

## SOME VIEWS BASED ON THE SURVEY OF MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND PRACTITIONERS

B. RAMA RAO\*

### ABSTRACT

In ancient India, all the branches of learning-arts as well as sciences were transmitted orally from generation to generation. This practice of oral transmission gradually dwindled and was supplemented by compilations and compositions. Frequent seminars and symposia were also held. Later on, comprehensive treatises appeared on all branches of learning. Ayurveda is no exception of this type of transmission. There were also some changes in the priorities, mode of approach and classification of Ayurveda into different branches. Hundreds of manuscripts dealing with Ayurveda are still available in public and private libraries and also with individuals. Similarly, in the rural places, there are several medical practitioners of this ancient system of medicine. These practitioners had their knowledge acquired from their ancestors traditionally.

A study of the contents dealt within the manuscripts has been made.

In ancient India, all the branches of learning-arts as well as sciences were transmitted orally from generation to generation. As centuries passed on, this practice of oral transmission gradually dwindled and was supplemented by compilations and compositions in the form of sūtras or aphorisms. In this period, frequent seminars and symposia were also held to discuss, review, revise and improve the knowledge. Later on, comprehensive treatises appeared on all branches of learning.

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life of India, is no exception for this type of transmission. Bhardvāja was the first human being who acquired Ayurveda from Indra, the king of Gods. Ātreya transmitted it to his disciples Agniveśa and five others. These six disciples recorded their knowledge, which is the first available recorded knowledge of Ayurveda. Thereafter, the spread of knowledge was very wide and in the ensuing centuries, several comprehensive treatises and compilations appeared. There were

also some changes in the priorities, mode of approach and classification of Ayurveda in to different branches.

During the ancient classical period, the theoretical and philosophical background based on s̄āṅkhya and vaiśeṣika darśanas, appears to have been attached considerable importance in the study of Ayurveda along with the applied sections like materia medica, diagnosis and treatment as well as anatomy and physiology. The importance of philosophical and theoretical background was reduced in the medieval period and more stress was given to the study of sections which have applied utility. This reached its height in the late medieval and early modern period and the practitioners became interested only in diagnosis, treatment and medicines and not in the detailed knowledge of the fundamental principles.

Hundreds of manuscripts dealing with Ayurveda are still available in many public and private libraries and also with individuals who are descendants of hereditary families of physicians. Similarly, in the rural places, there are several medical practitioners of this ancient system of medicine. These practitioners had their knowledge acquired from their ancestors traditionally.

A study of the contents dealt with in the manuscripts has been made and it is suggested that the

manuscripts may be broadly classified into three categories:-

### **1. Texts with theoretical importance :**

Texts devoting considerable importance to the theoretical concepts and philosophical background, apart from the sections on anatomy, physiology and hygiene as well as diagnosis and therapeutics.

### **2. Texts with stress on applied aspects :**

Texts giving more importance to applied sections like materia medica, diagnosis and treatment and also preparation of medicines including rasaśāstra.

### **3. Manuals of Practitioners :**

Texts dealing with the treatment of different diseases with brief or no information on diagnosis and other related aspects.

There are evidences in the literature to infer that the developments in the priorities of subjects occurred gradually through centuries. Books and treatises are compiled to meet the needs of some group of scholars or practitioners. It may not be unreasonable to state that any literature has some group of readers or practitioners in its view. The survey of medical practitioners extends support to the existence of the above three practitioners.

## 1. Texts of theoretical importance :

This category includes works which deal suitably with all the branches of Ayurveda and also allot necessary importance to the philosophical concepts, theoretical background and also other applied sections like hygiene, materia medica, pathology. doṣas and rasas. All the saṁhitās (classics) and works of earlier centuries including their commentaries can be classified under this category. Bhāvaprakāśa, Parahitasāṁhitā, Kalyāṇākāraka are some of the later works of this category. The number of such works among the vast treasure of Ayurvedic literature is small. It is possible that several such works of ancient and early centuries of christian era have been lost. It is well known that the six disciples of Ātreya compiled independent treatises of their own, but only two have come down to us; and among the two, one is in the form of a revised and redacted version by later authors, while the other by Bheia is available only in a fragmentary form. Several other saṁhitās are also lost.

Among the practitioners also, few are found to belong to the first category. They are generally well-versed in Sanskrit and possess deep knowledge of the philosophical concepts, theories, fundamental principles of

darśanas and also the detailed knowledge of doṣas and their vitiation. Thus, it is found that the remnants of this type of scholar-practitioners as well as compilations by them were popular up to medieval period and are still existing.

## 2. Texts on Applied sections :

A study of the practitioners\* reveals that majority of the practitioners do not study the philosophical background or theoretical concepts.

Importance is attached to the knowledge of the applied branches including the preparation of medicines. Works or compilations appeared to meet their demand. Both these texts and practitioners eventually show that the topics of Ayurveda which are directly related to the practice and treatment of diseases had gained more and more importance gradually over the other sections.

The detailed classification of doṣas, rasas, the six stages of the vitiation of doṣas like caya, prakopa, praśama, sthānasamśraya, etc. and the three rogamārgas and other such details are not studied. It may be interesting to investigate the reasons for disregarding the sections which are not directly related to practice. It also appears from the literature that the organisation of seminars or confe-

\*The word practitioner is used in this paper to refer to hereditary practitioners of Ayurveda who acquired their knowledge from their predecessors in traditional way.

rences or scholarly gatherings disappeared.

There are several compilatory works with diagnosis and treatment of diseases in a very good number throughout the country. Majority of the manuscripts relate to this category. There are compilations of selected prescriptions from earlier works and also all those evolved out of their experience. Texts having their titles ending with—sāra, —kalika, —saṅgraha, —sāgara etc. are available in many manuscripts collections. Though there are no evidences to holding of seminars to discuss and exchange of views and experiences, the practitioners of medieval period were broad-minded and research-oriented. Drugs of foreign origin which found place in their compilations were introduced by the foreign invaders and traders. Some new diseases were also described. The drugs of foreign origin were administered, their effects studied and the findings and observations incorporated in the compilations. A practitioner of 17th century, Hejibu Rāmanna advises the physicians to be in touch with the new developments in the use of drugs and also to have discussions with monks, yogis, rāsavādins, medical scholars, paurāṅikas and foreign physicians and to exchange views with them. It is also noticed that several works exclusively on materia medica appeared during medieval period. The works Guṇapāṭha, Dravyaratnāvali, Śadra-

sanighaṅṭu and such others were popular.

The influence of other branches of learning like tantra, astrology and religion is a considerable phenomenon of this period. Books like Hara-mekhala of Māhuka, Kakṣapuṭatantra and Rasendramaṅgala attributed to Nāgārjuna, Ānandakanda attributed to Mahābhhairava and such other works and also some descriptions like the ten types of vāyu and different types of nāḍis indicate the effect of yoga and tantra. The astrological positions of different planets and constellations at the time of onset of disease or at the time of arrival of the messenger were considered to decide the prognosis. Virasimhāvaloka and some other minor works show the influence of astrology. Sins committed in the earlier births were considered to be the cause of diseases and various propitiatory rites were recommended for the cure. This subject is called 'Karmavipāka' and a work Madanamahārṇava attributed to king Madanapāla is exclusively devoted to Karmavipāka. Several minor works in the form of manuals for practitioners do not fail to mention karmavipāka and recommend propitiatory rites for the relief. It is mentioned in the classics that diseases are to be cured by medicines as well as by charities, japa (chanting), homa (sacrifice) worship of gods etc. But in the classical works, there is no elaboration of the methods other than medicine.

The feeling of pulse is also a significant contribution of this period. This is supposed to be due to the influence of tantra, yoga or siddha. Several booklets appeared on nāḍī—the feeling of pulse. The examination of eight places called aṣṭasthāna parikṣa also gained importance. Another salient feature on this category is, the specialisation of certain disease or diseases and subjects.

However, this specialisation does not conform to the eight divisions of Ayurveda. Apart from this, it appears that there were five types of physicians during the medieval period.

1. Nara Vaidyas—probably, to distinguish from the veterinary doctors.
2. Bhūta Vaidyas
3. Gaja Vaidyas
4. Aśva Vaidyas
5. Paśu Vaidyas.

Some works dealt exclusively with a disease or diseases, while some others appeared on other topics like dietetics, preparation of āsavas and single drug recipes and preparation of compound medicines.

Netraroganidāna, Jvaraparājaya, Vandhyācikitsā, Ṣaṇḍhacikitsā, Sarvakāśabheṣaja, Viśavaidya, Rasāyana-vidhi, Yakṣmaroganidāna, Pathyāp-thya etc.

Among the practitioners also, some are specialised in treating a particular disease; some are well

known for their diagnosis based exclusively on the feeling of pulse; some practitioners treat several diseases with and some selected drugs or single drug.

### 3. Manuals of Practitioners :

The works under this category are not necessarily in a book form. They are notes or manuals of practitioners. The number of such texts is limited in manuscript libraries or collections. While the number of practitioners, who use such works is more. The number of works of this category should also have been more. The reason for the limited number may be that such works were not collected and preserved, since they are not in book form, but are in the form of notes by individuals without any arrangement of subject or title and continuity. All families of hereditary physicians have bundles of leaves or papers noted down by the predecessors of recent past. These manuals generally contain the name of the disease and one or two prescriptions for its cure. They cover all common and prevalent diseases and also the medicines which were found effective during their practice. The prescriptions might have been recorded after their study, trial and experience. Sometimes, they also contain the ingredients and the method of preparation of important and commonly used age old compound medicines. The prescriptions contain mostly the drugs which are easily available.

Rarely, the traditional compound preparations may be authenticated by verses from classics or treatises. Except for such quotations, the matter is in the regional language and the drugs are also mentioned by the local names. The practitioners of this category are also almost ignorant of Sanskrit, except that they may have some verses by heart. They are not acquainted with any knowledge of darśanas or even with the fundamental principles of Ayurveda, except the names of diseases and attributing their causation to the doṣas. They do not have any knowledge of the basic principles like rasa, vīrya, vipāka and also the detailed classifications

of several major diseases. The detailed knowledge of diagnosis must have been acquired orally by the preceptors.

Thus, it can be well established that by the passage of time, the science of health and medical practice of Ayurveda had some transformation from a more philosophical and conceptual stage to a mere practice-oriented manual of practitioners. This does not mean that the scholarly study of Ayurveda along with the allied darśanas was completely given up, but it was limited only to a small section of the society.

सारांश

## चिकित्सापरक पांडुलिपियों तथा व्यवसायी चिकित्सकों के सर्वेक्षण पर आधारित कुछ विचार

—बी. रामाराव

प्राचीन भारत में कला एवं विज्ञान सहित विद्या की सभी शाखाओं का एक पीढ़ी से दूसरी पीढ़ी तक प्रसार श्रुति के रूप में हुआ। यह श्रुति द्वारा प्रसार की प्रथा घरे-घीरे समाप्त हो गई और उसका स्थान संग्रह ग्रन्थों तथा रचनाओं ने ले लिया। समय-समय पर विचार गोष्ठियों तथा सम्भाषण परिषदों का आयोजन भी किया गया। तत्पश्चात् विद्या की सभी शाखाओं पर विस्तृत संहिताओं की रचना का कार्य प्रारम्भ हुआ। इस प्रकार से ज्ञान के प्रसार के क्रम में आयुर्वेद अपवाद नहीं है। प्राथमिकताओं उपागम ढंग तथा विभिन्न शाखाओं में आयुर्वेद के वर्गीकरण में कुछ परिवर्तन भी हुए। आयुर्वेद संबंधी सैकड़ों पांडुलिपियां बहुतेरे सार्वजनिक तथा निजी पुस्तकालयों में एवं अनेक व्यक्तियों के घरों में अब भी उपलब्ध हैं। उसी प्रकार ग्रामीण प्रदेशों में इस प्राचीन चिकित्सा पद्धति के बहुत से व्यवसायी चिकित्सक हैं जिन्होंने यह ज्ञानार्जन अपने पूर्वजों से पारम्परिक रूप में किया है। उपरोक्त पांडुलिपियों में प्रतिपादित विषयों पर किया गया यह एक अध्यायन है।