



Guest Editorial

Historical development of basic concepts of Ayurveda from Veda up to Samhita

Introduction

Glimpses of the concepts expounded in Ayurvedic *Samhitas* have been given. Whether their roots are found in earlier works and whether they have been revised and improved in subsequent periods is worth examining, so that a clear picture of the stage-wise historical development may emerge. Our earliest literature is the *Vedas*. Shivadasa Sen, a commentator on Charaka, has aptly explained the meaning of the word *Veda*. He says that *Veda* denotes knowledge which has two forms—*Shabdarupa Veda* and *Artharupa Veda*, one is in verbal form and the other is in object form. The *Veda* in the form of words is contained in *Mantras* (and other subsequent literature). *Veda* in the form of objects is the whole universe i.e. the objects in whole universe are denoted by the word ‘*Veda*’ or the meaning of the word *Veda* is reflected in or represented by the whole universe.

Ayurveda is an *Upaveda* of *Atharva* or *Rigveda* according to some schools or is a *Panchama Veda*. It is also considered as *Upanga* of *Atharva Veda* i.e. it is not imposed or added from the exterior but is a part and parcel of the main body of the *Vedas*. If so, the basic of these discourses and commentaries, it should exist in *Mantras* and *Brahmanas*. We find that the present *samhitas* are in the form of *Vyakhyana*—discourses or commentaries. The basis of these discourses and commentaries should either be *Mantras* or some *Sutras*. Though there is mention of *Rishis* as *Sutra Kara*, none of the work in *Sutra* form is mentioned or found anywhere. The *Brahmanas*, *Upanishads* are considered as literature meant for explaining the procedures described in the *Mantras*, and later works like the *Mahabharat*, *Ramayana*, and *Puranas* are also considered as a collection of explanatory notes with illustrative cases or episodes. *Ayurvedic samhitas* fall somewhere between these two chronological landmarks. The method of exposition is of question-answer type followed in the *Upanishads*. Similarity of non-technical and easy flow of language is seen in *Ayurveda samhitas*. The *Rishis* mentioned in *samhitas* are in majority, authors of different *sutras* of *Darshan* and are also mentioned in *Adi Parva* of *Mahabharat*. Therefore they may be considered of post-*Upanishad* and pre-*Mahabharat* period.

Review and Discussion

It is interesting to note that the concept of a living person as a man living in a city with nine gates and as a lamp of life shining within a luminous case is given in *Atharva Veda (Brahma puri navadwara devanama pooh ayodhyapuri hiranmayakosho deepah)*. The word *Purusha* is defined in this way. One who resides in

pura is called *Purusha*. The same idea is expressed in connection with *Swasthavritta*. In *Charaka Samhita*, we can find the words *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna* and *kachakoshastha deepa*, which similes to express the intimate relationship by words *Nagar* and *Nagari* (synonyms of *Pura* and *Purusha*).

Imperishable *Atma* and perishable *Panchabhautik* body are the two main constituents of the *Purusha*. They are mentioned in *Yajurveda* in question-answer manner as “combining and mutually supporting during life and disintegrating and uniting with elements of the universe at the time of death.” The same concept is established more clearly as *Shad-dhatuka Purusha* and *Pancha mahabhoot Shareeri Samavayh Purusha*, and *Panchatwa prapti* at death by Charaka and Sushruta respectively.

Similarly, description of physiological concepts, viz. *Tridhatu* i.e. *Tridosha* and *Sapta Dhatus*, five divisions of *Vayu*, or its twin forms are also mentioned in the *Vedas* succinctly or by name clearly—*Ye Tri-saptah (Atharvaveda)*, *Prnaya Swana apanaya Swaha* etc. (*Yajurveda*), *Tri Dhatu Sharma (R.K.I-7/34/6)*.

We also come across a reference wherein the word *Vayu* is replaced by *Ayu* and Commentator *Uvata* explained that here the letter *V* of *Vayu* is to be understood as ‘apostrophe.’ A reflection of this is found in *Charaka Samhita* in *Chikitsa sthana*, 28th chapter- “*Vayayurayur balam Vayur- Vayurdhata Shareerinam.*”

Sapta Dhatus- Seven *dhatu*s are also mentioned in a covert and overt manner as *Sapta sayas* staying in the body and also categorically as *Twacha*, *Lohita*, *Mamsa*, *Asthi*, *Majja* and *Shukra*. *Hemchandracharya* of the 11th century in his *Abhidhan Chintamanikosha* cited the names of *Rishi Bharadwaja* etc. as synonyms of respective *Dhatu*s.

Tridoshas and seven *dhatu*s are mentioned as supporting agents of all living creatures in the *mantra* “*Ye Tri Saptah Vishwa Roopani Bibhratah*” of the *Atharvaveda* and *Sayan* the commentator explains them as *Tridosha* and *Sapta Dhatus*. Both the *Samhitas*, *Charaka* and *Sushruta* have also called them *Dhatu*s and compared with supportive pillars “*Tri-Sthuna*”. *Kashyapa* too uses the same terms to describe them (*Yajurveda-17-6-25-7* and *Atharva 9-1-2-27,12-9-1-3*).

The concept of *Agni-Soma* as pervasive forces equally controlling *Loka* and *Purusha* by creating bisexual creation is enunciated in *Prashnopanishad*. Ayurveda has applied the same in the description of *Loka* and *Purusha*, both being *agni somiya* characterize identity of *Shukra* and *Shonita* in human and *Dwividha veerya* in drugs viz. *Sheeta* and *Ushna* with these twin forces of universe.

Similarly, *Kala* in the form of *Samvatsar* with its clear-cut six

seasons and assignment of two months to each one of these seasons is mentioned in the *mantras* of Yajurveda and it is incorporated in the *Samhitas* of Ayurveda in the same order beginning with *Vasanta Ritu* and *Madhu* and *Madhava*, the two months assigned to it. The rest of the *Ritus* and pairs of months assigned to them come in the same succession in Yajurveda and Ayurveda. The concept of *Sat Ritu* begin with *pravrit* as a division of *Samvastara*, needful for the application of *Panchakarma* as described in both *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhita*, seems to be a later development conceived in the *samhita* period.

Concept of *Sharira* (body)

Concept of body configurations which are condemnable was originally mentioned in Yajurveda a.30. In connection of *Purusha medha*, it is stated as those who are unfit for homa are *analabhya*. The same eight are mentioned as condemned body configurations in *Charaka Samhita* in the same order.

As regards the four constituents of *Purusha*, the first and most obvious factor is *Shareera* or *Deha*. Its description is given in *Samhitas* under two heads—structures and functions. *Twacha*, *Loma*, *Lohita*, *Mamsa*, *Asthi*, *Majja* and *Shukra* i.e. seven *dhatus* are mentioned clearly in Yajurveda; and *Sheersha*, *bahu*, *uroo*, *pada*, *nabhi*, *hridaya*, *kloma*, *yakrit*, *pleeha*, *basti*, *vanisthu*, *matasna*, *antrani*, *puritat*, *chakshu*, *shrotra*, *mukha* etc. organs, limbs and viscera too are referred in *Purushasukta* and other contexts. *Prana*, *Vak*, *sravana*, *darshana*, *swapna*, *jagarana*, etc. functions are also mentioned briefly in the Vedas.

The second component of *purusha* is *indriyas*. They are located in *shareera* at specific sites (*adhishtana*) and are invisible and only are inferred by their respective functions. The *buddhindriyas*- *shrotra*, *chakshu*, *twacha* etc. and *karmendriyas*- *pada*, *hasta*, *payu*, *vak*, *upastha*, are also mentioned in connection with *ashwamedha*, *pashumedha*, and *purushamedha*.

The third component of *purusha*, *manas*, is still more subtle than the two inert ones referred above and is the instrument of *Atma* to communicate with the outer world, *indriyas* and body and to conceive the ideas of the past and future. Its dimensions and functions are poetically given in “*Shiv sankalpa sukta*” of Yajurveda.

The fourth component is *Atma*. It is described to be all-pervasive and one that enters into a physical body to take the form of a living creature; it is not different from the one that is universal, both are one and the same. This is described in the course of *sarvamedha* (Su.Yajur.a.32-mantra-11-12.and a.- 40,6-7).

These examples are sufficient to show that the basic concepts of Ayurveda are mentioned in the *mantras* of Vedas. They were developed in successive phases of *Brahmana* and *Upanishad* eras not separately but during discussions on processes of *yajna* or philosophical topics. However, they were discussed in detail and systematically arranged in the post-*Upanishad* period or *samhita* period of Ayurveda. It is categorically mentioned in all *samhitas* that they are discourses or explanatory notes, the concise text of which is extinct or is found only in the *mantras* of the Vedas.

The same may be mentioned regarding diseases and drugs.

Diseases

Yakshma (denotes general diseases and specifically a disease

characterized by consumption), *Takma* (Fevers), *Kasa* (cough), *Harima* (Jaundice), *Kilasa*, *Shwitras*, *sidhma* etc. affecting the skin (varieties of *Kushtha* etc.) are diseases of physique; *Unmada*, *Apriatipada*, *Amati*, *Durmati*, etc. are diseases of the psyche; *asu* (*vandhya*-infertility), *Atiskadvari* (*pradara*-excessive discharge red and white), *Palikni* (grey hairs) *viarjara* (laxity of the body tissues) etc., diseases of reproductive organs of women; and *kleeba* (impotent, the sexual debility in male) etc. disease are referred in a.30 of the Su. Yajurveda.

Drugs

There is mention of a chapter called *Aushadhi sukta* (12/75-101).

Vegetable source

Classification of *Udbhid*, *vanaspati*, *vriksha*, *pushpavati*, *prasoovari* etc. is given. There is mention of food grains (*Anna*) – *Yava*, *Godhuma*, *Vrihi*, *Masha*, *Masure*, *Mudga*, *Upavaka* (*Yavaka*), *Tila*, *Priyangu*, *Shyamaka*, *Nivara* etc.

Animal source

It is mentioned as the animals inhabiting villages and those inhabiting jungles (*gramya* and *aranya*). Those having abode in water (*naranya*), and those having the sky or air as their abode (*Vayavya*). Man, horse, cow, sheep and goat are given as examples of village animals, while *mayu* (*kinmer*), *gavaya*, *sharabha*, *ushtra* are of the *aranya* group. All these animals are used as foodstuff in *Mamsavarga* of *ahara*.

As regards mineral source

Ashma, *sikta*, *mrittika*, *hiranya*, *ayas*, *loha*, *shyama*, *seesa*, *trapu* etc. are mentioned. These were developed in *Rasashastra* with the processes of *shodhana*, *marana*, *apunarbhava*, *rasayana*, transformation in later period.

As regards preparations

Food preparations

Food preparations denoting culinary art are also found in Vedas. They are – *Yoosha*, *Mamsa pachana*, *Amiksha*, *Saktu*, *Laja*, *Masara*.

Masara – is a combination of powders of *Vreehi*, *Shyamaka*, *Odana* etc., eatables.

Nagnahu – is a combination of the powder of the bark of *Sarja* and 26 other items.

Shashpa is the name given to sprouted *Vreehi*. *Tokma* is the name given to sprouted *Yava*.

Preparation of medicines

In the nineteenth Adhyaya of Su. Yajur Samhita in connection with *Sautramani Yaga*, detailed description of the extraction of *Soma Rasa* and its fermentation, and the instruments, equipments and utensils to be used, with instructions of measurements and doses of each item and processes to be followed are given.

As for causative factors

Words *Ayakshma* and *Anameeba* are used to denote healthy condition. Mention of *Ameeva* is found to denote a disease and also as a causative factor of the disease in the form of an infectious germ. Similarly, *Rudra*, *Rakshas*, *Yatudhana*, *Arati*, *Sarpa* etc. which are invisible yet attack man are mentioned

to cause diseases through *Anna, Pana, Patra* (food, drinks and utensils) etc. They have their natural abode in environments in the outer world in air, rain water and earth; and they attack human beings with deadly results. Heat of the fire and Sun are also mentioned as capable of destroying them. *Anamaya* i.e. freedom from disease, of not only individuals but of the whole village with its population and cattle was desired and prayed for.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above that the *Vedas* are the original sources of the subject matter of Ayurveda. The concepts were occasionally conceived and commented on during casual discussions in *Upanishads* but they were systematically arranged and propounded during detailed discourses which were sequentially recorded in the *Samhitas* of Ayurveda; and even in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat* during narrations of different events. During the pre- and post-*Buddha* era these concepts were

in vogue in the theoretical as well as applied form and were well established in the society. Up to 1000 AD learned commentators and compilers like *Vagbhata* (old and younger), *Chakrapani*, *Jejjata*, *Gayadasa* and *Dallhana* kept this flame burning by collecting references and giving exhaustive explanations and sometimes introducing and adding new concepts. Concepts of *Avikarini vriddhi* and *Vikararupa vriddhi*, *Poshya* and *Poshaka dhatu* or *sthayi* and *asthayi dhatu* by Chakrapani and *Upachaya Lakshana Ojas* and *Shakti lakshana Ojas*; *jeerna Artava* and *Nava Artava*; *Stree Ojas* and *Stree Shukra*; along with their different functions respectively by *Dallahana* are some of the examples. Then the dark period begins. It is necessary to review and revive ancient Indian knowledge in light of modern science.

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