



AYURVEDA AND HISTORY: A ROOT OF INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The science of Ayurveda, therefore, encompasses treatment of the total knowledge of the whole lifespan. Ayurvedic treatments have been documented in various treatises for many generations. The root of Ayurveda is attributed to the Atharvaveda where mention is made several diseases, causes of diseases and use of different medicines and different medicinal plants to cure diseases. The systematic development of medical science was observed between the Sixth Century B.C.E and Seventh Century C.E, the period which we may call the Samhita period, when a large number of classical works on medical systems were composed by a large number of authors and during this period there is evidence of organized medical care.

Keywords: *Veda, Disease, Medicine, Medicinal Plants, Surgery, Ayurveda*

The word Ayurveda is a combination of two Sanskrit words- 'Ayush' means life and 'Veda' means science. Accordingly, the word Ayurveda means the science of life. Health is the well-being of humors (*dosha*), agni (fire), basic tissues (*dhatu*), excretions (*mala*), body, senses, mind and soul. Ayurveda is a complete science of life as it prescribes to keep all of them healthy. Ayurveda has emerged as one of the branches of medical science as a result of many researches since ancient times. In the context of the creation or continuation of Ayurveda, it is known that, the creator Brahma composed Brahmasamhita with lakhs of verses. Later he summarized Ayurveda and wrote *Astanga Ayurveda* considering the benefits of humans. They are- *Kayacikitsa* (medicine), *Salyatantra* (major surgery), *Salakyatantra* (minor surgery), *Kaumarabhritya* (science of paediatrics), *Bhutatantra* (demonology), *Agadatantra* (toxicology), *Rasayanatantra* (Science of tonics), *Vajikarantantra* (science of aphrodisiacs). Brahma first expounded this knowledge to king Daksha. Two Asvins received this Ayurvedic education from king Daksha. Later Lord Indra obtained this knowledge from these twins. The period in which these events took place is called *Deva yuga*. This era is so ancient that no scientific history is available about it. Later the Aryans settled in the Indus Valley region and fell ill with the natural order. To solve this problem, the first sage convention was held at the foothills of the Himalayas. According to the decision of this conference, sage Bharadwaj receiving Ayurvedic education from Indra marks the auspicious beginning of Ayurveda in earth.¹ Then in the second sage convention, Punarvasu Atreya and Dhanvantari learned *kayatantra* and *salyatantra* respectively from Bharadwaj. Atreya taught Ayurveda to his six disciples, namely Agnivesa, Bhela, Jatukarna, Parasara, Ksarapani and Harita. These disciples on the basis of their own understanding of the subject composed treatises and read them before the experts. One among whom was Punarvasu Atreya himself. Dhanvantari on the other hand, educated his disciples such as Susruta, Aupadhenava,

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Aurabhra, Puskalavata, Karavirya, Gopura-Raksita and Vaitarana in surgery. These disciples of Dhanvantari also composed a Samhita each. But among them Agnivesa Samhita and Susruta Samhita are considered to be the best. Later the Agnivesa Samhita was codified and edited by Caraka and Drdhabala to become known as the Caraka Samhita. On the other hand, the original *Sausruta Tantra* was afterwards recast by the famous Buddhist chemist Nagarjuna and received the name of Susruta Samhita.ⁱⁱ

Susruta says Ayurveda is an appendage of the Atharvaveda. Most of the ideas of Ayurveda are contained in the Atharvaveda. The concept of Ayurveda is found very sparingly in the Rig-veda. Atharvaveda Samhita contains many definitions of anatomy such as heart, lungs, kidneys, trachea-bronchial tree, bladder, pancreas, urethras, liver, spleen, rectum, intestines, muscles, artery, vein, nerves, prostate gland, testicles, brain, sinew etc. Ayurveda's well-known theory of *tridoshas* i.e., air, bile and phlegm is present in Vedic literature. The three basic components of *dosha* are air, bile and phlegm which together control catabolic and anabolic chemical reactions in the body. Disturbance in any one of these three humors (*dosha*) causes disease in the body. This is called *tridosha* theory. The Vedas describe visible and invisible *krimis* scattered everywhere in water, land, sky, air which were considered to be one of the main causes of disease. The Atharvaveda Samhita also mentions that the rays of the Sun are capable of destroying many fine *krimis*. Regarding the description of diseases, there are many diseases mentioned in the Vedas such as *takman* (fever), *balasa* (asthma or bronchitis), etc. *kilasa* and *palita* (leprosy), *ksetriya* (hereditary diseases), *rajayaksha* (tuberculosis), *harima* (jaundice), *mutrarodha*, *vraha* (acne), *asthibhanga* (bone fracture), *akshiroga* (eye diseases), *trnsa* (thirst caused by some disease) etc. There are many descriptions of herbs in Vedic literature as well. Names of many herbs like *Virina*, *Pippali*, *Kushtakhya*, *Satavara*, *Varana*, *Anjana*, *Cipudru*, *Arundhati*, *Gulgulu*, *apamarga*, *Jivala*, *Prshniparni*, *rohini*, *Sarsapa* (mustard), *talasa*, *palasha*, *udumbara*, *kampila*, *Jangida*, *khadira*, *tilaka*, *udumbara*, *Virut*, *bhringraj*, *haridra*, *indravaruni*, *nili*, *aswagandha*, *patha*, *arjuna*, *alasala*, *asikni*, *nalada* etc. are notable. Preparatory episodes of Ayurveda can be found in Brahmanical literature. Satapatha Brahmana mentions the use of *nyagrodha*, *arka*, *soma*, *kusha*, *shami*, *palasha*, *aswagandha*, *udumbara* etc. as medicine. Besides, seventeen types of water are also mentioned as medicines.ⁱⁱⁱ The Chandogya Upanishad describes the creation of the animal after living in the womb for nine or ten months, or as long as necessary, in the womb covered by the uterus.^{iv}

No detailed description of surgical treatment is available in the Vedas. But in the context of discussion of two Asvins in the Rig-Veda, there are few miraculous descriptions of their surgeries. The details of the surgeries performed by the two Asvins are surprising to know that Vedic doctors even in such ancient times performed major surgeries. According to the Rig-Veda, two Asvins healed a man who had been amputated in three parts and made him able to walk.^v Once, Vispala's thigh was cut off in a war. Two Asvins made iron thighs and transplanted them to Vispala's body to make her walk able.^{vi} Many other such descriptions are found in Vedic literature. Although some of the incidents seem miraculous, there is no doubt that the progress in medical science has been made. The Brahmana, the Upanisad and the Sutra works variously refer to the medical material and point out the unbroken continuity of the ancient medical tradition.^{vii}

There are many descriptions of Ayurveda in the *Puranas*. In the Atharvaveda Samhita air, bile and phlegm are said to be the root of all diseases. The statement of *Garuda Purana* is also the same in this regard. In this *Purana*, it is said that the balance of air, bile and phlegm is called *arogya*. Their decrease-increase is called disease. This *Purana* deals seriously with the disease called fever and mentions about eight types of fever.^{viii} A combination of *tribrita*, *triphalaka*, *shyama*, *pippali* and honey is described as an infallible antipyretic medicine.^{ix} This *Purana* gives a thorough description of fever and says that due to excess of air the patient always has fever in his body. Apart from this, all the other diseases that are described are- cough, *hikka*, dysentery, vomiting, poisoned, *Rajyaksha*, leprosy, jaundice, haemorrhage, *vidradhi*, urinary disease, venereal disease etc. Herbs such as *Satavara*, *guduchi*, *aswagandha*, *khadira* wood, *karabi*, *haridra*, *gulgulu*, *kalutthu* etc. are described in detail for the destruction of diseases. Besides, the use of salt and *gomutra* as medicine is also mentioned. On the other hand, Ayurveda, *vrikshayurveda*, animal treatment, snake bite treatment etc. are discussed in *Agnipurana*. This *Purana*

acknowledges the antiquity of this scripture by discussing Ayurveda with the four Vedas. This *Purana* lays emphasis on cleanliness in daily life so that common people are not affected by diseases. There is also considerable discussion here on how the effects of different seasons control human disease. What amount of food intake is required for proper digestion; how the effects of air, bile and phlegm affect the human nature, the number of bones in the human body, the identification of various diseases and various medicinal plants to combat them are available in detail. Besides, several details about animal treatment are also available in it. Another notable *Purana*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* also details the creation of Ayurvedic scriptures. It is said that Prajapati Brahma created Ayurveda as the fifth Veda after creating the four Vedas. In this *Purana* also *Tridosha* is recognized as the cause of diseases. *Padma Purana* and *Matsya Purana* discuss Ayurvedic treatment, hygiene, environmental pollution, diseases and their cure etc. Apart from this, the rules of conduct of pregnant women, the science of anatomy, fetal development, various diseases etc. have been discussed. The *Puranas* also give instructions on what to eat to keep the body healthy. From the *Puranas* we can get a picture of the indigenous medical ideas prevalent in the society. Here are basically the ways to stay healthy by using herbal medicine. Although it is a religious literature, *Puranas* have discussed in detail about human health, diseases, symptoms and cures. A healthy body and long life is the eternal dream of people. Almost everywhere in the ancient literature of India there is evidence of the unrelenting efforts of people in this regard.

Now we will discuss the period when the systematic development of Ayurveda took place. Several names associated with the development of Ayurveda during this period are prominent among them Agnivesa. He is a legendary sage, reputedly one of the earliest authors on Ayurveda. He was also considered to be the most intelligent and best disciple among the six disciples of Punarvasu Atreya. He composed an Ayurvedic treatise which was named after him and called Agnivesa Tantra, which forms the base of the Caraka Samhita and which is the oldest and most authentic treatise of Ayurveda. Agnivesa is believed to have flourished in the seventh Century B.C.E. Agnivesa Tantra was later scoured and recast by Caraka and named Caraka Samhita. Later it became well known in this form. The work has undergone a further revision by one Drdhabala: at least the last seventeenth chapters devoted to *Chikitsa* and the whole *Kalpa* and *Siddha Sthanas* have been re-written by Drdhabala as stated in the colophon of each chapter.

Caraka was a key contributor to Ayurveda's ancient art and science, medicine and lifestyle philosophy that was developed in ancient India. Caraka's emergence date is uncertain. Panini's Astadhyayi Sutra mentions a person named Caraka. From this many historians have speculated that Caraka was probably a man of the 4th Century B.C.E. But the Chinese Buddhist chronicles described Caraka as the family physician of the Indo-Scythian king Kaniska who reigned about the first Century C.E. Caraka was the main initiator of the medical treatise introduced by Atreya. His composition '*Caraka Samhita*' is essentially an expanded and revised version of '*Agnivesa-tantra*'. '*Caraka Samhita*' is still the most informative treatise in terms of medicine. It is divided in to eight sections or *ashtanga sthanas*- i. *Sutra*, ii. *Nidana*, iii. *Vimana*, iv. *Sarira*, v. *Indriya*, vi. *Chikitsa*, vii. *Kalpa* and viii. *Siddha*. Each section comprised many chapters. The total number of chapters in *Caraka Samhita* is 120. Ayurvedic symptoms and needs, descriptions of physical and mental weakness and causes of various diseases, pharmacology, food, dietetics, curing methods, physiology, physicians and quacks are discussed in the *sutrasthana*. *Nidanasthana* includes descriptions of the disease's differentiation, stages and symptoms and eight main diseases. *Vimanasthana* has been described about the effectiveness of *amla rasa* and their role in the root of various diseases, nourishment, general pathology and medical studies. Anatomy and embryology is described in *sarirasthana*. The role of the senses in the pathogenesis of disease is described in detail in *Indriyasthana*. The most important part of the *Caraka Samhita* is the *Chikitsasthana* which deals with special therapy. This section discusses the causes of various diseases and their remedies. Treatment methods for many chronic diseases like- tuberculosis, skin diseases, cancer etc. are described in this section. In the *Kalpasthan* there are descriptions of *dravyaguna* and preparation of medicine from various plants. In the *Siddhashthana*, the ways of recovery from various diseases and the method of taking medicine have been discussed.^x All that is required for attaining a healthy long life is discussed in the *Caraka Samhita*. According to Caraka, the root of all diseases is the influence or humors of air, bile and phlegm. This is called *tridosha* theory. It is possible to maintain health only if balance is maintained

between these three types of humors. Modern *Ayurvedacharyas* also believe this theory. Besides, in Caraka's treatise on medicine, the theory that air, bile and phlegm are the three primary elements of the human body and the harmonious presence of these three elements ensures good health is also established in medical system. In one word, the Caraka Samhita is a comprehensive treatise on various aspects of medicine, including aetiology, diagnosis, treatment and ethical considerations. It covers a wide range of topics, including anatomy, physiology, herbal medicine and the use of minerals and metals in medicine.

Susruta's treatise is also famous in Ayurveda like Caraka's treatise. Susruta Samhita is more scientific than Caraka Samhita. There are many differences of opinion among historians about the time of appearance of Susruta like Caraka. Evidence of Susruta is found in the Mahabharata. According to the Mahabharata, Susruta was the son of sage Viswamitra and learned the science of medicine from the king of Kasi, Divodasa, surnamed Dhanvantari at his Himalayan retreat. After completing his education, he composed a treatise on *Salyayurveda* called Susruta Samhita. On the other hand, due to the peculiar consistency of the language of the Bower manuscript with Susruta's style of writing, Macdonell suggests that Susruta was born before the 4th Century C.E.^{xi} According to Lietard and Max Neuberger, Susruta must have lived somewhere between the 1st century C.E. and 10th century C.E.^{xii} Girindranath Mukhopadhyaya believed that Susruta should have lived at about 1000 B.C.E.^{xiii} Hessler also thinks so.^{xiv} Susruta was a surgeon. Surgery is the main subject of his discussion. One of the characteristics of surgery is the use of various necessary instruments. Susruta mentions various types of instruments. A glimpse of the skill of Hindu surgeons in various types of complicated and difficult surgeries can be seen from the instruments mentioned in *Susruta Samhita*. Susruta is called the father of plastic surgery all over the world. He prescribed the first caesarean section. He was highly skilled in surgically removing bladder stones, treating broken bones and treating cataracts.

Susruta Samhita is basically a surgical treatise. It is divided into six *sthanas* or sections, namely- i. *Sutra*, ii. *Nidana*, iii. *Sarira*, iv. *Chikitsa*, v. *Kalpa*, and vi. *Uttara*. There was no *Uttar sthana* in the ancient texts. Later *Uttarasthan* was added. It is believed that later Nagarjuna re-edited the treatise and the last section of the treatise *Uttarasthan* was completely written by him. The *Sutrasthan* deals with basic general questions like the origin and division of medicine, training of physicians, theory of therapeutic substances, surgical instruments, alkalis and *dravyaguna*. Diagnoses of significant diseases are discussed in *Nidanasthan*. *Sarirasthan* deals with the structure and function of the body as well as anatomy, embryology and physiology. In the *Chikitsasthan* mainly surgical procedures, *vajikarana*, *panchakarma* and *rasayana* are discussed. Discussions about poison as well as *agadatantric* discussions have been held in *Kalpasthan*. In the *Uttarasthan* the theories related to *salakyatantra*, *kaumara-vidya*, and *kayachikitsa* are discussed. In this Samhita nasal repair or the rhinoplasty has been described in greater detail. Lastly labioplasty too has received his attention. Like Charaka, Susruta's fame spread to Kamboja in the east and Arabia in the west during the 9th to 10th Centuries C.E.

A prominent figure of the Atreya sect, Vagbhata is the author of three Ayurvedic texts. They are Astanga Samgraha, Astanga Hridaya and Rasaratnasamuccaya. Hoernle and other scholars admit the existence of three Vagbhatas. They identify the author of the Astanga Samgraha as the first Vagbhata or the elder Vagbhata; the author of the Astanga Hridaya as the second Vagbhata and the author of the Rasaratnasamuccaya as the third Vagbhata. But Gananath Sen considers the author of Astanga Samgraha and Astanga Hridaya to be the same person. According to him the author of the Rasaratnasamuccaya is a separate person.^{xv} Whatever, Astanga Samgraha is divided into six *sthanas* or sections, namely *Sutrasthan*, *Sarirasthan*, *Nidanasthan*, *Chikitsasthan*, *Kalpasthan* and *Uttarasthan*. It covers all the eight medical disciplines of Ayurveda. The language of the treatise is simple and prose. He wanted to present the incomprehensible facts of Ayurveda more simply to the people. Both medicine and surgery are discussed in Astanga Samgraha. But Astanga Hridaya mainly deals with surgery and analgesia. These two texts give an idea of the development of medicine in the period after Caraka and Susruta.

Elder Vagbhata, the author of the Astanga Samgraha, was born in a Brahmin family but converted to Buddhism during his career. The date of the elder Vagbhata has been recognised as seventh Century C.E.

although there is considerable disagreement about this date. Both Vedic and Buddhist ideas co-exist in his works. He researched and discovered the uses and properties of various herbs. He also researched in surgery. He describes the diseases of the private parts in two chapters and separately describes the diseases of gynaecology and sexual diseases of men. The medicinal uses of poison are first found in this treatise.

There is another important work called *Astanga Hridaya* which was authored by Vagbhata II. The speciality of this treatise is the combination of surgery with *Kayachikitsa* and it is written entirely in verse. It is natural that the *Astanga Hridaya* was composed in the early part of the seventh Century. It is currently the most popular Ayurvedic texts in south India. It contains such a beautiful presentation of the theoretical and practical knowledge of medicine that one can gain the etymology of medical science by studying this book alone without reviewing other treatises. In addition, the use of many new herbs is included in this chapter of the treatise. In a word, *Astanga Hridaya* is an up-to-date scientific medical treatise. More modern scientific developments are seen in discussions of disease aetiology and treatment.

It was composed by Bhela, one of the six disciples of Punarvasu Atreya. It was earlier popular in the south. It is a medical treatise that primarily deals with internal medicine (*Kayachikitsa*). The list of internal and external organs described in this Samhita is slightly different from that of Caraka Samhita and it also deals with other concepts of anatomy. For example, descriptions of eight types of sweat, descriptions of twenty types of worms or parasites, wide range of the causes of the physical disorders etc. This Samhita also describes many drug formulae and therapeutic rules. *Harita Samhita* is another text based on Ayurveda authored by Harita. Like Bhela, Harita was one of the six disciples of Punarvasu Atreya. However, the exact period of the author could not be determined. This medical treatise is not available now; but a more modern compilation has been printed in Calcutta as the original treatise. Other disciples of Punarvasu Atreya such as Jatukarna, Ksarapani, Parasara wrote a treatise on general medicine. But they are no longer available now.

Of lesser cognition than Caraka, Susruta and Vagbhata, but no less worthy of attention to the student of Ayurvedic medicine are Madhavakara, Cakradatta and Sarngadhara. Madhavakara (8th Century C.E) wrote the famous medical treatise *Madhava Nidana* which deals with aetiology, diagnosis, pathology, prognosis of diseases etc. Madhavakara has presented a wonderful stream of medical science through his wonderful presentation and introduction to scientific phases. In the book first the symptoms of the disease and then the treatment are written.

Cakrapanidatta's name is memorable among brilliant commentator of Caraka Samhita. He belongs to the middle of the 11th century C.E. His commentary on Caraka Samhita is titled *Ayurveda Deepika*. He also composed 'Bhanumati' on Susruta Samhita, the '*Cakradatta Samhita*' for the benefit of physicians and the *Dravyagunasamgraha* on *materia medica*. Cakrapanidatta was the first pioneer of the epoch-making creation made possible by the combination of *Rasatantra* and herbal medicine. A scientific form of Ayurveda can be found in his collection of *Cakradatta Samhita* and *Dravyagunasamgraha*.

Vangasena is believed to have appeared in the 12th Century C.E. He is believed to have been a contemporary of Lakshmana Sena. His '*Cikitsasarasamgraha*' is a notable Ayurvedic treatise. General discussion on pathology, duty of physician, diseases and their treatment, pharmacology, diagnosis and prognosis are described in detail by him. His work has a separate discussion of haemorrhoids and its treatment. *Sarngadhara Samhita* composed by Sarngadhara, a medicinal treatise who flourished in the 13th Century C.E. Its composition is very comprehensive; the subject section is beautiful and distinguished. It contains a number of useful prescriptions and is very popular among practitioners all over the country for its technical terms. Quality of medicinal stuffs, effect of seasons, diagnosis and prognosis, anatomy and physiology, embryology, decoctions, broths, electuaries, oxides of gold and other metals and preparations of quicksilver etc. are described in detail by him.

Side by side with the systematic development of medicines in ancient India, there were many hospitals and dispensaries built all over India for the purpose of providing health services. During Buddhist period,

Lord Buddha was considered the greatest *bhisaka* in the world. He not only showed the spiritual path, but also traced the glorious path to the all-round development of human life, in action and healing- a life rich in all aspects. During this period Buddhist monasteries played a very important role as centres of Ayurvedic treatment. Buddha's contemporaries Kasyapa and Jivaka were both skilful children's doctor. The formulae quoted from Kasyapa in the *Navanitaka* refer to children's diseases. Jivaka was a famous physician-in-ordinary to king Bimbisara. He was a master of the *Kaumarabhrtya* science that means he was a skilful physician in paediatrics. Jivaka learned the science of medicine from Atreya at Taksasila. He gained immense popularity by curing many difficult diseases. Once he cured the *Setthi's* wife who had been suffering for seven years from a disease in the head. On reaching Rajagriha, he relieved the Magadha king Bimbisara of fistula. Later he also performed a cranial operation on a *Setthi* at Rajagriha. More later Jivaka also performed a laparotomy on a *Setthi's* son at Benares. He also cured king Paggota of jaundice. Thus he earned a lot of popularity and money. In third century B.C.E. Mauryan king Asoka established hospitals for men and animals. Mahavagga, a Buddhist text of the fourth century B.C.E gives detailed information about *tridosha*, nasal remedy, eye ointment, fomentations, different kinds of salt, gargling, myrobalan etc. An imbalance of air, bile and phlegm which is explained in the Caraka Samhita and Susruta Samhita as the root cause of disease is mentioned in the Mahavagga.^{xvi} But even before Asoka's time evidence of organized medical care was seen in Caraka Samhita. Various descriptions are found about the location, building, personnel, amenities of hospital, a maternity home and a pharmacy etc.

Conclusion

Ancient Indians practiced physical science. Their goal was the science of healing and prolonging life through this science. This is known as Ayurveda. The science of healing reached its highest level during the reign of Emperor Asoka. During this time, Indian traditional medicine spread to other countries as well. For Indians, man is a spiritual being. The best ideas of Indian thought, ideals of creation of great life for people, their history, science, philosophy and medicine have attracted the attention of the world. The vow of an ancient Indian physician was to save human life, not worldly gain or external procession. Physicians in this country prayed for divine grace and strength before seeing their patients and before operating. A prominent gift of ancient India is scientific medicine. India has shown the path of progress in modern medicine by determining the structure and various functions of the body. The diagnosis of medical system in the Aryan civilization is of particular importance to historians. Various historical facts of medicine have been collected from these treatises. Their scientific value is undeniable even today. It is certain that the ancient Indian physicians were not particularly aware of modern machinery. They could not keep proper documentation. But their metaphysical ideas are so strong and realistic that we cannot deny that ancient view even today.

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