

## A REVIEW OF PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS IN AYURVEDA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ATICHINTANA

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### ABSTRACT

Psychosomatic disorders represent a group of conditions in which psychological factors exert a significant influence on physical health. Ayurveda explains this interaction through the concept of *Sharira–Manasa Sambandha*, highlighting the interdependence of mind and body. Among various psychological factors, *Atichintana* (excessive thinking) is considered a major causative factor that disturbs *Dosha* balance, particularly *Vata*, and leads to dysfunction of *Rasavaha Srotas*. This impairment affects the proper formation and circulation of *Rasa Dhatu*, resulting in inadequate tissue nourishment and clinical manifestations such as *Karshya*, *Daurbalya*, and *Panduta*. In modern science, similar effects are observed in chronic stress conditions mediated through activation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis and

increased cortisol secretion. This review critically analyzes the role of *Atichintana* in psychosomatic disorders and attempts to correlate classical Ayurvedic concepts with contemporary stress physiology. The findings emphasize the importance of mental health in maintaining systemic equilibrium and preventing disease progression.

**KEYWORDS:** *Atichintana*, Psychosomatic Disorders, *Rasavaha Srotas*, *Stress*, Mind-Body Interaction.

## INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of psychosomatic disorders has increased considerably in recent times, largely due to psychological stress, improper dietary habits, and altered lifestyle patterns. Modern biomedical science identifies stress as a significant contributing factor in the development of various systemic disorders, including cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and neuropsychological conditions.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ayurveda, since ancient times, has emphasized the close relationship between psychological and physiological processes, described as *Sharira–Manasa Sambandha*. Classical texts mention that mental factors such as *Chinta* (worry), *Shoka* (grief), and *Bhaya* (fear) can disturb the internal balance of the body, thereby initiating disease processes.<sup>[2]</sup>

Among these factors, *Atichintana* (persistent excessive thinking) is specifically implicated in the vitiation of *Rasavaha Srotas*. This disturbance interferes with the proper formation and distribution of *Rasa Dhatu*, ultimately leading to compromised nourishment of tissues and manifestation of systemic symptoms.<sup>[3]</sup>

## AIM AND OBJECTIVES

### AIM

To review psychosomatic disorders in Ayurveda with special reference to *Atichintana*.

### OBJECTIVES

- To analyze *Atichintana* as a disease-causing factor
- To understand psychosomatic disorders in Ayurveda
- To correlate Ayurvedic concepts with modern stress mechanisms.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study is a narrative review based on classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary scientific literature. References from Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya were analyzed. Relevant modern literature was obtained from electronic databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar using keywords including “*Atichintana*”, “stress”, “psychosomatic disorders”, and “HPA axis”. Articles were selected based on relevance to the topic and scientific validity.

## Conceptual Review

### 1. Psychosomatic Concept in Ayurveda<sup>[4]</sup>

Ayurveda describes psychosomatic disorders as the result of a close functional relationship between the mind (*Manas*) and body (*Sharira*). This interconnection is understood through factors such as *Manasika Bhava*, balance of *Dosha* and *Dhatu*, and the integrity of *Srotas*.

Psychological states like *Chinta*, *Shoka*, and *Bhaya* can disturb the internal homeostasis of the body.<sup>[5]</sup> These mental influences primarily aggravate *Doshas*, especially *Vata*, which subsequently affects *Agni*, the key factor responsible for digestion and metabolism.

When *Agni* becomes impaired, the proper formation and nourishment of *Dhatus* are affected, leading to depletion at the tissue level. Along with this, disturbances in *Srotas* interfere with the normal flow and distribution of nutrients throughout the body.

In this way, alterations in mental health can initiate a sequence of physiological changes, ultimately resulting in physical disease. This reflects the Ayurvedic view that mental and physical processes are deeply interconnected in both health and disease.

### 2. Atichintana (Excessive Thinking)<sup>[5,6]</sup>

*Atichintana* refers to a state of continuous and excessive mental engagement, where the mind remains persistently occupied with thoughts, worries, or over-analysis. In Ayurveda, such prolonged mental activity is considered a significant etiological factor that disturbs both psychological and physiological balance.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, *Atichintana* primarily leads to the aggravation of *Vata Dosha*, as *Vata* is closely associated with mental functions such as thinking, movement, and neural activity. The excessive stimulation of *Vata* disrupts the normal functioning of *Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire), resulting in *Agnimandya* (reduced digestive capacity).

Impaired *Agni* affects the proper digestion and assimilation of nutrients, leading to inadequate formation of *Rasa Dhatu*, the primary nutritive fluid of the body. This condition, known as *Rasadhatu Kshaya*, results in poor nourishment of subsequent *Dhatus* and manifests as generalized weakness, fatigue, and emaciation.

Furthermore, chronic disturbance caused by *Atichintana* ultimately leads to depletion of *Ojas*, which is considered the essence of all *Dhatus* and the basis of immunity and vitality.

Reduction in Ojas makes the body more susceptible to disease and decreases overall physical and mental resilience.

Thus, *Atichintana* initiates a pathological cascade involving Vata aggravation, Agni impairment, Dhatu depletion, and Ojas reduction, ultimately contributing to the development of psychosomatic disorders.

### 3. Rasavaha Srotas and Dushti<sup>[7]</sup>

*Rasavaha Srotas* represents the channels responsible for the formation, transportation, and circulation of *Rasa Dhatu*, which is the primary nutritive fluid in the body. It plays a crucial role in maintaining overall nourishment, hydration, and metabolic balance of all tissues. Proper functioning of *Rasavaha Srotas* ensures adequate supply of nutrients to successive Dhatus, thereby sustaining normal physiological functions.

#### Hetu (Etiological Factors)

The vitiation (*Dushti*) of *Rasavaha Srotas* occurs due to various dietary, lifestyle, and psychological factors. Among these, *Atichintana* (excessive thinking) acts as a *Manasik Hetu*, leading to aggravation of *Vata Dosha* and disturbance of metabolic processes.

*Vishama Ahara* (irregular and incompatible dietary habits), such as untimely eating and consumption of unsuitable food combinations, disrupts *Agni* and impairs proper digestion. Similarly, *Ruksha Ahara* (dry and non-nutritive food) contributes to depletion of body fluids and aggravates Vata, further affecting the quality of *Rasa Dhatu*.

These factors collectively lead to *Agnimandya*, improper formation of *Rasa*, and obstruction or dysfunction of *Rasavaha Srotas*.

#### Lakshana (Clinical Features)

The clinical manifestations of *Rasavaha Srotodushti* primarily reflect impaired nourishment and systemic depletion

- **Karshya (emaciation):** Due to inadequate nutrition and poor tissue formation, leading to weight loss and reduced body mass.
- **Daurbalya (generalized weakness):** Resulting from insufficient energy supply and diminished tissue strength.
- **Panduta (pallor):** Indicative of defective *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu* formation, often associated with nutritional deficiencies.

- **Hridaya Aswasthata (cardiac discomfort):** Manifesting as uneasiness or functional disturbances in the cardiac region, reflecting impaired circulation and systemic imbalance.

#### 4. Psychosomatic Manifestations<sup>[8]</sup>

Psychological stress has a profound impact on physical health, often presenting as a variety of somatic symptoms. Prolonged mental strain disturbs neuroendocrine regulation and metabolic balance, leading to noticeable clinical manifestations.

Common features associated with chronic stress include **loss of appetite (anorexia), persistent fatigue, progressive weight loss, and sleep disturbances such as insomnia.** These symptoms reflect altered digestive function, reduced energy levels, and impaired restorative processes within the body.

#### Ayurvedic Correlation

From an Ayurvedic perspective, these manifestations can be understood through the concepts of *Dosha imbalance, Agni dysfunction, and Dhatu depletion*

- **Agnimandya (impaired digestive fire):** Mental stress, particularly *Atichintana*, vitiates *Vata Dosha*, which adversely affects *Agni*. This leads to reduced appetite and improper digestion, correlating with anorexia observed in modern medicine.
- **Karshya (emaciation):** Due to inadequate digestion and assimilation of nutrients, the body experiences gradual weight loss and depletion of body tissues, presenting as *Karshya*.
- **Dhatu Kshaya (tissue depletion):** Continuous impairment of nutrient supply results in progressive depletion of *Dhatus*, leading to generalized weakness, fatigue, and reduced physical endurance.
- **Nidranasha (insomnia):** Aggravated *Vata* and disturbed mental equilibrium interfere with normal sleep patterns, resulting in difficulty in initiating or maintaining sleep.

#### Modern Correlation<sup>[9,10]</sup>

##### Stress Physiology

In contemporary biomedical science, psychological stress triggers a complex neuroendocrine response primarily mediated through activation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis. When an individual experiences stress, the hypothalamus releases corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which stimulates the pituitary gland to secrete adrenocorticotropic

hormone (ACTH). This, in turn, activates the adrenal cortex to produce and release cortisol, the principal stress hormone.

Cortisol plays a vital role in maintaining homeostasis during acute stress by mobilizing energy reserves and modulating immune responses. However, persistent activation of this pathway due to chronic stress leads to sustained elevation of cortisol levels, which adversely affects multiple physiological systems.

### Effects of Chronic Stress

- **Immunosuppression:** Prolonged elevation of cortisol suppresses immune function by inhibiting inflammatory and immune responses, thereby increasing susceptibility to infections and delaying healing processes.
- **Metabolic Imbalance:** Chronic stress alters carbohydrate, protein, and lipid metabolism, leading to impaired nutrient utilization and energy imbalance. This may contribute to conditions such as weight loss, fatigue, and reduced muscle mass.
- **Gastrointestinal Dysfunction:** Stress negatively affects gastrointestinal motility and secretion, resulting in symptoms like loss of appetite, indigestion, and altered bowel habits. These changes reflect impaired digestive efficiency.
- **Weight Loss:** Due to decreased appetite, poor nutrient absorption, and increased metabolic demand, chronic stress often leads to progressive weight loss and physical debility.

### DISCUSSION

*Atichintana* plays a crucial role in the pathogenesis of psychosomatic disorders by disturbing the normal equilibrium of *Doshas*, especially *Vata*, which governs mental activities and neural functions. Persistent excessive thinking leads to instability of *Vata*, which in turn impairs *Agni* (digestive and metabolic processes). As a result, the proper formation and transformation of *Rasa Dhatu* are adversely affected, leading to inadequate nourishment of body tissues and manifestation of symptoms such as weakness, fatigue, and emaciation.

Furthermore, impaired *Rasa Dhatu* initiates a cascade of *Dhatu Kshaya*, ultimately affecting overall vitality and reducing the strength of the body. Continuous mental stress also contributes to depletion of *Ojas*, which is considered essential for immunity and physiological resilience. This explains the increased susceptibility to diseases in individuals experiencing prolonged psychological strain.

From a modern scientific perspective, these changes can be correlated with chronic stress-induced dysregulation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis. Sustained activation of this axis results in prolonged cortisol secretion, which negatively impacts metabolism, immune function, and gastrointestinal processes. These alterations closely parallel the Ayurvedic concepts of *Agnimandya*, *Dhatu Kshaya*, and *Oja depletion*.

Thus, both Ayurveda and modern biomedical science highlight the significant impact of mental factors on physical health. Ayurveda, however, offers a more holistic approach by integrating preventive and therapeutic strategies aimed at maintaining mental balance and promoting overall well-being. Early identification and management of *Atichintana* can therefore play a vital role in preventing the progression of psychosomatic disorders.

## CONCLUSION

*Atichintana* plays a significant role in the development of psychosomatic disorders by disturbing *Rasavaha Srotas* and impairing the proper nourishment of *Dhatus*. This leads to systemic weakness and increased susceptibility to disease. Both Ayurveda and modern biomedical science emphasize the critical role of mental health in maintaining physiological balance and preventing disease progression. Therefore, early recognition and effective management of psychological stress are essential for preserving overall health and ensuring holistic well-being.

## Future Scope

- Clinical validation studies
- Integration of Ayurvedic stress management with modern medicine
- Development of standardized assessment tools

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