



\* Corresponding Author

**Dr. Binod Kumar Singh**

drbinodbaghel@gmail.com

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# Characteristics of *Vata* and its association with Nervous system

**Dr. Binod Kumar Singh<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Sah<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Prashant Kumar Singh<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>. Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of Kayachikitsa,  
Ayurveda Campus, TU, Kirtipur

<sup>2</sup>. Assistant Professor, Head, Dept. of Samhita Siddhant,  
Ayurveda Campus, TU, Kirtipur.

<sup>3</sup>. Teaching Assistant, Dept. of Rasa Shastra and Bhaishajya Kalpana,  
Ayurveda Campus, Kirtipur.

## Abstract

*Ayurveda*, the science of life is all about preserving health and curing disease through the understanding of bodily principles, especially the *Tridosha*. Among them, *Vata Dosha* is regarded as the most important, which controls all physiological functions as well as perception, movement, and communication. Through the lens of contemporary biomedical science, this review seeks to examine the characteristics, locations, functions, and subtypes of *Vata* as well as its relationship to the neurological system. Ayurveda introduces *Vata* as the force of life that rules all the movements and sensory activities of the body. It is described by its qualities such as *Amurtatva* (formlessness), *Anavasthita* (instability), *Chalatva* (mobility) and can only be perceived by its action. *Vata* moves and functions through the *Vatavaha Srotas*, which are functionally analogous to neural pathways. These are categorized as *Sangyavaha* (sensory) and *Chestavaha* (motor) *Srotas* (channels), and they are further separated into *Samvrita* (myelinated) and *Asamvrita* (demyelinated) structures. This aligns closely with the central and peripheral nervous systems. In the same way the five subtypes of *Vata*; *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana*, and *Apana* govern key physiological functions that correspond to neurological, autonomic, and visceral processes. This integrative review concludes that the conceptual and functional framework of *Vata Dosha* closely mirrors the structure and role of the nervous system in contemporary medicine. Such cross-system comparison enhances the understanding of neuro-physiological processes through Ayurvedic principles and provides a basis for further research into *Vata*-related disorders (*Vatavyadhi*) as possible Ayurvedic representations of neurological diseases.

**Key words:** *Dosha, Vata, Nervous System, Vatavaha Srotas, Prana Vata*

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda gives equal importance to the preservation of health and the cure of disease. The perfect description of a healthy individual has been given by Acharya *Sushruta* as one in whom the *Dosha* are in a state of equilibrium, *Agni* is working normally, the *Dhatu*s (bodily tissues) and *Mala* (waste products) are performing their functions properly, and whose *Atma* (soul), *Indriyas* (sensory faculties), and *Manas* (mind) are in a state of harmony. This extensive definition of *Swasthya* highlights the central role of Doshic balance in the maintenance of health.<sup>1</sup> Along with this, Ayurveda also presents the doctrine of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* (DDM) that together represent the structural and functional constitution of the human body.

DDM governs all the functions of the body with their controlling factors, classifies all the tissues with its function and a group of excretory substances which are the outcome of digestion and metabolic activities. These controlling factors are called *Dosha*: these are *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. Understanding and maintaining the balance amongst these three components are not only essential for ensuring health, but also for the prevention and treatment of disease. Among three *Dosha*, *Vata* is undoubtedly the most fundamental and crucial *Dosha* for survival of any creation.

The importance of *Vata Dosha* in Ayurvedic physiology is evident from the fact that Charaka dedicated an entire chapter *Vatakalakaliya Adhyaya* (*Sutrasthana*, Chapter 12) exclusively to its discussion. Among the three *Doshas*, *Vata* is considered the most vital, being the driving force behind all physiological and psychological functions. It controls functions like circulation, respiration, nerve conduction and excretion.<sup>2</sup>

Although in Ayurveda, *Dosha* are considered as functional forces as well as regulatory entities, they cannot be directly equated with any specific biological system, organ, cell type, or signaling pathway as understood in modern biomedical science. However, deciphering the physiological correlates of *Dosha* can significantly enhance our understanding of both normal and pathological processes, and may help in evaluating pharmacological responses to therapeutic interventions.

In this context, the following discussion is designed to explore the possible correlation between Vata Dosha and the nervous system. As Vata governs movement, communication, sensory and motor activities; attributes inseparable from nervous system activity; a discussion such as this offers a great opportunity to bridge classical Ayurvedic thought with modern physiological frameworks.

### Aim and Objectives.

- To explore the explanation of *Vata dosha*.
- To explore some characteristics of *Vata* in light of allied science.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was carried out by collection of the basic and conceptual materials from the Ayurvedic classics viz. *Brihatrayee* and *Laghutrayee* mainly the *Sushruta Samhita*, *Charaka Samhita* and other classics with the available commentaries, as well as various reference books to be reviewed. Various Publications, text books of contemporary science, research papers, and proceedings of seminars have been referred for better understanding of the concept and its comparison with contemporary science. The discussions with the seniors and renowned academicians have paved the way to achieve some fruitful conclusions.

## Explanation of Vata

### Definition of the word 'Vata'

*Sushruta* defined the word as 'Vaa Gatigandhanayo',<sup>3</sup> meanings of the word *Gati* is movement, moving, going etc and of *Gandhana* is information, knowledge, sensory perception. The movement of the body expressed by the action of the muscles i.e. motor functions and the attainment of information or knowledge is through the functions of cognitive organs i.e. sensory functions. It is therefore clear that *Vata* is involved in these two motor and sensory functions. *Acharya Charaka* clearly indicates that *Vata* is responsible for all the activities of the body<sup>4</sup> and it constitutes the very life of living beings.<sup>5</sup> *Vata* is the most important and powerful because of its control over the function of the body.<sup>6</sup>

### Location of Vata

According to *Acharya Charaka*, the site of *Vata* are: *Vasti* (Urinary bladder), *Purishadhana* (Large intestine and rectum), *Kati*, *Sakthi* (thigh), *pada* (feet), *Asthi* (bones) and *Pakwashaya*<sup>7</sup>. *Purishadhana* has been interpreted by *Chakrapani Datta* as *Pakwashaya*. But *Purishadhana* should be taken as that portion of the intestines where in is located the *Purishadhara kala*<sup>8</sup>. According to *Sushruta*, *Vata* located in *Pakwadhana* or *Pakwashaya*,<sup>[9]</sup> *Sroni* (Pelvis) and *Guda* (rectum)<sup>10</sup>. Apart from these other location of *Vata* are the ears and the skin<sup>11</sup>. According to *Atharvaveda* *Vata* is located in upper portion of *Mastishka* (brain) and controls everything.<sup>12</sup>

### Vatavaha Srotas

The synonyms of *Srotas* are *Nadi*, *Srotamsi*, *Sira*, *Dhamani*, *pantha*, *Sharirachhidra*, *Samvrita-asamvrita* etc.<sup>13</sup> Majority of these indicate the tubular passages allowing corporeal substances to pass through them. "Since *Vata* is not corporeal but an energetic principle, the

*Srotas* (channels) that allow the movement of *Vata* need not be strictly tubular in structure. This is because *Vata* primarily governs two essential functions; *Gati* (movement) and *Gandhana* (sensory perception). Hence the *Vata* has to move through *Vatavaha Srotas* to reach target organs throughout the body. These *Vatavaha Nadi* or *Srotas* can be divided into two varieties on the basis of the functions:

1. **Chestavaha Vatavaha Srotas** - These are originated in *Buddhi* and finally terminate in the connective organs and other muscles to conduct motor function.
2. **Sangyavaha Vatavaha Srotas** - These are originated from cognitive organs and end in the respective *Indriya* to conduct sensory function.

On the basis of structure, the *Vatavaha srotas* are two types;

1. **Samvrita Nadi** - Well concealed or covered *Srotas*. These are the myelinated nerve fibers.
2. **Asamvrita Nadi** - Non covered or open. These are the non myelinated nerve fibers.

### Characteristics of Vata

There are some characteristics of *Vata* which explain its nature more correctly.

1. **Amurtatva** - It is explained by *Chakrapani* as *adrishya*; means invisibility.<sup>14</sup> This particular quality is due to the predominance of *Akasa* and *Vayu Mahabhutas* in its composition.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, *Vata* does not possess any corporal form. It is also stated as *Asanghatam*<sup>16</sup> indicating the absence of corporeal forms like *Pitta* and *Kapha*. It is to be clearly understood that *Vata* cannot be perceived through color, taste and order. In view of its *Amurtatva*, *Vata* can be perceived by *Anumana Pramana* (inferential reasoning) only i.e. it is only observed by its function.<sup>17</sup>

**2. Anavasthita-** The next important quality is *Anavasthita* (instability) which is also qualified as *Chalavabhava* (motility) as a natural quality.<sup>18</sup> It is also stated that *Vata* has *Shighragatitvat* (swift in action)<sup>19</sup> as mentioned in *Vata prakriti lakshana*. *Vata* is not only mobile but also capable of moving other two *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*.<sup>20</sup> This quality of *Chalatva* is directional in character. The word *Gati* also indicates directional movement. In the *Chestavaha srotas* (motor fibres), the *Vata* moves from *Buddhi* and *Mana* towards the muscles of *Karmendriya*, where as in *Sangyavaha srotas* (Sensory fibres) the movement is towards the *Mana* and *Buddhi* from *Gyaneindriya* (sense organs). Due to its swift movement, *Vata* is instantaneous in action and radiates through body in repetitive current.<sup>21</sup> For the maintenance of physiological function, *Vata* should have *Avyhatgati*<sup>22</sup> i.e. movement without any obstruction indicating that an obstruction to its movement will lead to pathological condition.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Swayambhu :

*Vata* is regarded as *swayambhu*<sup>24</sup> i.e self originated, self existent and also interpreted as self propagating in view of the *Chalatva lakshana* of it. While executing the function of *Gandhana*, *Vata* may be self originated in *Buddhi* which initiates the action/ movement in the body.<sup>25</sup> As the action occurs with the role of *Vata*, but it needs order by our brain. According to modern science, the intellect help brain for prompt decision of action. As per *Chakrapani Datta* the action is usually initiated by *Buddhi* after the conclusive judgment about the information transmitted by *Mana* regarding the *Artha* as received from the *Gyanendriya*. Here the action is the result of the combined effort of *Budhhi* and *Mana* in association with sensory connection and this independent triggering is understood as *Swayambhu*.<sup>26</sup>

### 4. Physical properties of Vata: Rukshadi Gunas -

*Vata* being '*Amurta* (formless)' the word has been given by *Chakrapani* as '*Adrishya*' and '*Anavasthita*' (unstable).<sup>27</sup> *Acharya Charaka* has explained the qualities of *Vata: Ruksha* (dryness), *Laghu* (lightness), *Sheeta* (coldness), *Daruna* (motility), *Khara* (roughness), *Vishada* (clearness), *Sukshma* (penetrative) and *Chalatva* (mobility),<sup>28</sup> in the same way as per *Sushruta*, *Vata* is *Ruksha*, *Sheeta*, *Laghu* and *Khara*, has moment in all direction as well as predominant with *Rajo guna*.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it cannot be perceived directly and the *Anumana pramana* has to be applied here.

Based on the principle of *Samanya Vriddhikaranam*<sup>30</sup>, in a situation of constant use of *Ahara* and *Aushadha* possessing the *Rukshadi Guna* being associated with abnormal states of the functioning of *Vata* and vice versa i.e *Vata* is alleviated by medicines having opposite *Snigdhadhi Guna*. This association with the aggravation and alleviation of the sign and symptoms and the pathological condition and restoration of normal physiological state of functioning leads to conclusion that the qualities of *Sarira Vata* must comprise of *Rukshadi Guna*.<sup>31</sup>

According to *Chakrapani Vata* does not have direct contact with its aggravating and alleviating factors, there are still such factors having direct connection with the body. Thus, we can say that *Vata* moving within the body has direct contact with them resulting aggravation or alleviation depending on its contact with homologous and heterologous qualities respectively.<sup>32</sup> The effect of the *Ahara* and *Aushadha* on the seats of *Vata* in the body by causing subtle changes on their both structural and functional integrity can either aggravate or alleviate the *Vata* regarding its activity.

### General functions of Vata:

The function of *Vata* is of two types:

1. *Prakrita* or physiological function conducted in their state of equilibrium, and
2. *Vakrita* or pathological or abnormal function conducted by the vitiated *Vata*.

The functions of normal *Vata*<sup>33</sup> are summarized as; *Vata* upholds the structures and function of the body, originator of every kind of action in the body, regulates and controls *Manas* (mind), stimulates all the sensory organs, conveys all stimuli. It also regulates the quality and quantity of all the *Dhatus*, generates speech, it is the origin of all excitement and animation. It stimulates the *Agni* (digestive fire), eliminates the excretions from the body and it is the cause of the formation of different structures of the fetal body. Charaka has also described other functions like *Utsaha* (effort), *Uchchhvasa*, *Nishwasa* (respiratory function), *Chesta* or movement/initiation for any action of body and mind, *Harsha* (pleasure or excitement) etc.<sup>34</sup>

### Sub division of *Vata*

#### *Prana Vata*

***Sthana (location)*** - *Shira* (Mashtishka) and circulates through *Kantha* (trachea) and *Urah* (Lunga and heart), *Jihwa*, *Nasika*, etc.

***Karma (Function)*** - It commands *Buddhi* (intellect), *Hridaya* (mind), *Indriya* (sense organs). It is responsible for *Swashakriya* (respiration), *Annapravesha* (degglutition), *Nisteevana* (salivation) *Kshavathu* (sneezing), *Udgara* (erructations) etc. responsible for all vital function.<sup>35,36,37</sup>

#### *Udana Vata*

***Sthana (location)***: *Urah* (chesta) circulates towards *Nasika* (nostrils), *Kantha* (neck and *Nabhi* (spinal cord).

***Karma***: It produces *Vaka* (speech), motivates

people to work (*prayatna*) and provides *Bala* (Immunity/strength), *Urja* (stamina/zeal), *Varna* (color) and *Smriti* (memory).

#### *Samana Vata*

***Sthana (location)***: It is located nearer to *Jatharagni* and moves throughout the *Kostha* (alimentary canal).

***Karma***: *Annagrahana* (reception of food), *Agnisandukshana* (secretion of digestive enzymes), *Annapachana* (digestion through digestive juices), *Sara-kitta Vibhajana* (sorting digested, undigested, indigestible and excretory parts of food materials), and *Munchana* (facilitation of absorption of digested food and excretion of waste metabolites).

#### *Vyana Vata*

***Sthana (location)***: It is located in *Hridaya* and moves throughout the body through the medium of *Rasa Dhatu*.

***Karma***: *Gati* (all movements i.e. contraction, relaxation), *Akshepa-Nimesha* (eyelid reflexes), *Rasa Sambahana* (circulation of the blood), *Svedaya* (profusion of sweat), *Asrika shravana* (blood circulation). *Vagbatta* further describe that it is also responsible for the ejaculation of semen during sexual intercourse.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Apana Vata*

***Sthana (location)***: It is located in the testes, the urinary bladder, the penis, the umbilicus, the thigh, the groin, the rectum and the lower part of intestine.<sup>39</sup> As per *Sushrita* and *Vagbhata* *Apana Vata* resides in the *Pakwadhana* (colon and rectum).<sup>40,41,42,</sup>

***Karma***: *Vega pravartana* (facilitate excretion of faeces and urine), *Nishkramana* of *Shukra*, *Artava*, and *Garbha* (ejection of semen, menstrual flow and uterine action during labour)

### DISCUSSION

The concept of *Vata Dosha* as elaborated

above depicts an inherent connection between ancient physiology and modern neurophysiology. The elaborate understanding of *Vata* - from its etymological source, location, directions of movement, qualities, and functional subdivisions; unveils the manner in which this *Dosha* governs the fundamental motor, sensory, and regulative functions of the human organism.

#### **Conceptual Clarity on *Gati* and *Gandhana*:**

In Sanskrit etymology, the term '*Vata*' as "*Gatigandhanyoh*" also clearly articulates its basic function in movement (motor function) and sensory perception or to get knowledge (sensory function). These two are also the basic realms of neurological function, where central and peripheral nervous systems regulate motor outputs and sensory inputs. It is thus reasonable to equate *Gati* and *Gandhana Karma* of the *Vata* to the motor-sensory channels and information processing of the nervous system. In Ayurveda the neurological deficits are also described under heading of *Vatavyadhi* and impaired *Vata Dosha* is directly correlated with serious neurological disorders

***Amūrtatva (Invisibility) and Sukṣmatva (Subtlety):*** *Vata* is *Amūrta* (formless), *Sūkṣhma* (subtle), and *Anāvasthita* (unstable). These are similar to the intangible and electric impulses (nerve signals) carried by the nervous system. While *Vāta* is not visible but is discerned through its activities, the nerve impulse or action potential also cannot be visibly detected but is realized through electrophysiological studies and responses.

**Structural and Functional Analogy:** The classification of *Vatavaha Srotas* into: *Chestavaha* (motor pathways) and *Sangyavaha* (sensory pathways) similarly subsequent division into *Samvrita* (myelinated) and *Asamvrita* (non-myelinated) provides a powerful analogy with the afferent-efferent and myelinated-unmyelinated

nerve fibers. This knowledge of structure greatly facilitates correlation of Ayurvedic concepts with neuronal structures and neuro-physiological processes of conduction.

**Locational Insight and CNS Correlation:** The *Prana Vata*, is situated in *Shira* (brain), *Kanṭha* (trachea), *Hṛidaya* (heart) and its activities like respiration, swallowing, and cerebral control have a fair correlation with brainstem activity and autonomic control by reticular formation, medulla oblongata, and higher centers. Similarly, the function of *Samana Vāta* in digestion is also well-correlated with the enteric nervous system, popularly referred to as the 'second brain'. The entry of *Apana Vata* into pelvis and lower GI tract is a representation of the sacral spinal outflow and autonomic nerves of the pelvic region which are responsible for micturition, defecation, and reproduction. The distributional influence of *Vyana Vata* through the medium of *Rasa Dhatu* is analogous to sympathetic nervous system-mediated circulatory control.

#### **Physiological Functions and Coordination of *Dosha*:**

*Vāta* acts as the regulator and initiator of all physiological activities, such as:

*Utsaha* (motivation) similar to limbic system & dopamine pathways.

*Chetana* (awareness)—linked with consciousness and reticular activation system

*Uchchavasa-Nishvasa* (breathing)- regulated by respiratory centers.

*Chesta* (movement)—coordinated by motor cortex and cerebellum *Harṣha* (excitement)—again linked with emotional centers like amygdala

The above functions propose a neurobiological basis of *Vāta* and propose that it may be interpreted as the body's neural and bioelectrical control system in modern terms.

**Pathological significance such as *Vata Vikriti*:**

*Vata has Avyahata gati* (unobstructed movement) hence any obstruction of the flow of *Vata* causes pathologies just like nerve compression, demyelination, or neurotransmitter imbalance leads to neurologic illness. Hence, *Vata Vikriti* would refer to neuromuscular or neurodegenerative disease like Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, peripheral neuropathy etc. where the sensations and movements are affected.

**Table no.1** shows the similarities between the phenomenon of *Vata* and nerve impulse

| VATA |   | NERVE IMPULSE   |
|------|---|---|
| 1    | <i>Amurta</i> - Invisible.<br>Invisible, not perceived by sense organs. | Invisible, not perceived by sense organs.   |
| 2    | <i>Anavasthita/Chalatva</i> - It is mobile.                             | It is conducted in one direction from the neuron through the axon to its termination. |
| 3    | <i>Swayambhu</i> - Self originated and self propagated.                 | Self originated in the neurons of CNS and self propagated in nerve fibres.            |
| 4    | <i>Sukshma</i> - Capable of passing through smallest channels           | Passes through nerve fibres of even one micron in diameter.                           |
| 5    | <i>Sheeghragati</i> - Swift in action.                                  | Moves in a nerve fibre sometimes at a velocity of 100 meter per second.               |
| 6    | <i>Avyahata gati</i> - unobstructed movement.                           | Obstruction in its movement leads to pathological conditions.                         |
| 7    | Functions of <i>Gati</i> and <i>Gandhana</i> .                          | It possesses motor and sensory functions.   |
| 8    | Both <i>Vata</i> and nerve impulse are present in the living body only. |   |

**CONCLUSION:**

This review lays out a thorough and conceptually sound connection between the nervous system and *Vata Dosha*. There are obvious parallels between the motor and sensory functions of neurons and the classical definitions, characteristics, and functional domains of *Vata*, especially *Gati* (movement) and *Gandhana* (cognitive perception). *Vatavaha Nadi* or *Srotas* can be classified functionally into *Chestavaha* (motor) and *Sangyavaha* (sensory) types, and structurally into *Samvrita Nadi* (myelinated) and *Asamvrita Nadi* (non-myelinated). *Vata* can be viewed

**Integration of Dosha in system physiology:**

Whereas *Vata* governs movement, conduction, and initiation, *Pitta* governs transformation (such as metabolism, digestion), and *Kapha* provides structure and stability. Such a triad is equivalent to the systems of control (nervous), processing (enzymatic/metabolic), and support (structural) in the human system. *Vata* is thus the neurological counterpart of the human system.

as the neurofunctional principle of the body, reflecting the dynamics of neural signaling and autonomic regulation. Its region-specific subtypes align with key physiological systems, and disturbances in *Vata* correlate with neurological disorders. Integrating Ayurvedic insights with modern neurophysiology may offer a more holistic and evidence-based approach to diagnosis and treatment.

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