

THE CONCEPT OF VARNA (COMPLEXION) IN AYURVEDA

Khan Mohd Ashraf¹, Khatoon Hena², Awasthi H.H³

¹Lecturer, Dept. of Rachana Sharir, Shri Sai Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Junior Resident, Dept. of Siddhant Darshan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU, Uttar Pradesh, India

³Professor and Head, Dept. of Rachana Sharir, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

The concept of *Varna* has being described very well in *Ayurveda*. The term *Varna* means color, complexion and lustre of body. Various synonyms for the term *Varna* have been mentioned which are *Rupa*, *Kanti*, *Prabha*, *Chaya*, etc.

Varna is a physical property, it is a natural color, texture and appearance of a person's skin. *Varna* in *Ayurveda* doesn't only means to complexion but it includes a broader aspect of parameters necessary for a healthy skin. This *varna* is affected by many factors before and after birth of human life. According to modern science, three main pigments i.e. Melanin, Carotene and Haemoglobin are considered for the skin color. Human skin color ranges in variety from the darkest brown to the lightest pinkish white hues. In human beings the skin pigmentation primarily regulates the amount of ultraviolet radiation penetrating the skin, controlling its biochemical effects.

Keywords: *Varna*, *Ahara*, *Dosa*, *Melanin*

INTRODUCTION

According to *Acharya Charak* four *Varnas* are considered as 'Prakrit' *Varna*, viz. *Krishna*, *Shyama*, *Shyama-avadat*, *Avadat* and five *Varnas* as 'Vaikrit' i.e. *Nila*, *Shyama*, *Tamra*, *Harita*, *Shukla*¹. According to *Ayurveda* there is not a single factor for *Varnotpatti*, but group of factors are assigned for the formation of *Varna*. *Varnotpatti* can be classified into two main categories:

- A. During *Garbhavastha* (Foetal life)²⁻¹⁶
- B. After birth¹⁷⁻²⁹

A. Factors responsible for the formation of *Varna* during *Garbhavastha* (Foetal life):

1. Effect of *Mahabhuta*:

Acharya Sushrut said, *Tejo Dhatu* (*Tejas Mahabhuta*) is the cause of production

of *Varna* (color), when this becomes predominant of *Ap Dhatu* (*Ap Mahabhuta*) at the time of formation of the *Garbha* (foetus), then it makes the *Garbha* (foetus) *Gaura* (white); when it becomes predominant of *Prithvi Dhatu* (*Prithvi Mahabhuta*) then it makes the *Garbha* (foetus) *Krishna* (black); when predominant of *Prithvi* and *Akasha*, then it makes the *Garbha* (foetus) *Krishna Shyama* (blue-black); when predominant of *Toya* (*Ap*) and *Akasha Dhatu* (*Bhuta*) then it makes the foetus *Gaura Shyama* (whitish-blue).²

But according to *Acharya Charak* and *Vagbhata*, *Agni Mahabhuta* when associated with *Udaka* and *Antariksha Mahabhutas* also produce *Avadata* (white complexion). Associated with *Prithvi* and *Vayu*

it produces *Krishna Varna* (black complexion) and with all the *Mahabhutas* in equal proportion, it produces *Shyama Varna* (brown complexion).^{3,4}

In the *Garbhashaya*, *Mahabhutas* contributed by the *Shukra* and *Shonita* form the *Varna* according to their relative dominance. *Teja Dhatu* i.e. *Agni Mahabhuta* plays the important role in *Varnotpatti*. It forms different color and *Varna* (complexion) in combination with other *Mahabhutas*.

2. Role of Shukra:

Acharya Vagbhatt has correlated the color of *Shukra* to the *Varna* of the *Garbha*, i.e. If *Shukra* (semen) is of *Shukla* (white) color like *Ghrutamanda* (supernatant fluid of ghee), the color of the offspring will be *Gaura Varna*; if it is of the color of *Taila* (oil), the offspring will be *Krishna* (black); and if the *Shukra* (semen) is of the *Madhvabh* (color of honey) the offspring will be *Shyama* (bluish-black).⁵

Commentator *Indu* further emphasised that varied nutrition plays important role in variant of semen and hence affect the variant in the *Garbha*. Thus, it can be said that the *Varna* (complexion) is determined by the paternal factors.⁶

3. Role of Garbhotpadaka Bhavas:

Atma and *Satmya* are assigned for the manifestation of color and complexion.⁷ *Atma* (Soul) after entering *Garbhashaya* (uterus) gets combined with the *Shukra* and *Shonita* thereby reproducing Himself in the form of *Garbha* (foetus). Thus the *Garbha* (foetus) takes the designation of *Atma*. The state of mere existence of *Shukra* (sperm) and *Shonita* (ovum) prior to the combination of *Atma* cannot be called as *Garbha* (foetus). They are only entitled to be known as *Garbha* (foetus) only when the *Atma* gets combined with them.⁸

This *Atma* influences the *Varna* of the person. As per the deeds and the dominant *Trigunas* of the *Purvajanma* the physical characters of the *Garbha* (foetus) are formed by the transmigration of *Atma* from one body to another.

In this reference *Satmya* is related to the substance which stabilizes health in pregnant women and which help in alleviation of the disease or vitiated *Dosas* in an unhealthy mother during the *Garbhavastha*, or even before the *Garbhavastha* and also the *Satmya* of the father. because *Shukra* is responsible for formation of the *Garbha*. This *Satmya* depends upon the type of *Ahara* taken. This *Panchabhautic Ahara*, and the dominant *Mahabhuta* nourishes the *Sharira Avayava*. Therefore the *Satmya* influences the *Varna* of *Garbha* eg. If excess of *Kasaya Rasa* is taken by the *Garbhini* it causes *Shyavatva* in the offspring; and if excess *Amla* is taken the child is more prone to *Tvaka Vikar* (skin disorder).

Acharya Vagbhatt I said that in accordance with the rule that “effects are similar to the cause”, the foetus will be similar to its causative factors which combine inside the uterus.⁹

Acharya Indu has explained that as from *Tila* seeds only *Tila* plant will grow not the *Maricha*, similarly from collective efforts of *Matrija* (mother), *Pitrija* (father), *Bhuta*, *Desa* (dwelling place), *Kala* (time), *Garbhashaya* (uterus) and *Matrija Ahara* (dietetics of the mother), the resultant conception would be of similar shape. So, besides the *Mahabhutas*, *Atma* also plays important role. On account of the *Karmas* of *Purvajanma*, *Atma* becomes the causative factor in the production of *Varna*.¹⁰

4. Effect of Psychology of Mother:

Psychology has a deep, long-lasting effect on our entire body. During pregnancy,

depression, anxiety and other psychological conditions in the mother can cause physical changes. *Acharya Charak* said that woman should be made to have a mental visit to the country of her choice, adopt the food, regimen, manners and apparel of the people of those countries whom she wishes her son to resemble. He also said that child resembles those things which the mother thinks in her mind during conception. Thoughts which occupy the mind of the woman during conception, because of their specific action, determine the resemblance of the offspring to one or the other things. Psychic factors are well known to initiate identical reaction in the body of living beings. The thinking will influence the *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* accordingly through the mother. These *Trigunas* further influences the *Panchabhautika* dominance, which decides the *Varna*.¹¹

5. Effect of *Ahara* and *Vihara* of the mother:

If the mother indulges in *Madhura* (sweet foods) such as *Kshira* (milk) etc, and in water sports, the color of the child will be *Gaura* (whitish-yellow); indulgence in foods which causes *Vidaha* (heart-burn) such as *Tila*, the color of the child will be *Krishna* (black); with the use of mixed type of *Ahara* (foods), the color will be *Shyama* (blue black).¹²

The *Nabhi Nadi* (umbilical cord) of the *Garbha* (foetus) is attached to the *Nabhi* (umbilicus) and the *Apara* (placenta) to the *Nabhi Nadi* (umbilical cord) on one side and to the *Matrija Hridaya* (mother's heart) on the other. The *Matrija Hridaya* (mother's heart) floods the *Apara* (placenta with nourishment) by the *Sira Spandana* (pulsating vessels). This *Rasa* (nutritive fluid) promotes *Bala* (strength) and *Varna* (complexion) of the *Garbha* (foe-

tus) because it is composed of all essential factors.¹³

While describing the factors which damage to the *Garbha*, *Acharya Charak* said that excessive use of *Amla Rasa* by mother results in the child suffering from skin disorders and that of *Kasaya Rasa* results the child having *Shyava Varna*. He states that the *Garbhini* gives birth to the child suffering mostly from the respective disorders etio-pathological factors of which are used by her during the gestation. Hence, the woman desiring good progeny should particularly abstain from the unwholesome diet and behavior¹⁴.

Matruahara is *Panchabhautic* and the *Vihara* also has an impact on the *Panchabhautic Sharira*, both causes and effect on the normalcy of the *Mahabhutas*, which in turn influences the *Varnopatti*.

6. Effect of *Desa* and *Kula* :

According to *Vagbhatacharya*, the color of the child will be different even in accordance with the *Desa* (region), *Kula* (race) and *Anuvritti* (occupation).¹¹ *Arun-datta* has given his opinion that the people of the *Autar* (North) are *Gaura varna* and those in the *Dakshin* (South) are *Krishnavarna*, while the people of the *Madhya* region of India have the *Shyama Varna*.¹⁵

Dr. *Ghanekar* has also emphasized on the role of *Desa* on the *Varna* of a person. He states that a person from a cold region has a characteristic *Varna* in accordance to his *Desa*. But when he moves from the cold region to the hotter regions his *Varna* will definitely show a change to suit the climate there. The same can be said about a person from a hot region migrating to a cooler region. His *Varna* will also change to be more *Gaura* as compared to his previous color. But this change will not be more than a particular degree from his normal color. Hence though the color and complexion of a person is genetically de-

terminated, the *Desa* does influence it to a certain extent. So, the geographical conditions have their contribution in their respect.¹⁶

Acharya Ghanekar explaining *Varna* according to *Kula* stated that their *Ahara* as main causative factor. Any person either Europeans or Chinese or Japanese, stay in any country, if possible they do not change their diet. It is obvious that their saplings are having the same kind of *Varna* as their parents have. For instance, that of the Negros are having darker complexion, that of Chinese or Japanese are having yellowish complexion and that of Europeans have fairer. In India also, *Varna* differs among particular races, Momedians and Brahmins have fairer complexion, while some other races have the darker one. This shows the uniqueness of color due to genetic factor.¹⁶

B. Varnotpatti after birth:

1. Role of Jathragni:

Jathragni is referred as main cause of the formation of *Varna* throughout the life¹⁷. Also, *Ahara* is considered as conditioning the *Varna*¹⁸, but whatever may be eaten is only digested by the *Agni*. This *Agni* is again responsible for the conversion of the *Ahara* to the *Rasa Raktadi Dhatus*. These *Dhatus* particularly the *Rasa* and the *Rakta* nourishes the *Tvacha* and helps in the maintenance of *Varna*. Any derangement in these *Dhatus* is manifested on the *Tvacha*.

The *Pachaka Pitta* also controls the *Bhrajaka Pitta* responsible for *Varna*. *Agni* is main cause for the any type of transformation anywhere in the Universe, either in the body or in the outer world. The *Naiyayikas* have interpreted the conversion of *Mahabhutas* in the terms of 'Paka'. All the *Pakas* takes place only through the *Agni*. *Panchabhutagni* is also responsible for the digestion of the *Pancabhautic Ahara*.

Their normalcy is also responsible for the maintenance of normal color. Thus, *Agni* has a main role in the formation of *Varna*.

2. Effect of Ahara and Aharavidhi

Acharya Charak mentioned that *Varna* (complexion), *Prasad* (cheerfulness), *Svara* (good voice), *Jivita* (life), *Pratibha* (geniusness), *Sukha* (happiness), *Tushti* (Satisfaction), *Pushti* (corpulence), *Bala* (Strength), *Medha* (intellect) all these are dependent on *Ahara*¹⁸.

Acharya Sushrut also states that *Ahara* is the root cause for all the *Prani* (people) and provides *Bala* (strength), and *Varna* (complexion)¹⁹.

Acharya Charak also mentioned that *Ahara* taken in proper quantity and dietary pattern certainly provides *Varna* (complexion) without disturbing *Prakriti*²⁰.

Charak said that food and drinks with desirable smell, taste, touch and taken according to prescribed method produces *Bala*, *Varna* and *Indriya Prasad* i.e. it is a complexion promoter²¹.

So, the impact of *Ahara* and *Aharavidhi* plays important and equal role on the process of *Varnotpatti*. If this factor is vitiated the digestion will not be proper and thus hampers the normal *Varnotpatti* because only properly digested food will lead to the maintenance of *Prakrita Varna*.

3. Effect of Dosa:

Tridosha brings about the excellence of *Upacaya*, *Bala*, *Varna*, *Prasada* etc. in *Prakrit* state and in *Vikrit* state they cause various types of diseases. Thus, they affect the *Varna* of the body²².

Acharya Harita said that *Shyama Varna* is due to *Vata*, *Gaura Varna* is due to *Pitta*, *Shyama Varna* is due to *Kapha*, *Krishna Varna* is due to *Vata* *Rakta*, *Pingala Varna* is due to *Pitta* *Rakta*, *Shyama Varna* is due to *Kapha Asrika*.²³

These *Dosas* are responsible for the various biochemical changes occurring in the body. These changes affect the *Avayavas* of the *Sharira* as well as the *Varna* of the skin. Thus, affects the *Varna* of the body.

4. Effect of *Dhatu*:

According to *Acharya Charak Lakshana* of *Tvak Sara Purush* indicates that *Rasa Dhatu* plays an important role in formation of color as well as lustre and complexion²⁴.

Charak opines that *Visuddha Rakta* is responsible factor for *Bala*, *Varna*, *Sukh* and *Ayu*²⁵.

Sushrut opines that *Rakta* as increasing glow of color and complexion²⁶.

Acharya Charak has mentioned that unctuousness in *Varna* (complexion) as the quality of *Medosara*, *Majjasara* and *Shukrasara Purush*²⁷.

5. Effect of *Oja*:

Acharya Charak said that when the *Ojas* is diminished, the person is having deranged lustre. (*Dushchaya*)²⁸. *Varna* is one of the functions of the *Oja*²⁹.

As *Oja* is also *Panchabhautic*, more over *Oja* is the *Sara* of all the *Dhatus* in the body. Hence if *Oja* is well formed it means that the *Dhatus* from which it is formed are also of the best quality. Therefore an *Ojasvi* person will have good, clear and dazzling complexion.

Normal level of *Oja* increases the complexion according to the relative dominance.

DISCUSSION

From the above description it is clear that *Varna* of a person does not depend on single factors. The process of *Varnotpatti* starts from *Garbhavastha* and it continues after birth. So there are certain factors which involve in *Varnotpatti* during *Garbhavastha* such as *Mahabhuta*, *Shukra*, *Triguna*, *Garbhotpadak Bhava*, Psychology of mother and on *Desa*, *Kula* and *Jati*. There are also some factors which participate in process of *Varnotpatti* after birth such as *Jathragni*, *Ahara*, *Aharavidhi*, *Dosa* and *Dhatu*.

Table 1 showing factors for formation of body complexion

Complexion	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Charak</i>	<i>Vagbhatt I</i>	<i>Harita</i>
Gaura (Fair)	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Pitta</i>
	<i>Jala</i>	<i>Jala</i>	<i>Jala</i>	
		<i>Akasha</i>	<i>Akasha</i>	
Krishna (Black)	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Vata</i>
	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Rakta</i>
		<i>Vayu</i>	<i>Vayu</i>	
Shyama	-	All <i>Bhutas</i> equal	All <i>Bhutas</i> equal	<i>Vata and Kapha</i>
Gaura Shyama	<i>Teja</i>	-	-	-
	<i>Jala</i>			
	<i>Akasha</i>			
Krishna Shyama	<i>Teja</i>	-	-	
	<i>Prithvi</i>			
	<i>Akasha</i>			
Pingla	-	-	-	<i>Pitta+Rakta</i>

Acharya Charak mentioned equal proportions of all *Mahabhutas* to give the *Shyama Varna*. *Acharya Sushrut* has di-

vided it into two; *Gaura Shyama* and *Krishna Shyama*, in which the dominance is of *Jala* and *Prithvi Mahabhutas* respec-

tively. Acharya Charak and Acharya Vagbhata I have described three types of Varna while Acharya Sushruta mentioned four types of Varna according to Mahabhautika dominance²⁻⁴.

Modern medical science also says that the *Desa* affects the *Varna* (complexion) of a person. Area which receives higher amount of ultraviolet radiation, generally located closer to the equator, tend to have darker skinned populations. Areas that are far from the tropics and closer to the poles have lower concentration of ultraviolet radiation which is reflected in lighter skinned population. Natural skinned colour can also darken as a result of tanning due to exposure to sunlight. The leading theory is that skin color adapts to intense sunlight irradiation to provide partial protection against UV fraction that produces damage and thus mutation in the DNA of the skin cells. Hence it proves that distribution of melanin is according to the solar intensity hence the concept of *Desa* affecting the *Varna*³⁰.

Result and Conclusion:

Varnotpatti starts with the conception and continues by various factors during *Garbhavastha* (pregnancy) which is discussed above. Complexion of a person is also influenced after birth by various environmental factors, dietary regimen etc.

According to modern medical science also skin color in human beings is affected by many factors although the most important substance is the pigment melanin. Melanin is produced within the skin in cells called melanocytes and it is the main determinant of the skin color of darker skinned humans. If the melanin is more in the skin the solar radiation is absorbed more and hence causes direct and indirect DNA damage to the skin and body naturally combats and seeks to repair damage and protect the skin by creating and releas-

ing further melanin into the skin cells. With the production of melanin, the skin color darkens. The skin color of people with light skin is determined mainly by the bluish white connective tissue under the dermis and by the haemoglobin circulating in the veins of the dermis. The red color underlying the skin becomes more visible, especially in the face, when, as consequences of physical exercise or the stimulation of the nervous system (anger, fear) arterioles dilate.

REFERENCES

1. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 559
2. Murthy K.R. Srikantha, *Susruta Samhita* with English translation, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2012 page no. 26,27
3. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 559
4. Vagbhata, *Astanga Samgraha*, Text, English Translation, Notes Index, Vol. II by Prof. K.R. Shrikantha Murti, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2009 Page 15
5. Vagbhata, *Astanga Samgraha*, Text, English Translation, Notes Index, Vol. II by Prof. K.R. Shrikantha Murti, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2009 Page 15
6. *Astanga Samgraha, Sasilekha Sanskrit Commentary by Indu, Mitra Jyotir, Edited by Sharma Shivprasad, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001 Page 273
7. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and

- critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 375, 376
8. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 374
9. Vagbhatta, *Astanga Samgraha*, Text, English Translation, Notes Index, Vol. II by Prof. K.R. Shrikantha Murti, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2009 Page 108
10. Vagbhatta, *Astanga Samgraha*, Text, English Translation, Notes Index, Vol. II by Prof. K.R. Shrikantha Murti, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2009 Page 109
11. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 468
12. Vagbhatta, *Astanga Samgraha*, Text, English Translation, Notes Index, Vol. II by Prof. K.R. Shrikantha Murti, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2009 Page 15
13. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 443
14. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 474
15. Vrddha Vagbhatt, *Astanga Samgraha*, *Saroj Hindi Comm. By Dr. Ravi Datta Tripathi, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthana, Delhi*, 2nd Edition, 1992. Page 16
16. Ghanekar Bhaskar Govind, *Sushruta Samhita Sharirasthan, Meherchand Lakshmanadas Publication, New Delhi, Reprint 2008*. Page 41,42
17. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. IV, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 1
18. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 565
19. Murthy K.R. Shrikantha, *Susruta Samhita* with English translation, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 2012 page no. 9
20. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 108
21. Sharma P.V., *Caraka Samhita* English Translation and critical notes Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi*, 1994 page 193
22. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 240
23. Harita, *Harita Samhita*, Hindi Comm. By Pt. Hari Prasad Tripathi, *Chaukhambha Krishnadas Academy, Varanasi* 1st Edition, 2005. Page No. 517
24. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 268
25. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 403

26. Murthy K.R. Srikantha, *Susruta Samhita* with English translation, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Orientalia*, Varanasi, 2012 page no.102
27. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. II, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 269
28. Sharma R.K., and Dasa B., *Caraka Samhita* with English translation and critical exposition, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Bharati Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi*, 2001. Page 325
29. Murthy K.R. Srikantha, *Susruta Samhita* with English translation, Vol. I, *Chaukhambha Orientalia*, Varanasi, 2012 page no. 104
30. Norton, H.L.; Kittles, R.A. et al. *Genetic Evidence for the Convergent Evolution of light skin in Europeans and east Asians, Molecular biology and evolution 2006 page 710*

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Dr. Khan Mohd Ashraf

Lecturer, Dept. of Rachana Sharir, Shri Sai Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

Email: ashrafk194@gmail.com
