

Understanding of the Vata Karma in Relation to Nervous System

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ABSTRACT

Dosha stand for the presence of the Paanchaboutic component of our body. Panchamahabhuta is the foundation upon which all Ayurvedic concepts are based, and Panchabhutika refers to every matter and material in the universe. The management of Panchamahabhuta, for which the Ayurvedic approach is essential, determines the course of treatment, regardless of advancements in modern science. One of the three basic humours, Vata, has a significant impact on both health and disease. The Panchamahaboutika components of Vata are Akasha and Vayu. The majority of Vata disorders that are discussed in Ayurveda are classified as neurological disorders in contemporary medicine. As a result, an effort has been made to comprehend Vata physiological activity, paying particular attention to neurophysiology. Vata, Pitta, and Kapha constitute three regulatory systems, respectively controlling input/ output, turnover, and storage, making them universal properties of all living systems. The two main Lakshanas of Vata, which are movement (Gati) and knowledge perception (Gandhana), are attributed to the same functional properties of the nervous system of modern science. Vata is the only principle that has a predominance over Vayu Mahabhuta. An attempt has been made to determine whether the principles of Ayurveda are timeless and relevant at any moment or place by comparing the physiological functions of the nervous system to those of Vata.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Nervous system, Vata, Humours, Panchamahabhuta

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurvedic Literature, the concept of Tridosha, along with Vata, is described elaborately. There are particular chapters on these Dosha as Vatakalakaliya Adhyaya and Vata Vyadhi Adhyaya in Charaka Samhita Sutra and Chikitsa Sthana. Acharya Sushruta explains it in Nidana and Chikitsa Sthana. Acharya Bhela in Sutra and Chikitsa Sthana. Acharya Kaashyap in Sutra Sthana. All the above references discuss Vata elaborately, along with its functions in the Sharira.

दोषधातुमलमूलं हि शरीरं ॥

दोषधातुमला मूलं सदा देहस्य ॥

In the Sharira (Body), the different constituents of the body are grouped into three principles categories, namely Dosha, Dhātu and Mala.^{1,2} There is no other entity in Ayurveda other than these three constitutional elements of the living body. These three Dosha influence the three Guna of Manas like Satwa, Raja and Tama. Vata is influencing Rajoguna.³ Vata Dosha pervades all over the body. In old age, person Vata Dosha is predominant.⁴ Vata becomes predominant at the end of the day, night, and during the digestion process.⁴ Vata Chaya (accumulation) occurs in Grishma Ritu (Summer Season), Prakopa (Aggravation) in Varsha Ritu (Rainy Season) and Prashama (Subsides) in Sharat Ritu (Cold Season).⁵ Among all six Rasa, Madhura, Amla, Lavana, does the Kshaya (subsidence) of Vata and Katu, Tikta, Kashaya cause Vriddhi (aggravation) of Vata.⁶

सर्वशरीरचरास्तु वातपित्तश्लेष्माणः सर्वस्मिञ्छरीरे कुपिताकुपिताः शुभाशुभानि कुर्वन्ति- प्रकृतिभूताः शुभान्युपचयबलवर्णप्रसादादीनि, अशुभानि पुनर्विकृतिमापन्ना विकारसञ्ज्ञकानि ॥

Dosha moves in the entire body and carries out body functions, which are beneficial for the Shareera (Body), and also which are harmful for the body. When Dosha are in Sama Avastha (homeostatic condition), they support the living body, so Dosha are called Tristhuna. Diseases are manifested in two conditions of Dosha- Kupita (abnormal) and Akupita (normal) Awastha (state). When Doshas are in a normal state, they do all kinds of anabolic functions like growth, strength, complexion, happiness, etc, and when they are abnormal state, they cause various diseases.⁷

Nirukti of vata

‘वा’ गतिगन्धनयोः॥

तत्र वायोराल्मैवात्मा ॥

Gati means movement or acquisition. ‘Gandhana’ means it is a sensory activity taking the role of the sensory organ, afferent nerves and then interpretation of that sense by the corresponding entity in the brain. The three meanings of these two words have been told by Acharya Dalhana, Gyan (to know), Gamana (to move) and Prapti (to gain). Acharya Charaka explains capability to perform any activity is ‘Cheshta’, the urge to do any work. Respiration, blinking of the eye, contraction and relaxation of muscles, propulsion, retention, along with touch and tactile sensation. Vata initiates the movement and enthusiasm required by the body and also helps in controlling over self and body.^{8,9}

Importance of Vata

सर्वा हि चेष्टा वातेन स प्राणः प्राणीनां स्मृतः तेनैव रोगा जायन्ते तेन चैवोपरुध्यते॥

All the movement occurs in the body are due to Vata Dosha, it also helps in movement of other Dosha, Dhatu and Mala.¹⁰

योगवाहः परं वायुः संयोगादुभयार्थकृत् ॥ दाहकृत्तेजसा युक्तः, शीतकृत् सोमसंश्रयात्॥

Vata is having a very unique property of Yogavahi Guna, when it combines with Ushma (heat) it effects Ushma (heat) in the Shareera (body) and when it combines with Shaithya (cold) its effects Sheeta (cold) in the body.¹¹

Panchamahabhuta in Vata Dosha

Vayu Mahabhuta and Akasha Mahabhuta are predominant in Vata. Due to Akasha Mahabhuta, it provides space for movement, and Vayu provides energy, which is needed for any kind of movement. Acharya Chakrapani opines that Vata Dosha originates from Vayu Mahabhuta predominantly. Although Vata Dosha is Paanchabhautika and Vata Dosha is representative of all the respective Mahabhuta in the human body.¹²

Vata Guna

रूक्षः शीतो लघुः सूक्ष्मश्चलोऽथ विशदः खरः विपरीतगुणैर्द्रव्यैर्मरुतः सम्प्रशाम्यति॥

Vata is having Ruksha (dryness), Laghu (lightness), Sheeta (coldness), Khara (roughness), Sukshma (Minuteness) and Chala (movement) properties. If these properties are disturbed, it becomes responsible for disturbance in health.¹³

Vata Sthana

बस्तिः पुरीषाधानं कटिः सक्थिनी पादावस्थीनि पक्वाशयश्च वातस्थानानि, तत्रापि पक्वाशयो विशेषेण वातस्थानं

चक्रपाणिदत्त - पुरीषाधानं पक्वाशयः॥

The Sthana for Vata is located in Basti (urinary bladder), Purishadhana (large intestine and rectum), Kati (Pelvic region), Sakthi (Lower extremity), Paada, Asthi, and Pakwashaya is the special seat for Vata. According to

Acharya Chakrapani, he interprets Purishadhana as Pakwashaya. Acharya Vagbhata also opines the same for Sthana of Vata, but other than Acharya Charaka, he has mentioned two extra sites of Vata as the skin and ear. As per Acharya Srushuta, Vata resides in Shroni and Guda.¹⁴

Vata Types

There are five types of Vata.¹⁵

Prana Vata.

Udaana Vata.

Samaana Vata.

Vyana Vata.

Apaana Vata.

प्राणोदानसमानाख्यव्यानापानैः स पञ्चधा | देहं तन्त्रयते सम्यक् स्थानेष्वव्याहतश्चरन् ||

स्थानं प्राणस्य मूर्धोरः कण्ठजिह्वास्यनासिकाः | श्ठीवनक्षवधूद्वारश्वासाहारादि कर्म च ||

Prana resides in the Murdha (head), chest, neck, tongue, and it helps in functions like spitting, sneezing, belching, respiration and ingestion of food. It is that type of Vayu which sustains the whole body and which freely circulates in the mouth, and causes diseases like Hikka.

उदानस्य पुनः स्थानं नाभ्युरः कण्ठ एव च | वाक्प्रवृत्तिः प्रयत्नौर्जोबलवर्णादि कर्म च ||

Udanavata is the type of Vata which tends to travel in the upper direction. Vagbhata considers that Udanavata is essential for the strength of the person. Nabhi, Kantha, and Urah are the seats of Udanavata. The verbal expression, effort, enthusiasm, vitality or strength, imparting colour and complexion to the skin, are the functions of Udanavata.

स्वेददोषाम्बुवाहीनि स्रोतांसि समधिष्ठितः | अन्तरग्रेष्व पार्श्वस्थः समानोऽग्निबलप्रदः ||

The Samana vata helps in carrying food to the Annavaha Srotas and helps in the further function of Digestion. This Vata helps in Nurturing agent for Agni. It is therefore found in the Vicinity of Agni. System conveying Dosha should be taken as all the systems, as Dosha circulate throughout the body.

देहं व्याप्नोति सर्वं तु व्यानः शीघ्रगतिर्नृणाम् | गतिप्रसारणाक्षेपनिमेषादिक्रियः सदा ||

The life of an individual depends upon the motor and sensory functions of the body. The Vata, which is attributed as Vyana Vata, moves fast and gets circulated all over the body. The Vyana Vata helps in motion, relaxation, Contraction, eyelid movement, etc, by this type of Vata.

वृषणौ बस्तिमेद्वं च नाभ्यूरू वङ्कणौ गुदम् | अपानस्थानमन्त्रस्थः शुक्रमूत्रशकृन्ति च ||

सृजत्यार्तवगर्भौ च युक्ताः स्थानस्थिताश्च ते | स्वकर्म कुर्वते देहो धार्यते तैरनामयः ||

The lower abdominal organs are under the influence of Apana Vata. It controls the reflexes related to organs like Testis, Penis, Anus and Groin. It helps in the Menstrual flow, the Ejection of semen and the expulsion of the fetus. Apana Vata is the controller of all excretions through the pelvic organs. By its Swakarma, it helps in supporting the Deha and maintaining it disease-free.

Vata Vridhi

वृद्धस्तु कुरुतेऽनिलः॥
कार्श्यकाष्ण्योष्णकामत्वकम्पानाहशकृद्ब्रह्मन्
बलनिद्रेन्द्रियभ्रंशप्रलापभ्रमदीनताः॥

When Vata is increased in Shareera, it produces emaciation, black discolouration, desire for hot things, tremors, distention in the abdomen, constipation, loss of strength, loss of sleep, loss of sensory function, irrelevant speech, giddiness, timidity. It produces roughness or dryness of skin, dark complexion of skin, lack of sleep, and people feel weakness and constipation.¹⁶

Vata Kshaya

लिङ्गं क्षीणेऽनिलेऽङ्गस्य सादोऽल्पं भाषितेहितम्
संज्ञामोहस्तथा श्लेष्मवृद्धयुक्तामयसम्भवः॥

When Vata is decreased in Shareera, it causes debility of body, less speech, less bodily movements, loss of sensory function, loss of consciousness and expression as well as diseases caused due to Kapha Prakopa (aggravation) such as numbness in the body, obesity, debility of body parts, Asthma, cough, low digestive power and other such ailments.¹⁷

Vata Karma

सर्वा हि चेष्टा वातेन स प्राणः प्राणीनां स्मृतः तेनैव रोगा जायन्ते तेन चैवोपरुध्यते ॥

All kinds of movement are due to Vatadosha. All the diseases that occur in the body (Shareera) are due to the vitiation of Dosha to an extent where a person may lead to death.¹⁸

उत्साहोच्छ्वासनिः श्वासचेष्टा धातुगतिः समा समो मोक्षो गतिमतां वायोः कर्माविकारजम् ॥

Vata Dosha helps in enthusiasm in work, makes the body function normally, such as respiration to be normal, develops all body organs to their full growth and proper body functions.¹⁹

वायुस्तन्त्रयन्त्रधरः, प्राणोदानसमानव्यानापानात्मा, प्रवर्तकश्चेष्टानामुच्चावचानां, नियन्ता प्रणेता च मनसः, सर्वेन्द्रियाणामुद्योजकः, सर्वेन्द्रियार्थानामभिवोढा, सर्वशरीरधातुव्यूहकरः, सन्धानकरः शरीरस्य, प्रवर्तको वाचः, प्रकृतिः स्पर्शशब्दयोः, श्रोत्रस्पर्शनयोर्मूलं, हर्षोत्साहयोर्योनिः, समीरणोऽग्नेः, दोषसंशोषणः, क्षेप्ता बहिर्मलानां, स्थूलाणुस्रोतसां भेत्ता, कर्तागर्भाकृतीनाम्, आयुषोऽनुवृत्तिप्रत्ययभूतो भवत्यकुपितः॥

Vata is the controller of both structural and functional aspects of the body. Tranta means technique, Yantra means the machinery aspects of the body. So, Vata is useful for both structural and functional aspects of the body. Vata maintains and controls all the human machinery or body; it is the originator of all kinds of movements, regulates and guides the mind, stimulates all sensory and motor organs, and directs senses to their respective objects. It has control over the mind and Prana, it guides the body towards desirable things and prevents indulging in the undesirable things which may be harmful, stimulates the sense organs and conveys all the sensory and motor stimuli to the concerned organs. Regulates the proper synthesis of Dhatus. It makes Sandhana of Shareera. Vata, having Sparsha Jnana, makes Jatharagni pradipta and expels Mala out of the body. It is responsible for the separation of minute and larger channels of the body, and is responsible for giving shape to the foetus and the maintenance of life.²⁰

शरीरावयवास्तु परमाणुभेदेनापरिसङ्ख्येया भवन्ति, अतिबहुत्वादतिसौक्ष्म्यादतीन्द्रियत्वाच्च।
तेषां संयोगविभागे परमाणूनां कारणं वायुः कर्मस्वभावश्च॥

The body constituents are not measurable; they are innumerable, many are very minute, many are not perceived by human sense organs, so difficult to count. The molecules of different systems are brought together or segregated from each other by movements of Vayu.²¹

DISCUSSION

Vata is that force which keeps the Pitta, Kapha, Dhatu and Mala of Shareera in motion (as they are Pangu). It is the same as the Vayu in nature, whose force propels clouds from place to place in the sky. As per Acharya Sushruta, the five types of Vayu together contribute towards the integration and maintenance of the body in the same way plexus present in the different parts of the body will take care of respective functions.

According to Acharya Vagbhata, Vata in its normal state is said to govern enthusiasm, respiration, motor activities of the body, mental and vocal and physical regulation of proper circulation and function of the seven Dhatu. It also controls and regulates Spino cerebral reflexes, which can be inhibited or provoked and also the function of sensory organs. So Vata very closely resembles that of a nerve impulse, which later has been described as self-propagated, i.e. Vata, which is Swayambu, means energy transmission of the impulse is stated to be derived from the nerve fibre over which it passes. Vata is the key to the machine (Yantra) and its mechanism, or the living body and its functions.

Prana Vata situated in Mastiska (Brain) circulate through Kanta (larynx-Trachea) and Uras (Lungs and Heart). It commands the Buddhi (Intellectual), Hridaya (Heart), Chitta and Indriya and is responsible for Nistiva (Salivation), Swayathu (Sneezing), Udgara (Burping), Niswasha (expiration) and Anna Praveshkrit (ingestion). It helps in Buddhi, Hridaya, Indriya and Chitta Dharana, which are considered as higher motor functions. Nistiva and Anna Pravesha is related to Salivary gland secretion, admixture of food with Bodhaka Kapha, articulation of muscles and tm joint in converting food into coarse form, process of swallowing, deglutition, function of Pharynx and oesophagus in movement of bolus, Gastric contraction, thoracic movement that helps in respiration, exchange of gases along with other expulsive movements like sneezing, coughing, yawning etc. Thus, Prana Vata is related to centres in the brain executing these functions (Prano Atra Murdhaga).

Neurological Implications of Prana Vata:

Prana Vata, being one of the five subtypes of Vata Dosha, is responsible for governing the nervous system. It is the subtlest and most refined aspect of Vata Dosha for governing the Respiratory system, digestive system, Cardiovascular System and overall vitality of the body. It helps in the regulation of nervous impulses and their transmission. It helps in Sensory perception, allowing us to experience the world around us. Prana Vata helps regulate motor control, enabling voluntary movement, and it also governs the Respiratory System, regulating Breathing and oxygenation along with the functions of swallowing, deglutition and ingestion of food.

As per contemporary science, the central nervous control (Prano Atra Murdhaga) of respiration is a complex process that involves the coordinated efforts of multiple brain region nerves and neurotransmitters.

The brain regions involved are the Medulla Oblongata, which forms the primary respiratory control centre responsible for generating the Respiratory rhythm. The Pons helps in regulating the depth and rate of breathing. Mid midbrain plays a role in regulating the respiratory response to emotional states like stress or fear. The cerebral cortex is involved in the voluntary control of breathing, such as holding one's breath. The centres receive input from stretch receptors of the lung, chemoreceptors and baroreceptors that help in the generation of the Respiratory rhythm, which is under the control of the Autonomic nervous system and the centres present in the brain.

Voluntary control of breathing is mediated by the central cerebral cortex via respiratory centres, which allow conscious control of breathing, like taking deep breaths or beholding one's breath.

The Nervous System plays a crucial role in the process of ingestion and digestion of food. The appetite regulation is done by the Hypothalamus, which also regulates satiety hormones. The orbitofrontal cortex is involved in food selection and preference. In the ingestional phase (Annapraveshakrit), mastication is added by the Trigeminal

nerve that innervates the muscles of mastication, regulating chewing and food breakdown. The swallowing reflex is coordinated by the brain stem. The olfactory system and taste buds on the tongue send signals that enhance sensory experiences of eating. The irritation of the nasal mucosa is detected by the Trigeminal nerve, and signals are sent to the brain stem, specifically the medulla oblongata responds to the irritants.

Udana Vayu is situated in Uras (Chest) and circulates between Nasa, Gala, and Nabhi. Its functions are Vak Pravartana, Prayatna, Bala, Varna, Smritikriya, etc.

Various respiratory and vocal functions are regulated by the nervous system, which can be correlated with Udaan Vayu functions. The functions of phonation include the control of vocal cords, assisted by recurrent laryngeal nerves, that regulate their tension and vibration. The Motor cortex sends signals to the vocal cords to control pitch and volume. The nervous system coordinates Phonation with breathing, ensuring the air flow is adequate for sound production. The cranial nerves, like the Vagus, Facial, and Trigeminal nerves, play a crucial role in sneezing, spitting and expiration. The Phrenic nerve and intercostal nerves regulate the contraction and relaxation of respiratory muscles during expiration (Nasa Nabhagalamscharet). The nervous system plays a crucial role in memory formation, consolidation and retrieval, which in other way known as (Smritikriya) as per Sanskrit. The expiratory functions of Udana Vayu help in the removal of waste products like Carbon dioxide from the body. These processes essential for maintaining cellular health and preventing the accumulation of toxins, which can weaken the body. By regulating breathing pattern, it ensures that the body receives adequate oxygenation, which is responsible for energy production and maintaining strength. The expiratory functions for the Sympathetic nervous system that prepare the body for Fight and flight response. This stimulation can help in an increase in strength and energy. (as one of the functions of Udana Vata)

Removal of toxins by expiration improves skin health and complexion. By regulating of blood flow, the radiance of skin can be maintained. Stimulation of the Parasympathetic nervous system relaxation and reduced strength, which can help in improving skin health and complexion. The expiratory functions regulate Prana that flows to the body, and it also helps in maintaining Ojas, the vital essence that nourishes the body and thereby promotes strength, complexion and overall health.

Samana Vayu is situated near Jataragni and helps in functions such as receiving food that is swallowed and stimulating the stomach and intestine to secrete digestive juices, which facilitates the absorption of digested food and excretion of waste products. It aids the function of Agni in the process of digestion.

Samana Vayu helps in governing the digestive process. It is responsible for digestion by breaking down food into smaller molecules that can be absorbed by the body. It helps in the absorption of nutrients from the digestive tract into blood stream and their assimilation into body tissue. Samana Vayu helps by regulating digestive enzymes through the production and secretion of enzymes like Pepsin and Amylase. It helps in controlling gut motility, regulating the movement of food through the digestive tract, ensuring that it is properly mixed with enzymes and observed. It also maintains the health of the Gut lining, preventing damage from toxins and pathogens. Samana Vayu can be considered as closely linked to the enteric nervous system, which is referred to as the little brain. The ANS regulates Gut motility, secretions and blood flow. The vagus nerve, which is responsible for regulating various bodily functions including digestion, heart rate and respiration, can be linked to Samana Vayu. Samana Vayu is influenced by both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system which regulates the fight or flight response and relaxation response, respectively. It regulates Gut Gut-Brain axis, the bidirectional communication network between the Gut and the Brain. It helps in the modulation of stress response and also influences neurotransmitters that play a role in mood regulation, appetite and digestion.

Vyana Vayu is situated in proximity to the Heart, and stimulates the circulation of blood. It acts as a Voluntary control over the functions of muscles.

Vyan Vayu is a type of Vayu that governs the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and the peripheral nerves. It is responsible for nerve conduction, transmission of nerve impulses between neurons, regulates muscle contraction and relaxation and helps in the transmission of sensory information from the senses to the brain. It helps in the maintenance of neural connections essential for learning and memory. It helps in the modulation of body stress response by regulating the Hypothalamopituitary axis.

Apana Vata is helpful in the Niskramana of Sukra, Artava, Mutra and Garbha. When the child starts growing, it will start developing all parts of the body, in which all the Dhātu are attaining Pakwa Avastha from the Aparipakwa Dhātu, in which Vayu plays a major role in the maturation and thereby development. The development includes motor development and fine motor development of the child.

Apana Vata is a type of Vata that governs the downward and outward flow of energy in the body, particularly in the pelvic region. It is responsible for the elimination of waste products from the body, like urine, faeces and menstrual fluid (Artava). It plays a role in reproductive functions including menstruation, fertility and childbirth. Apana Vata regulates the nervous system in the pelvic region by controlling the flow of energy and nerve impulses. It regulates pelvic nerves, which control muscles and organs in the pelvic region. It controls the blood and bowel functions by regulating nerve impulses in the Autonomic nervous system, and it also helps in the modulation of pain in the pelvic region.

According to Acharya Charaka in Sutra Sthana Prakrit Karma of Vata is to initiate all the Psycho Somatic activities, controller and activator of mind, employer of all Indriya, moderator of all sense objects, It is the organiser of all the tissues of the body, it coordinator of different parts of the body, organiser of Phonation, basis for touch and sound sense, Basis for sense organ of hearing and touch, Root for pleasure and enthusiasm, stimulates the Jataragni, Dries up the excessively secreting Dosha, eliminates excretory products, forms cavities for required Srotas, forms different shapes and curves that are required for all the organ of the embryo. These all indicate that Vayu is important for maintaining a normal, balanced life.

CONCLUSION

Vata, among the three fundamental Dosha in Ayurveda, holds a central and dynamic role in maintaining and governing the physiological and psychological integrity of the human body. It is the principle of motion and communication, likened to the Vayu in nature, and is responsible for initiating and regulating the activities of Pitta, Kapha, Dhātu, and Mala, all of which are inert (Pangu) without its impetus. As emphasised by Acharyas like Sushruta, Charaka, and Vagbhata, Vata is not merely a biological component but a subtle force underlying every movement, transformation, and cognitive function within the body.

Each subtype of Vata, Prana, Udana, Samana, Vyana, and Apana, has distinct physiological domains and neurological correlates, harmoniously governing vital functions such as respiration, phonation, digestion, circulation, elimination, cognition, motor control, and sensory processing. Prana Vata aligns closely with the central nervous system, especially the brainstem and cerebral regulation of respiratory, cardiac, and ingestion functions. Udana Vata corresponds to respiratory control, phonation, and memory (Smriti), linking it with higher cortical and autonomic regulation. Samana Vata integrates with the enteric nervous system and autonomic pathways to modulate digestion and nutrient assimilation. Vyana Vata synchronises with neural transmission and cardiovascular regulation, while Apana Vata commands pelvic autonomic control, elimination, and reproductive mechanisms.

Modern neuroscience validates many of these Ayurvedic insights, as seen in the roles played by cranial nerves, medullary and cortical centres, gut-brain axis, and the autonomic nervous system. Vata Dosha has the property of Swayambhu (self-propelling) is conceptually mirrored in the self-propagating nature of nerve impulses, making it a profound example of Ayurvedic foresight in neurophysiological understanding.

Ultimately, Vata is not only the driving force (Preraka) of life but also the coordinator (Sancharaka) of all biological, neurological, and psychological functions. It maintains homeostasis, supports conscious experience, and enables interaction with the internal and external environment. Its balance ensures vitality, clarity, strength, and well-being, while its disturbance can lead to profound dysfunctions across multiple systems. Hence, understanding Vata in both classical and contemporary frameworks provides a holistic perspective for integrating ancient wisdom with modern biomedical science, paving the way for personalised and integrative approaches in healthcare.

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