

AYURVEDIC APPROACH IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

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Anxiety and depression are among the most prevalent mental health disorders worldwide, significantly affecting quality of life and productivity. In modern medicine, these conditions are managed primarily through pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy; however, long-term use of psychotropic drugs is often associated with adverse effects and dependency issues. Ayurveda offers a holistic and individualized approach to mental health through the concepts of Manas, Manasika Dosha (Rajas and Tamas), Tridosha, and Satva. Anxiety and depression can be correlated with conditions such as Chittodvega, Vishada, and Kaphaja-Vataja Unmada as described in classical Ayurvedic texts. The etiopathogenesis of these disorders involves disturbances of Manasika Dosha along

with Sharirika Dosha, Agni, and Ojas. Ayurveda management emphasizes Nidana Parivarjana, Daivavyapashraya, Yuktivayapashraya, and Satvavajaya Chikitsa, along with the use of Medhya Rasayana, Panchakarma therapies, diet, lifestyle modifications, and ethical conduct (Sadhrana). This conceptual review aims to analyze the Ayurvedic understanding of anxiety and depression and highlight the holistic management strategies described in classical texts with relevant modern correlations. The integrative Ayurvedic approach may offer a safe, effective, and sustainable alternative or complementary therapy for managing anxiety and depression.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety, Depression, Mano Roga, Manasika Dosha, Satvavajaya Chikitsa.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health disorders are emerging as a major public health concern in the modern era due to rapid urbanization, lifestyle changes, stress, and social isolation. Anxiety and depression are the most common psychiatric disorders, often coexisting and contributing to significant emotional, physical, and social impairment.^[5] Despite advances in psychopharmacology, modern management faces challenges such as adverse drug reactions, relapse, and limited improvement in overall well-being.^[6]

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, gives profound importance to mental health and considers a healthy mind essential for overall well-being.^[1] Classical Ayurvedic texts describe various Mano Roga arising from disturbances in Manasika Dosha—Rajas and Tamas—along with the imbalance of Sharirika Dosha.^[1,4,7] Conditions resembling anxiety and depression are described under entities such as Chittodvega, Vishada, and Unmada.^[1,2] Ayurveda offers a comprehensive management approach that addresses the root cause of mental illness rather than merely suppressing symptoms.^[1,3,8]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To conceptually review of Ayurvedic approach in the management of anxiety and depression.

Objectives

To understand anxiety and depression in light of Ayurveda concepts.

To analyze the role of Manasika Dosha in the pathogenesis of these disorders.

To review Ayurvedic principles of management including Chikitsa and lifestyle measures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This conceptual review is based on a comprehensive study of classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and relevant commentaries. Modern psychiatric literature and published research articles were reviewed to establish conceptual correlation with anxiety and depression.

Ayurvedic Concept of Mano Roga

Manoroga should not be treated merely as “mental disease”, but as a dynamic psychobiological disturbance arising from Prajñāparādha interacting with Kala, Desa, Satmya, and Guna imbalance.^[1,2]

A breakdown of higher cognitive regulation (Dhi–Dhriti–Smriti axis) leading to chronic dysregulation of affect, behavior, and somatic response.^[1,7]

Ayurvedic Concept	Advanced Interpretation
Dhi	Cognitive appraisal & executive function
Dhriti	Emotional regulation & impulse control
Smriti	Memory integration & experiential learning

Prajñāparādha should be viewed not merely as ethical or intellectual error but as a meta-pathogenic process underlying most chronic mental disorders. The repeated violation of Dhi–Dhriti–Smriti leads to distorted appraisal of experiences, impaired emotional regulation, and maladaptive behavioral reinforcement.

Conceptual interpretation

Dhi dysfunction → faulty cognition and distorted perception of reality

Dhriti dysfunction → impulsivity, poor emotional containment

Smriti dysfunction → maladaptive memory consolidation and rumination

Role of Satva: Mental Strength to Neuro-Adaptive Capacity –

Pravara Satva → cognitive flexibility, emotional stability, placebo responsiveness

Madhyama Satva → partial coping, stress-induced relapse

Avara Satva → learned helplessness, chronic anxiety/depression

According to Ayurveda, Manas (mind) is responsible for perception, cognition, thinking, and emotional responses.^[1,2,3] Mental health is maintained by equilibrium of Satva, Rajas, and Tamas. Mano Roga arise due to predominance or vitiation of Rajas and Tamas, leading to impaired functioning of Manas.

Charaka states that both Sharirika and Manasika Dosha are responsible for the manifestation of diseases, emphasizing the psychosomatic nature of illnesses.^[1] Anxiety and depression can be considered as Manasika Vyadhi with involvement of Sharirika Dosha, particularly Vata and Kapha.^[1,4]

Ayurvedic View of Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety may be correlated with Chittodvega, characterized by restlessness, fear, apprehension, insomnia, and palpitations, predominantly involving Vata Dosha and Rajas.^[1,2]

Depression can be correlated with Vishada, presenting as sadness, hopelessness, lack of interest, fatigue, and withdrawal, primarily associated with Kapha Dosha and Tamas.^[1,2]

Nidana (Etiological Factors)

Common causative factors include:

Prajnaparadha (intellectual blasphemy)

Vega Dharana (suppression of natural urges)

Asatmya Indriyarth Samyoga

Excessive stress, fear, grief, and anger

Improper diet and lifestyle

Lack of sleep and physical inactivity

Samprapti (Pathogenesis)

Due to Nidana factors, Rajas and Tamas become aggravated, leading to impairment of Manovaha Srotas.^[1] Vitiation of Vata and Kapha further affects Manas, Agni, and Ojas, resulting in symptoms of anxiety and depression. Chronic involvement leads to disturbed cognition, emotions, and behaviour.^[1,4,7]

Ayurvedic Management of Anxiety and Depression

1. Nidana Parivarjana

Avoidance of causative factors such as stress, irregular lifestyle, unhealthy diet, and negative emotions.^[1]

2. Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa

Includes Mantra, meditation, spiritual practices, and faith-based interventions to enhance mental stability.^[1,2] Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa functions as a symbolic-neurocognitive reset mechanism.

For Examples

Mantra → rhythmic auditory stimulation → autonomic stabilization

Homa/Yajna → sensory coherence → parasympathetic dominance

Upavāsa/Vrata → behavioral reframing & impulse discipline

3. Yuktiyapashraya Chikitsa

Medhya Rasayana: Brahmi, Mandukaparni, Shankhapushpi, Guduchi, Ashwagandha

Panchakarma: Shirodhara, Nasya, Abhyanga, and Basti

Ahara: Satvika diet, fresh and nutritious food

Vihara: Adequate sleep, yoga, pranayama, and regular exercise

4. Satvavajaya Chikitsa

Ayurvedic psychotherapy focusing on:

Regulation of thoughts, Emotional control, Development of positive attitudes, Counseling and reassurance.^[8]

Satvavajaya Tool	Modern Equivalent
Manonigraha	Impulse control therapy
Ashwasana	Supportive psychotherapy
Jñāna–Vijñāna	Psychoeducation
Smriti-Pratyānayana	Trauma processing
Samādhi	Mindfulness & deep attention training

DISCUSSION

Classical Ayurvedic literature describes Manoroga as a disturbance of Manas governed by Rajas and Tamas, yet contemporary publications often reduce this rich framework to a symptom-based narrative. At a higher epistemological level, Manoroga may be reinterpreted as a failure of adaptive consciousness, wherein the individual loses the capacity to harmonize internal cognition with external stimuli. This adaptive failure emerges not abruptly but through a gradual erosion of regulatory mechanisms rooted in Dhi (intellect), Dhriti (self-restraint), and Smriti (memory integration).

From this perspective, Manoroga is neither purely psychological nor exclusively somatic; rather, it represents a psychobiological continuum in which mental dysregulation precedes and perpetuates somatic vulnerability. This aligns with systems-oriented models in modern neuroscience, where chronic stress and maladaptive cognition are understood to destabilize neuroendocrine and immune homeostasis.

Anxiety and depression represent complex mental health disorders involving emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and neurobiological disturbances. Modern psychiatry explains these conditions through neurotransmitter imbalance, dysregulation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis, and maladaptive cognitive patterns. Ayurveda interprets these disorders as Mano Roga caused by vitiation of Manasika Dosha—Rajas and Tamas—with associated involvement of Sharirika Dosha, particularly Vata and Kapha.

Among the various therapeutic approaches described in Ayurveda, Daivavyapashraya and Satvavajaya Chikitsa play a crucial role in the management of anxiety and depression by directly addressing the psychological and emotional dimensions of disease.

Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa primarily acts at the level of faith, belief, and emotional reassurance. Classical texts advocate its use in conditions where mental disturbances arise due to fear, grief, unknown causes, or poor coping capacity. Practices such as mantra chanting, prayer, meditation, and spiritual rituals help stabilize Manas by reducing excessive Rajas and Tamas while promoting Satva. From a modern perspective, these interventions activate relaxation responses, reduce stress hormone levels, and enhance emotional regulation, thereby alleviating anxiety and depressive symptoms. The therapeutic value of Daivavyapashraya lies in its ability to restore hope, confidence, and psychological security, which are often impaired in depressive and anxiety disorders.

Satvavajaya Chikitsa represents the psychotherapeutic dimension of Ayurveda and is considered the most specific treatment modality for Mano Roga. It focuses on restraining the mind from unwholesome objects and redirecting it toward healthy thoughts and behaviors. Through counseling, reassurance, cultivation of self-control, enhancement of knowledge (Jnana), intellectual discrimination (Vijnana), emotional stability (Dhairya), positive memory recall (Smriti), and mental concentration (Samadhi), Satvavajaya Chikitsa effectively corrects distorted cognition and emotional imbalance. This approach closely resembles modern cognitive behavioral therapy, which aims to identify and modify negative thought patterns responsible for anxiety and depression.

Manoroga results from the failure of Trisutra (Hetu–Linga–Aushadha) when Manas is excluded from Aushadha. Hence:

Drug therapy alone → partial relief

Without Satvavajaya → relapse common

Without Daivavyapashraya → existential distress persists

The combined application of Daivavyapashraya and Satvavajaya Chikitsa strengthens mental resilience, improves coping mechanisms, and prevents relapse by addressing the root psychological causes rather than merely suppressing symptoms. Unlike pharmacological management, these therapies enhance Satva Guna and promote long-term emotional well-being without adverse effects. Thus, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive and sustainable

mental healthcare model that aligns well with contemporary psychosomatic and holistic health concepts.

CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic approach to anxiety and depression emphasizes restoration of mental balance through regulation of Manasika Dosha and enhancement of Satva. Daivavyapashraya and Satvavajaya Chikitsa play a pivotal role in addressing emotional disturbances, maladaptive thought patterns, and stress-related factors.^[8] Their integrative application, along with Yuktiyapashraya measures, provides a holistic framework for effective and sustainable management of anxiety and depression.^[8,9] Incorporation of these principles into modern mental healthcare may offer promising therapeutic benefits.^[5,6]

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