



# Addressing Anxiety Disorder through Indigenous Therapeutics : A Review

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**Abstract.** In modern times, there is a rise in the number of cases suffering from mental health issues. Anxiety disorder is one of the significant mental illnesses. Various psychological and pharmacological interventions are available to treat anxiety and reduce its symptoms. However, these interventions have various limitations, and comprehensive treatment of this disorder is still a challenge. Ancient indigenous therapeutic techniques such as Yoga Therapy, Marma Therapy and Pranic healing, and Yagya Therapy are promising in the treatment of this disorder. The present study reviewed the applicability of these techniques for the treatment of this disorder. Yoga is an effective therapeutic intervention which can be used to treat anxiety. Yoga helps in addressing the biological symptoms of anxiety disorder. Stimulating marma points helps in mental and physical well-being and the development of self-healing powers. Stimulation of marma points of throat and head helps in treating anxiety disorder. Through pranic healing, the imbalanced chakras responsible for anxiety are energised which influence the physical body, mind, and emotions. Yagya therapy is beneficial in managing anxiety through the fumes of the herbs. It is beneficial in maintaining overall psychological well-being. From the review, it is clear that indigenous therapeutic interventions such as yoga therapy, marma therapy, pranic healing, and Yagya therapy help treat anxiety disorder and maintain good mental wellbeing.

**Keywords.** Anxiety Disorder, Yoga Therapy, Marma Therapy, Pranic Healing, Yagya Therapy

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PUBLISHED BY  
Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya Gayatrikunj-Shantikunj Haridwar, India

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## Introduction

On the eve of 26th March 2020, the Government of India announced a nationwide lockdown [1]. Little did Indians know that this was just the beginning of the change that they were about to experience. During COVID-19 there was a massive increase in the total number of cases suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression [2]. According to the report of WHO (World Health Organisation), anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders worldwide with specific phobia, major depressive disorder, and social phobia being the most common anxiety disorders [3]. Post COVID-19 there is an increase in cases of anxiety disorder. Before COVID-19 the estimated global prevalence of anxiety disorders in 2020 was 3824 • 9 per 100,000 population [4]. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the global prevalence of anxiety disorders in 2020 was 4802 • 4 per 100,000 population [4]. It indicates that anxiety disorder is one of the important disorders to be addressed for impactful intervention and treatment.

In a study by Bystritsky et al. (2013), it was found that anxiety disorders can be treated effectively using various pharmacotherapies and psychotherapies which include psychopharmacological and cognitive-behavioural interventions. Pharmacological and psychological interventions have different symptom targets; there is a need to study the logical combination of these strategies for improved future outcomes [5]. However, the authors quoted that the treatment of anxiety disorders is still a challenge [5]. Additional treatment methodology needs to include the development of algorithms that can be easily used in primary care and with a greater focus on managing functional impairment in patients with anxiety [5]. Modern science recognizes the need for newer methods to treat anxiety disorders.

Thus, this study is a review of Indian indigenous techniques such as Yoga Therapy, Marma therapy, Yagya Therapy, and Pranic healing in treating anxiety disorders.

## Anxiety

Experiencing anxiety occasionally is a part of life. We usually feel anxious when faced with

a problem at work, before taking an examination, or even before making a crucial decision. But anxiety disorders are something different from this temporary fear. According to American Psychological Association (APA), anxiety is defined as an emotion characterized by feeling tensed, worried thoughts, and physiological changes like an increase in blood pressure [6]. People who suffer from anxiety usually experience recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns and they may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat [6]. Physiologically, anxiety is defined as a feeling marked by fear and bodily tension signs in which a person expects impending danger, calamity, or misfortune [7]. The body commonly radicalizes in response to a perceived threat: muscles tense up, respiration quickens, and the heart beats quicker [7]. Headache, back pain, toughness in the neck region, and tightening of the muscles are also attributed to be the cause of anxiety disorder [8].

## Physiology of Anxiety

The major brain structures and neuronal circuits involved in emotional information processing and behaviour are precisely studied and the biological bases of fear and anxiety are now recognized [9]. Studies show that panic disorder can emerge as a result of dysregulation in the peripheral nervous system and central nervous system [10]. Anxiety disorders are caused by a malfunction of a neurochemical and neuroanatomical system that is linked together [10]. The hypothalamus, hippocampus, cingulate, entorhinal cortex, and thalamus are subcortical brain areas above the level of the midbrain that mediate the human anxiety response [10].

Norepinephrine, serotonin, dopamine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) are the significant arbitrators of anxiety in the central nervous system [11]. The autonomic nervous system, especially the sympathetic nervous system, mediates most of the symptoms [11]. The important role in the management of anxiety and fear is played by the amygdala [11]. Heightened response of the amygdala is observed in the patients with anxiety disorder towards anxiety cues

[11]. Brain imaging of panic disorder patients shows cortical atrophy in the right temporal lobe [10]. When we experience a lightning situation the fear is recorded not only in our rational, conscious memory but also indelibly recorded immediately and directly in a separate location called the emotional memory within the amygdala [12]. Neurotransmitter GABA plays a key role in accessing this emotional memory and regulating anxiety. With the advancement of brain imaging Technology new causes and symptoms of different psychological disorders have been discovered. The aetiology of anxiety has a physiological basis and disruption in specific areas of the brain and imbalance in certain neurotransmitters could result in disorders related to anxiety.

## Evidence of Anxiety in Ancient Indian Texts

Anxiety finds its reference in ancient Indian texts in different forms. It is mentioned as a chinta in ancient texts like Bhagwat Geeta and Yoga Vasishta. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra when the holy war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas was about to begin, Arjuna was in the dilemma of fighting against his kin and teacher. Verses 30,31 and 32 of chapter 1 of Bhagavad Geeta mention how Arjuna felt. As he was standing against his blood on the battlefield Arjuna's hands were trembling, his bow was slipping from his hands, his body was trembling, his mouth was parched, his hairs stand straight and his skin was on fire [13].

दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥30॥ सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति | वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ 31॥ गाण्डीवं संसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते | न च शक्नोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥ 32॥ [13]

Symptoms experienced by Arjuna are akin to symptoms of panic disorder (a subtype of anxiety disorder) as mentioned in DSM-5 (Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 5th edition). DSM-5 lists palpitation, pounding heart, sweating, trembling, chills, heat sensations and fear of losing control as the symptoms of pathological anxiety [14]. Numbness in the limbs, tensed muscles, rigidity, abdominal tension and dry mouth are some other symptoms of

anxiety [11].

Various other references to anxiety disorders are found in Indian literature. Indian literature does not only mention the symptoms of anxiety disorders. We also find a reference about the effects of anxiety. It is mentioned in Yoga Vasishta (5.21.6) [15]. Yearning after objects increases our desire, just as our thinking of something increases our thoughts about it. The fire that burns bright from its fuel soon dies out without it [18].

चिन्तनेनैधते चिन्ता त्विन्धनेनेव पावकः । नश्यत्यचिन्ततेनैव विनेन्धनमिवानलः ॥6॥

A verse from Yoga Vasishta (5.23.6) explains how thoughts are continuously fuelled by thoughts that gradually lead to anxiety. Once an individual has certain control over thoughts then it can prevent anxiety as well. In Atharvaveda, the references of various mental disorders and their treatment can be found [16]. Disorders like schizophrenia, delusion, eroticism, hysteria and other disorders are mentioned in Atharvaveda [17]. Various pathological fears- fear of nature, death, germs and water are also mentioned in Atharvaveda [17]. These fears are synonymous to OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and other related disorders [7].

## Treatment of Anxiety Disorder in Yoga

Yoga is a spiritual discipline that focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It helps individuals to lead a healthy and relaxed lifestyle. It developed in India as a comprehensive life discipline that puts mind, body, and spirit in a harmony and transcends suffering by developing awareness about one's spiritual nature [19].

The sage Patanjali consolidated the ancient tradition of yoga into Yogasutra consisting of eight elements- Yam (ethical behaviour), Niyama (self-discipline), Asana (yogic postures), Pranayama (breathing practices), Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (enlightenment) [20].

The positive effects that Yogasana practice

can have in diffusing anger and reducing anxiety, worry, feelings of helplessness, emotional stress, and psychological stress while increasing a sense of personal mastery and self-regulation have reached new heights [12]. Yoga should be considered as a complementary therapy or alternative method for medical therapy in the treatment of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders as it has been shown to create a greater sense of well-being, increase feelings of relaxation, improve self-confidence and body image, improve efficiency, better interpersonal relationships, increase attentiveness, lower irritability, and encourage an optimistic outlook on life [21]. Yogic intervention is associated with greater improvements in mood and anxiety than a metabolically matched walking exercise. Increased thalamic GABA levels are associated with improved mood and decreased anxiety [22]. A favourable connection has been shown between acute increases in thalamic GABA levels and improvements in mood and anxiety scores following behavioural intervention (e.g., yoga postures) [22]. The reported relationships are in the predicted direction, given that pharmacologic medications that boost GABA system activity are recommended to improve mood and reduce anxiety [22].

There is a significant reduction in the level of anxiety when the patient meditates as the thoughts are centred on the sensations within the body and not on external or an environmental stimulus [23]. Negative imagery is believed to be successfully suppressed when one is relaxed, preventing the right hemisphere from processing any anxiety-producing feelings [24]. Long-term relaxation reduces anxiety [12]. Practicing relaxation asanas can have a significant decrease in the level of anxiety [12]. Relaxation can be practised on the physical level as well as a mental level. Savasana, Shithilasana, Sukhasana, and Veerasana can be practised for physical relaxation and Trataka, and mantra chanting can be practised for mental relaxation [25]. Yoga Nidra is also helpful in significantly reducing anxiety [26]. Practice of Surya Namaskar also has a significant reduction in the level of anxiety. There is also a possibility of using other yogic asanas

to help in the treatment of anxiety. Some of the symptoms like muscle tension and abdominal tension can be reduced by practising the Pawanmuktasana series [27].

In Gherand Samhita, references of different yoga asanas that are helpful in anxiety can be found. According to Gherand Samhita, Siddhasana, Padmasana, Veerasana, Savasana and Kurmasana help reduce anxiety [28].

Not only the practice of yoga asana has a significant effect on anxiety but pranayama (one of the eight limbs of yoga) also affects different psychological variables. Regular practice of Anlom Vilom pranayama reduces the level of anxiety significantly [29]. Bhramari pranayama reduced anxiety and increase positive affect, and these changes are associated with the activity and connectivity of a brain network involved in emotion processing, particularly the amygdala, anterior cingulate, anterior insula, and the prefrontal cortex [30]. Pranayama affects anxiety at the physiological level. Yogic activities of practising yoga asana and pranayama help in reducing the level of anxiety. Yoga therapy can be given alongside other therapeutic interventions such as pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, it will work as a traditional therapeutic intervention in reducing anxiety.

## Treatment of Anxiety Disorder in Marma Therapy

Marma Science is an ancient medical discipline that focuses on illness prevention and treatment, as well as mental and physical well-being and the development of self-healing powers [31]. Sushruta Samhita mentions Marma as an anatomical site where muscles, veins, ligaments, bones and joints meet together [33]. Marma points also represent the intersection of mind, body, and awareness, therefore they may contain crucial information about ideas, emotions, and sentiments, as well as their relationship to general health [34]. There is a total of 107 Marma points in the human body [35].

Marma therapy is an essential ayurvedic treatment in which pressure is given on the Marma, causing vital energy (Prana) to flow via

subtle pathways (Nadis). National Health Portal discusses the use of Marma therapy to treat paralysis, sciatic pain, migraine, muscle and joint pain, and other disorders [32].

Problems related to the brain, especially the Marma of the throat and head are stimulated. Any type of mental illness can be cured by the stimulation of Adhipati, Simanta, Avarta, Apanga, Phana, Vidhur, Matrika and Krikatika [35]. Anxiety can be reduced by the stimulation of Marma points of the throat and head. Stimulation of Guda, Vasti, Vitapa, Shiromarma, Talahridaya, Gulpha. Janu, and Amsa Marma points can also reduce anxiety [36]. These Marma points can be stimulated using pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions [36]. The Pharmacological interventions include aromatherapy, nasal administration of herbs, oil massage, dry massage, coating of herbs, herbal bath, and herbal drip whereas non-pharmacological interventions include pressure, practising yoga asana, pranayama, meditation, shatkarma and pranic healing [36]. Different yogasanas stimulate different Marma points in the body. The practice of Padmasana stimulates Vitapa Marma and Siddhasana stimulates Guda and Vasti Marma which significantly helps in developing control over the mind and reducing internal anxiety [36]. Bhramari pranayama stimulates Shiromarma which also helps in developing control over thoughts [36]. Svamarma therapy is beneficial in reducing mental ailments [35]. Studies show that massage therapy which is used for stimulation of marma points also has a significant effect on anxiety. In research, it was found that after the massage therapy there was a significant reduction in norepinephrine and cortisol levels along with the anxious behaviour in children suffering from Generalized Anxiety disorder [37]. Performing facial massage also reduces the level of anxiety and negative mood [38]. Marma therapy can be used as an intervention in the treatment of mental illness. Unlike, yoga therapy which has certain restrictions, there aren't any such restrictions in Marma therapy [36]. Marma therapy is one of the finest indigenous therapies that can be used for therapeutic intervention in reducing anxiety [32].

## Treatment of Anxiety in Pranic Healing

Prana or Bioplasmic energy is the vital force of life, the living energy that keeps the body alive and healthy [39]. Prana is the subtle energy of the air as the master force and guiding intellect underlying all psychophysical functions, in charge of breath, senses, and mind coordination, it oversees the unfolding and harmonising of all higher levels of awareness on an inner level [40]. When we breathe in then the prana is directly absorbed in our energy centres called Chakras [41]. The major chakras, or energy centres, not only regulate and energise the internal organs but also regulate and influence one's psychological state [41]. The major chakras have psychological functions that correlate to them. The patient will be treated by addressing the chakras [41].

Pranic healing is a therapeutic science and art that focuses on the energy body, which pervades and influences the physical body, mind, and emotions. Pranic healing can drastically modify the molecular structure of liquid and dense states of matter, resulting in favourable effects [42]. There are 11 chakras which are treated in pranic healing- Basic chakra, Sex chakra, Navel chakra, Meng Mein chakra, Spleen chakra, Solar plexus chakra, Heart chakra, Throat chakra, Ajna chakra, Forehead chakra, and Crown chakra. These chakras perform different psychological functions and any imbalance in these chakras will result in psychological dysfunction [41].

Crown chakra which is located at the crown of the head and corresponds with the brain and pineal gland is responsible for psychological illness [39]. The frontal Solar Plexus is placed between the front ribs in a hollow location [39]. At the rear of the front Solar Plexus chakra lies the back Solar Plexus chakra [39]. The Solar Plexus chakra is the seat of lower emotions such as rage, irritability, resentment, anxiety, tension, fear, selfishness, and aggression. This chakra is generally treated while dealing with psychological issues [41]. Between the eyebrows lies the Ajna chakra [39]. It is the abstract mind's centre

for comprehending abstract notions and principles. This chakra's activation strengthens one's willpower. As a result, an individual can control their cognitive and emotional faculties. This check must be handled to overcome uncontrolled, chaotic emotions. For the treatment of anxiety, it is necessary to create chakral shields for the front and back Solar Plexus, Ajna and Crown chakras [41]. Thus, it is clear that Crown chakra, Solar Plexus chakra and Ajna chakra play a key role in anxiety.

The balancing of the Crown, Ajna and Solar Plexus Chakra is achieved using various techniques such as sensitizing the hands, scanning the inner aura, sweeping, increasing the receptivity of the patient, and energizing with prana, stabilizing the projected pranic energy, and releasing the projected pranic energy. The imbalance in chakra energy, which leads to anxiety can be treated by doing abdominal breathing, sweeping and energizing the Solar Plexus, Crown, and Ajna chakra, doing twin Heart meditation, and practising positive self-affirmations [41]. It was found that viewing ground and air prana leads to an increase in mental well-being [42].

Thus, it is clear that Pranic healing helps in increasing mental well-being and can also be used to treat anxiety while modulating the flow of prana through chakras.

## Treatment of Anxiety in Yagya therapy

Yagya is a comprehensive, systemic, and integrative approach to human health and wellness, rather than a mechanical one. It is a living entity made up of the body, intellect, emotions, and spirit [43]. Yagya has been used to solve environmental problems, to manage natural catastrophes, to achieve spiritual advancement, to preserve ecological balance, to manage social and political equilibrium, and to prevent and cure diseases [44]. Yagya was a therapy method for a variety of physical and mental ailments [45]. In Vedic era Yagya therapy had been developed into a sophisticated therapeutic system [44]. In Yagya, various herbs are poured into fire which results in a medic-

inal smoke and taking through breath it leads to healthy benefits [44]. Yagya provides advantage and mental welding as the herbal components used are known for psychological benefits [46]. Herbs like- chandan, jaiphal, ashwagandha, giloy, shankhpushpi, almond, clove have anti-anxiety properties in them. Using these in Yagya has a significant effect in reduction of anxiety [46]. In terms of simultaneous care of symptoms linked with OCD, an integrated strategy employing Yagya therapy offers promising results [47]. Yagya when used as a therapeutic intervention helps in reduction of stress and anxiety [45]. Yagya promotes total health which include physical mental social spiritual well-being [43]. Yagya treatment is a very successful traditional therapy with a holistic approach. It may help with all types of diseases, whether they are somatic, psychological, somatopsychic, or psychosomatic [45]. Thus, it is clear that Yagya therapy is effective in managing anxiety and anxiety related disorders.

## Discussion and conclusion

Anxiety is not a problem that emerged in the 21st century it existed since ancient times as it has been mentioned in ancient Indian texts [13]. In modern times various physiological causes of anxiety are being identified. Anxiety is not only caused by psychological or environmental factors but it is also caused by physiological factors [9]. The present review explores the possibility of treatment of anxiety through indigenous techniques. The probable treatment of anxiety through yogic practices, Marma therapy and pranic healing was studied.

The yogic practices were developed by ancient sages and had been passed on through generations. Yogic practices not only affect us physically but also affect us psychologically and spiritually. Physiological factors such as the level of norepinephrine, serotonin, dopamine, GABA and the activity of the limbic system have a significant effect on anxiety [12]. Whenever there is a malfunction, then anxiety disorders appear. The practice of yogasana, pranayama and meditation help treat and reduce the level of anxiety [43]. Relaxation yogasana directly affects

the activity of GABA which helps in improving mood and reducing anxiety [12]. Pranayama practise reduces anxiety and has a positive effect on the activity and connectivity of brain networks which are involved in processing [29, 30].

Marma therapy is an ancient science of healing which focuses on the stimulation of subtle pathways (nadis) so that the vital energy (prana) can flow through it [32]. Marma therapy is very beneficial in addressing and treating anxiety and other mental illnesses. The stimulation of Marma points around the throat and head are related to mental well-being [35]. Different Marma practises such as massage, herbal baths, herbal drips and various yoga practises are very beneficial in the stimulation of these Marma points [36]. Massage therapy has been found significantly affect the level of norepinephrine and cortisol which play a significant role in anxious behaviour [37].

Pranic healing is a therapeutic intervention that focuses on healing the chakras which form the basis of our psycho-spiritual system the chakras are distributed all along the body [39]. Any imbalance in chakras is primarily because of some mental or physical illness and these illnesses can be treated by balancing the Chakras [41]. In anxiety, the Crown Chakra, Solar Plexus Chakra, and Ajna Chakra are imbalanced which results in uncontrolled chaotic emotions, resentment irritability, restlessness and fear therefore the balancing of the Chakras helps treat the anxiety [41]. Balancing the chakras through pranic healing helps achieve good mental well-being.

Yagya therapy is a comprehensive therapeutic strategy that improves overall health, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being [43]. It brings equilibrium to all elements of life, and when one's life is in balance and harmony, one may feel safe [43]. Yagya is a type of complementary or alternative treatment that may be used to heal mental or physical illnesses [43].

From the review, it is clear that indigenous therapeutic interventions yoga therapy, Marma therapy, Yagya therapy and pranic healing help treat anxiety and maintain good mental well-being. It is recommended that well planned clinical

trials must be conducted to establish the efficacy of these therapeutic interventions in the light of the modern scientific understanding.

**Compliance with ethical standards** Not required.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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