

**AYURVEDIC APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH-A REVIEW****Dr. Aswathy Mohan<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Pankaja Choudhary<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Deepa Kale<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

As a holistic medical system, Ayurveda approaches mental health through the synergistic relationship between the Sharira (body), Manas (mind), Indriyas (senses), and Atma (soul). With nearly 970 million individuals worldwide suffering from mental health challenges, there is an urgent demand for therapeutic interventions that are both holistic and free from adverse side effects. This review explores the non-pharmacological potential of Ayurvedic Psychology, centering on the Manas-comparable to the modern psyche-as a critical mediator (Ubhayendriya) of cognitive and motor functions. It further examines therapeutic methodologies such as Daivavyapashraya, Yuktivyapashraya, and Satvavajaya Chikitsa, alongside the neuro-psychological benefits of Panchakarma therapies (e.g., Nasya, Shirodhara) and Yoga in stabilizing the nervous system.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mental health is defined not merely by the absence of disease, but by a positive state of psychological equilibrium that fosters emotional resilience, behavioral adaptability, and the capacity for constructive social relationships. Despite the availability of modern pharmacotherapy, the global burden of neuropsychiatric disorders remains high.

Conventional anxiolytics, while effective, often carry risks of dependency and adverse effects such as sedation, poor mental clarity, or digestive disturbances.<sup>[1]</sup> This has catalyzed a shift towards holistic and integrative protocols. Unlike reductionist approaches, Ayurveda views health as a dynamic balance of biological humors (Doshas), metabolism (Agni), tissues (Dhatus), and the psycho-spiritual triad of Mind, Senses, and Soul.<sup>[2]</sup> Ayurveda recognizes the intricate relationship between mental and physical health and personalized treatment methods. Charaka Samhitha describes Manas as the entity which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings, intelligence, and unconscious cognitive processes.<sup>[3]</sup> Ayurveda emphasises mental health as the dynamic balance of the three Gunas-Satva, Rajas, and Tamas-which collectively form the fundamental attributes of the mind (Manas).<sup>[4]</sup> Satva, representing clarity, harmony, and purity, is considered essential for psychological stability and well-being. Rajas, associated with activity and passion, and Tamas, linked with inertia and ignorance.

An imbalance marked by the predominance of Rajas and Tamas along with a decline in Satva is regarded as the primary cause of mental disturbances. This disequilibrium manifests as emotional instability, impaired judgment, and behavioural abnormalities. In Ayurvedic terminology, Mano Vikara refers to such abnormal mental states arising from the vitiation of both Shareerika Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and Manasika Doshas (Rajas and Tamas). This conceptual framework provides a holistic foundation for understanding psychiatric disorders and guides therapeutic interventions aimed at restoring mental equilibrium.

## METHODS

This review synthesizes data from classical Ayurvedic compendia, specifically the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, alongside contemporary medical literature. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using digital databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, the AYUSH Research Portal, and Research Gate to integrate traditional knowledge with modern psychiatric perspectives.

### Concept of Mind

The mind is generally defined as the entity governing cognition, emotion, perception, and memory. While 19th-century psychoanalytic theory, notably by Sigmund Freud, emphasized the dominance of unconscious motives over conscious behavior, Ayurvedic science offers a more structured anatomical and functional description. In Ayurveda, Manas (mind) is a fundamental component of Ayu (life), existing in a functional tetrad alongside Sharira

(physical body), Indriya (sense faculties), and Atma (soul).<sup>[5]</sup> While the Sharira represents the gross physical form and the Atma represents the subtlest element of consciousness, Manas acts as the critical instrument (Karana) of the cognitive process. Furthermore, Manas is identified as the substratum for mental disease, and its inherent attributes-Satva, Rajas, and Tamas determine an individual's psychological constitution (Manas Prakriti).

### **Manas, Atma, and Indriya**

The Atma serves as the seat of consciousness, while Manas functions as the apparatus through which consciousness operates. The Indriyas (sense faculties) serve as the peripheral tools that gather sensory input. In Ayurvedic physiology, consciousness is the result of the synchronized function of this triad: The Soul (the witness), the Mind (the processor), and the Senses (the collectors).

This parallels the 'Cognitive Triad' in modern psychology, which encompasses thoughts, affects, and behavior. However, where modern psychology views the psyche as a cluster of cognitive functions, Ayurveda differentiates the Manas (the processor of impressions and thoughts) from the Atma (the true custodian or observer). A state of Prasanna Mana (blissful or clear mind) is therefore cited not just as a mood, but as a definitive clinical indicator of health.

### **Manas and Atma as Dravya**

Ayurveda included Manas and Dravya among the nine Dravyas which started from the Vaisheshika Darsana. By that way Guna (properties) and Karma (functions) of Manas and Atma can be elaborated.

### **Location of Manas**

Efforts had been made to precisely locate Manas in the Samhithas. Acharya Charaka located Manas in the Hridaya whereas Acharya Bhela described it between head and palate. It is also mentioned that Manas moves and locate itself in the sentient portion of the body.<sup>[6]</sup> Modern scientific research supports the view that mental phenomena are closely associated with the brain's biochemical and electrophysiological mechanisms. Dr John Andrew Armour made a break through by establishing an anatomical entity which is also considered as 'heart brain'. He describes it as a cardiac nervous system which is a complex neurological system which have relations with mind and emotions.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Attributes of Manas

Manas is minute (Anutwa) and single (Eka) and it is by these attributes superimposition of information is prevented by achieving clarity of knowledge.<sup>[8]</sup> It is proved by Deerghashashkuli Nyaya in which it is argued that all the perceptions happen in the same time. It is counter argued with Ulpalasathapatrasuchiveda Nyaya in which it is elaborated like if a hundred petals are arranged and pierced with a needle it seems like the perception happens in the same time but actually each petal are pierced in different time period.

### Lakshana of Manas

Perseverance and non-perseverance of knowledge is the characteristic feature of Manas.<sup>[9]</sup> The Swarupa of all Indriyas as well as the mind is considered Panchabhautika, indicating their origin from the five Mahabhutas. Among these, the mind (Manas) occupies a unique position because it functions as a mediator between the Jnanendriyas and Karmendriyas. Owing to this dual role, it is designated as Ubhayendriya. The mind initiates and regulates the activity of the sensory organs, enabling the perception of knowledge, and subsequently evaluates and interprets the information received. After this analytical process, the mind governs and directs the motor organs (Karmendriyas) to perform appropriate actions. Thus, the mind serves as a central coordinating faculty that integrates sensory perception and motor response, maintaining harmony between cognition and action.

### Objects of Manas

According to Acharya Charaka, the objects of mind comprise Chintya, Vicharya, Uhya, Dhyeya, and Sankalpya.<sup>[10]</sup> Chintya refers to intention analysis, involving deliberation on whether an action should be performed or not. Vicharya denotes feasibility assessment, where possibilities and limitations are examined. Uhya represents probabilistic thinking, while Dhyeya pertains to imaginative or conceptual visualization. Sankalpya involves value-based evaluation, discerning the ethical or qualitative nature of an action, such as whether it is good or bad.

### Therapeutic Modalities (Trividha Aushadha)

The method of treatment in Ayurveda as a whole has been classified into three categories by Charaka

1. Daiva Vyapashraya - Divine therapy
2. Yukti Vyapashraya - Rational therapy
3. Satvavajaya - Psycho therapy

### 1. Daiva Vyapashraya (Divine therapy):

Daiva Vyapashraya represents the spiritual dimension of healing, utilizing faith and cosmic resonance to manage diseases, particularly those classified as Manasaroga (mental disorders) or those with idiopathic origins.<sup>[11]</sup> Rather than a mere list of rituals, these can be categorized into:

- Vocalizations: The use of Mantra (hymns) and Svastyayana (auspicious chanting) to induce vibrational calm.
- Ritualistic Offerings: Including Bali (oblations), Homa (fire rituals), and Upahara (offerings) to appease unseen forces.
- Physical Disciplines: Such as Upavasa (fasting), Niyamana (adherence to scriptural rules), and Pranipata (surrender to the divine).
- Symbolic Protection: The wearing of Mani (gems) or Aushadha (amulets) to ward off negative influences.

These interventions serve to reduce fear, instill confidence, and restore the patient's spiritual equilibrium.

### 2. Yukti Vyapashraya (Rational Therapy):

Yukti Vyapashraya constitutes the evidence-based, rational application of therapeutics. The term 'Yukti' implies strategic reasoning; thus, this modality relies on the physician's intellectual ability to analyze the pathogenesis. Treatment protocols-encompassing diet (Ahara), lifestyle (Vihara), and pharmaceuticals (Aushadha)-are not generic but are meticulously tailored based on an assessment of the patient's Dosha (humors), Agni (digestive fire), Bala (strength), and the stage of the disease. This approach represents the practical, clinical arm of Ayurveda, comparable to modern medical interventions.

### 3. Satvavajaya Chikitsa (Ayurvedic Psychotherapy):

Satvavajaya is the specialized branch of Ayurvedic psychotherapy dedicated to restraining the mind from unwholesome objects (Ahita Artha) and enhancing the Satva Guna (clarity and balance). The core objective is "victory over the mind," achieved through cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation.

The Five Pillars of Satvavajaya:

Acharya Charaka outlines five essential components for managing mental instability:

- Jnana (Insight): Cultivating self-awareness and spiritual knowledge.

- Vijnana (Education): Providing the patient with scriptural or scientific knowledge to dispel ignorance.
- Dhairya (Resilience): Reinforcing patience, courage, and impulse control.
- Smriti (Memory/Recall): Correcting cognitive distortions by recalling past experiences or core values.
- Samadhi (Focus): developing mindfulness and concentration to stabilize the wandering mind.

### **Counseling and Social Support**

Beyond the individual, Ayurvedic psychotherapy emphasizes the social context. Patients are guided to align their decisions with the ethical frameworks of Dharma and Artha. Furthermore, familial involvement is prioritized; educating the family on the prognosis and necessary behavioral adjustments creates a supportive environment that significantly enhances therapeutic outcomes.

### **Smriti Meditation**

Smriti Meditation, grounded in traditional Ayurvedic and Yogic concepts, focuses on developing sustained awareness and stability of memory. The technique involves repeatedly directing the mind to the present moment and observing thoughts, feelings, and inner experiences with a sense of detachment. Through this process, the faculty of Smriti (memory) becomes more organized, cognitive functions are better integrated, and mental clarity is enhanced. Consistent practice is thought to calm internal disturbances, sharpen judgment, and build emotional strength. In clinical or therapeutic contexts, Smriti Meditation is used to help individuals identify ingrained mental patterns and cultivate a balanced, harmonious state of mind that supports the healing process.

### **Role of Panchakarma**

The five-fold cleansing and rejuvenating process of Panchakarma offers profound benefits in managing neuropsychiatric conditions by stabilizing the Doshas and enhancing neuro-modulation.

#### **A. Snehana and Murdhni Taila (External Oil Therapies)**

Snehana procedures, such as full-body oil massage (Abhyanga) and foot massage (Padabhyanga), are established to reduce stress by modulating the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis. These therapies enhance parasympathetic activity and have been

empirically linked to increased levels of calming neurotransmitters like serotonin, promoting emotional stability and mental focus.

Murdhni Taila (application of oil to the head) encompasses specialized treatments including Shiro Abhyanga (head massage), Shirodhara (Shiroseka), Shiro Pichu (oil-soaked cotton application), and Shiro Basti (retaining oil on the scalp). These interventions deliver significant soothing effects to the central nervous system.

Shirodhara (continuous pouring of herbal oil over the forehead), Shiro Basti and Thalapothichil<sup>[13]</sup> (application of herbal paste on the head) are widely used for their stabilizing and rejuvenating actions. The rhythmic stimulation of Shirodhara is particularly effective in reducing anxiety and regulating stress responses.

#### B. Nasya (Nasal Therapy)

Nasya therapy, the administration of medicated substances through the nasal route, is critical for cleansing the Shirovaha Srotas (channels leading to the head). Nasya has demonstrated efficacy in managing stress-induced cephalalgia and improving mental clarity by influencing cranial nerves and higher cerebral functions.

#### C. Takradhara (Medicated Buttermilk Therapy)

Takradhara (pouring medicated buttermilk over the forehead) is also utilized for its cooling and stabilizing properties, offering benefits in both the preventive and curative aspects of mental health management.

### RESULT

The findings affirm that Ayurveda conceptualizes Manas as the indispensable mediator, or Ubhayendriya, coordinating both sensory and motor organs. Cognitive processes are detailed through its objects (Chintya, Vicharya, Uhya, Dhyeya, and Sankalpya). The holistic management of Manovikaras is delivered through the Trividha Aushadha: Daiva Vyapasraya Chikitsa (spiritual and faith-based therapies), Yukti Vyapasraya Chikitsa (rational, personalized diet and drug protocols) and Satvavajaya Chikitsa (psychotherapy focused on enhancing Sattva through Jnana, Dhairya, Smriti, and mindfulness). Furthermore, practices like Yoga, Smriti meditation, and Panchakarma therapies (Shirodhara, Nasya etc) demonstrate specific neuropsychological benefits through stress regulation and physiological stabilization.



## CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a robust, integrative, and culturally adaptable framework for mental healthcare. By emphasizing prevention, personalized healing, and the Mind-Body-Soul connection, its psychotherapeutic approaches and non-pharmacological interventions offer safe and effective alternatives to conventional anxiolytics, mitigating issues related to dependency and adverse effects. The increasing validation from neuropharmacological research into Ayurvedic therapeutics strengthens its therapeutic potential. Continued interdisciplinary research and the thoughtful integration of these principles into global healthcare systems are essential for advancing sustainable, holistic models of mental well-being.

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