



Review Article

Volume 11 Issue 6

Nov-Dec 2022

CRITICAL REVIEW OF GERIATRIC CARE IN AYURVEDA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JARA: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Geriatric medicine is the specialized branch of medicine that deals with the problem of elderly persons. Increase in average life span due to enhanced medical facilities has resulted in demographic shift towards older age. Also, a lot has been stated in Ayurveda texts regarding longevity and vitality in terms of Jarachikitsa and Rasayan. This study was undertaken to critically review the Ayurveda texts and re-evaluate the concept of jara (ageing) and to analyze the various considerations and therapeutic interventions which have promotive, preventive and curative effect on diseases of old age. The three main texts of Ayurveda, i.e., Brihatryi were explored regarding the aspects of ageing and non-pharmacological as well as drug approaches were studied. Analyses of the texts revealed that the preventive aspects of ideal regimen, healthy dietary habits, use of Rasayana drugs and Panchakarma purification procedures, if adopted in daily routine can have a positive effect in improving vitality and longevity of the body. This also improves the quality of life especially in the elderly.

Keywords: Geriatrics, Jara, Rasayan

INTRODUCTION

The word GERIATRICS has been derived from Latin word “geras” meaning “To grow old. Geriatric medicine is the specialized branch of medicine that deals with the problem of elderly persons”¹. Demographic trends reveal that population of people in old age is growing at an enhanced rate. Due to increased geriatric population, the prevalence of geriatric specific diseases is also increasing. A need is felt to develop newer strategies for geriatric health care. This branch of medicine is relatively new and the vast therapeutic treasure of Ayurveda has a lot to contribute towards jarachikitsa. Geriatrics or JaraChikitsa of Ayurveda is a method to slow down or delay the process of ageing in human beings during the later stages of life when degeneration of body tissues and senses occurs at an enhanced rate. Ayurveda advocates healthy ageing through Rasayanachikitsa (jarachikitsa), Panchkarma, principles of daily and seasonal regimen and code of conduct like sadvritta. For a better understanding of Jarachikitsa, the concept of ageing (jara) should be first acknowledged. Ageing is a universal, intrinsic, progressive and deleterious process. Normal ageing refers to the common complex of diseases and impairments that characterize many of the elderly whereas successful ageing refers to a process by which deleterious effects are minimized, preserving function until senescence makes continued life impossible. The Ayurveda concepts related to geriatrics were searched in the three-main treatise of ancient medicine and have been discussed here.

Concept of Ayurveda on ageing-

Jara Ayurveda has prominently described the concept of ageing as ‘Jara’. The word Jara itself has been derived from root word ‘Jru’ which means decline stage or old age. Jara is defined as, phenomenon of becoming old by the act of wearing out. It is synonymic as “vardhakya” meaning increasing age. The last stage of human life-Vridhhaawastha corresponds to the old age of modern ideology. According to Acharya Charak, ageing or vridhhaawastha is between 60 -100 years. Swabhav and Kala play pivotal role in the process of ageing. Jara is considered as natural phenomenon like hunger, thirst and

sleep. Modified improper dietary habits, sedentary life style, excessive stress and anxiety enhance the process of ageing.

Types of JaraJara has been divided into two types physiologically-Kalajajara-Itrefers to chronological ageing. The symptoms of ageing occur at the appropriate age of the person due to swabhav and kala. It is a naturally occurring inevitable process. Akalajjara (Premature ageing)-Ageing which occurs before the appropriate age of the individual i.e. before old age is Akaalajjara Clinical features of jara viz. ageing -During the stage of Vridhhaawastha, gradual deterioration of functions of mental and physical faculties occur at an enhanced rate. In this stage of life, there is diminution of Dhatu(body tissues),strength of sense organs, virility, energy, retention, power and memory. Thus, both the physical and psychological changes occur in old age. Changes of ageing are always degenerative in nature.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda offers multi-dimensional approach for the prevention of early ageing and management of diseases of old age. Modern research trends on healthy ageing also revolve around the Ayurveda principles of management of jara. Various Ayurveda guidelines and therapies have been stated which may delay the onset of debilitating symptoms of ageing process.

Ideal lifestyle Regimen–Principles of ideal lifestyle regimen laid down by the ancient scholars is the foremost step in the prevention of early ageing and disorders of old age.

Dinacharya (daily regimen) and Ritucharaya (seasonal regimen) are concerned with the personal aspect of individual. Physical and mental ageing of one's life can be prolonged by adopting these principles.

Sadvritta-The path of ethical, social, mental, moral and physical conduct induces a positive influence on the mind and body. It helps to lead a healthy life. The person who behaves as per the principles of code of conduct (sadvritta) becomes more divine and lives a good quality of life, thus preventing early ageing

Rejuvenation therapy-Ageing cannot be cured but can be delayed with the help of rejuvenation therapy. Concept of anti-ageing is embodied in Jarachikitsa (Rasayana). This is the unique modality of Ayurveda which can be extensively utilized for the preservation of health and longevity in the aged. Sushruta has described Rasayana as one, which delays ageing, increases the life-span, promotes intellect and memory, and increases resistance to diseases. This shows an immune-stimulant, anti-oxidant and nootropic effect of this therapy on human body. This is also responsible for combating the effect of age related problems. Rejuvenation therapy offers a comprehensive physiological and metabolic restoration.

Age stabilising drugs-Apart from the rasayan drugs, Cgaraka has mentioned a unique group of drugs namely Vayasthapana Mahakashaya for maintaining vitality and managing ageing and its allied ill effects. Vayasthapanamahakashaya is a group of drugs having rasayana properties which promote overall nourishment of body tissues. Ten Vayasthapana drugs which can be used for anti-ageing purpose are -Amrita(*Tinospora cordifolia*), Abhaya(*Terminalia chebula*), Dhaatri (*Embilica officinalis*), Rasna(*Pluchea lanceolata*), Shveta(*Alpenia galanga*), Jeevanti (*Leptadenia reticulata*), Atirasa(*Asparagus racemosus*), Mandookaparni(*Centella asiatica*), Sthira (*Desmodium gangeticum*) and Punarnava (*Boerhavia diffusa*)

Medicinal plants for diseases of old age -Numerous single drugs and compound formulations are prescribed by physicians which help in prevention and cure of diseases of old age.

Panchkarma-

Panchakarma therapy possesses numerous preventive, curative and promotive potentials which impart rehabilitative effect and help in maintaining physical fitness. These therapies aim at promoting longevity in life by guiding the individual in the prevention of disease and delaying ageing. Some intermediary palliative measures like Abhyanga (massage), Swedana (oleation) including Pinda Sveda and Kaya Seka are very suitable in providing relief to patients having complaints related to

musculoskeletal system. Panchakarma procedures should be administered with great precaution and after careful monitoring of the general health and accompanying diseases in the elderly. Vamana (medical emesis) and virechana (therapeutic purgation) especially of mridu type and matrabasti (therapeutic oil enema) are best suited for old aged individuals. Palliative measures like shirodhara and shirobasti are useful in anxiety, tension headache, insomnia, psychiatric and neurodegenerative conditions. Periodical use of panchakarma therapy helps in overall maintenance of physical fitness and promotion of health.

CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic system of medicine provides elaborative description about ageing. The signs and symptoms of the jara-awastha (old age) mentioned in Ayurveda texts resembles with the problems of old age of present modern ideology. Geriatric problems are best confronted by preventive measures than curative ones through the ancient science. General awareness should be created among people regarding these preventive aspects and various rasayan modalities must be included in practice. This will go a long way in increasing the happiness quotient of our population.

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