

Manas(Psyche) in Ayurveda: Role in Cognition, Behavior, and Mental Health



Devanand Upadhyay¹, Dinesh Kumar Meena²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Siddhant Darshan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU.
Email: dev.asdbhu10@bhu.ac.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Siddhant Darshan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU
dinesh4ubhu@gmail.com

Submission Date: 12/12/2020, Revised Dates: 24/01/2021, Accepted Date: 01/02/2021, Publication Date: 04/03/2021

Abstract

Manas (mind/psyche) occupies a central position in Ayurvedic philosophy and medicine. It is regarded as one of the three fundamental constituents of life (Tridanda), along with Sharira (body) and Atma (soul), and is responsible for cognition, perception, emotional regulation, and behavioral responses. The maintenance of mental equilibrium is considered essential for health, whereas disturbances in mental functioning contribute to the manifestation of disease. To critically review the Ayurvedic concept of Manas, its physiological and psychological functions, psychological constitutions, role in mental health, etiological factors of mental disorders, and principles of mental health management. A narrative review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts, including the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and allied philosophical literature, as well as contemporary scientific publications retrieved from academic databases. Relevant concepts pertaining to Manas, Manasika Prakriti, mental disorders, and therapeutic approaches were critically analyzed and synthesized. Ayurveda describes Manas as an internal faculty mediating between Atma and Indriyas, facilitating cognition, perception, and behavioral regulation. Its principal functions include thinking, deliberation, reasoning, determination, and self-control. Psychological constitutions are categorized as Sattvika, Rajasika, and Tamasika according to the predominance of the Trigunas. Mental disorders primarily arise from disturbances of Rajas and Tamas, often precipitated by Prajnaparadha (intellectual error), inappropriate sensory engagement, and maladaptive behavioral patterns. Therapeutic approaches such as Sattvavajaya Chikitsa, Achara Rasayana, Medhya Rasayana, and appropriate lifestyle regulation aim to restore psychological balance, strengthen mental resilience, and promote overall well-being.

Keywords: Manas; Manasika Prakriti; Triguna; Sattvavajaya Chikitsa; Mental Health.

Introduction

In Ayurveda, Manas (mind) is considered an essential component of life, integral to maintaining health (Swasthya) and disease manifestation. Manas (mind) is considered one of the three foundational pillars (Tridanda) of life, alongside Sharira (body) and Atma (soul). [1] It serves as the interface between sensory input and intellectual response, reflecting both the subtle nature of consciousness and the physiological processes of perception and cognition. The functional integrity of Manas is crucial, as it determines an individual's capacity to perceive, comprehend, and respond to both external stimuli and internal emotional states such as pleasure, pain, and awareness [2]. It is grouped with Sharira (body), Indriyas (senses), and Atma (soul) as foundational elements. The concept of Prasanna Manas—a clear, balanced, and peaceful mind—is described as critical for health, while Aprasanna Manas leads to disease. [3] Manas is conceptualized in Ayurveda as an Antahkarana (internal faculty) that governs perception, cognition, and the coordination of sensory and motor functions. It serves as a vital intermediary

between the Atma (soul) and the Indriyas (sense organs), facilitating the acquisition of knowledge (Pratyaksha Gyana). [4]. Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual is aware of their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can make a contribution to their community. [5] It reflects positive functioning, resilience, and social participation, rather than just the absence of mental illness. [1] Mental health in Ayurveda is not merely psychological well-being but a harmonious alignment of mind, body, and soul aimed at achieving Prasannata (mental clarity), self-realization, and liberation (Moksha). [6]

The manas (psyche) is described as Ubhayendriya, functioning both as a gyanendriya (sensory organ) and a karmendriya (motor organ). It receives input from the senses, processes information through Buddhi, and coordinates actions accordingly. [1,2] Manas operates with the characteristics of Ekatva (one mind active at a time), which denotes its singularity, allowing it to interact with only one sensory input at a time, thus ensuring focused perception and cognitive clarity. The key qualities (Gunas) of Manas are Anutva

(atomic/subtle), [7] which refers to its minuteness, enabling swift and subtle connections with different sensory organs and facilitating singular, focused perception at any given moment, thereby defining its uniqueness and functional capacity. It integrates sensory information, filters perception, and supports decision-making processes. The mind is said to operate through Manovaha Srotas, the channels responsible for transmitting mental functions across the body. [8]

Ayurveda does not view the mind as a byproduct of the brain, but rather as an independent, subtle entity connected to Atma. It is involved in both external perception and inner processing, and is essential for the expression of human intelligence, morality, and self-awareness.[9] The manas is said to dwell primarily in the Hridaya (heart), though ancient texts also mention Shiras (head), aligning it with the control centers of the sensory system and even the palate region (Talu) as potential locations.[10] While Ayurveda provides a rich understanding of Manas and its functions, it does not offer a framework for measuring or quantifying it in a conventional sense.

Vata Dosha In The Regulation Of Manas

Deep interconnection between Vata Dosha and Manas (mind) in Ayurvedic physiology is rooted in classical references from the Charaka Samhita and the Hathayoga Pradipika, where the functional supremacy of Vata as the regulator (Niyanta) and stimulator (Praneta) of mental activity is clearly seen. [11] According to Charaka, Vata not only orchestrates physical movements but also guides mental faculties. It enables cognition by coordinating Indriyas (sense organs) and Manas, thus facilitating Artha Grahana (perception). The correlation between Vata and Rajo Guna, one of the Manasika Doshas. Disturbance in Vata leads to mental imbalances and various Manasa Rogas, such as anxiety and restlessness. [12]

Key Mental And Cognitive Functions

These include Indriyabhi-graha—the control and regulation of the sensory faculties, and Svasya Nigraha—self-restraint or internal regulation of its own impulses. [1] According to Charaka, the functional domains of Manas include Chintya (thought), Vicharya (deliberation), Uhya (hypothetical reasoning), Dhyeya (goals), and Sankalpya (determination). [1,4,7] These processes are collectively referred to as Manovyapara. Manas is classified as a Karana Dravya (instrumental substance) that facilitates Gyana Bhava (cognition) through the conjunction of Atma and Indriyas.[13] These functions illustrate the role of Manas in cognitive coordination, emotional regulation, decision-making, and intellectual processing. Internal cognition involves two types of conjunctions, while external perception involves four, including interaction with external objects. Manas is considered vital for both

savikalpaka (determinate) and nirvikalpaka (indeterminate) perception. [14]

Variability in Cognitive Perception

The Ayurvedic understanding of perception (Gyana-Utpatti) offers explanation of how cognitive experiences originate and why they differ among individuals. According to classical texts, knowledge arises through the coordinated interaction among the Atma (Self), Indriya (sense organs), Manas (mind), and Artha (objects).[1] Cognition begins only when the mind actively connects the self with a specific sense organ, forming a conscious channel for sensory input. The diversity of cognition is attributed to variations in the objects perceived and the specific senses involved.[15] Ayurveda emphasizes that perception is not a fixed response but is shaped by contextual and subjective variables. An analogy in the texts likens perceptual differences to variations in sound produced by plucking a veena string, striking a nail, or rubbing fingers together, each producing distinct auditory experiences despite sharing a common source (Samyojaka Buddhi). [16] This ancient explanation parallels contemporary cognitive science theories, which attribute perceptual variation to attentional states, neural plasticity, and psychophysical thresholds.

Categories of Manas bala

Manas is also shaped by three inherent Gunas—Sattva (clarity), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia)—which determine an individual's mental state and disposition. [17] Ayurvedic psychology aims to transition the mind from Tamasic and Rajasic tendencies toward Sattvic balance through ethical living, proper diet, spiritual practice, and behavioral discipline. Based on mental resilience, Satva is classified into three categories: Pravara Satva, indicating strong mental strength and high tolerance to stress and adversity; Madhyama Satva, representing moderate resilience and emotional balance under common life challenges; and Avara Satva, reflecting a weak psyche that is easily disturbed and prone to emotional breakdowns even under minor stressors. [18]

Manasika Prakriti: Psychological Constitutions in Ayurveda

In Ayurvedic thought, Manasika Prakriti refers to the inherent mental disposition or psychological constitution of an individual. [19] These constitutions are broadly classified into three types—Sattvika, Rajasika, and Tamasika—each characterized by a distinct set of mental attributes, behavioral tendencies, and cognitive inclinations. This classification is rooted in the Triguna theory, which posits that the interplay of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas influences both the mental and physical nature of a person.

The qualities associated with each mental constitution are described below:

Table 1: Characteristics of Psychological Constitution (Manasika Prakriti) [20,21]

S.No.	Type of Mental Constitution	Qualities
1	Sattvika	Kindness (Anrushasyam), Tendency to share (Samvibhagaruchita), Forgiveness (Titiksha), Truthfulness (Satya), Religiousness (Dharma), Theism/Optimism (Astikyam), Knowledge (Jnana), Logic (Buddhi), Good memory (Smriti), Wisdom (Medha), Mental firmness (Dhriti), Non-attachment (Anabhishanga)
2	Rajasika	Suffering (Dukkha), Restlessness (Atanshilata), Impatience (Adhriti), Ego (Ahankara), Falsehood (Anrutikatvam), in Cruelty (Akarunyam), Hypocrisy (Dambha), Arrogance (Mana), Joy (Harsha), Lust (Kama), Anger (Krodha)
3	Tamasika	Depression (Vishada), Atheism/Pessimism (Nastikyam), Immorality (Adharmashilata), Perverted intellect (Buddhinirodha), Ignorance (Ajnana), Foolishness (Durmedhastvam), Inactivity (Akarmashilata), Sleepiness (Nidralu)

Causes of mental disorders (Manasika Vyadhis)

Pathologically, mental disorders (Manasika Vyadhis) occur due to the vitiation of Rajas and Tamas, the two Manasika Doshas. [22] These arise from causes such as Asatmendriyarthasamyoga (improper use of the senses), Pragyaparadha (intellectual error), and karma (improper conduct). [23] When these factors disrupt Satva (mental equilibrium), they lead to disorders like Unmada (psychosis), Apasmara (epilepsy), and Atavabhinivesha (delusional thinking). [24] Ayurveda conceptualizes Manas (mind) as one of the essential components of life, alongside Sharira (body), Indriyas (senses), and Atma (soul). It plays a central role in the origin, manifestation, and management of mental and psychosomatic disorders. The mind, composed of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, is especially prone to derangement when Rajas and Tamas are dominant, resulting in Manas Rog (mental disorders). Manas is closely linked to Vata, and both influence each other synergistically. The vitiation of Manasik and Sharirik Doshas results in Manovaha Srotodushti (impairment of mental pathways), especially in individuals with Alpasattva (weak mental strength). Normal mental functions (Bhavas) become pathological (Rogas) when this balance is disturbed.

Classification of Manas Rog

Although classical texts do not present a fixed classification, Manas Rog can be broadly categorized as Nija (endogenous), caused by vitiation of Rajas and Tamas alone, or by their combination with Sharirik Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha). Examples include

conditions like Unmada (psychosis), Apasmara (epilepsy), Krodha (anger), Shoka (grief), and Chinta (depression). Agantuja (exogenous) resulting from external factors such as Bhuta or Graha influences (e.g., Bhutonmada, Grahonmada). Manodehik Rog are Disorders originating in the mind but manifesting physically, such as Shokaja Jwara (grief-induced fever), Tamak Shwasa (bronchial asthma), and Amavata (rheumatoid arthritis). [25]

Treatment Principles

The therapeutic framework in Ayurveda addresses mental disturbances through three principal approaches:

1. Sattvavajaya Chikitsa – Psychotherapeutic techniques that promote emotional strength and cognitive control, including Dhairya (courage), Smriti (memory), Vijnana (knowledge), and Samadhi (meditative withdrawal). [26]
2. Achara Rasayana and Sadvritta – Ethical behavior, disciplined lifestyle, and social conduct designed to foster mental stability and resilience. [27]
3. Medhya Rasayana and Lifestyle Regulation – The use of intellect-promoting herbs such as Jyotishmati and Mahakalyanaka Ghrita, combined with Dinacharya (daily routine), Ratricharya (night regimen), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), and balanced diet (Nitya Sevaneeya Ahara), to maintain the harmony of mind and body. [28]

Discussion

The Ayurvedic concept of Manas represents one of the earliest systematic frameworks for understanding human psychology. Unlike reductionist models that localize mental activity solely within the brain, Ayurveda conceptualizes Manas as a subtle functional entity that mediates interactions among Atma, Indriyas, and Sharira. This holistic view enables the integration of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions within a single theoretical construct.

The description of Manas as Anu and Eka reflects an advanced understanding of attentional mechanisms. The notion that the mind can engage with only one sensory object at a time resembles contemporary theories of selective attention and cognitive processing capacity. Similarly, the categorization of mental activities into Chintya, Vicharya, Uhya, Dhyeya, and Sankalpya demonstrates a sophisticated recognition of higher-order cognitive functions including reasoning, planning, decision-making, and goal-oriented behavior.

The Triguna-based classification of psychological constitutions provides a personalized approach to mental health. Sattvika individuals exhibit qualities associated with emotional stability, resilience, and prosocial behavior, whereas excessive predominance of Rajas or Tamas predisposes individuals to psychological disturbances. This constitutional perspective aligns with modern concepts of temperament, personality traits, and psychological vulnerability.

The Ayurvedic explanation of mental disorders through disturbances of Rajas and Tamas emphasizes the importance of behavioral, ethical, sensory, and cognitive factors in disease causation. The concepts of Pragyaparadha and Asatmendriyarthā Samyoga are particularly relevant in the modern era, where chronic stress, unhealthy lifestyles, excessive sensory stimulation, and maladaptive behaviors contribute significantly to mental health disorders.

The therapeutic approach of Ayurveda is noteworthy because it extends beyond symptom management. Sattvavajaya Chikitsa incorporates elements comparable to cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and behavioral therapy. Likewise, Achara Rasayana promotes positive social conduct, self-discipline, and moral development, which are increasingly recognized as determinants of psychological well-being. Emerging evidence concerning the gut-brain axis further supports Ayurvedic emphasis on diet, digestion, and lifestyle in maintaining mental health.

Conclusion

Manas occupies a central position in the Ayurvedic understanding of health, behavior, cognition, and disease. As a subtle yet indispensable component of life, it regulates perception, emotional responses, decision-making, and self-awareness. The concepts of

Triguna, Manasika Prakriti, Satva Bala, and Manasika Doshas provide a unique framework for understanding individual psychological differences and mental disorders. Ayurvedic interventions such as Sattvavajaya Chikitsa, Achara Rasayana, Medhya Rasayana, and lifestyle regulation aim not only to treat disease but also to cultivate mental resilience and well-being. The holistic and personalized perspective of Manas is highly relevant to contemporary mental health research and offers promising opportunities for integrative healthcare.

References

1. Madhukar LS, Nivrutti BA, Bhatnagar V. A critical review study on the concept of Manas in Ayurveda and its consequence in present epoch. *European Journal of Pharmaceutical and Medical Research*. 2017;4(7):288-94.
2. Chakrabarti A. The connecting manas: Inner Sense, common Sense, or the organ of imagination. *After Appropriation: Explorations in Intercultural Philosophy and Religion*. 2011:57-75.
3. Rastogi S, Chaudhari P. Ethics as a modality affecting health and healthcare practice: revealing the real strengths of traditional healthcare. *Asian Bioethics Review*. 2015;7(4):371-9.
4. Amin H, Sharma R. Concepts of Manas (mind): An Insight from Vaisesika Darshana and Ayurveda. *British Journal of Medical and Health Research*. 2014;1(1):1-2.
5. Aggarwal GP. Ayurveda and mental health: an insight. *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences and Technology*. 2019 Jan;7:36-40
6. Menon S, Rajaraman S, Kuchibotla L. Well-being and self-transformation in Indian psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. 2018;37(1):4.
7. Amin H, Sharma R, Vyas HA, Vyas MK. Concept of Manas: Insights from Nyāya Darśana and Āyurveda. *Yoga Mimamsa*. 2014 Jul 1;46(3-4):71-5.
8. Takahashi K. The manas and the manovahā channel in the Vārṣṇeyādhyātma of the Mahābhārata: A Critical Reading of Mahābhārata 12.207. 16–29. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 2019 Jul 15;47(3):421-52.
9. Tu VD. Nature Of Citta, Mano And Viññāna. *Unifying buddhist philosophical views*. 2012:99-113.
10. Khedekar SG, Singhai S. A study of Mana (mind) to elucidate its location. *Journal of Indian System of Medicine*. 2017 Apr 1;5(2):161-5.
11. Kumar S, Mehra D, Raole VV, Nikhate SP. A conceptual study on Medha, Buddhi, Dhee, Dhruti, Smruti, and Manas. *ThePharmInnovJ*. 2019;8(6):567-72.

12. Rao AV. Mind in ayurveda. Indian journal of psychiatry. 2002 Jul 1;44(3):201-11.
13. Rai DV, Dubey S, Kumar G. Soul and Mind as Functional Control in the Management of Human Body: A Scientific Approach. Journal of Biological Engineering Research and Review. 2019;6(1):37-43.
14. Bronkhorst J. A note on nirvikalpaka and savikalpaka perception. Philosophy East and West. 2011;61(2):373-9.
15. Rowe C, Healy SD. Measuring variation in cognition. Behavioral Ecology. 2014 Jan 1;25(6):1287-92.
16. Caraka. Caraka Samhita of Agnivesa, revised by Caraka and Dridhabala. Vidyotini Hindi Commentary by Kashinatha Shastri and Gorakha Natha Chaturvedi. Part I. Reprint ed. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Bharati Academy; 2007. Sharira Sthana 1/33-34.
17. Rajpurohit JS, Satpathy J. Anthology on Triguna in Contemporary Humanity. Journal of Pune Research Discovery. 2018;2(3):1-7.
18. Sarokte AS, Rao MV. Effects of Medhya Rasayana and Yogic practices in improvement of short-term memory among school-going children. AYU (An international quarterly journal of research in Ayurveda). 2013 Oct 1;34(4):383-9.
19. Ravindra S, Reeta M, Vipin S, Sumanth S, Murthy AR. Prakriti (human constitution)-an individual identity of a human. Ayurpharm-Int J Ayur Alli Sci. 2012;1(7):151-8.
20. Maurya BN, Byadgi PS. Concept of Manasa Prakriti described in Sushruta Samhita. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research. 2014 Mar 1;3(3):4180-7.
21. Bagali SS, Baragi UC. Concept of Manasa Prakriti as described in Charaka Samhita. Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences. 2016 Oct 31;1(03):81-6.
22. Yogita C, Anitta R, Siddhanta SV, Ilkal K. Stress-A psychological disorder and its management in ayurveda-a review. Ayurpub. 2018;3(4):970-80.
23. Upadhyay D, Dwibedy BK. Critical appraisal of karana (causes) in Ayurveda.
24. Balsavar A, Deshpande SN. Hallucinations in the classical Indian system of Ayurveda: A brief overview. Indian journal of psychiatry. 2014 Oct 1;56(4):325-9.
25. Sahoo S, Das AK, Das K. Psychiatry in Ayurveda. Research journal of Pharmacology and Pharmacodynamics. 2015 Oct 1;7(4):191.
26. Tripathi JS. Dimensions of Sattvavajaya Chikitsa (Ayurvedic psychotherapy) and their clinical applications. Ann Ayurvedic Med. 2012;1(1-2):31-8.
27. Shriwas HK, Chandrakar R. Conceptual Study Of Achara Rasayana In Ayurveda Science.
28. Sumi Jain DK. Ayurvedic principles to prevent & management of life style disorders. J Sci Innov Res. 2019;8(1):24-8.