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Significance of Religious Activities in Ayurveda

Dr. Manik Thakar,,
Laxmi Residency, Flat No. 10,
Dahanukar Colony, Lane No. 10.
Kothrud, Pune - 411 029.
(Maharashtra).

In the tradition of Indian medicine interdependence of religion and health is the fact evident from the Vedas. It is not the one sided affinity that the religious scriptures included principles and practices related to health. The authentic texts of medicine in ancient India have also included religious practices as the authentic remedies. Basically the treatises of medicine were considered as the integral part of religious scriptures i.e. Vedas. For example science of healthy life i.e. *°yurveda* is a subordinate literature i.e. *Upveda* of *Atharvaveda*. There was a long tradition of correlation between medicines & religious activities such as chanting the mystic chants and spells; performing *°entikarmans*...etc. for the destruction of diseases. The tradition was developed from the scattered occurrences in the *°gveda* and from the folk beliefs and disbeliefs from the time of *Atharvaveda*. The tradition was continued in the *Vidhena* literature and *sm°tis*. It is interesting to find how and why the non-medicinal remedies were adopted by the profounders of *°yurveda* as the authoritative remedies. This is the stage when religious activities had the strong impression on the human mind. They could provide a best diversion from the thoughts about diseases. They served the purpose of being the excellent relievers from the mental fatigue and there by provided a great solace.

Religious activities in Ayurveda form the significant aspect of the origin and development of medicine in ancient India. There were some views and patterns of behaviour; which were shared by the tradition of religious scriptures and tradition of scriptures about the science of medicine. For example theory of results of past and present deeds i.e. *karmavip°ka* has been occasionally considered as the causal factor of diseases. Such diseases arising from the unrighteous behaviour in the past or present birth are referred as *P°paroga*. These trends are clearly based on *Sm°ti* assumptions. Another example is the concept of auspiciousness (*°auca*) in the form of cleanliness on physical and mental level. It served various purposes in both the traditions. While defining the medicine *Carak°c°rya* has provided a wider scope to this concept. Whatever is regarded as helpful to the betterment of a person is considered as medicine. Both *caraka* and *su°r°uta* have successfully distinguished between the treatments for ailments which have arisen from the ill-fate and the treatments depending upon rational therapeutic nature. The first type of treatment is *Daivavyap°raya*. The nature of this treatment is magico-religious. This is the main area of diseases which are incurable by mere medicines. They need the main course of religious activities with the medicines acting as the supplementary treatment.

Daivavyap°raya. treatments (1) prescribed by the *caraka sa°hit°* include variety of activities pertaining to religious performances. The earlier tradition of nonclinical remedies was also based on recitations of Mantras, prayers, repetitions of chants and formulas or stotras i.e. eulogies of Gods. The other activities which are prescribed by treatises of *°yurved°* range from offerings for deities related to that particular disease; giving away gifts (*D°na*) sacrificial rites *homas* and *S°entikarmans*; observing observances and expiations (*Pr°yascittas*), fasting, feasting the Brahmins, bowing down to elderly persons... etc. For example for curation of Typhoid fever worship of *deiva* along with *M°ct°ga°yas* is prescribed in *caraka sa°hit°* (2) The other religious means which are prescribed are chanting of *Via°yusahasran°ma*, observing celebusy (*Brahmacarya*), penance (*Tapas*); truth (*satya*), abstinences (*Niyama*), repeated chanting (*Japa*); hearing the scriptures of Vedas (*veda°rava°ya*) and also meeting the great persons. (*S°edh°j°n°dar°anam*) This shows that Ayurveda is not against invoking divine grace for the cure of diseases. This also proves that medical knowledge current in the contemporary society preserved the influence of religion to some extent. This research is an humble attempt to understand the approach of science of medicine towards the religious performance. This can be done under the following broad categories.

Dharma and Adharma :
Moral and spiritual Values :
The rituals and rites :
Mantras and Ayurveda :
Devotion and Ayurveda :
The theory of karman and Ayurveda :

Dharma and Adharma :

The treatises of Ayurveda have said firmly that Adharma i.e. unrighteousness is the cause of polluting natural resource. It seems that this assumption is based on the Vedic current of thoughts that the nature is also confind to obey the universal law of truth i.e. *°ta*. Therefore it is the duty Dharma of constituents of nature to follow the particular order. Violation of Dharma on human level, leads to the violation of Universal law which further leads to the disturbance of natural resources. On the contrary this imbalance further hastens the destruction of settlements; It is noted by the *su°r°uta sa°hit°* (3) that the seasons are spoiled because of Adharma i.e. unrighteousness. Even if they are not spoiled because of wrath of evil spirits, demons etc the settlements are destroyed. *Carak°c°rya* (4) has pointed out that from the ancient times there was no occurrence of inauspicious happenings from any other foundation other than unrighteousness.

As a result; naturally Dharma i.e. righteousness was thought of as a curing energy in various cases. Specially in the case of diseases arising because of ill-fate the religious activities such as chanting the formulas, giving the offerings, charity; rites; observances; expiations, fasting, bowing down were given the status of medicine by the treatises like *Caraka Sa°hit°* (5) For example *Su°r°uta Sa°hit°* (6) has listed almost all religious activities in the context of madness for the betterment of health. These activities are pertaining to various section of religious behaviour one can find some of the components in *sm°tis* and some other components in yogic prac-



tices. Even for the doctor, the purpose of treating the patients is different than worldly gains. According to su^oruta^ocrya, the achievements of a vaidya include the success accompanied by three major Puru^oerthas i.e. Dharma Artha and k^oma.

Moral and Spiritual Values :

For the preservation of health science of medicine expects that daily routine of a person should be highly balanced on physical, mental and spiritual level. The seers had the faith that various diseases have their root in ethically and spiritually wrong behavior. For example the su^oruta Sa^ohit^o (7) has noted that skin diseases and ku^oha i.e. leprosy can arise because of wrong food and wrong behavior. Good conduct if absent can cause the occurrence of the diseases. The cause is fault in the intellectual thinking i.e. Praj^opar^odha according to carak^ocrya (8).while narrating the cause of diseases in the form of Praj^opar^odha; Caraka Sa^ohit^o includes Vinay^ocralopa i.e. absence of discipline and good conduct and also insulting the elderly honorable persons. The rules of good behaviour are also a province of religious scriptures. The su^oruta Sa^ohit^o (9) co-relates the unethical behaviour with the incurability of the diseases which are curable according to the medical science yet they become incurable in the case of particular persons. Among them are the deceitful persons and individuals of high temperament. These two characteristics i.e. untruth and wrath are banned in religious literature also as immoral and inimical qualities. The treatises such as caraka sa^ohit^o and s^oruta sa^ohit^o have prescribed good conduct i.e. Sadv^ottā as nourishing preventive remedy. ^oc^oraras^oyana i.e. rejuvenative combination in the context of behaviour has been considered as the best rejuvenation remedy. It is referred to in the Cikitsita sth^ona of caraka sa^ohit^o (10) It refers to various moral qualities such as speaking the truth, speaking the appealing things chief quality of calmness, having attitude of compassion, giving away i.e. charity. In this behaviour pattern refrain from cruelty, anger, wine, excess sexual acts are expected. It includes cultivation of qualities like non-violence and attitude of respect for deities, cow, Brahmins, teachers, elderly persons. The rules of good conduct Sadv^ottā are also pertaining the individual and social hygiene and safety. The observance of these rules can safeguard the person from danger of pollution and infections arising from the misuse of various kinds. Surely our seers were aware of the fact that unethical behaviour may lead to the development of guilty consciousness and there by it can become cause of many mental and physical disorders.

The rituals and rites :

The Vedic tradition is a tradition of sacrifices. The same heritage was carried further by the religious tradition. The rituals and rites form the major part of religious performances. The treatises of Ayurveda have regularly included them in the treatment; but the proportion is not very high. There are few specific recommendations about the rites yet general mention of rites as the remedies is surely there. Especially rites are recommended in the context of Daivavyap^oraya diseases. These arouse from the result of past sins; misbehaviour about deities and religion, curses... etc. They

are also the part of the treatment of trouble from evil spirits (11) For example su^oruta (12) has said that in the case of being possessed by divine spirit one has to offer the offerings to Agni. The ritual should take place in the temple. Especially in the cases of treatments for children the practitioner is expected to know how to sacrifice su^oruta sa^ohit^o (13) describes such rites in the context of getting rid from the pediatric ailments and making the child healthy by making him free from various Grahas. The practitioner is expected to be well versed in Mantras, Procedures and herbs.

Mantras and Ayurveda :

The texts of Ayurveda fulfill their duty of being a part of tradition of religious scriptures. They honour the Atharvanic tradition which surely recognizes the importance of Mantras for the cure. For instance, in case of a pregnant woman if the foetus is alive it should be pushed out by the lady herself, [s^otik^o] with great efforts. If it is not possible to drag him out of uterine cavity, she should hear the chants for the removal of the foetus [Cy^ovana Mantra]. She should also drink the water enchanted by these Mantras. The mantras are narrated in the su^oruta sa^ohit^o. In the case of treatment of poisoning by the cutting by the serpents, the significance of Mantras is more effectively recognized by the su^oruta. (15) He says that Mantras are more effective than remedies for the two reasons. They are narrated by deities and Brahmar^ois. These Mantras are consisting of principles such as Truth, penance and mystic powers. At the same time su^oruta. is aware of necessity of treatment by remedies, because sometimes the Mantras are recited in improper manner, lacking the proper pronunciation of exact speech and syllables. In such conditions Mantras are not fully accomplished. One should use the remedies in a proper sequence in such lingering cases. This explanation proves that both the stream of literature were conscious of the efficacies and inefficacies of such other. The medical practitioner was expected to have a complete balance of mind. Then he has to select and arrange the appropriate chant of formula or to arrange for the preparation of the exact and proportionate remedies. The mysterious power of Mantras is also proved by another way, Sometimes Mantras are utilized for purification of various substances. su^oruta sa^ohit^o (16)

notes an instance where the oil purified by the Mantras is prescribed for intake for the purification for all the Dh^otus. The result is expected in the form of removal of Do^oas i.e. humours in the upper and the lower parts of the body. This accounts for the potentization by the Vibrations of Mantras. Use of Mantras depends on the faith in vedic literature and faith in folk lore. The concept of faith healing is involved in this kind of treatments.

Devotion and Ayurveda :

Activities denoting the devotion of a particular deity were also prescribed as the remedies for some diseases. For example the su^oruta (17) said in his uttara tantra that incase someone is afflicted by Apasm^ora i.e. epilepsy he should daily worship lord Rudra and his attendants i.e. Ga^oas. Caraka (18) also prescribes various religious activities for getting rid from the mental diseases such as madness i.e. Unm^oda Roga. The activities include worship, offerings, charity, chants,



passificatory rites i.e. ^ontikarmas Japa i.e. repetition of Mantras performing expiations etc. sacrifices, worshipping deities cows and Brahmin... etc. The su^oruta sa^ohit^o (19) goes to an extent of saying that the expert and flawless Brahmins can even ward off death by using remedies of rejuvenization and also by penance and repeated chanting of the Mantras.

The theory of karman & Ayurveda :

As a constituent part of ancient Indian culture, the treatises of medicine also express their firm belief about few basic characteristics of religion. Theory of karman is the foremost among them. The ancient Indian medical science has a strong faith in the fact that sinful acts in the present and past births have invariably the inevitable bad effects. This basic assumption comes from the religious tradition. It attempts to provide the explanation of the unknown cause of the diseases. The theory acts as a major motivation for the masses to follow the path of ethico-religious behaviour. The su^oruta sa^ohit^o (20) says about foetus that if he is deformed like a serpent, scorpion or ku^oṣṭha; or if he is in abnormal shape it is surely because of the sinful acts of the parents in their past birth. It is also caused by the parental non belief in the efficacy of the Vedas and the God. The same treatise (21) has noted that ku^oṣṭha (leprosy) is definitely disease arising from the sinful acts like killing a Brahmin or a lady or a gentleman. Robbing the wealth of somebody else can also be a cause of this disease. In this case along with the appropriate behaviour; diet medication etc. su^oruta has suggested penance as the remedy. It is also observed by su^oruta that along with the other causes such as consuming the food item of contrast nature, controlling natural secretions and selection of wrong time to start the treatments with oils; ku^oṣṭha (leprosy) and other skin diseases arise because of performance of evil actions and because of past deeds.

Conclusion :

The purpose of the above discussion of significance of religious activities in Ayurveda was to observe the various dimensions of the relationship between religion and remedies. The relation between them is very much intense and it has been approved by the medicinal scriptures on one hand and by religious scriptures like sm^oti and vidh^ona literature on the other hand. The caraka sa^ohit^o has clearly declared that the very purpose of the narration of Ayurveda is Dharma and not the other goals of human life such as Artha : i.e. wealth and k^oma i.e. sexual pleasure. The profounders of Ayurveda were desirous of obtaining the eternal reality. Ayurveda considered human health in its totality; therefore it considered the means of mental peace and mental purification and mental and physical health. Here the religious activities got ample scope. The reasons are, they divert the mind from the diseased condition and physical pains are lessened there by. They work on the subtle level of mind by providing a higher type of satisfaction. Dependence on religious performance has taught the human beings; not to be depressed even in

extremely severe conditions. They have provided a strong positive thinking by pointing to a highest authority i.e. the God. At the same time these recommendations of Ayurveda show awareness of limitations of human efforts, and yet scope of human effort in another direction. The role of inclusions of religious activities in the science of medicine reflects the intense and deep impression of religious trends upon Ayurveda. The practices reflect beliefs and superstitions prevalent in contemporary society. The striking similarities between the health advice in religious scriptures such as sm^oti and the principles of ^oyurveda also show the trend of synthesis. It also reflects the possibility of the common source of these practices. Religious background was provided to the right habits of personal hygiene. This was done with the intention to make them more obligatory indirectly. This was for the upliftment of society at large. Dr. Ram karan sharma said in his book i Rejuvenative health care in Ayurveda " It is quite in keeping with the holistic tradition of Ayurvedic therapeutics that caraka sa^ohit^o and other texts remind us time and again about the role played by the invisible spiritual recipes even in respect of our physical health care". This is quite true in the case of the abstinences i.e. Yamas and observances i.e. Niyamas, which are used in rejuvenative therapy by the su^oruta sa^ohit^o. (22) The basic current of thoughts underlying, all the types of religious activities, working as remedies, is surely faith healing. It is faith in the efficacy of Mantras, faith in the efficacy of religious performances. Finally it is faith in the power of God that helps the person to cure from the diseased condition. The religious remedies were a kind of unique combination of faith healing accompanied by sound therapy, water therapy, food therapy etc. and the cure was achieved either as a collective effect of all or the effect of any constituents of these treatments. One of the purposes of including non-clinical religious remedies in the treatises of Ayurveda seems to be faith in the Vedas. It was an attempt to be in touch with the Vedic tradition of formulas and practices. This provided a high status to the treatises of Ayurveda as a constituent parts of vedic tradition and religious tradition. It was easily possible to include various aspects of religion in the scriptures of science of medicine because the purpose of the diagnosis and treatment was not merely restricted to the cure of the disease but it was much wider. It encompassed the total welfare or well being of the human being extending upto his full life span. (23) Like Ayurveda, the purpose of the composition of Pur^oṣas is also propagation of dharma. Thus these two stream lines have the same foundation giving rise to them, depending upon their point of stress. Pur^oṣas are the torch bearers of the subtle thinking that religion in principle and in practice can be a good remedy for physical and mental health. The another reason seems to be that the total well being of a person surely includes his healthy life span with a diseaseless state. The highest goals to be achieved with these two are the aspects of Dharma which further leads to Mok^oṣa liberation.