

Role of Prakruti in Ageing

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Abstract

Ayurveda is a vast entity with its principles and protocols to understand the body system. Prakruti is one among its dynamic principles. Prakruti is decided at the time of conception according to the predominance of dosha. Prakruti is non changeable, it never changes its characters for the whole life and it determines the physical and mental characteristics of an individual. As per Tridosha, Prakruti is of seven types. Ageing/Jara is a process of decaying and is included under Swabhavika vyadhi. In our body, Pitta or Agni is responsible for the various types of pathological conditions. Although ageing is a natural pathological condition, Pitta plays an important role in its causation like other pathological conditions. Charaka Samhita indicates that persons with Pitta predominance personality tend to suffer early with decaying process and other changes of ageing. Present article will help to understand role of Prakruti in ageing.

Keywords: Ageing, Dosha, Tridosha, Pitta, Prakruti, Jara

Introduction

Ayurveda has a holistic approach and includes all the factors which are absolute or accessory in the determination of health. Prakruti is one of the most important concepts and it is decided at the time of conception. Prakruti plays an important role in the selection and establishment of every factor for which a person is going to interact from conception till death, e.g. lifestyle, diet planning, etc. Prakruti stands for nature of the body in terms of Dosha Prakruti indicates toward physical or Dosha constitution. Involvement of Dosha in Prakruti formation may be individual or intermingled. The individuals of specific Prakruti exhibit biological variations in terms of structure, function, behavior, individual response to internal and external environmental stimuli, susceptibility to different diseases, etc. So prakruti is of seven types, i.e. Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja, three Dwandaja and one Samdoshaja. Among these, Samdoshaja is an excellent and homeostatic state while others are considered as defective constitutions and susceptible for various diseases.^{[1][2][3]} Each Prakruti has specific physical and mental characteristics which totally depend on the involvement of Dosha. For instance, individuals with Kaphaja constitution have smoothness of organs and joints, clarity of complexion, firmness, compactness and stability of the body, are slow in action and movement, have a stable gait, excellent strength, patience, peacefulness, longevity, etc. These characteristics are manifested due to particular properties of the dosha which is involved predominantly in the formation of Prakruti. Prakruti affects each factor by which a person is going to interact and decides the status of health. It is clearly indicated in texts that lifestyle and various activities

should be planned opposite to prakruti for the maintenance of health. In this way, Prakruti also affects and decides the quality and rate of ageing. All the constitutions having Pitta predominance have a tendency to suffer untimely with ageing because Pitta has a synergistic effect on the process of ageing due to its Ushna, Tikshna, Amla, Sara, Katu gunas. It is clearly indicated in classical texts. We can utilize this concept in the prevention and management of ageing, especially in the case of Pittaja predominant persons, and make Vruddhavastha pleasant and disease free.

Material and methods

Only textual materials from Ayurveda samhita have been used for this study, from which various references have been collected. Modern texts and related websites have also been searched.

Concept of Prakruti

The word Prakruti has been derived from "Prakarshen karoti iti Prakruti" which means manifestation of special characteristics due to predominance.^[4] In Ayurveda, the word Prakruti has been used in the sense of Deha Prakruti or Doshaja Prakruti. According to Rasa-vaisheshika, Prakruti is a state which is formed at the time of fertilization due to eminence of Dosha.^[4] It remains unchanged from fertilization till death. According to Acharya Sushruta and Charaka, Prakruti is determined at the time of fertilization due to the predominance or increased status of Dosha which is normal or physiological. Although Prakruti is determined by the Dosha predominantly involved, some other factors are also involved in the Prakruti formation as described by Acharya Charaka. These factors are Shukra-Shonita, status of uterus at the time of fertilization, status of environmental time period, food and regimen adopted by mother during pregnancy and nature of Mahabhuta comprising the fetus. The fetus gets afflicted with one or more of the Doshas which are dominantly associated with the above-mentioned factors. Prakruti of an individual is determined on the basis of these dominant Dosha in the above-mentioned factors when they initially unite in the form of fetus. Therefore, Prakruti of some people is dominated by Kapha, some others by Pitta, some others by Vata and some others by the combination of two Dosha. In some other cases, however, the equilibrium of Dosha is well maintained.^{[5][6]} Although all these factors mentioned above play an important role in the determination of Prakruti, Dosha are involved primarily in the formation of Prakruti of above-mentioned factors. Therefore, Dosha are the root cause in the initiation and formation of Prakruti of any individual. Characters which are manifested in a person of any specific Prakruti depend upon properties of the Dosha involved. For example, Vata with Laghu, Sukshma, Chala, Vishada, Ruksha, Sheeta and Khara properties imparts its properties in developing personality. Same should be understood with regard to rest of the Dosha. In mixed personality characters, more than one Dosha appear specifically. Characters of various Prakruti personalities are discussed below:

Vataja Prakruti

Characters of Vataja Prakruti persons are as follows:^{[7][8][9]}

Ruksha: Unctuousness, emaciation and dwarfness of the body; long-drawn, dry, low, broken, obstructed and hoarse voice; always keeping awake

Laghu: Light and inconsistent gait, action, food and movement

Chala: Unstable joints, eyes, eye brows, jaws, lips, tongue, head, shoulder, hands and legs

Bahu: Talkativeness, abundance of tendons and veins

Shighra: Quick in initiating actions, getting irritated and the onset of morbid manifestations, quick in affliction with fear, quick in likes and dislikes, quick in understanding and forgetting things

Sheeta: Intolerance to cold things, often getting afflicted with cold, shivering and stiffness

Parusha: Roughness of hair of the head, face and other parts of the body, nails, teeth, face, hands and feet

Vishada: Cracking of the limbs and organs, production of cracking sound in joints when they move

Based on the above-mentioned qualities, it can be seen that individuals having Vataja type of constitution mostly possess strength, lifespan, procreation, accessories of life and wealth in lesser quantity

Pittaja Prakruti

Characters of Pittaja Prakruti persons are as follows: ^{[10][11][12]}

Ushna: Intolerance to hot things, having hot face, tender and clear body of port-wine mark, freckles, black moles, excessive hunger and thirst, quick advent of wrinkles, graying of hairs and baldness, presence of some soft and brown hair on the face, head and other parts of the body

Tikshna: Sharp physical strength, strong digestive power, intake of food and drink in large quantity, inability to face difficult situations and glutton habits

Drava: Looseness and softness of joints and muscles, voiding of sweat, urine and feces in large quantity

Visra: Putrid smell of axilla, mouth, head and body in excess

Amla and katu: Insufficiency of semen, sexual desire and procreation

By virtue of above mentioned qualities, a man having Pittaja type of constitution is endowed with moderate strength, moderate lifespan, moderate spiritual and materialistic knowledge, wealth and accessories of life

Kaphaja Prakruti

Characters of Kaphaja Prakruti persons are as follows: ^{[13][14][15]}

Snigdha: Unctuousness of organs

Shlakshna: Smoothness of organs

Mridu: Pleasing appearance, tenderness and clarity of complexion

Madhura: Increased quantity of semen, desire for sexual intercourse and number of procreation

Sara: Firmness, compactness and stability of the body

Sandra: Plumpness and roundedness of all organs

Manda: Slow in action, intake of food and movement

Stimita: Slow in initiating actions, getting irritated and morbid manifestations

Guru: Non-slippery and stable gait with entire sole of the feet pressing against the ground

Sheeta: Lack of intensity in hunger, thirst, heat and perspiration

Vijjala: Firmness and compactness in joints

Achha: Clarity and unctuousness in complexion, appearance and voice

By virtue of the above-mentioned qualities, a man having Kaphaja type of constitution is endowed with the excellence of strength, wealth, knowledge, energy, peace and longevity.

Dwandaja Prakruti

Individuals having a constitution dominated by a combination of two doshas are characterized by the combination of the manifestations of the respective doshas ^[16]

Samdoshaja Prakruti

A Samdoshaja type of individual who has all the doshas in a state of equilibrium is endowed with good qualities of all three types of individuals described above ^[17]

Concept of Ageing

Vaya represents the state of the body depending upon the length of the time that has passed since birth. Whole lifespan is divided into three parts i.e. Bala, Madhya and Jirna.

Jirnavastha or Vruddhavastha is the last phase of life, at the age of 60-70 years. This time period signifies by its name, i.e. the name Vruddha is given to old age and the word Jirna represents characteristics of this stage of life with of decay or degeneration. This stage is characterized by diminution of the Dhatu, strength of sense organs, energy, manliness, valor, power of understanding, retention, memorizing, speech and analyzing facts. There is gradual diminution in the qualities of Dhatu and dominance of Vata during this age. ^[18] According to modern medical science, ageing is the accumulation of changes in an organism or object over time. Ageing in humans refers to a multidimensional process of physical, psychological, and social change. Some dimensions of ageing grow and expand over time, while others decline. Reaction time e.g. may slow with age, while knowledge of world events and wisdom may expand. Research shows that even late in life, the potential exists for physical, mental, and social growth and development. ^{[19][20][21]} Ageing is an important part of all human societies, not only reflecting the biological changes that occur, but also reflecting cultural and societal conventions. In biology, senescence is the state or process of ageing. Cellular senescence is a phenomenon where isolated cells demonstrate a limited ability to divide in culture, while organismal senescence is the ageing of organisms. After a period of near perfect renewal (in humans, between 20 and 35 years of age), organismal senescence is characterized by the declining ability to respond to stress, increasing homeostatic imbalance and increased risk of disease. This irreversible series of changes inevitably ends in death. Some researchers (specifically biogerontologists) treat ageing as a disease. As genes that have an effect on ageing are discovered, ageing is increasingly being regarded in a similar fashion to other genetically influenced "conditions", potentially "treatable". Indeed, ageing is not an unavoidable property of life. Instead, it is the result of a genetic program. Numerous species show very low signs of aging. In humans and other animals, cellular senescence has been attributed to the shortening of telomeres with each cell cycle; when telomeres become too short, the cells die. ^[22]

Historically, the lifespan of humans is divided into eight ages; because the biological changes are slow and vary from person to person, arbitrary dates are usually set to mark the periods of life. In some cultures, the divisions given below are quite varied. In the USA, adulthood legally begins at the age of 18, while old age is considered to begin at the age of legal retirement (approximately 65 years). ^[23] Stages of age on the basis of years is given as follows:

- Pre-conception: Ovum, spermatozoa
- Conception: Fertilization
- Pre-birth: Conception to birth (pregnancy)

- Infancy: Birth to 1 year
- Childhood: 1-12 years
- Adolescence: 13-19 years
- Early adulthood: 20-39 years
- Middle adulthood: 40-64 years
- Late adulthood: 65 + years
- Death
- Post-death: Decomposition of the body

Overall, ageing is a natural phenomenon and Vruddhavastha is the last stage of life. This stage is basically characterized by degenerative changes.

Interrelationship between Ageing And Prakruti

Ageing is a phenomenon of body and characterized by decay and degeneration in which anatomical structures are basically affected following which physiology is also disturbed. Body is governed by three humours known as Vata, Pitta and Kapha. They govern the whole body according to their nature, e.g. Vata is responsible for all the movements of the body. Same applies for the rest of Doshas. These Tridoshas determine the prakruti of a person according to their predominance. Each Dosha has been designed for a specific group of bodily functions depending upon its Guna. ^{[24][25][26]} These functions of Dosha are also found in an aggravated form in a particular type of Prakruti dominated by that particular Dosha. Samdosha Prakruti is exception for this because all the functions of Tridosha are neutralized by each other and a state of Dhatusamyia is maintained.

Among the Tridosha, Pitta is basically responsible for the decay and degenerative changes due to its specific properties like Ushna, Tikshna, Visra, Amla, etc. ^[27] If the Prakruti of any person is dominated by Pitta Dosha, aggravated functions of Pitta can be observed in that particular person. These aggravated functions of Pitta first change the related physiology following which the anatomical structures are also affected with special reference to decay and degeneration. It is just like how excessive heat changes the surrounding environment and then destroys the articles in its path. Therefore, it can be said in the context of Pittaja Prakruti persons that they are susceptible to untimely or premature manifestations of ageing like graying of hairs, formation of wrinkles on skin, hair fall, etc. ^[28] Increased level of Pitta with special reference to Agni increases the metabolic level of biotransformation and thus energy consumption. These physiological changes result in various types of tissue destruction and premature manifestation of ageing.

Discussion

Ayurveda is designed for healthy and long lifespan. This aim is fulfilled by its sound and absolute principles. Prakruti is one of the very important principles and plays a very important role in the designing of lifestyle of a person for maintenance of health. Its determination is also important in diseased condition as it is essential in the prognosis and planning of treatment. Prakruti remains unchanged during the whole life and affects every aspect of life. Thus, ageing is not an exception. Prakruti is determined by the predominance of Dosha with others combined in different proportions. Doshas are basic bodily factors responsible for the maintenance of physiology in different sections due to their specific properties. Among these, Pitta governs the section of metabolism, biotransformation and energy production.

These physiological functions are increased in the persons having Pitta predominance Prakruti. Increased Pitta functions tend to increase the basal metabolic rate (BMR) and energy consumption which may lead to tissue destruction. Consequently, Pittaja prakruti persons are susceptible to premature ageing and average life span. On the other hand, persons with Kapha predominance Prakruti have a tendency to delayed manifestation of ageing due to its specific synthetic properties as well as long lifespan. So, it is clearly indicated that if a person wants to be healthy, he must design his lifestyle opposite to Prakruti. ^[29]

Conclusion

Prakruti and ageing both are natural phenomena as well as occur essentially. All the physiological processes are directly controlled by Tridosha and thus by the predominant Dosha in a particular type of Prakruti. Both Vata and Pitta are responsible for destructive changes in their predominant stage due to their specific properties. Ageing is the procedure of decay and degeneration and thus aggravated by the predominant Pitta supported by Vata. Ageing is closely related with Prakruti and can be delayed by using Kapha predominant Ahara and Vihara.

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