



The Origins and Development of Āyurveda as a Medical System

Dr. Supriya Roy

Assistant Professor

Department of Sanskrit, Kandi Raj College,
Kandi, West Bengal, India -742137
Email: roy.supriya9999@gmail.com

Abstract:

Āyurveda, the traditional medical system of India, has played a significant role in promoting holistic health and longevity since ancient times. This study examines the historical foundations, philosophical principles, and therapeutic practices of Āyurveda with special reference to its classical Sanskrit sources. The primary objective of this research is to analyze how Āyurvedic knowledge developed in ancient India and how its principles continue to influence contemporary healthcare practices.

The study is based on a qualitative and textual analysis of primary Āyurvedic texts such as the Carakasamhitā and Suśrutasamhitā, along with relevant secondary scholarly works. By examining these classical sources, the research explores the theoretical framework of Āyurveda, including its understanding of health, disease, and the balance of bodily elements. Special attention is given to the holistic approach of Āyurveda, which integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being in the process of healing.

The findings indicate that Āyurveda developed as a comprehensive medical system grounded in philosophical and empirical knowledge. Its diagnostic methods, preventive measures, and therapeutic practices were designed to maintain harmony between the body, mind, and environment. Unlike many modern medical treatments that may involve adverse side effects, Āyurvedic therapies emphasize natural remedies, lifestyle regulation, and preventive healthcare.



The study concludes that Āyurveda represents a valuable component of India's traditional knowledge system and continues to hold relevance in the modern world. Its principles of holistic health and natural healing can contribute significantly to contemporary discussions on sustainable and preventive healthcare.

Key Words: Tridoṣaa, Vāgbhaṭa, Śalyatantra, Pañcamahābhūta, Vedic Medicine.

Introduction

About the vast Āyurveda, we know very little. Nonetheless, it is clear from the few materials we find that modern medical knowledge and ancient Āyurveda did not significantly differ from one another. A testament to the supreme brilliance of Indian culture, Āyurveda has emerged as a prestigious medical discipline, one of several branches, because of numerous studies conducted since ancient times. Actually, life is the world's most valuable resource. However, living alone is insufficient; a successful life is one that is spontaneous and healthy. Failure in life's struggles stems from being unwell and sickly. According to the Carakasamhitā-“rogastasyāpahartāraḥ śreyaso jīvitasya ca” (1) .Āyurveda helps to achieve a certain life goal by eliminating this illness and the state of being unhealthy. This rationalist approach to medicine made it possible for individuals to live long lives and find respite from disease.

The first original content of Indian culture is the Veda. A variety of topics, including religion, money, politics, health, science, and more, are covered in the Veda. Numerous indications suggest that the origins of Āyurveda can be traced back to Vedic literature. For instance, the Veda contains descriptions of Sūryacikitsā, (2) Vāyucikitsā, (3) Agnicikitsā, (4) Jalacikitsā, (5) and other similar concepts. In addition, the Vedic literature contains excellent examples of restoring body parts and granting eyesight, hearing, and youth, among other things. In order to prevent numerous ailments and to live a long life, the Vedic sages offered a variety of medical recommendations. Physiology, embryology, health science, infertility, brain surgery, etc., were all carefully studied



and practiced back then. In the past, Āyurveda was regarded as one of the Vedic secondary sciences.

Health and medicine have always been fundamental concerns of human civilization. Every culture has developed methods to maintain health and treat disease. Among the oldest and most comprehensive systems of medicine is Āyurveda, which originated in ancient India and has been practiced continuously for thousands of years.

Āyurveda is not merely a system of medical treatment but a complete philosophy of life. It focuses on maintaining harmony between the physical body, mental faculties, and environmental factors. The goal of Āyurveda is not only to cure diseases but also to promote longevity, vitality, and overall well-being.

The classical definition of Āyurveda appears in the Carakasamhitā:

“hitāhitam sukham duḥkhamāyustasya hitāhitam ।
mānam ca tacca yatroktamāyurvedaḥ sa ucyate ॥” (6)

Central Thesis Statement:

This study argues that Āyurveda developed through a gradual intellectual transformation from early Vedic healing traditions rooted in ritual and religious practices to a systematic medical science grounded in theoretical and empirical knowledge. By examining key classical texts such as the Carakasamhitā and the Suśrutasamhitā, the paper demonstrates how medical ideas were organized into a coherent framework of diagnosis, prevention, and treatment. It further suggests that the development of Āyurveda was shaped not only by textual traditions but also by evolving philosophical and cultural contexts in ancient India. Therefore, the emergence of Āyurveda as a structured medical system reflects a dynamic interaction between ritual knowledge, empirical observation, and intellectual systematization.

Purpose of the Research

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the origin, historical growth, and systematic development of Āyurveda as one of the most ancient and comprehensive systems of



medicine in the world. Āyurveda, which literally means “the science of life” (Āyus = life, Veda = knowledge), represents a holistic approach to health that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This research seeks to investigate how this medical tradition originated in ancient India and gradually developed into a structured and influential medical system.

- 1. To Investigate the Historical Origins of Āyurveda-** One of the main purposes of the research is to explore the earliest sources of Āyurvedic knowledge. The roots of Āyurveda are closely associated with the Atharva Veda, which contains numerous hymns related to healing practices, medicinal herbs, disease prevention, and spiritual remedies. By studying these early Vedic references, the research aims to understand how ancient Indian society perceived disease, health, and the role of nature and divine forces in healing. The research also seeks to analyze how traditional medical knowledge was transmitted through oral traditions and gradually organized into systematic medical literature.
- 2. To Examine the Development of Classical Āyurvedic Literature-** Another important objective of this research is to study the development of Āyurveda through its classical medical treatises. Among the most important works are the Carakasamhitā, associated with the physician Charaka, and the Suśrutasaṃhitā, composed by the famous surgeon Suśruta. These texts systematically present medical theories, diagnostic methods, surgical procedures, pharmacology, dietetics, and preventive healthcare. The research aims to analyze how these works contributed to transforming Āyurveda from a collection of traditional healing practices into a well-organized scientific discipline.
- 3. To Study the Fundamental Principles of Āyurvedic Medicine-** Another purpose of the research is to understand the fundamental theoretical framework of Āyurveda. A central concept of this system is the Tridoṣa theory, which explains that the human body is governed by three biological energies: Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha. According to Āyurvedic philosophy, the balance of these three doṣas ensures good health, while their imbalance leads to disease.



The research also investigates other key concepts such as digestion (Agni), body tissues (Dhātu), metabolic waste (Mala), and the role of diet, lifestyle, and seasonal changes in maintaining health.

- 4. To Trace the Historical Evolution and Expansion of Āyurveda-** The research further aims to trace how Āyurveda developed through different historical periods. Over time, Āyurvedic knowledge expanded through commentaries, regional traditions, and the contributions of later scholars. It also interacted with other medical systems and cultural traditions across Asia.

This part of the research focuses on understanding how Āyurvedic ideas evolved, adapted, and spread beyond their original context while retaining their philosophical and scientific foundations.

- 5. To Analyze the Philosophical and Cultural Foundations of Āyurveda-** Āyurveda is not merely a medical system but is deeply connected with Indian philosophy, spirituality, and cultural traditions. Therefore, another purpose of this research is to examine the philosophical foundations that support Āyurvedic thought. These include the concepts of harmony between body, mind, and environment, as well as the belief that health is closely linked to ethical living, mental balance, and spiritual awareness.
- 6. To Evaluate the Relevance of Āyurveda in the Modern World-** Finally, the research seeks to assess the continuing relevance of Āyurveda in contemporary healthcare. In recent decades, there has been growing global interest in natural medicine, preventive healthcare, and holistic healing methods. Āyurveda offers valuable insights into lifestyle management, herbal medicine, nutrition, and disease prevention.

Thus, this research aims to show how the ancient principles of Āyurveda can contribute to modern medical discussions and complement contemporary healthcare practices.

In summary, the purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the origin, development, theoretical principles, and continuing relevance of Āyurveda. By studying



its historical roots and intellectual foundations, the research highlights the significance of Āyurveda as a rich medical tradition that has shaped the history of medicine and continues to influence modern approaches to health and well-being.

Literature Review

The origins and development of Āyurveda have been widely discussed by scholars in the fields of history, medicine, Indology, and philosophy. Classical Sanskrit texts as well as modern academic studies have contributed significantly to understanding the theoretical foundations and historical evolution of this medical tradition. However, existing scholarship also reveals several debates and interpretative differences regarding the development, chronology, and intellectual context of Āyurveda.

1. Vedic Foundations of Āyurveda- Many scholars trace the earliest roots of Indian medical knowledge to the Atharva Veda, which contains numerous hymns relating to healing, medicinal plants, disease prevention, and spiritual remedies. Modern researchers such as Dominik Wujastyk and G. Jan Meulenbeld argue that these Vedic sources provide the cultural and philosophical background from which the Āyurvedic medical tradition gradually developed. Their studies have established that early Indian healing practices were closely connected with ritual activities, religious beliefs, and the natural environment.

However, the relationship between Vedic healing traditions and classical Āyurveda remains a subject of scholarly debate. Some researchers argue that the medical concepts in the Atharva Veda were largely ritualistic and symbolic rather than systematic medical theories. Consequently, the process through which these early healing practices evolved into the structured theoretical framework of classical Āyurveda remains insufficiently explored.

The present study addresses this issue by examining how early healing traditions reflected in Vedic literature gradually contributed to the emergence of a more systematic medical tradition in later Āyurvedic texts.



2. Classical Āyurvedic Treatises- A significant portion of the scholarly literature focuses on the classical Āyurvedic treatises that systematized medical knowledge. Among these, the Carakasamhitā is widely recognized as one of the foundational texts of internal medicine (Kāyacikitsā). Existing scholarship has established that this text presents a systematic exposition of important theoretical concepts, including the Tridoṣa theory, the concept of digestion and metabolic fire (Agni), and the role of diet and lifestyle in maintaining health and preventing disease. These discussions demonstrate that classical Āyurveda developed a coherent framework for understanding physiology, pathology, and therapeutic practice. Similarly, the Suśrutasamhitā is regarded as one of the earliest comprehensive works on surgery in the history of medicine. Scholars have emphasized its detailed descriptions of surgical techniques, anatomical observations, and medical instruments, which indicate a high level of empirical medical knowledge. These contributions have led many historians of medicine to consider the text a landmark in the development of early surgical science. Despite this scholarly consensus regarding their theoretical and medical significance, important debates remain concerning the chronology, dating, and compositional history of these classical Āyurvedic texts. Traditional accounts attribute the Carakasamhitā to the sage Caraka and the Suśrutasamhitā to the sage Suśruta, placing their origins in remote antiquity. However, modern philological and historical research suggests that these texts evolved over several centuries through processes of compilation, redaction, and revision. Many scholars propose that the core layers of the Carakasamhitā may date roughly between the last centuries BCE and the early centuries CE, while the Suśrutasamhitā likely developed between the late first millennium BCE and the early centuries CE, with later additions by subsequent scholars. Modern researchers such as Dominik Wujastyk, Kenneth G. Zysk, and G. Jan Meulenbeld therefore argue that these works should not be understood as the product of a single author or moment in time, but rather as layered compilations reflecting the gradual development of Āyurvedic medical knowledge. This debate highlights an important gap in the existing literature. While the philosophical and medical theories of these texts have been extensively studied, the historical processes through which they were composed, edited, and



transmitted remain insufficiently explored. The present study contributes to this discussion by examining these classical texts within their broader intellectual and historical context, particularly addressing the scholarly debate regarding their dating and composition, and by analyzing how they reflect the transition from earlier healing traditions to a more systematic and theoretically organized medical framework.

3. Medieval Commentaries and Medical Compendia- During the medieval period, Āyurvedic knowledge was further expanded and preserved through commentaries and medical compendia. Works such as the Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya and Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha by Vāgbhaṭa played an important role in synthesizing earlier teachings and organizing them into more accessible forms for students and practitioners of medicine.

Scholars have generally agreed that these texts contributed significantly to the transmission and consolidation of Āyurvedic knowledge. They helped standardize medical theories and practices and ensured the continuity of the tradition across generations.

However, many researchers observe that medieval commentaries often focused primarily on interpreting and preserving earlier doctrines rather than introducing major theoretical innovations. Consequently, the medieval phase is frequently viewed as a period of consolidation rather than radical intellectual transformation.

The present study revisits these developments in order to better understand how earlier medical concepts were preserved, reorganized, and transmitted within the evolving intellectual tradition of Āyurveda.

4. Modern Scholarly Studies on Āyurveda- Modern academic research has played a crucial role in reconstructing the historical development of Āyurvedic literature. G. Jan Meulenbeld's monumental work History of Indian Medical Literature provides a comprehensive bibliographical and historical survey of Āyurvedic texts. Dominik Wujastyk's the roots of Āyurveda offers critical translations and analyses of early medical sources, while Kenneth G. Zysk has examined the relationship between early Indian medicine, religion, and cultural practices.



These studies have significantly advanced the academic understanding of Āyurveda by providing detailed philological analysis and historical interpretation of classical texts. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that earlier research relied heavily on textual analysis without sufficiently considering the broader social, cultural, and practical contexts in which medical knowledge developed.

Recent interdisciplinary approaches therefore attempt to integrate textual scholarship with insights from anthropology, history of science, and medical studies. This shift highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual and historical environment in which Āyurvedic medicine evolved.

The present research adopts such a contextual approach by combining textual analysis with broader historical perspectives on the development of medical knowledge in ancient India.

5. Contemporary Relevance and Interdisciplinary Perspectives- Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the contemporary relevance of Āyurveda within global healthcare systems. Researchers have explored its contributions to preventive medicine, herbal pharmacology, lifestyle management, and holistic health practices. These studies emphasize that Āyurveda is not merely a historical tradition but a living medical system that continues to influence discussions on complementary and alternative medicine.

However, debates remain regarding the scientific validation, standardization, and integration of Āyurvedic practices within modern biomedical frameworks. These discussions highlight the ongoing tension between traditional medical knowledge and modern scientific methodologies.

The present study contributes to this broader discussion by examining the historical development of Āyurvedic medical theory and its intellectual foundations, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the tradition that informs its modern applications.

The existing scholarship demonstrates that Āyurveda evolved gradually from early Vedic healing traditions into a sophisticated and organized medical system. Classical treatises, medieval



commentaries, and modern academic studies collectively provide important insights into its theoretical principles and historical development.

Nevertheless, significant questions remain regarding the chronology of classical Āyurvedic texts, the transition from ritual healing to systematic medical theory, and the broader intellectual context in which Āyurvedic knowledge developed. By critically engaging with both classical sources and modern scholarship, the present study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the historical origins and development of Āyurveda as a medical system.

Methodology

The present research on the origin and development of Āyurveda is based primarily on a historical and textual analytical approach. Since Āyurveda is an ancient medical tradition preserved in classical Sanskrit literature and later scholarly works, the methodology of this study relies mainly on qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources. The aim is to examine the historical evolution, theoretical foundations, and intellectual development of Āyurvedic medicine.

Historical Method- The research employs the historical method to trace the chronological development of Āyurveda from the early Vedic period to the modern era. This method involves studying ancient medical traditions within their cultural, social, and intellectual contexts. Early references to healing practices are examined in Vedic literature, particularly in the Atharva Veda, which contains hymns related to diseases, healing rituals, and medicinal plants. By analyzing such sources, the research attempts to understand how medical ideas gradually evolved into a systematic body of knowledge.

Textual Analysis- A major part of the research methodology involves the detailed study and interpretation of classical Āyurvedic texts. Important works such as the Carakasamhitā, attributed to Charaka, and the Suśrutasamhitā, associated with Suśruta, are analyzed to understand the development of medical theory, diagnosis, and treatment. These texts provide valuable insights into physiology, pathology, pharmacology, and surgical practices in ancient India.



The study also considers later works such as the Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya of Vāgbhaṭa, which helped consolidate and summarize earlier Āyurvedic teachings. Through careful textual examination, the research identifies the major concepts, principles, and medical practices described in these works.

Comparative and Analytical Approach- The research also adopts a comparative and analytical approach to understand the relationship between Āyurvedic ideas and Indian philosophical traditions. Particular attention is given to the influence of Sāṅkhya philosophy, which provides the metaphysical framework for many Āyurvedic concepts, such as the theory of the five elements and the balance of bodily energies. By comparing philosophical and medical ideas, the study seeks to explain how theoretical concepts were applied to practical medical science.

Use of Secondary Sources- In addition to classical texts, the research utilizes modern academic studies, historical analyses, and scholarly interpretations related to Āyurveda. Works by historians of medicine and Indologists provide important perspectives on the historical development, textual transmission, and cultural significance of Āyurvedic knowledge.

Analytical Interpretation- Finally, the collected information is analyzed and interpreted to understand the evolution of Āyurveda as a medical system. This process involves identifying key developments, major contributions of physicians, and the gradual transformation of medical knowledge from early traditions into a structured scientific discipline.

Thus, by combining historical research, textual analysis, and comparative study, this methodology aims to present a comprehensive understanding of the origins and development of Āyurveda. This approach helps reveal how Āyurvedic medicine evolved through centuries of intellectual and practical advancement.

History of Āyurveda

Brahmā is known as the omniscient in all the scriptures. Brahmā has been referred to as Āyurveda's first advisor in all anthologies and passages. It is believed that Brahmāsamhitā, or the anthology of Brahmā, was the first book of Āyurveda and was penned by Brahmā himself. Dakṣa,



Prajāpati, and Bhāskara received Āyurvedic guidance for the first time from Brahmā. In the Dakṣa tradition, decision-makers were prominent, but in the Bhāskara tradition, medicine was the main focus. Dakṣa and Prajāpati taught the Aśvinīkumāras, and they shared this knowledge with Indra. Indra was the only person in the Olympus who knew Āyurveda. From then on, the sages were filled with compassion as they observed the people afflicted by illnesses on the planet. Because of this, the sages made plans for the “Śāstra” practices in order to deliver Āyurveda to the world for the benefit of humanity. Consequently, sages such as Bharadvāja traveled to Indra to learn about Āyurveda, returned to earth, and taught their followers more. The term “āyurvedāvatarāṇa” (History of Āyurveda) refers to this knowledge flow from Lord Brahmā to the world. The tradition of “āyurvedāvatarāṇa” is slightly altered in various Āyurvedic literature.

Meaning and Concept of Āyurveda:

The word Āyurveda is composed of two Sanskrit terms: Āyus – life or lifespan, Veda – knowledge or science. Thus Āyurveda literally means “the knowledge of life.” Āyurveda defines life as the combination of body, senses, mind, and soul. This concept is expressed in the classical verse: “śarīrendriyasattvātmasaṃyogo dhāri jīvitam” (7)

According to Āyurvedic philosophy, health exists when all bodily systems function in harmony. The famous definition of health given in the Suśrutasaṃhitā is:

“samadoṣaḥ samāgnīśca samadhātumalakriyaḥ ।
prasannātmendriyamanāḥ svastha ityabhidhīyate ॥” (8)

This verse indicates that health depends on: Balance of the three doṣas (Vāta, Pitta, Kapha), Proper functioning of digestive fire (agni), Balanced body tissues (dhātu), Proper elimination of waste (mala), Mental and sensory tranquillity. Thus Āyurveda approaches health in a holistic manner, integrating physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

Development during the Pre-Classical Period of Āyurveda:

The pre-classical period of Āyurveda, generally dated from about 1500 BCE to 600 BCE, represents an important formative stage in the history of Indian medical science. During this period, medical knowledge was not yet compiled into systematic written texts. Instead, it was



transmitted orally through the traditional guru–śiṣya (teacher–disciple) system. In this method, teachers imparted knowledge of healing practices, medicinal plants, diagnosis, and therapeutic techniques directly to their students, who preserved and passed on this knowledge to the next generation. This oral tradition ensured the continuity and gradual refinement of medical ideas and practices.

The intellectual roots of Āyurvedic medicine during this time were closely connected with Vedic culture, especially the Atharva Veda, which contains references to diseases, healing rituals, and herbal remedies. Although early healing practices were often associated with religious beliefs and rituals, they gradually developed into more systematic approaches based on observation, experience, and practical application.

During the pre-classical period, two important schools of medical thought emerged that significantly influenced the later development of Āyurveda. These were the Ātreya School and the Dhanvantari School.

The Ātreya School, founded by the renowned teacher Punarvasu Ātreya, mainly emphasized internal medicine (Kāyacikitsā). This school focused on understanding the causes of diseases, diagnosis, and therapeutic treatment through diet, medicine, and lifestyle regulation. The teachings of Ātreya were preserved by several disciples, among whom Agniveśa was the most prominent. Agniveśa compiled the teachings of his teacher into a medical treatise known as the Agniveśa Tantra, which later became the basis of the famous Carakasamhitā. This work eventually became one of the most authoritative texts of Āyurvedic internal medicine.

The second major tradition was the Dhanvantari School, associated with the legendary physician Dhanvantari, who is often regarded as the divine patron of Āyurveda. This school focused primarily on surgery (Śalyatantra) and practical medical procedures. The teachings of this tradition were later systematized by the eminent surgeon Suśruta, whose celebrated work, the Suśrutasamhitā, provides detailed descriptions of surgical instruments, operative techniques, anatomy, and various surgical treatments.



Both the Ātreya and Dhanvantari traditions played a crucial role in shaping the foundation of classical Āyurvedic medicine. The former emphasized theoretical knowledge, diagnosis, and internal therapy, while the latter developed practical surgical methods. Together, these two streams contributed to the systematic organization and comprehensive nature of Āyurveda.

Thus, the pre-classical period represents a significant stage in the evolution of Āyurveda, during which diverse medical traditions were gradually organized into coherent schools of thought that later formed the basis of classical Āyurvedic literature and practice.

Foundational sources of Āyurveda in Caraka

There are two instances in the Carakasamhitā where the description of “āyurvedāvatarāṇa” has somewhat changed. “āyurvedāvatarāṇa” has been described in the fourth quadrant of "Rasāyanādhyāya" of the book of medicines and “Dīrghañjīvitīyādhyāya,” the first chapter of the Carakasamhitā's source. According to the first chapter of the Carakasamhitā's source, Dakṣa and Prajāpati first learned all of Āyurveda from Brahmā. Next, they passed the information on to Aśvinīkumāras, who in turn passed it on to Indra. The sage Bharadvāja then came before Indra to attain the wisdom of Āyurveda:

brahmaṇā hi yathāproktamāyurvedam prajāpatiḥ ।
jagrāha nikhilenādāvaśvinau tu punastataḥ॥
asvibhyāṃ bhagavān śakraḥ pratipede ha kevalam ।
ṛṣiprokto bharadvājastasmācchakramupāgamat॥ (9)

In this context, it has been observed that Lord Ātreya has taken on the form of a narrative that recounts the genesis of Āyurvedic texts. He claims that a millennium ago, the pious sages organized a general assembly at the base of the Himalayas to discuss the causes of various diseases and to examine how these diseases affected religious austerities, fasting, study, vows, and human life. The great sage Bharadvāja went to Lord Indra as the sages' representative - bharadvājo'bravīttasmādrṣibhiḥ sa niyojitaḥ, (10) after understanding through his inner sight that



only Devarāja Indra could disclose the means of preventing diseases. Assuming Bharadvāja was intelligent, Indra gave him the knowledge of Āyurveda in a few succinct sentences:

tasmai provāca bhagavānāyurvedam śatakratuḥ |
padairalpaimarti buddhā vipulām paramarṣaye || (11)

Indra gave the knowledge of that Āyurveda that has to do with health and is infused with the three wise formulas of “hetu,” “liṅga,” and “auśadha” (reason, gender, and medicine), which are eternal or everlasting and virtuous. Sage Bharadvāja quickly gained a long life by formally obtaining the limitless knowledge of triskandha (also known as “hetu,” “liṅga,” and “auśadha”) Āyurveda. The sages thereafter obtained the wisdom of Āyurveda from Bharadvāja. The sages likewise took the omnipotent, life-improving wisdom of Āyurveda from Bharadvāja with affection, attained the light of knowledge, rightly adhered to Āyurvedic precepts, and ultimately attained a blissful and everlasting life in anticipation of longevity. Then, Punarvasu Ātreya, a compassionate follower of the sage Bharadvāja, imparted his wisdom to his six followers with the intention of spreading the influence of Āyurveda and showing kindness to all living things. These six disciples are “Agniveśa,” “Bhela,” “Jatukarṇa,” “Parāśara,” “Hārīta,” and “Kṣārapāṇi”-

atha maitrīparaḥ puṇyamāyurvedam punarvasuḥ | śiṣyebhyo dattavān ṣaḍbhyaḥ
sarvabhūtānukampayā ||
agniveśaśca bhelaśca jatūkarṇaḥ parāśaraḥ | hārītaḥ kṣārapāṇiśca jagrḥustanmunervacaḥ || (12)

Despite the fact that the great sage Punarvasu Ātreya's advice was the same for all of his followers, Agniveśa was particularly intelligent; thus, he wrote the first tantra. Other disciples then wrote their own tantras. Thus, Āyurveda was developed for the benefit of the fauna from Punarvasu Ātreya through Agniveśa and his composed tantras:

yāni cānumatānyeṣāṃ tantrāṇi paramarṣibhiḥ |
bhāvāya bhūtaśaṅghānām pratiṣṭhāna bhuvi lebhire || (13)



But there is no reference to Bharadwaja in the Cikitsāsthāna of the Carakasamhitā, where Āyurvedāvatarāṇa was mentioned. It tells the tale of how all the sages save Bharadvāja went to Indra and learned Āyurveda: -

himarādhīpatiguptaṃ jagmurbhugvaṅgirā'trivaśiṣṭhakaśyapāgastyapulastyavāmadevāsita-
gautamaprabhṛtayo maharṣaya. (14)

Regarding the sequence of Āyurveda's genesis, Brahmapurāṇa states that initially, Brahmā advised Bhāskara on the fifth Veda-Āyurveda-after learning about Ṛg, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharvaveda. Later, Bhāskara wrote an individual anthology about Āyurveda. He then taught his sixteen followers about Āyurveda:

dhanvantarīdivodāsaḥ kāsīrāja'svinīsutau |
nakulaḥ sahadevo'rkiśrīyaḥ vanojanakovudhaḥ ||
jāvālo jājalīpaulaḥ karatho'gastya eva ca |
jāte vedāṅgavedaśñāḥ ṣoḍaśavyādhināśakāḥ || (15)

Thus, the 16th chapter of Brahmapurāṇa contains the name of the 16 distinct Āyurvedic treatises written by these sixteen followers.

Carakasamhitā and the Development of Internal Medicine

The Carakasamhitā is one of the most authoritative and influential texts of Āyurveda. It is traditionally associated with the renowned physician Charaka, who systematized and expanded earlier medical teachings. The text represents a major milestone in the development of Kāyachikitsā, or internal medicine, and provides a comprehensive account of physiology, pathology, pharmacology, diagnosis, and medical ethics.

The Carakasamhitā primarily focuses on understanding the nature of the human body, the causes of disease, and the methods of maintaining health. One of the central ideas presented in this text is the theory of the Tridoṣa theory, which explains that the human body is governed by three



fundamental biological energies known as doṣas: Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha. According to Caraka, the proper balance of these three doṣas is essential for maintaining physical and mental health.

Vāta is considered the principle responsible for movement and activity within the body. It governs functions such as breathing, circulation, nerve impulses, and the movement of muscles and joints. Because of its dynamic nature, Vāta is often associated with the nervous system and various physiological movements.

Pitta represents the principle of transformation and metabolism. It regulates processes such as digestion, body temperature, vision, and the biochemical reactions that occur within the body. Pitta is closely connected with the digestive system and the body's ability to convert food into energy and nutrients.

Kapha, on the other hand, is responsible for structure, stability, and lubrication within the body. It supports the formation of bodily tissues, strengthens the immune system, and maintains the balance of fluids. Kapha provides physical strength and endurance and helps maintain the stability of the body.

According to the teachings of the Carakasamhitā, good health is achieved when these three doṣas remain in a state of equilibrium. However, when the balance among them is disturbed due to improper diet, lifestyle, environmental factors, or mental stress, diseases arise. Therefore, diagnosis in Āyurveda involves identifying which doṣa has become imbalanced and restoring harmony through appropriate treatment.

Another important contribution of Caraka is his emphasis on preventive healthcare. He believed that maintaining health is more important than merely treating disease. The text provides detailed guidelines regarding proper diet, daily routines, seasonal practices, and personal discipline. Caraka also highlighted the importance of ethical conduct for physicians, emphasizing qualities such as compassion, knowledge, honesty, and dedication to patient welfare.

Thus, the Carakasamhitā represents a comprehensive medical treatise that combines theoretical knowledge with practical medical guidance. Its holistic approach to health, focusing on



balance, prevention, and ethical practice, has played a crucial role in shaping the tradition of Āyurvedic internal medicine and continues to influence healthcare practices even today.

Suśrutasamhitā and Surgical Science

The Suśrutasamhitā is one of the most important classical texts of Āyurveda and is widely regarded as the foundational work on ancient Indian surgery. The text is traditionally attributed to the great physician Suśruta, who is often honored as the “father of surgery” due to his systematic and detailed descriptions of surgical knowledge and techniques. His work represents a remarkable achievement in the history of medical science and demonstrates the advanced level of medical understanding that existed in ancient India.

The Suśrutasamhitā primarily deals with Śalyatantra, the branch of Āyurveda concerned with surgical treatment. In this text, Suśruta provides extensive descriptions of various surgical procedures, diseases, and therapeutic methods. One of the most remarkable aspects of the work is its detailed account of more than 300 surgical procedures. These procedures include operations for treating wounds, fractures, tumors, abscesses, and other medical conditions requiring surgical intervention. Such detailed explanations show that surgery had already developed into a well-organized medical discipline in ancient India.

Another significant contribution of the Suśrutasamhitā is its description of over 100 surgical instruments. These instruments were carefully classified according to their shape and function. Suśruta described tools such as scalpels, forceps, needles, probes, and scissors, many of which resemble instruments used in modern surgical practice. He also explained the proper methods for handling and maintaining these instruments, emphasizing precision and cleanliness during surgical operations.

The text also contains remarkable information about plastic surgery and cataract surgery. One of the most famous surgical techniques described by Suśruta is rhinoplasty, the reconstruction of the nose, which was often required in ancient times due to injuries or punitive amputations. His method involved using a flap of skin from the patient’s cheek or forehead to rebuild the nose, a



technique that later influenced modern reconstructive surgery. Similarly, Suśruta described early procedures for removing cataracts from the eye, demonstrating advanced knowledge of ophthalmic surgery.

In addition to surgical techniques, the Suśrutasaṃhitā provides detailed information about human anatomy, emphasizing the importance of anatomical knowledge for successful surgery. Suśruta recommended the study of the human body through observation and dissection, which was a progressive idea for that period. He also outlined systematic training methods for surgeons, advising students to practice surgical skills on natural objects such as fruits, vegetables, and animal tissues before performing actual operations.

Furthermore, Suśruta discussed the proper management of wounds, including cleaning, bandaging, and healing techniques. His emphasis on hygiene, patient care, and post-operative treatment highlights the scientific and practical nature of his medical approach.

Thus, the Suśrutasaṃhitā stands as a monumental work in the history of medicine. It reflects the highly developed state of surgical science in ancient India and continues to be recognized as an important contribution to the global history of medical knowledge.

Philosophical Foundations of Āyurveda

The theoretical basis of Āyurveda is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical thought. Among the various philosophical systems of India, Sāṅkhya philosophy has had a particularly strong influence on Āyurvedic theory. This philosophical framework explains the origin and structure of the universe through fundamental principles and provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the human body and health. Āyurveda adopts many of these ideas and applies them to the study of physiology, pathology, and medical treatment.

According to the philosophical perspective of Āyurveda, the human body is not separate from the universe. Rather, it is considered a microcosm of the larger cosmos. This idea is expressed through the doctrine of the Pañcamahābhūta, or the five fundamental elements that constitute both the universe and the human body. These five elements are Earth (Pṛthvī), Water (Ap), Fire (Tejas),



Air (Vāyu), and Ether (Ākāśa). Each of these elements possesses specific qualities and functions that contribute to the structure and functioning of living beings.

The element Earth (Pṛthvī) represents solidity and stability. It is responsible for the structural components of the body, such as bones, muscles, tissues, and organs. This element provides strength and firmness to the physical body.

Water (Ap) symbolizes fluidity and cohesion. It maintains the body's moisture and is associated with bodily fluids such as blood, lymph, and other secretions. Water helps maintain lubrication, nourishment, and smooth functioning of bodily systems.

The element Fire (Tejas) represents transformation and energy. It is responsible for metabolic processes such as digestion, body temperature regulation, and the conversion of food into energy. Fire is closely connected with physiological transformation within the body.

Air (Vāyu) signifies movement and activity. It governs various dynamic processes such as breathing, circulation, nerve impulses, and muscular movements. This element plays a crucial role in coordinating bodily functions.

Finally, Ether (Ākāśa) represents space or openness. It forms the cavities and channels within the body that allow physiological processes to occur, such as the spaces in the digestive tract, respiratory system, and blood vessels.

In Āyurvedic theory, these five elements combine in different proportions to form the three fundamental biological energies or Tridoṣa theory: Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha. Vāta is mainly associated with Air and Ether, Pitta with Fire and Water, and Kapha with Earth and Water. These three doṣas regulate all physiological and psychological functions of the human body.

When the elements and the doṣas remain in proper balance, the body functions normally and health is maintained. However, imbalance among them leads to disturbances in bodily processes and results in disease. Therefore, the philosophical framework of Āyurveda helps explain the causes of illness and guides physicians in selecting appropriate treatments to restore balance.



Thus, the philosophical principles derived from Sāṅkhya thought provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for Āyurveda. This framework allows Āyurvedic medicine to interpret physiological processes, disease mechanisms, and therapeutic methods in a holistic and systematic manner.

Medieval Development of Āyurveda

The medieval period marks an important phase in the continued growth and refinement of Āyurveda. After the classical era, in which foundational texts such as the Carakasamhitā and Suśrutasamhitā were composed, Āyurvedic scholars continued to expand and reinterpret medical knowledge. During the medieval period, several important treatises were written that enriched the fields of diagnosis, pharmacology, therapeutics, and herbal medicine. These works helped preserve earlier medical traditions while also introducing new observations and practical approaches to treatment.

One of the most significant texts of this period is the Mādhavanidāna, composed by Mādhavakara. This work is particularly important for its systematic treatment of nidāna, or the diagnosis and classification of diseases. Mādhavakara carefully described various diseases, their causes, symptoms, and stages of development. The text became widely respected for its clarity and detailed descriptions of pathological conditions. Because of its focus on diagnostic methods, Mādhavanidāna greatly improved the physician's ability to identify diseases accurately and determine appropriate treatment.

Another influential work of the medieval period is the Śārṅgadharasamhitā, attributed to the scholar Śārṅgadhara. This text is especially known for its contributions to Āyurvedic pharmacology and the preparation of medicines. It provides detailed descriptions of medicinal formulations, dosage, and methods of preparing herbal and mineral compounds. Śārṅgadhara also discussed the importance of pulse diagnosis (nāḍīparīkṣā), which later became a widely practiced method in Āyurvedic clinical examination. Through these contributions, the Śārṅgadharasamhitā helped develop practical and effective pharmaceutical techniques.



Another major work of this period is the Bhāvaprakāśa, written by Bhāvamiśra. This text provides a comprehensive account of diseases, treatments, and medicinal plants. One of its most valuable contributions is its extensive discussion of herbs, food substances, and their therapeutic properties. Bhāvamiśra also incorporated knowledge of newly introduced plants and substances that became known in India during the medieval period. In this way, the Bhāvaprakāśa reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of Āyurvedic medicine.

The medieval period was therefore characterized by the compilation, systematization, and expansion of earlier Āyurvedic knowledge. Scholars carefully studied the classical texts while also contributing their own observations and clinical experiences. As a result, Āyurvedic medicine continued to develop into a comprehensive system that addressed a wide range of diseases and treatments.

In conclusion, the works such as Mādhavanidāna, Śārṅgadharaśaṃhitā, and Bhāvaprakāśa played a crucial role in strengthening the Āyurvedic tradition during the medieval period. They expanded knowledge of disease classification, pharmacology, and herbal medicine, ensuring that Āyurveda remained a living and evolving medical system.

Āyurveda in the Modern Era

The modern era represents a significant phase in the history of Āyurveda, marked by both challenges and revival. During the colonial period in India, particularly under the rule of the British East India Company and later the British administration, Western medical science began to dominate the formal healthcare system. Colonial authorities established medical colleges and hospitals that followed European scientific methods and promoted modern biomedical practices. As a result, traditional systems of medicine such as Āyurveda gradually lost institutional support and recognition within official medical institutions.

Because of this shift in policy, Āyurvedic education and practice were marginalized in many urban centers. Western medicine was increasingly viewed as more scientific and modern, which led to a decline in state patronage for traditional medical systems. However, despite these



challenges, Āyurveda continued to survive through the efforts of traditional physicians, known as Vaidyas, who preserved and transmitted their knowledge through family traditions and local training. In rural areas and many parts of Indian society, Āyurvedic practices remained widely respected and continued to be used for treating various diseases and maintaining general health.

In the early twentieth century, a strong movement emerged to revive and promote traditional Indian knowledge systems. Scholars, physicians, and social reformers began to emphasize the cultural and scientific value of Āyurveda. Several educational institutions and research centers were established to promote systematic study and teaching of Āyurvedic medicine. Āyurvedic colleges began to adopt structured curricula that combined traditional knowledge with modern scientific approaches. This revival helped restore the status of Āyurveda as an important component of Indian medical heritage.

After India gained independence in 1947, the government began to take active steps to support and institutionalize traditional medical systems. Various research councils, universities, and hospitals dedicated to Āyurvedic education and practice were established across the country. A major step in this direction was the creation of the Ministry of AYUSH, which oversees traditional medical systems such as Āyurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy. Through this institutional framework, the government supports education, research, and clinical practice related to Āyurveda.

Today, Āyurveda is officially recognized as an important healthcare system in India and is widely practiced both nationally and internationally. Many universities offer professional degrees in Āyurvedic medicine, and research institutions continue to explore the therapeutic value of Āyurvedic herbs, treatments, and preventive health practices. Furthermore, the growing global interest in natural medicine, holistic health, and wellness has contributed to the international popularity of Āyurveda.

Thus, despite the challenges faced during the colonial period, Āyurveda has successfully adapted to modern circumstances. Its integration into contemporary healthcare systems and its



increasing global recognition demonstrate the continuing relevance of this ancient medical tradition in the modern world.

Conclusion

The historical development of Āyurveda demonstrates the gradual transformation of early healing traditions into a systematic and intellectually structured medical system. Beginning with scattered references to healing practices in Vedic literature, particularly in the Atharva Veda, medical knowledge in ancient India gradually evolved through observation, experience, and philosophical reflection. This process culminated in the composition of classical treatises such as the Carakasamhitā and the Suśrutasamhitā, which organized medical knowledge into coherent frameworks of diagnosis, prevention, and treatment.

The present study has attempted to contribute to the scholarly understanding of this development by examining the historical continuity between early Vedic healing traditions and the later classical formulation of Āyurvedic medicine. Through a textual and historical analysis of primary sources and modern scholarship, the research highlights how medical ideas were progressively systematized and integrated with broader philosophical concepts such as the Tridoṣa theory and the Pañcamahābhūta doctrine. In this sense, the study demonstrates that Āyurveda emerged not as a static body of knowledge but as a dynamic intellectual tradition shaped by cultural, philosophical, and practical influences over several centuries.

More broadly, the historical trajectory of Āyurveda reveals how traditional medical systems often develop through a complex interaction between ritual practices, empirical observation, and theoretical systematization. The evolution of Āyurveda from early healing rituals to a comprehensive medical science illustrates the capacity of traditional knowledge systems to adapt, expand, and organize practical experience into coherent theoretical frameworks.

Despite the substantial scholarship on classical Āyurvedic texts, several important areas remain open for further research. Future studies may focus on the detailed philological analysis of lesser-known medical manuscripts, the regional transmission of Āyurvedic knowledge, and the



interaction between Āyurveda and other medical traditions in Asia. In addition, interdisciplinary research

References:

- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/16
- Ṛgveda. 1/50/11
- Ṛgveda. 10/186/3
- Yajurveda. 23/10
- Ṛgveda. 1/43/4, 1/23/19-20
- Carakasamhitā, Sūtrasthāna 1/41
- Carakasamhitā, Sūtrasthāna
- Suśrutasamhitā, Sūtrasthāna 15/41
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/4-5
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/19
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/23
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/30-31
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/40
- Carakasamhitā: Sūtrasthāna. 1/4/3
- Brahmavaivartapurāṇa: Brahma -Khaṇḍam. 16/13-14; p-75

Bibliography:

1. Bhāvamiśra. (2004). Bhāvaprakāśa. Chaukhambha Sanskrit Bhawan.
2. Charaka. (2008). Carakasamhitā (P. V. Sharma, Trans.). Chaukhambha Orientalia.
3. Dasgupta, S. N. (2005). A history of Indian philosophy (Vol. 1). Motilal Banarsidass.
4. Frawley, D. (2000). Āyurveda and the mind: The healing of consciousness. Lotus Press.
5. Lad, V. (1998). Āyurveda: The science of self-healing. Lotus Press.
6. Lad, V. (2002). Textbook of Āyurveda: Fundamental principles. Āyurvedic Press.
7. Mādhavakara. (1998). Mādhavanidāna. Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office.
8. Meulenbeld, G. J. (1999). A history of Indian medical literature (Vols. 1–5). Egbert Forsten.
9. Sharma, P. V. (1994). Āyurveda: Its principles and philosophies. Chaukhambha Orientalia.
10. Sharma, P. V. (1995). History of medicine in India: From antiquity to 1000 A.D. Indian National Science Academy.
11. Śārṅgadharā. (2002). Śārṅgadharasamhitā. Chaukhambha Orientalia.
12. Suśruta. (2006). Suśrutasamhitā (K. R. Srikantha Murthy, Trans.). Chaukhambha Orientalia.
13. Svoboda, R. (1992). Prakriti: Your Āyurvedic constitution. Lotus Press.
14. Vāgbhaṭa. (2000). Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya (K. R. Srikantha Murthy, Trans.). Krishnadas Academy.
15. World Health Organization. (2013). WHO traditional medicine strategy 2014–2023. WHO Press.
16. Wujastyk, D. (1998). The roots of Āyurveda. Penguin Classics.



17. Zysk, K. G. (1991). Asceticism and healing in ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist monastery. Oxford University Press.
18. Zimmermann, F. (1987). The jungle and the aroma of meats: An ecological theme in Hindu medicine. University of California Press.