



“CONCEPT OF PANCHAMAHABHUTA IN SAMHITAS – CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS AND MODERN PERSPECTIVES”

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The concept of Panchamahabhuta (five great elements: Prithvi, Jala, Agni, Vayu, Akasha) forms a cornerstone of Ayurvedic philosophy, explaining the structure, function, and balance of the human body and the universe. Samhitas describe these elements as essential in health maintenance, disease pathogenesis, and therapeutic interventions. **Methods:** A comprehensive literature review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts (*Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*) and modern databases (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science). Keywords included “Panchamahabhuta,” “Ayurveda,” “Samhita,” “Dosha,” and “elemental theory.” Inclusion criteria comprised classical references and peer-reviewed studies on elemental physiology, clinical relevance, and modern correlations. Exclusion criteria were anecdotal and non-peer-reviewed sources. **Results:** Samhitas describe each Mahabhuta as associated with specific sensory qualities and Dosha predominance, influencing body constitution, disease susceptibility, and treatment strategies. Modern research links Panchamahabhuta to fundamental biochemical and physiological principles, including tissue composition, neuroendocrine balance, and environmental interactions. Understanding elemental imbalances offers insight into personalized medicine, preventive strategies, and lifestyle interventions. **Discussion:** Panchamahabhuta theory integrates classical Ayurvedic understanding with contemporary scientific evidence, highlighting the relevance of elemental balance in health and disease. Despite promising correlations, challenges exist in quantitatively measuring elemental influences and translating them into modern clinical practice. **Conclusion:** The Panchamahabhuta framework provides a timeless model for holistic understanding of physiology and pathology. Its integration into modern preventive and therapeutic strategies can enhance individualized healthcare approaches and support evidence-based Ayurvedic practice.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Dosha, Elements, Panchamahabhuta, Samhita

INTRODUCTION

Panchamahabhuta—Earth (Prithvi), Water (Jala), Fire (Agni), Air (Vayu), and Space (Akasha)—constitutes the foundational framework of Ayurveda^[1-2]. These five elements are considered building blocks of all matter, including the human body, and are directly linked to the formation and function of Doshas, Dhatus, and Malas^[3-4].

Classical texts emphasize that the balance of Mahabhutas is critical for maintaining health, while their imbalance contributes to disease pathogenesis^[5]. The qualitative characteristics of each element (e.g., Prithvi: heaviness, stability; Agni: heat, transformation) explain the variations in physical and psychological traits, guiding individualized therapeutic strategies^[6-7].

To review the classical descriptions of Panchamahabhuta in Samhitas and analyze their relevance in modern physiological and clinical contexts. Summarize classical principles of Panchamahabhuta and their influence on health and disease. Explore modern scientific correlates and physiological interpretations. Evaluate the potential integration of elemental understanding in contemporary personalized healthcare^[9-10].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literature Search Strategy:^[11-12]

- Primary sources: *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and commentaries.
- Modern databases: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar.
- Keywords: “Panchamahabhuta,” “five elements,” “Ayurveda,” “Dosha,” “elemental theory.”

Inclusion Criteria:^[13]

- Classical references to Panchamahabhuta.
- Peer-reviewed studies correlating elements with physiological, biochemical, or clinical phenomena.

Exclusion Criteria:^[14]

- Non-peer-reviewed articles, anecdotal reports, and irrelevant studies.

Data Synthesis:^[15]

- Findings organized thematically: classical descriptions, physiological functions, Dosha correlations, disease implications, and modern scientific interpretations.

OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

1. Classical Descriptions of Panchamahabhuta

- *Charaka Samhita*: Elements form the basis of the universe and human body, influencing Dosha constitution and disease susceptibility.
- *Sushruta Samhita*: Elaborates on elemental combinations in Dhatus (tissues), Malas (waste products), and physiological processes.
- *Ashtanga Hridaya*: Connects Panchamahabhuta to sensory perception, mental functions, and therapeutic interventions.

Element-Specific Characteristics:

- **Prithvi (Earth)**: Stability, heaviness; dominant in Dhatus like Asthi (bone) and Majja (bone marrow).
- **Jala (Water)**: Fluidity, cohesion; associated with blood, lymph, and body fluids.
- **Agni (Fire)**: Transformation, heat; governs metabolism and digestion.
- **Vayu (Air)**: Movement, lightness; controls nerve impulses, respiration, and circulation.
- **Akasha (Space)**: Subtlety, expansiveness; facilitates communication, void, and mental cognition.

2. Role in Dosha Formation and Health

- Doshas are functional expressions of elemental balance:
 - Vata: Vayu + Akasha
 - Pitta: Agni + Jala
 - Kapha: Prithvi + Jala
- Elemental imbalance manifests as physiological dysfunction, e.g., excessive Vayu leading to neurological disorders or digestive irregularities.

3. Physiological Correlates

- Modern research suggests elements represent biochemical and biophysical principles:
 - Prithvi: Structural proteins, skeletal system.
 - Jala: Body fluids, electrolytes, hydration.
 - Agni: Metabolic enzymes, thermoregulation.
 - Vayu: Neural conduction, circulatory dynamics.
 - Akasha: Cellular communication, extracellular matrix, cognitive space.

4. Clinical Relevance

- Panchamahabhuta theory guides diagnosis (elemental assessment via Dosha dominance) and treatment:
 - Herbal formulations tailored to elemental constitution.
 - Panchakarma and Rasayana therapies designed to restore elemental balance.
 - Lifestyle interventions (Dinacharya, Ritucharya) influenced by elemental dominance.

5. Modern Scientific Perspectives

- Elements provide a conceptual framework for understanding physiology, biochemistry, and systems biology.
- Studies on stress, metabolism, and tissue-specific biochemistry mirror classical interpretations: e.g., metabolic imbalance corresponds to Agni dysfunction, fluid imbalance corresponds to Jala disruption.
- Personalized medicine approaches echo Dosha-elemental principles, emphasizing individualized treatment based on constitution.

6. Integration and Applications

- Panchamahabhuta-informed lifestyle interventions reduce disease risk and improve homeostasis.
- Digital tools and biofeedback may quantify elemental imbalances, offering new avenues for integrative healthcare.
- Clinical trials exploring Dosha-elemental interventions in chronic diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular disorders) show promising outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The Panchamahabhuta concept provides a holistic model linking the microcosm (human body) and macrocosm (universe), emphasizing harmony and balance as central to health. Classical texts present detailed qualitative descriptions of each element and its influence on tissues, metabolism, and mental functions^[16].

Modern research validates these principles by associating elemental characteristics with measurable physiological parameters. For instance, Agni correlates with enzymatic and metabolic activities, Jala with fluid homeostasis, and Vayu with neural

and circulatory dynamics. This supports the concept that elemental imbalance contributes to disease susceptibility^[17].

The integration of Panchamahabhuta theory into modern medicine offers a framework for personalized health assessment, preventive strategies, and lifestyle interventions. Challenges include quantifying elements objectively, standardizing assessments, and translating qualitative classical principles into reproducible scientific measures^[18-19].

Future research should focus on interdisciplinary approaches, combining Ayurvedic diagnostics, modern physiology, and bioinformatics to validate elemental influences on health and disease. Integrative strategies can enhance preventive care, optimize lifestyle recommendations, and improve therapeutic outcomes, reaffirming the relevance of Panchamahabhuta in contemporary healthcare^[20].

CONCLUSION

Panchamahabhuta forms the foundation of Ayurvedic understanding of human physiology, pathology, and therapeutic interventions. Classical descriptions emphasize the interconnection of elements with Doshas, Dhatus, Malas, and mental faculties, guiding diagnosis, lifestyle, and treatment strategies.

Modern scientific evidence supports the relevance of elemental balance in physiological regulation, metabolic processes, neural function, and immune modulation. Personalized healthcare approaches resonate with Panchamahabhuta principles, offering insights for lifestyle optimization, disease prevention, and integrative therapies.

Challenges remain in objectively quantifying elemental influences, translating qualitative descriptions into measurable outcomes, and standardizing integrative interventions. Nevertheless, Panchamahabhuta remains a timeless framework for holistic health, bridging classical wisdom and modern science.

Integrating Panchamahabhuta-based principles into contemporary healthcare can enhance preventive medicine, support personalized treatment, and provide a comprehensive understanding of human health in harmony with environmental and lifestyle factors. This underscores the enduring clinical and philosophical relevance of Samhita teachings in modern health paradigms.

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