



## A HISTORICAL APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING AYURVEDA

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### ABSTRACT

*Ayurveda* is the traditional system of Indian medicine and being historical, linguistic, religious, philosophical importance of *Ayurveda*, it is very necessary to do critical study of *Ayurveda* according to ancient India's history, *Prakrita*, *Pali* (*Magdhi*), *Ardhamagdhi* languages, religious and philosophical point of view. It is prejudice to compare *Ayurveda* with the modern science. First, we should try to know what is *Ayurveda*? It is considered as science of life but what is the meaning of science according to Indian philosophy? *Ayurveda* is considered as the philosophy as well as clinical science also. The two main distinctions of Indian philosophy – the believer (i.e. *Sankhya*, *Yog*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Purva Mimansa*, *Uttar Mimansa*) and the atheist (i.e. *Charvaka*, *Jain* and *Baudha*) philosophy. Unless and until we have the deep knowledge of Indian philosophical sciences i.e. *Darshan Shastras* (*Aastika* and *Naastika*), we won't be able to understand *Ayurveda* properly. Therefore, it is the need of time to do critical study of *Darshan Shastras* (*Aastika* and *Naastika*) and it is to be noted that with the help of *Sanskrita* language alone we won't be able to achieve our goal; it is very much important to have the knowledge of languages such as *Prakrit*, *Pali* which is also known as *Magadhi* and *Ardhamagdhi*, then only we could be able to understand the proper meanings of *Darshan Shastras* (*Aastika* and *Naastika*); Buddhist literature is available in the *Pali* language which is also known as *Magdhi*; it was the dialect of ancient north India, and *Ardhamagdhi* is the language in which Jain literature is available. This research paper is an attempt to review the *Ayurveda* literature regarding historical facts and what are the means so that we could be able to understand *Ayurveda* appropriately.

**KEYWORDS:** *Atharva-Veda*, *Ayurveda*, Buddhist, *Darshan Shastra*, Upanishad, *Veda*.

### INTRODUCTION

We are living in the era of developed science and technology. "The impact of science has been particularly strong on traditional religious beliefs. Many basic religious concepts are crumbling under the pressure of modern science and are no longer acceptable to the intellectual and the well informed man. It is no longer possible to assert truth derived merely through theological speculations or based on the authority of religious scriptures in isolation to scientific consideration."<sup>1</sup>

There are different views among *Ayurveda* scholars regarding historical aspect of *Ayurveda* and those are contradictory to each other, creating confusion which is given below in details.

Dr. M.S. Valiathan has said that, "From the internal evidence in the *Samhita*, *Caraka* seems to have lived in northwest India in the post –Buddhist period and adored the Himalayas. Nowhere does *Caraka* appear as a passive borrower of ideas, and in this case whatever was borrowed, underwent a transformation in his mind. *Caraka* was not averse to accepting ideas from Buddhist philosophy despite its denial of *Vedic* authority."<sup>2</sup> And Das Gupta said that, "*Caraka's* extensive treatment of logical categories in relation to *Ayurvedic* debate antedated the *Nyaya Sutras*, which were codified later. He believed that *Caraka* took the logical portion of the *Samhita* from earlier non – medical literature and grafted them into his work."<sup>3</sup>

But Dr.R.K. Sharma and Dr. Bhagwan Dash totally denied any Buddhist influence on the *Charak Samhita* without providing any archeological, historical, literary proof. They said that, "Neither the text nor any external

evidence provides any precise data about the time of *Caraka*. Absence of any Buddhist influence, maintenance of a *Brahminic* style and the nature of the exposition are indicative of the pre- Buddhist origin of his work. It is likely that *Caraka*, the redactor of the work, flourished in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. His place of residence is not known. As the very name *Caraka* indicates, he travelled from place to place preaching the science of medicine."<sup>4</sup>

And also said that, "In the Chinese translation of Buddhist Tripitaka, there is the mention of a physician by name Tehe-lokia, (that is *Caraka* in Sanskrit) who was in the court of the King Kanishka (100 A.D.) It will be seen from the above that the name *Caraka* is associated with vedic, post-vedic and even pre-vedic entities. This is either their personal name or the name of the clan or school to which they belong. The propagator of the science of medicine and the redactor of the *Caraka-samhita* appears to be different from them. And "the *Agnives'a samhita* was perhaps written around 1000B.C. This is further substantiated by the composition which resembles that of *Satapatha Brahmana* written almost at the same time. The description of *Vedic* gods and rituals, and absence of the name of Lord Buddha or his philosophical doctrine (except some indirect references), description of places *Loke Kampilya* and *Pancala*, institutions of the systems of seminar for debate on specific topics and absence of the names of week days further substantiate this view."<sup>5</sup> It seems that both the authors have made up their minds to prove that the *Charaka Samhita* and its original work the *Agnives'a samhita* were existed in the pre- Buddhist era.

It is said that, "It is impossible to understand any religious movement unless we approach it in a spirit of humility and reverence, which is the hallmark of all great scholars and pioneers of learning."<sup>6</sup>

"The *Charakasamhita* by *Agnivesh*, the *Sushrutsamhita* by *Sushrut* and the *Ashtanghrudaya* by *Vagbhata* are recognized as *Bruhatrayi* or the 'Great Trio.'<sup>7</sup>

Prof.K.R. Srikantha Murthy said that, "*Astanga hrdaya*-quintessence of the eight branches (of Ayurveda) is one of the authoritative treatises on ancient Indian medicine. It had attracted the attention of medical men not only within this country but also of neighbouring countries such as Arabia, Persia, Tibet and Germany."<sup>8</sup> And regarding the religion of *Acharya Vagbhata*, further said that, "The religion to which *Vagbhata* belonged is another subject of discussion. One set of scholars argue that *Vagbhata* was a Brahmin following the *Vedic* tradition. The basis for such a view are mention of *Ayurveda* as an *Upveda* of *Atharaveda*, performance of propitiatory and magical rites according to *Atharaveda*, advice for worship of gods- *Siva*, *Sivasuta*. *Hara*, *Hari* and other divine beings, the cow, the *Brahmana* etc. description of *Sishopanayana* ceremony, advise not to enter a *Caitya* (Buddhist shrine), not forbidding of meat and alcohol in daily use – all these and many more such are enough to accept him as Brahmin. Another set of scholars argue that *Vagbhata* was a Buddhist as can be decided on the following points- the Buddha is specifically named in the invocatory verse of *Astanga sangraha* and indirectly in that of *Astanga hrdaya*; *Avalokita* the preceptor was a renowned Buddhist scholar, mention of names of *Arya Tara*, *Parnashabari*, *Jina*, *Jinasuta*, *Samyaksambuddha*, *Baishajyaguru*, etc. are all definitely of Buddhist religion, advice to recite the invocatory hymn before consuming the medicine, advice to follow the *Madhyama marga*- middle mean – in all the activities, advice to avoid the ten kinds of sinful acts, mention of four kinds of death, *Mayuri*, and *Maha-mayuri vidya* (sorcery rites) and many more."<sup>9</sup>

Dr. P.Srinivas Rao said that, "*Ayurvedic* historians are making constant efforts to find out who and when was this *Vagbhata*? What was his religion, which country he belongs his other books; the real solution perhaps, will await more evidence from external sources in future."<sup>10</sup>

It is surprising to know about the type of historian i.e. *Ayurvedic* historians who are making to find out who and when was this *Vagbhata*? And the reason is not clearly mentioned by the author, Dr. P.Srinivas Rao that, why to await more evidence from external sources in future. Why not internal sources? It shows that some link is missing which is necessary to find out and it would be possible only with the help of real historians and not by *Ayurvedic* historians. It is most important to weed out unnecessary teaching materials like History of Ayurveda books written by the Ayurveda Scholars and also the philosophical books i.e. *Darshan Shastras books (Aastika and Naastika)* written by the Ayurveda Scholars immediately. And those books should be recognized as unauthenticated. It is very sad and nervous that, instead of an authenticated historian, how Ayurveda Scholars can dare to write such books? They are propagating false knowledge. The same issue is with the philosophical books, instead of an authenticated

philosopher like Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Swami Vivekananda, Pandit Rahul Sankrutayan, how *Ayurveda* Scholars can dare to write philosophical books i.e. *Darshan Shastras books (Aastika and Naastika)*? We should never forget that false knowledge is more dangerous than ignores.

In the preface of *Charaka Samhita*, Dr. Brahmanand Tripathi said that, before studying the ancient clinical literature, we should have the knowledge of grammar and six orthodox Indian philosophies, otherwise we won't be able to understand the meaning mentioned in the *Samhitas*<sup>11</sup>, but *Kaviraj Kunjal Bhishagratna* has stated in the preface of *Sushruta Samhita* that, "The true meaning of the *Ayurveda* can be better explained of understood only with the light of modern science."<sup>12</sup> One *Ayurveda* scholar is giving importance of having the knowledge of grammar and six Indian philosophies for better understanding of *Ayurveda* while another *Ayurveda* scholar is giving importance to the knowledge of modern science without mentioning the root causes in details or creating confusion in the minds of readers.

### Necessity of the study

"The widening of the scope and fields of modern knowledge makes severe demands on the equipment of the interpreter of the *Veda*. He should not only be conversant with the *Veda* and *Vedanga* in the traditional way, but also possess an expert knowledge of text-criticism; comparative philology; comparative mythology, religion, and philosophy; ancient history; anthropology; archaeology; Assyriology; and several other relevant sciences."<sup>13</sup>

Though modern science has developed too much but in the field of health care it has its own limitations. Therefore, now a day's integrated approach is preferred and demand for alternative medicine or the traditional medicine is increasing day by day worldwide. *Ayurveda's* fundamentals are based on the Indian philosophy, i.e. *Darshan Shastra (Aastik and Naastik)*; therefore, we should have the knowledge of *Darshan Shastra (Aastik and Naastik)*, along with the knowledge of languages such as *Pali*, *Prakrita*, *Ardhamagdi*, And also there are different views among the scholars of Ayurveda regarding the historical background of Ayurveda which needs to illuminate for the welfare of human beings.

### Aims and objectives

Importance for understanding Ayurveda in a philosophical, historical, religious, linguistic point of view.

### Objectives

1. To study historical background of Ayurveda.
2. To study influence of Buddhism on *Ayurveda* in short.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Review of *Ayurveda* literature such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtang Sangrah*, *Ashtang hrudaya*, and historical books along with research journals have been carried out.

### Historical background

*Ayurveda* is considered as the *up-Veda of Atharva-Veda*. "It has been long suspected that the later Shiva sects,

which recognized the *Atharva-Veda* as their chief scripture, were closely connected with the Buddhist sects. Buddhist influence was transmitted to the *Prashna* and *Mundaka Upanishad* of the *Atharva-Veda*.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Meena Talim in her book, 'Science of Medicine and Surgery in Buddhist India' has clearly stated that, "One must keep in mind that Pali Tipitakas (Buddhist literature) and Milindapanha are Pre *Charaka* and *Sushruta* treatises; therefore they are one of the earliest sources of getting information about the Science of Medicine and Surgery in ancient India and she also stated that, one can notice a Buddhist influence on later *Ayurvedic* treatises. It is well known fact that the great physician *Charak* was in the court of King *Kanishka* and was influenced by Buddhism. Similarly '*Navanitak*, Bower-manuscript' of 2<sup>nd</sup> A.D. was compiled under the Buddhist influence. Later, it was considered as an authentic treatise and referred by scholars from tenth to sixteenth A.D."<sup>15</sup>

In the book 'The Cultural Heritage of India', it is clearly stated regarding the *Rg-Veda* and the Indus Valley Civilization that, "The *Rg-Veda* was hitherto regarded as the fountainhead of everything Indian, the repository of the essence of Indian culture: the source of philosophical ideas and religious beliefs, of cultural life, of code of conduct, and of all the sciences was traced to the *Rg-Veda*. With the discovery of the protohistoric civilization in the Indus valley thirty-six years ago, the pendulum has swung the other way. The discovery has affected the antiquity and prestige of the *Rg-Veda*. Not only much of what is found in the religious practices as also in the material culture of India is now traced to the protohistoric people of the Indus valley, but the Vedic Aryans have been associated with the destruction of the civilization of the Indus valley. The Vedic deity or war lord Indra is said to be the commander of the invading Aryan forces, and his epithet *Purarah-dara* (sacker of the city) is explained as having been applied to him on account of his wholesale destruction of the Indus cities.

The dating of the Indus valley civilization has been changing with the corresponding changes in Mesopotamian chronology. The 'carbon 14' tests at the pre-Harappan site of Mundigak in Afghanistan tend to ascribe to the Harappa culture a period not earlier than 2500 b.c. The recent view is to place the Harappa culture between 2500 and 1500 b.c. The Aryan invasion of India is said to have occurred not before 1500 B.C. Thus a contact is sought to be established between the topmost layers or the last phase of the Indus valley civilization and the entry' of the Aryans into India. Renou has stated that the Indus civilization appears to owe nothing to the *Veda*, nor does the *Veda* appear to owe anything to it, and that 'the Aryan tribes may well have overrun it without in any way being influenced by it, settling on the ruins of a decayed or decaying empire'.<sup>16</sup> By ignoring these findings, Kaviraj Kunjalal Bhishagratna said that, "The excavations of Mohan-jo-Daro in Sind and other sites in India have revealed the remains of an Aryan civilization that flourished some 6, 000 or more years ago."<sup>17</sup>

Dr. M.S. Valiathan has said that, "The covered drains, bath, toilets and town planning of Harappa, Dhola Virra and other sites indicate the practice of public health measures by the Indus valley people. Their script

continues to remain an enigma, and therefore we are at a loss to know the ideas and concepts that inspired their magnificent public health works. We can only speculate as to whether the *Atharva Veda* which came a thousand years later in circa 1500 B.C., contains echoes from the Indus valley.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the *Atharva-Veda*, it is said, "The *Atharva-Veda* deals chiefly with sorcery, witch-craft and demonology. There are deadly imprecations against evil-doers; magical incantations for bringing about ruin, death, dementation and stupefaction of one's adversaries; and charms intended to secure the love of women through the potency of various herbs. Some of them are of hostile character, being meant to injure rivals. The *Atharva-Veda*, on account of its frequent calling-in -aid of super natural agencies for selfish and malevolent purposes, has not generally been accorded the canonical sanctity of the *Vedic Triad- The Rik, The Yajur* and *The Saman*; the very authority of the fourth Veda as a scripture has been questioned in the several law books of the *Apastamba*, the *Vishnu*, the *Yajnavalkya* and the *Manu* schools and the practices it sanctions strongly condemned. As Hindu medicine has seldom been able to shake itself completely free from the influence of magic and alchemy as auxiliaries, physicians, as practices of the 'black art', have been given an inferior position in the legal treatises. The Mahabharata, reflecting the spirit of the above law books, regards the physician as impure. In spite of this 'the *Atharvan* retains in a measure its place by virtue of its profound hold upon popular beliefs, because the *Atharvan* performs, especially for the king, inestimable services in the injury and overthrow of enemies."<sup>19</sup>

And also said that, "In the *Atharvaveda*, which may be looked upon as the parent of the *Ayurveda*, we naturally come across ample evidences of an ingrained belief in the causation of diseases by the disturbances of the humors. Thus we have such terms as '*Vatikrita*', i.e. a disease brought on by the derangement of the humor '*Vata*' (wind or air), '*Vatagulmin*', etc. Early Buddhist literature also furnishes us with abundant proofs of this nature. On going through the chapter on 'Medicaments' in the *Mahavagga*, we are often reminded of the contents of the *Susruta*. We have thus what amounts to positive historical evidence that during the life time of Buddha and even much earlier the doctrine of humoral pathology and the *Ayurvedic* method of treatment were in vogue."<sup>20</sup>

Indian medical manuscripts which lie scattered custody not only in India but also in other parts of the World like Bower Manuscript which found near China border.

"The origin of the *Ayurveda* as given in the Bower Ms., is on much the same lines as in the *Charaka* and the mention in it, among others, of such names as *Harit*, *Bhela*, *Panisara* and the *Asvins* as founders of the sciences of medicine, would go to prove that even so early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the old *Susruta* had come to be regarded as of mythical origin, and that therefore it must have been composed many centuries anterior to that time. Several important recipes as given in the Bower Ms., e.g. those of the "*Chavanaprasa*", '*Silajatuprayog*' etc., occur in practically identical recensions in the *Charaka*. This is



easily encountered for. The *Charaka*, the *Susruta*, and the Bower Ms., and even the *Ashtangahridaya* of *Vagbhata* have more or less common basis or substratum."<sup>21</sup> and also it is said that, "Bower Manuscript (dating back to between 350 A.D. and 375 A.D., according to Hoernle) depicts *Susruta* as an ancient Rsi and explicitly quotes from *Susruta's* work."<sup>22</sup>

It is the fact that, "The Bower MS comes from the Buddhists as is precisely shown by the several references to Bhagava, Tathagata, and Buddha etc. in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> parts. Traces of Buddhistic tendency are found in *Vagbhata* and this explains its transplantation to Tibet; besides the whole hearted reception of Indian medicine in Tibet leads to conclude the existence of Buddhistic medicine in India. The detailed statements of the Buddhist I-tsing (671-695 A.D.) on the condition prevailing at the time of Indian medicine (medicinal herbs, the *Tridosas*, diagnosis etc.) agree with the contents of our *Caraka* and *Susruta*, as well as of the Bower MS; I-tsing even quotes from sutra on medicine preached by Buddha himself. The Buddhist king Buddhadosa of Ceylon (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) cured the ill, maintained physicians whom he extended special grant, erected asylums and wrote the medical work *Saratthasamgaha*. *Caraka* is said to have been the court physician of the Buddhist king Kaniska (circa 100 A.D.) and the well known *Nagarjuna* who is placed in the same period is said to have composed, along with other medical works, an elaboration of *Susruta*, since a recipe engraved on a column in Pataliputra is attributed to him. King Asoka established hospitals for men and animals (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) and the old Buddhistic medicine of *Mahavagga* (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) knows the *Tridosas*, eye - ointment, nasal remedy, horn-scarifying, fomentation, oils, ghee, different kind of salt, and even the laparotomy mentioned in the later works; it, however, knows no metallic preparation. The great importance of the Bower MS for the history of Indian Medicine lies in the fact that it has certainly proved the existence of the Indian Medicine already in the 4-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and thereby has removed all doubts about the faithfulness of Arabic accounts."<sup>23</sup>

Though *Ayurveda* scholars are not accepting the influence of Buddhism on *Ayurveda* but it is that, "Buddhist ring is audible in *Charaka* as well as *Susruta*, but *Vagbhata*, he was himself a self declared Buddhist. So that is the very important role the Buddhist played in the development of *Ayurveda* today. *Athar vedic* period started in first century. There was a very change in the practice of medicine. Essentially in relation to the practice of medicine, not so much in the theory medicine and that is the disappearance or the largely the disappearance of mantras and rituals. Now, this was because of the influence of Buddhism which was the dominant religion in India during those 1000 years. Buddhism not only influenced of *Ayurveda*, a practice of medicine, but influenced every other aspect of human endeavor during this period. Everywhere Buddhism was a great influence and medicine could not remain immune from this change. Spread of *Ayurveda* all over India, after all it was Buddhist texts. *Digha Nikaya* a part of Buddhist *Sutta* listed *Salya*, *Salakya*, *Kaumarabhrtya*, *Kayacikitsa* and *Vajikarana* and also referred to *Visavidya* and *Bhutavidya*. These terms cover

seven of the eight branches of *Ayurveda*; *Rasayana* was left out because Buddhist philosophers sought nirvana, not rejuvenation. *Ayurveda* is a term they whenever used because any term like Veda would not be used in Buddhist texts. In Buddhist texts diseases were known by many names, *Abadha*, *Amaya*, all these terms synonyms which are used, *Roga*, They are all used in *Ayurveda* also. And treatment collectively is called *Tikiccha*; that was the term, *Ayurveda* the Buddhist medicine used."<sup>24</sup>

It is accepted that Indian philosophy has originated from the *Upanishada*, but "Buddhist texts do not refer to any *Upanishad* or *Upanishadic* teacher. Some scholars maintain that Buddhism accepted most of the *Upanishadic* thoughts and for this reason it is silent in this regard. Dr. N Dutt holds that "it is idle to say that Buddhism issued out of the *Upanishads* and was a phase in the evolution of *Upanishadic* thought. On the other hand it may be stated that Buddhism was a revolt against the *Upanishadic* thought and it was this denial of soul, which undermined the belief in the efficacy of the sacrificial rituals and ceremonies."<sup>25</sup>

Dr. M. S. Baghel said that, "Religious persons also played major role in propagating *Ayurveda* in foreign countries. Especially Buddhist religious persons had carried *Ayurveda* to the Asian countries particularly East Asian countries like Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Singapore, Korea and Tibet."<sup>26</sup> How it is possible to accept that Buddhist religious persons had carried *Ayurveda* to the Asian countries? It is natural that Buddhist religious persons i.e. *Bhikkus* may have carried Buddhist literature to the Asian countries to propagate the teaching of the Lord Buddha and it clearly indicates that it was the Buddhist literature to which we have taken for granted it as *Ayurvedic* literature.

In the book 'History of Hindu Chemistry, R.C. Ray accepted the influence of Buddhism even on the six classical or orthodox Indian philosophy i.e. *Aastika Darshan Shastras*; saying that, "With regard to the relation of Buddhism to the six orthodox systems it seems to me that all we can honestly say is that schools of philosophy handlings down doctrines very similar to those of our six classical or orthodox systems are presupposed by the Buddhist Suttas."<sup>27</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Great Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda had said that, 'Hindu religion cannot survive without Buddhism.'<sup>28</sup>

From the above historical facts, it is very clear that, radical thinking is necessary to understand *Ayurveda*; instead of blindly following footprints of modern science, we should create our own footprints which would be possible only with the comprehensive knowledge of Indian philosophy i.e. *Vedas*, *Upishadas*, *Sankhya*, *Yog*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Mimansa*, *Baudha*, *Charvaka* and *Jain*. Western world is looking towards east particularly India with great expectation for total eradication of human sufferings as the Ancient India was the knowledge center for the whole world where famous *Nalanda*, *Takshashila*, and *Vikramshila* universities were existed. Today, our thinking has become very narrow; we have forgotten our strength due to which we could not become the world teachers who

can show the right path of total eradication of human sufferings as like ancient India.

It is the eternal fact that our strength is in the comprehensive knowledge of Indian philosophy including *Aastika* and *Naastika Darshan Shastras* which would definitely show the whole world the right path of total eradication of all human sufferings and not merely the good health.

#### CONCLUSION

It is necessary to do critical study of *Ayurveda* according to the historical, religious, philosophical, linguistic point of view in collaboration with the departments of history, religion, philosophy, languages such as *Pali, Prakrita, Ardhamagdhi, Sanskrit* of every university of our country as well as from the universities of neighboring countries and also from the western countries; we should collaborate our activities with the department of Archeological Survey of India, department of Manuscripts mission of India, historical research council of India, Asiatic Society of India, Linguistic Survey of India, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, Vipassana International Research Institute, Igatpuri, Nashik, Maharashtra, Pali Text Society, London, then only we will understand *Ayurveda* in its real sense which is necessary for the welfare of all human beings.

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