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An Introduction To Charak Samhitokta Rishi Shaunaka and Evaluation of His Contribution To Ayurveda

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Abstract

Sage Shaunaka is considered as one of the noble and gentle rishis. For his noble and gentleness, he is also called as 'Bhadra Shaunaka'. He is mentioned in the Indian *vedic* and *pauranic* literature and in both great Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. He is said to be the strict follower of rules and regulations of the *Vratas* (rituals). He was the grandson of famous rishi Gritsamada. His decedents are found in all four classes of Indian class system (*Chaturvarna Vywastha*). The 1st part (*Pratham Skandha*) of Shreemad Bhagwat Purana represents the dialogue between sage Shaunaka and Sutaji. Rishi Shaunaka divided his text (*Atharva Samhita*) into two parts. He learnt Bramhavidya from the Angirasa. Rishi Shaunaka was present in the conclave of *rishis* conducted beneath the mountains of Himalayas held some 5000 years ago to discuss the impact of diseases on human health. Like other rishis, he also wrote his book called 'Shaunaka Tantra' as mentioned by Atreya Punarwasu. We find the reference of medicinal preparations made by sage Shaunaka in various Ayurvedic commentaries on books like Chakradutta, Vrinda Madhava and Todarmala's Ayurved Saukhyam. Even the ancient acharyas like Sushruta, Agnivesha and Bhela have quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka in their books (*Samhitas*). Hence, it is necessary to explore the life of rishi Shaunaka and his contribution to Ayurveda. Exploration to sage Shaunaka in Indological literature reveals that rishi Shaunaka was very gentle and expert in Indian knowledge system. He was the head of the Naimisharanya Gurukula. He had also contributed richly in the Ayurvedic literature by giving the detail account of measurements of many medicinal preparations as mentioned in various books and also by keeping his views on many important topics.

Keywords: *Anuvasa Basti, Panchanimba choorna, Puran ghrita*

Introduction :

Sage 'Shaunaka' was an illustrious ancient Indian rishi who is largely known for his gentleman Ness in the Indian Puaranic literature. He was the head of the Naimisharanya School. He uses to observe very strict austerity/penance. He performed Tapa by 'Vaikhanas' method i.e. in the forest and living on the forest food. His decedents are found in all four classes of Indian class system (*Chaturvarna Vyawastha*). He was instrumental in shaping the Shreemad Bhagwat Purana and the Mahabharata. He wrote the medical book called 'Shaunaka Samhita'. Even the ancient acharyas like Sushruta, Agnivesha and Bhela have quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka in their books (*Samhitas*). Maharishi Shaunaka was present in the conclave of *rishis* conducted beneath the mountains of Himalayas, some 5000 years ago.^[1]

Material And Method :

Literary method of research is followed in this article. All the available Ayurvedic and Indological literature is explored to find the maximum information about the sage Shaunaka.

Review Of Literature :

Birth and Lineage of Rishi Shaunaka :

We find three different versions about birth and lineage of sage Shaunaka in the puranas, Mahabharata and Ramayana.

As per **Vishnu Purana**, the eldest son of king Pururava was 'Ayu' who married to the daughter of Rahu. She gave birth to five sons, viz. 1. Nahush, 2. Kshatravruddha, 3. Rambha, 4. Raji and 5. Anena. Kshatravruddha's son was Suhotra and Suhotra had 3 sons; Viz. 1. Kashya 2. Kash, 3. Gritsamada. The sage Gritsamada had son called

'Shaunaka' who had progeny in all four classes of fourfold class system (*Chaturvarnya Vyawastha*).^[2]

As per Ramayana, sage Chyawana had **Grandson** named Kamatha from the son Harita. His grandson Ruru was from the son Sumati/Pramati. Ruru's son was Shunak and his son was rishi **Shaunaka**.^[3]

As per Mahabharata, Haihay king Veetahavya turned as brahmin on the advice of sage Bhrigu to avoid the fury of Kashi king Pratardana. His son 'Gritsamada' was an illustrious and brilliant sage. His son was 'Sucheta'. Sucheta's son was 'Varcha'. The son of Varcha was 'Vihavya'. The son of Vihavya was 'Viatatya'. The son of Vitatya was 'Satya'. The son of Satya was 'Santa'. The son of Santa was Maharshi 'Shrava'. The son of Shrava was 'Tama'. The son of Tama was 'Prakash' and the son of Prakash was 'Vagindra'. The son of Vagindra was 'Pramiti' who was well versed in Veda and Vedangas. Pramiti's son from nymph Ghritachi was 'Ruru'. The son of Ruru from wife Pramadadara was Bramharshi 'Shunaka' and the Shunka's son was 'Shaunaka' muni.^[4]

Shaunaka As Bhadra Shaunaka:

When Rishi Shaunaka approached the Angirasa to learn the 'Bramhavidya', he is been referred as *Bhadra/Mahashalo* (gentleman) in the Munduko Upanishada. As he was always truthful having great control over sensory organs and mind and uses to strictly follow the rules and regulations of the codes of conduct, he is referred as the *Bhadra Purusha* (gentleman).^[5]

Shaunaka As Chancellor of Gurukula:

Shaunaka was the Chancellor (*Kulapati*) of the school (*Gurukula*) located in the forest called

‘Naimishyaranya’. Shaunaka was the teacher of subjects like *Shastras* (Shruti, Smruti, Itihas, Puranas) and *Aranyakas* (Brihadaranyaka etc). He was always truthful having great control over sensory organs and mind. He used to strictly follow the rules and regulations of the *Vrata*. That time a twelve yearlong one ritual was ongoing there. Maharshi Shaunaka had also participated in it along with many other rishis.^[6]

Dialogue Between Rishi Angirasa And Shaunaka Regarding Bramhavidya:

Lord Bramha first evolved in the universe. He taught the ‘Bramhavidya’ to his eldest son ‘Atharva’. This ‘Bramhavidya’ is the basis of all the *Vidyas* (courses). Atharva taught this Vidya to the rishi Angira who in turn taught it to sage Bhardwaja’s son called Satyawaha. And Satyawaha gave it to the Angirasa (Brihaspati). Rishi Shaunaka approached the Angirasa to learn the ‘Bramhavidya’. He asked Angirasa, as to what is that on knowing which everything is learnt. Sage Angirasa replied that there are two main *Vidyas* under *Bramhavidya* which one should know. One is *Para Vidya* and other is *Apara Vidya*. The *Para Vidya* gives knowledge about the *Akshar Bramha* (Alphabets) and the *Apara Vidya* gives knowledge about *Vedas*, *Shiksha* (Phonetics), *Kalpa* (Ritual canon), *Vyakarana* (Grammar), *Nirukta* (Etymology), *Chhandas* (meter), *Jyotisha* (Astrology). Sage Angirasa further replied that it is the *Para Bramha* (Almighty) which is responsible for everything in the universe. Penance in forest and faithful contented life takes the individual towards *Para Bramha*. The materialistic desires and its consequences prevent individual’s journey

towards *Para Bramha* (Almighty).^[7]

Shaunaka And Bhagwat Purana:

The 1st Skandha (part) of Shreemad Bhagwat Purana represents the dialogue between sage Shaunaka and Sutaji. In this part sage Shaunaka asked Sutaji about the various incarnations of lord Vishnu, the biography of Brahma rishi Narada, deeds of Ashwatthama, death of Bhishma, Shrikrisna’s entry in Dwarika, birth of king Parikshita, Pandava’s swargarohana (travel to heaven) and curse of rishi shrungi to king Parikshita.^[8]

Conduction of Ashwamedh Yagya:

King Parikshit’s son Janamejaya had committed the sin of *Bramha-hatya* (murder of Brahmin) by killing the sage Garga’s son named Akrura. Hence, king Janamejaya remained restless for long time. Later he approached the sage Shaunaka for peace. Rishi Shaunaka organized the ‘*Ashwamedh Yagya*’ for the king to get rid of this sin. After performing this Yagya successfully, king Janamejaya not only relieved of his sin of murder of Brahmin but also got rid of bad body smell.^[9]

Contribution of Shaunaka In Atharva-Veda:

Atharvaveda was first propagated by the sage Sumantu. He taught it to his disciple called Kabandha muni who in turn taught it to his two disciples namely Pathya and Devadarsha. Rishi Shaunaka was the disciple of sage Pathya. Rishi Shaunaka divided his text (Samhita) into two parts and gave it to his disciples namely Vabhru and Saindhava. This Saindhava’s student Munjikesha divided his text into five parts namely 1. Nakshatra Kalpa, 2. Veda Kalpa, 3. Samhita Kalpa, 4. Angirasa Kalpa and 5. Shanti Kalpa.^[10]

In ancient Indian knowledge system, the 6 *Vedangas*, 4 *Vedas*, *Mimansa Shastra*, *Nyaya Shastra*, *Puran Shastra* and *Dharma Shastra* constitute 14 *Vidyas*. The addition of *Ayurveda*, *Dhanurveda*, *Gandharvaveda* and *Artha Sahstra* make it 18 *vidyas* (knowledge systems).

Shaunaka And Bhagwat Purana:

The 1st Skandha (part) of Shreemad Bhagwat Purana represents the dialogue between sage Shaunaka and Sutaji. In this part sage Shaunaka asked Sutaji about the various incarnations of lord Vishnu, the biography of Brahma rishi Narada, deeds of Ashwatthama, death of Bhishma, Shrikrisna's entry in Dwarika, birth of king Parikshita, Pandava's swargarohana (travel to heaven) and curse of rishi shrungi to king Parikshita.^[11]

Contribution To Ayurveda:

Acharya Shrikantha Datta in his commentary Vyakhyakusumavali on Vrinda Madhava, in Mishrakadhikar chapter, quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka regarding the usefulness of old ghee. Acharya Shaunaka is of the view that one year old ghee sweet and acts as tonic. Ten years old ghee is little pungent. The hundred years old ghee is best and acts as medicine.^[12]

Acharya Shrikantha Datta in his commentary Vyakhyakusumavali on Vrinda Madhava, in Mishrakadhikar chapter, quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka regarding administration of **Anuvasan Basti** (oily enema) after the *Virechana* (purgation). Acharya Shaunaka is of the view that at the interval of 15 days *Vamana* (emesis) and *Virechana* should be carried out and after one month of these procedures i.e.

after 15 days of *Virechana*, individual should be administered the *Anuvasan Basti*.^[13]

Shrikantha Datta in his commentary Vyakhyakusumavali on Vrinda Madhava, in Mishrakadhikar chapter, quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka regarding measurement of substances for preparing the decoction.^[14]

Acharya Nischalkara in his commentary Ratnaprabha on Chakradutta, mentioned the medicinal formulation called '**Panchanimba Churna**' given by acharya Bhadra Shaunaka for the treatment of *Kushtha* (skin diseases).^[15]

Commentator Nischalkara in his commentary Ratnaprabha on Chakradutta, measurement of substances and liquids in the preparation of decoction, had mentioned that acharya Vagbhata is the follower of acharya Shaunaka. Whatever that is mentioned with regard to preparation of various decoctions in the treatment of fever, is accepted by acharya Vagbhata.^[16]

Todarananda had quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka on *Koshtha* in his book Ayurved Saukhyam. As per Shaunaka, *Nabhi* (umbilicus), *Vrikkas* (Kidneys), *Yakrita* (Liver), *Kloma* (Pancreas), *Pleeha* (Spleen), *Antra* (Intestine), *Ashayas* (Viscera) are taken together as *Koshtha*.^[17]

Acharya Charaka had mentioned the views of acharya Shaunaka in eleventh chapter of Siddhithana on Falabasti. As per acharya Shaunaka, the drug Jimutaka (*Luffa echinata*) is best for *Vamana* as it removes the Kapha and Pitta. He further opined that the drug Kritavedhana (*Luffa actuangula*) is not good for the process of emesis.^[18]

Acharya Bhela had quoted the views of acharya Shaunak regarding the merits of Chikitsa *Chatushpada* i.e. doctor, nurse, medicine and patient. Acharya Shaunaka here contradicted the views of acharya Atreya Punarvasu saying that mere absence or presence of some of the qualities of these four does not affect the outcome of the treatment. The credit may not be given to the single person or substance.^[19]

Acharya Bhela had quoted the views of acharya Shaunak regarding the colour of the foetus. Acharya Shaunaka is of the view that if the pregnant lady is given the *yava mantha* cooked in the cow milk in the 7th month of pregnancy and if the lady is kept in the home painted with white colour and lady is also asked to wear the white clothes, then she delivers the child with red colour (*pingala*).^[20]

Acharya Charaka while enumerating the list of textbook writers in *Sharir Sthana*, had mentioned about the book 'Bhadra Shaunaka Tantra' written by acharya Shaunaka indicated by the word *Sutrakarta rishi*.^[21]

Acharya Charaka and Sushruta while mentioning the views of different acharyas on the organogenesis during embryogenesis, quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka. As per acharya Shaunaka stated that in the process of organogenesis during embryogenesis, first of all head is evolved.^{[22] [23]}

Declaration :

Conflict of Interest : None

Observations:

Sr	Parameters	Particulars
1	Lineage	Bhrigu Vansha
2	Great grand father	Pramiti
3	Grandfather	Ruru
4	Father	Shunak
5	Education	Vedic and Ayurveda
6	Teacher	Rishi Pathya
7	Position Held	Head of the Gurukula
8	Place of Educational institute	Naimisharanya
9	Disciples	Vabhru, Saindhava etc
10	Ayurvedic contribution	Shaunak Tantra
11	Other contribution	Division of Atharvaveda
12	Quoted by	Agnivesha, Bhela, Sushruta, Vagbhata, Hemadri, Nischalkara, Shrikanthadutta, Todarmala

Discussion :

Although there are different views regarding the birth of rishi Shaunaka, one thing is common that he was born in Bhrigu vansha (lineage). He was the son of rishi 'Shunak' in the lineage of rishi Gritsamada. His great grandfather was 'Pramiti' and grandfather was 'Ruru'. Sage Shaunaka was known for his noble and gentleness. Hence, he was also called as 'Bhadra Shaunaka'. In Ayurveda, at many places he is referred as 'Bhadra Shaunaka'. He was the head of the school in Naimisharanya. He himself was well versed in Vedas and other Vaidik branches. This gives an idea about his authority not only being scholar in Vedic studies but the great teacher who headed the institution. He divided the Atharvaveda into many branches. His interest in knowing the Bramhavidya put him as the

curious learner. He learnt Bramhavidya from Angiras rishi. All Bhrigu vanshis were great *Tapasvis*. Rishi Shaunaka was also strict follower of austerity and penance. He was present in the assembly of rishis to discuss the impact of diseases on human lives and its solution. Sage Bhargava gave him the knowledge of Ayurveda. Maharshi Shaunaka created his own treatise called 'Shaunaka Tantra'. This was followed by acharya Vagbhata. Nischalkara the commentator of Chakradutta, called Vagbhata as Shaunak Matanuyayi i.e. follower of the vies of Shaunaka at many places in his commentary 'Ratnaprabha' and showed the similarity of their opinion on many medicinal preparations. Not only the commentators like Shrikanthadatta or Nischalkara or Hemadri but ancient great scholars like Agnivesha, Sushruta, Bhela and Vagbhata have also quoted the views of acharya Shaunaka in their respective treatise. This shows the high regard acharya Shaunaka held in the ancient Indian medical science sphere of that time. Unfortunately, his scholarly work is not available today but since the many commentators have quoted the references from ancient Shaunaka Tantra, there is a reason to believe that it might exist in some or another place. It is the duty of modern-day researchers to find it. The present article may prove to be of help in this direction.

Conclusion:

Acharya Shaunaka was the gentle sage of ancient time who was proficient in vedic sciences. He was the head of the ancient school of great learners which he found at Naimisharanya. As the work of acharya Shaunaka is quoted not only by the commentators but by the ancient great scholars like

Agnivesha, Sushruta and Bhela and Vagbhata, it can safely be concluded that medical treatise composed by acharya Shaunaka called 'Shaunaka Tantra' was existent and followed by many till medieval time.

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