

Review Article

Fundamental Concept of Health in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Health is one of the main desires of man since ages. The desire of long life and health is witnessed in *vedas* and other classical texts of India. The concept of health is widely described in *Āyurveda*. The parameters are mentioned in terms of *doṣa*, *dhātu*, *mala* and *agni* etc. These parameters include the physical fitness, function of the various systems of the body, interaction with the environment, tolerance to the climate, and the mental state of the man. A review of these parameters is discussed in this paper. Equilibrium of these *doṣa*, *dhātu*, *mala* & *agni* is responsible for health and the inequalities of these bring about the disease. By understanding these factors we can assess health status of an individual.

Keywords- Health, *doṣa*, *dhātu*, *agni*, *āyurveda*.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving good health, wealth and paradise are the three basic desires which every human being possesses. Due to the desire of long life *āyurveda* has been introduced, [1] and elaborated in the eight sub division of *aṣṭāṅga āyurveda*.

Out of all three desires, the desire for longevity has been the utmost priority because with the end of life there is end of everything. This can be achieved by observance of the rules meant for healthy persons and by non-negligence in treatment of diseases if they occur. [2]

The longevity is dependent on health basically. Any disturbance in the equilibrium of *dhātus* is known as disease and on the other hand the state of their equilibrium is health. Health and disease are

also defined as pleasure and pain respectively. [3]

The good health stands at the very root of virtuous acts, acquirement of wealth, gratification of desire and final emancipation. Diseases are destroyers of health, well-being and life. [4] As rightly told in *ayurveda* “*Arogyam mulamuttamam*,” *āyurveda* has given utmost importance to *ārogya* (health). Thus the health is the root cause par excellence of the attainment of all these four objects of human life in as much as one suffering from a disease is absolutely incapable of performing any acts conducive to attainment of any of these four objects. [5] Health is the result of a balanced network of interactions and interrelations within living beings and their environment. [6]

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES- To explore the concept and various parameters of health in Ayurveda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Astanga Hridhya, Kashyap Samhita and their commentaries, published research papers and others scientific database was explored and analysed regarding the concept of health in ayurveda.

REVIEW OF HEALTH IN CLASSICAL TEXTS- Different *acharyas* has given concept of health as below:

Ācārya Caraka has defined healthy persons as those having proportionate musculature and compactness of the body, who possess very strong sensory organs and who are not affected by the onslaught of diseases. They can tolerate hunger, thirst, the heat of the sun, cold and physical exercises. They can digest and assimilate properly. [7]

Ācarya Suśruta has stated that a man is *svāstha* whose *doṣas*, *agni*, *dhātus* and *malas* are in the states of normalcy (*samadoṣa*, *samāgni*, *samadhātumalakriya*) and who is mentally, and spiritually in the state of calmness i.e. bliss and happiness. [8] This definition essentially touches the state of health in terms of all the four aspects of *āyu*. The reverse of this state is considered as illness.

Definition of health according to *Ācārya Kāśyapa* is a bit different from *Caraka* and *Suśruta*. The definition given by *Ācārya Kāśyapa* is easily understood by common people. *Ācārya Kāśyapa* has not used the terms such as *samadoṣa*, *samadhātu* etc. Instead, he has emphasized on the outcomes of proper functioning of *doṣa*, *dhātu* and *mala*. These symptoms are- [9]

1. Feeling of appetite followed by digestion of food at proper time.
2. Excretion of waste products without any obstruction.
3. Feeling of lightness in the body.
4. Proper functioning of sense organs.
5. Sound sleep at proper time and waking up with happy and fresh mind.

6. Attainment of strength, luster, longevity.
7. Healthy and happy mental state.

Hence, *Āyurveda* describes health as *svāsthya*, which is a state of physical sensorial, mental and spiritual equipoising.

1. Concept of *samadoṣa*

When *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha doṣa* are in balanced state, this is called *samadoṣa* and this is a state of healthy individual. When this balanced state is disturbed i.e. increased or decreased it produces a state of *doṣa viṣamatā* which leads to different types of diseases. In nutshell equilibrium of *doṣas* etc. is health. Due to time factor and age there is a constant accumulation of *doṣas* but this is negligible and should not be taken into account. Seasonal and day to day accumulation etc. of *doṣas* equilibrium is affected by observing the healthy conduct and prescribed daily routine. [10] Body is originally composed of *doṣas*, *dhātus* and *malas*. Equilibrium, decrease and increase of *doṣas*, *dhātus*, *malas* etc. should be known by their natural characters and functions, hence in the context of equilibrium, here the function of *doṣa* etc. are mentioned. [11]

1.1 Properties of *Samavāta* [12] (Equilibrium of *Vāta*)

Prāṇa vāyu - The functions include spitting, sneezing, eructation, respiration and deglutition of food.

Udāna vāyu- Its functions are manifestation of speech, efforts, enthusiasm, strength and lustre.

Samāna vāyu - The functions include promotion of power of digestion and separation of *prasāda* (nutrients) and *kitta bhāga* (waste product) of food. [13]

Vyāna vāyu - It is responsible for movement like extensions-contraction, blinking of eyes and circulation.

Apāna vāyu - Its functions include ejaculation of semen, voiding urine and stool, elimination of menstrual blood and parturition of fetus.

If the functions of *vāta* are observed then it is found that *vāta doṣa* is stimulator and controller of all types of movements.

These includes function of breathing in and out (respiration), movement of the food in alimentary system, absorption of the nutrients and formation or excreta (digestive system); excretion of stool and urine (excretory system); propulsion of semen, menstrual blood and fetus (reproductive system); transportation of blood and other materials (circulatory system), all kind of movements related to locomotion (locomotory system). So it acts as driving or impelling force in the body.

1.2 Properties of Samapitta (Equilibrium of Pitta)-

Rañjaka pitta- It is responsible for formation of blood from former *rasa dhatu*. [14]

Pācaka pitta- The functions include digestion of food and separation of *prasāda* (nutrients) and *kitta bhāga* (waste product), sustenance of other pitta. [13]

Sādhaka pitta- This is related to *oja*, [15] and is helpful in fulfilment of desires through buddhi, *medha*, and *abhimāna*. [14]

Ālocaka pitta – It helps in perception of image of objects (vision). [16]

Bhrājaka pitta – It has the function of thermoregulation, [15] maintenance of complexion and lustre of skin. [16]

Formation of blood, digestion of food and metabolism, immunity, eyesight, intellect, thermoregulation and complexion of body are the outcomes of normal functioning of pitta.

1.3 Properties of Samakapha [17] (Equilibrium of kapha) –

Avalambaka kapha- It provides support to *trika pradeśa* and *hradaya* (thoracic region) and helps in sustenance of other types of kapha.

Keladaka kapha - Its functions include lubrication and softening of food (bolus) in stomach.

Bodhaka kapha – It is responsible for perception of taste.

Tarpaka kapha - The functions include nourishment of sense organs.

Śleska kapha- It maintains lubrication and binding of joints.

The nourishment of body, maintenance of moisture, lubrication of different part of body, perception of taste and binding of joints are the outcomes of normal functioning of *kapha*.

2. Concept of Samāgni

Agni refers to the digestion and metabolism of the individual. Health of an individual depends on strength of *agni*. [18] If an individual wants healthy life its digestive power (*jāṭharāgni*) and tissue enzymes (*dhātu agni*) must be in balanced state. When *Agni* is increased or decreased it leads to many diseases. [19] On the basis of its strength or digestion power, it is said to be of four types -*samāgni*, *viṣamāgni*, *tīkṣṇāgni* and *mandāgni*.

2.1 Viṣamāgni – It is a state when *agni* is affected by *vāta doṣa*. Sometimes, it digests the food properly and on the other times it causes *adhmāna* (distension of abdomen), *śūla* (pain in abdomen), *udāvarta* (belching), *atīsāra* (diarrhoea), *jathargaurava* (heaviness in abdomen), *antrakujana* (borborygmi), *pravāhaṇa* (need to strain while defecation). [20] As per sage *Cakrapāṇi*, sometimes it is affected by *viṣama apcāra* (alteration in diet) and sometimes not. [21]

2.2 Tīkṣṇāgni - It is a state when *agni* is affected by *pitta doṣa*. In this condition the food taken even in excessive amount gets digested without any difficulty and in a short time. It is capable of digesting any type of food. [21] When *tīkṣṇāgni* is increased, it is known as *atyāgni* which is able to digest even more quantities of food. If *atyāgni* is not treated it gets increased further and digest the large quantities of food taken frequently and very quickly followed by *śōṣa* (dryness of mouth), *dāha* (burning sensation) and *santāpa* (raised temperature) in buccal cavity at the end of digestion. [22]

2.3 Mandāgni - It is a state when *agni* is affected by *kapha doṣa*. In this condition digestion of food ingested even in less quantity is not possible and it may lead to *udara* and *siro gaurava* (heaviness in abdomen and head), *kāsa* (cough), *śvāsa*

(dyspnoea), *praseka* (drooling), *vaman* (vomiting), and *gatrasadana* (laziness in body). Time taken to digest the food is also very high.

2.4 Samāgni – It is because of *doṣas* in normal or balanced state. It digests the food properly in due time and is balanced. [23] As per *Caraka* in case of *apcāra* (altered food habits, intake of improper or heavy diet) it may get vitiated and otherwise it remains to be in normal state. So, it should be protected. [21]

Viṣamāgni, *tīkṣṇāgni*, *mandagni*, leads to *vātajanya roga*, *pittajanya roga* and *kaphajanya roga* respectively. [24] They cause diseases and hence require treatment. *Samāgni* is responsible for health and should always be protected. [25] Ācārya *Caraka* also said that health achieved in equilibrium state of *agni* and in unequal state (like *viṣamāgni*, *tīkṣṇāgni*, *mandagni*) of *agni* many kinds of disease are produced. [19]

3. Concept of *Samadhātumalakriyā*

In *Āyurveda*, there are seven *dhātus* i.e. *rasa*, *rakta*, *mamsa*, *medas*, *asthī*, *majjā* and *śukra* and three types of *mala* i.e. *puriṣa*, *mutra* and *sveda*. *Dhātus* should be in balanced state for the proper nourishment of our body. Similarly *mala* should also get excreted from the body time to time.

In equilibrium state *dhātu*; *rasa* provides contentment, saturation and nourishes blood; blood generate clarity in complexions, nourishes muscles and sustains life; *mamsa* strengthens the body and nourishes *medas* (fat), *medas* gives rises to unctuous materials, sweat and firmness and nourishes *asthī* (bones); *asthi* support the body and nourish marrow, *majja* provides unction, strength, nourishes semen and fill ups bones; *śukra* provides valour, pleasure, physical strength, exhilaration and is meant for reproduction. [26] The preceding *dhātus*, if increased excessively, also increase the successive *dhātus* and as such pacification of such *dhātus* is wholesome (necessary to maintain the balance). [27] Vitality, nourishment, compactness, lustre,

support, strength and reproduction are the normal function of *dhātus*.

Equilibrium state of *mala* (faeces) support the body and maintain the equilibrium of *vāyu* and *agni*, *mutra* (urine) fills up the bladder and eliminates watery content, *sweda* (sweat) maintains wetness and softness of skin. [28]

4. Concept of *Prasannātmendriyemanaḥ* (ecstasy of soul, sense organs and mind)

The normal functions of *ātma*, *indriya* and *mana* refer to *prasannātmendriyemanaḥ*. The normal functioning of *ātma* (locative of knowledge), *indriya* (sensory perception), *mana* (tool of knowledge) are possible in the happy state only. Mental state is also important as that of physical state of a person. If physical state of individual is good but his mental status is not good then he is not considered healthy. So, in *Āyurveda* sensory and motor organs and mind has been given the special importance. As *Āyurveda* told, there is no sense of regret in the mind, it is a best sign of health. [29]

CONCLUSION

Āyurveda is widely used in India as a system of primary health care, and it is growing worldwide as well. [30] The classical text of *ayurveda* delineates various principles for health with respect of *āyu*, *doṣa*, *agni*. The present work is a literature approach to assess the concept of health in *Āyurveda* which is similar to the concept of health in modern text i.e. the definition of health given by WHO and quality of life.

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