

Naturopathic Perspective on Elemental Theory

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Abstract: Naturopathy is a holistic system of healing that incorporates a range of treatments and natural therapies, with the underlying belief that your body is able to fight infection and disease. The treatment modalities included in Naturopathy medicine is purely based on panchamahabhootas, they are Jala, Prithvi, Vayu, Agni, and Akasha, each one has unique components in terms of health care. Panchamahabhootas also known as a five elemental theory is one of the ancient healing theory mentioned in the Indian philosophical scriptures. Concept of five elemental theory is mentioned in Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) also which has unique theories and practices to treat diseases and enhance health. Five elements has different characteristics based on functional activity, organs, appearance, taste. Anatomically earth element - related with bones, Teeth, Cartilage, Muscles and Skin, water element - related with Blood and Plasma, Saliva and Digestive Juices and Cytoplasm, Fire element - related with Digestive Enzymes, Body Temperature and Sight, vayu, Air element - related with Nervous System, Respiratory System and Circulatory System, ether element - related with Body Cavities, Mouth and Gastrointestinal Tract and Cells and Tissues. This theory, which emphasizes the great five great elements can be applied to understand the patient illness, to identify the underlying and root causes of diseases, similarly in the application of treatment methods to specific conditions. Hence Panchamahabhuta theory in Naturopathy plays a crucial role in the clinical aspect of diagnosis and treatment.

Keywords: Naturopathy, Panchamahabhootas, Yoga, elemental theory, Traditional Chinese medicine

1. Introduction

Nature Cure is a system of building the entire being in harmony with the constructive principle in Nature on the physical, mental, moral and spiritual planes of being¹. It is a holistic system of healing that incorporates a range of treatments and natural therapies, with the underlying belief that your body is able to fight infection and disease itself, given the right support¹. It is a system of medicine to cure the diseases by encouraging natural curative reactions inherent in every diseased cell through methods and treatments based upon the fundamental laws which govern health². The naturopathy system involves different natural treatments together to allow the patient to have optimal health. Some of natural treatments like acupuncture, hydrotherapy, physical medicine, nutrition, fasting therapy herbal medicine and psychological counseling³. Detoxification is the process of eliminating toxins and other harmful chemicals from the body through fasting, drinking high volume of water and using enemas. Hydrotherapy or water therapy where the patient is recommended to take certain baths such as hip bath, spinal bath, immersion bath and contrast arm and foot bath and drink natural spring water. Physical medicine is healing with the involvement of touch therapy and cold compresses as well as electric currents and sound waves in manipulating spine, bones and muscles. Lifestyle and psychological counselling includes guided imagery, hypnosis and many counselling methods in the treatment program. Naturopathy has addressed many conditions so that there is no limitation to what illnesses it can treat. This is because of the many therapies under this alternative medicine; acute to chronic conditions can be helped by the naturopath. Naturopathic medicine aims to heal the whole body and not just one area of it. It is best to allow nature to do the treatment and to enhance the capability of the body to heal itself. Doing this will not only get relief from a certain disease but boost the immune system of the body. The Panchamahabhuta concept is the oldest tool available for exploring this universe. The three words Pancha, Maha, and Bhuta make form the Sanskrit term that gives rise to the name Panchamahabhuta. The word "bhuta" is derived from "bhu," which signifies the existence of an individual; similarly, the

word "pancha" means five. Based on their research, Indian scientists claimed that there are five causative variables in the universe. They are Jala, Prithvi, Vayu, Agni, and Akasha, together known as Panchamahabhuta. They behave and possess particular traits. Health is the state in which these elements are in balance within our bodies; illness results when they are not³.

Evolution of Panchamahabhuta:

Prominent Indian philosophical tradition Samkhya gives deep insights into the nature of existence and the course of evolution. Samkhya, which has its roots in ancient knowledge, offers a comprehensive view of reality that takes into account the interactions between matter and mind. According to Samkhya philosophy, Purusha and Prakriti are the two basic entities that make up ultimate reality.

Purusha and Prakriti are the two basic entities that make up the ultimate reality. According to Samkhya philosophy, Nature of Purusha is pure consciousness devoid of attributes, qualities, and characteristics. The nature of Prakriti is the ultimate cause of the world of objects.

The various forms and experiences in the manifest world are the result of the interplay between consciousness (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti). The stages of manifestation—Avyakta, Mahat, Ahamkara, Tanmatras, and gross elements—offer insights into the progressive unfolding of existence. Gross elements represent the panchamahabhootas⁴.

Why are there Only Five Bhuta and Not Less or More?

In 1952, Stanley Miller of the University of Chicago undertook a remarkable experiment which showed that abiotic materials are the source of life. It was the first experimental evidence in favor of the theory of abiogenesis and therefore contradicted the preconceived notion that life can only arise from pre-existing life. Miller chose the following four compounds for his experiment: hydrogen, water, methane, and ammonia. He sparked an electric spark within the vacuum flask containing these four chemicals. When the experiment was finished, a dark red, turbid liquid

was extracted from the flask. Investigation revealed that this liquid included a combination of at least five necessary amino acids.

In This experiment miller was surprised that these basic elements which formed all four compounds namely Carbon, Nitrogen, Hydrogen and Oxygen, which have given rise to basic building blocks of life in the form of essential amino acids. Miller discovered that Carbon is the essential element forming a high proportion in earth; Hydrogen is an essential component of water; Oxygen is essential for fire, and Nitrogen forms the most abundant element in air. These elements are translated into Sanskrit terminology Prithvi, Jala, Agni and Vayu respectively. If we consider Aakash as the space between molecules, this completes the dogma of five elements.¹²

Concept of five elemental theory in Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a systematic healthcare system which relies on unique theories and practices to treat diseases and enhance health⁶. The origin of TCM remains more than 5000 years of history. An essential aspect of TCM is an understanding of the body's qi or life force it means "vital breath", which flows through invisible meridians or channels of the body. The main include the teaching of "yin" and "yang" and the Five trespasses Phases. The Five Phases, often referred to as Five Elements ("Wu Xing").⁶

A TCM practitioner uses smell, hearing, voice vibration, touch, and pulse diagnosis to discover the source of an illness, which organ it is related and which meridians are affected. The practitioner typically makes use of what is known as the five agents, or five phases (wuxing). By observing natural law in action, ancient healers recognized five basic elements in the world—wood (mu), fire (huo), earth (tu), metal (jin), and water (shui)⁷. Each element has its own literal and philosophical meaning⁸.

A) Theory of Yin and Yang in TCM

Theories of TCM is one of the most important and fundamental in prevention of disease. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the concept of Yin and Yang serves as the foundation for understanding health, as well as diagnosing and treating illnesses. The dual relationship of Ying and Yang demonstrates that everything in the universe exists as connected and complementary, yet opposite elements.¹¹

B) Five elements and its characteristics:

The wood element is represented by a tree that grows straight and is abundantly spreading out. The fire element is represented by a state of combustion that generates heat. It is likely that the earth element will establish a foothold to newly change an outdated system. The metal element is represented by the formation of hard crystal. Lastly, the water - type is represented by a stream that seems to run out of a solid melting.⁸

C) Five elements and its appearance:

The wood element appears as long sticks, fire element is symbolized by an inverted triangle, earth element appears as

wide ground, metal element describes images of sharp edge, and water element depicts the shape of a running stream⁸.

D) Five elements and functional activity

Wood is the creation of potential. Fire is the transformation of potential into function; Metal shows a relative lack of energy, as well as the rhythmical distribution of energy; Water is regeneration; Earth stimulates transformation and evolution.⁶

E) Five elements and taste

The sense of taste is essential for the evaluation of food quality. In TCM, food is seen as a way to nourish the body and restore balance. Emphasize a varied diet that includes both Yin and Yang foods. Yang foods, such as ginger, garlic, and spices, can add warmth and stimulate digestion. Yin foods, like leafy greens, cucumbers, and fruits, provide cooling and nourishment. Avoid excessive consumption of extreme Yin or Yang foods to prevent imbalances. The five tastes are related with five elements ie, sour for Wood, bitter for Fire, sweet for Earth, pungent for Metal, and salty for Water.⁹

F) Five elements and organs:

Based on the interaction of five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) and theory of the balance of Yin and Yang. Yin organs such as liver organ is related with wood element, heart is connected with fire element, spleen organ is linked with earth element, lung organ is related with metal and kidney is connected with water element. Yang organs such as as gallbladder organ is related with wood element, small intestine is connected with fire element, stomach organ is linked with earth element, large Intestine organ is related with metal and urinary bladder is connected with water element.¹⁰

2. Anatomical - Physiological Correlations with Panchamahabhootas

2.1. Prithvi (Earth)

Anatomically Bones, Teeth, Cartilage, Muscles and Skin is correlated with earth element. Prithvi (Earth) gives the stability and strength to the skeletal system. The body's connective tissues and muscles exhibit the stability. The resilience and hardness of the skin are influenced by the earth element.

Physiologically earth is correlated with the growth and development, Stamina and Endurance, Earth element supports physical growth and structural development and also Provides the foundation for physical strength and endurance.

2.2 Jala (Water)

Anatomically water element is related with Blood and Plasma, Saliva and Digestive Juices and Cytoplasm. Jala is present in all bodily fluids, ensuring hydration and nutrient transport. Water is essential for digestion and maintaining mucosal linings. The element's fluid nature is reflected in the cell's internal environment.

Physiologically Jal is correlated with the Nutrient Transport and Lubrication. Water facilitates the movement of nutrients

and waste products and maintains the lubrication of joints and the smooth functioning of bodily processes.

2.3 Agni (Fire)

Anatomically Fire element is related with Digestive Enzymes, Body Temperature and Sight. Fire governs the metabolic processes, particularly digestion and nutrient assimilation. Agni regulates body heat and thermoregulation. The element's transformative nature is also linked to the visual process and ocular functions.

Physiologically Agni is correlated with the Metabolism and Immunity. Agni Controls digestive and metabolic activities, converting food into energy. The element's transformative power is vital for immune responses and pathogen destruction.

2.4. Vayu (Air)

Anatomically vayu element is related with Nervous System, Respiratory System and Circulatory System. Air governs the movement of nerve impulses and sensory activities. Air is essential for breathing and oxygen transport. The element's mobility is reflected in blood circulation and heart functions.

Physiologically Agni is correlated with the Movement and Nerve Function. Fire Governs all movements including breathing, circulation, and peristalsis and Ensures the proper transmission of nerve impulses and sensory signals.

2.5 Akasha (Ether)

Anatomically ether element is related with Body Cavities, Mouth and Gastrointestinal Tract and Cells and Tissues. Akasha is present in the empty spaces within the body, such as the thoracic, abdominal, pelvic and Cranial cavities. The element's expansiveness is reflected in the body's hollow organs. Ether contributes to the intercellular spaces and the structural framework.

Physiologically Agni is correlated with the Communication and Consciousness. Akash facilitates the space for communication within the body, such as neural pathways. Digestive processes. Ether is linked to mental functions and also the consciousness expansion.¹³

3. Clinical application of Panchamahabhutas:

The Panchamahabhuta theory in Naturopathy plays a crucial role in the clinical aspect of diagnosis and treatment. This theory, which encompasses the five great elements (Ether, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth) is applied to understand the individuals, the underlying and root causes of diseases.

3.1 Prithvi (Earth)

Clinical Relevance with earth element is related with bone and muscular disease conditions such as muscular weaknesses, Osteo arthritis, osteomalacia, Rickets, Osteopenia, muscular dystrophy etc. Skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, Acne, measles and lupus.

The aim of the treatment Strengthening and stabilizing body structures. The treatment modalities such as Mud therapy such as mudpacks and mudbath, Nutrient - rich diets such as vegetables and fruits, physical exercises to build strength, grounding practices like yoga and meditation - mindfulness to enhance stability and Bare foot walking.

3.2 Jala (Water)

Clinical Relevance with water element is related with the function that provides fluidity and cohesion within the body. The disease conditions related to fluid balance and retention, such as edema, obesity, and mucous - related respiratory issues. The aim of the Treatment Focuses on Managing fluid balance and reducing excess moisture. The treatment Methods such Diuretics, detoxifying herbs, lighter and drier foods, and activities that promote circulation and reduce stagnation, like regular exercise and also hydrotherapy treatments such as hip bath, gastro - hepatic packs, spinal bath and immersion bath.

3.3 Agni (Fire)

Clinical Relevance with water element is related with the function of digestion, metabolism, and transformation. It is associated with the disease conditions issues related to digestion and metabolism, such as acid reflux, inflammation, ulcers, Diabetes Mellitus, hypertension, paralysis etc. The Treatment Focuses on Regulating digestive fire and reducing excess heat. The treatment Methods such as Herbal remedies and practices that calm and soothe the body, and avoiding hot, spicy foods. The Agni supports the Heliotherapy and Chromotherapy.

3.4 Vayu (Air)

Clinical Relevance with Vayu element is related with the function of Governs movement, including circulation, respiration, and nerve impulses. Air element is associated with disease conditions such as movement and dryness, such as bronchial asthma, constipation, anxiety, and neurological issues. This element focuses on Balancing movement and reducing dryness. The treatment methods such as dietary recommendations (moist and grounding foods), and lifestyle modifications to reduce stress and enhance relaxation.

3.5 Akasha (Ether)

The Clinical Relevance with space element related with the function that space within the body, such as cavities and channels. This element is associated with the Conditions such as sinusitis etc. The clinical application focuses on Enhancing space and clearing blockages. The treatment method such as Fasting.

4. Concept of Panchamahabhootas in relation with Yoga Mudras

Yoga Mudra is an ancient science that which connects certain energy - flows in mind and body. The meaning of yogamudra is the expression of internal feelings by way of different postures of fingers, palms, hands feet and or body.¹⁴ The science of mudra and the principle of mudras is that the

transfer of energy takes place from higher level to the lower level.¹⁵ The fingers of our palms are just like live wires of electric current. While mudra is performed, one or more of the fingers touch the thumb to complete an electric circuit and the life energy flows through that circuit to balance the elements represented by those particular fingers.¹⁶ According to Naturopathy strongly believes in five elements theory namely: Agni (fire), Vayu (Air), Aakash (space), Pruthvi (Earth) and Jal (water). These five elements are balanced in our body this results in optimum health. However, imbalance in any one of them affects the body in a negative way. This ultimately leads to disease. When specific mudras are performed, any imbalance in the five elements is restored and the person recovers. These 5 elements are well represented by the fingers of our hands as below: The thumb represents the Agni, Index finger or the second finger represents the vayu, third finger or middle finger represents the space, Ring finger or fourth finger represents the earth and little finger or the last finger represents water.¹⁷

4.1 AKASH MUDRA

Akash, the word comes from Sanskrit term means 'view or recognizes' and mudra means 'gesture or seal'. It is also known as the Shuni mudra, which means the gesture of patience.

4.2 PRITHVI MUDRA

This mudra refers to the 'earth,' and 'mudra,' refers to 'gesture of the hands' in the Sanskrit term. Earth is considered as one of the elements within the body and with the practice of Prithvi Mudra helps to awaken the earth element.

4.3 VAYU MUDRA

This mudra refers to the 'air,' and 'mudra,' refers to 'gesture of the hands' in the Sanskrit term. The practice of vayu Mudra helps to awaken the air element.

4.4 AGNI MUDRA

This mudra refers to the 'fire,' and 'mudra,' refers to 'gesture of the hands' in the Sanskrit term. The practice of agni Mudra helps to awaken the air element.

4.5 JAL MUDRA

This mudra refers to the 'Jal,' and 'mudra,' refers to 'gesture of the hands' in the Sanskrit term. The practice of Jal Mudra helps to awaken the Water element.

5. Conclusion

Naturopathy is a holistic system of healing that incorporates a range of treatments and natural therapies. The five elemental theory concept states the fundamental structural basis of all living beings and is composed of five elements known as panchamahabhootas. Its greatness has been mentioned in ancient sankya philosophy, traditional Chinese medicine and Gheranda Samhita.

Naturopathy strongly believes in five elements theory namely: Agni (fire), Vayu (Air), Aakash (space), Pruthvi (Earth) and Jal (water) and these five elements are balanced in our body which results in optimum health. However, imbalance in any one of them due to any influential factors affects the body and ultimately leads to disease.

Each element anatomically and physiologically correlated with some of the tissues, organs in the body. When these elements are not in a balanced form it affects the structure and function of the body. Hence it is well understood that when five elements are balanced, there is an optimum health and when there is imbalance it shows the deficiency which results in the illness which plays a significant role in the clinical diagnosis and treatment.

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