



PANCHAMAHABHUTA SIDDHANTA AND CHIKITSA-A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Despite rich history and plentiful references in *Samhitas*, the concept of *Panchamahabhutas* is poorly understood, occasionally considered and rarely practiced. Ayurveda treatment principles are based on correcting the imbalances of *Panchamahabhutas* in the body. Thus it becomes very important for us to understand the concept of *Panchamahabhuta*, especially with an approach of treatment perspective. Since the human body and the nature are both created from the *Panchamahabhutas*, *Ayurveda* considers all substances found in the nature as medicine; provided that it is used for explicit indications and with suitable formulations. Therefore, it utilizes a wide range of materia medica mostly natural products viz. herbs, minerals, animal products and marine originates. They are used for indications in different conditions of health and disease. This review article intends to demonstrate how *Panchabhautika Chikitsa* is conceptualized and practiced in various disorders.

KEY WORDS: *Panchamahabhuta, Chikitsa, Ayurveda, Samhita.*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary era is phase of knowledge and inventions where humans are in race of conceiving new concepts, but the good old theories of evolution of all substances still remain uncontested. The concept of *Panchamahabhutas* (five primordial elements) is intensely and scientifically articulated in *Ayurveda* classics and accredited that human body is *Panchabhautika*. Not only human body but all matters in this universe are composed of *Panchamahabhuta*.^[1] The food we consume is also composed of *Panchamahabhutas* and it undergoes digestion with the help of *Jatharagni* (digestive fire) thereafter it nourishes the *Dhatus* (tissues) alike to its properties. This concept in *Ayurveda* is known as *Samanya vridhhi kaarnam*^[2] i.e. like increases like. e.g. *Parthiva* (Prithvi Dominant) properties of food will nourish the *Parthiva* component of the body.

The equilibrium of these five elements in the body symbolizes well being while their imbalance or disturbance represents disease. *Panchabhautika Chikitsa* is a branch of *Ayurveda* which analysis and treats based upon this principle. The word *Panchabhautika Chikitsa* covers an array of aspects regarding health, diet, exercise, occupation, surroundings, drugs, preparation of the medicines, diagnosis and treatment. The core idea involves analysis of the scientific facts and disease

management approach on the background of *Panchamahabhuta* theory. In this article we will try to comprehend the theoretical as well as practical characteristic of *Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta* and establish this principle as the foundation of all other fundamentals viz *Tridosha Siddhanta* (theory of humors), *Guna-Karma Vada* (theory of property & action of matter), *Garbhotpatti* (fetal development), *Deha Sanghatana* (body composition) etc.

Evolution of Panchamahabhuta

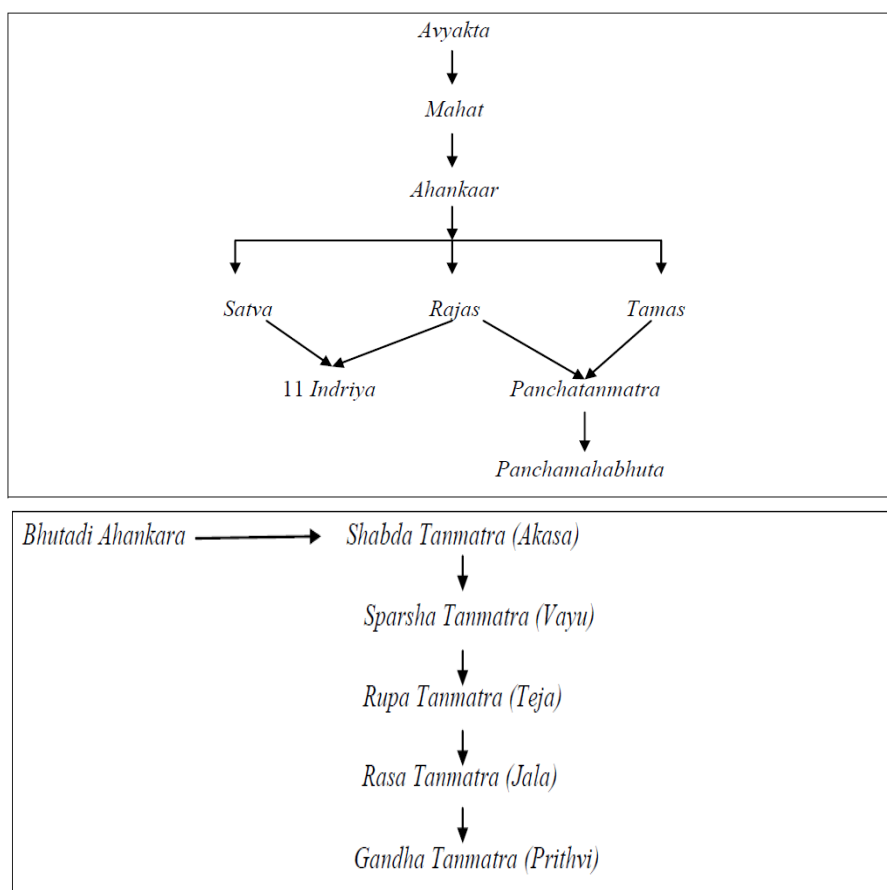
All the *Karya Dravyas* (perceivable matters) accessible in the world are *Panchabhautika*. Sushruta opines, *Panchamahabhutas* are capable of providing decisive explanation for the queries in the field of *Ayurveda*. In contemporary state of affairs each and every branch of science is busy in enunciating the basic opinion of existence which has lead to absolute anarchy in scientific fraternity. These limitations have fascinated them towards Indian philosophy. *Ayurveda* can satisfy them with a further fitting explanation on the basis of *Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta*. Evolution of *Panchamahabhuta* takes place in 3 levels

a) First level: Evolution of Panchatanmatra (Subtle elements)

b) Second level: Bhutantaranupravesha (Imitative pervasion)

c) Third level: Panchikarana (Reciprocal pervasion)

From Avyakta (indistinct), a short look up to evolution of *Mahabhutas*^[3] is as shown below in fig-



Clinical Application of *Panchamahabhuta*

1. *Dhatsamayta* (Equilibrium state of tissues)

This is achieved by the principle (*Siddhanta*) of *Samanya vridhhi kaarnam* which is the backbone of *Ayurvedic* treatment. To fulfill this purpose we must know the *Panchabhautika* composition of therapeutic substances (*Dravya*).

2. *Tridosha Prakopa* and *Prashamana* (Vitiation and alleviation of humors)

Ayurveda opines that *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are the main factors for maintaining health as well as causing diseases in the body.^[5] *Tridoshas* are also composed of *Panchamahabhutas*.^[6] So the knowledge of these *Doshas* in terms of *Panchamahabhutas* will help not

only in *Dosha Prakopa* but *Prashmana* as well. *Dravyas* composed of *Prithvi*, *Agni* and *Jala Mahabhuta* helps in alleviation of *Vata Dosha*^[7]; *Dravyas* having dominancy in *Prithvi*, *Jala* and *Vayu Mahabhuta* alleviates *Pitta Dosha*^[8] and *Dravyas* having predominance in *Akasha*, *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhutas* trim down *Kapha Dosha*.^[9] *Dravyas* which are rich in *Akasha* and *Vayu Mahabhuta* aggravate *Vata Dosha*, *Agni Mahabhuta* predominant *Dravyas* cause *Pitta Prakopa* (Increases *Pitta*) while *Prithvi* and *Jala Mahabhuta* predominant *Dravyas* aggravates *Kapha*. In this way all *Dravyas* having different composition of *Mahabhuta* possess varied functions. So by seeking accurate knowledge of properties of *Mahabhutas* one can apply them in treatment.

Dosha	Bhoota Composition	Characteristic
Vata	Vayu, Akasha	Prana
Pitta	Agni	Tejas
Kapha	Prithvi, Jala	Ojas

3. *Trigunas*: One of the modes of treatment in *Ayurveda* is *Satvajaya*^[10] i.e winning over the *Satva* (Mind) of the patient. But for this we should know which component of mind is altered. *Trigunas* include *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Rajas* and *Tamas* are responsible for diseases

whereas *Satva* state signifies health. By assessing the *Manobala* (strength of mind) the physician decides the mode and dose of treatment. *Trigunas* are also related to *Panchamahabhutas* as shown below

S. No.	Mahabhuta	MahaGuna
1	Akash	Satva
2	Vayu	Rajas
3	Tejas	Satva + Rajas
4	Jala	Satva + Tamas
5	Prithvi	Tamas

4. Chakras: *Panchamahabhutas* also influence our *Chakras* which are also one of the factors responsible for health and diseases.^[11]

S. No	Chakra	Bhoota	Characteristic
1	Muladhara Chakra	Prithvi	Stability, Support
2	Swadhishtan Chakra	Jala	Joy, Well-being
3	Manipura Chakra	Agni	Wisdom, Power
4	Anahata Chakra	Vayu	Compassion
5	Vishuddha Chakra	Akasha	Trust, Creativity
6	Ajna Chakra	Akasha	Knowledge, Intuition, Dignity
7	Sahasrara Chakra	Akasha	Oneness

5. Hastamudra: Different *mudras* are known to cure several diseases as described in *Samhita*^[12] which are also related to *Panchamahabhutas*.

S. No	Finger Name	Bhoota
1	Kanishthika, Little Finger	Jala
2	Anamika, Ring Finger	Prithvi
3	Madhyama, Middle Finger	Akasha
4	Tarjani, Index Finger	Vayu
5	Angustha, Thumb	Agni

6. Rasa: The food we consume is *Panchabhautika* as discussed above and the taste we get from different kind of foods is associated with *Panchamahabhuta*. All six rasa mentioned in *Ayurveda* have association with *Panchamahabhuta*^[13] as shown below

S. No.	Rasa	Mahabhuta
1	Madhura	Prithvi + Jala
2	Amla	Prithvi + Teja
3	Lavana	Jala + Teja
4	Katu	Vayu + Akasha
5	Tikta	Vayu + Teja
6	Kashaya	Vayu + Prithvi

7. Diagnostic methods^[14]

S. No.	Mahabhuta	Diagnostic Method
1	Prithvi	Mala, Mutra, Sweda, Kapha by <i>gandha tanmatra</i> (specific smell) which is characteristic feature of <i>Prithvi Mahabhuta</i> .
2	Jala	Rasa Sarata examination, CSF, Sputum and Ascitic fluid.
3	Teja	Color of eyes, skin, urine, stool. Digestion, Temperature of body.
4	Vayu	Respiration, Cardiac sounds, peristaltic sounds, nerve conduction, movement of limbs etc.
5	Akasha	Regarding examination of hollow structures ear, nose, throat and intestine, Extracellular spaces.

Application of *Panchamahabhuta* principle in *Vyadhi*

• *Jwara*(Fever)

Jwara is minor manifestation of *Teja Mahabhuta*. Increased *Teja Mahabhuta* does not produce fever every time. For that to happen the impairment/ diminishing of *Agni* in *Aamashya* is essential and *Ama* is produced.^[15] That *Sama Dosha* pervades to *Rasa Dhatu* and displays the symptoms of fever. Unilateral increase in *Teja Mahabhuta* leads to *Bhasmaka*. In initial stages of fever

fasting/ meager diet (*langhana*) is advised followed by *Swedana*.^[16] from the perspective of *Panchamahabhutas* the fever is the result of excessive *Prithvi* and *Jala Mahabhuta*. They pervade in each and every part of body thus reducing the space and movement of *Vayu*. In that case the first treatment principle is to create space for movement of *Vayu* and activation of *Teja Mahabhuta* which is achieved by *Langhana*. The period of *Langhana* depends upon the strength of patient and *Dosha*.

S. No.	Drugs	Latin Name	Mahabhuta predominance
1	Mustaka	Cyprus rotundus	Teja+Vayu+Akasha
2	Parpata	Fumaria indica	Akasha + Vayu
3	Ushira	Vetiveria zizanioides	Akasha + Vayu
4	Chandan	Santalum album	Akasha + Vayu
5	Udichi	Pavonia odorata	Akasha + Vayu
6	Naagar	Zingiber officinale	Agni + Vayu

In fever, digestion of *Ama* is the mainstay of treatment. All these drugs prove effective when used as infusion. All the ingredients are pungent, bitter, astringent and are opposite to the properties of *Prithvi* and *Jala* thus providing relief.

• **Atisaara(Diarrhoea):** *Atisaara* (Diarrhoea), *Sangrahani* (Sprue) and *Arsha* (Piles) are all interlinked with each other. The pathogenesis of *Atisaara* starts from *Aamashaya*. As it is the seat of *Kapha Dosha*, the properties of *Jala* and *Prithvi Mahabhuta* are present in abundance. In *Atisaara*, the *Drava* (liquid) *Guna* of *Jala Mahabhuta* is increased. Due to specific etiology, there is abnormal increase in *Jala Mahabhuta* in *Aamashaya*,

disturbing the equilibrium of *Dosha*. Also liquidity of *Kapha Dosha* increases excessively thus affecting *Jatharagni* (digestive fire).

So the line of treatment should be reducing *Jala Mahabhuta* and increasing *Teja Mahabhuta*. In initial stages of *Atisaara* one should get rid of the accumulated abnormal *Dosha* by giving mild purgation.^[17] Thereafter to increase the *Teja Mahabhuta* there should be stimulation of *Jatharagni* by the drugs predominant in *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhuta*. Increased *Teja Mahabhuta* counters the increased *Jala Mahabhuta* by drying it up by *Soshana Karma*.

S. No.	Drugs	Latin Name	Mahabhuta predominance
1	Mustaka	Cyprus rotundus	Teja+Vayu+Akasha
2	Bilva	Aegle marmelos	Teja+Vayu
3	Ativisha	Aconitum heterophyllum	Teja+Vayu+Akasha
4	Kutaja	Holarrhena antidysentrica	Teja+Vayu+Prithvi
5	Sunthi	Zingiber officinale	Teja + Vayu

• **Arsha(Piles):** *Arsha* is a diseases caused by the vitiation of *Apana Vayu* in rectum. Here *Ruksha* (Dry) *Guna* of *Vata* is increased because of various *Hetus* (causative factors) cited in texts. Dry piles are associated with *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* whereas in bleeding piles there is predominance of *Pitta* and *Rakta* (Blood).

Treatment varies according to the condition; one where the patient has normal defecation and other when patient

complains of constipation. In second case, the *Ruksha Guna* of *Vayu* is to be countered with *Anulomana taila/ Snigdha Guna*. One should consume *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*) fried in *Ghee* (purified butter) mixed with jaggery and *Pippali* (*Piper longum*)/ *Nisoth* (*Operculina turpethum*). Both drugs are predominant in *Teja Mahabhuta*. By this *anulomna* there will be proper movement of *Vayu*, in turn stimulating *Jatharagni*.

S. No.	Drugs	Latin Name	Mahabhuta predominance
1	Triphala	Triphala	Vayu+Akasha
2	Vidang	Embila ribes	Vayu+Akasha
3	Devdaru	Cedrus deodara	Jala+Vayu+Akasha
4	Sunthi	Zingiber officinale	Teja + Vayu

• **Prameha:** All the predisposing factors described by *Ayurveda* increase the properties of *Kapha Dosha* in primary stage; but till the time body continues to fight against it, the symptoms won't appear. As soon as it crosses threshold and diet has more of *Kapha* increasing components, *Kapha Dosha Prakopa* (accumulation

beyond normal limits) occurs. *Kapha Dosha* is similar to *Jala Mahabhuta* thus *Drava Guna* of *Kapha* increases which is cardinal symptom of *Prameha*.^[18] Treatment includes the drugs which can absorb (*Soshana*) excess *Drava Guna* of *Kapha*.

S.No.	Drugs	Latin Name	Mahabhuta predominance
1	Triphala	Triphala	Vayu+Akasha
2	Pippali	Piper longum	Agni + Vayu
3	Sunthi	Zingiber officinale	Agni + Vayu
4	Kampillaka	Mallotus philippensis	Vayu + Akasha

• **Raktapitta (Haemorrhage):** This disorder should be treated with utmost care and without wasting any time as described by Charaka.^[19] Consumption of excess Pitta vitiating food is one of the major causative factors for Raktapitta. It is of two types

- Urdva Raktapitta
- Adhoga Raktapitta

The treatment principle is very unique to this disease which is known as *Pratimargam cha harnam* i.e Urdva Raktapitta should be treated with Dravyas having predominance of Prithvi and Jala Mahabhuta whereas Adhoga Raktapitta should be pacified by Dravyas which have principal Vayu and Akasa Mahabhutas.^[20]

S.No.	Drugs	Latin Name	Mahabhuta predominance
1	Madanphala	Randia dumetorum	Vayu
2	Haritaki	Terminalia chebula	Vayu
3	Nagarmotha	Zingiber officinale	Agni + Vayu
4	Amaltas	Cassia fistula	Prithvi + Jala
5	Shatavari	Asparagus racemosus	Prithvi + Jala
6	Vasa	Adhatoda vasica	Prithvi + Jala

DISCUSSION

Panchabhautika Chikitsa is a fundamental treatment which uproots the diseases from its base. The concept of *Panchamahabhuta* (five elements) is the base of *Ayurveda* to understand its physiology (normal functioning), pathology (disease formation) & pharmacokinetics (movement of drug within the body). Everything, including drugs, herbs and living beings are made of these indispensable elements. Every substance contains all of these five elements. Depending on the predominance of the content, the substance is classified as *Parthiva*, *Aapya*, *Tajasa*, *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. *Ayurveda* understands 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. Since these are present in all matter they are used in *Chikitsa* also. *Chikitsa* depends upon using *Gunas* opposite the qualities of causative factors. These *Gunas* are present in *Panchamahabhutas*, therefore judicious use of drugs on the basis of *Panchamahabhuta* can provide apt treatment. The concept of *Panchamahabhuta* principle is peculiarity of *Ayurveda*. Though, *Ayurveda* is having similar views with *Darshana shastras* like *Vaisheshika*, *Sankhya* etc. in many aspects, but the concept of *Panchamahabhuta* in *Ayurveda* is molded in such a way that, it becomes helpful in *Nidana* and *Chikitsa*, thereby fulfilling its aim of *Dhatusamya*. *Mahabhuta* dominance of a *Panchabhautika* *Dravya* can be perceived by its *karma* (action in body), but it is not possible to recognize or forecast the arrangement of *Mahabhutas*, shapes and size of *Mahabhuta* molecules due to limitations of human senses and intelligence. So in this regards the present review article also opens a new research window in the field of *Ayurvedic* fundamental research on this *Siddhanta*.

CONCLUSION

The fruitful conclusions, which have automatically emerged through the discussion of the conceptual review study, are being presented here. All the available *Dravyas* can be used as *Aushada* (medicine), but it requires proper logic and *Yukti* (planning). Also this is possible only after deep understanding of *Panchamahabhutas* as it forms the foundation base of all other *Siddhantas* (principles). This concept involves interpretation of scientific knowledge, and disease management approach on the background of *Panchamahabhuta* theory. While treating patients, *Ayurveda* does not emphasize on labeling diseases but gives due importance to *Hetu* (causative factors), *Samprapti* etc and analysis on the basis of different *Siddhanta*. This helps to treat many complicated medical conditions which have no cure in contemporary medical science. *Panchabhautika Chikitsa Siddhanta* is one of the imperative *Siddhanta* of *Ayurveda* which facilitates every *Ayurveda* practitioner to accept diagnostic and therapeutic challenges.

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