



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON AYURVEDA, THE INDIAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE: RICH HERITAGE AND ITS SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the science of life.

Tasyaayushah punyatamo vedo vedvidam matah !! ch.su. 1/43

It is the oldest time-tested science, having principles and treatment guidelines which were way ahead of time. Ages before the origin of modern medicine (Allopathy), it has been an established and effective Healthcare as well as life-care system which had its roots in rich Indian culture and it incorporated all principles, rituals and beliefs of our country. Therefore, it is aptly known as Indian system of medicine. It is fascinating to know that the scientists of Ayurveda had laid down such treatment protocols, patient care methods and lifestyle guidelines which have stood by the test of time. It becomes commendable that they did not have help of present scientific gadgets and investigative procedures, still they have explained with such a precision. Ayurveda was on its Zenith and was the lifeline of Indian Healthcare system. Unfortunately, it has been overlooked and ignored by the Western approach of treatment in last few centuries due to complacent behaviour of Ayurvedic scholars and some other obvious reasons. Hereby, I am going to highlight some Ayurvedic principles and therapeutic approaches which were much ahead of time and are still relevant in present era, although few modifications may be done according to need of present time.

KEY WORDS: Ayurveda, Acharya Sushruta, Prakriti, Rakta.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda has always been a premium scientific field of rich Indian culture. The wholesome approach and the fundamental concepts of Ayurveda are a gift of our country to the ailing humanity globally. Thousands of years before the modern medicine came into existence, Ayurveda was an established and time-tested medical science. The fundamental principles and concepts of Ayurveda are epitome of scientific brilliance possessed by ancient scientists. A substantial amount of work was done in every branch of medicine and Ayurveda was further subdivided into various specialised branches like kaya chikitsa (medicine), shalakyata (Eye, ENT), shalya tantra (Surgery), agadtantra (toxicology), bhootvidya, balrog (paediatrics and gynaecology), rasayana (rejuvenators) and vajikarna (aphrodisiacs and sexual health)¹. Unlike today, they did not have the liberty of advanced investigative procedures and specialized instruments. Still their principles stand true after huge evolution in field of science. But unfortunately, our very own Indian system of medicine fell into oblivion for a long time due to multiple factors and ignorance by our own countrymen. Luckily in last few years, there has been some revival of therapeutic use of Ayurveda and western world has also recognised the potential of our system in solving the ever increasing health care challenges. This paper stresses upon the vast potential and some premium concepts of Ayurveda, which can certainly bring a boom to health-care of Indian population. Simultaneously it highlights the unbelievable scientific insight of ancient Ayurvedic scholars and their contribution in various fields of medicine.

RESEARCH METHODS

This is a review article, thus this section deals with different concepts, with importance and their scientific relevance in today's world.

THE CONCEPT OF HOLISTIC HEALTH

It was original contribution of Ayurveda and has been a gift of Ayurveda to the whole world. WHO also accepted this concept of Whole-some health later in 1948.

Samdoshah samagni samdhatu malkriya prassanatmendriya
manah swasth
iti abhidhiyate !! su.su.15/48

Ayurveda always believed that health can never be achieved completely with only physical well-being, health in real sense means normalcy of all physiological and Anatomical parameters of body along with healthy mind, intellect and all senses². So the concept of health is very much comprehensive and inclusive in Ayurveda. It truly means Holistic health. It is quoted that Health is supreme foundation of Virtue, Wealth, Enjoyment and Salvation³.

Dharmartha kaammokshanam aarogyam moolam uttamam !!
ch.su.1/15

PREVENTIVE APPROACH TO HEALTH

Preventive aspect of treatment and maintenance of health was and still is the first aim of Ayurveda⁴.

Prayojanam chasya swasthasya swasthyarakshanam aaturasya vikaar prashamanam cha!! Ch.su. 30/26

This concept of “Prevention is better than cure” is acknowledged by every pathy in our country at present times. We, the Ayurvedic clinicians believe that if health is maintained cautiously and care is taken with our daily routine, lifestyle and diet plans, the incidence of diseases can be brought down drastically. Ayurveda advocates the guidelines for daily routine known as “*Dincharya*” which is mentioned in all the major texts of Ayurveda. The guidelines and protocols for all seasons are also advocated which are mentioned as “*Ritucharya*”. Ayurveda has a beautiful concept of “*Sadvritta*” (guidelines to follow ethical practices). These all protocols and guidelines if followed properly, the occurrence of disease will automatically come down very fast.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH towards the patient care and empathetic behaviour is the strength of Ayurveda it aims at reaching the inner conscious of patient to cure the root cause of disease⁸.

Gyaanbuddhi pradeepen yo naavishti tatvavit.
Aaturasyaantraatmanaam na sa rogh chikitsati !! ch.vi. 4/11

Ayurveda also advises to be empathetic towards patient and to treat the patient as physician’s own son, because patient trusts the doctor more than his family members⁹.

Visrijayaatma naatmaanam na chenam parishankate.
Tasmaat putravadevenam paalyetaaturam bhishak!! Su.su.26/44

THE CONCEPT OF PRAKRITI

This concept states that every individual has different body forms and basic traits¹⁰. It has now been proven scientifically that Pitta Prakriti people have genetic coding that is different from vaat and kapha Prakriti people. Pitta prakriti persons have PGM1 gene which is unique to them¹¹. Nowadays, a separate branch of Ayurgenomics is operationalized to study the differences in different prakriti people.

CUSTOMISED APPROACH to treat each individual according to his body form, doshic predominance, Prakriti, season of year etc. is a unique concept of Ayurveda¹².

Yogamaasam tu yo vidyaat desh kaal uppaditam.
Purusham purusham vikshaya sa gyeyo bhishakuttamam!!
Ch.su.1/124

BIOLOGICAL CLOCK

Last year Nobel Prize for medicine and physiology was awarded for discovering the biological clock. Ironically Ayurveda has explained that body reacts differently at different periods of time during day and night¹³ and this was told thousands of years before this Discovery.

Tatra poorvahne vasantasya lingam, madhyahane
greeshamasya...
pratyushasi hemantuplakshyet!! Su.su.6/16

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERIES/ PLASTIC SURGERY AND SKIN GRAFTING

Acharya Sushruta has been designated as “Father of Surgery” and “first Plastic Surgeon”. He has explained the techniques of skin grafting and reconstructive surgery like external ear

reconstruction, nasal and labial reconstruction. Head transplantation surgery is also mentioned in Ayurveda. Even the vascular surgeries were also explained. The principles of skin grafting told by Sushruta are still relevant and acceptable in spite of so many advancements.

Ganddad utpatya maansen sanubandhen jeevta.
Karnapaalim paalestu kuryat nirlikhya shaastravit!! Su.su.16/16

It explains- cutting out a flap of living muscle from the cheek retaining its connection intact, turning it over to the side of lobe should be done by the physician learned in this science.¹⁴

EXPLANATION AND MANAGEMENT OF BONE AND JOINT INJURIES

It is extremely commendable that without any investigating procedures and radiographic advancements, Sushruta has explained 12 different types of fractures and six types of dislocations. He has advised the treatment procedures and principles which are still followed and relevant e.g:- traction reduction bandaging splint application etc¹⁵.

Aanchane peedane chaiv sankshepai bandhanaistatha.
Sandhim sharire sarvastu chalaanapi achalaanapi!! Su.chi.3/18

SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Acharya Sushruta and some other clinicians of Ayurveda have explained the techniques of various surgical procedures in that primitive Era, ranging from Vesicular calculus, Cataract surgery, Repair of Intestinal perforation, Intestinal obstruction, Tapping of fluid in Ascites and hydrocele, Caesarean Section, surgery for Haemorrhoids, Fistula and Perianal abscess etc. This becomes more commendable as the injectable anaesthetics, analgesics and antibiotics were not available at that time. Sushruta has also explained various techniques of bandaging¹⁶ and suturing and has explained 121(100+21) different surgical instruments¹⁷ (sharp as well as blunt).

REPLENISHMENT OF BLOOD VOLUME

Blood transfusion has been discovered in 1857 only but Ayurvedic texts have advocated the use of blood of various animals like deer, goat, buffalo etc. through oral or rectal route (enema of blood) to replenish the lost blood volume¹⁸. Importance of blood in maintaining life was well understood¹⁹.

Dehasya rudhiram moolam, rudhiranev dhaaryate.
Tasmaad yatnen samrakshyam raktam jeev iti sthiti !!
Su.su.14/44

The usefulness of ‘Rakta Basti’ is now well established in improving the condition of Thalassaemia major as per the studies conducted recently²⁰. Some government projects are also running nowadays to establish the efficacy of Rakta Basti at larger level.

STIMULATING THE CNS WITH NASAL ROUTE

Ayurveda has always claimed that nose/ nasal passage is the entry gate to head²¹ and “*NASYA*” (medicines instilled through nose) can cure the Supraclavicular diseases(Shirorog), Psychiatric illness (Unmada, Apasmara etc.), Neurological disorders (e.g Facial palsy) and can even revive the consciousness.

Dwaaram hi shirso naasa ten tad vyaapya hanti taan!! Ch.si. 9

This concept has been validated as recent studies have shown that if the medicine in form of nanoparticles is installed through nose, it stimulates the cortex directly²². This technique is covered under “Pradhama nasya” in Ayurveda.

DISCUSSION

Various concepts discussed above have concrete base of science and make a lot of sense. The fundamental concepts like definition of health, incorporates all the entities and the emphasis on prevention of disease suggest that the approach was to make the basic foundation of health strong. Ayurveda deals with each individual in a unique manner, customised according to patient. The concepts like “dosha predominance in day and night, skin grafting/ reconstructive surgeries, management of bone and joint disorders, numerous surgical procedures, replenishment of blood volume and the concept of Nasya” advocate the great inquisitive approach and scientific insight of the ancient scientists of Ayurveda. These points explain how the thinking of stalwarts of Ayurveda was way ahead of their time. It also indicates that they must have conducted a lot of experiments with available resources and must have treated a large number of patients before putting forth such accurate principles. If our ancestors and stakeholders of Ayurveda had focussed on our ancient principles and worked harder on research and documentation, the picture today would have been very different and bright. There is still time for our governments to understand the strength of our own system of medicine. It is a rich treasure which must be utilized before it becomes extinct or taken away by the western world in the name of herbal medicine or food supplement. We need to work sincerely in a focussed manner and make efforts to document our concepts with a logical background. The administration of the country needs to be sensitized about this very important issue. We can lead the healthcare system in world and can promote Health tourism in our country.

CONCLUSION

It is clearly evident that age old Ayurvedic science has been very advanced and authentic. Its principles guide us to live a healthy, happy and disease-free life. It aims at curing the disease from the root cause and treating the individual as a whole, on contrary to modern medicine. The fundamental concepts of Ayurveda have stood by the test of time and it definitely deserves more budget and attention of government to conduct more researches for further consolidation of these concepts. Thus it can be concluded that Ayurveda aptly called as “**Indian system of medicine**”, has got all the potential to rule the Healthcare system of India as well as lead it globally. It can be a solution to ever increasing resistance of diseases towards allopathic medicines and can also minimise the unwanted side effects. Therefore the government should make sincere efforts to mainstream this beautiful science and it must be incorporated as a leading healthcare system of future India. We will have a *healthier Nation* which can definitely be more progressive, productive and prosperous.

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