



Review Article

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UNDERSTANDING BASICS OF AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient science dealing with remedial properties for several disorders. However, due to lack of documentation, ayurveda has not gained popularity in practice worldwide. It is a rich knowledge entangled with the tradition of Indian culture which is highly disciplined. It aims not only in curing the disorder but identifies the root cause and eradicates it from the system. Ayurveda looks at the human physic with a different angle and all its diagnostic tools are different from that of the conventional allopathic treatment. To bridge the gap between the modern science and the inherited ancient knowledge of ayurveda is the role of the present scientists today.

Keywords: Ayurveda, prakriti, dosha, veda.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient system of health care that is native to the Indian subcontinent. It is presently in daily use by millions of people in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, Tibet and Pakistan. It is now in practice for health care in European countries too. The word "Ayurveda" is a compound term made of the word āyus meaning "life" or "life principle" and the word veda, which refers to a system of "knowledge" ¹. The Ayurvedic system of medicine has great antiquity, dating back to about 5000 years B.C. Its Materia Medica contain resources in the form of drugs derived from plant, animal, metal and mineral sources, the use of which have been advocated in various different pathological manifestations ².

Philosophical Origin

It is very close to Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta. Both the scriptures explain the basic concepts such as Srushti aavirbhaav (evolution process), Karma (views resulting from ones actions), Triguna (illusion), Panch Mahabhuta (5 elements of universe), Atma tatva (awareness of soul), Punarjanma (rebirth) and Moksha (salvation). Ayurveda talks about life style which leads the human being towards the ultimate goal or salvation³. It gives more emphasis to the prevention and promotion of the health whereby avoiding etiological factors of disease is considered as the first line of management ⁴.

Scope of Ayurveda

Though practiced mainly in India, it is a science which articulates all potential good or bad aspects for every living being. So the scope of Ayurveda needs to be widened and made part of lifestyle of every individual in the present day to enrich the lives ⁵. There is a wide variety in Indian traditional diet which offers a whole range of nutrients and also activates digestion and several physiological functions. The Indian food system is interlaced with the lives of people through cultural, seasonal and religious customs ⁶.

Need for Ayurveda

According to the World Health Organization, about 70–80% of the world populations rely on nonconventional medicines mainly of herbal sources in their healthcare. Due to lack of proper documentation Ayurveda is unable to outgrow various other forms of therapies⁷. Public interest for the treatment with complementary and alternative medicine is mainly due to increased side effects in synthetic drugs, lack of curative treatment for several chronic disease high cost of new drugs, microbial resistance and emerging diseases etc. ⁸.

Ayurvedic Approach

Invariably it is time taking and slow and also unique. To an adequate extent it is based on the use of medicated oils and/or followed by the consumption of unpleasant and unpalatable decoctions and medications. However, there are two precepts which go hand in hand with Ayurveda are Dinacharya (routine) and Ritucharya (seasonal) which demand the adherence of a strict daily habit of eating, sleeping, taking a daily bath after evacuation of the bowels which renders to a pleasant and happy disposition ⁹.

Threefold Classification in Ayurveda

The three complex terms together known as tridosha theory (Vata, Pitta and Kapha dosha) is used for determining a person's mind and/or body classification. The first element, namely Vata is related to motion, Pitta is related to metabolism and Kapha is related to lubrication and structure, rather to classify phenotypic groupings. These three components are present in all the people, but with a difference in the degrees of predominance or the combinations in which they occur ^{10,11}. Each of these doshas (energy which defines a body) are represented by different elements of the human system which are physical, physiological and psychological characteristics. The doshas are supposed to be the basic elements for regulating the body and helping in the functioning and manifesting certain characteristics which are significant and unique to that individual ¹².

Different individuals can have different combination of Vata, Pitta and Kapha as their basic constitution or Prakruti. This is how Ayurveda can explain the subtle differences between individuals and explains why everyone is unique and that two persons can react very differently when exposed to the same environment or stimuli. An individual's Prakruti is unique to oneself just as fingerprint to DNA. Thus, in order to understand a person, it is necessary to determine his or her Prakruti^{13,14}.

The Ayurvedic classification system classifies all individuals into different 'Prakriti' types based on relative proportions of each dosha. Prakriti constitutes the physical or bodily constitution, the bodily temperament of an individual and the basic form which is highly specific for every individual. It is known to remain unaltered throughout the lifetime and it is believed to have imbibed the features during conception. Some contributions towards this could have been due to the environmental factors including maternal diet and lifestyle; in other words, prakriti is known to be a strong genetic components¹⁵. Therefore, it can be said that the Prakriti classification of an individual is purely based on the makeup of his or her physical, physiological and psychological characteristics. It is not dependent on external factors like the race, ethnic or geographical considerations¹⁶. Prakriti helps us to understand the nature and severity of disease, reaction of body to the drugs (pharmacogenomics), selection of drugs and their doses, prognosis of the disease and preventive measures such as diet, diurnal and seasonal regimes¹⁷.

Fundamentals of Ayurveda

Both fundamental and applied knowledge have thrown light on the basic concept of Srotovijnana (knowledge of channels) which highlights that the living body comprises of innumerable channels designed for all inner transport system. By all means, the health and disease of a system depends purely on the Srotas (body channels), which may lose its function due to various factors (food and lifestyle). Ayurveda developed a therapeutic technology for Samshodhana (bio-purification) commonly known as Panchakarma therapy (5 actions involved in detoxification of mind and body). It is said that Ayurveda has an in-dept concept based on philosophy and physics, rather than biology since the study encompasses range of Srotas. This further helps us to comprehend the relationships in structural and functional biology¹⁸. This is supported by the fact that the quantum theory which has enabled to through light on the concept of Ayurveda for a perfect health which includes the restoration and maintenance of a system¹⁹.

Knowledge of Disease

To create an evidence base in Ayurveda, to diagnose a disease and acquire knowledge is very complex. It uses 5 different terminologies which involves different senses based on five different concepts. The first is the concept of 'Apta' which is purely based on an intuitive acquisition of knowledge from the superiors or masters. The second is called 'Pratyaksha' which refers to the observational data which can be acquired through the senses or from the actual experiments. The third concept is called as 'Anumana' which is derived from logical analysis giving rise to deduce an understanding about the disorder. The fourth concept is 'Upamana' which is derived from the similar association that exists between variables. The last element is called Yukti which is based on a planned intervention to test an idea or evaluate an observation. Together, all these five elements highlight the epistemology of Ayurveda and its approach to create an evidence based strategy²⁰.

In order to formulate a specific treatment protocol, an Ayurvedic physician has to determine the exact nature of imbalance of the doshas. To a great extent, imbalance of the doshas can be understood by careful analysis of clinical symptoms and signs. However, in many instances, it can be challenging to compute the imbalance in terms of the dominance and relative increase or decrease of the doshas. In ancient times, Ayurvedic physicians developed protocols for detailed examination of tongue, eyes, urine, feces, skin and so on to measure imbalance of doshas. Subtle techniques like pulse diagnosis were introduced later on and eventually became the gold standard for diagnosing dosha imbalance²¹.

Causes for Disease

The four components of a person's daily life are Ahara (food), Achara (conduct), Vihara (behavior) and Vichara (thoughts). When any of these components is, unhealthy there is imbalance in the Tridosha, which manifests as disease and causes imbalance. The measures to be employed are specified as Swastha vritta which means avoidance of one which causes the imbalance²². Ayurveda holds that specific disease conditions are symptoms of an underlying imbalance. It does not neglect relief of these symptoms, but its main focus is on the big picture: to restore balance and to help you create such a healthy lifestyle that the imbalance won't occur again. Living in health and balance is the key to a long life free from disease²³.

In the treatises of Ayurveda much more emphasis is given on the deeds of an individual as a causative factor of the disease. The wise man should not blame any deity, ancestors or Raksas as (an evil spirit) for diseases caused by his own misdeeds²⁴. The action performed in the previous life which is also known as Daiva constitutes in due course causative factors for the manifestation of diseases²⁵. Some of the diseases arises due to Karma –bad deeds, some others due to the vitiation of the Doshas and some diseases occurs by the combination of both Karma as well as vitiated Dosha²⁶. All the diseases in the human being are due to their bad deeds and it leads to terrific suffering³.

Action Research

Education in Ayurveda sector has undergone tremendous changes starting from the 'Gurukul system' to 'Modern classrooms', moving onto technology-based learning. Hence, it is obvious that our teachers must have been doing action research unknowingly, but, its complete systematic knowledge will bridge the gap between lack of documentation and communication of these researches and communication²⁷.

Motto of Ayurveda

"Swasthasya swasthya rakshanam, aaturasay vikaara prashamanam, i.e., ayurveda aims to maintain the health of a healthy person and to restore the health if diseased. Instead of pacifying the symptoms, it targets to achieve harmony in the body. Health is mentioned as swasthya – a balance in one's system biology. It is the state of equilibrium of the three principles of the body namely, Vata, Pitta and Kapha, along with a contented state of senses, mind and soul²⁸.

CONCLUSION

The goodness of ayurveda must lead to the betterment of health for mankind. This can be implemented only by incorporating studies on clinical research in ayurveda and at the same time enhance the interdisciplinary collaborative efforts which is possible only with an open mindedness towards this ancient

science -ayurveda which embarks on array of natural healing methods²⁹.

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