A. Historical Overview

Ayurveda is a living medical tradition of India which dates back to atleast 5000 years to the Aryan age. It is well known that the Aryans have migrated from the West and settled in the bank of river Sindhu which raved the plains of North Western part of ancient India, hundreds of miles to meet the Arabian Sea after descending from Himalayas; making the entire plain fertile and rich land, sustaining the human civilization, providing food, shelter and clothing. This Sindh valley civilization inhabited by Aryans vis-a-vis the fertile crescent of river Nyle. Nevertheless this civilization had an opportunity to interact with rich treasure of plants both in Himalayas as well as in the plains. Possibly the native's culture in Indian continent practised folk medicine of plant origin, which has sought its scientific shape in the mortar of Aryan alchemy. During the Vedic time ancient Indians have visualised that for pursuit of God needed support of good health as Kalidasa put it 'सत्यसाधनम् खलु धर्म शास्त्रम्' meaning one has to achieve his goal through his body - the health. This is the period when the Aryans compiled four Vedas perhaps during the period 1500 to 800 B.C. Amongst them Rgveda and Athrvaveda have made the maximum references to the healing art. They have in these texts mentioned in detail the method of preservation of life, prevention of illness and healing of the sick (Udupa and Singh, 1978).

The classical Ayurvedic text started from 6th century B.C. to 1000 A.D. Three great authors compiled their classical books during this period. They were Carak, Susruta and Vaghbhata. The CarakSarhita was written sometimes in 5th century B.C. It is believed that Areya, the great physician
and teacher of Carak taught and practised medicine in Taxsilā University in the 6th century B.C. and almost the contemporary period Suṣūrta, a surgeon taught and practised surgery in Vārānāsi and he compiled his great book Suṣūrta-Saṁhita. This book not only describes various diseases and the treatment but also gives vivid description of several operative techniques and surgical instruments (Udupa and Singh, 1978). It is said that the classical description of rhinoplasty by Suṣūrta has taught alphabets of surgery to European surgeons (Vd.Pt. Hariprapannaji, 1927).

India being a tropical country with rich treasure of medicinal plants both in Himalaya as well as in the South, the medical science of Āyurveda profoundly developed in India. Vāgbhaṭa wrote his main book 'Āstāṅga Saṁgraha' sometimes in 7th century A.D. He summarised the views of Carak and Suṣūrta and gave his original thoughts to management of many diseases. Carak described such 500 drugs and Suṣūrta 760. All these authors described not only principles of general medicine and surgery but also the principles of different specialities. They have described eight specialities of medical services - 1) Internal medicine, 2) Paediatric, 3) Diseases of Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat, 4) Psychiatry, 5) Surgery, 6) Toxicology, 7) Rejuvination and 8) Virilisation. The fact that so much of specialisation has been made by the physicians during this period is itself an evidence to show how advanced the Āyurvedic science was during those days (Udupa and Singh, 1978). Similarly the Arabs had the trade relation with Indians from the time immemorial, who might have carried this treasure of knowledge to middle east.

There are evidences to show in the history that the great Greek philosophers who practised medicine, had borrowed this knowledge from
India. In Rasayogsāgara Vd. Pandit Hariprāpānajī Sharma, citing the writing from Dr. Hoernle in 'The Studies in Medicines of Ancient India' quotes: "Probably it will come a surprise to many as it did to myself to discover the amount of anatomical knowledge disclosed in the works of earliest medical writers of India. Its extent and accuracy are surprising when we allow from their early age, probable the 6th century B.C., and their peculiar methods of definition. In these circumstances the interesting question of the relation of medicine of the Indians to that of Greek naturally suggests itself. The possibility at least of a dependence of either on the other cannot well be denied when we know that a historical fact that two physicians Kētesias about 400 B.C. and Magasthenes about 300 B.C. visited or resided in Northern India. This bespeaks of possible migration of Āyurvedic knowledge to the West.

There are evidences to show that: "After the conquest of Alexander the great in 4th century B.C. a contact with India was established and Indian medical science became the part of Greek heritage. Greek physicians became well acquainted with Hindu culture and medical science. Alexander himself had Indian physicians. In the later Greco-Roman period, it is obvious that Pliny and Solen borrowed heavily from Indian sciences. During Islamic period Indian medicine was a powerful stimulus in the development of Arabic medical science. From all these observations it becomes clear that Indian medicine not only flourished in India during this period, but also spread to the neighbouring countries. In the West it influenced the Greek and Arab medicine.

This might have led to the cultural exchange, where practicing medicine of plant origin might have moved towards the West. However the
experimental science which has taken its birth in the West has lead to the origin of the modern medicine of the West. This has greatly influenced modern civilization in prescribing medicine and has profound influence over rest of the world. Albeit its efficiency in curing many diseases it could not communicate with the human body as effectively on the Ayurvedic medicine, because it did not seek its origin in eco-friendly way and hence lacked homogeneity of communication with the human body. Certainly of course it worked effectively in the epidemic diseases. Because of the number of problems cropping up with the synthetic medicines in the west and diminishing and unblasting efficiency of them the western world looking with great expectation towards Ayurveda.

The advanced science of medicine of India possibly traversed towards the West via south east Asia and China, because the Buddhism which has taken its origin in India and migrated to south-east Asia and to China. There are evidences to show that several scholars from China, Tibet and other far eastern countries believed to have come to India to study Ayurvedic medicine at Nalanda University sometimes in 7th Century A.D. and went back after studying Buddhism and medicine (Udupa and Singh, 1978).

B. The birth and Growth of Ayurveda:

As referred above, the ancient Indians greatly contemplated ways and means to good health and experimental immortality through practising medicine of nature's gift. This writing of Carak is in itself an evidence to the fact that there were many schools both practising and contemplating medicines spread over
different parts of India. There are evidences in history of Vedic time that the ancient Rishis have moved from South to North and from North to South. For instance, it is known that Agasti Rishi has crossed Vindhya and came towards South. Similarly Rishi Vālmiki who wrote Rāmāyana has mentioned that Vaidya who accompanied Rāma suggested to get the Sanjivani from Himālayā to save Laxman. It means that the medical schools which were taking their shapes in different parts of India needed co-ordination, and possibly in those days Rishi Munis must have had some sort of conference on common platform somewhere at the foothills of Himālayas and exchanged their thoughts to develop this great Indian medical science (Rānade, Paranjape, 1985). They must have thoroughly interacted with other scholars of different philosophies such as Sānkhya, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣik and exchanged their thoughts as to how this important Vedic cult might have its own philosophical footing on scientific basis. Besides Yoga another important darśana of Sastra the ancient Indian scientific cult is Sānkhya, the reference of which is given by Caraka at five different places of Caraka Saṁhitā (Kushāvaha, 1986).

This possibly contributed to the great extent the development of Āyurveda as a medical science and therefore today we find the Āyurveda has the great bearing of Indian philosophy. Thus the important observations and their recordings and inferences, though unwritten were thoroughly understood by scholars of medical science of those days. The concept of Prakriti Puruṣa, evolution, pramāna were incorporated by Indian medical schools of those days and that is how the birth and evolution of Indian medical science called Āyurveda, took place. Since Āyurveda has evolved with the evolution of mankind with his style, and way of living and his
activities, it is better understood to cope up with his ailments and hence today we are able to treat various diseases. When no other medicine provide you any hope of curing a disease, one looks with great hope towards Ayurveda, especially those based on physiological disorders. Today by following the basic principles of Ayurveda we can understand the pathophysiology of disease of recent origin i.e. wearing of the bones creates void. This tends to increase the Vāta and hence pains. Ayurveda therefore has a basic principle of believing that there is a firm relationship between Asthi and Vāta. The treatment precisely identifies the target of very origin of the ailment.