

# Srotas Dysfunction (Srotodushti) as an Underlying Factor in Anxiety and Depression: An Ayurvedic Analysis

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**Abstract—** Mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression are increasingly prevalent in modern society, posing significant challenges to public health systems worldwide. While contemporary psychiatry emphasizes neurochemical imbalances, cognitive patterns, and psychosocial stressors, traditional medical systems such as Ayurveda offer a holistic understanding of mental health rooted in mind–body integration. Central to Ayurvedic physiology is the concept of Srotas, the functional channels responsible for the transport, transformation, and communication of substances and energies throughout the body. Disturbances in these channels, known as Srotodushti, are considered fundamental to disease pathogenesis.

This paper explores Srotas dysfunction as an underlying etiological factor in anxiety and depression from an Ayurvedic perspective. By integrating classical Ayurvedic texts with contemporary interpretations, the study examines how dysfunctions in Manovaha Srotas and related bodily channels contribute to psychological imbalance. The paper analyzes the role of Dosha vitiation, Agni impairment, Ama formation, and psychosomatic interactions in the manifestation of anxiety and depressive states. Furthermore, it discusses Ayurvedic diagnostic principles and therapeutic implications for restoring Srotas integrity. This analysis highlights the relevance of Ayurvedic concepts in understanding mental health disorders and underscores

the potential of integrative approaches for holistic mental well-being.

**Keywords:** Srotas, Srotodushti, anxiety, depression, Manovaha Srotas, Ayurveda, psychosomatic health

## 1. Introduction

Mental health disorders, particularly anxiety and depression, have emerged as major contributors to global disease burden. Rapid urbanization, lifestyle changes, academic and occupational stress, and social disconnection have intensified psychological distress across populations. Although modern medicine has advanced pharmacological and psychotherapeutic interventions, rising prevalence rates suggest the need for broader, more holistic frameworks to understand and manage mental health conditions.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a comprehensive model of health that integrates the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. In Ayurveda, health is defined not merely as the absence of disease but as a state of equilibrium among Doshas, Dhatus, Malas, Agni, and Srotas, along with mental clarity and spiritual well-being. Mental health is deeply interwoven with bodily processes, reflecting the principle that mind and body are inseparable.

One of the most distinctive concepts in Ayurvedic physiology is that of Srotas, the channels through which nutrients, waste products, sensory information, and mental

processes flow. Any disturbance in these channels—referred to as Srotodushti—can disrupt homeostasis and lead to disease. While Srotodushti has traditionally been discussed in the context of physical disorders, its relevance to mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression warrants deeper exploration.

This paper aims to analyze anxiety and depression through the lens of Srotas dysfunction, with particular emphasis on Manovaha Srotas and its interconnections with other physiological channels. By bridging classical Ayurvedic theory with contemporary mental health concerns, the study seeks to offer a holistic and integrative understanding of psychological disorders.

## 2. Concept of Srotas in Ayurveda

### 2.1 Definition and Meaning of Srotas

The term Srotas is derived from the Sanskrit root “sru”, meaning “to flow” or “to move.” Srotas are described in classical Ayurvedic texts as channels or pathways that facilitate the movement of substances and energies throughout the body. These channels are not limited to gross anatomical structures but also include subtle functional pathways.

According to Acharya Charaka, Srotas are responsible for the transformation, transportation, and nourishment of bodily tissues. They maintain internal communication between different systems and ensure physiological harmony. Every function in the body, whether physical or mental, depends on the integrity of these channels.

### 2.2 Classification of Srotas

Ayurvedic texts classify Srotas in multiple ways:

- Bahya Srotas (external openings)
- Abhyantara Srotas (internal channels)
- Sthula Srotas (gross channels)
- Sukshma Srotas (subtle channels)

Charaka Samhita enumerates thirteen major internal Srotas, each associated with specific Dhatus and functions. In

addition to these, Manovaha Srotas, responsible for mental functions, are described implicitly through references to mind-related processes.

### 2.3 Functional Importance of Srotas

Srotas serve as the foundation of physiological and psychological functioning. They regulate nourishment, detoxification, sensory perception, emotional processing, and cognitive activity. Any obstruction, damage, or imbalance in these channels can compromise systemic health.

## 3. Srotodushti: Concept and Pathogenesis

### 3.1 Meaning of Srotodushti

Srotodushti refers to pathological alterations in the structure or function of Srotas. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe four primary types of Srotodushti:

- Atipravritti (excessive flow)
- Sanga (obstruction)
- Siragranthi (structural distortion or knotting)
- Vimargagamana (flow in abnormal directions)

These disturbances impair the normal functioning of tissues and organs, leading to disease manifestation.

### 3.2 Causes of Srotodushti

Several factors contribute to Srotas dysfunction, including:

- Improper diet (Ahara)
- Unhealthy lifestyle (Vihara)
- Mental stress and emotional imbalance
- Suppression of natural urges
- Dosha vitiation
- Weak digestive fire (Agni) and Ama formation

Mental stress is particularly significant in the context of Manovaha Srotas.

### 3.3 Srotodushti and Disease Development

Ayurveda views disease as a progressive process beginning with Dosha imbalance, followed by Srotas involvement, Dhatu impairment, and clinical manifestation. Thus,

Srotodushti acts as a crucial intermediary between Dosha vitiation and disease expression.

#### 4. Manovaha Srotas and Mental Health

##### 4.1 Concept of Manas in Ayurveda

Manas (mind) is considered a subtle entity responsible for cognition, perception, emotion, and behavior. It mediates between the sensory organs and the intellect (Buddhi). Mental health depends on the balance of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, the three Gunas of the mind.

##### 4.2 Manovaha Srotas

Although Manovaha Srotas are not explicitly enumerated in the classical list of Srotas, their existence is inferred through descriptions of mental processes and disorders. These channels govern the flow of thoughts, emotions, memory, and awareness.

Manovaha Srotas are closely linked with:

- Hridaya (heart/mind center)
- Indriyas (sensory organs)
- Prana Vata

Any disturbance in these channels disrupts mental equilibrium.

##### 4.3 Interaction with Other Srotas

Mental functioning is influenced by several bodily Srotas, including:

- Pranavaha Srotas (life force and respiration)
- Rasavaha Srotas (nutrition and emotional nourishment)
- Majjavaha Srotas (nervous system and cognition)

Thus, mental disorders reflect systemic imbalance rather than isolated psychological pathology.

#### 5. Ayurvedic Understanding of Anxiety and Depression

##### 5.1 Anxiety (Chittodvega / Udvega)

Anxiety is described in Ayurveda as Chittodvega, characterized by restlessness, fear, excessive thinking, and disturbed sleep. It is primarily associated with Vata Dosha vitiation, particularly Prana and Vyana Vata.

Vata aggravation leads to:

- Excessive movement of thoughts
- Instability of mind
- Heightened sensitivity

Srotodushti in Manovaha and Pranavaha Srotas plays a key role in anxiety.

##### 5.2 Depression (Vishada / Avasada)

Depression is described as Vishada or Avasada, marked by sadness, lethargy, loss of interest, and mental heaviness. It is predominantly linked to Kapha and Tamas dominance.

Kapha-related Srotodushti results in:

- Obstruction of mental flow
- Reduced motivation
- Emotional dullness

##### 5.3 Role of Srotodushti

In both anxiety and depression, Srotodushti disrupts the balanced flow of mental and physiological energies. Anxiety reflects hyperactivity and erratic flow, while depression reflects stagnation and obstruction.

#### 6. Pathophysiological Mechanism: Srotodushti and Mental Disorders

##### 6.1 Dosha-Srotas Interaction

Dosha vitiation initiates dysfunction in specific Srotas:

- Vata → irregular flow in Manovaha Srotas
- Kapha → obstruction and heaviness
- Pitta → irritability and emotional volatility

##### 6.2 Role of Agni and Ama

Impaired digestive and metabolic fire (Agni) leads to Ama formation, which obstructs Srotas and affects mental clarity. Ama accumulation in subtle channels contributes to brain fog, emotional instability, and depressive symptoms.

##### 6.3 Psychosomatic Integration

Ayurveda emphasizes bidirectional interaction between mind and body. Psychological stress worsens Srotodushti,

while bodily imbalances exacerbate mental distress, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.

## 7. Diagnostic Perspective in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic diagnosis of mental disorders involves:

- Assessment of Dosha dominance
- Evaluation of Srotas involvement
- Analysis of mental Gunas
- Examination of lifestyle and emotional factors

Understanding Srotodushti enables personalized treatment planning.

## 8. Therapeutic Implications

### 8.1 Principles of Management

Ayurvedic management focuses on:

- Srotoshodhana (cleansing of channels)
- Dosha pacification
- Strengthening Agni
- Nourishing mind and body

### 8.2 Panchakarma and Shamana Therapy

Therapies such as Nasya, Shirodhara, and Basti help restore balance in Manovaha Srotas. Herbal formulations and Rasayana therapy support mental resilience.

### 8.3 Satvavajaya Chikitsa

Psychological counseling, ethical living, meditation, and emotional regulation are integral to restoring mental harmony.

## 9. Contemporary Relevance and Integrative Perspective

Modern mental health approaches increasingly recognize the mind-body connection. The Ayurvedic concept of Srotas aligns with contemporary systems biology and psychosomatic medicine. Integrating Ayurvedic principles with modern psychotherapy may enhance holistic mental health care.

## 10. Conclusion

Srotas dysfunction (Srotodushti) provides a profound and holistic framework for understanding anxiety and depression in Ayurveda. Rather than viewing mental disorders as isolated psychological phenomena, Ayurveda recognizes them as systemic imbalances involving mind, body, and consciousness. Disturbances in Manovaha Srotas, influenced by Dosha vitiation, Agni impairment, and emotional stress, play a central role in the manifestation of anxiety and depressive states. This Ayurvedic analysis underscores the importance of restoring channel integrity and systemic balance for sustainable mental well-being. Recognizing the relevance of Srotas in mental health not only enriches traditional Ayurvedic practice but also offers valuable insights for integrative and preventive mental healthcare in the modern world.