

Importance Of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala And Vikṛti Vijñāna In Understanding The Disease Process In Ayurveda

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Abstract

Ayurveda explains health and disease through the fundamental principles of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, and Agni. The branch of Ayurveda dealing with pathological alterations occurring in these entities is known as Vikṛti Vijñāna. It provides a comprehensive understanding of disease manifestation, progression, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. The present article reviews the classical concepts of Śārīrika and Mānāsika Doṣas, Dhātu formation and nourishment, Mala production, Doṣa–Dūṣya interaction, and the clinical importance of Vikṛti Vijñāna. Classical references from Caraka Samhītā, Suśruta Samhītā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya are critically analyzed. Understanding Vikṛti Vijñāna is essential for identifying disease at an early stage, understanding Samprāpti, and selecting appropriate treatment modalities.

Introduction

Ayurveda considers the human body as a dynamic combination of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, Mana, Indriya, and Ātma. The equilibrium of these components maintains health, whereas their imbalance results in disease. The science dealing with normal physiological status is termed Prakṛti Vijñāna or Sāmya Vijñāna, while the science dealing with abnormalities and pathological alterations is known as Vikṛti Vijñāna.

Vikṛti Vijñāna forms the basis of Ayurvedic pathology. It explains the changes occurring in Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, and Srotas during disease manifestation. These alterations may occur in the form of:

- Vṛddhi (increase)
- Kṣaya (depletion)
- Sāmya-vikṛti (simultaneous increase and decrease)

A thorough understanding of Vikṛti Vijñāna helps in:

- diagnosis,
- understanding Samprāpti,
- prognosis,
- disease prevention,
- and planning suitable treatment.

Aim

To study the importance of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, and Vikṛti Vijñāna in understanding the pathogenesis and clinical manifestation of diseases according to Ayurveda.

Objectives

1. To explain the concept of Vikṛti Vijñāna.
2. To study the classification and functions of Doṣas.
3. To understand the formation and significance of Dhātus and Malas.
4. To evaluate the relationship between Doṣa and Dūṣya.
5. To study Dhātu Poṣaṇa Siddhānta.
6. To analyze the clinical importance of Vikṛti Vijñāna in diagnosis and treatment.

Materials and Methods

Materials

The present review article is based on classical Ayurvedic literature including:

- Caraka Saṁhitā
- Suśruta Saṁhitā
- Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya
- Sarvāṅgasundarī Commentary
- Āyurveda Rasāyana Commentary
- Standard Ayurvedic academic texts and published literature

Methods

The study was conducted through:

1. Review of classical references related to Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, and Vikṛti Vijñāna.
2. Comparative literary analysis of different Ayurvedic Saṁhitās.
3. Conceptual interpretation of pathological processes in Ayurveda.

Concept of Vikṛti Vijñāna

The term Vikṛti refers to deviation from the normal state. Vikṛti Vijñāna deals with pathological changes occurring within the body.

The pathological changes may involve:

- Doṣa
- Dūṣya
- Agni
- Srotas
- Other disease-producing factors

These alterations are responsible for disease manifestation and progression.

Classification of Doṣa

1. Śārīrika Doṣa

The three physical Doṣas are:

- Vāta
- Pitta
- Kapha

Functions

In their balanced state, these Doṣas maintain:

- physiological activities,
- tissue nourishment,
- metabolic functions,
- and homeostasis.

Disorders Due to Imbalance

Their vitiation produces diseases such as:

- Jvara

- Atisāra
- Śopha
- Śvāsa
- Kuṣṭha
- Meha

2. Mānāsika Doṣa

The two mental Doṣas are:

- Rajas
- Tamas

Functions

They regulate:

- mental stability,
- emotional balance,
- and psychological activities.

Disorders Due to Imbalance

Their disturbance produces:

- Kāma
- Krodha
- Lobha
- Moha
- Irṣyā
- Śoka
- Bhaya
- Cittodvega

Simultaneous disturbance of Śārīrika and Mānāsika Doṣas results in psychosomatic disorders such as:

- Unmāda
- Apsmāra
- Atattvābhiniveśa

Dhātu

The seven Dhātus are:

1. Rasa
2. Rakta
3. Māṃsa
4. Meda
5. Asthi
6. Majjā
7. Śukra

According to Suśruta:

“शरीरधारणाद्भ्रातवः”

Dhātus are called so because they sustain the body.

Sequential Formation of Dhātus

The Dhātus are formed sequentially:

Rasa → Rakta → Māṃsa → Meda → Asthi → Majjā → Śukra

Each Dhātu nourishes the succeeding Dhātu through its Prasāda Bhāga.

Dhātu Poṣaṇa Siddhānta

1. Kṣīra–Dadhi Nyāya

Explains sequential transformation of Dhātus similar to:

Milk → Curd → Butter → Ghee

2. Kedāri–Kulya Nyāya

Explains nourishment through circulation similar to irrigation channels nourishing fields.

3. Khale–Kapota Nyāya

Explains selective nourishment of Dhātus through specific channels.

Clinical Importance

These theories explain:

- tissue metabolism,
- nutrition,
- tissue depletion,
- growth,
- degeneration,
- and disease formation.

Mala

Malas are waste products produced during digestion and metabolism.

Primary Malas

- Purīṣa
- Mūtra
- Sveda

Secondary Malas

Dhātu Mala Produced

Rasa Kapha

Rakta Pitta

Māṃsa Khamala

Meda Sweat

Asthī Hair and Nails

Majjā Oily secretions

Śukra Ojas

Any alteration in the quantity, quality, or function of Malas causes disease.

Doṣa–Dūṣya Relationship

Dhātus are called Dūṣyas because they become vitiated by Doṣas.

Importance

- Doṣas cannot produce disease without Dūṣya involvement.
- Disease manifestation occurs due to Doṣa–Dūṣya Sammūrchanā.
- Understanding this interaction is essential for:
 - diagnosis,
 - prognosis,
 - treatment planning,
 - and assessment of tissue involvement.

Importance of Agni

Agni plays a central role in maintaining health.

The classical definition of health states:

“समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः ।

प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ॥”

Balanced Agni ensures:

- proper digestion,
- metabolism,
- tissue nourishment,
- immunity,

- and vitality.

Impaired Agni leads to:

- Āma formation,
- Doṣa vitiation,
- and disease manifestation.

Clinical Importance of Vikṛti Vijñāna

Vikṛti Vijñāna helps physicians to:

- understand Samprāpti,
- identify Doṣa predominance,
- assess Dhātu involvement,
- evaluate Agni and Srotas,
- and select appropriate therapies.

Ṣaṭkriyākāla (Six Stages of Disease)

According to Suśruta:

1. Caya
2. Prakopa
3. Prasara
4. Sthānasamśraya
5. Vyakti
6. Bheda

Among these, Sthānasamśraya is crucial because Doṣa–Dūṣya interaction begins at this stage.

Early recognition of Vikṛti helps in:

- prevention,
- early intervention,
- and avoiding complications.

Discussion

Vikṛti Vijñāna forms the cornerstone of Ayurvedic pathology. The concepts of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, and Srotas collectively explain the mechanisms of disease development. The equilibrium among these factors maintains health, while their disturbance initiates pathological processes.

The understanding of Doṣa–Dūṣya Sammūrchanā provides insight into disease localization and tissue involvement. Dhātu Poṣaṇa Siddhānta explains tissue metabolism and nutrition, while the concept of Agni highlights the importance of digestion and metabolic transformation in health maintenance.

Modern pathological investigations such as blood analysis, urine examination, imaging techniques, and scanning methods may assist Ayurvedic physicians in identifying the manifestations of Vikṛti. However, subtle pathological changes may exist even before they become detectable through laboratory investigations. Therefore, Ayurvedic clinical examination remains highly significant.

A physician possessing proper knowledge of Vikṛti Vijñāna can diagnose diseases in their early stages and implement preventive as well as curative measures effectively.

The concept of Doṣabala Pravṛtta Vyādhi described in Ayurveda represents a comprehensive etiopathological model explaining diseases arising due to the vitiation of Śārīrika Doṣas (Vāta, Pitta, Kapha) and Mānasika Doṣas (Rajas and Tamas). According to classical Ayurvedic literature, these disorders originate primarily from Mithyā Āhāra (improper and incompatible diet) and Mithyā Ācāra (improper lifestyle and behavioral practices). Dalhaṇa explains that diseases producing physical discomfort and suffering to the individual are termed Ātaṅka or roga, indicating the pathological consequences of disturbed physiological equilibrium. The concept demonstrates Ayurveda's multidimensional understanding of disease causation, where diet, lifestyle, psychological state, and environmental interactions collectively contribute to disease manifestation.

The term Mithyāhāra refers to inappropriate dietary practices that violate the principles of Aṣṭavidha Āhāra Viśeṣāyatana, including improper quantity, incompatible combinations, unsuitable preparation, untimely consumption, and unhealthy food habits. Similarly, Mithyācāra includes erroneous activities

related to body, speech, and mind such as excessive physical exertion, emotional disturbances, suppression of natural urges, excessive talking, overexertion beyond individual capacity, stress, and unhealthy behavioral patterns. These concepts closely resemble contemporary risk factors associated with lifestyle disorders, metabolic syndrome, psychosomatic diseases, and behavioral medicine. Modern medicine increasingly recognizes unhealthy diet, sedentary lifestyle, chronic stress, sleep disturbances, and psychological factors as major contributors to non-communicable diseases, thereby reflecting the clinical relevance of Ayurvedic etiological principles.

Ayurveda further classifies Doṣabala Pravṛtta diseases into Āmāśaya Samuttha and Pakvāśaya Samuttha conditions based on their primary site of origin. Diseases arising from Kapha and Pitta predominantly originate in the Āmāśaya (upper gastrointestinal tract), whereas Vātaja disorders are mainly associated with Pakvāśaya (lower gastrointestinal tract and colon). Conditions such as Prameha, Āmlapitta, Raktapitta, Pāṇḍu, and Kāmālā are described under Āmāśaya Samuttha Vyādhi, while various Vātaja disorders originate from Pakvāśaya. This classification indicates an advanced understanding of gastrointestinal pathology and systemic disease correlation. Contemporary biomedical science also acknowledges the importance of gut physiology, intestinal microbiota, inflammatory mediators, and metabolic pathways in the pathogenesis of systemic disorders, supporting the Ayurvedic concept of gastrointestinal origin of disease.

The classical texts also differentiate diseases into Śārīrika and Mānasika categories. Śārīrika diseases arise due to vitiation of Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha and include conditions such as Jvara, Atisāra, Śvāsa, Kuṣṭha, and Meha. Ayurveda further elaborates eighty Vātaja, forty Pittaja, twenty Kaphaja, and ten Raktaja disorders, reflecting detailed clinical classification. In contrast, Mānasika disorders originate from disturbances in Rajas and Tamas and manifest as Kāma (excessive desire), Krodha (anger), Lobha (greed), Moha (confusion), Śoka (grief), Bhaya (fear), and Cittodvega (anxiety). This demonstrates Ayurveda's sophisticated psychosomatic approach wherein emotional and psychological disturbances are recognized as independent pathological entities as well as contributing factors in physical disease manifestation. Contemporary psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine similarly acknowledge the bidirectional relationship between mental health and systemic disease.

Dalhaṇa further explains the concept of Ubhaya disorders, wherein both physical and psychological Doṣas participate simultaneously in disease manifestation. Disorders such as Apasmāra represent combined involvement of Śārīrika and Mānasika factors. This integrated perspective parallels the modern biopsychosocial model of disease, which emphasizes the interaction of biological, psychological, and social determinants in health and illness.

Ayurveda repeatedly emphasizes that Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha constitute the fundamental basis of all pathological processes. Classical statements such as "Sarveṣāṃ ca Vyādhīnāṃ Vāta-Pitta-Śleṣmāṇa eva Mūlam" indicate that no disease manifests without the involvement of Doṣas. In their equilibrium state, the Doṣas maintain physiological functions such as growth, strength, complexion, nourishment, and vitality, whereas their disequilibrium produces disease. This reflects the Ayurvedic concept of homeostasis, comparable to modern physiological balance and internal regulatory mechanisms. Disturbance of these regulatory systems through environmental, nutritional, metabolic, infectious, or psychological factors ultimately results in pathology.

The concept of Saṃsargaja Vikāra further demonstrates Ayurveda's advanced understanding of complex disease mechanisms. Diseases may arise due to interaction between multiple Doṣas along with Dhātu and Mala involvement. For example, Vāta-Pitta-Kapha associated with Rasadhātu may produce Jvara, while involvement of Mūtra leads to Prameha, and association with Raktadhātu results in conditions such as Vātarakta, Raktapitta, Vidradhi, and Raktagulma. This multidimensional interaction resembles contemporary concepts of multifactorial disease pathogenesis involving metabolic, vascular, inflammatory, immune, and tissue-specific mechanisms.

Thus, the Ayurvedic description of Doṣabala Pravṛtta Vyādhi presents a highly systematic and holistic model of disease causation integrating diet, lifestyle, gastrointestinal pathology, psychological factors, constitutional susceptibility, and tissue involvement. These principles closely parallel contemporary concepts of lifestyle medicine, psychosomatic disorders, gut-systemic interactions, chronic inflammatory diseases, and integrative medicine. The classical framework therefore remains highly relevant for understanding the multifactorial nature of disease and for developing individualized preventive and therapeutic strategies in modern clinical practice.

The classical texts further emphasize that all diseases ultimately depend upon the involvement of Doṣas. Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha are considered the fundamental pathogenic factors responsible for the manifestation, progression, and prognosis of disease. In their balanced state, these Doṣas maintain physiological functions such as nourishment, strength, complexion, and vitality; however, when vitiated they produce pathological changes leading to numerous disorders including Jvara, Atisāra, Śvāsa, Kuṣṭha, Meha, and Śopha. Ayurveda also recognizes Samsargaja Vikāra, conditions produced by the combined involvement of multiple Doṣas along with Dhātu and Mala interactions. For example, Vātādi Doṣas associated with Rasadhātu may produce Jvara, while their association with Mūtra results in various forms of Prameha. This multidimensional understanding demonstrates the sophisticated Ayurvedic concept of systemic pathogenesis.

The theory of Dhātu Vriddhi and Kṣaya provides another important framework for understanding disease manifestation. According to Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridaya, Dhātus increase through the intake of substances possessing similar qualities (sāmānya siddhānta) and decrease through exposure to opposite qualities. Thus, excessive intake of heavy, unctuous, and nourishing substances leads to Dhātu Vriddhi, whereas depletion occurs due to opposing factors, improper digestion, and tissue exhaustion. The texts explain that Rakta increases by consumption of blood-rich substances, Māmsa by meat intake, Meda by excessive unctuous nourishment, and similarly for other Dhātus. This principle closely resembles modern concepts of metabolic adaptation and tissue-specific nutritional influence.

Dhātu Vriddhi produces characteristic clinical manifestations depending upon the affected tissue. Increased Rasadhātu manifests as salivation, anorexia, nausea, heaviness, and Kapha-like disorders, while Raktadhātu Vriddhi produces Kuṣṭha, Visarpa, burning sensation, bleeding disorders, jaundice, and vascular congestion. Excess Māmsa Dhātu leads to glandular enlargements, tumours, heaviness, and abnormal tissue overgrowth, whereas Medadhātu Vriddhi results in Sthaulya (obesity), Prameha-pūrvarūpa, dyspnoea, lethargy, and excessive body unctuousness. Similarly, Asthi Vriddhi produces extra bony growths and teeth, Majjā Vriddhi causes heaviness and joint swelling, and Śukra Vriddhi results in excessive sexual desire and seminal calculi. These descriptions indicate Ayurveda's detailed clinicopathological correlation between tissue excess and systemic disease.

Conversely, Dhātu Kṣaya produces degenerative and deficiency-related manifestations. Rasakṣaya leads to fatigue, dryness, palpitations, thirst, and exhaustion even after minimal exertion. Raktakṣaya manifests as skin dryness, pallor, venous laxity, and craving for sour substances. Māmsakṣaya causes muscular wasting, joint crepitus, vascular laxity, and generalized debility, whereas Medakṣaya produces emaciation, roughness, splenic enlargement, and fatigue. Asthikṣaya is characterized by bone pain, loosening of joints, falling of teeth and hair, and fragility of nails. Majjākṣaya leads to hollowness of bones, dizziness, weakness, and chronic Vātavyādhi, while Śukrakṣaya manifests as impotence, exhaustion, painful ejaculation, infertility, and diminished reproductive capacity. These observations reflect Ayurveda's profound understanding of tissue depletion syndromes, nutritional pathology, and chronic degenerative diseases.

Collectively, these classical concepts demonstrate that Ayurvedic pathology is based upon dynamic interactions among Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, diet, lifestyle, and psychological factors. The detailed descriptions of Dhātu Vriddhi and Kṣaya not only aid in clinical diagnosis and prognosis but also support individualized therapeutic planning through dietary regulation, lifestyle modification, and Doṣa-specific interventions. The Ayurvedic understanding of tissue homeostasis, metabolic imbalance, psychosomatic interaction, and systemic disease progression bears significant resemblance to contemporary concepts of metabolism, nutrition, endocrinology, chronic inflammatory disorders, and degenerative pathology.

The concept of mala (waste products) occupies an important place in Ayurvedic physiology and pathology, as proper elimination is essential for maintenance of homeostasis and tissue health. Classical texts describe that during the process of digestion and tissue metabolism, both prasāda bhāga (nutritive essence) and kiṭṭa bhāga (waste portion) are formed simultaneously. The nutritive portion contributes to the formation and nourishment of successive dhātus, whereas the waste portion forms various malas such as kapha, pitta, sweat, urine, and feces. Thus, proper digestion and metabolism naturally produce both nourishment and excretory products. Each dhātu also generates its own metabolic waste; for example, rasa produces kapha, rakta produces pitta, meda produces sweat, asthi produces hair and nails, and majjā produces unctuous secretions. This sequential transformation

reflects the dynamic relationship between tissue metabolism and waste elimination in maintaining physiological balance.

Ayurveda emphasizes that both increase (vṛddhi) and decrease (kṣaya) of malas can lead to pathological manifestations. Excess accumulation of purīṣa (feces) results in abdominal pain, gurgling sounds, distension, and heaviness in the abdomen, indicating impaired gastrointestinal function. Similarly, aggravated mūtra (urine) manifests as increased frequency and quantity of urination, enlargement or discomfort of the urinary bladder, and bladder pain. Excessive sveda (sweat) produces profuse perspiration, foul body odor, and itching, reflecting derangement of fluid metabolism and thermoregulation.

Conversely, diminution of malas also produces characteristic clinical features. Deficiency of stool causes intestinal twisting, pain in the flanks and cardiac region, abnormal movement of flatus with sound, and reduced fecal quantity, indicating disturbed vāta activity in the gastrointestinal tract. Decreased urine manifests with dysuria, scanty and discolored urine, thirst, dryness of mouth, bladder pain, and occasionally hematuria. Reduced sweat production leads to dryness and cracking of the skin, stiffness of hair follicles, loss of body hair, roughness, diminished perspiration, and sensory impairment of the skin. General depletion of other waste products is associated with dryness, emptiness, and lightness of body channels and excretory pathways.

These descriptions demonstrate that malas are not merely waste substances but essential physiological entities contributing to equilibrium of the body. Their proper formation, retention in appropriate quantity, and timely elimination are necessary for preservation of health, whereas imbalance in their quantity or function contributes significantly to disease pathogenesis. Therefore, assessment of mala vṛddhi and kṣaya provides valuable clinical insight into the metabolic and functional status of the body and plays an important role in Ayurvedic diagnosis and management.

According to Ayurvedic physiology, the process of dhātu metabolism results in the simultaneous formation of three components: mala (waste products), sthūla bhāga (stable gross tissue portion), and anu bhāga (subtle nourishing essence). During digestion of food (anna), the waste products formed are viṇ/purīṣa (feces) and mūtra (urine), indicating that nourishment and excretion occur together as natural metabolic outcomes. Similarly, each dhātu produces a specific mala while nourishing the subsequent dhātu in sequence. Rasa dhātu forms kapha and nourishes rakta; rakta produces pitta and nourishes māṃsa; māṃsa gives rise to excretions from body orifices and nourishes meda; meda produces sweat (sveda) and nourishes asthi; asthi forms hair, body hair, and nails while nourishing majjā; and majjā produces oily secretions of the eyes, skin, and feces while nourishing śukra. Finally, śukra dhātu produces ojas as its metabolic by-product (mala-rūpa upadhātu according to certain Ayurvedic interpretations). This sequential transformation highlights the continuous relationship between tissue nourishment and waste formation in maintaining physiological balance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Vikṛti Vijñāna constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of Ayurvedic pathology and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the origin, progression, diagnosis, and management of diseases. The physiological and pathological interrelationship of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, and Srotas forms the basis of health and disease in Ayurveda. Equilibrium among these entities maintains normal bodily functions, whereas their disequilibrium initiates pathological changes at both physical and psychological levels. The concepts of Doṣabala Pravṛtta Vyādhi, Doṣa-Dūṣya Sammūrchanā, Dhātu Vriddhi-Kṣaya, and Mala Vriddhi-Kṣaya collectively explain the mechanisms through which improper diet, unhealthy lifestyle, impaired digestion, metabolic disturbances, tissue dysfunction, and psychological stress contribute to disease manifestation.

The theory of Dhātu metabolism and Mala formation further highlights the dynamic process of tissue nourishment, transformation, and waste elimination essential for physiological homeostasis. Simultaneous formation of nutritive (prasāda) and waste (kiṭṭa) components during metabolism demonstrates Ayurveda's advanced understanding of systemic regulation and internal balance. In addition, the concepts of Agni and Saṭkriyākāla emphasize the importance of early pathological changes, enabling timely diagnosis, prevention, and therapeutic intervention before disease reaches advanced stages.

These classical Ayurvedic principles show remarkable correlation with modern concepts of metabolism, psychosomatic medicine, chronic inflammatory disorders, degenerative pathology, and

lifestyle-related diseases. Therefore, the study of Vikṛti Vijñāna remains indispensable for successful Ayurvedic clinical practice, as it provides a scientific and individualized approach to diagnosis, prognosis, prevention, and treatment. By integrating constitutional assessment, metabolic status, tissue involvement, and psychological factors, Vikṛti Vijñāna continues to offer significant relevance in contemporary healthcare and holistic disease management.

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