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A bird's eye view on *Kesha* (hair) in *Charaka Samhita*

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a *Tantra* which mainly aims at preserving the health of an individual and to treat the illness of a patient. The structure and function of bodily entities vary in health and disease conditions accordingly. The study of these structures acts as a yardstick to understand the health and illness of a person. One such indicator of health or disease is hair (*Kesha*). *Kesha* being one such parameter of health, description about it regarding its formation, characteristics, variation according to different body constitution (*Prakruti*), beneficial and harmful factors for *Kesha*, its maintenance, importance in clinical diagnosis and prognosis of a disease etc. is available in Ayurveda. In this article, an attempt is made to understand *Kesha Sharira* according to *Charaka Samhita*.

Key words: *Kesha*, *Hair*, *Shareera Rachana*, *Swasthya*, *Charaka Samhita*.

INTRODUCTION

Life *Kesha* in Ayurveda is used for denoting the body hair. It is an indicator of health and also has much influence on the psychological confidence of a person. *Kesha* has many synonyms like *Chikura*, *Kuntala*, *Bāla*, *Kacha*, *Kesha*, *Shiroruha*^[1] etc. But in Ayurvedic classics, though these terminologies have been used synonymously in many contexts, the word *Kesha* has been used mainly to denote the scalp hair.^[2]

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Study the concept of *Kesha Shareera* in *Charaka*

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Samhita.

2. Holistic approach of study of *Kesha* in the context of *Shareera*, *Swasthya* and *Aturavastha*.

METHODOLOGY

Study design: Literary review of *Kesha* in *Charaka Samhita*.

Source of Information: References of *Kesha* is collected and compiled from all the *Sthanas* of *Charaka Samhita* and then classified under three subheadings,

- *Kesha* in the context of *Shareera Rachana* (Anatomical description)
- *Kesha* in the context of *Swasthya* (Health)
- *Kesha* in the context of *Aturavastha* (Ill-health)

LITERARY REVIEW

Shareera Rachana description of *Kesha*

Kesha is considered as a *Parthiva Dravya*,^[3] i.e. it is derived from the *Prithvi Mahabhuta* and is one among the *Pitruja Bhava*^[4] (paternal entities) which is obtained from father. In the context of *Putreshti Yajna*, a religious ceremony performed to obtain a healthy progeny, it is mentioned as the child having

black, soft and long hair are among the ideal features.^[5] It is formed in the third month of intra-uterine life along with formation of other organs.^[6]

Kesha is produced as the *Kitta Bhaga* (waste portion) of the food^[7] and also as a byproduct of *Asthi Dhatu*.^[8] During the description of the *Deerghayu Lakshana* (signs of longevity), it is mentioned that the newborn having discrete, soft, sparse, oily, deep rooted and black hairs will enjoy a long life.^[9] The physical attributes of the hair also vary according to the *Prakruti* (body constitution) and *Sara Lakshana* (constitutional essence) of the person. The person having *Vata Prakruti* will have coarse and small hairs^[10] whereas person belonging to *Pitta Prakruti* will have soft, sparse, grey hair followed by early hair fall.^[11] The person having a constitutional essence of *Meda Dhatu* will have soft and oily hairs on his body.^[12] While enumerating, it is mentioned that there are about 29,956 *Kesha* present in the body.^[13] The rationale behind this number is that there are about the similar number of *Sira* present in the body and these hairs are attached to the end openings of these *Siras* hence the number.^[14]

Atma (soul) is the possessing authority of knowledge and knowledge is perceived with the help of *Indriyas* (sensory organs). *Sattva* or *Manas* being a *Ubhayendriya* (both *Jnanendriya* and *Karmendriya*) assists in conveying the knowledge to the *Atma*. The hair and nails don't have *Atma*^[15] and *Indriya*, specifically the *sparshanendriya*.^[16] *Doshas* (humors) can affect the *Dhatu*s (tissues) till the realm of *Sparshanendriya*. The absence of perception of any sense or knowledge from *Kesha* proves that all the three entities, i.e. *Atma*, *Sattva* and *Indriyas* are absent in *Kesha*. Even the anomalies like *Palitya* (greying of hair) etc. is the result of *Dosha* present in the *Sparshanendriya Adhishtana* and they cannot affect the *Kesha* and *Nakha*.

The place where *Kesha* grows is called as *Keshabhumi*^[17] and any abnormality in *Keshabhumi* will reflect in the health of *Kesha*.^[18]

Description of Kesha in the context of Swasthya

Apart from the clinical application of *Shareera* of *Kesha*, it's considered as something which helps to

increase the self-confidence of a person. Hence, nurturing and maintaining of *Kesha* is also of prime importance. In *Charaka Samhita*, there is mention of food and activities which are good or bad for the health of *Kesha* along with how to maintain it.

The factors which are good for *Kesha* are, *Dhumapana* which helps to prevent hair fall.^[19] Use of *Anu Taila* regularly in the form of *Nasya* helps for hair growth.^[20] *Murdhni Taila* (*Shirodhara*, *Shiroabhyanga*, *Shirobasti*, *Shiro Pichu*) not only strengthens the hair but also helps for its growth and darkening its colour.^[21] *Madhuka* drug is considered good for the growth of hair.^[22] Food which is *Madhura Rasa* predominant is good for the health of hair.^[23] *Krishna Tila* (Black sesame) is said to be effective in hair health.^[24]

Kshara Dravyas are said to be bad for the health of *Kesha*.^[25] Frequent consumption of *Shami* fruit is also considered as bad for the health if *Kesha*.^[26]

Maintenance of health of *Kesha* is explained while describing *Sadvrutta* (the virtuous conduct) of a person. *Kalpana* (cutting) and *Prasadana* (proper dressing) of hair, moustache and beard etc. will act as an aphrodisiac, promotes as nutritive and also enhances the beauty and cleanliness of a person.^[27] *Kesha* should be cut once in every three months.^[28] One should not strike at the hair tips frequently.^[29] Presence of *Kesha* in food items is considered as the *Bhojyagata Dosha* (the polluted food).^[30] Preparation of hair dye is mentioned using drugs like *Loha Churna*, *Shukta Amla* and *Saindhava Lavana* etc.^[31]

Description of Kesha in the context of Aturavastha

The knowledge of *Shareera* of *Kesha* and understanding its characters helps the physician in diagnostic as well as prognostic values of many medical conditions.

Increased hair fall could be a sign of *Asthidhatu Kshaya*.^[32] Abnormality in the structure of hair is found when *Asthidhatu* is morbidly affected by the *Doshas*.^[33] In *Prameha* there will be an abnormal increase in the number of *Kesha*^[34] as well as matting of *Kesha*.^[35] In *Rajayakshma* there will be abnormal

growth of *Kesha* associated with increased loss of *Kesha*.^[36] The person also dreams of walking on the heap of *Kesha*.^[37]

The characteristics of *Kesha* also plays a vital role in deciding prognosis of certain diseases. When *Kesha* comes out without pain upon pulling, it is considered that patient is dead^[38] or the patient won't survive beyond 6 days.^[39] If a person pulls out his *Kesha* after fainting and feels weak even after having a good amount of food is impelled by death.^[40] In the context of *Duta Lakshanas*, it was believed that, if the messenger touches his own hair before meeting the doctor, the patient would die.^[41] In certain condition, deep-seated and long standing fever with parting line of *Kesha* is considered as *Asadhya* to treat.^[42] In death due to poisoning, there will unusual hair fall in the victim.^[43] *Kesha* is considered as the seat for *Bahyamalajanya Krimis*^[44] and *Shonitaja Krimis* like *Keshada*, *Lomada*, *Lomadveepa* etc. are responsible for the destruction of *Kesha*.^[45]

In some of the treatment modalities like, pulling of *Kesha* is advised to recover a patient with *Sanyasa Roga*.^[46] Fumigation with human hair is done in treatment of *Arshas*.^[47] In cases of *Unmada Roga*, *Siravyadha* is done at the junction of *Shankha Pradesha* and *Keshanta* (hair line).^[48] When *Keshabhumi* (scalp region) is burnt due to *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhuta* in the body, it leads to *Khalitya* (hair loss) and *Palitya* (greying of hair).

DISCUSSION

Kesha is a very important structure in the body, not only because of its significant role in approaching a patient due to its role in health and ill health, but also because of its impact on psychology of a person. Study of *Kesha* in detail helps a physician to understand the overall health of a person. It acts as an indicator of health and disease and also because of its prognostic value in certain disease conditions.

The information of *Kesha* is vastly available in *Charaka Samhita*. It is discrete and spread throughout the different chapters. *Kesha* being such an important structure it can be studied under three heading viz.

the *Shaareera* (anatomical and physiological attributes), *Swasthya* (preservation and maintenance) and *Aturavastha* (ill-health).

In *Shaareera* aspect of *Kesha*, it mainly involves the general physical attributes like the thickness, enumeration of *Kesha*, the colour etc depending on the different *Prakruti* (body constitution) and *Sara* (constitutional essence) of a person. The formation of *Kesha* starts in the third month of intrauterine life, and later from the *Kitta Bhaga* (waste portion) of food as well as a byproduct of *Asthi Dhatu*. It is mainly *Prithvi Mahabhuta* in predominance. This relation will certainly help to understand the body constitution of a person before diagnosing and advising the precise treatment for his illness. This knowledge helps in selection of medicines, based on the *Panchabhoutika* predominance of the drug as well as on which particular *Dhatu* physician should concentrate on. It also gives us an insight that *Atma* (soul) is absent in *Kesha* except at their roots, hence absence of *Indriya* and thereby knowledge arising from *Indriyas*.

Kesha plays a very important role in the psychological aspect of the person also and hence, its maintenance and nourishment is also of equal importance. In *Charaka Samhita*, procedures like, *Anu Taila Nasya*, *Murdhni Taila* (*Shiro Abhyanga*, *Shiro Basti*, *Shirodhara* and *Shiro Pichu*) *Prayogas* have been mentioned which not only strengthens the hair, but also helps for its growth and darkening its colour. Measures like *Kesha Kalpana* and *Prasadana* (grooming of hair) in regular intervals and their benefits have also been mentioned. Dying of *Kesha* and its maintenance like the do's and don'ts have also been advised.

The structure of *Kesha* is also studied in different diseases as the prodromal signs in diseases like *Prameha* and *Rajyakshma*, signs of problems with *Dhatu* like *Asthi Dhatu Kshaya* or *Asthi Pradoshaja Vikaras* and in prognostic values in conditions like poisoning, *Krimi Roga*, signs of death etc. In some of the treatment modalities like, pulling of *Kesha* is advised to recover a patient with *Sanyasa Roga* fumigation with human hair in treatment of *Arshas*,

Siravyadha in cases of *Unmada Roga*, and the reasons for *Khalitya* (hair loss) and *Palitya* (greying of hair) etc. have been mentioned.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion brings us to the conclusion that *Kesha* is one of the important yardstick for a physician as it plays a very vital role as a yardstick in determining the health of person. It also plays a important role in determining the prognosis of a disease and is used both as a diagnostic tool as well as for treatment purpose. In the present era where the people are more conscious about their aesthetic sense where *Kesha* plays a very important role, a holistic study of *Kesha Shareera* and it's utilisation will certainly help a physician to achieve success and benefit the patients in maintaining their health and avoiding the measures which can lead to manifestation of diseases in the future.

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