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

Prakash Mangalasseri¹ Hari T²

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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. There is a sufficiently powerful link between depression and morbidities like cardiovascular diseases including angina, myocardial infarction and stroke and type II diabetes. There is good evidence that maternal depression is associated with sub-optimal breastfeeding. 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.

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 kapha-jama 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

¹Asst. Professor, Dept. of Kayachikitsa, VPSV Ayurveda College, Kottakkal, Kerala
²Medical officer, Indian Systems of Medicine, Govt. of Kerala
Corresponding Author email: drayurprakash@gmail.com
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In Ayurveda, mind and body are the two substrata for manifestation of disease. 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 [19]. 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 devopmental.

### 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. [18] *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), *saucar(cleanliness), dwesha* (hatred), *smriti(memory), moha* (desire), *matsarya* (competitiveness), *saurya(valour), bhaya* (fearfulness), *krotha* (anger), *utsaha* (enthusiasm) etc are comes under these characteristics. Apart from this, *saraalakshana* (features of tissue excellence) explain the classical blue print of a human trait. *Satvasarasata* (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. *Pranjaparadha* is nothing but involving unwholsome activities with lack of self control [22]. It is told that *pranjaparadha* leads to vitiation of all the three humors. 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 *prvarasatva* (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 psychopathy. 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 *atisaara*, symptoms like *nidralu* (hypersomnia), *alasa* (laziness) are explained. [26] Once *agni* get vitiated, it may lead to *ama*, the toxic indigestion which show certain psychological symptom in premonitory stage itself like *arati* (restlessness), *akhshani* (intolerability) to wise words, *dwesha* (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 concretises 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). 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 ahaara. If the ahaara is not in quantity the development of all kala will be in vein. The sukshmanamsa (subtlest) of ahaara will nourish the mind. A lucid uncontaminated food can import a healthy mind. In Bhagavat Gita, three kinds of food has been explained, viz, saattvika, rajjasika, tamasika. If the food is pure, it will give clarity to mind too. 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. 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 aahara. 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), atisignghda(oily), atimaatra(large quantity) ahaara will afflict the formation of rasa dhatu. The same way, excessive unwanted thinking is one of the main reasons in its vitiation. 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. 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). Also, in the features of deranged rasa, loss of concentration is a cardinal one. 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.

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 dhatu (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 anavasthitacittata(unequal mind) and vishada(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 (rasapradsusthi). Improper ahaara 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.

REFERENCES:


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