

# Anxiety and Depression in Ayurveda



# Anxiety and depression

- as signs and symptoms of disease, anxiety and depression are described in the traditional literature of Ayurveda, but generally aren't categorized as distinct clinical entities
- both disorders are related to disturbance of the mind (*manas*), which can be caused by vitiation of the *doṣāḥ* (*vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*), behavioural and lifestyle issues, or spiritual problems



# Therapeutic principles

- three elements that comprise the theory, prevention, and treatment of mental disorders in Ayurveda including:
  1. *yuktivyapāśraya cikitsā* (i.e. rational therapy)
  2. *sattvāvajaya cikitsā* (i.e. behavioural therapy)
  3. *daivavyapāśraya cikitsā* (spiritual medicine)



# *Daivavyapāśraya cikitsā*

- refers to the use of spiritual (*daivya*) techniques in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, drawing from a branch of Ayurveda called *bhuta vidya tantra*
- according to Ayurveda theory, not all disease can be explained by the theory of the *tridoṣāḥ*, i.e. has a rational cause
- particularly when a dramatic change in personality is observed, or when physical symptoms arise prior to the appearance of anatomical changes, this is linked to an affliction of the *graha* and *bhūta*, or unseen biological entities
- the different types are identified and named on the basis of specific patterns that are observed
- if the *graha* or *bhūta* are determined to play a role, specific spiritual measures are implemented, each of which targets one of the five senses



# *Daivavyapāśraya cikitsā*

- *gandhā cikitsā* (odor therapy): application of different scents, usually in the form of a medicinal incense (*dhūpa*) that is burnt in proximity to the patient to ward off negative influences
- *rasa cikitsā* (taste therapy): makes use of an 'offering' (*bali*) in the form of a sumptuous morsel of food which is offered to the patient, drawing the *bhūta* or *graha* into it, after which it is offered to a deity, and then discarded in a suitable location, such as a riverbank, at the cemetery grounds, or at a crossroads
- *rūpa cikitsā* (sight therapy): relies on the use of sacred geometry and other sacred images, including *yantra* and *maṇḍala*, as well as images of the protector deities such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Mañjuśrī, and the *Bhaiṣajyaguru*

# *Daivavyapāśraya cikitsā*

- *sparśa cikitsā* (touch therapy): involves the use of 'sacred objects' (*maṇi*) either handled or worn by the patient, including talismans, jewels, herbs or animal products (e.g. *gorocanā*) that are believed to have special powers
- *mantra cikitsā* (chanting therapy): consists of the recitation of certain *mantra* by the patient or those attending them, or by inscribing them on some object and then wearing this as a talisman
  - specific *mantrāḥ* are prescribed on the basis of the signs and symptoms of the patient, which indicates the particular *graha* and *bhūta* that is manifest
  - among the many different *mantrāḥ*, what are typically referred to as the *śānti mantrāḥ* can be used generally to ward off negative influences



# Śraddhā: ancestor appeasement

- similar to one's individual constitution, a family has its own *kuṭumba doṣa* that represents the ancestral body
- disturbances to this body will continue to affect successive generations until these elements are normalized
- after death the ancestor resides in an intermediary state between heaven and earth called the *pitṛ loka*, governed by Yama, lord of death
- the departed ancestor resides in this state for three generations before being released to heaven, and during this period must be ritually honored, to ensure their release to heaven and to avoid the negative consequences of not appeasing their ancestor
- ancestor appeasement takes place on every 'new moon day' (*amāvāsyā*) and during the *pitṛ pakṣa*, a 15-day period starting in the second half of the 'seven month' (*aśvayuja*) of the Hindu calendar, continuing until the new moon day
- ritual offerings are made in the form little 'balls' of rice (*piṇḍa*), offered to a priest and then fed to the crows, who represent the departed ancestors

# *Sattvāvajaya cikitsā*

- refers to psycho-behavioural therapy, including measures to control and balance the mind, and to correct the function of *prāṇā*
- the natural state of mind is *sattva*, representing a state of pure subjective awareness
- when misdirected by 'ignorance' (*avidyā*) the natural equanimity of *sattva* is disrupted, giving rise to 'desire' (*rāga*) and 'aversion' (*dviṣ*)
- ignorance is dispelled through the cultivation of wisdom' (*prajñā*), comprised of:
  1. *śīla* (virtue)
  2. *śamatha* (peace)
  3. *vipaśyanā* (mindfulness)



# Cultivation of *prajñā*

- *śīla* (virtue) is cultivated through the application of:
  - *sadvṛtta* (good behavior), e.g. in yoga, *yama* (ethics) and *niyama* (morality)
  - practice of *dinacaryā* (daily routine), e.g. *brahmamuhūrta*, *traya upastambhā*
  - avoidance of *asātmyeṇḍriyārtha* (abnormal use of the senses) and *prajñaparādha* (intellectual error) e.g. forced expulsion or suppression of natural urges, excessive work/activity, etc.
- *śamatha* (peace) and *vipaśyanā* (mindfulness) can be cultivated through techniques such as *ānāpānasmṛti bhāvana*, and the techniques of *yoga*, e.g.
  - *āsana*: posture; physical training
  - *prāṇāyāma*: breath control; breathing exercises
  - *pratyāhāra*: sensory inhibition; restraint of the senses
  - *dhāraṇā*: concentration; the ability to direct the mind
  - *dhyāna*: meditation

# *Yuktivyapāśraya cikitsā*

- among the *doṣāḥ*, specific experiences of anxiety and/or depression can be correlated with each *doṣa*
  - *vāta* relates to *prāṇā*, the elements of wind and ether, the quality of dry, cold, and light
    - corresponds to the experience of or feeling of loss, emptiness, and disconnect
  - *pitta* relates to *agni*, the element of fire, the quality of heat, light, and
    - corresponds to the experience of frustration, embattlement, and anger
  - *kapha* relates to *ojas*, the elements of earth and water, the quality of heavy, wet, and cold
    - corresponds to the experience of heaviness, inertia, and attachment
- all mental disturbances are fundamentally linked *vata*, as a disturbed form of *prāṇā*
- when *vāta* is increased, *āma* increases, and *ojas* is diminished



# *Yuktivyapāśraya cikitsā*

- *yuktivyapāśraya* utilizes dietary modification (*āhāra*) and herbal medication (*auśada*)
- *āhāra* (diet) is first orientated to resolving *āma*, restoring *agni*, and re-establishing the flow of *prāṇā*, by use of fasting or foods that are light and easily digestible
  - pungent and warming herbs and foods that stimulate the stomach are used to balance *kapha*
  - bitter and cooling herbs and foods that stimulate the liver are used to balance *pitta*
  - sweet and nourishing herbs and foods that lubricate the GIT are used to resolve *vāta*
- meal times need to respect diurnal rhythms and the function of *agni*
  - "breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, dine like a pauper"

# *Yuktivyapāśraya cikitsā*

- *auśada* (medicinal herbs)
  - ashwagandha (*Withania somniferum*, *Convovulus arvensis* root)
  - shatavari (*Asparagus racemosa*, *A. cochinchinensis*)
  - peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*)
  - vacha (*Acorus calamus* rhizome)
  - chai hu (*Bupleurum chinense* root)
  - brahmi (*Bacopa monniera* leaf)
  - kava (*Piper methysticum*)
  - ling zhi (*Ganoderma lucidum* fruiting body)
  - CBD cannabis, e.g. Charlotte's web
  - kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa* leaf)
  - psilocybin mushroom (*Psilocybe* spp.)
- physical therapy
  - *abhyāṅga*, *śiro dhārā*, *hṛdaya vasti*
  - *vyāyāma* (regular exercise)
- creative release
- community



