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Management of Skin Disorders in Ayurveda : A Review

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ABSTRACT:

Skin is the largest organ of human body. Its size and external location makes it susceptible to various disorders. Skin diseases are mostly caused by infections like bacteria, fungi etc. All the skin diseases in Ayurveda have been classified under the broad heading of *Kushta* which are further classified into *Mahakushta* and *Kshudrakushta*. Ayurveda has its own unique principles of diagnosis and treatment of various skin diseases under the heading of *Kuṣṭha*. A review was conducted from the relevant texts of Ayurvedic and contemporary science to collect information about the skin diseases and their treatment through Ayurveda. The review concluded that Ayurveda management through *Shodhana* and *Shamana Chikitsa* (with Ayurvedic herbs) is beneficial in skin diseases.

Keywords; *Kshudrakushta*, *Kuṣṭha*, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION

Human skin, the outer covering of the body, is the largest organ in the body. It also constitutes the first line of defence. Skin contains many specialized cells and structures. It is divided into three main layers viz. epidermis, dermis and hypodermis. Each layer provides a distinct role in the overall function of the skin. Epidermis, the outer most layer of the skin, varies in thickness in different regions of the body. It is the thinnest on the eyelids (0.05 mm) and the thickest on the palms and soles (1.5 mm)¹ The dermis also varies in thickness depending on the location of the skin. It is 0.3 mm on the eyelid and 3.0 mm on the back of the body. The dermis is attached to an underlying hypodermis or subcutaneous connective tissue. The subcutaneous tissue is a layer of fat and

connective tissue that houses larger blood vessels and nerves. Skin has a key role in protecting (the body) against pathogens² and excessive water loss.³ Its physiological actions further include insulation, temperature regulation, sensation, storage and synthesis of vitamin D by action of ultraviolet (UV) and the protection of vitamin B folates, absorption of oxygen and drugs⁴ and water resistance.⁵ Severely damaged skin tries to heal through scar tissue which is often discoloured and depigmented.

According to Ayurveda, the skin is one of the essential sense organs which has different layers serving seats for different skin disorders worldwide near about 20% of the total number of patients seeking medical advice suffer from skin diseases including cosmetic problems⁶. It is estimated that around 5 to 10% of consultations in general practice



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involve a skin problem.⁷ Skin disease is a common disease and it affects all ages from the paediatric to the elderly and causes harm in a number of ways. Beside this, people suffering from skin disease also suffer from social stigma. Skin (*Twaka*) has been given a great importance since time immemorial owing to the aesthetic value attributed to skin, complexion and beauty by the society. Ayurveda has given prime importance to *Ahara* (diet) and *vihara* (lifestyle) in the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. In the recent past, the relation between diet and skin ailments has been well established in contemporary medicine. Skin disorders having complex pathophysiology have lengthy process of treatment. Present review aims at analysing different treatment modalities present in Ayurveda for varied skin disorders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Various Ayurvedic classic texts have been used for this study as source materials. Main Ayurvedic classic texts used are *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya*, *Astanga Samgrah*, *Sarngadhara Samhita*, *Bhava prakasha*, *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* and various other Ayurvedic literature. Also, relevant modern medical science book, various review and research articles, Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India and website have also been referred.

RESULTS

Skin diseases in Ayurvedic perspective:

Skin diseases if seen in Ayurvedic perspective, it is necessary to analyse the individual's prakriti and their skin condition/s. The doctor diagnoses the *doshika* composition of the individual, their diet and lifestyle, their pulse and their skin health. The main aim of Ayurvedic treatment is to restore *doshika* balance. Treatment methods involve a healthy diet and lifestyle with proper balance of food, exercise, herbs, meditation, and daily routines. The best treatment to manage accumulation of toxins in the body is *Shodhana/Panchakarma*). As a complete program of cleansing and detoxifying, *Panchakarma/Shodhana* flushes all toxins from the body at the cellular level. When the body is clear of toxins, it gains *sama dosha*, *sama agni* and *sama dhatu* including healthy skin, resulting its function to be conducted normally again. Repeated *Shodhana karma* has been advised to the patients of skin diseases at repeated intervals.

Various herbs for Skin diseases in Ayurveda:

Azadirachata indica

It is commonly called as Neem and every part of the plant is used as herb. Neem oil contains margosic acid, glycerides of fatty acid, butyric acid and trace of valeric acid. Active ingredients of the drug include Nimbidin, Nimbidal, Azadirachtin, Meliantriol, Nimbin, Azadirine, gedunin, Salanin which has diverse medicinal activities. Alcoholic extract of neem is useful in eczema, ringworm and scabies. Seeds of neem (powdered kernel) have been reported to be useful in preventing hair loss and treatment of dandruff in canines and felines. Neem oil (Oil of magosa) from kernel boiled with nuxvomica seeds are useful in eczema. Oil from kernels of neem fruit and leaves are a local stimulant, insecticide and antiseptic. Neem oil is used as a dressing for foul ulcers, eczema and skin diseases. Dry seeds are used for killing pediculi and powdered kernel for washing of hair. Leaves heated over boiling water to form a paste and mixed with honey can be applied to pustules boils, ulcers and skin diseases. Toddy or auto-oozing sap is valuable in skin diseases. According to Chakradatta a preparation called Pancha tikta ghrita, made from boiling 80 tolas each of neem bark, leaves of *Momordica dioica*, *Solanum jacquini*, *Gulanca* and bark of *Adhatoda vasika*, in 64 seers of water, till it is reduced to quarter and then adding butter and one seer of three myrobalans, is recommended as one tea spoonful with little hot milk internally twice daily in Chronic skin diseases.

Piper nigrum

In English it is commonly known as Black pepper, *Kalimirch* in Hindi and *Kurumulaku* in vernacular. *Piper nigrum* is bitter, hot, light, alterative, carminative, anthelmintic and an appetizer. Fruits and roots are used as medicine. It contains a volatile alkaloid Piperine and mesocarp contains chavicin. Externally it is applied to the boils in form of paste, alopecia and other skin diseases. Strong friction with pepper and onion makes hair growth on bald patches left by ring worm. With sesame oil this powdered black pepper mixed and heated can be applied upon the affected part of paralysis.

Abrus precatorius

In English it is called Jequirity and called *Ratti* in Hindi. The part used are roots, seeds and leaves. Seeds contain a poisonous protein, a fat splitting enzyme and an albuminous substance abrin. Paste of seed are used against skin diseases and externally has fungistatic activities against *Cryptococcus neoformis*. Roots contain glycyrrhizin and leaves are considered useful in

biliousness and in leucoderma, itching and other skin ailments. Leaves warmed with mustard oil gives relief to the painful areas. Juice rubbed with plumbago roots (*chitraka*) to the leucoderma spots remove them to a large extent within a month. It is also applied to the bare skin in alopecia, stiffness of shoulder joint and paralysis.

Curcuma longa

In English it is commonly known as Turmeric. The part used are rhizomes. It contains turmeric oil or turmerol, curcumin (diferuloyl methane) and 1, 7-bis, 6-heptadiene-3, 5-dione from rhizome. It is aromatic, stimulant, tonic and carminative. Internally the extract is anti-helmenthic. Juice of the fresh rhizome is applied to recent wounds, bruises and leech bites. A paste of turmeric and leaves of *Justica adhatoda* with cowurine is rubbed on the skin affected with prurigo and eczema. When mixed with ginger oil and applied to the skin it prevents skin eruptions. A paste of turmeric in combination to the paste of neem leaves is used in ringworm infection, itching, eczema and other parasitic diseases of the skin. In chronic eczema and itches ointment made of turmeric, hemp leaves, onion and warm mustard oil gives immediate and immense relief. In chronic skin ailment turmeric 64 tolas, clarified butter 48 tolas, milk 16 seers, sugar 12 tolas are boiled and black pepper, ginger, cinnamon are mixed to it. The dose includes one tola every morning in prurigo, boils, urticaria and chronic skin eruptions.

Calotropis gigantea

Commonly called as Ak or Madar in Hindi. The part used are root, root bark, leaves, inspissated juice and flowers. The active ingredient is yellow bitter resins, β -sitosterol, triterpenoids, Amyrin, stigmasterol and Calotropin. These are in higher quantity in older plant. It is used in boils, scabies, ringworm, carbuncle and rabies. Its flowers are digestive, tonic and have powerful action on the skin. An oily preparation (*Arka taila*) made by boiling together 8 parts Sesamum oil, 16 parts Calotropis juice and one part turmeric is useful in eczema and skin diseases. In scorpion and insect bites it relieves pain and burning. It is also useful in ringworm infection. Equal part of branches, leaves, milky juice and flower in form of pill, given every morning treats various kinds of skin diseases. A powder of dried leaves boiled with sweet oil and turmeric added can be applied to eczema and other skin ailments with high efficacy.

Picorrhiza kurroa

P. kurroa rhizomes are main ingredients of a bitter tonic used in fever and dyspepsia (indigestion). This drug occupies a prestigious position in Ayurveda. It often

substitutes for *Gentiana kurroo*, the Indian gentian. Study shows that *P. kurroa* works to boost the immune system as a supplement to other treatments in patients with vitiligo, a skin disease that causes discolored spots.

Sinapsis Juncea

Commonly called as mustard in English and Sarson in Hindi. Usable parts include seeds and oil. Seed contains sinigrin and an enzyme myrosin. Mustard bath is recommended in case of acne. They have a cleansing effect on the skin and make it soft, removes the grease and useful in general pustular condition. Mustard oil is used as a base for several other herbal preparations and in combination with several other medicinal plants is used in several skin ailments of various degrees. In Cholera, colic and spasms of bowels it is applied on abdomen and is applied on chest in *shwasa roga*.

Aloe vera

Aloe vera has shown very good results in skin diseases and it is often taken as health drink. It is also found effective in treating wrinkles, stretch marks and pigmentations. It also seems to be able to speed wound healing by improving blood circulation through the area and preventing cell death around a wound. One of the studies conducted on mice to investigate the effects of *Scutellariae radix* and Aloe vera gel (AV), in spontaneous atopic dermatitis (AD)-like skin lesions revealed that the group receiving only AV in a dose of 0.8 mg/kg p.o provided relief in AD due to reduction of interleukin (IL)-5 and IL-10 levels⁸.

Saraca asoca

Paste of the roots is useful in freckles and external inflammations, ulcers and skin diseases. It is used for itching in eczema, psoriasis, dermatitis and herpes (*visarpa*) by rubbing the crushed flower on the skin. It is a favourite herb to relieve pruritis, scabies and tinea pedis. 50 g of the dried flowers of *S. asoca* and the leaves of *L. inermis* when boiled in coconut oil and the extract is externally applied twice a day to treat eczema and scabies. Furthermore, the latency period for the appearance of the first tumour was delayed by *S. asoca* pre-treatment. A significant reduction in the expression of ornithine decarboxylase, a key enzyme in the promotion stage of 2-stage skin cancer, in the plant-treated group was also observed suggesting the chemopreventive activity of flavonoids from *S. asoca* on 2-stage skin carcinogenesis⁹

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Patients with *Kushta* (dermatological disorders) approach

various health care systems with a hope to get a cure. Diseases of the skin pose a great deal of miseries and suffering on the mental state of the patient. Herbs have great potential to cure different kinds of skin diseases. The ancient Ayurvedic text has emphasized on *Shodhana* therapy for the skillful management of *Kushta*. *Kushta* is difficult to cure, but by the application of *Shodhana* therapy, cure of the diseases becomes easier due to removal of the root cause, hence *Shodhana* has great importance in *Bahudosha avastha* (multifactorial condition). According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Vamana* (medicated emesis) should be administered once every fortnight; *Virechana* (medicated purgation) once in a month; *Raktamokshna* (blood-letting) should done twice in a year and *Nasya* (Nasal installation) once in three days in a chronic case of *Kushta* considering the involvement and strength of *dosha-dushya avastha* (pathogenesis). According to *Acharya Charaka*, the patients suffering from *Kushta* dominated by *Vata* should first be administered *Ghruta* internally. The patient suffering from *Kushta* dominated by *Kapha* should first be administered *Vamana*. The patient suffering from *Kushta* dominated by *Pitta* should first be administered *Virechana* therapy. Drugs of *Tikta Rasa* (bitter taste herbs) are found very useful in the management of skin diseases. A lot of scientific research has been carried out on different herbs with regards to their medicinal properties in relation to *kushtha*. The result obtained reveals that single herbs have a potent role in the management of *kushtha* (both with and without *shodhana*). Therefore these herbs can be used with appropriate skill in the management of skin diseases.

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