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Research Article

Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala–Mūlam: An Elaborated Conceptual and Clinical Review of the Fundamental Principles of Ayurveda

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Abstract

Ayurveda conceptualises the human body as a dynamically balanced system governed by Doṣa, Dhātu, and Mala. These three entities constitute the fundamental basis of physiological regulation, tissue nourishment, and metabolic waste elimination. The classical dictum "Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala–Mūlam Hi Śarīram" emphasises that equilibrium among these components maintains health, whereas their disequilibrium initiates disease processes. This review critically elaborates the conceptual framework, interrelationship, clinical relevance, and modern scientific correlations of Doṣa, Dhātu, and Mala based on classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary research literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda offers a holistic and integrative understanding of human physiology that extends beyond structural anatomy to include functional and metabolic principles. The human body is explained as a living system maintained by the dynamic balance of Doṣa, Dhātu, and Mala. Unlike reductionist biomedical models, Ayurveda emphasises systemic harmony and individualised health assessment.

Acharya Charaka's statement

"Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala–Mūlam Hi Śarīram"

—establishes these three entities as the foundational pillars of life. Their equilibrium (Sāmya) results in health, while disequilibrium (Vaiṣamya) leads to disease. Understanding this principle is fundamental for both preventive and curative aspects of Ayurveda.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This narrative review was conducted through:

Critical study of primary Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Saṁhitā, Suśruta Saṁhitā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya

Analysis of authoritative commentaries by Chakrapāṇi, Dalhaṇa, and Aruṇadatta

Review of published research articles from indexed Ayurvedic and integrative medicine journals

Classical concepts were systematically interpreted and correlated with contemporary biomedical understanding.

3. Doṣa: Functional Regulators of the Body

3.1 Conceptual Understanding of Doṣa

The term Doṣa derives from the root "Duṣ," meaning to vitiate or contaminate when aggravated. However, in their physiological state, Doṣas are essential regulators of normal bodily functions. They govern movement, transformation, and stability.

3.2 Tridoṣa and Their Functions

Vāta Doṣa: Controls all forms of motion, including nerve impulses, muscular activity, circulation, respiration, and elimination. It is considered the prime mover among the Doṣas.

Pitta Doṣa: Governs digestion, metabolism, enzymatic activity, thermoregulation, and cognitive functions such as perception and intelligence.

Kapha Doṣa: Provides structural integrity, lubrication of joints, immunity, growth, and tissue nourishment.

3.3 Role in Health and Disease

Balanced Doṣas maintain physiological harmony, whereas aggravated or depleted Doṣas interact with susceptible Dhātus to initiate disease (Doṣa–Dūṣya Sammūrchanā).

4. Dhātu: Structural and Nutritional Components

4.1 Concept and Formation of Dhātu

Dhātus are the fundamental tissues that support, nourish, and sustain the body. They are formed sequentially from ingested food through metabolic processes governed by Jatharāgni and Dhātvāgni.

4.2 Sapta Dhātu and Their Functions

Rasa Dhātu: Nourishes all tissues and maintains fluid balance.

Rakta Dhātu: Supports life, oxygenation, and vitality.

Māṁsa Dhātu: Provides muscular strength and protection to organs.

Meda Dhātu: Maintains lubrication, energy storage, and insulation.

Asthi Dhātu: Forms skeletal structure and support.

Majjā Dhātu: Fills bone cavities and supports nervous functions.

Śukra Dhātu: Responsible for reproduction, vitality, and immunity.

4.3 Dhātu Vaiṣamya

Quantitative or qualitative imbalance of Dhātus results in tissue degeneration, weakness, or abnormal growth, contributing to chronic diseases.

5. Mala: Metabolic Waste Products

5.1 Conceptual Significance

Malas are not merely waste but essential by-products of metabolism that contribute to physiological balance when properly formed and excreted.

5.2 Types and Functions

Purīṣa: Maintains gut motility and supports digestive fire.

Mūtra: Regulates water and electrolyte balance.

Sveda: Assists in thermoregulation and skin health.

5.3 Mala Dushti

Improper elimination leads to accumulation of toxins (Āma), obstruction of channels (Srotorodha), and disease manifestation.

6. Integrated Relationship of Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala

Doṣas regulate Dhātu metabolism, Dhātus provide the substratum for Doṣas, and Malas are the metabolic end-products of Dhātu transformation. This integrated relationship maintains homeostasis. Disturbance at any level disrupts the entire system, explaining the holistic nature of Ayurvedic pathology.

7. Clinical and Therapeutic Relevance

Assessment of Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala forms the foundation of:

Rogī and Roga Parīkṣā

Personalized treatment planning

Panchakarma and Rasāyana therapies

Preventive healthcare strategies

8. Correlation with Modern Biomedical Science

Doṣas may be compared to regulatory systems such as neuro-endocrine and metabolic pathways. Dhātus resemble structural and functional tissues, while Malas correspond to metabolic waste products. Despite conceptual differences, both systems emphasise systemic balance.

9. DISCUSSION

The Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding disease pathogenesis and individualized treatment. Its relevance is increasing in integrative medicine, preventive healthcare, and personalized therapeutic strategies.

10. CONCLUSION

The elaborated understanding of Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala–Mūlam reinforces its central role in Ayurvedic physiology and clinical practice. Maintenance of equilibrium among these components is essential for health promotion, disease prevention, and effective treatment.

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