

PRAJNAPARADHA AS A FUNDAMENTAL DETERMINANT OF LIFESTYLE DISORDERS: AN INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON PREVENTION

Dr. V. Kranthi Kumari¹, Dr. K. Laxmikantham², Dr. P. Srikanth Babu³

¹Post Graduate Scholar, ²Professor & Guide, ³PG Professor & HOD,

³Director, Department of AYUSH, Telangana, India.

Post Graduate Department of Kaya Chikitsa,

Dr BRKR Govt. Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Corresponding Author & Address:

Dr. V. Kranthi Kumari,

Post Graduate Scholar,

PG Department of Kaya Chikitsa,

Dr. BRKR Govt. Ayurveda Medical College, Hyderabad – 500038.

Telangana, India.

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ABSTRACT

The global health landscape has shifted significantly from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as Hypertension, Diabetes mellitus, Dyslipidemia and Obesity-related Cardiovascular disorders. These conditions are strongly linked to rapid urbanization, sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary habits, and psychosocial stress. From an Ayurvedic perspective, the root cause of many such disorders is attributed to *Prajnaparadha* (intellectual error), which is defined as the failure of an individual to act in accordance with knowledge of what is beneficial for health. **Aim:** To critically analyse the concept of *Prajnaparadha* and its significance in the etiopathogenesis of lifestyle disorders from an Ayurvedic viewpoint. **Materials and Methods:** This is a conceptual review based on an in-depth study of classical Ayurvedic texts supported by relevant contemporary literature. The concept of *Prajnaparadha* was examined, and its correlation with present-day lifestyle patterns was explored. **Results:** Unhealthy dietary habits, physical inactivity, disturbed sleep and mental stress observed in contemporary life can be interpreted as outcomes of *Prajnaparadha*. These factors contribute to *Dosha* imbalance, *Agnimandya* (impaired digestive fire) and *Ama* formation, which play a crucial role in the development of lifestyle disorders. Preventive measures described in Ayurveda, including *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya* and *Pathya-Apathya*, promote the maintenance of health. Therapeutic interventions such as *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana* and *Yoga* aid in restoring systemic balance and enhancing overall quality of life. **Conclusion:** *Prajnaparadha* serves as a fundamental concept in understanding the behavioural and cognitive origins of lifestyle disorders. Adoption of Ayurvedic principles focusing on disciplined living, mindful practices and appropriate therapeutic interventions can effectively contribute to the prevention and management of these conditions, supporting a holistic approach to health and well-being.

KEYWORDS: Life-Style Disorders, *Prajnaparadha*, *Dhee-Dhruti-Smriti Bhramsha*, Non-communicable diseases, Cognitive Errors.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Non-Communicable diseases (NCDs) represent a major global health challenge, contributing significantly to morbidity and mortality worldwide. Lifestyle related conditions such as Cardio-vascular diseases, Diabetes mellitus, Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome and Stress related illnesses have seen a notable rise over recent decades, primarily due to rapid urbanization, unhealthy dietary habits, physical inactivity and chronic psychosocial stress. Despite advancements in pharmacological and interventional treatments, the increasing prevalence of these conditions highlights the limitations of conventional biomedical approaches, which mainly focus on pathophysiological mechanisms while often under-representing behavioural and cognitive factors in disease development.

Ayurveda presents a holistic framework for understanding health and disease by integrating physical, mental and behavioural dimensions. Within this framework, “*Prajnaparadha*” is recognized as a primary cause of disease, classified among the *Trividha Hetu* (the 3 fundamental causes of disease), along with *Kala Parinama* (the influence of Seasons and Time) and *Asatmendriyarth Samyoga* (Inappropriate sensory interactions). *Prajnaparadha* is defined as the impairment of *Dhee* (Intellect), *Dhruti* (Restraint) and *Smriti* (Memory), leading to actions that harm health. Ayurveda highlights the considerable role of *Prajnaparadha* in the causation of diseases, underscoring its central role in disrupting physiological balance. Contemporary health behaviours, such as the consumption of processed foods, sedentary lifestyles, irregular sleep patterns, suppression of natural urges and Chronic stress exposure can be viewed as manifestations of such intellectual errors, often continuing despite awareness of their negative effects.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PRAJNAPARADHA IN AYURVEDA:

2.1 Definition an Etymological Analysis of Dhee, Dhruti and Smriti

In Ayurveda, the Mind and its thoughts are very important for keeping a person healthy. The term *Prajnaparadha* comes from two words: ‘*Prajna*’ – which means Wisdom or Intelligence and ‘*Aparadha*’ – meaning Wrongdoing or Mistake. *Prajnaparadha* refers to the disruption of three key mental abilities – *Dhee*, *Dhruti*, and *Smriti*.

“धीधृतिस्मृतिविभ्रष्टः कर्म यत्कुरुते अशुभम्।
प्रज्ञापराधं तं विद्यात् सर्वदोषप्रकोपणम्॥” (Cha. Sha. 1/102)

Dhee is the power to understand things clearly to know what is good (*Pathya*) and what is bad (*Apathya*). When *Dhee* is not working properly, someone can’t make good decisions, which leads them to take actions that harm their body and mind. This kind of thinking is the beginning of Lifestyle problems because the person doesn’t see the long-term effects of their short-term wants.

“विषमाभिनिवेशो यो नित्यानित्ये हिताहिते ज्ञेयः स बुद्धिविभ्रंशः समं बुद्धिर्हि पश्यति॥९९॥” (Cha. Sha. 1/99)

Dhruti is the second ability, which means the strength to hold back from harmful things. Even if someone’s mind knows something is bad, its *Dhruti* that helps them resist the urge to do it. In today’s world, a lack of *Dhruti* is seen in things like not being able to stop eating too much, not quitting smoking or not exercising even if they know it’s good for them.

“विषयप्रवणं सत्त्वं धृतिभ्रंशान्न शक्यते। नियन्तुमहितादर्थाद्दृतिर्हि नियमात्मिका॥१००॥”
(Cha. Sha. 1/100)

Smriti is the third part and its about remembering past experiences and learning from them. Someone with strong *Smriti* will remember how bad certain actions felt and use that knowledge to make better choices in the future. When these three abilities are broken, the person commits *Prajnaparadha*, which is the main cause of the body's imbalance and illness.

“तत्त्वज्ञाने स्मृतिर्यस्य रजोमोहावृतात्मनः| भ्रश्यते स स्मृतिभ्रंशः स्मर्तव्यं हि स्मृतौ स्थितम्॥१०१॥” (Cha. Sha. 1/101)

When *Dhee*, *Dhruti* and *Smriti* are all strong, a person naturally follows healthy habits and avoids harmful ones. However, today's environment is full of distractions and quick rewards that make it hard to control the mind and remember good practices. The fast pace of life also makes it easier to forget traditional health advice. So, the idea of *Prajnaparadha* explains why people sometimes do things that hurt themselves, making it an important concept for understanding modern behaviour.

2.2 The Role of Volitional Transgression as the Root Cause of Disease

Ayurveda delineates three principal etiological factors underlying disease manifestation, collectively termed *Trividha Hetu*: *Asatmyendriyarth Samyoga* (improper contact of the senses with their objects), *Parinama* (the effects of time and seasonal variations) and *Prajnaparadha* (error of intellect).

“असात्त्येन्द्रियार्थसंयोगः, प्रज्ञापराधः, परिणामश्चेति त्रयस्त्रिविधविकल्पा हेतवो विकाराणां, समयोगयुक्तास्तु प्रकृतिहेतवो भवन्ति ॥” (Cha. Su. 11/43)

Among these, *Prajnaparadha* is accorded primary importance, as it governs an individual's response to the other two factors. It represents a state in which a person consciously acts in contradiction to their own knowledge and wisdom, thereby disturbing both *Shareerika* (physical) and *Manasika* (mental) *Doshas*. Unlike passive or incidental causes, *Prajnaparadha* reflects an active, volitional deviation from healthy conduct. Volitional transgression means a deliberate or intentional violation of a known rule, principle or healthy behaviour. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary lifestyle behaviours. Persistent engagement in unhealthy dietary practices, inadequate sleep and physical inactivity—despite awareness of their adverse consequences—exemplifies *Prajnaparadha* in action. Such patterns provide a compelling explanation for the characterization of lifestyle disorders as “diseases of choice” in modern medical discourse. The centrality of *Prajnaparadha* becomes even more evident in the pathogenesis of *Santarpanjanya Vikaras* (diseases arising from overnutrition and sedentary habits). When individuals knowingly indulge in excessive food intake and reduced physical activity, these choices impair *Agni* (digestive fire), leading to *Agnimandya* and subsequent formation of *Ama* (metabolic toxins). The accumulation and systemic dissemination of *Ama* contribute to disease conditions such as *Amavata* and Metabolic Syndrome. Non-compliance with *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) further reflects this intellectual error and predisposes individuals to chronic disease states.

Furthermore, *Prajnaparadha* may act as a precipitating factor for the other two etiological components. For instance, individuals may knowingly expose themselves to adverse environmental conditions (*Parinama*) or engage in excessive use of digital devices (*Asatmyendriyarth Samyoga*) due to impaired *Dhriti* (self-restraint). This interplay underscores the pivotal role of cognitive and behavioural regulation in maintaining health. From this perspective, modern conditions such as Hypertension and Diabetes mellitus are not merely isolated biological phenomena but represent the cumulative outcome of repeated maladaptive choices. By identifying *Prajnaparadha* as a fundamental cause of disease, Ayurveda shifts the therapeutic focus from symptomatic management to the correction of underlying behavioural and cognitive patterns. This approach offers a more sustainable and holistic pathway for the prevention and management of lifestyle disorders.

2.3 Classification of Prajnaparadha in Shareerika and Manasika Contexts

Prajnaparadha (Volitional transgression) represents a fundamental etiological concept in Ayurveda, operating across both physical (*Shareera*) and psychological (*Manasa*) domains. In the *Shareera* context, it involves improper use of the body through unhealthy dietary and lifestyle practices. This includes the consumption of *Apathya Ahara*—such as excessively oily, spicy, processed and incompatible foods—and neglect of *Pathya Ahara*. It also encompasses behaviours like *Vegadharana* (suppression of natural urges), including delaying urination, defaecation or sleep due to occupational or social pressures. These actions disturb the equilibrium of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, resulting in structural and functional derangements that predispose individuals to disease.

In the *Manasika* dimension, *Prajnaparadha* reflects disturbances in mental and emotional regulation, primarily involving the aggravation of *Rajas* and *Tamas*. It manifests as indulgence in negative emotions such as *Krodha* (Anger), *Lobha* (Greed), *Moha* (Delusion) and *Irshya* (Envy), often due to impaired *Dhruti* (self-restraint). These mental disturbances are not confined to the psyche; they exert systemic effects through neuroendocrine pathways, contributing to increased cortisol levels, sympathetic overactivity and heightened risk of Hypertension and Cardiovascular disorders.

The concept further extends to *Gramya Ahara-Vihara*, describing sedentary, urban lifestyles characterised by reduced physical activity and unhealthy environmental exposures. Daily choices—such as avoiding physical exertion, excessive screen use and preference for convenience over health—represent combined forms of *Shareera* and *Manasika Prajnaparadha*. Over time, such behaviours lead to depletion of *Ojas*, diminished immunity and increased susceptibility to chronic diseases. This dual classification provides a comprehensive framework for identifying behavioural lapses and designing targeted preventive and therapeutic interventions.

3. ETIOPATHOGENESIS OF MODERN LIFESTYLE DISORDERS:

3.1 Impact of Sedentary Habits and Disrupted Biological Clocks

The rising burden of Lifestyle disorders is closely linked to sedentary behaviour and disruption of biological rhythms. Reduced physical activity leads to *Agnimandya* (impaired digestive and metabolic function), resulting in incomplete transformation of nutrients and accumulation of *Ama* (metabolic toxins) and *Medas* (adipose tissue). This forms the pathological basis for Obesity, dyslipidemia and Type 2 Diabetes. Additionally, physical inactivity impairs the circulation of *Prana* and disrupts the integrity of *Srotas* (body channels), promoting stagnation and disease progression.

Circadian rhythm disruption, a hallmark of modern living, further aggravates disease risk. Irregular sleep patterns, night shifts and prolonged digital exposure lead to practices such as *Ratri Jagarana* (night awakening) and *Diva Swapna* (daytime sleep), which vitiate *Vata* and *Pitta*. These disturbances contribute to hormonal imbalance, impaired glucose metabolism and increased Cardiovascular risk. Ayurveda emphasises alignment with natural cycles through *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), which supports physiological homeostasis and prevents disease.

The combination of sedentary habits and circadian misalignment aligns with the Ayurvedic concept of *Santarpanajanya Vikaras* (diseases due to over-nourishment). Restoration of balance through early rising, regular exercise (*Vyayama*) and structured routines is essential for prevention and management.

3.2 Nutritional Imbalances and the Concept of Unwholesome Dietary Intake

Dietary imbalance is a central driver of modern non-communicable diseases. The widespread consumption of *Apathya Ahara*—processed, calorie-dense and nutrient-poor foods—reflects *Prajnaparadha*,

where sensory gratification overrides rational judgment. Ayurveda emphasises not only the quality, but also the timing and method of food intake. Practices such as *Adhyashana* (overeating), *Vishamashana* (irregular eating) and *Samashana* (incompatible food combinations) impair *Agni* (digestive fire), leading to Metabolic dysfunction. When *Agni* is compromised, even wholesome food becomes pathogenic, contributing to disorders such as *Amavata* and Atherosclerosis.

The concept of *Gramya Ahara* parallels modern dietary patterns rich in salt, preservatives and fermented foods, which are strongly associated with Hypertension and Cardiovascular diseases. Ayurveda advocates *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*, which includes consuming fresh, warm meals in a calm and mindful manner. Re-establishing these dietary principles is essential for restoring metabolic balance and preventing disease progression.

3.3 Psychological Stress and Behavioural Orientations in Contemporary Society

Psychological stress is a pervasive contributor to lifestyle disorders. Ayurveda recognizes the inseparable connection between *Manas* (mind) and *Shareera* (body), wherein mental disturbances directly influence physiological processes. Modern societal pressures characterized by competition, rapid pace and material pursuits foster *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* mental states, resulting in chronic stress, anxiety and depression—hallmarks of *Manasa Prajnaparadha*. These disturbances primarily aggravate *Vata*, disrupting neurological and endocrine functions. Chronic stress leads to depletion of *Ojas*, the essence responsible for vitality and immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*), thereby increasing susceptibility to conditions such as Hypertension, Metabolic syndrome and Autoimmune disorders.

Ayurveda addresses these challenges by promoting *Satva* (mental balance) through practices such as *Sadvritta* (ethical living), *Achara Rasayana* (behavioural rejuvenation), meditation and *Pranayama*. These interventions strengthen *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*, enhancing emotional regulation and resilience. Addressing psychological health is therefore essential for effective prevention and management of lifestyle disorders.

4. PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES:

4.1 Implementation of Dinacharya and Ritucharya in Disease Prevention

Dinacharya (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) constitute the cornerstone of Ayurvedic preventive medicine. *Dinacharya* promotes alignment with circadian rhythms through structured daily practices, including early rising, personal hygiene, regular exercise and timely meals. Such routines minimise *Prajnaparadha* and maintain *doshic* balance, thereby preventing disease onset.

Ritucharya emphasizes adaptation to seasonal variations to prevent *doshic* imbalance. Failure to modify diet and lifestyle according to seasonal changes is a form of *Prajnaparadha* that contributes to disease development. Modern lifestyles, characterized by artificial environments and uniform habits, often neglect this principle, leading to increased vulnerability to chronic conditions.

Even partial adoption of these regimens—such as maintaining regular meal times, engaging in moderate exercise and practicing mindfulness—can significantly improve metabolic and psychological health. These practices enhance self-regulation and strengthen the body's adaptive capacity.

4.2 Therapeutic Potential of Panchakarma, Rasayana and Ashtanga Yoga

In cases where lifestyle disorders are already established, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive therapeutic approach through *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana* and *Ashtanga Yoga*.

Panchakarma serves as a detoxification and purification therapy aimed at eliminating accumulated *Ama* and excess *Doshas*. It restores metabolic balance, improves tissue function, and enhances the body's

responsiveness. It is particularly beneficial in conditions such as Obesity, Dyslipidemia and Metabolic syndrome.

Rasayana therapy focuses on rejuvenation, enhancing tissue quality, immunity and longevity. It includes both pharmacological and behavioural interventions (*Achara Rasayana*), addressing the psychological dimensions of *Prajnaparadha*. By strengthening mental faculties, *Rasayana* supports sustainable lifestyle modifications. *Rasayana* justifies its role in *Prajnaparadha* by enhancing *Dhee*, *Dhruti* and *Smriti*, which correct impaired judgement and prevent the initiation of harmful actions responsible for disease.

Ashtanga Yoga provides a structured framework for physical and mental discipline. Practices such as *Asana* and *Pranayama* improve physical health and stress regulation, while *Dhyana* enhances cognitive clarity and emotional stability. Together, these interventions address both the root cause and manifestations of lifestyle disorders.

5. CONCLUSION:

Prajnaparadha offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the aetiology of modern lifestyle disorders by emphasizing the role of impaired cognition and behaviour. The dysfunction of *Dhee*, *Dhruti* and *Smriti* underlie unhealthy lifestyle choices related to diet, physical activity and stress management. The strong alignment between *Prajnaparadha* and modern behavioural risk factors underscores its contemporary relevance. Ayurvedic strategies—including *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana* and Yoga—provide effective preventive and therapeutic approaches by restoring balance at both physical and psychological levels.

5.1 Cultivating Prajna for Holistic Health

The cultivation of *Prajna*—the integrated functioning of *Dhee* (intellect), *Dhruti* (restraint) and *Smriti* (memory)—is central to the Ayurvedic paradigm of disease prevention and health promotion. A well-nurtured *Prajna* enables individuals to align their cognitive and behavioural responses with the principles of health and harmony described in Ayurveda.

- ❖ **True Understanding:** *Prajna* facilitates accurate perception and discernment of reality. When *Dhee*, *Dhruti* and *Smriti* function in a coordinated manner, individuals develop the capacity to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome actions, thereby supporting rational decision-making and balanced living.
- ❖ **Wise Conduct:** Properly guided *Prajna* translates knowledge into action. It directs individuals toward disciplined, ethical and health-promoting behaviours, ensuring equilibrium at both physical and psychological levels. Such conduct sustains long-term well-being and resilience.
- ❖ **Ignorance and Disease:** Conversely, when *Rajas* and *Tamas* obscure cognitive clarity, the integrity of *Prajna* is compromised. This leads to *Prajnaparadha* (intellectual and behavioural transgression), which manifests as maladaptive choices and ultimately contributes to the development of various disorders.
- ❖ **Prevention:** Preventive health is rooted in maintaining the integrity of *Prajna*. Regulation of the senses, preservation of memory and adherence to ethical conduct (*Sadvritta*) are essential strategies for minimizing *Prajnaparadha* and sustaining health.
- ❖ **Root Cause:** *Prajnaparadha* is regarded as a fundamental etiological factor (*Moola Karana*) in disease manifestation. It underlies many pathological processes by disrupting the balance between cognition, behaviour and physiology.

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