

Understanding the Concept of *Varnotpatti* in Ayurveda

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Abstract

The concept of *Varna* has been adroitly described in the *ayurveda* texts. In *Ayurveda Varna* has considered as a mark of Health. The word *Varna* does not stands for complexion or colour of the skin but it comprises of a ample aspect of parameters useful for healthy and radiant skin. This *Varna* is influenced by a several circumstances before and after birth of human life. According to modern science, the skin complexion and colour of a person mainly depend upon the background of the ancestors and parents. The race to which the person belongs also matters upto great extent, because it is the genes that are mainly responsible. Various Ayurvedic and modern lexicons, journals, internet are used for present study. In classics role of diet, *mahabhuta*, *shukra*, *ahara*, *vihara* etc. is also explained for healthy skin.

Keywords: *Varna*, *Mahabhuta*, *Shukra*, *Ahara*, *Vihara*.

Introduction

The concept of *Varna* has been described in the classics. Colour and Complexion of an individual are the inborn entities of his beauty which is represented by the term *Varna* in *Ayurveda*. *Varna* of an individual be contingent on several factors like *prakriti*, genetics, *doshas* and *dhatu*s. The total health of the skin is represented by its texture, colour, tone, lustre, complexion etc. Complexion means normal appearance of the skin on a persons face. Texture is the quality of something that can be decided by touch. Lustre means radiance or glint. In *Ayurveda* terms like *Kanti*, *Prabha*, *Chhaya*, *Varna* etc. are used regarding the subject. *Varna* word is used in a broader aspect which includes most of the parameters which are necessary for healthy skin. *Acharya Kashyapa* describes that the equilibrium of all the *dhatu* is the root cause for strength, complexion, vigour, intellect and happiness. The disrupt state of the same result in ailments.^[1]

Therefore *Varna* is also considered as one of the criteria for examining the *Dhatu Samya*.^[2] In addition, *Acharya Charaka* in *Indriyasthanas* describes about the prognostic symptoms, in which *Varna*, as it can be directly observed has given more magnitude in postulating the lifespan of an individual.^[3] According to *Charaka*, The word *Varna* is not intended to convey the colour and complexion, but for all these distinctive attributes which can be recognized by the eyes.^[4]

Prakrita & Vaikrita Varna of the body:

Acharya Charaka categorized *Varna* as '*Prakrit*' *Varna* and '*Vaikrit*' *Varna*. *Prakrit Varna* includes *Krishna*, *Shyama*, *Shyamavadat*, *avadat* and five *Varnas* as *vaikrit* i.e. *Nila*, *Shyama*, *Tamra*, *Harita*, *Shukla*.^[5] *Harita Samhita* explains about an additional one by name *Pingala Varna* which is constituted by *Pitta* and *Rakta*.^[6] The factors which determine *Varna* significantly are *Ahara*, *Vihara*, *Desa*, *Kula*, *Bhutadhikya*. The Various arrangements and unification among these factors result in variation in *Varna* like *Gaura*, *Avadata*, *Krishna*.^[7] *Tejodhatu* is said to be *prabhava* or *mula* for *Varna utpatti*.^[8]

Factors accountable for the disposition of Varna

The physiological phenomenon of *Varna utpatti* (formation of *Varna*) is basically influenced by many factors, some contribute in the formation of *Varna* in *Garbhavastha* and some factors contribute in the process after birth and later stage of life. As per *Mansanumasika Garbha Vriddhi Krama* the *Varnautpatti kala* is considered to be as 6th month by almost all the Scholars. In the 6th month the pregnant lady suffer from *Varna hani*.^[9] So *Varnotpatti* can be differentiated into two main categories.

- A. Factors contributing in the formation of *Varna* in Foetal life.
- B. Factor contributing in the process of *Varnotpatti* after birth.

A) Factor contributing in the formation of Varna in Foetal life

1) Role of Mahabhuta:

Mahabhutas play an important role in Varnotpatti.^[10] Acharya Sushruta said that *Tejo Dhatu* (*Agni Mahabhuta*) is responsible dominant factor for formation of *Varna*. Rest four *Mahabhutas* also take part in *Varnotpatti* during foetal life. During foetal development the different combinations of *Mahabhuta* generate different *Varna* in foetus.^[11] There are two different opinions in the ayurvedic texts.

According to Sushruta:

Tejodhatu (*Agni Mahabhuta*):- Responsible for *Garbhavarna*.

Teja + Jala (dominance):- *Gaura Varna* (fair complexion).

Teja+ Prithvi + Akash: - *Krishna-shyama Varna* (bluish black)

Teja + Prithvi: - *Krishna Varna* (black)

Teja+ Jala + Akash: - *Gaura shyama Varna* (fair black complexion)

According to Charaka:

Agni + Jala + Akasha (*Antariksha*) :- *Avadata Varna* (fair)

Agni + Prithvi + Vayu: - *Krishna Varna* (black)

Pancha Mahabhuta (equal):- Brown complexion.^[12]

In the *Garbhashaya*, *Mahabhutas* provided by the *Shukra* and *Shonita* form the *Varna* according to their relative dominance.

2) Role of Shukra:

The colour of the *Shukra* has an ascending on the colour of the foetus. When the colour of *Shukra* (semen) is *Shukla* (white) like *Ghritamanda* (Supernant fluid of ghee), the *Garbha* (foetus) will have *Gaura Varna* (fair). When it resembles the colour of *Taila* (oil), the progeny will have *Krishna Varna* (Black) and when it is like the colour of honey, the offspring will be of *Shyam Varna* (bluish black or brown).^[13] Quality of nutrition influences the quality of semen and hence affect the variation in the *Garbha*.^[14]

3) Role of Garbhakara Bhavas:

In *Ayurvedic* texts *shad Garbhakara Bhavas* (six procreative factors) viz. *Matrija*, *Pitrija*, *Atmaja*, *Satmyaja*, *Rasaja* and *Sattvaja* has been described. Among these various factors, *Atma* and *Satmya* are attributed for revelation of colour and complexion.^[15] *Atma* and *Satmya* are allocated for the revelation of *Varna*. *Atma* influences the *Varna* of an individual. *Atma*, according to past deeds and dominant *trigunas*, transmigrates from one body to another body with the help of *trigunas* along with the four *sukshma Bhuta*.

Manas, *Prerana*, *Dharana*, *Akriti*, *Swara* and *Varna* in the foetus are mainly due to *Atmaja Bhava*.

In this context *Satmya* is the suitability towards the diet and regimens consumed by mother during the period of pregnancy. *Satmyaja Bhavas* have a great impact in the formation of *Varna*. *Varna Sampat* is considered as one of the *satmyaja Bhava*. Foetus gets nutrition from the mother, hence the diet and regimen of pregnant woman has a strong importance on the *Varna* of offspring.

4) Role of manassthiti of Garbhini (State of mind of the mother):

Charaka Samhita and *Astang Hridaya* have clearly accepted the role of *manassthiti* of mother on the *Varna* of the offspring. Human psychology has a deep, long- lasting influence on our entire body. As foetus grows, it is constantly getting messages from its mother. It gets chemical signals through the placenta. This includes signals about the mothers mental state. If the mother is depressed, that affects how the baby develops after it is born. During pregnancy depression, anxiety and other psychological conditions in the mother can cause physical changes. The human foetus is an active participant in its own development and is collecting information for life after birth. It is preparing for life based on messages the mother is providing. The thoughts will influence the *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* through the mother. These *trigunas* further influences the *Panchabhantika* dominance, which decides the *Varna*, therefore *Rupa* and *Varna* of the offspring born will be in accordance with the thoughts of the lady during her pregnancy.^[16]

5) Role of Ahara and Vihara of the mother:

Ayurveda gives guidelines regarding diet, activities, behavior and mental activity (*ahar*, *vihar*, *achar* and *vichar*) of a pregnant mother. *Ayurveda* emphasizes the importance of maintaining *ahar*, *vihar*, *achar* and *vichar* and during pregnancy *achar*, *vihar* and *vichar* are particularly important. Eating a wholesome diet, having a healthy lifestyle, and good thoughts encourages the growth and health of both mother and the baby. Excessive use of *Madhura ahara*, *Jalakrida* (water sports) produces *Gaura Varna* of the offspring. Excessive intake of *tila* and *vidahi anna* (which causes heart burn) generates *Krishna Varna* (Black), with the use of mixed type of *anna* (food), the colour will be *Shyama*.^[17] Foetus gets nourished from the *ahara rasa* of mother through the placenta which provide *Bala* and *Varna* to foetus.^[18] *Acharya Charaka* while describing the factors which are harmful to the foetus, states that the excessive use of *kasaya rasa* by the mother will produce a child having *Shyava Varna* and excessive use of *amla rasa* will produce a child suffering from skin disorders.

The quality of the *Mahabhutas* present in the foetus will be affected by mothers *ahara* and *vihara* thereby influencing *Varnopatti* in foetus.

6) Role of *Desa, Kula* and *Jati*:

Certainly there is an effect of *Desa, Kula* and *Jati* on *Varna*. The people living in the northern regions have *Gaur Varna* those in the southern regions have *Krishna Varna* and the people who live in the central part of India have *Shyama Varna*.^[19] Dr. Ghanekar also explains about the change in *Varna* when people migrates from hot region to cold region and vice versa. But this change in *Varna* will not be more than a particular degree from his normal colour.

Varna also differs among particular *Kula* and *Jati*. As per *Ashtang Samgraha*, *Kula* and *Jati* also have important role in influencing *Varna*. For instance, Negro have dark complexion, Chinese or Japanese have yellowish complexion and the Europeans have fair complexion. In India also *Varna* differs from race to race. Some races have fair complexion, some have darker complexion. This uniqueness of *Varna* in specific species is due to genetic factor.

B) Factors contributing in the process of *Varnopatti* after birth:

Once the colour and complexion which is formed during foetal life, It does not change after birth. But due to some factors like atmosphere in which individual dwells, pollution etc., the colour and complexion is found to be influencing.

1) Importance of *Jatharagni*:

Charaka and Vagbhata narrated the candid role of *Jatharagni* as a causative factor for *Varna, Bala, Swasthya, Utsaha, Upchaya, Prabha, Oja, Teja* etc.^[20] Everything that we eat is digested by *Agni*. From the digested food, with the help of *Agni Uttarottar dhatu* are going to form. These *Rasa, Raktadi dhatus* gives nourishment to the skin thereby helping in the maintenance of *Varna*. The *Ahara* that we eat is *Panchabhautik*. *Panchabhutagni* is responsible for the digestion of *Panchabhautik Ahara*. Therefore *Jatharagni, Panchabhutagni* should be in normal state for the maintenance of normal colour of skin.

2) Role of *Ahara* and *Aharavidhi*:

Acharya Sushruta considers *Ahara* as a mula (root) cause for *Bala* (strength) *Varna* (complexion) and *Ojas*.^[21] It makes adequate preparation for *Varna* (complexion), *Suswara* (good voice), *Prasadana* (clarity), *Jivana* (longevity), *Pratibha* (geniuses), *Sukha* (happiness), *Tushti* (satisfaction), *Pushti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength), *Medha* (Intellect).^[22] The dietary pattern also has equal importance as that of *Ahara*. Charaka has given special importance on rules for intake of food. Diet taken in the appropriate quantity and wholesome food consumed certainly helps the

individual to maintain the *Varna* without disturbing the *prakriti*.^[23] *Snigdham asniyat* is one of the quality of food which is attributed to *Varna prasadana guna*.^[24]

3) Influence of *Dosha, Dhatu* and *Mala* on *Varna*:

Charaka states that *Tridoshas* in the state of equilibrium bestows *Upachaya, Bala* and *Varna* and in disequilibrium state they cause diseases.^[25]

• Relationship with *Vata*:

Among five types of *Vayu, Udanvayu* is responsible for *Bala, Swara* and *Varna*.^[26] *Udan Vayu* supplies essence of the digested food to all the *Sukshma avayavas* (Body parts) and nourishes it and hence endows the body with *Bala, Swara* and *Varna*.

• Relationship with *Pitta*:

Along with the other functions like *darshana* (vision), *Pakti* (digestion) etc. two important functions which are *Dehamardava* (texture/ softness of the body) and *Prabha* (lustre/complexion) of the body are entrusted to the *pitta dosha*. *Prabha* is sovereign quality which is held responsible for the radiance in the skin which is expressed through *Varna*. *Bhrajaka Pitta* is responsible for colour and complexion of the skin and keeps it warm. The skin is the main location of *Bhrajaka pitta*. Along with the colour and complexion of the skin and maintaining warmth of the skin it is also responsible for digesting the local medicaments applied externally on the skin in the form of *Abhyanga, Parisheka, Avagaha, Alepa*.^[27]

• Relationship with *Kapha*:

While describing the *lakshanas* of *Kapha Prakriti* it is clearly mentioned that individuals belonging to *Kapha Prakriti* possess *Sukumar aavadata gatra* (fair body), *Prasanna Snigdha Varna* which obliquely demonstrates the truth that *kapha* has a major role in the manifestation of *Varna*.

Impact of *Dhatu* on *Varna*:

For the *Prakrit* (normal) *Varna* of the skin, all the *dhatus* should be in equilibrium state. *Tvak* is a seat of *rasa dhatu* and hence *rasa* have a role in the formation of *Varna*. *Rasa, Rakta* and *Mamsadhatu* have to be in good condition for healthy skin. Health of *Rasa- dhatu* depends upon the good digestion and appropriate choice of the food according to *Prakriti* of an individual. Similarly sufficient oxygen uptake, lack of toxins and food rich with Vitamines, Proteins, Minerals etc will be responsible for the good health of *Raktadhatu*. Regular exercise will make *mamsadhatu* healthy. *Acharya Charaka* describes the role of *Rasa* and *Raktadhatu* in the formation of colour.^[28]

Relationship with *Malas*:

The presence of *Mala* in the body may create disturbances in the formation of *Varna*. Therefore the elimination of

wastes from the body is necessary for healthy skin. Removal of waste and keeping the tissues cleansed is important for healthy skin.

4) Effect of Oja:

Ojas is the essence part of all the body tissues. *Varna bheda* (skin discolouration) is one of the *lakshana* of *ojovyapat*. *Duskhaya* (loss of complexion) is a symptom of decrease in *Oja*.^[29] As *Oja* is a *sar* of all the *dhatu*s, all the *dhatu*s should be in their good quality for Proper formation of *Oja*. Normal level of *Oja* increases the complexion according to the relative dominance of the *dhatu*s.

5) Effect of Vaya (Age) on Varna:

There is degenerative changes (*Hrasa*) of skin after 50 years. Tightness of the skin is lost leading to wrinkles. Texture of the skin is lost. There is deprivation of complexion after 30 years of age.^[30]

Bala and Varna:

Bala is considered as a complexion promoter. *Varna* (complexion) is an indicator of the status of health and strength of an individual.^[31]

Discussion

Varna of an individual depends upon several factors. This process of *Varnotpatti* begins from *Garbhavastha* and continues after birth. There are several factors influencing the process of *Varnotpatti*. In intrauterine life the factors that are responsible for *Varnotpatti* are *Mahabhuta*, *Atma* (soul), *Shukra*, *Garbhakara Bhavas*, *mansthi* of *garbhini* (state of mind of the mother), role of *Ahara* and *Vihara* of mother, Role of *Desa*, *Kula* and *Jati*. Similarly there are some factors which influences the *Varna* after birth are *Jatharagni*, *Ahara* (food), *Aharvidhi*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala*, *Vayu* etc. According to dominance of *Mahabhuta Acharya Charaka* and *Sushruta* have described three and four types of *Varna* respectively.

According to modern medical science human skin colour ranges in variety from the darkest brown to the lightest hues. An individual's skin pigmentation is the result of genetics. In evolution, skin pigmentation in human beings evolved by a process of natural selection primarily to regulate the amount of ultraviolet radiation penetrating the skin controlling its biochemical effects. Melanin acts as a protective biological shield against ultraviolet radiation. The number of melanin producing cells is similar between people of different ethnic groups. So in fact, in determining the skin colour, it is the process of melanin production and the manner in which melanosomes are transferred to and distributed within Keratinocytes which changes skin colour. In addition to melanin, other pigments including hemoglobin and carotene also help to determine skin colour

As evident from the above description the basic skin colour of different humans is affected by several facts. However the single most significant substance is the pigment melanin. Melanin is produced within the skin in cells called melanocytes which is the main determinant of the skin colour of darker skin humans. Modern medical science also approves the concept of effect of *Desa* on *Varna*. There is direct correlation between the geographic distribution to ultraviolet radiation and the distribution of indigenous skin pigmentation around the world. Areas that receive higher amounts 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 intensity of ultraviolet radiations, which is reflected in lighter skinned populations. Migration of humans from one area to another also affects the *Varna* depending upon the intensity of ultraviolet radiation in that particular area. Natural skin colour can also darken as a result of tanning due to exposure to sunlight. The type of diet one consume can also affect *Varna*. Carotene is an orange/ yellow pigment found in the skin as well as in yellow and orange vegetables. Eating excessive quantity of vegetables like carrots over a long period of time can change the skin colour. However it's a rare occurrence and won't happen with normal fruit and vegetable Intake. The intake of certain eating stuff like saffron in milk are considered very good for the skin as well as blood of the foetus.

Some factors which affects the complexion are vitamin deficiency, Hormonal changes, Excessive iron deposition, Excess melanin production, Acne or pimple marks. In lighter skin, Skin colour is also affected by red cells in blood flowing close to the skin. To a lesser extent, the colour is affected by the presence of fat under the skin and carotene.

Conclusion

The conformation of *Varna* during intrauterine life is because of several circumstances like *Mahabhuta*, *Ahara*, *Atma*, etc. which is described above. Complexion of an individual after birth is influenced by food, dietary and daily regimens, various environmental factors etc. Complexion of an individual can be promoted by internal administration of dietary ingredients, medicine, external applications.

According to modern medical science the complexion of an individual, whether dark or fair, is determined by his genes at the time of conception. Genetics determine the amount of melanin in the skin. Melanin is the pigmentation that occurs in the skin. The more melanin one's skin has, the darker his complexion will be. Melanin protects skin from the harmful rays of the sun. The skin can adopt melanin production to sunlight exposure.

Exposure to intense sunlight regularly induces mutation in DNA of the skin cells. Some complexion changes may

signal a health problem and need medical attention. Environmental factors can cause a change in one's skin colour. Now a days it has become necessary to empower people to fight old values regarding skin colour.

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