

## INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY HEALING TRADITIONS

**Dr. Akhilesh Kumar Singh\***

Assistant Professor, Social and Natural Sciences-Ayurveda, Sanchi University of Buddhist-  
Indic Studies, Academic Campus, Barla, Raisen, M.P., India.

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### \*Corresponding Author

**Dr. Akhilesh Kumar  
Singh**

Assistant Professor, Social  
and Natural Sciences-  
Ayurveda Sanchi  
University of Buddhist-  
Indic Studies, Academic  
Campus, Barla, Raisen,  
M.P., India.

### ABSTRACT

Buddhism and Ayurveda originated in India and both aim at eliminating *dukkha* (sufferings). Buddha himself was renowned as the *Bhaishajya-guru* (healing master) and healing practices were integral part of Buddhist monasteries. In addition to dissemination of Indic healing traditions westward to Persia and Central Asia, to China and to South-east Asia, Buddhist monks (Vagbhata, Nagarjun, Jivak etc.) had also developed various new dimensions of healing, further assimilated by Ayurveda. There are various authoritative texts of Buddhism that contain important references to medical concepts, procedures, medications, sanitations and code for healthy livings like *Digha Nikaya*, *Milinda Panho*, *Vishuddhimagga of Buddhaghosha*, *Dhammapada* and *Vinaya Pitaka* (especially *Mahavagga*). So, it is quite evident that Buddhism and Ayurveda have great influence over each other. Ayurvedic historians never admitted the influence of

Buddhism in the development of Indic healing tradition probably because one among other reasons was that they discredited Emperor Ashok for the demolition of Ayurvedic surgery, as he banned the bloodshed in his kingdom. The paper shall unfolds the hidden vistas available in Buddhist medical concepts, procedures, medications, sanitations and code for healthy livings; Ayurvedic healing practices adopted and groomed by Buddhism and new dimensions of healing developed by Buddhist monks, assimilated by Ayurveda in later stage. There is profound need to explore as these are untouched and novel dimensions. Buddhist philosophy of healing is primarily based on humanistic healing. The philosophy of Indic healing tradition is primarily concerned with the treatment, prevention and preservation of health. The paper will addresses the biggest issue of 'suffering' by exploring humanistic healing along with

treatment, prevention and preservation of health will certainly translate to new philosophy of holistic humanistic healing.

**KEYWORDS:** Ayurveda, Buddhism, Healing, Sufferings.

## INTRODUCTION

Buddhism and Ayurveda originated in India and both aim at eliminating *dukkha* (sufferings). Buddha himself was renowned as the *Bhaishajya-guru* (healing master) and healing practices were integral part of Buddhist monasteries. In addition to dissemination of Indic healing traditions westward to Persia and Central Asia, to China and to South-east Asia, Buddhist monks (*Vagbhata, Nagarjun, Jivak* etc.) had also developed various new dimensions of healing, further assimilated by Ayurveda. There are various authoritative texts of Buddhism that contain important references to medical concepts, procedures, medications, sanitation and code for healthy livings like *Digha Nikaya, Milinda Panho, Vishuddhimagga of Buddhaghosha, Dhammapada* and *Vinaya Pitaka* (especially *Mahavagga*). So, it is quite evident that Buddhism and Ayurveda have great influence over each other.

## Overview of Asian Healing Traditions

Traditional Asian health beliefs and healing practices includes Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Chinese Herbal Medicine, Japanese Herbal Medicine, Tibetan Medicine, Traditional Vietnamese Medicine, Acupuncture, Moxibustion, Coin Rubbing and Cupping therapy etc.

As per Traditional Chinese Medicine all creation is born from the marriage of two polar principles, Yin and Yang. Examples are earth and heaven, winter and summer, night and day, cold and hot, wet and dry, inner and outer, body and mind. These pairs of opposites are connected via a circular harmony. Chinese Herbal Medicine is used to regulate the natural balance of the body and restore health. It has been used for centuries to treat most health conditions and as a preventative dietary supplement. Japanese Herbal Medicine i.e. *Kampo* uses precisely measured herbs to treat illness, based on the skillful use of well-known formulas, valued for their impact on clear as well as vague conditions. Tibetan Medicine i.e. *Sowa Rigpa* is based on principle to balance the three principal energies of the body. Tibetan Medicine is based on Buddhist principles and the close relationship between mind and body. Traditional Vietnamese Medicine emphasis on nourishing the blood and vital energy, rather than concentrating on specific symptoms. The main treatments employed by Traditional Vietnamese Medicine are herbal medicine, acupuncture, and moxibustion. The cornerstone of

its theories is based on the observed effects of Qi (energy) in the body. Qi can be inherited from one's parents or it can be extracted from food. It is also blood and "fuel" gathered and stored by the body. Acupuncturists insert tiny needles into specific points on the energy channels of the body, to promote healing and stimulate the free flow of energy in the body and mind. Moxibustion is a therapy utilizing moxa, or mugwort herb. It plays an important role in the traditional medical systems of China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Tibet, and Mongolia. Coin Rubbing an ancient technique used to scrape away disease by allowing the disease to escape as sandy-looking objects through the skin. It is also used in Indonesia. Cupping Fire, or simply cupping involves placing glass, plastic, or bamboo cups on the skin. This technique, in varying forms, has been found in the folk medicine of China, Vietnam, the Balkans, Iran, Mexico, Russia and Poland.

### **Evolution of Healing Tradition**

Archeological and modern genetic evidence suggest that human populations have migrated into the Indian subcontinent since prehistoric times. The knowledge of the medicinal value of plants and other substances and their uses go back to the time of the earliest settlers. The vast amount of medical knowledge that has come down to modern times is the result of long evolution through trial and error and exchange of know-how between diverse communities and regions. The process of exchange and assimilation continues, and today traditional medical practices are obliged to accommodate to various traditional and conventional medicine.

The spirit of scientific enquiry influencing the intellectual world since the time of Buddha led to old belief systems being questioned and tangible proofs being sought after. In this cultural milieu in the Indo-Gangetic and lower Himalayan regions, tribal and wandering healers, learned physicians, ascetic and yogic traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism, and philosophical schools such as *Samkhya*, *Visheshika* and *Nyaya* all contributed to the emergence of a formal scientific culture of healing that became Ayurveda.

### **Healing Perspective in Mahayan Buddhism**

It is in Mahayana, the dominant Buddhist tradition of East Asia that the Medicine Buddha first appears. Veneration of this Lord of Healing became one of the most popular and widespread devotional groups. According to Mahayana tradition there are infinite Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities. They represent various aspects of the absolute Buddha-nature, such

as compassion, wisdom, power, and emptiness. The Medicine Buddha embodies the healing aspect.

The Medicine Buddha is the highest possible model of a healer. Among the 12 vows the Medicine Buddha is said to have taken is that of curing just by the invocation of his name or the thought of Him. He was worshipped as the dispenser of spiritual medicine that could cure spiritual, psychological, and physical disease. But this Buddha is not worshipped simply for healing powers alone; he is the form of the Buddha-nature that we aspire to realize in ourselves. Through the practice of meditation on the Medicine Buddha, one can generate enormous healing power for self and for the healing of others. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the union of religion and medicine in Buddhism than the fact that the greatest of the Mahayana philosopher-saints were also great physicians, who wrote important medical works. According to the Tibetans, all medical knowledge has a sacred origin and is ascribed to the wisdom of the Buddhas.

A measure of the high regard with which physicians were held in Tibet is shown in the title accorded to the greatest ones among them, an epithet for bodhisattvas: "The All Knowing One." Ideally a doctor was expected to practice compassion at all times, and equally towards all beings, to perfect his skill for their sake, and to remember always that a physician is a representative of the Medicine Buddha and the holy lineage of medicine teaching. Astrologically, the day of the Medicine Buddha is the eighth day of the lunar month. At that time, his power and that of all the healing deities is said to be especially strong. This is when rituals for healing and for making medicines are performed.

### **Healing Perspective in Tibetan Buddhism**

In the Tibetan medical tradition, the concept of well-being takes into account the full dynamics of mind, body and spirit to achieve an effective and comprehensive healing strategy. It is immersed in Buddhist tradition, which differs from non-Buddhist medicine in that it utilizes three types of therapeutic intervention: medicinal entities, the power of mantra (a creative, repetitive sound) and the power of meditative stabilization. In doing so, the Tibetan healing traditions transport us into a strange world of interconnectedness between macrocosmic principles and their microcosmic manifestations; harmony and balance between the cosmic macrocosm and the human microcosm is believed to be essential for health and well-being. This is true not only in the sense that balance is required for health, but also in the

somewhat deeper sense that such balance is the essence of health; balance among the physical, psychological and spiritual elements of human existence is health.

In addition to being a relatively secular approach to health and well-being, involving medicines and dietary and practical suggestions, the Tibetan healing tradition is rich in tantric Buddhist ritual and symbolism. Furthermore, ritual and symbol contain multiple levels of meaning which all exist collaterally in a spiritual approach to healing. Iconography, music, chants, mantra, symbolic objects such as prayer wheels and prayer flags, *mandalas* (geometric paintings or drawings) and visualizations are utilized in modest to elaborate rituals to focus and objectify the source of healing power. Tibetan symbols and rituals, whose ultimate purpose is to mobilize the *bodhicitta* (aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to free all sentient beings from suffering) in the individual, generate not only cognitive considerations but also encompass subjective meaning for the spiritual, emotional and sensual spheres.

### **Buddhism and Ayurveda**

Ayurveda existed long before Buddha in the timeline. Buddhism absorbed all previous and prevalent culture and medicine. We can find a lot of references in Buddhism related books regarding Ayurveda and Ayurvedic medicines. This shows that Ayurveda had its impact and influence on Buddhism and vice versa. The multi-cultural origins of Ayurvedic knowledge are revealed in various classical texts. Both *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* urge physicians to seek the help of cowherds, hunters and forest-dwellers for procuring medicinal plants. In the *Charaka Samhita*, we notice the participation and contribution of a Central Asian physician in one of the assemblies of scholars gathered to formulate the principles of Ayurveda. While the three major classical texts attribute the origin of Ayurveda to Vedic divinities, they give importance to Buddhist moral values, and *Vagbhata*, the author of one of the classical texts (*Ashtangahrdayam*), was a Buddhist.

Ayurvedic historians never admitted the influence of Buddhism in the development of Indic healing tradition probably because one among other reasons was that they discredited Emperor Ashok for the demolition of Ayurvedic surgery, as he banned the bloodshed in his kingdom. Ayurvedic healing practices adopted and groomed by Buddhism and new dimensions of healing developed by Buddhist monks, assimilated by Ayurveda in later stage. There is profound need to explore as these are untouched and novel dimensions. Buddhist philosophy of healing is primarily based on humanistic healing. The philosophy of Indic

healing tradition is primarily concerned with the treatment, prevention and preservation of health.

Through the term, Ayurveda was neither used in Vedas nor in Buddhist literature, medical concept and practices of Ayurveda widely used in Buddhist era. The samhita phase of Charak, Susruta, Vagbhata has spectacular change of abolition of mantras and rituals in treatment of patients as seen earlier in Vedas. Buddha is referred as physician and surgeon in Buddhist literature. Anything foreign to the human body is taken out by surgical procedures mentioned in Susruta Samhita similarly grief was considered as something foreign, Buddha could remove sorrow thus he was a surgeon and could remove and lessen the suffering hence he was a physician.

### **Promotion and propagation of Ayurveda by Buddhism**

Buddhism promoted Ayurveda in the universities of Nalanda and Taxila during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Ayurvedic Physicians had an outstanding role in these universities of northwest of India. King Ashoka who embraced Buddhism promoted to Ayurvedic system throughout the Mauryan Empire in third century B.C. Ayurvedic medicines, charitable institutions and hospitals had extensive components of medicine as well as surgery to treat both humans and animals. Buddhism propagates the system of medicine wherever this religion flourished. Buddhist monks took the Ayurvedic wisdom to all the countries where Buddhism was spread. Thus, it reached central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and many other countries. Promotion of well being vinaya texts are the set of rules Buddha had prescribed for bhikshus. Now, there, very detailed instructions are there about aspects of healthcare which covered food, dining etiquette, hygiene, bath, oral care, eye care, clothes, public hygiene; goes into minutest details about their behavior, conduct, great stress was laid on all, and personal conduct the same doctrines are mentioned under Swasthavritta in Ayurveda. Buddha who had condemned many of these practices, he found that something was helping people, even though he may not have been fully convinced, there is a tendency for him to accept.

Mental health promotion *Dhammapada* of course, everybody knows that it is something like Baghavad Gita, a universal book of Buddhism, and Vinaya Pitaka, dealing with the discipline or the way of life, the code of conduct; all these are dealt with Vinaya Pitaka, what to eat, how to live, a very great detail, these all closely relate to sadvritta in Ayurveda.

Disease is considered as dukha in Ayurveda because health (arogya) has been considered as the *mulam* of *pursartha catustya* including *moksha*. Good health was the highly priced and here is a quote from *Dhiga Nikahya* health is the highest gain, contentment is the greatest treasure, confidence is the greatest friend and Nirvana is the greatest joy. The greater impact of this is seen in *Charaka Sharir* chapter 1. Diseases were known by many names *abadha*, *amaya*, all these terms synonyms, which are used, *roga*, they are all used in Ayurveda also. Treatment collectively is called *chikitsa*, that was the term, Ayurveda the Buddhist medicine used. They never used the word *chikitsa*; they never used the word Ayurveda and the cause of diseases were regarded as eight, which again is very similar to Ayurveda. In one of the discourses known as *Girimananda sutta*, the Buddha talks about the cause of sickness and disease as originating from an imbalance of bile, phlegm, wind, from conflict of the humours, from changes of weather, from adverse condition (which here means faulty deportment), from devices (practiced by others such as black magic, poisoning and so on) from the result of *kamma* (*kamma-vipaka*) cold, heat, hunger, thirst, excrement, and urine. Similar etiological reasons are mentioned in *Charak samhita Sutrasthana*. He said that you will find excess of *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha* or a combinations of these; that comes to four; changes of season, incompatible food, external agencies, and *karma*, effective of past *karma*. These are all we considered the causes according to *Dhammapada* which regarded hunger as the worst disease.

The basic doctrines according to Buddhist canon: one is *Panchabhuta*, as you know, today in Ayurveda, this is a fundamental doctrine. The five elements, not the elements in the periodic table, but these are space, air, fire, water, earth; these five, they constitute the *Panchabhutas* and all that we see in the universe; fundamental doctrine and this in a Buddhist of *Dhiga Nikhaya*, there are only four, that is *prithvi*, *ap*, *tejas*, *vayu*, ether is not there. Then, later on, in the *Milinda Panho*, we find *akasha* is added. *Tridosha*, another very fundamental doctrine in Ayurveda; we will be discussing all these later on, but here you will find *Visuddhimagga*. Again, there is reference to *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*; their imbalance could cause death. So, obviously it has something to do with health and ill health. Buddha himself says, when the three *doshas* are in a balanced state, there is happiness; when they are unbalanced, there is unhappiness or grief.

## CONCLUSION

Buddhism that has enlightened the whole world with this ancient wisdom of medicine, Buddhism promoted Ayurveda in the universities of Nalanda and Taxila during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Ayurvedic Physicians had an outstanding role in these universities of northwest of India. King Ashoka who embraced Buddhism promoted to Ayurvedic system throughout the Mauryan Empire in third century B.C. Ayurvedic medicines, charitable institutions and hospitals had extensive components of medicine as well as surgery to treat both humans and animals. Buddhism propagates the system of medicine wherever this religion flourished. Buddhist monks took the Ayurvedic wisdom to all the countries where Buddhism was spread. Thus, it reached central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and many other countries. Promotion of well being vinaya texts are the set of rules Buddha had prescribed for bhikshus.

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