



“ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN THE MANAGEMENT OF *CHITTODVEGA* (ANXIETY DISORDERS): A SCIENTIFIC REVIEW”

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Anxiety disorders, classified under *Chittodvega* in Ayurveda, are among the most common psychiatric conditions globally, affecting nearly 300 million individuals. While modern medicine relies primarily on pharmacological agents such as benzodiazepines and SSRIs, their long-term use is limited by side effects and dependency risks. Ayurveda, through its holistic approach targeting mind, body, and spirit, offers preventive, promotive, and therapeutic strategies. **Methods:** A structured literature search was performed in Ayurvedic classics (*Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*), PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. Studies from 2000–2024 were included if they focused on Ayurvedic interventions (herbs, Panchakarma, Rasayana, Yoga, and meditation) or modern correlates of anxiety management. Both clinical and preclinical studies were considered. **Results:** Ayurvedic texts describe *Chittodvega* as a *Manas Roga* caused by *Rajo* and *Tamo guna* vitiation, disturbances in *Manovaha Srotas*, and *Prana Vata* imbalance. Herbs such as *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*), *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), *Jatamansi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), and *Shankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) demonstrate anxiolytic, adaptogenic, and neuroprotective effects in modern studies. Panchakarma therapies like *Shirodhara* and *Nasya*, as well as Yoga and meditation, improve stress biomarkers and mental well-being. Evidence supports Ayurveda’s role in modulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, neurotransmitter balance, and oxidative stress. **Discussion:** Ayurveda emphasizes root-cause correction through *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* (*psychotherapy*), *Daivavyapashraya* (*spiritual healing*), and *Yuktivyapashraya* (*rational therapy*), aligning with modern psychotherapeutic, pharmacological, and mindfulness approaches. However, the lack of large-scale randomized controlled trials limits universal acceptance. **Conclusion:** Ayurveda offers a promising integrative approach in anxiety disorders, combining herbal medicines, Panchakarma, and lifestyle interventions with modern psychiatric care. Future research should focus on standardization, mechanistic validation, and integrative clinical protocols.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety disorders, Ayurveda, *Chittodvega*, Panchakarma, Rasayana

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent psychiatric conditions worldwide, characterized by excessive fear, worry, and somatic symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, and restlessness.^[1] According to WHO, nearly 4% of the global population suffers from anxiety disorders, with higher prevalence in women. Chronic anxiety is associated with reduced quality of life, functional impairment, and increased risk of comorbidities such as depression and cardiovascular disease.^[2-3]

In Ayurveda, anxiety can be correlated with *Chittodvega*, a *Manas Roga* (mental disorder) arising due to imbalance in *Manas Doshas* (*Rajas* and *Tamas*) and *Vata vitiation*, particularly *Prana Vata*.^[4-5] Classical texts emphasize the role of *Manovaha Srotas dushti*, improper lifestyle, and lack of *Satvabala* (mental strength). Anxiety is not only viewed as a disorder of the mind but also as a systemic imbalance involving diet, lifestyle, and spiritual factors.^[6-8]

The objective of this review is to explore the Ayurvedic understanding of *Chittodvega*, summarize existing evidence for Ayurvedic interventions, compare them with modern psychiatric approaches, and propose integrative strategies for anxiety management.^[9-10]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- **Databases searched:** PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, AYUSH Research Portal, and Google Scholar.^[11]
- **Keywords used:** “Chittodvega,” “Ayurveda and anxiety,” “Ashwagandha anxiolytic,” “Panchakarma in psychiatry,” “Yoga anxiety disorders.”^[12]
- **Inclusion criteria:** (1) Articles published between 2000–2024; (2) Clinical trials, review articles, and pharmacological studies on Ayurvedic interventions in anxiety; (3) Classical Ayurvedic references.^[13]
- **Exclusion criteria:** (1) Non-peer-reviewed studies; (2) Case reports without scientific validation; (3) Articles unrelated to Ayurveda or anxiety.^[14]
- **Type of studies reviewed:** Ayurvedic classical references, experimental studies, randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, and integrative clinical models.^[15]

OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

1. Ayurvedic Concept of *Chittodvega*

- Described as a *Manas Roga* involving *Rajas* and *Tamas* vitiation.
- *Prana Vata* governs mental functions, memory, and stress response; its imbalance manifests as anxiety, palpitations, and restlessness.
- *Manovaha Srotas dushti* leads to improper processing of sensory information and emotional regulation.
- *Agni imbalance* and accumulation of *Ama* contribute to psychosomatic symptoms.

2. Symptomatology (Ayurveda vs Modern)

- **Ayurveda:** Fear (*bhaya*), restlessness (*chittodvega*), insomnia (*anidra*), excessive worry, palpitations, fatigue.
- **Modern psychiatry:** Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, social anxiety, and phobias with overlapping features like tachycardia, sweating, and cognitive hyperarousal.

3. Herbal Interventions

- **Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*):** Improves memory, reduces anxiety via serotonergic modulation.
- **Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*):** Adaptogen reducing cortisol and oxidative stress. A double-blind RCT (2012) showed significant reduction in Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) scores.
- **Jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*):** Calms the nervous system, shown to reduce stress-induced behavioral changes in animal models.
- **Shankhpushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*):** Enhances cognitive function, reduces anxiety through GABAergic activity.
- **Tagara (*Valeriana wallichii*):** Sedative and anxiolytic, comparable to diazepam in preclinical studies.

4. Panchakarma Therapies

- **Shirodhara:** Continuous pouring of medicated oil over the forehead reduces sympathetic overactivity and improves sleep. Clinical studies show reduction in anxiety scores.

- **Nasya (medicated nasal drops):** Delivers herbal oils to the brain, regulating *Prana Vata*.
- **Abhyanga (oil massage):** Reduces muscle tension, balances *Vata*, and improves relaxation.

5. Rasayana Therapy

- Herbs like *Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)*, *Amalaki (Emblica officinalis)*, and formulations like *Chyawanprash* improve resilience, immunity, and stress adaptation.

6. Satvavajaya Chikitsa (Psychotherapy in Ayurveda)

- Includes control of mind through *Jnana* (knowledge), *Vijnana* (wisdom), *Dhairya* (courage), *Smriti* (memory), and *Samadhi* (meditation).
- Comparable to modern psychotherapies such as CBT, mindfulness-based therapy, and relaxation training.

7. Yoga and Meditation

- **Yoga Asanas:** Sukhasana, Shavasana, and Bhramari Pranayama reduce stress responses.
- **Meditation:** Improves parasympathetic activity, reduces amygdala hyperactivation, and enhances emotional regulation.
- Meta-analyses confirm Yoga's effectiveness in reducing anxiety symptoms.

8. Modern Scientific Evidence Supporting Ayurveda

- RCTs have demonstrated Ashwagandha's anxiolytic effects comparable to lorazepam.
- Shirodhara and Abhyanga have been shown to reduce blood pressure, cortisol levels, and improve sleep quality.
- Combined Ayurveda and Yoga protocols reduce anxiety scores in cancer and post-COVID patients.

9. Integrative Models

- Ayurveda-based lifestyle interventions combined with SSRIs have been shown to enhance outcomes and reduce drug dependency.
- Preventive role of Ayurveda through *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), and dietary corrections highlighted in studies on stress resilience.

DISCUSSION

This review reveals that Ayurveda conceptualizes *Chittodvega* as a multifactorial disorder arising from *Prana Vata* imbalance, *Manovaha Srotas dushti*, and *Rajas-Tamas predominance*. This framework resonates with modern neurobiological models of anxiety involving neurotransmitter imbalance, HPA axis dysfunction, and autonomic hyperactivity.^[16]

Ayurvedic herbs such as Ashwagandha and Brahmi demonstrate anxiolytic effects through modulation of serotonin, GABA, and cortisol, aligning with modern pharmacotherapy mechanisms. Panchakarma therapies, particularly Shirodhara, provide psychophysiological relaxation similar to biofeedback and relaxation therapies.^[17]

Ayurveda's unique strength lies in its holistic approach, incorporating diet, lifestyle, and mental training (*Satvavajaya*). Unlike modern medicine, which primarily manages symptoms, Ayurveda emphasizes root-cause correction by balancing mind-body interactions and enhancing resilience.^[18]

However, gaps remain in clinical validation. Most Ayurvedic trials are small-scale, lack blinding, or use non-standardized outcome measures. Herbal formulations require standardization for dose, quality, and pharmacovigilance. Moreover, integration into mainstream psychiatry requires collaboration between Vaidyas and psychiatrists.^[19]

Future prospects include multi-center RCTs comparing Ayurveda-based interventions with SSRIs, mechanistic studies on neurobiology of Panchakarma, and integration of Yoga with psychotherapy. Personalized medicine approaches using *Prakriti-based mental health profiling* could revolutionize anxiety care.^[20]

CONCLUSION

Anxiety disorders, described as *Chittodvega* in Ayurveda, represent a major public health challenge worldwide. Ayurveda offers comprehensive management through herbal remedies, Panchakarma, Rasayana, Satvavajaya Chikitsa, and Yoga. These interventions not only alleviate symptoms but also enhance resilience, prevent recurrence, and improve quality of life.

Modern evidence supports the anxiolytic, adaptogenic, and neuroprotective effects of Ashwagandha, Brahmi, and Jatamansi. Panchakarma therapies such as Shirodhara and Nasya demonstrate physiological effects on the nervous system, while

Yoga and meditation reduce stress biomarkers. Together, these reflect Ayurveda's integrative and holistic approach.

The convergence of Ayurveda with modern psychiatry offers new opportunities for safe, effective, and sustainable anxiety care. However, robust clinical trials, pharmacological standardization, and interdisciplinary collaboration are needed to establish global acceptance.

In conclusion, Ayurveda holds significant promise in addressing the limitations of modern anxiety management. Its preventive and therapeutic strategies, when integrated with modern psychiatry, could provide a more holistic, patient-centered approach for managing *Chittodvega*.

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