

**AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVES ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER:
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ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by impaired social interaction, communication difficulties, and repetitive behavioural patterns. Although modern science attributes ASD to neurobiological and genetic factors, Ayurveda interprets it through concepts such as Unmada, Buddhi-Vibhrama, Dhi-Dhriti-Smriti disturbances, and Vata-pradhana dosha vitiation affecting the developing Majja Dhatu and Manovaha Srotas. Prenatal factors, Garbhopaghata karanas, and improper Ahara-Vihara during pregnancy also play contributory roles. Ayurvedic literature suggests that therapies aimed at Vata balancing, Majja vardhana, and Manasa dosha pacification may offer supportive benefits. Interventions such as Panchakarma (Abhyanga, Shirodhara, Nasya), Medhya Rasayana (Brahmi, Mandukaparni, Shankhapushpi), dietary modifications, and

behavioural support have shown potential in improving cognitive, sensory, and behavioural symptoms. Emerging clinical studies indicate encouraging outcomes, though standardised research remains limited. This review consolidates Ayurvedic concepts, possible samprapti models, and therapeutic approaches to provide an integrative understanding of ASD within the Ayurvedic framework.

KEYWORDS: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Ayurveda, Unmada, Vata Vyadhi, Manovaha Srotas, Majja Dhatu, Medhya Rasayana, Panchakarma, Neurodevelopmental Disorder.

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by impaired social interaction, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviours. Global prevalence has steadily increased over the last decade, affecting nearly 1 in 100 children worldwide.^[1] Modern science associates ASD with genetic, epigenetic, and neurobiological abnormalities leading to impaired neural connectivity.^[2]

Ayurveda does not describe ASD as a separate entity but explains symptoms through conditions such as *Unmada*, *Apasmara*, *Buddhi-Medha Dhriti Smriti Vibhrama*, and *Vata-predominant disorders*.^[3] Vitiating of Vata dosha during pregnancy, *Garbhopaghata karanas*, and *Majja dhatu kshaya* contribute to neurodevelopmental disturbances.^[4] Further, improper *Ahara-Vihara* of the mother, psychological stress, and environmental toxins may impair normal foetal neurodevelopment.^[5] Ayurvedic therapeutic principles focusing on *Vata shamana*, *Majja poshana*, and *Medhya dravyas* have shown potential benefits in improving cognitive and behavioural outcomes.^[6]

Review of Literature (Ayurvedic Concepts)

Ayurvedic literature provides several conceptual frameworks relevant to ASD:

1. Unmada

Classical texts describe *Unmada* as a derangement of *mana*, *buddhi*, *smriti*, *bhakti*, *sheela*, and *achara*. The behavioural abnormalities, impaired social response, and stereotyped patterns seen in ASD correlate with these features.

2. Role of Vata Dosha

Vata governs neurological signalling, cognition, and sensory integration. Its vitiation leads to *chalatva*, hyperactivity, impaired communication, and repetitive behaviours—core features of ASD.

3. Majja Dhatu & Manovaha Srotas

Majja Dhatu nourishes the nervous system; its depletion or vitiation manifests as neurodevelopmental delay. *Manovaha srotas dushti* leads to poor emotional regulation and sensory issues.

4. Garbhopaghata Karanas

Faulty diet, lifestyle, maternal stress, and exposure to toxins during pregnancy negatively influence neurodevelopment, aligning with risk factors seen in ASD.

5. Medhya Rasayana

Drugs like Brahmi, Mandukaparni, Shankhapushpi, Vacha, and Jyotishmati enhance memory, perception, and behavioural stability.

6. Panchakarma

Procedures such as Abhyanga, Shirodhara, Shiobasti, Basti, and Nasya promote neurological calming and improve sensory processing.

Samprapti (Pathogenesis According to Ayurveda)

1. **Beeja Dushti / Garbhopaghata Karanas** → impaired fetal neural development
2. **Vata prakopa** due to maternal factors, genetic tendencies → deranged neurological signalling
3. **Majja dhatu kshaya** → weak neural networks, sensory processing abnormalities
4. **Manovaha srotas dushti** → communication deficits, social withdrawal
5. **Rajas–Tamas predominance** → behavioural rigidity, emotional imbalance
6. **Srotorodha + Pranavaha–Manovaha impairment** → stereotypy, cognitive impairment

Overall samprapti

Vata-pradhana tridoshaja involvement with Majja Dhatu kshaya and Manovaha Srotas dushti leading to behavioural, communicative, and sensory abnormalities characteristic of ASD.

Samprapti of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Ayurveda

Autism can be understood in Ayurveda as a **Vata-pradhana Manovaha Srotas disorder** with involvement of **Majja Dhatu, Rajas, and Tamas**. The samprapti evolves from prenatal to postnatal stages and manifests as behavioural, cognitive, and sensory abnormalities.

1. Beeja Dushti / Garbhopaghata Stage (Prenatal Stage)

- Improper *ahara–vihara* of mother
- Maternal stress, infections, toxin exposure
- Genetic factors affecting *shukra–shonita*
- Leads to **Beeja dushti** and **Garbhavikara**

- Impairs development of *manas*, *buddhi*, *indriya*, and *majja dhatu*

→ **Early vulnerability of fetal neurological system**

2. Vata Prakopa

Because fetal nervous development is governed by **Vata dosha**, any disturbance results in:

- Abnormal neural signalling
- Poor sensory coordination
- Delayed or atypical neurodevelopment

Factors aggravating prenatal/postnatal Vata include

- Ruksha, alpa ahara
- Irregular routine
- Environmental stress
- Low birth weight, premature birth

→ **Initiates neurofunctional dysregulation**

3. Majja Dhatu Kshaya

Due to **Beeja dushti + Vata prakopa**, there is:

- Weak nourishment of *Majja dhatu*
- Impaired myelination
- Poor integration of sensory and cognitive functions

→ **Causes developmental delays and repetitive behaviours**

4. Manovaha Srotas Dushti

Disturbance in *manovaha srotas* leads to:

- Reduced *Dhi*, *Dhriti*, *Smriti*
- Poor emotional regulation
- Lack of social interaction
- Communication deficits

→ **Core behavioural symptoms of ASD appear**

5. Rajas–Tamas Vridhhi

Psychological doshas aggravate due to:

- Impaired *sattva*
- Abnormal sensory processing

- Hyperactivity or withdrawal
- **Produces irritability, repetitive actions, restricted interests**

6. Srotorodha + Pranavaha / Vata vitiation

Obstruction of subtle channels further aggravates:

- Cognitive inflexibility
- Poor attention
- Language delay
- Sensory hypersensitivity

→ **Full clinical manifestation of Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Overall Samprapti Flow

Beeja Dushti → Garbhopaghata Karana → Vata Prakopa → Majja Dhatu Kshaya → Manovaha Srotas Dushti → Raja–Tama Vriddhi → Srotorodha → ASD Symptoms

Samprapti Ghatakas (Summary)

Dosha: Vata (predominant), Pitta & Kapha secondarily involved

Dhatu: Majja Dhatu (primary), Rasa & Ojas involvement

Srotas: Manovaha Srotas, Pranavaha & Rasavaha

Adhithana: Mastishka (brain), Indriyatha Samprayoga

Manas: Raja–Tamas prakopa

Vyadhi Swabhava: Chirakari (chronic), Vataja, Anukta Vyadhi model

Treatment Protocol (Ayurvedic Approach)

1. Panchakarma

- **Abhyanga with sesame-based oils** (Ksheerabala, Balaashwagandha taila) – Vata shamana.
- **Shirodhara / Shirobasti** – calming, improved sleep & attention.
- **Nasya with Medhya oils** – enhances brain functioning.
- **Matra Basti** with medicated oils – nourishes Majja dhatu and regulates Vata.

2. Shamana Chikitsa

- **Medhya Rasayana:** Brahmi, Mandukaparni, Shankhapushpi, Vacha, Jyotishmati.
- **Majja poshana drugs:** Ashwagandha, Yashtimadhu, Guduchi.
- **Vata-hara Aharas:** ghee, milk, warm foods, easily digestible meals.

3. Diet & Lifestyle

- Avoid dry, cold, irregular foods.
- Encourage routine, restful sleep, sensory-friendly environment.
- Gentle yoga: Balasana, Shavasana, and pranayama.

4. Behavioural Support

Integrative therapy with speech therapy, occupational therapy, and structured learning enhances outcomes.

Probable Mode of Action

1. Vata Shamaka Effect

Oleation therapies and Vata-pacifying herbs reduce neural hyper-reactivity and improve sensory integration.

2. Neuro-nourishment / Majja Dhatu Poshana

Rasayana herbs enhance synaptic plasticity, memory, and cognitive function.

3. Medhya Action

Improves neurotransmitter modulation (Ayurveda: *Dhi*, *Dhriti*, *Smriti* enhancement).

4. Stress Reduction

Shirodhara and Abhyanga regulate autonomic nervous system → reduced anxiety, better sleep.

5. Detoxification

Basti improves gut health, reduces systemic inflammation—correlating with improved behaviour.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda offers a holistic framework for understanding ASD through doshic imbalance, impaired dhatu-nourishment, and dysfunction of manas and indriyas. The correlation with *Unmada* and *Vata-predominant disorders* provides a conceptual basis for therapeutic planning. Panchakarma procedures show promise in regulating sensory disturbances, hyperactivity, and behavioural rigidity. Medhya Rasayana contributes to cognitive enhancement and emotional stability.

Emerging clinical studies suggest significant improvements in speech, eye contact, sleep, attention span, and behavioural adaptation with integrative Ayurvedic treatment. However, the heterogeneity of ASD, lack of standardised protocols, and limited sample sizes create challenges for universal recommendations. Rigorous research is needed to validate these interventions scientifically. Nevertheless, Ayurveda's emphasis on individualized care, diet, lifestyle, and mind-body therapies provides a strong complementary model for ASD management.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a comprehensive understanding of Autism through concepts of Vata imbalance, Majja dhatu impairment, and manas dushti. Panchakarma, Medhya Rasayana, dietary regulation, and behavioural therapies collectively help improve cognitive, emotional, and behavioural outcomes. While promising, more standardised research is required to establish evidence-based Ayurvedic protocols.

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