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Conceptual explanation of *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya* (six essentials), their effect on vital heat and human health, A Unani perspective

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Abstract

In Unani system of medicine the effect of surroundings and environmental conditions on the human health is described in detail. The main concern of this system is to restore the equilibrium of the core body temperature known as vital heat and maintain the health status of human being with the help of *Tabiat* (Physis). The effects of environmental variations and surroundings are described by the name of *Asbabe Sitta Zaroriya* (six essentials) in unani letrature. These are *Hawa* (environmental factors), *Makool wa Mashroob* (food and beverages) *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Badani* (movement and rest of body), *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani* (psychological factors), *Nawam wa Yaqza* (sleep and wakefulness), *Istifragh wa Ehtebas* (retention and evacuation). Ancient physicians described that all body functions are performed by this vital heat, various diseases occurs when there is imbalance in it. In this article we will discuss concept of six essentials, how they affect human health and vital heat in details.

Keywords: Asbabe Sitta, unani, vital heat, Tabiat, Physis

1. Introduction

According to the Unani system of medicine “*Asbab*” are the factors which are precursors and have an influence on human body to generate a new state or to maintain an old state. *Asbab-e-Sitta Zaroriyah* are basically that six essentials of life without them life of humans is unimaginable. This is a well known fact that, various changes continuously take place in human body throughout the life. For example when body unexpectedly exposed to cold or hot air or any sort of harmful thing, such as during excessive rest, movements and sleep disturbance in physiological functions occurs, at that time Physis (*Tabiat*) stands to manage these situations and try to maintain equilibrium of the body [1, 2].

1.1 Vital Heat

Unani scholars described that existence of human life depends upon vital heat. Which is found in human body and responsible for keeping the body live and maintains the *Sūrat* (structure) of the body [1]. It also helps in accomplishment of all those functions of the body which are responsible for sustenance of life [1, 2]. Ali Bin Abbas Majoosi writes that all body functions are performed by this vital heat, various diseases occurs when there is imbalance in it [3]. In this article we will discuss concept of six essentials, how they affect human health and vital heat. Unani scholars specified these factors affecting core body temperature or vital heat are: *Hawa* (environmental factors), *Makool wa Mashroob* (food and beverages) *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Badani* (movement and rest of body), *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani* (psychological factors), *Nawam wa Yaqza* (sleep and wakefulness), *Istifragh wa Ehtebas* (retention and evacuation) [4].

2.1 *Hawa* (Environmental factors)

Over the past several decades, climate change has become an emerging global threat to our planet and has induced a remarkable increase in morbidity and mortality by affecting the human health [5]. As described in Unani literature affect of climate occurs on the core temperature or vital heat of the body. They described that variation in vital heat occurs due to environmental changes, vital heat is strong in the cold weather and lies deep inside the body

and helps in growth and development more easily than summer. *Quwwat Haḍima* (digestive faculty) works slightly better in winter than summer and helps to utilize the nutriment and expel out the waste products. Continuous exposure to cold air for a longer duration affects the organs of the body and leads to extinction of vital heat [6]. In spring season vital heat is at optimum level and equally present in all organs of the body. Vital heat usually becomes weak during summer season, the environmental hot air is responsible for dissolution of various body substances, in such a way that it helps in thinning the *Akhlat* (humours) and *Arwah* (pneuma) of the body and makes them capable to easily dissipate from the body in the form of vapors. Hot environmental air makes the body *Mutakhkhal* (rarefied) and causes to open the skin pores which in turn facilitate the process of dissolution in the body [2, 3, 7].

In very hot season when we inspire hot air in to the lungs it may cause the slight increase in the temperature of the heart which can raise the body temperature and increase the blood circulation in the peripheral parts of the body and skin, so the skin becomes reddish and hot in touch and this hot air ultimately causes the dissolution of *Ruḥbat Gharziyya* (innate moisture) and affects all parts and organs of the body [6].

2.2 Makool WA Mashroob (Food and beverages)

Nutrient is a substance that provides replenishment for the dissolution occurring from the body therefore it is necessary that the substance which is being used as nutrient should be similar to that entity which is undergoing dissolution from the body [6]. All nutritional substances produce heat as their natural consequence, because their conversion into blood leads to a natural increase of heat in the body [8, 9]. Certain hot drugs which have nutritional properties like garlic when consumed immediately produces heat in the body while certain nutrients like lettuce and pumpkin which are cold, after conversion produce heat in the body. In both cases even after the completion of digestion some of their original qualities remain [8, 9].

As per concept of Unani system of medicine Physis increases the heat production after digestion and metabolism of nutrients and maintains the body's core temperature on a constant level. Mahmood Amlī described that nutrient provides replenishment of dissolved substances in the body and it is also responsible for growth and development [1]. But excessive food intake decreases vital heat because at that time Physis becomes unable to utilize its tool for digestion due to excessive amount of nutrients and which ultimately results into indigestion. This affects the process of heat production in the body and as a result an abnormal heat is produced which is known as *Hararat Ghariba* (increased body heat/abnormal heat). On the other side Physis continuously utilizes innate moisture to maintain body's core temperature at a constant level. If insufficient nutrient is provided so after some time dissolution of innate moisture starts which causes further decrease in vital heat because it is the basic source for heat and it gets reinforced from it [1, 9, 10]. Desire of tea, coffee and other hot drinks in winter season is actually a contrivance of Physis to provide heat to the body. During winter high protein diet is very much liked and accepted by the body, whereas in summer the same individual shows dislike or avoid the same diet, and if taken dyspepsia may emerge out. What is required in the body under certain condition likes and dislikes of nutrient it is not arbitrary but meant to maintain *e'tadal-e-mizāj* (normal constitution) and vital heat in the body [11].

2.3 Harkāt-o-Sukoon Badani (movement and rest of the body)

According to Unani system of medicine movement is essential for human being; it produces heat in the body and support vital heat to perform better body functions. Physis acts on ingested nutrient in the body and make them capable to produce heat, in this process some waste substances are also produced, movements expel them out because they are harmful for the body and vital heat. Movement is described according to its effects on human body as *Shadid* (vigorous), *Da'if* (weak), *Qalil* (short duration), *Kathir* (prolonged duration) [1, 2].

All types of movements produce heat, during vigorous movement with short duration more heat is produced and body's temperature increases because heat generation is greater than heat loss. Where as weak movements with prolonged duration also produce heat in the body within average quantity. When any of the above mentioned movements are excessive, they produce cold because there is excessive dissolution of moisture which results into suppression and dissolution of vital heat and causes coldness in the body [2, 12].

So this is clear that body movements affect vital heat and also affect the action of Physis. Therefore, by moderate body movement we can provide strength to vital heat and thus, to Physis. The movement associated with person's daily workout sometimes may be strong and sometimes weak. For instance, the movements associated with washer man's occupation, are liable to produce coldness and moistness, and the movements associated with black smith's art, are liable to produce more heat and dryness in the body [8].

The rest always produces cooling and moistening effects on the body because vital heat does not get excited during rest. Therefore excessive rest produces *Burudat* (cooling) and may be responsible for the suppression of vital heat and affect the actions of Physis [2, 8].

The effect of rest and movements on the human body is clear from above description and it is a fact that the physicians can assist Physis, in such a way that the movements or rest assist in the action of Physis. Sometimes there is accumulation of abnormal substances in the body which can be harmful, in this case moderate physical activity for their expulsion is advised. The one most important fact is that excessive viscosity of *Maddah* (source material/humours) produce hindrance in the action of Physis and also affect vital heat, which is the tool for Physis so with the help of movements or exercise we can help the Physis to decrease the viscosity and abnormal quantity of that *Maddah* for the proper functions of Physis.

2.4 Harkāt-o-Sukoon Nafsanī (Psychological factors)

There are some psychological factors which affect vital heat. Physis moves the vital heat and pneuma interior or exterior of the body according to the different psychological conditions. Sudden movement of vital heat towards the exterior of the body is seen in anger or extreme excitement. While slow movement of vital heat toward the exterior of the body is seen in *lazzat* (happiness). There are also some factors which move the vital heat and pneuma towards interior to the body e.g fear and sadness. Beside all these there are some special or unique factors in which the movement of pneuma and vital heat from interior to exterior and exterior to interior happened in same time like fear with anger and anger with shame. *Andoh* (anxiety) is a psychological condition in which vital heat move on both interior or exterior of the body [13].

2.5 *Nawm-o-Yaqza* (Sleep and wakefulness)

For maintenance of health sleep and wakefulness also necessary in moderate level. Normal sleep and wakefulness are beneficial for the body and potentiate vital heat. Sleep is the natural periodic state of rest for mind and body with closed eyes characterized by partial or complete loss of consciousness [8, 14]. According to physicians normal sleep help all the faculties of the body to prevent the dispersion of pneuma and also restores the innate moisture of the body [2]. Similarly normal wakefulness is also necessary for health. Sleep closely resembles rest while wakefulness is equivalent to movement [15]. Rāzi stated that Physis creates the desire of sleep when body fluids and vital heat dissolve in excess amount due to wakefulness. Hence, the sleep is the best physiological and natural way to preserve the vital heat and body fluids. It can be observed in a tired person who enjoys deep sleep after moderate meal [4]. Sleep removes all types of fatigue [15]. According to Ibn Rushd, the sleep is very essential for those livings who instinct to sleep, and human is also one of them. If sleep is disturbed for longer time it may cause death [16]. Sleep is considered as the great restorer and serves at least two biological purposes. Firstly, the energy conservation to achieve high performance during day time and secondly the restoration of neurotransmitters that are depleted during waking hours. This process is responsible for clearing the brain of daily minutiae and prepares for a new day. Sleep is basic need of life because there is continuous dissolution of *lateef bukharat* in the body due to wakefulness and during sleep the replenishment of these *lateef bukharat* are provided because sleep facilitates into concoction and digestion of the nutriment and provides moisture to body [16, 17] during sleep vital heat moves inside the body and helps in concoction and digestion of food [2, 16]. For the sake of heat production during sleep Physis metabolize food/substance it into the humours and produces heat in the body. This heat spread all over the body and maintain body's core temperature. The reason for a tired person to get sleep is that the movement and exertion reduces the quantity of vital heat and comparatively brings about coldness and moisture in it, thus in order to increase the quantity of vital heat and as a preventive measure it return towards its source hence due to deficiency of vital heat person feels desire to sleep [16].

Sometimes prolonged duration of sleep decreases the quantity of vital heat and produces *Harārat Gharība* (increased heat/abnormal heat) which makes the body muscles flaccid, during prolonged duration of sleep a yellow humour is produced which causes the elevation of core body temperature and results in the production of abnormal heat in the body. If there is deficiency of nutriments and humour in the body, Physis is unable produce enough heat due to dissolution innate moisture [18].

The movement of vital heat inside the body can be understood by simple example i.e. during sleep when vital heat accumulate inside the body and peripheral parts of the body become cold so person need something to cover and to keep the body warm. There is no need to cover the body when person is awoken because in this condition vital heat is equally distributed throughout the body [18].

2.6 *Estifragh wa Ehtibas* (Elimination and retention)

Estifragh means the elimination of unnecessary substances out of the body because retention of these substances inside the body produces harmful effects. In the same way, elimination of the substances which must be retained causes the abnormal condition [2, 8]. Elimination is carried through

normal channels such as passage of urine, stools, sweat, menstrual blood etc. But excess excretion results in abnormal condition and dissolve vital heat. Retention of normal and useful substance potentiates vital heat. But retention of waste substances affects vital heat directly. Therefore elimination and retention within normal limits are beneficial and maintain health [12, 13].

3. Conclusion

So from the above discussion it is predicted that, how these six essentials affect the vital heat and how Physis try to maintain the normalcy in vital heat to make the life enjoyable and protect the body from harmful effects. Unani philosophers described importance of these six essential factors in very details, because human life is impossible without them; an equilibrium and balance in *Asbab-e-sitta zaroriyah* is necessary for healthy life. Therefore basic knowledge of *Asbab-e-sitta zaroriyah* is very necessary to maintain the fitness and health condition. So that each and every individual can adopt the healthy life style and may stay healthy as long as possible.

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