

An Ayurvedic Review of *Garbha Sharir* Through the Lens of *Panchabhautika Siddhant*: Insights into Congenital Anomalies

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Abstract

Ayurveda, through *Garbha Sharir*, explains the embryological development in very philosophical way, which is based on the *Panchabhautika Siddhant*—the theory of the five elements (*Prithvi, Aap, Teja, Vayu, and Akasha*).

To study and analyse the Ayurvedic concept of *Garbha Sharir* based on *Panchabhautika Siddhant* with a special focus on its role in the elucidation of congenital anomalies (*Garbha Vyapad*).

This study is a compilation of classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Kasyapa Samhita*, which provides an account of fetal development from the *Panchabhautika* perspective. Besides, interpretations of the commentaries and works of contemporary Ayurvedic scholars were also considered to prepare a comprehensive conception of fetal formation and disorders.

The five *Mahabhutas* in unison govern the physical and functional characteristics of the fetus. The occurrence of an imbalance or a disturbance of these elements either at the time of conception or during gestation leads to a wide range of *Garbha Vyapads*.

The knowledge of *Panchabhautika Siddhant* opens up a comprehensive Ayurvedic model that can be used for understanding and also for the possible prevention of congenital anomalies. According to it, if prenatal care (*Garbhini Paricharya*) and preconceptional cleansing (*Garbhadhan Samskara*) are properly coordinated with the balance of the elements, then fetal development will be in its best condition as per classical Ayurvedic wisdom.

Key words : Ayurveda, Congenital Anomalies, *Garbha Sharir*, *Garbha Vyapad*, *Panchbhautika Siddhant*

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Based on Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, human life is considered a combination of five basic elements (*Panchamahabhuta*): *Prithvi* (earth), *Aap* (water), *Teja* (fire), *Vayu* (air), and *Akasha* (ether). The *Panchabhautika Siddhant* concept shows how these universal elements become human body and regulate the physiological and developmental processes.

These *Mahabhutas* being the fundamental elements of nature form the basis for creation, differentiation, and maturation of the embryo in *Garbha Sharir*, the Ayurvedic study of the developmental biology of the human body. The classical texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* give detailed accounts of the origin of the fetus (*Garbha Utpatti*), the role of *Beeja* (sperm and ovum), *Atma* (consciousness), and *Ahara Rasa* (maternal nutrition) in the formation of the new being.

The knowledge of *Panchabhautika* involvement in *Garbha Sharir* is a step further to not only understanding the life's complex web but also the causes and the ways of congenital anomalies (*Garbha Vyapad*) prevention. *Acharya Sushruta* in his work points out that chaotic *Mahabhutas* in the pregnancy period bring deformities and diseases of the fetus, thus stressing the importance of equilibrium to get a healthy offspring.¹

This paper presents a critical qualitative review of the major Ayurvedic texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Kasyapa Samhita*, along with the translations and commentaries provided by well-known scholars. The researchers interpreted the classic verses

related to *Panchabhautika Siddhant* and *Garbha Sharir* to get the connection between these concepts and fetal development as well as congenital anomalies.

The research method consisted of :

1. **Textual Analysis:** Gathering of Shlokas on topics of *Garbha Utpatti* and *Mahabhuta* functions.
2. **Comparative Study:** Comparison of *Charaka*, *Sushruta*, *Vagbhata*, and *Kasyapa* opinions.
3. **Synthesis:** Using the different points of view to demonstrate the five-elemental influence on the fetus and its anomalies.

1. *Panchabhautika Basis of Garbha Formation:*

According to *Ashtanga Hridaya*,

“बीजात्मकैर्महाभूतैः सूक्ष्मैः सत्वानुगैश्च सा

मातुश्चाहाररसजैः क्रमात्कुक्षौ विवर्द्धते ॥” (A.H. Sha. 1/2)

The conception comes about the union of the fine *Mahabhutas* in the germ cells with *Satva* (consciousness) and is nourished by the mother's food.

In the same manner, the *Sushruta Samhita* describes that when *Chetana* (consciousness) is in the fertilized egg, *Vayu* is responsible for division, *Teja* is responsible for metabolism, *Aap* is responsible for moisture, *Prithvi* is responsible for giving the body a solid nature, and *Akasha* is responsible for giving the body the space for growth.²

Hence, the human fetus is considered as the combination of all five *Mahabhutas* alive, and each is credited with giving unique features necessary for normal growth.

2. Panchabhautika components in the foetus⁶Table-1. Components Derived from *Akasha Mahabhuta*

Derived Component	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhata</i>	<i>Kasyapa</i>
<i>Sabda</i> (Sound)	+	+	+	+
<i>Sabdendriya</i> (Auditory organ)	+	+	+	+
<i>Srotasa</i> (Channels)	-	+	-	-
<i>Mukha, Kantha</i> (Mouth, throat)	-	-	+	+

This table summarises the components derived from Akasha Mahabhuta

Table-2. Components Derived from *Vayu Mahabhuta*

Derived Component	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhata</i>	<i>Kasyapa</i>
<i>Sparsh</i> (Touch)	+	+	+	+
<i>Chetan</i> (Movement)	+	+	-	+
<i>Raukshya</i> (Dryness)	+	-	-	+
<i>Prana-Apana</i> (Breathing)	-	-	+	+

This table summarises the components derived from Vayu Mahabhuta

Table-3. Components Derived from *Teja Mahabhuta*

Derived Component	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhata</i>	<i>Kasyapa</i>
<i>Rupa</i> (Vision)	+	+	+	+
<i>Ushma</i> (Heat)	+	+	-	+
<i>Pitta</i> (Metabolism)	-	+	-	+
<i>Varna</i> (Complexion)	-	+	-	-

This table summarises the components derived from Teja Mahabhuta

Table-4. Components Derived from *Aap Mahabhuta*

Derived Component	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhata</i>	<i>Kasyapa</i>
<i>Rasa</i> (Taste)	+	+	+	+
<i>Sneha</i> (Unctuousness)	+	+	-	+
<i>Mardava</i> (Softness)	+	-	-	+
<i>Kleda</i> (Moisture)	+	-	+	+

This table summarises the components derived from Aap Mahabhuta

Table-5. Components Derived from *Prithvi Mahabhuta*

Derived Component	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhata</i>	<i>Kasyapa</i>
<i>Gandha</i> (Smell)	+	+	+	+
<i>Ghranendriya</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Sthairya</i> (Stability)	+	-	-	+
<i>Asthi</i> (Bones)	-	-	+	-

This table summarises the components derived from Prithvi Mahabhuta

3. Role of Mahabhutas in Fetal Growth :

Every Mahabhuta is necessary for a certain biological and structural role:

Vayu Bhuta: Controls Vibhajana (cell division) and the movement of the fetus in the womb.

Teja Bhuta: Is responsible for *Pachana* (transformation) and the origin of the new being's organs.

Jala Bhuta: Is responsible for the *Kledana* (moisture, nourishment) processes.

Prithvi Bhuta: Is responsible for *Samhanana* (density, firmness, stability).

Akasha Bhuta: Is responsible for spatial expansion (*Vivardhana*) and growth support.³

It is extremely important that these elements interact with each other in a balanced way, as an imbalance of elements leads to developmental anomalies.

4. Garbha Vyapad (Congenital Anomalies) and Mahabhuta Imbalance :

Classical Ayurvedic scholars describe various *Garbha Vyapads* that result from an imbalance of elements or *Doshas* :

- **Vata-Agni disturbance:** Leads to the creation of deformed structures like *Vakri*, *Vatikasandaka*.
- **Prithvi-Jala imbalance:** Is the cause of skeletal deformities (*Pangu*, *Kubja*).
- **Teja deficiency:** Causes the development of the sensory organs and that leads to *Jatyandha* (congenital blindness) type of disorders.

- **Excess of Vayu:** Results in the malformation or incomplete development (*Garbhapata*).⁴

The *Panchabhautika Siddhant* serves as a base theory that not only explain the physical makeup of the fetus, but also the source of congenital disorders. The fetus is a reflection of the universe, maintaining the balance of *Mahabhutas* in the microcosm.

The balance of these elements is affected by the mother's diet, her mental state, and the environment, during the pregnancy period—known as *Matruja Bhava*. Imbalance of *Mahabhutas* results in the abnormal manifestation of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) which in turn cause specific congenital anomalies.

Acharya Sushruta and *Vagbhata* were very vocal about *Teja* being the chief factor in the formation of visual organs, and to that effect, they said that it lacks results in *Andhatva* (blindness) at birth.⁵ Similarly, the over-activity of *Vayu* causes the fetal tissues to be dry and induces the premature movement, and hence, deformities and malfunctional disorders are correlated.⁷

The knowledge of *Garbha Vyapad* is also very important in terms of taking precautions. With *Garbhadhan Samskara* (preconceptional purification), *Masaanumasik Paricharya* (month-wise antenatal regimen), and *Rasayana* therapy, the mother's body becomes the perfect ground where the *Panchamahabhutas* can co-exist harmoniously in the fetus.⁸

The *Panchabhautika Siddhant* is the groundwork of Ayurvedic embryology.

Identifying the fetus as a *Panchabhautika Sharira* offers a comprehensive insight into its formation, structure, and functions.

Unbalanced *Mahabhutas* during the moment of conception or pregnancy cause the infant to be born with anomalies documented in the classical texts.

Grasping this concept is an excellent tool for prenatal and perinatal care in Ayurveda. Incorporating *Garbhini Paricharya*, *Rasayana Chikitsa*, and a well-balanced lifestyle of the mother allows the natural balance of *Mahabhutas* to remain intact which in turn facilitates proper fetal development and prevents the occurrence of anomalies.

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