

CHARAKA: THE AYURVEDA ENCYCLOPAEDIA**Dr. Vaibhav Dadu***

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ABSTRACT

The *Ayurveda* system of medicine is based on the fundamental principles having a deep relationship with the tenets of Indian Philosophy which are in the coded form mainly in the three great treatises namely the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and the *Vagbhata Samhita*. The *Charaka Samhita* is the numero-uno treatise of the *Ayurveda* system of medicine. The seers have used their own particular style of narration in *Charaka Samhita* which needs to be understood properly to bring about the desired levels of the theoretical and practical know-how in the *Ayurveda* scholars. The *Charaka Samhita* is unique in many sorts as it presents a comprehensive view of *Ayurveda* system. Thus, it is herewith termed as an *Ayurveda* encyclopaedia that is the guiding principle for understanding the classical approach as well as prospective of research activity in *Ayurveda*.

KEYWORDS: Fundamental Principles, *Charaka Samhita*, Encyclopaedia, Research, Classical approach.**CHARAKA: THE AYURVEDA ENCYCLOPAEDIA**

The history of Indian system of medicine, *Ayurveda* revolves around the three stalwarts namely the *Charaka*, *Sushruta* and the *Vagbhata*. The treatises authored by them are the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and the *Ashtanga Hridaya* better known as the *brihatrayee* (the major triad).^[1] The *Charaka Samhita* specializes in the *Ayurveda* medicine, *Sushruta Samhita* promulgates the *Ayurveda* Surgery and the *Vagbhata's Ashtanga Hridaya* deliberates on both the sciences of medicine & surgery. Although a number of other treatises are said to have been written by the *Ayurveda* seers of yore, they are not available today. The texts available today have been formed in number of strata as evident through the internal and external evidences studied under the literary research. The literary research of the *Charaka Samhita* also reveals its transformation at various levels of time. The *Charaka Samhita* is one of the most revered and followed classical text of *Ayurveda* considered as the treasure trove of the Basic Principles of *Ayurveda* and a rich literary source of the *Ayurveda* research activity. The *Charaka Samhita* is therefore the *Ayurveda* encyclopaedia that needs to be deciphered in all its might for the propagation of the *Ayurveda* system of life.

CHARAKA – AN ENIGMATIC LEGEND

Before coming to any conclusion about *Charaka*, it is imperative to study the various views or evidences deciphering the exact lineage of the seer. Some consider *Charaka* as an individual while the others consider him as a clan. In this rather confusing scenario, let us first review the various legends and historical evidences available regarding the details of *Charaka*. For the

purpose of a simple understanding, the study of *Charaka* has been presented here in two headings–

a. Charaka as a clan or group

In the preface of the famous commentary namely the *Ayurveda Deepika* on *Charaka Samhita* by *Charaka Chaturanana Shri Chakrapani Dutta*, *Pandit Haridutta Shastri* refers to the *Panini Sootra*,^[1] indicating an existence of the 'Charaka' clan of the *Veda Samhita*. The '*kath Charakalluk*' defines the word *Charaka* as the branch of the *Veda* and not as an individual. Thus, here the word *Charaka* has been explained in terms of Sanskrit grammar. This view has although a few takers as majority of the intellectuals agree upon the individual *Charaka*, one of the most significant authors of the *Charaka Samhita*.

b. Charaka as an individual

The majority of the *Ayurveda* academicians accept the *Charaka* as an individual. The supporters of this view refute the explanation of the word '*Charaka*' in the grammatical terms. It is not the word that describes the clan; in fact the word clan is signified by the word '*Chaaraka*' not '*Charaka*'.^[11] As the word *Chaaraka* hasn't been used by the *Panini*, it becomes clear that *Charaka* is not a group but an individual. However, there is a difference of opinion about the evolution or lineage of *Charaka* as there are words like the *Vridha* (senior) prefixed indicating the existence of more than one *Charaka*. There is an ambiguity regarding the *Charaka* being an incarnation of lord of serpents, *Shesha* who is supposed to be the author of the *Vyakarana*

Mahabhashya, Patanjala along with the redaction of *Charaka Samhita*.^[IV]

Thus, from the above discussion it becomes apparent that the *Charaka* is an individual not a clan although, the study of *Charaka* as an individual presents a number of views with the legends available in various classical texts. The difference of opinion regarding the details of lineage of *Charaka* is presented below.

- a. The incarnation of lord of serpents, *Shesha-Bhavaprakasha* (16th century) states that the *Charaka* is the incarnation of the lord of serpents, *Shesha*. The legend says that the *Shesha* visited the mortal world and was distressed to see the people in pain and suffering. Then he decided to be born to a sage named *Vishuddha*. The son of this sage and incarnation of lord *Shesha* is the *Charaka*. This person is credited for being the author of the *Charaka Samhita*.
- b. The nomadic preacher of *Ayurveda* – The historian Sylvian Levi enunciates that the *Charaka* is the name of the famous physician of the king *Kanishka* (1-2 century AD) of the *kushana* dynasty. He collected the nectar of the old texts and created the *Charaka Samhita* in his name.^[V]
- c. *Patanjali & Charaka*, the same person? - The revered commentator *Chakrapani Dutta* in his prayer at the beginning of the commentary considers the *Patanjali & Charaka* as the same person.^[VI] This issue appears to be a very controversial one. A close look at the present form of the *Charaka Samhita* finds no reference to the name *Patanjali*. At the end of each chapter there is mention of the seer *Agnivesha* as the main author of the text followed by name of the *Charaka* as the redactor. The word *Patanjali* is conspicuously absent. In the chapters of the *Siddhi & Kalpa Sthana* also the name *Dridhbala* appears as the name credited for the completion of the text. Therefore, the *Charaka* and *Patanjali* cannot be the same persons. Early Commentators

like the *Bhattara Harishchandra* (6th Century) and the authors like the *Vagbhata* also approve *Charaka* as the author of the *Charaka Samhita* not *Patanjali*.

THE FORMATION OF THE CHARAKA SAMHITA

The contemporary *Charaka Samhita* has been formed in different stages which per se is an excellent example of the literary research. The literary research aims at the expansion of the knowledge vistas or contribution in the studies of the subject to make the science up to date. The *Charaka Samhita* has been formed in three stages-

- a. The *Agnivesha Tantra* (1000 BC) – The seer *Agnivesha* was the disciple of the *Atreya*.^[VII] *Agnivesha* formed the *Agnivesha tantra* as promulgated by his preacher. This first stage signifies the knowledge of *Ayurveda* in a very concise form having the capacity to be elaborated in various forms.
- b. *Charaka* as redactor (200 BC) – The concise text, *Agnivesha tantra* has been updated by *Charaka*. The newer concepts having the influence of the Indian Philosophy like the *Satkaryavada* of *Samkhya* seen in the explanation of the physiology of digestion,^[VIII] and the concept of six categories of *Vaisheshika*,^[IX] are some of the significant contributions of the redactor, *Charaka*. Similarly, the whole of the epistemology of the *Nyaya* School has been accepted as *Pareeksha* or examination in *Charaka Samhita*.^[X]
- c. *Dridhbala* as the restorer/completer (300-400 AD) – With the passage of time and the reasons not known, the *Charaka Samhita* redacted by the seer *Charaka* could not be kept intact as a major portion of *Charaka Samhita* went missing. The son of *Kapilabala*, *Dridhbala*, resident of Kashmir took this challenge of completion of the *Charaka Samhita* and with the help of the available texts and the assistance of fully scientific methodology of the selective and collective methods filled the gaps and brought about the completion of the text.

THE CHARAKA SAMHITA – CLASSIFICATION

The *Charaka Samhita* is divided into eight sections known as *Sthana* which are again divided into specific number of *Adhyaya* or chapters. The total chapters in the *Charaka Samhita* are 120. The details of the classification is tabulated below-

S.No.	<i>Sthana</i> (Section)	No. of chapters	Speciality
01	<i>Sootra/Shloka/Shirah Sthana</i>	30	1. Basic Principles and Philosophy of <i>Ayurveda</i> system of medicine 2. Unique <i>Chatushka</i> (quartet) methodology of explanation of the <i>Ayurveda</i> principles 3. Acts as the guiding principle or controller of the whole treatise 4. Rightly compared with the head in the body
02	<i>Nidana</i>	08	1. The diagnosis of the diseases in terms of <i>Ayurveda</i> 2. Arrangement of the eight chapters in tandem with the tissues/ <i>dhatu</i> s afflicted. 3. All the diseases hitherto unknown can be diagnosed through the application of basics of diagnosis explained here.
03	<i>Vimana/Mana</i>	08	1. Unique section found only in <i>Charaka Samhita</i>

			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Measurement and knowledge unit 3. Basics of <i>Ayurveda</i> teaching and research methodology 4. Ten fold examination of the patient 5. The elaboration of the natural constitution or the <i>prakriti</i> in special context of the attributes of the <i>dosha</i> 6. The epidemic and its root cause 7. Factors of the specific diagnostic tools i.e. the clinical utility of the epistemology of the philosophical schools
04	<i>Shareera/Ashraya</i>	08	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principles of anatomical development of the body 2. Psychology in <i>Ayurveda</i>- description of <i>mana</i> 3. The physiological basics mainly the foetal development and the anomalies along with their line of treatment. 4. The birth of the baby, actions and precaution 5. The care of the new born- A holistic approach 6. The fundamentals of genetic diseases
05	<i>Indriya/Arishta</i>	12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A vivid description of the prognostic signs – Signs of imminent death known as <i>Arishta</i> 2. A matter of research especially in the present day conditions expecting ICU admission.
06	<i>Chikitsa/Aushadha</i>	30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The line of treatment of the major diseases 2. Considered the best among major triad 3. The concept of <i>Ayurveda</i> anti-oxidants/rejuvenation (<i>Rasayana</i>) and the aphrodisiacs (<i>Vajeekarana</i>) 4. Guiding principles of the treatment of the diseases hitherto unknown.
07	<i>Kalpa/Vikalpa</i>	12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Twelve formulations of the elimination therapy or the <i>panchakarma</i> 2. Various combinations as per the needs of the disease and the diseased along with their eligibility criteria
08	<i>Siddhi</i>	12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principles governing the <i>Panchkarma</i> therapy 2. Prevention of the untoward conditions (<i>Vyapada</i>) and the methods of its control

This table thus illustrates the significance of the *Charaka Samhita* in the propagation of the *Ayurveda* principles of health care incorporating both the preventive and the curative aspects.

CHARAKA SAMHITA- A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The science of life, *Ayurveda* is well known as the holistic system of medicine. The biggest asset that *Ayurveda* possesses is the concept of the unity of the macrocosm, universe and the microcosm, the man. The concept of the three physiological and pathological units, the *tridosha* is the representatives of the three universal entities of moon, sun and air.^[XI] The basic elements namely the *Panchmahabhuta* are the common entities present in the universe and the human being. These five basic elements,^[XII] signify the correspondence of the universal and individual phenomena. The *prithvi* (earth) in the universe is represented as form in the body while the moisture/water content embodies the *apah* (water) of the universe.^[XIII] The biggest point of the uniformity between the microcosm and the macrocosm is the *Panchmahabhautika* nature of the atom itself. The atom is *Panchmahabhautika* and thus every entity is *Panchbhautika*.^[XIV] The principle of the natural destruction i.e. *Swabhavoparamavada* again goes with the nature as everything that exists in the material world

has to end one day.^[XV] This process of degradation is innate quality of every entity including the man and the disease. The seer *Charaka* categorically emphasises on the need of maintaining of the balance of the body by following the various regimen in accordance with the time and body constitution. It is the intellectual blasphemy or the *Prajnaparadhah* that is the root cause of all the pain and suffering.^[XVI] It is thus mandatory to control oneself by renouncing the illicit utilization of the physical and mental faculties. Thus, the majority of the portion of the *Charaka Samhita* stresses upon the need to prevent the diseases and ways to promote a healthy and long life.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The *Charaka Samhita* is the essence of *Ayurveda* medicine as it promulgates all the basics of the *Ayurveda* method of living a healthy life. The *Dridhabala* categorically applauds the *Charaka Samhita* as the book which is the source of all the knowledge of the life. Whatever is available in this text may be found elsewhere but the knowledge unavailable in this text is conspicuous by its absence everywhere.^[XVII] Thus the *Charaka Samhita* is the complete treasure of the *Ayurveda* knowledge that is the foundation for all the progress and development in *Ayurveda* through Research

and Analysis. The well known commentator, *Gangadhara* rightly terms this text as the *Kalpadruma* i.e. the tree which is supposed to deliver the desired. The *Charaka Samhita* incorporates the unique methodology of description of the subject as it divides the portions into the *Sthana* and then the *Sootra Sthana* into *Chatushka* (Quartets). The specific and separate section of the measurement and knowledge unit is the *Vimana Sthana*. The description of the *Vimana Sthana* is a very specific feature of the *Charaka Samhita* as this moots upon the *Ayurveda* teaching and research methodology along with the basic concepts of the innate nature (*Prakriti*) of an individual in relation with the attributes, *Guna*.^[XVIII] The *Charaka Samhita* is the guiding principle of the glorious journey of *Ayurveda* from its divine *trisootra* form to the contemporary progressive science of medicine. The holistic approach of *Charaka Samhita* can be gauged with the application of the philosophical theory of cause and effect applied in the promulgation of the *Ayurveda* principles of health care. Therefore, the *Charaka Samhita* is not an ordinary or old text but it is in fact the *Ayurveda* encyclopaedia that was, is and will be the unending source of *Ayurveda* propagation and continuity.

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