

## Understanding Basic Principles of Ayurveda

Dr. Reshma Shivanagutti<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mahantesh R Sajjanashetty<sup>2</sup>, Dr. G N Kannolli<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PG Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Professor & HOD, <sup>3</sup>Associate Professor,

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Department of PG Studies in Ayurveda Samhita & Siddhanta,

Svm Ayurvedic Medical College, PG & Research Centre, Ilkal, Bagalakote, Karnataka, India

### ABSTRACT

*Ayurveda* is one of the oldest traditional systems of medicine that has survived and flourished from ages till date. *Ayurveda* is knowledge system dealing with what is required to maintain health and to cure diseases. The basic theories of *Ayurveda* are the *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, *Saptadhatu*, *Trimalas* etc. Understanding and practices of *Ayurveda* are based on these theories. In an age where validity of concepts is judged by their scientific relevance, establishing the scientific validity of basic concepts is utmost important. It requires translating concepts and their practical application. There are many approaches still to be explored by the Researchers, practitioners, experts in the field of *Ayurveda* to keep the traditional system alive and contributing to its growth in the future. However, due to many barriers such as lack of literature sources in different languages and insufficiency of awareness about the basic principles, there is a lacuna of exchange of information from the system around the globe. In this work we have made an attempt to put forth the basic principles of doctrines of *Ayurveda* to contribute to the society.

**KEYWORDS:** *Ayurvedic principles, Panchamahabhuta, Tridosas, Trimalas, Saptadhatu*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda* is one of the branches of Vedas. It is regarded as upaveda of Atharva veda. Its the Holistic system of medicine which is evolved from *Brahma* sages of ancient India, some 3000-5000 years ago. The principles & philosophy of *Ayurveda* view man as a whole, with a deep understanding of the unseen intelligence of the universe. *Ayurveda* defines life "Ayuh" As the intelligent co-ordination of our four parts, the soul, the mind, the senses, and the body, with the totality of nature and cosmos. Health is not just a state of body. We interact with seasons, planetary changes of earth, and moons well as orbiting relationship within our lives, our loved ones and friends etc. We affect and are affected by every other animate and inanimate thing in existence. Bringing all of this into Balance is the key to living healthy. *Caraka* explains "Siddhanta" or theory as a conclusion arrived at using logical reasoning and based upon experiments conducted in a systemic manner. So according to *Ayurveda*, is the conclusion arrived at by the experience gained from various practical experiments supported by logical reasoning.

*Ayurveda* is conceived as a practical science and the word "Sastra" used to characterize *Ayurveda*, indicates a practical knowledge system. 'Sastra' merely give examples so that the intelligent may suitably get appraised and act in a manner most suited to a person's given circumstances. Every view & each division in *Ayurveda* is a logical and correct from its stand point, Hence understanding of basic principles of *Ayurveda* is very important to understand the concepts explained by our *Acharyas* and for the practical application to maintain the health and cure the diseases of the human being.

### Aims & Objectives

Understanding basic principles of *Ayurveda* for beginners.

### Materials & Methods

**Materials:** *Ayurvedic* classical texts, journals, internet

**Methods:** Literary review

1. Panchamahabhuta
2. Trigunas

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3. Tridosas
4. Saptadhatus
5. Trimalas
6. Trayodashagni

### History of Ayurveda

*Ayurveda* has an age-old history since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. *Ayurveda* has its foundations laid by the ancient schools of Hindu Philosophical teachings named Vaisheshika and the school of logic named as Nyaya. It is also related to the manifestation framework, well known as Samkya, and it was established in the same period when schools of Nyaya and Vaisheshika flourished.

The Vaisheshika school preached about inferences and perceptions that should be obtained about a patient's pathological condition for treatment. Whereas Nyaya school propagated its teachings on the basis that one should have an extensive knowledge of the patient's condition, and the disease condition before proceeding for treatment. The school of Vaisheshika, classifies the attributes of any object into six types: substance, particularity, activity, generality, inherence, and quality called as *Dravya*, *Vishesha*, *Karma*, *Samanya*, *Samavaya*, *Guna* respectively, in Sanskrit language. Even before these school were established and also today, the origin of *Ayurveda* is considered to be devine, from the Hindu God, *Brahma* who is called as the creator of the universe<sup>1</sup>. It is believed that the creator of the universe passed on this holistic knowledge of healing onto the sages for the well being of mankind. From the sages the knowledge of traditional medicines was passed on to the disciples and then to the common man by various writings and oral narrations. The information about the healing properties of the herbs was composed in the form of poems, called "*Shlokas*". These were used by sages to describe the use of medicinal plants. The Hindu system of Healing is believed to be based on four eminent compilations of knowledge (*Vedas*). The practice of *Ayurveda* is based upon the knowledge gained from these *Vedas*. The writings in Rig Veda and Atharva Veda are attributed to "*Atreya*" who believed to have been conferred with this Knowledge from Lord Indra, who initially receives it from Lord *Brahma*. *Agnivesha* compiled the knowledge from the *Vedas*, and it was edited by *charaka* and some other scholars and is presently called as "*Charaka samhita*". *Charaka samhita* describes all aspects of *Ayurvedic* medicine and *Sushruta samhita* describes the Science of Surgery. Both these legendary compilations are still used by practitioners of traditional medicine. These ancient texts are available in various translations and languages. There are several other allied minor

compilations like *Nighantu Granthas*, *Madhava Nidana* and *Bhava prakash* from the contributions of various scholars; however, *Charaka samhita* is the most respected of all the records.

### Definition of Ayurveda

*Ayuramin*

*vidyate*.....[S. S. 1/15]<sup>2</sup>

*Ayurveda* is that which deals with *Ayuh* (life) or promotes life span.

*Ayurveda* is that which deals with good, bad, happy, unhappy life, its promoters, and non promoters, span and nature.

*Sarirendriyasatvatmasamyogo*

*dhari*

*jivitam*.....[C. S. 1/42]<sup>3</sup>

### Definition of Ayuh (life)

*Satvatmatma sariram ca trayamaitattridandavat*  
..... [C. S. 1/46]<sup>4</sup>

Mind, self, and body – these three make a tripod on which the living world stands. That (living body) is *purusha* (person), sentient and its location is *Ayurveda*.

### Definition of sarira (Body)

The Science of *Ayurveda* has simplified the organisation of human body into three basic components, *Dosha* (Body Humours), *Dhatu* (Tissues), and *Malas* (Impurities).

*Doshadhatumalamulam hi sariram*.....[S. S.15/3]<sup>5</sup>

Body is originally composed of *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*.

*Panchamahabhootasaririsamavayah*.....[S.S. 1/22]<sup>6</sup>

*Purusha* is defined as combination of the five great elements and consciousness

### Definition of Health

*Samdoshah*

*samagnischa*

*samadhatumalakriyah*.....[S. S. 15/41]<sup>7</sup>

One whose *Doshas*, *Agni*, and function of *Dhatu* and *malas* are in the state of equilibrium and who has cheerful mind, intellect and sense organs is termed as "*swastha*" (Healthy).

*Samayoga* refers to a combination of healthy habits, lifestyle, and a healthy environment, a balanced state of *doshas*, *dhatu*, and *malas*. The external factors affect the body because everything is panchabhautika in this universe. All biological functions can be broadly divided into three kinds – constructive, destructive, and regulative. The body constituents are simultaneously undergoing construction and destruction. Growth is maintaining the correct balance of these activities. The word *Sarira* literally

translates as something that is being destroyed. *Deha* means that which is being constructed. *Kaya* denotes metabolism, which is a combination of assimilation and elimination. All these functions have to be regulated to maintain equilibrium. It can be inferred from the root meaning of the words that *kapha*, constructs, *Pitta* consumes and *vata* regulates. All three in equilibrium maintain health. The term *Dosha* means that which vitiates *dhatu*s, and *malas* that are called *dushyas*, meaning liable to be vitiated by the doshas. In *Ayurveda*, it is held that names are given to a disease only for the sake of convenience and understanding, but treatment always has to strictly on the basis of the circumstances and conditions of the body and has to vary from person to person. The *doshas* are also *panchabhautika dravyas* with predominance of one or more *bhutas*. There is another kind of reflection of doshas called *prakruti*. It is an inherited constitutional condition. It is resulted from the nature of the *sukra* (sperm) and *artava* (ovum) which join to form the embryo<sup>8</sup>.

### Aim of Ayurveda

*Prayojanam casya swasthasya swasthyarakshanamaturasya vikaraprasamanam ca*..... [C. S. 30/26]<sup>9</sup>

The aim and objective of *Ayurveda* is to protect health of the body and to alleviate disorders in the diseased.

*Dharmarthakamamokshanamarogyam*..... [C. S. 1/16]<sup>10</sup>

Disease – free condition is the best source of virtue, wealth, gratification and emancipation while the disease is destroyer of this source, welfare and life itself.

### Subject matter of Ayurveda

*Hetulingaousadhgyanam svasthataturaparanam*.....[C. S. 1/24]<sup>11</sup>

*Ayurveda* provides knowledge of aetiology, symptomatology, therapeutics, best way for both the healthy and the sick, triphormismic, continuing since time immemorial and virtuous which was first known to *Brahma* the creator.

*Hitahitam sukham dukhamayustasya hitahitam*..... [C. S. 1/41]<sup>12</sup>

‘*Ayuh*’ means the conjunction of body, sense organs, mind and self and is known by the synonyms *dhari*, *jivita*, *nityaga* and *anubhanda*.

### Astanga Ayurveda

*Ayurveda* has eight divisions such as –  
*Tasyayurvedasyaanyastauh*.....[C.S. 30/28]<sup>13</sup>

### Viz.

1. *Kayachikitsa* (Medicine)
2. *Shalakya* (Ent. & Optha.)
3. *Shalya* (Surgery)
4. *Visa vigyan* (Toxicology)
5. *Bhuta vidya* (Psychiatry Medicie)
6. *Kaumarabhrtya* (Pediatrics)
7. *Rasayana* (Rejuvenates)
8. *Vajikarana* (Aphrodisiac)

These can be classified as follows:

### Promoting health

*Rasyana & Vajikarana kaumarabhritya*

### Curatives / Treatment of diseases

*Kayachikitsa, shalya, shalakya, Agada tantra, Bhutavidya*

### Basic Principles of Ayurveda

#### 1. The Trigunas-

Three Fundamental universal energies: Viz – *Satva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*.

#### 2. The Panchamahabhutas-

Five basic elements viz – *Akasha* (Space), *Vayu* (Air), *Teja* or *Agni* (Fire), *Jala* (Water), and *Prithvi* (Earth)

#### 3. The Tridosha -

Three body Humours viz – *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*

#### 4. The Saptadhatus -

Seven types of body tissues: viz – *Rasa* (Fluid), *Rakta* (Blood), *Mamsa* (Muscles), *Medha* (Fat), *Asthi* (Bones), *Majja* (Bone marrow), *Shukra* (Semen).

#### 5. The Trayodashagni –

Thirteen types of digestive fires: Viz – *Jatharagni* (gastric fire), *Saptadhatwagni* and *Panchabhutagni*.

#### 6. The Trimalas –

Three types of Body wastes: Viz – *Pureesha* (feaces), *Mutra* (Urine), *Sweda* (Sweat).

### The Panchamahabhutas

“*Mahabhutani kham vayuragnirapah kshitistatha | Sabdah sparshasca rupam ca raso gandhasa tadgunah*” || [C. SA. 1/27]<sup>14</sup>

*Ayurveda* believes that entire universe is composed of five elements: *Akash*, *Vayu*, *Agni*, *Aap* or *Jala*, and *Prithvi*, Viz- Sound, Touch, Vision, Taste, and Smell are their properties respectively. Omnipresent, they are mixed in an infinite variety of relative proportions such that each form of matter is distinctly unique. Although each element has a range of attributes, only some get evident in particular situations. Constantly changing and interacting with each other, they create a situation of dynamic flux that keeps the world going.

In a simple, single living cell for example the earth elements predominate by giving structure to the cell. The water element is present in the cytoplasm or the liquid within the cell membrane. The fire element regulates the metabolic processes regulating the cell. While the air element predominates the gases therein. The space occupied by the cell denoting *Akash*.

The *panchamahabhutas* 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 relationship of *panchamahabhutas* with sense organs, its properties and actions are as follows:

<i>Panchamahabhutas</i>	Sense organs	Sensory faculty	Properties	Actions
<i>Akash</i> (space)	Ears	Sound	Creates natural void in the body, no distinct state	Produces softness, lightness and porosity
<i>Vayu</i> (Air)	Skin	Touch	Light, clear and dry, governs inhalation, opening and closing of eyelids, extension and contraction of joints, locomotion and other motor functions. Slightly bitter taste	Creates lightness, dryness and emaciation.
<i>Teja</i> (Fire)	Eyes	Visual (sight)	Rough & bright, controls temperature and luster of body colour. Pungent taste	Helps in digestion, maturation, improves eye sight.
<i>Jala</i> (water)	Tongue	Taste	Cold, heavy fluid, slimy, fat and sweat by nature, sweet and astringent, sour, and saline taste	Imparts glossiness. Enhances fluid content and purgative. Acts as nutrient, emollient and purgative
<i>Prithvi</i> (Earth)	Nose	Smell	Heavy, immobile, compact, and rough. Controls organs as teeth, nails, flesh, skin, tendons & muscles. Sweet taste	Increases firmness & strength of the body nutrient, emollient and purgative

### Trigunas

The three *gunas* *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* – are the three essential components or energies of mind. *Ayurveda* provides a distinct description of people on the basis of their *Manas* (psychological) *Prakriti* (Constitution). Genetically determined, these psychological characteristics are dependent on the relative dominance of the three *gunas*.

*Trividham khalu satvam, rajasam, tamasamiti..... [C. SA. 4/36]<sup>15</sup>*

The psyche is of three types – *Satva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamasa*

While all individuals have mixed amounts of the three, the predominant *guna* determines an individual's *manas prakriti*. In equilibrium, the three *gunas* preserve the mind (and indirectly the body), maintaining it in a healthy state. Any disturbance in this equilibrium results in various types of mental disorders.

*Satvika* individuals are usually noble and spiritual in character, their nature determined as much by body type as their star constellation, having an element of *kapha* in their constitution.

*Rajasika* are vulnerable to temptations, are very human in their character and approach to life.

*Tamasika* are *vata* predominant individuals, and are most down to earth, concerned about fundamental questions of practical existence, especially when confronted by more spiritual and less physical issues.

### The Tridoshas

*“Vayuh pittam kaphasceti trayo dosah samasatah||” [A. S. 1/11]<sup>16</sup>*

*Vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* are three names of *tridoshas* – *Vata*(air), *Pitta*(bile), and *Kapha*(phlegm) means more than literal. *Doshas* are basically three different forms of energy. The *Tridoshas* are the primary and essential factors of the human body that govern our entire physical structure and function. Derived from the *panchamahabhutas*, each *dosha*, like elements cannot be detected with our senses but their qualities can be

combination of any two of the five *bhutas* with the predominance of one. These three factors are responsible for all the physiological and psychological processes within the body and mind – dynamic forces that determine growth and decay. Every physical characteristic, mental capacity and the emotional tendency of a human being can therefore be explained in terms of the *tridoshas*.

**The relation between *Tridosas* and *panchamahabhutas* with respect to their *Guna* and *Karma* (properties and Functions) as follows:**

<i>Vata (vayu and Akash)</i>	<i>Pitta (Agni and Jala)</i>	<i>Kapha (Jala and Prithvi)</i>
Light	Light	Heavy
Cold	Hot	Cold
Dry	Oily	Slow
Rough	Sharp	Slimy
Subtle	Liquid	Dense
Mobile	Sour	Soft
Clear	Pungent	Oily
Dispersing	-	-
Erratic	-	-
Astringent	-	-

**The Saptadhatus**

*Rasa asrk mamsa medah asthi majja shukrani dhatavah..... [AH.S. 1/13]<sup>17</sup>*

Nourishment of these seven body tissues takes place in sequential manner with original material provided by digested food material. The (seven) *Dhatus* (tissues) elements form the pillars of the body that form the means of nourishment and growth while providing support to the body as well as the mind.

<i>Dhatus</i>	Functions
<i>Rasa</i> (plasma)	Derived from the digested food, it contains nutrients & minerals which nourishes & replenishes all the tissues and organs
<i>Rakta</i> (Blood)	Regarded as basis of life, which transports oxygen to all tissues and vital organs and maintains life. It not only nourishes the body tissues, but provides physical strength and colour to the body.
<i>Mamsa</i> (Muscles)	The Muscle tissue, its main function is to provide physical strength and support for the <i>medha dhatu</i> .
<i>Meda</i> (Adipose tissue)	Consists of adipose tissue providing support to <i>asthi dhatu</i> . It maintains the lubrication and oiliness of all the tissues.
<i>Asthi</i> (Bones & cartilage)	Its main function is to give nourishment to the <i>majja dhatu</i> and provide support to the <i>mamsa dhatu</i> & body structures.
<i>Majja</i> (Bone marrow)	Fills up the bony spaces
<i>Shukra</i> (Semen)	The main aim of this reproductive tissue is to help reproduction and strengthen the body.

Any disease where *vata-pitta-kapha* are involved, the vitiated *doshas* directly affect the *dhatus*. With insight into governing *dosha*, the cause of a diseased *dhatu* is accurately determined. The disturbed *dosha* (*vata, pitta, kapha*) and improper *dhatus* are always directly involved in the disease process. Once the root cause of the illness is known, the corresponding therapies are used to balance the system through reducing the excess element and increasing the deficient one. Balance of the *dhatus* can be maintained by taking steps to keep the *Tridoshas* in balance through a proper diet, exercise and recovery program.

**The Trimalas**

*Mala mutra sakrtsvedadayo api ca..... [A. S. 1/20]<sup>18</sup>*

*Malas* are the various waste products of food and the *dhatus* produced during the normal digestive and metabolic process. The three primary *malas* being *Purisha* (faeces), *Mutra* (Urine), and *Sveda*(sweat). *Ayurveda* clearly states that only a balanced condition of *dosas, dhatus, and malas* is *arogya* (good health or diseased free condition) and their imbalance is the cause of ill health or disease.

*Purisha* is the waste left back after nutrients of digested food have been absorbed in the small intestine. The *Tridoshas* must be in balance to ensure normal evacuation. *Pitta* and *Kapha* help in digestion and *Vata* govern the mobility throughout the process. Any imbalance between these can lead to various symptoms of abdominal heaviness or pain, flatulence,

constipation or diarrhea. It may also give rise to diseases as rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, low back pain, asthma, bronchitis as well as stomach ulcers and irritable bowels.

*Mutra* is derived during the course of biological processes within the human body. Any imbalance of increased or decreased urine, may result in disorders such as kidney stones, urinary infections, cystitis, abdominal pain and bladder disorders.

*Sveda* is the third primary mala, and it occurs as a waste product during the synthesis of *medha dhatu* (fatty tissue). Eliminated through skin pores, it controls body temperature and helps to regulate the electrolyte imbalance. It is essential that the normal formation and flow of sweat must takes place, otherwise it may lead to skin infections, itching/burning sensation over the body, loss of fluid balance and reduced body temperature.

### The Trayodashagni

As per the principles of *Ayurveda* the biological Fire of the body for all the metabolic function is called as “*Agni*”. There are Thirteen types of *Agni* in a human body and most the most important is the one responsible for digestive fire, called as *Jatharagni*. This biological fire governs metabolism, *Agni* encompasses all the changes in the body and mind from the dense to the more subtle. Such changes include the digestion and absorption of food, cellular transformations, assimilation of sensory perceptions and mental and emotional experiences. *Agni* therefore covers whole sequences of chemical interactions and changes in the body and mind. Digestive abilities being related to the strength of *agni*.

*Agni* and *Pitta* are closely connected. While both are hot and light, *Agni* is subtle and dry. The heat energy to help digestion by *pitta* is *Agni*. *Pitta* therefore the container and *Agni* is the content. *Agni* is acidic in nature and stimulates digestion. It is also related to the movement of *vata*. In every tissue and cell *Agni* is present and is necessary for maintaining the nutrition and auto immune mechanism. By destroying micro-organisms, foreign bacteria and toxins in the stomach and the intestines.

A balanced *Agni* therefore is vital for health. The strength of the body to resist disease and also its physical strength are directly related to its heat energy determining the metabolic processes of the body. Disturbances of *Agni* are usually the chief causes of disease. If digestive *Agni* is low and the capacity is impaired, one may experience pain, discomfort, feeling of heaviness or gases gurgling, constipation or loose stools.

Other *Agnis* are:

*Saptadhatvagni* and *Panchabhutagni*

### Discussion

- *Ayurveda* represents a holistic and simple form of healing approach. It aims to know oneself and to reveal deeper causes of one’s health conditions. It strives to gain insight into the very core of a problem and discover the primary cause of the ailment, whether it originates in improper diet, lifestyle, hereditary taint etc.
- *Ayurveda* believes that the entire universe is made of *Pancha mahabhutas* which in turns gives rise to *Tridosas*. Every human being is born with a unique proportion of biologic principles (*Doshas*) – *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha* representing the individual genetic code which takes part in the forming our mental and physical health condition. Psychic consciousness, thoughts, emotions, relationships, diet, life style, season etc influence the balance of the *Doshas*.
- *Saptadhatu*s (tissues), these seven tissues work in coordination with each other for proper physiological functioning of the human body. Apart from these, other important factors are *Trimalas* and *Trayodashagni*.
- *Trimalas* (three types of waste products) formed in the body due to metabolic and digestive functions of the body.
- *Ayurveda* explains that if the balance between *Tridoshas* is not maintained the waste products of the body are not effectively eliminated and these lead to further complications.
- *Jataragni* is important in controlling the normal micro flora, proper digestive functions and provision of energy to the entire body. Any disturbances in its balance, creates discomfort to the gastro – intestinal tract and result in pathological complications.
- Considering the bodily constitution, pathological history, the *Dosha* characteristics, life style and environmental conditions in an individual’s routine life style, *Ayurveda* has many treatment strategies for promoting well – being to individuals.
- So, understanding of basic principles of *Ayurveda* is very important in promoting the health and prolonging the life span by establishing homeostasis between *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*. It helps to keep diseases free life.

### Conclusion

- There is a great need of time of globalisation of *Ayurvedic* Basic principles of *Caraka*, *Sushruta*

and *Vagbhata* in the references to prevent and cure the diseases.

- An integration of the knowledge of modern analytical techniques with a broader perspective for applications of *Ayurvedic* principles can help in its wider acceptance globally.
- There is an increasing need of proving and fostering the scientific basis of the principles of *Ayurveda*, to keep this age-old valuable system of medicine, as a living tradition in future.
- Many researchers have been undertaken in *Ayurveda* throughout the course of existence. Even now such researches are being conducted, perhaps not in laboratories but in daily practice of intelligent physicians, who have a thorough grasp and knowledge of the subject. It has only proved that the philosophic and fundamental concepts of *Ayurveda* are still valid. It is eternal in nature which can however be explained to suit the changing times.
- *Ayurveda* has been '*anadi*' (beginning less) and will be '*ananta*' (endless) as told by our *Acharyas*. It so because it is natural as nature.

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