

Ayurveda and Skin Health: A Comprehensive Framework for the Management of Dermatological Disorders

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ABSTRACT

Skin disorders constitute a major segment of global disease burden, affecting millions across all age groups. Chronic conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, acne, vitiligo, and recurrent infections significantly impair quality of life and often resist permanent cure through conventional dermatology. While modern approaches provide symptomatic relief through pharmacological and surgical interventions, recurrence, side effects, and psychosocial impact remain key challenges. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a holistic framework of dermatology (*Kushtha Chikitsa*) that emphasizes internal balance, detoxification, rejuvenation, and lifestyle correction. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of Ayurvedic dermatology in the management of skin disorders, correlating classical principles with modern biomedical insights. Textual references from *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* are examined alongside contemporary evidence on phytopharmacology and clinical outcomes. Internal medicines including *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Neem* (*Azadirachta indica*), *Haridra* (*Curcuma longa*), and *Khadira* (*Acacia catechu*) are explored for their blood-purifying, antimicrobial, and immunomodulatory properties. Panchakarma therapies, Rasayana interventions, and diet-lifestyle regimens are highlighted as key holistic strategies. The paper integrates conceptual models of dosha imbalance, *Agni* dysfunction, and *Ama* accumulation with modern concepts of inflammation, immunity, and the gut-skin axis. Evidence from clinical trials, pharmacological studies, and integrative dermatology frameworks supports the relevance of Ayurveda in global skin health. Challenges such as lack of standardization, regulatory acceptance and need for rigorous randomized controlled trials are also discussed. The findings argue that Ayurveda provides a sustainable, patient-centred and scientifically relevant paradigm for integrative dermatology.

Keywords: Kushtha, Panchakarma, Rasayana, Dermatology, Pharmacology, Standardization

INTRODUCTION

Skin, the largest organ of the human body, serves as a protective barrier, a sensory organ, and a mirror of internal health. Globally, skin diseases are recognized as one of the top ten causes of disability, affecting nearly 1.9 billion people at any given time (WHO, 2020). Chronic conditions such as psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, acne, and vitiligo are associated not only with physical discomfort but also with profound psychosocial stress, stigma, and economic burden.

Modern dermatology has made significant progress in diagnostics, immunotherapy, and targeted drugs. However, limitations persist: long-term use of corticosteroids or immunosuppressants often leads to side effects, while recurrence and chronicity remain unresolved. This has prompted growing interest in integrative approaches that address both internal imbalances and external manifestations.

Ayurveda conceptualizes skin (*Twak*) disorders as manifestations of systemic imbalances involving *Doshas* (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), *Dhatus* (tissues), and *Agni* (digestive fire). The classics describe *Kushtha* as an umbrella term for chronic and complex skin conditions, emphasizing purification, blood detoxification, rejuvenation, and lifestyle correction. Unlike modern symptom-focused treatments, Ayurveda adopts a root-cause approach that integrates preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative dimensions.

This paper aims to provide a transdisciplinary perspective on Ayurvedic dermatology, linking ancient frameworks with modern biomedical science, and highlighting its potential role in sustainable dermatology

practices.

Aim And Objectives of the Study

Aim:

The primary aim of this study is to explore and critically analyze the role of Ayurvedic dermatology and internal medicines in the holistic management of skin disorders, with emphasis on integrating classical Ayurvedic principles and contemporary scientific evidence to establish Ayurveda's relevance in modern dermatological practice.

Objectives:

1. To review and document the Ayurvedic concepts of skin health and pathology with reference to classical texts.
2. To identify and highlight key Ayurvedic herbs, formulations, and therapies used in the management of skin disorders.
3. To evaluate the pharmacological and clinical evidence supporting the dermatological applications of selected Ayurvedic interventions.
4. To compare Ayurvedic approaches with modern dermatological strategies and assess their integrative potential.
5. To analyze challenges related to standardization, safety, and global acceptance of Ayurvedic dermatology.
6. To propose future directions for research and application of Ayurveda in global dermatology and integrative medicine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical Ayurvedic Perspectives

Skin (*Twak*) is described in Ayurveda as one of the most important sense organs and the outer reflection of internal health. Classical texts describe seven layers of the skin, each associated with specific disorders (*Charaka Samhita*, *Chikitsa Sthana* 7). Diseases such as *Kushtha* (a broad term encompassing chronic skin diseases) and *Kilas* (vitiligo-like disorders) are described with detailed pathogenesis, classification, and treatment protocols.

Charaka Samhita attributes skin diseases to the vitiation of all three doshas with predominant involvement of *Rakta dhatu* (blood tissue). *Sushruta Samhita* provides surgical and parasurgical measures, including leech therapy (*Jalaukavacharana*), while *Ashtanga Hridaya* emphasizes dietary modifications and internal cleansing.

Ayurvedic texts classify the skin into seven layers (*Twak Avachheda*), each susceptible to specific disorders (Table 1). *Kushtha* and *Kilas* (conditions resembling vitiligo) are extensively described, with causes traced to incompatible diet, lifestyle errors, psychosomatic factors, and hereditary predispositions. Pathogenesis is explained through *Dosha-Dushya Samoorchana*, where vitiated doshas interact with vulnerable tissues, primarily *Rasa* and *Rakta dhatus*.

Table 1. Ayurvedic Classification of Skin (*Twak*) and Related Disorders

Skin Layer (<i>Twak Avachheda</i>)	Description	Associated Disorders (Examples)	Reference
Avabhasini (1 st layer)	Outermost layer, gives complexion	Dullness, acne, tanning	Charaka Samhita
Lohita (2nd layer)	Blood-rich layer	Eczema, allergic reactions	Sushruta Samhita
Shweta (3rd layer)	Maintains skin brightness	Vitiligo, leukoderma	Ashtanga Hridaya
Tamra (4th layer)	Coppery hue, supports dermis	Psoriasis, chronic eczema	Charaka

Vedini (5th layer)	Sensory perception layer	Pruritus, neuropathic pain	Sushruta
Rohini (6th layer)	Healing and regenerative	Non-healing ulcers, scarring	Ayurveda classics
Mamsadhara (7th layer)	Deep structural support	Abscesses, fistulas, keloids	Classical texts

Contemporary Scientific Literature

Modern studies validate many Ayurvedic herbs for dermatological applications:

- *Neem* (*Azadirachta indica*) has demonstrated antibacterial and antifungal effects in managing acne and eczema.
- *Haridra* (*Curcuma longa*) is rich in curcumin, known for anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects in psoriasis and wound healing.
- *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*) shows blood-purifying, hepatoprotective, and immunomodulatory properties.
- *Khadira* (*Acacia catechu*) has astringent, anti-allergic, and detoxifying properties beneficial in chronic dermatoses.

Clinical trials indicate that integrated Ayurvedic regimens can improve outcomes in psoriasis, vitiligo and atopic dermatitis when compared to standard care.

Conceptual Framework of Ayurvedic Dermatology

Ayurvedic dermatology rests on three pillars:

1. **Dosha-Dushya Samoorchana** – The pathogenesis of skin disease occurs when vitiated doshas interact with susceptible tissues (dhatus), particularly *Rasa* and *Rakta*.
2. **Role of Agni and Ama** – Impaired digestive fire leads to the accumulation of toxins that circulate in the blood and manifest as skin pathology.
3. **Rasayana and Rejuvenation** – Long-term management emphasizes strengthening immunity (*Ojas*), purifying blood, and maintaining equilibrium through rejuvenative herbs and therapies.

The Ayurvedic understanding of skin pathology can be summarized in Figure 1

Figure 1. Pathogenesis of Skin Disorders in Ayurveda

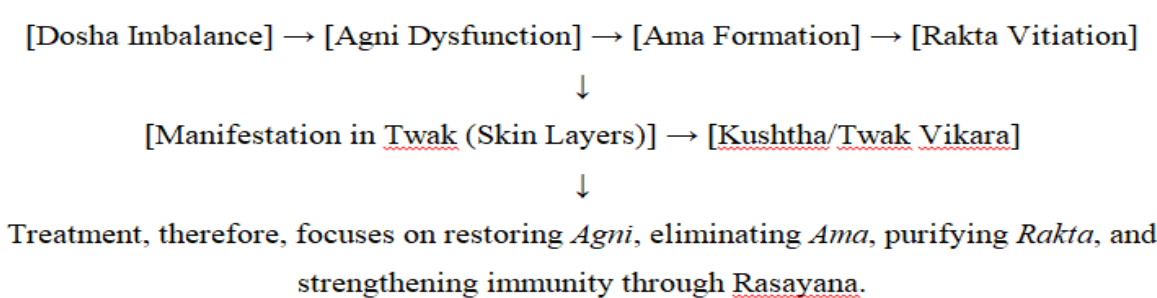
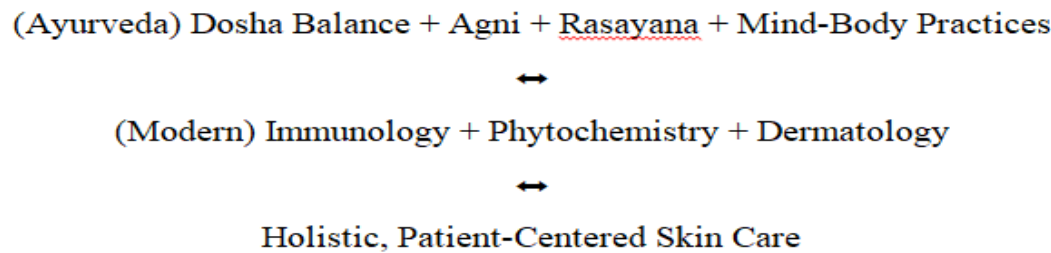


Figure 2. Integrative Model of Skin Health (Ayurveda + Modern Science)



Materials And Methods / Clinical Insights

This paper synthesizes information from Ayurvedic classics, clinical practice observations, and recent pharmacological and clinical studies. While not a single clinical trial, the methodology involves:

- **Textual analysis** of Ayurvedic dermatological references.
- **Phytopharmacological review** of selected herbs.
- **Observational insights** from Ayurvedic dermatology case reports and documented outcomes.
- **Comparative analysis** with modern dermatological frameworks.

Ayurvedic Therapeutic Approaches

Internal Medicines

- *Manjishtha (Rubia cordifolia)* – Blood purifier, indicated in chronic skin diseases.
- *Haridra (Curcuma longa)* – Reduces inflammation, antioxidant, beneficial in psoriasis.
- *Neem (Azadirachta indica)* – Antimicrobial, detoxifying, useful in eczema and acne.
- *Khadira (Acacia catechu)* – Astringent and detoxifying in *Kushtha*.
- *Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)* – Immunomodulator and anti-allergic.

Table 2. Common Ayurvedic Herbs for Skin Disorders and Their Pharmacological Actions

Herb (Sanskrit/Latin)	Primary Properties in Ayurveda	Modern Pharmacological Evidence
Manjishtha (<i>Rubia cordifolia</i>)	Rakta shodhaka (blood purifier), Kushthaghna	Antioxidant, hepatoprotective, immunomodulatory
Haridra (<i>Curcuma longa</i>)	Krimighna (antimicrobial), Vishaghna (detoxifier)	Curcumin: anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, wound healing
Neem (<i>Azadirachta indica</i>)	Kandughna (anti-pruritic), Tikta (bitter)	Antibacterial, antifungal, immunostimulant
Khadira (<i>Acacia catechu</i>)	Kushthaghna, Rasayana	Astringent, anti-allergic, detoxifying
Guduchi (<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>)	Rasayana, Tridosahara	Immunomodulatory, anti-inflammatory
Amalaki (<i>Embllica officinalis</i>)	Rasayana, Vayasthapana (anti-aging)	Vitamin C-rich antioxidant, collagen synthesis

Panchakarma Therapies

- *Vamana* (therapeutic emesis) and *Virechana* (purgation) to expel vitiated doshas.
- *Raktamokshana* (bloodletting/leech therapy) in localized skin conditions.
- *Basti* (medicated enema) for systemic purification.

Rasayana Therapy

- Long-term rejuvenative use of *Amalaki (Embllica officinalis)*, *Shatavari (Asparagus racemosus)*, and polyherbal formulations to enhance immunity and prevent recurrence.

Diet and Lifestyle

- Avoidance of incompatible foods (*Viruddha Ahara*) such as milk with salty or sour items.
- Emphasis on bitter, astringent, and light foods for detoxification.
- Stress reduction through Yoga and meditation, recognizing the psychosomatic role in skin disorders.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda's strength lies in its multidimensional approach. While modern dermatology targets external pathology, Ayurveda addresses systemic imbalances that predispose the skin to disease. Scientific studies on phytochemicals (curcumin, neem extracts, manjisthin) validate these classical herbs as anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory.

Table 3. Comparison: Ayurvedic vs. Modern Dermatology Approaches

Aspect	Ayurveda	Modern Dermatology	Integration Potential
Etiology	Dosha imbalance, Ama accumulation, Rakta vitiation	Microbial, genetic, autoimmune, environmental	Understanding gut-skin axis & immune dysregulation
Diagnosis	Nidan Panchaka (cause, symptoms, dosha, dushya, etc.)	Histopathology, lab tests, imaging	Combined diagnostics (holistic + biomedical)
Treatment	Panchakarma, herbal formulations, Rasayana, lifestyle	Steroids, antibiotics, immunosuppressants, surgery	Reducing side effects & recurrence with integrative care
Prevention	Dinacharya (daily routine), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), Sattvic diet	Sunscreens, hygiene, vaccination	Combining preventive regimens for holistic skin health

Challenges include the need for standardization, clinical validation, and regulatory harmonization. Yet, integrative potential is vast: cosmeceuticals, nutraceuticals, and personalized Ayurvedic profiling align with current trends in precision medicine.

Future Prospects

1. **Personalized dermatology** combining dosha analysis with genomics and microbiome profiling.
2. **Integrative clinics** offering both modern dermatology and Ayurvedic interventions.
3. **Eco-sustainable herbal products** promoting green dermatology.
4. **Collaborative research** with WHO and global institutions to establish guidelines.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a holistic, preventive and therapeutic model for skin disorders, addressing not only symptoms but root causes. Internal medicines, Panchakarma, Rasayana, and lifestyle correction together offer sustainable solutions where modern dermatology often faces limitations. With growing scientific validation, Ayurveda can become a cornerstone of integrative dermatology, contributing to global skin health and wellness.

Declaration By Author

Ethical Approval:

This study did not involve direct experimentation on human participants or animals. Hence, formal ethical approval and clearance requirements were not applicable.

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Conflict of Interest:

The author affirms that there are no conflicts of interest i.e. financial, personal or professional that could have influenced the research findings or the preparation of this manuscript.

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