AYURVEDA: AN INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW-PART II

MADHABENDRA NATH PAL

C1-211 Sector-II, Salt Lake City, Calcutta- 700 091, India

Received: 6 May 1988 Accepted: 16 December 1988

ABSTRACT: In the second part of the study the author discusses disease, drug and Ayurvedic theory and practice briefly.

4. DISEASE

4.1: Ayurvedic notion

According to modern concept, disease indicates a condition of body in which there is incorrect function, and simply means disappearance or absence of ease or comfort. This is more than that, as the scholars of Ayurveda say, and disease also embraces suffering or pain. Roga is the Sanskrit equivalent of the English word ‘disease’, and denotes anything that aches or pains, susruta defines roga as dukha samyoga, which means coming in contact with dukha, in essence, it means physical discomfort, suffering or pain, and also mental anguish that includes pain or suffering arising out of fear, anger, passion, greed etc. In reality the feeling or sensation of pain or suffering or anything that is unpleasant to body or mind, or both, is all that characterizes any disease known till now, and there is no disease without pain or anguish of any kind, degree or duration.

4.2: Classification of disease

Susruta classifies disease into four kinds, according to its cause of origin, or location of pain or suffering. These are agantuja (or, of external origin), sharirika (or, Physical), manasika (or metal) and swabhabika (or, natural). The agantuja or adventitious disease has its origin in external causes like accidents, cuts, burms, bites, stings, injuries etc. the sharirika or physical disease embraces internal ailments arising out of nutritional deficiencies, metabolic imbalances, growths, and inflammations, tissue degeneration, diseases of infection etc. true, infections invade the body from outside, still disease of infection arises out of internal weakness or lack of proper functioning of the internal defence mechanisms; so it is included as sharirika or physical disease, and into as agantuja or adventitious disease, the manasika or mental disease is somewhat different form ‘mental disorder’ of modern times, and is indicated by suffering of affliction emerging out of various states of mind in pride, vanity, anger wrath, fear, cruelly, anxiety, sorrow, seclusion or idleness etc. the swabhaika or natural disease means birth old age, death, urges of hunger, thirst or sleep, as in all such cases sensation of feeling of pain or distress is experienced.
4.3: Apprehension of disease:

Ayurvedic scholars also consider roga-bhava or apprehension of disease, or fear from other’s disease, even when there is in reality no signs of disease, as the primary contributory cause for disease in many cases, as such apprehension of fear also brings one into contact with dukha or results in distress or pain.

5.0: DRUG

5.1: Modern concept:

Etymologically, drug is derived from a French word ‘drogue’, that means ‘dry herb’: it is defined as any substance used for diagnosis, prevention, relief of cure of disease in man or animal. It is defined by the world Health Organisation (WHO) as follows: “A drug in any substance or product that is used or intended to be used to modify or explore physiological systems of pathological states for the benefit or the recipient”.

Ideally, on administration a drug should be localized at the site it is needed most. In real condition, no drug, however, behaves like that; it tends to spread and distribute itself anywhere within the living system, and the host cells for which it is specifically susceptible or effective, may acquire resistance to it with the result that it is on more effective or able to cure the specific ailments.

It is also found that often a drug behaves in a way which is opposite to its intended behavior. In fact, at the same time most of the modern drugs produce curative effects as well as some undesirable, adverse and harmful side-effects. It is now-a-days noticed that use of such drugs often leads to appearance of some other or new diseases in course of alleviating or eliminating the specific ailments for which they are used; prevalence of iatrogenic of drug-produced diseases is now a reality.

5.2: Ayurvedic notion:

Veshaj is the Sanskrit equivalent of the English word ‘drug’, and it means anything, material or means or both, that conquers or overcomes vesham, that is rogabhaya or dear from disease or apprehension of disease.

Taking of food or drink overcomes the pain arising out of hunger or thirst, representing swabhabika or natural disease. Even words of consolation removes to a great extent the pain or anguish of a person when he is distressed with sorrow owing to loss of some near and dear one. It is the common experience with many a person that the faith or confidence usually reposed in a family physician contribute in not a small measure towards amelioration or cure of ailment in many cases. In reality, the very smiling approach or appearance of the family physician, or for that matter, of any physician can and does remove the initial despair and suffering of a patient, and even instill in him a new hope or courage to fight out the ailments, It is the patient who is a the receiving end, and unless he is able to receive an accept a drug as a pain-killing agent as well as a comforting aid, the latter may not have its intended effect at all , no matter how potent of efficacious the so called drug may be. It is observed in many cases that even an antibiotic or any so called ‘miracle drug’ is into able to produce any effect or result at all, and in the event an attempt is made to force or
push through such drug or substance, allergic condition arises or appears along with serious or even fatal consequences in many cases. The compatibility or acceptability of a substance or a thing to the patient is what is considered by Ayurvedic scholars as one of the primary factors that determines what may be a drug in his case at any phase of disease. This is an important aspect that seems to be intimately relate to the healing power inherent in a person.

It has been indicated at the outset that the capacity or ability to overcome the pangs of pain in order to attain freedom from it may be deemed to be the healing power inherent in a person. As long as this capacity or ability endures or lasts, a person, who undergoes suffering from pain, may be in a position to get over it. This has been so clearly and nicely illustrated by Caraka. He stated that a person who has fallen to the ground can rise up again if he has the capacity or ability to do so; and if a stick is extended to him he can rise up more readily and quickly than without it. In the even his capacity or ability has since been exhausted or lost he will not be in a position to rise up, even if the stick is extended to him.

The Ayurvedic notion of drug has evolved around these two notions, namely, first, roga or disease that implies pain or suffering and its apprehension of fear, and secondly, the inherent capacity or ability to overcome pain or suffering and its apprehension or fear.

5.3: Concept of non-drug:

It is firmly held in Ayurvedic medicine that any substance, or means or both is considered, recognized and accepted as veshaja or drug only if it fulfills the requirement of eliminating or removing the specific ailment or affliction being suffered by a person, and does not produce any adverse or harmful side-effects in course of its operation, and if it does produce any, it is at once rejected as the substance or the mean is not considered or recognized as veshaja or drug. Any such substance or means that produces such undesired and harmful side-effect is classified as aveshaja, which may be deemed as equivalent to “non-drug”. This is a distinctive characteristic of Ayurvedic medicine.

5.3: Accessory drug substance:

Another distinguishing feature of Ayurvedic medicine is that a drug is usually administered along with ‘anupan” or “accessory drug substance” like juice or extract from leaves, roots, shoots etc. of various plants or other substances like honey, milk etc. It is held by scholars of Ayurveda that such accessory drug substance not only tends to correct the probable ill or harmful side-effect produced by the principal drug, but also tends to boost up or augment its ameliorative or curative effects.

6.0: AYURVEDIC MEDICINE: THEORY

6.1: Man in cosmos

It is the firm belief of scholars of Ayurveda that human being is part and parcel of nature; whatever material constitutes the physical nature also contributes to the composition of human being. Everything in cosmos is composed of ‘pancha mahabhuta’ or the five
fundamental elements of nature, in various permutation and combination; these are kshiti, ap, tej, marut, and byom; in terms of modern science these correspond to earth, water, fire, air and space respectively. Obviously, human being is also made up of these five fundamental elements, and is microcosm of the macrocosm. Indeed, they held that jibatma or human being emerges through the unique union of sarira (or, body with the sense organs), manas (or, mind) and atman (or spirit or consciousness). Atman is an eternal entity which is not describable by the words of mouth, and is only perceptible and realizable by an individual human being, if he resolves to realize it by regular meditation or pinpointed concentration of this resolution. It is perpetually present, indestructible, and is beyond any kind of transformation. Life lasts or endures so long as this union of sarira, manas and atman continues as such, and disappears or ceases to exist as soon as this union breaks off, when panchatta sets in that is, the human being gradually mingles into the five fundamental elements out of which it was made.

6.2: Evolution of ‘tridosh theory’:

According to scholars of ancient India an immutable truth permeates the realm of ever-changing nature; and they also believed that an equivalent truth of like effect were there in the core of the human being. They held that it is the same essence of existence that pervades both physical and human nature. They also held that the sun, the moon and the wind move the universe.

Effect of fire or heat is evident in the sun, of cold or wetness in the moon, of motion in the wind. So, they came to hold is rendered possible at the influence of effect of wind, fire, and water. This is how the seed of an elementary idea that disease appears at the influence of effect of wind, fire, and water, was sown in their minds. In course of evolution of thoughts or concepts the wind, the fire, and water, gradually began to be related to vayu, pitta, and kapha respectively, the three factors that lead to the evolution of ‘tridosh’ theory, upon which practice of Ayurvedic medicine is based.

6.3: The tridosh theory:

Primarily, it is out of food that man derives everything essential for existence of his life. Food, on digestion, is broadly divided into two portions one fine, and the other gross. Out of the fine portion emerge forces that combine to constitute what is called manas or mind.

The gross portion undergoes further subdivision into two portions, one called aharprasad or essential and the other, kitta, or non-essential. Seven components are produced one after another in successive steps in the order stated, out of the essential portion, and these are rasa (or, chyle), rakta (or, blood) mansa (or, protein), meda (or, fat) asthi (or, bone), majja (or, marrow), and sukra (or, reproductive elements irrespective of sexes). These components contribute to growth of body in volume, as also nourish and support it. So, each one of these components is called a dhatu, that means supporter or upholder and all of them collectively called sapta-dhatu, that means supporter or upholder and all of them collectively called sapta-dhatu, which means seven dhatu, where sapta stands for the number seven. In course of generation of dhatu from aharprasad, some
substances not essential for growth are also produced, and refused by the system, and these are described as Dhatu-mala or impurities from dhatu. Generation of kita or non-essential portion of food takes place at the same time apharprosad or essential portion of food is produced. Impurities namely faces, urine, sweat, hairs, nails etc., and three factors namely vayu, pitta and kapha are produced out of kita.

Vayu, pitta and kapha, which are also included as mala or impurities, play a predominant role in maintenance of health. If these factors persist in normal and desirable degree of measure and operate in harmony with one another, these render special aid of support to health, and for this, these are called as mala-dhatu or impurities supporting maintenance of health. Mala-dhatu is distinct from saptadhatu in that the former does not provide any nourishment, while the latter does. In fact, vayu, pitta and kapha pollute the effects of saptadhatu, and generate such condition as may help appearance of ailments; and so, these were also describe as dosha (or pollutant), and collectively called tridosh (or, three-fold pollutant).

Dosha, dhatu and mala, by their very manner of generation from food, influence one another deeply. Of these, tridosha, exerts the most meaningful influence, n that if these three doshas operate in harmony with one another, it leads to a state which is described as dosha samyata, is an index of persistence of a dynamic equilibrium among three doshas, that constitute or contribute to what is a state of health. If three doshas do not so operate in harmony with one another, or when the dynamic equilibrium is disturbed adversely it lead to a state described as dosha-vaishamya, and such a state leads to conditions or situation that may result in the appearance of ailment or disease. In essence, dosha-samyata and dosha-vaishamya stand for health and disease respectively. According to scholars of Ayurveda, restoration of dosha-vaishamya to dosha-samyata constitute what is known as chikitsa or treatment of an ailing patient. This is in a nut-shell, tridosha theory, which is the bed-rock of Ayurvedic medicine.

Vayu, pitta and kapha permeate the entire body; they are, however, localized specially in the lower, middle and upper regions between heart and navel, susruta held that vayu dominated in pelvic cavity, the space between anus and hipbone; pitta is localized in midspace between heart and navel, and kapha in intestines. According to Caraka, upper space of heart is the seat of kapha.

It is noticed that vayu, pitta and kapha vary at the end, middle and initial phases of age, of day and night, and of intake of meals, it is observed that in course of taking of meals, kapha predominates at the outset, pitta at the middle, and vayu at the end in the like manner, kapha predominates during infancy pitta in middle age and vayu in old age.

The Ayurvedic physician takes a considered view of all normal and abnormal activities and signs displayed by such activities, and then determines if disease has been caused by deranged vayu pitta or kapha. For instance, if a sense of
looseness, dislocation, extension and expansion of organs, reluctance to act, perspiration, etc. are noticed, it is presumed that vayu has been deranged or adversely disturbed from its normal state of functioning. Such state often leads to disease caused by deranged vayu, pitta or kapha. For instance, if a sense of looseness, dislocation, extension and expansion of organs, reluctance to act, perspiration, etc. are noticed, it is presumed that vayu has been deranged or adversely disturbed from its normal state of functioning. Such state often leads to disease caused by deranged vayu.

This is just to illustrate broadly how an Ayurvedic physician applies the tridosha theory in determining the ground for appearance of disease, but, this involves more of an art, which requires a good deal of practical experience to be gained over a period through training from and expert practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine.

6.4: Modern view of tridosh:

Kaviraj Gananath Sen, MA, IMS (1887-1944), an eminent Ayurvedic Physician of Calcutta, was well versed in modern medicine, and he was the pioneer who sought to read tridosh theory in the light thrown by modern science. Broadly, his idea is that physiological functions in man are subject to regulation by three fundamental or basic principles. The originates in the very initial cell produced from fertilization of ovum and spermatozoon donated each by parents. In course of time, this principle is turned into the body of offspring. The effect of this force is denoted by vayu: different cells assume the shape of various organs at the impact of this force; the effect of vayu permeates throughout the boy mechanism.

In essence, vayu is the index of vital energy, and moves from cell to cell; so, it is also described as cellular force. Gananath conceived that the activities of vayu correspond to those of the central Nervous system.

The second is the heating principle at the instance of which heat is generated in the body and the body temperature is preserved; this is denoted by pitta. The major influence of pitta is there in reactions or processes like digestion and assimilation. Gananath held that pitta is like the internal fire, that keeps the rhythm of life ever on its play and regulatory influence over metabolic functions is intimately related to pitta; in essence, pitta corresponds to activities of thermogenesis and thermotaxis.

The third is the cooling principle, termed as kapha. The role of kapha in maintaining coolness in body is almost like that of a water-jacket in keeping an internal combustion engine cool. Gananath held that the activities of kapha correspond to those of endocrine or hormone secretion.

Gananath held, if all these functions take place in harmony with one another, a dynamic equilibrium is set up, that indicated state of health, and if not condition inviting ailment or disease prevails.

It is envisaged in modern physiology also that for promotion and maintenance of health, an harmonious internal environment, described as homeostasis is required to be generated; during homeostasis all functions take place in such a manner, as a dynamic equilibrium is set up and sustained.
Gananath’s view of tridosh seems to be strikingly similar to that of homoeostasis; and the notion of tridosh now needs verification with the aids of modern science and technology.

6.5: Promotion of health:

As earlier indicated, manas or mid emerges out of forces that result from the fine portion of digested food and drink; mind displays itself into three states denoted by the terms states, raja and tama, in respect of its speed of action. A person with qualities arising from raja state, knows no rest whenever he gets on with any idea, unless stopped or arrested by some other idea; a person with qualities arising from tama state virtually does not move at all, unless he is forced to do. In real conditions of life, however, no person is exclusively full of qualities arising from either raja or tama states. In fact, he is the embodiment of these qualities in varying degrees of permutation and combination. This is so, because a person should not be always under the influence of either excessive activity or idleness, if he is to attain sound health and peace of mind. So it is absolutely necessary for him to strike a balance between the extreme states of raja and tama. It is possible to strike such a balance by virtue of qualities arising from the state of mind denoted by the term satwa; is the index of harmony and balance between raja and tama.

It has been noticed on close observation that activities of vayu are demonstrated mainly in mobility that reflects through such qualities as initiative, courage excitement etc. activities actuated at the instance of vayu correspond qualities relative to raja state of mind activities demonstrated by a person under the impact of kapha usually tend to attain a stable state; and as such, activities arising from kapha an tama state of mind look similar in nature, Basically, the effect of pitta is to bring about transformation and harmonization or balance of all kinds of functions. The main activity of satwa is also to strike a harmony or balance between raja and tama, the two opposing urges of mind. So, pitta and satwa are similar in nature.

All these go to indicate that body and mind are intimately related to each other, and influence each other very closely, in fact, their interrelationship is radically influenced by the different foods and drinks one usually takes in; quantitatively, food and drink help bring about transformation of one dhatu to another on a continuous line, as long as the process continues smoothly in accordance with the actual need of the individual; as soon as the need in fulfilled and satisfied, even a slight excess of food and drink would not only tell upon the transformational process itself, but would also set the entire subsequent process of assimilation into chaos and confusion that may lead to appearance of ailment or disease. This is why any Ayurvedic physician, as a routine, forbid intake of meal until and unless the one taken earlier has been digested duly and assimilated.

The urge to attain hitayuh and sukhayuh is to be pursued vigorously in order to attain sound health; obviously mind, the internal instrument, has to be applied for such pursuit, and it has to be trained and exercised to that end. Of the many means laid down in the Ayurvedic texts for such training and exercise, a few such are cited below by way of illustration. These are to
be practiced as a routine, and in course of time such practice forms into a habit of the person who practices. This constitutes what is known as Dinacharya or daily conduct of beneficial effect.

“With all humility look for those well wishing friends who help you with advice for doing good. Keep away form those friends who only help in doing needs that lead to woes”.

“Kindness to all beings, charity, restraint over body, mind and words, self-interest in the need of others, that is performance of the work of others as your own, are considered as deeds of eminently noble nature, or are best of conducts”.

“If a person always recounts as to ‘how my days and nights are passing on presently’ or if I am doing the right or the wrong, he has never to undergo sufferings and sorrow”.

Always, mind has to be applied certainly and surely, step by step to achieve enduring effect or result; no hasty decision or action and no decision or no action at all should be taken a balance has to be struck between too much activity indicative of raja state of mind, and idleness or non-activity indicative of tama state of mind; implying in essence, restraint and poise have to be cultivated and followed as rigidly as practicable to achieve whatever is desired for beneficial purpose. According to scholars and practitioners of ayurveda, regular diet, consisting of beneficial food and drink, beneficial code of conduct, and beneficial practices are elementary prerequisites to the pursuit of a purposeful and pleasant state of life. Indeed, the supreme goal of Ayurvedic medicine is to help a person achieve the highest degree or level of swasthya or health that is achievable with restraint in real situation through which he may happen to pass, so that he may be a source of pleasure to himself and to his fellow beings in the community at large. Essentially, in theory, tridosha implies harmony in life, and in practice, Ayurvedic medicine seeks to achieve whatever contributes to realisation and promotion of this harmony indicative of health.

(To be concluded)