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An Introduction To Rishi Shandilya Mentioned In Charak Samhita and Evaluation of His Contribution To Ayurveda

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Abstract

Brahma-rishi Shandilya was a revered sage in India's ancient rishi tradition. He is a contemporary of famous sages such as Vishwamitra and Agastya. He authored the Shandilya Upanishad and the Shandilya Bhakti Sutra. There is a reference to 'Shandilya Vidya' in the Chhandogya Upanishad, in which Brahma-rishi Shandilya propagates that the entire world is Brahma. The world evolves from Brahma and dissolves into it. According to the Puranas, he was the Shandilya *Gotra Pravartaka rishi* (the initiator of the Shandilya lineage). As per the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Lord Brahma's son was Pracheta, along with seven other rishis. Pracheta's son was Asita Muni. With their boon, Asita's wife gave birth to the famous sage Devala. This Devala married the king Suyagya's daughter, called 'Ratnamalavati'. From this union, they had a son called 'Shandilya'. Mahadeva described Brahma-rishi Shandilya as *Tapasvi* (Penance observer), *Tejasvi* (Brilliant), *Gyani* (Knowledgeable), *Jitendriya* (having control over senses). He propagated Brahma philosophy. Sage Shandilya attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains some 7000 years ago. This not only shows his interest in medical science but also shows him as a caring person for mankind's suffering. Hence, it is essential to explore the life of sage Shandilya to understand his contribution to Ayurveda. References to sage Shandilya, beyond Ayurveda, appear in the Skanda Purana, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads. This literary study evaluates available Ayurvedic, Upanishadic, and Puranic references concerning Rishi Shandilya and examines his possible contribution to Ayurveda. No direct evidence of an independent Ayurvedic treatise authored by Shandilya is presently available. However, his presence in the Charaka tradition, his association with the early assembly of sages concerned with human disease, and his teachings on disciplined living, Yoga and Brahma-vidya provide an important intellectual context for understanding the holistic foundations of Indian health science. The study concludes that Shandilya's contribution to Ayurveda is best understood as an indirect and interdisciplinary contribution rather than as the authorship of a currently identifiable Ayurvedic compendium.

Keywords: *Brahma, Atma, Vidya*

Introduction :

Brahma-rishi Shandilya was present at the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains, some 5000 years ago, as mentioned in the Charaka Samhita.^[1] He was the son of sage Devala from his wife Ratnamalavati. His grandfather was sage Asita, and his great-grandfather was Maharshi Kashyapa. His Ashrama was initially in Kurukhetra (in modern Haryana state) and later on the bank of the river Narmada (in modern Madhya Pradesh state). He built the *Shandileschwara* temple there, dedicated to Lord Mahadeva. Brahma-rishi Shandilya was *Tapasvi* (Penance observer), *Tejasvi* (Brilliant), *Gyani* (Knowledgeable), *Jitendriya* (having control over senses). He propagated the Brahma philosophy. Brahma-rishi Shandilya learnt Ashtanga Yoga (eightfold Yoga) from the sage Atharva of the Atharvaveda tradition. The Chhandogya Upanishad mentions 'Shandilya Vidya,' in which Brahma-rishi Shandilya teaches that the entire world is Brahma. He explained the procedure of Pradosh Vrata to the king, called Dharmadhwaja. He organised a meeting between the Kanchi king Ravishchandra and the sage Agasti. He also cooperated with the sage Vishwamitra in organising the Yagya for the Ayodhya king Trishanku. He saved the life of a Brahmin named Chand Sharma by telling him an easy way to get rid of his sins. Sage Shandilya attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains some 7000 years ago.^[1] Puranic literature provides further narratives concerning his genealogy, austerities, geographical associations and interactions with other celebrated sages. These accounts should be understood within

the framework of traditional Indian literary history rather than interpreted automatically as independently verifiable historical biography.

The present article therefore attempts to bring together the available references concerning Rishi Shandilya, with particular emphasis on his mention in the *Charaka Samhita*, and to critically evaluate the nature and extent of his contribution to Ayurveda.

Aim :

To study the references concerning Rishi Shandilya in Ayurvedic and allied classical literature and to evaluate his possible contribution to Ayurveda.

Objectives :

1. To identify the reference to Rishi Shandilya in the *Charaka Samhita*.
2. To review the available information regarding his lineage and personality.
3. To study references to Shandilya in the *Upanishads* and *Puranas*.
4. To examine the significance of *Shandilya Vidya* and *Shandilya Upanishad*.
5. To evaluate his possible relationship with the early Ayurvedic tradition.
6. To assess his contribution to the broader Indian concept of holistic health through Yoga, discipline and spiritual knowledge.
7. To identify the limitations of the currently available evidence concerning his direct contribution to Ayurveda.

Material And Method :

The present study is a **literary and conceptual review** based on classical Ayurvedic and Indological literature. Primary and secondary

textual sources concerning Rishi Shandilya. Is reviewed.

The principal sources included:

- *Charaka Samhita*
- *Chhandogya Upanishad*
- *Shandilya Upanishad*
- *Skanda Purana*
- *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*
- *Saur Purana*
- *Vishnu Purana*
- Relevant traditional commentaries and translations

References concerning Shandilya were identified, compiled, compared and critically interpreted. The information was categorized under genealogy, personality, philosophical contribution, Yoga, geographical associations, interaction with other sages and relationship with Ayurveda.

Because the available literature includes both philosophical teachings and Puranic narratives, the information has been interpreted within its textual context. Traditional accounts have not been treated as equivalent to independently established historical evidence.

Review Of Literature :

Family Tree of Rishi Shandilya

As per Saur Purana, due to the auspicious fruit of observing the penance, sage Kashyapa got two sons, viz., 1. Vatsara, 2. Asita. His son Asita married Ekaparna. From this union, they had a son named 'Devala'. Their son, Deval, pleased Lord Shambhu through worship. Deval had a son called 'Shandilya'. Sage Shadilya was the grandson of Sage Kashyapa. [2]

As per the Bramha Vaivarta Purana, Lord Bramha's

son was Pracheta, along with seven other rishis. Pracheta's son was Asit Muni. Asit Muni was childless, so he prayed to lord Shiva and Devi Bhagwati. With their boon, Asita's wife gave birth to the famous sage Devala. This Devala married the king Suyagya's daughter, called 'Ratnamalavati'. [2] Here, Pracheta refers to Kashyapa. The other seven rishis are Vasishtha, Angira, Bhrigu, Pulaha, Pulastya, Atri. [3]

Personality of Shandilya

Mahadeva described Brahma-rishi Shandilya as *Tapasvi* (Penance observer), *Tejasvi* (Brilliant), *Gyani* (Knowledgeable), *Jitendriya* (having control over senses). He propagated Brahma philosophy. [4]

Creation of 'Shandileshwara Shivalinga'

Mahadeva told that Brahma-rishi Shandilya observed great austerity in Prabhas Kshetra (Gujarat) and created the 'Shandileshwara Shivalinga' to the north of the famous Somnath temple. He worshipped that ling for a hundred years. Pleased by the worship and penance of Brahma-rishi Shandilya, Lord Mahadeva appeared before him and blessed him with the desired things and siddhis, such as Anima, Ganima, and others. [5]

Ashrama of Shandilya

When muni Shandilya was young, he resided in a hermitage at Kurukshetra. Brahma-rishi Shandilya created the 'Shandileshwara' Shivalinga where the Shandili and Narmada rivers meet. On the bank of these rivers, there is a beautiful hermitage of sage Shandilya. That place is called as 'Shandilyapura'. [6]

Becoming The Hota (priest) in The

Yagya of Sage Vishwamitra

Sage Vishwamitra was trying to send the king Trishanku of Ayodhya to heaven with his body intact. For that purpose, he organised the *Yagya* (fire ritual). In that *Yagya*, he made Shandilya Muni the Hota (Rigvedi), Maharshi Gautama the Brahma, sage Chaywana the Agnidhra, sage Yagyavalkya the Udgata (Samvedi), sage Jaimini the Pratiharta, sage Galava the Unneta, and sage Pulastya the *Uchhansi*.^[7]

Conversation With Sage Atharva

The discussion between Brahma-rishi Shandilya and Atharva is mentioned in the Shandilya Upanishad. In this Upanishada, there are 3 chapters. The first chapter has 22 khandas. Shandilya Muni requests sage Atharva to explain the *Ashtang Yoga* (eightfold Yoga) on the basis of which one can know the sawrupa of Ama Tatva (The true form of the sole). To this sage, Atharva replied that *Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi are the eight limbs of Yoga*. Further, *Yama* and *Niyama* are of the 10 types. *Asanas* are of 8 types. *Dhyana* is of 2 types. Types of *Yama* are -1. *Ahinsa*, 2. *Satya*, 3. *Asteya*, 4. *Brahmacharya*, 5. *Daya*, 6. *Arjava*, 7. *Kshama*, 8. *Dhairya*, 9. *Alpa Ahar*, 10. *Pavitrata*. Types of *Niyama* are -1. *Tapa*, 2. *Santosh*, 3. *Astikata*, 4. *Dana*, 5. *Ishwar Poojan*, 6. *Siddhant Shrawana*, 7. *Hiya*, 8. *Mati*, 9. *Japa*, 10. *Vrata*. Types of *Asanas* are -1. *Swastika*, 2. *Gomukha*, 3. *Padma*, 4. *Veera*, 5. *Simha*, 6. *Bhadra*, 7. *Mukta*, 8. *Mayura*. After successfully completing the first 3 stages, *Yama, Niyama, and Asana*, one should practice *Pranayama*.

After this, sage Atharva explained the types of Nadis and Vayu moving in it. Later, he explained different mudras and their benefits. Later, he explained the *Brahma-vidya*.^[8]

Shandilya Vidya

There is a reference to 'Shandilya Vidya' in Chhandogya Upanishada, in which Brahma-rishi Shandilya propagates that the entire world is Brahma. The world evolves from Brahma and dissolves into it. Brahma is the initiator of all functions (*Sarva Karma*), all desires (*Sarva Kama*), all odours (*Sarva Gandha*), all tastes (*Sarva Rasa*), Speechless, devoid of any confusion and occupies everything. The soul in the heart (*Hriday Kamala*) is bigger than anything.^[9]

As A Teacher of Vatsya

According to the Chandogya Upanishad, Shandilya was Vatsya's teacher. As per the Vishnu Purana, Indrapramiti's son was Mandukeya (creator of the Mandukya Upanishada). Mandukeya's disciple was Shakalya. Rishi Shakalya had five disciples Viz. 1. **Mudgal**, 2. Gomukha, 3. **Vatsya**, 4. Sahaliya 5. Sharira.^[10]

Saving the Brahmin Chada Sharma

and his family

Once upon a time, a Brahmin called Chanda Sharma, who was living in Chamatkarpura (an ancient city), got addicted to a prostitute at a young age. Once, when he was thirsty, he asked the prostitute for water. In place of water, she gave him the wine. When Brahmin Chanda Sharma drank it, he shouted at her and left. He confessed in the meeting of the Brahmanas that he had drunk the wine unknowingly, for which he wanted atonement. The assembly of Brahmins asked him to drink the

hot ghee. Hearing this, the parents of Chada Sharma said that they would enter the fire to clean the sin committed by their son, and were about to enter the fire, when Brahma-rishi Shandilya appeared there and dissuaded them by saying that, when better options are available, then why such an extreme step is being undertaken. He asked Chanda Sharma to bathe in the Vishnu Ganga, a river there. This will cleanse his sins. The assembly of Brahmins thanked the Brahma-rishi Shandilya.^[11]

Explaining the 'Pradosh Vrata'

To Prince Dharmagupta

Once, the king of Shalva *desha* attacked the Vidarbha king Satyaratha and killed him. The queen of Satyratha fled and saved herself. She was full-term pregnant at that time. On seeing the clean lake, she halted there and gave birth to a child. After delivery, she entered the lake to clean herself, but a crocodile attacked and killed her. The newborn baby was crying loudly, which caught the attention of a Brahmin lady passing by. She adopted that child and raised him with her. Once, she was begging with this child near the temple where sage Shandilya was performing the rituals. On seeing them, Shandilya told the Brahmin lady that the boy is a Kshatriya prince and only due to misfortune, he had to beg with you. His father, the king of Vidarbha, gave up the worship of Lord Mahadeva in Pradosh Kala (evening time) in his earlier birth, when he was king of Pandya *desha* (the region between Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in India). Hence, he not only had to lose the state but also his son. Later, Rishi Shandilya explained the methodology of performing the

Pradosh Vrata to the Brahmin lady who was taking care of Dharmagupta. Accordingly, the prince Dharmagupta performed it. Lord Mahadeva asked the Gandharva king Dravika to help the prince named Dharmagupta by giving him his daughter, Anshumati, as a wife and by providing his army to recapture his state. Accordingly, the things happened, and Dharmagupta regained his state by performing the Pradosh Vrata as guided by the Brahma-rishi Shandilya.^[12]

Organizing the meeting of King Ravishchandra

With Sage Agasti

In the *Swayambhuva Manvantara of Aadi Kalpa, Satyayuga*, a king named Ravishchandra ruled in the lineage of Chandra. He was the king of Kanchi and won over all the kings (*Chakravarti Samrat*). Once, his royal priest, Rishi Shandilya, took him to the Agasti Teertha located on the bank of the river Narmada. He introduced the king to the sage Agasti and asked the sage to guide the king. Sage Agasti asked the king to perform a Yagya in the nearby holy land called 'Ashok Vanika'. Accordingly, the king organised the Yagya there. Rishi Lomash participated in this Yagya along with other rishis, such as Vishwamitra, Bhardwaj, Kashyap, and Bhargava.^[13]

Suggestion To Katyayini (Yagyavalakya's Wife)

By daughter of Sahandilya

Maharshi Yagyvalky had two wives, viz., 1. Maitreyi and 2. Katyayani. He was first married to Maitreyi and then to Katyayani. Both built two lakes at Hatakeshwara in Anarta Desha (a sacred place near Vadnagar in modern-day Gujarat, India). Once Katyayani came out of the hermitage and saw Shandili, the daughter of Shandilya rishi, who was

being praised by her husband, Jaimini, and they were both very happy with each other. Seeing them so happy, she asked Shandili about their secret. Shandili told Katyayini that when she lived in Kurukshetra, the sage Narada visited their home and spoke to her mother about the 'Gauri Vrata,' explaining that one who does it gets a good husband. On sage Narada's suggestion, Shandili performed the 'Panchapinda Gauri Vrata' for one year and obtained an auspicious husband, rishi Jaimini. Returning home, Katyayini too began this Vrata on the third day of the Margasheersha month and continued it for one year. After one year, Katyayini's husband, sage Yagyavalkya, came and took her to his hermitage, where he loved her as he had loved his first wife, Maitreyi.^[14]

Contribution To Ayurveda

There is no evidence of sage Shandilya's direct contribution to Ayurveda. He attended the famous conference held almost 5000 years ago beneath the Himalayan mountains, where sages discussed diseases in society. At this conference, all the sages unanimously selected sage Bharadwaja as their leader to bring Ayurveda from the God-king Indra. After receiving knowledge of Ayurveda from Indra, sage Bhardwaja taught it to all the Rishis and Munis present at the first conference, as mentioned by Acharya Charaka. Hence, like other rishis, sage Shandilya may have created his own treatise on Ayurveda, which is not available today. He explained eight-fold Yoga (*Ashtag Yoga*) for mental health and metaphysical growth.

Observations :

Table No. 1 – Sage Shandilya in a nutshell

1.	Great Grandfather	Bramha
2.	Grandfather	Kashyapa
3	Grandfather	Asita
4.	Grandmother	Ekaparna
5.	Father	Devala
6.	Mother	Ratnamalavati
7.	Father-in-law	Suyagya
8.	Uncle	Vatsara
9.	Cousin brothers	Raibhya, Naidhrevva
10.	Daughter	Shandili
11.	Son in law	Jaimini
12.	Teacher	Atharva
13	Disciples	Vatsya, others
14.	Literature Contribution	Shandilya Upanishada
15	Contemporary sages	Vishwamitra Agasti

Discussion :

The reference to sage Shandilya, apart from Ayurveda, is found in the Skanda Purana, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads. As per the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Lord Brahma's son was Pracheta, along with seven other rishis. Pracheta's son was Asit muni. With their boon, Asita's wife gave birth to the famous sage Devala. This Devala married the king Suyagya's daughter, called 'Ratnamalavati'. From this union, they had a son called 'Shandilya'. Shandilya was a revered sage of the Vedic era. He is the author of the Shadilya Upanishad and the Shandilya Bhakti Sutra. There is a reference to 'Shandilya Vidya' in Chhandogya Upanishada in which Brahma-rishi Shandilya propagates that the entire world is Brahma.

According to him, the world evolves from Brahma and dissolves into it. Lord Mahadeva described Brahma-rishi Shandilya as *Tapasvi* (Penance observer), *Tejasvi* (Brilliant), *Gyani* (Knowledgeable), *Jitendriya* (having control over senses). He propagated Brahma philosophy. According to the Puranas, he was the Shandilya Gotra Pravartaka rishi (the initiator of the Shandilya lineage). According to the Charaka Samhita, Shandilya attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains some 5000 years ago. This not only shows his interest in medical science but also portrays him as caring about mankind's suffering. According to the Skanda Purana, rishi Shandilya laid the foundations of the Shandilyeshwar linga on the banks of the Narmada River.

According to Shandilyopnishada, Shandilya learnt Ashtanga Yoga (eightfold Yoga) from the sage Atharva of the Atharvaveda tradition. According to the Skanda Purana, rishi Shandilya explained the procedure for Pradosh Vrata to King Dharmadhwaja. He helped organise the meeting between the Kanchi king Ravishchandra and the sage Agasti. He also helped the sage Vishwamitra organise the Yagya for the Ayodhya king Trishanku. He saved the life of a Brahmin named Chand Sharma by telling him an easy way to get rid of his sins. According to the Charak Samhita, Shandilya attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains some 5000 years ago. This not only shows his interest in medical science but also portrays him as a caring person concerned for mankind's suffering.

Limitations Of The Present Study:

1. Information regarding Shandilya is scattered across Ayurvedic, Upanishadic and Puranic literature.
2. Different texts provide varying genealogical accounts.
3. Many Puranic narratives belong to traditional sacred literature and cannot be independently verified through modern historical methodology.
4. No independently established Ayurvedic treatise authored by Shandilya is presently available.
5. The exact historical chronology of Shandilya cannot be established solely from traditional references.
6. The relationship between the historical sage Shandilya and later texts carrying his name cannot always be established with certainty.
7. Interpretations connecting his Yoga teachings with modern concepts of mental health should remain conceptual rather than being presented as direct historical equivalence.

Future Scope :

Further research may be undertaken to:

1. Search manuscript repositories for texts or fragments attributed to Shandilya.
2. Examine different recensions of the *Charaka Samhita* for variations in the reading of his name.
3. Compare Shandilya references across Vedic, Brahmana, Upanishadic and Puranic literature.

4. Study the development of *Shandilya Vidya* from early Vedic literature to later Vedantic traditions.
5. Examine the relationship between the Yoga teachings attributed to Shandilya and Ayurvedic concepts of *Sattva*, *Manas*, *Indriya* and *Ahara*.
6. Investigate archaeological and historical traditions associated with Shandilya-related sacred sites.

Explore the possible role of *Mitahara*, sensory regulation and meditation in the development of ancient preventive health concepts.

Conclusion :

Sage Shandilya attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the Himalayan mountains some 7000 years ago and learnt the wisdom of Ayurveda from Rishi Bhardwaja. More details about Acharya Shandilya's contribution to Ayurveda are not available at present.

Rishi Shandilya was an eminent sage of the ancient Indian intellectual tradition whose influence extended across philosophy, Yoga, spiritual discipline and the wider *Rishi-parampara*. His importance to Ayurveda rests primarily on his explicit mention in the *Charaka Samhita* among the sages assembled in the Himalayas to address disease and obtain Ayurvedic knowledge from Indra through Bharadwaja.

This reference links him to the early Ayurvedic knowledge tradition but does not show that he authored an independent Ayurvedic treatise. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to attribute specific Ayurvedic theories or therapeutic practices to him without

additional textual evidence.

His better-preserved intellectual legacy is represented by *Shandilya Vidya* and the Yoga teachings associated with the *Shandilya Upanishad*. His emphasis on ethical conduct, sensory control, moderation in food, breath regulation, concentration, and meditation has considerable conceptual relevance to Ayurveda's holistic orientation.

The available evidence therefore suggests that Shandilya's contribution to Ayurveda should be understood primarily as **an indirect, philosophical and interdisciplinary contribution within the ancient Indian holistic health tradition**, rather than as the contribution of a known independent Ayurvedic physician or author.

His presence in the Charaka assembly is nevertheless significant because it shows that Ayurveda developed and was transmitted within a broad community of sages concerned with the welfare of humanity. In this sense, Rishi Shandilya represents an important link between the traditions of **Ayurveda, Yoga, Brahma-vidya and holistic human well-being**.

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