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An Exploration to Ayurvedic Acharya Vasishtha and His Contribution to The Field of Ayurveda

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Abstract

Rishi Vasishtha is the highly regarded ancient learned scholar not only of Ayurvedic field but of other Indian sciences such as Indian astrology and ancient Indian architecture. His book 'Vasishtha Samhita' is found in all 3 Indological sciences. However, the book on Ayurveda is missing though the quotes from it are available in various Ayurvedic commentaries. In Puranic history, we find reference to two Vasishtha rishis. The first Vasishtha was born in Swayambhuv Manvantara. The Vasishtha (I) was the *Manas putra* (desired son) of lord Bramha. The second Vasishtha was born in Vaivaswat Manvantara. This Vasishtha (II) is important from Ayurvedic point of view. He was the son of Mitravaruna and brother of Agastya rishi. He was the Kulguru of famous Ramayan fame Raghuvansha. His wife was Arundhati who gave birth to 100 sons. Among them Shakti was the eldest. Sage Vasishtha left the legacy of Ayurveda in his lineage in the form of his grandson 'Parashara' who was the student of Atreya Punarwasu and wrote famous 'Parashar Samhita'. Rishi Vasishtha was present in the assembly of rishis held under mountain Himalaya which discussed about the growing diseases in the community and ways to tackle it. The present study aims to explore the family and work details of sage Vasishtha and his contribution to Ayurveda. After taking proper knowledge of Ayurveda from the God king Indra, sage Bhardwaja disseminated this knowledge among many rishis including sage Vasishtha. Acharya Vangasena had quoted a medicinal preparation named 'Vasishtha Haritaki Avaleha' prepared by sage Vasishtha in his text Vangasen Samhita (48/191-201) and by Vriddha Vagbhata (A. S. Chi. 5/86-94). Similarly, acharya Charaka also quoted a medicinal preparation termed as 'Aamalakya Bramharasaya' in his text 'Charak Samhita' (C.Chi. 1/3/4-5). Todarmala the writer of book 'Ayurved Saukhyam' had given several quotes of sage Vasishtha in his textbook (A.S. chapter 4). This literary retrospective research study showed that sage Vasishtha contributed richly in the development of Ayurveda.

Keywords : Vasishtha, Shakti, Parashara

Introduction:

The sage Vasishtha is a great ancient Indian Ayurvedic scholar of high repute. He wrote an Ayurvedic textbook called 'Vasishtha Samhita' which is lost in the course of time. However, many references of it are found in various Ayurvedic commentaries. Sage Vasishtha left the legacy of Ayurveda in his lineage in the form of his grandson 'Parashara' who was the student of Atreya Punarwasu and wrote famous 'Parashar Samhita'. The first Vasishtha was born in Swayambhuv Manvantara. The Vasishtha (I) was the *Manas putra* (desired son) of lord Bramha. The second Vasishtha was born in Vaivaswat Manwantara. This Vasishtha (II) is important from Ayurvedic point of view. He was the son of Mitrarvaruna and brother of Agastya rishi. He was the Kulguru of famous Ramayan fame Raghuvansha. His wife was Arundhati who gave birth to 100 sons. Among them Shakti was the eldest. Rishi Vasishtha was present in the assembly of rishis held under mountain Himalaya which discussed about the growing diseases in the community and ways to tackle it. The present study aims to explore the family and work details of sage Vasishtha and his contribution to Ayurveda. After taking proper knowledge of Ayurveda from the God king Indra, sage Bhardwaja disseminated this knowledge among many rishis including sage Vasishtha. Acharya Vangasena had quoted a medicinal preparation named 'Vasishtha Haritaki Avaleha' prepared by sage Vasishtha in his text Vangasen Samhita ^[1] and by Vriddha Vagbhata ^[2]. Similarly, acharya Charaka also quoted a medicinal preparation termed as

'Aamalakya Bramharasaya' in his text 'Charak Samhita' ^[3]. Todarmala the writer of book 'Ayurved Saukhyam' had given several quotes of sage Vasishtha in his textbook ^[4]. Sage Vasishtha is also credited with books like Vasishtha Dharmasutra, Yogavasishtha, Agni Purana and Vishnu Puran.

Material & Method :

Literary method of research was adopted in present study. For this purpose, retrospective study of Ayurvedic texts like Charak Samita and Puran texts such as Shreemad Bhagwat Mahapuran, Harivansh Puran, Linga Puran, Vayu Puran, Vishnu Puran etc was done.

Review Of Literature :

Birth of Vasishtha

Vasishtha (I) was born as Manas Putra (desired son) to lord Bramha along with other sages like Bhrigu, Angira Pulstya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha etc. in the swayambhuv Manvantara. ^[5]

The other name of Vasishtha (II) was Mitra-varuna. He was born in the land of Gods called 'Elavarta'. His mother was 'Urwashi' Apsara. She uses to please both Varuna (Bramha) and Mitra (Surya). Since she had sex with both at the same time on one occasion, the father of the baby delivered could not be decided. Hence, she kept the name of the baby jointly as 'Mitra-Varuna. Lord Surya's other sons were terrible like Yama, Shani etc. Since all the other sons of lord Varuna became sages, this baby called Mitrarvaruna alias Vasishtha could be credited to Varun Bramha. Mitrarvaruna is supposed to be the reincarnation of Vasishtha (I) ^{[6][7]}

Wives And Progeny of Vasishtha

Vasishtha (I) married to the daughter Urja of his brother Daksha Prajapati. From her he had seven sons namely - 1. Raja, 2. Suhotra, 3. Bahu, 4. Sawan, 5. Anagha, 6. Sutapa, 7. Shukra^[8]

Vasishtha (I) married to the *chandal* daughter Arundhati. He had eldest son called Shakti and 99 other sons from her. All they were killed by sage Vishvamitra because of old rivalry. Shakti's son was sage Parashara and Parashara's son was famous Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa.^{[9] [10]} Sage Vasishtha also married Ghrutach Apsara and from her he had son called 'Kapinjalya'. He also married girl called 'Pruthvi' and from her he had son called 'Bhadra'. His son was Vasu and Vasu's son was Upamanyu. And Upamanyu's sons were collectively called as 'Kaundinya'^[11]

Death And Rebirth of Vasishtha (I) As Vasishtha (II)

Lord Brahma's son 'Daksha' fathered a daughter called 'Aditi'. She gave birth to the son called Vivaswan (Aaditya). Vivaswan's son was 'Manu' and Manu's son was 'Ikshwaku' and Ikshwaku's son was '**Nimi**' along with 8 others. Nimi though inherited a royal lineage, created a separate empire at Mithila which is presently located in Nepal.^[12] As per the story given in Vishnu Purana, the king Nimi, arranged a *Yagya* at his place which was going to be performed by sage Vasishtha. But as Vasishtha went to perform Indra's *Yagya*, King Nimi, performed it at the hands of sage Gautama. Seeing this on return, sage Vasishtha, got angry and cursed the king Nimi to become bodyless. King Nimi also got angry to get cursed without his fault and in turn cursed the sage Vasishtha. Both fought

intensely with each other and got seriously injured. Vasishtha met with the death due to curse and fight with King Nimi. Sage Vasishtha's soul entered the semen of Mitravaruna and he got rebirth from the union of Mitravaruna and Urvashi Apsara^{[13] [14]}

Vasishtha's Struggle & Placement As Kulguru of Ayodhya Dynasty

The other name of Vasishtha was Mitra-varuna. He was born in the land of Gods called 'Elavarta'. His mother was 'Urvashi' Apsara. She used to please both Varuna (Brahma) and Mitra (Surya). Since she had sex with both, the father of the baby delivered could not be decided. Hence, she kept the name of the baby jointly as 'Mitra-Varuna. Lord Surya's other sons were terrible like Yama, Shani etc. Since all the other sons of lord Varuna became sages, this baby called Mitravaruna alias Vasishtha could be credited to Varuna.^{[6] [7]}

In the 'Elavarta', sage Vasishtha received competition from sage 'Narada'. Vasishtha initiated 'Agnihotra' in the 'Elavarta'. But Narada ridiculed it. He didn't accept the oblation method of Vasishtha rather sang 'Vamdeviya' song (opposite action). The competition between Vasishtha and Narada grew to such an extent that whatever sage Vasishtha used to do, Narada used to do the opposite of it. Hence sage, Narada got the name 'Vamadeva' (opposer). Narada pleased Indra the king of Elavarata with his praising poems and got entry into his court. Sage Vasishtha could not get entry into the court of Indra due to stiff opposition from Narada. Fed up with this, sage Vasishtha, came to Shakal Dwipa (Arabia).

In ancient days, Arabasthana was called as 'Shakal Dwipa'. Here also Vasishtha met with a competitor

called 'Shukra' who was the teacher of Daityas and Danavas. Sage Vasishtha here also performed many *Yagyas* (Oblations) but could not get that name and fame as like Shukra.

Vasishtha later came to **Bharatwarsha** (India). He became the priest of king Ekshwaku (Manu's son). He showed his valor in the battle of ten kings (*Dashradjnya Yuddha*). During the rule of Ayodhya king 'Ekshvaku', Vasishtha predicted the stale meat of rabbit brought by Ekshwaku's son Vikukshi. As Vikukshi ate rabbit before it is served to the Kulguru Vasishtha, he got the name 'Shashad'. Shashad was disowned by his father Ekshwaku for telling lie.^{[15][16]}

Later, sage Vasishtha got rebirth through the union of Urvashi Apsara and Varun Bramha. That time he was named as 'Mitravaruna'. Again, after becoming young, he became the priest of Ekshwaku lineage. During the rule of Ayodhya king 'Sagar', Vasishtha persuaded king Sagar to forgive defeated Shakas, Yavanas, Kambojas, Paradas, Pahalavas. On request of minister Vasishtha, king 'Sagar' dehaired the Yavanas, half haired the Shakas, Made Paradas to keep long hairs and made Pahalavas to keep long moustache and beard. Bramhanas boycotted all them and they came to know as **Mlenchhas (Now Muslims)**.^[17]

Vasishtha developed animosity with Ayodhya king Saudas on the issue of serving human meat for the meal. Though king Saudas was unaware of it, but Vasishtha though that it was purposeful action on the part of king and he cursed king Saudas to become *Bramharakshas* (demon). King Saudas also took the water in his hand to curse the Vasishtha in retaliation to his thoughtless action but his wife

Madyantika stopped him from doing so. But he has to throw this water in hand somewhere. So, he put it on his feet as a result of which his feet got blackened. Hence, he was also come to know as '**Kalmash-Pada**' (Person with black feet). His wife urged the sage Vasishtha to forgive her husband with lesser degree of curse (*Ushap*). Obliging to her request, Vasishtha made an arrangement that king Saudas will remain as demon for twelve years only. During his exile in forest and life as demon (*Bramharakshas*) king Saudas, kept on hunting the animals and humans. One day he started eating one Bramhana. The wife of that Bramhana requested a lot to the Saudas but he didn't show any mercy and ate that Bramhana. The wife of Bramhana gave curse to Saudas that he will not be able to cohabit with his wife. Should he do that he will die. After completing the twelve years in exile, King Saudas, returned to his kingdom but could not cohabit with his wife due to the earlier curse. Hence, he requested sage Vasishtha to have sex with his wife Madyanti and give him the progeny. Vasishtha accepted the request and had sex with queen Madyanti. From this union, queen Madyanti had son called 'Ashmaka'. King Ashmaka's son was 'Moolaka'. When Parashuram was eliminating all Kshatriyas from the Bharatwarsh, the queens protected Moolaka from getting killed. Hence, he was also come to know as 'Nari Kavacha' (person protected by women). The lineage after Moolaka is as follows :

Moolaka – Dashrath – Elvil – Vishwasaha – **Khatwanga** – Deerghabahu – **Raghu** – Aja – Dashratha – **Rama** – Kusha.^[18]

In the Bharawarsha, sage Vasishtha received

competition from sage Vishwamitra. Their rivalry grew to the bitter extent. King Vishwamitra attacked sage Vasishtha with his one *Akshoini* Army. But he lost to the Vasishtha in the war. His all sons were killed in the battle. Only one left alive. In this battle, Pallavas, Kirats, Hirats, Kambojas and Barbaras helped Vasishtha in winning the war as he obliged them during the rule of Ayodhya king Sagar. Vishwamitra had to take shelter in the forest because of shame. From here, he developed relations with the Ayodhya king Satyavrata alias Trishanku. With his help, he challenged sage Vasishtha again. Whenever and wherever Vasishtha and Vishwamitra use to meet they use to quarrel. Vasishtha uses to sing the *Rigvedic richas* (hymens from Rigveda) whereas Vishwamitra use to sing opposite *Atharvan richas* (hymens from Atharvaveda). Ultimately Vishwamitra killed all the sons of sage Vasishtha.^[19]

Vasishtha's Attempt To Commit Suicide

On learning that sage Vishwamitra had killed all his sons including eldest Shakti. Both sage Vasishtha and his wife Arundhati cried a lot remembering them. Later both decided to commit the suicide by drowning into water. However, their daughter in law dissuaded them from doing this by saying that their grandson Parashara is growing in her womb. And they have to live for him. On learning this they withdrew their decision and started taking care of their daughter in law and the baby later. Their grandson Parashara on becoming young performed yagya to kill all those Rakshasas who were involved in the murder of his father Shakti. But on request of his grand-father he stopped it.^[20]

Vasishtha's Contribution To Ayurveda

Acharya Vangasena had quoted a medicinal preparation named 'Vasishtha Haritaki Avaleha' prepared by sage Vasishtha in his text Vangasen Samhita^[1] and by Vruddha Vagbhata in chapter fifth of Ashtang Samgraha Chikitsasthana^[2]. Similarly, acharya Charaka also quoted a medicinal preparation termed as 'Aamalakya Bramharasaya' in his text 'Charak Samhita'^[3]. Todarmala the writer of book 'Ayurved Saukhyam' had given several quotes of sage Vasishtha in chapter four of his textbook.^[4]

Quotes of Vasishtha In Ayurved Saukhyam

Todarmala the writer of book 'Ayurved Saukhyam' had given several quotes of sage Vasishtha in chapter four of his textbook.

Vasishtha's view on Metabolism

Sage Vasishtha is of the view that aafter the digestion of ingested Panchabhutatmak diet, the minute molecules of respective dietary bhutas nourishes the respective bhutas in the body.^[21]

Vasishtha's view on Embryogenesis

Even for the wise person, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether there is fragrance in a bud or not. Similarly, it is impossible to say whether semen is present in a child or not. Certain factors even if they are present, are not observable because of their subtle nature. The fragrance of a flower can be observed only when its petals and stamens have appeared.^[22]

Vasishtha's view on Organogenesis

Sage Vasishtha is of the view that at the time of union of sperm and ovum, five basic elements (*panchmahbhutatmak*) with soul and body organs and appendages also gets located there by virtue of

its own nature.^[23]

Vasishtha' s view on Intrauterine Life

On the 9th month of pregnancy, the foetus gets matured. In the 10th month, foetus develops hate about the intrauterine environment. It thinks that what sinful deeds it had committed in the past that it had landed to this hell. It also feels that if by luck it comes out of the womb, it will ask the God not put it again into it. It also feels that after completing the account of deed (*Karmafala*), it will come out of the womb.^{[24] [25]}

Vasishtha' s view on Injury to Marmas & Prognosis

If the foreign body in Vishalyaghna marmas falls down after suppuration, even then the person dies and there is no doubt about it. The Vaikalyakara marmas are dominated by the attributes of Jala Mahabhuta. The Jala Mahabhuta is stable and cooling, Hence, any injury to these marmas does not result in death. The Rukkar marmas are dominated by the attributes of Vayu and Agni mahabhutas. Injury to the sady pranhar marmas results in death within seven nights. Injury to the Kalantar pranhar marmas results in death within a fortnight or a month or two months. If there is excessive injury in Vakailayakar and Rukkar marmas then this also results in the death of the patient.^[26]

Observations :

Table No. 1 – Vasishtha's Family Details

Sr	Criteria	Vasishtha (I)
01	Manvantar (Time)	Swayambhuv
02	Father	Bramha
03	Mother	Desired son

Sr	Criteria	Vasishtha (I)
04	Siblings	Bhrigu, Angira Pulstya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha, Atri (brothers)
05	Wife	Urja
06	Son	1. Raja, 2. Suhotra, 3. Bahu, 4. Sawan, 5. Anagha, 6. Sutapa, 7. Shukra

Sr	Criteria	Vasishtha (II)
01	Manvantar (Time)	Vaivaswat
02	Father	Varun (Mitravarun)
03	Mother	Urvashi Apsara
04	Siblings	Agasti rishi (brother)
05	Wife	Arundhati
06	Son	Shakti + 99 others from
07	Grandson	Parashara
08	Great grandson	Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa

Results :

1. Sage Vasishtha is also known as Mitravaruna and Apava.
2. Sage Vasishtha (II) contributed richly to Ayurveda.
3. Sage Vasishtha is a grand-father of sage Parashara.
4. Vasishtha Samhita was existent till the period of 16th century king Todarmala.
5. Vasishtha's medicinal preparations found place in Charak Samhita, Vagbhat Samhita and Vangasen Samhita.

Discussion :

The synonyms for sage Vasishtha were Mitavarun and Apava. There is little difference in names of Vasishtha's (I) son in Puranas. As per Shreemad Bhagwat Purana, the names of son from wife Urja were - 1. Chitraketu, 2. Surochi, 3. Viraja, 4. Mitra, 5. Ulban, 6. VasHrudyan, 7. Dyuman. Whereas as per Linga Puran and Vishnu Purana these names are - 1. Raja, 2. Suhotra, 3. Bahu, 4. Sawan, 5. Anagha, 6. Sutapa, 7. Shukra. Whether these are synonyms or not remains unanswered. But in Purana there is a practice to use synonyms. The life of sage Vasishtha was full of struggle. He received stiff competition from contemporary sages like Narada in Elavarta, from Shukra in Arabia and from Vishwamitra in Bharatwarsha. He lived long and was the Kulguru of Ekshwaku dynasty. He guided many kings of Ekshwaku lineage. He kept alive this lineage by donating the semen to the queen Madyanti who was king Saudas's wife. He too like other human beings felt devastated and tried to commit suicide on learning about the death of his beloved son at the hands of demon. His forgiveness is reflected when he asked his grand son Parashar to forgive the demons who killed his father. He was also a brave fighter which is reflected from his bravery in Dashragya war. He was having the great geo political acumen which is reflected when he gathered pahalavas, Kahambojas and Shakas and Yavanas to fight against the Vishwamitra. He had described the process of embryogenesis and organogenesis. He had contributed to geriatric medicine through his Rasayan Kalpas. He might have experimented with the Rasayan kalpas to enjoy longevity. Since he lived very long, the

Rasayan Kalpas described by him needs to be studied extensively for the betterment of mankind.

Summary & Conclusion :

Sage Vasishtha was a great famous ancient Indian scholar with many virtues. His mastery in many sciences like military education, political science, civil administration, priest related science and medical science make him a versatile personality. He had contributed to the field of Geriatric medicine through the Rasayan Kalpas developed by him. His thought on foetal perception during intrauterine life make him a parapsychological scientist who can see beyond the obvious things.

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