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Review Article

PREMATURE AGEING (AKALAJA JARA): AYURVEDIC VIEW

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ABSTRACT

As the incidence of premature aging is increasing globally, it has become a burning issue to take major steps for its prevention. Conventional system of medicine has limited approach regarding its prevention. In Ayurveda, Geriatrics is considered as a separate branch among 8 branches of Ayurveda and it is also becoming a major medical speciality globally. In ancient Ayurvedic texts there is a detailed description of Rasayana therapy which is considered as one of the best therapy to prevent premature aging as well as other geriatric problems. As it is well said, "Prevention is better than cure". Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self-dependent for their daily activities to maximum possible extent. Ayurveda also described Swasthvrut (personal hygiene) and Sadavrut which is also considered to be effective to slow down the aging process. There is a considerable scope to develop safe and cost-effective protocol for premature aging on the basis of Ayurvedic life-style management and Rasayana therapy.

Keywords: Akalaja Jara, premature aging, Rasayana, Swasthvrut, Sadavrut.

INTRODUCTION

The desire to live, one of the basic instincts has been common to all living creatures ever since the first unicellular organism evolved on this graceful planet, the Earth. Man, the most developed and sophisticated living being on earth, so considered due to his tremendous intellectual abilities is in no way at par from this. In the blown up human civilization of present era, in the midst of increased pronocity and various stresses, it is natural to anticipate majority of population as having undesired health problems resulting in short life span. Moreover, the changed dietetics and day to day life also adversely affects the process of ageing and may cause signs of early ageing i.e. premature ageing.

DEFINITION OF AGEING

Although everyone is familiar with aging, defining aging is not so straightforward. Ageing is defined as process of growing old, accumulating damage to cells, tissues and organs with the passage of time.

In Ayurved ageing is defined as 'Jara'. Jara word derived from root "Jrush vayohanau" explained as "Vayah krita slathamamsady avastha" meaning loosening of muscle and other tissues under the influence of ageing¹. Ageing is defined as a progressive failure of the body's homeostatic adaptive responses.

Jara is an inescapable part of life. In fact, it is the conglomeration of the richness of one's experience of living. Jara, the old age is of two types 1. Kalaj jara 2. Akalajajara². Kalaj jara is Swabhavaj or Sahaj in nature which affects every one, the later one "Akalotpanna lakshana-Akalaja"³, "Akale jata iti Akalaja"⁴ means that thing which occurs Akalaja. Akalaja jara is an unnatural and untimely process, occurring ahead of time. This type of Jara induces a set of social problems, and mental agony terminating in 'social stigma'. "Swabhava

nispratikriya"⁵ this dictum of Charak should be understood in the sense that Svabhavaj jara or Kalaj jara is unavoidable and irreversible process but Akalaja jara is a somewhat reversible process.

One of the most popular theories of ageing; was first proposed by Dr. Denham Harman in 1950. In 1972, Harman modified his original theory to what became known as The Mitochondrial Theory of Aging. In its current form, this Theory proposes that reactive oxygen species that are produced in the Mitochondria causes damage to certain micro molecules including Lipids, Proteins and most importantly Mitochondrial DNA. This damage then causes mutation which leads to increase of ROS production and greatly enhance the accumulation of free radical within cells. This mitochondrial theory has been more widely accepted and is believed to play a major role in contributing to aging process.⁶

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charaka Samhita (1000 BC): This treatise has given Nidana, Samprapti, symptoms and treatment of the Jara which occurs prematurely in Rishi Parishad and the bad effects of Gramya Ahara, though Charaka has not clearly mentioned word 'Akalaja' for it.

Sushruta Samhita (800 –1000 BC): Sushruta has first time used the word 'Akalaj Jara' among naturally occurring diseases. He mentioned that diseases that occur prematurely are treatable.

Samgraha kala (7thad): Both Ashtanga Hridaya and Ashtanga Samgraha has given description of Jara which is similar to that mentioned by Acharya Sushruta, they described that this disease occurs because of 'Arakshana' (lack in care).

SYMPTOMS⁷

Physical signs & symptoms: Physical signs and symptoms are Vali (wrinkles), Palitya (premature greying of hair), Khalitya

(hair loss), Sukra Apravartanam, Ojakshaya(weakness), Mamsa Saithilya (muscles weakness), Asamartha Chesta (inability to work), Analpmeda (debilitated).

Mental signs & symptoms: Medhahani (Decreased functions of Intellect), Avasannata & Nairasya (Depression), Smritihani (Loss of Memory), Utsahahani (Decreased Enthusiasm), Buddhihani (Deterioration in Wisdom).

MANAGEMENT

The ancient Ayurvedic Acharyas have found the solution, thousands of years ago, after an extensive search to explore the means and methods for Hitayu, Sukhayu and Dirghayu in the concept of

Rasayana
Swasthvru
Sadvrut

Which helped to attain longer and healthier life.

Rasayana

The Rasayan word is composed from two words “Ras” and “Ayan” which refers to nutritional essence and its transportation throughout the body for its efficient assimilation into the body. A plentiful rasa holds promise of an impeccable nutritional state which is essential for increased vitality prevention of “Jara” (ageing), immunity against diseases and for prompt mental functioning Rasayan agents act by various modes such as 1) Direct enrichment of the nutritional quality of rasa 2) Improving the competence of Ayanas or Strotas in the body leading to improved DhatusPoshan or tissue perfusion and optimum bioavailability of nutrients to the tissue.

Rasayana is amongst the Astang Ayurveda, the eight divisions of Ayurveda as advocated in various Ayurvedic texts. As others it was propounded to serve the fundamentals of Ayurveda i.e. “Swasthasya swasthya rakshanama aturasya vikar prasamnam cha”⁸ described by Acharya Charak and Acharya Sushrut.

Acharya Sushrut defines Rasayan as “Rasayantantram vayahsthanay aayu medha balakaram roga apaharan samartham cha”⁹ which means that branch of Astang Ayurveda where all measures which help for attaining longevity, enhance intelligence and mental strength and increase immunity against various disorders are elucidated. The Rasayan therapy endeavours to preserve good health thus ensuring longevity by optimizing the cellular nutrition. Sushrut has defined Swasthapurusha as one who has equilibrium of the Doshas, normal functioning of Agni, normal state of seven Dhatus, normal excretion of waste products as well as a blissful state of Atma, Indriya and Man.¹⁰

Acharya Charak and Acharya Vagbhta described various benefits of Rasayan therapy as – enjoying long healthy life, enhances intelligence, memory, strength, youth, lustre, sweetness of voice etc. Rasayan improves metabolic processes, which results in apposite biotransformation and produces the best quality body tissues.¹¹

Acharya sharngdharaha clearly stated that Rasayana includes use of certain Dravyas as Rudanti, Guggulu, Haritaki etc. that prevent early aging and guard against many disorders also¹². Same statement is found in Bhaishajyaratnavali¹³. Overall, in Ayurveda texts, Rasayans have been mentioned as a set of rejuvenating measures which aim towards a youthful rich and disease free life.

Rasayan therapy is basically towards the daily wear and tear, a human body suffers in the course of routine life and also the unwanted ill effects of infirmities afflicted during the same.

Swasthvru

Acknowledgement of rules of daily living as prescribed by Ayurveda, slows down the process of ageing and prevent many

life style disorders. Acharya Charaka described Dincharya and Rutucharya in Charaka Shamhita.¹⁴ Description of Dincharya guide us what to do whole day to make body healthy. They described daily routine procedures scientifically. In Rutucharya, Acharya described seasonal regimen because they knew that seasons affect one’s body. By following these one can make his body healthy and aging process slow.

Sadavrut

Rasayana is not merely a drug therapy but a specialized procedure practiced in the form of rejuvenative recipes, dietary regimen and special health promoting conduct and behavior i.e. Acharya Rasayana, which is also similarly beneficial as Rasayana therapy.¹⁵ Acharya rasayana described by Acharya Charak is to speak truth (satyavadinm), remain anger less (akrodham), be calm and peaceful (prashantam), keep cleanliness (shauch) etc.

CONCLUSION

In this modernized era, lifestyle and faulty dietary habits are the main cause for premature ageing which is burning problem of today’s era. To prevent this disease, we have to follow Swasthvru (personal hygiene) and Sadvrut (medical ethics) of Ayurveda. Rasayan is a magical tool to slow down ageing process. So one should obey the three main commands given by Ayurvedacharya i.e. Rasayan, Sadvrut and Svasthvru to prevent premature ageing.

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