

## Role of Ayurveda and Yoga in Psychosomatic Disorders

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### Abstract

Psychosomatic disorders are a group of diseases which involves both mind and body. They are physical illness, like IBS, gastrointestinal ulcers, diabetes mellitus caused by mental factors such as stress, anxiety and depression. Studies have established a relation between the role of stress in weakening immunity. This dual nature of psychosomatic disorders is reflected in the dual approach of *sharirik bhava – vatta, pitta, kapha* and *Manas bhava – satva, rajas, tamas* of ayurveda in relation to its integrated effect on the functioning of the human body. Since these diseases have medically unexplained symptoms, thus the best possible treatment approach should be non-invasive therapy with a holistic view and negligible side effects. This body-mind balance can be achieved by a combined effort of ayurveda and yoga. The ancient ayurvedic science of *Dincharya* (daily-routine), *Ritucharya* (seasonal routine), *sadvritta* (code of good conduct for mental health and social behavior), *ahar*(food), *vihar* (recreation) and *nidra* (sleep) along with the yogic practice of *asthang yoga* can be explored as a potential preventive pathway. Further, the two types of treatment methods mentioned in ayurveda along with the avoidance of *pragyaparadha, asatmaendriyarthasanyoga* and *kala*, techniques like *shirodhara, nasya, medhya rasayana and bhasma* etc in combination with yoga as an auxiliary tool complete with *panchkosha* can be a helpful advancement in the direction of the treatment of psychosomatic disorders.

**Keywords:** Psychosomatic disorders, *Sharirik bhava, manas bhava, medhya rasaya, panchkosha yoga.*

### Introduction

Psychosomatic disorders are basically somatic manifestations of disturbed psychic state. They either cause physical illness or worsen pre-existing symptoms of a disease. Diseases that can be categorized under them are hypertension, respiratory ailments (Bronchial asthma, Hyper ventilation syndrome), Gastrointestinal ailments (Peptic ulcer, Ulcerative colitis, IBS), Migraine etc. caused by underlying factors like stress, anxiety and depression. They can be broadly classified under medically unexplained symptoms (MUS) as their etiopathogenesis and reasons for exacerbation are not clearly known. Due to this the most reliable treatment should be non- invasive approach with negligible side effects and a

holistic approach providing curative as well as preventive benefits. This is where ayurveda and yoga emerge as a panacea for psychosomatic disorders.

#### Ayurvedic approach -Pathogenesis

Ayurveda defines ayu as a conjunction of *sharir* (physical body), *indriya* (sensory organs), *stva* (mind) and *atma* (soul) [1], thus to be called healthy, one should balance all the attributes. On one side where modern science is working on finding a firm link between physical and mental aspects of human body, in ayurveda there had always been an established relation between them in form of *sharirik prakriti* and *mansik prakriti*, better described as *tridoshas* and *trigunas* respectively.

*Pragyaparadha*, *asatmaendriyarthasanyoga* and *kala* are three main causative factors for such diseases [2] Brihat-Tri, the three principal text of ayurveda mention a number of instances where bodily and cognitive functions show co-relation with *tridoshas* and psyche. For instance, increase of vatta dosha produces *bala*, *nidra* and *indriya bhramsha*, *pralapa*, *bhrama* and *deenata* [3] Decrease of *vatta dosha* produces *alap bhashite hitam* (the person speaks very less), *samjna moha* [4] Decrease *kapha* produces *bhrama* [5]

*Vatta* gets aggravated by grief and fear while *pitta* by anger [6]

*Jwara* due psychological factors, (*Kamaja jwara*, *Shokaja jwara*, *Bhayaja jwara* and *Krodhajwara*) [7]

#### Treatment

Ayurveda puts emphasis on both preventive and curative aspects of a disease.

Where one on hand, *Sadvritta* [8] (righteous code of conduct) along with *dincharya* and *ritucharya* when followed maintain a healthy mind and body relation preventing psychosomatic disorders.

On other hand, ayurvedic science focuses on the correcting the mind-body balance by pacifying aggravated doshas and relaxing the stress factor by two approaches: -

Shaman-In these medicines or therapies are given in order to pacify the aggravated doshas causing illness.

Primarily *Medhya Rasayana* is used which works on improving memory and intellect. *Sankhapushpi*, *Guduchi*, *Mandukaparni* and *mulethi* are main four *medhya rasayans* mentioned in charak samhita [9]. These along with other medicines such a *swarna bhasma*,

*hiraka* and *abhraka* have shown anti-stress effect.

Techniques like Oleation effects Pacinian corpuscles which are mechanic receptors having central nerve fibres, carry impulse through the dorsal column to medial lemnisci and terminates in brain stem, hypothalamus and amygdala. So, stimulation of the area of head after application of *Murdha taila* can lower the hyper secretion of ACTH and cortisol consequently which then lowers the non-adrenergic activity [10]

*Shodhana* – It is a method in which the aggravated doshas are removed from the body.

*Shirodhara* [11] and *Nasya* [12] are type of *panchkarmas* which are proven to improve sleep quality, lessen anxiety and reduce stress.

Yogic approach

Yoga is one of the oldest known practices, with its origin tracing back to the dawn of civilization. Regular practice of yoga affects both mind and body, decreasing mental stress, increasing clarity of mind and promoting positive effect on somatic aspect including improved circulation, clearing of channels etc.

*Panchkosh* meditation

The *manomaya*, which is the third *kosha* among the five is said to be the seat of diseases. It is concerned with the *trigunas* of mind. Yogic practice of meditation provides stability of this *kosha* resulting in a strengthened immunity [13]

*Asthang* yoga

*Asthanga* refers to the 8 limbs of yoga, which are, *yama* (abstinences), *niyama* (observances), *asana* (yoga postures), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (absorption). "Practicing them provides a balance of somatic, psychic and spiritual aspects of a human, resulting in a better lifestyle. This causes tremendous decrease in stress, which can subsequently prevent undesired somatic symptoms [14]

Physiological mechanism of yoga

Researchers have found that level of brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), circadian salivary cortisol levels, pro-anti inflammatory cytokines level and cortisol awaking response (CAR) has been increased by these practices. Increased level of BDNF and CAR is associated with increased neuroplasticity and level of alertness respectively that in turn has

good hippocampal integrity activity maintaining hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis equilibrium <sup>[15]</sup>

## Conclusion

Since psychosomatic disorders are somatic presentations of psychic illness, their treatment should focus on both the aspects equally. Prevention of these diseases could be achieved by avoiding *pragyaparadha*, *asatmaendriyatha sanyoga* and *kala*, following *sadvritta* and incorporating yoga in quotidian lifestyle. Additionally by using *shaman* and *shodhan* methods of ayurveda including *medhya rasayan*, *shirodhara* etc the stress factor could be dealt in an efficient manner. All these can work together to maintain HPA equilibrium, which can successfully avert the occurrence of these illnesses.

Thus, union of Ayurveda and yoga along with proper *aahar*(diet), *vihar*(behavior) and *nidra* (sleep) possess potential as panacea for psychosomatic disorders.

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