

ROLE OF SWASTHVIRTA IN PUBLIC HEALTH-A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient medical science of the human civilization. It is holistic health science which deals with each individual as well as at community level in entirety. The social impact of ill health is on the rise, with some diseases affecting not only the health of individuals but also that of a nation's economy with their increasing healthcare costs. *Ayurveda* system has its own advantages that it is also fulfill the social health demands. *Swastavritta* or the promotion of health is one of the strongest and most unique aspects of *Ayurvedic* medicine. *Ayurveda* emphasises on the rules of conduct and its effects on social and behavioural aspects of life. It deals with preventive, curative aspects. Classical texts of *Ayurveda* describe many principles such as infectious disease, immunity, nutrition etc.

KEYWORD: Public Health, *Ayurveda*, *Swasthvritta*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine, which stresses principally on prevention of body ailments rather than simply relieving pathological problems or symptoms. *Ayurveda* believes in the treatment of an individual as a whole. The real value of *Ayurveda* lies in its basic principles, including its unique concepts of *Panchamahabhuta* (Five elements), *Prakriti* (Constitution), *Guna* (Quality), *Rasa* (Taste), *Agni* (Gastric fire), *Dosha* (Humour), *Dhatu* (Tissues), *Mala* (Faeces), *Srotas* (Channels), and its personalized approach to *Nidan* (Etiology), *Cikitsa* (Treat-ment) and *Rasayana* (Macrobiotics/Life lengthening drugs).^[1] Various principles de-scribed in the classical texts of *Ayurveda* hold good value even today. The present day *Ayurveda* have undergone many changes as per the need of the day, but, important principles have remained unchanged. Public health as a discipline is mainly seen as a part of or a similar stream to community medicine. But the classical text of *Ayurveda* also describes certain principles of public health in its own parlances. The classical texts of *Ayurveda* describe many principles relevant to public health such as infectious disease, immunity, nutrition etc. But this present document is limited to the concept of public health and health in brief.

Concept of Health in *Ayurveda*

Unlike Allopathic system of Medicine where human body is considered a machine and takes a reductionist

approach, *Ayurveda* considered human body as a continuum of nature with consciousness at its core. The all inclusiveness of *Ayurveda* and its willingness to put welfare of the patient above everything else in unique.

In order to substantiate this point let us look at the definition of health given *Maharishi Sushruta*.^[2]

lenks'k% lekfXu"p le/kkrqefyØ;%A
izlUukResfUnz;eu%LoLFkbR;fHk/kh;rsAA¼lqJqr½

Definition of health given by *Sushrut* is translated as follows

A person possessing-

1. Equilibrium of the *dosha*
2. Balanced condition of gastric fire.
3. Harmonious working of digestion, assimilation and elimination process.
4. The best mood of spirit, senses and mind is said to be in perfect health.

This definition which is based on harmony of various energies in the body is very holistic in nature and is more practical than the definition of health given by WHO, which states.^[3]

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental, social well-being and not merely absence of diseases or infirmity"

In this definition health is mentioned as a state while *Ayurveda* talks of harmony and equilibrium which is dynamic in nature. In WHO definition spiritual dimension is missing which is included in *Ayurvedic* concept of health.

Prevention of disease is the primary focus of *Ayurveda* “*SwasthasyaSwasthyaRakshanam*”.^[4]

Is the prime aim of *Ayurveda* which means “preserving the health of healthy persons *Ayurveda* is primarily the science of positive health and it is only secondly the science of curing diseases”

Ayurveda is based on the principle of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, and *Agni*. Health is the outcome of the harmonized state of these factors whereas the opposite leads to ill health. *Dosha* is understood by humour as its modern parlance and *Ayurveda* describes about three different types of such *Doshas* named *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* and each of these *Doshas* are again classified in to five different types. Some people compare *Vata* with nervous system owing to some of its characteristics, *Pitta* with GI system and especially with gastric enzymes and the metabolites and *Kapha* with some of the fluids of our body such phlegm and synovial fluid. *Ayurveda* describes seven different types of *Dhatu*, these are *rasa*, *rakta*, *mamsa*, *meda*, *asthi*, *majja* and *shukra*. So from *rasa* (life sap) the body develops *rakta* (blood), from *rakta* it develops *mamsa* (muscles), from *mamsa* is developed *meda* (fat), from *meda* is developed *asthi* (bones), from *asthi* the body develops *majja* (nervous system) and from *majja* is generated *sukra*. Thus, *vaat*, *Pitta* and *kapha* rule the body kingdom, i.e. the kingdom of *rasa*, *rakta*, *mamsa*, *meda*, *asthi*, *majja* and *shukra* and hence the body continues to function. Our daily life activities are a result of this functioning. Waste products, which are byproducts of our daily activities, are called *malas*. *Mala* (faeces), *akshimala* (dirt coming from the eyes), *mutra* (urine) and *sweda* (sweat) are the *malas* mentioned by *Ayurveda*. To summarize, *Ayurveda* explains the body functions using the *Dosh-Dhatu-Mala* concept. *Doshas* are body constituents which are responsible for the way the body functions. This body is made up of seven *dhatu*s. *Malas* are waste products of the body. If this chain works well, we can maintain good health. If anything goes wrong in this chain of activity then we are affected by disease. Let us understand the WHO definition of health as per the concepts of “*swasthya*”. The definition proposed by *Sushrut* also says about physical, mental and social health; the physical health is related to *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala* and *Agni*, means, their harmonized presence will lead to healthy state and the opposite will lead to unhealthy state or diseased state; the social and mental dimensions of health is related with the stage of ecstasy of soul, sense organs (*Indriya*) and the mind. Here the sense organs give a social relevance; means, these sense organs always get access to social issues and happenings bringing social dimension in to health.^[5,6]

Concept of ‘ritucharya’ and ‘dincharya’ in public health

Ayurveda is unique in prescribing specific life style changes according to changing seasons (*ritucharya*) as well as according to 24 hour day and night cycle (*dincharya*). Following are some of the daily regimens prescribed by *Ayurvedic rishis* to promote health & prevent diseases.

To get up early in the morning

Charaksamhita (sutra Sthanam) 8/7

Sushrut samhita 24/3

AshtangaHridaya sutra Sthanam – 3/3

Morning drinking (‘Ushapan’) of water

AshtangaHridaya Sutra Sthanam 2/1

Mouth Hygiene cleaning practices for face & Mouth cavity

Charaksamhita (sutra Sthanam) – 5/73-74

Scraping of the tongue

SushrutaSamhita – 24/10, 11, 12

Gargling of month

CharakaSamhita – 5 – 77, 80

Physical Exercise

“Physical Exercise should be taken after due consideration for age, physical capacity, place, time and food habits – otherwise it may invite disorders”- *SushrutaSamhita 24/48*

Bath regimens

Maharishi Charak says “Bath purifies the body, promotes the virility and longevity, eliminates fatigue, sweat and dirt; induces body strength and is vitalizing to highest degree - *CharakSamhita, Sutra Sthanam 5/44*

Food Regimens (Ahara)

In our knowledge nowhere food has been discussed in such a great detail and given so much importance as done by the great *Ayurvedic Rishis*.

Not only hundreds of food items have been detailed according to their ‘*gunas*’ (inherent properties) but also, based on that, recommendations have been given (including contraindications) for persons with different ‘*prakruti*’. Compared to this, the concept of classifying foods based on calories, proteins, vitamins looks very basic. Another unique concept of *Ayurveda* is ‘*pathya*’ (desirable) ‘*apathya*’ (undesirable) and ‘*virudha*’ *ahaar* (incompatible) foods.

Only recently the modern medicine is talking about ‘food-based’ dietary recommendation rather than ‘nutrient-based’ dietary recommendation.

Both *Sushruta* and *Charaka* have given great importance to the food choices in order to preserve health. (*Charaka*,

Sutra Sthanam, 27/349) (*SushrutaSamhita*, 24/68) *Maharishi Charak* says “a daily diet should be of such a quality which not only helps to maintain present well-being but serves as a prophylactic against coming diseases. (*CharakSamhita* 5/13)

DISCUSSION

The present document is confined to two important concepts; the concept of public health and thereby driving the related concept of health. This is so because when we try to understand the concept of public health in *Ayurveda* we also should understand that of the health. This document does not go in detail to what all principles have been described under the big umbrella of public health in *Ayurveda*. The specific concepts and principles require deeper study for detailed insight about each one of them. This study deliberately limits its scope to the brief concept of public health and health.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda is the best option for achieving the goal of Personal health along with public health.

Ayurveda concerns mostly with longevity, whose notion is not only limited merely to long-lasting life, but it encompasses all the conditions to live in health and vitality in order to achieve a healthy death, meaning the natural final experience of the cycle of life. Thus, in *Ayurveda* the concept of public health, even encompassing all ages, focuses primarily on the individual capability of healthy aging intended as complete fulfilling one's life.^[7,8] Finally *Ayurveda* is based on universal principles not limited to a particular ethnic group or culture- being both person centered and intercultural and it can be used as an integration of the existent healthcare systems as well as a template to rescue local traditional values in order to meet the needs of different populations.^[9] The present document is a theoretical approach to the concept of health and public health which does not obviously gain access in to the details of the principles and practices of public health. The classical texts of *Ayurveda* delineate various principles relevant to the present day public health practice. *Ayurveda* is widely used in India as a system of primary health care, and interest in it is growing worldwide as well.^[10]

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