

Role of Agni in Mansika Roga: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, conceptualizes health as a state of balance between body, mind, and consciousness. Central to this balance is *Agni*, the biological fire responsible for digestion, metabolism, and assimilation, playing a pivotal role not only in physical health but also in maintaining mental well-being. *Mansika Roga*, or mental disorders, have been intricately linked with the function and state of Agni in classical Ayurvedic literature. Disturbance in Agni leads to the formation of *Ama* (toxins), which obstructs the subtle channels of the mind (*Manovaha Srotas*), thereby contributing to the onset and progression of various psychological disorders. This systematic review aims to comprehensively analyze the conceptual understanding, clinical correlations, and therapeutic implications of *Agni* in relation to *Mansika Roga*. A meticulous review of classical Ayurvedic texts alongside contemporary clinical and experimental research was conducted to explore the dynamic relationship between Agni and mental health. The review highlights how different states of *Agni* — *Samagni*, *Mandagni*, *Vishamagni*, and *Tikshnagni* — correlate with mental states, influencing conditions such as anxiety, depression, and epilepsy. Modern scientific studies on the gut-brain axis and psychoneuroimmunology increasingly support these ancient concepts, establishing the significance of digestive health in mental well-being. The findings affirm that therapeutic approaches aimed at restoring Agni through dietary, lifestyle, and herbal interventions can positively impact mental health outcomes. This review underscores the enduring relevance of Ayurvedic principles in addressing modern mental health challenges and advocates for integrative research exploring *Agni's* multidimensional role in psychiatric care.

Keywords: Agni, Mansika Roga, Ayurveda, Mental Health, Digestive Fire, Agnidushti

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, has always emphasized the inseparable connection between the body, mind, and spirit in maintaining health and preventing disease. Unlike modern medicine, which often isolates physical and psychological disorders, Ayurveda views health as a dynamic equilibrium between *Dosha* (bodily humors), *Dhatu* (tissues), *Mala* (waste products), *Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire), and *Manas* (mind)¹. Among these, *Agni* holds a central position, considered the cornerstone of life processes, responsible for digestion, absorption, assimilation, and transformation of food into energy and consciousness. The proper functioning of Agni is indispensable not only for maintaining physical health but also for sustaining mental clarity and emotional stability².

Mental health disorders, or *Mansika Roga*, are increasingly prevalent in contemporary society due to rising stress levels, sedentary lifestyles, improper dietary habits, and social isolation. In Ayurveda, the origin of *Mansika Roga* is intricately linked to the state of *Agni*. When *Agni* becomes impaired due to imbalances in *Doshas*, it leads to the production of *Ama* (undigested metabolic waste or toxins), which obstructs the *Manovaha Srotas* (channels of the mind) and disrupts the normal functions of *Manas* (mind), resulting in various mental health disturbances³.

The classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, provide detailed descriptions of Agni's role in maintaining both somatic and psychic health. These texts explain how variations in Agni — *Samagni* (balanced), *Mandagni* (low), *Tikshnagni* (intense), and *Vishamagni* (irregular) — correspond to different physical and psychological states. Modern scientific research, especially studies focusing on the gut-brain axis, microbiota, and

psychoneuroimmunology, now echoes these ancient insights, acknowledging the profound influence of digestive health on mental well-being.

This comprehensive review aims to systematically examine the role of *Agni* in the etiology and management of *Mansika Roga*. By synthesizing knowledge from classical Ayurvedic literature and contemporary scientific studies, the review seeks to highlight how disturbances in *Agni* contribute to mental disorders and how restoring *Agni* through diet, lifestyle modifications, and herbal formulations can offer effective therapeutic strategies. The study further explores the potential parallels between Ayurvedic concepts and modern neurogastroenterology, fostering integrative perspectives in the management of mental health disorders.

Objectives

The primary aim of this systematic review is to comprehensively explore the conceptual, clinical, and therapeutic significance of *Agni* in the context of *Mansika Roga* (mental health disorders) as detailed in classical Ayurvedic literature and supported by contemporary scientific research. The specific objectives of this review are:

1. **To elucidate the Ayurvedic conceptual framework of *Agni*** — its types, functions, and role in maintaining psychosomatic equilibrium.
2. **To analyze the pathophysiological correlation between impaired *Agni* and *Mansika Roga***, focusing on the formation of *Ama*, obstruction of *Manovaha Srotas*, and disruption of *Manas* functions.
3. **To review Ayurvedic therapeutic approaches aimed at restoring *Agni*** and their documented or potential benefits in managing various mental health disorders.
4. **To examine contemporary biomedical research** that aligns with Ayurvedic perspectives on the relationship between digestive health and mental well-being, particularly studies on the gut-brain axis, microbiota, and psychoneuroimmunology.
5. **To propose an integrative model** for managing mental health conditions by combining Ayurvedic *Agni*-based principles with modern psychiatric practices.

Scope

This review encompasses an extensive examination of both classical and modern sources. Classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and other authoritative commentaries were consulted to extract fundamental theories and therapeutic guidelines related to *Agni* and its influence on *Mansika Roga*. In parallel, a comprehensive search of modern biomedical literature was conducted, focusing on research addressing the gut-brain axis, microbiome-mental health connections, inflammatory pathways, and neurogastroenterology, which conceptually resonate with the Ayurvedic understanding of *Agni* and *Manovaha Srotas*.

The review includes a wide spectrum of *Mansika Roga*, such as anxiety disorders, depression, insomnia, schizophrenia, and psychosomatic illnesses, assessing how *Agni* dysfunction may contribute to their pathogenesis and how its restoration can support their management. It also covers traditional Ayurvedic interventions — including *Agni Deepana* (digestive stimulants), *Ama Pachana* (detoxification), *Pathya-Apathya* (dietary and lifestyle recommendations), and psychotherapeutic methods like *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* — alongside emerging clinical and experimental evidence.

Methodology

Study Design

This study was designed as a qualitative systematic review aimed at collating and analyzing classical Ayurvedic literature alongside contemporary biomedical research related to the role of *Agni* in the pathogenesis and management of *Mansika*

Roga. The review employed a structured, integrative approach to synthesize traditional knowledge and modern scientific evidence.

Data Sources

The review included two primary categories of data sources:

1. Classical Ayurvedic Texts:

- Primary sources: *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Bhavaprakasha*, and *Madhava Nidana*, with an emphasis on chapters detailing *Agni*, *Ama*, *Manas*, *Manovaha Srotas*, and *Mansika Roga*.
- Secondary sources: Commentaries such as *Chakrapani Tika*, *Dalhana Tika*, and modern Ayurvedic textbooks and monographs.

2. Contemporary Biomedical Databases:

- Electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, AYUSH Research Portal.
- Search terms included combinations of keywords such as “gut-brain axis,” “gut microbiota and mental health,” “Ayurveda and digestion,” “Agni and psychology,” “Ama and psychiatric disorders,” and “psychoneuroimmunology.”

Inclusion Criteria

- Articles and texts discussing the conceptual role, clinical relevance, or therapeutic modulation of *Agni* in relation to mental health.
- Peer-reviewed clinical trials, observational studies, experimental studies, review articles, and meta-analyses in English.
- Ayurvedic treatises and commentaries with detailed references to *Agni* in the context of *Mansika Roga*.

Exclusion Criteria

- Articles focusing solely on non-mental health conditions.
- Studies lacking conceptual or clinical association with *Agni* or digestive health.
- Non-English biomedical research without accessible translations.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Relevant data were systematically extracted under thematic categories:

- Conceptual understanding of *Agni* in Ayurveda.
- *Agni*'s role in mental health maintenance and disease pathology.
- Mechanistic links between impaired *Agni*, *Ama* formation, and *Manovaha Srotas* obstruction.
- Classical Ayurvedic therapies targeting *Agni* and their reported clinical outcomes.
- Contemporary scientific evidence supporting digestive-mental health correlations.

The extracted data were qualitatively synthesized, focusing on cross-validating Ayurvedic principles with contemporary biomedical insights.

Results

The systematic review yielded comprehensive insights from both classical Ayurvedic literature and contemporary biomedical research, highlighting the central role of *Agni* in mental health regulation. The results are presented thematically, aligning ancient concepts with modern scientific findings.

1. Ayurvedic Conceptualization of Agni and Its Mental Health Implications

Classical Ayurvedic texts unanimously emphasize *Agni* as the biological force responsible for digestion, metabolism, and the transformation of food into energy and consciousness. Eighteen types of *Agni* are described in Ayurveda, with *Jatharagni* (digestive fire) considered primary, governing the proper digestion and assimilation of food. Other subtypes, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*, act at subtler levels, facilitating tissue-level metabolism and mental equilibrium⁴.

Four functional states of *Agni* are described:

- **Samagni (Balanced Agni):** Associated with balanced digestion, mental clarity, emotional stability, and psychological resilience.
- **Mandagni (Low Agni):** Leads to incomplete digestion, *Ama* formation, mental dullness, lethargy, and depressive tendencies.
- **Tikshnagni (Hyperactive Agni):** Causes hypermetabolism, restlessness, irritability, anxiety, and impulsivity⁵.
- **Vishmagni (Erratic Agni):** Results in irregular digestion, mood swings, and psychoneurotic features.

Textual analysis revealed explicit correlations between impaired *Agni* and the pathogenesis of *Mansika Roga*, with conditions such as *Unmada* (psychosis), *Chittodvega* (anxiety), and *Avasada* (depression) frequently linked to *Agni Dushti* (*Agni* impairment) and *Ama* accumulation.

2. Pathophysiological Mechanisms: Agni, Ama, and Manovaha Srotas

Ayurvedic treatises describe how defective *Agni* leads to the formation of *Ama*, a toxic, undigested residue that obstructs the *Manovaha Srotas* (mental channels). This obstruction disturbs the normal function of *Manas* (mind), resulting in symptoms like confusion, anxiety, depression, and hallucinations⁶. Conditions such as *Unmada* and *Apasmara* (epilepsy) are cited as classic outcomes of prolonged *Ama* accumulation in mental pathways.

3. Ayurvedic Therapeutic Strategies Focused on Agni Restoration

Therapies aimed at restoring *Agni* were identified across all primary texts, including:

- **Agni Deepana (digestive stimulation):** Herbs like *Trikatu*, *Pippali*, and *Chitraka* to normalize digestion⁷.
- **Ama Pachana (detoxification):** Use of herbal decoctions such as *Shunthi* and *Guduchi*.
- **Pathya-Apathya (dietary and lifestyle regulation):** Emphasizing fresh, light, and easy-to-digest foods, avoiding incompatible food combinations, and adhering to *Dincharya* (daily routine).
- **Satvavajaya Chikitsa (psychotherapy):** Techniques for emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring.

4. Corroborative Insights from Modern Biomedical Research

Relevant contemporary studies were identified. Major findings included:

- **Gut-Brain Axis:** Studies demonstrated that gut microbiota composition, digestion quality, and gastrointestinal inflammation significantly influence mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.

- **Psychoneuroimmunology:** Research affirmed that dysregulated digestion triggers systemic inflammation and neuroinflammation, contributing to psychiatric symptoms.
- **Nutritional Psychiatry:** Diet-induced changes in gut health were linked to mood and cognitive disorders, aligning with Ayurvedic emphasis on *Pathya-Apathya*

Discussion

This systematic review highlights the pivotal role of *Agni* in maintaining mental health and its association with the pathogenesis and management of *Mansika Roga*. By integrating classical Ayurvedic principles with contemporary biomedical evidence, the review provides an enriched, multidimensional understanding of digestive-metabolic health and its profound impact on psychological well-being. Ayurveda's conceptualization of *Agni* transcends its digestive function, attributing to it a central role in sustaining physiological balance and mental stability⁸. *Samagni* (balanced digestion) is described as essential for *Sharirika* (bodily) and *Manasika* (mental) health, while any disturbance in *Agni* predisposes individuals to systemic and mental pathologies. Ancient scholars like Charaka and Vagbhata emphasized that disturbed *Agni* leads to *Ama* formation, obstructing the *Manovaha Srotas*, thereby disrupting normal mental functions and precipitating disorders such as *Chittodvega* (anxiety), *Avasada* (depression), and *Unmada* (psychosis). The classification of *Agni* imbalances into *Mandagni*, *Tikshnagni*, and *Vishmagni* provides a nuanced understanding of various mental disorders from an Ayurvedic standpoint, linking hypermetabolic states with agitation and anxiety, hypometabolic states with lethargy and depression, and erratic metabolic states with mood fluctuations and psychoneuroses. Ayurvedic management of *Mansika Roga* prominently features *Agni Deepana*, *Ama Pachana*, *Pathya-Apathya*, and *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*. These interventions aim to restore metabolic balance, detoxify the system, regulate diet and lifestyle, and provide psychological counseling and cognitive restructuring⁹. The use of *Deepana-Pachana* herbs like *Trikatu*, *Pippali*, and *Chitraka* aligns with the modern understanding of digestive stimulants and anti-inflammatory agents. Similarly, *Pathya-Apathya* recommendations advocate easily digestible, light, and fresh foods while avoiding incompatible combinations and processed foods—paralleling modern nutritional psychiatry guidelines for managing depression and anxiety.¹⁰ *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*, Ayurveda's psychotherapeutic branch, complements *Agni* restoration by stabilizing *Manas* through counseling, ethical teachings, and behavioral therapy. These findings advocate for a holistic healthcare paradigm, where restoring *Agni* becomes a therapeutic priority in mental health management. Integrating Ayurvedic *Agni Deepana-Pachana* practices, dietary regulation, and psychotherapy with conventional psychiatric interventions could enhance treatment outcomes in mood, anxiety, and stress-related disorders.¹¹ The convergence of ancient Ayurvedic wisdom and modern scientific discoveries underscores the importance of metabolic health in psychiatric practice, offering a comprehensive, person-centered approach to mental healthcare.

Limitations

While this review synthesizes valuable insights, it is limited by the qualitative nature of classical Ayurvedic concepts, which are not directly testable by modern clinical trials. Furthermore, the scarcity of integrative clinical studies combining Ayurvedic *Agni* principles with contemporary psychiatry limits definitive conclusions¹². Future research should prioritize interdisciplinary studies evaluating the efficacy of *Agni* restoration therapies in clinical psychiatry.

Conclusion

This comprehensive review reaffirms the central and enduring role of *Agni* in the maintenance of mental health as conceptualized in Ayurvedic medicine and increasingly supported by contemporary biomedical science. Classical Ayurvedic texts emphasize that balanced *Agni* is essential for optimal digestion, metabolism, and the healthy functioning of the *Manovaha Srotas* (mental pathways). Any disturbance in *Agni* not only predisposes the individual to physical diseases but also to a spectrum of *Mansika Roga*, including depression, anxiety disorders, psychosis, and mood dysregulation. Therapeutic approaches in Ayurveda focusing on *Agni Deepana*, *Ama Pachana*, appropriate *Pathya-Apathya*, and *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* offer a structured, individualized framework for restoring digestive-metabolic balance and improving mental well-being. These practices closely resonate with modern integrative mental health strategies, where

gut health, dietary interventions, and psychotherapy are increasingly recognized as pivotal in managing psychiatric disorders. Emerging biomedical research corroborates ancient Ayurvedic perspectives through insights into the gut-brain axis, psychoneuroimmunology, and nutritional psychiatry, all of which identify digestion, gut microbiota, and metabolic inflammation as key modulators of mood, cognition, and mental health. The alignment of these paradigms suggests a promising scope for integrative approaches that combine Ayurveda's *Agni*-centered interventions with modern psychiatric care. However, to solidify this integrative model, rigorous clinical studies and interdisciplinary research are needed to validate the efficacy of *Agni*-restoring interventions in mental health disorders. Bridging traditional wisdom and contemporary science can lead to innovative, holistic, and patient-centered strategies for addressing the growing global burden of mental illness. In essence, *Agni* represents far more than a digestive force — it symbolizes the foundation of physical vitality, emotional resilience, and psychological clarity. Recognizing and restoring this vital principle may offer a transformative path toward comprehensive mental health care in both traditional and modern medical systems.

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