

## EVOLUTION OF HOSPITALS AND HOSPITAL SYSTEMS IN ANCIENT INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Records of the earlier history have shown evidence that the treatment of sick started as a magico-religious practice in Indus civilization and *Vedic* period. Subsequently hospitals were established in the Buddhist period. After that cosmopolitan medical system was evolved in the Indian sub continent. Though there is description about the construction of hospitals in the traditional literature, history of evolution of hospital system can be effectively reconstructed from the available archaeological and epigraphical sources. The present article throws light on the main hospitals and hospital systems, which were evolved in ancient India.

Evidence of magico-religious practice can be seen in the great bath at Mohenjo-daro of Indus valley civilization. Thereafter *Jivaka Āmravana* and other significant sites explain about the hospital system during the period of Buddhism and Jainism. There after during the reign of *Ashoka* the great, separate hospitals were established for human beings and animals. In the period of Gupta emperor medical science reached its peak and hospital system fully evolved as per the evidences seen from *Kumārāgāra* excavation. Contemporarily in south India also hospital system was completely evolved and these details are seen in the inscriptions of *Nāgārjunakoṇḍa* and *Tirumukkuḍal* temple. In the beginning, hospitals were started in the premises of temples and monasteries, but gradually independent establishments were built. Later on super specialty hospital like mukhya jvarālaya (speciality fever hospital) in *Nāgārjunakoṇḍa* was also developed by the third century A.D. But, at present, few archeological monuments and inscriptions are only preserved to stand as a testimony to the evolution of hospitals in India.

**Key words:** Healthcare delivery, hospitals, Ancient India.

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**Introduction:**

History of evolution of hospitals and hospital systems can be constructed based on the archaeological, epigraphical, monumental evidences, foreign testimony and traditional Indian literature etc. In the ancient times dispensaries are called as *ātulaśālā* or *vaidyaśālā*. The term *ātulaśālā* might have been used for *āturaśālā*, a *Sanskrit* term denoting hospitals. There are some epigraphical records, temple inscriptions that show the evidence for existence of dispensaries in the olden days. Some relics of hospital are also found at the excavated sites at different parts of India. Foreign testimony is also available to support the concept of hospitals in India and they establish that India is the first country in the globe to develop and execute the cosmopolitan type of health care system. Travelers belongs China, Greece, Italy etc., countries visited India and recorded the Indian culture and political scenario of that particular period.

The present study is an attempt to review the ancient literature, monuments and inscriptions relevant to medical history in order to give full account of the history of hospital evolution in ancient India.

**I. Indus valley civilization:**

The people of ancient India had hospitals devoted to healing divinities and cults. The Indian civilization dates back to very ancient period i.e. from Mehargarh culture to Indus Valley Civilization (7000 B.C.E.-1500 B.C.E.). The systematic sanitation and public health care is seen in the Indus civilization as evidenced by Harappa-Mohenjodaro excavations.

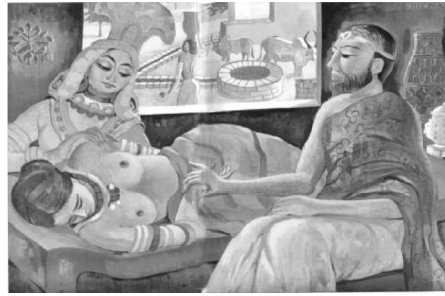
History of providing medical care to the sick appears to have started from Indus valley civilization. Based on the historical evidences it is seen that the people of Indus valley were mainly banking on magico-religious practices for the health care. The great bath found at the Mohenjo-daro, probably epitomizes the faith of purification through bath. This shows that the hydrotherapy was believed as cure for diseases and restoration of health. This kind of practice was observed in Romans during later ages. Less artfully sculptured terra-cotta figurines of mother goddess found at site indicate that they were worshipping the mother goddess. Seals depicting short inscriptions with pictographic script were found in the Indus civilization sites. These may be used to wear as amulets or ring to ward off evils, as a part of magico-religious practices. Evidences are also available about the trepanation of skull; two skulls were found having holes on them, one is adult skull and the other is child skull. On the adult skull the hole appears as man made and appears to be performed with a small circular gauge with alabaster handle. The same instrument was discovered in the same strata from where the skull came. The other skull i.e. child's skull found at the site of

Kalibangan have three holes over it, shows that child was suffering with hydrocephalus. Seated male sculpture was found in Mohenjo-daro excavations, having fillet (ribbon headband) with circular inlay ornament on the forehead and similar small ornament on the right upper arm. This sculpture, named as 'Priest King' was probably performing the religious practices as a part of health care during this civilization.



(Courtesy -

<http://www.harappa.com/indus/41.html>)



A physician of Mohenjo-daro period (Courtesy - Dr. P. K. Sanyal, A Short story of medicine)

## II. Vedic period:

From the period of *Veda*, treatment to the patients might have started giving at the temples. The knowledge of medicine was incorporated in two *Vedic* texts, major part in Atharvaveda and to some lesser extent in Rigveda. Atharvaveda is the principal source of medicine during the early *Vedic* period, since it contains a significant number of charms devoted to the removal of the disease. Textual evidences suggest that, during the period of Veda, treatment of the disease was fundamentally a system of healing based on magic, called as medico-religious practices. Healing ritual was performed by recitation of mantra and amulet was used to wear to dispel the evil powers. *Vedic* medicine was also given an elaborate pharmacopoeia; different kinds of pharmaceutical preparations were also evolved. In the Rigveda, healers are (*bhisaja*) considered as one among the threefold list of skilled professionals.

Priests were used to perform rituals for healing. Some heterodox wandering ascetics in the quest of spiritual knowledge and nomadic physicians were also used to treat the ill people. From all these three sections of people a vast treasure house of knowledge developed<sup>1</sup>.

### III. Buddhist period:

Medical knowledge was also shared by Buddhist monks and they also contributed in the development of medicine. Treating the patients of saṅgha at in-patient level was started by Buddhist monks only. Most of the ancient archaeological evidences available on hospital establishment are from Buddhist monasteries<sup>2</sup>. Medicine and healing; these two are the integral parts of the Buddhist monasticism. During the initial period of saṅgha, medical activities were focused on the care and treatment of monks, but from the middle of the third century health care was extended to the general population. From the Buddhist monasteries, an institution of monk-healers was evolved to provide healthcare to the sick, by utilizing medical doctrines codified as per the monastic rules<sup>3</sup>.

### IV. Haryanka dynasty:

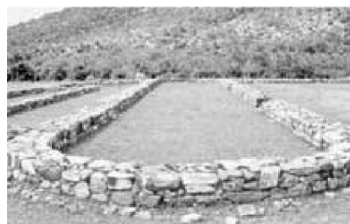
*Ajātaśatru* was a king of the *Magadha* Empire in north India. He was the son of King *Bimbisara*, the great monarch of Magadha and contemporary to *Mahavira* and Buddha. The *Ajātaśatru* donated *Jīvaka āmravana* to *Jīvaka*, who was the court physician of the king *Ajātaśatru* and was also the consultant of Lord Buddha.

*Jīvaka* was the disciple of the *Ātrēya* (Propounder of *Carakasamhitā*), and practitioner of pediatrics as well as surgery. In the context of ancient hospitals, *Jīvaka* needs a special mention. *Jīvaka āmravana* or *Jivakarāma* is the seat of the Royal Physician *Jīvaka*, where Lord Buddha was once brought for the dressing of wounds. Physician *Jīvaka* was probably running it as a hospital as well as herbal garden. *Jīvaka* did the neurosurgery and removal of intra-cranial mass. At the age of sixteen *Jīvaka* took sanctuary with the historical Buddha *Śākyamuni*, who supported him in his idea of starting a medical education. One year later *Jīvaka* set off to the famous medical university of Taxila, in the kingdom of Gāndhāra. After attaining training, *Jīvaka* started practicing in the territory of Magadha region. Many references about *Jīvaka*'s cure are found in the Buddhist classical *Mahāvagga*<sup>4</sup>.

*Jivaka āmravana* archaeological site is situated in Rajgir, District Nalanda, south-west to Biharsharif. Rajgir was probably the capital of Magadha from traditional day to 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the valley of excavations, a unique structure of hallow brick cylinder with thick wall with stucco images of *Brahminical* divinities of Gupta tradition is found. Further, one kilometre away a stone enclosure in 60 meters square is situated. In this site during 1953-55, D.R. Patil of Archeological survey of India, excavated two large elliptical halls with subsidiary rooms with in a compound wall.



Relics of the *Jivakāmravana* - Hospital of Royal Physician *Jivaka*



*Jivakāmravana* (Mango garden) donated to Physician *Jivaka*

#### V. *Mauryan* dynasty:

Concept of separate hospital to human beings and animals was evolved during the period of the emperor *Ashoka*, of the *Mauryan* dynasty. Two types of hospitals were believed to have been constructed separately for human beings and animals. This was described in the traveler's account of *Fa-Xian*, a Chinese Buddhist monk, who traveled across India in ca. 400 C.E. He observed that establishments of medical relief organizations with a dispensary and physician. Every village which is having around 500 population use to have a dispensary equipped with all essential drugs<sup>5</sup>.

King *Ashoka*, the third monarch of the Indian *Mauryan* dynasty, has regarded as one of the most exemplary rulers in world history. During his reign, he issued number of edicts, inscribed on rocks and pillars proclaiming *Ashoka's* reforms and policies and to promulgate his advice to his subjects. An introspective approach into these edicts give us a picture of *Ashoka's* attempt to establish an empire on the foundation of righteousness, a reign which makes the moral and spiritual welfare of his subjects its primary concern. Major rock edicts of *Ashoka* are found scattered in more than thirty places throughout India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Among them, Girnar rock edict is found to have more details about the hospital system of *Ashoka's* period. These inscriptions are in *Brāhmī* script and the language is *prakṛti*.

Rock edict inscription at Girnar, describes that everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King *Piyadasi's* domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as Tamraparni and where the Greek king Antiochos rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos, made provision for two types of medical treatment; *manusacikicchā* (medical treatment for human beings) and *pasuchikicchā* (medical treatment for animals). In the absence of suitable *ōsuḍhāni* (medical herbs), *mūlāni* (roots) and *phalāni* (fruits) for the use of humans or animals king

has ordered to import them and make it grow. He founded at least eighteen hospitals during ca. 230 B.C., with physicians and nursing staff, and the expenses of hospital maintenance were borne by the royal treasury<sup>6</sup>.

**Erragudi Inscription- Minor rock edict:**



Girnar Rock edict issued by Emperor *Ashoka*  
(Courtesy - Archeological Survey of India - Epigraphia of Indica, Vol. II)



Veterinary hospital during the time of Emperor *Ashoka* (Courtesy - Dr. P. K. Sanyal, A Short story of medicine)

One minor inscription of the king *Ashoka* was found at *Erragudi* site, in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. It was the second rock edict discovered in that site. This inscription also mentions about the establishment of two types of hospitals for human beings and animals. Raw herbal drugs were also advised to be procured from local areas and if not available from other places<sup>7</sup>.

***Kumārāhāra* excavation, Rajgir, Bihar:**

The archaeological remains of ancient Pāṭalīputra, eighty pillared hall and Ārōgyavihāra are located at Kumārāhāra, situated about six kms east of Patna railway station. The excavation at Pāṭalīputra, Bihar, has revealed the habitation at *Kumārāhāra* was continued from the Mauryan times to A.D. 600.

*Kumārāhāra*, the Mauryan pillared hall was brought to light by excavations conducted by Archaeological Survey of India in the years 1912-15 under D.B. Spooner, below a ruined brick structure. In this excavation, traces of 72 pillars were found. Further excavations

conducted during 1951-55 by K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna exposed eight more pillars of the hall and four additional ones belonging to the entrance or porch. Since then it is popularly referred as the 'Eighty Pillared Hall'. The pillars are made of black spotted polished sand stone monolith based on the wooden support and probably the hall was the assembly hall of the third Buddhist council convened by the *Ashoka*.

An important monastery-cum-sanatorium was discovered from this site and was identified by a seal with the legend Śrī-ārōgya-vihārē bhikṣu-saṅghasya. Excavations by K.P. Jayaswal, Research Institute have unearthed this brick structure of Ārōgyavihāra (hospital-cum-monastery) on the basis of an inscribed terracotta sealing discovered from the place which bears the inscription reading 'Śrī-ārōgya-vihārē bhikṣu-saṅghasya'. Another small red potsherd was also found inscribed with the word 'Dhanvantarēḥ', possibly referring to the name or the title of the presiding physician of *Ārogya Vihāra*<sup>8</sup>. This may be one of the monasteries seen by Fa-Hien, the Chinese traveler visited India during 5<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Hospital at Mahintale, Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka:**

Through the other Rock edicts we can also come to know that missionary deputed by Emperor *Ashoka* achieved success in their work. One of the results achieved was the extension of emperor's arrangements for providing medical aid to men and animals to the foreign countries. The *Mahāvamsa* relates that in the seventeenth year of *Ashoka*'s coronation was held at *Pātaliputra*, under the presidency of the monk *Moggaliputta Tissa* (in the northern texts, Upagupta), the third Buddhist Council, and when brought the Council to an end, 'he sent forth *theras*, one here and one there' whose names are thus given, together with the countries they were sent to. Missionary sent to the country Lanka (Ceylon) includes *Mahendra* with *Rishtriya*, *Utriya*, *Sambala* and *Bhadrasāra*<sup>9</sup>.

As a part of his legacy, King *Ashoka* expanded medical services in foreign countries also. One of such hospital relics is still found at *Mahintale*, a mountain peak situated near the Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. It is believed that this is a site of a meeting between the Buddhist monk *Mahinda* and King *Devanampiyadassi*. At the foot of the mountain, the ruins of a hospital, medical bath (or stone canoe in which patients were immersed in medicated oils), a stone inscription etc., are found.

The *Mahintale* hospital was a rectangular building, in which, on the right hand side there is a 5.18m x 4.27m room was found, probably to use as a dispensary. In the north-east side of the building there is a stone paved room with a medicinal trough probably used



Bouddhashtupa of *Ashoka's* period at Mahintale, Srilanka



Hospital at *Mahintale*, Srilanka (Courtesy - <http://travel-srilanka.yinteing.com/2010/07/21/mihintale-1-ancient-hospital>)

for *abhyāṅga* (oil immersion) therapy. A *Jāntaghara* (room for steam therapy) was also found in the hospital building<sup>10</sup>.

#### VI. Gupta Empire:

The Gupta Empire (320 AD-500 AD) had covered most of north India. It was the time of peace and prosperity which led to greatest achievements in every walk of life including art, music and sciences. It was also continued to establish hospitals for the care of sick and advancements also achieved in the field of medicine.

#### VII. Ikshvaku Dynasty:

The *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* (*Vijayapuri*) is a historical Buddhist town, the capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty (225 AD - 325 AD). It was a great religious center promoting *Brahmanical* and Buddhist faiths, molded the early phases of art and architecture affiliated with them<sup>11</sup>. Archeological excavations at *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* have shown evidences of a specialty hospital. *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* is situated in Macherla Mandal of the District Guntur, in Andhra Pradesh. *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa*, meaning the hill of *Nāgārjuna*, was named after the Buddhist scholar and savant *Āchārya Nāgārjun*. According to A. Ghosh, the Author of an encyclopaedia of Indian archaeology, the name *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* is seen in medieval records only; it does not have any connection with the *Nāgārjuna*, the Buddhist philosopher of 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.<sup>12</sup>.



Relics of Nagarjunakonda



*Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* is the largest and presumably the central monastic establishment believed to design to house a monastic university and is now traceable only by its ground plan. It has got two extensive wings, set with in a circuit-wall. Part of this establishment seems to be used as a hospital. An inscription engraved on one of the walls of *Mukhyajvarālaya* (main hospital for fever) stating that this monument was used for treating the patients suffering with fever<sup>13</sup>.

### VIII. Chola Dynasty:

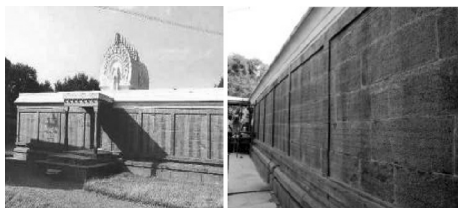
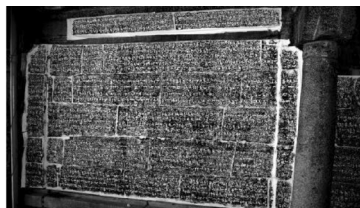
**Temple inscription of *Tirumukkuḍaḷ*:** Hospital establishment and hospital administration was more detailed in the inscription of *Vīra Rājēndracōla* of *Chola* dynasty, situated on the temple walls of god *Vēṅkatēśvara* of *Tirumukkuḍaḷ*, located near to *Kanchipuram*, in the *Chengalpat* district of Tamil Nadu. The record was written in Tamil language and alphabet, under two sections. The entire space covered by the inscription is 540 square feet. The inscription given us to understand that a temple, hospital, college and hostel were built in one building with separate apartments for each section.

It can be learn from the inscription that the hospital situated in the temple premises is set up with 15 beds and named as *Srī Vīracōlēśvara cikitsālaya*. The in-charge physician was paid annually 90 kalam of paddy, 8 kāśu, apart from a grant of land. The nurses who were serving the sick were paid 30 kalam of paddy and 1 kāśu. The barber, who is believed to perform minor surgeries along with his professional duties, is use to get 15 kalam of paddy as payment. For medicines stock 40 kalam of paddy was allocated.

Physician's job was prescription of medicines to the patients from the teachers and students of Vedic school as well as to the servants attached to this institution. Nurses used to attend the patients and administer medicines to them. Diet to the patients was decided as 1 nāli of rice per day. Medicines used in the hospital were - *Vāsāharītakī*, *Gōmūtraharītakī*, *Daśamūlaharītakī*, *Bhallātakaharītakī*, *Gaṇḍīra*, *Bhālakēraṇḍataila*, *Uttama-karaṇādi taila*, *Bilvādighṛta* etc<sup>14</sup>.

### IX. Kakatiya Dynasty:

***Malkapuram* Inscription:** An inscription dated 1226 C.E., found on a stone pillar at *Malakapur*, in Andhra Pradesh and is considered as one of the record of references of medical interest. According to this inscription, *Kākatīya* Queen *Rudrama Dēvi* and her father *King Gaṇapati* donated several villages to the south of the river *Kriṣṇa* to *Viśvēśvara* and the income accruing from these holdings was divided into three parts, one part of which was used for a maternity home, one part for a hospital and the last or the remaining part for a school<sup>15</sup>.

Epigraph from *Tirumukkuḍal* temple wall*Tirumukkuḍal* temple wall inscription

### X. Traditional Indian medical literature:

The *Carakasamhita* and the *Sushrutasamhita* medical treatises are very significant works of medicine. Hospital wards, construction of *Sūtikāgāra* (maternity homes), *Kumārāgāra* (neonatal wards) and *Vraṇitāgāra* (post surgical ward) etc., are described in these classics. Hospitals or wards to perform the *Jēntākasvēda* (steam therapy), *Rasāyana* therapy with different measurements and specifications are also described in *Āyurvedic* classics.

*Carakasamhita*: This book is believed to be written in the first century B.C., and one of the repositories of ancient medical lore. It is the first comprehensive lexicon on *Āyurveda*, which dealt elaborately on Anatomy, Physiology of human body, Pathology of diseases, Pharmacology, Medicine and Surgery etc. Descriptions are available about different types of specialty hospitals and wards like *Sūtikāgāra* (Maternity home), *Kumārāgāra* (Neonatal care unit), and specialized hospitals for administration of *Rasāyana* (Rejuvenation) therapies in this compendium. Details about the construction, list of materials, medicines, surgical instruments to be stored are given<sup>16</sup>.

*Sushrutasamhita*: This lexicon is the authority on surgery and is mentioned about *Vraṇitāgāra* (post surgical ward). Details are provided about the construction, maintenance and equipments<sup>17</sup>.

### Traveler's accounts:

#### Fa-Xian:

*Fa Xian* was one of the first and perhaps the oldest Chinese Buddhist monk to travel to India. He traveled across India between years 399 to 414 with a main aim of procurement of texts related to monastic rules (i.e. Vinaya). This can be known from the opening passage of *Fa-xian's* 'A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms'<sup>18</sup>.

He recorded in his travelogue that, India has one of the earliest accounts of a civic hospital system and suggested that India may have been the first part of the world to have evolved an organized cosmopolitan system of institutionally-based medical provision<sup>19</sup>.

Fa-Hien has also made some interesting observations on the country of *Magadha* and its civilization. He says on public philanthropy endowing social service as; 'The elders and gentry of the countries have instituted in their capitals free hospitals, and cripples. They are well taken care of, a doctor attends them, food and medicine being supplied according to their needs. They are all made quite comfortable, and when they are cured, they go away'<sup>20</sup>.

#### **Hiouen Thsang:**

*Hiouen Thsang* (C.E. 629 - 645), another Chinese traveler, contemporary to the emperor *Harsha*, also provides description about the hospitals of that time. He recorded in his book '*Si-Yu-Ki - Buddhist Records of the Western world*', that on all the highways of the towns and the villages throughout India, there were 'hospices' (*punya-sālās*). These hospices were provided with food and drink as well as physicians with medicines that provide medical facilities to the travelers and poor people. While mentioning the Kosala country he mentioned about the esteemed Nagarjuna and said that he is an expert in the art of compounding of medicines<sup>21</sup>.

#### **I-tsing:**

I-tsing is another Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, who visited India during later half of the seventh century. He mentioned about the eight branches of *Āyurvedic* medicine as *Aṣṭāṅga*.

#### **Conclusion:**

After reviewing the available archeological and epigraphical evidences and travelers accounts, it can be concluded that the hospital system was started as magico-religious health care practices and gradually evaluated up to cosmopolitan health care and to super specialties later on.

Excavations at Indus valley civilization sites show that the people of the Indus valley were believers in mother goddess and Paśupati god. Great bath at Mohanjo-daro shows that they were practicing the magico-religious practices for health care. During Vedic period, treatment is converted from magico-religious practices to medicinal treatment. Temples and stūpa were considered as divine healing cults.

Post-*vedic* period dispensary type of hospitals was evaluated and treatment was even used to give at the location of patient. During Buddhist and Jainism dominant phases of history, in-patient houses were also started especially to treat monks. Buddhist monasteries were built with sanitoriums and equipped with instruments to provide in-patient treatment.

Later on hospitals for men and animals were established separately during the reign of

*Maurya* and Gupta Kings. Under the Emperor *Ashoka* reign, schools with attached hospitals were established. King *Ashoka* is said to have founded at least eighteen hospitals with physicians and nursing staff, the expense to run hospitals were borne by the royal treasury.

The reign of Gupta kings may be called the golden period of Indian history, especially for *Āyurveda*. During this period, medical facilities were improved and the University of *Nalanda* was established by King Kumāra Gupta for the teaching of *Āyurveda*, where hospital was also associated to treat the patients.

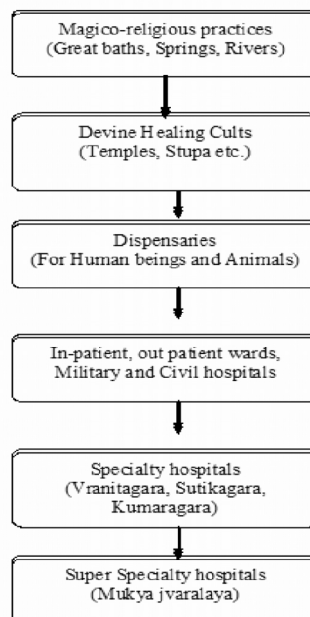
*Mukhyajvarālaya* (fever hospital) at *Nāgārjunakōṇḍa* is another historically important Buddhist establishment, evidences of this hospital is seen from the rescued relics and displayed at the Archaeological Museum.

In South India an edict dated 1097 of *Vīra Rājēndracōla* king refer to a fifteen bedded hospital for students of the school attached to the temple at *Tirumukkuḍal*, near to *Kanchipuram*, located in the *Chengalput* District of Tamil Nadu. This edict provides much information on hospital administration.

*Malakāpur* stone pillar inscription (1226 CE) found in Andhra Pradesh, is a reference of evidence for the maintenance of Maternity and general hospitals during the times of *Kākatīya* dynasty. Lands were donated by the *Kākatīya* kings to generate funds to run the hospital.

Archeological evidence based hospitals history is also supported by contemporary traditional Indian and foreign literature. There is mention of military hospitals in *Mahabharata* which are said to be located in the cantonments (*Skandhavāra*). *Kautilya*, the author of *Arthaśāstra*, is probably the first person to put in words the ideas of public healthcare and hospital systems and maintenance of published records and also written in detail about the importance of public healthcare system and hospital administration.

There are at present more than 3650 ancient monuments and archaeological sites with inscriptions in different scripts and languages are identified in India. In the present study,



Schematic presentation of development of hospital system in India

some of the monuments belong to ancient periods, starting from the prehistoric period (Indus valley civilization) to the medieval period are reviewed to build the history of hospitals in India.

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सारांश

## प्राचीन भारत में चिकित्सालयों एवं चिकित्सालय प्रणालियों का विकास

के. भारती एवं अला नारायण

प्रारम्भिक इतिहास के अभिलेखों ने साक्ष्य प्रदर्शित किये हैं कि रोगी की चिकित्सा इण्डस सभ्यता और वैदिक काल में जादू-धार्मिक व्यवसाय के रूप में आरम्भ हुई। तदनन्तर बौद्धकाल में चिकित्सालय स्थापित हुए। इसके पश्चात् भारतीय प्रायद्वीप विश्वनागरिक चिकित्सा पद्धति विकसित हुई। यद्यपि पारम्परिक साहित्य में चिकित्सालयों के निर्माण का वर्णन है, उपलब्ध पुरातत्वीय शिलालेखीय साक्ष्यों से चिकित्सालय प्रणाली के विकास का इतिहास प्रभावी तरीके से पुनर्निर्मित किया जा सकता है। प्रस्तुत लेख प्राचीन भारत में विकसित प्रमुख चिकित्सालयों और चिकित्सालय प्रणालियों पर प्रकाश डालता है।

इण्डस घाटी सभ्यता के मोहेनजोदड़ो में महान् स्नान में जादू-धार्मिक व्यवसाय का साक्ष्य देखा जा सकता है। इसके पश्चात् जीवक आम्रवन और अन्य महत्त्वपूर्ण स्थल बौद्ध और जैन काल के दौरान चिकित्सालय प्रणाली के बारे में स्पष्ट करते हैं। तदनन्तर अशोक महान् के शासन के दौरान मानवमात्र और पशुओं के पृथक्-पृथक् चिकित्सालय विकसित किये गए। गुप्त सम्राट के काल में चिकित्सा विज्ञान अपरे शिखर पर पहुँच गया एवं कुमारागार उत्खनन से प्राप्त प्रमाणों के अनुसार चिकित्सालय प्रणाली पूर्णतः विकसित हो गयी थी। उसी समय दक्षिणी भारत में भी चिकित्सालय प्रणाली पूर्णतः विकसित थी एवं नागार्जुनकोण्डा और तिरुमुक्कुडल मन्दिर के शिलालेखों में ये वर्णन देखे गये हैं। आरम्भ में मन्दिरों और मठों के भवनों में चिकित्सालय प्रारम्भ किये गये, किन्तु क्रमशः स्वतन्त्र प्रतिष्ठान बनाये गये। बाद में तीसरी सदी में नागार्जुनकोण्डा में मुख्य ज्वरालय जैसे उच्च विशेषता चिकित्सालय भी विकसित किये गये। किन्तु भारत में चिकित्सालयों का विकास के प्रमाण के रूप में वर्तमान में केवल कुछ पुरातत्वीय स्मारक और शिलालेख सुरक्षित रखे गये हैं।