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An Ayurvedic perspective about Autism - Literary Review

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ABSTRACT

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts on the normal functioning of brain, challenging child development particularly in the field of language and communication, social and emotional with presence of unusually strong narrow interest and personal occupation by repetitive stereotype mannerism. Western medicine and research have seemingly stalled in respect to the management of autism however early intervention and behavioral therapies have shown improvement in some extent. Ayurveda understand the nature of human brain in a completely different manner from modern psychiatric and physiological theories. Autism has close similarities to the features of that *Unmada* which is described in Ayurveda. The condition may be due to *Khavaigunya* (disarrangements) of *Srotas* (channels) which nurtures *Manas* (mind) as a consequences of many *Agantuja* (epigenetic and toxic insults and post-natal environmental factor) and *Sahaja* (genetic) factors. Among the various type of treatment modalities *Yuktivyapashrya Chikitsa* plays a vital role in managing the symptoms of autism in children.

Key words: *Unmada, Autism, Poorvakarma, Yuktivyapashrya Chikitsa, Agantuja, Manas.*

INTRODUCTION

Autism is one of the main concern of pediatrics in the present era. This neurodevelopmental disorder of unknown etiology begins in early childhood. The main characteristic features of Childhood Autism are impairment in communication skills, social interactions and reciprocity, and imagination and play. The features of Autism are much similar to that of *Unmada* (disease of mind characterized by mental confusion etc.), a disease condition mentioned in Ayurvedic classics. Due

to various etiological factors, the conjunction between *Atma* (the self) and *Manas* (mind) is disrupted resulting in the vitiation of *Manovaha Srotas* (channels of consciousness). Along with this, the vitiation of three *Doshas* (*Vata, Pitta, and Kapha*) will end up in the manifestation of *Unmada*. *Manovaha Sroto-Dushti* together with *Tridosha Dusti* is the basic cause of Childhood Autism. Due to etiology of vitiation *Dhee, Dhriti* and *Smriti* that causes imbalance of *Kala* and *Karma* which results into improper contact of the senses with their objectives (*Asatmendriyarth Samyoga*) and give rise to inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity A systematic Ayurvedic treatment consisting primarily of *Vata-Pittahara Chikitsa* (treatment for pacifying *Vata* and *Pitta*) along with *Deepana-Pachana* (drugs for enhancing digestive power), *Snehana-Swedana* (oleation with lipophilic drugs and sudation therapies), *Sroto-Sodhana* (cleansing of channels which corrects the metabolism and does modulation of gut microbiome), *Brumhana* (nourishing treatments) and *Medhya Rasayana* (drugs for promoting intellectual and cognitive functions) and

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Pathya Karma (congenial diet and habits) should be considerable relief of the condition.^{[1],[2]}

The Prevalence rate of Autism among primary school children was found to be 11.32%. The ADHD subtype is rare (about 2%), while the ADHD subtype is the predominant one and is associated with severe impairment. There is no satisfactory treatment in any other system of medicine except in Ayurveda, where a lot of description about its etiopathogenesis and treatment is available right from the Vedic and Samhita period. Hence it is necessary to study this disease thoroughly.^[3]

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study literature review of Autism through Ayurveda.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

All relevant Ayurvedic and modern science literature along with internet databases is referred for study. A literature review to evaluate the effect of Ayurveda modalities, modern medicines, association of biochemical parameters, other interventions in Autism.

Method of data source: Google scholar, MEDLINE (Pubmed), Cochrane and Ayurveda were searched.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of *Unmada*^[5]

According to *Acharya Charak*, *Unmada*, is the *Manasvyadhi* is which understood as the unsettled condition of the *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (understanding), *Samjna* (consciousness), *Gnana* (perception), *Smriti* (memory), *Bhakti* (inclination), *Sheela* (character), *Chesta* (behaviour), and *Achara* (conduct).

Classification of *Unmada*^{[4],[6],[7]}

Classification is based on the prognosis, the knowledge of which is very essential in treating any disease is focusing on aetiology, mode of manifestation, prognosis and principles of treatment he offers two more classifications as *Nija* and *Agantu Nija Unmada* is further divided into four kinds. They are also known as *Doshaja Unmaadas* (those arising from the morbidity

of *Doshas*. Out of these the fourth kind namely *Sannipataja Unmada* is said to be incurable according to *Acharya Shushruta* and *Vagbhata*.

Nidana^[9]

The *Hetu* of the *Unmada* are given as:

1. *Aaharaja Hetu*
2. *Viharaja Hetu*

Aaharaja Hetu: Incompatible, dirty, impure food like fruits and milk, heavy diet like non-veg, *Dhadhi*, bakery products etc. increases *Tridoshas*.

Viharaja Hetu: disrespect of *Dev* (God), *Guru* (Teachers), *Brahmins* (learned), excessive *Bhaya* (fear), *Harsha* (joy) to produce *Manobhighata* disturbing all the normal mental functions increases *Rajas* and *Tamas Mansik Doshas*. *Agantu Unmaadas* arising *Himsa* (cruelty) the *Rati* (lust) and *Abhyarchana* (extortion).

Etiopathogenesis

Samprapti of Autism as per Ayurveda^[8]

As per Ayurvedic classics, the acquisition of knowledge takes place by a sequence of events where the conjunction of *Atma* (the self), *Manas* (mind), *Indriya* (sense organ), *Indriyatha* (object of perception). *Atma* (the self) is responsible for the cognition, and *Manas* is the substratum of *Indriyas* (sense organs) to perceive *Indriyatha* (object of perception). The factors responsible for the mental constitution of the foetus are *Satwa* (mind) of mother and father, the objects of hearing, actions of the pregnant mother and past deeds. In children with Autism, the conjunction between *Atma* and *Manas* is disrupted. i.e.; *Manovaha-Sroto-Dusti* (vitiation of channels of consciousness that flows through mind) along with *Tridosha Dusti* (vitiation of three *doshas*) is the characteristic feature of Childhood Autism. As per Ayurvedic classics, the same etiopathology is explained in the context of *Unmada* (Disease of mind characterized by mental confusion etc.).

Characteristics^[10]

The features of *Unmada* as per Ayurvedic classics are:

1. *Manovibhrama* (perversion of mind) - Due to this, the subject does not think about such matters which are worth thinking, and he/she also indulge in thinking about the matters which he/she is not supposed to think about.
2. *Budhi Vibhrama* (perversion of intellect) - Due to this, the subject understands the eternal things as noneternal and advantageous as disadvantageous.
3. *Samjnajnana Vibhrama* (impaired sensory perception)
4. *Smruti Vibhrama* (impairment of memory)
5. *Bhakti Vibhrama* (abnormal desires)
6. *Sheela Vibhrama* (inappropriate manners and behaviors)
7. *Cesta Vibhrama* (abnormal activities)
8. *Achara Vibhrama* (loss of learned skills) By analyzing the etiopathology and clinical features of Autism, it can be included under the broad spectrum of *Unmada*. As per Ayurvedic classics, *Garbhopaghatakara bhavas* (the prenatal factors which harm the product of conception) (8) are considered as major etiological factors in its causation. Among cases of childhood Autism, etiopathogenic factors and line of treatment varies from individual to individual.^{[11],[12],[13]}

Etiopathogenesis of Autism as Modern science

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder of unknown aetiology. The cardinal features of Autism are impairment of social interaction, communication and imagination, and restricted interests and repetitive behaviour. Childhood autism has its manifestations usually at around 18-24 months of age and is well established by 3 years of age. World Health Organization has estimated that worldwide 1 in 160 children has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Latest survey by Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network of Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest a 15% increase in prevalence that 1 in every 59 children are being identified with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in the United States and is about 4 times more common

among boys than in girls. These statistics calls for the urgency of evaluating this condition in scientific backgrounds.^[14]

The exact cause of Autism is unknown. However, the various causes which are believed to contribute to the occurrence of Autism are genetic factors, various environmental factors, perinatal brain injury, hormonal imbalance etc. Abnormalities in brainstructure and function have also recommended by neuro -radiological and neurochemical studies. But, the findings of various studies are conflicting and there is no diagnostic imaging or other tests specific for Autism. The factors like emotionally distant parenting styles (refrigerator mothers) and MMR vaccination were previously thought as etiological factors for Autism. But currently, the causation of Autism by above-mentioned factors stays invalid.^{[15],[17]}

Treatment (*Chikitsa*)

Treatment of Autism as per Ayurveda^{[18],[19]}

The classical management of *Unmada* mentioned in Ayurvedic classics is found to be very effective in the management of Autism. *Deepana* and *Pachana* which are the procedures in which various drugs are used for promoting digestion, *Snehapana* (oral intake of medicated ghee preparation), *Mridu Sodhana* (Mild purification of body by emesis or purgation), *Niruha Basti* (decoction enema) and *Sneha Basti* (oil enema), *Siro Virechana* or *Nasya* (medicated nasal drops), *Samjna Prabodhana* (medication to stimulate the mind). Apart from the *Sodhana* (purificatory) therapies mentioned in Ayurvedic classics, *Abhyanga* (oil massage of head and body), *Siro-Pichu* (Overhead application of a piece of cotton dipped in medicated oil), *Sirodhara* (pouring of medicated oil over the forehead as a continuous stream), *Sirolepam* (Overhead application of medicinal paste), and *Takra Dhara* (pouring of medicated buttermilk over forehead as a continuous stream) are various treatment modalities aimed to promote the development of brain and to reduce or control the troublesome behaviours found with Autism Spectrum Disorders. As per *Charaka Samhita*, the avoidance of Meat and intoxicating drinks, intake of *Hitahara* (compatible foods), following

cleanliness and possessing a good mental strength can prevent the disease *Unmada* and, the person cured of *Unmada* will attain clarity of *Indriyarth* (objects of senses), *Buddhi*, *Atma*, *Manas* and normalcy of *Dhatu*s. Autism is regarded as a lifelong condition due to *Bija Dosh*a (genetic predisposition). But, by adopting *Unmada Chikitsa* as a long-term intervention the triggering elements of Autism can be eliminated thereby the quality of life can be improved.

Ayurveda approach^[20]

Unmada in a holistic approach with due importance to the logic based pharmacotherapy, Panchakarma interventions and psychotherapy in the form of spiritual and psychological interventions.

Daiva-Vyapashraya Chikitsa (Spiritual therapy)

Ayurveda considers individuals as part of the supreme conscience and the role of spirituality has been explained in detail in various contexts. Logical use of *Mantra*, *Aushadhi*, *Mani* (wearing gems), *Bali* (auspicious offerings), *Upahara* (gifts to deserving people), *Homa* (oblations), *Niyama* (observance of scriptural rules), *Prayashchitta* (atonement), *Upavasa* (fasting), *Svastyayana* (chanting of auspicious hymns), *Pran-Patagamana* (obeisance to the Gods, going to pilgrimage), etc. are aimed at boosting the self-confidence and mental strength to the individuals.

Satvavajaya Chikitsa

Satvavajaya Chikitsa literally means controlling the mind, in such a way that it is not acted upon by various stressors making it prone to *Prajnaparadha*. *Acharya Charaka*, defines *Satvavajaya* as withdrawal of mind from unwholesome objects. It includes:

- **Mano Nigraha:** Regulating mind/subjugating mind from unwholesome interactions
- **Dhee-Dhairyaatmadi Vijnanam:** It is providing a deeper level of understanding which helps ultimately in better control of mind. *Acharya Charaka* also explains the utility of replacing negative emotions with that of positive emotions that is beneficial to psyche. Thus, *Satvavajaya* encompasses various aspects that deal with mind -

its physiology, morphology, morbidity and also management of Psychological as well as Psychosomatic diseases.

Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa

This includes treatment through logical use of medicines and modification of *Ahara* and *Vihara* to suit the needs of the person. The patient should be encouraged to follow proper dietary regimen, follow rules of *Sadvrita*, to use *Medhya Rasayana* (medicines that boost psyche) and *Doshahara Ousadha* (medicines) to control the imbalanced mind.

Dietary Management^[16]

Most of ADHD affected patients have the proper nutrients deficient that's why, parents who are troubled with medicating their children are often more comfortable with the initiative of dietary interventions. Proper nutrition is essential for growing children, and children who eat a diet high in "junk food" in early childhood are more likely to exhibit hyperactivity by age seven; this may reflect a long-term nutritional imbalance. So advised the parents to refined, carbohydrates, sugars, and processed foods containing additives should be completely eliminated from the diet.

CONCLUSION

Psychiatric disorder is well explained in Ayurvedic Samhita. That ancient knowledge of Ayurveda will help in diagnosis and management of *Unmad* in present era very well. In Ayurveda it may be correlated to *Unmad* (Autism) disease. So, line of treatment such as neuro-protective medications along with *Panchakarma* therapies have definitely shown outcome on the disease and thus pave way to further researches in employing Ayurvedic methods towards the management of Autism. So, this review article is an attempt to highlighting on details of *Unmada* with correlating with Autism.

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