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# Ayurvedic Understanding of Gut–Brain Interaction: Role of *Agni* and Manas Running title Gut–Brain Axis in Ayurveda

**Rupali Muralidharrao Patil[1], Priyanka Deshmukh*[2]**

1. Assistant Professor, Kriya Sharir,

   Email ID dr.rupali555@gmail.com; Mobile no .7387179244/9975756516

2. Assistant Professor, Samhita Sidhant Dept.,

   SSVP Ayurvedic College and Research Institute, Hatta, Dist. Parbhani

***Corresponding author:** Email ID priyankadeshmukh.c@gmail.com; Mob.: 8857833231

**Abstract:**

The gut–brain axis represents a bidirectional communication system between the gastrointestinal tract and the central nervous system involving neural, endocrine, and immune pathways. Ayurveda provides a conceptual framework for understanding this interaction through the principles of *Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire) and Manas (mind). *Agni* governs digestion, metabolism, and transformation of nutrients, whereas Manas regulates cognition, emotional responses, and mental stability. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe a strong relationship between digestive health and psychological well-being, suggesting that impaired digestion leads to the formation of Ama (metabolic toxins), which may influence mental functioning. This review analyzes Ayurvedic perspectives on gut–brain interaction and correlates them with modern physiological concepts such as the gut–brain axis, neuroendocrine signaling, and microbiota-mediated communication. Integrating Ayurvedic physiology with modern biomedical understanding may contribute to new approaches for managing gastrointestinal and neuropsychiatric disorders.

**Keywords:**

Ayurveda, gut–brain axis, *Agni*, Manas, Ama, physiology

**Introduction**:

The gut–brain axis is a complex communication network connecting the gastrointestinal system and the central nervous system. This interaction involves neural pathways, hormonal signaling, immune mediators, and microbial metabolites. Recent scientific evidence indicates that disturbances in gut physiology can significantly affect emotional and cognitive functions.

Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of India, has long recognized a relationship

between digestive processes and mental health. Classical Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita describe digestion and mental functioning through the concepts of *Agni* and Manas. *Agni* represents the metabolic principle responsible for digestion and transformation, while Manas refers to the mental faculty governing cognition, perception, and emotional regulation.

Ayurvedic literature suggests that disturbances in digestion lead to the formation of Ama, a toxic metabolic byproduct that can affect systemic physiology and mental functioning. These descriptions closely resemble contemporary concepts involving metabolic endotoxins, inflammation, and microbiota-related pathways influencing the gut–brain axis.

This article reviews the Ayurvedic understanding of gut–brain interaction and correlates classical concepts with modern physiological mechanisms.

Concept of *Agni* in Digestive Physiology *Agni* is considered the fundamental force responsible for digestion, absorption, and metabolic transformation in the body. Proper functioning of *Agni* ensures the conversion of food into nutrients that nourish the body tissues.

Ayurveda describes multiple types of *Agni*:

- *JatharAgni* – primary digestive fire located in the gastrointestinal tract
- *BhutAgni* – metabolic transformation of elemental components
- *DhatvAgni* – metabolic activity within tissues

Balanced *Agni* supports proper nutrient assimilation, tissue formation, and waste elimination. Impairment of *Agni* results in incomplete digestion and accumulation of toxic metabolic substances known as Ama.

Concept of *Manas* in *Ayurvedic* Physiology Manas represents the mental faculty responsible for cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and coordination between sensory organs and the self. Ayurveda considers Manas as an internal organ that interacts with both the body and consciousness.

The functioning of Manas is influenced by the three psychological qualities known as Triguna:

- *Sattva* – clarity, harmony, and stability
- *Rajas* – activity, stimulation, and emotional fluctuation
- *Tamas* – inertia, dullness, and confusion

Balance among these qualities maintains psychological well-being, whereas imbalance may lead to mental disturbances.

**Table 1:** Correlation of Ayurvedic Concepts with Modern Physiology Ayurvedic Concept Physiological Role Modern Correlation *Agni* Digestion and metabolism Enzymatic and metabolic processes Ama Toxic metabolic byproducts Endotoxins and inflammatory mediators Manas Mental processing Cognitive and psychological functions Prana Vata Neural communication Autonomic nervous system Sadhaka Pitta Cognitive activity Neuroendocrine regulation Gut–Brain Interaction in *Ayurveda. Ayurveda* emphasizes that proper digestion is essential for maintaining mental clarity and

emotional balance. When *Agni* functions properly, nutrients are efficiently absorbed and converted into healthy Dhatus (tissues). This process supports physical vitality and mental stability.

However, impaired digestion leads to the formation of Ama. According to Ayurvedic texts, Ama circulates through the body via *Srotas* (channels) and may obstruct physiological pathways, including those associated with mental functions.

This concept parallels modern observations that metabolic toxins and inflammatory mediators originating in the gastrointestinal tract may influence brain function and contribute to neurological or psychological disorders.

**Table 2:** Ayurvedic and Modern Interpretation of the Gut–Brain Axis Ayurvedic Concept Modern Scientific Interpretation *Agni* Gastrointestinal digestion and metabolism Ama Microbial toxins and inflammatory metabolites *Manovaha Srotas* Neural communication pathways Prana Vata Neural signalling and autonomic regulation *Sadhaka Pitta* Cognitive and emotional processing Conceptual Diagram of Ayurvedic Gut–Brain Interaction

**Food Intake**

↓

***Agni***

↓

**(Digestion & metabolism)**

↓

**Nutrient formation → Dhatu nourishment**

**Manas**

↓

**(Mental stability)**

↓

**If *Agni* impaired:**

↓

**Food → Incomplete digestion**

↓

**Ama formation**

↓

**Srotas obstruction**

↓

**Manovaha Srotas disturbance**

↓

**Mental imbalance**

Modern Scientific Evidence Supporting Gut–Brain Interaction Modern research demonstrates that the gut communicates with the brain through several mechanisms:

Neural signaling via the vagus nerve

Hormonal pathways involving stress hormones and neurotransmitters

Immune responses and inflammatory mediators

Gut microbiota producing neuroactive compounds

These pathways show similarities with Ayurvedic descriptions involving Vata-mediated neural communication and metabolic regulation through *Agni*.

Discussion Ayurvedic physiology provides a holistic framework for understanding the interaction between digestive processes and mental health. Unlike reductionist biomedical approaches that often focus on isolated pathways, Ayurveda emphasizes systemic integration.

The concept of *Agni* correlates with metabolic and digestive processes, while Ama resembles inflammatory metabolites and microbial toxins. Similarly, Manas represents cognitive and psychological functions regulated by neurophysiological mechanisms.

Integrating Ayurvedic and modern scientific perspectives may offer new insights into disorders that involve both gastrointestinal and psychological components, such as:

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Metabolic syndrome

Further interdisciplinary research is required to explore these correlations and develop integrative therapeutic strategies.

Conclusion Ayurveda describes a strong relationship between digestive physiology and mental health through the principles of *Agni* and Manas. Balanced digestion supports proper tissue nourishment and mental clarity, whereas impaired digestion leads to toxin formation and systemic dysfunction.

The Ayurvedic model of gut–brain interaction aligns with modern scientific understanding of neuroendocrine and microbiota-mediated communication between the gastrointestinal system and the brain. Integrating these perspectives may contribute to the development of holistic approaches for managing metabolic and neuropsychiatric disorders.

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**Figure 1:** Ayurvedic model of gut–brain interaction

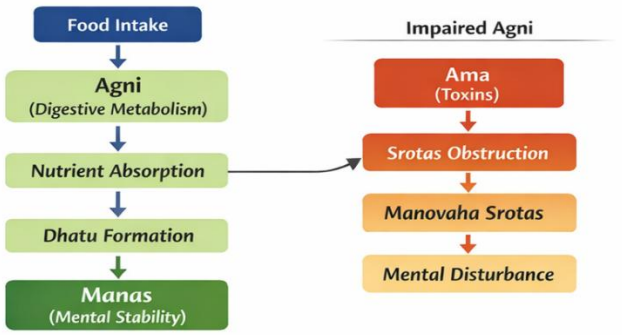


Table 1: Correlation of Agni with digestive physiology

| Ayurvedic Concept | Physiological Role | Modern Correlation |
|---|---|---|
| *Jatharagni* | Digestion | *Gastric enzymes & acids* |
| *Bhutagni* | *Elemental Transformation* | *Cellular Metabolism* |
| *Dhatvagni* | *Tissue Metabolism* | *Cellular Enzymatic Activity* |


Table 2: Ayurvedic and modern interpretation of the gut-brain axis

| Ayurvedic Concept | Modern Scientific Interpretation |
|---|---|
| *Agni* | *Digestive Metabolism* |
| *Ama* | *Toxins & Inflammatory Byproducts* |
| *Manovaha Srotas* | *Neural Communication Pathways* |
| *Prana Vata* | *Autonomic Nervous System* |
| *Sadhaka Pitta* | *Cognitive & Emotional Processing* |

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