

THE ĀYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF DISEASE

The word disease, having its roots in ME (inconvenience, trouble, sickness) and in OE (discomfort), has the following definition in Webster's New World Dictionary—1) Any departure from health; illness in general 2) a particular destructive process in an organ or organism with a specific cause and characteristic symptoms; specifically, an illness, ailment 3) any harmful or destructive condition, as of society. Synonyms: affection, malady, ailment

Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary offers the French derivation—lack of ease--and defines disease thusly: a pathological condition of the body that presents a group of clinical signs and symptoms and laboratory findings peculiar to it and that sets the condition apart as an abnormal entity differing from other normal or pathological body states. The concept of disease may include the condition of illness or suffering not necessarily arising from the pathological changes in the body. There is a major distinction between disease and illness in that the former is usually tangible and may even be measured, whereas illness is highly individual and personal, as with pain, suffering, and distress. A person may have a serious disease such as hypertension but no feeling of pain or suffering, and thus no illness. Conversely, a person may be extremely ill, as with hysteria or mental illness, but have no evidence of disease as measured by pathological changes in the body. This word has many modifying forms:

Acute	Congenital	Epidemic	Iatrogenic	Occupational	Self-limited
Anticipated	Constitutional	Epizootic	Idiopathic	Organic	Sporadic
Autoimmune	Contagious	Familial	Infectious	Pandemic	Storage
Chronic	Deficiency	Focal	Intercurrent	Parasitic	Subacute
Communicable	Degenerative	Functional	Malignant	Psychosomatic	Systemic
Complicating	Endemic	Hereditary	Metabolic	Secondary	

The Āyurvedic literature is full of the names and synonyms of disease and of a varied classification of its types. Reviewing these names will give a picture of the scope of the concept:

- abnormality of the doṣas
- unhappiness, sorrow, or misery—duḥkam,
- that which produces pain—roga,
- born of sin or unhealthy acts--pāpma,
- exhibits many kinds of distress--vyādhi,
- abnormality--vikāra,
- born of āma--āmaya,
- symptom complex—yakṣma,
- cause of miserable life--ātaṅka,
- born from more than one cause—gada,
- continuous or all-around suffering--ābādhā.
- fever—jvara

Caraka states that (Su. 9.4) health (prakṛti) is the balance of tissues and tissue imbalance is disease. Health is happiness and disease is pain. (This means structure and function are appropriate in health and otherwise in disease.)

Su Su.1.19 Anything that affects the inner man (Self) is disease and that disease has its primary seat in the inner spring of vitality from which it flows out to the surface, the external body. (The force is felt first at the center of the being/body and moves outward.)

All diseases do not have a name Ca. Su. 18.44-47 The one who can not label a disorder with some name should not feel ashamed because all disorders have no established footing by name. The reason is that the same vitiated doṣa causes various disorders according to variation in etiology and location.

Caraka, an ancient Āyurvedic authority, states that diseases are innumerable (Vi. VI.5) by reason of permissible combinations of constitution, location, symptoms, etiology, and proportion of causative factors (Ca. Su. XX.3)

Caraka states diseases are of 2 types—innate and exogenous (Ni. I.11.4). Prognosis is of 4 types—curable, incurable, mild and severe (Ni. I.11.4).

Sushruta deals with 1120 diseases, grouped under 3 headings:

1. bodily ailments due to injury,
2. natural infirmities due to old age (including congenital diseases) and
3. mental diseases; he also describes 76 eye diseases, of which 51 are regarded as appropriate for ophthalmic surgery

Disease classifications are limited: according to effect, severity, location, etiology, and site of origin (Vi. VI.3).

Su. Su. XXIV.2 Diseases are medical or surgical;

Diseases are of 3 kinds:

1. controllable—yāpya;
2. curable is of 2 kinds—
 1. easily—susahya or
 2. with difficulty—kaṣṭasādhyā. incurable—asādhyā
3. incurable--Incurability may arise from several factors including stage and strength of disease versus the person's strength and treatment that requires treating doṣas and dhātus which are opposite. With the progression of disease from lack of treatment the curable becomes manageable or incurable and the manageable becomes incurable. Severity is mild or severe.

Location is of two types:

1. bodily--kāyaka (Ca. Su. XX.3).
2. mental--mānasa The mind can be adversely affected by two qualities of functioning called rajas and tamas. Rajas is the quality of being over-active/unstable and promotes wrong desires such as addiction and dislikes. Tamas is inert to sensory input. It promotes greed, overeating, and destruction. Other mental factors are: vanity--māna; attachment—raga; aversion—dveṣa; and delusion—moha. Ayurveda gives more emphasis to disorders of the body but clearly gives importance to the emotions as having a critical role in health or disease—greed—lobha; anger—krodha; fear—bahya; grief—śoka.

Location also pertains to the site of origin from which it spreads—

1. stomach or
2. colon.

Doṣic theory of disease is central to Āyurveda—stating that nearly all disease (spirit possession, parasites, etc., and mental disorders are notable exceptions) are mediated by the vitiated doṣas. Suśruta describes this relationship of doṣa to disease as neither constant nor separable (Su. XXIV.25). While the doṣas always exist they need not always be in a morbid state of increase nor in an observable manner.

Scanning the literature one finds that nomenclature arises to identify disease according to: vāta, pitta, kapha (doṣa), tissue (dhātu), sub-ordinate tissue (upadhātu), organ (avayaha), body part (aṅga), digestion (agni), vitality (prāna), immunity (ojas), waste product (mala), the process or effect it produces—primary sign or symptom--e.g. swelling (gulma), fever (jvara), the pathway of disease--interior, external, or central, and the channel—srotas. Sometimes the disease is the main symptom (fever of non-specific origin) and sometimes it is a symptom complex or syndrome (fever with infection as in malaria). Additionally, Caraka remarks at length on poisonings, which are not technically to be considered a disease or disease process. Poison sources include vegetables, minerals, and animals (such as snake bites). Toxic effects are often mistaken for diseases. Ci. 23.18 A modern classification scheme using Ayurvedic literature: Causes of Ill Health S. N Tripathi p. 14-144 Science and Philosophy of Indian Medicine Ed. KN Udupa and RH Singh Shri Baidyanath Ayurved Bhavan Nagpur 9 India 1990

1. Genetic (adibala pravṛtta)
2. Congenital (janmabala pravṛtta)

3. Constitutional (dosha-bala pravṛtta)
4. Traumatic (samghata bala pravṛtta)
5. Seasonal Diseases (kala bala pravṛtta)
6. Infectious and spiritual (daiva bala pravṛtta)
7. Natural diseases (svabhavabala pravṛtta)

Su. Su. XXIV. note other descriptions as to genetic, congenital etc. verse 5-6

Caraka states that one must know the disease according to etiology, prodroma, symptoms, main symptoms, suitability, (pathogenesis) = number, predominance, types, proportional variation, severity and time. Ca. Vi. I.3 This is commonly referred to as the five-fold scheme called pañca nidānam: 1) etiology—(synonyms = nidānam, nimitta, hetu, āyatana, pratyaya, utthāna, & kāraṇa), 2) preliminary or prodromal symptoms and signs—purva rupa / prāgrupa, 3) main or cardinal signs and symptoms—rupa (synonyms—samsthāna, vyañjana, liṅga, lakṣaṇa, cinha, ākṛti), 4) therapeutic index of treatment—upaśaya, 5) pathogenesis—samprāpti (synonyms—jāti or āgati) (Ni. I.6). (Also see: Vāg. A.H. Ni. I.2-8; Mā. Ni. Ch. 1) (AH Su. I.22 also)