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CONCEPT OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is a minor mental illness characterized by substantial degree of fear in one or more social situations. The condition becomes clinically relevant when the fear is persistent for a period of six months or more. A few outcomes of Social Anxiety Disorder are depression and substance abuse. It can be seen more in teenagers than in young adults. In common populaces, women are having more rates of Social Anxiety Disorder than in men. The contemporary management of Social Anxiety Disorder are with the usage of anxiolytic drugs and their practice is limited owing to the risk of drug abuse and dependency. As per Ayurveda, Social Anxiety Disorder can be considered under the Shareerika - Manasika Vikara (psychosomatic disorder). This involves Udvega avastha of Manas (hesitant state of mind) along with the predominance of Vata and Pitta dosa. As the references are scattered, the paper is an attempt to understand the concept of Social Anxiety Disorder. This article is an endeavor to bring light to understanding the concept and find out suitable solutions for Social Anxiety Disorder through an Ayurvedic perspective.

Keywords: Social Anxiety Disorder, Udvega, Shareerika Manasika Vikara

INTRODUCTION

The basic instincts of humans are inherently hard-wired behaviors that enhance their ability to cope with vital environmental situations. In Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), there will be some sort of fear in social situations like social interactions, such as having a conversation, meeting unfamiliar people, being observed while eating or drinking, and performing in front of others like in giving a speech or a presentation.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. So, there are lot of things that contribute to our overall health, including our relationships with other people. Social health is defined as our ability to form meaningful relations with other people and work together in a healthy positive way. Socially anxious people imitate the shy and solitary behavior of sloths, whereas socially active people imitate the herd behavior of elephants. In a herd, elephants support and care for one another and communicate information and pass it down from one generation to the next, making a very healthy society.

In humans, social behavior can be determined by the individual's physical characteristics and their current circumstances. Communication is the basis for survival and reproduction. The symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder include excessive blushing, excessive sweating, trembling, palpitations and nausea. The

individual fears that he or she will be negatively evaluated when exposed to social situations. Some may use alcohol or other drugs to reduce fear at social events. This may lead to alcoholism or other kinds of substance abuse. Its prevalence rate decreases with age.¹

As per Ayurveda, Bhaya (fear) is one among the Manasika bhavas (Emotions). Bhaya (fear) has a positive aspect of being a motivator and its negative aspect is that it causes anxiety.² In Bhagavat Gita, Arjuna, at the time of war, becomes anxious and worried about confronting his relatives, friends and family. He expressed symptoms like Seedanti mama gaatrani (limbs are giving away), Mukham ca parisushyate (mouth is drying up), Vepathu ca shareere (whole body shudders), Romaharsa (horripilation), Paridahyate (generalized burning sensation), na Shaknami avasthatum (not able to stand steady), Bhramativa ca me mana (mind is quandary and whirling in confusion), Nimittani ca pasyami vipareetani (only see omens of misfortune) similar to Social Anxiety Disorder.³

In another context, the Vishadhata (a individual who has intentionally poisoned food) has been defined as Syavasushkaasya (Mouth will be dry), Sweda (Sweating), Vepathu (Tremble), Bheeta (fear)⁴ as that of Social Anxiety Disorder.

Table 1: Symptoms and their Doshic Predominance

Symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder	Symptoms From Bhagavat Gita ⁵	Symptoms of Vishadhata	Doshic Predominance
Fear	Sidanti mama gaatrani	Bheeta	Vata
Anxious			
Nervous	Mukham ca parisushyate	Syavasushkaasya	Vata
Palpitation	Paridahyate	Sweda	Pitta
Excessive Sweating			
Trouble breathing	Bhramateeva ca me mana		Vata
Fainting			
Restless	Na Shaknami avasthatum	Skalathi	Vata
Shaky	Vepathu	Vepathu	Vata
Feels like he/she will be negatively evaluated	Nimittani ca pasyami vipareetani		Vata
	Romaharsa		Vata

From the above symptoms, there is Udvega avasta of manas (hesitant state of mind) along with the predominance of Vata and Pitta Dosha (Shareerika dosha).

Etiological Considerations in Social Anxiety

The main reason of social anxiety is stress. It can be either Eustress or distress. Eustress positively prompt for increased performance levels, whereas distress, a negative stress leads to anxiety. The brain areas involved in the modulation of social anxiety are a set of limbic structures which are responsible for the regulation of negative emotions. The emotional life is largely housed in the Limbic system. The Amygdala, the portion of Limbic system has been related with fear and other negative emotions.⁶ The stimulus of the right amygdala is linked with negative emotions and plays a key role in the manifestation of distress and fear stimuli.

Causative Factors According to Ayurveda

The Nidana (Causative factors) for Social Anxiety Disorder according to Dosha Predominance are:
 In an Alpa satva (Inferior psyche) individual, the Aharaja nidana (dietary causes) is taking Ahara (Diet) which provoke Vata like Katu (Pungent taste), Tikta (Bitter Taste), Kashaya (Astringent

Taste) and Pitta aggravating Katu (Pungent Taste), Amla (sour taste), lavana (salt), Athyushna (Excessive hot), Tikshna (penetrate deep), Ruksha (dryness), Vidahi (burning sensation) Aharas (diet).⁷ The Viharaja Nidana includes Adharana of Dharaneeya vegas (lack of restraint over emotions) like lobha (greed), Irshya (envy), Dvesha (hatred), Matsarya (jealousy), Raga (desire) etc. The Manasika Nidana (psychological causes) are Hina (insufficient union), Mithya (perverted union) and Atiyoga (excessive union) of Kala (season), Artha (objects) and Karma (Actions) and Asatmya indriyartha samyoga (unwholesome conjunction of sense organs and objects), Prajnaparadha (intellectual errors) and Parinama (consequence).⁸

The predisposed factors are Prakrti (Constitution) of the individual. A person with a predominance of Vata and Pitta in Prakrti and having a mind dominated by either Rajasika or Tamasika gunas or both is susceptible. The attitude of the expectant mother will affect the emotional status of the offspring and a person having Avara or Hina satvabala (Inferior psyche) is more vulnerable to mental disorders.

The precipitating factors are Manoabhighata (Mental trauma) and Prajnaparadha (Intellectual errors) and the perpetuating factors are diet which aggravates Vata and pitta, family stress, occupational stress and the social environment.

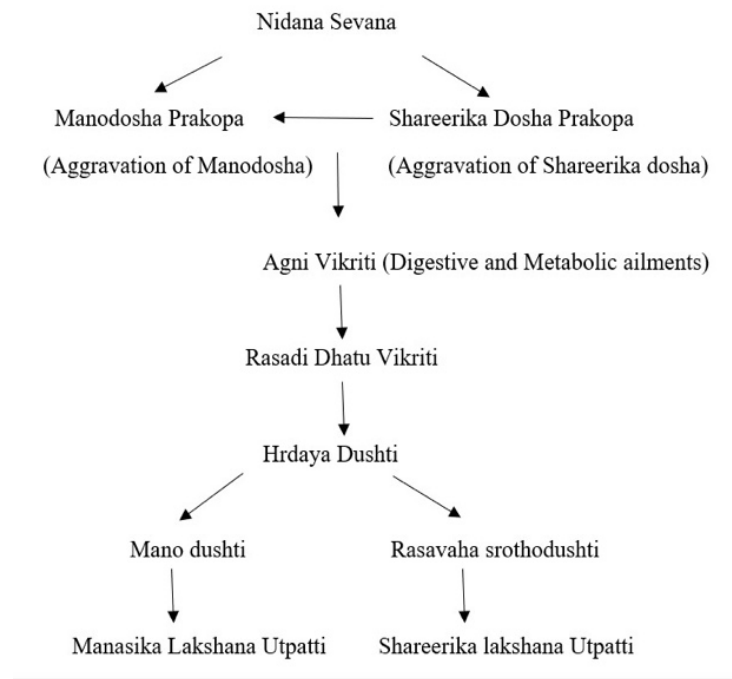


Chart 1: Probable Samprapti in Ayurveda

Pathophysiology

Anxiety appears when one becomes conscious that a proper adaptive action is not possible when there is loss of control over the circumstances. Confronting a new social situation involves the activation of the HPA axis. In the presence of a stressor, the hypothalamus gets stimulated, which in turn arouses the anterior pituitary to release adrenocorticotrophic releasing hormone, which in turn stimulates the adrenal cortex to release the cortisol. The cortisol helps to provide the energy needed for the physical response of either flight or fight. The adrenal medulla secretes epinephrine that stimulates the autonomic nervous system, causing the signs and symptoms of social anxiety disorder. The release of cortisol continues till the stressor is present and once it reaches a particular concentration in the blood, it exerts negative feedback and thus bringing back the body to normalcy. On the other hand, in pathology, the stimulation of HPA axis occurs even with the absence of stressor and the feedback mechanism is poorly regulated⁹. This initiates the pathogenesis of Social Anxiety.

The pathogenesis of this clinical condition could be understood at the level of Samprapti Ghataka in Ayurveda.

Table 2: Samprapti Ghataka

Dosha	Vata Pittadhika Tridosha
Dusya	Manas, Rasadi Dhatus
Srotas	Manovaha Srotas, Rasayani
Srotodusti	Atipravriti
Agni	Vishamagni
Ama	Jatharagnijanya
Udbhava Sthana	Mahasrotas
Sanchara Sthana	Sarva Sharira
Adhishtana	Hrdaya
Rogamarga	Three rogamargas
Rogaprakriti	Chirakari

According to Ayurvedic Principles, Social Anxiety Disorder can be considered under the Shareerika Manasika vikara (psychosomatic disorder), where there is udvega avastha of Manas (hesitant state of mind) along with the predominance of Vata and Pitta dosa.

DISCUSSION

Manas (mind) is the master of the Indriyas (Sense organs) and Vata is the master of Manas (mind). Vata (Prana Vata located in the head) employs all sense organs in its activity.¹⁰ Chakrapani has ascribed to the Pitta (Sadhaka pitta located in the heart), emotions like Bhaya (fear), Shourya (bravery), Krodha (Anger), and Moha (Confusion)¹¹. All these show the importance of Vata Pitta dosha in mind and its aggravation leading to Social Anxiety Disorder.

The main line of treatment of Social Anxiety Disorder includes Pacana Deepana (Digestant and Appetizers), Sodhana (Elimination therapy), Buddhi prasadana (clarity of intelligence) and Indriya bala (strength of sense organs can be attained),¹² Samana (Vata -Pittahara Chikitsa-alleviating the Vata Pitta dosha), Murdhni Tailas (Application of oil on head). Medhya drugs (drugs which improve memory and intellect) like Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri), Shankapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis), Vaca (Acorus Calamus) etc. can be given. Satvavajaya Chikitsa (Counselling) providing Dhi (intelligence), Dhairya (confidence), Atma jnana (knowledge about self) is also effective add-on therapy.^{13,14}

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a technique that helps people to find new ways to perform by changing their thought forms when exposed to a social situation. In Bhagavat Gita, Lord Krishna advice Arjuna that “Everyone should overcome one’s own Durbalata (weaknesses) and evolve by performing one’s duty without doubting self and shedding off their insecurities”¹⁵. This can be adapted to the management of Social Anxiety Disorder where one should face the situation and overcome it, rather than being its prey. Similarly, “Vasudaivakudumbakam” (The world is a family), a concept explained in Maha Upanishad, emphasizes that the entire world is a family. The realization of this concept induces a feeling of oneness which essentially drives out anxiety. From these evidence we can infer the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) have been practiced for a long time in mental disorders.

The preventive measures include Sadvrta (Good Regimen), Acara Rasayana (Social and Personal Conduct) and Yoga Practices like Pranayama (Practice of breath control), Dhyana (Meditation) etc. will improve individuals by developing social relationships, enabling them to obtain better physical health and enhance spiritual wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Social anxiety disorder is the persistent fear of one or more social situations where embarrassment may occur, and the fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation. In Ayurveda, as it is a psychosomatic disease, it can be understood as the Udvega Avasta of Manas (hesitant state of mind) which has the predominance of Vata and Pitta Dosa. Analyzing the concept in subtle terms of Ayurveda could be a promising hand in preventing and managing this social concern.

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