

AN AYURVEDIC VIEW ON VITILIGO (*SHWITRA*) - AN AUTOIMMUNE DISORDER  
OF SKINDr. Shilpa Kantilal Ingle\*<sup>1</sup> and Dr. J. J. Pawar<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Kriya Sharir Dept. Government Ayurved College, Nanded. (M.S.) India.<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Kriya Sharir Dept. R.A. Podar Ayurved Medical College, Worli, Mumbai-400018 (M.S.), India.

\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Shilpa Kantilal Ingle

Research Scholar, Development and Innovation Centre C. U. Shah University Wadhwanicity – 363 030.

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**ABSTRACT**

Vitiligo (*Shwitra*) is a skin disease with unknown etiology in which skin loses its colour in blotches and develops in white patches. It has unpredictability on extent and rate of spread even with area of body parts involved. It may also affect oral cavity and hairs. Vitiligo can affect people of any age, gender. It is considered as autoimmune disorder which destroys the melanocytes in the skin. This is also has chance to run in family and has medication origin like chemotherapy. Ayurveda states that causes of *Shwitra* may be *Chardivegadharan*, *Atisevan* of *Amla-Katu-Ushna-Lavan-Madhur Aaharsevan*, *Viruddhahar* and *Atimatra Bhojan* along with *Navann Sevan* and *Dahi Sevan*. These *Hetu* leads to vitiate *Tridosha* specially aggravation of *Pitta Dosha* which symbolizes heat as fire and is manifested in the skin, *Mamsa*, *Udak*, *Rakta*. *Ayurveda* quotes *Shwitra* as *Deergha Roga* so should be treated immediately with purification and pacification remedies (with *psoralea corylifolia*) with oil application, exposure to sun rays.

**KEY WORDS:** Autoimmune disorder, *Tridosha*, *Shwitra*, Vitiligo.**INTRODUCTION**

Partial or complete loss of skin pigmentation giving rise to white patch on any part of the body is called as leucoderma or vitiligo and in *Ayurveda* it is called as *Shwitra*.<sup>[1]</sup> Though it is not very common disease but as explained in *Ayurveda* it is difficult to cure (*kashtasadhya vyadhi*). The exact cause is unknown, but it may be due to autoimmune disorder. Faulty dietary habits *Kulaj Itihas*, excessive mental stress, general low immunity are the precipitating factors of leucoderma. *Ayurveda* states that basically it is due to the aggravation of *Pitta Dosha* which leads to cause of accumulation of *Aam* in deep layers of skin.<sup>[2]</sup> Main part of treatment depends upon whether the disease is spreading or it is stable. If it is spreading, first step should be to stop the spread and then re-pigmentation can be done. Treatment again depends upon *Dussham-Desham-Balm-Kaalam-Prakriti-Analam-Vayah* etc.<sup>[3]</sup> Actually in vitiligo pigment producing cells die or stop functioning. The areas affected may be the mouth, hair, eyes etc. It is more noticeable in people with darker skin. Mostly it occurs in middle age from 20 to 30 years and good news about it is that it doesn't spread from touching, saliva, inhalation, blood, sexual intercourse or sharing of personal items like bottles, towels etc.

**AIM**

To study the pathophysiology of *Shwitra* (Vitiligo) with *Ayurvedic* as well as modern aspect and its management through with *Ayurveda*.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand pathophysiology of *Shwitra* (Vitiligo) with *Ayurvedic* and modern aspect.
2. To review *Ayurvedic* management of *Shwitra*.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Textual references are from *Ayurvedic* classics available in library of Government Ayurved College, Nanded (M.S. India), modern texts, journals and websites are also referred and logical analysis has been done.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE****1. AYURVEDIC ASPECT OF SHWITRA**

*Ayurvedic* science considers *Shwitra* as a group of skin disorders.<sup>[4]</sup> Though *Shwitra* has to be treated immediately, most of the time patient comes with chronic condition. In *Kashyapa Samhita* *Shwitra* means *Shweta Bhava Micchanti*.<sup>[5]</sup> According to Acharya Sushrut, it means reflection of white colour. He called this disease as *Kilas* instead of *Shwitra*.<sup>[6]</sup>

## 2. MODERN ASPECT OF VITILIGO (*Shwitra*)

Haemoglobin, carotenoids and melanin pigment are the responsible factors for the normal skin colour. It is an autoimmune disease in which hypo-pigmentation occurs due to the insufficiency or complete absence of melanin in skin. It is progressive type of disease with gradual destruction of melanocytes in epidermis resulting in depigmented, a-pigmented or hypo-pigmented areas on the skin.<sup>[7]</sup> In this, the autoimmune destruction of melanocytes occurs. Though the exact cause is unknown, stress like conditions triggers the disease and the stress triggered vitiligo include the increased levels of catecholamines and neuropeptides is seen.

## 3. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY (*SAMPRAPTI*) OF *SHWITRA*

Due to *Atisevan* of *Asamyak Aahar Vihar*, vitiation of *Tridoshas* occur in association with *Twakchagat Pitta Dosha* and *Rasa-Rakta-mamasa –Udaka Dhatu*. When the vitiation is significantly at the level of *Ras* and *Rakta* it results in *Shwitra-Kushtha* i.e. Vitiligo<sup>[8]</sup> *Vata Pradhan Shwitra* is difficult to cure, *Pitta Pradhan Shwitra* is more difficult to treat and *Kapha Pradhan Shwitra* is incurable. Also the lesions at palm, sole, genitalia, lips are incurable. But the lesions which are occurred due to burn, non matted, newly originated, thin, with black hair are curable.

## 4. AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT

Treatment plan should be designed taking in account of the disease pattern, patient's age, occupation, *Prakriti*, condition e.g. pregnancy etc.

### a. Internal medication

To relieve the *Aam*, the best *Shodhan Karma* as per *Dosha-Dushya* is *Virechana*. *Virechan* with herbal decoction of *Psoralia Corylifolia* (*Bakuchi*) and *Euphobia Neriifolia* (*Snuhi*). For *Shaman* treatment *Bakuchyadi Churna*, *Khadirasaradi Churna*, *Panchnimbadi Churna* can be used. *Asavas* like *Kanakabindvarista*, *Madhwasa* and *Ghrita* like *Neeli Ghrita*, *Mahatikta Ghrita* and *Neelika Ghrita* can be used.<sup>[9]</sup> Other *Ayurvedic* preparations such as dried ginger, black pepper, *Pippali* and Leadwort root fermented in *Gomutra* also are in use which gives positive results.

### b. External medication

- i. **Stimulation of pigmentation:** The best combination for the external application on lesion is of *Cassia fistula*, *Psoralia Cordifolia* (active principle is Psoralen) and *Piper Longum*. This combination stimulate the pigment cells for re-pigmentation.
- ii. **To provide favourable conditions in the skin for better pigmentation:** Pigment cells multiply very slowly like nerve cells. So herbs like vitix can be given to provide better environment for pigment cells to grow quickly.
- iii. **To preserve the pigmentation:** Pigmentation which has been formed, this can be achieved by using different herbal combinations in adequate dosage.

iv. **Suitable Oil application:** Oil application followed by exposure of lesion to the sun rays as long as according to the tolerance of patient. After exposure to the sun rays the affected part gets dark colour as well as form a *bullae*. If *bullae* is formed, it should be punctured with sterile needle.

v. **Lepa application:** Application of *Ankollakandi Lepa*, *Avalgajadi Lepa*, *Balyadi Lepa*, *Bhallakadi Lepa*, *Bhringarajadi Lepa*, *Manashiladi Lepa*, *Panchnimbadi Lepa* etc also has fruitful effect.<sup>[10]</sup>

Throughout the days of treatment patient should follow *Pathyakar Aahar-Vihaar*.

c. **Pathyakar Aahar-Vihar** – *Aachar Rasayana* and diet containing aged rice, *Godhum*, *Mudga*, *Laghu Aahar*, *Patola*, *Khadiridaka* etc should be practice of daily routine.

At the same time *Viruddh Aahar*, *Guru Aahar*, *Vidahi Aahar*, *Vishthanbi Aahar*, *Anup Mamsa*, *Kanda Moola*, *Masha* etc should be avoided.<sup>[11]</sup>

d. **Yoga practice** - Yoga practice for 20 minutes in the morning will act as good stress reliever. As stress triggers the disease, that's why this treatment part is as must to do level.<sup>[12]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Ayurveda* as Holy science has a very different approach towards treating and understanding of *Shwitra* which is holistic so included *Vrutta-Pooja-Patha-Dana* etc. The combined effect of all *Shaman-Shodhan* and *Bahya Chikitsa* may be due to increased hepatic function, immunostimulation and photoreaction.<sup>[13]</sup> The main *Dushya* in *Shwitra* is *Rakta Dhatu* and *Dosha* is *Pitta Dosha* the expression of disease is at skin level. And the above all are interlinked with each other so the best treatment for the *Pitta Dosha* pacification is *Virechana*. *Virechana* removes the *Dosha Sanga* and breaks the *Samprapti* and enhances the absorption of drugs given in *Shaman Chikitsa*.

## CONCLUSION

Scientific rationale behind use of all the medications in *Ayurvedic* texts need to be further explored with modern methods and research also. Though the *Shwitra* is explained as *Kashtasadhya Vyadhi* and takes long period to cure, can be managed with better improvement with practice of *Shodhan*, *Shaman* and external application of oils and *Lepas* taking the consideration of *Rugna*, *Bala*, *Vyadhi Bala*, *Dosha*, *Dushya*, *Desh*, *Prakriti*, *Kaal*.

**Conflicts of interest:** There is no conflict of interest.

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