ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

Dr. Kambale Supriya Suryakant¹ Dr. Virkar Chandana A²

¹M.S. Scholar, ²MS. D.O. (Professor & H.O.D.); Shalakya tantra- Netra Roga
College of Ayurveda and Research Centre, Nigdi, Pune, Maharastra, India

ABSTRACT

Eye is the most precious organ in the body. Blindness is a lack of vision. Worldwide 39 million people are blind and 246 have low vision. Vision loss refers to the partial or complete loss of vision. The vision loss may happen suddenly or over period of time. Globally the major causes of visual impairment are uncorrected refractive errors, cataract and glaucoma. Visual impairment can limit people’s ability to perform everyday tasks and can affect their quality of life and ability to interact with world. Blindness is the most severe form of visual impairment. Ayurveda is the ancient Indian system of natural and holistic medicine. Basic principle of ayurveda is to protect health and prolong life. Management of preventable and curable blindness according to ancient science is important. According to Ayurveda to maintain a healthy and disease free life should follow a dinacharya. Healthy diet, eye exercises play major role in giving strength to the eyes. Kriyakalpa is the main therapeutic process for netra roga. It gives nourishment to the eyes and cures diseases. Ayurveda recommends kriyakalpa for preventive and curative benefits. Shodhan chikitsa is a body purification therapy which eradicates toxins and balances tridosha. So, purpose of this article is to enlighten role of ayurveda in prevention of blindness and explain ayurvedic management for visual impairment.

Keywords: Blindness-prevention, management, Chakshushya medicines, Dincharya, kriyakalpa, Visual impairment.

INTRODUCTION

Eye is the most precious organ in the body. Blindness is a lack of vision. Worldwide 39 million people are blind and 246 have low vision. Vision loss refers to the partial or complete loss of vision. The vision loss may happen suddenly or over period of time. Globally the major causes of visual impairment are uncorrected refractive errors, cataract and glaucoma. Visual impairment can limit people’s ability to perform everyday tasks and can affect their quality of life and ability to interact with world. Blindness is the most severe form of visual impairment. Ayurveda is the ancient Indian system of natural and holistic medicine. Basic principle of ayurveda is to protect health and prolong life. Management of preventable and curable blindness according to ancient science is important. According to Ayurveda to maintain a healthy and disease free life should follow a dinacharya. Healthy diet, eye exercises play major role in giving strength to the eyes. Kriyakalpa is the main therapeutic process for netra roga. It gives nourishment to the eyes and cures diseases. Ayurveda recommends kriyakalpa for preventive and curative benefits. Shodhan chikitsa is a body purification therapy which eradicates toxins and balances tridosha. So, purpose of this article is to

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**INTRODUCTION-**

Vision is the greatest gift for human. Globally 285 million people are visually disabled and 39 million people are blind among 15 million from India. The burden of visual impairment is not distributed uniformly throughout the world. Developing countries carry the largest share. A distribution imbalance is also found with regard to age groups and gender. Adult above 50 years and females have a significantly higher risk of having visual impairment. In spite of progress made in surgical techniques, Cataract remains the leading cause of blindness. Other main causes of visual impairment are uncorrected refractive errors, glaucoma. So it’s time to know ‘Right to sight’.

Ayurveda medicine is a system of medicine with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent. Ayurveda means “the science of life”. The aim of this system is to protect health and prolong life, to prevent illness and to eliminate diseases. Ayurveda provides guidance on lifestyle like eating habits, daily routine, exercises and yogas. It will play major role in giving strength to eyes. *Kriyakalpa* is a *bahirparimarjana chikitsa* and has several advantages over oral administration. It is the specialized treatment for prevention of blindness. It acts as a both preventive and curative therapy for maintaining health of eyes. *Panchakarma* procedures are used to eliminate the vitiated *doshas* from the body.

Prevention of blindness and management of visual impairment with the help of ancient ayurveda science is important. It will be a big challenge for Ophthalmologists to be aware and make conscious effort in preventing and treating avoidable blindness.

**MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY-**

Study of literature – Study of literature was done with the help of books, *samhitas* and internet websites.

**Study of blindness-**

**Definitions of blindness-** 1.WHO–Visual acuity of less than 3/60, or a corresponding visual field loss to less than 10, in the better eye with best possible correction.

**Visual impairment** includes both low vision and blindness.

2. National Program for control of blindness- Inability of a person to count fingers from a distance of 6 meters or 20 feet. Or Vision 6/60 or less with best possible spectacle correction. Diminution of field vision to 20 or less in better eye.

**Visually handicapped in India-** Visual acuity in the better eye is less than 6/18.

**CAUSES OF BLINDNESS IN WORLD AND INDIA-**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of blindness</th>
<th>World Vision &lt;3/60</th>
<th>India Vision &lt;6/60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cataract</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refractive error</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corneal opacity</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trachoma</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onchocerciasis</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posterior segment disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Age related macular degeneration</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoidable blindness$^{8}$ - 85% of total blindness. This includes both Preventable and Curable blindness.

**Preventable blindness** - The blindness which can be easily prevented by attacking the causative factors at an appropriate time. e.g. corneal blindness due to Vitamin A Deficiency, Trachoma, Industrial blindness, Diabetic retinopathy etc.

**Curable blindness** - The blindness in which vision can be restored by timely intervention. e.g. cataract, glaucoma, inflammation of ocular tissues etc.

**Prevention of blindness and Management of visual impairment**

**Prevention** -

Follow dincharya- Anjana karma - Eyes mainly having teja property, they can easily get affected by Kapha dosha$^{14}$. Rasanjana should be done once in week$^{14}$. Anjana scrapes and expel dosha from netra, varthma, sira, netra kosha and ashru vaha srotas through mouth, nose and eye$^{15}$. It will help in avoiding ageing effects in Netra. It gives strength to the eyes. Prasadan anjan help in improvement of vision. Anjana used as treatment and also as preventive measures. It is useful in ocular growth, opacity, kapha predominant condition.

Regular Padabhyanga (Foot massage) - Aacharya Vaghbhata identifies 4 major nerves in the feet that connect to eyes. These nerves help to maintain good eye sight and relieve eye strain. It improves blood circulation. It controls & balances Vayu, as a vata dosha prominent in degenerative disorders.

**Chakshushya Medicines** -

Main properties- Chakshushya, anti oxidant, anti inflammatory and neuroprotective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posterior capsule opacification</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical complication</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood blindness</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc/ undetermined</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Triphala**$^{9}$ - Aamlaki (Emblica officinalis, Gaertn), Haritaki (Terminalia chebula, Retz.), Bibhitaki (Terminalia bellirica, Roxb.)- Balances tridosha, chakshushya, anti ageing property.

**Triphala ghrita** - Drug which penetrates through cornea must have properties of lipid soluble as well as water soluble. Triphala ghrita which usually used for netra tarpana is saturated with decoction of various drugs and hence it contains both lipid and water soluble properties. It has got good penetration through various layers of cornea. It provides chakshushya effect.

**Shigru** (Moringa oleifera, Lam)$^{10}$ - Balances kapha and vata dosha, improve vision.

**Healthy Diet (Hitakara aahara)** - Proper food is an important factor in growth and development of human. The improper food or deficiency of nutrition will lead to several eye diseases.

**Raisins** - Antioxidant, protect eyes from a weakening vision.

**Pomegranate** - Antioxidant, anti inflammatory, anti bacterial, anti fungal properties.

**Mudga** (Phaseolus radiates, Linn.) - Antioxidant, source of vitamin A, alleviates kapha, pitta and blood.

**Shatavari** (Asparagus racemosus, Willd.)$^{12}$ - Balances vata and pitta dosha, anti ageing property, improve vision.

**Ghee** - Balances tridosha, acts as good Rasayan, rich in antioxidant, improve strength of eye.

**Honey** - Antioxidant, anti inflammatory, anti bacterial, it protect eyes from macular degeneration, it’s regular
internal as well as external application will prevent glaucoma in the initial stage of disease.

**Increase dietary intake of Vitamin A rich food**
Nutritional blindness due to Vitamin A deficiency.
Vitamin A useful for scotopic vision means dim light vision and colour vision.
Vitamin A play major role in prevention of age related macular degeneration, stargardt disease.
Vitamin A with lutein and zeaxanthin prolong vision in retinitis pigmentosa.
Vegetable sources- Dark green leafy vegetables, spinach, carrot tomato, pumpkin etc.
Animal sources- Liver, meat, cod and shark liver oil, egg yolk etc.
Fortification of dietary items like milk, sugar, tea, cereal grains etc.
Daily requirement$^{13}$-
School children, adolescent and adults-2250IU
Children (0-4 years)-1000-2000IU
Pregnancy and lactation-3000-3500IU
Periodic supplementation-
Orally 200,000IU and half dose for 6-11 months children.

**Eye exercises**-
Palming, Distant and near focusing, Rotational movements of eye will help to improve blood circulations to eyes. So oxygen supply, nutritional supply to the eyes is increased. These exercises will strengthen the muscles of eyes and maintain vision level.

**Yogic kriya**- Trataka (concentrating on specific object/candle light), Bhramari, Soorya Namaskara useful to improve strength of eye.

**Kriyakalpa**- Kriyakalpas are specific procedures for eyes. They lubricate and rejuvenate the eyes. Impurities are expelled out. It helps to bring back brightness and clarity to the eyes$^{16}$. Kriyakalpa has several advantages over oral administration. The drug given orally will undergo digestion under the influence of pachaka pitta. The drugs administered through kriyakalpa are not digested by it and possibly rectify accumulated doshas.

**Tarpana**- Tarpana is very effective kriyakalpa. It is used to treat early formation of cataract, glaucoma. It is indicated in all the degenerative disorders, inflammatory and chronic disorders of the eyes. It will play major role in giving strength to eye.

**Putapaka**- This is usually done after tarpana.

**Seka**- Indicated in inflammatory conditions, Pitta, rakta dosha vitiation.

**Aschyotana**- When doshas are not severely vitiated and the disease in early stage, it is useful.

**Pindi**- It is useful in abhisyand (conjunctivitis) and vranas (ulcers) of the eyes. It is beneficial in kapha pitta disorders.

**Vidalaka**- Initial symptoms of eye diseases like burning, discharge, swelling, pain, redness, congestion can be controlled by application of medicated paste to the outer surface of eye lids.

**Nasya karma**- It is indicated in several eye diseases as it eliminates doshas from the cranial region. Vaisesika nasya is useful to improve eye sight. It is indicated in visual disturbances like timira$^{20}$.

**Vamana**- Usually Vamana is contraindicated in drishtigata rogas$^{21}$. If done, it will increase timira.

**Management** -

**CATARACT, GLAUCOMA, AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION**-
These are the main disorders occurring in old age and can grossly affect visual acuity. In old age vata dosha, ruksha guna are increased. So management is Vataghna Upakramas like Snehana, Snehapana, Ghritapan, mrudu virechana, basti, shiro basti, shiro pichu, nasya (snehana), snigdha anjana, parisheka with siddha dugdha. Shamana chikitsa should be Rasayana and Chakshushya medicines.

For cataract surgical extraction of cataract and implantation of intraocular lens gives better visual acuity.
For Glaucoma regular check up of Intra ocular tension is important. Clinical features of Adhimanth can be correlate to Glaucoma. So management is, 

**In early stage**- Tikshn shirovirechan, Tikshn kavaladharan/gandush, dhumpan, lep/vidalak. 

**In samavastha**- For aampachan-Langhan, Seka, Bashpswed, Lepa, Madhur, tikta things intake. Avoid anjana, ghritpan, puran, kaashyan, heavy food intake. It causes new aama formation. 

**In niramawastha**- Snehana, swedana then sirawedh at forehead or at apang. Then vaman, virechan, basti, shirobost, nasya, dhumpan. After this shodhan chikista internal dosh shamak chikista will helpful. 

**Locally**- Kriyakalpa, pindika, agnikarma. 

**REFRACTIVE ERRORS**-Vision screening, best spectacle correction, treatment for strengthening of eyes-Tarpana especially with Triphala ghrita, nasya, anjana, pitpaka, panchkarma. 

**CONTROL DIABETES**-

Effect of diabetes mellitus seen on retina causes diabetic retinopathy. So control of diabetes is essential. According to age, duration and strength appropriate treatment like shodhan, santarpan, sanshman will decide. Role of pathyapathya is also important. 

**OBSERVATION AND RESULT**-

Avoidable blindness is 85% of total blindness. Many people are blind because they live in poverty. Blindness due to senile disorders is difficult to treat because of “swabhavabala pravrutattva”. For prevention of blindness diagnosis of their cause at right time is very important. 

While allopathic medicine tends to focus on the management of disease; ayurveda provides us with the knowledge of how to prevent disease and how to eliminate its route cause. Proper quantity of food is necessary for nourishment of sense organs. Only local treatment will not be helpful. Combined therapy like Kriyakalpa, panchkarma, internal medicines and preventive measures like following dincharya, healthy diet, eye exercises and yogic kriyas are helpful in the management of visual impairment. Rasayan chikista (rejuvenation) will helpful in prolonging degenerative changes in eye. For cataract surgical extraction of cataract and implantation of intraocular lens will gives better vision. 

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Blindness is going to be a big challenge for us in future. Ayurveda prefers to prevention of any disease than cure. Delay treatment for visual impairment causes complications, many time irreversible loss of vision. Basic principles of ayurveda are helpful here for management. Ayurveda management is avoiding ageing effects in eye, rejuvenates the eyes, improve function of eye. Topical administration of drugs achieves higher bioavailability than oral drugs. Ayurvedic drugs and therapy controls the disease and prevent blindness. Good quality of management allows people with visual impairment to get fully profit from life and achieve their goals.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR
Dr. Kambale Supriya Suryakant
M.S. (Scholar)
Institute College of Ayurveda and Research Centre, Nigdi, Pune, Maharashtra, India
Email: supriyakambale05@gmail.com

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