

# Ayurvedic Perspective on Madatyaya (Alcoholism): A Classical and Contemporary Review

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**Abstract:** Alcoholism, or *Madatyaya*, is a well-documented condition in Ayurvedic classics, where it is described as a result of the excessive and improper consumption of *Madya* (alcoholic beverages). Rooted in the ancient texts such as Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, *Madatyaya* is recognized not merely as a physical ailment but as a psychosomatic disorder influenced by one's constitution (*Prakriti*), mental state (*Manas*), and lifestyle factors. Ayurveda categorizes *Madatyaya* into three types—*Vataja*, *Pittaja*, and *Kaphaja*—each with distinct clinical manifestations based on the predominance of Doshas. Classical management includes detoxification (*Shodhana*), palliative therapies (*Shamana*), and rejuvenation (*Rasayana*), along with psychological counselling and spiritual practices to restore equilibrium in mind and body. From a contemporary standpoint, alcoholism is understood as a chronic, relapsing disorder with significant neurobiological, behavioural, and social components. Modern treatment modalities often involve pharmacotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, and rehabilitation programs. However, relapse and treatment resistance remain major challenges. The Ayurvedic approach, with its holistic and individualized methodology, offers promising complementary strategies that may enhance current therapeutic outcomes. This review attempts to bridge the gap between classical Ayurvedic insights and modern medical understanding of alcoholism. It explores the pathogenesis, symptomatology, and treatment strategies of *Madatyaya* in ancient texts, and aligns these with current scientific perspectives on alcohol use disorder (AUD). It also discusses the potential role of Ayurvedic herbs such as *Ashwagandha*, *Brahmi*, and *Guduchi* in modulating addiction-related pathways, managing withdrawal symptoms, and promoting mental resilience. By integrating classical Ayurvedic knowledge with contemporary evidence-based practices, this review highlights the relevance and potential of Ayurveda in addressing the complex, multidimensional problem of alcoholism in modern society. Further interdisciplinary research and clinical validation are essential to establish safe, effective, and culturally sensitive treatment protocols.

**Keywords:** *Madatyaya*, Alcoholism, Ayurveda, Dosha, *Madya*, Tridosha, Panchakarma, Satvavajaya.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism, or alcohol use disorder (AUD), is a major health issue globally. In Ayurveda, this condition is known as *Madatyaya*, derived from excessive consumption of *Madya* (intoxicating drinks). In ayurvedic Texts elaborate Madatyaya as a tridoshaja vyadhi (disorder involving all three doshas) with significant involvement of psychological and digestive systems. Unlike the modern approach that emphasizes only behavioural and neurological facets, Ayurveda considers the doshja imbalances and mental disturbances as central to the pathology.

### ➤ Etiology (*Nidana*)<sup>(1-3)</sup>

As per ayurvedic texts , Madatyaya is caused by:

- Excessive and habitual consumption of *Madya*,
- Intake without food,
- Use during unsuitable seasons (especially hot),
- Incompatible diet along with alcohol,
- Consumption by individuals of weak constitution or impaired digestion.

These factors disturb the balance of *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*, leading to disease.

➤ *Pathogenesis (Samprapti)*<sup>(4-5)</sup>

Alcohol initially stimulates *Pitta* and *Rajas*, leading to excitement and euphoria. Prolonged and excessive intake affects *Rasa Dhatu*, impairing nourishment and stability of the mind (*Sattva*), causing:

- *Agnimandya* (weak digestion),
- *Manasika vikara* (mental disturbances),
- *Oja kshaya* (loss of vitality),
- Vitiating of *Tridoshas*.

➤ *Properties of Alcohol (Madya)*<sup>(6-8)</sup>

Acharya Charka and Vagbhata explain 10 properties of *Madhya* while Acharya Sushruta explained only eight *guna* except *laghu* and *amla*. *Madhya* is *panchrasatamak* except *laghu* (light), *Ushna* (hot), *Teekshna* (sharp), *Sookshma* (subtle), *Vikashi* (diffusive), *Ashukari* (instantaneous in action), *Vyavayi* (exhilarating), *Vishada* (cleansing), *Amla* (sour), *Ruksha* (dry)

➤ *Symptoms of Alcoholism (Madatyaya)*<sup>(10-11)</sup>

The symptoms of alcoholism are categorized based on the predominance of *doshas*:

- *Vataja Madatyaya*: Characterized by loss of sleep, dyspnoea, tremors, headache, and delusions.
- *Pittaja Madatyaya*: Marked by excessive thirst, burning sensations, and yellowish discoloration of the skin.
- *Kaphaja Madatyaya*: Symptoms include vomiting, anorexia, nausea, drowsiness, and heaviness.
- *Sannipataja Madatyaya*: A combination of symptoms from all three *doshas*.

In chronic states, signs include hallucinations, delirium tremens, withdrawal syndromes, and even insanity.

➤ *Stages of Madatyaya (Progression of Intoxication)*<sup>(12-13)</sup>• *Manda Madatyaya (Mild Intoxication)*

## ✓ Features:

- Relaxation
- Mild euphoria
- Slight excitement
- Increased sociability
- ✓ Comparable to modern "buzz" or early stage intoxication
- ✓ Mind remains under control

• *Madhyama Madatyaya (Moderate Intoxication)*

## ✓ Features:

- Slurred speech
- Loss of coordination
- Emotional instability
- Confusion or irritability
- ✓ Person begins to lose judgment
- ✓ Involvement of *manas* (mind) and *buddhi* (intellect) begins

• *Pramada or Ati Madatyaya (Severe/Chronic Intoxication)*

## ✓ Features:

- Aggression, delusions
- Hallucinations, fainting
- Insomnia, tremors
- Debility, sexual dysfunction
- ✓ Chronic alcoholism stage
- ✓ Reflects neurological and psychiatric involvement
- ✓ Leads to deterioration of *ojas* (vital essence)

➤ *Comparison between Stages of Madatyaya vs. Modern Alcoholism Symptoms*<sup>(14)</sup>Table 1 Comparison between Stages of Madatyaya vs. Modern Alcoholism Symptoms<sup>(14)</sup>

Ayurvedic Stage (Madatyaya)	Ayurvedic Description	Modern Alcoholism Equivalent	Modern Clinical Features
<b>Manda Madatyaya</b> (मन्द मदात्यय) <i>Mild Intoxication</i>	Euphoria, relaxation, slight excitement, social disinhibition.	<b>Initial/Early Stage</b> (Social Drinking, Mild Intoxication)	Mild euphoria, talkativeness, flushed skin, impaired judgment, decreased inhibitions.
<b>Madhyama Madatyaya</b> (मध्यम मदात्यय) <i>Moderate Intoxication</i>	Slurred speech, impaired coordination, emotional instability, confusion.	<b>Problem Drinking / Binge Drinking</b>	Aggression, mood swings, poor coordination, risky behaviors, blackouts. Often associated with <b>binge drinking episodes</b> .
<b>Pramada / Ati Madatyaya</b> (प्रमाद / अति मदात्यय) <i>Severe or Chronic Intoxication</i>	Delusions, hallucinations, tremors, weakness, insomnia, depletion of <i>ojas</i> , disturbed perception.	<b>Chronic Alcoholism / Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)</b>	Tremors (e.g. DTs), hallucinations, memory loss, anxiety, liver dysfunction, dependence, withdrawal symptoms. May include <b>alcohol-induced psychosis, Wernicke's encephalopathy, or liver disease</b> .

➤ *Management (Chikitsa)<sup>(15-16)</sup>*• *Nidana Parivarjana (Elimination of cause)*

- ✓ The foremost line of treatment is abstaining from alcohol.
- ✓ Satvavajaya (mental control), counseling, and peer support are encouraged.

• *Dosha-Specific Management (As per Charaka Samhita Chikitsa Sthana)*✓ *Vataja Madatyaya:*

- Warm unctuous food, medicated wine with spices.
- Abhyanga (oil massage), Swedana (steam therapy).

✓ *Pittaja Madatyaya:*

- Cooling food, milk, Ghee-based formulations.
- Shirodhara with medicated oils like Brahmi taila.

✓ *Kaphaja Madatyaya:*

- Dry and light food, Vamana (therapeutic emesis),
- Trikatu (dry ginger, long pepper, black pepper), and bitter decoctions.

• *Panchakarma Therapies*

- ✓ Vamana: Especially useful in Kapha-dominant patients.
- ✓ Virechana: For Pitta vitiation.
- ✓ Nasya- Mrudvikadi Kashaya and Kalyanaka Ghrita Nasya<sup>(17)</sup>
- ✓ Shirodhara, and Basti therapies for chronic cases.

• *Rasayana and Medhya Drugs*

- ✓ Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Yashtimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), Kalyanaka Ghrita, Panchagavya Ghrita, Punarnavadi Ghrita and Saraswatarishta for rejuvenation and mental calm.<sup>(18)</sup>

• *Satvavajaya Chikitsa (Psychotherapy)*

Yoga, meditation, mantra chanting, moral uplifting. Mindfulness techniques for control of urges and emotional regulation.

✓ *Asadhya Lakshna*

*Heenottaraushitam, Atisheetam, Amandadaaham, Tailaprabhaasyam, Jihvaushtiha, Dantamasitam, Vaaneel and Peetanayana rudhirataa are asadhya lakshanas.*<sup>(19)</sup>

**II. DISCUSSION**

In Ayurveda, Madya broadly refers to alcoholic substances, which are recognized both for their therapeutic properties and potential for harm when misused. Traditional texts like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* classify Madya based on their source and preparation methods, such as fermented cereals (Sura), herbal decoctions (Asava), and

honey-derived alcohol (Madhu-Madya). While moderate consumption in specific contexts may aid digestion and promote vitality, excessive or habitual intake leads to Madatyaya, a pathological condition akin to alcohol intoxication and dependence. Madatyaya progresses through distinct stages—mild (Manda), moderate (Madhyama), and severe or chronic (Ati/Pramada)—each characterized by worsening physical, mental, and behavioral symptoms such as euphoria, impaired coordination, emotional disturbances, and ultimately neurological and systemic decline. Ayurvedic texts further categorize Madatyaya by doshic predominance, recognizing variations in symptoms and guiding tailored treatment approaches. Treatment in Ayurveda integrates detoxification procedures (shodhana), herbal medicines (shamana), and rejuvenation therapies (rasayana), emphasizing holistic management that addresses body, mind, and spirit. When compared to modern medical concepts, Madatyaya's stages closely parallel contemporary definitions of alcohol use spectrum disorders, from social drinking and binge episodes to chronic alcoholism with physical dependence and psychiatric complications. Both systems acknowledge the progression from initial use to harmful consequences, underscoring the need for early intervention and individualized care. Thus, Ayurveda's comprehensive understanding of Madya and Madatyaya provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of substance use, physiology, and mental health, complementing modern approaches to alcohol-related disorders.

**III. CONCLUSION**

Madatyaya is a complex psychosomatic condition comprehensively addressed in Ayurvedic classics. The multifaceted approach—detoxification, dietary discipline, dosha-specific therapies, rasayana supplementation, and psychological management—makes Ayurveda a viable complementary strategy in alcoholism management. Contemporary integrative approaches can benefit significantly from Ayurvedic wisdom, particularly in relapse prevention and holistic rehabilitation.

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