



REVIEW ARTICLE

AN OUTLOOK OF VARNA AND VARNYA (COMPLEXION PROMOTERS) IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The colour, appearance and texture of the skin are known as complexion. *Varna* is attributed to complexion which is important biologically, cosmetically and socially. *Varnya dravya* are those which are useful for imparting complexion. *Varnya* as an attribute has been highlighted in *Swastha* (healthy) and *Atura* (diseased). *Varnya* drugs are useful in external application (*lepa*) which have its influence on *Bhrajaka pitta* and when advised internally, stimulates *Jatharagni*. A good *Jatharagni* (digestive fire), *Ahara* (food), *Aharavidhi* (dietary regimens), *Dinacharya* (daily regimens) like *Abhyanga* (Massage), *Anulepana* (Unguent), *Nidra* (Sleep) also contribute in producing and maintaining *Varna*. It has been mentioned as an outcome of formulations like *Gandearadyarishta*, *Kamsaharitaki*, *Takrarishta* etc. *Charaka* has enumerated *Varnya* drugs exclusively in “*Varnyadashemani*” which are a group of ten drugs.

Key words: *Swastha*, *Atura*, *Varnyadashemani*, *Varnya*, *Varna*

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INTRODUCTION

Fair complexion has become a barometer of beauty. The 'fallacy of fairness', as coined by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, got a fillip and this myth of colour got entrenched in our collective psyche ^[1]. Therefore, people are enticed about fairness and everyone is keen in utilizing cosmetics to enhance their complexion, which has given rise to more production of cosmetics. Since complexion served as a fundamental concept, not only in physiology but also in pathology and therapy, complexion theory provided important support for the idea that medicine constituted a unified and rational body of knowledge. By observation and judgment, medieval physicians determined the proper complexion of the individual when healthy. The body was healthy when all were in balance, but diagnosis was difficult, as there was no absolute measure of the right complexion, since this varied for individuals. Balance was thought to be restored by various remedies, which included blood-letting, scarifying, purging and consuming certain foods. The equilibrium of all the *dhatu* is the root cause for strength, complexion, vigour, intellect and happiness. The disturbed state of the same results in ailments ^[2]. Here, *Varna* is symbolized as a sign of health. The knowledge about the concept of *Varna* is thus

essential for the clinical assessment of health as well as ill health.

The term '*Varna*' means good colour or complexion, luster, beauty, outward appearance, exterior form, shape, colour of the face ^[3]. Prime importance has been given to *Agni Mahabhuta* in the manifestation of *Varna* ^[4].

The term '*Varnya*' refers to that which imparts *Varna* ^[5] (skin colour) i.e it acts as an instrument to restore and retain the natural hue, texture and tone of the skin. These *Varnya dravya* (complexion promoters) are not to convert the inherent colour and complexion into fairer one, but to exemplify the abnormal colour which is changed by some disturbance in normal state. Therefore, these have led to a new avenue in the exploration of Ayurvedic cosmetics.

Factors deciding *Varna*: The physiological phenomenon of *Varna utpatti* (formation of *Varna*) is basically governed by many factors, some contribute in the formation of *Varna* in *Garbhavastha* and some others influence in changing the *Varna* after birth and later stages of life.

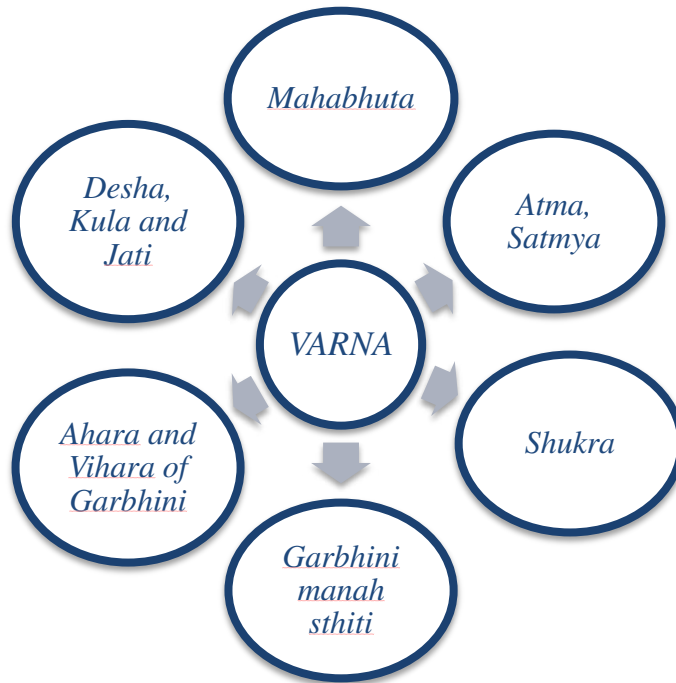
The *Prakruta Varna* of an individual has to be considered in two headings:

1. ***Sahaja*** (Factors responsible for the formation of *Varna* in foetal life): The colour and complexion, which is since birth, falls under this category

2. **Jatottara (Factors influencing Varna after birth):** Sometimes the complexion of an individual may change in case of sun exposure from the complexion which it is since birth. This type of colour and complexion falls under this category.

Factors responsible for formation of Varna in Garbhavastha (Sahaja)

Various factors responsible for formation of Varna in *garbha* are been mentioned in the different classical texts which are as follows:



Role of Mahabhuta: The term 'bhuta' is derived from the root 'bhu' which means to exist. Hence anything that exists can be termed as *bhuta*. The five elements (*Panchamahabhuta*) are *Prithvi* (earth), *Ap* (water), *Teja* (fire), *Vayu* (air) and *Akasha* (ether). Merely every substance is made up of *Panchamahabhuta* in different proportions including medicines. Depending upon the majority of the content, the matter is classified as *Parthiva*, *Aapya dravya* etc ^[6]. The permutation and combination of these

elements and its quantum in a given matter decides its properties. For example: *Agni* predominant *dravya* possess properties like *Ushna* (hot), *Tikshna* (sharp), *Sukshma* (subtle), *Laghu* (light), *Ruksha* (dry), *Vishada* (clear), *Rupa guna bahula* (predominance of rupa quality) and exhibits actions like *Daha* (burning sensation), *Paka* (digestion), *Prabha* (lustre), *Prakasha* (illumination), *Varnakara* (imparts varna)^[7]. So, *Agni Mahabhuta* has been considered as a responsible factor for formation of *Varna* and during formation of

foetus, the different combinations of *Mahabhuta* produce different *Tvak varna* in the foetus.

- *Teja dhatu (Agni)* → *karana for garbhavarna.*
- *Teja + Ap* → *Gaura varna* (fair complexion)
- *Teja +Prithvi + Akasha* → *Krishna shyama* (bluish black)
- *Teja+ Prithvi* → *Krishna* (bluish)
- *Teja+ Akasha* → *Gaura shyama* (fair, black) [8].

Role of *Garbhotpadaka Bhava*: Certain factors are inherited from mother (*matruja*), certain from father (*pitruja*), some past impressions of *Atma* (*atmaja*) and others from the nutrition of the food ingested (*rasaja*). Among these various factors, *Atma* and *Satmya* are attributed for manifestation of colour and complexion [9].

Role of *Atma* (Soul)

Atma, due to past actions, transmigrates from one body to another body with the help of *Manas* along with four *Sukshma Bhuta*. Continuity of the migration of these *Bhuta* is maintained by the *Atma*. That is why *Rupa* (physical attributes) and also *Rajas* and *Tamas* (psychic faculties) are derived from that of the past life. Thus *Varna* has been assigned as the *Atmaja Bhava*. [10]

Role of *Satmya* (Suitability towards diet and regimens)

Satmya is the suitability towards the diet and regimens taken by mother during the period of gestation. Foetus gets nutrition from the mother and thereby the respective *Mahabhuta* gets nourished and there is strength and complexion to the foetus. Thus, it can be attributed towards the role of *Satmya* [11].

Role of *Shukra* (Sperm)

Shukra also plays a vital role in the determination of *Varna* of embryo. When the colour of the *Shukra* is white or has the colour of *Ghrita* or *Manda*, 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 child will be of *Shyama Varna* [12] (brownish). Hence, based on the nutrition effects, there are variations in the quality of sperm and thus variation in the foetus.

Role of *Manas Sthiti of Garbhini* (State of mind of the mother)

The pregnant woman should think about the persons who have that type of *rupa* and *varna*, whom she wishes to have in her offspring. Arunadatta opines that *Rupa* includes *Varna*, *Akruti* etc, so based on the role of *Manas sthiti of Garbhini* (thinking/state of mind of mother), the *Varna* is determined in the foetus [13].

Role of *Ahara* of the mother (Food)

Foetus gets nourished from the *Ahara rasa* of mother through the placenta, which provide *bala* (strength) and *varna* (skin colour) to the foetus [14]. Intake of *Madhura dravya* like *Kshira*, excessive use of water by the pregnant woman, leads in the *gaura varna* (fair) complexion of the child, the use of *tila, vidahi anna* by her results in the *krishna varna* (dark) complexion and with the mixed diets, results in *Shyama Varna* of the foetus [15].

Role of Desha, Kula and Jati (Country, Family and Race)

The impact of *Desha, Kula and Jati* on *Varna* i.e “*Deshakulanuvrittishca Varnabhedah*” [16]

Role of *Desha*: The people of the Northern regions have *Gaura Varna*, those in the

Southern regions have *Krishna Varna* and the people who live in central part of India have *Shyama Varna* [16].

Role of *Kula and Jati*: *Varna* also varies among particular *Kula and Jati*. For instance, the Negroes have dark complexion, Chinese or Japanese have yellowish complexion and the Europeans have fair complexion. Also in India, *Varna* differs among races-people of some of the races have fair complexion while some have darker complexion. This shows the uniqueness of colour due to genetic factor.

Role of Prakruti

Prakruti also influences the formation of *Varna* in the foetus.

Table No 1 showing relation of Sharirika Prakruti and Varna

| Prakruti | Charaka ^[17] | Sushruta ^[18] | Vagbhata ^[19] |
|-----------------|---|---|--|
| <i>Vata</i> | <i>Parusha vadana, pani, sphutita avayava</i> | <i>Sphutita karacharana</i> | <i>Dhusara</i> |
| <i>Pitta</i> | <i>Sukumara, avadata (fair)</i> | <i>Tamra pani, pada</i> | <i>Gaura anga (fair)</i> |
| <i>Kapha</i> | <i>Sukumara, avadata, prasanna, snigdha</i> | <i>Durva, indivara, arishtaka, sarakanda varna</i> | <i>Snigdha, priyangu, durva, Gorocana, padma, suvarna varna</i> |

Factors influencing Varna after birth and Varnya as a benefit in Swastha (Healthy)

The colour and complexion which is formed during the foetal life, cannot be changed after

birth, but due to environmental factors like sunlight, pollutants etc., there may be abnormal skin colour and there are numerous factors which act as *Varnya* (complexion

promoters) after birth which are discussed below:

Jatharagni

Ayu (lifespan), *Varna* (skin colour or complexion), *Bala* (strength), *Swasthya* (healthy), *Utsaha* (enthusiasm), *Upachaya* (nourishment), *Prabha* (lustre), *Oja*, *Teja* are the resultants of a potent *jatharagni* [20]. *Agni* acting on the *ahara*, breaks down into its five *Bhautik* constituents which are further digested by their respective *Agni*. In the process, *Mahabhuta* nourishes the particular *Mahabhuta* which are present in the body and according to their dominance, they increase the relative *mahabhuta*, thus have the effect on skin complexion [21]. *Agni* is indirectly responsible for change in colour and complexion. In *grahani chikitsa*, it has been explained as *Jatharagni* is responsible for *swasthya*, the term *swasthya* includes appropriate colour of the skin, strength etc. Unimpaired colour of the skin is not invariably present in the state of normal health. Food provides nourishment to *deha dhatu* and enhances *ojas*, *bala* and *varna*, but, in effect, it is the *agni* that plays a pivotal role in this

connection as *dhatu* like *rasa*, *rakta* etc, cannot even originate from *apakva rasa* (undigested food particles) [22].

Ahara (food)

Ahara is a root cause for all the living things, provides strength and complexion [23]. It provides complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect [24].

“*Sarvamdravyam Panchabhautikam Asminnarthe*” [25] means all the substances are *Panchabhautik* in nature. The *Bhuta* (element) which is predominant in the substance add to their respective *Bhuta* in the *Sharira Dhatu* (bodily elements) and the qualities in food articles add to their similar qualities of the body. For example: *Parthiva dravya* nourishes *Parthivamsha* of the body and so on. Food nourishes those *dhatu* (tissues) which are similar in qualities to that of it [26]. Thus food has a great influence on skin complexion. The importance of food is highlighted in maintaining *Varna*. Here are few examples of food articles quoted in the classics as complexion promoters.

Table No.2 showing examples of Ahara Varga as complexion promoters

| Ahara Varga | Dravya |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Shali Varga</i> | Lohita ^[27] (Red variety of rice) |
| <i>Shimbidhanya varga</i> | Masura ^[28] (pea) |
| <i>Mamsa Varga</i> (Meat) | Meat of Rohita (a variety of fish), tittira, |

| | |
|--|--|
| | hamsa (swan), mayura (peacock) ^[29] |
| <i>Harita Varga</i> | Rasona (garlic) ^[30] |
| <i>Phala Varga</i> (Fruits) | Pakvaamra (ripened mango), Dugdhayukta amra ^[31] |
| <i>Gorasa Varga</i> (milk and milk products) | Kshira (milk), Navaneeta (butter), Ghrita (ghee) ^[32] |
| <i>Madya Varga</i> (Alcohol) | Madya, pakva rasa madya ^[33] |
| <i>Taila Varga</i> (Oil) | Tila taila (oil of sesamum), eranda taila (castor oil) ^[34] |
| <i>Madhu Varga</i> (Honey) | Madhu (honey) ^[35] |

Aharavidhi (dietary pattern)

Diet taken in appropriate quantity and wholesome food consumed according to the rules have an effect on *Varna* ^[36]. *Snigdha ahara* (Unctuous food) provides brightness in the complexion ^[37]. It is also mentioned that, diet taken in appropriate quantity helps the individual in bringing out the complexion without disturbing the *prakruti* ^[38].

Influence of Dosha, Dhatu and Mala on Varna

Tridosha in normal state bestows *Upachaya, Bala, Varna* and in abnormal state they cause various types of diseases ^[39]. Though *Teja dhatu* is the main factor in determination of *Varna*, but *Vayu* also promotes *Varna*.

Influence of Vata dosha on Varna: Among the five types of *Vayu*, *Udana vayu* endows the body with *Bala, Swara* and *Varna* ^[40].

Influence of Pitta dosha on Varna: Pitta is responsible for normal skin colour and abnormal skin colour. Along with other

functions like *darshana* (vision), *pakti* (digestion) etc, two important functions are *Deha mardava* (maintains the texture/softness of the body) and *Prabha* ^[41] (luster/complexion of the body).

Bhrajaka Pitta: The *pitta* seated in the *tvacha* is termed as *Bhrajaka pitta*. It is responsible for variations in the *ushma* (temperature) and *varna* of the body. *Bhrajaka Pitta* also digests the *aushadha* which is applied on the skin in the form of *Abhyanga, Parisheka, Avagaha, Alepa* and is responsible for imparting *Varna* ^[42]. *Ranjaka Pitta, Pachaka Pitta* also have their impact on *Varna*.

Influence of kapha dosha: In the context of *Prakruti lakshana*, it is clearly mentioned that individuals belonging to *Kapha Prakruti* possess *Sukumara, avadata gatra* (fair) and *Prasanna snigdha varna* which indirectly proves that *kapha* has a major role in the formation of *varna*.

Impact of *Dhatu* on *Varna*

Varna is basically an outcome of equilibrium of all the *dhatu*. Each *dhatu* has unique role in the formation and maintenance of *Varna*. *Tvak* is a seat of *Rasa dhatu* and hence *rasa* have a role in formation of *Varna*. *Vishuddha Rakta*

(Pure blood) is a responsible factor for *Bala, Varna, Sukha and Ayu*. No clear references are found for the role of other *dhatu* in the formation of *Varna* but *Charaka* has mentioned *Varna* as an attribute of *Rakta, Meda, Majja* and *Shukra sara purusha*.

Table No 3: Relation of *Dhatu Sara lakshana* and *Varna*^[43]

| <i>Dhatu</i> | <i>Sara lakshana</i> related to <i>Varna</i> |
|---------------|--|
| <i>Rasa</i> | <i>Snigdha</i> (unctuous), <i>Shlakshna</i> (smooth), <i>Prasanna, Saprabha tvak</i> (lustrous skin) |
| <i>Rakta</i> | <i>Mukha, pani, pada, snigdha rakta varna</i> (red colour of face, palm, sole) |
| <i>Meda</i> | <i>Snigdha varna</i> |
| <i>Majja</i> | <i>Mrudu anga, Snigdha varna</i> |
| <i>Shukra</i> | <i>Prasanna, snigdha Varna</i> |

This clearly indicates that almost all the *dhatu* are directly linked with *Varna*. Thus *Varna* is related to *Dosha* and *Dhatu*.

Influence of *Mala* on *Varna*:

Though *Mala* do not have a direct role in *Varnotpatti*, their presence in the body may create disturbances in *Varna* formation. Hence, their excretion through the body must

be done. They also stand among the three main roots of the body^[44].

Dinacharya (Daily regimens)

To maintain the health, following daily regimens like massage, exercise, rubbing the body with powder etc are elucidated and these also have an impact on the skin colour and complexion.

Table No.4 showing *Dinacharya* and its effect on *Varna*

| <i>Dinacharya</i> | Effect on <i>Varna</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>Abhyanga</i> (Massage) ^[45] | <i>Varna</i> (enhances the colour and complexion), <i>balaprada</i> (improves strength) |
| <i>Anulepana</i> (Unguent) ^[46] | <i>Varnakara, Vaivarnyagham</i> (subsides discoloration) |
| <i>Vyayama</i> (Exercise) ^[45] | <i>Kanti gatranaam</i> (enhances beauty) |

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Udvardana</i> (Rubbing the body with powder) ^[46] | <i>Tvakprasadakara</i> (promotes the health of the skin) |
| <i>Chatradharana</i> (Using umbrella) ^[47] | <i>Varnya</i> (complexion promoter) |
| <i>Asya</i> (Sitting idle) ^[48] | <i>Varna, soukumaryakara</i> (enhances skin complexion and softness) |
| <i>Nidra</i> (Sleep) ^[49] | <i>Varnakara</i> (promotes skin complexion) |

Varna is also considered as an end point of *chikitsa*, therefore it is considered as one of the benefit in many formulations like *Gandearadyarishta*^[50], *Kamsaharitaki*^[51] indicated in *Shvayatu* (oedema) are utilized in the clinical practice for internal administration, which have an additive benefit of complexion promotion. Apart from these formulations, in ‘*Vrana-shotha Chikitsa*’, ‘*Krishnakarma*’ and ‘*Pandukarma*’ directly suggests importance of *Varnya*.

Krishna karma (converting into black colour) – *Bhallataka taila* (Oil of *Semecarpus Anacardium*) is used for imparting normal skin colour in the case of whitish discoloration due to non-healed ulcer^[52].

Pandukarma (converting into white colour) - *Rohiniphala/Haritaki* (*Terminalus chebula*) soaked in goat’s milk for 7 days and made into a paste is beneficial in *savarnakarana* (brings back to normal skin colour) in the case of blackish discoloration due to non-healed ulcer^[53].

In the description of ‘*Mukhalepa*’, three types of ‘*Mukhalepa*’ are mentioned, one of them

being ‘*Varnya lepa*’ and specification of *lepa* according to the seasons are also been enlisted^[54].

Specificity of drugs as Varnya: In classical texts, abundant drugs are available which promotes the skin colour or which restores the normal colour and clarifies the abnormal colour of the skin by imparting radiant skin. *Charaka* exclusively mentions a group of ten drugs known as ‘*Varnya Dashemani*’ like *Chandana* (*Santalum album*), *Tunga* (*Colophyllum phyllon*), *Padmaka* (*Prunus Cerasoides*), *Usheera* (*Vitteveria zizanoides*), *Madhuka* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Manjishtha* (*Rubiocordifolia*), *Sariva* (*Hemidesmusindica*), *Payasya* (*Pueraria tuberosa*), *Sita* (white variety of *Cyanadondactylon*) and *Lata* (black variety of *Cyanadondactylon*), which are oriented towards a single effect i.e., *Varnya*^[55]. *Sushruta* has described the benefit of *varnya* in the two groups of drugs, i.e., ‘*Rodhradi*’ and ‘*Eladi gana*’^[56]. *Varnya gana* has been cited even by *Vagbhata* and enlists the same drugs as that of *Charaka*^[57].

In *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, many single drugs and their specific part have been mentioned as complexion promoters. For instance: The roots of *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycirrhizia glabra*) and *Manjishta* (*Rubia cordifolia*)

Rhizomes of *Haridra* (*Curcumalonga*), *Varahikanda* (*Dioscoreaalata*), *Vidarikanda* (*Pueraria tuberosa*) Fruits of *Jatiphala* (*Myristica fragrans*) Flowers of *Kumkuma* (*Crocus sativa*), *Kamala* (*Nelumbo nucifera*), *Shatapatri* (*Rosa centifolia*), *Ashoka* (*Saraca asoca*)

Leaves of *Parpati* (*Abelmoschus moschatus*)

Panchanga of *Vata* (*Ficus benghalensis*), *Ashwattha* (*Ficus religiosa*), *Udumbara* (*ficus racemosa*)^[58].

Apart from these, the food articles like, among *Dhanya Varga* (grains), *Raktashali* (red variety of rice), *godhuma* (Wheat), *Yava* (barley), *Adhaki* (pigeon pea) have influence on complexion^[59]. A formulation named '*Savarnikarana Lepa*' is indicated in *Dvivraniya Chikitsa* which comprises of *Ayoraja*, *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Kakubha* (*terminalis arjuna*), *Udumbara* (*ficus racemosa*), *kasisa*, *Triphala*, *Kaliyaka* (*Berberis asiatica*), *Amrutasti*, *Rasottama* with

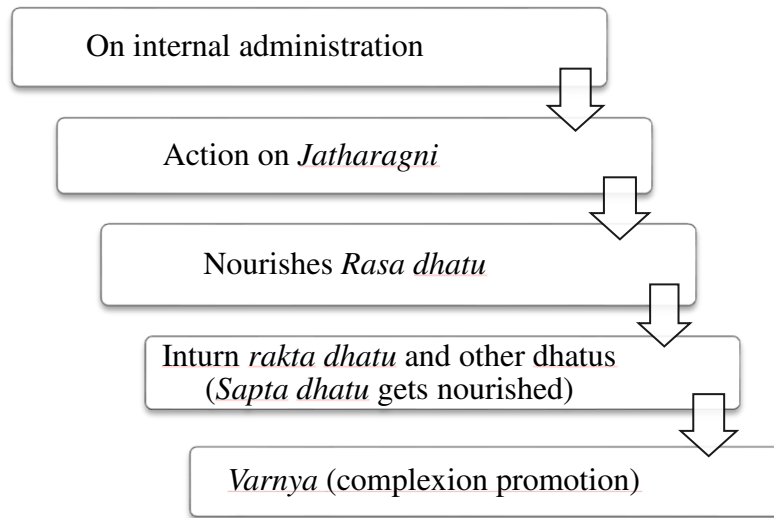
Gomayarasa (cowdung), *Ashwatta* (*Ficus religiosa*) etc, have the effect of *Varnya*^[60]. In *Ashtanga Hridaya Chikitsasthana*, the ingredients of *Savarnikarana lepa* are paste of *Avalguja* (*Psoralia corylifolia*) *beeja-1 kudava* and *haratala-1/4* part with *Gomutra* is beneficial in bringing back to normal skin colour, especially in *shwitra*^[61]

Shodhana and Rasayana

Normal complexion is restored by *Samshodhana* (purificatory therapies). *Basti* given in a prescribed manner improves complexion and strength^[62]. Thus purificatory therapies are beneficial in eradicating toxins, diseases, thus aid in promoting strength and complexion and in enhancing longevity of life^[63]. *Yapana basti*, *Chaturprasrutiki basti* have the effect of complexion promotion^[64]. The *Rasayana* therapy is indicated after *shodhana* and it nourishes *Rasa*, *Raktadi dhatu* inturn enhances *ojas*, as a result improves both lustre and complexion^[65]. *Certain Rasayana Yoga* such as *Chyavanprash*, *Amalaghrita AindraRasayana*, *Medhya Rasayana*, *Indrokta Rasayana*^[66] have the influence on skin complexion.

Probable mode of action of Complexion Promoters

***Abhyantara prayoga* (Internal administration)**



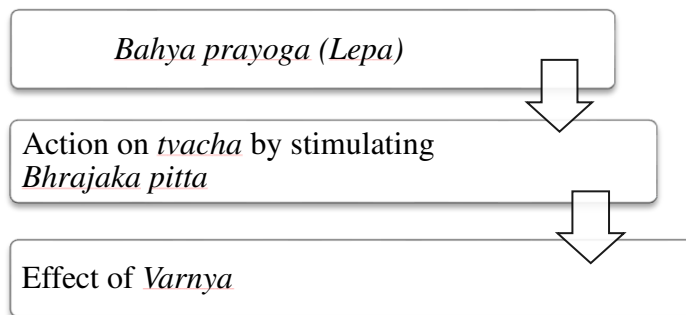
Therefore, intake of *aharadravya* (dietary regimens)

or *aushadha dravya* (medicines) have an effect

of *Varnya* by nourishing *Rasa, raktadi*

dhatu and thereby *ojas*.

***Bahya prayoga* (Topical application)**



Varnya dravya in the form of *lepa* which are the medicines in the form of paste used for external application, enters the hair follicles, reaches *Swedavaha srotas*, inturn does *rasa tarpana*, has the action on the skin stimulating *Bhrajaka Pitta* which metabolizes the applied drug by the virtue of its *aushnya guna*, providing the impact of *Varnya*^[67]. However, there are wide array of medicines which can be used internally or externally which yield complexion in discoloration of the skin.

CONCLUSION

The formation of Varna during foetal life is due to various factors like Mahabhuta, Ahara, Atma, Satmya. After birth, for maintenance of complexion, food, dietary and daily regimens are elucidated and following these regimens, contribute in enhancing complexion. Complexion can be promoted by internal administration of dietary ingredients, medicines which are beneficial for skin and the other way is by topical application. *Varnya* is a

complex criteria used in *Ayurveda* as an end point of *chikitsa* as well as optimum health.

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