

REVIEW ARTICLE

Scope of Ayurveda in the Management of *Kushtha* (Skin Diseases)

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ABSTRACT

Background: Skin disorders are multi-faceted and may have their origin in allergy, autoimmunity, and hereditary. Ayurveda describes skin disorders under the umbrella of *Kushtha*, a disease characterized by the derangement of the skin. When we take into account the prevalence of different diseases, over 20% of all people seeking medical attention each year are suffering from skin disorders globally. *Kushtha* is categorized as *Maha Kushtha* and *Kshudra Kushtha* by all *Acharyas* depending on the severity of the symptoms and its prognosis. Many different etiological factors and disease management strategies are described in the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

Aim: The aim of the study is to assess the scope of Ayurveda in the management of skin diseases.

Materials and Methods: Different classical Ayurvedic texts, websites, journals, and research articles were referred in the above context.

Discussion and Conclusion: *Kushtha* arises from the vitiation of *Tridosha* and *Twak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, and *Lasika*. Thus, the management of *Kushtha* is based on the involvement of *Dosha* and *Dushya*. Although some treatment modalities are condition specific, the fundamental principle of treatment is consistent with all forms of *Kushtha*. *Acharya* has emphasized the significance of *Shodhana* (detoxification) therapy to eliminate the morbid *Dosha* from the body and *Raktamokshana* to expel *Dushita Rakta* which is the key *Dushya* in the pathology of *Kushtha*. The *Shamana* (palliative) therapy comprises both internal and external medications, namely *Rasa Aushadhi*, *Churna*, *Kwath*, *Asav*, *Arishta*, *Guggulu*, *Ghrita*, and *Malhara*, *Tail*, *Lepa*. Dietary management, *Dincharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Rasayana* therapy, and *Sadvritta* are given immense importance in Ayurveda to preserve good health and prevention of diseases. This wholesome viewpoint of detoxification, palliative care, and lifestyle modification needs to be analyzed to develop guidelines for the management of skin diseases based on Ayurveda principles.

1. INTRODUCTION

Skin is the biggest organ in the human body covering the exterior of the body. It serves as the first line of defense as well. The skin is considered one of the important sensory organs in Ayurveda. When we take into account the prevalence of different diseases, we find that every year in the world, about 20% of all people seeking medical guidance have skin disorders, including cosmetic issues.^[1] Skin diseases affect people of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, and can harm individuals in various ways, often leading to societal stigma.

Ayurveda has unique concepts for diagnosing and treating a variety of skin diseases. Skin diseases are referred to as *Kushtha* in Ayurveda which means unsightly skin; the involvement of all three *Dosha* (humor) and four *Dushya* (pathological elements) make *Kushtha* a complex disease to treat. The specific *Nidana* (etiological component) aggravates the *Tridosha*, which in turn vitiates *Tvaka* (skin), *Mamsa* (muscle), *Rakta* (blood), and *Lasika* (lymph). These seven elements are the primary pathogenic component of *Kushtha*.^[2]

The degree and severity of the vitiation of these sevenfold pathogenic substances precipitate in the distinct presentation of *Kushtha*. Understanding the involvement of dominant *Dosha* and vitiated *Dushya* is crucial for differential diagnosis among various types of *Kushtha*. This can easily be understood by the manifestation of signs and symptoms of the various types of *Kushtha*. This manifestation of

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specific signs and symptoms and detailed history-taking facilitates the understanding of *Doshik* involvement and the etiology of the disease. The fundamental therapeutic approach in *Ayurveda* is *Nidana Parivarjana*, i.e., (avoidance of causative factors) and alleviation of vitiated *Dosha*. This involves *Shodhana* (detoxification) and *Shamana* (palliative) *Chikitsa* along with *Ahara* (Diet) and *Vihara* (Lifestyle) modification. The aim of treatment in Ayurveda is not only symptomatic relief but also the complete remission of disease without any recurrence. This article seeks to explore the various Ayurvedic therapy approaches for different skin disorders.

1.1. Aim

The aim of the study is to assess the scope of Ayurveda in the management of *Kushtha* (skin diseases).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Various Ayurvedic classic texts have been used for this study as primary source materials, namely *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya*, *Astanga Samgrah*, *Sarngadhara Samhita*, *Bhava Prakasha*, *Nighantu*, and various other texts. Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India, several review and research publications, and websites have also been referenced.

3. DISCUSSION

When treating skin disorders from an Ayurvedic perspective, it is important to examine *Prakriti* of each patient as well as their sign and symptoms. The diagnosis and management of the skin condition are based on the detailed history of the patient's *Doshika* composition, diet and lifestyle choices, pulse, and disease manifestations. *Kushtha* arises from the vitiation of *Tridosha* and *Twak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, and *Lasika*. Thus, the management for each type of *Kushtha* is determined by the severity of vitiation of involved *Dosha* and *Dushya*. The restoration of *Doshika* equilibrium is the primary goal of Ayurvedic treatment. A balanced diet and lifestyle that includes regular exercise, food, herbs, meditation, and daily routines are all auxiliary parts of management. While certain modalities are condition specific, fundamental principles for the management of *Kushtha* are universal throughout the various forms.

The incidence of skin diseases increasing due to the following factors^[1]

- An inadequate diet and daily routine; eating incompatible and unhealthy foods; eating meals before the previous meal requires time to digest; consuming milk with meat and fish (aquatic animals); having a bath immediately after being in the sun or after physical exertion etc.
- Misuse and overuse of chemicals, soap, shampoo, deodorant, and other cosmetic products.
- Unhygienic practices.
- Excessive and unnecessary usage of steroids and antibiotics.

3.1. Fundamental Principles for the Management of Skin Diseases through Ayurveda

- *Nidana Parivarjana* (avoidance of causative factors).
- *Shamana* (Internal Medication)
- *Shodhana* (Purification)
- Local application
- Lifestyle modifications: Dietary management, *Dincharya*, *Rutucharya*, *Rasayana* therapy, and *Sadvritta*

3.1.1. *Nidana Parivarjana*: (Avoidance of causative factors)

- Avoid eating unwholesome and incompatible foods, such as hot and salty foods, milk with meats, fish (aquatic animals), and meals taken before the previous meal has had time to digest.
- Avoid taking a bath right away after being in the sun or after exercising.
- Avoid unnecessary and excessive use of antibiotics and steroids.
- Avoid using chemicals, cosmetics, soap, shampoo, deodorants, and other items excessively or improperly.
- Certain skin diseases are caused by emotional conflicts and psychogenic stress. In the treatment of such conditions, various yogic practices should be used to calm the patient's sentiments.

3.1.2. *Shamana Therapy*: (Internal medication)

The line of treatment involves *Agnideepana*, *Krimihara*, *Doshashamak*, and *Rakta Prasadana* medications. The major medications used in the management of *Kushtha* and their mode of action are discussed henceforth.

3.1.2.1. *Rasa Kalpa*

- *Arogyavardhini Vati*: (*Kutaki*, *Shuddha Parada*, *Shuddha Gandhaka*, *Loha Bhasma*, *Abhraka Bhasma*, *Tamra Bhasma*, *Triphala*, *Shilajatu*, *Guggul*, *Chitrakmoola*)^[3]
It is mainly used in *Kushtha*. It acts as *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Pathyakara*, *Hrudya*, *Medonashaka*, *Malashudhhikara*. It is said that *Kushtha* occurs due to *Grahani* and *Pakwashaya Dushti* and *Arogyavardhini* normalize their function by doing *Samprapti Bhang* hence useful in all 18 types of *Kushtha*. It is specifically used in *Vata* and *Vata-kaphaja Kushtha*.^[4] *Arogyavardhini Vati* helps to remove *Ama* (toxins) from the body.^[5] It also has an antipruritic nature that relieves the itching sensation.^[6]
- *Gandhaka Rasayana*: (*Gandhaka*, *Sarkara*)^[7]
Gandhaka Rasayana Vati is *Agnideepaka*, *Pachaka*, *Kaphaghna*, *Kledaghna*, *Raktaprasadaka*, *Krimighna*, *Kushthaghna*, *Rasayana*, and *Vishaghna*. *Rakta* and *Twacha* are the site of action of *Gandhaka Rasayana*. It helps to detoxify the vitiated *Rakta Dhatu* by eliminating its *Malinata* and help to transform the saturated *Vikrut Dravya* of body.^[8]
- *Krumikuthar Rasa*: (*Karpura*, *Kutaja*, *Trayamana*, *Ajamoda*, *Vidanga*, *Hingula Bhasma*, *Vatsanabha*, *Palasha Beeja*)^[9]
Due to its *Krimighna* characteristic (de-worming effect), *Krumikuthara Rasa* helps in the body's detoxification. It clears the airways, prevents germs from growing, shields the biological membrane from oxidative stress, and activates cell-mediated immune processes.^[10]
- *Rasamanikya*: (*Shuddha Hartala*)^[9]
It acts as *Raktashodhaka* (~blood purifier), thus providing relief for skin disorders. It removes excess toxins from the body and relieves pain, inflammation, and swelling. Similarly, the action of antiseptic, antifungal, and antioxidant helps to treat skin disorders.^[11]

3.1.2.2. *Guggulu Kalpa*

- *Kaishore Guuggulu*: *Kaishore Guggulu* is mainly used for anti-inflammatory, antiallergic, antibacterial, and blood purifying properties.^[12]
- *Triphala Guggulu*: *Triphala Guggulu* acts as *Shothahara* and *Shulahara*, *Triphala* has antiviral property.^[13]
- *Amritadi Guggulu*: *Amritadi Guggulu* is mentioned specifically in *Kushtha* and acts as *Shothahara* and *Vranahara*, it is constituent *Guduchi* lowers the burning sensation and has antiviral properties.^[14]

3.1.2.3. *Kashay Kalpa*

- *Guduchyadi Kwath*: *Guduchyadi Kwath* has anti-microbial, antiallergic, anti-inflammatory, and antileprotic actions. It mostly affects ailments of the *Pitta* and *Kapha Doshas*.^[15]
- *Patoladi Kwath*:^[16] It possesses *Tikta Rasa Dravyas*, which balance the vitiated *Pitta* and *Kapha Dosha* and help in *Raktadhatu Prasadana*. It has *Kushthaghna*, *Jwaraghna*, and *Vishghna* properties. It calms itching, discoloration, and burning sensations of various kinds of skin disorders. Moreover, it can support liver detoxification. The liver is an essential organ for *Raktadhatu* and proper functioning. It has *Amapachana* and *Agni vardhana* properties, which aid in digestion and arouse appetite.
- *Mahamanjishtadi Kwath*: It serves as a *Raktashodhaka*, *Kaphaghna*, and *Kushtha Nashaka*.^[17]

3.1.2.4. *Asav Arishta*

- *Khadiraristha*: *Khadira* is a primary component. The properties of *Khadira* include *Kushthaghna*, *Kandughna*, *Kushthaghna*, *Krumighna*, *Raktashodhaka*, and *Vranaropaka*. It has antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant qualities.^[18]
- *Sarivadyasava*: This formulation primarily consists of *Tikta*, *Kashaya* (~astringent) *Rasa*, *Sheeta Virya*, and *Katu vipaka*, which soothe *Pitta*, *Rakta* (because of *Sheeta virya*), and *Kapha* (because of *Katu Vipaka*). Its *Raktashodhaka*, *Raktaprasadaka*, and *Pidaka Nashaka* actions are well established.^[19] It helps cure wounds and has antibacterial, antioxidant, antithrombotic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-ulcerogenic properties.
- *Chandanasava*: *Chandanasava* pacifies *Pitta Dosha* and acts as *Raktaprasadaka* and *Agnideepaka*.^[20]

3.1.2.5. *Ghrita*

Panchtikta Ghrita: Its properties include *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Amapachaka*, *Strotoshodhaka*, *Raktaprasadana*, *Raktashodhaka*, *Kandughna*, *Kushthaghna*, and *Varnya*.^[21]

The ingredients of *Panchatikta Ghrita* have *Katu*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya*, and *Madhura Rasa*, *Laghu*, *Ruksha*, *Sheeta*, and *Snigdha Guna* along with *Ushna Virya*, which helps to balance *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha Doshas*. The pacification of *Vata Dosha* results in a decrease in dryness and roughness. Pacification of *Kapha Dosha* helps to subside itching, demarcate and thickness plaque, and plaque adherence. Furthermore, pacification of *Pitta Dosha* helps in pinpoint bleeding and a reduction in burning sensation.

3.1.2.6. *Churna*

- *Nimba*: *Nimba* is used in *Kapha Pitta Vikara* because of its *Sheeta Virya* hence utilized for *Dahaprashamana* and as it is *Tikta Kashaya Rasa Dravya*, it is *Kushthaghna*. It is *Krumighna* and *Rasayana*.^[22]
- *Avipattikar Churna*: The qualities of *Avipattikar Churna* include *Pachana*, *Deepan*, and *Mridu Virechaka* (mild laxative). It eliminates aggravating *Doshas*, rectifies *Agnimandya*, and therefore, eliminates *Strotorodha*.^[23]
- *Vidanga*: *Vidanga* has the properties of *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Raktashodhaka*, and *Rasayana*. It acts as *Krimighna* by its *Prabhava*. *Vidanga* was described by *Charaka* in *Kushthaghna Mahakashaya*. *Vidanga* possesses *Ushna Virya* and therefore works as a good *Kapha Vata Shamaka*.^[24]
- *Manjishtha*: The properties of *Manjishtha* described in Ayurveda as blood purifier, vermifugal, and wound healer. It helps to manage itching and burning sensation in the skin. *Manjishtha* purifies blood, acts as *Deepana*, *Pachana*, and has a *Kushthaghna* effect on the skin. Furthermore, it is *Raktashodhak* (blood purifier) that

raises *Raktadhatvagni*, which helps to generate pure blood and acts upon *Bhrajak* and *Ranjak Pitta*. *Rakta Dhatu* is then circulated throughout the body by *Vyan Vayu*. In addition, it strengthens *Oja*, which is reflected in *Twacha*.^[25,26]

- *Guduchi Satva*: *Guduchi Satva* has *Ushna*, *Tikta*, *Tridoshaghna*, *Rasayana*, *Deepana*, *Twakarogahara*, *Vishaghna*, *Pittasaraka Dravya*. It lowers *Daha*, *Kandu*, and discoloration.^[27]
- *Amalaki*: *Amalaki* is having *Pittaghna*, *Kledaghna*, *Rasayana*, *Agnidipana* and *Amapachana* properties, and *Tridoshahar*. It is *Kushthaghna*.^[28]

These drugs remove *Kleda* and *Doshas* from *Rasa*, *Rakta*, and *Meda*. It eliminates both *Dushta Kapha* and *Pitta*, which causes *Raktaprasadana*. *Tikta Rasa* eliminates the *Gara Vishas* which are present in *Rakta*. Through blood purification and *Kleda* absorption from *Rakta*, it enhances complexion.

3.1.3. *Shodhana (Purification)*

Shodhana is the most effective treatment for expelling the vitiated *Dosha* and controlling the accumulation of toxins in the body. The significance of *Shodhana* therapy has been underlined by all *Acharyas* in the management of *Kushtha*. *Shodhana* therapy expel out the morbid *Dosha* from the body. *Shodhana* removes all toxins from the body at the cellular level as a comprehensive detoxification and cleaning treatment. Repeated *Shodhana karma* has been recommended for patients with skin disorders at repeated intervals.

Acharya Sushruta recommended that the *Vamana* (therapeutic emesis) should be given once every fortnight; *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation) once a month; *Raktamokshana* (blood-letting) should done twice a year and *Nasya* (Nasal installation) once in 3 days in a chronic case of *Kushtha* considering the severity of vitiation of involved *Dosha-Dushya*.^[29]

The *Vamana* and *Virechana* procedures involve the administration of *Deepana-Pachana* medications to aggravate the digestive fire. This is followed by *Abhyantar Snehepana* with *Panchtikta Ghrita*, *Mahatikta Ghrita*, etc. for 3, 5, or 7 days depending on the manifestation of *Samyak Snigdha Lakshana*. This is followed by the rest period of 1–3 days along with *Abhyanga-Swedana* to bring all the vitiated *Dosha* into the *Koshtha*. The *Vamana* and *Virechana* eliminate these vitiated *Dosha* from the *Koshtha*.

Acharya Charaka advocated the internal administration of *Ghrita* in patients with *Vata*-dominated *Kushtha*, *Vamana* therapy in *Kapha*-dominated *Kushtha*, and *Virechana* therapy in *Pitta*-dominated *Kushtha* in the initial phase of treatment for optimum outcomes.^[30]

The majority of *Kushtha* are described as *Raktapradoshaja Vyadhi*. *Pitta Dosha* is the *Mala* of *Rakta*. *Rakta* and *Pitta* share an *Avinabhava Sambandha*. When aggravated *Pitta Dosha* is eliminated from the body through *Shodhana*, it pacifies the *Rakta* ultimately alleviating *Raktapradoshaja Vikara* such as *Kushtha*. Therefore, *Virechana* is overall a good measure for *Kushtha*. While discolored, dry skin patches, increased sensitivity, etc. are the cardinal symptoms of skin diseases, the most frustrating symptoms for patients are *Kandu* (itching) and *Daha* (burning). While *Kandu* indicates the involvement of *Kapha*, *Rasa*, and *Rakta Dushya*. *Nitya Virechana* (Repeated therapeutic purgation) has the property of *Pitta Shodhaka* (detoxification of *Pitta*) and *Rasa Rakta Prasadana* (Pacification of *Rasa Rakta*), which may be the reason for reduced *Kandu*^[31] and *Daha*.

Raktamokshana is one of the important procedures among *Panchkarma* (Penta-bio purificatory) procedures as per *Sushruta*.^[32]

It is an important non-pharmacological intervention through which vitiated *Rakta Dosha*, along with *Pitta*, is eliminated through the body by using different techniques such as *Sira Vedha* (Venous puncture), *Prachhana* (Incision), *Jalauka Avacharana* (leech therapy), *Shringa Avacharana* (horn application), *Alabu Avacharana* (cupping therapy). *Shringa Avacharana* is used in the case of *Vata Dushta Rakta*; *Jalauka Avacharana* for *Pitta Dushta Rakta* and *Alabu Avacharana* is used for *Kapha Dushta Rakta*.^[33]

In the post-*Shodhana* and *Raktamokshana* phase, *Ghratapana* (internal administration of Ghee namely) is essential to prevent *Vata Prakopa*.

3.1.4. Local application

- *Marichyadi Taila*: Most of the drugs of *Marichyadi Taila* are *Katu*, *Tikta*, and *Kashaya Rasa*, which acts as *Kapha Shamaka*, which decreases *Kandu*. *Laghu*, *Snigdha Guna* decreases scaling. *Ushna Virya* raises *Swedana* by *Vata Kapha Nashak Dravya*, having immunomodulator, *Raktashodhaka*, and *Kushtha Kandu Nashak* characteristics.^[34]
- *Karanj Taila*: It is *Kruminashaka* (antibacterial/antifungal), *Kandughna* (antipruritic), *Vranashodhaka* (wound cleaning), and *Vranaropaka* (wound healing).^[35]
- *Gandhaka Malahara*: It is *Kaphavatahara* hence used to decrease itching and dryness in the initial stages.^[36]
- *Shatadhouta Ghrita*: It possesses the qualities of *Sukshma*, *Madhur Rasa*, *Sheet Veerya*, *Madhur Vipaka*, and *Dahashamaka*. All of the aforementioned *Pitta Shaman* qualities are present in *Shatadhouta Ghrita*. It functions as a *Vranaropaka* (wound healing).

3.1.5. Lifestyle modifications

3.1.5.1. Dietary management

As per Ayurveda, a healthy human being requires perfect digestion and assimilation of food and efficient evaluation of wastes. Together they are responsible for resulting healthy skin.

- One should consume enough seasonal fruits and green veggies.
- Drinking enough water.
- *Tikta Rasa* veggies and *Laghu Ahar* need to be consumed.
- Diet should be rich in nutrients, antioxidants, and easily digestible foods.

3.1.5.2. Dinacharya

Dinacharya, i.e., “practice of daily routine” has been described as the correct sequence of routine one should follow to get a healthy long life. To maintain a healthy physique and youthful appearance for a long period of time, one should follow these procedures into their routine so it can be benefited in the beauty of hair, skin, eyes, etc.

It is recommended to awaken during *Brahma Muhurta*, and consuming water early in the day aids in the removal of toxic substances, natural urges should not be suppressed.

- *Abhyanga*: The body gets firm, attractive, with smooth skin, and less prone to skin disorders.
- *Shiro Abhyanga*, *Pada Abhyanga*: Smoothens the skin of the head, foot, and sole, preventing it from scaling due to dryness.
- *Snana*, *Udvartana*: Clean the skin from foul smell, dirt, etc.
- *Nasya*: Expel out vitiated *Dosha* from *Shira*.

In addition, it is mentioned that using an umbrella may protect against rain, wind, sun, and dust as well as mitigate the effects of natural disasters.

3.1.5.3. Ritucharya

Ritu, or the season, is characterized by different characteristics that show various effects on the environment and body. The ability to adapt is essential for survival. People often lack knowledge of what

kinds of food, clothes, and other guidelines are appropriate for a given season, which affects homeostasis and leads to a variety of skin diseases. Knowledge of *Ritucharya* is essential for detoxifying the body according to the aggravation of *Dosha* in different *Ritu*.

- In summer – *Pitta* is worse by the hot weather; thus, a cool, liquid, and sweet diet is recommended. Diets that are very hot, spicy, sour, or salty should be avoided. Consuming rice, coconut water, ghee, milk, and sugar is recommended.
- In spring – A diet that is hot, bitter, and astringent is recommended; salty, sour, and sweet foods should be avoided. Consumption of wheat, barley, honey, and mango is advised.
- In Rainy season – *Vata* becomes aggravated therefore sweet, sour, salty food is recommended. Food should be warm, dry, and easily digestible.
- In winter – *Vata* becomes aggravated so *Vata Shamak* and *Pitta Vardhak* diet is recommended, hot, sweet, sour, salty food, milk is advised.
- In autumn – *Pitta* aggravates so ghee, bitter, sweet diet is advised.

3.1.5.4. Rasayana therapy

Rasayana is defined as a therapeutic measure that promotes longevity, delays aging, improves physical and mental wellness, strengthens memory, and builds resistance and immunity against diseases.

Certain skin diseases are caused by psychogenic stresses and emotional issues. Patients with chronic skin disorders ought to take *Medhya Rasayana* (*Ashwagandha*, *Bramhi*, *Guduchi*, etc.); these have nootropic effects that enhance the intelligence and functions of the brain. Disease-specific *Rasayana* (anti-oxidant and immunomodulator) should be provided.

3.1.5.5. Sadvritta

Ayurveda provides guidelines for leading a healthy life and mind. These principles are applicable at anywhere and anytime such as always speaking truth, do not harm anyone, having patience, avoiding disruption in everyday routines, etc. We will experience a variety of problems if we disobey or break these rules.

4. CONCLUSION

Dincharya, *Ritucharya*, and *Sadvritta* play very vital role in the prevention and management of diseases. Due to Sedentary lifestyle and unwholesome dietary habits, the incidence of skin diseases are very high. Ayurveda has great potential to combat with these problems in holistic way. It offers a plethora of modalities such as Dietary management, *Shamana* therapy, and *Shodhana* therapy for treating skin diseases.

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9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript, and all data are available for only review purposes from the principal investigators.

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