

Chapter 7: Role of Prakriti in disease management

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Abstract:

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a personalized approach to healthcare through the concept of Prakriti, or individual constitution. This unique framework, determined by the dominance of the three Doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) at conception, guides diagnostics, therapeutic interventions, and lifestyle recommendations. This paper explores the classification of Prakriti into Sharira (physical), Manasa (mental), and Bhautik (elemental) types and delves into their clinical significance. Emphasis is placed on the features of each Dosha-based Prakriti, disease susceptibility, and detailed management approaches. References to classical texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, along with modern interpretations, underscore the enduring relevance of this system in both traditional and integrative medicine contexts.

Keywords: Chetna, Chikitsa, Dashvidhpariksha, Panchamahabhutas, Prakriti, Tridosha

1. Introduction

Ayurveda, a time-honored healing tradition, promotes a comprehensive and balanced approach to health. A central idea in this system is the concept of Prakriti, which refers to an individual's inherent constitution. This unique combination shapes a person's physical characteristics, mental tendencies, and physiological functions. According to Ayurvedic principles, each person possesses a distinct Prakriti determined by the dominance of the three fundamental energies—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—now of conception. This constitution plays a crucial role in determining one's vulnerability to diseases, the effectiveness of treatments, and the most suitable lifestyle and dietary habits. If we know the Prakriti of an individual, then we can recommend a customized lifestyle, dietary regimen and therapeutic intervention. According to Acharya Charak, Purusha is the combined form of Panchamahabhutas and Chetana (soul) and Parkriti is nature of Sharira.

2. Material and Methods

The present study aims to highlight the concept of Prakriti as described in Ayurveda. The relevant literary study is carried out from Classics and recent available references in electronic databases.

3. Review literature

Prakriti, or the inherent constitution of an individual, is generally categorized into three main types: Sharira Prakriti (bodily constitution), Manasa Prakriti (mental constitution), and Bhautik Prakriti (elemental constitution). When Prakriti is discussed in the context of the Tridosha (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), it is referred to as Dosha or Deha Prakriti. Based on which Dosha predominates, Deha Prakriti is further divided into seven distinct types. Similarly, Manasa Prakriti is classified into three types, depending on the predominance of the three Gunas—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Bhautik Prakriti, on the other hand, is categorized into five types depending on the dominance of the five Mahabhutas (basic elements).

The individual's characteristics are influenced by the dominance of a single Dosha (Ekadoshaja: Vataja, Pittaja, or Kaphaja), a combination of two Doshas (Dvandvaja: Vata-Pitta, Vata-Kapha, or Kapha-Pitta), or an equal expression of all three (Sama Prakriti). Following dietary and lifestyle guidelines that align with one's Prakriti helps maintain a balanced state of Doshas and promotes the development of healthy body tissues. Knowing one's unique constitution is essential for adopting habits that support long-term health and disease prevention. To understand how

specific traits correlate with the dominance of particular Doshas, the Prakriti assessment methodology detailed in the Charaka Samhita was closely examined.

3.1 Features of Prakriti

Vata Prakriti

Individuals with this constitution often exhibit symptoms such as dryness of the body, a lean or undernourished frame, and shorter stature. Their voice tends to be hoarse, low-pitched, and dry, frequently causing difficulty in sleeping through the night. They are typically light-spirited, inconsistent in their eating habits, and display delicate or sensitive behavior. Movement may be restricted in areas like the jaw, lips, tongue, shoulders, hands, or head, leading to stiffness or a lack of coordination. Their speech may lack clarity, and their bodies reveal prominent tendons and ligaments. They often act impulsively, exhibit irritability, and display signs of fear and distress. Preferences and dislikes may shift unpredictably. Their memory may fluctuate, with quick comprehension followed by forgetfulness. Such individuals are usually sensitive to cold, frequently experiencing chills, stiffness, or discomfort in colder environments. Coarseness and rigidity may be noticeable in their nails, teeth, head, limbs, hair, and other extremities. As they move, their joints and limbs may produce audible crackling or popping sounds, which are persistent.

Pitta Prakriti

Characterized by a warm complexion and a heightened sensitivity to heat, individuals often display fair and delicate physiques, brown hair, and sparse or thinning hair on the scalp, face, and body. They may also experience minor skin issues such as small boils, facial pigmentation, flat moles, and frequent skin eruptions. These individuals tend to possess robust physical stamina and efficient digestion, often showing an inclination toward overeating and consuming large quantities of food and drink. However, they typically struggle to handle stress or challenging situations. A distinctive trait includes a persistent unpleasant odor, often noticeable from areas like the underarms, scalp, mouth, and other regions of the body.

Kapha Prakriti

Radiant skin and a well-toned, luminous physique are often observed. The body exhibits tenderness and sensitivity in its parts, along with attractive features, a pleasant countenance, and delicate muscles, skin, and internal organs. Such individuals tend to possess greater vitality, enhanced reproductive capacity, and stronger physical appeal, often associated with increased fertility. Their body is characterized by firmness, stability, and well-developed musculature and organs. They tend to be slow

in their actions, speech, and eating habits, showing a gradual onset of irritation and signs of poor health. Their walk is steady and grounded, each step firmly connecting with the surface. Their appearance often includes charming eyes, a gentle voice, a pleasant smile, and smooth, soft skin.

Prakriti is considered the foremost diagnostic parameter by Acharya Charaka, included in the Dashavidha Pariksha (tenfold examination) for understanding a patient's condition. For a physician, recognizing an individual's Prakriti (natural constitution) is essential for effective treatment (Chikitsa Karma). Both the prognosis and diagnosis of an ailment rely significantly on this knowledge. According to Charaka, the curability of diseases (Sukhasadhyata) is partly determined by whether the Dosha involved in the illness matches the individual's inherent Dosha. If they are dissimilar, the condition is generally easier to treat, and if they align, treatment becomes more challenging (Asadhyata).

Acharya Sushruta emphasized that any therapeutic intervention should only begin after properly assessing the patient's Prakriti. This understanding plays a critical role in selecting appropriate medications and predicting their effects on the individual. It also supports timely disease prevention. The dosage of medicinal preparations (Bheshaja) and the choice of accompanying substances (Anupana) should be tailored based on one's Prakriti. Thus, accurate knowledge of a person's constitutional type is fundamental to ensuring correct diagnosis, forecasting the course of illness, and implementing effective treatment strategies.

3.2 Different Prakriti and its management

Vatala

Individuals of Vatala constitution are particularly sensitive to factors that aggravate the Vata dosha. When exposed to such triggers, the Vata within their bodies tends to become imbalanced swiftly—more rapidly than in individuals dominated by the other two doshas. This Vata aggravation often leads to ailments previously described in Ayurvedic texts and can diminish one's physical strength, skin luster, sense of well-being, and lifespan.

To pacify this aggravated Vata, the following therapeutic interventions are recommended-

- Application of oleation (snehana) and fomentation (swedana) therapies in appropriate manner;
- Use of mild laxatives that incorporate fatty substances, warming agents, and ingredients with sweet, sour, and salty flavors;

- Consumption of foods containing the same characteristics as those described above;
- Physical therapies such as oil massage, warm poultices, bandaging, kneading, pouring of warm liquids over the body, bathing, hand-pressing, and other tactile treatments including shock therapy or methods that alter memory and perception;
- Intake of fermented beverages like wine and āsavas (medicated wines);
- Usage of fatty substances derived from various sources that are infused with herbs known for their digestive, carminative, stimulant, Vata-pacifying, and mild purgative actions. These fats may be processed through repeated boiling (up to a hundred or thousand times) and employed for internal administration, massages, or enemas;
- Implementation of therapeutic enemas along with appropriate supportive regimens. The frequency and type of enemas—such as karma basti, kala basti, and yoga basti—should be guided by the detailed instructions found in the Siddhi section of classical Ayurvedic texts.

Pittala

When a person of Pittala constitution engages in activities or consumes substances known to intensify Pitta, the Pitta within their body is quickly disturbed. This immediate reaction is unique to individuals with a predominant Pitta constitution and is not commonly observed in those with Vata or Kapha dominance. The aggravation of Pitta results in various health issues, such as diminished strength, dullness of complexion, reduced joy, and a shortened lifespan, as previously outlined.

To bring balance and soothe aggravated Pitta, the following therapeutic approaches are beneficial:

- Consuming clarified butter (ghee);
- External oleation therapies using ghee;
- Administering purgative treatments;
- Incorporating diets and medications with cooling effects and flavors such as sweet, bitter, and astringent;
- Applying fragrances that are gentle, sweet-scented, cooling, and uplifting;
- Wearing ornaments like pearls and garlands that have been cooled in chilled water;
- Regular use of cool water sprays and exposure to refreshing breezes infused with substances such as Agryacandana (*Santalum album*), Priyansu (*Callicarpa macrophylla*), Kāliyā (the yellow form of sandalwood), and Mrnāla (lotus stalk),

combined with Utpala (*Nymphaea alba*), Kumuda, Kokanada, Sugandhika, and Padma (*Nelumbo nucifera*);

- Listening to soft, melodious, and pleasant music;
- Hearing uplifting and prosperous news;
- Spending time with close companions;
- Enjoying the company of pleasant women adorned in cool attire and floral garlands;
- Living in residences that are naturally ventilated and bathed in moonlight;
- Staying in cool environments such as mountain retreats or riverbanks, wearing light garments, and using fans to enjoy cool breezes;
- Visiting scenic gardens that offer refreshing, fragrant, and cool air.

Sleshmala

When an individual of the Sleshmala (Kapha-dominant) constitution engages in activities or consumes substances that elevate Kapha, this dosha becomes imbalanced rapidly—unlike the other two doshas, which do not react as swiftly. Once aggravated, Kapha manifests in various ailments previously detailed, leading to a decline in physical strength, radiance, emotional well-being, and lifespan. To restore balance, the following therapeutic measures are recommended:

- Appropriately administered potent and heat-inducing elimination procedures;
- Consumption of light, non-oily foods that are primarily pungent, bitter, and astringent in taste;
- Engaging in physically stimulating activities such as running, jumping, swimming, spinning, staying awake at night, combat, sexual activity, exercise, oil application, bathing, and massage;
- Drinking aged, strong wines in moderation;
- Employing lightening therapies in conjunction with herbal smoking;
- Wearing warm clothing; and
- Renouncing luxurious comforts to ultimately experience genuine and lasting happiness.

For alleviation of Kapha, diets mostly ununctuous in nature are prescribed in the above paragraph. Such diets should not however be completely ununctuous. Because in that case there will be aggravation of Vata and the supply of nourishment to dhātus will be impaired.

4. Discussion

Understanding Prakriti offers deep insights into health predispositions, behavior patterns, and disease tendencies. It fosters proactive healthcare by enabling lifestyle adjustments suited to one's constitution. Unlike one-size-fits-all models in conventional medicine, Ayurveda's Prakriti-based model offers an individualized roadmap to health.

Imbalance in Kapha and Pitta Prakriti due to lifestyle factors can lead to chronic conditions like hypertension and high cholesterol, which in turn increase the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and strokes. Kapha individuals, due to their lipid-rich constitution, are particularly prone to hyperlipidemia. Obesity—a major modern health issue—further exacerbates these risks, contributing to conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and sleep apnea, while also intensifying stress and anxiety (Aggarwal, S., et al. (2010)).

Vata Prakriti is closely associated with psychosomatic processes, making individuals more susceptible to stress-related and malnutrition-linked disorders. Chronic stress can worsen Vata imbalance, contributing to conditions like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, Alzheimer's, premature aging, and digestive issues. Additionally, stress and anxiety disrupt sleep and relaxation, further impacting overall health (Mahalle, N. P., et al (2012)).

5. Conclusion

Prakriti assessment serves as a cornerstone for preventive, promotive, and curative healthcare in Ayurveda. The individualized approach, rooted in Dosha dominance, bridges traditional wisdom and modern personalized medicine. With emerging interest in genomics and constitution-based care, integrating Prakriti analysis into modern research could revolutionize future healthcare model.

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