



SUSHRUTA: A GREAT SURGEON AND VISIONARY OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is described as science of life and it was recalled by Brahma as mentioned in Ayurvedic treatises. Brahma transformed his noble knowledge to Prajapati or Daksha, later Daksha passed his legacy to Ashwins and Indra received knowledge from Aswins. As per Sushruta opinion, Indra taught Ayurveda to Dhanvantari, the surgeon of gods embodied as king Divodasa of Banaras (Kashiraja). Divodasa then transmitted medical knowledge with special reference to surgery to the wise men like Sushruta and others who approached him as pupils, out of sympathy for the suffering humanity and also in order to prolong their own life. This school of thoughts is known as Dhanvantara-Sampradaya i.e. the school of surgery. All the fellows of Sushruta and Sushruta himself composed texts on the base of the perceptions of the teacher Divodasa Dhanvantari. Sushruta composed 'Sushruta-Samhita' which is fully available till now and is considered the best book for Sharira. Nagarjuna redacted the Sushruta-Samhita and possibly added Uttarantra in 5th century A.D. In 10th century Chandrata, son of Tisata did the Pathashuddhi and renewed the Sushruta-Samhita on the basis of commentary done by Jejjata. In due course of time, many commentaries in Sanskrit, Hindi and English were written which show the growing acceptance and utility of the text. Charaka-Samhita, Sushruta-Samhita and Samhitas of Vagbhata are considered as Brihat-trayee i.e. three main treatises. In Kshemakutuhala text, it is well versed that a Vaidya who has listened many more text books but not listened the Sushruta-Samhita is devoid of actual benefits and if studied many other books but not the Charaka-Samhita gets defame or criticism among Vaidyas who have studied both the Samhitas. Vagbhata says that if the texts written by seers and sages get recognition in society then except Charaka-Samhita and Sushruta-Samhita why Bhela-Samhita etc. are not studied. All these references prove the gravity of Charaka-Samhita and Sushruta-Samhita. Sushruta-Samhita has unique position and contributions in the field of Ayurveda especially anatomy and surgery. Sushruta elaborates many surgical procedures like Nasa-Sandhana, Karnapali-Sandhana, Siravedha, Vranopakrama, treatment of Asthibhagna and Sandhibhagna etc. which is indicative of his excellent surgical skills. Hence Sushruta is regarded as the father of surgery. He was educated at Kashi in India and mentions the places of India in his text mainly southern portion which is suggestive of the view that he was a native of this country.

Key words: Ayurveda, Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari, Sushruta-Samhita, Surgery, Nagarjuna, Chandrata, Dalhana.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is described as science of life and it was recalled by Brahma as mentioned in Ayurvedic treatises¹. Brahma transformed his noble knowledge to Prajapati or Daksha, later Daksha passed his legacy to Ashwins and Indra received knowledge from Aswins. As per Sushruta opinion, Indra taught Ayurveda to Dhanvantari, the surgeon of gods embodied as king Divodasa of Banaras (Kashiraja). Divodasa then transmitted medical knowledge with special reference to surgery to the wise men like Sushruta and others who approached him as pupils, out of sympathy for the suffering humanity and also in order to prolong their own life². Sushruta composed 'Sushruta-Samhita' on the basis of percepts of his teacher Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari³ which is considered the best book for Shareera (knowledge related to Human Anatomy and Physiology)⁴. Sushruta is equally famous with Charaka, and he is named with Atreya and Harita in the Bower Manuscript. The Mahabharata represents him to be a son of Vishvamitra. Nagarjuna is credited with having worked over his text. Moreover, like Charaka, he won fame beyond India and he was renowned both in Cambodia in the east and Arabia in the west around 9th and 10th centuries. We have also a revised text of Sushruta-Samhita prepared by Chandrata on the basis of the commentary of Jajjata⁵.

Charaka-Samhita, Sushruta-Samhita and Samhitas of Vagbhata are considered as the main Samhitas of Kritayuga, Dvaparayuga and Kaliyuga respectively⁶. In Kshemakutuhala text, it is well versed that a Vaidya who

has listened many more text books but not listened the Sushruta-Samhita is devoid of actual benefits and if studied many other books but not the Charaka-Samhita gets defame or criticism among Vaidyas who have studied both the Samhitas⁷. Vagbhata says that if the texts written by seers and sages get recognition in society then except Charaka-Samhita and Sushruta-Samhita why Bhela-Samhita etc. are not studied⁸. All these references prove the gravity of Sushruta-Samhita, Charaka-Samhita and Samhitas of Vagbhata in the field of Ayurveda. Sushruta-Samhita is one of the most authentic texts of Ayurveda begins with a Sutrashtana, which deals with general questions and makes out that Sushruta's teacher was king Divodasa of Benares, an incarnation of Dhanvantari, physician of the gods. Nidanasthana deals with diagnosis (Nidan-Panchaka of diseases) in detail; Sharirasthana covers anatomy and embryology; Chikitsasthana contains therapeutics, Rasayana and Vajikarana; Kalpasthana deals with toxicology; and the Uttarantra covers diseases of urdhwanga (upper body parts), Balagraha, Kayachikitsa and Bhutavidya mainly which is clearly a later edition, supplements the work. The view of Hoernle that even this later book is as old as Charaka and Bhela-Samhita appears to be quite untenable, for it rests on his erroneous view that the anatomical view of Sushruta were known to the author of the Shatapatha Brahmana, a view which has been disproved. It is of interest to note the high standard demanded from a doctor by Sushruta; the introduction of the student is based on the formal initiation of a youth as a member of twice-born; he is made to circum-ambulate a

fire, and a number of instructions are given to him including purity of body and life; he should wear a red garment-an idea with many parallels; his hair and nails are to be cut short; he is to treat as if they were his kith and kin, holy men, friends, neighbors, the widow and the orphan, the poor and travelers, but to deny his skills to hunters, bird-catchers, out-castes, and sinners.⁹ Sushruta is mainly concerned with surgery and elaborates many surgical procedures like Karnapali-sandhana¹⁰, Nasa-Sandhana and Aushtha-Sandhana¹¹, Vranopakrama¹², treatment of Asthibhagna and Sandhibhagna¹³, Siravedha¹⁴ and the surgical treatment of different diseases which is indicative of his excellent surgical skills. About 900 A.D, Sushruta was cited in an Arabic translation of the famous Arabian physician Razi (Rhazes) in such a way that one feels that this translation could well have been based on Sushruta-Samhita. The present condition of the whole Sushruta is indeed born out by the commentaries, especially the Bhanumati of Chakradatta (11th cent.) and the Nibandhasamgraha of Dalhana (12th cent.). Jejjata is usually considered as their predecessor. On the basis of his commentary Chandrata, son of Tisata undertook a revision (Pathashuddhi) of the text of Sushruta. According to Hoernle many original readings can still be restored from Bhanumati. On the base of Sutrasthana 1st chapter 39th Shloka and Sutrasthana 4th chapter 5th Shloka and one can draw the conclusion that originally there were 120 Adhyayas in five sthanas and Uttaratanttra was supplemented in later addition¹⁵.

Sushruta, such a great legendary in the field of Ayurveda especially in Shalya-Tantra has not given his proper introduction any where in text which creates curiosity among historians and ayurvedists. This article deals with the historical study of such a great personality and his special contribution in the field of Ayurveda.

About Sushruta

The word Sushruta means well-heard or versed in the Vedas. Sushruta is the author of a Sushruta Samhita, whose work, together with that of Charaka, is regarded as the oldest medical authority, and held in great esteem in India till today¹⁶. Personality of Sushruta is also debatable like Charaka as there are references of being two Sushrutas viz.-Vridhdha Sushruta and Sushruta. References of Vridhdha Sushruta are available in the Nibandha-Samgraha commentary of Sushruta-Samhita written by Dalhana, Sarvangasundari Vyakhya of Ashtanga-Hridaya, Madhukosha Vyakhya of Madhav-Nidan, Bhavprakash etc. but these references are not available in presently available edition of Sushruta-Samhita¹⁷. These references prove the existence of Vridhdha Sushruta. It is also assumed that Vridhdha Sushruta wrote the original text and Sushruta redacted it. Acharya P.V. Sharma in his book on history named "Ayurveda ka Vaigyanika Itihasa" discussed about the Vridhdha Sushruta and Sushruta and accepts that such type of situation is with many other streams also. He discussed about the development of Sushruta-Samhita in four steps i.e. Vridhdha Sushruta, Sushruta, Nagarjuna and Chandrata. The introduction of Kashyapa-Samhita disagrees with the view of Vridhdha-Sushruta as there is no reference of Vridhdha-Sushruta in the list of predecessor seers and sages, Mahabharata also quotes the name of Sushruta as a son of Vishvamitra,

Mahabhashyakara, Nagarjuna, Vagbhata and Navanitakakara also quote the Sushruta not the Vridhdha Sushruta, unfamiliarity of Vridhdha-Sushruta as a surgeon etc. are the facts against the acceptance of Vridhdha-Sushruta¹⁸. Sushruta does not mention about Vridhdha Sushruta anywhere in his text, so it is difficult to accept the Vridhdha Sushruta. As the name Sushruta appears in many ancient treatises, each one of them giving different informations creates difference of opinion.

Sushruta-Samhita mentions that Sushruta was the son of sage Vishvamitra¹⁹. He along with Aupadhenava, Vaitarana, Aurabhra, Paushkalavata, Karavirya, Gopurarakshita and others approached Divodasa, The Kashiraja (king of Kashi) to teach them Ayurveda especially Shalya-Tantra (surgery). Mahabharata mentions Sushruta as one of the sons of sage Vishvamitra, the teacher of Rama and Lakshmana, princes of Ayodhya, but it does not mention about Sushruta as a learner of Ayurveda from Divodasa, the king of kashi²⁰. Bhavaprakasha mentions that Vishvamitra etc. seers and sages knew through their divine vision that Kashiraja Divodasa is an incarnation of lord Dhanvantari, so Vishvamitra told his son Sushruta to go Varanasi and get the education of Ayurveda from Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari²¹. Garuda-Purana also mentions Sushruta as the son of Vishvamitra²². Shalihotra-Samhita, a treatise on the science of medicine of the horses (Ashvayurveda) mentions Sushruta as the son of sage Shalihotra who learnt that science from his father. Mitrajita, Gandhara, Garga and others were his classmates²³. Agni-Purana states that Sushruta learnt both human medicine (Narayurveda) and medicine of horses (Ashvayurveda) from Dhanvantari Divodasa, the king of Kashi²⁴.

On the base of all the informations and references, majority of scholars are of the view that Sushruta, son of Vishvamitra, was the disciple of Divodasa, king of Kashi. But here is again difficult to identify that which Vishvamitra was the father of Sushruta as many sages having this name are available in the history e.g. Vishvamitra as a seer in Rigveda of many hymns, Vishvamitra as the son of king Gadhi, ruler of Kanyakubja and teacher of Rama and Lakshmana, as an author of a treatise on Ayurveda, as an author of Dhanurveda, as an author of Dharmashastra etc. Out of these, the view that Vishvamitra of the Ramayana is the father of Sushruta has been generally accepted²⁵. Sushruta, the son of sage Shalihotra may be the different authority, as no more description on Ashvayurveda is available in Sushruta-Samhita.

Date of Sushruta

Historians accept the ambiguity in the exact period of Sushruta. Hass accept Sushruta in 12th century, Jones Wilson in 9-10th century, Macdonal in 4th Cent.B.C, Hoernle accept 6 century before Vikrama Samvata, Hessler and Shriyut Girindranath Mukhopadhyaya accept 1000 B.C. On the basis of all these views Sushruta-Samhita, Part-1 may be 2600 years old²⁶. Acharya P.V. Sharma considers two Sushruta i.e. Vridhdha Sushruta and Sushruta. He accepts Vridhdha Sushruta in the time period of Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari and it is 1000-1500 B.C. Sushruta, the redactor of main text can be placed in the 2nd century A.D on the basis of many supportive references such as - Hora word is used in Sushruta-

Samhita which is derived from Horus, the Greek word. The good contact with Greek people took place in 4th Cent.B.C. So the date of second Sushruta will be after 4th Cent.B.C. Sushruta mentions Yuktaseniya adhyaya, Dundubhiswaniya agada and many more topics related to king which shows his relation with any king possibly Satavahana Samrata Gautamiputra Shatakarni who is considered in between the 2nd – 3rd Cent.A.D. Vasudeva Dharma is abundantly followed in Sushruta-Samhita which grew in 1st to 4th Cent.A.D. Shashthi-puja which was in vogue in Gupta period is not mentioned in Sushruta-Samhita. Two type of classification of Ritu (season) is available in Sushruta-Samhita, Ekendranath Gosh, on the base of mathematics, stated 1500 years difference in between the two type of classification. So if we consider the first classification of Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari, then second classification may be linked with Pratisamsakarta Sushruta. On the basis of all these references, the time period of second Sushruta stands near about 2nd century A.D.²⁷. If we accept one Sushruta as per the opinion of Nepal Rajaguru Pt.Hemraj Sharma, the time period of Sushruta will be the same as is accepted for Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari and that is 1500-1000 years B.C.

Place of Sushruta

Sushruta has not mentioned his birth place any where, but he quoted many places related to south India such as mountains, source places to collect Jalauka i.e. leech and used Dakshinapatha word in different context for south which show his relation some how with southern part of India. In Etareya Brahmana, the origin of the Andhrapradesha is considered by Vishvamitra. Sushruta is considered as a son of Vishvamitra. Scholars from southern part namely Ugradityacharya etc. followed Sushruta mostly²⁸. All these references suggest that he may be from southern part of the India.

Contribution of Sushruta

Charaka and Sushruta are considered the two exemplary personalities in the field of Ayurveda. Vagbhata clearly accepted the indebtedness to both the Charaka and Sushruta. In medieval period; Naishadhiyacharita also quoted both the authorities. In the inscriptions of king Yashovarman (9th-10th Cent.A.D.), Sushruta is quoted respectfully. Arabic physician Rhazes (9thcent.A.D.) also mentioned Sushruta in his writings. Sanaka, the textbook of Toxicology is based on the Kalpasthana of Sushruta-Samhita. The Navanitakam, the old book of medicine quotes Sushruta but not the Charaka which shows the name and fame of Sushruta and it seems that Sushruta-Samhita was more popular at that time than Charaka-Samhita²⁹. If we accept Vriddha Sushruta and Sushruta then the Aupanishadika description goes in credit of Vriddha Sushruta and Pauranika and Pre-Guptakalina description can be credited to Sushruta. But it will be better to assume Sushruta as a single personality as sufficient references are not available in the original text of Sushruta-Samhita about Vriddha Sushruta. Sushruta elaborates the other specialties of medicine but mainly the Shalya-Tantra (surgery) as in the beginning of Samhita he

quotes “Shalyagyanam samantatah” means surgical knowledge is mentioned everywhere in his text. The specific contributions of Sushruta by his text are teaching and learning methods, Yogya, dissection of cadaver at the macro level, exclusive description of Yantra-Shastras, shashti upakramas of Vrana (sixty types of treatment procedures of wound), Kshara-karma, Agni-karma, Jalauka-avacharan, detail description of Siravedha (venepuncture), Sandhana-Shalyakarma (plastic surgery) such as- Nasa-sandhana, Karnapali-Sandhana etc., discussion of Emergency conditions like-Ushnavatapatadagha, Shitavarshanilahata, Indravajradagha, Dhumopahata (burns), Udakapurnodara (drowning), Bahurajulatapasha (hanging and strangulation), description of Marma, differentiation of Shira, Dhamani and Srotas, discussion about Pitta and Agni, five types of Pitta Dosha, Shatkriyakala, ideal definition of healthy person, description of aupasargika rogas (infectious diseases) like-Kushtha, Jwara, Shosha etc., detail informations of Visha-Vidya (toxicology), first time mentioning of Phenashma, Haritala as Dhatu-Visha, purification or neutralization of aerobic toxins by Dundubhiswaniya, initiation of military medicine in the form of Yuktaseniya adhyaya, various pharmaceutical preparations such as- Putapaka, Ayaskriti, Asava-Arishta, Churnakriya etc., properties of medicines according to their place of origin, Panchapanchamula gana etc.³⁰. Sushruta's contributions are linked with different specialties of Ayurveda which shows his great wisdom and devotion towards medicine and ultimately towards the service of suffering humanity.

CONCLUSION

Sushruta and Sushruta-Samhita are two famous names in the history of Ayurveda. Credit of Sushruta-Samhita goes to Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari, Sushruta, Nagarjuna, and Chandrata who are the preceptor, composer, redactor and amendor respectively. The extant Sushruta-Samhita is the comprehensive dealing with all the eight specialties of Ayurveda with greater portion of Shalya-Tantra. Sushruta, who might be a son of Vishvamitra, composed it in 1500-1000 year B.C. on the base of perceptions of his teacher and later on redacted by Nagarjuna who possibly added the Uttara-Tantra also. Chandrata amended it in 10th Cent.A.D. on the basis of available commentary of Jejjata. Because of catering all the needs and requirements of medical sectors, many commentators wrote commentaries on it out of which Nibandha-Samgraha commentary by Dalhana (12th Cent.A.D.) is fully available and accepted by physicians due to its unique explanations of the subject. Sushruta has not mentioned his detail identity in his classic, so it is quite difficult to comment upon it but he has contributed a lot in the field of Ayurveda especially in Sharira and Shalya-Tantra which is the shining and everlasting identity. Looking toward his contributions made in Ayurveda, it becomes clear that he is the great Surgeon and visionary in the field of Ayurveda.

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