

PANCHAMAHABHUTA- BASED UNDERSTANDING OF KARSHYA AND ITS AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background: *PanchaMahabhutas* (five fundamental elements) constitute both the external world and the human body and therefore provide a conceptual basis for understanding tissue nourishment and depletion. *Karshya* is a condition characterised by depletion of body tissues, emaciation, and reduced strength. Management of *Karshya* follows the *Saamanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*. This study analyses the role of *PanchaMahabhuta* in understanding the pathogenesis of *Karshya* and explores its application in planning dietary, lifestyle, and therapeutic measures for restoring nourishment and vitality. Classical references related to *PanchaMahabhuta*, *Karshya*, *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*, *Brimhana*, and *Rasayana* were reviewed. Relevant contemporary literature concerning *Karshya*, undernutrition, and Ayurvedic approaches to nutritional depletion was also studied. The reviewed

literature indicates that *Karshya* can be understood through progressive depletion of nourishing components, particularly *Rasa Dhatu*, with predominance of *Vata*. The *PanchaMahabhuta* perspective provides a framework for interpreting the structural, fluid, metabolic, movement-related, and space-related components involved in nourishment and depletion. According to *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*, substances possessing similar qualities can support restoration of depleted tissues. *Brimhana* measures, including milk, ghee, *Shali*, *Godhuma*, *Masha*, and other nourishing substances, can therefore be selected according to the

individual's *Dosha*, *Agni*, and degree of depletion. *Rasayana* may further support restoration and maintenance of functional vitality. *PanchaMahabhuta* provides a conceptual framework for individualising the Ayurvedic management of *Karshya*. Integration of appropriate *Ahara*, *Vihara* and *Chikitsa* (like *Brimhana* and *Rasayana*) may be considered according to the underlying pattern of depletion rather than using a uniform nutritional approach.

KEYWORDS: *Brimhana*, *Karshya*, *PanchaMahabhuta*, *Rasayana*, *Maashaadi modaka*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda considers maintenance of health as a primary objective and gives importance to preservation of equilibrium between the bodily components, mental functions and environmental influences. Food, lifestyle and appropriate therapeutic measures are therefore selected according to the individual's constitution, digestive capacity and state of health.

Karshya refers to a state of excessive leanness or depletion. The clinical picture may include reduced body bulk, weakness, poor tolerance to environmental factors, and disease susceptibility.^[1] Depletion involves inadequate nourishment of the *Dhatu* and reduction in strength or working capacity.

PanchaMahabhutas - *Akasha*, *Vayu*, *Agni*, *Jala* and *Prithvi* are fundamental components of all material existence. Their combination in different proportions determines the properties and functions of substances. In the body, these principles manifest through structural, fluid, metabolic, movement-related, and spatial components.

Karshya describes depletion of *Rasa* as linked with excessive intake of *Vata*-promoting factors, excessive exercise, excessive sexual activity, excessive study, psychological factors, inadequate food intake, and other causes.^[2] Here, *Rasakshaya* occurs due to *Shoshana* of *Ahara Rasa*, caused by *Vata's* *Rooksha Guna*. Thus, *Karshya* may be understood as inadequate nourishment and progressive tissue depletion.

The treatment principle of *Karshya* is based on *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*, according to which similarity promotes increase and dissimilarity promotes reduction.^[3] Therefore, substances and measures possessing nourishing and stabilising qualities are selected for an individual with depletion.

Classical texts describe the use of milk, ghee, *Shali*, *Godhuma*, *Masha*, *Yava*, *Ashwagandha*, *Shatavari* and other nourishing measures in conditions associated with depletion.^[4] *Brimhana*

and *Rasayana* measures are also described for promoting nourishment and maintaining the strength of the body.

The present review attempts to integrate these classical principles into a conceptual framework in which *PanchaMahabhuta* can be used to understand the development of *Karshya* and guide individualised dietary, lifestyle and therapeutic planning.

OBJECTIVE

To analyse the role of *PanchaMahabhuta* in understanding *Karshya* and to explore its application in planning Ayurvedic measures for restoration of nourishment and vitality.

SOURCE OF DATA

Classical Ayurvedic references were obtained from Ayurvedic treatises including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Sharangadhara Samhita*. Particular attention was given to references concerning:

- *PanchaMahabhuta Siddhanta*
- *Karshya* and its etiological factors
- *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*
- *Brimhana Chikitsa*
- *Rasayana*
- Properties of nourishing *Ahara* and *Dravya*

Contemporary literature related to *Karshya*, undernutrition, nutritional deficiency, and Ayurvedic management was also reviewed from electronic scholarly sources.

Data Synthesis

The information obtained from classical and contemporary sources was organised under four major themes:

- *PanchaMahabhuta*
- Pathogenesis of *Karshya*
- *PanchaMahabhuta* interpretation of nourishment and depletion
- Application of *Brimhana*, *Ahara*, *Vihara* and *Rasayana*

The findings were qualitatively synthesised according to Ayurvedic principles and interpreted as follows.

PanchaMahabhuta perspective of *Karshya*

The etiological factors described for *Karshya* include excessive use of *Vata*-promoting diet and lifestyle, excessive exercise, excessive sexual activity, excessive study, fear, grief, excessive thinking, night awakening, fasting, and inadequate food intake.

- **Vata aggravating factors:** Excessive exposure to *Vata*-aggravating dietary and lifestyle factors increases *Vata*, which is associated with *Vayu* (Air) and *Akasha* (Ether) *Mahabhutas*.
- **Rasa Dhatu depletion:** Aggravated *Vata* and inadequate nourishment may lead to a reduction in *Rasa Dhatu*, the primary nourishing tissue.
- **Subsequent Dhatu depletion:** Reduced nourishment of *Rasa Dhatu* affects the successive *Dhatus*, resulting in progressive tissue depletion.
- **Reduction of Prithvi and Jala Mahabhutas:** Since most *Dhatus* are considered predominantly composed of *Prithvi* (Earth) and *Jala* (Water), their depletion manifests as loss of body mass, muscle bulk, and tissue nourishment.

From the *PanchaMahabhuta* perspective, depletion may therefore be considered as a relative reduction in the nourishing and stabilising aspects of *Prithvi* and *Jala*, together with disturbance of *Agni* and excessive activity of *Vayu*. This interpretation is conceptual and should not be considered equivalent to a direct biomedical measurement of individual elemental components.

Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta and Restoration of Depletion

The management of depletion follows the principle of similarity. Substances possessing similar properties support the increase of corresponding tissues and functions.

For example:

- *Mamsa* is described as promoting *Mamsa Vriddhi* through similarity.
- *Brimhana* and *Guru Guna* substances may support restoration of depleted tissues.
- *Madhura Rasa*, *Snigdha*, and *Guru Guna* are frequently associated with *Brimhana* measures.
- *Brimhana* measures are selected according to the individual's digestive capacity and disease status.

Thus, treatment is not based merely on increasing caloric intake but on selecting appropriate substances and practices according to the nature of depletion.

Brimhana and Rasayana Measures

If a particular *Dhatu* or part of the *Shareera* is deficient due to deficiency of its predominant *Mahabhuta*, the deficiency is corrected by administering *Dravya* that is predominantly composed of the same *Mahabhuta*.^[5] With reference to the *Samanya Siddhanta*, Brimhana is particularly relevant in *Karshya*, as it promotes nourishment and restoration of depleted *Dhatus*. By administering appropriately selected Brimhana *Dravyas* possessing qualities that are similar to those of the depleted tissues, tissue nourishment and replenishment can be supported.

Brimhana Dravyas have *Guru*, *Mridu*, *Sheeta*, *Snigdha*, *Bahala*, *Manda*, *Sthoola*, *Pichchhila*, *Manda*, *Sthira* and *Shlakshna* properties.^[6] Subsequently, *Rasayana* measures may be employed to maintain the quality of the *Dhatus* and support their functional vitality. Management of *Karshya* includes nourishing substances such as milk, ghee, *Shali*, *Godhuma*, *Masha*, and other suitable foods. *Mashaadi Modaka* is an example of a formulation indicated for *Pushti* and *Vrishya* purposes.^[7] The formulation contains *Masha*, *Godhuma*, *Shali*, *Yava*, *Pippali*, *Ghrita*, and *Khanda Sharkara*, administered with milk. The *Dravya* composition illustrates the combined presence of predominantly nourishing and stabilising substances with digestive-supporting components.

Dravya (Substance)	Guna (Properties)	Mahabhuta (Elements)
<i>Masha</i>	<i>Snigdha, Madhura, Guru, Vrishya, Vatahara</i>	<i>Jala, Prithvi</i>
<i>Shashtika Shali</i>	<i>Sheeta, Snigdha, Swadu, Sthira, Aguru</i>	<i>Jala, Prithvi</i>
<i>Godhuma</i>	<i>Swadu, Sheetala, Snigdha, Sthairyakara, Guru, Brimhana</i>	<i>Prithvi, Jala</i>
<i>Yava</i>	<i>Ruksha, Sheetata, Sthairyakrit, Balya,</i>	<i>Prithvi, Vayu</i>
<i>Pippali</i>	<i>Katu, Snigdha, Anushna, Swadupaka, Rasayani</i>	<i>Agni, Vayu</i>
<i>Ghrita</i>	<i>Madhura, Sheetata</i>	<i>Jala, Prithvi</i>
<i>Sharkara</i>	<i>Vrishya, Sasneha, Madhura</i>	<i>Prithvi, Jala</i>
<i>Kshira</i>	<i>Swadu, Snigdha, Sheetata, Mridu, Guru, Manda</i>	<i>Jala, Prithvi</i>

PanchaMahabhuta-Based Dietary Interpretation

The dietary approach to *Karshya* can be conceptualised according to the dominant qualities required by the individual.

Depletion → assessment of *Dosha* and *Agni* → assessment of nutritional requirement → selection of appropriate *Mahabhuta*-dominant qualities → *Ahara* + *Vihara* +

Brimhana/Rasayana In *Karshya*, *Prithvi* and *Jala Mahabhuta*-dominant measures have to be adopted.

Prithvi Mahabhuta-dominant *Dravyas* have *Guru*, *Khara*, *Kathina*, *Manda*, *Sthira*, *Saandra*, *Sthoola* qualities abundantly, and their functions are *Upachaya*, *Sanghaata*, *Gaurava*, and *Sthairya*. *Jala Mahabhuta*-dominant *Dravyas* have *Drava*, *Snigdha*, *Sheeta*, *Manda*, *Mridu*, and *Pichchhila* qualities in abundance, and they do *Upakleda*, *Sneha*, *Bandha*, *Vishyanda*, and *Maardava*. Management of *Karshya* includes nourishing substances such as milk, ghee, *Shali*, *Godhuma*, *Masha*, and other suitable foods.

The objective is not simply to increase body weight but to support appropriate nourishment, strength, and functional well-being.

DISCUSSION

Karshya is described in Ayurveda as a condition of excessive leanness associated with depletion and reduced strength. Contemporary reviews have also discussed *Karshya* in relation to undernutrition and nutritional deficiency.^[8-10] However, an Ayurvedic assessment extends beyond body weight and considers *Agni*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu* status, dietary habits, and lifestyle.

The *PanchaMahabhuta* framework provides a theoretical bridge between the properties of food and medicine and their expected effects in the body, in health as well as in disease.^[11] *Prithvi* and *Jala* are conceptually important for structural stability, cohesion, and nourishment, while *Agni* is necessary for transformation and utilisation. *Vayu* governs movement, and *Akasha* provides the spatial basis for physiological processes.

The role of *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta* becomes particularly important in this context. When depletion is present, substances with appropriate similar qualities may support restoration. Classical recommendations of milk, ghee, cereals and nourishing drugs can therefore be interpreted through their *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya* and *Vipaka*, together with their broader *PanchaMahabhuta* predominance.

PROBABLE MODE OF ACTION

- **Prithvi Mahabhuta** contributes heaviness, solidity, stability, and compactness, supporting the formation and strengthening of body tissues.

- **Jala Mahabhuta** contributes liquidity, unctuousness, softness, and nourishment, supporting hydration and tissue nourishment.
- **Moorta Dravyas** are substances possessing a definite form or material manifestation.

Relevant *Gunas* and their functions

Guna (quality)	Relevance to <i>Karshya</i>
<i>Guru</i>	Promotes nourishment and body bulk
<i>Mridu</i>	Supports softness and reduces excessive tissue depletion
<i>Snigdha</i>	Nourishes and lubricates tissues
<i>Drava</i>	Supports fluid content and hydration
<i>Pichchhila</i>	Supports cohesion and binding
<i>Sthira</i>	Promotes stability and strength
<i>Manda</i>	Counteracts excessive activity and depletion

Six important functions^[12]

- **Upachaya:** Increases body bulk and tissue mass.
- **Upakleda:** Increases the liquid content or moistness of the body.
- **Upasneha:** Provides unctuousness, lubrication, and nourishment.
- **Bandha:** Promotes binding and cohesion of body tissues.
- **Sthairya:** Supports stability and strength.
- **Sanghaata:** Promotes compactness and structural integrity.

How does this counteract *Karshya*?

Karshya is characterised by reduced body bulk and depletion of tissues. *Vayu* and *Akasha Mahabhutas* are associated with qualities such as lightness, dryness, and spaciousness. When these qualities predominate, they conceptually favour tissue depletion and reduced body mass. *Prithvi-Jala* dominant *Dravyas* counteract these tendencies through their heavier, unctuous, moistening, nourishing, and stabilising properties. Thus, they support *Upachaya*, *Dhatu Poshana* (tissue nourishment), and restoration of body bulk, including the nourishment of *Rasa Dhatu* and subsequent *Dhatus*. Moreover, ***Karshya* resulting from the predominance of *Amoorta Mahabhutas* (*Vayu- Akasha*) can be counteracted by *Moorta Mahabhutas* (*Prithvi-Jala*) through *Brimhana* and *Rasayana Chikitsa*.**

Mashaadi Modaka, a dietary preparation for *Dhatu Poshana*, is an example of *Pancha Mahabhuta-based treatment* for *Karshya*. *Maashaadi Modaka*, by virtue of its ingredients *Maasha*, *Godhuma*, *Shaali*, *Yava*, *Sharkara*, *Ghrta*, having the properties dominant in *Prithvi* and *Jala Mahabhutas*, does nourish the tissues, increase the body bulk, promote structural

integrity and stability, and increase the tissue mass. *Pippali*, by virtue of its *Ushna* property, will help in the restoration and maintenance of *Agni*, which is also an essential part of *Brimhana* and *Rasayana*.

Such combinations illustrate that an Ayurvedic formulation need not act through a single mechanism. Different ingredients may contribute to digestion, nourishment, tissue support, and functional restoration.

The management of *Karshya* should therefore be individualised. A person with reduced appetite or impaired digestive capacity may not benefit from indiscriminate administration of heavy foods. Similarly, excessive intake without attention to *Agni* may result in poor utilisation. Therefore, assessment of *Agni*, *Dosha*, dietary habits and the nature of depletion should precede selection of *Brimhana* measures.

From the *Swasthavritta* perspective, management should extend beyond medication. Appropriate *Ahara*, adequate sleep, avoidance of excessive physical exertion, regulation of lifestyle, yoga, and suitable *Pranayama* may be incorporated according to individual needs.

CONCLUSION

PanchaMahabhuta provides a useful Ayurvedic framework for understanding the relationship between the external environment, dietary substances, and the human body in *Karshya*. Through *Loka-Purusha Samya Siddhanta* and *Samanya-Vishesha Siddhanta*, depletion can be interpreted in terms of altered balance of nourishing, stabilising, transformative and movement-related qualities. Individualised application of *Ahara*, *Vihara*, *Brimhana* and *Rasayana* according to *Dosha*, *Agni* and the degree of depletion may provide a holistic approach to restoring nourishment and functional vitality. The conceptual model warrants further validation through clinical and nutritional research.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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