

PANCHMAHABHUTA SIDDHANT - A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The *Panchmahabhuta Siddhant* is the fundamental concept of *Ayurveda* which postulates that all matter, including the human body, is composed of five primordial elements: *Prithvi* (earth), *Aap* (water), *Tejas* (fire), *Vayu* (air), and *Akash* (space). These elements interact to form bodily structures, govern physiological functions, and influence disease pathology. The doctrine aligns with *Saankhya* philosophy, where the evolution of matter is attributed to interactions between these elements. Their predominance in *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and *dhatu*s (tissues) determines health status. Understanding *Panchmahabhuta* enables targeted therapeutic interventions, where imbalances are corrected using substances with opposing elemental properties, ensuring holistic health maintenance.

KEYWORDS: Panchmahabhuta, Ayurveda, Saankhya philosophy, physiological functions, holistic health.

INTRODUCTION

The universe is developed from five elements or primordial substances i.e. *panchmahabhuta*.

Nirukti of Panchmahabhuta-

The word *Panchmahabhuta* comprises of three words: Panch meaning "Five"; Maha meaning "Great"; Bhuta meaning "to exist".

Bhutas are the microscopic and invisible structures whereas Maha-bhuta are the macroscopic and visible structures.

Prithvi, *Aap*, *Tejas*, *Vayu* and *Akash* are collectively known as *panchmahabhuta*.

Marely every substance is made up of five basic elements in different proportions, hence it is said that,

सर्वं द्रव्यं पाञ्चभौतिकमस्मिन्नर्थे । (Ch.Su.26/10)

Among the five elements, one element may be dominant in a substance or being and can be identified by its name. For example, if *Prithvi* is predominant, it is called *Parthiva Dravya*; if *Aap* (*Jala*) is predominant, it is called *Apya Dravya*; if *Tejas* is predominant, it is called *Agneya Dravya*; if *Vayu* is predominant, it is called *Vayaviya Dravya*; and if *Akash* is predominant, it is called *Akashiya Dravya*.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

1. To explore the scientific basis of the *Panchmahabhuta* theory in *Ayurveda* and its relevance in physiology, pathology, and therapeutic applications.
2. To establish the relationship of *Panchmahabhuta* with *Tridosha*, *Triguna*, *Shad Rasa*, *Sapta Dhatu* and *Mala*.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

References are collected from *ayurveda* classics such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya* and various research articles and scientific reviews.

EVOLUTION OF PANCHMAHABHUTA

The evolution of *Panchmahabhuta* follows the doctrine of *Saankhya* Philosophy. *Avyakta* (The unmanifest principle) produces *Mahan* (intelligence) and from this *Mahan*, *Ahankara* (ego) is produced which contains three charactersitics viz. *Satva* (Stable and balanced), *Raja* (Active, turbulent) and *Tamas* (Lethargic and heavy).

The *Satva* and *Raja* manifested from *Ahankara* forms *ekadashendriyas* (5 karmendriyas + 5 Gyanendriya + 1 Ubhayendriya i.e. mana). In the same way, *Raja* and *Tamas* of *Ahankara* 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. 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.

In the evolution of matter, *Mahabhuta* is the smallest divisible part of any matter. Among the panchmahabhutas, the first *Bhuta* has only one property, and each subsequent *Bhuta* gains an additional property. Thus, the preceding *Bhuta*, along with its property, is associated with the succeeding one as mentioned by *Acharya Charaka*-

तेषामेकगुणः पूर्वो गुणवृद्धिः परे परे । पूर्वः पूर्वगुणश्चैव क्रमशो गुणिषु स्मृतः॥ (Ch.Sha.1/28)

Akash mahabhuta: Akash Mahabhuta is the space without which matter cannot exist. Its main sense attribute is sound (*Shabda*) and its main property is non-resistance (*Apratighatatva*).

Vayu mahabhuta: Vayu Mahabhuta is evolved from Akash mahabhuta. Touch (*Sparsha*) is its chief sense attribute and as it is evolved from Akash so it also inherits attribute of sound (*Shabda*). *Chalatva* or movability is its chief property.

Agni mahabhuta: Agni Mahabhuta evolves next from Vayu mahabhuta. The main sense attribute of Agni is Vision (*Roopa*) and the chief property is heat (*Ushnatva*). It also inherits the sense attributes of sound

(*Shabda*) and touch (*Sparsha*) from the Akash and Vayu mahabhuta respectively.

Aap mahabhuta: The next mahabhuta evolve from Agni mahabhuta is Aap mahabhuta (Jal mahabhuta). Taste (*Rasa*) is its main sense attribute and liquidity (*Dravatava*) is the chief property, along with the properties inherited from the earlier Mahabhutas.

Prithvi mahabhuta: The last to evolve is Prithvi mahabhuta. Roughness (*Kharatva*) is the chief property and Smell (*Gandha*) is the main sense attribute of this mahabhuta, besides the properties inherited from the earlier mahabhutas.

Mahabhuta	Properties
Akash	Shabda
Vayu	Shabda + Sparsha
Teja	Shabda + Sparsha + Roopa
Jala	Shabda + Sparsha + Roopa + Rasa
Prithvi	Shabda + Sparsha + Roopa + Rasa + Gandha

Relation of Panchmahabhuta with Tridosha

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. Similarly, *Vayu* and *Akash* as their dominant component in those having *Vata dosha* characteristics.

S. No.	Dosha	Panchmahabhuta
1.	Vata	Vayu + Akash
2.	Pitta	Agni
3.	Kapha	Prithvi + Jala

Relation of Panchmahabhuta with Rasa

Jala is the substratum for all *Rasa*. When *Jala*, which is *Saumya* in *Antariksha* (atmosphere), is in its pure form, it has *Avyakta Rasa* (no taste). However, when it comes into contact with the ground, it acquires all Panchabhautika qualities and develops six distinct tastes

that nourish both animals and plants.

Acharya Sushruta opines that the manifestation of the six rasas occurs due to the combination of different mahabhutas. While all six Rasas contain all the Mahabhutas, one or two will be dominant.

Yogendranath Sen presents a logical argument that since Dravya is Panchabhautika, the Rasa residing in Dravya must also be Panchabhautika.

द्रव्यस्य पाञ्चभौतिकत्वात् तदाश्रित रसेऽपि पाञ्चभौतिकः (योगेन्द्रनाथ सेन)

S. No.	Name of Rasa	Panchbhautika components
1.	Madhur rasa	Prithvi + Jala
2.	Amla rasa	Agni + Prithvi
3.	Lavana rasa	Jala + Agni
4.	Katu rasa	Agni + Vayu
5.	Tikta rasa	Vayu + Akash
6.	Kashaya rasa	Vayu + Prithvi

Relation of Rasa and Dosha with Panchamahabhuta:

- Madhur-Amla-Lavana rasa → *Kaphakara* and *Vatahara* (Aggravates Kapha dosha and Alleviates Vata dosha)
- Katu-Tikta-Kashaya rasa → *Vatahara* and *Kaphahara* (Alleviates Kapha dosha and Aggravates Vata dosha)
- Kashaya-Tikta-Madhur rasa → *Pittahara* (Alleviates Pitta dosha)
- Amla-Lavana-Katu rasa → *Pittakara* (Aggravates Pitta dosha)

The above relation proves that the Shad-rasaja objects of the creation and bodily Tridosha are Panchabhautika and interlinked.

Hence, in the depletion of bodily Panchabhautika components, the relevant components of creation are given either in the form of *Ahara* or *Aushadha* for the maintenance of equilibrium of health.

Relation of Mahabhuta, Guna and Indriya

S. No.	Mahabhuta	Vishishtha Guna	Indriya
1.	Akash	Shabda	Received by Shravanendriya
2.	Vayu	Sparsha	Received by Sparshanendriya
3.	Agni	Roopa	Received by Chakshurendriya
4.	Jala	Rasa	Received by Rasanendriya
5.	Prithvi	Gandha	Received by Ghranendriya

Relation of Panchamahabhuta with Triguna

S. No.	Mahabhuta	Triguna
1.	Akash	Sattva Guna
2.	Vayu	Rajo Guna
3.	Agni	Sattva + Rajo Guna
4.	Jala	Sattva + Tamo Guna
5.	Prithvi	Tamo Guna

Development of Embryo based on Panchmahabhuta:

'वायुर्विभजति' – *Vayu* initiates cell division for growth.

'तेज एनं पचति' – *Teja* produces transformation in the tissue.

'आपः क्लेदयति' – *Aap* brings the liquidity.

'पृथिवी संहन्ति' – *Prithvi* brings the consolidation state.

'आकाशं विवर्धयति' – *Akash* causes expansion by creating proper spaces among the tissues.

Panchbhautika elements in human body:

i) Parthiva elements:

तत्र यद् विशेषतः स्थूलं स्थिरं मूर्तिमद्गुरुखरकठिनमङ्गं नख-अस्थि-दन्त-मांस-चर्म-वर्चः केश-श्मश्रु-लोम-कण्डरादि तत् पार्थिवं गन्धो घ्राणं च । (Ch.Sha.7/16)

Body elements that are *Sthula* (gross), *Sthira* (stable), *Murtiman* (having structure/dimensions), *Guru* (heavy),

Khara (rough), and *Kathin* (hard) are called Parthiva elements, e.g., nails, teeth, bones, etc.

ii) Apya elements:

यद् द्रव-सर-मन्द-स्निग्ध-मृदु-पिच्छिलं रस-रुधिर-वसा-कफ-पित्त-मूत्र-स्वेदादि तद् आप्यं रसो रसनं च । (Ch.Sha.7/16)

Body elements that are liquid, fluid, slow (in activity), unctuous (*snigdha*), soft (*mridu*), slimy (*picchil*) are apya

elements. e.g. rasa, rudhira (blood), vasa (fat in the muscles), kapha, pitta, urine, sweat, gustatory organs etc.

iii) Taijasa elements:

यत् पित्तमूष्मा यो या च भाः शरीरे, तत् सर्वमानेयं रूपं दर्शनं च । (Ch.Sha.7/16)

Substances that have the qualities of heat and sharpness are Taijasa elements, e.g., Pitta, digestive fire, skin

texture and luster, eyes, etc.

iv) Vayaviya elements:

'यदुच्छवासप्रश्वासोन्मेषनिमेषकुञ्चनप्रसारणागमनप्रेरणधारणादि तद्वायवीयं स्पर्शः स्पर्शनं च'

(Ch.Sha.7/16)

Body elements that are responsible for expiration, inspiration, opening and closing of the eyes, contraction and relaxation, movements, stimulation, control of

activities, and tactile sensations are classified as Vayaviya elements.

v) Akashiya elements:

'यद्विविक्तं यदुच्यते, महान्ति चाणूनि स्रोतांसि तदान्तरीक्षं शब्दः श्रोत्रं च' ।

(Ch.Sha.7/16)

Body elements that have space, porosity (*Vivikta*), macro and micro-channels in the body, and the ears are

classified as Akashiya elements.

Relation of Panchmahabhuta with Sapta dhatu

Panchabhautika constitution of Rasa dhatu

'रस आप्यः'।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Jala mahabhuta is predominantly present in *rasa dhatu*.

Panchabhautika constitution of Rakta dhatu:

Every substance is made of five mahabhutas. Hence, they

are also present in the rakta dhatu and qualities of rakta dhatu can be explained on the basis of five mahabhutas.

पाञ्चभौतिकं त्वपरे जीवरक्तमाहुराचार्यः॥ 'विसृता द्रवता रागः स्पन्दनं लघुता तथा' ।

(Su.Su.14/8-9)

Five Qualities of Rakta Dhatu	Mahabhuta
<i>Visrata</i> (Fleshy odour)	Prithvi
<i>Dravata</i> (Fluidity)	Jala
<i>Raga</i> (Red Colour)	Teja
<i>Spandana</i> (Pulsation)	Vayu
<i>Laghuta</i> (Lightness)	Akash

In spite of existence of five mahabhutas, *rakta dhatu* has dominance of *teja* and *jala mahabhuta*.

'रक्तं तेजोजलात्मकं' ॥

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Panchabhautika constitution of Mamsa dhatu:

'मांसं पार्थिवं' ।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Mamsa dhatu predominantly consists of *prithvi mahabhuta*.

Panchabhautika constitution of Meda dhatu:

Meda dhatu is made up of *Jala* and *Prithvi mahabhutas*.

'मेदो जलपृथिव्यात्मकम्' ।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Panchabhautika constitution of Asthi dhatu:

'अस्थि पृथिव्यनिलतेजसाम्' ।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

In spite of presence of all 5 mahabhutas, *asthi* has predominance of *prithvi* and *vayu mahabhuta*.

अस्थि पृथिव्यनिलतेजसाम् ।

(Dalhana on Su.Su.15/10)

According to *Dalhana*, along with *prithvi* and *vayu*, *asthi* also has the dominance of *teja mahabhuta*.

Panchabhautika constitution of Majja dhatu:

'मज्जा आप्यम्'

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

There is predominance of *Jala mahabhuta* in *majja dhatu*.

Panchabhautika constitution of Shukra dhatu:

'शुक्रं चाप्यं' ।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

In *shukra*, there is predominance of *Jala mahabhuta*.

Relation of Panchmahabhuta with Mala:

मूत्रं जलानलात्मकम् ।

(Dalhana on Su.Su.15/10)

There is predominance of *Jala* and *Anal (agni) mahabhuta* in *mutra* (urine).

पुरीषं पार्थिवम् ।

(Dalhana on Su.Su.15/10, Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Prithvi mahabhuta is predominant in *Purisha*.

स्वेदः स्तन्यं चाप्यम् ।

(Chakrapani on Su.Su.15/8)

Aap mahabhuta is predominant in *sweda*.

Mala	Panchbhautika Composition
Mutra	Jala + Agni
Purisha	Prithvi
Sweda	Jala

Relation of Panchmahabhuta with Dravya

सर्वं द्रव्यं पाञ्चभौतिकमस्मिन्नर्थे ।

(Ch.Su.26/10)

सर्वद्रव्यमिति कार्यद्रव्यम् । अस्मिन्नर्थे अस्मिन् प्रकरणे ।

(Chakrapani on Ch.Su.26/10)

Acharya Charaka advocates that all *Dravyas* (substances) in this universe are composed of Panchamahabhuta. In this context, '*Sarva Dravya*' refers to *Karya Dravyas* only.

According to *Sushruta*, *Dravya* is formed by an appropriate combination of *Prithvi*, *Aap*, *Teja*, *Vayu* and *Akash Mahabhuta*. Even though *dravya* is composed of Panchamahabhutas, depending on the *Pradhanyata* of *Mahabhuta*, the *dravyas* are classified into *Parthiva*, *Apya*, *Aagneya*, *Vayaviya* and *Akashiya*.

According to *Vagbhatta*, among the five Mahabhutas, *Prithvi* serves as the *Adhithana* (substratum or support), while *Jala Mahabhuta* forms the *Yoni*, meaning it binds the particles in the *Dravya*. *Akash*, *Vayu*, and *Agni Mahabhutas* together contribute to giving structure to the *Dravya*.

Panchbhautik predominance in different Aushadh Dravya:

Vaman Dravya: Agni + Vayu mahabhuta
Virechan Dravya: Prithvi + Jala mahabhuta
Sanshaman Dravya: Akash mahabhuta
Lekhan Dravya: Vayu + Agni mahabhuta
Brimhana Dravya: Prithvi + Jala mahabhuta
Deepaniya Dravya: Agni mahabhuta.

Clinical application of panchmahabhuta

If any of the mahabhutas become vitiated in the body and cause disease, they can be normalized by administering drugs and foods containing mahabhutas with opposite properties. For instance, if *Prithvi mahabhuta* becomes vitiated, it can be treated with *dravyas* predominantly composed of *Vayu*, *Agni*, and *Akash mahabhutas*, as they possess opposing qualities to *prithvi mahabhuta*.

According to the *Samanya-Visheshha Siddhant*, *Samanya* (similarity) is the primary cause of increase, while *Visheshha* (dissimilarity) is the primary cause of decrease. Thus, the principle of opposite *Chikitsa* (treatment) for each mahabhuta aligns with this concept. Therefore, understanding the panchabhautika composition of therapeutic substances is essential for effective treatment.

DISCUSSION

The concept of Panchamahabhutas (Five elements) is the foundation of Ayurveda to understand its physiology (normal functioning), pathology (disease formation) and pharmacokinetics (movement of drug within the body). Ayurveda believes that everything in this universe is made up of Panchamahabhuta. Panchamahabhutas are earth (*Prithvi*), water (*Jala*), heat (*Agni* or *Teja*), air (*Vayu*) and space (*Akash*) and collectively they are termed as Panchmahabhutas. These are the minutest

elements, which constitute living and non-living matters. Everything including drugs, herbs and living beings are made of these basic elements. Every matter contains all of these

Panchamahabhutas. A single cell of a living organism has combination of the five components. The earth or the *Prithvi mahabhuta* forms the major structure of the cell. The *Aap mahabhuta* or the water forms the cytoplasm of the cell.

The various metabolisms of the body cells are governed by the *Agni mahabhuta*. The space inside the cell is governed by the *Akash mahabhuta*. And finally, the channel through which the waste materials and nutrients get transported in various parts of the body is given by *Vayu mahabhuta*.

CONCLUSION

The *Panchmahabhuta* theory is a foundational concept in *Ayurveda*, explaining the composition and functioning of the human body through five elemental forces i.e. *Prithvi*, *Aap*, *Tejas*, *Vayu*, and *Akash*. These elements govern physiological processes, disease pathology, and therapeutic interventions. Their relationship with *Tridosha*, *Sapta Dhatu*, *Shad Rasa* and *Mala* underscores their role in health and disease management. The integration of Panchmahabhuta principles with modern scientific perspectives enhances our understanding of bodily functions and treatment strategies. By applying this knowledge in clinical practice, *Ayurveda* offers a holistic approach to restoring balance and promoting well-being through dietary and medicinal interventions.

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