

A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a common form of inflammatory arthritis, occurring throughout the world in all ethnic group. It is a chronic systemic autoimmune disease with varying severity among patients. The cause of the disease is still unknown. RA initially affects small joints, progressing to larger joints, and eventually the skin, eyes, heart, kidneys, and lungs. It imposes a substantial socioeconomic burden on individuals and is one of the challenging disorders for the clinicians due to its chronicity, incurability and morbidity. As contemporary medical science aims at relieving the signs and symptoms of the disease by administering NSAIDS, analgesics etc. Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine explains well about joint disorders. This article is a simple attempt to explore the Ayurvedic perspective on rheumatoid arthritis through an analysis of its causative factors, pathology, clinical features and prognosis, while considering *Vatarakta*, *Amavata* and *Samavata*.

KEYWORDS: Rheumatoid arthritis, *Vatarakta*, *Amavata*, *Samavata*.

INTRODUCTION

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic multisystem disease of unknown cause, characterized by persistent inflammatory synovitis, usually involving peripheral joints in a symmetric

distribution. The potential of the synovial inflammation to cause cartilage destruction and bone erosion and subsequent changes in joints integrity is the hallmark of the disease.^[1] Epidemiological survey done by COPCORD shows a prevalence of 0.45% in urban and 0.7% in rural population.^[2] Around 18 million people worldwide are living with rheumatoid arthritis. The typical onset of the disease occurs in adults in their sixties and women are two-to-three times more often affected than men.^[3]

In *Vatarakta*, *Vata* and *Rakta* with their own causative factors get vitiated and dosas get accumulated in the *Sandhipradesa*. These vitiated dosas along with other dosas produce different types of pain. *Uttana* and *Gambeera* stage of *Vatarakta* shows different kinds of symptoms. In *Amavata*, *Ama* and *Vata* simultaneously get vitiated and enters the *Sandhi* leading to the manifestation of the disease. *Sama* is the state where *Ama* combines with *Dosha* and *Dushya*, causing their vitiation and giving rise to various diseases.⁴ *Samavata* is characterized by *Agnisada*, *Tantra*, *Toda* and *Shopha*. By proper analysis and understanding of the ailment using the *Ayurvedic* approach, suitable measures can be efficiently implemented.

AIM

To understand Rheumatoid arthritis in *Ayurvedic* perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

For this study, literary method which includes the reference of Rheumatoid Arthritis, *Vatarakta*, *Amavata* and *Samavata* have been collected from modern textbooks, journals and ayurvedic classics.

NIDANA

The exact cause of RA is not fully known.² It has been suggested that RA might be a manifestation of the response to an infectious agent in a genetically susceptible host. Women are affected approximately three times more often than men.¹ Consumption of processed meats, sugary beverages like soda, sedentary behavior and obesity are recognized as a risk factor associated with RA.^[5,6,7]

Virudhahara, *Sukumara prakriti* and *Sthoulya* are recognized as *Nidanas* of *Vatarakta*.^[8,9] Intake of foods which are *Lavana*, *Amla* and *Katu Rasa pradhana*, *Kshara* and excessive

intake of *Sura*, *Asava* and *Souviraka* are the factors specifically responsible for *Rakta Dushti*.^[10] In *Amavata*, *Virudhahara* and *Nishchalatha* are considered as causative factors.^[11]

SAMPRAPTI

Genetic predisposition and environmental variables trigger autoimmune reaction leads to release of inflammatory mediators and cytokines which drive synoviocytes to proliferate and produce proteases in the synovial fluid resulting in a hypertrophied synovial tissue known as pannus.^[12] Pannus invades bone and cartilage to cause joint erosion. Formation of new blood vessels causing the inflamed synovium to become highly vascular. Within these blood vessels proinflammatory cytokines activates endothelial cells, which support recruitment of yet more leucocytes to perpetuate the inflammatory process in Rheumatoid Arthritis.^[13]

In *Vatarakta*, when person restoring *Vata* and *Rakta Prakopa Nidana*, they individually get vitiated. The vitiated *Rakta* obstruct the path of *Vata* leads to further aggravation of *vata* which tend to vitiate the entire *Rakta* in the body. *Dravatwa* and *Saratwa Guna* of *Rakta* and *Sookshmatwa* and *Saratwa Guna* of *Vata* helps to spreads entire body. Due to the *Vakratha* of *Sandhi* these gets settles in *Sandhi* and associated with *Pitta* produce symptoms of *Vatarakta*.^[8]

In *Amavata*, *Ama* is taken up by the *vata* to the *Kaphasthana* mainly *Amashaya*, *Uras*, *Shiras*, *Kantha* and *Sandhi* and enters the *Dhamani*. Here it amalgmates with the existing *Doshas* which vitiated further in excess and distress the *Srotas* due to its *Abhishyandana* nature. This causes *Dourbalya* and *Gourava* of *Hridaya* responsible for the genesis of the symptom complex, manifestation of disease *Amavata*.^[11] *Samavata* is a phase of the disease in which *ama* resulting from *Agnimandhya*, combines with *vata* leads to its vitiation. The vitiated *Dosha* circulates throughout the body and gets localized in the site of *Khavaigunya* results in the manifestation of disease.

PURVARUPA

RA begins insidiously with fatigue, generalized weakness and vague musculoskeletal symptoms until the appearance of synovitis becomes apparent. This prodrome may persist for weak or months.^[1]

Purvarupa of *Vatarakta* includes *Sadana*, *Sandhitoda*, *Bheda*, *Suptata*, *Kandu* and *Karshnya* while *Shirogatra Ruja* is mentioned as *Purvarupa* of *Amavata*.^[8,14]

RUPA

Rheumatoid arthritis is characterized by pain in joints that worsens with movement, particularly affecting the small joints of the hands, feet, and wrists. It also involves larger joints. Morning stiffness is an invariable feature of inflammatory arthritis. Constitutional symptoms such as weakness, easily fatigability, anorexia and weight loss and occasional fever are observed in RA. Clinically, synovial inflammation causes swelling, tenderness, warmth, erythema, muscle wasting and limitation of motion. Over time, specific deformities such as Swan neck deformity, Boutonniere deformity, and Z deformity may emerge, accompanied by flexion contractures. In rheumatoid arthritis, cutaneous ulceration and dermal necrosis and cardiomyopathy may develop, particularly in chronic stages of the disease.^[1,13]

In the beginning, *Lakshanas* of *Vatarakta* is manifested in *Hasta* and *Pada*. From this base, it spreads to all the other parts of the body. *Vatarakta Lakshanas* include *Sparshaakshamatvam*, *Svayadhu*, *Raga*, *Athyarthoshna*, *Sthambha*, *Angulivakrata*, *Shosha*, *Jwara*, *Dhamaniangulisandheenam Sankocha*, *Paka* and *Mamsakotha*.^[8] *Rakta Dushti Lakshanas* such as *Shyavalohita Vaivarnya* of *Twak*, *Aruchi*, *Klama*, *Daha* can be observed in *Vatarakta*.^[9]

Samanya Amavata Lakshanas are *Angamarda*, *Aruchi*, *Jwara*, *Agnidourbalya* and *Alasya* while *Pravridha Amavata Lakshanas* include *Ruja* and *Shotha* in *Hastapadashirogulgulphatrikajanuru Sandhi*, *Gatra Sthambha* and *Utsahahani*. It can cause *Dourbalya* and *Gourava* of *Hridaya*.^[11] *Samavata* state is characterized by *Vedanashophanistoda*, *Tantra*, *Sthambha* and *Agnisada*. The symptoms tend to manifest more prominently during *Suryameghadayonishi*.^[4]

PROGNOSIS

Early in the course of RA disability is more associated with pain and inflammation, whereas later in the course of the disease, damages to articular structures makes a great contribution. Sustained disease activity of more than one year duration is associated with poor outcome of the disease.^[1]

Vatarakta with a duration of one year is *Yapya*.^[9] *Amavata* associated with swelling all over the body indicates that the disease is *Krichrasadhya*.^[11]

DISCUSSION

Rheumatoid Arthritis in its cause, pathogenesis, signs & Symptoms having many similar features with *Gambheera Vatarakta*, *Amavata* and in *Samavata* condition. Processed meat and sugar sweetened soda, recognized as a risk factor for Rheumatoid Arthritis aligns with the concept of *Virudhahara*, a causative factor mentioned in *Amavata* and *Vatarakta*. Symptoms like pain, swelling, redness, stiffness, fever, anorexia and fatigue are seen in Rheumatoid Arthritis, *Amavata*, and *Vatarakta*. Articular pain in RA is commonly centered on the smaller joints of the hands and feet, although it may also extend to larger joints. The initial occurrence of pain in *Vatarakta* is localized to the smaller joints of the hands and feet. In *Amavata*, the condition impacts all joints, including the hands, feet, head, heels, waist, knees, and thighs. RA is characterized by joint swelling and stiffness, *Gambhira Vatarakta* exhibits symptoms of *Swayathu* and *Sthambha*. *Swayathu* is identified as a manifestation of *Pravrudha Amavata*, and *Sthambha* is considered as the cardinal feature of *Amavata*. Fever may be evident in rheumatoid arthritis as one of its clinical features. In *Vatarakta*, *Jwara* is noted among its complication. On the other hand, in *Amavata*, *Jwara* is highlighted as one of the initial symptoms. Erythema in RA is denoted as *Raga* in both *Pittaja Vatarakta* and *Amavata*.

Sedentary lifestyle is identified as risk factors for RA, whereas *Nishchalatha* are causative factors for *Amavata*. In the prodromal phase of RA indistinct musculoskeletal symptoms may manifest. *Shirogatra Ruja* is recognized as a premonitory symptom of *Amavata*. Additionally, cardiomyopathy is mentioned in the context of RA, while *Hrudaya Dourbalya* is associated with *Amavata*.

Obesity is linked to an elevated likelihood of developing RA, whereas *Sthoulya* is recognized as a causative factor for *Vatarakta*. There are specific joint deformities commonly associated with rheumatoid arthritis such as swan neck deformity, boutonniere deformity, z deformity. Chronic inflammation in the blood vessel walls leads to Cutaneous ulceration and dermal necrosis in RA. *Vatarakta* affected in deeper *Dhathu* shows similar manifestation such as *Angulivakrata* and *Mamsakoda*. Persisting disease activity lasting beyond one year is associated with poor outcome of RA. In the context of *Vatarakta*, this is analogous to the *Yapya* condition.

The symptoms of RA including pain and swelling are described as *Vedanashophanistoda* in the context of *Samavata*. Morning stiffness is a significant feature of RA. In *Samavata*, symptoms tend to manifest more prominently during *Suryameghadayonishi*.

CONCLUSION

According to the *Brhatrayees*, rheumatoid arthritis can be regarded as *Gambheera Vatarakta* while in the perspective of *Laghutrayees*, it can be viewed as *Amavata*. *Samavata* represents a phase of the disease.

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