



“Ayurveda’s Holistic View of Chittodvega (Generalized Anxiety Disorder): Restoring Mind- Body Harmony Through Achara Rasayana”

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Abstract

Background: *Chittodvega*, described in Ayurveda as a state of mental stress and anxiety, correlates with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) in modern medicine. Conventional pharmacological interventions often show limited long-term effectiveness, creating a need for holistic approaches. *Achara Rasayana*, an Ayurvedic code of righteous conduct and lifestyle discipline, emphasizes ethical living, mindfulness, and social harmony, which collectively promote psychological well-being.

Objective: To review the role of *Achara Rasayana* in the prevention and management of *Chittodvega*.

Methods: A comprehensive review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts and relevant contemporary literature from academic journals and databases. The analysis focused on the conceptual understanding, benefits, and therapeutic applications of *Achara Rasayana* in mental health.

Discussion: *Chittodvega* manifests through symptoms such as anxiety, palpitations, irritability, sleep disturbances, and impaired concentration. Ayurveda attributes this condition to vitiation of *Rajas* and *Tamas* along with *vata* and *pitta* imbalance. *Achara Rasayana* promotes emotional stability and resilience through practices including meditation (*Dhyana*), *Mantra* recitation (*Japa*), and observance of *Sadvritta* (ethical conduct). These measures enhance cognitive function, regulate neurotransmitter activity, restore *Manodosha* balance, and strengthen adaptive responses.

Conclusion: *Achara Rasayana* provides a comprehensive Ayurvedic framework for managing *Chittodvega*, integrating preventive and therapeutic strategies. By fostering mind-body harmony through ethical lifestyle practices, it offers a sustainable approach to mental health promotion and anxiety management.

Keywords: *Chittodvega, Achara Rasayana, Ayurveda, Anxiety, Mental Health*

Introduction

With the rapid advancement of modern science and technology, human life has become increasingly fast-paced and stressful. This shift, while bringing remarkable progress, has also contributed to the rising burden of psychiatric disorders. Among these, anxiety disorders are the most prevalent, with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) affecting nearly 7% of the global population, particularly women¹. Characterized by persistent worry, restlessness, disturbed sleep, and impaired concentration, GAD poses a significant challenge to mental health and quality of life.²

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, has long emphasized the inseparable connection between body and mind. It describes *Manas* (mind) as a fundamental component of *Ayu* (life), essential for health, cognition, and even spiritual attainment. The *Hridaya* (heart) is considered its chief seat, through which the mind functions across the body via *Manovaha Srotas*, in association with *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. When the *Manasika Doshas*—*Rajas* and *Tamas*—become vitiated, they disturb the *Hridaya* (seat of *Buddhi*) and obstruct the *Manovaha Srotas*, resulting in various psychological disorders, including *Chittodvega*.

Although the term *Chittodvega* is not directly mentioned in the *Brihatrayi*, it is recognized as a *Purvarupa* (prodromal symptom) of *Unmada* (psychosis). Classical texts also describe several related conditions—*Chittavibhramsha* (mental decadence)³, *Chittavibhrama* (mental perturbation), *Anavasthita chitta* (unstable mind)⁴, *Chittaviparyaya* (misapprehension of mind), and *Unmattachitta* (furious mind)—all of which resemble modern concepts of anxiety and disturbed mental states.

In this context, Ayurveda's psychosomatic approach provides a holistic framework for understanding and managing disorders like *Chittodvega*. By focusing on preventive and promotive measures such as *Achara Rasayana*, it offers tools to restore balance, enhance resilience, and ensure mental well-being in today's stressful world.⁵

Modern treatment of GAD involves anxiolytic drugs and psychotherapy, but challenges like dependency and limited long-term relief remain⁶. Ayurveda emphasizes preventive psychiatry through lifestyle measures such as *Achara Rasayana*, which aims to balance the psyche through righteous conduct, meditation, and ethical living.

Etymology and Definition

- *Chitta* = mind, psyche, consciousness
- *Udvega* = anxiety, agitation, restlessness

Thus, *Chittodvega* = anxious or restless state of the mind.⁷

Ayurvedic Nidana ⁸	Modern Correlates
<i>Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga</i> – improper use of senses	Overstimulation, sensory overload
<i>Prajnaparadha</i> – errors of intellect	Poor coping, wrong lifestyle choices
<i>Parinama</i> – seasonal/time effects	Stress, environmental triggers
<i>Alpasattva</i> – weak personality	Low stress tolerance, genetic predisposition
<i>Hridaya pradushti</i> – disturbed intellect	Dysfunctional cognition

NIDANA

(*Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga, Prajnaparadha, Parinama*)



Vitiation of *Manodoshas* (*Rajas & Tamas*)



Disturbance of *Hridaya* (seat of *Buddhi & Manas*)



Obstruction of *Manovaha Srotas*



Imbalance of *Vata-Pitta*



Chittodvega

(Clinical manifestation: Anxiety, restlessness, palpitations, insomnia)

Ayurvedic Symptoms	Modern Symptoms (GAD)
<i>Shirahshoonyata</i> (mental blankness)	Poor concentration, mental fatigue
<i>Udvega</i> (palpitations, anxiety)	Palpitations, excessive worry
<i>Hridgraha</i> (tightness in chest)	Chest discomfort
<i>Avipaka</i> (indigestion)	GI disturbances
<i>Anannabhilasha</i> (loss of appetite)	Reduced appetite
<i>Nidranasha</i> (insomnia)	Sleep disturbance

Need for the Theory of *Achara Rasayana* – Mind and Its Impact on Physical Health

Acharaya Charaka described *Achara Rasayana* in *Rasayana Adhyaya Chaturtha Pada* of *Chikitsa Sthana*⁹

It is well established that the mind has a profound influence on the body and can manifest physical symptoms during states of emotional disturbance. For instance, fear or anxiety can trigger a series of bodily reactions such as rapid heartbeat, palpitations, nausea, trembling, excessive sweating, dry mouth, chest discomfort, headaches, abdominal knots, and fast or shallow breathing.

These responses occur due to increased nervous activity from the brain and the release of stress hormones like adrenaline (epinephrine) into the bloodstream. Such physiological changes illustrate the close connection between mental stress and physical health. Prolonged disturbances in the mind not only cause temporary symptoms but may also contribute to chronic disorders including hypertension, gastrointestinal disturbances, and metabolic dysfunctions.

Hence, Ayurveda emphasizes *Achara Rasayana*—a code of righteous and disciplined behavior—as a preventive and promotive approach. By cultivating calmness, ethical living, and mental balance, *Achara Rasayana* helps to regulate psychosomatic pathways, reduce stress-induced responses, and maintain overall health and longevity.

Concept of *Achara Rasayana* (Behavioral Medicine)

Achara Rasayana, also called *Sadvritta*, is a unique Ayurvedic concept emphasizing moral, ethical, and disciplined conduct as a form of rejuvenation therapy. Unlike material *Rasayana*, which involve herbs or formulations, *Achara Rasayana* rejuvenates the mind–body system through behavior, lifestyle, and values. Achara Charaka explains that those who follow this code of conduct enjoy the benefits of *Rasayana* even without consuming allopathic / any medicines.

Principles of Achara Rasayana ^{10,11,12}

1. **Truthfulness (*Satyavada*):** Promotes harmony of mind and prevents stress caused by dishonesty.
2. **Control of Anger (*Akrodha*):** Prevents Pitta aggravation and stress-related disorders.
3. **Avoidance of Alcohol & Excessive Sex (*Madya & Maithuna Nivirati*):** Preserves *Ojas*, strengthens immunity, and protects the nervous system.
4. **Non-violence (*Ahimsa*):** In thought, speech, and action; essential for mental peace and social harmony.
5. **Moderation in Activity (*Anayasaka*):** Prevents over-exertion and Vata imbalance.
6. **Mental Calmness (*Prashanta*):** Cultivates inner peace, reduces anxiety, and supports healing.¹³
7. **Pleasant Speech (*Priyavada*):** Maintains harmony in relationships.
8. **Purity & Cleanliness (*Shaucha*):** Essential for personal hygiene and preventing diseases.
9. **Charity & Compassion (*Dana, Karuna*):** Encourage selflessness, emotional stability, and social well-being.
10. **Respect for Elders, Teachers & Saints (*Vridhdha, Guru, Astika Seva*):** Strengthens values and wisdom.
11. **Balanced Sleep & Wakefulness (*Samajagarana-Swapna*):** Supports circadian rhythm and organ health.
12. **Dietary Discipline (Milk & Ghee in moderation):** Nourishes *Ojas* and maintains vitality.
13. **Patience, Self-control & Humility (*Dheera, Jitatma, Anahankari*):** Strengthen psychological resilience.
14. **Religious/Spiritual Inclination (*Japa, Dharma, Adhyatma*):** Enhances Sattva Guna, mindfulness, and grounding.
15. **Continuous Learning (*Shastra Para*):** Encourages intellectual growth and adaptability.

Therapeutic Role in Chittodvega

1. **Preventive Aspect** – strengthens coping mechanisms, prevents progression of anxiety.
2. **Curative Aspect** – meditation and *japa* regulate ANS and normalize neurotransmitters like serotonin, norepinephrine, and GABA.
3. **Holistic Benefits** – enhances intellect (*buddhi*), memory (*smriti*), immunity (*ojas*), and emotional stability.

Discussion

Chittodvega, though described in Ayurveda as a symptom of Unmada, strikingly resembles Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) in its clinical presentation, where patients experience persistent worry, restlessness, sleep disturbances, palpitations, irritability, and reduced coping ability. In modern medicine, GAD is primarily explained as a neurobiological condition resulting from altered neurotransmitter activity—particularly involving serotonin, norepinephrine, and GABA—combined with genetic predisposition and environmental stressors. Treatment mainly relies on anxiolytic drugs such as benzodiazepines and SSRIs along with psychotherapy, but these modalities often face challenges including dependency, tolerance, withdrawal effects, and limited long-term relief, leaving patients vulnerable to relapse.

Ayurveda, by contrast, explains mental illness from a psychosomatic perspective, considering the imbalance of Rajas and Tamas (the two Manasika doshas) as the root cause, which when aggravated disturb the Hridaya (the seat of mind and intellect) and obstruct the Manovaha srotas, ultimately manifesting as anxiety-like disorders. This understanding highlights the deep connection between emotional states and bodily functions, a view that is increasingly validated by modern fields such as psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), which demonstrates how chronic stress alters endocrine function, suppresses immunity, and predisposes to conditions like hypertension, gastrointestinal dysfunction, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular diseases.

In this context, Ayurveda's approach through Achara Rasayana—a code of righteous living, ethical conduct, and disciplined behavior—offers a holistic and sustainable alternative that not only alleviates symptoms but also addresses the root cause by cultivating Sattva Guna (mental clarity and stability). Charaka emphasizes that even without consuming herbal Rasayanas, one who practices truthfulness, self-control, moderation, compassion, respect for elders, meditation, and pleasant speech achieves the rejuvenative benefits of *Rasayana* therapy.

Modern neurobiology provides further insight into how each Achara Rasayana principle may act upon the central nervous system and endocrine pathways. Satyavada (truthfulness) reduces inner conflict and excessive cortisol release, thereby stabilizing prefrontal cortical control. Akrodha (control of anger) prevents amygdala hyperactivation and sympathetic overdrive, reducing adrenaline and noradrenaline surges. Ahimsa (non-violence) and Karuna (compassion) enhance oxytocin and endorphin release,

improving social bonding and emotional resilience. Prashanta (mental calmness/meditation) regulates GABA and serotonin pathways while promoting hippocampal neuroplasticity.

Balanced sleep and wakefulness (Samajagarana–Swapna) normalize melatonin secretion and circadian rhythm, supporting memory and reducing anxiety. Practices such as Japa, Dharma, and Adhyatma (spiritual inclinations) increase alpha wave activity and dopamine, reducing hyperactivity of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis. Moderation in activity (Anayasaka) maintains energy balance and prevents HPA axis overactivation, while pleasant speech (Priyavada) and social respect (Guru–Vriddha Seva) enhance oxytocin-mediated bonding. Even dietary moderation with milk and ghee supports neurosteroid formation and CNS vitality, and continuous learning (Shastra para) promotes synaptic plasticity and cognitive reserve.

Thus, Achara Rasayana can be understood as a form of behavioral neuromodulation: it regulates neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine, GABA), optimizes stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline), and enhances bonding hormones (oxytocin, endorphins). This integrative view shows that Achara Rasayana works not only through psychosocial well-being but also via measurable effects on CNS and hormonal pathways.

Therefore, Achara Rasayana acts as both a preventive and curative measure: it prevents the vitiation of Rajas and Tamas through disciplined conduct, while also offering therapeutic value in correcting imbalances once they occur. In today's era of urbanization, competition, and psychosocial stress, where psychosomatic disorders are on the rise, this approach offers a sustainable and side-effect-free model of mental health care that integrates seamlessly with modern psychiatry. By bridging ethical living with mental discipline, CNS regulation, and psychosomatic balance, Achara Rasayana not only provides immediate relief from symptoms of anxiety but also ensures long-term stability, improved quality of life, and holistic well-being, making it highly relevant in contemporary times.

Conclusion

Chittodvega, correlated with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), is not just a mental disturbance but a major psychosomatic disorder arising from the delicate imbalance between mind and body. Modern medicine undoubtedly provides symptomatic relief through anxiolytic drugs and psychotherapy, yet the challenges of side effects, dependency, and lack of long-term stability continue to limit their effectiveness.

Ayurveda, however, offers a deeper and more holistic perspective. The concept of Achara Rasayana, beautifully described by *Acharya Charaka*, demonstrates how righteous conduct, truthfulness, compassion, meditation, self-control, and disciplined living can rejuvenate both mind and body without the need for material formulations.

By normalizing Manodoshas, enhancing sattva *Guna*, and promoting harmony within the *Manovaha srotas*, *Achara Rasayana* builds resilience, strengthens coping ability, and restores inner balance. Its

benefits extend beyond individual health to foster ethical, social, and spiritual well-being—making it a timeless principle that is as relevant today as it was in ancient times. In an era where stress, competition, and lifestyle disorders dominate human life, *Achara Rasayana* stands out as a sustainable model of integrative mental health care. By bridging Ayurveda's ancient wisdom with modern insights such as psychoneuroimmunology, it shows that the path to peace of mind and true health lies not merely in medicines, but in the way we live, think, and interact with the world around us.

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