somatic and Psychic presentations. In the later path, the progress of disease starts from body and transfer to mind. Here, *agni* is the base which is deranging first. From there, consecutive *dhatu* (*rasa*), its location (mind), and essence of all *dhaatu* (*ojus*) also get vitiated. In both ways, i.e., either from mind to body, or from body to mind, *agni* serves the role of a fundamental mediator. So the treatment should aim to increase the productivity of *agni*. From there, the proper formation of *dhatu*, *ojus* and mind may be calculated. In the classics also *agni* serves as the base of all general treatment. The branch *Kaayacikitsa* was developed only on the basis of that relationship.

In the possible mode of Psychopathology, the Depression may evolve in the following way.

- A persisting stress (exogenous or endogenous), gradually hampering *satwa* leads to indecisiveness following with lack of self confidence and worthlessness. It is an earlier form of Depression (Mild Depressive Disorder) with a dominance of *vata dosha*. Here persistent depletion of *rasa* may also happen. Since *anavasthitacitta*(unstable mind) and *vishaada*(sadness) are the disorders of *vaata* origin, the governing *dosha* will be the same. This explain the role of *satwa* and *rasakshaya* in manifestation of Depression
- The cumulating stress may hamper the *agni* in chronic stay leading to vitiation of *rasa* (*rasapradushti*). Improper *ahara* may augment this. *Rasadhatu* and *kapha dosha* are similar in nature. This leads to the involvement of *kapha* dominant features along with further vitiation of *hrdaya*. So in the later stage, when *agni* is involved along with *rasa dhatu*, mind will get more disturbed. Here, the second stage of disease may evolve with more features relating with body. Eg, disturbed sleep, reduced appetite, lack of interest, increased fatigability etc. The symptoms of *vata* may be held back with *kapha* dominant features. A real form of depression with moderate level of severity will be established.
- In the further progress, the *ojus* and its function will be denatured critically leading to severe form of Depression with Psychotic features.

CONCLUSION:

It can be assessed that Depression is a byproduct of deranged *Rasadhathu* as a result of derangement in *Agni* in a mentally prone (*Avara satwa*) individual. The course of progression may vary from mind to body or from body to mind in accordance with the vulnerability. In both cases, role of *Agni* has to be taken in account while assembling any treatment strategies. It may also yield better outcome in managing Depression and to arrest the further progression.

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