



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### DEPRESSION - AN AYURVEDIC OUTLOOK

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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. It can affect a person's ability to work, form of relationships, and destroy their quality of life. At its most, severe depression can lead to suicide. It remains as a social stigma in terms of prevalence and suffering, dysfunction, morbidity and economic burden. 80% of depressed people are not currently having any treatment. Depression is mentioned in *ayurvedic* classics in various scattered references. It is both a state of emotion (*manasika bhava*) as well as a disease (*manasika vyadhi*). Previous scholars have tried to correlate the clinical condition with *vishada*, *avasada*, *manodhukhaja unmada* and *kaphaja unmada*. Psychopathology of depression may even extend up to somatic level. As there are multiple correlations, understanding the pathology of depression by means of *ayurvedic* basic principles such as *sharirika dosha* (bodily humor), *manasika dosha* (attributes of psyche), *satwa bala* (strength of mind), *jnanendriya* (sense organs), *karmendriya* (motor organs), *agni* (biological fire), *dhathu* (tissues sustaining the body), *srotos* (channels or pathways of the body) and *ojus* (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.

**Keywords:** Depression, *Ayurveda*, Mind, *Vishada*, *Unmada*

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## 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. Even though as many as 1 in 5 people are thought to suffer from a form of mental illness it still carries with its stigma and discrimination. Depression is usually a neglected disease and a condition not well accepted or admitted. When such mental illness goes untreated the result can be suicide which claims 873000 lives a year. The economic cost of these conditions are also enormous and growing<sup>[1]</sup>.

*Ayurveda* gives prime concern to mind and its disorders whenever it is a matter of health. All *ayurvedic* classics describe physical disorders and its psychiatric impacts simultaneously. The *ayurvedic* texts study mind and its ailments particularly in the context of *bootha vidya*. This emphasizes the clinical importance of the subject and need of specialization. It is mandatory in modern times to explore and evaluate the actual effect of the treatment in all fields of specialization under scientific research validation. In the present era this is applicable to all alternative systems of medicine. Psychiatric disorders described in Ayurveda thousands of years ago are relevant in present time too. Depression is

such an area where many studies have been done and it is very well correlated with *vishada*<sup>[2]</sup>, *avasada*<sup>[3]</sup>, *manodhukhaja* or *adhija unmada*<sup>[4]</sup> and *kaphaja unmada*<sup>[5]</sup>.

Depression is a disease of antiquity. It was initially known as "melancholia". References of depression are found in the ancient writings of all the lands. India's epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* feature instances of depression.

According to WHO, depression is expected to account for more lost years of healthy life than other disease by 2030 except for HIV/AIDS<sup>[6]</sup>. Everyone occasionally feels sad or gloomy. But these feelings pass within a couple of days. When a person has a depressive disorder it interfere his daily life. It leaves pain for the person who is affected and those who care about him<sup>[7]</sup>. World Health Organization define depression as a common mental disorder, presented with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feeling of guilt or low self worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy and power of concentration<sup>[8]</sup>. These problems can become chronic or recurrent and leads to substantial impairment in an individual's ability to take care of his or her everyday responsibilities.

Depression is significant contributor to the Global burden of disease and affects people in all communities across the world. Today depression is estimated the effect

350 million people in the world. Mental health survey conducted in 17 countries found that on average have about 1 in 20 people reported having an episode of depression in the previous year. Depressive disorders often start at a younger age. They reduce people's functioning and often are recurring. For these reasons depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide in terms of years lost due to disability<sup>[9]</sup>.

The *ayurvedic* understanding at the levels of *sharirika Dosha* (bodily humor), *manasika dosha* (attributes of psyche), *satwa bala* (strength of mind), *jnanendriya* (sense organs), *karmendriya* (motor organs), *agni* (digestive fire), *dhathu* (tissues sustaining body), *srotos*(channels or pathways of body) and *ojus* (vital essence of life) is essential for the two fold management as prevention and cure of the disease.

#### **Depression and Sharirika Dosha:**

According to *Ayurveda* every disease has predominance of any of the humor. Most of the cardinal features of depression are due to the vitiation of *vata*, the humor which governs all movements of mind and body. Among the five types of *vata*, *prana vata* is the motivator and controller of *manas*<sup>[10]</sup>. It has the property of *budhidharana* (retaining intellect). The impairment in pre frontal lobe in depression leads to lack of self control, distractibility, lack

of memory, lack of initiation, improper perception. Thus the intellect, retention and memory are impaired to cause psychological disturbances. 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.

**Table no.1: Doshic premoninace of symptoms**

<b>Symptoms of depression<sup>[11]</sup></b>	<b>Dosha</b>
Sadness of mood	<i>Vata</i>
Lack of pleasure	<i>Kapha</i>
Sleep disturbances	<i>Vata</i>
Appetite changes	<i>Vata</i>
Easy fatigability	<i>Vata</i>
Psychomotor retardation	<i>Kapha</i>
Guilty feeling	<i>Vata</i>
Poor concentration	<i>Vata</i>
Suicidal ideation	<i>Vata</i>

Along with the above mentioned humors, *sadhaka pitta* and *vyana vata*, located in *hridaya* (heart), the seat of mind, which is responsible for emotions are also vitiated.

#### **Depression and Manasika Dosha:**

*Rajas* (attributes activity) and *tamas* (attributes inactivity) are the two *manasika dosha*. *Manasika dosha* 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<sup>[12]</sup>. So depression is a condition of *tamo* predominance over *rajas*.

#### **Depression and *Satwa bala*:**

The conjunction of *shareera* (body), *indriya* (sense organs), *satwa* (mind) and *atma* (supreme soul) leads to healthy life<sup>[13]</sup>. Thus the relationship of mind and body in an animate is established.

According to the *satwa bala* (strength of the mind), individuals can be classified into *pravara* (superior), *madhyama* (medium) and *avara* (inferior) psychic capacity<sup>[14]</sup>.

Among these, the persons with *madhyama* and *avara satwa* are prone to affliction of mental disorders. *Charaka* in the same context tells that the presence of a weak mind will transform a mild disorder to severe<sup>[15]</sup>. He adds that those who are coward, depressed, possessed with unwanted thoughts are more prone to get insanity<sup>[16]</sup>. Since mind and body are interrelated, psychological derangements are reflected in the body. From the previous studies carried out on depression, it is noted

that most subjects were of *madhyama* and *avara satwa*. This relationship in between *satwa* and psychiatric illnesses is evident even in clinical practice.

#### **Depression and *Jnanendriya*:**

Relation of mind and sense organs is well defined in *ayurveda*. For the process of perception these two factors play prime role. The deranged link between mind and sense organs cause impaired perceptions leading to illusions and hallucinations. The sense faculties together with mind get vitiated by excessive utilization, non utilization and wrong utilization of the objects concerned, which pave major cause of psychiatric illness<sup>[17]</sup>. The aversion towards everything can lead to wrong utilization; this causes an impediment to the respective sense perceptions. The concept of *sajnavaha srotos*, the one which carries the sensations are disturbed here.

#### **Depression and *Karmendriya*:**

The motor organs are tongue which produce speech, upper and lower limbs which involves in activities, external orifices such as anus, which eliminates waste from the body and genital organs which involves in pleasure and recreation<sup>[18]</sup>. In depression, along with sense organs the activities of motor organs are also declined. Psychomotor retardation is one among the major feature of depression. Reduced speech and activities is the other main symptom. Reduced libido is another

frequent complaint of depressed patients. These occur due to the impaired *karmendriya*.

#### **Depression and Agni:**

*Agni*, along with the digestive properties, serves as a factor responsible for all the transformation and metabolism in the body. The psychological functions like fear, anger, dejection, greed, excessive thoughts etc has direct influence in impairing the functions of *agni*. A food taken even in proper time and right quantity does not get digested in disturbed state of mind<sup>[19]</sup>. The reduced intake of food can hamper the functions of brain and sense organs. 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*<sup>[20]</sup>.

#### **Depression and Dhathu:**

Equilibrium state of bodily humors, tissues and waste products along with the supreme soul, sense organs and mind leads to health<sup>[21]</sup>. So, akin to *dosha* and *agni*, there is relationship with *dhathu* towards mind. An impaired *Agni* is not capable of metabolism and thus the foremost *dhathu*- *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 *dhathu* 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. According to *Indu* (one of the commentators of *Ashtanga hridaya*), *thushti* (nourishment) the function of *rasa dhathu*- is considered as *manah thushti* (mental satisfaction)<sup>[22]</sup>.

“*Chinthyanam ati chinthana*” (excessive thinking) causes *rasavaha srotho dushti*. The clinical features like restlessness lose of concentration, sound intolerance, palpitation, pains and aches, exhaustion even on slight exertion are seen in depletion of *rasa dhathu*<sup>[23]</sup>.

#### **Depression and srotos:**

In depression, the initial etiology affects the mind. So, the involvement of *manovahasrotos*, the channels related to the mind in pathogenesis is crucial as in *unmada*<sup>[24]</sup>. The vitiated *dosha* get dislodged in these channels and the manifestation is disseminated. Human body is made of numerous such channels<sup>[25]</sup>. So, the notion of *manovahasrotos* can be taken as the relationship with mind and body or the psycho-neuro-body axis. When one is deranged, the other will be influenced.

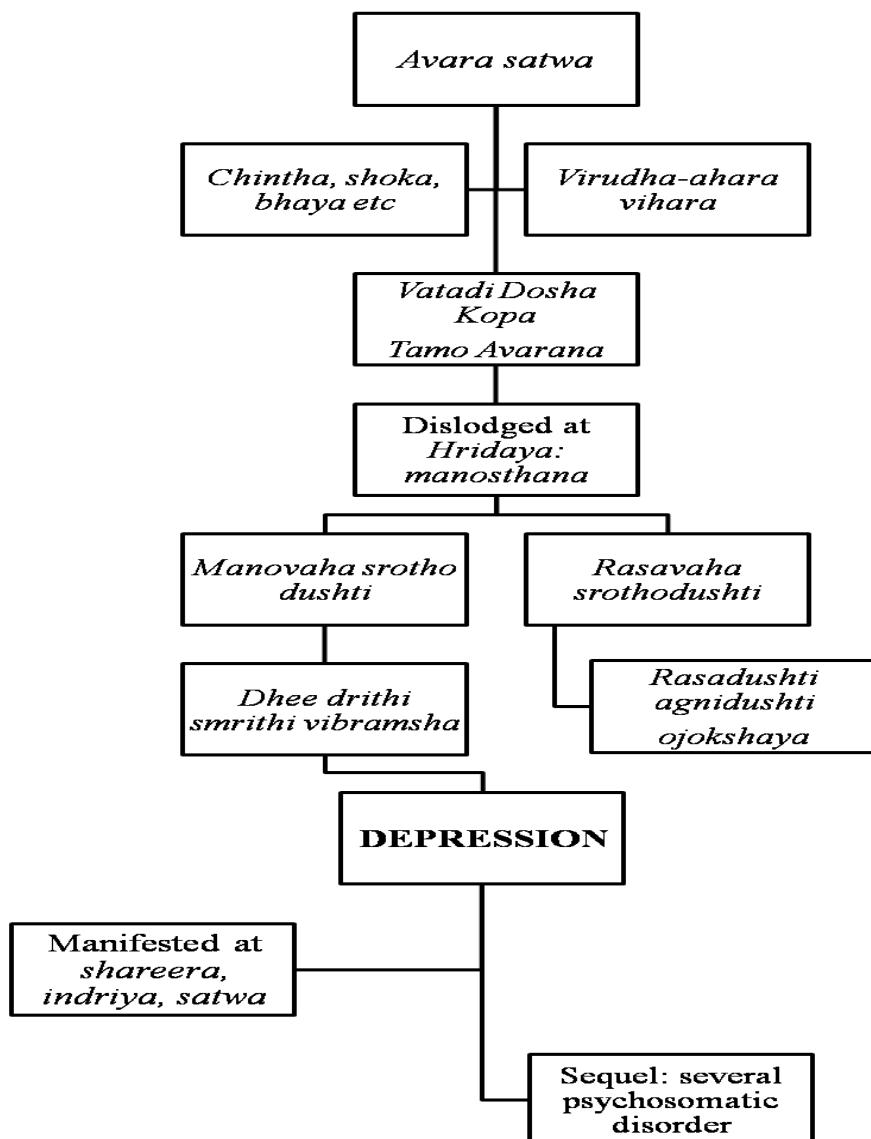
#### **Depression and Ojus:**

*Ojus* is the end product of proper` *dhathwagni vyapara* (metabolism). *Ojus* constitutes the essence of all *dhathu*<sup>[26]</sup>. *Ojus* being located in *hridaya*, combines with *rasa* and circulates through the vessels and performs the *tarpana* (nourishment) of the entire body. So the relation between *ojus* and mind can be

understood through the common location they share. Psychological symptoms of weakened *ojus* like fear complex, constant

weakness, worry, loss of complexion; cheerlessness, emaciation etc are similar to that of depression<sup>[27]</sup>.

**Chart 1: pathophysiology of Depression**



#### DISCUSSION:

Depression is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. The disease remain unrecognized or not approached for treatment due to masking somatic complaints, lack of insight, reluctance to disclose and stigma in the society.

The biological factors, genetic and personality components, psycho social and psychodynamic factors along with life style changes contribute to the etiology of the disease. The biological changes in the body are controlled by *dosha*. So the vulnerable humors will result in the pathophysiology of the disease. The genetic and personality

components determine the *satwa bala* of the person. A short allele of the 5HT T gene polymorph can cause distress in a person. This is how stressful life events lead to depression in some people but not in others<sup>[28]</sup>. The psychosocial and lifestyle factors leading to vitiation of *dosha*, *dhatu* etc results in the devastating disease by increasing the vulnerability. Diet patterns like junk food, left over and old food suggestive of *tamasika* and *rajasika ahara* plays a major role in the manifestation of depression<sup>[29]</sup>.

#### **Clinical correlations:**

Several conceptual and clinical studies have correlated depression as *avasada*, *vishada*, *manodhukhaja unmada* and *kaphaja unmada* according to the etiology and symptoms exhibited by the disease.

*Vishada* and *avasada* are the terms used synonymously<sup>[30]</sup>. *Vishada* is classified under *manasika bhava* as well as *manasika vikara* in *ayurveda*<sup>[31]</sup>. It is particularly caused by *vata dosha*<sup>[32]</sup>. *Vishada* is caused by apprehension and result in despondency and inertia<sup>[33]</sup>. It is the prime factor for aggravation of all illnesses<sup>[34]</sup>. So the psychoneuro immunological aspect of depression can be established here. The stress hormone, cortisol which is found elevated in depressed is known in suppressing the functions of immune system<sup>[35]</sup>.

One of the psychodynamic factors in causation of depression is loss of object. The hate and

anger of the lost object is directed to self<sup>[36]</sup>. Similar condition is explained as *manodhukhaja unmada*. The symptoms expressed are grief, complaining or praising the lost, pallor and fainting, weeping, tearfulness, emotional withdrawal<sup>[37]</sup>. *Kaphaja unmada* on the other hand is characterized by *sthanam eka dehse* (staying in one place-catatonic features), *thushni bhava* (observing silence), *achankramana* (reduced or absence of activities), *lalasinghanaka srava*, *sauchadwesha* (discharge of saliva and nasal secretion- lack of self care), *anannabhilasha* (disinclination for food), *rahaskamatha* (prefer to stay alone), *bhibhatsyathwam* (disgust feeling)<sup>[38]</sup>. These features are seen in patients with major depressive disorders. So in severe conditions, the disease can be correlated with *kaphajonmada*.

#### **Treatment in ayurveda:**

The general line of treatment of *manasika vikaras* i.e. *daivavyapashraya chikitsa*, *yuktivyapashraya chikitsa* and *satvavajaya chikitsa* is applied for depression<sup>[39]</sup>.

#### ***Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa (spiritual healing):***

*Daivavyapashraya chikitsa* is mentioned specially for *manasika roga*. Considering the faith, religion, culture, educational levels of the patient, *Mantradi chikitsa* is administered to attain better results. It creates confidence and reduces

pessimism and fear.

#### ***Yuktivyaprasraya chikitsa (rationale therapy):***

The rationale approach is planning the treatment according to the condition of the inherent factors like *dosha*, *dhathu* etc. This includes internal medications, external therapeutic procedures and diet. In psychiatric diseases, the prior line of treatment is *snehabana* (intake of medicated ghee). *Ghrita* alleviates *vata* and *pitta*, which are mainly impaired in diseases like depression as *vata* is the controller of the mind and *medha* (intellect) is the property of *Pitta*. Ghee does not increase *kapha* too. It improves *sadhaka pitta* and *prana vata* thus by reducing the stress and diseases caused by it.

The oleation is followed by *mridu sodhana* (mild purification by emesis or purgation). The vitiated humors are removed and the channels to the mind are cleared by this process. Further treatment is planned in order to channelize the impaired *doshas*. *Niruha vasti* (enema with decoction), *sirovirechana* (medicated errhines) and *sajna prabodhana* (medication for mood and intellect stabilization) can be given<sup>[40]</sup>.

#### ***Satwavajaya chikitsa (psychotherapy):***

*Satwavajaya* literally means to enhance

*satwa guna*. As depression is a *tamo guna* predominant disease, the psychotherapy can be preferred. *Satvavajaya chikitsa* viz, *jnana* (knowledge of self), *vijnana* (analytic knowledge), *dhairyya* (confidence), *smriti* (scriptural wisdom), and *samadhi* (concentration) corrects the negative cognition<sup>[41]</sup>. Emotional support can be given in the form of *aswasana*, *santhwana* (consoling), *harshana* (motivating) to balance *manasika dosha*.

All the treatments ultimately aim at *manovahasrotho* *sodhana* and *rasayana* (enhancing *rasa*) as the disease debilitates the person both mentally and physically. The role of *agni* has to be considered while planning any treatment protocol<sup>[42]</sup>. The medication and dietary pattern which enhance cognitive function, *Yoga* in the form of dynamic exercise and *pranayama* can be practiced as both counter agent and prophylaxis<sup>[43,44]</sup>. The *dinacharya* (healthy daily regimens), *ritucharya* (regimens according to seasonal change), *sadvritta* and *achara rasayana* (moral codes of conduct) explained in our science can be practiced as prevention.

**Table no 2: principles of treatment**

Parameter	Treatment principle
<i>Sareerika dosha</i>	<i>Vatanulomana, Vata-Kaphahara</i>

<i>Manasika dosha</i>	<i>Tamodosha hara</i>
<i>Satwa</i>	<i>Satwajaya</i>
<i>Jnanendriya</i>	<i>Indriya Uttejaka, Indriya Prasada</i>
<i>Agni</i>	<i>Agni Deepana, Sadhakagni balanced for proper emotions</i>
<i>Dhathu</i>	<i>Correction of Agni and metabolism</i>
<i>Ojus</i>	<i>Rasayana and Medhya</i>

### **CONCLUSION:**

Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life in all countries. It causes mental torment and impacts on people's ability to carry out even the routine tasks, sometimes with distressing consequences in relationships within family and society. At worst, depression can lead to suicide. It is a consequence of derangement of vital factors of the body such as *tridosha*, *triguna*, *rasadhathu*, *manovaha srotos*, *satwa*, *jnanendriya* and *karmendriya*, *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.

Unlike a physical illness, the reluctance of a person to realize within as having a psychological illness prevents them from approaching a doctor. But once diagnosed, our science offers enough modalities to support them. 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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