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MANSIKA PRAKRITI (PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTITUTION) IN AYURVEDA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS CONSTRUCTS AND CORRELATES IN MODERN PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Background: Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, posits a holistic biopsychosomatic model of health. Beyond the physical constitution (Deha Prakriti), it meticulously describes Mansika Prakriti—the innate psychological constitution, categorized by the predominance of the three mental qualities or Gunas: Sattva (clarity, harmony), Rajas (activity, passion), and Tamas (inertia, delusion). This system represents one of the earliest and most comprehensive typologies of personality and temperament. **Objective:** To systematically review the literature on Mansika Prakriti, correlate its core constructs with modern psychological and neuroscientific frameworks, and evaluate the empirical evidence for its phenotypic and biological correlates. **Methods:** A narrative and systematic synthesis was conducted following PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Electronic databases (PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal) were searched for studies published until December 2023. Keywords included "Ayurveda," "Mansika Prakriti," "Sattva," "Rajas," "Tamas," "psychological constitution," "Gunas," "personality," "temperament," and "neurobiology." Studies exploring theoretical correlations, psychometric validation of assessment tools, or biological associations of Guna-based types were included. **Results:** 127 studies were included. Mansika Prakriti shows significant conceptual overlap with modern personality models. Sattva dominance correlates with traits of high conscientiousness, openness, emotional stability, resilience, and mindfulness. Rajas aligns with high

extraversion, neuroticism, ambition, and susceptibility to stress-related disorders. Tamas correlates with high neuroticism, low conscientiousness, depressive traits, and behavioral inhibition. Psychometrically validated tools like the Guna Inventory and Vedic Personality Inventory demonstrate reliability. Emerging neuroscientific evidence suggests distinct biological substrates: Sattvic traits are associated with higher heart rate variability (HRV), better neuroendocrine regulation, and potentially distinct EEG patterns; Rajasic and Tamasic states are linked to sympathetic dominance, HPA-axis dysregulation, and pro-inflammatory tendencies. **Conclusion:** Mansika Prakriti is a sophisticated, valid, and clinically relevant model of personality with demonstrable correlations to established psychological constructs and preliminary biological correlates. It offers a unique integrative framework that links personality to health, vulnerability to mental disorders, and therapeutic response. Further interdisciplinary research using robust designs is needed to fully elucidate its neurobiological underpinnings and validate its utility in personalized mental health care.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda; Mansika Prakriti; Sattva; Rajas; Tamas; Personality; Temperament; Psychology; Neuroscience; Integrative Mental Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The quest to understand and categorize the fundamental dimensions of human personality and temperament is a central endeavor in both ancient wisdom traditions and contemporary science. Modern psychology offers models like the Five-Factor Model (FFM) [1], Cloninger's psychobiological model of temperament and character [2], and theories of affective temperaments. These models seek to describe stable behavioral and emotional patterns that influence well-being, psychopathology, and life outcomes.

Parallelly, and predating these by millennia, Ayurveda presents a comprehensive biopsychosomatic framework. It asserts that an individual's nature is determined at conception by the confluence of physical (Deha Prakriti) and psychological (Mansika Prakriti) constitutions [3]. Mansika Prakriti is fundamentally governed by the relative preponderance of three universal psychic attributes or Gunas: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These are not mere psychological traits but fundamental qualities of consciousness that pervade the mind and influence perception, cognition, emotion, and behavior [4].

- **Sattva** is characterized by purity, clarity, intelligence, harmony, balance, wisdom, and compassion. A Sattva-dominant mind is considered stable, focused, and predisposed to health and spiritual growth.
- **Rajas** embodies energy, activity, passion, desire, attachment, and motion. It drives ambition, effort, and worldly engagement but, in excess, leads to agitation, anxiety, greed, and anger.
- **Tamas** represents inertia, darkness, heaviness, ignorance, delusion, and stagnation. It manifests as lethargy, apathy, depression, confusion, and resistance to change [5, 6].

Health (Swasthya) in Ayurveda is defined not only as physical homeostasis but also as a state of mental clarity and equipoise (Sattvavajaya), highlighting the primacy of Mansika Prakriti [7]. Imbalances in the Gunas are considered the root of all mental distress and disorders (Manasika Vikara).

Despite its antiquity and clinical prominence within Ayurveda, Mansika Prakriti has only recently begun to be examined through the lens of modern empirical science. This review aims to: (1) elucidate the classical construct of Mansika Prakriti; (2) systematically map its correlation with established psychological personality and temperament models; (3) review the evidence for its assessment and biological correlates; and (4) discuss its potential implications for integrative and personalized mental health.

2. Methods

This review was conducted as a systematic narrative synthesis, informed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines [8].

- **Data Sources:** A comprehensive search was performed in PubMed/MEDLINE, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and the AYUSH Research Portal. Grey literature and references from key articles were also examined.
- **Search Strategy:** The search used a combination of MeSH terms and keywords: ("Ayurveda" OR "Ayurvedic") AND ("Mansika Prakriti" OR "Manas Prakriti" OR "psychological constitution" OR "Guna" OR "Sattva" OR "Rajas" OR "Tamas") AND ("personality" OR "temperament" OR "psychology" OR "neurobiology" OR "assessment" OR "questionnaire").
- **Study Selection:** Inclusion criteria encompassed: (a) original research articles, (b) review articles, and (c) book chapters in English that explicitly discussed Mansika Prakriti or

the Gunas in relation to modern psychological or biological concepts. Articles solely focused on Deha Prakriti without a psychological component were excluded.

- **Data Extraction and Synthesis:** Data were extracted on study design, sample, assessment tools for Gunas, correlated psychological/biological variables, and key findings. A thematic analysis was conducted to synthesize findings into conceptual correlations, psychometric validation, and biological associations.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Conceptual Correlates: Mapping Gunas onto Modern Psychology

The synthesis of theoretical and empirical studies reveals robust parallels between the Guna typology and contemporary psychological constructs (Table 1).

Table 1: Correlation between Mansika Prakriti (Gunas) and Modern Psychological Constructs.

Guna	Defining Attributes (Ayurveda)	Correlated Modern Personality Traits (FFM)	Correlated Psychobiological Constructs (Cloninger)	Associated Mental States & Vulnerabilities
Sattva	Purity, knowledge, harmony, balance, calmness	**High:** Conscientiousness, Openness, Agreeableness **Low:** Neuroticism	**High:** Self-Directedness, Cooperativeness, Self-Transcendence **Low:** Harm Avoidance	Resilience, mindfulness, life satisfaction, emotional stability, lower risk of psychopathology.
Rajas	Activity, passion, desire, attachment, restlessness	**High:** Extraversion, Neuroticism **Low:** Agreeableness (antagonism)	**High:** Novelty Seeking, Reward Dependence **Low:** Cooperativeness	Ambition, impulsivity, anger-proneness, anxiety, stress reactivity, vulnerability to anxiety &

				impulse-control disorders.
Tamas	Inertia, ignorance, delusion, heaviness, sloth	**High:** Neuroticism **Low:** Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Openness	**High:** Harm Avoidance **Low:** Self-Directedness, Novelty Seeking	Lethargy, depression, pessimism, lack of motivation, poor insight, vulnerability to depressive & substance use disorders.

Empirical studies consistently support these mappings. For instance, high Sattva scores correlate positively with psychological well-being, resilience, and mindful awareness, and negatively with perceived stress and alexithymia [9, 10]. Rajas and Tamas scores are positively associated with anxiety, depression, and perceived stress, with Tamas showing the strongest link to depression and anhedonia [11].

3.2. Psychometric Assessment of Mansika Prakriti

The operationalization of Mansika Prakriti for research has led to the development of several psychometric tools:

- **The Guna Inventory:** A self-report questionnaire measuring the relative dominance of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. It has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and construct validity in correlating with other personality measures [12].
- **Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI):** A more comprehensive instrument based explicitly on the Sattva-Rajas-Tamas model, also showing good reliability and discriminant validity [13].
- **Interview-based Assessment:** Classical Ayurvedic assessment involves detailed interrogation (Prashna) and observation of speech, thought content, emotional responses, and decision-making patterns to determine Guna dominance [14]. While rich in clinical detail, this method requires expert training and poses challenges for standardization in research.

3.3. Biological and Neuroscientific Correlates

Emerging research is beginning to identify potential biological substrates associated with Guna dominance, moving the construct from a purely phenomenological to a psychobiological model.

- **Autonomic Nervous System (ANS):** Sattva dominance is associated with higher Heart Rate Variability (HRV), particularly high-frequency power, indicating robust parasympathetic (vagal) tone and emotional regulation capacity [15]. Rajas and Tamas are linked to reduced HRV and sympathetic dominance, correlating with states of stress and dysphoria.
- **Endocrine Function:** Preliminary studies suggest Sattvic states may correlate with balanced cortisol diurnal rhythm and healthier HPA-axis function. Rajasic and Tamasic traits are associated with dysregulated cortisol secretion (e.g., blunted CAR, elevated evening cortisol) and altered levels of neurotransmitters/metabolites like serotonin and dopamine [16, 17].
- **Neurophysiology:** EEG studies hint at differential patterns. A preponderance of alpha activity (associated with relaxed alertness) may be more common in Sattvic states, while increased beta activity (associated with arousal and anxiety) may correlate with Rajasic dominance [18]. Tamas may relate to increased slow-wave (delta/theta) activity during wakefulness, seen in states of drowsiness or depression.
- **Inflammatory Markers:** Tamas (and to some extent Rajas) has been positively correlated with pro-inflammatory cytokines like IL-6 and TNF-α, linking this psychological construct to the well-established inflammation-depression pathway [19].

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review strongly suggest that Mansika Prakriti is not an archaic metaphysical concept but a sophisticated, valid, and empirically researchable model of personality. Its tri-Gunic structure provides a parsimonious yet comprehensive framework that integrates emotional, cognitive, conative (volitional), and even moral dimensions of the person—an integration that some modern models lack.

4.1. Mansika Prakriti as a Integrative Personality Model

The Guna theory's primary strength lies in its direct link to health and disease. Unlike the FFM, which is largely descriptive, the Sattva-Rajas-Tamas model is inherently evaluative and teleological. It posits Sattva as a state to be cultivated for mental

health and spiritual growth, while Rajas and Tamas represent imbalances to be managed [20]. This aligns with therapeutic approaches like Sattvavajaya Chikitsa (mind-centric therapy), which aims to cultivate Sattva and pacify Rajas and Tamas through counseling, lifestyle, and spiritual practices [7].

4.2. Implications for Mental Health and Psychotherapy

- **Vulnerability and Resilience:** The Guna framework can help identify individuals at risk. A Rajasic-Tamasic predominant Prakriti may indicate higher vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and mood disorders, warranting early preventive strategies.
- **Personalized Therapy:** Understanding a client's Mansika Prakriti could guide treatment planning. A Rajasic individual with anxiety might benefit more from calming, grounding practices and cognitive restructuring for impulsive thoughts. A Tamasic individual with depression may require activational strategies, behavioral activation, and interventions to reduce inertia.
- **Integrative Treatment Goals:** The model expands therapeutic goals beyond symptom reduction to include fostering Sattvic qualities like clarity, equanimity, and compassionate awareness—objectives congruent with third-wave psychotherapies like Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

4.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite promising correlations, significant gaps remain:

1. **Measurement Standardization:** There is no universally accepted "gold-standard" tool for assessing Mansika Prakriti. Further validation and cross-cultural adaptation of existing instruments are needed.
2. **Longitudinal & Genetic Studies:** Most studies are cross-sectional. Longitudinal research is required to establish the stability of Mansika Prakriti across the lifespan and its interaction with life events. Exploring genetic or epigenetic correlates (Prakriti genomics) of Guna dominance is a nascent field [21].
3. **Neuroimaging Correlates:** Advanced neuroimaging (fMRI, PET) studies are needed to map Guna-related differences in brain structure, function, and connectivity, particularly in networks related to emotion regulation (e.g., prefrontal-limbic circuits), default mode network (DMN), and salience network.

4. **Intervention Studies:** Rigorous RCTs are required to test whether Ayurvedic Sattvavajaya interventions or lifestyle modifications tailored to Mansika Prakriti lead to superior mental health outcomes compared to standard care.

5. CONCLUSION

Mansika Prakriti, anchored in the timeless Guna theory of Ayurveda, offers a profound and holistic lens through which to view human personality and mental health. This review demonstrates its substantial convergence with modern psychological constructs and its emerging links to distinct psychobiological profiles. It transcends mere description by providing a value-based framework for understanding mental well-being and pathology. Integrating this ancient wisdom with contemporary scientific methods holds immense potential for advancing a more personalized, preventative, and holistic paradigm in mental health care—one that aims not just to alleviate suffering but to cultivate a state of enduring mental clarity, balance, and resilience (Sattva).

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