

## SWITRA AND ITS TREATMENT IN VEDA

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**ABTRACT:** This article reports some reference to Switra (vitiligo) and its treatment from the Veda.

### INTRODUCTION

The disease *Switra* was reported in ancient literature. Several references are found in the Vedas, regarded as one of the oldest written documents since the dawn of civilization. The word *Switra* has its root in the Sanskrit word *Sveta*, which means white patch<sup>1</sup>. So *Switra* is a disease where white patches appear on the body. The disease has got a special importance as it causes ugliness of the body. Probably keeping this in mind. Ayurveda described the disease along with *Kustha*.

### Vedic Literature

In the *Atharva* literature *Switra* appears for the first time in the commentary of Darila on *Kau Sutra* 26.22. References to *Kilasa* is found in *Atharva Veda* in two hymns (A.V. 1.23 and 1.24). In *Rig-Veda* (V.53.1) also the reference to *Kilasa* is found in different places as well as it is available in *Vajaseneji Samhita*, *Kathaka Samhita*; *Taittiriya Brahmana* and *Tandya Mahabrahmana*<sup>3</sup>. the disease is described in *Panini Vyakarana* also<sup>4</sup>.

Reference to *Switra* is found in *Samhita Kala* also. Manu abhors marriage to the son or daughter of a *Switra Kushtha* patient<sup>5</sup>.

The important classical texts of Ayurveda such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya* etc. clearly mention the treatment of *Switra* along with its classification and prognosis. Most of them use *Switra* and *Kilasa* as Synonyms.

Medieval authors like Madhava, Bhavamishra, Sarangadhara and Chakradatta also enumerated certain additional information regarding *Switra*.

References to this diseases are available in *Agni Purana*, *Guruda Purana* and *Mahabharata* also<sup>6</sup>.

*Switra* is known by different names like.

- Kilasam* (diseases where normal colour of skin is destroyed) *Atharva Veda*.
- Palitam* (meant particularly for whiteness of the scalp hair) *Atharva*.
- Kilasi* (meaning spotted deer) Max Muller's commentary on *Rig Veda*
- Alasa* (*Atreya Bhraman*)<sup>7</sup>.
- Darun*, *Charuna*, *Switra* – (*Charaka Samhita*)<sup>8</sup>.

- f. *Darun Varun* (Bhaluki Samhita)
- g. *Padur Kustha*<sup>9</sup>.
- h. *Pada Sphota, TwakPuspi, Kilasa, Sidhmali*. These four terms have been used as synonym of *Switra* in *Amarakosha*<sup>10</sup>.

Besides these some other terms are used colloquially.

They are as follows:-

- a. *Saphed Kustha* (Northern India)
- b. *Chitala* or *Chitkabra* (Himachal and Punjab)
- c. *Switra Kustha* and *Dhala Chhau* (Orissa)
- d. *Saphed Dag Phulbazi* (Hindi speaking area)
- e. *Dhaval Kustha, Kahiphula* (Assam)
- f. *Sweti* (Bengal)<sup>11</sup>.

The diseases *Switra* can be equated with vitiligo. Vitiligo is a skin disease characterized by milky white patches with hypopigmented border due to failure of melanin formation. References to vitiligo are available in other traditions also. It is said that, by the touch of Jesus Christ, the vitiligo of a Palestinian was cured. It is mentioned in Persian history, that vitiligo was known in the period of Aushooryans in 2200 B.C.<sup>12</sup>.

The occurrence of this disease in Arab country and the efforts at its treatment are mentioned in Arabic literature. *Koran* the religious book of Islam written during 6

Century A.D. described this disease as *Bars* and remarked that it can be cured by the grace of the Almighty<sup>13</sup>.

Behl, (1962) says that disease is an acquired idiopathic depigmentary condition found mostly in tropical countries like India, Egypt, Japan. In India vitiligo has assumed epidemic proportions in several parts of India<sup>14</sup>.

The two terms leucoderma and vitiligo are used synonymously by most physicians, but a little bit difference exists between this two terminology. The word leucoderma is composed of two words leuco and derma. Leuco means whiteness and derma means skin. Therefore leucoderma is whiteness of the skin. But this whiteness of skin is due to burn or found after healing of wounds. The white patch may remain throughout life whereas vitiligo denotes the primary lesion of the disease.

Any part of the body, any age group and any sex can be affected, but the sites of predilection are the face, dorsa of the feet and hand, wrist and leg. As per age relation the disease is generally seen in the first decade of life and after menopause (Behl P.N.)

*Atharva Veda* has stated four causative factors in case of *Kilasa*. They are as follows:

1. Contact – (*Yat-tvachi*).
2. One's own previous sins – (*Asthijasya*).
3. Inheritance from parents – (*Tanujasya*)
4. Witchcraft or infection – (*Dushya Krtyasya brahamans*).

## TREATMENT

There is a hymn in *Atharva Veda*, which hints that plants abundantly growing during rainy season are remedy for *Switra (Kilasa)*.

Use of some black seeds like *Vakuchi (Psoralea corylifoli)* together with *Bhringaraja (Eclipta prostrata)*, *Indravaruni (Citrullus colocynthis)* and *Rajan (Curcuma longa)* are recommended for the cure of *Switra Roga*<sup>15</sup>.

Four plants are recommended for the treatment of *Kilasa* in the two hymns of *Atharva Veda* by their descriptive epithets – *Rama* (dark). *Krina* (black or stable) *Asikni* (dusky) and *Rajani* (yellow). They are according to Darila the commentator of *Atharva Veda*, the same as *Bhringaja (Eclipta Prostrata)* *Indravaruni (Citrullus colocynthis)*, *Nili (Indigofera tinctoria)* and *Haridra (Curcuma longa)*.

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