THE CONCEPT OF Varna (COMPLEXION) IN AYURVEDA

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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 ‘Vairukrit’ i.e. Nila, Shyama, Tamra, Harita, Shukla. 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 Vagbhatt, 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 Vagbhhatt has correlated the color of Shukra to the Varna of the Garbha, i.e. If Shukra (sperm) is of Shukla (white) color like Ghritamanda (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 (sperm) 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 Garbhshaya (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 them8.

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 Panchabhaautic 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), Garbhshaya (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 Panchabhattika 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 (foetus) 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 behavior\(^{14}\).

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

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).\(^{11}\) Arundatta 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-
termined, 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 Brahmanas 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 life.17 Also, Ahara is considered as conditioning the Varna, 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 Pancabhaautic 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), Tushit (Satisfaction), Pushiti (corpulence), Bala (Strength), Medha (intellect) all these are dependent on Ahara.

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

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

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 promoter.

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:

Tridosa 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 body.

Acharya Harita said that ShyamaVarna 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.
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 Tvaksara Purush indicates that Rasa Dhatu plays an important role in formation of color as well as lustre and complexion. Charak opines that Visuddha Rakta is responsible factor for Bala, Varna, Sukh and Ayu. Sushrut opines that Rakta as increasing glow of color and complexion. Acharya Charak has mentioned that unctuousness in Varna (complexion) as the quality of Medosara, Majjasara and Shukrasara Purush.

5. Effect of Oja:

Acharya Charak said that when the Ojas is diminished, the person is having deranged lustre. Ojas is one of the functions of the Oja. As Oja is also Panchabhautic, more over Oja is the Sra 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, Aharvidhi, Dosa and Dhatu.

**Table 1 showing factors for formation of body complexion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexion</th>
<th>Sushruta</th>
<th>Charak</th>
<th>Vagbhatt 1</th>
<th>Harita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gaura (Fair)</strong></td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Pitta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jala</td>
<td>Jala</td>
<td>Jala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akasha</td>
<td>Akasha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Krishna (Black)</strong></td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>Vata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prithvi</td>
<td>Prithvi</td>
<td>Prithvi</td>
<td>Rakta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shyama</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>All equal Bhutas</td>
<td>All Bhutas equal</td>
<td>Vata and Kapha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gaura Shyama</strong></td>
<td>Teja</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jala</td>
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<td>Akasha</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Krishna Shyama</strong></td>
<td>Teja</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prithvi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Akasha</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pingla</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Pitta+Raka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acharya Charak mentioned equal proportions of all Mahabhutas to give the Shyama Varna. Acharya Sushrut has divided it into two; Gaura Shyama and Krishna Shyama, in which the dominance is of Jala and Prithvi Mahabhutas respec-
Acharya Charak and Acharya Vagbhata have described three types of Varna while Acharya Sushrut mentioned four types of Varna according to Mahabhartika dominance. 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.

**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 releasing 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.

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