

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF GERIATRIC WOMEN: A BEACON OF HOPE IN AYURVEDA

Garima¹, Kamini Dhiman²

¹PG Scholar, ²Associate Professor;

Dept of Stri Roga and Prasuti Tantra, All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, India

Email: garimaal234@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Women go through significant biological changes across their lifespan. These cyclic shifts can disrupt, malfunction or create diseases in them and one of the most often and badly affected aspect is Psychological. Studies have shown that 10 to 15% of women experience depression at some point in their lives - double the number of men. Approximately, 15% of adults aged 60 and above suffer from a mental disorder and elderly women are more prone to develop psychological problems than men. Common symptoms include sad mood, sleep disturbance, irritability, anxiety, poor appetite and depression. Health of elderly women need greater attention as along with physical, mental and emotional health are of more importance at this stage of life. In Ayurveda, *Acharya* Sushruta has mentioned Madhwadi yoga in Medhaayushkamiya Rasayanadhyaya, which if administered regularly and properly, is a boon to women of Geriatric age. Its powerful ingredients like Swarna *bhasma*, amalaki and Madhu can not only prevent psychological and geriatric problems in women but also help curing them. It also strengthens immune system preventing physical illnesses. This paper emphasizes on considering Madhwadi yoga in geriatric care of women to reduce their suffering and promote healthy ageing.

Keywords: Psychological problems, elderly women, Madhwadi yoga

INTRODUCTION

During old age, an individual has to face many physical, mental, intellectual and social changes. Proportion of persons aged 60 and above worldwide, is projected to increase from 11% in 2007 to 22% by 2050.¹ Hence, concern for health of our elderly is more relevant than ever. Many Indian women face discrimination at various stages of their lives making them more vulnerable to psychological and systemic disorders, as physical health affects mental health and vice versa. Neuropsychiatric disorders alone, account

for 6.6% of total disability of this group. Therefore, Psychological problems of elderly women should not be neglected. Geriatric women draw special attention here, as in advancing age, depressed physical immunity along with changed hormonal status contribute to even more proneness of women towards depressed mental health leading to various psychological disorders and serious physical illnesses too. The cognitive functions majorly affected in old age are attention and memory.² Elderly women are twice more prone

to develop Psychological problems and paranoid disorders, than men. Hence, there is need of an effective and safe remedy for our geriatric women, so that, they can have a strong emotional and immunological status, to not only prevent such diseases, but also effects of aging, for an active healthy life even in their sixties. Madhwadi yoga is one such yoga described by *Acharya Sushruta* in '*Medhaayushkaamiya Rasayan Chikitsa*' specially for great intelligence and longevity. Its ingredients, *madhu*, *amalaki* and *swarna bhasma* have great potential in improving cognitive abilities, reduce chronic stress and its effects. Thus, if administered properly and regularly it can act as a marvel in Geriatric care.

GERIATRICS IN AYURVEDA

The term 'Geriatrics' gets its derivation from Greek words, 'Geri' meaning old age and 'latrics' means care and is concerned with the care and health of elderly.

It resembles to the Sanskrit word '*Geeryadi*' meaning degenerated. In Ayurveda, *Acharya Charak*³ considered old age above 60 years of age while *Acharya Sushruta* considers it above 70 years of age.⁴ *Acharya Sushruta* says that after 70 years of age, there occurs continuous *kshinta* (decrease) in *dhatu*, *indriya* (senses), *bala-virya* (strength and potential), *utsaah* (excitement in life) etc and also that elderly get prone to various diseases⁵. However, he also accepts that beginning of this *kshinta* occurs after the age of 40 years only according to *Acharya Sharangdhar*, loss of *medha* also begins after fourth decade of life. *Vata dosha* is the most important factor in the pathophysiology of ageing and related disorders because of its natural predominance at that stage of life⁶. *Acharya Sushruta* has also accepted that in females *jara* (old age) occurs at 50 years of age. It is due to this old age that menopause occurs.⁷

Ayurveda is the science of life and longevity. Therefore, Rasayan Therapy, one among Ayurveda's major eight branches⁸, is specifically devoted towards health, longevity, immunity and youthfulness even in older age.

MADHWADI YOGA⁹

Acharya Sushrut has described Rasayan Therapy and various Yogas for the same in *Chikitsa Sthan* starting

from 27th chapter named, '*Sarvaupghaata Shamaniya Rasayan*', i.e. rejuvenatory therapy to reduce and subside all types of damages or diseases. *Madhwadi yoga* has been described in chapter 28, named, '*Medhaayushkaamiya Rasayan Chikitsa*' meaning rejuvenatory therapy for those desiring great intelligence and long life. *Yogas* (formulations) described in this are specially meant for increasing mental cognitive abilities and longevity. It is said for this yoga that he who consumes this gets relieved of the fear of loss of life, even though possessed of fatal signs¹⁰. Therefore, this yoga is meant for psychological health and contributes specially towards emotional well being.

CONTENTS

It contains following ingredients:

- *MADHU* (Honey)
- *AMALAKI CHURNA* (*Emblca officinalis*)
- *Swarna Bhasma* (Calcined Gold)

DRUG PROPERTIES

MADHU (Honey)¹¹

Madhu is used in various Ayurvedic medicines as an ingredient and sometimes as an adjuvant. Its *rasa* or taste is described to be *Madhuraa* (sweet) with *kashaya* as *anurasa* (astringent sub-taste). It has *laghu* (light), *ruksha* (dry) and *tikshna* (pungent) *guna* or properties. Thus, it is *tridosha shaamaka*, i.e., subsides all the three *doshas* and increases *bala* (strength), *varna* (lusture) and is *agnideepak* (increases digestive power). It is beneficial in Heart diseases, eye disorders, diabetes, cough, vomiting, diarrhea and worms among others. It can enter minute channels of the body due to its *laghu* property and enhances effects of drugs it is given with due to its *Yogavaahi guna*.

AMALAKI CHURNA¹²

Amalaki or Indian gooseberry consists of *Pancharsasa*, i.e. contains five tastes out of six as mentioned in classics including predominance of *amla* (sour) and exclusion of *lavana* (salty). It has *laghu*, *ruksha*, *sheeta* (coldness) *guna*, *sheeta veerya* and *madhura vipaka*. It is *Rasayana* by *prabhaav* and is widely used for the purpose. *Tridoshahara*, *Pittashamak* (pacifies mainly *Pitta*). It has been kept in the *Vayasthaapan* (stabilise and balancing age),

Prajasthaapan, chakshushya (ocular tonic) and *hridya* (cardiotonic)¹³. It has anti-anxiety, anti-inflammatory, analgesic and diuretic properties.¹⁴ It also possesses, antioxidant, immuno-modulatory, antipyretic, cytoprotective, anti ulcer, anti-tussive and gastro protective activities along with anti-carcinogenic and anti metastatic activity.¹⁵

SWARNA BHASMA(Calcined Gold)¹⁶

It has *kashaya, tikta* (bitter) and *madhura rasa* along with *snigdha* (oleation property), *sheeta, pichchhila* (glistening) properties. It has *sheeta veerya, madhuraa vipaka* and pacifies the three *doshas*. It has been considered *chakshushya, sarvadoshaprashaman* (pacifying all the doshas) and *vishaghna* (detoxifying). It is a potent anti-depressant, anti-anxiety, has free radical scavenging activity and analgesic properties. It has shown to increase serum estradiol levels in female albino rats and is the first in-organic compound with anti-angiogenic property.¹⁷ It is a cardiotonic, immunity booster, improves intelligence and memory. It is used in various disorders like asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, skin ailments, dementia, Parkinsonism and infertility. It decreases stress induced raised levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, 5-Hydroxytryptamine, dopamine and even corticosterones.¹⁸

FORM OF DRUGS

In the present formulation, the three drugs are to be used in different forms. The fruit pulp of *amalaki* or Indian gooseberry is to be taken in the dried powder form, calcined Gold should be used which is very fine metallic powder, while honey may be used in crude available form.

DRUG POSOLOGY

Considering views of *Acharyas*, gradual *kshintā* in *dhatu, indriya, bala* etc. begins after the age of *sampoornta*, i.e., 40 years and old age in females is considered around 50 years or around menopause. Therefore, it could be optimally started at the age of 45 years or in peri-menopausal period, in otherwise healthy female individuals.

DOSE AND DURATION

Amalaki churna 3 gram, *Swarna Bhasma* 25 mg and *madhu* enough to mix these two or as per requirement

should be taken daily in early morning in continuation for at least 3 months in healthy individuals and six months in diseased ones and then a break or gap could be given and then started again. Renal Function Test should be done before and after the drug administration to check for any adverse effect.

DISCUSSION

Madhwadi Yoga contains *Madhu, Amalaki* and *Swarna Bhasma*, all having Tridosha properties. *Amalaki* is a well known Rasayana and hence, provides with longevity, improves *smriti* (memory), *medha* (intelligence) and preserves health and youth. *Amalaki* and *Swarna bhasma* both have their effects on vital organs of the body, thus maintaining Systemic Health, for e.g., Heart for Circulation and Agni for Gastrointestinal tract (GIT). *Amalaki* includes bioflavonoids, flavones, polyphenols and carotenoids and is the richest source of Vitamin-C, which plays significant role in synthesis of neurotransmitters. It detoxifies body with its rich antioxidant content. *Amalaki* tannoids have recently been reported to enhance Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) scavenging activity in rat brain cortex and striatum, enhancing concentration of anti-oxidant enzymes-super oxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT) and glutathione peroxidase (GPX) leading to decreased Lipid per Oxidation. Toxic product of lipid per oxidation induces damage of the structural and functional integrity of cell membranes, breaks DNA strands and denatures cellular proteins. It is thus possible that in chronic stress, increased levels of SOD lead to increased generation of per-oxides which do not get effectively scavenged due to decreased levels of CAT and GPX resulting in augmented lipid per oxidation¹⁹. *Amalaki* appears to mitigate these stress induced effects tending to normalize SOD activity and increasing CAT and GPX. Thus there is decreased lipid per oxidation and attenuation of the adverse effects of even chronic stress preventing psychological disorders. On a systemic level detoxification begins with Agni (digestive power) in GIT and also relies on healthy circulation and elimination. *Amalaki* supports all three of these and has a particular affinity for the blood. It supports virtually every stage from innate intelligence of *Agni*

to proper elimination of wastes and toxins. It has potent anti-viral and anti-fungal activity and significant anti-bacterial effects against *S.aureus* and *E.coli*. *Madhu* and *Swarnabhasma* both are proved catalysts²⁰ and thus along with their own gunas, enhance effects of the other two drugs. *Madhu* enters *sukshma strotas* or minute channels of the body taking effect of this *yoga* (formulation) to cellular level. Honey was found to improve memory and learning abilities by reducing oxidative stress in brain, improving morphology of memory associated areas, enhancing Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF) along with Acetylcholine and reducing acetylcholine esterase.²¹ It contains flavanoids, alkaloids, cardiac glycosides, vitamins and eight essential amino acids. Its anti-inflammatory effect reduces neuroinflammatory processes thus preventing neuro-degenerative diseases and effects of neuronal injury. It also provides with invaluable nutritional ingredients, antioxidant substances, mono-saccharides, di-saccharides and tri-saccharides and trace components such as Copper, Zinc, Lithium, strontium²² and unidentified materials that could ensure an elderly stay in healthy lives. *Swarnabhasma* has anti-depressant, anti-anxiety and anti-cataleptic activities. It also has free radical scavenging activity.²³ Gold nanoparticles with monolayer of Polyethylene Glycol (PEG) improve cellular internalization properties²⁴. It has shown to decrease stress induced raised levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, 5-Hydroxytryptamine, dopamine and corticosterones and increases adaptogenic activity. Its neuroprotective action may be attributed to its direct action on neurons producing catecholamines in medulla oblongata and immune-modulatory effect, thus, inhibiting inflammatory response system seen in depressive illnesses²⁵. Its gametogenic functions^{xx} and estradiol increasing property may help correcting and improving the disturbed hormonal status of the women at elderly age. It probably also acts on *Oja*, i.e., *saara bhut dravya* of all *dhatas*, thus enhancing its *prasannadi guna*, helping in Psychological disorders. The *Madhwadi Yoga*, probably, also helps in Homeostasis, delays Apoptosis (natural cell death) and maintains cellular Vitality. Vitality in turn, heals injuries faster, protects against infections and increases

stamina. It helps prevent degenerative disease processes and can even help to reverse them. However, further research is needed to prove above point.

Therefore, *Madhwadi yoga*, can help in stress and psychological disorders of women and also delays age related signs. It can rejuvenate whole body, i.e. all *dhatas*, *indriyas*, *bala* (strength), *varna* (skin lusture), *smriti* (memory) and *medha* (intelligence).

CONCLUSION

Ingredients of *Madhwadi Yoga* have easy availability. This yoga is easy to administer, safe and effective. It may help prevent psychological problems, increases cognitive abilities and also provide with better immunity along with delaying age-related signs and symptoms. It also strengthens major organs preventing systemic diseases. Therefore, it is advocated here, that this yoga should be considered and used for psychological problems and geriatric health of elderly women.

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