A review on role of prakriti in aging

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Abstract

Ayurveda is an eternal science with absolute principles, and prakriti is one of these. It 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. Prakriti stands for nature of the body in terms of dosha and is decided at the time of conception according to the predominance of dosha. It does not change during the whole life and is responsible for the physical and mental characteristics of an individual. This prakriti is of seven types according to tridosha. The individuals of specific prakriti exhibit biological variations in terms of structure, function, behavior, individual response to internal and external environmental stimuli, susceptibility to different diseases, etc. Aging is a process of decaying and included in natural diseases. In our body, Pitta or Agni is responsible for the various types of pathological conditions. Although aging is a natural pathological condition, Pitta plays an important role in its causation like other pathological conditions. It is clearly indicated in Charak samhita that persons having Pitta predominance personality tend to suffer early with decaying process and other changes of aging. Through this article, we have made an attempt to reevaluate the interrelationships between prakriti and aging.

Key words: Aging, dosha, Pitta, prakriti, Jara

Introduction

Ayurveda has a holistic approach and includes all the factors which are absolute or accessory in the determination of health. Prakriti is one of the most important concepts and it is decided at the time of conception. Prakriti indicates toward physical or dosha constitution. Involvement of dosha in prakriti formation may be individual or intermingled. So, prakriti is of seven types, i.e. Vataj, Pittaj, Kaphaj, three dwandaj and one samadoshaj. Among these, samadoshaj is an excellent and homeostatic state, while others are considered as defective constitutions and susceptible for various diseases. Each prakriti has specific physical and mental characteristics which totally depend on the involvement of dosha. For instance, individuals with Kaphaj 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 prakriti. Prakriti 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 prakriti for the maintenance of health. In this way, prakriti also affects and decides the quality and rate of aging. All the constitutions having Pitta predominance have a tendency to suffer untimely with aging because Pitta has a synergistic effect on the process of aging 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 aging, especially in the case of Pittaj predominant persons, and make vridhavastha pleasant and disease free.

Aims and objectives

1. To study the concept of prakriti in context of aging.
2. To establish the interrelationship between prakriti and aging.

This conceptual study will be helpful in the various progressive clinical and survey studies.

Materials and Methods

Only textual materials have been used for this study, from which various references have been collected. Main Ayurvedic texts used in this study are Charak Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtang Sangrah, Ashtang Hridaya and the available
commentaries on it. Modern texts and related websites have also been searched.

**Conceptual study**

**Concept of prakriti**

The word prakriti has been derived from "Prakarshten karoti iti Prakriti" which means manifestation of special characteristics due to predominance.(9) In Ayurveda, the word prakriti has been used in the sense of deha prakriti or doshaja prakriti. According to rasa-vaiseshik, prakriti is a state which is formed at the time of fertilization due to eminence of dosha.(9) It remains unchanged from fertilization till death. According to Acharya Sushruta and Charak, prakriti is determined at the time of fertilization due to the predominance or increased status of dosha which is normal or physiological. Although prakriti is determined by the dosha predominantly involved, some other factors are also involved in the prakriti formation as described by Acharya Charak in viman-sthan chapter 8. 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. Prakriti of an individual is determined on the basis of these dominant doshas in the above-mentioned factors when they initially unite in the form of fetus. Therefore, prakriti of some people is dominated by Kapha, some others by Pitta, some others by Vata and some others by the combination of two doshas. In some other cases, however, the equilibrium of doshas is well maintained.(5,6) Although all these factors mentioned above play an important role in the determination of prakriti, doshas are involved primarily in the formation of prakriti of above-mentioned factors. Therefore, doshas are the root cause in the initiation and formation of prakriti of any individual. Characters which are manifested in a person of any specific prakriti depend upon properties of the dosha involved. For example, Vata with laghu, sukshma, chala, vishada, raksha, shita and khara properties imparts its properties in developing personality. Same should be understood with regard to rest of the doshas. In mixed personality characters, more than one dosha appear specifically. Characters of various personalities are discussed below.

**Vataja prakriti**

Characters of Vataja prakriti persons are as follows:(7,9)

*Ruksha*: Uinctuousness, 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.

*Shita*: Intolerance to cold things, often getting afflicted with cold, shivering and stiffness.

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*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 Vataj type of constitution mostly possess strength, lifespan, procreation, accessories of life and wealth in lesser quantity.

**Pittaja prakriti**

Characters of Pittaja prakriti persons are as follows:(10-12)

*Ushana*: 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 kata*: Insufficiency of semen, sexual desire and procreation.

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

**Kaphaja prakriti**

Characters of Kaphaja prakriti persons are as follows:(13-15)

*Snigdha*: Uinctuousness of organs.

*Shlakshna*: Smoothness of organs.

*Mridu*: Pleasing appearance, tenderness and clarity of complexion.

*Madhur*: 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.

*Shita*: Lack of intensity in hunger, thirst, heat and perspiration.

*Vijjala*: Firmness and compactness in joints.

*Achha*: Clarity and uinctuousness in complexion, appearance and voice.

By virtue of the above-mentioned qualities, a man having Kaphaj type of constitution is endowed with the excellence of strength, wealth, knowledge, energy, peace and longevity.
Dwandvaja prakriti
Individuals having a constitution dominated by a combination of two doshas are characterized by the combination of the manifestations of the respective doshas.[16]

Samadoshaj prakriti
A samadoshaj type of individual who has all the doshas in a state of equilbrium is endowed with good qualities of all three types of individuals described above.[17]

Concept of aging
Vāya 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 jîrna. jîrnavastha or vridhavastha is the last phase of life, at the age of 60-70 years. This time period signifies by its name, i.e. the name vridhha is given to old age and the word jîrna represents characteristics of this stage of life with of decay or degeneration. This stage is characterized by diminution of the dhātu, strength of sense organs, energy, manliness, valor, power of understanding, retention, memorizing, speech and analyzing facts. There is gradual diminution in the qualities of dhātu and dominance of Vata during this age. According to modern medical science, aging is the accumulation of changes in an organism or object over time. Aging in humans refers to a multidimensional process of physical, psychological, and social change. Some dimensions of aging 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.[18-21] Aging 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 aging. Cellular senescence is a phenomenon where isolated cells demonstrate a limited ability to divide in culture, while organismal senescence is the aging 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 aging as a disease. As genes that have an effect on aging are discovered, aging is increasingly being regarded in a similar fashion to other genetically influenced “conditions”, potentially “treatable”. Indeed, aging 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).[21]

- 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

Ages can also be divided by decade:

| Term     | Age (years) |
|----------|-------------|
| Denarian | 10-19       |
| Vicenarian | 20-29     |
| Tricenarian | 30-39   |
| Quadragenarian | 40-49 |
| Quinquagenarian | 50-59 |
| Sexagenarian | 60-69   |
| Septuagenarian | 70-79  |
| Octogenarian | 80-89   |
| Nonagenarian | 90-99   |
| Centenarian | 100-109  |
| Supercentenarian | 110 and older |

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

Interrelationship between aging and prakriti
Aging 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 Vāta, Pitta and Kapha. They govern the whole body according to their nature, e.g. Vāta is responsible for all the movements of the body. Same applies for the rest of doshas. These tridoshas determine the prakriti of a person according to their predominance. Each dosha has been designed for a specific group of bodily functions depending upon its guna.[23-26] These functions of dosha are also found in an aggravated form in a particular type of prakriti dominated by that particular dosha. Samadoshaj prakriti is exception for this because all the functions of tridosha are neutralized by each other and a state of dhatusamya is maintained.

Among the tridoshas, Pitta is basically responsible for the decay and degenerative changes due to its specific properties like ushna, tikshna, visra, amla, etc.[27] If the prakriti 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 Pittaj prakriti persons that they are susceptible to untimely or premature manifestations of aging 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 aging.
Discussion

Ayurveda is designed for healthy and long lifespan. This aim is fulfilled by its sound and absolute principles. Prakriti 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. Prakriti remains unchanged throughout the whole life and affects every aspect of life. Thus, aging is not an exception. Prakriti 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 prakriti. Increased Pitta functions tend to increase the basal metabolic rate (BMR) and energy consumption which may lead to tissue destruction. Consequently, Pitta predominance prakriti persons are susceptible to premature aging and average life span. On the other hand, persons with Kapha predominance prakriti have a tendency to delayed manifestation of aging 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 prakriti.29

Conclusions

To conclude, the following are the points derived from the above discussion.

1. Prakriti and aging both are natural phenomena as well as occur essentially.
2. All the physiological processes are directly controlled by tridosha and thus by the predominant dosha in a particular type of prakriti.
3. Both Vata and Pitta are responsible for destructive changes in their predominant stage due to their specific properties.
4. Aging is the procedure of decay and degeneration and thus aggravated by the predominant Pitta supported by Vata.
5. Aging is closely related with prakriti and can be delayed by using Kapha predominant ahara and vihara.

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प्रकृति आयुर्वेद के मूलभूत सिद्धांतों में से एक है। मानव के जन्म से लेकर मृत्यु तक जीवन के हर एक पहलू पर प्रकृति का प्रभाव होता है। गर्भाधान के समय औषधि के अनुसार प्रकृति घटित होती है। त्रिदोष पर आधारित यह प्रकृति सात प्रकार की होती है। व्यक्ति अपनी प्रकृति के अनुसार शारीर, संहन, क्रिया, वर्तमान, बाहु एवं आयुंग्रंत प्रतिकृतियाँ का अनुकूलन, विभिन्न व्याहितियों के प्रति ग्राह्यता इत्यादि दर्शाता है। ‘जरा’ का समावेश स्वाभाविक व्याहितियों में किया गया है। शरीर में पित्त अथवा आष्ट्र विभिन्न क्रियाओं के लिए उत्तरदायी है। चर्क संहिता के अनुसार पित्त प्रकृतिवाले व्यक्तिओं में जरावश्या श्वान देखी जाती है। प्रस्तुत अध्ययन में जरा प्रक्रिया एवं प्रकृति इन दोनों का संबंध निर्धारित किया गया है।