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Theory of *Arakan-E Arbaa* (Four Basic Elements) As a Fundamental Matter of Human Being and Its Explanation: A Pivotal Concept of *Tibb-E Unani*

Md Imran Khan¹, Anisur Rahman², Mohd Akram Laeeque³, F. S. Sheerani⁴

¹ PG scholar, Department of Kulliyat, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Amu, Aligarh

² PG scholar, Department of Ilmul-advia, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Amu, Aligarh

³ PG scholar, Department of Moalejat, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Amu, Aligarh

⁴ Professor, Department of Kulliyat, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Amu, Aligarh

Abstract:

Unani system of medicine (*Tibb-e Unani*) provides a holistic approach toward human health. Unani system of medicine starts the discussion of health and disease with seven *umoor-e tabiyah*, which are necessary for existence of human body. In *umoor-e-tabiyah*, *arkan-e arbaa* (four basic elements) exist at prime position. The *arkan-e-arbaa* takes part in formation of not only human body but the entire universe. It is the basic and fundamental matter, for the development of human being. These are *al-ardh*, *al-ma'a*, *al-hawa*, and *al-naar*. Of these four *arkan*, *al-naar* and *al-hawaa* are light while *alma'a* and *al-ardh* are heavy. These *arkan-e arbaa* possesses four qualities, and have four different positions in this universe. Two heavy *arkan*, *Al-ardh* and *alma'a* possesses *barudat wa yabusat* and *barudat wa ratubat* respectively. While the other two light *arakaan*, *al-hawaa* and *al-naar* possesses *harat wa barudat* and *hararat wa yabusat* respectively. All the living and non-living bodies get existence from *arakaan-e arbaa* and finally dissolve into it.

Key words: *Arkan-e-arbaa*, Fundamental matter, *Tibb-e Unani*

Introduction:

Unani system of medicine provides unique approach towards health of human being. Unani system of medicine starts the discussion of health and disease with seven *umoor-e tabiyah*, which are necessary for existence of human body. These are *al-arakaan*, *al-mizaj*; *al-akhlat*; *al-aza'a*; *al-arwah*; *al-quwa*; and *al-afaal*. According to *Tibb-e Unani* the human body is made up of *arkan-e arbaa*, i.e. *al-ardh*, *al-ma'a*, *al-hawa*, and *al-naar*. These *arkan-e arbaa* are basically the building blocks of human body. Without these basic pillars the formation of all living and non-living bodies in universe is impossible. Basically this concept provides a level, which is a step below from the modern concept. As we know in modern science, the basic unit of human body is known as cell. But Unani system of medicine provides a concept in which the basic unit from which human body is made up is *arkan-e arbaa*. These *arkan-e arbaa* takes part in formation of different cell organelles like mitochondria, Golgi apparatus, endoplasmic reticulum, cell membrane etc. Without these *arakaan-e arbaa* no one can imagine life. Because *arakaan-e arbaa* is belongs from *umoor-e tabiya*. If any *umoor-e tabiya* abolished, the existence of human being is

compromised. These four substances are formulated as elementary constituent of the human body. Their intermixture results in different forms of living and nonliving bodies in the universe. So the Unani system of medicine start the discussion the health and disease one step below from modern science. This unique approach towards human body, the condition of health and disease, makes the Unani system of medicine as holistic system.

Historical perspective:

With the passage of time various theories were given by philosophers about the possible basic matter which takes part in the origin of living and non-living things in universe. Some of them regarded only one element as the possible source of origin of life and universe. Some others believe that only two elements are pure and the whole universe is made from it. Some were regarded the only three elements as pure and basic one for origin of life and universe. The concept of four was given by Empedocles and is widely accepted among *flasfa masha'een*, and became the basic concept for the Unani system of medicine.

Thales of Miletus (639-544 BC) believe that the all the universe originated from one original element. This

original substance according to the philosophy of Thales is water. But it is not water in the sense of a divine substance, as it was considered in the ancient cosmology, but water regarded as an essential fundamental substance, and logically demonstrable in every living thing. From water, or one of its transformations, everything is derived: the fertility of seeds, the life of plants, the life of animals and man. All life ends in the water, because everything that is corrupted or dies is transformed into liquid that is water.^[1]

Anaximenes, also of Miletus (570-500 BC), believed that the essential substance was not water but air, and that from the condensation or refraction of air are derived the most important phenomena of life.^[1]

He gave the reason for it that air easily accepts different shapes. He believed that when the softness and hotness of air increases and cross a threshold level then it changes into fire. When hotness decreases the air become hardened, it changed into water. With persistent increase in hardness it converts into earth.^[2]

Heraclitus (556-460BC) believed that a single element, fire, was the basis of matter.^[1] He thought that fire was that inevitable substance of universe which can be converted into all states of matter and vice versa. Due to this property fire was called as ever living.^[3]

Anaxagoras (500-428 BC) of Clazomene, created the theory of Homoiomeri, countless minute particles that were separated or aggregated by Nous (the mind) as the ruler of the universe.^[1]

On the basis of observation, Phrekidis (600 BC) believe that the earth is only element. He gave the reason that all the things are stable on the earth. When some external force is applied over a thing to separate it from earth, the thing is separated, but when the force became inactive, the thing returns back to earth.^[2]

Some of the philosophers however, maintained that the whole universe depend upon the *imtizaj* (chemical combination) of two elements for its existence. Thus Anaximender (610-545 BC) put forth the theory that water and earth was the fundamental constituent of all the things, and therefore, man too were regarded the result of *imtizaj* of water and earth infused with the energy of sun.^[4]

Some of the philosophers given the theory of *arakaan-e thalatha*, they were thought that the three *arakan/unsur* is the basic constituent of all living things and whole universe. One of the exponent of this theory is named as Airen Quesy.^[5]

The theory of three states of arakaan was given by Perphyrus (325 B.C.). They classified all the matter in the universe in these three forms. The solid, liquid and gaseous matter of the universe was named as *milh* (salt), *Zeebaq* (mercury), and *Kibreet* (sulphur) respectively.^{[3], [4]}

Actually the theory of three elements and the theory of three states are two different theories. Because the theory of three states of matter exactly stated that the complete matter of the universe is classified in to three categories solid, liquid, and gaseous. While according to tri element theory complete universe is made up of only three basic elements.

One group of philosophers, named as *Ashhab-e Kamun wa Baruz*, thinks that, the universe is made from uncountable particles and elements, having different qualities. Combination of these particles causes formation of things while due to disintegration destruction occurs.^[6]

Philosopher Epicurus believes that the fundamental constituent of living and non-living things in this universe is indivisible little bits of matter, when they collide incidentally, a body get existence. The follower of this theory is known as *ashab-e khaleet*.^[23]

Different theories were given by different philosopher within two centuries. The Unani system of medicine only relies on the concept of *arakan-e arbaa*. This concept and theory of *arakaan arbaa* is one of the basic theories which is adopted by Unani system of medicine. About the historical perspective of *araakan-e arbaa* Dr. Rudolf E. Siegel writes: the concept of the number four has to be attributed to the Pythagoras (530 B.C.) and his school. The founder of Sicilian medical tradition, Alcmaeon (beginning if the 5th century B.C.) spoke of innumerable qualities as the basis of health. His successors Empedocles and Philistion, and also Philaos (later part of 5th century B.C.) restricted the number of elements and qualities to four.^[7]

Empedocles of Agrigentum (504- 443 B.C), was the first who introduce the consideration of four elementary forms, the first termed terrestrial or solid, the second aqueous or liquid, the third aerial or gases, and the fourth igneous or ethereal. He also believe that everything is made from two principles, one is active, intelligent and impalpable, which is god, and the second is passive, which is amorphous matter. He conceived that the amorphous matter had received from supreme intelligence, four fundamental or elementary mode of existence, and these four principle modalities of matter, variously combined, constituted all the bodies in nature.⁸ These are substances without formation and indestructible, the elements from which comes everything that was and is to be. They are equal among themselves and of the same age, each of them possessing its own character and from time to time dominating or dominated by the others. The human body like all living beings is composed of these four elements, and health comes from their harmony, just as their disturbance or disharmony causes disease.^[1]

The exponent of this theory contended that the fire, air, water and earth were the four primary elements. This concept was widely accepted and Hippocrates (460- 377 B.C), Aristotle (384-322 B.C), Galen (130-200 C.E), Avicenna and in fact all other followers belonging to *flasfa masha'een* (pedestrians) became exponent of this concept.^[4]

Synonym of arakaan: Ustuqissat, Ummahaat, Uss, Anasir
When Arabs translate the books of medicines and philosophy from Greek to Arabic they suggest the term “*ustuquss*” for these primary substances. Later on Ibn Sina coined two words to name these primary components: *arakaan* (pillars) and *unsur* (elements).^[1]

According to Ibn-e Hubl Bhagdadi, when these primary matters takes part in formation it is known as arakaan or anasir and basic component of a disintegrated compound is known as *ustuqus*.^[9]

Tabri uses the term *uss* or *ummahat* for the *arakaan*. He given the reason that as existence of mother is necessary for origin or birth of a child likewise *arakaan* are the basis of formation of living and non-living things in universe.^[10]

Definition:

Arakaan-e arbaa are simple bodies. They cannot be further subdivided in to bodies which have different forms and compositions. The all living and nonliving bodies of this universe are made up of *arakaan-e arbaa*. These are fire, water air and earth.^{[11],[12],[13]} These four substances are formulated as elementary constituent of the human body. Their intermixture results in different forms in nature.^[12]

The physicians must accepts from physics that elements are only four neither less nor more: two of these light and two heavy. Fire and air are light: earth and water are heavy.^[14]

Gruner explained the lightness and heaviness of elements by correlating it with vibration. He said that “the earth element may be compared with a slow vibration rate, and the remaining elements are still quicker vibration rate. The slower rates are coarser and the more rapid ones are finer. Hence as Avicenna says, the earth and water are heavy and the other are light.”^[15]

Natural position of Arakaan-e araba:

Earth is a simple body the natural position of which is the centre of the other elements. In that position, it remains stationary by virtue of its nature, but when it is displaced it returns to its original position. This is the explanation for its absolute heaviness. Earth is by nature, cold and dry, that is, left to its natural form without outside influences, it makes it cold and dry nature palpable.

Water is a simple body which, in its natural position, surrounds the earth and is, in its turn, surrounded by the air provided that both of them are in their natural position. This is the explanation for its relative heaviness.

Water is cold and moist, that is, left to its natural form without outside interference, it manifests it is cold and moist quality. Moisture in water means that water is in its nature such as it gets easily dispersed and gathered again and assumes any kind of shape but is incapable of retaining it.

Air is a simple body, the natural position of which is above water and below fire. This is the explanation for its relative lightness. Under the aforementioned conditions, its nature is hot and moist.

Fire is a simple body the natural position of which is above all the elements. In nature, it is located in the concave surface of the heavens, free from integration and disintegration. This is the explanation for its absolute lightness. Fire is hot and dry in its nature.^[16]

Mijaz, properties of arakaan-e arbaa:

The properties of an *unsur* (element) , according to *Tibb* are described in terms of their *mijaz* (temperament) which is expressed in terms of four *kaifiyat* (qualities) i.e. heat, cold, moistness and dryness. Heat and cold are considered *kaifiyat faillah* (active qualities) and moisture and dryness are *kaifiyat munfailah* (passive qualities).^[4] All the living and non-living bodies in this universe is either hot, cold, dry or wet in terms of qualities of *arakaan-e arbaa*. These are not merely the word for qualities but the substance should contain any one of these four qualities at its extreme, beyond that level no quality should imagine. So the substance which associated with hotness, coldness, wetness and dryness at extreme level is fire, water, air and earth respectively. One another quality also imposes on these pure elemental substances, which is actually not possess by these *arakan-e arbaa*, but due to closeness and nearness of another elemental sphere. So the passive quality which imposed on fire, water, air and earth is dryness, wetness, coldness and hotness respectively.^[11] So the binary qualities are attributed to each of the *arakaan-e arbaa* to express their *mijaz* and properties. First one is *Al-nar* (fire) possesses hot and dry (*har and yabis*) quality with upward movement. Second one is *Al-hawa* (air) possesses hot and wet (*har and ratab*) quality, its movement is all around. Third one is *Al-ma'a* (water) containing cold and wet (*barid and ratb*) quality and its movement is downward. Fourth and last one is *Al-ardh* (earth) having cold and dry (*barid and yabis*) quality and its movement is also downward.^{[4],[17]}

Primary Elements
Elements & Properties
<i>Nar</i> or Fire – Hot and dry (<i>har and yabis</i>)
<i>Hawa</i> or Air – Hot and wet (<i>har and ratab</i>)
<i>Ma</i> or Water – Cold and wet (<i>barid and ratab</i>)
<i>Arz</i> or Earth – Cold and dry (<i>barid and yabis</i>) ^[24]

Table-1

Importance of arakaan-e araba:

In nature earth serves the purpose of making the objects firm, stable and lasting. Water is necessary in the creation, for shaping compounds and for moulding and spreading of parts according to their characteristic contours. This is because water can easily part with different shapes and can as easily accept new ones. In the creation the purpose of air to impart porosity, lightness and thinness to matter and to enables objects to rise upwards. On the other hand fire is essential for the creation of various orders of things as it produces maturation, lightness and porosity. It counteracts cold and heaviness of earth and water and thus enables their integration into various compounds with new temperaments. Of the four elements, the heavier two are required for the formation and stability of the organs while the lighter two are necessary for the production and movement of the vital forces and to assist the movement of the organs.^[14]

Existence of *arakaan-e arbaa* in today life:

One important question certainly arise in our mind that, "As the name of *arakaan* suggest, it is fire, water, earth and air, are these *arakaan* actually what we feel and see in our day to day life? Possibly this question had been arisen before *Sahib-e kamil* at that time and they wrote the answer for it in his book *kamil al sana'a*. He stated that "what we see and feel as fire, water, earth and air, in our day to day life is not the original, pure elemental *arakaan-e arbaa*, but the admixture. As in case of earth, it not the pure elemental earth but admixture of different matters. All the living and non-living bodies in this universe is either hot, cold, dry or wet in terms of qualities of *arakaan-e arbaa*. These are not merely the word for qualities but the substance should contain any one of these four qualities at its extreme, beyond that level no quality should imagine. So the substance which associated with hotness, coldness, wetness and dryness at extreme level is fire, water, air and earth respectively. One another quality also imposes on these pure elemental substances, which is actually not possess by these *arakaan-e arbaa*, but due to closeness and nearness of another elemental sphere. So the passive quality which imposed on fire, water, air and earth is dryness, wetness, coldness and hotness respectively.^[11]

Arkan arbaa as basic unit of living and non-living things:

According to the ancient precepts of Unani theory there are four primary elements: fire or *nar*, air or *hawah*, water or *ma* and earth or *arz*. These elements are the basic building blocks of all substances in nature including the human body.^[24]

Allah says that "And verily we created man out of clay from altered black mud. And we created the jinn before from scorching fire."¹⁸ At another place Allah says that

"He created man from clay like that of pottery. And He created the jinn from a smokeless flame of fire."^[18]

Raghib asfahani said that "clay from altered black mud" reveals that after intermixing the earth and water, it dried by air, and the word "like that of pottery" reveals that it is roast by fire at some stage of development. While another creature of almighty Allah, jinn is created from flame of fire or scorching fire. It means the extreme level of fire.^[19] The heat of fire around us is 17 times less than that heat of fire by which the creation of jinn takes place.^[20]

According to Hippocratic doctrine, the formation of human is not possible through single element. How it is possible that formation of human takes place through single element and produces different kind of substances (excreta) belonging from categories of *arakaan-e arbaa*, while no other substance is admixture. Suppose it is due to eating of herbs, so the herbs are also formed from *arakaan-e arbaa*. If the formation of human is takes place through single element, then they cannot felt the pain and distress except by that single element. But the human feel the pain and distress through other substances. All the human and non-human bodies in this universe are formed from *arakaan-e arbaa*. In other words if any animal became dead and disintegrated then the innate heat changes into vapors and dissolves as fire element, and the spirit mixed into the elemental air, the fluid of the body dissolves into water element through vapors, likewise the earthy substances after a long period changes into elemental earth. Similarly this example also applies on plants and non-living bodies.^[11]

Zakaria Rhazi in his book *kitabul murshid* illustrate the formation of universe from these *arakaan-e araba* in a very simply that "All the bodies (animals, plant and minerals) in this universe get existence from *arakaan-e araba* and finally dissolved and disintegrated into it. For example, animal gets nutrition and its development depends on plants and water, and plants gets its nutrition from water and earth and mineral substances comes from soil and water. If any one of them is not supplied by their respective matter, their development & growth are retarded, and destructive changes occurs as in human in absence of food, similarly in wheat and barley in absence of water. Likewise if above three gets heated or burned then they change into vapors. The production of vapor is due to water, fire, and air present in these bodies and ashes are due to earthy particles". Further he stated that Human being is made from a combination of *arakaan-e araba* and *nafs*. *Nafs* produces sensitivity and *arakaan-e araba* makes built of human being.^[21]

From above illustration of Zakaria Rhazi it is clear that not only human being but complete universe is made from these *arakaan e araba* and when the bodies disintegrate

and dissolved the final outcome is also *arakaan-e araba*. He described the formation of vapors and ashes which is the combination of these *arakaan-e araba*.

As we know that *arakaan-e araba* possesses *kaifiyat-e araba*, which actually determines the temperament of *arakaan*. When these *arakaan-e araba* intermingled for the purpose of formation of a compound, actually the *kaifiyat-e araba* takes part actively. And the final outcome is a new compound with their own unique temperament.

According to Ibn-e Nafis, "For formation and existence of living and non-living bodies in this universe, a wet substance is required, which easily take and modified in different shapes. Likely a dry substance is required to maintain the fluidity of wet substance at optimal range. After that requirement of heat is must to make a permanent shape. That heat should be at optimal range. Through coldness optimal level of heat can be maintained. So it is proved that the requirement of *kaifiyat-e arbaa* is necessary for formation and existence of living and non – living bodies in the universe".^[22]

Development of human and *arakaan-e araba*:

In Tibb-e Unani the basic unit of human being is regarded as the four basic elements (*arakan-e arbaa*). By the intermixture of *arakan-e arbaa* in specific proportion formation of *akhlat* takes place and from *akhlat* the human being is developed.

Ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi said that all organs of human bodies and other living bodies containing blood formed from four *akhlat* (humours), blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. He given the term *banat-e arakaan* (daughter of elements) for *akhlat*. He correlates the *akhlat* from each element according to their properties. He correlates the yellow bile to element fire, blood to element air, phlegm to water, and black bile to earth. These four *akhlat* takes part in the formation of fetus.^[11]

According to Ibn-e Sina: organs are bodies generated from the primary admixture of sound humors just as the humors are bodies generated from the primary admixtures of elements.^[16]

Ibn-e Sina further explain it, human body is developed from a union of the seminal fluid of the male and the germinal fluid and menstrual blood of the female. The seminal fluid of the male generally considered as the efficient cause while the germinal fluid of female and menstrual blood provide the material cause. Both resemble in being moist and liquid although the earthy matter and the watery content are greater in the blood and in the seminal fluid of the female and air and fire (heat) are greater in the semen of the male.^[1]

Therefore *arakaan* are the remote principles (*awamil ba'idah*) for the human body. They are the proximate principles for our *akhlat*, which is a mixture of various

compounds which are formed from the primary combinations of *arakan*. So the proximate principles of our body are *akhlat*.^[4]

Conclusion:

Umoor-e tabiyah are those basic principles without which the existence of human being is unimaginable. If any of these principle start to diminished a healthy person diverted towards disease condition. Of these basic principles, *arakaan* is at prime position. *Arakaan-e araba* not only taking part in the formation of human being, and other living things but also in the formation of non- living things, in fact in the formation of universe. We, as a physician, have to accept the theory of four element. About this Ibn-e Sina explained and clearly stated in his book *Al Qanoon* that, "if a physician undertakes to prove the existence of the elements, temperaments and other postulates taken from physics, he is committing two mistakes: first he is bringing into medicine, matters which do not belongs to it and secondly, he thinks that he is explained something in medicine while he has not explained anything at all". Today Unani physicians start to discuss the number and properties of *arakaan* and try to explain it on the basis of science. Some of them start to correlate it with modern periodic table and categorize all the chemical element into four categories. Some of them try to explain it as *anasir-e insaniyah* and *ghair insaniyah*. Actually we are committing mistake as Ibn-e sina said. Actually we did not understand the philosophy and spirit of tibb-e Unani. Thousand years back the Unani physicians and philosopher explained all the possible question of today's. As Majoosi clearly stated that the *arakaan-e araba* are not what we seen in our day to day life and he had given the explanation about it. Almighty Allah made the first human Adam from these *arakaan-e araba* as Allah says in Quran that the man is made from clay like that of pottery. After the first man, their successors start to be made from *al-akhlat*. So these *arakaan-e araba* are the basis of origin of human being and the essence and properties of these *arakaan-e araba* always lies inside the human being.

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