

## **Education system of India and Ayurveda – A Critical analysis**

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### **Abstract**

The Indian System of Medicine known as ‘Ayurveda’, had been in use from time immemorial. It was the main system of healthcare in the ancient and medieval period but has presently become a contemporary system today. It has its own principles developed during its peak which formed the basis for stable concepts upon which the whole system has grown and developed. But today due to various political, social, cultural, etc. turmoils that had resulted due to repeated and consistent invasion on India right from the ages for almost 8 centuries have resulted in its fall of status from main system to a contemporary or alternate system. But from the last two decades, the failure of Modern system of medicine to provide safe and desired health status to many people has resulted in retracing their steps towards this science.

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Today, education system of Ayurveda is far more different from the past methods as it has undergone drastic changes totally. The result of this change has also affected the field and the science too. A question thus emerges as to how far this methodology and understanding will help it to reach the levels and importance that it was in the past with the present system of education. The present chapter is an attempt to give a detailed review of the education system of India and its relative effect with respect to Ayurvedic education.

### **Keywords**

tradition, alternative medicine, symbolic violence, history, language of healing

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## Introduction

Ayurveda, the indigenous system of medicine in India which had its origin right from the day of creation as it was remembered by Lord Brahma the creator of the universe (Vagbhata 1997, p. 2). He is considered as the first preceptor of Ayurveda who later on passed the knowledge to his son Daksha Prajapati and in his turn to Lord Ashwini Kumaras who were considered as eternal physicians. They in turn passed on the knowledge to Lord Indra the king of Gods. It was Lord Indra who is believed to have taught the same to Sage Bharadwaja who in turn spread the science of Ayurveda on earth by preaching and teaching it to many other sages (Agnivesha (1998), p. 8).

From a different perspective we can infer from the sequence that the knowledge of healing was existing on earth in an unorganized manner right from the day of creation and was Lord Brahma who organized it such that it can be understood and propagated to the successive generations. This was present only with elite group of people till Lord Indra being a head or a leader disseminated to the scholarly people such for the benefit of mankind. Initially, it was a part of the Vedic literatures and didn't have individual existence. But as it swelled up with experience, formulation of new concepts and understanding gradually, it came to be recognized such that it became the Upaveda of Atharvaveda which is the last among the Vedic texts. The end of Atharvaveda also marked the end of Vedic period too. Vedas are the main texts that conceal every knowledge within it. These are present in the form of Sutras (Discourse or Short sentence or Aphoristic rule) that give explanation of larger meaning that will be a part of concept or sometimes the whole concept itself. But as the experiences increased, there was need for further analysis and development of new concepts which again further swelled the Vedic knowledge making it impossible to be contained in the Sutras. This gave rise to a new era known as the Samhita period. Samhitas are texts similar to Vedic literature, but unlike the Vedas where every field is touched, Samhitas were restricted to a particular field of knowledge. The books namely the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, etc are some of the examples that deal exclusively with the knowledge of Ayurveda. During this period of enlightenment, the knowledge, research, experience and development of Ayurveda increased so much that it obtained an individual status like many other contemporary fields. Thus, Ayurveda got established in every household as it gave directions to everyone as how to live in a healthy way rather than only concentrating on cure of disease. Thus, preaching of parts of Ayurveda that dealt with healthy living was commonly intermingled in the culture and tradition such that the common man doesn't suffer from any diseases. But the parts of Ayurveda that dealt with treatment of disease conditions were not imparted generally and was restricted to those who wanted to know it deeply and with precision. These set of people were known as Vaidyas or physicians while those who preached were known by the prefix Acharyas or simply teachers.

The education system of Ayurveda was the Gurukula system that existed in India right from the ancient period till the dawn of Indian Independence. The system became rudimentary with its presence being restricted to the teaching of vedic literature that have been in practice and is unaffected by any outward influence of the invasions or regimes. There are many other systems that have emerged and influenced Ayurvedic education before reaching its present condition. This chapter will deal with the various facets of Education system through which the science of Ayurveda was imparted to the present generation.

## **1. Education System of Ayurveda**

Initially, the system of education that dealt with imparting knowledge of Ayurveda was the Gurukula system as it was the part of Vedic method of learning. But when the tides of time led to political uncertainty due to invasions leading to mixture of culture, tradition and inducement of newer systems of learning, the methodology for education too changed drastically. For the purpose of our convenience and proper understanding, the whole timeline can be divided into three spheres namely Ancient period (3600BC – 500AD), Medieval period (500AD – 1500 AD) and Modern period (1500AD – Present) as per common practice (Nate Sullivan (2018), Web on 29/11/2018). The period before ancient is the pre-historic. These drastic changes not only brought changes in education system but also in the practice of Ayurveda resulting in a slow decline. Today it has fallen from the level of being main stream of healthcare to alternate or complimentary stream of healthcare. Now let us understand the Ayurvedic education system and its influence on its status in detail.

## **2. Ancient Period**

The time period right from 3600 BC till the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD is normally considered as Ancient period. The period starts with the invention of writing where scriptural records take their origin. It also marks the end of the pre-historic period. This time period assumes greater importance for the system of Ayurveda as it was the period which saw its origin and bloom right from the naive to the most dominant health care systems of India. Even the other systems like the Yoga and Siddha were having its own presence but were not as dominant as Ayurveda during its time. This period can be again bifurcated into two periods namely the Vedic and the Samhita Period.

Vedas refers to scriptures or books that are considered as sacred and the main source of knowledge. The Vedic Period was the time when the Vedic thoughts, concepts and practices were composed. During this period, the system of education was more like a mutual choice of student and teacher while the induction was marked by a ceremony known as ‘Upanayana’ after which he was known as ‘Brahmachari’. It is only after this process the student goes to his chosen teacher called as Acharya. The student was supposed to stay along with the Guru during the whole process of education in the Guru’s house which was the center of learning. It was normally situated in natural surroundings, in solitude and silence without any artificial constitutions. The main aim of education was to realize the supreme, preservation and spread of ancient culture, unfold spiritual and moral character in the individual and obtain perfection of physical, mental and intellectual personality of the student. It also aimed in inculcating social and civic duties which was necessary to have a peaceful and better life. Even development of vocational efficiency, positive and healthy attitude and finally dignity of labor was fostered in pupils. The education was done in 3 methods namely Shravana (Listening the texts as uttered by the teacher), Manana (Deliberation and reflection of the topic) and Nididhyana (Meditation or repeatedly remembering the topic). During this time period the education was free and the students led an exemplary life with having a father-son like relationship with the teacher. Moreover, the education was not based on caste, creed, colour or religion (Nikita Iyer (2018), Web on 29/11/2018). It was purely based on interest, personal ability, interest or passion and inherent skills of the individual.

The Samhita period is the post Vedic period when Ayurveda emerged in its crystallized form as a result of discussions and serious thinking on the subject that was a part of the Vedas itself. It was in this period that large texts that were exclusively dedicated to Ayurveda namely the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Astanga Hridaya, Astanga Sangraha, Bhela Samhita, etc got composed and was put into practice. It was the most flourishing age of Ayurveda as it became the mainstream of healthcare system of the country. There was no change in the education system as the same was followed but the emphasis was slightly changed with more importance given to Ayurveda. But the primary objective was the same as in any other fields of knowledge. The teaching was purely on discussion basis as seen in the chapters of Charaka Samhita (Agnivesha (1998), p. 255) where the student starts the topic of discussion by posing questions to the Guru and then follows the series of discussion with final clarification by the Guru.

### **3. Influence on Ayurveda**

Like all fields of knowledge even Ayurveda education too was disseminated in the similar manner. Initially, Ayurveda was a part of Vedic literature where it was only in the form of a topic namely the Osadhi Sukta (10-47,1,2,3) in the Rigveda with some other references dealing with instances of medical reliefs provided by different celestial physicians. Here too there is description of characteristic features required for an individual to be recognized as a Royal Physician or Raja Vaidya (Rig Veda 10-19-23). But later as the knowledge of medicine and cure increased the system of Ayurveda assumed greater importance and came to be recognized as Upaveda in Atharvaveda (Rama Rao R and Shastry J L N (2010), p. 15). But during the whole period it was educated along with the vedic scriptures.

During the Samhita period even though the method of teaching was the same, the emphasis was much laid on Ayurvedic aspects. This led to more precision and understanding which again propelled its growth. This also marked the formation of branches in Ayurveda with emergence of two different school of thoughts namely Atreya and Dhanvantari school of thoughts with the former emphasizing on the Conservative lines of treatment while the latter on the Surgical lines of treatment. The rise of Buddhism saw major changes in education and also addition of its principles in Ayurveda like the swabhavoparmo Vada in Charaka Samhita (Agnivesha (1998), p. 323). Even though the development of primary education was in temples, monasteries and Gurukul that formed the large network of education system, there were seats of higher institutionalized learning like the Nalanda, Banaras and Taxashila. Works like the Haramekhala, Kalyanakaraka, Nidanamuktavali are some of the contributions by the Jain authors to Ayurveda (Rama Rao R and Shastry J L N (2010), p. 36). The influence of Ahimsa principle pertaining to Buddhism and Jainism on Ayurveda had resulted in the suppress of the Surgical procedures but simultaneous development of another branch known as Rasa Shastra (Indian Alchemy). Rasa Shastra was present in the past too as a method to obtain Lohasiddhi (Conversion of lower metals to higher metals) but later it was used for Dehasiddhi (Medicinal purposes). Many texts like Rasa Ratna Samucchaya, etc are significant. The institution of Rasa Shastra into Ayurveda can be seen in Charaka samhita (Agnivesha (1998), p. 42) but not the extent of its full-fledged use. Later on Buddhist influence it received significant thrust resulting it having a larger importance in the system of Ayurveda. The fall of the ancient period marked great influence with the destruction of universities of Nalanda by Islamic invaders resulted in migration of scholars. Some towards the

South India who again developed it with the guidance of 48 Siddhiars and the medicine came to be known as Siddha Medicine (Rama Rao R and Shastry J L N (2010), p. 103).

During this period, the language that dominated mainly is the Sanskrit in which the Vedic scriptures and other literary works were written. But with the dominance of the Buddhism especially during the reign of Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya Dynasty, the whole system got a slight set back. Systems like Traditional Tibetan medicine which is known as Tibbi system of medicine today was greatly influenced by Buddhism. Still the dominance of Sanskrit language can be commonly seen during the entire period.

#### **4. Medieval Period**

The time period from 500 AD to 1500AD is considered as the medieval period which saw great upheavals in the history of India with regular invasions, loss of unity among the rulers in India and lastly establishment of Muslim rule.

Even though the earlier period there was frequent wars, conquests and change of rulers or ruling clans, the basic belief was either the Vedas or the other belief systems like Buddhism or Jainism that have originated in India itself which again added to the materia medica of Ayurveda rather than shunting its growth. But during the medieval period foreign invasions starting from Alexander had started which brought in new culture, tradition, beliefs and practices into the country.

The invasion of Greeks under Alexander only added its influence and the existing system continued its presence. But the later Persian-Afghan invasion followed by the Islamic invasion and establishment of Islamic rule under Muhamad Ghazni and Muhamad Ghauri, the educational institutions of the Hindu and the Buddhists were destroyed paving way for the Muslim system of education which was quite similar to the existing system (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 100). Even though it was a new order of education system but the methodology was on similar lines but the emphasis was on Islamic principles, thoughts and practices. Especially during the rule of Akbar, there was great patronage to the spreading of education and learning (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 102). During the period both the Hindu and Islamic system still existed with the books of knowledge being translated into different languages like Urdu and Persian from Sanskrit and vice versa. The Islamic rulers introduced vocational and technical education system as the most important reforms bringing under central administration (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 102).

#### **5. Influence on Ayurveda as a representation of symbolic violence**

Like any other fields even Ayurveda was influenced greatly by the period. The invasions resulted in acquiring of new knowledge of herbs, technology etc. along with new diseases. This made the materia medica of the system to be increased in a large way. Even though the basic books of knowledge were the Samhitas, newer literatures emerged which again bifurcated the science into many more branches. These literatures were known in general as Nighantus like Dhanvantari Nighantu, Astanga Nighantu, Raja Nighantu, Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, Siddhayoga Sangraha, Basavarajeeyam etc. There were also several commentaries on the Samhitas and even the Nighantus so as to update the knowledge and make it more suitable for the existing era. But as

there were frequent wars and political turmoil, the stability of education system used to vary considerably due to which the literatures were mostly compiled leading to mass confusion and inaccuracy. Moreover, the fall of the medieval society led to social anarchy and growth of socio-personal immorality. The scholars mainly the Pandits and the Mullahs became social conservers leading to a considerable damage to cultural front (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 102). This made the scholars to even hide or wrongly interpret the sciences as to protect it from wrong use.

During the period too, the classical literary works were basically done in Sanskrit. But the influence of Sanskrit was comparatively lesser during this time and at the end of the period, the literary works were either translated into the foreign languages like Arabic and Persian as the period was mainly dominated by Muslim invasion and these two languages were the official language during their rule.

## **6. Modern Period**

The modern system of education in India takes its origin from the Christian missionaries who had mainly started schools to preach and spread Christianity in India. As a result, most of the missionary schools are attached to church or to the missionary offices (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 103). These missionaries were first introduced by the Portuguese but later on the patronage was extended by other European powers including the British. The British Indian Government gave a provision of its budget to the development of Education system in India. Initially the missionaries started their education propagation from the lowest classes of the society by adopting the native language as the medium of instruction concentrating mainly on primary education but after 1813, they shifted the focus on the rich and elite class with English as the medium of instruction concentrating on secondary and higher education. The Bengal Presidency in 1823 appointed Central Committee of Public Instruction which reorganized Calcutta Madrassa and Banaras Sanskrit College along with establishment of Sanskrit College in Calcutta in 10 years. It also introduced English classes in all the colleges (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 105). Thus, the indigenous system of education in India still existed and thrived in a reorganized way even under the British rule till 1835. But in 1835 the order of Lord Bentinck on the recommendation of Macaulay resulted in removal of funds to print the books in Oriental Language even though the Oriental institutions were funded (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 106). The filtration of the English and the modern system from the upper class also resulted in the deviation of the rich and their patronage from the Indigenous or Oriental system of education towards English education. Further Harding’s Resolution in 1844 resulted in giving preference for the candidates educated in the institutions established for English Education in the selection for Public employment. This still more degraded the indigenous system making it secondary to English education. But after 1857, a series of reforms were introduced by the British Government to expand education starting from Hunter’s Commission (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 109). Lord Curzon adopted a policy to improve the curriculum due to which majority of institutions imparted education in English and the number of schools where the medium of instruction was in mother tongue was in minority (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 110). The advent of the British education system resulted in an institutionalized center known as Schools in Modern India (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 112).

The British era saw rise of modern education system along opening of the people to international levels of interaction and understanding. Even scholars and reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy

and Gandhi had strived for the development of modern education in religious society of India are notable. (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 112-113).

Independent India opened new avenues of economic development, social change and democracy which required skilled and knowledgeable people for development. After 1968 the investment for education was accelerated, and there was an acceptance of common structure of education throughout the country (Siwakoti, Tej Kuamr, (2015), p. 114). Later in 1986 and 1992 new education policies were drafted to achieve complete literacy through modern system of education. The 1992 education policy is still in vogue while the goal of complete literacy is still not possible.

## **7. Influence on Ayurveda**

Like all other social order and fields of science, even Ayurveda was affected considerably by this new order of education. Initially during the British rule in India, the modern education system that dealt more of western philosophy resulted in opening of the Modern system of medicine in India as well. But as the indigenous system of education was still in vogue and supported by the British initially that was suspended in 1835 (Uma Ganesan, (2010), p. 109). Still the methodology for teaching of Ayurveda was still in vogue as in ancient times especially patronized by Indian princes in their states. Moreover, in these states it still remained to be the main system of healthcare. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was proliferation of Ayurveda in English, Sanskrit and other regional languages making it more inaccessible as a social knowledge (Uma Ganesan, (2010), p. 108).

The British period saw Ayurveda take a defensive position as it tried to justify and answering itself to the critics and queries of the Modern or European system of medicine. The revival of Ayurveda started with from the year 1885 to 1947 for its legitimate right and position and more intensely during the 1920 to 1930. People like G. Srinivasa Murti, M. M. Gananath Sen of Bengal, Jivaram Kalidas Shastri of Gondal, A Lakshmi pathi of Madras, etc were the proponents of this revival who got engaged in a reasoned analysis of the pros and cons contained in different systems of medicine (Uma Ganesan, (2010), p. 117 -121).

After the dawn of Independence, Ayurveda was slowly institutionalized by incorporating into the modern pattern of education. During this process, there was compromise of some of the important merits of the ancient system of education. (Kishor Patwardhan, Sangeeta Gehlot, Girish Singh, and H. C. S. Rathore (2011), p.1)

Today, India officially recognizes Ayurveda as an indigenous system of medicine along with other systems like Siddha, Yoga, Unani and Homeopathy and is brought under a separate department known as AYUSH Department. This department is responsible for the overall development of Ayurveda with respect to its propagation or awareness, infrastructure facilities, education and practice. The CCIM (Central Council for Indian Medicine) established in 1970 is the board that monitors the matters related to Ayurvedic Education in India by enacting norms and regulations such that there is standard and uniform education all over the country. Presently the 5½ year undergraduate course of Ayurveda (BAMS) is imparted by over 240 colleges all over the country with majority of them being controlled by private management. The mushrooming of

private colleges as a result of the liberal policies of the governments and the loopholes in the existing norms has led to fall in the standards of Ayurvedic education. Thus, the standard of Ayurvedic education has been a great concern for the policy makers and the monitors today (Kishor Patwardhan, Sangeeta Gehlot, Girish Singh, and H. C. S. Rathore (2011), p. 2). In spite of these challenges, the system is on a revival mode especially after the 1990s as a complementary and alternate system to the Modern system of medicine due to continuous patronage and support from the Indian Government.

With the advent of the Europeans especially the British in India, a new system of education was introduced with the language English being the main medium of instruction. This resulted in the addition of new language to the country. The education system ensured that everyone was made to learn English. Moreover, at the initial period, the British government had funded many translations to regional and English language. This made the British to understand the system too. But after the initial years of rule, the introduction of British Medical system was seen resulting in loss of patronage and funding to oriental sciences. But it had slowly given the thrust to opening of new era in understanding with many translations into European languages like German, French, etc. The fading of Sanskrit language as the main language of communication led to difficulty in understanding the texts. Hence there were mass translations and commentaries on regional languages like Kannada, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, etc. Many texts were in fact transliterated into these languages for easy understanding and authenticity.

But the colonial language English traversed into the system so much that it became one of the official languages for medium of instruction along with Hindi and other regional languages (presently 22 languages recognized by Indian constitution) in Modern educational system today. Hence in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when India got independence, many texts were translated into English. This not only helped Ayurveda to improve its status but gave a better understanding and easy communication to every individual of the world. Today, all the major texts of Ayurveda are available with English translation so that it has crossed the borders of India slowly and is getting ready to serve the global health problems.

## **Conclusions**

During the different phases of history, Ayurveda was not affected much as it was during the end of the medieval and modern period. The shift of the system of education from the traditional and indigenous one to the modern and institutionalized one led to drastic changes. The deletion of Indian philosophy and metaphysics from the education system which forms the basis for the proper understanding of Ayurvedic theories and concepts was the main reason for the loss of its prominence. This is due to the fact that the theories of Ayurveda were either improperly or completely misunderstood resulting in chaos within and around the system. This made it to be considered as unscientific, rudimentary and only an unsystematic field not only by the British but also by the elite Indians.

Moreover, the present syllabus of the institutionalized system of education adopted too have not included the Indian theories and philosophies regarding various fields that were dealt in the Gurukula system that has resulted in the present situation of Ayurvedic education.



The main cause of such a situation is the difference in the approach of Modern and Indian system of Education. The Modern system's approach is more of mathematical which is technically correct but negates the abstract factors which at times are responsible for the manifestation of various events. While the Indian system's approach with its philosophical background is more of Holistic one which is logically correct and includes all the factors even the abstract ones. Thus, for a science like Ayurveda to be learnt and understood properly it is obvious that a holistic approach should be provided in the primary education system. This is the need of the present hour especially for the development and flourish of Ayurveda such that it regains its lost glory.

The expression and explanation of the concepts and literature in English and other languages have made it more acceptable and understandable in the present world making it one of the major contemporary system of medicine around the world. But its journey and changes from Sanskrit to English had been a very long with lots of ups and down.

To conclude it is obvious that every concept of thought or system has to undergo three important phases namely the initial phase or the Dawn of the concept or system, the maintenance Phase or the Balance of the concept or system and lastly the Decaying phase or the Fall and destruction of the concept or system. Ayurveda appears to have just finished the cycle and is again drawing up towards the initial phase of development with a new look, experience and approach but surely on the basis of its well rooted principles of the past.

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