

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL LIBRARIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA (UPTO 18 C)

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ABSTRACT

Ancient medical knowledge was communicated orally from teacher to pupil. The discovery of script in the excavations in Indus valley and Babilonia made clear regarding the existence of knowledge of medical information in the second and first millennium before the christ. Egyptian papyri and Edwin Smith Papyrus, Clay tablets in the Assyrian Library are some of the ancient medical literature available from the West. Samhitas, Bowers manuscript are some of the available medical literature from Ancient India. Travellers from China and other countries described Universities, University Libraries where medical sections were existed in ancient India. Arab Physicians used to study and write medical texts for their students. In the medieval period, Churches used to collect medical books in the West. In India, temples, monasteries used to maintain medical libraries to educate students. Kings used to patronise scholars, physicians, and encouraged them to write books on medicine in Indian languages.

INTRODUCTION

The Art of Medicine had its origins in the dim antiquity of Neolithic and Prehistoric Human Society. Our Indian Medical classics (Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita) as well as the Greek Physician Hippocrates 'Father of Medicine' allude at that early epoch, to 'The Ancient Medicine'. At the very beginning of Medical Practice, it is probable

that all knowledge and procedure were communicated orally from Patriarch to Juniors or from teacher to pupil. But as the volume of knowledge became increased and diverse, there was temptation to record and preserve it for successive generations and to transport from place to place without the necessity of a learned teacher (probably an old age too) having to walk long distance or sail

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over seas or cross over high ranges. It is generally stated that writing was introduced into India from Mesopotamia in the 6th or 8th century before Christ. Further, the discovery of Egyptian and of the famous clay tablets in Babylonian excavations ought to be sufficient to remove any vestiges of doubt regarding the existence of knowledge reduced to writing and of the international inter-change of medical information in the second and first millennium before Christ.

ORIGIN

The earliest medical texts now available in their ancient and original form, are the Egyptian Papyri (so called because they are written on papyrus leaf). Of these, the Edwin Smith Papyrus (1600 B.C.) is a roll 15 ft. long written on both sides in 22 columns, containing 1500 lines of script. Its chief interest lies in its surgical case reports. The Ebers Papyrus (1550 B.C.) has 110 columns (pages) containing nearly 2300 lines. It was believed by Egyptologists to be one of the sacred books (Hermetic book of Thoth) supposed to have been lost. This text is a complete Encyclopedia, written in several dialects, and containing a variety of medical and allied subjects beginning with incantations giving lists of diseases, and 875 recipes and citing case reports. It even includes sections on Parasites, Tumours, diseases of Ear and Eye and pediatrics. The earliest of the Egyptian medical pap-

yri assigned to 2000 B.C. is devoted to Gynaecology (The Gardinar Papyrus). The first proof found in 1849 shows the existence of medical libraries in antiquity started in the world in 1849, when about 10,000 Assyrian and Babylonian clay tablets, forming the great library of Assurbanipal (7th cent. B.C.) were unearthed. Out of which 3000 tablets were related with different sciences and out of these nearly 800 tablets deal with medicine.

DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL LIBRARIES

History tells us about the repeated destruction and burning of the great library at Alexandria, collected by the enthusiasm and energy of the lovers of learning, the Ptolemeys. The loss to civilisation and to medicine in particular, must have been incalculable. The bridge between the past and the succeeding ages was completely blown up, literally into atoms. A Scott's article on 'Libraries of Ancient Rome' in relation to medical science (Athens : VIII 503 Dec. 39) ought to stimulate some Oriental Scholar or Librarian to give us similar studies on the medical libraries of ancient India.

The evidences discovered so far are additional arguments for more thorough and vigorous search for either traces of the libraries or the record of such libraries — bigger or smaller earlier or later than those that

have actually and accidentally been brought to light, in some parts of the world.

IN ANCIENT ERA

Would it not be considered rash if one were to dogmatize that there were no medical libraries in Ancient India on the slender negative as in Egypt or Assyria evidence that no medical collections of hoary antiquity have been discovered in this Country? Charaka tells us in his Samhita that all the pupils of Atreya, Preceptor of Agnivesa and his pupils, studying medicine in the University of Takshasila, centuries before the invasion of Alexander wrote treatises (corresponding to the graduation thesis of modern European and American Universities). Only recently, one of these treatises, in its original form was luckily identified in the Tanjore Manuscript Library. This rare manuscript has been printed by the Calcutta University and is called Bhela Samhita, because Bhela is the author of the book. The late Pandit Ganganath Jha had drawn the attention of the Oriental Scholars to some medical texts and treatises mentioned by name yet undiscovered. An Ancient Indian Medical Manuscript written on Bhurja leaves and belonging to 4th cent. A D. was found among the excavations in Central Asia. A fascimile edition of it is available for reference libraries and wealthy collectors, while a cheap edition is also now sold at Lahore. The medical

manuscript contains many recipes and is called 'Bower Manuscript'. Nepal and Kashmir still possess many ancient and medieval manuscripts and many more similar collections may be expected to have been collected and preserved as precious treasures in the capitals of Chandragupta Maurya and Kanishka Gupta Emprors, in the North and in the Courts of the Pandyas, Pallavas and Cholas in the South.

Chinese visitors to India in the 7th cen. leaves us in no doubt regarding the splendid libraries that were attached to the great University of Dhanyakataka on the bank of Krishna in the heyday of the Andhra Empire in the 1st and 2nd cen. A.D. It would appear that this University (and specially its Library) was taken as the model for many Tibetan and Chinese centres of learning.

Both It-sing and Huen-Tsang have described with admiration and awe the Library of the Nalanda University. Foreign visitors came to India to visit various centres of learning, to see the collections of books to study some of them and if possible to copy the most valuable of the treatises; for the benefit of other countries and people. There are many such medical books now in the Far East, the originals in India having been lost or destroyed. The West also derived some benefit from the Indian Libraries and Medical manuscripts. Indian

Medical men and Indian Medical treatises found an honoured place and encouragement in the Court of Bagdad. Indian Medical texts were translated into Arabic during the reign of Harun-al-Rashid. The impact with the Indian medicine gave the Arabian medicine a new stimulus. We do not yet know much, the Indian medicine influenced the minds and practices of the great Arab Physicians of Cairo and Cordova. A detailed and comparative study of the texts of Rhazes and of Avicenna may yield interesting clues. European writers on the History of Medicine refer only to the preservation of the Greek and Roman texts by Byzantine and Arab Scholar Physicians. The Byzantine and Arab Physicians rendered another great service to medicine, namely, they passed on the treatises and wisdom of the East to Europe submerged in darkness at that time. Albiruni who visited India in the early part of the 11th cent. refers to medical classics of India. Marco Polo mentions that the Chinese Emperor Kubla Khan got as presents from Indian physicians the medical books and rare medicines.

IN MEDIEVAL ERA

In the medieval period, in Europe, the Church, the Clergy and monasteries collected medical literature. Many handsome collections have bequeathed to the cathedral libraries. These libraries of medieval Europe were small in extent, seldom exceeding 100 or more volumes. Lists of

books found in some of the important libraries have been published by Prof. Sudhoff and his pupils. Similarly, in India, the priestly orders of the Buddhists, the Jains and Shaivas and their own private collections of books on medicine. One of the Jain Acharyas at the Court of Rashtrakuta King, composed a Jain treatise, now available as manuscript Kalyanakarakā. The Hindu temples of Tamilnadu and Jain monasteries of Mysore regions were not only administering food, water and medicines to the needy and the sick but also trained youths to give medical relief and had collections of old classics as well as 'note books for reference and study.

In addition, there were the courts of the disorning kings who patronized scholars and physicians. What happened to the many collections of books gathered together by the various Kingdoms and Royal houses is a mystery, if not a tragedy. Among the nine gems of every important Indian court was a Dhanwantari. King Bhoja of Dhara himself wrote a book 'Characharya' (Regimen of Life) which resembles in its title and probably in its contents, a book published in Europe in the 12th century, under the seal of the medical school of Salerno and read widely all over Europe for three or four centuries. There were also the Pandit physicians of Royal Courts and Temples and the hereditary families of physicians. All those

had their own private collections and some of them kept note books recording their experiences of diseases and extracts from their readings. Parahita Samhita, a manuscript in the Madras Oriental Library, written by a descendent of a famous family of physicians of Andhra Desh in the 14th or 15th cen. is an example of the learned works composed by hereditary physicians. From the house of hereditary physician we can get a number of medical manuscripts containing many prescriptions, of indigenous origin.

During the reign of the Moghul Emperors at Delhi, a special attention was paid to gather books. Baber was a man of letters. Humayun was a booklover and had a good library. Akbar the great had a magnificent library, which was enriched by his successors. One can not help regretting that we have no catalogue of the library of the great Moghuls. In a famous scene where tobacco was first brought before Akbar the great, the court scholars, botanists and physicians are said to have consulted books on the subject, and given their opinion. Likewise, the Mahammdan kings of the Deccan had collections of medical books written by Arabian Persian physicians and also the works of Galen and his commentators,

The medical school library at Paris began in 1369. St. Bartholomew's Hospital had a small Medical

library in 1422 and Royal Hospital in 1551. The Bibliotheque Nationale, which as an extensive medical collection, was founded in 1518, as was that of the Royal College of Physicians in London. The Bodleian Medical Library was founded in 1602; the Biblioteca della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Linsei in 1602; the Preussische Staatsbibliothek in 1659; the Library of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburg in 1681; the Library of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glassgow in 1698. In U.S.A. the first medical institutional libraries were the Pennsylvania Hospital (1762), the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (1788), and the New York Hospital (1796.)

The European physicians who came to India in the 16th and 17th centuries had to get their own books and some of them were very learned men, with large libraries. Garcia Da Orts, the first writer of an Indo-European Medical treatises "The Colloquies on simples of India" and the proprietor of the Island of Bombay had a fine Library in his house at Goa and later at Bombay. Manucci, the Italian physician mentions that he learned the art of medicine mainly from books. Goa had a good collection of European medical books of the 16th and 17th centuries. When the East India Company started to send surgeons to India, they sent not only chests of surgery and medicine but also books, pharmacopoeias

etc. Fort St. George had a library even at the close of the 17th century. It would be very interesting to get a list of books on medicine then available in Madras.

With the failing of in the general level of Sanskrit learning from the 12th or 13th century onwards, pandits were attempting to annotate the older Sanskrit texts in simple easy Sanskrit prose. Later, the Sanskrit texts had to be annotated in Indian languages. Ultimately, many of the Sanskrit originals ceased to be read. Learned and experienced physicians wrote compendiums in the Indian languages for the ordinary man to read understand and practise. Thus arose large collections of books on all branches of medicine in many of the Indian languages. Collections of such books existed all over the country in the 17th and 18th centuries. The local kings and hereditary physicians had such collections with them and these libraries served as teaching Institutions.

From the end of the 18th century, with the revival of interest in Ancient Indian culture and classics the collection of the old texts and manuscripts was taken up as a sacred duty. European savants who read and appreciated the treasures of knowledge available in India in the Sanskrit Literature and language and also in the modern Indian languages, began to search or encourage the search for manuscripts in various parts of the Libraries of country. Thus came into existence the great Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Bombay Branch of the Royal Society etc. The ancient and medieval libraries in Indian States were also examined more carefully with a view to identify and preserve rare and precious copies. One of the tasks of the librarians, medical men and scholars is to prepare a complete and comprehensive catalogue of all the available Indian Medical manuscripts (not only in Sanskrit but also in other Indian language) scattered all over the world and of the early additions of books in India also.

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सारांश

चिकित्सीय पुस्तकालयों का आरम्भ एवं विकास विशेष रूप से भारत के संदर्भ में (18वीं शताब्दी तक)

सी. गोविन्द रेड्डी

प्राचीन काल में चिकित्सा शास्त्र का प्रसार गुरु-शिष्य परम्परा द्वारा होता था। सिन्धु घाटी खुदाई तथा बेबिलोनिया में मिली लिपि से यह स्पष्ट होता है कि ईसा पूर्व द्वितीय तथा प्रथम सहस्राब्दि में चिकित्सा शास्त्र का ज्ञान उपलब्ध था। मिस्री पेपिरी एवं एड्विन स्मिथ पेपिरस, असीरियन पुस्तकालय के क्ले टेब्लेट्स, पश्चिम में उपलब्ध प्राचीन चिकित्सा वाङ्मय से सम्बन्धित हैं। संहिताये, बोवर पाण्डुलिपि प्राचीन भारत के चिकित्सा वाङ्मय के उदाहरण हैं। चीन तथा अन्य देशों के यात्रियों के लेखन से ज्ञात होता है कि प्राचीन भारत के विश्वविद्यालयों तथा उनमें स्थित पुस्तकालयों में चिकित्सा शास्त्र विभाग भी होते थे। अपने विद्यार्थियों के लिए अरब चिकित्सक अपने अध्ययन पर आधारित चिकित्सा ग्रन्थों की रचना करते थे। विद्यार्थियों की शिक्षा के लिए मध्यकालीन पश्चिम में चर्च चिकित्सा ग्रन्थों का संग्रह करते थे। इसी प्रकार भारत के मन्दिरों, विहारों में पुस्तकालय हुआ करते थे। विद्वानों एवं चिकित्सकों को राजाओं द्वारा संरक्षण प्रदान किया जाता था तथा भारतीय भाषाओं में चिकित्सा शास्त्र सम्बन्धि ग्रन्थों की रचना के लिए प्रोत्साहन दिया जाता था।