

Ayurveda: Origin and Expansion

Jaya Verma

Department of History, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar College, University of Delhi

Email Id: jayarajivverma@hotmail.com

Abstract: Ayurveda consists of two terms ayus i.e. jivita or life and veda i.e. knowledge or science, meaning Science of life. According to the Charaka Samhita, ayus comprises sukha [happiness], dukha [sorrow], hita [good] and ahita [bad]. According to tradition and Charaka and Susruta Samhitas, Ayurveda is of divine origin from Brahma who later on communicated this knowledge to the Asvins and from Asvin brothers it was passed over to Indra. Later on it was passed over to Bharadvaja and Dhanavantri, who were responsible for the two streams i.e. medicine and surgery respectively.

Historically, pre-Indus and Indus sites testify to rudimentary ideas about medical and surgical practices. From Vedic period we get the ideas about the three basic constituents of living organisms i.e. vayu, pitta and kapha and association of gods with medical treatment. From Atharva-Veda, we not only get the information about curing of disease and the attainment of a long life but also about anatomical and physiological ideas. However, Ayurveda does not find mention in Vedic literature. The Mahabharata first refers to Ayurveda. The Charaka and Susruta Samhitas are the main works which throw ample light on the development of medicine and surgery in Ancient India. Ayurveda expanded from India to Iran, Hellenistic countries and Mesopotamia, Central Asia, Indonesia, Cambodia etc.

In this background, in this paper an attempt will be made to review the earlier sources i.e. both literary and archaeological throwing lights on origin and expansion of the Ayurveda and its expansion outside India.

Keywords: Ayus, Charaka, Susruta, Brahma, Dhanavantri, Atharva-Veda, Mahabharata, Iran, Greece, Mesopotamia, Central Asia, Indonesia, Cambodia.

Ayurveda is a traditional system of medicine dealing with knowledge of life with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent. It consists of ayus i.e. jivita or life and veda i.e. knowledge or science, thereby meaning science of life. According to the Charaka Samhita, ayus comprises sukha [happiness], dukha [sorrow], hita [good], and ahita [bad]. Its ultimate aim is not only a life of happiness free from diseases but the prolongation of life itself. The Ayurveda covers relationship between matter and life, biological theories, body, life and soul, physiological

and pathological theories, rules of health and longevity, diseases, their diagnosis and treatment and ethics.

The main classical Ayurveda treatises begin with legendary accounts of the transmission of medical knowledge from the Gods to sages i.e. from Brahma to the Asvins and finally to Indra., and thence to human physicians i.e. Bhardvaja and Dhanvantari who were responsible for the two streams of Ayurveda i.e. medicine and surgery. Sushruta Samhita narrates how Dhanvantari, "greatest of the mighty celestial," incarnated himself as Divodāsa, a mythical king of Varanasi, who then taught medicine to a group of wise physicians, including Sushruta himself.

H. D. Sankalia asserts that Ayurveda originated in prehistoric times and surgical activities are inferred from trephined human skulls and curved knives from two pre-Indus sites, viz. Burzahom in Kashmir and Kalibangan in Rajasthan.. J. Fillozat in his work, *The Classical Doctrine of Indian Medicine-Its Origins and Its Greek Parallels*, trans. Dev Raj Chanana, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1964 asserts that some of the concepts of Ayurveda have existed from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization. The excavations at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa comprise sanitary measures and medicinal substances consisting of stag-horn, cult-fish bone etc. Ayurveda developed significantly during the Vedic period and later some of the non-Vedic systems such as Buddhism and Jainism also developed medical concepts and practices that appear in the classical Ayurveda treatises.

The origins of Ayurveda have been traced back to around 5,000 BC when they originated as an oral tradition. The first recorded forms of Ayurveda as medical texts evolved from the Vedas. Ayurveda is a discipline of the upaveda or "auxiliary knowledge" in Vedic tradition. The origins of Ayurveda are also found in Atharvaveda which contains 114 hymns and incantations described as magical cures for disease.

During Vedic period some concepts and theories developed relating to cosmo-physiological speculations about the three basic constituents of living organisms, viz. vayu, pitta and kapha, ideas about etiology of diseases i.e. pathological conditions and abnormal conditions [theory of dosas] and belief in the association of medical treatment with god-physicians such as Brahma, Indra, Rudra, Surya, Agni and the two Asvins. There are three principal early texts on Ayurveda include the Charaka Samhita, the Sushruta Samhita and the Bhela Samhita. The

Sushruta Samhita is based on an original from the 6th century BCE, and was updated by the Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna in the 2nd century CE. The Charaka Samhita, written by Charaka and the Bhela Samhita, attributed to Atreya Punarvasu are also dated to the 6th century BCE. The Charaka Samhita was also updated by Dridhabala during the early centuries of the Christian Era.

The Atharva Veda contains a description of diseases and the cure of them. As an example, we might cite the ancient view of the disease consumption. Yogapanishad refers to anatomical and other knowledge. References to drugs, diseases and health care are to be found in the epics. Thus we see in the Ramayana, that expert physicians attended on kings and they were capable of preserving dead bodies. In the Mahabharatha there are references to surgeons attending on the wounded and the disabled with all the appliances and equipments in the battle field.

The Samhita written by Agnivesa has survived to this day and has been made available to the world by Caraka, a redactor. The work has undergone a further revision by one Dridabala. Caraka Samhita is the record of teaching by Atreya Punarvasu to his students and Agnivesa was one of them. Caraka is believed to have flourished in the sixth century B.C. Caraka Samhita is a complete compendium of medical information, dealing with medical aspects, as etiology, symptomatology, treatment and medical care in health and in disease.

Susruta Samhita

This work deals with surgical diseases, and diseases of the special organs such as the eye, ear etc. Just as by tradition Caraka Samhita is ascribed to Atreya Punarvasu. Susruta Samhita is ascribed to Dhanvantari. Susruta has recorded the precepts of this puranic personage Dhanvantari, just as Agnivesa has recorded those of Atreya Punarvasu. It is generally believed that Susruta lived sometime around 600 B.C. Susruta Samhita could have undergone several revisions, the last of which was attributed to Nagarjuna.

Astanga Samgraha

Vagbhata [Second century A.D] has summarized both Caraka and Susruta and brought both medical and surgical diseases within the compass of a single treatise. He divided his work into

eight parts (Astanga), and called it as such. The eight parts are general medicines, pediatrics, mental diseases of special sense organs, surgery, toxicology, gerontology and aphrodisiac.

Astanga Hridaya

It is written entirely in verse and its author also bears the name Vagbhata. The opinion is held by many that, both Astanga Samgraha and Astanga Hridaya are the work of one and the same person. The method of presentation the classification of the subject under various chapter and even many of the Slokas are so strikingly similar in both works, that this view may be correct. Bhela Samita was probably written by a contemporary of Agnivesa. It is modeled on the pattern of Agnivesa Samhita. Harita Samhita, which is claimed to have been written by one Harita, another contemporary of Agnivesa.

Nidana by Madhavakara (8th Century A.D.) deals with etiology, diagnosis, pathology and prognosis of diseases. Bhavaprakasa of Bhavamisra [10th to the 16th Century A.D.] refers to various new diseases and drugs. He is the first author to refer to the disease, 'Phirangaroga' which was evidently the contemporary name of syphilis. The word 'Phiranga' denotes Europeans in general and the Portuguese in particular, in many of the Indian languages.

Expansion

Concepts and Theories of Ayurveda have expanded beyond India in the lands of Iran, Hellenic countries and Mesopotamia. The Indus Valley Civilization, ancient Chinese, Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilizations had several similarities. The Fundamental attitude to the relationship of man and nature was similar in these Civilizations and their approach to health was holistic, but their explanations of the human body, physiology, pathology and therapy were different.

Ayurveda also influenced the Greek Medicine as prescribed in Hippocratic manuals. Nevertheless, some Greek ideas may have been incorporated in Ayurveda. Similarity between Ayurveda and Greek Medicine

- Importance of wind and fluid circulation in nervous system;
- Anatomy and physiology of fetus from the moment of conception;
- Circulation of the mother's vital breath through the embryo;
- Concept of humoral origin of diseases;

- Medical treatment of eye diseases of elephants influenced by Hastyaurveda of Palakapya;
- Use of drugs like dry pippali [long pepper] as a cure of eye diseases.
- Theory of Macrocosm and Microcosm;
- Concept of Four elements- fire, air, water and earth;
- Four Qualities- hot, dry, wet and cold;
- Four humors-yellow bile, blood, phlegm and black bile.

Some Ayurvedic texts were translated into Arabic and from Arabic into Persian by Abdulla-bin-Ali, Manka and Ibun-Dhan and Ali ibn Zain.

- Susruta Samhita was translated as Kitab-Samural-hind-i or Kitab-E-Sushru;.
- Charaka Samhita was translated as Sharaka;
- Astangahridaya was translated as Astankar;
- Madhava's Nidana was translated as Badan;
- Siddhayoga was translated as Sindhashtaq.

About 75%-80% of the population of Nepal use Ayurveda, and it is the most practiced form of medicine in the country. The Sri Lankan tradition of Ayurveda is similar to the Indian tradition. Practitioners of Ayurveda in Sri Lanka refer to Sanskrit texts which are common to both countries. However, they do differ in some aspects, particularly in the herbs used.

According to the Mahavamsa, King Pandukabhaya of Sri Lanka (reigned 437 BCE to 367 BCE) had built Ayurvedic hospitals (Sivikasotthi-Sala) various parts of the country. According to R.C. Majumdar, there is evidence of the spread of Ayurvedic concepts and texts in Iran, Central Asia, Tibet, Indo-China, Indonesia and Cambodia. Evidence of influence of Ayurveda is found in the works of pioneers in the works of Hippocrates, Avicenna [Canon of Medicine], Galen and Osler.

In the end we can say that in the field of medicine whereas the Western mind and philosophy seem more restrictive, reductive, quantitative, calculative and analytical, the Indian mind and philosophy seem more open, inclusive, holistic, qualitative, creative and intuitive in approach.

References

- A.F.R. Hoernle, *Studies in the Medicine of Ancient India*, Pt. I, Oxford, 1970.
- Ācārya, Yādava Trivikramātmaja, ed. (1945). "Sūtrasthāna 1.7-9". *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, Bombay: Nirṇayasāgara Press.
- Alam, Zulfeeqar (2008). *Herbal Medicines*. New Delhi, India: A.P.H. Publishing.
- Anil Kumar Mehta; Naveen K. Gupta; R. N. Sharma (2002). *Health & Harmony Through Ayurveda*. B. Jain Publishers.
- Basham, A. L. (1976). "The Practice of Medicine in Ancient and Medieval India". In Leslie, Charles. *Asian Medical Systems*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bhishagratna, Kaviraj Kunjalal (1907). *An English Translation of the Sushruta Samhita Based on Original Sanskrit text*, Calcutta: K. K. Bhishagratn.
- Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad, (1991). *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India: Formation of the theoretical fundamentals of natural science*.
- Comba, Antonella (2001). "Carakasamhitā, Śārīrasthāna~I and Vaiśeṣika Philosophy". In Meulenbeld, G. Jan; Wujastyk, Dominik. *Studies on Indian Medical History*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Clifford, Terry (2003). *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry*. 42. Motilal Banarsidass Publications.
- Dasgupta, S.N., *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.II, Cambridge, 1952.
- Filliozat, J., *The Classical Doctrine of Indian Medicine-Its Origins and Its Greek Prallels*, trans. Dev Raj Chanana, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1964.
- Frawley, David; Ranade, Subhash (2001). *Ayurveda, Nature's Medicine*, Lotus Press.
- Jolly, J., *Indian Medicine*, trans. C.G. Kashikar, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1977.
- Kutumbia, P., *Ancient Indian Medicine*, Orient Longman, 1962.
- Leslie, Charles, ed. (1976). *Asian Medical Systems*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Majumdar, R.C., *Medicine, A Concise History of Science in India*, Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, 1971.
- Mishra, L.; Singh, B. B.; Dagenais, S. (2001). "Healthcare and disease management in Ayurveda". *Alternative therapies in health and medicine*.
- Mukhopadhyaya, G.N., *History of Indian Medicine*, Vol. I, Calcutta University.
- Pankaj Gupta; Vijay Kumar Sharma; Sushma Sharma (2014). *Healing Traditions of the Northwestern Himalayas*, Springer.

- “Research in Ayurveda-About CCRAS”, Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha, Department of Ayush, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2014.
- Robert E Svoboda (2000). Ayurveda: Life, Health and Longevity. Penguin UK. p. 58.
- Sankalia, H.D., Some Aspects of Pre-Historic Technology in India, Indian Natyional Science Academy, 1970.
- Sen Gananath, Ayurveda Parichaya, Vishwabharti Granthalaya, 1944.
- Sharma, Priya Vrat (1999). Suśruta-Samhitā With English Translation of text,. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Visvabharati.
- Sharma, Shiv (1975). Ayurvedic Medicine: Past and Present. Calcutta: Dabur (Dr. S. K. Burman).
- Upinder Singh (2008), AHistory of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century, Pearson.
- V.W. Karambelkar, The Atharva-Veda and the Ayurveda, Nagpue, 1961.
- Wujastyk, Dominik (2003). The Roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings (3 ed.). London etc.: Penguin Books.
- Zimmer, Hindu Medicine, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1948.
- Zysk, Kenneth G. (1999). "Mythology and the Brāhmaṇization of Indian medicine: Transforming Heterodoxy into Orthodoxy". In Josephson, Folke. Categorisation and Interpretation. Meijerbergs institut för svensk etymologisk forskning, Göteborgs universitet.
- Zysk, Kenneth G. (2010). Medicine in the {Veda}: Religious Healing in the {Veda} with Translations and Annotations of Medical Hymns from the {Rigveda and the Atharvaveda} and Renderings from the Corresponding Ritual Texts. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.