



Bars (Vitiligo): A Comprehensive Review on Aetiopathology and Treatment in Unani Classics

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ABSTRACT

Bars (Vitiligo) is a disease that was observed very early in history and most ancient civilizations and religions had some references about lack of pigmentation. The knowledge on aetiopathology of *Bars* is ambiguous and the treatment is very difficult till date. Wide range of literature is available in classical Unani system of medicine. Keeping in view, this review is focused on the aetiopathology and treatment of *bars*.

Keywords: *Bars*; Vitiligo; Unani System of Medicine; *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah*

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INTRODUCTION

The word Vitiligo has been said to have derived from “*vitium*” (defect or blemish) rather than “*vitellus*” meaning calf¹. The term was first used by Celsus, a Roman physician of Second Century A.D.² The earliest reference to the disease was found in 2200 B.C in the period of Aushooryan, according to the literature of Iran “*Tareekh-e Tib.*”³ One of the earliest terms was ‘KILAS’ in the Rig Veda, which was meant as similar to a white spotted deer.⁴ The Ebers Papyrus in 1550 B.C, dealing with medicine in the age of the Pharaohs, describes two types of skin disease involving changes in the colour of skin. One type, involving tumors and mutations, is likely leprosy, since it is affirmed that “thou shalt not do anything to it”. The other seems to simply involve a lack of pigmentation: it is likely to be vitiligo, because “only a change in colour is found.” It is said that in the case a cure was effected.^{5,6} Classics of Unani Medicine are stuffed with references to *Bars*. A number of Unani physicians have given a detailed account of the disease. Buqrat (Hippocrates), Father of Medicine was the first to define *Bars*. Raban Tabri in his famous book *Firdaus-ul- Hikmat*,⁷ Zakariya Razi (Rhazes) in *Kitab-al-Hawi*⁸ and Ibn-e Sina (Avicenna) in his most famous medical text book *Al-Qanoon Fit Tib*⁹ gave comprehensive descriptions of the disease.

Definition

Majusi in his masterpiece *Kamil-us-Sana’ah* defined *Bars* as whiteness occurring in outer surface of the body. Sometimes it limited to few organs and sometimes can affect all organs. Consequently, the whole body becomes white. The disease occurs due to domination of phlegmatic humour in the blood, and due to weakness in *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* (altering power) in the organ.¹⁰ Akbar Arzani in his famous book *Tibb-e Akbar* stated “*Bars* is a whiteness appearing on the skin.”¹¹

Types

Raban Tabri described that *Bars* is of two types. In the first type of *Bars*, the *Rutoobat-e Fasida* affect completely at the site of lesion. It may extend up to the bone. This category of *Bars* is difficult to treat. In the subsequent type of *Bars*, the lesion is limited to skin and bones that is curable.⁷ Azam Khan stated “*Bars* is white patch which appears on the outer layer of the body (skin). It may occur on certain parts or may involve whole of the body and turns its colour white. This type of *Bars* is known as “*Bars-e Muntashir*” (generalized vitiligo) weakness of *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* being its cause.”¹²

Precipitating Factors

Various precipitating factors are described in Unani system of medicine like *Zarba wa Saqta*, *A'asabi futoor* and *Wirasat*.¹³

Aetiopathogenesis

The aetiology of *Bars* (Vitiligo) is still ambiguous in conventional medicine; however a detail discussion related to cause is available in Unani classics. It is mentioned that weakness of *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah wa Mushabbiha* (transformative faculty) of the skin and liver is the prime cause. *Fasad-ud-Dam* (impairment of blood) and *Burudat-ud-Dam* (coldness of blood) are the aggravating factors for the infliction of *Bars*.^{14,15,16} Raban Tabri while describing the etiology of *Bars* in his famous book *Firdaus-ul- Hikmat*, stated “*Fasad-ud-dam* (impairment of blood) and *Burudat-ud-dam* (coldness of blood) are the main causes of *Bars*. If the digestive faculty of the body cannot metabolise the food properly, there is formation of those ingredients in the blood which may have cold & moist temperament (Phlegmatic temperament) instead of its normal temperament, leads to appearance of *Bars*.”⁷ Zakariya Razi has also described the aetiopathology of the disease. He confirmed that owing to too much accumulation of *Balgham-e ghaleez*, the affected parts turn into phlegmatic and soft similar to mollusc. In addition to it, the temperament of the circulating blood is changed on reaching the affected part and turns into phlegmatic and the region receiving such blood cannot be nourished appropriately.¹⁷ He quoted Ibn-e Sarafiyoon that “If *Bars* spreads over a large segment of the body or when it turns into chronic or if white liquid oozes out on piercing the *Bars* patches, it is not curable⁸. The above quotation from Raban Tabri and Zakariya-Razi can be summarized that the disease is caused by excessive *Burudat*, and have mentioned similar causes. Another renowned Unani physician Ibn-e Sina has given another version of *Bars* in his book *Al-Qanoon fit-tib*, in which he stated that the *Bars* is caused by weakened *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah*. The weakened *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* predisposes weakening of *Quwat-e Mushabbeha* under the influence of *Maddae Ghaleeza* and excessive *Burudat*. Furthermore due to the weakness of *Quwat-e Dafia*, the *Maddae Ghaleeza* remain accumulated in the affected part, therefore the nutrients that reached at the affected parts through blood circulation become altered and unable to be a part of the organ so that organ is unable to take its normal appearance because of weakened *Quwat-e Mushabbeha*. Discussing the diseases he stated that the diseases can be transmitted from parents to their offspring and from generation to generation, he stated that there are certain diseases which can be transmitted from generation to generation and *Bars* is one of them.^{14, 15, 16} While going through the classical Unani literature, physicians of the later era endorsed the description of *Bars* given by Ibn-e Sina and others. Since then no significant change is found in the writings of Unani physicians.

Following are the description of some important authors of Unani medicine. Ibn-e Rushd depicted that *Bars* emerges owing to derangement in the function of *Quwat-e Ghazia* and fault in *Quwat-e Hazima*. In this situation, the nutrients reach the tissues and are retained there, but do not take the appropriate form due to malfunctioning of these *Quwa*.¹⁸ Jurjani in his book *Zakheera Khawarizam Shahi* affirmed that “*Bars* is caused by excessive accumulation of *Balgham-e Ghaleez* in the blood, *Zoaf-e Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* of skin, *Zoaf-e Hazm-e Salis*, *Akhlat-e Fasida* and *Sue’ Mizaj Barid* of the organ.”¹⁹ Sadeeduddin Gazrooni illustrated that *Bars* is whiteness which appears on the skin. It may involve whole of the body and infiltrate deep into the skin. Due to malfunctioning of *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah*, the formation of nutrients does not take place similar to to organ’s requirement.²⁰ The authors of *Moalajat-e Nafeesi* and *Aqsarai* absolutely stated that *Bahaq* and *Bars* both are the whiteness appearing on the skin. *Bahaq* does not infiltrate deep as does *Bars*. It remains superficial due to augmented *Quwat-e Dafia*, but in *Bars* it infiltrate deep into the muscles and bones due to weakness of *Quwat-e Dafia*.^{21,22} The authors of *Bayaz-e Ajmal* and *Makhzanul Hikmat* have also declared that in *Bars*, white spots arises on skin surface. These spots are primarily of small in size then increased gradually. Sometimes it may be idiopathic and/or due to neurogenic disorder leads to damaged the influence of skin and *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah*.^{13,23,24}

Clinical Features

Raban Tabri illustrated that occasionally the lesion of *Bars* is smooth, shiny and soft to feel and it is because of *Maddae Raddiya* that deranged the nutritional process of the affected site. In some cases the *Bars*, lesion is neither smooth nor shining and soft. It is due to *Ghaleez Rutoobat* at the affected site. Sometimes the lesion is reddish due to the presence of blood. This state is affected by *Rutoobat-eFasida*.²⁵ Majusi in his masterpiece *Kamil-us-Sana’ah* stated “As far as the symptoms are concerned, the organ becomes white, even the hair also turn white. If the skin is punctured with a needle, the white liquid or reddish liquid oozes in spite of blood.”¹⁰

Usool ilaj/ ilaj

Raban Tabri explained that *Bars* is of two types. In the first category of *Bars* the *Rutoobat-e Fasida* affects completely the site of lesion. It may extend at deep, even up to the bone. This type of *Bars* is to treat. In the second type of *Bars* the lesion is superficial and its management is possible.²⁵ Qamri described in his book *Ghina Muna*,²⁶ quoting Yahya Ibn-e Masviyah that, if the white patches of *Bars* turned red on rubbing, it means the lesion is new and can be treated easily and if the colour remains unchanged, it signifies that the disease is chronic and it is difficult to treat. Moreover he quoted Zakariya Razi that if *Bars* is widespread, chronic and its

colour is like that of *Sahaab* (cloudy) then it will not be cured. He also added that the patches on the feet and the hands do not respond to treatment effectively. According to Ibn-e Zohr, *Bars* is a white shining spot emerges on the skin. If there is no redness on rubbing and no bleeding occurs on pricking, it is to treat. It is due to the metabolic disturbance resulted from *Zoaf-e Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* of *kabid*.²⁷ Akbar Arzani has also given a thorough description of *Bars* in his famous book *Tibb-e Akbar*. According to him, *Bars* is a whiteness emerging on the skin. When it spreads all over the body it is called *Bars -e Muntashir* (generalized vitiligo), weakness of *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* being its cause. Its treatment becomes difficult, if it turns chronic and remains progressive. He has given an account of the prognostic factors in *Bars*. Those lesions where the hair are not affected and the lesions which become red on rubbing are curable.¹¹

Resistant Areas for treatment²⁸

1. Lips, over the joints, acral areas
2. Patches with depigmented hair
3. Patches with thickened integument, scaling and tendency to fibrosis
4. Pale patches with lack of vascularity (do not bleed easily)

Reasons for Poor Response to Treatment²⁸

1. Malnutrition
2. Emotional stress and strain
3. Recurrent infections
4. Long term antibiotic treatment
5. Dyspepsia, diarrhoea and dysentery
6. Endemic areas
7. Age above 60 years

TREATMENT

The treatment of *Bars* includes three modes of treatment viz. Psycho-therapy, Dieto-therapy and pharmaco-therapy. Several treatment modalities have been mentioned in the valuable literature of Unani Medicine. The father of medicine, Buqrat was the first to define *Bars*. Many other physicians elaborated this disease extensively in their writings; like Raban Tabri in his book, *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat*, Zakaria Razi in his treatise, *Kitab-al-Hawi* and Ibn-e Sina in his masterpiece, *Al-Qanoon fit-Tib* gave a comprehensive description of the disease. According to Akbar Arzani there is type of *Bars* called *Bars-e Muntashir* (generalized vitiligo) which is caused by weakness of *Quwat-e Mughaiyirah*. Its treatment is supposed to be difficult, if it turns chronic and remains progressive.¹¹ In Pharmaco-therapy, treatment begins with the removal of *Balgham-e Ghaleez*

from the body by *Munzij* and *Mus'hil* therapy. The *Munzij-e Balgham* should be administered till the manifestation of “*Nuzj*” as decoction followed by three “*Mus'hil*” with “*Tabreed*” on alternate day. After completion of “*Munzij*” and *Mus'hil* regimens, drugs of hot temperament (*Haar Mizaj*) should be advised. The other specific medicines such as *Babchi* (*Psoralea corylifolia* Linn), *Chaksu* (*Cassia absus* Linn), *Anjir* (*Ficus carica* Linn), *Panwar* (*Cleome brachycarpa* Vahl ex DC), *Atrilaal* (*Ammi majus* Linn), *Sudab* (*Ruta graveolence* Linn) and *Halela Siyah* (*Terminalia chebula*) are advocated for the treatment of *Bars*.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the above discussion, it can be concluded that the description of *Bars* given by ancient Unani physicians stands authentic and accepted by other physicians without any significant change. Most of the Unani physicians agreed that the disease occur mostly because of *Zoaf-e Quwat-e Mughaiyirah* and *Mushabbaha*, the power that brings changes in the nutrients and becomes the part of the body. This weakness may be because of *Fasad-ud-dam* and *Burudat-ud-dam* or it may be due to collection of *Balgham-e Ghaleez* in the whole body or on the affected parts.^{7,8,11,13,14,15,16,17,23,29,30,31}

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