SECTION-E

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
6.1 DISCUSSION

"India suffers today in the estimation of the world, more through the world's ignorance of
her achievements than in the absence or insignificance of these achievements"

---- H.W. Rawlison.

This is an appropriate evaluation of the treasures of Indian history in the eye of the rest of
the world. The achievement of this country in the past is unknown or little known to the
world even today. India witnessed the activity of the pre-historic men, it nurtured the Indus
valley civilization—a highly well developed civilization contemporary to the other very
early civilizations of mankind in Sumer, Egypt, China etc. The country saw the early
beginning of the scientific thought on physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy,
medicine and many other field and its standard scaled a peak that surprises the most well
advanced scientific brain of present day.

The legends of these golden days are not known to the others. The reason behind this is
manifold. The details of the Indus valley civilization remained veiled due to the inability to
decipher the seals recovered from different places of the civilization. The literary and
scientific works of the ancient India that began with the Aryan and continued for the next
few millennia are exclusively in Sanskrit, Pali and some other languages that are not easily
accessible to the people of present days within and outside the country. In the Vedic period
there was no custom of laying down the subject matter in written manner; the knowledge
used to be propagated from one generation to the next by the way of memorizing the whole
thing; this led some time to the distortion and omission of many important facts. The
philosophical reluctance of the scholars towards the wide promotion of their achievements
is one of the most important reasons of ignorance of the rest of the world about the
treasures of this country. In the course of time, with the invasion of the foreigners the scholars tried to preserve their treasury of knowledge within the family and few well trusted friends and pupils in secret and allegorical manner that is not easily decipherable directly by the others. The war and intrusion destroyed many ancient works. Many of the literatures on various subjects were either taken away by the invaders to the foreign lands or were removed by the Indian scholars to other safer lands with an attempt to preserve from destruction in the hand of the enemies. This has caused the difficulty in obtaining most of the work in original and uncorrupted forms. In the course of time, with the beginning of foreign rules the culture suffered from the lack of patronage from the state which is the life line for the nourishment and growth of any culture or subject. The learned population turned their face away from the indigenous culture towards the apparently more rewarding cultures of the rulers. This phenomenon was most evident during the British period. The scholars and educated mass that came to India from other countries were unable to understand the native culture and were ignorant about the history of the country. They had also a natural inclination towards nurturing the idea of superiority of their own culture over the culture of the ruled and hence instead of discovering and promoting the traditional knowledge of the country, they tried to demote it.

The history of studies on the past of this country started with the work of Sir William Jones and H.T.Colebrooke. Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society in 1786 which took the central role in the studies, translation of the Indian works into English language and publication of the same. This had an immense effect on the western scholars. During 19th century most of the available literatures were translated into English, German and other foreign languages.

The article entitled “On the Medical and Surgical Sciences of the Hindus” by H.H.Wilson was the first of its kind to introduce the past of the Indian medicine to the Western world in 1823. Many other famous works like “The Antiquity and Independent origin of Hindu Medicine” by J.F.Royle in 1837, “A Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine” by T.A.Wise in 1845 did much to unveil the ancient medical system of this country to the rest of the world.276 Another important land mark was “Studies in the Medicine of Ancient India, Part I: Osteology” published in 1907 by A.F.H.Hoernle. This study and articles
entitled “Studies in Asian Indian Medicine” during 1906-1910 in the ‘Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society’ attracted attention of the learned personalities of the country and abroad. With the discovery of the famous Bower’s manuscript a new chapter in the history of medicine in India was started. In the later years many works were published by Indian as well as foreign scholars. In this regard pioneering work of Dr. P. Kutumbiah has remained a landmark. In the year 1947 Dr. Kutumbiah along with some scholars with a common interest in the study and promotion of the glorious past of the Indian Medicine established a society for the study of history of medicine. This was subsequently changed to ‘Indian Association of the History of Medicine’ in 1953 under the presidency of Dr. Kutumbiah.

The majority of the studies remained confined to the studies on medicine and surgery in general. The history of dermatology remained only a part of little discussion of these literatures. Only a few articles like “Dermatological writings of ancient India,”278 “Indian Dermatology,”279 the roots of ancient medicine: an historical outline,”280 “History of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology in India”281 were published in the recent past that exclusively dealt with the history of dermatology in India. Thus this horizon has remained almost unexplored. This present work was undertaken with the aim of going through the history of the medicine to find out how we reached the present state of dermatology in this country.

The skin has engrossed people from different sphere of life. To a medical man it is the canvas on which the portrait of many external as well as internal diseases are drawn; for an artist it is the way of expression of his/her subject’s intention; for a businessman it is a rich place where the industry of cosmetics and cosmeceuticals can be harvested and to a common man it is the individuality of oneself and the avenue of expressing one to the rest of the world. Any variation in the functions of the skin has led to the agony and the exasperated one has seek the path to reinstate the whole thing into right trail. Dermatology is the subject which deals with the rectification and restitution of normal performance of the skin and therefore is a subject of colossal interest. The subject today deals with not only the diseases and their management, but a number of sophisticated researches are going on through out the globe for other medical disorders where skin can be used for diagnosis,
genetic studies, investigation, application of medicaments, and other aspects. This picture of great advancement is a result of experience assembled in many thousands of years. The history of these achievements is enthralling. India is a country which has witnessed many developments in every aspect of science and philosophy. The present study was undertaken with an object to paint a portrait of dermatology on the background of history.

How the skin became the candidate for medical attention in the beginning of the history of mankind remains inscrutable. It may be imagined that the bodily injury in the daily life of the primitive man in the course of their search for food (that required hunting and sometimes fighting with wild animals) and shelter (that might have led to the fight for territorial right) became the most common skin condition that required medical attention. The urge to decorate one had remained another area that required skin to gain notice of the mankind. The discovery of various archaeological objects from ancient Indus valley civilization clearly showed how the people of those days took care of the hairs.

The earliest literary work of the Aryans, the Rig-Veda clearly mentions about many diseases among which many are dermatological ailments. The treatment of some skin conditions like disease involving skin and hairs of Apala and her father (Rig-Veda VIII.91.5-7), leprosy of Ghosha (Rig-Veda X.39.3 and X.40.5-14) are examples of this fact. The Atharvaveda deals largely with diseases and their remedies. Though incantations, charms, amulets were the important parts of treatments, use of many herbs are worth mentioning. After this period of Vedic culture Ayurveda, the science of life, which exclusively dealt with the diseases and their diagnoses, management, prognoses and prevention emerged. The period of Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita and other medical works are the compilation of the already available knowledge of medical sciences. This was the golden period of ancient medicine in India.

The later period of Indian history saw the consolidation and improvement of medical knowledge till the entry of foreign medical system of Unani with the Islamic rulers. In many instances there were acculturation between the indigenous system and Unani. It led to the development of more fruitful medical system. With the beginning of the British period this country witnessed the establishment of Western medical system and in the present days this system has become the backbone of the health care system of the country.
It is out of the ordinary to note that in the very early days of the history the scholars of medicine formulated an orderly thought of humors that tried to explain aetiopathology of diseases and established that diseases are mainly an imbalance of harmony of various factors. The division and subdivision of medical specialties into surgery, toxicology, pediatrics etc are also an example of highly evolved medical system of that era. The emergence of alchemy is an important landmark. Medical men started using various inorganic and chemical substances that added more to the armamentarium of medicine. Some medicines of those days like those of vitiligo (psoralens), leprosy (hydnocapus) have been found useful even during the days of modern medical system.

The history of dermatology in India is very eventful. The early record of recognition of many dermatological disorders and perception of the clinical significance of skin in the diagnoses of diseases are most important phenomena. The very early recognition and classification of many diseases, notably that of leprosy is astounding. The clinical descriptions of many varieties show the keen observation of the physicians of those days when there were no sophisticated investigative procedures. The role of worms (krimi) in many diseases probably was the commencement of the rudimentary idea of microbiology. The various surgical procedures like plastic reconstruction of nose, cauterizations using heated objects and chemicals are relevant even in the present day medicine. The use of various herbal and chemical substances to dye the gray hairs showed that dermatology of the ancient days was not confined to the skin diseases only. The importance of cosmetic aspect of the skin was also equally recognized as we do today.

After going through the history of evolution of dermatology in different periods of the history some interesting facts may be observed that are discussed here.

The ancient Indian medical system was quite advanced amongst the various civilizations that evolved in different parts of the globe. It appears from the comparative analyses that though there might be an apparent similarity in the various philosophical aspects of medical science among the existing civilizations, the Indian system has its own elementary thinking about the diseases and their reasons. These facts were very rarely discussed and highlighted by the Indian scholars collectively. Some individual approaches were confined to the academic world only. The present day medicine of the West expresses its debt to the
Greeks only but what was the mutual effect between the ancient Indian medicines and that of the Greece must be searched as both the country came closer in the ancient time. The discovery of Bowers manuscript far away from the country showed that the concept and possibly practice of Indian medicine had spread far and wide. Even in the later period the Arabs translated Charak Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Madhavanidan etc. into their languages and therefore must have accommodated various concepts from them. This Greco-Arabic medicine is the ground on which the edifice of modern medicine has been built, so there must some direct or indirect influence of the Ayurveda upon the Western medicine. This fact should be recognized and honoured.

The medical system was not a subject that merely deals with the ailments and their treatments, but also a way that must stress in the subject of prevention of diseases and maintenance of sound health. The concept of highly discussed holistic approach of present day was thoroughly practiced in the Indian system thousands of years ago.

The skin disease like leprosy was seen as disease and not a purely stigmatized condition that bore the wrath of god. This is an example of scientific bent of the ancient physicians of India when the contemporary world associated it with taboos.

The older system of medicine prescribes many remedies on various enigmatic diseases like vitiligo. There is no specific medicine to provide an end of this disease even today in the present day medicine. This should arouse interest and search should be undertaken to find out the fact instead of ignoring it.

Many of the skin diseases are not effectively cured in the present system of medicine using available methods. The help from other system of medicine including those of alternative systems should be shought to see whether they can be of help. The newer ideas and practices should be adopted from these systems to give the medical system a fuller and a more effective shape. The whole system of medicines that are practiced in the past as well as present in different systems, communities, regions or tribes should be examined in the light of the modern medical knowledge instead of downgrading them.

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Many of the time-tested indigenous methods are cost effective and more acceptable to the Indian environment and custom. A search in the history of dermatology may enlighten us of various newer methods and medicines that can be very effective. The renewed interest of the world towards the *Ayurveda* is an illustration of it.

While undertaking this present study many difficulties were faced and noted. These facts will be of help in pursuing further research on the subject in the future:

The diversity of language and scripts is a major impediment in studying available literatures. Translations of all the works are not available. Many of the systems are even today confined to some families who are not ready to divulge any thing to outsiders. Many of these important research materials are most of the times lost with the demise of a particular person who only knew the truth. Many of the facts are expressed in allegorical terms. These require a thorough commentary on the subject. They are most of the time are either not available or are bewildering. In past there were no printing presses. So manuscripts were copied by the copiers. In most occasions these copiers were professional and not well versed with the subject. So there were misinterpretation, omission and distortion of language as well as facts leading to divergence among the different manuscripts on same subject matters. Over and above these addition and alterations of facts were done and put in the name of the well-known authorities who had caused alteration of the original works. At times there were two or more different personalities bearing the same name. Thus there were two or more Susrutas, Vagbhatas etc. Some times even there may be a tribe or community whose name resembles a particular person. Example of this is *Dhanvantri*—a name which was probably used by multiple personalities and some *vaid* community at different time of the history. These produce difficulty in ascertaining the proper date of a literature. There is very little or no academic endeavour to systematic study of the ancient medicine in general and dermatology in particular. Most of the studies on the history of medicine are confined to the medicine and surgery in broad sense. Only passing references are made about the specialties like dermatology. There are very little studies available that are done specialty wise. Many books and manuscripts are kept in occult places in fear of public attention. Most of them are not preserved in scientific way and hence on the verge of destruction. Most of the tribal healers are not easily approachable to the researchers. It is a very hard job to make inroad among them. There are so many tribals
that it is impossible for any particular worker to study the whole. Even there are differences among various groups within a particular tribe.

The present study has tried to accumulate and discuss the various aspects of the practice and development dermatology in India. There are many difficulties in doing this type of studies. There is also no major work on the history of dermatology unlike that of medicine and surgery. This study has tried to start the process of research on the history of dermatology as a whole including all systems and ways of medicine that are in vogue in the country. This study also intends to open a field of research to complement the present method of management of various difficult-to-treat skin diseases with the knowledge from other systems of medicine. This is only possible if we know the history of the subject and enter into the detail of them.

The present study also shows that the unexplored area of research on this subject is vast and therefore much work has to be done to unveil the history of dermatology in India. To complete this task a team consisting of researchers from different branches of medicine along with those from history, archeology, anthropology, comparative literatures etc. must orchestrate the job from a single platform. This study may be able to offer a fundamental guideline on which further advancement can be achieved.
From the foregoing discussions it may be said a comprehensive study is lacking on the development and progress of dermatology in India. The study also concludes the following facts that perceived in the course of this present work:

The subject of medicine was greatly developed in this country from the dawn of history. Medicine had remained a highly developed branch of science and it was well organized. Various diseases of skin and the role of skin in the diagnoses and prognoses of different other diseases were enthusiastically observed since the beginning of the subject of medicine.

The history of using different routes of administration of medicaments was known since the early days of olden times. Surgical procedures of reconstruction and grafting were very much developed in ancient India.

There was a highly developed classification system for many diseases and treatments were prescribed according to the nature and class of the diseases. Dermatology of the past was not merely confined to the study and practice of diseases. It was also engaged with the study of aesthetic aspect of the skin. Cosmetology was highly developed in ancient India.

There were different methods of management and interpretation of skin diseases in each system of medicine. Each system was unique in its own way of management. So, one system may be complementary to the other in various intricate dermatological conditions.

There is no systemic as well as exhaustive study as yet in the history of dermatology in this country, though the subject was recognized since past. This has caused paucity in the availability of material for research. Diversity in culture, languages and customs is a great stumbling block for this type of study in this country.
Though this study has tried to go through available literatures on the subject, it has many limitations. It has been tried to enumerate these limitations to avoid difficulties in future works on the subject.

The old methods of treatments may throw new light for the treatment of many difficult diseases even today. The use of psoralens for the management of vitiligo is a good example of this. This study has endeavoured to find out a variety of treatments of skin disorders done in diverse methods of medicine in the past. Further studies may be undertaken to see the effectiveness of older methods in modern day’s medicine.

India witnessed a great progress in science and civilization in ancient days. It had a well organized system of medicine. Various dermatological disorders including many difficult ones were recognized by the physicians of those days. Well constructed theories based on the philosophies of humors and other factors were developed at the early age of the history. This great history has rarely been presented before the scholars all over the world and a vague idea of the country’s past is prevailing even among the scholars of this country itself. The glorious history of medical science including that of dermatology should be recovered and promoted in the international platform. The present study may be considered a step towards this goal.

To do all these tasks a great effort is needed. An organization to perform the task of recovering the facts of older days is very much in need. A well consorted faculty on the subject of history of medicine in academic institutions and universities involving different branches of the related subjects may be set up to carry out this difficult mission.