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ANATOMICAL AND ETIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONGENITAL DISORDERS AS PER AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science that accounts for all possible aspects of human health, disease preventive measures, and treatments. It gives many diseases descriptions and classifications based on the reasons and symptoms of its manifestation. Ayurveda also gives special attention to *Garbhajanya Vikriti* (congenital disorders) and fetal developmental process. Ayurveda claims that wrong nutrition of the mother, bad living conditions, and disruptions in quality of *Beeja* and *Beejabhaga* are the main causes of congenital birth defects. Ayurveda describes how a healthy child is born with the help of *Shadgarbhakara Bhavas* including *Matrija*, *Pitrija*, *Atmaja*, *Rasaja*, *Satmyaja* and *Sattvaja* factors. Ayurveda recognized congenital disorders as being influenced by both genetic and hereditary factors, along with offering preventive and therapeutic modalities for tackling these problems. These conditions are associated with *Kularaja Vikara*, and viewed as *Asadhya* disorders in general terms. As per Ayurveda, *Beeja Dosha* and *Matrija Vikriti* are the major causes for *Garbhaja Vikriti* in babies. Any abnormalities can affect the normal development of fetus and lead to problems in shape, size and structure of fetus. The classical texts talk about various kinds of abnormalities including excessive body proportions and snake or scorpion-like shape of fetus. Considering importance of this problem present article explores Anatomical and etiological perspectives on congenital disorders as per Ayurvedic view.

KEYWORDS: *Ayurveda, Garbhaja Vikriti, Congenital Disorders, Beeja Dosha, Matrija Vikriti.*

INTRODUCTION

Sharira Rachana is the Ayurvedic branch of anatomy that includes normal human anatomy and the congenital defects of human body. Ayurveda as a science of holistic approaches gives emphasis on healthy progeny. In this regards Ayurveda presented concept of *Shadgarbhakara Bhavas*, as factors that lead to fetal development. *Matrija*, *Pitrija*, *Atmaja*, *Rasaja*, *Satmyaja* and *Sattvaja* factors are major component of *Shadgarbhakaran Bhavas*. These factors play crucial role in the proper development of fetus. In case there is a disturbance in any one of them, the unborn child might have some congenital or anatomical defect.[1-4]

SADBHAVA

Ayurveda describes the process of developing a fetus in accordance with the principles of *Sadbhava* as depicted in **Table 1**; according to which six different factors play a vital role in creating and supporting the health of the embryo. In Ayurveda, normal processes of developing an embryo are possible only if all six processes are balanced; if not, the embryo may develop congenital diseases or difficulties in development.

Table 1: The six components of *Sadbhava* and their role in fetal development.

Sadbhava	**Role in Fetal Development**
Matŗja Bhava	Includes the mother's ovum quality, uterine health, hormonal balance, nutrition, immunity, metabolism, and overall physical, mental, and emotional well-being during pregnancy.
Pitŗja Bhava	Refers to the father's sperm quality, genetic makeup, hereditary traits, and environmental influences affecting fetal development.
Atmaja Bhava	Represents the innate constitution, vitality, and natural resistance of the fetus to environmental factors and diseases.
Satmyaja Bhava	Denotes the influence of adaptable habits, including parental diet, lifestyle, ethnicity, and climatic conditions on fetal growth.
Rasaja Bhava	Represents the nutritional support (*Rasa*) essential for proper fetal growth and development.
Sattvaja Bhava	Emphasizes maternal mental health, emotional stability, stress levels, and psychological environment during pregnancy, which influences fetal well-being.

Classifications

Ayurveda recognizes various congenital conditions resulting from *Garbhajanya Vikriti*, such as *Kubja, Kuni, Pangu, Muka* and *Minmin*. According to Ayurveda, congenital diseases can be divided into two categories as depicted in **Figure 1**. This classification is based on their place of genesis. As mentioned in figure *Adibala-pravŗtta Vyadhi* and *Janmabala-pravŗtta Vyadhi* are two types of *Garbhajanya Vikriti.* This classification demonstrates that Ayurveda was aware of the etiological mechanisms leading to congenital diseases and is close in its meaning to the modern division of causes of congenital diseases into genetic and environmental ones.[4-6]

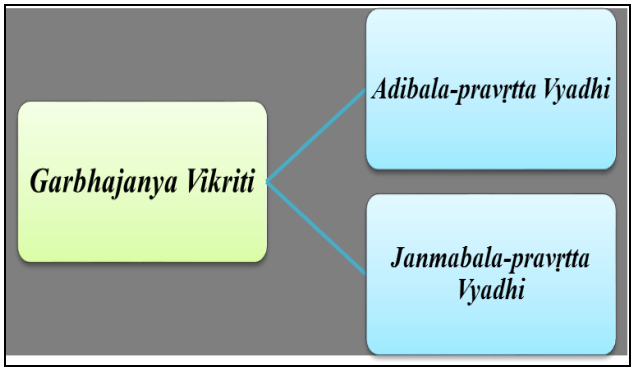

Figure 1: *Garbhajanya Vikriti.*

Adibala-pravŗtta Vyadhi

Adibala-pravŗtta diseases occur due to errors happening in the process of formation of *Beeja*, *Beejabhaga* or *Beejabhagavayava*. The indicated defects are caused by the progenitors of an individual and are associated with inherited congenital diseases. *Beeja Dosha* in Ayurveda is similar to the modern meaning of genetic mutations and chromosomal defects. The diseases included in this category can be associated with chromosomal anomalies, single-gene diseases, inherited metabolic syndromes, and family congenital malformations.[5-7]

Janmabala-pravŗtta Vyadhi

Janmabala-pravŗtta Vyadhi refers to the disorders that arise in the intrauterine life and are usually the consequence of physiological alterations of the fetus, rather than the hereditary genetic defects. According to Ayurveda, these disorders may be caused by improper diet of mothers, harmful habits in food and way of living, exposure to toxic substances, maternal diseases, stress conditions, and insufficient prenatal care. In the same way, contemporary medicine recognizes maternal malnutrition, exposure of the fetus to alcohol, drugs, heavy metals, and other toxins, as well as the intrauterine infections, emotional tension, incompatible eating habits, and insufficient antenatal care as the causes of congenital deformities.[5-7]

Etiological Aspects

Vitiation of *Beeja* and *Beejabhaga* is thought to be one of the major causes of the structural defects of the developing fetus. Besides *Beeja* defects, there are various other causes of congenital defects which are *Kula* and *Gotra* of parents, maternal condition, parental age, condition of generative organs, nutrition, and hereditary factors. *Acharya Sushruta* blamed *Nastikata* of the parents and their *Ashubha Karma* for the congenital defects. He, also, claimed that *Purvajanmakrita Karma* is responsible for congenital defects. The aggravation of *Vata Dosha* in the course of pregnancy is considered to be one of the major causes of congenital defects. Ayurveda speculates that these prenatal anomalies occur due to defective sperm and ovum, imbalance in the environment of the womb, maternal age being too old or young, improper dominance of *Dosha*, incorrect timing and quality of conception, improper food habits during the time of pregnancy, emotional condition of parents, etc.[6-8]

Contemporary genetics clearly identify chromosomal aberration that can be linked to the Ayurvedic definition of *Beeja Dosha* which incorporates the deformity in the elements involved in reproduction leading to hereditary disorders. Ayurveda holds that *Beeja Dosha* can lead to situations where there is *Vandhya*, *Varta* or *Putipraja* revealing deviations in the quality of the germ cells. Yet another cause of disease is *Atmakarmaja Dosha*.

Kala Dosha is a term for the defects associated with the timing of conception. According to Ayurveda, conception taking place in the first to the third days of *Rajasrava Kala* would increase the chances of congenital defects in the newborn baby leading to the conditions

such as *Asampurnanga* and *Mrutagarbha*. *Matruja Ahara-Vihara Dosha* refers to the negative effects caused by incorrect maternal consumption and lifestyle during pregnancy.[7-9]

Anatomical Aspects

Symptoms of congenital defects according to Ayurveda are the absence of organs, malformations of organs, too much and abnormal development of tissues, anatomical variations, failure to develop parts of the body properly, etc. *Ashaya Dosha* deals with the abnormalities of the uterus or reproductive organs having a negative effect on the fetus. *Garbhashaya Dosha* which is presented more specifically in the form of *Yonivyapada* corresponds to congenital defects of the uterus described in modern medicine including unicornuate uterus, septate uterus or any other structural anomalies of the uterus which negatively affect normal conception or pregnancy. Consequences of *Papa karma* might produce effects on the development of the fetus causing serious congenital deviations which will make the fetus look like *Sarpa* or *Vrishchika*.[8-10]

Ayurveda speaks of many hereditary defects of the skin that can happen due to faults in the *Beej* and *Beejabhaga*. Such disorders get manifested in terms of hyperpigmentation, discoloration of the skin, alteration in the color of the skin, and excess growth of tissue. The defects in genes and genetic make-up including those affecting structures of the skin can change the structure of the skin, its texture, and pigmentation leading to different hereditary skin disorders.

Ayurveda acknowledges many congenital anomalies affecting the reproductive system. For example, *Dwireta* is an abnormality when a person has both ovarian and testicular tissues and can be connected with modern disorders of sex development. Another disorder that can be referred to infertility issue is called *Pavanendriya*. Other congenital problems in reproduction mentioned in Ayurvedic medicine are called *Samskarvahi*, *Narashanda* and *Irshyabhirati*, each presenting some abnormalities in the development of sexual organs.[9-11]

Modern medicine states that genetic disorders are four main types; chromosomal, single-gene, mitochondrial and multifactorial. The most popular diseases include sickle cell anemia, polycystic kidney disease, cystic fibrosis and chronic myeloid leukemia. Apart from the above-mentioned diseases, many congenital structural anomalies exist due to improper formation or absence of some organs.

From a clinical perspective, congenital defects may manifest in incomplete closure of the spinal canal, abnormal placement of the urinary bladder, the occurrence of a cleft lip/cleft palate, congenital bradycardia, the presence of nodules/hypertrophy of the liver, errors or malformations of the portal vein (Portal system), vessel wall thinning, aneurysmal enlargement, and various other vascular defects. Structural deformities represent abnormal morphology of organs or body parts, e.g., congenital heart defects, cleft lip/cleft palate, spina bifida, as well as clubfoot. Developmental diseases cause problems with the processes of growth, nervous and physiological development, i.e., Down syndrome, hearing impairments, vision impairments, cerebral palsy, and muscular dystrophy.[8-10]

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Ayurveda highlights a holistic approach to prevent congenital disabilities, focusing on the health of both parents prior to conception, ensuring a healthy uterine environment, and providing appropriate nutrition for the fetus during pregnancy. The goal here is to enhance the quality of *Shukra*, *Artava/Shonita* and the womb environment of the child. Therefore, the preventive techniques discussed are similar to contemporary philosophy of preconception advice, prenatal assistance, food supplementation, and prenatal diagnostics.[9-11]

Garbhadhana Samskara is an aspect of preconception services aimed to get ready for the onset of pregnancy. This includes *Shodhana*, *Rasayana*, food regimes and healthy lifestyles which lead to positive changes in reproductive health and wellness. *Ritu* refers to conception at the right time whereby Ayurveda suggests that conception should take place only at the period when both male and female reproductive systems are functioning and operating as they should.

Kshetra Shodhana refers to the state of a healthy uterus and the reproductive system prior to conception or childbearing. Cleansing and restoration of reproductive organs produce an environment conducive for implantation and development of embryo. *Masa-anumasika Paricharya* represents the month-by-month antenatal care that has been developed to fulfill the needs of the baby. The recommendations of the system give advice on maternal meal planning, lifestyle, and other behavioral aspects of life that are followed by a woman during pregnancy period.[10-12]

CONCLUSION

The discipline of *Sharira Rachana* in Ayurveda describes congenital and anatomical malformations in detail, indicating their origin, pathogenesis, prevention, and treatment. Ayurveda states that congenital and anatomical malformations arise because of heredity and congenital factors, which is collectively called *Garbhajanya Vikriti*. The defects of *Beeja*, *Beejabhaga*, and *Beejabhagavayava* can give rise to hereditary illnesses and the health conditions of parents have a great impact on the development of the fetus. The principles of *Shadgarbhakara Bhavas*, such as *Matarija*, *Pitarija*, *Rasaja*, *Sattvaja*, *Satmyaja*, and *Atmajja*, are regarded as the basic framework for the development of a healthy offspring. These factors play a crucial role in embryogenesis and if any one of them is not functioning normally, congenital and developmental abnormalities

may occur. Children may be born without some organs or with dysfunctional organs, abnormal growth of tissues, enlarged organs, etc. Ayurveda emphasizes the significance of healthy parents and preventive measures, which have to be taken before and during pregnancy, such as the monitoring of parents' health, proper nutrition and lifestyle, and psychological condition, in order to prevent congenital illnesses.

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