

ELEMENTAL THEORY OF AYURVEDA: PANCHAMAHABHUT

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Abstract:

As a whole human body is a part and parcel of this mother universe, whatever is available in this universe, are also present in the living being. Panchamahabhuta or basic elemental theory is the most ancient tool to analyze this Universe. Ayurveda has its own fundamental laws which certainly maintain the equilibrium between a life and nature. It has its own principles, among them Panchamahabhut principle is the basic elemental theory which covers this whole universe whether living or non living. The basic principles Panchamahabhuta is the first accepted principle to analyze this world. A comparison of the signs of Panchamahabhuta in this universe, as well as inside the Human body, is explained. For further validation, exploration and establishment of Ayurveda. We have to put forward our own theory which not only confirm but correlates Ayurveda's basic principles and philosophy to contemporary science. Till date so many studies have been done for elaboration of fundamental principles but Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta is a still gridlock for so many of us. In this perception, let's enlighten this basic concept and its importance in Ayurveda.

Key words: Panchamahabhut Ayurveda, contemporary science, fundamental principles.

Introduction:

Ayurveda the science of life is based on universal fundamental laws, which not only influence the conscious body, mind and soul through non-conscious various fundamental laws of nature. The duality of the nature surprises us with the similarity with life. The nature surrounding us, day, night, sun, moon, heat and coldness, disease, and health and of course death and life taught us to correlate the relation of this duality. Ancient Indian scientists were not able to measure the structure, properties and functions of their principles quantitatively but able to measure the qualitative values in the form of comparative qualities like panchamahabhuta, tridosha, gunas etc. With the advancement of technology and science, modern scientist can measure the same but laws of any science, i.e. Ayurveda is universal. On the basis of such analysis, Indian scientists have stated that, this Universe is made up of five causative factors. They are Akasha, Vayu, Agni, Jala and Prithvi, and termed as Panchamahabhuta [1]. Human body is one form of existence in this universe which contains earthly matter. Therefore, naturally all the elements present in earth are under the concept of this panchamahabhut. According to Charaka whatever is present in this universe is also present in the human body. On the basis of such analysis, Indian scientists analyse that this Universe is made up of five causative factors. They are Akasha, Vayu, Agni, Jala and Prithvi, and termed as Panchamahabhuta.

Elemental theory of Ayurveda:

Ayurveda believes that everything in this universe is made up of five basic elements. These five elements are earth (prithvi), water (jal), fire (Agni or tej), air (Vayu) and ether or space (akash) and collectively they are termed as Panchmahabhuta. These are the minutest elements, which constitute living and non-living matters. Every thing, including drugs, herbs and living beings are made of these basic elements. Every matter contains all of these five elements. Depending on the predominance of the content, the matter is classified as Parthiva, Apya, Taijasa, Vayaviya and Akashiya (With predominance of earth, water, fire, air and space respectively). The permutation and combination of these elements and its quantity in a given matter determines its properties. [2]

These mahabhutas are combined in an infinite variety of relative proportions such that each form of matter is unique. Each element has a variety of attributes, only some get apparent in a particular situations.

In the case of a complex, multi-cellular organism as a human being , spaces within the body (mouth, nostrils, abdomen etc.) denotes the ether or space element; the gases and the impulses or movements denote the air element; The functioning of enzymes (intelligence, digestive system, metabolism) denotes the fire element; All body fluids (as plasma, saliva, digestive juices) denotes the water element; Solid structure of the body (bones, teeth, flesh, hair etc.) denotes the earth element.

Evolution process of panchamahabhut or matter:

Mahabhuta is the smallest divisible part of any matter. Akash Mahabhuta is the space without which matter cannot exist. Its main sense attribute is Sound (Shabda) and Nonresistance (Apratighatatwa) is its main property.

Vayumahabhuta evolved from Akashamahabhuta. Touch (Sparsha)is its chief sense attribute and as it is evolved from Akasha it also inherits attribute of sound (Shabda). Chalatawa or movability is its chief property.

Agnimahabhoota evolves next from Vayumahabhoota. The main sense attribute of Agni is Vision (Roop) and the chief property is heat (Ushnatwa). It also inherits the sense attributes of sound(Shabda) and touch (Sparsha) from the Akash and Vayu Mahabhuta respectively.

The next Mahabhuta to evolve from Agnimahabhoota isAapamahabhuta (Jalmahabhuta). Taste (Rasa) is its main sense attribute and liquidity (Dravta) is the chief property, along with that inherited from earlier Mahabhuta.

The last to evolve is Prithwimahabhuta. Roughness (Kharatwa) is the chief property and Smell (Gandha) is the main sense of this Mahabhoota besides properties inherited from the earlier mahabhut.[3]

<u>Mahabhuta / Element</u>	<u>Chief sense attribute</u>	<u>Chief Property</u>
1.Space / Ether/ Akash	Shabda	Apratighatatwa
2.Air / Vayu	Shabda, Sparsha	Chalatawa / Mobility
3.Fire /Agni	Shabda, Sparsha, Roop	Ushnatwa/ Heat
4.water/Jal	Shabda, Sparsha, Roop, Rasa	Dravata/Liquidity.
5.Earth/ Prithvi	Shabda, Sparsha, Roop, Rasa, Gandha.	Kharta/dryness

Physiological aspects of elemental theory:

Ayurveda consider body, mind and spirit likewise. It divides the constitution of people into three categories—Vata (ether/air), Pitta (fire) and Kapha (water/earth). These are three basic energies or life forces that are the biological derivatives of the five elements and they govern all the function and structure of the body or its existence as a whole.Ayurveda depends on the concept of Panchamahabhutas i.e. Aakaash, Vayu, Agni, Prithvi, Jala.[1] T] According to Ayurveda this holistic approach comprises five elements of nature. The food, the planets and every living and non-living things are made up of these five elements. Tridoshas (Vata, Pita, Kapha) also comprises Panchmahabhuta.[4].On the basis of thorough knowledge and understanding of Panchmahabhuta Siddhanta one can take an account of the causative factor of imbalance of Doshas and thereby discover the solution for the treatment.Panchamahabhuta principle is the basic tool that is helpful in the analysis of other principles like Sapta dhatu

Concept (Seven tissue system), Tridosha theory(Vata, Pitta and Kapha), Mala concept and Triguna theory (mental triads)

Concept of Panchamahabhuta (Five elements) is the foundation of Ayurveda to understand its physiology (normal functioning), pathology (disease formation) & pharmacokinetics. The Panchmahabhut revolves around the normal functioning of the body (physiological), occurrence of disease (pathological) and action of drug in various part of the body (pharmacokinetics). Ether Akash is not synonymous with the sky. It can be something similar to Space. All the body channels, pores or empty spaces symbolizes Ether or space.

Air is the gaseous form of matter which is mobile and dynamic. Conceptually anything that moves or transported does so because of this Mahabhuta. In living beings this Mahabhuta is a major constituent of Vata dosha which is responsible for movements like that of motor or sensory nerve impulses, food through G.I.T, movements of the joints etc. Vayu or air follows Akash in the hierarchy of creation.

Fire possess power to transform the state of any substance. In living beings, Agni Mahabhoota is the major constituent of biological humor Pitta dosha. It is responsible for biotransformation. This Agni provides the energy required for all activities in our body. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but it can be converted from one form to another. We derive energy from the food we eat. Biological Agni transforms the energy in the food to the energy, which can be utilized by our cells. The vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, fats etc. we consume, are biotransformed by this Agni to the substances that can be utilized by our body. All the activities in body are performed smoothly as long as this Agni is in balance. Any disturbance in this Agni causes imbalance in the homeostasis and disturbs functioning. Ayurvedic therapeutics is entirely based on this concept of Agni. The branch of Ayurveda which deals in internal medicine and treatment is known as “Kaya chikitsa”, where Kaya means Agni and Chikitsa means treatment. Ayurvedic therapeutics focuses on rectification and maintenance of biological Agni.

Water symbolizes the liquid state. Our blood, lymph, and other fluids bringing energy, carrying away wastes, regulating temperature, bringing disease fighters, and carrying hormones from one area to another.

Evolution of Aapamahabhoota follows that of Agnimahabhuta. Sense of taste (Rasa) is its chief sense attribute and liquidity (DraVatawa) is the main property. Apa Mahabhuta is the main constituent of the biological humor Kapha dosha. This Mahabhuta brings and keeps things together. Conceptually all biological and chemical are feasible because of this Mahabhuta.

Earth represents the solid state of matter. It symbolizes stability, permanence and rigidity. In our body, the parts such as bones, teeth, cells and tissue indicate earth element. The last in the series to evolve is Prithvi Mahabhuta. Sense of smell (Gandha) is its main sense attribute and Roughness (Kharatwa) is its basic property.

A single living cell is a unique combination of these five elements- the earth element gives structure to the cell. The water element is present in the cytoplasm or the liquid within the cell membrane. The metabolic processes being carried out in the cell symbolize the fire element. The gaseous exchange taking place symbolizes the air element. The space occupied by the cell symbolizes the Space or ether element. The pores or channels through which nutrition reaches the cell and the waste metabolic products that are formed are excreted out denotes the space element.

The correspondence of the presence of Panchamahabhuta is as follows:

Space represents the voids within the body such as mouth, nostrils, abdomen Air denotes the movement of the muscular and nervous system Fire controls the functioning of enzymes and corresponds to intelligence, functioning of digestive system and metabolism Water is in all bodily fluids such as plasma, saliva, digestive juices Earth manifests itself in the solid structure of the body such as bones, teeth, flesh, and hair etc. The Panchamahabhuta therefore serve as the foundation of all diagnosis & treatment modalities in Ayurveda and has served as a most valuable theory for physicians to detect and treat illness of the body and mind successfully.

The Panchamahabhuta work together in different ways to create physical energies, termed as “dosha” in individuals. These three govern creation, maintenance and destruction of bodily tissues (“dhatus”) as well as the assimilation and elimination functions.[5]

1. Earth + Water → “Kapha” corresponding to structure and all of the oily factors of our body such as, fat tissue, lubricating fluids like synovial fluid in joints, the mucous secretions in the digestive system and respiratory system. Qualities – heaviness, slow movement, oiliness, liquidity, thickness and density.
2. Air + Fire → “Pitta” corresponding to digestion, bio transformation of the digested food, and the factors responsible for our metabolism. The seats of Pitta are in the digestive system, skin, eyes, brain, lymph, liver, spleen and blood. Presence of Pitta is evident through our body temperature. Qualities – hotness, sharpness, lightness, liquidity, sourness, oiliness and fast spreading nature.
3. Air+ Space → “Vata” corresponding to movements of our body and inside our body. These include movements of the muscles, movement of food through our digestive tract and movement of the blood through the blood vessels. Qualities – dryness, roughness, coldness, mobility, clarity and astringent taste.

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