

## PANCHAMAHABHUTA-STRUCTURE: FUNCTIONAL BASIS OF PHARMACOLOGICAL ACTION IN AYURVEDA

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### ABSTRACT

The ultimate aim of *Ayurveda* is to maintain the health of a healthy person and prevent from disease. The fundamental principles of *Ayurveda* are responsible for the creation of this universe to physiological functions of the body, etiopathogenesis of a disease and the *dravyas* used for the treatment, all are originated from the *Ayurvedic Adharbhuta Siddhanta (Panchamahabhuta)*. Everything in this universe is made up of five basic elements which are *Akasha*, *Vyau*, *Agni*, *Jala*, *Prithvi* and together they are termed as *Panchamahabhuta*. On the basis of *Guna* (Property) and *Karma* (Action), the *Panchamahabhuta* accomplish their functions. The present study is aimed to elucidate the concept of *Panchamahabhuta* in a systemic manner and its interrelation with other components of the body like *Tridosha*, *Dhatu*, *Triguna*, *Rasa* etc. This study, also concludes that each and every fundamental principle of *Ayurveda* is

based on *Panchamahabhuta* theory.

**KEYWORDS:** *Ayurveda*, *Aadharbhut Siddhanta*, *Panchamahabhuta*, *Chikitsa*.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Panchamahabhuta* is precisely elaborated in *Ayurvedic* literature. The word '*Panchamahabhuta*' is made up of three words- '*Pancha*', '*Maha*' and '*Bhuta*'. '*Pancha*' means five, '*Maha*' means great and '*Bhuta*' means that which exists. The term *Bhuta* is consist of two words i.e. *Bhoo* and *Kta*. The meaning of the word *Bhuta* is 'that which has its identity and existence. *Bhutas* are not formed by any other things or elements. *Bhutas* are five

in number and they further give origin to *Panchamahabhuta* or five greater *Bhutas*. This gives an idea that the *Bhutas* are earlier forms of *Mahabhutas*. “*Mahanti bhutani mahabhutani*” means the larger forms of *bhutas* are called *Mahabhutas*. “*Ihahi dravyam panchamahabhootaatmakam*” (A.S.Su.17/3). These *Mahabhutas* has showed their presence in all the living and non- living objects of this universe. According to *Vedanta* philosophy, *Panchamahabhuta siddhanta* is *sarvatantra siddhanta* (Universal theory). *Panchamahabhuta siddhanta* has been well adapted by *Ayurveda Sastra*. Thus, the *Panchamahabhuta* does not anticipate the *sastra* but the *chikitsa*. It is stated that the digested *Ahara* consumed by the *Panchabhautika Shareera* assimilates into the respective *Panchabhautika* constituents of the body. In this manner symmetrical properties of *mahabhutas* (Elements) gives nutrition to corresponding symmetrical organs of body.<sup>[1]</sup> The variation in these *Panchamahabhutas* will lead to numerous diseases.

“*Sarvam Dravyam Panchabhautikam Asminartheya*”. *Acharya Charka* advocates that all *dravyas* (Substances) in this universe are composed of *Panchamahabhauta*.<sup>[2]</sup> In this context ‘*Sarva Dravya*’ refers to *Karya dravyas* only (*Chkarpani*). Thus, all the *Karya dravyas* (Perceivable matters) existing in the world are *Panchabhautika*.

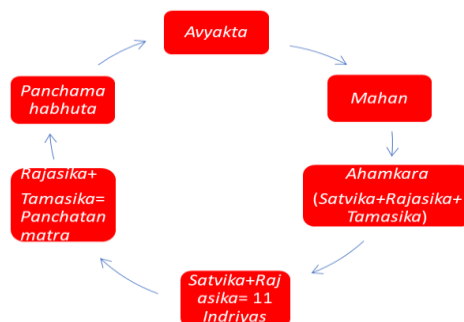
## AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. To interpret the basic concept of *Panchamahabhuta siddhanta* to its full perspective.
2. To understand the *Panchamahabhuta* structure: functional basis pharmacological action in *Ayurveda*.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Collection of literature in the ancient classical texts, scientific journals, research papers, dissertation etc. concerned with the concept.
2. Critical review of the compiled literature and suggestions derived therefrom.

## Evolution of *Panchamahabhuta* theory<sup>[3]</sup>



The evolution of *Panchmahabhuta* follows the doctrine of *Saankhya* Philosophy. *Avyakta* (The unmanifest principle) produced *Mahan* and from this *Mahan Ahmkara* is produced which contains three characteristics viz. *Satva* (Essence), *Raja* (Energy) and *Tamas* (Mass). The *Satva* and *Raja* manifested from *Ahamkara* forms *ekadashaindriyas* (5 *karmaendriyas* + 5 *Gyanendriya* + 1 *Ubhayendriya*). In the same way, *Raja* and *Tamas* of *Ahamkara* forms *Panchtanmatra* i.e 5 subtle elements *Shabda* (Sound), *Sparsha* (Touch), *Roopa* (Form, vision), *Rasa* (Taste), and *Gandha* (Smell) that finally leads to the formation of *Panchmahabhuta*.

*Acharya Sushruta* described 3 types of conjugations taking place among *mahabhutas* to form *Panchabhautika dravya*.<sup>[4]</sup> These are:

***Paraspara-samsarga***: In this process two or more *mahabhutas* come in contact with each other to form *Panchabhautika dravya*.

***Paraspar-anugraha***: *Anugraha* means *Upakara*, give and take relationship, to enhance properties of each other. In this type of conjugation reaction, *mahabhutas* act in such a way that they will favour each other.

***Paraspara-anupravesha***: In this type of conjugation, *mahabhutas* get submerged into each other at *mahabhuta* level.

### Properties of *Panchamahabhuta*<sup>[5]</sup>

**Table no. 1: Showing properties of *mahabhuta*.**

<i>Panchamahabhuta</i>	<i>Tanmatra</i>	<i>Indriya</i>	<i>Gunas</i>
<i>Akasha</i>	<i>Shabda</i>	<i>Karna</i>	<i>Aprtighaat</i>
<i>Vayu</i>	<i>Sparsha</i>	<i>Twak</i>	<i>Chaltva</i>
<i>Agni</i>	<i>Roopa</i>	<i>Chakshu</i>	<i>Usantva</i>
<i>Jala</i>	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Jihwa</i>	<i>Dravta</i>
<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Gandha</i>	<i>Nasa</i>	<i>Kharatva</i>

Properties of *Panchmahabhuta* shows their importance in *Chikitsa*. By following this concept, the predominant components of *panchmahabhuta* can be seen in people possessing different characteristics of three *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*). *Jala* and *Prithvi mahabhuta* is a predominant component of people having *kapha dosha* characteristics likewise *Agni mahabhuta* in those with *Pitta dosha* characteristics and *Vayu* and *Akasha* as their dominant component in those having *vata dosha* characteristics.

**Table no. 2: Showing *Panchamahabhuta* and *Tridosha* relation.**

<i>Dosha</i>	<i>Mahabhuta</i>
<i>Vata</i>	<i>Vayu+Akasha</i>
<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Agni</i>
<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Jala+Prithvi</i>

***Panchamahabhuta* and *Garbha* (Embryonic) development**

The factor which is implanted for the formation of *Garbha* (Embryo) is known as *Sukra* or sperm. Its composed of *vayu*, *agni*, *jala* and *prthvi* in the state of their excellence-all these factors individually share one factor of the attributes of each of the *mahabhutas*.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Chakarpan* icomments, all the above described *Panchabhautika* elements possess equivalent contribution in *sukra* formation. *Akasha* is also no doubt present in *sukra* in view of its all, pervasive nature but as it does not move together with the other four *mahabhutas* present in sperm in the course of ejaculation, it is not considered to be a distinct factor responsible for the composition of sperms. *Akasha* does not figure even in the process of transmigration of a soul from one body to the other.

“*Panchamahabhuta vikara samudayatmaka*” *Acharya Charka* mentioned that the embryo is formed by the five *Mahabhutas* and it serves as the receptacle of *chetana* (Consciousness). In fact, the soul (Conscious element) constitutes the sixth *dhatu* responsible for the formation of *Garbha* (Embryo)<sup>[7]</sup>. *Acharya Vagbhata* and *Bhavamisra* have also corroborated that the body is composed of the *Mahabhutas* and combined also with *Chetana*, give life to the *Garbha* (foetus).<sup>[8,9]</sup>

“*Khadayschetanasasthadhatva purushsamrata*” According to *Ayurveda Chikitsya purush/ Karma purush* comprises six *dhatu*s, *Panchamahabhuta* and *Chetana*.<sup>[10]</sup>

***Panchamahabhutas* and *Trigunas*<sup>[11]</sup>**

*Satvaparikshan* (Mental strength examination) is the diagnostic tool to assess the *manobal* (Mental strength) of the patient. By knowing the level of *satva* one can decide what to intervene in the patient.

**Table no. 3: Showing *Panchamahabhutas* and *Trigunas* relation.**

S. No.	<i>Mahabhuta</i>	<i>Mahaguna</i>
1.	<i>Akasha</i>	<i>Satva</i>
2.	<i>Vyau</i>	<i>Raja</i>
3.	<i>Agni</i>	<i>Satva+Raja</i>
4.	<i>Jala</i>	<i>Satva+Tama</i>
5.	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Tamas</i>

From the above table, we can assume the importance of *Panchabhautika dravyas* in numerous *manovikaras*.

### ***Panchamahabhutas* and *Rasa***<sup>[12]</sup>

Each of the *rasa* originate with predominance of two of the *Panchamahabhutas*.

**Table no. 4: Showing predominant *mahabhutas* in *rasa*.**

<i>Rasa</i> (Taste)	<i>Mahabhutadominance</i>
<i>Madhura</i> (Sweet)	<i>Prithvi+Jala</i>
<i>Amla</i> (Sour)	<i>Prithvi+Teja</i>
<i>Lavana</i> (Salty)	<i>Jala+Teja</i>
<i>Tikta</i> (Bitter)	<i>Vayu+Teja</i>
<i>Katu</i> (Pungent)	<i>Vayu+ Akasha</i>
<i>Kashaya</i> (Astringent)	<i>Vayu+Prithvi</i>

### ***Panchamahabhutas*, *Ritu Prabhava* and *Rasa***<sup>[13]</sup>

The year is divided into six *Ritus*, like wise because of variation in dominancy of *mahabhutas*, six *Rasas* will be formed.

**Table No. 5: Showing *Ritu* and Corresponding *Rasas*.**

S.No.	<i>Ritu</i>	<i>Dominant Mahabhutas</i>	<i>Rasa formed</i>
1.	<i>Sisira</i>	<i>Vayu+Akasha</i>	<i>Tikta</i>
2.	<i>Vasanta</i>	<i>Vayu+Prithvi</i>	<i>Kasaya</i>
3.	<i>Grisma</i>	<i>Agni+Vayu</i>	<i>Katu</i>
4.	<i>Varsa</i>	<i>Agni+Prithvi</i>	<i>Amla</i>
5.	<i>Sarat</i>	<i>Agni+Jala</i>	<i>Lavana</i>
6.	<i>Hemanta</i>	<i>Prthvi+Jala</i>	<i>Madhura</i>

### ***Panchamahabhutas* and *Dhatus***

All *sapta dhatus* are *Panchabhautika* and *dhatuvridhi* and *dhatukshaya* conditions are predominantly responsible for disease manifestations. For the treatment of *Panchabhautika dhatus*, it is essential for the *bhishak* (Physician) to know the concept of *dhatvagni* and permutation combination of *mahabhutas* of *bheshaja* (medicine) *dravyas*.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Clinical application of *Panchamahabhutas*

From thorough review of *Panchamahabhutas* literature, it can be predicted vitiation of any of these *mahabhutas* in the body causes disease and vitiated *mahabhuta* can be normalized by giving the *dravya* and *ahara* having *mahabhuta* of opposite to vitiated one. As vitiated *prithvi mahabhuta* can be treated by *Vayu, Agni, Akasha mahabhuta Pradhan dravya Dhatusamyata* (Equilibrium state of *dhatu*) is the ultimate aim of our *Ayurveda* science.<sup>[15]</sup> *Acharya Charaka Samanyam* (Similarity) principle helps in increasing degraded similar *dhatu* in body and when there is *dhatu vriddhi* condition *Vishesha dravyas* (Opposite substances) are preferred in the treatment.<sup>[16]</sup> To fulfil this purpose, knowledge of *Panchamahabhutika* composition of therapeutic substances is essential.

### *Tridosha Prakopa and Prasham* (Vitiating and Alleviation of humours)

According to *Acharya Sushruta Vata, Pitta* and *Kapha* are the main factors responsible for the induction of all pathogenesis inside the body, because of having their symptoms. *Dosha* which is *kshina* (Decreased) should be nourished (Increased to normal), those *kupita* (Slightly aggravated) should be mitigated, those *vriddh* (Highly aggravated) should be expelled out and those which are same (Normal) should be protected (Maintained normally), this is the principle of treatment of *dosha*.<sup>[17]</sup>

*Acharya Sushruta* has described the relation of predominant *mahabhuta* in *dravya* with *doshas*.<sup>[18]</sup>

**Table no. 7: Showing *Mahabhuta* and *Dosha* relation.**

S. No.	Dominancy of <i>mahabhuta</i> in <i>Dravya</i>	Alleviate or reduce <i>Dosha</i>
1.	<i>Prithvi, Agni and Jala</i>	<i>Vatadosha</i>
2.	<i>Prithvi, Jala and Vayu</i>	<i>Pitta dosha</i>
3.	<i>Akasha, Teja and Vayu</i>	<i>Kaphadosha</i>

### DISCUSSION

*Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta* has precisely showed its validation in the determination of causative factors responsible for the imbalance of *doshas* and thereby solution for the treatment. The concepts which cannot be explained by *tridoshas, dhatus*, can be very well interpreted by *Panchamahabhuta siddhanta*. *Dravya* is formed by an appropriate combination of *Prithvi, Apaya, Teja, Vayu* and *Akasha mahabhuta*. Even though *dravya* is composed of *Panchamahabhutas*, depending on the *Pradhanyata* of *mahabhuta*, the *Dravyas* are classified into *Prithvi, Apya, Agneyaa, Vayavya* and *Akasiya* (Su.Su.41/3). In this context,



*Acharya Vagbhata* has described, out of the five *Bhutas*, *Prithvi* becomes the *Adhista* or *Asraya*, *Jala mahabhuta* forms the *yonis*, i.e. it combines the particles in the *Dravya* and *Akasa*, *Vayu* and *Agni mahabhutas* together combine to give a structure to *Dravya* (A.H.Su.9/1-2). Likewise, *Guduchi* as *aushada dravya*, *Godhuma* as *ahara dravya* and all the remaining *karya dravyas* in this universe; *adhara* of a *dravya* furnishes by *Prithvi mahabhuta*, combination of particles in *dravya* by *Jala mahabhuta*, *paka* by *Agni mahabhuta*, growth and movements of *dravya* by *Vayu mahabhuta* and the space by *Akasha mahabhuta* (*Acharya Yadavjitrikamji*). Substances which are heavy, tough, hard, dull, stable, non-slimy, dense, gross and abounding in the quality of smell are dominated by *Prithvi*; they promote plumpness, compactness, heaviness and stability. Substances which are liquid, unctuous, cold, dull, soft, slimy and abounding in the qualities of taste are dominated by *Jala*; they promote stickiness, unctuousness, compactness, moistness, softness and happiness. Substances that are hot, sharp, subtle, light, non-unctuous, non-slimy and abounding in the qualities of vision are dominated by *Tejas*, they promote combustion, metabolism, lustre, radiance and colour. Substances that are light, cold, non-unctuous, rough, non-slimy, subtle, and abounding in the qualities of touch are dominated by *Vayu*; they promote roughness, aversion, movement, non-sliminess and lightness. Substances that are soft, light, subtle, smooth and dominated by the qualities of sound are dominated by *Akasha*; they promote softness, porosity and lightness (Ch.Su.26/11). It is evident in *Srstikarma* that all *Dravyas* are an outcome of *Panchamahabhuta* only. *Panchamahabhuta* becomes an inborn constituent of every *Dravya* on this universe. *Shareera* (Human body) as well as the *lokabhava* are also made up of *Panchamahabhuta* that indicates on intake of *Prithvipradhana* and *Jalapradhana dravya* will increase the same quality in the *Shareera*. In the same way *Samanya Vishesha Siddhanta* where *Samanya* is the main cause for the increase and *Vishesha* is the cause of decrease plays an important role accordingly. *Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta* plays an important role in *Chikitsa* which precisely signifies that a *Vaidya* with a sound knowledge of *Panchabhautikatva* of *Dravyas* need not worry to treat *Vyadhis* (Su.Sa.1/13). Thus, the *Ayurvedic Acharyas Charaka, Sushruta, Vagbhata* opines that there is no need to think beyond *Panchamahabhutas*.

## CONCLUSION

The thorough review of present study concludes, *Panchamahabhuta siddhanta* is well accepted and have general consideration that every *dravya* including *dosha*, *dhatu*, *mala*, *rasa* as well as *Shareer* (Human body) are made up of *Panchamahabhuta*. The equilibrium of

*dosha, dhatu, mala* can be nurtured by taking particular *Ahara & Dravyas* on the background of *Vridhhi* and *Kshaya Siddhanta*, which can be managed by *Samanya & Vishesh Siddhanta*. This *Siddhanta* (Theory) is very much beneficial in understanding the theories of *Ayurveda* like *Tridosha* theory, *Rasavirya* (Theory of taste and potency) theory etc. It also opens a new research window in the field of *Ayurvedic* fundamental research.

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