

BOOK REVIEW

An Exploration to Age-old Wisdom – A Book Review on Geriatrics in Ayurveda

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received on: 01-12-2023

Accepted on: 03-01-2024

Published on: 31-01-2024

Key words:

Geriatrics

Ayurveda

Preventive gerontology

ABSTRACT

“Geriatrics in Ayurveda” is authored by experts from both the fields of Ayurveda and modern medicine, seamlessly blending anecdotes from both medical systems. Geriatrics is Emerging as a challenging speciality, because of ever growing population of Aged people all over the world including India. In near Future, Every physician has to “treat” a large Number of Aging Problems of our Ripe and Senior citizens in their CLINICS. Ayurveda system of Medicine (ASM) offers an Excellent Line of Management for these i.e. Aging problems under Rasayana and ‘Rasa’ therapies. In fact ‘Jara’ is an exclusive therapy for old-age related complaints. Keeping all these concepts in view, a systematic search to gather the relevant and useful information on “Geriatrics in Ayurveda” has been attempted along with inputs from (MODERN) Geriatrics, so as to have a comprehensive book on GERITRICS with Practical and clinical applications. The presented book was studied, analyzed, and compared with other contemporary works on a similar subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most invaluable asset within any society undoubtedly resides in the venerable class of its citizens, serving as icons of acumen, awareness, and wisdom cultivated over the years bestowed upon them by life. Life extension alone is not the ultimate pursuit in geriatric medicine; its goal is to enhance an individual’s quality of life encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions.^[1]

The book titled “Geriatrics in Ayurveda” originated from an essay that clinched the first prize in the Annual National Essay Competition held by *Arya Vaidya Sala*, Kottakkal in 1999. It was authored by the esteemed physicians, the late Vaidya Nagaratnam Atturu (titled *Vaidyavisharada* and *Vaidyacharya*) and his son, Dr. Gnaneshwar Atturu, hailing from Nellore in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. They boast several other classical works such as “*Rasaratnakaram*” and “*Rasakhandam*” to their credit. Vaidya Nagaratnam Atturu was a renowned Ayurvedic practitioner proficient in both Ayurvedic and modern medicine. He traversed India, imbibing knowledge through the revered *Guru-Sishya Parampara* (teacher-disciple lineage). Meanwhile, Dr. Gnaneshwar Atturu, currently serving as Head and Senior Consultant in the Department of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery at Gleneagles

Global Hospital, Hyderabad, exhibits a keen interest in amalgamating Ayurveda and modern medicine. His approach involves selecting the best from both disciplines for the benefit of humanity.

The first edition of the book was published in 2000, followed by the release of the second edition in November 2022, unveiled at the prestigious World Ayurveda Congress 2022 in Goa. The book is published by the Department of Publications, Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal, and is priced at Rs 300 and spans 140 pages. It represents an endeavor to disseminate the wealth of information that this science possesses, aiming to bestow upon people a graceful, peaceful, and healthy progression during the later stages of life.

2. BODY

The book comprises eleven chapters, with the preface written by renowned physician Dr. PM Varier. The first chapter, titled “Review of Literature,” introduces various terms such as gerontology, gerontechnology, geriatric clinical pharmacology, social and behavioral gerontology, preventive gerontology, and experimental gerontology. This chapter also covers global geriatric medical institutions and delineates the various specializations within the field. The subsequent chapter, “General Medicine and Geriatrics,” explores the aging process and differentiates general medicine from geriatric medicine like in probability structures of diagnosis and outcome, presentation of

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illness, and the need for explicit determination of aim of intervention. It emphasizes the necessity for more investigative procedures in old age to attain diagnostic accuracy.

The chapter three delves into the demographic aspects of aging, highlighting the rapid aging of the world population, surpassing the growth rate of the general population. It provides a detailed description of the aging process in various bodily systems and internal organs, encompassing not only physical aging but also mental and social factors related to aging. The mental factors include the slow and steady decline in reasoning and thinking and narrowed and restricted emotional reaction to people and events. It may even include senile dementia. The social factors like role of exercise and senility accelerating bad habits such as debauchery, cigarette smoking, or heavy alcohol consumption are also explained in this chapter. The theory of aging is the subject of the following chapter. This chapter seeks to address the question of “how and why we age?” by examining programmed theories based on the biology of aging and error or damage theories. Genetic theories such as “pleiotropic antagonism” are also touched upon. In addition, the chapter briefly discusses stress as a cause of senescence, leading into the subsequent chapter, which explores the Ayurvedic concept of stress. Continuing from the previous chapter, the next segment explains each theory briefly and outlines its Ayurvedic treatment strategies with logical reasoning. The author has included 19 flowcharts that succinctly explain every symptom in the geriatric population. They include acute confusion, easy fatigability, repeated falls, painful joints, sleep disorders, generalized pruritis, etc.

The sixth chapter offers an Ayurvedic literature review, briefly explaining the philosophy of Ayurveda and *Rasayana tantra* (rejuvenation therapy), which holds paramount importance in geriatrics. The chapter delves into the concept of recitation of sacred mantras to invoke the deity and is explained as *Pran Pratishtha* or invoking life into it and later explains the *Caraka* concept of collection of herbs. The author also points out the importance of identification of many herbs like *dasamoolas* as its controversial. The subsequent chapter, “Pathology,” elucidates the integration of gerontology in Ayurveda. It also delves into the concept of the role of Ayurveda in preventive gerontology and discusses the Ayurvedic perspective on homeostasis. The Ayurvedic perspective on theories of senescence is the focus of the following chapter, explaining the role of diet, regimen, and the vitiation of *tridoshas* in the aging process. The ninth chapter delves into the significance of *Rasayana tantra* in geriatrics, citing various references from *Caraka Samhita* and briefly explains the *rasayanas* of *Rasasastra*. “Preventive Geriatrics in Ayurveda” follows explaining various recipes based on *dosha* vitiation. This chapter discusses *Yoga Rasayana* and *Ushahpana Rasayana* and concludes with the concept of *Acharya Rasayana*. The final chapter concerns the role of *Rasasastra* (alchemy) in Geriatrics, providing a detailed explanation of *Silajatu*, *Loha Rasayana*, and *Bhallataka* (*Semecarpus anacardium* Linn.). For example here, author explains the special processing of *Silajatu* in *Aragwadadi* group or *Salararadi* group in equal quantity to that of *Silajatu*. The filtrate of decoction is made and filtered and the filtrate while its hot purified *Silajathu* must be added. It is then dried and reduced to powder and used. The dosage of *Silajatu* is calculated according to general body weight of our population and is determined as 0.5–1 g of *Silajatu* per day.

3. ANALYSIS

“Geriatrics in Ayurveda” is authored by experts from both the fields of Ayurveda and modern medicine, seamlessly blending anecdotes from both medical systems. The book is the published work of an award-

winning essay, which itself is a clear indicator of its well-organized content delivery. The role of stress in Ayurveda receives significant attention, with a dedicated chapter addressing its importance. Stress disrupts the body’s normal functioning, ultimately leading to the vitiation of *tridoshas*. While minor derangements can be corrected by the proper functioning of the immune system, normal aging is explained as a consequence of developing immunodeficiency, a process that can potentially be influenced or manipulated.

The author also delves into theories of senescence, such as the killer hormone theory, elucidating the interplay of hormones in the aging process. He explains the potential role of dopamine supplementation and starvation as tools to address the effects of the killer hormone senescence, potentially improving lifespan. In attempting to correlate these theories with Ayurvedic literature, he emphasizes the significance of *Kapikachu* (*Mucuna pruriens* Linn.) and controlled diet (*mitha bhojana*) in managing such situations.

The author draws upon anecdotes from articles published in the Aryavaidyan magazine, *Rasaratna Samuchayam*, and other Ayurvedic classics while elucidating dietary antioxidants. Examples include *tila taila* (sesame oil) and oil extracted from the seeds of *jyothishmati* (*Celastrus paniculatus* Wild.), compounded with cow ghee, honey, or milk, proposed as potential *rasayanas*.

The biochemical free energy responsible for all cellular-level metabolic processes is referred to as “*agni*.” The text explores methods to rectify *agni* derangement, discussing the usage of drugs with various *rasa* predominances and few *sodhana* (biopurificatory) therapies. In addition, it explains a concurrent perspective linking the role of *agni* to the mitochondrial theory of aging, citing several scientific articles. Thus, the author concludes that modern science and biology are progressively aligning with Ayurveda, recognizing *agni* as a crucial factor in maintaining health, life, longevity, and senescence.

Preventive gerontology is explained under the umbrella of *Swasthavritta* in Ayurveda where we can find references of *dinacharya* (daily duties), *rathricharya* (night duties), *rthucharya* (seasonal regimen) and steps to maintain healthy sperm and ova, regimens to be followed during menstruation, antenatal and postnatal period, etc.^[2] The book also provides details of recipes from *Susrutha Samhita* aimed at restoring the balance of *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*, and *sonita*. These are explained as various permutations and combinations of milk, ghee, honey, and cold water.

The Ayurvedic concepts are explained in this book in simple language as a counterpart of modern purview. The diverse areas of excellence of the authors are blended perfectly in this book and are visible in the effortless content delivery.

4. CONCLUSION

Geriatrics in Ayurveda extends through all the realms of health care including primary care, acute care, rehabilitation, long-term care, and other aspects of health and wellness for the most mature and valued class of society. Geriatrics being an emerging medical specialty the scope of research in preventive gerontology is need of the hour which can be attributable to Ayurvedic science. The book serves as a fuel to take up research in the field of experimental gerontology, biology of aging, preventive gerontology, etc. incorporating the holistic science of Ayurveda.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

6. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors give equal contribution while preparing this book review.

7. FUNDING

Nil.

8. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study is not required ethical clearance as it is book review.

9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

11. PUBLISHERS NOTE

This journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published institutional affiliation.

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How to cite this article:

Priya NK, Binitha A, Jigeesh PP. An Exploration to Age-old Wisdom – A Book Review on Geriatrics in Ayurveda. *IRJAY*. [online] 2024;7(1):102-104.

Available from: <https://irjay.com>

DOI link- <https://doi.org/10.47223/IRJAY.2024.70117>

