



ISSN 2456-3110

Vol 8 · Issue 9

September 2023

Journal of
**Ayurveda and Integrated
Medical Sciences**

www.jaims.in

JAIMS

An International Journal for Researches in Ayurveda and Allied Sciences



Maharshi Charaka
Ayurveda

Indexed

Cancer - An Ayurvedic Understanding

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ABSTRACT

Cancer,^[1] one of the deadly challenges, drastically in 21st century, has now officially become the most dangerous killer in the world according to the World Health Organization. No one can deny the fact that cancer is related to adversary of modernization and at once pattern of irregular and stressed life dominated by unhealthy lifestyle. An integral approach is needed to manage cancer using the growing body of knowledge, gained through significant developments. Thousands of herbal and traditional compounds are being screened worldwide to validate their use as anticancer drugs. Also, the *Panchakarma* - the detoxification procedures mentioned in *Ayurvedic* literatures are proving best in cancer treatment. The science of *Ayurveda* is supposed to add first step on to the curative aspects of cancer that have resemblance with clinical entities of *Arbuda*, and *Granthi* - mentioned in *Sushrut Samhita*. Hence an attempt is made in this review to discuss about pathology and therapeutic management of various diseases similar to cancer described in *Ayurveda*.

Key words: *Apachi, Arbuda, Cancer, Dushivish, Granthi, Mansavaha Strotas*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of modern medicine, various investigations on cancer, its causes, surgery, and medicinal treatment have been carried out and talked about a lot till now. Today also the scientists and researchers in the field of medicine are trying their best to find the root cause and complete curative treatment of cancer.

The history^[2] of cancer describes the development of the field of oncology and its role in the history of medicine. The earliest known description of cancer appear in several papyri in ancient Egypt. The Edwin

Smith Papyrus was written around 1600 B.C. and contains description of cancer as well as a procedure to remove breast tumours by cauterization, stating that the disease has no treatment.

Hippocrates (460 B.C. to 370 B.C.) described several kinds of cancer referring to them by the term *kapkivoc* (carcinosis), the Greek word for crab as well as carcinoma. This comes from the appearance of the cut surface of a solid malignant tumour with the veins stretched on all sides as animal the crab has its feet, hence it derives the name.

In the 2nd century AD, the Greek physician Galen used *Oncos* (Greek word for swelling) to describe all tumours, reserving Hippocrates term *Carcinosis* for malignant tumours. Galen also used the suffix - *oma* to indicate cancerous lesions.

If we see towards the history of treatment for cancer when M. Curie and P. Curie discovered radiation at the end of 19th Century, they stumbled upon the first effective non-surgical cancer treatment with radiation.

The Japanese medical community observed that the bone marrow of the victims of atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was completely destroyed. They concluded that the diseased bone marrow could

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Submission Date: 16/07/2023 Accepted Date: 25/08/2023

Access this article online

Quick Response Code



Website: www.jaims.in

DOI: [10.21760/jaims.8.9.16](https://doi.org/10.21760/jaims.8.9.16)

also be destroyed with radiation, and this led to the development of bone marrow transplant for leukaemia.

Now a days the treatments that are said to be effective in various types of cancer are; 1] Surgery 2] Chemotherapy, 3] Radiation Therapy, 4] Targeted Therapy, 5] Immunotherapy, 6] Stem Cells or Bone Marrow transplant and 7] Hormone Therapy. Since the recognition of cancer many effective therapies have come forward. No doubt because of these modern treatments the life of cancer patients has improved, But, as we know every pathy has its own limitations and some drawbacks, these modern medicines also have some drawbacks and limitations. It is a responsibility of an *Ayurvedic* graduate to use our ancient *Ayurvedic* knowledge in cancer patients with totally *Ayurvedic* approach for its diagnosis and treatment, which can be helpful to overcome the drawbacks of modern therapies and the combination of modern and *Ayurvedic* approach may give complete cure to a cancer patient.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. To put forward the way of *Ayurvedic* thinking about Cancer.
2. To try to diagnose and treat the cancer patients with purely *Ayurvedic* view.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Different *Ayurvedic* texts, research papers, articles are referred to study the concept of cancer in *Ayurvedic* perspective and entitled as Cancer - An *Ayurvedic* Understanding.

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Ayurveda describes many diseases similar to the cancer that is described today such as *Granthi*, *Gulma*, *Arbuda*, *Visarpa* (to spread), *Galganda* (goitre), *Apachi*, *Adhimansa* (metastatic tumour) & *Dusht Vrana* (non-healing wound), *Nadi Vrana* (sinus tract or fistula), etc.^[3]

The *Hetu*, *Sadhya-Sadhyatva*, treatment and *Pathya Kalpana* (Do's and Don'ts) all these are describe in

detail in *Ayurvedic* texts. So, studying the basic concepts of *Ayurveda*, mainly 2 things we think about the cancer;

- 1] What can be done to prevent a person from getting cancer?

[As the main Moto of *Ayurveda* is^[4] '*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*'.....]

- 2] What should be line of *Ayurvedic* treatment for the patient suffering with cancer, by taking the detail history of patient with *Ayurvedic* criteria and thinking of *Dosh-Dushya Sammurchrana* so that, *Samprapti Bhanga* can be achieved and this will make one's life as happy and as pain free as possible.

It is important to think about following in order to achieve both these goals.

- 1) *Tridosh Sanght* (hard consistency glandular swelling)
- 2) *Aam Sankalpana* (metabolic disorder)
- 3) *Saman Vayu - Grahani* concept (digestive disorders at micro level)
- 4) *Mansavrana Strotas* (muscular system)
- 5) Layers of skin according to *Ayurveda*
- 6) *Samanya - Vishesh* concepts (inculcating the similar properties)
- 7) *Artav Veg Dharan* (Postpone the Menstruation) and Uterus-breast cancer
- 8) *Dooshi Vish* (slow poisoning)
- 9) *Ajeerna* (indigestion) – PPI (proton pump inhibitors)
- 10) *Satva* (strong minded)
- 11) Lastly *Ayurvedic* treatment

Modern medical science cannot give any guidance on what kind of diet the patient should follow according to the type of cancer, since the patient is diagnosed with cancer. Allopath suggests eating eggs, high protein diet, green salad, and all kinds of fruits, vegetables to make the patient strong to give response to chemotherapy and to build immunity of the patient.

They believe that this diet gives benefits to the patient but on the contrary- The^[5] *Samprapti* (phenomenon of disease occurrence in the body) of cancer patient Begins with *Agnimandya* (loss of appetite / slow metabolism), *Mansavaha* (muscular), *Raktavaha* (blood, liver and spleen), *Strotodushti* (imbalance of channels), such type of *Guru* (heavy to digest) and *Abhishyandi* (obstructing the channels) substances results in *Aamsanchiti* and the disease progresses.

DISCUSSION

Concept of Cancer in Ayurvedic Perspective

1] *Tridosh Sanghat*

Clinical examination of cancer patients, the patient appears to have an indeterminate growth in any part of the body, which is palpable like gland on the skin, or under the skin or in the abdominal cavity.

In *Ayurveda*, the type of growth is called *Granthi* or *Arbuda*, which is always *Tridosh Sanghat*.

2] *Visarpa (To spread)*

Visarpa and its types like *Granthi Visarpa*, *Sannipatik Visarpa (Bahya and Abhyantar)* these are having very resemblance with metastatic stage of the cancer.

3] Concept of *Aam (Indigested toxic part of metabolism)*

Aam^[6] (that is *Apachit Annarasa*) is a type of poison and being lying in the dormant state absorb in the *Dhatu*. When the *Aamjanit Doshas* are accumulated in some *Strotas*, their forms a *Dosh Sanghat* which is *Drudhmula* (deeply sited) and it is nothing but glands or tumours. (*Granthi*^[7], *Arbuda*, or *Gulma*).

As said in *Ayurveda*, when the *Dhatu* increases, the nutrients of all *Dhatu*s are reduced and only the *Meda* increases, similarly when there is *Aamyukt Dosh Sanghat* in any states, all the nutrients nourish this tumour and we weaken the strength of all *Dhatu*s and the disease / cancer becomes *Mahamool* (deeply sited).

4] *Saman Vayu & Grahani*^[8]

In digestion (*Sthul Pachan*), there is a place of *Saman Vayu*, near *Pachakagni* (समानोऽग्नि समीपस्थे ...|) the

role of *Samanvayu* each to breakdown the food to excrete excremental and absorb the essence.

अन्नं गृह्णाति पचति विवेचयति मुञ्चति च ।

Similar function is going on at the cellular level of the body (*Sukshma Pachan*). When there is a disturbance in this function of *Saman Vayu* add cellular level, the *Mala-Mutra Kleda* Start accumulating at the cellular level of specific *Strotas Dushti* that results in abnormal growth of sales (वायुर्विभजति) and the last picture is gland or tumour.

5] Concept of *Strotas Dushti (Manasavaha Strotas)*^[9]

If there is any gland tumour or swelling in the body then it is permissible to think about *Manasavaha Strotas Dushti*. Because according to *Ayurveda* the origin of this disease is an "*Manasavaha Strotas Dushti*".

Why only '*Manasavaha Strotas*' ?

A thorough study of causes, symptoms, and origin of *Manasavaha Strotas* can the reveal a lot about disease like cancer.

a) *Manasavaha Strotas - Mool Sthan*

मांसवहानां च स्रोतसां स्नायूर्मूलं त्वक् च..| (च. वि.5)^[9]

मांसवहे द्वे तयोर्मूलं स्नायूत्वचं रक्तवहाश्च धमन्यः| (सु.शा. 9)^[10]

b) *Manasavaha Strotas Dushti Hetu (Causes)*

अभिष्यंदानि भोज्यानि स्थूलानि च गुरुणि च ।

मांसवाहिनी दुष्यन्ति भुक्त्वां च स्वपतां दिवां || (च.वि.5)

c) *Manasavaha Strotas Dushti Lakshanam (Symptoms)*^[11]

अधिमांसं अर्बुदं कीलं गलशालूक शुण्डिके ।

पूतिमांसालजी गण्ड गण्डमाला उपजिह्विका || (च. सू.28)

As said earlier, *Mool Sthana* of *Manasavaha Strotas*, is *Tvacha* (skin), which is occupied all over the body, all pervasive and all sense organs are located in it (इंद्रिय अधिष्ठाति...|)

In cancer, it is necessary to think deeply about the *Mool Sthana* of *Mahavaha Strotas* i.e., *Tvacha*.

In *Ayurveda*, seven layers of skin and the diseases that occur in each layer are specifically described.

These layers are;^[12]

1. *Avabhasini*, 2. *Lohita*, 3. *Shweta*, 4. *Tamra*, 5. *Vedini*, 6. *Rohini*, 7. *Mansadhara*

The disease like cancer i.e. *Granthi*, *Apachi*, *Arbuda*^[13] are said to occur in '*Rohini*' layer of the skin and *Visarpa kushta* at '*Vedini*' layer.

The thickness of *Rohini* is *Vrihi Praman*^[14] and that of *Vedini* is '*Vrihe Pancham Bhag Praman*'. So, there are two reasons why *Manasavaha Strotas* should be considered in treating cancer,

- 1) The origin of *Manasavaha Strotas* is *Tvacha*, which is whole body pervasive.
- 2) '*Lepana*' (coating) is an important function of the *Mansa Dhatu*. The whole human body is coated with *Mansa Dhatu*.

And all the diseases - *Granthi*, *Arbuda*, *Apachi*, *Visarpa* are said to occur in such body wide part i.e., *Mansadhatu*.

6] The Concept of *Samanya*^[15] – *Vishesh* (Inculcate the similar properties)

सर्वदा सर्व भावानां सामान्यं वृद्धिकारणम् ||

According to this concept, it would not be an exaggeration to say that all food substances, currently available in the market are carcinogenic.

Examples;

1. Seeds that give a lot of yield in a short period of time produce food grains, fruits from them.
2. Injections of hormones into the vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, etc. and broiler chicken and eggs, give us these products in huge size which is artificially done' beyond their natural capacity.

Actually, the metabolism and their own *Dhatvagni* in all these artificially produced food substances, is already damaged. Consuming food with such qualities

may increase the speed of abnormal cell growth in the human body as well.

The person whose metabolism (*Dhatvagni*) is basically good or a person who exercises regularly or take balanced diet (*Laghu Aahar*), their *Mansadhatu* is properly metabolised and they do not suffer with cancer like disease.

But most of the people consume broiler chicken, eggs. In almost 95% of the ceremonies, the food is like paneer, chicken, etc. which is of *Guru* (heavy to digest) or *Abhishyandi Gunas* (channel obstructing properties), and vegetables contain cauliflower which is full of chemicals & hormones. These substances are consumed insistently.

The paneer is obtained from the milk of Jersey Cow and that also has properties of producing cells in abnormally huge quantity.

Consuming this type of perverted fast growing food, because of this *Gun Samanya*, the human body also acquires this quality of abnormally fast growing cells.

Apart from this, lack of exercise, daytime sleep, living in AC, all these reasons causes *Agnimandya* and specifically in *Mansa Dhatu*, it causes *Aama Sanchiti*, *Swed Vaha Strotas* are blocked and ultimately the *Mool Sthan* (Origin) of the *Mansavaha Strotas* i.e., *Tvacha Dushti* occurs, it can lead to *Granthi*, *Arbuda*, etc.

Cancer of Female Reproductive organs & Breast Cancer due to *Artav Vah Strotas Dushti*

Nowadays hormonal pills are widely used to postpone menstrual cycle. In *Ayurvedic Samhitas*, *Veg Dharan* is contraindicated. There is description of 13 *Vegas*, which should not be suppressed. There is no description of *Artav Vega Dharan* in any *Ayurvedic* text because there was no any artificial way to suppress or postpone the menstrual flow.

Unfortunately, in modern world, there are so many medicines which are being regularly used blindly to postpone MC, which directly hamper the function of *Apaan Vayu* in female body. It results in *Artavjanya Udavarta*. As *Aartav* is *Upadhātu* of *Rakta*, there occurs direct *Raktadhātu Dushti*. Also, there is connection

between *Aartav Vaha Strotas* (Female reproductive system) & *Stnya Vaha Strotas* (breast and lactative channels), so *Aartav Udavarta* (Opposite direction of *Apaanvayu*) also badly affects the *Stanya Vaha Strotas*. All this phenomenon may result into cancer of uterus, ovaries or breast.

There is a description about uterine tumour in *Gulma Chikitsa* in *Ayurveda* as '*Raktaj Gulma*' (Uterine tumour). It says that the main cause of uterine tumour is suppressing the menstrual flow.

ऋतावनाहारतया भयेन विरुक्षणैः वेगविनिग्रहैश्च ।^[16]

संस्तम्भनोल्लेखन योनिदोषैः गुल्मः स्त्रियं ऽम्युपैति ॥ (च. चि. 5/18)

Dushi Vish Concept (Slow Poisoning)

यत् स्थावरं जंगमं कृत्रिमं वा देहादशेषं यदनिर्गतं वा ।

जीर्णं विषघ्नौषधीभिर्हितं वा दावाग्निं वातातप शोषितं वा ।

स्वभावतो वा गुणविप्रहीनं विषं ही दूषी विषतामुपैति ।^[17] (सु. क. 2)

दूषीविषं तु शोणितं दुष्ट्यारुः कितिभं कोठलिगं च ।

विषमेकैक दोषं संदूष्य हरत्यसूनेवम् ॥^[18] (च.चि.23/31)

Dushi Visha causes death by contaminating *Raktadhatu* or contaminating any single *Dosha*.

In today's prevalent treatment method, the arbitrary use of allopathic medicines to get quick cure can also be seen from this perspective as one of the causes of cancer. Because all these allopathic drugs have properties of *Visha* i.e., *Sukshma*, *Vyvayi*, & *Vikasi*.

Examples:

If there is fever in the body due to bacterial or even non-bacterial causative factor there is a gunshot allopathic treatment of anti-pyretics and antibiotics. In bacterial infection the causative organisms are killed due to antibiotics but the root cause due to which the bacteria grow in the body i.e., *Kleda* (toxins) or *Aam* (undigested food) in the specific *Strotas* (Channel or system) is not treated with these drugs and this *Aam* or *Kleda* gets accumulated in the specific *Strotas* due to

recurrent infection and treatment of antibiotics. There is no *Smaprapti Bhang*, and the phenomenon of *Stroto sang* and *Aamyukta Tridosh Sanghat* takes place. This *Tridosh Sanghat* becomes *Dridh Mool* i.e., *Granthi* or *Arbud*. It may take so many years to finally result in cancer. Likewise, almost every patient of vomiting, nausea, heartburn, pain in abdomen, flatulence, loss of appetite is treated with antacids, PPI, ulcer healing drugs, anti-spasmodic or antibiotic. Actually, all these symptoms are due to various types of *Ajeernas*, stated in *Ayurveda*, which is due to disturbed *Pachakagni*.

And this disturbed or imbalanced *Pachakagni* is never treated with these allopathic drugs and the phenomenon goes on occurring in the human body for years and years.

Langhana, *Deepana*, *Anulomanam* is never told to patient in allopathy practice. Therefore, *Apachit Doshas* go on accumulating in the *Koshtha* and then travel to *Shakhas* and finally result in *Praghadh Moolyukt Granthi* and *Arbuda* etc.

There is an article on internet Increasing cases of stomach cancer due to excessive use of proton pump inhibitors

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9264794/>^[19]

Which supports the above statement.

Concept of Satva

There is a concept of *Guru Vyadhit*^[20] and *Laghu Vyadhit* in *Ayurveda*. It says that the patient having *Pravarsatva* can get cured also from highly critical condition or from incurable diseases.

Currently available treatment for cancer i.e., chemotherapy and radiation also have lot of side effects on the human body. The strength to bear this treatment is higher in the patients with *Pravarsatva* and those patients are majority examples of getting cancer-free.

Ayurvedic treatment of Cancer

To treat the cancer patient, we have to think about following.

1. *Mansavaha Strotas* and *Tvacha* (Muscular system and Skin)

2. *Aam-Kled Sanchiti*
3. *Langhan-Bruhan, Shatra Karma* (Surgery), *Kshar-Agnikarma*.
4. *Vyayam* (Exercise)
5. *Rasayan Chikitsa* (Antiaging treatment)

CONCLUSION

Considering the previously discussed objectives in patients who regularly consume or do all these *Hetusevan* or the patients with family history of cancer should undergo *Panchakarma* procedures regularly as said in *Ritucharya*, modify the life style, regular exercise is must, yoga meditation is also important. For the cancer patients who are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation, should be treated with *Pittashamak*, *Rakta Prasadak*, *Balya* and *Brihan Kalpas* (Tonics). Various *Daaha Shamak Lepas* (Get rid of burning sensation), *Paanak Kalpana* should be given. Spiritual treatment is also important for mental support.

If the patient is not eligible for chemotherapy or radiation or if the patient wishes to undergo complete *Ayurvedic* treatment, firstly it is important to understand the history of patient and determine where and what *Dosha-Dushya*, *Sammurchhana* (etiology) has occurred. After that we can give local pain relieving treatments like *Lepanam* (local application of mediated powders) *Raktamokshan* (Take out impure blood), *Agni-Vedhan Karma* (cautery and puncture), etc.

According to the *Bala* of the patient *Shodhan Chikitsa* (detoxication) can be done after proper *Deepan* (improve appetite) and *Pachanam* (digestion). After that *Balya* and *Rasayan* treatment can be given.

To avoid metastasis, it is necessary to give *Ghritpaan*, *Raktamokshan*, *Mridu Virechan* and *Basti Chikitsa*. Because metastasis is *Prasaravastha* of the cancer. In *Ayurvedic* text, use of *Kshara* (*Bahya* and *Abhyantar*) for *Arbuda*, *Granthi* have been mentioned, researches have been done on the successful use of turmeric, *Gomutra*, *Neem* and *Tulasi* in cancer patients.

Uses of plants like *Kanchanar*, *Varun*, *Bhallatak* and the minerals like *Shilajit* and *Hirak* have been mentioned in

Ayurvedic text in the treatment of *Tridosh Sanghataj* diseases.

As the treatment of *Mansavaha Strotas Dushti* is *Shatra-Kshar-Agnikarma*, these procedures have to be followed whenever necessary.

Cancer is a worldwide problem which can destroy a patient's lifetime earnings and not even guarantee life. In such a situation, treatment with a thorough consideration of the basic principles of *Ayurveda* can definitely be helpful for the patients to fight against cancer.

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How to cite this article: Ninad Patwardhan. Cancer - An Ayurvedic Understanding. *J Ayurveda Integr Med Sci* 2023;09:98-104.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21760/jaims.8.9.16>

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.
