



Philosophy And Practice Of Soundarya In Ayurveda: Cosmetic Insights From Charaka Samhita

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *Soundarya* in Ayurveda transcends mere physical appearance, emphasizing the harmonious integration of body, mind, and spirit as the true essence of beauty.

The *Charaka Samhita* presents a comprehensive vision of aesthetics through its detailed descriptions of *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), *Rtucharya* (seasonal regimen), and rejuvenative therapies such as *Rasayana*, alongside external applications including *Lepa* (herbal paste), *Abhyanga* (oil massage), and *Mukhalepa* (facial applications), all of which enhance complexion, luster, and vitality. These references reveal the classical Ayurvedic understanding of beauty as an outcome of internal wellness, *dosha* equilibrium, and mindful external care. Thus, the *Charaka Samhita* articulates an enduring and holistic perspective on *Soundarya*—one that harmonizes aesthetics with health, longevity, and psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Cosmetics are substances used to enhance the appearance of the human body. Preparations applied to the skin, eyes, face, mouth, lips, hair, and nails for various purposes are broadly classified as cosmetics. In Ayurveda, several treatments such as *Nasya*, *Raktamokshana*, *Lepa*, *Pradeha*, *Abhyanga*, *Lekhana*, *Udvarthan*, and *Malahara* are mentioned for detoxification of the skin and blood, as well as for improving hair health, beauty, and complexion.

According to Ayurvedic philosophy, the **protection and promotion of the body** should be the prime objective in life¹. The *Charaka Samhita* contains numerous scattered references of cosmetics and perfumes, reflecting the ancient awareness of personal grooming and aesthetics.

Ayurveda emphasizes that true beauty comes from within and is not limited to external appearance alone. In this context, cosmetics are not merely beautifying substances—they are those that make a person feel comfortable and confident, contributing to overall well-being on **physical, mental, and social** levels.

This holistic beauty can be achieved through the proper observance of *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), *Achara Rasayana* (code of good conduct), *Sadvritta* (ethical living), and *Pathyapalana* (wholesome diet and lifestyle). Therapies such as *Shodhana* (purification) and *Shamana*

(pacification) contribute to *Sharira Shuddhi* (bodily purification), which in turn helps in delaying aging and reducing wrinkles and grey hair (*Jara–Vali–Palita Nashana*). Other important factors such as *Prakriti* (constitution), *Sara* (tissue excellence), *Samhanana* (body build), and *Pramana* (proportion) also determine a person's beauty. Classical procedures like *Vyayama* (exercise), *Abhyanga* (oil massage), and various types of *Snana* (bathing) demonstrate the significance of cosmetology in ancient times. Furthermore, *Rasayana* therapy highlights the importance of rejuvenation and maintaining a youthful and attractive appearance.

Thus, Ayurveda, especially through the teachings of the *Charaka Samhita*, explains the interrelationship between **health and beauty**, emphasizing that external radiance reflects internal wellness.

Some of the cosmetics references mentioned in *Charaka Samhitha* are:

VARNYA MAHAKASHAYA²

The group of drugs that enhance beauty and improve complexion are classified under *Varnya Mahakashaya*. This group of herbs helps to correct disorders related to the *Twacha* and *Varṇa* and promotes healthy, radiant skin.

Charaka Samhita describes ten principal herbs under *Varnya Mahakashaya*: *Chandana* (*Santalum album*), *Tunga* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), *Padmaka* (*Prunus cerasoides*), *Ushira* (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), *Madhuka* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Manjistha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Sariva* (*Hemidesmus indicus*), *Payasya* (*Ipomoea digitata*), *Sita* (*Saccharum officinarum*), and *Lata* (*Cynodon dactylon*). These herbs may be used individually or in combination, both internally and externally, for treating *Vivarṇya* (discoloration) and promoting *Varṇa Vardhana* (enhancement of complexion). In addition to their cosmetic benefits, these drugs possess *Raktashodhaka* (blood-purifying), *Raktaprasadaka* (blood-nourishing), and *Twachya* (skin-promoting) properties, thereby supporting overall dermatological health and inner radiance.

MAHATWA OF TWAGINDRIYA

तैके स्पर्शनमिन्द्रियाणां इन्द्रियव्यापकम्, चेतः-समवायि ॥ 3

The sense of touch pervades all senses as it is permanently associated with the mind. The mind again pervades the sense of touch. The latter in its turn pervades all senses.

According to *Acharya Chakrapani*, although there are five sense organs and their respective objects, all sensory perceptions arise from a single faculty—the tactile faculty—which pervades all senses, as no sensation occurs without touch. Governed and pervaded by the mind, the tactile faculty engages the mind in perceiving a single object, making touch the basis of all five sensory experiences: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile.

TWAK

In Ayurveda, the terms *Twak* or *Charma* are derived from “त्वचसंवरणे” (Dhatu), meaning that which covers the body. *Acarya Charaka* describes six layers of the skin, which are formed by the *Mamsa Dhatu*: *Udakadhara*, *Asrigdhara*, *Sidhma*, *Dadru*, *Alaji*, *And Shashthi*.⁴

TWACHA AND TRIDOSHA

In Ayurveda, *Twak* serves as the *Adhisthana* of the *Sparshanendriya*, and *Sparsha* is the function of this sense organ, performed primarily by *Vata Dosha*⁵. Aggravation of *Vata* can impair complexion. When *Vata* becomes deranged in the skin, it causes *Twakvikāras* such as *Rukshatha* and *Sputhana*.

Pitta Dosha governs *Prakṛita* and *Vikṛta Varna*. *Acharya Chakrapani* described five types of *Pittas* and emphasized *Bhrajaka Pitta*, which resides in the *Twak* and contributes to *Prabha*. *Twak*, being an *Upadhatu* of *Mamsa Dhatu*, forms six layers and is also a *Mula* of *Mamsavaha Srotas*; any derangement leads to *Vaivarnya*.

The *Snigdhata*, *Mrđutā* and luster of skin are attributed to *Kapha Dosha*.

TWACHA AND DHATU

The first layer of Twak, *Udakadhara*, contains *Rasa*, highlighting the close relationship between *Twacha* and *Rasa*. *Shuddha Rakta* enhances *Varna*⁶, whereas *Rakta Kshaya* causes roughness, dryness, cracks, and loss of luster⁷. *Rakta Dushti* leads to *Vaivarnya*, *Atisweda*, and *Dourgandhya*⁸. *Twak*, the *Upadhatu* of *Mamsa*, comprises six layers derived from *Mamsa Dhatus*⁹ and serves as the *Mula* of *Mamsavahasrotas*¹⁰. *Meda Kshaya* causes *Tanutva* of *Udara*¹¹, *Asthi Kshaya* leads to *Kesha*, *Loma*, *Nakha*, *Smashru Patana*¹², and *Shukra Kshaya* results in *Pandutva*¹³.

TWACHA AND MALA

Sweda is the *Mala* of *Meda* whereas *Kesha* and *Loma* are the *Malas* of *Asthi*. Similarly, *Sneha* of *Twacha* is the *Mala* of *Majja*¹⁴.

SWEDA

Sweda, the *Mala* of *Meda*, is excreted through *Twacha*¹⁵ and maintains skin luster and moisture¹⁶. Its *Srotas*, *Svedavaha Srotas*, originate from *Lomakupa* of *Twacha*. Disturbances such as *Atisweda*, *Asweda*, and *Parushya* indicate *Dushta Lakshanas*¹⁷. Acharya *Chakrapani* emphasizes that suppression of *Sweda* is a key factor in the pathogenesis of skin disorders

TWAK VARNA

The *Prakrita Varnas* are *Krishna*, *Shyama*, *Shyamavadata*, and *Avadata*, while the *Vaikrita Varnas* include *Neela*, *Shyava*, *Tamra*, *Harita*, and *Shukla*¹⁸. The *Tejo Dhatus* governs the manifestation of all skin colors.

PANCHABHAUTIKATVA OF TWACHA

Twacha is dominated by *Prithvi Mahabhuta*, while *Nakha*, *Kesha*, *Smashru*, and *Loma* are predominant of *Parthiva Mahabhuta*. *Prabha* and *Varna* reflect *Tejo Mahabhuta*, whereas *Sparsha* and *Sparshana* are characteristics of *Vayu Mahabhuta*¹⁹.

LEPANA KARMA

The *Aragvadheeyam Adhyaya* detailed description of *Bahirparimarjana Dravyas* and *Lepana Karma*, with 32 types of *Lepas*. It highlights treatment of *Twak Dosha Samswedahara* and *Shareera Dourgandhyahara Pradeha* using drugs like *Sirisha*, *Lamajjaka*, *Patra*, *Lodhra*, and *Chandana*²⁰. *Bahirparimarjana Chikitsa*, included in *Trividha Oushadha*, encompasses *Abhyanga*, *Sweda*, *Pradeha*, *Parisheka*, and *Unmardana*, emphasizing external therapies²¹.

DAILY REGIMENT AND ASTHETICS

Dinacharya practices such as *Dhumapana*, *Nasya*, *Shiroabhyanga*, *Anjana*, *Dantadhavana*, *Asya Dharana*, *Abhyanga*, *Shareera Parimarjana*, *Nirmalambara Dharana*, *Kesha-Smashru-Nakha Shuchitwa*, *Gandha-Malya Nishevana*, *Ratna Abharana Dharana*, and *Chatra Dharana* promote *Varna Vriddhi*, *Mukha Prassannata*, *Twak Sukomalata*, *Jara Naasha*, *Samprasadana* and overall hygiene.

Specific benefits include *Dhuma* for paleness reduction²², *Nasya* for facial cheerfulness and plumpness (*mukham prasannopachitam*)²³, *Shiroabhyanga* for skin radiance (*sutwak bhavati cha ananam*)²⁴, and *Abhyanga* for skin smoothness²⁵.

FOOD AND STHETICS

In the *Matrashiteeyya Adhyaya*, the importance of food in maintaining beauty and complexion is emphasized, with *Matravat Bhojana* noted to enhance *Varna*, reflecting the classical view that beauty arises from a proper lifestyle rather than external means²⁶.

The *Deerghanjiviteeyya Adhyaya* describes *Sarpi*, *Taila*, *Vasa*, and *Majja* as *Varnya Dravyas*, where *Ghrita* is *Varna Prasadaka*, *Taila* is *Twachya*, and *Vasa* is *Roukshyahara*²⁷.

According to *Charaka's Agroushadhi Adhyaya*, *Khadira* is the best *Kushtahara*, *Amalaka* the best *Vayasthapaka*, *Ksheera* and *Ghrita* the best *Rasayanas*, *Chandana* the best *Shareera Dourgandhyahara*, while *Lamajjaka* and *Usheera* act as *Twakdosha* and *Svedahara Dravyas*. *Madhuka* is both *Keshya* and *Varnya*²⁸.

In the *Annapana Vidhi Adhyaya*, *Tila* is described as *Keshya* and *Twachya*²⁹; *Mayura* and *Hamsa Mamsa* as *Varnya*³⁰; *Kakamachi* as *Kushtahara*³¹; *Lashuna* as *Kushta* and *Kilasahara*³²; and *Sharkara*, *Pakvarasa*, *Sheetarasika Madhya* as *Varnya*³³, and *Mamsa Rasa* as *Varnya* and *Vayasthapaka*³⁴.

Snigdha Bhojana is further noted to enhance complexion and plumpness³⁵.

INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

In Ayurveda, beauty is not merely the result of external beautification but a reflection of internal balance and physiological harmony. The equilibrium of *Doshas* significantly influences *Varna* and *Prabha*.

According to *Acharya Chakrapani*, Aggravated *Vata Dosha* is said to impair complexion³⁶, while *Bhrajaka Pitta*, located in the *Twacha*, governs skin tone; its imbalance results in *Vaivarnya*³⁷.

Shuddha Rakta enhances *Varna*³⁸, whereas *Ojokshaya* diminishes it³⁹. Normal functioning of *Pitta* contributes to *Prabha*⁴⁰, while *Raktadushti* (vitiation of blood) leads to bad breath, *Vaivarnya*, *Atisweda* and *Shareera Dourgandhyha*⁴¹.

Prakriti also determines inherent skin characteristics which cannot be changed: *Shleshma Prakriti* individuals possess *Snigdhanga*, *Slakshnanga*, clarity of complexion, appearance and compact body; *Pitta Prakriti* individuals often exhibit *Ushnamukha*, *Vyanga*, *Tilapidaka* while *Vata Prakriti* is marked by *Rooksha*, *Apachita*, *Alpa Shareera* and *Parusha Kesha*, *Smashru*, *Loma*, *Vadana*⁴².

Rasayana therapy is described as enhancing *Varna*, *Prabha*, *Pranathi*, *Kanti* and *Vayastapana*⁴³. Additionally, balanced *Jatharagni* is essential for maintaining healthy *Varna*, *Upachaya* and *Prabha*.⁴⁴

OTHER COSMETIC REFERENCES

In *Tasyashitiya Adhyaya*, adherence to *Rtucharya* promotes *Varna* and overall vitality⁴⁵. The use of *Lepa* prepared from *Agaru*, *Chandana*, *Gandha*, *Mala*, and *Snanacurna* is described for their cosmetic and skin-enhancing properties⁴⁶. *Acharya Charaka* further emphasizes that suppression of natural urges such as *Chardi* and *Kshudha* leads to disorders like *Kuṣṭha*, *Visarpa*, *Kandu*, *Kotha*, and *Vaivarnya*⁴⁷.

Properly administered *samshodhana* enhance *Varna* and delay aging (*jara nasha*)⁴⁸

In *Varnasvara Indriya Adhyaya*, both *Prakrtika* and *Vaikrtika Varna* are detailed—*Krishna*, *Shyama*, *Shyamavadata*, and *Avadata* are *Prakrtika*, while *Neela*, *Shyava*, *Tamra*, *Harita*, and *Shukla* are *Vaikrtika Varna*⁴⁹. The sudden appearance of any unusual complexion is considered a prognostic indicator of impending death⁵⁰.

Shodhana Karma has a great effect on asthetics. *Niruha Basti* is described as *Vayastapana* and *Varṇakara* while *Anuvasana Basti* similarly promotes *Varna*⁵¹.

COSMETIC FORMULATIONS

Classical Ayurvedic texts provide detailed descriptions of cosmetic formulations aimed at maintaining and enhancing physical appearance.

In the *Dvivarṇiya Chikitsita Adhyaya*⁵² and *Trimarmiya Adhyaya*⁵³, various preparations for improving *Varna* and promoting aesthetic wellness are elaborated. In *Trimarmiya Adhyaya*, Acharya Charaka describes multiple *Anjana*, *Ascyotana Yogas*, *Bidalaka*, and *Varti* formulations beneficial for ocular health⁵⁴.

Additionally, formulations promoting hair growth and preventing premature greying are highlighted, along with treatments for conditions such as *Khalitya*, *Phalitya*, *Vali*, and *Hariloma* (fine hair). Therapeutic procedures such as *Shodhana*, *Nasya*, and *Pralepa* for *Kesha* and *Vadana* are prescribed as effective measures in these conditions⁵⁵.

CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic concept of *Soundarya* emphasizes that true beauty arises from inner health and balance rather than mere external adornment. The *Charaka Samhita* illustrates this holistic view through regimens that nurture both inner vitality and outer radiance, recognizing the psychosocial and physiological dimensions of beauty.

Ayurveda presents *Soundarya* as a reflection of harmony between body, mind, and spirit. Its approach integrates internal purification, balanced nutrition, and external care, offering a comprehensive framework where cosmetic practices serve as extensions of health, confidence, self-respect, and harmony with nature. Thus, Ayurvedic beauty is not superficial—it is the radiance of holistic wellness.

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