

The Concept of *Ṭabī'at* in Unani System of Medicine

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Abstract

The Unani Medicine is a comprehensive medicine and based on certain basic principles i.e. the concept of *ṭabī'at*, *mizāj* (temperament) *akhlāt* (theory of humours), *quwā* (faculties) and *rūḥ* (pneuma). The whole philosophy of Unani Tibb revolves around these concepts and by understanding these; the complete Unani Tibb can be comprehended. But the understanding of the concept of *ṭabī'at* among scholars varies from ancient time to present era. Regarding *ṭabī'at* controversies exist among scholars and people of the community. They criticise the concept due to the lack of understanding and clarity. The aim of this paper is to minimize the level of difference in understanding of this core concept so that it becomes more acceptable and generalised among scholars of Unani Tibb and other systems of medicine. *Ṭabī'at* is the administrative hidden power in the human body which is a matter of prime concern and apprehension for physicians of Unani Medicine.

Keywords: *Ṭabī'at*; Mizāj; Akhlāt; Quwā; Rūḥ; Tibb; Hidden power.

Introduction

In the perspective of Allopathic Medicine, diseases are supposed to be caused by micro-organisms present in the atmosphere (Nadvi, 1995). The human beings are surrounded by many factors and causes which disturb the equilibrium of the body. In spite of these factors which affect the healthy condition of the body, all the population is not equally affected. This implies that there is a hidden power inside every individual which protects him/ her when this power is strong and it varies from person to person. The name of this hidden power is known as "*ṭabī'at-i-insāniyya*".

Ṭabī'at is a broad and central concept of Unani Medicine. Some of the scholars compare it with immunity. The concept of immunity is not equivalent to *ṭabī'at* but it is a part of *ṭabī'at*. In relation to the concept of *ṭabī'at*, *Cameron Gruner* is the person who has strong faith in this concept. He delineates that in Unani Tibb the concept of *ṭabī'at* is more comprehensive than the germ and any other theories (Ahmad, 1983). He further says that he likes *Ibn Sina* simply due to his acceptance of this concept. *Dr. Weil Fraid Narth Field* and *Loyal Sherald* were also the strong supporter of the concept or theory of *ṭabī'at*. *Dr. Weil Fraid Narth* also says that he does not care whether anyone accepts this concept or not (Rahman, H.S.Z, YNM 2015). As these scholars were not the scholars of Unani Tibb but they had a strong faith in the concept of *ṭabī'at*. Therefore, one should not criticise this concept only due to the dominance of Allopathic Medicine. In Allopathic Medicine the concept of autoimmunity, auto-circulation, intrinsic factors and idiopathic factors are accepted as such by every person without any criticism and controversies. Here, when these concepts are accepted as such

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then there is no matter of criticising the concept of *ṭabī'at* as we know both of the medical systems (Unani Medicine and Modern Medicine) have different basic principles and their limits. The basic principles of the related pathy are the pillars on which complete system depends. Hence, the concept of *ṭabī'at* is a unique basic qualitative concept and accepted as such as said in Unani Tibb. *Ṭabī'at* is the power which governs and administers the human body involuntarily and unconsciously (Jilani, 1998). It can be interpreted with other Systems of Medicine within the limits so that the concept of *ṭabī'at* existence can be maintained because interpretations within the limits would maintain the dignity of Unani Tibb and its existence.

Explanation of *Ṭabī'at*: Ancient scholars have explained *ṭabī'at* in different manners but all explanations are interlinked. In the present era, the same trend is present and everyone is explaining and understanding it in own way. From ancient period to present era, the scholars defined *ṭabī'at* in different ways and thus, controversies still exist among them. Some of the definitions specified by eminent Unani scholars are as follows:

Hippocrates says that the physician is the servant of *ṭabī'at* and that if *ṭabī'at* resists, all measures are ineffective (Anonymous, 1973).

Aflatoon: *Ṭabī'at* is a power gifted by God which works for the welfare of the body through which all the functions of the body are accomplished (Jilani, 1998; Arzani, 2010).

Aristotle defined *ṭabī'at* as the source of being in motion or at rest (Russell, 1972) in that to which it belongs primarily by virtue of itself and not by chance (Aristotle's, 1998). The word motion means change from pre-existing state of any thing, while rest is retention of pre-existing state. There are various kinds of motion such as growth, decay, genesis, destruction etc. (Jalinoos, YNM). The word motion is the initiation of existence of all the things and *intihā* (climax stage) reaches due to rest (Tabri, 2010). Therefore, we can say that *ṭabī'at* is responsible for existence and bringing end of everything, including human beings.

Ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi delineates that sometimes our intention by the word *ṭabī'at* is *quwwat-i-mudabbira badan* (supreme planner of the body), *mahiyat-i-badan* (essence of the body) and *mizāj* (temperament) (Majoosi, 2010).

Ali Ibn Rabban Tabri says that practically, *ṭabī'at* may be defined as a *quwwat-i-mudabbira badan* (supreme planner) of the body (Tabri, 2010). Here, the word supreme planner stands for all planning adopted for maintaining the equilibrium of the body before the implementation of the functions. Therefore, we can say that *ṭabī'at* actually knows what, when and how to plan to restore normalcy. Due to this reason, the physicians in Unani Tibb are called as subservient or assistant of *ṭabī'at* and the role of drugs is to help or support *ṭabī'at* (Rahman, H.S.Z., YNM 2015)

Abu Bakr Mohammad bin Zakariya Razi and Jalinoos (Galen) stated that *ṭabī'at* expels the fuzlat (waste materials) out of the body through different normal channels and sometimes the fuzlat (waste materials) are disposed off from one 'udw (organ) to other (Razi, 2000; Luqa, 2007). Therefore, retention or expulsion of any mādda (materials) in the body is decided by *ṭabī'at* of the individual. The one most important fact is that the *ṭabī'at* uses more processes of expulsion (*istifrāgh*) to maintain the internal harmony than retention.

Ibn Sina says that *ṭabī'at* develops, after the formation of *mizāj* (temperament) but it is not a *mizāj* (Ibn Sina, 2006).

Allama Qarshi calls *ṭabī'at* as a capacity which is responsible for preserving the *kamal'at* (extremes) of that body in which it is found (Arzani, 2010). Here, *kamal'at* of that body means *ṭabī'at* produces movement suitable to related body or compound.

Allama Ibn Qayim Jauzi is of the opinion that God the great has produced *ṭabī'at* in every individual as the armament of body and health. It administers the body up to the last movement of life (Jauzi, 1993).

From the above definitions, we can say that all the definitions are complementary to each other but scholars were not satisfied with any particular definition of *ṭabī'at*. This implies dissatisfaction with the definition and this tendency still persists and scholars keep on searching the exact definition and explanation of *ṭabī'at*.

Synonyms of Ṭabī'at: Physis/Physis (Russell, 1972), *Quwwat-i-Mudabbira Badan*, *Quwwat-i-Jismani* (Jilani, 1998) and *Ḥarakat-i-Nafs* (Arzani, 2010) are the synonyms of *ṭabī'at*.

Literal Meaning of Ṭabī'at: *Ṭabī'at* is derived from the word 'ṭaba' which means *mizāj*, *fitri adat* or *fitri khaslat* (natural habit). *Gulam Jilani* says that the term *ṭabī'at* is applied for different technical meanings by the physicians which are as follows:

- *Mizāj-i-Insāniyaa*
- *Haiat-i -Tarkībyaa*
- *Quwwat*
- Habit
- Bowel habit (Jilani, 1998).

Functions of Ṭabī'at: *Ṭabī'at* performs different bodily functions and maintains internal harmony of the body so that the *mizāji af'āl* (temperamental functions) can be accomplished and healthy condition can be maintained. The two main functions of *ṭabī'at* are as follows:

- Maintains the normal physiological functions of the body and preserves the existing health. *Hkm. Syed Ishtiyag Ahmad* clarifies the functions by saying

that the organs functions origin depend on *ṭabī'at* and these functions are manipulated by *ṭabī'at* according to the requirement of the body.

- Protects the body from various diseases and removes the disease when it occurs. These functions are also illustrated by Hkm. Syed Ishtiyaq Ahmad (Ahmad, 1983).

Causes of Weakness of *ṭabī'at*: Everything has certain *asbāb* (causes) either the stability or any changes that occur. Nothing will exist without a cause even health and disease. *ṭabī'at* simply becomes weak when the *asbāb* becomes *ghalib* (dominant) on *ṭabī'at*. But after sometime it prepares itself and again combats against the cause and restores health. The physicians by keeping in view the importance of *ṭabī'at* in combating the causative factors unsuitable for individuals, they pointed out the causes which may reduce the body combating power (*ṭabī'at*) and provide favourable condition for the causes to complete casualty. These causes are as follows:

- Malnutrition results in weakness of body and finally *ṭabī'at* becomes debilitated.
- Air pollution (Jilani, 1996)
- Increase or decrease in body functions effect *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* (innate heat) (Majoosi, 2010) and thus, result in debility of *ṭabī'at* because *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* is an *Āla-i- ṭabī'at* (tool of *ṭabī'at*).
- Abnormal evacuation
- Toxic substances
- Age (Jilani, 1996)
- Emotions such as fear, sorrow etc. are responsible for maltemperament and weakness of *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* as well as *ṭabī'at* (Majoosi, 2010).
- Miscellaneous diseases (Jilani, 1996).

All the above mentioned causes either directly or indirectly influence the *ṭabī'at*.

Āla-i- *ṭabī'at* (Tools of *ṭabī'at*): Each organ of the body works in co-ordination with each other to achieve the specific functions of the body. This co-ordination between the organs is maintained by *ṭabī'at* with the help of their different tools. Here, the '*Āla-i-ṭabī'at*' implies the relations to channels without which the functions and process of *ṭabī'at* cannot occur (Kabiruddin, YNM 1970). In relation to this statement *Abu Sahl Maseehi* in *Kitabul Miah* says that *ṭabī'at* depends on support for performing their functions and processes of the body. According to *Abu Sahl Maseehi* the tool (*Āla*) of *ṭabī'at* is "*Mizāj* (Maseehi, 2008) and *Ibn Sina* in *Kulliyat-i-Qanoon* says that, *ṭabī'at* needs a tool i.e. "*ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya*" for its functions (Ibn Sina, 2006). Therefore, the tools of *ṭabī'at* are *mizāj* and *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* and with help of these tools, *ṭabī'at* maintains the equilibrium

of the body. So, the direct relationship between *mizāj*, *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* and *ṭabī'at*, exists.

Relation Between Mizāj and Ṭabī'at: *Arkān* are *ajzā' awwaliyya* (primary constituent) of the human body and *mizāj* is formed by the interaction of opposite *kayfiyāt* (qualities) present in *arkān* (Ibn Sina, 2010). As soon as *mizāj* is formed, *ṭabī'at* lodged in the respected compound *mādda* (matter). But *ṭabī'at* is not a *mizāj*, neither it is precursor of *mizāj*; it is only a power which develops after *mizāj* and is associated with *mādda* (Ibn Sina, 2006). Once *ṭabī'at* lodges in any compound, then it works for the preservation of the *mizāj* by using its different “*Āla*” (tools). So, the *mizāji af'āl* can be performed.

Relation Between Ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya and Ṭabī'at: *Ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* (innate heat) is considered as a tool of *ṭabī'at*. It helps *ṭabī'at* in maintaining all bodily functions that are performed by various *quwā* (faculties). Each and every *quwwat* requires *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya* for its functions. In case of any deviation in this *ḥarārat*, *ṭabī'at* tries to bring back the moderate *ḥarārat-i-gharīziyya*, so that all the *quwā* can perform their functions properly (Jurjani, 2010).

Quwā and Ṭabī'at: The word *quwwat* stands for different technical meanings in literature e.g. potency, capacity and efficiency i.e. power of effecting others (Nafis, 1954). For all living beings certain functions are important to save the life. The continuation of these essential functions depends up on *quwwat*. The *quwwat* of the body is responsible for planning the following three different functions:

- *Quwwat-i-Ḥaywāniyya* (Vital Faculties)
- *Quwwat-i-Nafsāniyya* (Psychic Faculties)
- *Quwwat-i-Ṭabī'iyya* (Vegetative Faculties) (Ibn Rushd, 1987).

With the help of these three faculties and other subordinate faculties working for *ṭabī'at* such as *quwwat-i-jādhība* (absorptive faculty), *quwwat-i-māsika* (retentive faculty), *quwwat-i-mughayyira* (transformative faculty) and *quwwat-i-dāfi'a* (expulsive faculty) (Ahmad, 1980), it maintains the physiological functions of the body. *Ṭabī'at* with the help of *quwwat-i-dāfi'a* eliminates the waste products out of the body through normal channels (Tabri, 1995) and this eliminative function of *ṭabī'at* is very important for health maintenance. It works more for elimination than retention. As per the need of the body *ṭabī'at* manipulates all *quwā* and awakes the appropriate psychological instinct for restoration of health such as desire to sleep after fatigue, desire for cold beverages in sue *mizaj har*, etc.

Disease and Ṭabī'at: As we know the change is universal phenomenon, the same sequence can be seen in health and disease condition. For the occurrence of disease, it is essential that *ṭabī'at* be defeated because when *ṭabī'at* is stronger than disease, it overcomes the *mādda-i-maraḍ* (causative materials) in

the preliminary phase by directing it out of the body (Razi, 2000). According to Unani Medicine, disease consists of four stages. Therefore, *ṭabī'at* must play certain vital role in each stage for restoration of health. The four stages of *marad* (disease) are as follows:

- *Zamāna-i- Ibtidā'* (Onset Phase): In this stage, *ṭabī'at* does not do the process of *nudj* (concoction) in *bawl* (urine).
- *Zamāna-i-Tazayyud* (Increasing Phase): In this stage, *ṭabī'at* starts the process of *nudj* in *bawl* and slight alteration in colour of urine occurs, it indicates that *ṭabī'at* is giving the *nudj* in *mādda-i-maraḍ*.
- *Zamāna-i- Intihā'* (Climax Phase): In this stage, *ṭabī'at* completes the process of *nudj* which is evident by the existence of *rasūb* (sediments) in *bawl*.
- *Zamāna-i-Inḥitāt* (Convalescence Phase): In this stage, *ṭabī'at* becomes *ghalib* (dominant) over the disease (Ibn Rushd, 1987). Once *ṭabī'at* becomes dominant, it will surely restore health by eliminating the causative matter through normal channels.

Treatment of Disease and Ṭabī'at: *Ṭabī'at* plays the prime role in the treatment of the diseases. Its importance can be understood by the statement of *Zakariya Razi*. He says that:

- *Ṭabī'at* is the best physician.
- *Ṭabī'at* fights against the disease (Razi, 2000).

In Unani therapeutics, the immense confidence is placed on *ṭabī'at* and the chief aim of physicians is to support rather than produce hindrance in the action of *ṭabī'at* (Anonymous, 1973). The general principles of treatment modalities which a physician can adopt for assisting *ṭabī'at* are three:

- Regimen and diet.
- Use of drugs
- Manual operation (Ibn Sina, 2006).

Whatever the regimen, he chooses, in the treatment of any disease that must be in favour of *ṭabī'at* action. Because, Raban Tabri says that if the physician (by his/her regimens), patient and his or her attainer develop a helpful environment, the disease can easily be controlled. But, if they go against the desire or urge of *ṭabī'at* in disease eradication process, *ṭabī'at* is defeated and disease will occur (Tabri, 2010). So, it is clear that the physician assisting *ṭabī'at* from the initial phase of disease by using various treatment modalities is only to avoid the defeat of *ṭabī'at* and makes it strong enough to combat the disease condition. Once *ṭabī'at* becomes strong enough, it will surely maintain normalcy. Therefore, in Unani Medicine, the concept of *ṭabī'at* is the matter of chief concern for all the practitioners.

Conclusion

Ṭabīʿat is a central and broad concept in Unani Medicine. It is an inherent power gifted by the creator (God) in every individual which can be sensed through its action but cannot be measured quantitatively. It is an administrator of the body which works involuntarily and unconsciously for the welfare of human beings throughout the life. *Ṭabīʿat* is also responsible for co-ordination of the different functions, maintenance of the internal harmony of the body and adjustment of the body according to the surrounding atmosphere.

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सारांश

यूनानी चिकित्सा पद्धति में तबियत की अवधारणा

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यूनानी चिकित्सा एक व्यापक चिकित्सा है और कुछ बुनियादी सिद्धांतों अर्थात् तबियत, मिजाज (स्वभाव), अख़लात (स्वभाव पर सिद्धांत), कुवा (संकाय) और रुह (वायवीय) की अवधारणा पर आधारित है। यूनानी तिब्ब का समस्त तत्वज्ञान इन्हीं अवधारणाओं के चारों ओर घूमता है और इन्हें समझते हुए पूरे यूनानी तिब्ब को समझा जा सकता है। परन्तु तबियत की अवधारणा को समझते हुए विद्वानों के बीच में प्राचीन काल से वर्तमान युग तक भिन्नता पाई गई है। तबियत के संबंध में विद्वानों और समुदायों के लोगों के बीच विवाद अभी भी है। वह समझ और स्पष्टता की कमी के कारण अवधारणा की आलोचना करते हैं। इस लेख का उद्देश्य इस मूल अवधारणा को समझने में अंतर के स्तर को कम करना है ताकि यह यूनानी तिब्ब और अन्य चिकित्सा पद्धति के विद्वानों के बीच अधिक स्वीकार्य और सामान्यीकृत हो। तबियत मानव शरीर के भीतर छिपी एक प्रशासनिक शक्ति है जोकि यूनानी चिकित्सा के चिकित्सकों के लिए मुख्य चिंता और आशंका का केन्द्र है।

