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Review Article

HUMOURS (AKHLAT) AS A DEFINING FACTOR FOR THE CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH AND DISEASE

Sanila Adil Zafar ¹, Sultana Anjum ², Sana Kauser Ateeque Ahmed ^{3*}, Shaiha Firoz Ahmed ⁴, Mohd Anis Ansari ⁵

¹ MD, Dept. of Mahiyatul Amraz (Pathology), National Institute of Unani Medicine Bangalore, Karnataka, India

² MD, Department of Amraze Jild wa Tazeeniyat (Skin and Cosmetology), National Institute of Unani Medicine Bangalore, Karnataka, India

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Mahiyatul Amraz (Pathology), Al-Ameen Unani Medical College & Hospital, Malegaon, Maharashtra, India

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Ilmu Atfal (Paediatrics), Al-Ameen Unani Medical College & Hospital, Malegaon, Maharashtra, India

⁵ Assistant Professor, Department of Ilmu Saidla, Al-Ameen Unani Medical College & Hospital, Malegaon, Maharashtra, India

*Corresponding Author Email: sanakauserateeqe@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In the Unani system of medicine, the seven fundamental principles (Umür Tabi'iyya) i.e. Arkan (basic constituents), Mizaj (Temperament), Akhlat (Humours), A'da' (Organs), Arwah (Vital pneumas), Quwa (Faculties) and Afal (Functions) are not only responsible for the existence of human body but for the maintenance of health too. Any alteration in these principles could lead to disease or even death. Amongst them, the concept of four humours is momentous in the diagnosis and management of diseases, as it covers every single aspect of health and diseases. Hence innumerable diseases are classified depending on alteration in humours. Owing its philosophical and scientific facts Unani physicians believe on this classical concept and use it in their practice too. In the present study alteration and discordance of Akhlat i.e., Imtilā Ba Hasbul Quwa and Imtilā Ba Hasbul Awaiya and their alarming features have been described in detail. Thus, with the help of logical and scientific parameters the study will aid in better understanding of the concept of akhlat, their effect on health and diseases too.

Keywords: Humour; Health; Disease; Sanguine; Phlegmatic; Bilious; Melancholic

INTRODUCTION

The Unani System of Medicine (USM) is an inclusive system of medicine that envisions individual in relation to not only his/her internal and external environment, stresses on health of body, but mind and soul too. For instance, several idiosyncratic concepts are described in the USM viz. concept of temperament (mizaj), humoral theory (theory of akhlat), concept of tabiyat (physis) etc.¹⁻⁴ Amongst them the concept of temperament is given pronounced importance in the USM. Further Unani physicians have explained all the physiological and pathological processes of human body in relation to the body fluids (rutubat-i-Badan). In the USM all the body fluids are called Akhlat (humor); literally means "admixture"; because these body fluids are found amalgamated together within the body but not as a single entity. According to the USM the humor is formed after several digestive processes in the liver. Thus, the central framework of USM is based on humoral theory (theory of Akhlat), which was postulated by father of medicine Hippocrates (460B.C). According to him, the body contains four major kinds of humors (Akhlat arba), Blood (Dam), Phlegm (Balgham), Yellow Bile (safra) and Black Bile (Sawda) in right proportion. Mingling of different humours followed by dominance a humour in a body result in appearance of a particular temperament that is exclusive for that particular body only. A well-balanced state of humours

with normalcy in quality as well as quantity maintains health as an upshot. However, disturbances in their quality and quantity could lead to dyscrasia/disease obliging an individual to turn out to be sick.¹⁻⁴ Human temperament is usually represented by the dominant humour i.e. Sanguine (Damwi), Phlegmatic (Balghami), Choleric (safrawi) and Melancholic (sawdawi). Moreover, the human temperament can be correlated with the temperament of diet, drugs, environmental factors, etc. Thus, the humoral imbalance can be rectified by giving proper diet, medication and therapies. Accordingly, the physician is capable of prescribing medication and therapies also.^{5,6}

It is a fact that heart, brain and liver are the principal organs of human body. Therefore, the human survival depends on their healthier functions. Heart is the principal organ of vital faculty and brain is the principal organ of nervous faculty. Whereas the most important function of liver is to produce humours (akhlat) for nourishment, growth and development of the body.^{1,4}

Galen (Jalinoos) believed that all the animals and plants that are subjected to genesis and degradation beside minerals are made from four basic elements (Arkan Arba); fire (Nar), water (Maa), air (Hawa) and earth (Arz). Thus, Akhlat Arba are also made up of basic elements.¹ From above discussion Galen validated and made more comprehensive understanding of concept of Akhlat.²

Formation of Akhlat (Humours)

Formation of humours is determined by quality of ingested food and condition of digestive faculty of the person. In Unani System of Medicine, digestion entails processing of food in alimentary canal, liver, vessels and lastly its absorption in tissues. These are identified as gastric, hepatic, vascular and tissue digestion respectively.^{2,4,6,7} Food that are ingested, undergoes a number of digestive processes beginning from mouth where food is masticated and partially digested with the action of saliva. Following this, food passes through esophagus and reaches to the stomach where the gastric phase of digestion takes place by means of gastric secretions and gastric movements converting the food in white semisolid substance named as 'chyle' (kailus). This phase is considered as the first stage of digestion (hadm medi).^{1,4} The thinner and light portion of chyle is partially absorbed from stomach via roots of the mesenteric veins, but then mostly transferred to small intestine where further digestion takes place with the help of intestinal movements and secretions. The digested food is absorbed through the roots of mesenteric veins and later to the portal vein through which the digested food arrives in the liver and undergoes in the next phase of digestion bringing out changes in the color of the food from white to red i.e. formation of humurs (akhlat). Consequently, liver obtain nutrition from it, and sends it towards the heart via inferior vena cava to apportion this fluid to the whole-body providing nutrition and replenishment to each and every organ of the body in the form of humour (akhlat arba). The liver occupies the central position in vegetative functions of the body and known as matbakh (kitchen) of the body because it plays a pivotal role in the synthesis of humours (Akhlat arba). These humours produced in the liver undergoes in a variety of processes in different organs of the body and form a number of fluids having their definite functions. Amongst them some are crucial for the body's health viz., blood, bile etc. while, others necessitate to be expelled out from the body viz., menstrual blood, semen etc.^{6,7} Also the

temperament of the liver and other auxiliary organs wield their characteristics on the synthesis of humours. Therefore, the humours formed are normal if temperament is normal however, alteration in the temperament of these organs especially liver may lead to disharmony in the humours too thereby causing various diseases.^{1,7,8} Additionally the equilibrium and balance of the humours/ body fluid in respect of quantity and quality is maintained by a specific power of the body known as Tabiat (medicatrix naturae/). Once the tabiat becomes pooped to deter the extravagant causes interfering in the composition and qualities of the body fluids, the equilibrium gets disturbed. The disturbance in humours thus appeared could sometimes be localized, generalized or assorted together. When it comes to waste products, the first digestion waste products are eliminated via intestine in the form of stool, whereas the waste products of the second digestion are eliminated mostly through urine but small quantity of it is disposed towards gallbladder and spleen as well. Moreover, the waste products of the third and fourth digestion are eliminated via small pores of the body in the form of sweat.^{1,4,9,10} So, in preservation of health, digestion at all phases plays a crucial role. But, formation of humours in hepatic digestion, makes hepatic phase extremely significant.^{4,9}

Humours (Akhlat) as a functional component of human body

To one side humours (Akhlat) are structural component, but they also act as a functional component of the body because they take part in the maintenance of good health by executing innumerable functions. Any alteration in the quality and quantity of humours (Akhlat) lead to disturbance in the functions of the body thereby instigating various humoral diseases as well.

As discussed above there are four major kinds of humors (Akhlat arba), Blood (Dam), Phlegm (Balgham), Yellow Bile (safra) and Black Bile (Sawda) having their specific functions.

Table 1: The functions of individual humor (Khilt)

No.	Dam (blood)	Balgham (phlegm)	Safra (Yellow Bile)	Sawda (Black bile)
01	It is the most beneficial, most abundant and functional Khilt in the body. ^[1-4,8]	It is second most important Khilt in the body. ^[1-4,8] It makes the blood viscous which is responsible for normal blood flow or maintains the viscosity of blood. ^[1-4,8]	As it is light in consistency therefore makes the blood less viscous and helps in easy flowing through the small blood vessels and capillaries. ^[1-4,8]	Due to its high viscosity, it makes the blood more viscous wherever needed. ^[1-4,8]
02	It provides nutrition to the body and replenishes the tears.	It delivers the nutrition and replenishment to those organs which are phlegmatic in the temperament like brain, spinal cord and fatty tissues of the body etc.	It provides the nutrition and replenishment to certain organs like thyroid cartilage, tracheal rings etc.	It provides nutrition to spleen (Tehal), bones, nails and hairs.
03	It keeps the body warm and distributes the innate heat (Hararat-e Gharizia) throughout the body.	It maintains moisture in the organs and joints.	Some part of yellow bile goes into the blood while remaining part goes to the gall bladder. ²⁹ It helps in digestion of food.	It provides strength to the bone.
04	It prevents the organs of the body from vulnerability of coldness and maintain the warmth of viscera.	The continuous secretion of phlegm is needed at some parts of the body like joints to facilitate the movement.	It acts as a detergent into the intestine. It washes the viscous secretion from small intestine too.	It acts as an appetizer.
05	It provides beauty and luster to the skin.	It can be used as a Khilt Dam after further processing by Hararat Gharizia (Innate heat).	As it is a natural purgative it provides stimulation for defecation.	It makes the skin color dark.
06	Its Mizaj is suitable for life	Hotness of some organs and humours needs to be neutralized by phlegm, because heat may lead to dryness and shrinkage in the organ hampering the normal functions.	It helps in the killing of intestinal worms.	

Khilti Amraz/ Discordance of Akhlat Arba'a (Amraz due to abnormality in akhlat)

When equilibrium in four humours of the body is maintained, the body will remain healthier. However, any disturbance in their quantity or quality lead to various disorders, termed as humoral disorders (khilti Amraz). So, basically there are two types of humoral disorders.

- I. Derangement in quantity
- II. Derangement in quality

Derangement in quantity is nothing but disturbance of the ratio or proportion of one humour with respect to remaining humours without affecting their qualities. It may be either of excessive type or deficiency type. Increase in quantity is known as Imtilā (excess or plethora) however their reduction can lead to various forms of deficiencies. The features or symptoms of Imtila (congestion of akhlat) are specific for particular khilt.

Derangement in quality/ Imtila 'Ba Hasbul Quwa (Disharmony in quality) means there is increase in the quantity along with disharmony in the quality of humors. These types of humors interrupt the powers and functions of the body due to their bad quality. They do not metabolize completely, thus their presence make the body susceptible for infectious.³

Dam (blood)

Dam/Blood can be corrupted in six basic ways: - Its vital capacity and function may be reduced or compromised; It can be unduly thickened, stagnant, congested or congealed; It can be unduly thinned, softened or attenuated; It can be subjected to various distempers; It can suffer from various dyscrasias or amalgamations; It can suffer from sepsis or putrefaction.¹⁻³

Imtila' Dam

Ghayr Tabi't Khilt e Dam is the one which is abnormal either in its constitution/ quality (Imtilā Ba Hasbul Quwa) or quantity (Imtilā Ba Hasbul Auia). However, blood comprising the optimum quantity of Balgham, Safra, and sawdā, maintains the functions of bodily organ i.e. homeostasis. Further, viscosity of the blood is affected by irregularity in other humours too. Excessive Balgham in the Blood will make the blood thicker whereas excessive Safra will make it thinner, which fails to nourish organs and cause diseases. Moreover, Ghayr Tabi't Khilt e Dam are produced in the body due to various etiologies, Such as intake of food of abnormal qualities and quantities, Sü-i-Mizaj Kabid (abnormal temperament of liver), admixing of different Akhlät of abnormal qualities and quantities etc. Hence depending upon the type of etiology Unani scholars have classified Ghayr Tabi'i Khilte Dam in different ways.¹⁻³

Ibn e Sina has categorized Ghayr Tabi't Khilt e Dam into two types: firstly Sü-i-Mizaj of Khilt e Dam occurs due to the alterations within the blood and no other substance is involved. Secondly Sü-i-Mizaj of Khilt e Dam results due to involvement of Khilt Radi. This may happen either by admixing of abnormal Khilt along with Dam or Dam itself gets putrefied. The intensity of heat is more in this category as compared to Tabi't Khilt e Dam. The etiology behind the second condition is that the hirrif part of Dam gets changed into Mirra Safra' and kathif (thick) part gets converted into Mirra Sawda'. Whereas first condition of Ghayr Tabi't Khilt e Dam results due to admixing of abnormal types of Sawda, Safra', Balgham and Mä 'iyyat Dam. These abnormalities of Khilt e Dam cause variations in the characteristics of Dam, such as changes in its color, taste, odor and consistency depending upon what kind of substance/ matter involved.¹⁻³

Blood can be accumulated in the heart, arteries, blood vessels and small capillaries, many of them visible under the skin, are the primary accumulation sites for blood. The secondary accumulation sites tend to be organs and tissues which are inherently sanguine in temperament: liver and hepatic portal system, spleen and pancreas, veins, uterus and female genital organs, kidneys, skin, digestive, respiratory and genitourinary mucosa.¹¹ Hence the symptoms develop according to its sites of accumulation. Majority of the person complain for heaviness in eyes, mastoid region, head and body, excessive yawning, laziness, mental disturbance, feeling of fatigue without any efforts, sweetness in mouth, redness of tongue etc.^{3,10}

Qillat e Dam (Deficiency)

Qillate dam (anemia and sul qiniya) causes considerably grave threat to the health and vitality of the individual compared to Imtila. Causes of Qillate dam are many and varied, but they can be chiefly distinguished into following types: a) Dietary defects and nutrient deficiencies b) An inefficient or unbalanced digestion and metabolism.¹¹

Balgham (phlegm)

Balgham/Phlegm is expectorated, or excreted from the body, in a wide variety of forms that vary in quantity, texture, consistency, taste, color and many other properties. This shows that phlegm, once generated, can go through many different qualitative changes of varying degrees of morbidity. In addition to the forms of phlegm that are apparent and visible, there are other kinds of morbid phlegm that are usually found deep within the body. It stagnates and accumulates and undergo morbid changes that can greatly alter its form, taste, texture, viscosity, color and opacity. These changes include dystempers, dyscrasias, fermentations and putrefactions of the phlegm humor itself. The taste of one's saliva is an important indicator of the overall state of one's phlegm and phlegmatic humor. Putrefied phlegm in the digestive tract can produce dizziness, a sour stomach, chronic indigestion, gas, bloating and distension. The stools will be loose and foul smelling. When too much phlegm accumulates in the respiratory tract, it can putrefy and produce a respiratory tract infection.¹⁻⁴

Imtila' Balgham

It is a fact that any change in the quality or quantity of the humour (khilt) leads to disease. In the same way, phlegmatic diseases (Amrād-i-balghamī) results from abnormality/derangement in the quantity or quality/characteristics of khilt balgham e.g. changes in taste, consistency, odor, etc., or in its quantity. When it comes to quantity, there is either increase or decrease in quantity of balgham with respect to other humours. Phlegmatic fever (Hummayāt-balghamī) and phlegmatic swellings (Awrām balghamī) are two important diseases of derangement in khilt-e-balgham. Various factor can cause abnormality in Balgham, like dietary factors, abnormal metabolism of nutrients, disease of GIT and liver etc. These abnormalities of balgham can be identified with the help of its physical properties like consistency, color, taste and odour. Balgham-i-Ghayr Tabi' is classified with respect to consistency (Qivam) and taste (Maza). With respect to putrefaction there is only one type of Ghayr Tabi'i balgham. Balgham-i-Ghayr Tab'i was not classified with respect to colour. For this Ibn Nafees gives the reason that Ghayr Tabi'i Balgham with respect to colour should be included in that khilt according to its dominant colour. For instance, if yellow colour is dominant in Ghayr Tabi' Balgham then it should be included in Ghayr Tabi' Safra' as seen in Safra Muhhiyya in which the quantity of Balgham is greater than Safra.

Phlegm congestion in the lungs and chest will cause congestion and stagnation in the lymph and lymphatic system, which can also be aggravated by poor venous return. Finally, the serous and

synovial fluids become excessive, affecting the pleura, pericardium, brain and spinal cord, and the bones and joints. Excess phlegm can invade any part of the body.¹¹ Symptoms of accumulation of phlegm are texture of skin become soft and cold, body color change to whitish, excessive salivation, decreased thirst, incomplete digestion, color of urine become whitish, excessive sleeping, tiredness, pulse become soft slow and irregular.^{3,10}

Phlegmatic Deficiency

When it comes to deficiencies of the Phlegmatic humor, the chief concern is a depletion of the serous portion - the vital fluids and inherent moisture of the organism. In modern medical terms, this would involve a depletion of fluids, electrolytes and plasma proteins.¹¹

Safra' (yellow bile)

Safra': Dyscrasias and oxidations are the two basic categories into which qualitative diseases of yellow bile can be categorized. The amalgamation of yellow bile with various pathological types of phlegm is the most common dyscrasia. The process of turning yellow bile into a morbid ash-like substance is known as oxidation. The degree to which the bile has been burned or oxidized will determine the relative strength of the signs and symptoms generated. The severity and vehemence of the symptoms increase with the amount of hot, poisonous, and burnt bile. A foreign bacterium or metabolic agent can enter and devour Yellow Bile as a result of putrefaction induced by excessive moisture, which also weakens its innate heat, immunity, and digestive power. Bile's long-term stagnation can also result in putrefaction.^{3,10}

Imtila' Safra'

Any derangement in the quantity and quality of yellow bile (khilt safrā) leads to Amrād Safrāwiya (Bilious diseases). Temperament of yellow bile is hot and dry (Hār yabis), so excess intake of foods having hot and dry temperament (garm khushk aghziya), Hot climate, hot weather, hot area' like desert, occupations and various activities of the body amplifying the hotness could lead to excess production of yellow bile (Safrā). Also, the resulting yellow bile (Safra' ghyr tabi) is imbalanced in its quantity and quality of its components i.e. becomes more viscous or lighter and thinner which is unable to perform its normal functions and result in wide range of bilious diseases (Amrād Safrāwiya). Also, excessive dryness and hotness in the stomach and liver leads to more production of Safrā which then mingle with the blood resulting in the increased hotness (hārarāt) and dryness (yubūsat) in the blood too, further worsening the condition and augments severity of the disease. Clinically, signs and symptoms of accumulation of safra' will be present.^{3,10}

In the liver, gallbladder, and hepatobiliary tract, safra might build up initially. The duodenum and stomach are then affected, leading to ulcers, hyperacidity, acid reflux, and reflux esophagitis. Alternately, irritable bowel syndrome or soft, odorous, or scorching stools might result from exacerbated bile spreading from the hepatobiliary tract downhill, into the small intestine and colon. Choleric fumes can move systemically from the hepatobiliary system to harm any portion of the body.^{3,10}

Clinically individuals are presented with symptoms like yellowness of skin, conjunctiva, dryness in mouth and nostrils^{3,10},

heat intolerance and feeling better in cold weather, increased thirst, loss of appetite, feeling of tactile sensation, colour of urine and stool become yellowish and pulse become rapid and irregular.^{3,10}

Choleric Deficiency

It takes account of a lack or insufficiency of yellow bile. True bile deficiency, however, is quite uncommon. Furthermore, a real bile shortage would lead to inadequate fat and lipid assimilation and metabolism. The surgical removal of the gall bladder is a form of secondary or functional bile shortage because it results in the loss of a significant amount of bile, which the liver continually and slowly excretes into the intestines even in the absence of fatty foods for it to digest. Safra thins the blood, hence it can also cause thinness the blood's viscosity.

Sawda: Normal black bile is a sediment of blood and is Cold and Dry; it is also dense and heavy. Abnormal or morbid forms of black bile can be the charred, oxidized residues of any of the four Humors, including black bile itself. Morbid black bile will produce many different signs and symptoms, depending on where it's localized in the organism. If localized in the liver, morbid black bile may also affect the head, senses and nervous system. Mild perturbations will disturb the flow and patency of liver function and impede humor generation, resulting in neurovegetative dystonia, portal hypertension, an irritable liver, hepatobiliary insufficiency, and blood whose full nutritive capacity has been compromised. Morbid black bile in the stomach and middle digestive tract can produce a nervous or sour stomach, heartburn, perverted appetite and food cravings, poor appetite and nausea, and chronic indolent gastroduodenal ulcers. In the intestines, it can produce marked colic, gas, distension and pain, irritable bowel, gurgling intestines, and even intestinal obstruction. With morbid black bile, the obstruction, pain, colic, reflux and dysfunctional symptoms will be more severe. In the bones and joints, morbid black bile can produce marked, severe, or even crippling arthritic pains and degenerative changes in the joints and supporting structures.

Imtila' Sawda'

When khilt-e- sawdā becomes distempered or more in quantity, it affects the organs. It mixes with blood and spreads throughout the body, causing disorders like Amrad Sawdawiyya. These conditions have a chronic nature. They include some degenerative ones. This humour is least beneficial and when gets altered, it has a more devastating impact on human health than any other form of humour.

Sawda Ghayr Tabi' is produced by Ihtiraq e akhlat (Ihtiraq means an abnormal metabolic changes which are against the nature of body).¹² So, whenever any of Khilt/ humour, including Sawda itself becomes Muhtariq (burnt out) then it leads to production of sawda Ghayr Tabi' ² Sawda Ghayr Tabi' thus formed doesn't serve the physiological functions of the normal sawda e.g. feeling of appetite.^{4,6} It is a fact that the spleen naturally absorbs sawda tabai (normal black bile). However, the spleen fails to absorb Sawda Ghayr Tabi' (abnormal black bile) that leads to its accumulation in the spleen and various parts of the body, from where, it may spread all over the body. Symptoms of accumulation of Sawda Ghayr Tabi' are blackish discoloration of skin, loss of appetite or false appetite, psychiatric diseases like anxiety, depression and melancholia.

Deficiencies of Black Bile

Deficiencies of black bile are rare. The physiological functions of the normal sawda e. g. feeling of appetite does not happen and may suffer from lack of appetite or anorexia. Which further enhance weakness in the body.^{4,6} It involves various chronic or

congenital bleeding or hemorrhagic disorders, many of which are hereditary or constitutional in origin. Perhaps the most well-known of these bleeding disorders is hemophilia, which is a total lack of the clotting factors inherent in black bile.

Table 2: Humoral diseases

Humoral diseases			
Diseases of Dam ^[1,4]	Diseases of Balgham ^[1,4]	Diseases of Safra ^[1,4]	Diseases of Sawda ^[1,4]
Nafsuddam (Hemoptysis)	Falij(paralysis) and Saktah (apoplexy)	Hummae Safrawia (bilious fever)	Melancholia
Qaiuddam (Hematemesis)	Laqwah (Facial palsy)	Hummiyate Haddah (acute fever)	Juzam (leprosy)
Nakseer(Epistaxis)	Nisyan (Forgetfulness)	Barsam Har	Sartan (cancer)
Hummae Tifudia (Typhoid fever)	Hummae Balghami (phlegmatic fever)	Gangrenous pustules	Dawali (varicose vein)
Khuraj(Abscesses),	Lisarghus (type of meningitis)	Yarqan (Jaundice),	Da ul Fil (elephantiasis)
Waram Har,	Rasha (tremor)	Warme Kabid(hepatitis)	Hummiyat Raba (Type of fevers)
Damamil (Rashes)	Tashannuj (Convulsions)	Qarha (ulcer) of urinary bladder and intestine	Sue Hazm (indigestion)
Dubailah (Large Abscess)	Dawar (vertigo)	Faranitus (type of meningitis)	Sahr (insomnia)
Tap-e-Matbaqah(Type of fever)	Sadar (Giddiness)	Basoorat safrawiya	
Shaqiqa (Migraine)	Kabus(night mare)		
Dawali (Varicosevein)	Sara (epilepsy)		
reddish urine	Khidr (paresthesia),		
	Tahabbuj (Edema)		

DISCUSSION

The term Akhlat (Humours) originated in hippocratic theory of humours. It states that health come from a balance between the four bodily humours i.e. blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. However, imbalance in critical ratio and combination of these humours results in various diseases, known as humoral diseases. The four humors did not just explain health and disease. They were believed to correspond to the four principal temperaments too. According to the USM a critical ratio and proper combination of four bodily humours i.e. blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile have its physiological effects on the body and upholds various states of the body accordingly. Owing these facts treatment of humoral disease depends on correction in the balance between these humours. Further, humors (Akhlat Arba'a) are considered to be responsible to provide nutrition and replenishment of body organs without fail. Also, these humors are formed by food and nutrition.

CONCLUSION

The Temperament of food or drug consumed have its effect on various state of the body. It is an established fact that each food and drug have its own temperament by which it establishes definite and non-definite symptoms when the same is administered in various concentrations. Thus food (Quantitatively and qualitatively) should be taken according to individual's requirement in respect of age, occupation, habit and season etc. Based on temperament, four kinds of organs are present in the human body; they need replenishment against their dissolution by specific material. So, it is necessary that the Akhlat Arba'a should be synthesized in the body in their normal composition and qualities. Organs having hot and moist temperament are more in number, therefore Khilt having hot and moist temperament (blood) is present in abundance as compared to other Khilt. When Akhlät are synthesized in the body within normal composition, they normally provide nutrition and replenishment to each organ of the body. If any abnormal change takes place in their quantities and qualities, then organs are not nourished properly and lost their healthy state. So, it is clearly

evident that, the state of health human body directly depends on the healthy composition of Akhlat Arba'a.

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