

THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND ĀYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Human suffering arising from mental and physical diseases is only partly amenable to therapeutic treatment. Some diseases and genetic disorders are incurable and physical deformities and defects especially congenital can be corrected only to a limited extent. Again, of the persons suffering from the same disease, one may get cured without treatment, another with treatment and the third may not respond to the best treatment even when there are no significant differences in their bodily and environmental factors. The span of life of an individual is also unforeseen.

Ayurveda recognizes the limitations of medical science and admits past *karma*, accumulated actions of previous lives or *daiva* as causative factor in pathogenesis, in genetic disorders and mental ailments, in physical deformities and as a limiting factor which explains varying responses to therapeutic measures. Besides, this factor alone can explain the differences in lifespans; Carakasamhita, Susruta and Vagbhata recognize the role of *karma*.

Since, however, it is impossible to know beforehand whether *karmas* will render ineffective therapeutic measures Ayurveda retained its utility and importance. Ayurveda is deemed to be a part of *purusakara*, human effort.

Āyurveda is the science of life- what makes life happy and unhappy especially pathological states of mind and body, and the length of life. Since the doctrine of karma is a causal force which explained in a most rational manner suffering and physical inequality, āyurveda had necessarily to reckon with this doctrine. The most important text on āyurveda is Caraka Samhitā¹ (C.S.) of 4th century A. D. on which there is a commentary of high standard viz. Āyurveda dīpikā of Cakrapāṇidatta (11th century A. D.). Carakasamhitā classifies karma into two groups: daiva and puruṣakāra. C. S. III (Vimānasthāna) 3.30 defines them: Daivam ātmakṛtam vidyāt karma yat paurvadehikam. Smṛtaḥ puruṣakārastu kriyate yadihāparam. : What is done during the past life is known as daiva where

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1. R. K. Sharma and Bhagwan Dash: Agnivesa's Caraka Samhitā text and English translation, Varanasi, 1976. They date Caraka to 8th century B. C.

the effect is pre-determined and what is done during the existing life is known as puruṣakāra—where the effect is based upon the human effort.

C. S. IV (Śārīrasthāna) 1.116 reiterates this idea : nirdiṣṭam daiva śabdena karma yat paurvadehikam. The action performed in the previous life is known as daiva.

C. S. IV 2.44 again avers : daivam purā yat kṛtamucyate tat tat pauruṣam yattviha karma dṛṣṭam. The effect of what is done during the previous life is known as daiva.

The relative roles of daiva and puruṣakāra are also defined in C. S. In C. S. III. 3.29 Ātreya says "the rationality of life-span of individuals depends upon the strength or otherwise of both the daiva (past karmas) and puruṣakāra (human effort)". This is repeated in the opening sentence of C. S. III 3.36 "the daiva and puruṣakāra both play their role in the determination of the life span".

Chapter X of the Sūtrasthāna of the C. S. expounds the science of therapeutics. The sage Ātreya declares (C.S.I. 10.3) that therapeutics can eliminate diseases. Maitreya, however, challenges this. In CS I 10. 4 he asserts : "One taking recourse to therapeutic measures may sometimes succeed in recovering from disease and may sometimes die as well. Similar is the case with one who does not pay any heed to therapeutic measures. He at times succeeds in recovering from disease or may sometimes die even".

Cakrapāṇidatta¹ in his commentary Āyurvedadīpikā explains that "the gist of Maitreya's objection is that it is karman, that is the result of the past action, which is responsible for the maintenance of good health or otherwise. Therapeutic measures adopted are useful only when karman is favourable. Favourability of karman may bring about the desired effect even without the prescribed therapeutic measures".

Ātreya in C. S. I. 10.5 answers that Maitreya's conclusion was not correct. He asserts that "therapeutic measures can never be ineffective in curable diseases". He continues : "The diseases that

1. R. K. Sharma and Bhagwan Dash: *ibid* Vol. I. p. 193.

are curable can be cured only by taking recourse to therapeutic measures. Those which are not curable will certainly not respond to the treatment : not even the ablest physician is capable of curing a moribund patient".

Cakrapānidatta² in his commentary explains : "In such cases where the patients are cured without taking recourse to adequate therapeutic measures, certainly karman plays a very important role but even there, if proper therapeutic cares are taken, karman and present action would have combined effect in quickening the process of recovery." He further adds "So it is only when something cannot be explained in terms of present worldly action, taking recourse to karman or the results of past actions is justified."

C. S. I 25 expounds the "Origin of Man and the Diseases." Various theories are put forward : living beings and diseases originate from (i) the soul (ii) the gunas- sattva, rajas and tamas, (iii) rasa or water, product of nutrition after digestion (iv) the six dhātus (earth, water, light, wind and ether and soul); (v) father and mother (vi) svabhāva, inherent nature and (vii) karman. The karman school maintained: karmajastu mato jantuḥkarmajāstasya cāma-vāḥ, nahyṛte karmaṇo janma rogaṇām puruṣasya vā: The living beings as well as their diseases originate from karman (past actions). For neither living beings nor diseases can be born without karman.

The subsequent exposition of C. S. shows conclusively that it accepts karma as an important factor in causing diseases, in limiting the efficacy of therapeutic measures, the incurable character of certain diseases being due to karmas, and congenital deformities and deficiencies in physical and mental make-up, epidemics and seasonal abnormalities as being due to karmas.

In C. S. IV 1.116 daiva is said to constitute in due course one of the causative factors³ in the manifestation of diseases. In C. S. IV 2.41 it is said : dharmyāḥ kriyā harṣa-nimitta muktās tato anyathā śoka vaśam nayanti : Righteous acts are responsible for happiness and unrighteous acts for misery. Again in C. S. IV 2.43 it is emphasised

2. R. K. Sharma and Bhagwan Dash : *ibid* p. 195.

3. Other disease-causative factors are old age, unwholesome contact with objects of sense, over-indulgence, use of harmful objects of intoxicants etc.

that diseases can be prevented by taking proper therapeutic measures, avoiding intellectual blasphemy and unwholesome indulgence in senses "provided the manifestation of the diseases is not ordained by daiva, previous karmas". In C. S. IV 2.44 it is asserted "The unrighteous deeds of the previous life induce one to diseases...". C. S. IV 1.117 further declares that *kriyāghnāḥ karmajā rogāḥ praśamam yānti tatsayāt* : Diseases arising out of (past) actions are not amenable to any therapeutic measures. They are cured only after the results of past actions are exhausted. Thus *Sūśruta Saṁhitā Uttaratantra* 40.163 classifies diseases into three categories: *Karmajā vyādhayah kecit doṣajāḥ santi cāpare Karmadoṣodbhavāścānye* : Some diseases are born of karmas, others of defects in bodily humours, others are produced both by karmas and doṣas and have to be treated by non-therapeutic measures. (S. S. *ibid* 164) *Vāgbhaṭa's Aṣṭāṅghṛdaya Nidānasthāna* 14.1-2 in its exposition of leprosy, leukoderma and worms says that evil deeds in this life or previous life (*prāktana karman*) excite the doṣas, disease causing humours: *pāpmabhiḥ karmabhiḥ sadyaḥ prāktanaiḥ preritā malāḥ*. Again *Aṣṭāṅga* in *Uttara sthāna* 4.3 equates *prajāñā-aparādha* (wrong done instantly) with *pūrvakṛta*-actions done in previous lives and considers them as being responsible for *bhūta rogaḥ*-evil spirits possessing a person. Thus a medieval medical text *Yogarātnākara* thus sums up *janmāntarakṛtam pāpam vyādhirūpena bādhatē* : the evil deeds of previous karmas torment (a body) in the form of disease.

Apart from diseases being a product of karma, *āyurveda*⁴ in common with the other schools of thought, also relates transmigrātion-punarjanma-as a function of karma. In C. S. IV 2.31 it is said that "being guided by the associated past actions, the soul who travels with the help of the mind transmigrates from one body to another along with the four subtle *bhūtas*-fire, water, earth and air. Again, C. S. IV 2.35 says that the four *bhūtas*, which get fused (constantly associated) with the soul to enter into the foetus are the products of past actions. In C. S. IV 2.36 it is claimed that "the physique and the mind of an individual are derived from the physique and mind of his past life. The dissimilarity in the shape and intellectual faculties is caused by the

4. *Sūśruta Saṁhitā* in its *Śārīrasthāna* Chapter I also states that the bodies of all self-conscious karma puruṣas come into being through the dynamic energy of acts or *karman*.

rajas, tamas and the nature of the past actions". In fact, C. S. IV 2. 14-16 referring to twins, explains congenital defects as arising from unseen development of the foetus, due to past karmas. *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, *Śārīrasthāna* 2.52 & 54 ascribes malformed foetus to *pāpakṛtam bhṛṣam*. deadly sins and *pūrvakṛtaiḥ*-previous karmas. The same text in *Nidānasthāna*⁵ 5.29 ascribes leprosy to previous evil karmas and in *Nidānasthāna* 5.30 proclaims: *mriyate yadi kuṣṭhena punarjāte api gacchati*; if a person dies from leprosy, (this disease) accompanies him in his rebirth.

Caraka Saṁhitā even explains the diseases which befall a whole community as distinct from individuals such as epidemics as also being due to karmas of people as a whole. *Ātreya* explains in III. 3, 19-20 that the vitiation of air, water, land, etc. which destroys the entire country is due to karmas. To quote C. S. "Sins of the present life or the misdeeds of the past life are at the root of the vitiation of all these factors: *mūlam adharmastanmūlam vā asat karma pūrvakṛtam*. Likewise abnormalities in seasons such as absence of timely rainfall or failure of rainfall altogether or abnormal rain-fall, *na apo yathākālam devo varṣati na vā varṣati vikṛtam vā varṣati*. C.S. III. 3.21 attributes destruction of a country by war as a consequence of sinful act, *adharmā* and in C. S. III 3.22 sinful acts are held responsible for affliction of people by *rākṣasas*: C. S III 3.24 emphasises: *prāgapi ca adharmādṛte nāsubha utpattiranyato abhūt*: From the beginning of creation, manifestation of inauspiciousness has been preceded by sinful acts.

Caraka and *Suśruta Saṁhitās* clearly establish that *Āyurveda* accepted karma (*daiva*, past karmas and *puruṣakāra*, present acts) as an important factor in causing disease and suffering. Therapeutic measures are clearly in the nature of *puruṣakāra*, human effort; these include medication, observance of wholesome regimen and moderation. It is impossible to know beforehand whether *puruṣakāra* in the nature of therapeutic measures would be ineffective against any disease, other than incurable diseases, whether a disease is caused by past karmas and will, therefore, have to be suffered till those karmas are exhausted. As such, *puruṣakāra* or therapeutic measures continued to retain their

importance in Āyurveda. The doctrine of karma did not produce a sense of fatalism and of futility of these measures. At the same time the importance of past karmas effectively prevented human arrogance at men's mastery over the healing science from disregarding mental and physical discipline essential for health and longevity.

सारांश

आयुर्वेद तथा कर्मवाद

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मानसिक और शारीरिक रोगों के कारण उत्पन्न मानव के क्लेश चिकित्सा-उपचार द्वारा आंशिकरूपमें ही दूर किये जा सकते हैं। कुछ रोगों और आनुवंशिक व्याधियों की चिकित्सा सम्भव नहीं है तथा शारीरिक विरूपताएँ और मुख्यतया जन्मजात न्यूनताएँ कुछ हद तक ही सुधारी जा सकती हैं। दूसरे, शारीरिक तथा पर्यावरण घटक में कोई उल्लेखनीय अन्तर के न रहने पर भी, एक ही रोग से पीडित व्यक्तियों में से कोई चिकित्सा के बिना ही नीरोग बनजाता है, कोई चिकित्सा द्वारा तो किसी पर अति उत्तम चिकित्सा का कुछ भी प्रभाव नहीं पड़ता।

आयुर्वेद, चिकित्साविज्ञान की सीमाओं को मानता है तथा विगतकर्म अथवा दैव अर्थात् पिछले जन्मों के संचितकर्मों को रोगजनन, आनुवंशिक दोष, मानसिकरोग तथा शारीरिक विरूपताओं के कारण के रूपमें तथा चिकित्सीय उपायों की भिन्न भिन्न परिणामों का विश्लेषण करने वाले सीमाकारक गुणक के रूपमें स्वीकार करता है। इसके अतिरिक्त केवल यह गुणक ही जीवनकाल आयु के अन्तरों का विश्लेषण करसकता है। चरक संहिता, सुश्रुत तथा वाग्भट कर्मवाद को मानते हैं।

चूँकि इस विषय का पूर्वानुमान करना असम्भव—सा है कि कर्म चिकित्सा उपायों को अप्रभावी बना सकते हैं, अतः आयुर्वेद अपने उपयोग और महत्त्व को स्थापित प्रतिधारित करता है। आयुर्वेद को पुरुषकार अर्थात् मानव-प्रयत्न का अंश कहा जासकता है।