



Water as Discussed by Charaka, the Father of Indian Medicine

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Abstract

Water, the unavoidable substance for each and every object of the nature, has been counted as sacred and respectable since time immemorial. Water is needed for making the soil fertile, growth of the plants, drinking for the animals and humans, external cleaning purposes of the human, animal etc., cleaning of the dress, utensil etc. of the human beings etc. If observed, it is seen that, water is used in huge quantity by the human itself. In each step a man needs water. Summarily to say, for a man it is almost impossible to live without water even for a hour. Hence it is occupying an important place in the literatures also. Many descriptions are available in the Indian literatures showing the importance of water.

Water, along with its usefulness also may cause some sufferings to the human beings, animals etc. A good number of diseases are identified by the researchers that are transported by water when it becomes contaminated. Difference in the qualities of water according to different source is also an important point to be noted. Extensive study and research are already conducted and continuing in different levels to know more about the mysterious nature's gift "water".

The present scientific society is aware about the latest knowledge on water. But astonishingly there are some interesting facts and concepts about water in the classics of ancient Indian health science, Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha, Ashtanga Hridaya etc. which should be appraised to the modern scientists and researchers. Hence, considering as the need of time, a study on the descriptions on water in one among the Ayurvedic classics, Charaka Samhita, which is considered to be the oldest is conducted.

Keywords: Water; Importance of Water; Nature's Gift; Ayurvedic Classics

Introduction

Water is well accepted as the unavoidable nature's gift that cannot be opposed by anybody. It is necessary for maintenance of cleanliness of the surroundings, preparation of food and different forms of drinks, personal belongings and internal use like drinking etc. An individual needs water in every moment for different purposes. Bath with clean

water gives pleasure to the human beings, animals, birds etc. Rain water cleans the trees and gives them beautiful appearance. The joy of bath can be experienced by observing the animals and birds taking bath in water sources and reservoirs especially during summer season.

Though the word "water" indicates a class of liquid substance without colour, taste, odour and shape then also

the description available establish that, "all water are not same". Water carries different character depending upon the source, soil, surrounding, lodging area, human/animal behaviour with it etc. It sometimes may be the source of some diseases, specially related with the Gastro-intestinal tract. External contact with polluted / contaminated water may produce a good number of chronic skin diseases. Hence the modern scientists have started study and research on water and explored a number of facts about it related with character, usefulness, harm can be caused, rejectable conditions, examination, purification etc.

If looked back towards the ancient medical system, Ayurveda, it is observed that, the scholars of about 5000-6000 years B.C. have also did extensive and meticulous study on water and documented in their Samhitas like Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridaya. They observed very interesting facts on it which can be considered as facts important to appraise to the modern researchers, scientists and scholars for the benefit of the human society.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The present is a literary study aimed to:

- Search the descriptions on water available in Charaka Samhita, the most authentic and oldest Ayurvedic classic, and find out some important scientific facts on water mentioned in modern books
- Make a discussion to develop a concept on similarity/dissimilarity etc. on the different descriptions
- Arrange the information in the form of a scientific article and sent for publication for appraisal of the modern scientific society.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in the Central Library of Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science and Research Hospital, Sri Dri University, Cuttack, Odisha following the below mentioned steps.

- Charaka Samhita was studied to get information on water as mentioned in the aims and objectives
- Some information on water were also collected from some related modern classics
- The concepts were noted accordingly
- A comparative discussion on the findings was prepared
- A summary of the observations and findings was prepared
- The article was completed with a conclusion and sent for publication in peer reviewed journal expecting the appraisal of the scientific society.

Observation and Result

After the study the following observations were noted

- Water (jala) is described in JALABARGA saying that, water is of one type and falls on the earth from the sky as rain (eindrajala). After fall on the earth it acquires the quality according to the soil (desha), time (season) (kala) etc [1].
- After fall on the earth the rain water acquires the qualities like, coldness (sita), hotness(ushna), oiliness(snigdha), dryness(ruksha) etc. which are induced by the effect of the Sun(arka), Moon(soma) and Air(vayu) according to the season [2].
- The rain water is said to have the 6 natural qualities like-cold (sita), pure(suchi), useful(siva), tasty(mrista-swadu), clear(bimala) and light(laghu) [3].
- After fall and collection on the soil the rain water acquires the qualities as follows [4]-
 - Swetabhumi (white soil)-Kashaya (astringent)
 - Pandubhumi (pale soil)- Tikta(bitter)
 - Kapilabhumi(blackish coloured soil)- Ksharasangsrista (alkaline)
 - Usharabhumi (salty soil)-Lavana (salty)
 - Parbata (hilly soil /hills)- Katu (pungent)
 - Krishnabhumi (black soil)-Madhura(sweet)
- Rain water (aindrajala), ice water (karajala) and freezeed water (himajala) are tasteless (avyaktarasa). The rain water, if collected in clean vessel then it is pure and can be served to the king without fear (narendrapeya aindrajala) [5].
- The pure water can be selected with the qualities like-ishatkashayamadhura (slightly astringent and sweet in taste), swaccha (clear), laghu (light), aruksha (not dry), anabhisyaabdi (does not cause kafavridhhi) (kafavridhhi can be realised by feeling of heaviness of the abdomen and body, feeling of indigestion and reduced /loss of appetite etc.) [6].
- The rain water is said to bear the following qualities according to season [7]-
 - Rainy season (new rain) (Barsharitu)-guru (heavy), abhisyaandi (causes kafavridhhi lakshana) , Madhur (sweet in taste)
 - Autumn season (Saradritu)-laghu (light) , anabhisyaandi (does not cause kafavridhhi lakshana)
 - Hemanta ritu (pre winter)-snigdha (produces oiliness), brishya (aphrodisiac), balahita(increases strength), guru(heavy)
 - Winter season (Sishira ritu)- laghutara (more light), kafavatajit (useful in kafa and vatavyadhi)
 - Spring season (Basanta ritu)- Kashaya(astringent) ,

- Madhura(sweet) , ruksha(produces dryness)
- Summer season (Grishmaritu)- anabhisyandi (does not produce kafaja vyadhies)
- Bibhranta kala (rain from the cloud of rainy season)- Doshakaraka (produces vitiation of Doshas and causes different types of disease)
 - The water of Sarad ritu (autumn season) is said to be the best for all category of persons [8].
 - River water contains the following qualities depending upon their origin [9].
- Himabatprabhava (coming down from the Himalaya)- useful (pathya) and beneficial (punya) as the water comes down after getting strong friction with a good number of stones.
- Malayaprabhava (coming down from Malaya parvata)- useful like nectar as it flows through the stones, sand etc.
- Paschimabhimukha (flowing towards the West)-The water is clear and useful.
- Purbasamudraga-These rivers generally flows slowly hence the water is heavy (guru).
- Pariyatrabhava, Bindhyasahyabhava (flowing from Bindhya and other mountains)-The water of these rivers causes different types of diseases of the head (siroroga), heart diseases (hridroga), different types of skin diseases (kustha) and filariasis (sleepada).
 - The river water, during rainy season carries different types of dirty elements like soil, worm, insect, snake, rodents etc. with their excreta (kleda, krimi, kita , sarpa , mushaka and their mala , mutra etc.) hence this water should always be rejected for use [10].
 - The water of bapi (small reservoir), kupa (well), tadaga (pond), utsasara (lake), prarabana (spring) follows the qualities of the desha (geographical area) where it is. According to Jangala (dry land), Anupa (wet land) and Sadharana desha (the water also gets the quality) [11].
 - A nice description of the qualities of rejectable/harmful water is given for the common people. The water that carry these characters are said to be harmful (AHITAKARA)- picchila (slimy), krimila (mixed with insect, worm etc.), klinna (dirty), parna-saibala- kardamayukta (mixed with leaves, algae, clay etc.), bibarna (having abnormal colour), birasa (containing abnormal taste), Sandra (thick), durgandha (with foul smell) [12].
 - Sea water (samudrajala) is described as bishra (a peculiar smell), tridoshakara (vitiates the 3 body humors) and lavanayukta (salty) [13].

Discussion

From the above observations the following points can be discussed with the aim to come to a summary and conclusion

- The author has very closely and seriously observed and studied the rain water and described it with clear language that, it is the purest water that is provided

by the nature as it's gift to the human beings and other living organisms . Modern science also agrees that, after certain heights from the earth surface the air is free from all types of impurities like microorganisms, soil particles etc. Hence, if the rain water can be collected at a height before reaching the earth surface then it can be expected to be free from the contaminants and can be used freely for all purposes.

- When the rain water falls on the earth surface it becomes collected in the wells, rivers, lakes etc. and following the natural rule gets the quality of the soil and receives the characters of the local soil. Accordingly the surface and underground water contains different components and proves to be healthy or harmful. The presence of Arsenic in water in the water of certain area can be considered as the best example of the concept. It can be assumed that, if a region wise analysis of the character of surface and ground water will be conducted definitely the study will reveal difference in percentage the contents.
- The quality of water is also dependent upon season as season causes difference in the effect of the Sun which is hot in nature and with it's heat destroys a good number of organism etc., Moon which is cold and has a natural capacity to induce good qualities like coolness, feeling of happiness, taste etc. and air that carries the dirty substances from a distance and may mix with water at distant place. It can be expected that, analysis of water in different season, from different area will definitely support the concept in this regard. The concept of the natural purifiers- the Sun and the Moon and the natural carrier of the contaminants from one place to another place, the air, has justification and scientific background.
- The rivers originating from the rocky mountains flow with great speed and gets friction with the rocks of different size by which it become purified and it's use is said to be safe. This concept can be closely corelated with the modern method of large scale water purification "AERATION" where the water is aerated (supplied with air) by passing over a series of steps to facilitate to take Oxygen from the air. It expels soluble gases like Carbon dioxide, Hydrogen Sulphide etc. and makes the water less corrosive and expels out the gaseous organic compounds.
- In the process of purification of water a process "filtration" is occupying an important role. A common filter is prepared by arranging sand, rock etc.in layer. Hence the concept of considering the water of the rivers that flows through the sandy and rocky areas can be considered as justified and scientific.
- The concept of consideration of pure and usable water of the rivers flowing towards the west may be due to the more speed of these rivers.
- The water of the rivers flowing towards east is considered to be impure and rejectable which is justified by saying

that they flow slowly which a survey needs study to re-evaluate.

- Water of some rivers are said to be responsible for some specific diseases which also needs further study with reference to their character, quality and health status of the users of such water etc.
- Description of the rain water with special reference to its quality seems no need of further study and evaluation. The diseases that are prevalent during the rainy season, specially at the time of flood are always identified and it is a standing advice of the public health department to not to use the water (specially of river , pond , lake , spring etc.) during the rainy season without proper treatment .
- For selection of water for use more importance is given on inspection for mixture of insects, worms, leaves , grass and other substances and also for colour, feeling on touch and in some conditions taking the taste which are very useful and easy to utilise in day to day life .
- Sea water is also described with proper knowledge and experience by the author very nicely which indicate their minute study, observation and enthusiasm.

Summary

The study conducted reveals the following summary-

- Charaka, though is recognised as the father of medicine, his study and observations are not restricted only on medicine. He also concentrated on the study on the natural essentials and influential components on the human as well as the other living organisms.
- Charaka conducted a detail field study and experiment on natural water with special reference to it's property, quality, effect on the health of the user etc. He studied and co-related his observations with the different natural factors that can influence on his observations.
- Rain water is said to be the pure one if can be collected before fall on the earth. After fall on the earth it gets different qualities depending upon the character of the soil, surrounding environment etc.
- At the time of selection of water for use the character of the soil, Sun, Moon, Air and surrounding should always be considered sincerely as they determines the purity/ usefulness etc. of the same.
- The water of rainy season should never be used without proper purification as it contains a large number of contaminants.
- When the river water is decided to use then consideration on it's source and route of flow should be considered as these two factors have markable influence on the character of the water.
- Water can be examined with naked eye, touch, smell and sometimes with taste in day to day life which is neither time consuming nor needs financial involvement.

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- The concepts of Charaka can be scientifically established only with some very simple survey and analysis.

Conclusion

The study can be concluded with the following comment- "The statements and comments made by the great Ayurvedic scholar, Charaka in his famous treatise "Charaka Samhita" on water (jala) are the outcome of his extensive research, observation and experience . The principles of the Samhita need only study and analysis in modern technique by using some modern instruments. A multi-disciplinary scientific effort with administrative patronage can be considered to be the demand of time".

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