

Conceptual Study on the State of 'Swastha'

Deepti Singh¹

Abstract

Ayurveda advocates principle of *dhatu-samyata* as prime aim of attainment of good health. This *samyata* of *dhatu* is termed as *arogata* (state of health) according to Ayurveda. Health status of an individual also depends on other factors like age, body constitution, status of *agni*, seasonal variations, practice of particular food and regimen etc. The aim of this study is to explore the concept of *swastha* in different aspects as described in *Ayurveda* literature, so that each human being can understand it properly and can effort to achieve it.

Keywords: *Swastha*, Health, Ayurveda

Introduction

Ayurveda is the school of science which describes four aspects of whole life span dividing it into four types (*hita-ayu*, *ahita-ayu*, *sukhayu*, *dukhayu*) and giving knowledge of wholesome and unwholesome practices related to *ayu* along with its measurement.¹ The foremost aim of Ayurveda is to bless every human being with healthy and longer life. This is the reason why important literature of Ayurveda (*Brihatrayi*) started with chapters named *Dirghanjivitiya* in *Charaka Samhita*, *Vedotpattiya* in *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ayushkamiya* in *Ashtanga Sangrah*, describing the aim and cause of chronological landing of Ayurveda on earth. Providing and maintaining health of every individual and making them disease free is the aim of Ayurveda.² A healthy state of an individual has been told as the basic necessity to achieve any aim in life (*Purushartha-chatushtaya*).³ This is the reason why all ancient scholars have given more emphasis on health, i.e., *swastha*. And, therefore, it is necessary to understand the vision of ancient scholars regarding *swastha*.

Objective

Health (*swasthya*) is the basic requirement to achieve any aim of life. Need of the present time is to understand properly what exactly *swastha* means as each sage has defined *swastha* in different manner. The aim of this study is to explore the concept of *swastha* in different aspects as described in Ayurveda literature, so that each human being can understand it properly and can make effort to achieve it.

Materials and Methods

For this conceptual study, a detailed literary study was performed. The contents and references were analyzed and used for review. The principal Ayurveda text referred under this study is *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*. Other Ayurveda texts were also studied for the relevant references.

¹MD (Kriya Sharir), Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Science, Banaras Hindu University.

E-mail Id: vaidyadeepti007@gmail.com

Orcid Id: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6466-7563>

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Review on the State of *Swastha*

A long and healthy life is the wish of every human being since antiquity. The first and most important aim of Ayurveda is to maintain and promote the health of a healthy individual. Good health is a key to open the path of virtuous acts, wealth, gratification of desire and final salvation.² Diseases are destroyer of health, i.e., wellbeing and life. Achieving the state of *dhatu-samyak*, the aim of Ayurveda, is the pathway to obtain *swasthya* and *dirghayu*. A person can only be disease free if his/her *dhatu* are in the state of equilibrium. Thus, the two objectives of *swastha* are gaining appropriate immunity and along with that a longer life.

Word *swastha* comprises of 'swa' meaning one's own and that 'stha' means staying, i.e., being in one's own natural state. Defining *swastha*, Acharya Sushruta said that a person whose *dosha*, *agnis*, *dhatu*, *malas*, physiology are in the state of equilibrium along with mental, sensory and spiritual pleasant conditions is called *swastha*.⁴ While Acharya Charaka has given various parameters to understand health but nowhere he has given exact definition of *swastha* in *Charaka Samhita*. According to *Chakrapani*, the condition of body where it is devoid of any abnormality is known as healthy, i.e., *swastha*.⁵ Similar definition of health has been stated by *Kashyapa*, which is-a balanced state of *dosha* and absence of any abnormality.

Charaka and Sushruta have different vision about the concept of *swastha*. In 21st chapter of *Sutrasthana*, sage Charaka has stated that a person having proportionate musculature, compactness of the body, very strong sensory and motor organs and no or little effect of diseases on him/her may represent a personality of *swastha*.⁶ Acharya Charaka also stated that the person who can stand hunger, thirst, heat of the sun, cold and physical exercises may represent a personality of *swastha* and they can digest and assimilate properly.⁷ This aspect clears vision of Charaka that body is influenced by both internal as well as external factors and internal strength/health can be measured by effect of external factors on body. Sushruta's statement about health completely describes homeostasis of the body. This proves that on one hand where Sushruta has defined *swastha* by the measurement of internal parameters of body, i.e., equilibrium of *dosha*, *dhatu*, *agni* and *mala*; on the other hand, Charaka had different opinion about *swastha* and measured it according to appearance and strength of the body and its parts and according to the influence of external factors like heat, cold,

etc., and tolerating capacity of these factors by the body.

Out of the seven *dhatu*, Charaka emphasized firstly and especially on the *mamsa-dhatu* and points equilibrium state of the same as one criterion to judge health. This is because it is the *mamsa-dhatu* which gets stabled and nourished directly by the *bala (oja)*.⁸ The person with *sama-mamsa* body physique is able to tolerate hunger, thirst and heat along with cold and physical exercise in proportionate quantity, i.e., neither less nor excess. *Sama-pramana* person refers to exclusion of obese, lean, persons with excessive/without body hair and excess of fair/dark skin complexion. Even though ageing is a natural phenomenon, a healthy person achieves it according to *kala*, i.e., at the right time.⁷ A healthy person (*swastha*) has balanced state of *agni* which is one among the 12 seats of *prana*.⁹ *Jatharagni* and *bhutagni* are responsible for proper digestion of food. *Dhatvagni* is responsible for nourishment of *dhatu*. Equilibrium state of *agni* leads to proper formation of body tissues and derangement of *agni*, especially *mandagni*, leads to different diseases.

Dosha, *dhatu* and *mala* are the *moola* (roots) of *sharira* (body).¹⁰ Equilibrium state of *dosha* is necessary for health. The equilibrium state of *dosha* refers to normal physiological variations of *dosha* according to age, food, daily and seasonal variations.¹¹ Equilibrium state of *dhatu* is also essential for the maintenance of health as well as prevention of diseases. It depends upon the food consumed, regimes followed and state of *agni*. There should be proper formation and expulsion of the three *mala*, i.e., *purisha* (feces), *mutra* (urine) and *sweda* (sweat), otherwise toxins get accumulated in the body and may produce various related disorders. Pleasant state of soul, sense organs and mind is also one important parameter to define *swastha*. Although soul is devoid of blemishes, but in association with body, it experiences good and bad effects. All senses including mind should also be devoid of vitiation.

Similar characteristics of health have been mentioned by sage *Kashyapa*. These are -- desire for food intake, proper digestion of ingested food, proper evacuation of feces, urine and flatus, lightness in the body, proper functioning of sense organs, timely sleep and awakening with pleasant feeling, strengthening of body, pleasant mind and normal *agni*.¹² This again means that complete physical and mental well being is health (*swastha*).

Arogya (health) and happiness (*sukh*) are complementary states which depend on balanced state of *dhatu*.¹³ But happiness is a relative term to be construed depending upon the conditions varying from individual to individual. It may be said that while absolute happiness is not possible, absolute misery is a possible thing.¹⁴

Considering all these parameters of health, various measures for the maintenance and promotion of health have been given in whole Ayurveda literature but in a scattered manner. Daily regimes, seasonal regimes, codes of conduct, concept of suppressible and non-suppressible urges, etc., have been mentioned for the same. *Charaka* emphasizes on foods which are wholesome to the body like rice, green gram, rock salt, goose berry, barley, pure rain water milk, ghee, meat and honey.¹⁵ These should be consumed regularly for maintenance of health and prevention of diseases.¹⁶ *Charaka* while emphasizing on health told that taking care of body by neglecting all other things is very necessary because upon healthy body attainment of *purushartha chatustaya* is dependant.¹⁷ For the same purpose, sage *Vagbhatta* gave measures like consuming always wholesome food, practicing wholesome habits, one should not be interested in worldly matters, should sacrifice, always be balanced towards all beings, forgiving, speaking truth and following words of authorities (*apta-purusha*) to avoid diseases and live healthy.¹⁸ For achieving pleasant state of soul, senses and mind, various methods are indicated. Various procedures like *abhyanaga*, *shiroabhyanga*, *dhumpana*, *anjana*, *kavala*, *gandusha*, etc., are indicated to maintain the health of *indriya*. Suppression of mental urges like desire, anger, greediness, hatred, etc., and following the principles of *sadvritta* (codes and conducts), *achara-rasayana*, yoga and meditation help to keep the mind healthy.

It is a well-known fact that ageing and death are natural phenomena; they cannot be avoided but can only be delayed and for this *dhatu* should be in excellent state (*samyavastha*). Thus, for promotion of health, use of *rasayana*, *vajikarana* and *panchakarma* are indicated. The drugs which are immune-modulator in healthy person are generally *rasayana* and *vajikaraka*.¹⁹ *Charaka* has defined *rasayana* as the means used to acquire excellent state of *dhatu*.²⁰ By the proper consumption of first *panchakarma* and then *rasayana* and *vajikarana*, the tissue elements are maintained in homeostasis and diseases are not caused, there is proper growth of tissue elements and the process of ageing is delayed.²¹

Discussion

Both *Charaka* and *Sushruta* have considered maintenance of health as important aim of Ayurveda. According to them, establishing and maintaining health is one of the important tasks of Ayurveda. For this reason, sages have tried to explain the concept of *swastha* in different contexts. Considering all these contexts in one form, the equilibrium of anatomical and physiological units of body is nothing other than *swastha*. But this may also include some variations. Two persons could be called healthy if they do not possess any disease that means their *dosha*, *agni*, *dhatu* and *mala* are in the state of equilibrium. But consumption of *ahara* and *vihara* which vitiates the *dosha* results in occurrence of different symptoms in both individuals. This depends upon their *prakriti* (body constitution) i.e. the state of *dosha* in their body and how much are the *dhatu* (tissue elements) are in healthy state. In spite of having good health, the effect of *kala*, i.e., *vaya* occurs on body which deteriorates *dhatu* of body according to age. This means that even a healthy person also has different categories of state of health (*swasthavastha*). *Acharya Charaka* has defined *rasyana* and *vajikarana dravyas* as the power-generating *dravyas* for *swastha* which indicates scope of power generation in *swastha* also. These concepts may be able to define and categorize the state of health. Discussing all these parameters, we came to know about various measures which could be beneficial in maintenance of health as in daily regimes and seasonal regimes. Different acts have been mentioned according to *dosha*, *kala*, etc., along with this various suppressible and non-suppressible urges are described; physical, mental and verbal evil deeds are also contraindicated, so that the bodily *dosha*, etc., remain in the state of equilibrium.

Conclusion

If we collaborate the concepts given by *Acharya Charaka* and *Sushruta*, we can say that ancient scholars have defined state of health in three steps. First is defining the state of health on the basis of components of the body, i.e., equilibrium state of *dosha*, *dhatu*, *mala*, *agni*, *indriya* and *mana*. Second is defining the state of health on the basis of adverse external stimulus. Third is defining the state of the body on the basis of longevity of disease-free life.

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Conflict of Interest: None

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