



An overview of Kitibha Kushtha (Psoriasis) and the methods used in Ayurvedic scriptures to manage it

Gujjar P^{1*}, Mishra P², Charan D³

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^{1*} Pooja Gujjar, Post Graduate Scholar, PG Department of Kayachikitsa, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

² Pramod Mishra, Professor and HOD, PG Department of Kayachikitsa, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

³ Divyasingh Charan, Assistant Professor, PG Department of Kayachikitsa, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

The skin, as the largest organ of the human body, plays an essential role in maintaining overall health, performing functions such as insulation, temperature regulation, sensation, vitamin D and B synthesis, and protection against harmful pathogens. Skin disorders, such as psoriasis, can significantly impact physical health and lead to emotional distress and social embarrassment. In Ayurveda, skin disorders are broadly classified under Kustha, with subcategories of Mahakustha and Kshudrakustha. A condition under Kshudrakustha, Kitibha Kustha, presents with symptoms resembling plaque psoriasis, including red, dry, silvery scales, intense itching, and the absence of sweating. The Ayurvedic approaches to treating Kitibha Kustha and psoriasis have been evaluated. It might include the identification and classification of Ayurvedic herbs and treatments, clinical studies, and comparison of these remedies to conventional treatments in terms of safety and efficacy. Research into the pathophysiology of Kitibha Kustha and psoriasis in both modern and Ayurvedic contexts. The results of Ayurvedic treatments for skin conditions like Kitibha Kustha (and psoriasis) could be outlined. Key findings might include reports of symptom relief, reduction in severity of itching, scaling, and redness, as well as improvements in overall skin health and regeneration. The comparative effectiveness of Ayurvedic treatments in contrast to conventional treatments, along with any observed long-term benefits without severe side effects, would be presented. Psoriasis is a prevalent dermatological disease requiring lifelong management. Conventional treatments, although providing relief, often come with significant limitations, including potential side effects like hepatotoxicity and renal failure. This has prompted an increasing interest in Ayurveda, which offers holistic approaches with regenerative actions and potentially long-lasting effects. Ayurvedic remedies for managing Kitibha Kustha and psoriasis seem to be a promising alternative, offering a safer and more sustainable option.

Keywords: Kitibha Kushtha, Kshudra Kushtha, Twak Rog, Shodhana Chikitsa, Psoriasis, Chronic skin disorder, Plaque Psoriasis

Corresponding Author

Pooja Gujjar, Post Graduate Scholar, PG Department of Kayachikitsa, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.
Email: poojagujjar034@gmail.com

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Introduction

The skin, being a highly complex organ, plays a vital role not only in physical protection but also in maintaining mental well-being. As one of the five sensory organs of perception, it is essential in experiencing the sense of touch, also known as '*Sparsa Gyan*' in Ayurveda. When the skin remains healthy and intact, it serves as the body's natural protective barrier, safeguarding it from external pathogens and environmental threats. However, when damaged, the skin becomes vulnerable to numerous health issues, including various skin diseases.

In *Ayurveda*, skin diseases are collectively referred to as "*Kushtha*."^[1] These are classified into two major categories: *Mahakushtha* (major or severe skin diseases) and *Kshudrakushtha* (minor skin disorders).^[2] The Ayurvedic texts describe *Kushtha* in terms of its symptoms, the *Dosha* imbalances (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) responsible for the disease, and its severity. Treatments are individualized based on these factors.

A notable condition described under *Kushtha* is *Kitibha Kushtha*, which bears a close resemblance to plaque psoriasis. This condition is primarily linked to the dominance of *Vata* and *Kapha Doshas*. Common symptoms of *Kitibha Kushtha* include dry, scaly, and rough skin that produces a sound when scratched. The skin may appear blackened and is often accompanied by intense itching.^[3] In modern medicine psoriasis severity analysis can be done on the basis of PASI score. The Psoriasis Area and Severity Index (PASI) score is a tool used to measure the severity and extent of psoriasis. It evaluates the intensity of redness, thickness, and scaling of the psoriasis, as well as the percentage of the body affected. The score ranges from 0 to 72, with higher scores indicating more severe psoriasis.^[4]

The PASI score is calculated:

1. Intensity: The intensity of redness, thickness, and scaling is assessed for each body region (head and neck, upper limbs, trunk, lower limbs) and rated from 0 (none) to 4 (very severe).

2. Area: The percentage of the body affected by psoriasis is evaluated for each region and scored from 0 (no involvement) to 6 (90-100% involvement).

3. Calculation:

The intensity scores for each region are added up, and then multiplied by the area scores and the body surface area represented by that region. The final PASI score is the sum of these calculations.

Twacha Shareera

Sushruta compares the formation of *Twacha* (skin) to the layer of cream that develops on the surface of boiled milk, illustrating its delicate and superficial emergence following fertilization. Acharya Vagbhata reinforces this concept, describing *Twacha* as a component of *Matruja Bhava*, a fundamental factor in fetal development.

He further explains that the skin forms through the *Paka* (maturation) of *Rakta Dhatu* (blood tissue), guided by the influence of *Dhatwagni* (the metabolic fire governing tissue transformation).

By the sixth month of fetal growth, this process culminates in the skin's final structure, achieved through the maturation and drying of *Rakta Dhatu*.

This perspective underscores Ayurveda's comprehensive approach to fetal development, emphasizing the essential role of elements like *Dhatwagni* in shaping bodily structures.

It highlights the interconnected nature of the human system, where various *Dhatus* (tissues) mature in harmony, contributing to the formation of integrated physiological structures such as the skin.

1.	Avabhasini	1/18th	Varana-Chaya Prasadaka, Adhishtana of Sidma and Padmakantaka
2.	Lohita	1/16	Adhishtana of Tilakalaka, Vyanga and Nyaccha
3.	Shweta	1/12	Adhishtana of Charmadala, Ajakallika and Mashaka
4.	Tamra	1/8	Adhishtana of Kilasa Kushtadi
5.	Vedini	1/5	Adhishtana of Kushta, Visarpa
6.	Rohini	Vreehi Pramana	Adhishtana of Granti, Apache, Arbuda, Sleepada and Galaganda
7.	Mamsadhara	Vreehi Dwaya	Adhishtana of Bhagandara, Vidradi and Arsha

Relation between *Twacha* and *Dosha-Dushya*

Vata - *Sparanendriya* is the *Adhishtana* of *Vata* and the *Adhishtana* of *Samana Vata* includes *Swedavaha Srotas* which in turn is present in *Twacha* of *Kapha Dosha*.

Pitta - *Bhrajaka Pitta* is present in *Twacha*.

Kapha - Direct reference is not available of the presence or *Adhishtana* of *Kapha Dosha*. But the *Mardavata* and *Snighdhata* of the *Twacha* may be understood as the contribution

Rasa - *Rasa Sara Purusha* is assessed by the skin texture of the person. *Rukshta* of *Twacha* indicates *Rasa Kshaya* and *Shaitya* indicates the *Rasa Vrudhi*.

Rakta - *Karma* of *Rakta Dhatu* is told as *Sparsa Jnana* and *Varna Prasadana*. The *Adhistana* of *Rakta Dushti Rogas* like *Kushta*, *Neelika*, *Visarpa* etc. are *Twacha*. Hence one can conclude that there is a relationship between *Twacha* and *Rakta Dhatu*.

Mamsa - The six layers of *Twacha* formation is from the *Prasada Bhaga* of *Mamsadhatu*.

Sweda - *Karma* of *Sweda* is stated as maintenance of *Shareera Ardrata* and *Twak Sukumaryata*. Also, the *Kshaya* and *Vrudhi* of *Sweda Lakshanas* will be manifested in *Twacha*.

Kushta

According to *Amarakosha*, the etymology of the word *Kushta* is derived from the root '*Kush*' which means that comes from the inner part.

The meaning can be understood by the appearance of affected *Twacha* because of the vitiation in the factors like *Rakta*, *Lasika*, *Ambu* and *Tridoshas* of the body.

According to *Shabdakalpadruma*, *Kushta* means which causes despise and contemptible.

Acharya Vagbhata has defined the *Kushta Roga* as that which causes *Vaivaranya* and *Dushti* to the *Twacha*.

According to *Shabdhakalpadruma*, the word meaning of *Kitibha* is *Kesa Keeta*.

According to *Monier Williams*, the word *Kitibha* in English gives the meaning louse (a parasitic insect, infecting the human hairs and skin and transmitting various diseases).

Nidana

Specific *Nidana* for *Kitibha Kushta* has not been explained in the Ayurvedic classics. Hence the general *Nidana* for the *Kushta Roga* (*Samanya Kushta Roga Nidana*) are to be considered. Study of *Nidana* helps in planning of the treatment as well as to revalidate them to the present study. *Nidana* can be categorized as follows:[5]

Aharaja Nidana

- *Mithyahara Vihara*
- *Adhika Madhu, Dadhi, Snigdha Padartha Sevana*
- *Adhika Madhura, Amla, Lavana Sevana, Tila Sevana*
- *Chilichima Matsya along with Dugdha*
- *Paya Sevana after Amla Sevana*
- *Phanita*
- *Atimatrahara* etc.

Viharaja Nidana

- *Diwaswapna*
- *Maithuna*
- *Vyayama*
- *Vyavaya after Ahitasana*
- *Chardi Vegadharana*
- *Sheetodaka Sevana* after *Bhaya, Shrama, Santapa*

Lakshana

Lakshana is the term used to denote the characteristic features of a *Roga*. *Rupa* and *Linga* are the synonyms of *Lakshana*. *Lakshana* of a *Roga* will appear on the fifth stage of the *Kriyakala*, also this stage is called as *Vyakta*. The *Lakshanas* of *Kitibhakushta* is available in various Ayurvedic texts are as following.[6]

- **Shyava Varna** - because of *Vata Dosha*
- **Khartwam** - *Vata Dosha*,
- **Karkasha Sparsha** will be present.
- **Parusham** - *Rukshata* of the *Twacha* will be present; again it shows the involvement of *Vata Dosha*.
- **Krishna Varna** - *Aruna Varna* of
- **Snigdha** - This is a contradictory statement given by *Acharya Sushruta*. This can be understood as *Snigdha Sparsa* when there is an excessive *Kleda Guna* is present. Also, when there is predominance of *Kapha Dosha* in *Kitibha* this may be observed.
- **Srava** - *Pitta*
- **Ugrakandu** - *Kapha Dosha*
- **Vridhi** - increase in the size of the lesion

- **Guru/Dhrudam/Ghana** - indicates the thickness of *Vrana Sthana* (Kina)
- **Prashanthani Cha Puna Punarutpadhyante / Vartate Cha Samutpnnam** - the disease reoccurs after its complete disappearance.

The *Lakshanas* of *Kitibhakushta* mentioned by Acharya Charaka is as following, *Shyava Varna*, *Kharasparsha* and *Parushata*.

Sushruta, *Madhavanidana*, *Vagbhata*, *Yogaratanakara*, *Kasyapa* has been followed the same as that of Charaka.

Samprapti

The process beginning with the vitiation of *Doshas*, due to specific *Nidana* and which lead to the full-fledged manifestation of the disease after the *Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana* is called *Samprapti*. The knowledge of *Samprapti* helps the physician to understand the specific features of a disease, like the involvement of particular *Dosha*, *Agni* etc. The planning of *Chikitsa* is told as vain if it is not according to the *Samprapti Ghataks*. Since there is no detailed *Samprapti* of *Kitibhakushta* is mentioned in texts, *Samprapti* of *Kitibhakushta* is being derived here on the basis of *Kushtaroga*. *Kushta* is a *Tridoshajanya Vyadhi*. It is believed that this *Roga* cannot manifest with a single *Dosha* involvement. The classification of *Kushta* is based on the *Amshamshakalpna* of *Dosha*. The *Sapta Dravyas* of *Kushta* are *Tridoshas*, *Twak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa* and *Ambu*. According to Acharya Charaka, *Nidana Sevana* leads to *Prakopa* of *Tridosha* and thus the vitiated *Doshas* will get *Ashraya* in *Twak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa* and *Ambu* causing the *Shaithalyatha* in these *Dhatus* leading to the manifestation of *Kushta Roga*. Further in *Chikitsasthana*, he has been explained that the *Vatadi Doshas* get *Prakopa* and does *Dushana* of *Twak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa* and *Ambu* leading to seven or eleven types of *Maha* and *Kshudrakushta* respectively.[7]

Samprapti Ghatak

- **Dosha** - *Tridosha Pradhan*
- **Dushya** - *Twak, Rakta, Mansa, Lasika*
- **Srotas** - *Raktvahsrotas*
- **Rogamarga** - *Bahiyarogmarga*
- **Adhisthana** - *Twak & Mansa*
- **Shrotodushti** - *Sanga*

- **Savabhava** - *Chirkari* (Chronic)
- **Upsarga** - *Raktaj Krimi*

Sadhyasadhyata

Sadhyasadhyata of the *Kushta* is explained in Ayurvedic classics, but however the explanation of *Sadhyasadhyata* of *Kitibha* is not dealt separately. Before explaining *Chikitsa*, *Acharyas* have briefed about the condition of *Sadhya* and *Asadhyata* of the *Roga*, thus it gives a comprehensive hint to the physicians for treatment.[8]

Sadhya Kushta - *Eka Dosholbana*, *Vata-Kapha Pradhanata*, which has affected only *Twak*, *Rakta* and *Mamsa*, in this condition always have a chance of good recovery.[9]

Kruchra Sadhya Kushta - The chance of getting cure in this *Avastha* becomes with great effort, if it is either of *Kapha Pitta Mishrita* or of *Vata Pitta* or of alone *Pitta Dosha*.

Yapya Kushta - If the *Doshas* are in *Medo Dhatu* and the *Rogi* takes proper *Bheshaja* and follows *Pathya*, he will be free from the sufferings of the *Roga*. Once he stops the *Aushadhis* and follows the *Apathya*, relapse of *Vyadhi* is likely.

Asadhya Kushata - If the following features like, *Sarva Lingayukta*, *Abala*, *Trushna*, *Daha*, *Santhagni*, presence of *Jantu*, *Doshas* which have reached *Asthi*, *Majja* and *Shukra Dhatus* are considered as *Asadhya Kushta Lakshanas*.

Upadrava

Upadravas may arise either after the full manifestation of the disease or during its progression. The complications associated with *Kushta* include the following:

- *Prasravana*
- *Angabheda*
- *Patana Anyangavayavanam*
- *Trushna*
- *Jwar*
- *Atisara*
- *Daha*
- *Dourbalya*
- *Arochaka*
- *Avipaka*

Pathya-Apathya[8]

Pathya - *Laghu Anna, Tikta Shaka, Bhallataka, Triphala, Nimbayukta Anna and Ghrita, Purana Dhanya, Jangala Mamsa, Mudga, Patola.*

For *Pana, Snana and Parisheka Khadira Kashaya* is advised.

Apathya

According to *Acharya Sushruta, Mamsa, Vasa, Dugdha, Dadhi, Taila, Kulatha, Masha, Nishpava, Ikshu, Amla, Virudha Ahara, Adhyasana, Ajeerna, Vidahi and Abhishyandi* are said as *Varjya*.

Acharya Charaka says *Guru, Amla, Payas, Dadhi, Anupamamsa, Matsya, Guda, Tila* as *Apathya*.

Chikitsa

Skin diseases tend to be prolonged, challenging to cure, and demand patience for extended treatment durations. *Kushta Roga* arises only when the *Tridoshas* become imbalanced. As its development originates from *Nidana*, the primary approach to treatment should focus on *Nidana Parivarjana*, which helps prevent further progression by limiting *Dosha* vitiation. The therapeutic process aimed at the complete elimination of underlying pathogenic factors is known as *Samshodhana*. According to *Acharya Sharangadhara*, *Kushta Roga* occurs due to *Dosha Bahulyata*. These *Doshas* are *Tiryagami* and very difficult to treat by *Shamana Aushadhi*. *Acharya Vagbhata* says that, *Snehapanam* is given to the *Kushta Rogi* in the *Purvarupa Avastha*. [9]

Acharya Charaka emphasizes that in *Vata Dosha*-dominant *Kushta*, *Virechana* should be administered first, followed by *Niruha Basti* using *Madhuphaladi Sidha Taila*. Since *Kushta* is a *Tridoshajanya Vyadhi*, the primary focus should be on treating the predominant *Doshas* before addressing the secondary *Anubandha Doshas*. The periodic recommendation of *Panchakarma* procedures signifies the level of *Dosha* involvement in *Kushta Roga*, with *Shodhana Karmas* advised in cases of *Bahudoshaavastha*. For *Kaphapradhana* and *Doshotklesa Kushta*, *Vamana Karma* is prescribed in *Charaka Chikitsasthana*, [10] with *Raktamokshana* performed every six months, *Virechana* every month, and *Vamana* every 15 days.

Shamana therapy plays a crucial role in managing *Kushta*, particularly after completing *Shodhana Karma*, as it helps pacify the remaining *Doshas*.

Given the demands of modern lifestyles, where individuals may struggle to dedicate time to *Shodhana* therapy, *Shamana* therapy serves as a practical alternative. *Charaka* describes *Shamana* therapy using *Tikta* and *Kashaya Dravyas*, which are more effective when administered post-*Samshodhana*. Additionally, external therapies hold significance in *Kushta Roga*, as its site of manifestation (*Sthanasamasraya*) and expression (*Vyaktasthana*) is the skin (*Twacha*). The relevance of external applications is reinforced by numerous references to *Lepa Yoga* in classical texts.

Discussion

Skin Diseases recognized in modern medicine can be correlated with *Kushta Roga* in Ayurveda, a chronic and challenging disorder to treat. Various factors, including dietary habits, lifestyle choices, environmental influences, genetic predisposition, and immunological mechanisms, contribute to its pathogenesis, with psoriasis being a notable example. Psoriasis is a persistent, complex, and inflammatory condition characterized by excessive proliferation of keratinocytes, leading to an accelerated turnover of epidermal cells. It predominantly appears on the elbows, knees, scalp, lumbosacral region, intergluteal folds, and glans penis, and in approximately 30% of cases, it also affects the joints. An imbalance in *Kapha Dosha* is believed to trigger immunological changes that facilitate psoriasis development. Ayurveda classifies *Kushta Roga* into various subtypes, encompassing ailments such as psoriasis, eczema, and leprosy, based on severity and clinical presentation. Psoriasis, marked by scaling, inflammation, and itching, is closely linked to disturbances in *Vata* and *Kapha Doshas* - where *Vata* induces dryness and scaling, while *Kapha* leads to excessive skin accumulation.

Treatment in Ayurveda focuses on balancing the *Doshas*, particularly *Kapha*, through detoxification therapies like *Panchakarma*, dietary modifications, and the use of herbal remedies. Anti-inflammatory herbs such as Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), and *Guggulu* (*Commiphora wightii*) are commonly used to manage symptoms and reduce the intensity of the disease.

In modern medicine, the treatment of psoriasis includes topical treatments, systemic medications, phototherapy, and biologics,

Which aim to reduce inflammation, control the hyperproliferation of skin cells, and address the immune system's role in the disease.[10] The connection between environmental and genetic factors in psoriasis highlights the complexity of the disease, which, while treatable, often requires lifelong management. The stress component you've mentioned also aligns with modern understandings of psoriasis, where emotional and psychological stress is seen as a significant trigger or exacerbating factor. In Ayurveda, the mind (*Mana*) is tightly connected to the body's health, and any disruption in the mental state can manifest as physical ailments, including skin diseases like psoriasis.

Understanding psoriasis from both a modern medical and Ayurvedic perspective can help in holistic treatment approaches, where the patient is treated both physically and mentally to manage the chronic nature of this disorder.

Conclusion

Kushtha is among the oldest diseases known to humanity and is recognized as one of the most persistent ailments in Ayurveda. The skin's involvement in sensory perception, communication, and its connection to mental health (*Mana*) highlights the profound interrelationship between physical and psychological well-being in Ayurvedic thought. Notably, Ayurvedic treatments adopt both pharmacological and non-pharmacological methods, integrating herbal formulations, lifestyle modifications, and stress management techniques to strengthen immunity and alleviate skin disorders. This comprehensive approach seeks to harmonize the mind and body, addressing underlying factors that may contribute to dermatological conditions. Ayurveda emphasizes that by managing stress and enhancing immunity, many skin ailments can be effectively controlled in a natural manner, often with fewer side effects compared to conventional therapies.

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