Ruh and Ruh-e-Nafsaniyah: A literary research

Ghufran Ahmad, Ansari Sumaira, Mohd Zulkifle and Tasfiya

Abstract

Two different types of created objects are found in the universe; the first is that which possesses life, they are animates. The second is that which has no life, they are inanimates. This difference is due to the Ruh (spirit/pneuma). Like other animates humans are also animate, so, Ruh (pneuma) is present in human body as it is an essential component of the life, without which the maintenance of life is impossible. Ruh is produced in the heart by atmospheric air and light part of akhlat (humours). Concept of Ruh (spirit/pneuma) is mentioned in all medicine, including in religions. Unani System of Medicine (USM) has also described Ruh, its types and their genesis in different ways. Its existence as a part of external air is not denied by anyone. Unani Scholars categories Ruh into three; Ruh-e-haiwani, Ruh tabi'i and Ruh-e-nafsani (vital pneuma, natural/vegetative pneuma and psychic pneuma). In present paper general description about Ruh is giving first with especial attention on genesis of Ruh-e-nafsaniyya, as stated in Unani literature in a comprehensive way.

Methodology: The present work is of explanatory nature. For this all statement of Unani scholars and stanzas were collected from classical text. The collected material was put in systemic way and then was evaluated critically. Appropriate and befitting, commensurating with present day science, notes were given at places where need was realized to make the information more comprehensive.

Keywords: Ruh, Qi, Ruh-e-Nafsaniyya, Umur Tabi’iyya, Arwah, Unani, Pneuma

Introduction

Arwah (pneumas / spirits) are one of the Umūr Tabi’iyya (factors of the existence) of body. Ruh (pleural- arwāh) represents such constituents which the body receives from atmospheric air and without which sustenance of life cannot be imagined. Ruh has always been a figure of controversy among the scientists. This controversy has been partly due to the fact that present teacher of this subject, mostly being dogmatic and impervious to modern scientific knowledge, could not present this vital part of concept in its right perspective and partly due to the fact the word Ruh carries diverse meanings which created various misunderstanding even among the modern scientists, which eventually lead to wrong interpretations of the term Ruh actually meant in Tibb. Thus in religious books the Ruh is meant for soul. However, almost all the physician clarified that in Tibb it never meant for what it stands in the religion, besides its other meanings are of psych or power.[1, 2, 3]. Sometimes the term Ruh is used for qwawat (faculty, power) as Tabri says in his book Moaļāji-i-Buqrāṭiya, sometimes qwawat-i-haiwāniyya (vital faculty) of the qalb (heart) is called Ruh-i-haiwāniyya (vital pneuma) and qwawat-i-nafsāniyya (psychic faculty) of the dimāgh (brain) is called Ruh-i-nafsāniyya (psychic pneuma) and qwawat-i-tabī’iyya (vegetative/natural faculty) of the liver is called Ruh-i-tabī’iyya.[2, 4, 5]. In Ayurveda, Prana and vayu are described as equivalents of pneuma or the Breath of Life and Vital Force. Prana and vayu form the basis of all kinetic function in the organism. Qi is described in Chinese Medicine same as Unani concept of Ruh (pneuma) and Chinese medicine assumes Qi, as energies and essences that give life to the organism. Qi also has the same associations with the breath. The Jing, or essence, is Chinese Medicine’s equivalent of the Radical Moisture. And functionally, Shen, or the spiritual essence stored in the heart, is quite similar to what Unani Medicine calls the Ruh-e-Nafsaniyya(Vital Spirits).[6]

Definition and source of Ruh

Unani physicians have described Ruh in different ways; they also differ to a great extent in explaining its source. Some have considered it corporeal while some others immaterial. According to some physician the source of Ruh is external air while some others have denied it. Considering the view that Ruh is not the atmospheric as such; instead it is produced in the heart by atmospheric air and light part of akhlat.[4-5]. The views given by some physicians on this matter are as under:

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Galen held the view that Ruh is a part of atmospheric air which enters the lungs from air through the respiration and thence into the heart [3, 7]. From there it goes into the nervous system via the brain, where it operates as a sort of instrument for the soul in the form of a transmitter between mind and body of perceived information from the environment and the rational orders of the mind [11]. Abu Sahl Masīḥī was of the same opinion. He says, Ruh is inhaled inside through the respiration and there it undergoes some changes and gets converted into Ruh-e-Nafsāniyya (animal pneuma) [3, 9]. Ibn sina explains Ruh as it is produced by delicate and vaporous part of humours in the same way as organs are formed from dense and viscous part of humours [5, 2, 3,10]. When the blood reaches into the left ventricle of the heart and gets matured and rarified then some part of this blood turns into light gaseous part, which produces the Ruh [11, 12].

Maḥṣūsī says Ruh as a vehicle of nafs (psych). Ruh is not a body. It is something else permeated in the ventricles of the brain. Ruh is an instrument of nafs (psych) through which all sensory and voluntary movements of the body are carried out [13, 14]. The same phenomenon is also described by physiologist in the head of nerve impulse, which causes the muscle contraction, glandular secretion and produce a sensation in the brain [13].

**Functions of Ruh:** (1) Ruh produces ḥārarāt-i-gharῑziyya (innate heat) in the body. (2)Ruh produces energy in the body which keeps all the quwā (faculties) functioning and (3)Ruh keeps all the organs of the body alive [4, 7]. Ibn Rushd stated that for animals, Ruh is the approximate tool of quwā-i-mudābhirā. Death is inevitable in case of loss of Ruh [11].

**Types of Ruh:** Unani physicians have described Ruh into three categories; Ruh-i-ḥaiwānī, Ruh ṭabῑ’ῑ and Ruh-i-nafsānī. Explaining these three kinds of Ruh, Ibn Abbas Maḥṣūsī writes, Ruh ṭabῑ’ῑ (natural pneuma) is found in the Kabīd (liver) and is distributed throughout the body by veins. The existence, growth and functions of quwwat-i-ṭabῑ’ῑ are depend upon Ruh-i-ṭabῑ’ῑ. It is produced in the liver by pure blood devoid of other humours. Ruh-e-Nafsānīya (animal pneuma) is generated in the heart and reaches every part of the body through its arteries. Quwwat-i-ḥaiwānī is maintained, nourished and protected by this Ruh. It is produced in the heart by pure and clean blood and air which enters the body by inhalation [13].

**Relation between Ruh and quwā (pneuma and faculties):** Arwah are the ḥāmil (carrier/transporter) of all quwā [4]. And ḥārarāt-i-gharῑziyya (innate heat) is tool of all quwā i.e. quwwat-i-ṭabῑ’ῑya, quwwat-i-ḥaiwānīya and quwwat-i-nafsānīya [9]. The maintenance and proper functioning of quwā (faculties) depend upon the continuous supply of Ruh. Any cessation of the supply of Ruh means cessation in the functioning of quwā. Atībbā’ say the source and sustainer of life is Ruh which is the cause of vitality in the organs. It is our day to day observation that any obstruction in the respiratory tract which stops entry of air into the lungs causes sudden death of the individual. Similarly, obstruction of blood supply to any organ causes death of the organ, resulting in gangrene, hence blood is known as ḥumil-i-Ruh (carrier of pneuma). This is all due to the cessation of supply of Ruh. Ibn sina says, in the opinion of Aristotle, first of all mabda al awwal or nafs ula or ṭabῑ’at (human nature/physis) pays its attention towards Ruh, thereby all the quwā of the body are produced [3, 4].

**Ruh-i-Nafsānīya and its genesis**

Ruh-i-nafsānīya (psychic pneuma) generates into the ventricles of the branch, circulates in the body diffusing into nerves. It is produced by Ruh haiwānī which resides in the heart. When this Ruh reaches the brain, it is termed as Ruh nafsānī. This Ruh is essential for qul-i-nafsānīya (nervous functions) [13, 14]. Genesis of Ruh-i-nafsānīya has been described by various scholars. Some of the description regarding genesis of psychic pneuma are as under.

Rabbān Tabrīsī says dimāg (brain) is the centre of ḥiss wā harkat (sense and movement) and it is the palace of nafs nātīqua. It’s mizāj is bārid raḥ (cold and moist). He says the ḥārarāt-i-gharῑziyya (innate heat) ascends from heart to the brain through two vessels (which is divided into many branches) and the brain become warm and works as a tool of nafs nātīqua. Nafs nātīqua uses the a’dā’ wa hawāz (organs and senses) of the body during wakefulness and guards these senses during sleep. Dimāg does not remain always active rather it sometime sleep and sometimes remain awaken but, qalb always remains active because it’s harkat (movements) are nari (combustive) and stops only at the end of life that is death [16].

According to Galen qalb is the reservoir of Ruh and blood. The Ruh haiwānīya (spirit of the heart) has extreme heat. As it has an open passage between itself and the brain, the chill of the brain reaches to it to make it moderate and render it fit to receive quwwat-i-ḥiss, idrāk and harkat (faculty of sense, perception and movement). But when this passage suffers derangement the effect of the chill of the brain stops, and it does not remain capable of receiving the power of sensation and motion. This faculty therefore becomes nonexistent on the side that is connected with the heart, but the side nearing the brain remains unaffected, since there are many arteries in the brain all of which supply the power of heat to the brain from the heart which leads to sensation and motion [17].

Masīḥī holds that ḥārarāt-i-gharῑziyya (innate heat) is the common tool of all faculties, from which quwwat-i-nafsānīya is capable of movements, and qalb is the reservoir of the ḥārarāt-i-gharῑziyya [9, 18]. Abūl Ḥasan Mohammad Ṭabrīsī says qalb is the seat of three things Ruh, khān and ḥarῑrat-i-gharῑzīyya (pneuma, blood and innate heat) and Ruh haiwānīya (vital pneuma) is the mixture of these three [5, 19]. Masīḥī says when Ruh haiwānīya reaches the brain by two rag (two vessels, now it called carotid arteries) these vessels are further divided into many branches and makes a big jaal (network), and in this jaal, Ruh-i-haiwānīya circulates and stay for long then it gets transformed and matured as Ruh-i-nafsānīya (psychic pneuma) [9]. After transformation, Ruh-i-nafsānīya enters in all ventricles of the brain, and according to need of the body it enters into a’sāb (nerves), nukhā’ (spinal cord) and reaches ḥiss wā hirki a’dā’ (sensory and motor organs) of the body [9, 18].

Maḥṣūsī also described the genesis of Ruh nafsānīya same as Masīḥī. He says Ruh-i-nafsānīya is the Ruh which originates in ventricles of the brain. It reaches all over the body through nerves. It gets strength from quwwat-i-nafsānīya and in turn maintains and sustains the same quwā. This Ruh nafsānīya is produced by Ruh-i-haiwānīya, which is generated in the heart. Ruh-i-haiwānīya
ascends from heart to the brain through two vessels namely rag-i-subāti (carotid arteries). At the base of the brain these vessels are further divided into many branches, which form arterial network (jāl and naseēja), called shabka. In this convoluted arterial networking Ruh-e-Nafsaniyya stays longer and gets absolute nafsān (concoction), and becomes pellucid, this is called Ruḥ-i-nafsānī. This Ruḥ-i-nafsānī reaches batani-i-muqaddam (forebrain) and becomes more purified and fudūl of Ruḥ-i-nafsānīyya excreted through nostrils. From the forebrain Ruḥ-i-nafsānīyya goes to midbrain and hindbrain. In hind brain it accomplishes ḥarkat and dhikr means yaddasht (movements & memory), whereas in forebrain it accomplishes hiss and takhaivyul (sensation & imagination) and in midbrain accomplishes ḵīr (thought/worriement). Also, modern physiology substantiates this novel concept of mechanism. Likewise two internal carotid arteries and two vertebral arteries Anastomose and form circulus arteriosus / circle of Willis (then shabka) on the base of the brain. On account of rich vascularity, brain has high metabolic activity by which the constant neural activity is accomplished. Almost 15% of the cardiac output and 25% of total consumption of oxygen are utilized by brain for the accomplishment of its above described functions.

Methodology of research
The present study is literary. This study is based absolutely on explanatory, exploratory and contemplation of thought and doctrines. The method of collection of literary material was from three sources. The primary source of collection of material was from classical published books and from manuscripts and theirs translations i.e. Kamilus Sana'AH, Al Qanoon Fit Tib, Zakhiro Khawarazm Shahi, Kitab-ul-Kulliyat, Kulliyat-i-Qanoon, Kulliyat-i Nafisi, Kitab Fil Ansarir, Kitab Fil Mizaj, Chahar Maqula, Kitabul Miat, Firdausul Hikmat, Kitabul Mukhtarat Fit Tib and De Anima (Aristotle) etc. The secondary sources were from different types of available, published and unpublished forms i.e. journals, proceeding, periodicals, thesis, reports; souvenir, dissertation gazettes etc. The tertiary sources were from digitals material. These sources were available in different libraries and from where relevant material was collected. The collected material was then analyzed and systematized in comprehensive way. Finally the relevant aspects were elaborated in light of present and past knowledge. At some places explanatory notes were added as per need. The collected material was sorted out under various themes related to various aspects of Ruḥ-e-Nafsaniyya and their role in health promotion. The themes selected were (a) Conceptual understanding of Ruḥ and Ruḥ-e-Nafsaniyya (b) Applied aspects of Ruḥ-e-Nafsaniyya (c) Promotion and understanding of health through Ruḥ-e-Nafsaniyya. These themes were explained in perspective of health.

Conclusion and discussion
From the above description, it can be inferred that the Ruḥ is a gaseous substance; obtained from the inspired air and akhlāt-i-latīja (light part of humour), it helps in all the metabolic activities of the body. Ruḥ produces ēharrāt-i-gharzīyya and energy in the body which keeps all the qūwā functioning and it keeps all the organs of the body alive. Ruḥ is an instrument of nafs (psych) through which all sensory and voluntary movements of the body are carried out. Unani physicians have described concept of Ruḥ, its types, genesis of Ruḥ and specially genesis of Ruḥ-i-nafsānīyya (psychic pneuma) very scientifically and in acceptable manner. No one can pick the finger on this novel concept. Chinese medicine, Ayurveda and modern medicine also described the same phenomenon or concept of Ruḥ with different name/ terminology like the Unani system of medicine. In Ayurveda, prāna and vāya are the responsible for all kinetic function in the organism. Qi, of Chinese medicine assumes that Qi, energies and essences that give life to the organism. Qi also has the same associations with the breath and functionally, Shen, or the spiritual essence stored in the heart, is quite similar to what Unani Medicine calls the Ruḥ-e-Nafsaniyya (Vital Spirit).

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