

# VITILIGO: AN AYURVEDIC APPROACH

**\*Dr Rashi Dhasmana, \*\*Prof (Dr) Sanjay Kumar Singh**

*\*MD Scholar, \*\*Professor, Deptt. Of Rog Nidan Evum Vikriti Vigyan*

*Rishikul Campus, UAU, Haridwar*

## ABSTRACT

*Skin is the major sensory organ as it covers the whole body and is the first organ to interact with environmental stimuli. It reflects internal & external pathology of many diseases thus helping in their diagnosis. It is the best indicator of general health. Also, beauty and attraction depend upon skin health. In Ayurvedic classics, Switra, described under the heading Kushtha, is a disease caused due to vitiation of Tridosha and dhatus like Rakta, Mamsa and Medas. It can be correlated with Vitiligo in contemporary medicine. It is an autoimmune disease caused due to destruction of melanocytes and characterized by depigmentation appearing as chalk-white patches over skin. So, it is a cosmetic disfigurement which has a major impact on quality of life of patients affecting them not just physically but also psychologically. Its treatment in modern medicine has its own limitations and side effects. As per Ayurvedic classics, main line of treatment for Switra is Shodhana & Shamana (Antaparimarjana & Bahiparimarjana chikitsa). Present work is an attempt made to understand an Ayurvedic approach in the management of Switra or Vitiligo.*

**Keywords :** *Skin, Switra, Kushtha, Vitiligo, Depigmentation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Vitiligo is an acquired, progressive, chronic disfiguring disease of skin characterized by well circumscribed hypopigmented patches or chalk-white macules on the body. It has more of a cosmetic or social implications rather than medical. It may appear at any age and affects both sexes. Worldwide incidence of Vitiligo is observed in 1% of world population<sup>1</sup>. Based on dermatological out patient record, it is estimated between 3-4% in India and 0.1% to 1.3% in different parts of world. The exact pathogenesis of vitiligo is still to be elucidated. Multiple mechanisms, including metabolic abnormalities, oxidative stress, generation of inflammatory mediators, cell detachment and autoimmune responses, might contribute to the pathogenesis of this disease. In particular, the autoimmune mechanism (cellular and/or humoral) that results in destruction of melanocytes is now clearly established. Alternative hypothesis is self

destruction of melanocytes and circulating antibodies of cytotoxic T cells as a secondary phenomenon<sup>2</sup>.

People who develop vitiligo usually first notice white patches or spots on their skin. The skin remains of normal texture and there are usually no itching or other symptoms. The common distribution of these patches being periorificial areas like around mouth, nose, eyes, nipples, umbilicus, anus, etc; trunk; extensor surfaces of extremities; flexor wrists and axillae<sup>2</sup>.

In modern science, mainstream treatment of vitiligo is PUVA ( Psoralen + Ultraviolet A exposure) therapy and corticosteroids which have many harmful side effects like skin cancer, photo ageing, ultraviolet light burns, etc. Still, it remains a difficult skin disorder to treat.

Vitiligo can be equated with *Switra* as described in Ayurveda by different Acharya. In Ayurveda, all skin

diseases are included under the broad concept of *Kusta*. The description of *Switra* is available since Vedic Literature.

The terms used for it were *Sweta Kusta*, *Kilasa* and *Palita*. Acharya Charaka dealt with *Switra* after detailed description of *Kusta Chikitsa*. That might be because *Switra* differs from other types of *Kusta* by being less destructive to the tissues of the body and also by its non-exudative nature. Acharya Sushruta named the disease as *Kilasa* instead of *Switra*. He explained the difference between other *Kusta* and *Kilasa* as '*Twagatam eva aparisravi*'<sup>3</sup> which means *Kilasa* or *Switra* involves only skin and is '*Aparisravi*' i.e., non-exudative. According to Kashyapa Samhita, *Switra* is '*Sweta Bhava Micchanti Switram*'<sup>4</sup>, which means reflection of white colour.

The causative factors for *Kusta* and *Switra* are the same<sup>5</sup> and affect the same group of dhatus in body. According to involvement of different *Dhatus*, the specific colour is described to denote the disease's course. *Doshas* settled in *Rakta dhatu* produce lesions of *rakta varna*, in *Mamsa dhatu* produce *tamra varna* and in *Meda dhatu sweta varna* is produced<sup>7</sup>.

According to *Dosha* predominance, *Switra* is of three types:

1. *Vataja* : involves *Rakta dhatu* – *Rakta varna*
2. *Pittaja* : involves *Mamsa dhatu* – *Tamra varna*
3. *Shleshmaja* : involves *Meda dhatu* – *Sweta varna*<sup>8</sup>

Other than this, Acharya Bhoja classified *Switra* into 2 types : *Doshaja* and *Vranaja*<sup>9</sup>

Based on the clinical features, the condition where the lesions appear with normal black hair, thin, newly

Ayurvedic management of *Switra* includes both, *Shodhana* therapy i.e., purification procedures and *Shamana* therapy which again includes *Bahiparimarjan* (external use of medicines)

Ayurvedic texts explain different etiological factors or *Nidana* as the direct or indirect reasons of *Switra* such as *Viruddhahara* (incompatible food), *Chardivegadharana* (suppression of urge of vomiting), *Atibhojana* (excess food intake), *Ati amla-lavana ras sevana* (excess intake of sour and salty food), *Navanna*, *Dadhi*, *Matsyabhakshana* (intake of fresh grains, curd and fish), *vipra-guru gharshana* (teasing and disrespecting the elders), *Papakarma* (sinful acts), etc<sup>6</sup>.

Due to one or more than one reasons said above, three *doshas* – *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* are aggravated in association with *Twak* (skin), *Rakta* (blood), *Mamsa* (muscles) and *Ambu* (watery element). These altogether involved invariably in different grades and hence different types of *Kusta* or skin diseases including *Switra* are manifested.

originated, caused due to other than burn reasons are curable. On the other hand, the lesions which are numerous affecting a large area and chronic in nature, appearing in palm, sole, genitalia and lips are considered as incurable as per Ayurvedic classics<sup>10</sup>.

### Treatment

Looking towards the intensity of disease, Acharya Vagbhata stated that the treatment of *Switra* should be started as quickly as possible. He quotes that the fire should be controlled within time before it engulfs the burning forest.

Ayurvedic treatment for vitiligo is sought after by many because it remains a difficult skin disorder to treat. Traditional medicines may be alternative of unsatisfactory and harmful modern medical science approaches and may provide some safe, less complicating, cost effective and fruitful natural remedies for the disease.

& *Antaparimarjan* (internal use of medicines) *chikitsa*.

Acharya Charaka explained treatment of *Switra* after detailed description of *Kusta Chikitsa*. The important steps of *Switra chikitsa* are as follows :

- **Shodhana Karma** : Purification therapy using a herbal decoction of *Ficus racemosa* (*malapu*) mixed with jaggery. This medicine is expected to induce purgation.
- **Suryapadasantapam** : Exposure of lesions to sunlight as long as the patient can tolerate, for 3 days. If the patient feels thirsty, he/she is given *peya* (gruel) to drink.
- **Sphota utpatti** : If *sphota* or bullae arise after sun exposure, they must be punctured using a sterile needle (*kantakena tanbhindyata*).
- Then, every morning for next 15 days, patient is given a decoction made up of *Malapu*, *Asana*, *Priyangu* and *Shatpushpa* or is given *Palasha ksara* along with *Phanita* (alcoholic preparation of jaggery)<sup>11</sup>.

Following these steps of initial therapy, the Classical Ayurvedic texts recommend any of the following medicines alone or in combination to treat *Switra* :-

#### Topical applications (*Lepa*)

*Manasiladi lepa*, *Bakuchyadi lepa*, *Savarnakar lepa*, *Switranashaka lepa*, *Karviradi lepa*, *Marichadi lepa*, *Bhallatakadi lepa*, *Avalgujadi lepa*, etc.<sup>12</sup>

#### Powders (*Churna*)

*Panchnimba churna*, *Bakuchyadi churna*, *Narsimha churna*, *Manjisthadi churna*, *Khadirsaradi churna*, *Kakodumbarikadi yoga*, *Mustadi churna*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Herbalized Ghee preparations (*Ghrta*)

*Jatyadi ghrta*, *Mahaneela ghrta*, *Mahatiktaka ghrta*, *Tiktashatpalaka ghrta*, *Mahakhadira ghrta*, *Somraji ghrta*, *Neelaka ghrta*, *Neelinyadi ghrta*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Semisolid preparations taken orally (*Avaleha*)

*Bhallatakavleha*, *Shashanklekhadi leha*, *Dhatryavleha*, *Udumbaravleha*, *Vidangadi loha*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Medicated Oils (*Taila*)

*Panchanana taila*, *Vibhitaka taila*, *Aragvadhadya taila*, *Marichadya taila*, *Jyotishmati taila*, *Chitrakadya taila*, *Kusta Raksasa taila*, *Manasiladya taila*, *Kusta kalanala taila*, *Mahavajraka taila*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Fermented preparations (*Asava-Arishta*)

*Kanakabindvarishta*, *Madhwasava*, *Khadirarishta*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Decoctions (*Kwatha*)

*Manjisthadi kwatha*, *Bibhitakadi kwath*, *Patoladi kwath*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Tablets (*Vati*)

*Arogyavardhini vati*, *Shashilekha vati*, *Kaishor guggulu*, *Saptasama gutika*, *Swayambhu guggulu*, *Triphala gutika*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Minerals and Metallic preparations (*Rasa*)

*Switrari rasa*, *Rasmanikya*, *Swetari rasa*, *Swarna maksika bhasma*, *Kasisabadha rasa*, *Gandhaka rasayana*, *Talakeswar rasa*, *Vijayeswara rasa*.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the above mentioned treatment options, classical books list many more combined formulations for *Switra* that do not have any specific names. These may be topical or oral medications. For example, for local application, paste made up of seeds of *Mulaka*&*Bakuchi* mixed with *Gomutra*; *Kathgular*, *Bakuchi bija*, *Chitraka* mixed with *Gomutra*; *Karanja*, *Arka*, *Sehund*, *Deodar*, *Aragvadh* and leaves of *Chameli* mixed with *Gomutra*; *Bakuchi bija*, *Laksha*, *Gorochana*, *Rasanjana*, *Souviranjana*, *Pippali*&*Kalaloha*<sup>13</sup>.

**Wholesome diet and habits**

*Vrata* (fasting), *Pooja* (worship), *Patha*(enchanting the sacred hymns), *Dana* (donation or charity), *Puranashali* (old rice), *Godhuma* (wheat), *Mudga* (green gram), *Laghu ahara* (light food), *Patola* (bittergourd), *Khadirodaka* (hot infusion of *Khadira*),etc.<sup>14</sup>

**Unwholesome Food and Habits**

*Viruddhahara* (incompatible food), *Guru ahara* (heavy food), *Vidahi ahara* (spicy, pungent food), *Vishtambhiahara* (constipatives), *Anupa mamsa* (meat of aquatic animals), *Masha* (black gram), *Amla-Lavana-Katu rasa* (sour, salty, pungent food), *Kritaghnata* (being thankless), *Deva-Guru ninda* (speaking ill of teachers and deities), etc<sup>15</sup>.

**CONCLUSION**

Ayurveda has different approach to the understanding and treatment of Vitiligo which requires extensive research. Although medicines and holistic approach may contribute significant benefits to patients of vitiligo, scientific rationale behind use of these medications need to be further explored with modern methods and research.

**REFERENCES**

1. John A.A. Hunter (ed.). Davidson's Principles and Practice of Medicine , Edition- 20<sup>th</sup>, Chapter- 27<sup>th</sup>, Churchill living stone, 2002.
2. Fauci-Braunwald-Kasper-Hauser-Longo-Jameson-Loscalzo, Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine, Edition-17<sup>th</sup>, Volume- 1<sup>st</sup> , Part 2, Section-9, Chapter- 52<sup>nd</sup>, Table no. 52-10, Page no. 326.
3. Sushruta Samhita Ayurveda Tatva Sandipika, Hindi Commentary- Kaviraj Dr Ambikadutt Shastri, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthana, Varanasi, Nidana Sthana, Chapter 5th, Shloka- 17h.
4. Tewari PV, Kashyapa Samhita, Chaukhamba Vishwabharati, Varanasi, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter-9<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 2,Page no. 198.
5. Madhav Nidana- Madhukosha Vidyotini Tika- Acharya Shri Yadunandanupadhyaya, Chaukhamba Publication, Varanasi, Uttarardha, Chapter- 49, Page no. 196.
6. Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 177, Page no. 275.
7. Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 174, Page no. 274.
8. Ashtanga Hridaya Nirmala Hindi Commentary, Dr Brahmananda Tripathi, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthana, Delhi, Nidana sthana, Chapter 14.
9. Madhav Nidana- Madhukosha Vidyotini Tika- Acharya Shri Yadunandanupadhyaya, Chaukhamba Publication, Varanasi, Uttarardha, Chapter- 49, Shloka- 37-39,Page no. 197.
10. Madhav Nidana- Madhukosha Vidyotini Tika- Acharya Shri Yadunandanupadhyaya, Chaukhamba Publication, Varanasi, Uttarardha, Chapter- 49,Shloka 40-41, Page no. 198.
11. Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 162-165, Page no. 272-273.
12. Narahari SR, Aggithaya MG, Suraj KR, A Protocol for Systematic Reviews of Ayurveda Treatments. Int J Ayurveda Res 2010; 1:254-67. [PUBMED].
13. Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 169-171, Page no. 273.
14. Ashtanga Hridaya Nirmala Hindi Commentary, Dr Brahmananda Tripathi, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthana, Delhi, Chikitsa sthana, Chapter 19<sup>th</sup>, Shloka-98<sup>th</sup> and Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 82-83, Page no. 262.
15. Charaka Samhita Hindi Vidyotini Tika- Shri Satyanarayana Shastri Padmabhusana, Chaukhamba Bharati Academy, Uttarardha, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter- 7<sup>th</sup>, Shloka- 83 &177, Page no. 262 &275.