Chapter V

*Culture as determinant of Patient-Physician relationship in Ayurveda*
CHAPTER-5
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The notion of culture is so wide in its scope that it covers almost every dimension of human life. Ordinarily, the system of beliefs, customs, conventions, values which include in its sphere not only moral but aesthetic values also are taken collectively as a vague connotation of ‘culture’. In this ordinary sense, cognitive endeavors such as science, mathematics, etc. and their direct consequences such as technology are put beyond the purview of culture. So from one point of view, culture is seen as those aforesaid human activities which are separated from the value-neutral activities of purely rational or cognitive search (rational here is used in purely cognitive sense). However, if we look at the cognitive enterprise closely we find an implicit value-system operating there which is neither different nor cut-off from the rest of the value-oriented activities. Ordinarily, it is thought that science is culture-neutral and insulated from any kind of value consideration. This view does not seem to cover various aspects of either of culture or of science. A deeper study of the growth of science discloses that the belief-system of a community and its values also play an important role in shaping his cognitive endeavors. Although some people think that there is no sense in talking about Indian science or western science since they are one for all but it is only a superficial position and a close examination of the history of science compels us to read it essentially as a part of the history of that culture. The aim of this chapter is to underline some of the important points of the development of science that are closely connected to man’s cultural life. With special reference to Ayurveda an attempt has been made here to highlight this close link between culture and science that helps us understand how cultural factors determine or control scientific thinking.
The Relation between a vaidya and an ātura:

Ordinarily the relation between the patient and the physician is seen as a purely accidental and formal sort of relation. All human beings fall ill at one time or another in their life and for treatment they have to go to a doctor. It is obvious that the doctor to whom a patient goes for treatment may not necessarily be acquainted to him earlier. From the doctor's side also it is not necessary at all. No doctor treats only his familiar patient. Any stranger may come to a doctor for the treatment of a sickness and the doctor has to treat him. So this relation is obviously an accidental and formal kind of relation but this cannot remain in this very form if the doctor sincerely wants to diagnose the disease of his patient and help him cure out of it. It is clear that merely the statements of the symptoms by the patient of his particular present problem cannot help the doctor to reach the cause of his disease. The doctor has to know about his recent past and in that connection he may have to know about his profession, family background, etc. also. A patient cannot disclose all these things before a person with whom he thinks he has only a formal relation. He has to have a little confidence in the doctor. This is a normal condition of relation between a doctor and a patient which is necessary for the treatment of disease. In Ayurveda (and in some other systems also), the relation between patient and doctor has to become a deeper relation. The trust of the patient on the doctor which may only be a necessary condition for creating conducive situation for treatment only has to deepen further that helps the healing process directly. For a patient, a doctor is not merely an ordinary person who is merely professionally skilled but he is much more than that- he is next to God. The vaidya also has to look at the patient and treat him from a very different perspective. The vaidya does not look and examine the physical body of the patient only but he wants to understand the functioning of his life-force which covers the person's spiritual dimension also. Medicine and surgery, whatever may be necessary for the patient is done by the doctor to cure his disease by understanding all the dimension of his existence, or the imbalance produced by various reasons. Examination of physical body is necessary and obvious but the
examination of psychic and spiritual levels of a person's being is equally necessary for him. So when a doctor examines a patient he looks at him not merely as a living organism but something deeper and higher than that. The patient also feels it clearly while the vaidya examines him. He knows by all the activities of the vaidya that he is trying to reach the innermost core of his being. This makes the vaidya in his vision somewhat an extraordinary person. He understands that his vaidya is very special people who will give him the boon of restoration of svāsthya and he cannot repay his debt by merely paying him his fees. The relation between the patient and the vaidya is not merely a professional relation.

The qualities of a good Physician: From the standpoint of ancient Indian medical treatises

The qualities of a good physician as well as that of a quack are described in great details in traditional Indian medical texts like Carakasāṁhitā, Suśrutasāṁhitā, etc. the problem of quacks was also a major threat in the health sector at that period of time. It becomes evident by the fact that it was mandatory for any qualified physician to take the permission of a king before he can start practice. The objective behind this legal compulsion was to safeguard the people from the nuisance of quacks. The situation is no different in the modern time. Quite often charges are framed against Ayurveda as a system of medicine per se just because there are few quacks that are befooling the masses in the name of Ayurveda. Therefore, it is quite appropriate here to address this problem so that misgivings regarding Ayurveda can be dissolved.

The medical treatises of that period also describe the qualities of a good physician in detail so that any common citizen could differentiate between a good physician and a quack. A good physician is said to be born of a good family. He has learning as well as practical experience. He possesses self-control and he is in perfect control of his faculties. He should have a sophisticated and well equipped laboratory. He should be decisive.
and clear-headed so that he can appropriate and timely decision and prompt action. He must be fully conversant with all aspect of Ayurveda. It is important to note that here Ayurveda clearly disapprove the over-specialization in the realm of medicine. He must have a deep understanding of anatomy and physiology of the body and pathology of various diseases. He should be conversant with the diseases resulting from the various permutations and combinations of the three doṣas. He must develop a critical eye to differentiate between etiological factors, premonitory symptoms, actual signs and symptoms in relation to the different classes of diseases: easily curable, formidable, palliable, and irremediable. He understands the therapeutic use of the thirty five kinds of roots and herbs, the four groups of the unctuous substances, the five kinds of common salts, the eight kinds of urine, the eight kinds of milk, the barks of the six plants, the group of drugs used in five purificatory procedures, and so on. He must be equally proficient in the science of personal hygiene regarding food and drink. He understands the significance of eye salves, fumigation, nasal medication, inunctions, cleansing, and physical exercise. He must have a capacity to intuit what is acceptable to one’s immune system and what is not. He possesses a wonderful memory and intellect. He behaves with the patients as if they are his mother, father, brother or friend.

In contrast, the characteristic features of a quack are just opposite to it. Caraka says, ‘they walk the streets with a view to pick up practice. Immediately on hearing that somebody is ill, they swoop down on him from all quarters, and in his hearing, speak loudly of their medical attainments. If a doctor is already in attendance, they make repeated mention of his failings. They try to ingratiate themselves with the friends of the patient by suave manner, knowing whispers and officiousness. They make it known that they expect little by way of remuneration. On being entrusted with a case, they look about on all sides repeatedly to cloak their ignorance.’ Caraka further writes that, " such quack on being finding themselves unable to check the course of disease declare that it is the patient himself who is wanting in the necessary accessories, in attendance, and in self-control. When they realize
that the patient is at death’s door, they run away and seek another neighborhood. In the presence of uncultured people, they brag about their adroitness in the most unadroit manner, and like an ignorant person that they are, that run down the learning of the savants. But if they sight the company of learned, they slink away from a distance, like a roadster at the sight of a dark wood. If accidentally they happen to have coned a stray maxim, they constantly quote it. They can brook neither being questioned nor questioning others. They dread all questions as if they were the very devil. People like them know neither teacher, nor disciple, nor co-students nor disputants. Caraka says that such cheap people putting on the garb of physicians dupe their patients, just as the bird-catcher in the forest dupe the birds by camouflaging themselves in the nets. They should be shunned as they are the messengers of death on earth. One may survive the fall of a thunderbolt on one’s head but one cannot expect to escape the fatal effects of medicine prescribed by a pseudo-physician.

It is quite clear from the given writings of Caraka that the threat to public health from quacks was severe at that period of time. Such pseudo-physicians would have been large in number and they must be spreading a bad name to this holy art of healing. The situation is no different today. Therefore, it does not seem to be appropriate to criticize Ayurveda as a whole just because there are certain quacks that are spreading bad name for this holy art of healing. It is equally illogical to declare the whole Ayurveda to be a pseudo-science just because there are certain pseudo-physicians practicing Ayurveda. But it is a significant question to raise that what care this system of medicine takes in regard to medical education so that the best physicians could be produced. Here the question will be addressed from the perspective of ancient medical treatises.

Normally one can become a physician by following any of the following procedures: by learning the art and science of this system of medicine from a teacher by living and working with him in his compartment; or one could go to a gurukula where the students lived together with the teachers in the schools situated in the forests away from human habitations;
or else he could join one of the medical centers located in the larger cities like Taksasila, Banaras, or Nalanda. It is well established fact now that during that period very renowned, advanced and sophisticated medical centers were placed at these places. It was a common practice those days that foreigner come to India for higher studies. For instance, Chinese pilgrims Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing who came to India during the reign of emperor Harsa have left account of it. Hiuen Tsang stayed in India between A.D. 629 and 645 out of which he spent five full years as a student at Nalanda. I-Tsing spent ten years from A.D. 675 to A.D. 685 at Nalanda. Hieun Tsang has clearly mentioned in his record that students from China, Korea, Tibet, Mongolia, Tokhara, and Japan come to Nalanda for advanced studies and when they move back to their own countries after completing their education at India they were regarded as highly qualified scholars in their own country. The situation can be compared to our modern time where most students favor United States as a destination for advanced studies. In ancient India, among those foreigners who come to India for higher education, Ayurveda was one of the most popular courses. This, in fact, demonstrates the popularity of Indian system of medicine throughout the world. Getting admission in these institutions of India was extremely difficult and the rejection rate was very high. To be a student of Taksasila or Nalanda or Kasi was an academic distinction and all students of these institutions were treated with great respect throughout the world. Not only among the foreigners but in India also these institutions were highly respected. Students from all over the India came to get higher education here. Taksasila was the most popular destination. It was the leading seat of Hindu learning. It was the dream destination for princes and the sons of the well-to-do Brahmans who attained the age of sixteen for higher knowledge. It was popularly known as the university town. Though courses on all arts are sciences were offered but the medical education was the most popular among the students. It is interesting to note here that many among the most eminent persons of ancient India had either graduated from Taksasila or were associated with it. To name a few, Atreya, Cankya, Pannini, Jivaka,
Aśvaghosa, Deva, Nāgārjuna, Brahmadatta, Kumāralabdha, etc. were the popular figures studied at Taksasila. All the three above mentioned institutions were huge institution. Regarding Nālandā, it is said that some of the buildings were six-floored buildings. There was a huge library that occupied three buildings. More than ten thousand students and about fifteen hundred teachers resided in and around the institution. It may be noted here that food, clothing, and tuition was free for the students. It seems that huge expenditure of the institution was carried out by the enormous grants and donations made by the rich people and the kings.

Great care was taken to ensure that only highly qualified and virtuous teacher could be recruited. To be a teacher of medicine in these institutions was a matter of pride. It is interesting to note here what sort of qualities were sought after to be a teacher in these institutions. Normally the qualities mentioned in medical treatises like Kaśyapasaṁhitā, Carakasaṁhitā, etc. are followed in the selection procedure of the teachers. It was expected that he should have been taught by a holy teacher. He should be gentle in appearance and behavior. He should be proficient in both mundane as well as spiritual knowledge. He should be an acute observer and a passionate researcher. He should be able to comment upon different aspects of medicine. He should not indulge himself in any other career. He should be willingly ready to accept the limitations of his knowledge and must preserve the qualities of a student throughout his life. In Carakasaṁhitā, these qualities are mentioned in greater details. It says that an ideal teacher is one whose doubts have been disappeared in respect of medical scriptures. This statement is very crucial and can put some light on the kind of methodology used by the ayurvedic practitioners of those days. At the same time, it also suggests something about the nature of knowledge attained by applying the aforesaid method. These questions have been dealt in details in a separate chapter. But as a passing remark, it can be fairly said that Ayurveda strongly believe in self-evident truths and recommends the method of intuition to attain those truths. Now, coming back to our central theme here, many other qualities are also mentioned for an ideal teacher. Caraka says that an ideal
teacher should be compassionate towards all beings that approach him. His conduct should be pure. He should be malice-free. He should be one whose knowledge of medicine has been supplemented by knowledge of other branches of knowledge. All these qualities are important for understanding the true nature of Ayurveda.

Likewise, a student was also expected to possess certain qualities. They are purity of mind as well as body, integrity of character, truthfulness, non-violence, celibacy, politeness, perseverance, aptitude, and obedience. A candidate must attain the age of sixteen to study medicine. Before that he was supposed to master the general education which included the study of Vedas, Upaniṣads, the Brāhmaṇas, the Sūtra-s, Dharma-śāstras, Smṛtis, astrology, geography, geometry, philosophy, astronomy, poetry, etc. It is interesting to note here the width and depth of knowledge required those days to become a qualified doctor. As mentioned before, Ayurveda prefers generalist rather than specialist. It is because it perceives the body in its totality, in its wholeness rather breaking it into its parts. It also explains the wide canvass of knowledge expected out of an Ayurvedic practitioner. There was a formal ceremony before the initiation of a student into discipleship. There is a detailed prescribed procedure for such a ceremony in the ancient medical treatise like *Carakasaṁhitā*, *SuśrutaSaṁhitā*, etc. During the ceremony, the student has to take an oath which goes in the following words: “I will give up lust, anger, avarice, folly, vanity, pride, envy, rudeness, deception, falsehood, idleness and all other demeritorious conduct. I will lead an austere life, avoid sexual intercourse and be ready to obey my seniors….if I fail in my duty, then I will be committing sin and all my learning will be fruitless.” It is very important to note here that the purity of character has been assigned a critical role here for a medical student so much so that it has been clearly mentioned that any omission on this front can make whole of one’s learning fruitless. It might sound irrational to a modern mind as it is believed now a day that one’s virtues and vices do not play any direct role in the formation of a competent doctor. To be virtuous may have certain additional benefits but it has no necessary connection with the scholarship in
the field of medical science or in any other branch of knowledge. But here it is very critical to understand that it is the firm belief of Ayurveda that there can be no intellectual progress in the absence of conductive inner moral environment. Ayurveda explicitly claims that no wicked person can become a competent physician. It might sound strange to a modern mind but those who know what is the nature of knowledge in Ayurveda and how this knowledge is acquired do not face much difficulty in understanding the precise meaning of this axiom of Ayurveda. As the issue of wisdom in Ayurveda has been discussed in detail at a separate place so there is no need to repeat it here.

It would be appropriate here to mention about the method of teaching normally mentioned in the traditional medical treatises like Carakaśāṅhitā and Suśrutaśāṅhitā and was followed by the higher institutes of Ayurveda like Takṣaśilā and Nālandā. The learning by rote was rejected. It was considered that learning by rote, without understanding the meaning of what was said was like the ass carrying a load of sandalwood and the labor involved was without profit. The famous Indian surgeon Suśruta articulates it in the following way: “As the ass which carried the load of sandalwood perceived the weight but not the fragrance of the wood so the blockhead who studied numerous manuscripts without understanding their meaning, bore their weight without an appreciation of the value of their burden.” The intuitive realization of the truths regarding medical science was said to be a prerequisite to become a qualified doctor. It will be appropriate here to narrate a story related to Jivaka and his teacher Ātreyā to illustrate the type of training imparted and the knowledge and competency expected of a student. Under the guidance of Ātreyā, Jivaka learned everything splendidly. Ātreyā was very happy with Jivaka and he took him along with him wherever he went. The fellow students who were mostly Brahmins’ sons became envious and said, “O teacher, you are well pleased with him because he is a king’s son, and you bestow instructions upon him, but none upon us.” He replied, “That is not the case. Jivaka possesses great intelligence and he is able to comprehend intuitively whatever I indicate to him.” They said, “O
teacher, how do you know this?” in order to demonstrate that, the teacher said to the students, “Go and ask the prices of various commodities; you ask of such a one and you ask of such another.” And having so spoken, he sent them off to the market. He also gave orders to Jivaka to ask the price of a certain article. The Brahmins’ son did as they were told. Jivaka did likewise; but while he was in the market place, he said to himself, “Suppose the master asks the price of other things, shall I be able to reply? I should make myself acquainted with the prices of other commodities as well.” And so he did. Finally, when all the students returned, they told the teacher about all they were supposed to have found out. Then the teacher started asking the prices of articles which he had not specifically mentioned to them, saying to each of them, “O Brahmins’ son, what does this commodity cost? What does that commodity cost? They could not answer. But when he asked Jivaka, he gave a complete and satisfactory answer. Then Ātreya addressed his pupils: “O Brahmins’ son, have you heard? Behold, this is the reason, why I said that Jivaka as he is possessed of remarkable insight, intuitively comprehends the whole situation.”

Another significant point regarding the method of teaching was that all efforts are made to ensure that students develop a capacity to take sound independent judgment instead of blindly following some text or authority. It is very crucial as the doctor has to directly face the situations in which life and death are at stake. The ability to reach to the right decisions at critical hours under pressure laden situations is still considered to be an essential attribute of a good doctor. There is another popular story of Jivaka and his teacher that illustrates this point very succinctly. Jivaka was a favorite student of his teacher, Ātreya. Whenever he visited his patients, Ātreya took a young Brahmin along with him. One day, he took Jivaka with him, gave him directions about the administration of certain drugs and then came away. Jivaka perceived that his teacher had made a mistake inadvertently. He feared that if the patient took the medicine as suggested, he would die. A thought occurred to him and he soon left the house of the patient and came back after a while. He told the patient that he had met his teacher and he
had suggested another remedy. When the patient was treated with the second remedy, he felt better. The next time when Ātreya visited the patient, he asked him how he was getting on. On being informed that he was better, Ātreya suggested to him to continue the medicine. “Which medicine, the first or the second?” the patient asked. Ātreya was at first puzzled, then asked, “What did I prescribe first and what afterwards?” the patient said, “you prescribed me one medicine when you were present here; about the other you gave orders to Jīvaka”. Then it occurred to Ātreya that he had made a mistake and Jīvaka had perceived it and corrected it. He ordered the medicine prescribed by Jīvaka to be continued. Ātreya became very happy with Jīvaka, and, thereafter, took him along with him wherever he went.

Another theme regarding the medical education is the relative role of theoretical education and practical training in imparting the medical training to the physicians in the making. Suśrutasaṁhitā suggests that equal importance must be given to theoretical and practical training. A physician who is deficient in either of these skills can not said to be fully equipped in the practice of medicine. According to Suśruta, a person well versed in theory but in adept at practice is confused when facing a patient just as a weak-hearted person is confounded when confronted in a battle. Similarly one who is an expert at practical work but who is devoid of theoretical knowledge will not get respect in the company of learned persons. Such a person will never understand the overall significance of his practice. Such persons can never attain the status of an expert. They can never perform their duty as they know only half their science. They are like one-winged birds. It is interesting to note the depth of understanding of teachers of Ayurveda regarding the relative role of theory and practice. Theory without practical experience would be empty and content-less. At the same time, the practice without any theoretical framework will be blind and directionless. Regarding theory, the instruction given to the students was to read as many manuscripts and written records on medicine and other themes as possible. It was advised not to blindly follow any single work. For instance, Vāgbhatta regarding this issue says that, “if a man be well read in Caraka but ignorant
of even the names of diseases described in Suśruta and other works, or if he be not wanting in practical methods but wholly ignorant of Caraka, what can such a poorly-equipped man do to relieve the ailments of patients." This statement is very significant as it reflects open-minded, progressive, and flexible attitude of our forefathers. Such an attitude is extremely important for a learner. The sage Caraka has explicitly mentioned in his treatise that, “there is no limit at all to which Knowledge of Ayurveda can be acquired, so thou shouldst apply thyself to it with diligence. This is how thou shouldst act. Again, thou shouldst learn the skill of practice from another without carping. The entire world is the teacher to the intelligent and the foe to the unintelligent. Hence knowing this well, thou shouldst listen and act according to the words of instruction of even an unfriendly person, when they are worthy and such as bring fame to you and long life, and are capable of giving you strength and prosperity.”

Discussion among the like-minded people and conducting of regular seminar was also given due importance by Caraka. They were regarded as good tools of learning as they brought clarity of thought, enhanced dialectic skill, dispelled doubts, and leads to an understanding which is beyond doubt. Sometime extremely useful secret meetings with the teacher were also suggested where teacher can reveal secret meanings to the students. But here a very important point should be given due consideration regarding discussions in the seminars. Caraka seems to prefer a friendly discussion. Such a discussion could take place among persons who have abundance of experience and knowledge and who are adept in the art of persuasion. Such persons are easily persuaded. They are quite tolerant, humble, polite, and soft-speaking. It is very easy to talk confidingly with such people and one can freely share the deepest secrets of one’s life in the company of such persons. A systematic enquiry can take place during the discussion among such fellow-beings. Caraka also mentions certain specific dos and don’ts which must be followed during discussion so that the process does not get derailed. According to him, “during discussion, one should not rejoice after discomfiting others. One should not boast before others. One should not get
deluded by a partial or imperfect grasp of the subject. One should not expatiate on what the other is not at all acquainted with. One should persuade gently and in the spirit of goodness.” Therefore, undoubtedly the high point of learning for a student was the discussions held under the guidance of a teacher. There are many discussions recorded in Carakasamhitā that were chaired by Ātreya who introduced a theme on his own or took the cue from the questions of Agnivesa. The exchanges were lively in a very friendly atmosphere with the active participation of students who did not shrink, when opposed, from countering the views of others. The discussions ended with a summing up by Ātreya and the development of a consensus. The great emphasis laid by Caraka on the structure and parameters of debate would seem to be justified when we notice that the list of attainments for a sincere student in training were high.

Significance of the Code of Conduct for the Vaidya:

It is typically in Ayurveda that the vaidya is supposed to observe a code of conduct honestly. It is not necessary in any other system of medicine or therapeutics for the doctor to observe any moral code. As a normal citizen, everyone has to follow certain legal and social codes of conduct. The doctor, being one such citizen, has to follow them also but that code of conduct does not become obligatory for him because of his profession. In Ayurveda, however, a code of conduct is necessary for a doctor because of his professional position. He has to observe certain moral values strictly in his life. For instance, he should speak truth, he should free himself from “I”-ness, he should not speak too much, he should not get either too happy or too irritated, etc. Now, these values have dual function in his life. Overtly, the observance of these values gives him a respectable image in society and he becomes trustworthy for the people. Trust of a patient on his doctor is necessary not merely for his treatment. Trust also has a healing function for the patient. If a doctor is professionally very sound, that is, he possesses a good knowledge of human system and medicine but despite that if the
patient does not have confidence in him then it is not difficult to envisage that it will adversely affect the process of the curing of the disease directly. Being trustworthy cannot be the substitute of the vaidya's professional qualification but he has to have both of them essentially. Apart from his image of a trustworthy physician, the moral code of conduct enables the physician to achieve and stay at that undisturbed or non-perverted state of mind from where he could penetrate into the deeper levels of being and understand the cause of his ailment that surface at his physical, or bodily level. Without such a mental state the vaidya cannot understand the complex psychic life or the subtle spiritual life of man. Hence, the moral code of conduct prescribed for the physician in Ayurveda has also a higher epistemic value for him. It is not merely pragmatic.

The behavior of the vaidya towards a terminally-ill patient:

It is important to note that in Ayurveda several indications are given to determine about the death of a person. By a simple counting of rate of a pulse of a patient and through some other physical symptoms, the vaidya can ascertain whether a person is approaching death and not only that he is capable of forecasting the exact time of death. Apart from physical symptoms, some other indications are also given in Ayurveda that look like some sort of superstition or a blind faith. Bad omens, whether they are superstitions or not is a separate matter. But it brings at least two significant points to our notice: 1, death is believed to be predictable in Ayurveda, esp. about certain patients and; 2, death is not believed to be merely a cessation of the functioning of organism. Although it is the assumption of jyoti-śāstra that the death of every man is fixed and predictable because his āyu (or living span) is fixed, in Ayurveda this belief is not completely dismissed. Indirectly, in Ayurveda, it is accepted that death can occur because of various reasons; physical reason is not the only reason for death.

Whatever may be the reason for death, a vaidya, who is proficient in his skill, can know the time of death of his patient. Although he can know
with certainty that his patient will not survive after his calculated period but he is not allowed to predict it before the patient. Ayurveda gives clear instructions to the vaidya never to state before the patient about his imminent death. The reason for such an instruction is two-folded. One obvious reason is that no ordinary person can remain healthy by accepting his death. All of us know, in general, that we will die but we never take it seriously till it becomes clear to us that it is imminent. This ignorance is a boon for a normal healthy life. The declaration of one’s imminent death is so alarming for anyone that one cannot keep one’s mental balance after listening it. One might start sinking and might die before the predicted time of death. So a vaidya is instructed not to declare before his patient about his imminent death.

The second reason behind such an instruction is more important and significant. Ayurveda is a science which believes in life and never loses hope for life. Despite his best calculations, the vaidya is not supposed to lose hope for the life of his patient. The spark of life may come from any source—may be an unknown mysterious source. By not declaring the death of a patient who is terminally ill, a vaidya does not foreclose the hope for his life from an unknown source and never allow him to sink before his actual death. It is to be noted that it is not merely modesty on the part of vaidya not to declare about the imminent death of the patient but it has a deeper reason behind it.

In other systems of medicine and therapy, a doctor is advised not to declare about the terminally-ill patient’s death for a superficial reason only. It is the superficiality of this reason that nowadays doctors prefer to declare about the death of the patient because they think that it will help him prepare mentally for it. The attitude shows a rigid closeness about the system’s own methodology beyond which no hope is entertained. Although a vaidya may perhaps more accurately predict about the terminally-ill patient’s imminent death but he is not too close with his calculations to leave room for hope. He believes that despite his correct calculations, in some miraculous way, the patient can survive and live a longer life too. Ayurveda gives strict
instructions to the vaidya not to declare the imminent death of a patient and to make room for hope.

The attitude of Ayurveda for life, death, and health is very different from other systems of medicine and therapy which depends heavily and centrally on observation, empirical tests and reasoning within the scope of such tests only. Life is not out and out material for Ayurveda; it essentially contains a spark of immortal divinity within it. Spirituality is believed to be the essence of every human being. According to the foundational philosophical belief of Ayurveda, any physical ailment is a result of imbalance between different guṇās of prakṛti within an individual organism in the form of imbalance between Trīdosās. Not merely physical and psychological, but there may be a spiritual cause also for this imbalance. Health and survival both are intricately related to this balance. Since spiritual reason is beyond the control of any vaidya, he cannot do anything about it. However, since he sincerely believes in the operation of this factor in human life, it is a part of his professional knowledge to enrich further his knowledge about it. Therefore, it is not merely modesty, or living some scope for chance survival but a sincere, and integral belief of his knowledge that makes a vaidya look for some supra-earthly scope for the cure of disease also.

Although in caraka-saṁhitā, the vaidya is advised to have an indifferent attitude towards a patient who is terminally-ill but this should not be misunderstood as devoid of concern about his life and health10. An emotional involvement with such a patient may disturb the balance of vaidya's mind and it may prove to be an impediment in discharging his duties objectively. But it is important to note that the vaidya has an understanding of the life of the patient which does not finally end with his death. Death is merely a temporarily stoppage in the journey of the patient's life which extends beyond this life. In the backdrop of this understanding, the vaidya can take his patient's death with a calm and composed mind and also help the patient to develop such an attitude. In the absence of this understanding, the vaidya cannot suggest the patient to do that. If the doctor does not have any honest belief in the life after this life then he cannot preach the patient
effectively not to care for his life without an apathy or cruelty towards him. Although in such a situation, the role of vaidya changes to some extant but it is not opposite of what he was doing earlier. While giving all the treatment for the body if the vaidya, whom the patient trusts, suggests his terminally-ill patient not to worry for his ailment and prepares him to develop an indifferent attitude to his own body then it really helps the patient the way his medicines help him. The confidence of the patient in his vaidya produces that desirable effect which he cannot develop by hearing the same words from his near relatives or dear ones. It helps him withdrawing his attention from his physical pain that actually brings down the level of intensity of pain. So, the Caraka’s instructions to a vaidya to be indifferent towards his patient should not be confused with a pragmatic and professional attitude. It is full of compassion that arose as a result of his fundamental beliefs regarding his profession.

In fact, the patient-physician relationship in Ayurveda can be rightly understood only if we understand Ayurveda’s fundamental assumption about human life and svāsthya. In this assumption, a proper importance is given to the spiritual life of the man and his psychic and physical aspects of life are deemed to be integrally connected to it. Some elaboration of this point is necessary at this juncture.

**The Spiritual Aspect of Human Life:**

The spiritual level of existence of human being is a necessary belief in Ayurveda. Man is not mere psycho-somata in the eyes of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is a system of medicine or therapy that has developed on a theoretical foundation directly based on Sāṁkhya’s philosophical assumption of triguṇās. Corresponding to three guṇās of prakṛti as explained in the Sāṁkhya Philosophy, Ayurveda assumes that the organism of human beings that includes his mind and intellect also are formed of three sorts of forces only. At every level of human existence these three forces operate. When they operate in a balanced manner then equilibrium is formed in
different segments of the organism. But due to reasons, which may be both natural as well as supernatural, certain imbalances are created that result into diseases. ‘Asvastha’ that literally means “not to be in oneself” occurs only when the balance among the three forces is disturbed due to any reason in any part of the organism. It is worth noting that this imbalance may be caused by some supra-natural factors also. All of us know that any living human being is not merely a combination of various natural components but essentially he is a centre of consciousness also, that is called purusa in sāṁkhya. Puruṣa or consciousness is not a product of prakṛti- it is an explicit belief of sāṁkhya. Unlike the materialist’s philosophy, sāṁkhya does not believe that consciousness is produced by nature or prakṛti. Consciousness exists in its purity having a full awareness of its identity. Its attachment to the objects of materiality or prakṛti produces ahmākāra that is its false identity and becomes the root cause of its bondage. The puruṣa- the individual centre of consciousness, has a spiritual aim within it. It has to liberate itself from ahmākāra and retain its real nature of a centre of pure consciousness. Within every individual consciousness, this aim is implicitly contained irrespective of his knowledge of it. An individual may or may not know it that he has to regain his real nature of pure consciousness. In his life this inherent, implicit assumption manifests on various occasions in many many forms. An elaboration of that point would prove to be a digression here. But, in brief, it would be necessary to point out that the general tendency of human beings of not being satisfied with his material achievements reflect his deep aspiration to achieve something beyond it which he himself does not know what? Through svādhyāya (or self-meditation) or by other means some individuals come to know clearly about his aim in life. A journey on this path forms the spiritual aspect of life. As it is stated that man is basically a centre of consciousness, it becomes clear that his spiritual aspect of life has a central importance for him. On this spiritual journey, the growth of the individual is marked explicitly and implicitly, in his physical and psychic life. This does not mean to say that a spiritual person’s physical body grows in
somewhat a different manner; it is only to indicate that the physical body of a person does not remain completely untouched by his spiritual growth.

A spiritual factor of disease is a unique assumption of Ayurveda. A vaidya has to have the eye to see whether the disease with which the patient is suffering is produced due to physical reasons or spiritual reasons. If a person is on a spiritual journey and some disease is seen in his body because of the disturbance of the three forces in this process then the vaidya has to be cautious enough not to stop those symptoms to come up by the use of medicine which he would have used in the case of physical ailment. This situation arose in the life of Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Because of his spiritual growth, he used to feel peculiar pain in different parts of his body and despite all the treatments it could not be cured. Eventually, a vaidya who had this spiritual eye could understand the real reason of his disease and suggested that it should not be stopped to manifest. He assured that it will disappear only when Sri Ramkrishna will achieve the spiritual height for which it was an intermediary phase of change. This actually happened in Sri Ramkrishna’s life.iii

The spiritual or the supra-psychic aspects of human life play a dominant role in giving him svāsthya at his physical and psychic levels. Ayurveda has pointed out about it and shown a direction for research in this regard. A lot of research is needed to be done on this line. To understand svāsthya, in the backdrop of a spiritual philosophy, definitely shows how cultural life determines our thinking in this regard.

A few remarks towards the end:

Indian society is seen as a caste-dominated society. The seeds of this caste system were present in the varṇa system of ancient India. Discrimination on caste line was, and is a painful social reality of Indian society that cannot be denied. At times, the critics of Indian society take undue liberty to look down upon the Indian social system in this light. In such a caste-ridden society, the growth of knowledge is adversely affected.
However, it is very strange to see that a science like Ayurveda grew on this land and was respected by all castes and classes of the society. It is further surprising a fact that grown in this sort of society, it retains its pure objective, scientific spirit by giving clear instructions that no discrimination should be made along the caste lines in the system. No one has been given a privileged position to study and practice Ayurveda on the basis of caste.\textsuperscript{viii} A student of Ayurveda has been instructed to learn his lessons from any competent vaidya irrespective of his caste.\textsuperscript{ix}

Gender discrimination also is seen as an old stigma of Indian society but Ayurveda does not make any such discrimination at all in this regard. Midwifery has been the oldest duty and privilege of women from the very beginning but the position of a physician was not generally granted to woman in any ancient system of medicine and therapy. In sharp contrast to this old male chauvinism, in India we find mentions of the name of many female vaidyas like Bhairvi Brähamaṇi, etc. On the basis of above discussion, it would not be wrong to think that at least in a vital consideration of life and health, the culture of India was highly humane from the very beginning. Ayurveda did not make Indian culture. It was the Indian culture within which a rational scientific system of medicine and therapy like Ayurveda evolved and developed. Had the cultural factors not conducive and enabling for its growth, it would not have evolved. The age-old system of Ayurveda that is still successfully functioning and growing is a proof of the openness and humane nature of ancient Indian culture.

135

(Drinking, gambling and the company of prostitutes should be avoided. He should not make public the private secrets of someone. He should not humiliate anyone. He should free himself from "I"-ness, or personal ego. He should master the art in which he is trained. He should donate as much as possible. He should not oppose anyone. He should not speak too much. He should love all his near and dear ones and should never get alienated from them. He should not be impatient. He should not be fluctuating or vacillating by nature. He should not practice anyone which can hurt the trust of the people on him. He should always share his comforts and happiness with others; should be energetic and should never waste his time on unfruitful activities; should not get either too happy or too irritated. He should not feel too happy or proudy on achieving success and at the same time should not turn gloomy at his failure. He should free himself from attachment, lust and greed.) – v.26,27,28; p.72, sūrasthānam, Carakasamhita, trans. Vol.1., trans. by Ayurvedacarya Sri Jayadeva Vidyalmakarena Pranitya. Banaras: Motilal Banarasidass, 1947.

(One who is the knower of the true and real knowledge develops an attitude of indifference and non-attachment naturally. And that detached person is a suitable candidate to eat the fruits of that true and real knowledge which comes as a result of detachment and indifference.) – ch.18, p.31, vimanasthānam, ibid.

(If there appear certain peculiar and distorting symptoms in the sense-organs, objects of sense-organs, mind, intellect, and physical gestures, then it can be predicted that at what time the patient will die, that is, whether he will die the very same moment, the very next moment, after a day, after a week, a month, six months, or an year.) – v.165, indriyasthānam, ibid.
(Even if he is sufficiently assured about the death of the patient, an able physician should never declare it before his patient without being asked. And even if asked, he should never declare it there where this news may become the cause of the death of the patient or be painful for the patient or his dear ones.) v. 61, p. 518, indriyasthanam, ibid.

(Vi) maitri kārupyamārteṣu śakye pritrūpekṣaṇām I
prakṛtisthēsu bhūteṣu vaidyavr̥tiḥ ca turaaviddhāḥ II 25 II

(Friendliness and compassion towards the sufferers, love and attachment towards the patient who can be cured and an attitude of indifference towards the terminally-ill patient – these are the obvious characteristics of a physician.) – ch. 10, p. 75, sūtraṣṭhānam, ibid.

(Vi) “Before the arrival of Bhairvi Brahmani at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna was suffering heavily due to a disease known as gatradaha in which his whole body burnt like fire. Mathurababu took him to a number of vaidyas but it did not help. Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘from the rising of the sun till noon, the temperature of my body starts increasing and at 12:00 in the noon it become unbearable. I feel so uncomfortable that I enter into Gangaji and stand there with water up to my neck for hours and cover my head and forehead with a wet cloth. Out of fear that I may end up in catching some other water-borne disease if stand there for hours, I come out of water, though unwillingly and lie down on a wet cloth on the marble floor.

Brahmani thought otherwise about this disease of Sri Ramakrishna. She told Mathurababu that it is not a disease. It is nothing but a by-product of the intense feeling of love of Sri Ramakrishna for God which has shaken him thoroughly at bodily level. Srimati Radha and Sri Chaitanya Prabhu also had undergone the same problem. There is no medicine to treat it. The simple method to treat it is to wear the garland of fragrant flowers, and apply the sandalwood on your skin. Strangely, on the forth day itself, this strange gatradah was no more.” – p. 320-21, vicitra kshudha and gatradaha, ch. 22, Sri Ramakrishnalilamrita, vol. 1, Pandit Dwarkanath Tiwari, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Nagpur.

Furthermore, ‘after a few days another physical problem started surfacing, but that also got cured with the simple method of Brahamani. Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘during those days I was feeling extremely hungry. No amount of food intake could satisfy my appetite. Whether it is day or night, I remained fully occupied with the thoughts of food. I started thinking from where now this new disease came. I told the whole story to Brahamani. Brahamani responded, ‘Baba, there is nothing to worry about. Those who move on the spiritual path to realize the God face this kind of problem at their physical level sometime. Don’t worry. Very soon you will be out of it.’ After uttering these words, she arranged various types of food items and sweet eatables in large quantity with the help of Mathurababu and placed them in a room. And then she asked me, ‘Baba, now you sit in this room and eat whatever
you feel like to eat.' I did the same and on the very third day that very strange appetite for food got cured.” – P.321-22, vicitra kshudha and gatradaha; ch. 22, Sri Ramakrishnalilamrita, vol. 1, Pandit Dwarkanath Tiwari, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Nagpur.

vii Śudramapi kulagūrasaṃpannam mantrāvarjumaṇupāṇītaḥmadhyāpyedityeke II 5 II

(Even sudras, who are prohibited to mesmerize the vedic mantras and undertake upanayana samsakaras, are eligible to study and practice ayurveda – this is the standpoint of honorable teachers of Ayurveda.) – v. 5, sūtraṣṭhānam, Suśrutaśamhitā.

ix Ausadhirnāmarupāḥhyāṁ jānatehyajapā vane I
avipāscaiva gopāṣcanye cāṇye vanvāsinaḥ II 118 II

(Herdsmen, forest-dwellers, and other people who live in the proximity of nature are well aware of the medicines of their region by their name, form, and qualities.) – v. 118, ch. 1, p. 13, sūtraṣṭhānam, carakaśamhitā.