

THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT: *Ayurveda, which means the Science of life is erroneously understood and propagated by some of the scholars as just one of the traditional systems of medicine. It encompasses the entire gamut of human life aiming on projection of total personality, mental, physical and intellectual. Ayurveda's concept of diseases and treatments are different from other systems of medicine and with its wide scope embracing preventive, curative and positive aspects. Ayurveda belongs to a class by itself, unique and distinct.*

Before beginning a study of any Sastra, it is necessary to ascertain what the scope and nature of the particular sastra is, what is the aim in studying that sastra, what is the relation between the aim and that sastra and, whether one is fit for that study. These are collectively known as “Anubandha – Chatustaya”, comprising (1) abhidheya, (2) Prayojana, (3) Sambandha and (4) Adhikari.

The term ‘Ayurveda’ is composed of two words – Ayus, and Veda. In brief, it means the Veda of Ayus, i.e., the Science of Life. Thus, one might say that the nearest word in the English language for ‘Ayurveda’ is not ‘Medicine’ or ‘Therapeutics’, as is commonly thought, but ‘Biology’, which is composed of “Bios” and “Logos”, i.e. the Science of Life.

No book of medicine or Biology would teach how the youngsters and elders should behave with each other, and likewise, the husband and wife, the teacher and the pupil and so on. But Ayurveda teaches not only medicine and the science of life but the art of life too. It is cast in the mould of intellectual dimensions combining the conceptions of knowledge, methodology and

logic, giving it a very wide perception of life.

The great Caraka and Susruta, the propounders of Ayurveda, pointed out that unlike the lives of the other creatures, the lives of human beings have been created with a definite aim set for them – the aim of achieving eternal salvation. These Acaryas have also presented several simple and efficacious means which lead human beings to this destination. Thus, Ayurveda is, in fact, at once all, the Science, Art and philosophy of life.

Actually, the Vedas – of which Ayurveda is a part – an upveda – are so vast and deep in meaning that all these three terms, science, art and philosophy can hardly do full justice even collectively to describe any aspect of the Vedas. According to our tradition, Vedas are timeless – and apauruseya – representing the divine unwritten universal law and knowledge, communicated to the rishis – inspired seers or sages. As such the author belongs to the traditional school of thought which believes that Matter originated, prevailed and was (and is) controlled by the cosmic Intelligence, the

ultimate abode of Matter – Omnisicent, Omnipotent and Omnipresent. The Universe moves and rotates not from the little to the Great but from the Great to the little exemplifying the theory of devolution instead of evolution, theory of devolution having been strongly and firmly established by our ancient philosophers.

The term ‘Ayu’ is defined by Caraka as “Sarirendriya – Satwa – atma – Samyoga”, i.e., combination of Sarira (body), Indriya (senses), satwa (mind) and atma (soul). A combination of these four, places Ayurveda at the top of all the other sciences of medicine. Till yesterday, the western medicine science had no place where mind or mental diseases were concerned. The growth of psychology and psychiatry is so recent and has had to face such a considerable resistance from the medical world to establish itself.

The concept of connecting the mind with the body is new to the ‘modern’ system of medicine but the age – old Ayurveda is quite clear about the co-ordinated function of the body with the senses under the control of the soul. Caraka has clearly said “Shareeram hi sattwam anuvaidhiyate. Satvanca Sariram”, which means that the body follows the mind in action and the mind is in accordance with the body.

The concept of Senses and that of the soul are yet to be initiated by the other systems of medicine, whereas Ayurveda has given detailed explanations of these, substantially sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of any unbiased scholar.

Concept of Roga (Disease)

Ayurveda has a two – fold – aim – first to maintain the svasthya (health) of the svastha (healthy) persons and second to cure or

relieve the vyadhi (disease) of the vyadhitā (ill) persons. People think that the fulfillment of these aims can only be imaginary or idealistic, because if these aims are really fulfilled, the entire medical science will be purposeless. Fortunately, Ayurveda is an exception here, too. Our tradition records a very long era (the Satya or Krta yuga) when the whole of the mankind was totally free from all the physical diseases. If such an age ever returns, the other systems of medicine will lose all their utility, but Ayurveda will not; because it will begin treating manasa vyadhis or mental diseases. And if manasa vyadhis too should disappear, then there is the treatment of natural diseases, namely, hunger, thirst, sleep and the cycle of birth and death.

The concept of roga (disease) in Ayurveda is wider than that in any other system. The definition of roga or vyadhi (disease) is given by the great Sushruta as – tadduhkha samyogah vyadhiyah – which means that the union of pain with the soul is vyadhi. Now this pain could be of any type and from any source. There are various types of pain with various sources and various classifications of diseases based on them. Let us take just one classification, the simplest one, given in the very first chapter of Susruta Samhita – Swabhavikagantujakayikantarāh -, i.e., diseases are of four types, (1) Swabhavika, i.e., natural, (2), Agantuja, i.e., extragenic, (3) Kayika or nija, i.e., internal and (4) Antara or Manasa, i.e., mental or psychic. Now, the internal and the extragenic diseases are known to all the systems of medicine. The kayika diseases are caused by the disorders or dysfunction of the internal organs or tissues, etc. and the agantuja diseases are caused by some external factors, such as the attack by a weapon or an accident etc. The manasa

diseases are very uncommon in other systems medicine. It must be mentioned here that the western science of psychology or psychiatry are also too narrow in their scope as compared with our manasasastra. For example, Susruta includes kama, krodha, lobha, mada, matsarya, irshya, and many such in the manasa rogas, many of which would not be considered as 'diseases' at all put would be considered only description of the human physiological or psychological phenomena by the modern psychiatrists.

As far as the Swabdhavika or the natural diseases are concerned, Ayurveda has an exclusive jurisdiction in this field. No system of medicine, other than Ayurveda, would accept hunger, thirst, sleep, old age or death as 'diseases; to be considered for the treatment by the physicians, on the basis that they are only natural phenomena and not pathological conditions. But Ayurveda argues that these are to be taken as diseases, normal or abnormal, natural or unnatural, physiological or pathological. If pain is natural, it does not cease to hurt. And, thinking on these lines, what is unnatural in this world? If a person eats something more than what he can digest, the consequence is restlessness, but it unnatural? If any part of the body is burnt on contact with fire, it is natural. And all these have to be accepted as diseases.

Concept of treatment

The Charka has divided the treatment into three great branches – (1) Daiva – Vyapasraya, (2) Yukti Vyapasraya and (3) Sattwavyajaya. According to Charaka, "nothing exists in this world, the world of gross matter and that of even imagination, which is not useful to medicine". Not only the drugs or diets, even the environment can be utilized as a source for treatment. Even

thoughts can be manipulated to please or hurt the patient. Thus everything is a matter for our concern and utilization.

Ayurveda believes that the cause – effect – relationship (Karya – Karana – bhava) is not always within the reach of the Pratyaksa or Anumana. On a number of occasions we find that certain effects are caused by certain things but they are not easily explainable. Ayurveda has a third source of knowledge the word (Sabda) or the Scriptures (Sastra) this subject in an article presented in the first International Seminar on Ayurveda held in 1975 at Patiala. The standard treatises on Ayurveda give a number of such methods of treatment which are inexplicable by Pratyaksa or Anumana, but at the same time no less efficacious. We, therefore, classify the treatment itself into two major groups – (i) Adrsta Phalaka and (ii) Drsta Phalaka. The first includes some chanting of mantras, wearing of some specific stones, wearing of some parts of particular herbs, etc., this is known as Daiva Vyapasraya. The second is Yukti – Vyapasraya, where certain medicines are prescribed orally or externally, some diets, some practices inclusive of some postures (now-a-days) generally mistaken for 'Yoga' the actual yoga being quite different, very much higher and sublime knowledge, and many restrictions of diet and practices or both. This second classification is again divided into two Sodhana and Samana. The Sodhana is to eliminate the Vitiated dosas from the body and shaman is an attempt to subdue them. The third is 'sattwa-avajaya' which means the conquest of one's own mind. Ayurveda, though prescribe some medicines for the treatment of the mental diseases but emphasize is mainly on the methods of conquering of vrttis of mind – without which the mental diseases can never be controlled. I do not propose here to describe the types of these two major classes

but I cannot resist the temptation to mention another classification of the treatment referred to in the very first chapter of the well – known preliminary book for the students of Ayurveda, namely, Madhavanidana. There, this treatment is said to be of at least 18 types. The main heads are Ausadha (Drug), Ahara (Diet) and Vihara (Practice). Each one is divided into six groups (i) contrary to the cause of the disease, (ii) contrary to the disease itself, (iii) contrary to the cause and the disease both, simultaneously, (iv) similar to the cause of the disease, (v) similar to the disease and (vi) similar to the cause and disease both. Certain commentators are of the opinion that two more heads – Deas (place) and Kala (Time, in general or season in particular) should be added to the three main heads. If this is accepted then the total types of treatment are of the order 30. But even if these are not included for the sake of theoretical classification, the 18 types mentioned above are sufficient to cover a wide range for Ayurvedic treatments. In fact, all the present systems of medicine existent on the earth to-day can be very easily included in a few of these types. Even if any new system should emerge, it cannot transcend the scope of Ayurveda. For instance, Allopathy basically believes in the treatment by drug, contrary to the cause of the disease. If malaria develops through particular bacteria, a malaria parasite, the treatment should consist of a drug, say, quinine, which kills that particular parasite. Homeopathy basically believes in the drug similar to the cause of the disease. If belladonna, when introduced in the human body, is observed to produce headache or fever, a preparations based on belladonna, according to Homoeopathy is to be prescribed for this very symptom or disease. That Allopathy ignores the important of diet and practice in the treatment of the patient, is too common a topic of discussion to be

emphasized once again. Whereas the entire attitude of naturopathy is one of not taking any medicine at all, it exclusively prescribes diet and practice. In an Ayurvedic texts there are chapters and chapters which elaborate the importance of the restriction of diet and applications of different diets in different conditions of different diseases and even in different stages of different conditions of different diseases. Its only difference from naturopathy is in the prescription of medicines. Naturopathy holds that no medicine should ever be used at any stage of any disease. But what is difficult for an Ayurvedic to understand is this if the naturopaths prescribe, which they do, a fruit of Amala in a form of wet crush or dry powder, what objection should then have if amala in combination with similar fruits Bibhitaka and Maritaka, whose combination known as Thriphalaa similar fruit of Bibhitaka or Haritaki or powder whose combination, known as Triphala, were to be prescribed.

However, naturopathy has absolutely no scope for compromise with allopathy or Homoeopathy but Ayurveda itself provides some very fertile field for it even in the mistaken and misrepresented interpretation of the term “medicine”. Allopathy and Homoeopathy could not think of any cooperation between them, though both are being practiced in a number of European countries side by side for more than a century and a half. The Allopathy fights tooth and nail against a Homoeopathy even to-day, but Ayurveda has a number of similarities with both, and can actually absorb them all as different types of its 30 or 18 typical channels of treatment.

There is a very important principle for treatment, mentioned in Caraka – Samhitha itself. There it is said that the treatment which cures or relieves a particular symptom

or syndrome but at the same time results in the provocation of another symptom or syndrome is not a fair or vishuddha treatment. The treatment should ensure that, while eliminating one disease, there is no side-effect leading to another disease. Unfortunately, rarely do we find any medicine in the so-called 'scientific' and modern systems of medicine with its stress on synthetic drugs which does not carry any number of therapeutic side effects and after affects with it. It is difficult to find any Ayurvedic medicine which... far from having any side / or after affects.... Does not provide a number of side-benefits besides the actual results on the target disease. A veteran Ayurvedic physician was perfectly right when he said that the Ayurvedic

physician would get a very wide field for working even if he stopped treating the common diseases and restricted himself only to the treatment to the side effects of diseases and disorders brought into existence by the 'modern' and 'scientific' drugs.

In short whether we consider the life or the knowledge, the body or the mind, the senses or the soul, the cause of the disease, or the methods of their treatment. The drug or the diet, the gross world of thoughts, the main effects or the side effects; for every angle of the medical science, we find that Ayurvedic approach is unique in every respect. We find that Ayurvedic approach is unique in its perception of the unity of all existence.