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PANCHMAHABHOOTA (AN EPITOME OF SARVATANTRA SIDDHANTA)

***[1]Dr. Neelam Verma and [2]Dr. Navdeep Kaur**

[1,2]Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of Samhita & Siddhanta, Babe ke Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, VPO. Daudhar, Moga, Pb.142053.

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***Corresponding Author**
Dr. Neelam Verma
Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of Samhita & Siddhanta, Babe ke Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, VPO. Daudhar, Moga, Pb.142053.

INTRODUCTION

Mula-siddhanta as the noun specifies that the whole of the tree is reliant on the roots. Siddhanta is the base of all and as mentioned by Acharya Charaka:

सिद्वांतोनाम स यः परीक्षकैर्बहुविधंपरीक्ष्य
हेतुभिश्चसाधयित्वास्थाप्यतेनिर्णयें
(च. वि. 8/37)

A demonstrated truth established after several examination and reasoning is known as Siddhanta. It is of four types as follows:
Sarvatantra Siddhanta or truth which is common to all scriptures, e.g. existence of curatives for curable diseases.

Pratitantra Siddhanta or truth specific to a given scriptures, e.g-in other scriptures all diseases are described to be caused by dosas viz. Vata etc. but in Charaka Samhita diseases are caused by dosas.

Adhikarana Siddhanta or truth implied from a given context e.g-no liberated soul indulges in action leading to bondage for he is free from all desires; this preposition implies truth like fruit of action, liberation of the soul and existence of life after death.

Abhyupgama Siddhanta or truth taken for granted i.e. hypothesis (postulation) for e.g. things are explained sometimes on the basis of the predominance of matter, sometimes that of qualities and that of potentiality. The Siddhanta described by ancient Acharyas are sarvakaalik, sarvabhaumik and shashvata as they are mentioned on behalf of karya-karana hetu.

Panchbhoota Siddhanta

If everything is consciousness (*Brahman*), then how does this conscious energy put on the appearance of material solidity. Why does the table appear solid?

In order to bridge the gulf between consciousness and apparently durable matter, ancient Indian sages postulated (or divined) that all physical things are constituted iof five subtle elements called *Panchmahabhootas* earth, fire, water, air, ether. These are not the elements known in the conventional sense (e.g. water does not imply the water, and earth does not mean soil) but are actually subtle conditions which together create the perception of the forms can be sensed by the human mind. The actual name of these five elements are *Akasha* (ether), *Vayu* (aeriality), *Agni*(fire), *Jala*(liquidity), *Prithvi*(compaction). This is the Siddhanta acceptable to all the Darshanas which has been established after viewingdifferent guna, karma, swabhava and avastha etc. of dravyas, after keenly examining evolutionand by visualizing different functions of Sukshmabhoota by logically explaining panchpanchak on minute level by sages of India. Modern tatvavaad (Philosophical knowledge of subject), parmaanuvaad, vividh avasthavaad, and niharikavaad all of these have accepted it unopposingly and have seconded it. It forms the corner stone of Garbhvikasvada, Dehasanghatana, Tridoshvada, Niyatartha grahanshilta of indriya, Rasavada and Gunakarmavada of dravyas and its classification. All the major and micro creations whether they are living or non-living are made up of Panchmahabhootas or their anyonayanupravesh. The process of germination of seed comprises of these five Panchmahabhoota, similar process is seen in the case of human embryo formation and development.

तंचेतनावस्थितंवायुर्विभाजितेज एनंपचति, आपः
क्लेदयन्ति, पृथ्वीसंहन्ति, आकाशंविषर्धयति।
(सु शा. 5/3)

Human beings possess five gyanaindriyas which resides in five indriyaadhishthana, which perceives five shabadadi vishyas, and produces five indriya buddhi or gyana, as such their ashrayabhoota dravyas should also be five and those five are undoubtedly the Panchmahabhoota.

-Ch.Su.8/7-11.

The Marmas also entails Panchmahabhoota as sadyapranahara marma is agneya, kalantra pranahara marma is agneya and saumya, vishalyaghana marma is vayavya, vaikalyakara is saumya and finally rujakara being vayavya.

-Su.Sh.6/17.

Tridosha also comprises of Panchmahabhoota where vata has predominance of Vayu, [pitta has predominance of tejabhoot and kapha being jalabhoot predominant. Similarly shadrasa also have the Panchmahabhoota compositions like madhura being composed by prithvi & jala, amla by prithvi & agni etc. Apart from all the abovesaid Panchmahabhoota has also role in the chikitsa of rogas, as two main modes of treatment are there, one being samshamana and other being samshodhana chikitsa, both of these treatment modalities entail Panchmahabhoota for e.g:

Virechana dravya : prithvi+jala

Vamana dravya: agni+vayu

Samshamanadravya: aakasha

Graahidravya: vayu

Deepanadravya: agni

Lekhanadravya: vayu+agni

Brahanadravya: prithvi+jaha

Vata shaman: prithvi+jala+teja

Pitta shaman:prithvi+jala+vayu

Kapha shaman: aakasha+teja+vayu…and so on

The descriptions of these five constituents are quite similar across Mahabharata, NayayaDarshana, Vaishaishikdarshana, Sankhya, Kashmir shaivism, Tantra and Buddhist philosophy, Greek Stoic texts and even Vishnu iconography.

Mahabharata

भूमेः स्थैर्य गुरूत्वं च कवज्यिं

चैवभूतानांविकृतिनिंचमहाभारत शात्तिपर्वाध्याय (255)

Here bhautikguna and mansikaguna are described which implies that sharira is constituted of bhoota, therefore, person having more of prithvibhoota has more dhyeya, having jalabhoota is saumya, having agnibhoota possess shoka, raga, and having vayubhoota are bali and swantantrata priye.

It is profitable (profiter as the French say) to compare a variety of interpretations to discover the underlying meaning. The principle sources that we rely on are Sri Aurobindo's

interpretation based on Sankhya, Arthur Avalon'a interpretation based on Tantra, J.C. Chatterji's presentation of Kashmir Shaivism, the Buddhist presentation as given in the Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakosa, as werll as extant Greek Stoic texts. As we see there is remarkable jconvergence in all these interpretations.

"An ocean of electric Energy
Formlessly formed its strange wave-particles
Constructing by their dance this solid scheme,
Its mightiness in the atom shut to rest
Masses were forged or feigned and visible shapes;
Light flung the photon's swift revealing spark
And showed, in the minuteness of its flash
Imaged, this cosmos of apparent things.
Thus has been made this real impossible world,
An obvious miracle or convincing show."
(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Book II, Canto 5)

Sankhya perspective as given by Sri Aurobindo

The following text is culled from a few sources[1, 2, 3, 4] in which Sri Aurobindo expounded his interpretation of the five elements:

Ether or Akasha: The elementary state of material forces is, in the view of the old Indian physicists, a condition of pure material extension in Space of which the peculiar property is vibration typified to us by the phenomenon of sound.

Air or Vayu: Vibration in the state of other is the sufficient to create forms. There must first be some obstruction in the flow of the fporce ocean, some contraction and expansion, some interplay of vibrations, some impinging of force upon force so as to create a beginning of fixed relations and mutual effects. Material force modifying its first ethereal status assumes a second, called in the old language the aerial, of which the special property is contact between force and force, contact that is the basis of all material relations. Furthermore, he said that it is this principle, Vayu, which is the support of all contact and exchange, the cause of gravitation and of the fields (magnetic and electric).

Fire or Agni: Ether and air do not beget real forms but only varying forces. A sustaining principle is needed. This is provided by a third self-modification of the primitive force of which the principle of light, electricity, fire and heat is for us the characteristic manifestation. Fire is threefold: ordinary fire (Jala Agni), electric fire (Vaidyuta Agni), solar fire (Saura Agni).

Liquidity or Apas: Even with the above three, we can have forms of force preserving their own character and peculiar action, but not stable forms of matter. A fourth state characterised by diffusion and a first medium of permanent attrations and repulsions, termed picturesquely water or the liquid state.

Earth or Prithvi: There is then a fifth state which is needed for cohesion, termed earth or the solid state, and this completes the necessary elements.

All forms of matter of which we are aware, all physical things even to the most subtle, are built up by the combination of these five elements. Upon them also depends all our sensible experience; for by reception of vibration comes the sense of sound; by contact of things in a world of vibrations of force the sense of touch; by the action of light in the forms hatched, outlined, sustained by the force of light and fire and heat the sense of sight; by the fourth element the sense of taste; by the fifth the sense of smell. All is essentially response to vibratory contacts between force and force. In this way the ancient thinkers bridged the gulf between pure force and its final modifications and satisfied the difficulty which prevents the ordinary human mind from under-standing how all these forms which are to his senses so real, solid and durable can be in truth only temporary phenomena and a thing like pure energy, to the senses non-existent, intangible and almost incredible, can be the one permanent cosmic reality.

Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism was founded by Abhinavgupta in the 8th century. Here, we will focus solely on its exposition of the five elements as provided in J.C.Chatterji's book "Kashmir Shaivism"[5] What follows is a brief summary from that book.

There are five factors that constitute what may be termed the "materiality of the sensible universe":

The principle of Vacuity (Avakasha), technically "Akasha" and literally the sky, the bright shining firmament. This is nothing but "Dishah" or directions the lines of force radiating everywhere. These lines are symbolized as the "hairs" of Shiva who is therefore called vyomakesha (he whose hairs are made of vyoman, vyoman is a name for both space and direction). It is these lines of force which uphold all things in the universe in their various positional relations. The simile of all space and indeed the whole universe, being thus woven like a cloth is encountered several times in the veda.

The principle of aeriality, technically "Vayu" and literally air or the aerial atmosphere, Vayu is required in order to create variation in the uniform and homogenous "temperature" created by akasha (Ether).

The principle of what may be called formativity, i.e. the formative or form building principle, technically "Agni" and literally aire. In the varied play, some power is needed which produces, transforms and destroys forms. This burning and flaring up into various shapes and forms is called agni or fire.

The principle of liquidity, technically "api" and literally water.
The principle of solidity or stability, technically called the prithivi or dharanitattva, literally Earth.

Darshana perspective

Vedanta darshana' acharyavidyaranya swami has mentioned about panchmahabhoota in his book "Panchdashi". Here only bhoota word is used.

Aacharyavishavanathpanchanan of nyayavaisheshik has also described the gunas of various panchamahaboota like vayu having sparsh, sankhaya, parimaana, etc. guna, tej having roopa, vega etc., eleven guna, jala having roopa, rasa, sneha, etc, fourteen guna, prithvi also having fourteen guna (except sneha possesses gandhaguna), aakasha having shaded, etc, five guna.

स्पर्शादयोअष्वैवेगाख्यः
कालदिशो शब्दश्चते च खे।।
(मुक्तावली कारिका 30–33)

Tantra perspective

The British orientalist Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) elucidated the Tantra perspective on the five elements in his book "Serpent Power".[6] The following passage is excerpted from

the book: "…..there are certain motions or forces (five in number)which produce solid matter, and which are ultimately reducible to ether (Akasa)…..Akasa is one of the gross forces into which the Primordial Power (PrakrtiSakti) differentiates itself. Objectively considered it is a vibration in and or the substance of Prakriti of which it is a transformation in which the other forces are observed to be operating…..At the back of both "matter" and mind, there is the creative energy (Sakri) of the Su[preme who is the cause of the universe and Conscious-ness itself. Matter affects the Jiva (soul) in five different ways, giving rise in him to the sensations of smell, taste, sight, touch and feel, and hearing…… From the Sabda-Tanmatra and from the combinations of the latter with the other tanmatras are produced the gross Bhutas(Mahabhuta), which as things of physical magnitude perceivable by the sense approach the Western definition of discrete sensible "matter". These five Mahabhutas are Akasa (Ether), Vayu (Air), Tejas(Fire), Apas(Water) and Prithvi (Ether). Their development takes place from the Tanmatra, from one unit of that which is known in sensible matter as mass (Tamas), charged with energy (Rajas)by the gradual accretion of mass and redistribution of energy. The result of this is that each Bhuta is more gross than that which precedes it until "Earth" is reached. These five bhutas have no connection with the English "elements" so called, nor, indeed, are they elements at all, being derived from the Tanmatras. Dynamically and objectively considered they are (proceeding from Akasa) said to be five forms of motion into which Prakriti differentiates itself:

Akasha: non-obstructive, all-directed motion radiating lines of force in all directions, symbolized as the "Hairs of Siva" affording the space in which the other forces operate;

Vayu: transverse motion and locomotion in space.

Agni: upward motion giving rise to expansion.

Apas: downward motion giving rise to contraction.

Prithvi: that motion which produces cohesion, its characteristic of obstruction being the opposite of the non-obstructive ether in which it exists and from which it and the other tattvas spring.

…..These Bhutas(elements) when compounded make up the material universe…..Matter, thus exists in the five states etheric, aerial, fiery, fluid, and solid. Prithvi does not denote merely what is popularly called "Earth". All solid (Parthiva) odorous substance is in the Prithvi (earth) state. All substance in the fluid (Apya) state is in the A;as (liquid) state, as everything which has cohesive resistance is in that of Prithvi. This latter, therefore, is the cohesive vibration, the cause of solidity, of which the common earth is a gross compounded form. All

matter in the aerial (Vayava) condition is in the Vayu state. These are all primary differentiations of cosmic matter into a universe of subtly fine motion."

Avalon further adds that "according to Western notions, it is the air which is the cause of sound. According to Indian notions. Ether is the substratum (Asraya) of sound and Air (Vayu) is a helper (Sahakari) in its manifestation.".[6]

Buddhist perspective presented by VasubandhuVasubandhu (4th C.E) was a prominent Buddhist philosopher. The Buddhist interpretation of the elements is taken from his book Abhidharmakosa Yasomitra wrote a commentary called Sphutartha Abhidharmakosa-vyakhya on the Abhidharmakosa Among the recent books expounding on this scripture are Sukomal Chaudhuri's Analytical Study of Abhidhar-makosaand Louis De La ValleePoussin's Abhidharma-koshabhasyam.

The four elements are dissussed in verses 11-13 of Chapter I called "Dhatunirdesa" in the Abhidharmakosa. It is noreworthy that the elements are referred to as Forces rather than Matter. Also note that unlike the other systems. Vasubandhu discusses only four rather than five elements. He states:
Earth provides Supporting Force
Water provides Cohesion Force
Fire provides Ripening Force
Air provides Expanding Force

Chaudhuri presents Yasomitra's commentary in his book:
"Yasomitra explains how these great elements are interdependent. If we analyse any one of these elements, say earth, we will observe that together with the atoms of earth it contains at least one atom, if not more, of water, fire and air. But as the atoms of earth predominate here, we call it earth. Thus though the great elements (Mahabhutas) arise together, in all molecules, hard, moist, hot or mobile, for the time being the nature of one predominates and our senses notice only the predominating one and not the others. We, therefore, say: this is earch; this is water; this is fire; this is air. So each and every material object is the combination of the four great elements. Even the derivative material dharmas (laws) of the Rupaskandha (matter aggregrate) are nursed by the four great elements as an infant prince is fed, bathed, dressed and fanned by others.[7]

Greek Stoic philosophy

The Stoic school of philosophy in Greece was started by Zero under a porch (i.e. Stoa). There are several noteworthy similarities between the Indian philosophies and the Stoic philosophy, as pointed out by McEvilley in his book.[8] The couple of passages below from extant Stoic scriptures pertain to the five elements: God, Intelligence. Fate, and Zeus are all one, and many other names are applied to him. In the beginning, all by himself, he turned the entire substance through air into water. Just as the sperm is enveloped in the seminal fluid, so God, who is the seminal principle of the world, stays behing as such in the moisture, making matter serviceable to himself for the successive stages of creation. He then creates first of all the Four Elements: fire, water, air, earch, (Diogenes Laertius 7,135-6). The world, they hold, comes into being when its substance has first been converted from fire through air into moisture, and then the coarser part of the moisture has condensed as earth, while that whose particles are fine has been turned into air, and this process of rarefaction goes on increasing till it generates fire. Thereupon out of these elements animals and plants and all other natural kinds are formed by their mixure (Diogenes Laertius 7,142).

Although the ordering of the elements is a little different, the process resembles the other systems that we have seen above: there is a modification of the primordial substance with fire converting into air, then water and finally into earth.

Vishnu iconography

In the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism, Vishnu is supposed to be the Supreme and he is said to have had four expansions (Chatur-Vyuha): Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, as per the KurmaPurana, Agni Purana (48.13) and Vishnu Purana(V.18.58).[9] The Garuda Purana goes a step further and refers to the five forms of Vishnu (Pancha-tatvarchana) Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Narayana.[9] In a conversation recorded in 1910, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the "divine principle, enmeshed in a quadruple sheath of Vasudeva, Sankarshan, Pradyumna and Aniruddha".[10] The Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata alludes to this transformation as well:

……When He (Vishnu) becomes Jiva, He comes to be called sankarshana. Next, He transforms Himself into Pradyumna and then into Aniruddha. In this way, the high-souled Krishna, who has Himself for His origin divides (or displays) Himself in fourfold form. Desirous of creating this universe which consists of the fivefold primal elements.[11]

These names seem to have been chosen with care, because their Sanskrit meaning indicate a connection to the five elements discussed above:

Vasudeva is "that in which all things abide", indicating the element Ether.
Sankarsana indicates "squeezing together." (Samyak (complete)+Akarshan (attraction)), indicating the element of Aeriality.
Pradyumna means the "radiant one", indicating the element Fire.
Aniruddha in Sanskrit means "without obstacles", indicating liquidity or Water.
Narayana: In Sanskrit, another name for water is Nara so Narayana means "one who floats on Water", which is the previous element. Hence, Narayana probably indicates Earth.

Thus these expansions of Vishnu seem to have a correspondence with the five elements. The chatur-vyuha (four expansions) of Vishnu was later defined and became the basis for Vishnu iconography. Based on these expansions, the Pancharatra theology within Vaisnavism developed four-headed idols of Vishnu (called Chatumurti-Vishnu) which came to be worshipped in temples. You can see some of the idols at the links given below. This is an outstanding example of how cosmological insights of sages were transformed into external forms of worship suitable for the masses.

Sri Aurobindo said that Vayu is the "support of all contact and exchange, the cause of gravitation and of the fields (magnetic and electric)". This concept bears close resemblance to the four forces strong nuclear, weak nuclear, electromagnetic and gravity that modern physics seeks to integrate into a unified theory.

In 1989, John Hagelin, a particle physicist and Director at the Maharishi University of Management, claimed that there is a striking correspondence between these five tanmatras and the five quantum-mechnical spin types of aunivied quantum field theory.[12] He proposed the following parallels:
Between the akasha or "space" and the gravitational field;
Between the vayu or "air" tanmatra, which stands as a link between space and the other tanmatras, and the gravitational field;
Between the tejas or "fire" tanmatra, responsible for chemical transformations and the sense of sight, and the spin-I force fields;
And between the apas and prithivi ("water" and "earth") tanmatras and the spin-1/2 and spin-0 matter fields, respectively.

CONCLUSION

The crux of above said ias that the panchmahabhoot is a uniform entity which is present everywhere or can say either ways that everything is composed of them only, whether in Suksham form or Sthulaform. Hereby, have derived from different shastras like Vishnu iconography, darshan, tantra that panchbhoot is one of the basic siddhanta of all and proves out to be a sarvatantrasiddhanta as it is mentioned and world wide accepted by all literature.

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