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An Introduction To Rishi Shukracharya and Evaluation of His Contribution To Ayurveda

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Abstract

Shukracharya was an eminent rishi in the ancient Indian rishi tradition. He was the teacher and guide of the *Daityas* and *Danavas* (demons). His father's name was Kavi. His grandfather was the illustrious sage, Bhrigu. His other name was Ushana. He was also called Kavya. When he came out of lord Shankara's body along with semen, he got the name Shukra. Shukra was earlier married to Daksha Prajapati's daughter, Shanta. Shukra had four sons from Arani. He also had two more sons called Twashtadhara and Atri. All they were brilliant. This Atri created a city called Atripattan in present-day Iran, which is now called 'Atropatan' along the river Atrius (*Puranokta Atri Nadi*). His daughter, Devayani, was married to the famous king Yayati. As per the Mahabharata, sage Shukra was an expert in *Niti Shastra* (Political Science). According to the Jaiminiya Brahmana, sage Shukra resided in the Gandharva *loka*. The ancient Gandharva *loka* was from present-day Pakistan to Iran. After his mother's death at the hands of lord Vishnu, he became a permanent enemy of lord Vishnu. He pleased lord Shiva and obtained the rare '*Mrit Sanjivani Vidya*' (art of reviving the dead persons) from lord Shankara. By virtue of this art, he saved *daityas* and *danavas* from the onslaught of *devas*. He also saved his nephew, Sage Jamdagni, with this art. Despite knowing the fact that his disciple Kacha was the spy sent by the *devas* to obtain the *Mrita Sanjivani Vidya*, he taught it to Kacha.

Keywords: *Brahma, Atma, Vidya*

Introduction :

Sage Shukracharya is a highly regarded ancient Indian sage. In India, Friday is associated with the sage Shukra and is popularly called '*Shukra-wara*'. Sage Shukra was the teacher of the *Danavas* (demons). He is also called '*Danav Guru*'. The reference to sage Brihaspati, apart from Ayurveda, is found in many ancient Indological texts such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and the Upanishads. Sage Shukra was the son of the rishi Brahma and his mother, Divya. He had famous stepbrothers named Chyawana and Richika. Sage Shukracharya rivalled God's teacher, Brihaspati. Sage Shukracharya helped the demons in defeating the gods. He revived dead demons again and again on the battlefield. Sage Shukracharya had a famous daughter called 'Devayani' from his wife Jayanti. Devayani was married to the famous legendary ancient King 'Yayati'. As per the Mahabharata, Sage Shukra was an expert in *Niti Shastra* (Political Science). The assembly of Rishis chose Sage Bharadwaja as leader to bring Ayurvedic knowledge from the land of the *devas* to India. Sage Shukra was also present in this assembly, indicated by the word *anya* (others).^[1] In an Ayurvedic book called Chikitsa-kalika, authored by Tisatacharya, Sage Shukra is credited with the medicinal preparation called '*Graha Shanti Dhoopa*', which acts as an antimicrobial fumigation. Hence, it is essential to explore the life and contributions of Sage Shukra to Ayurveda.

Material & Method :

A literary method of research is presented in this article. All available Ayurvedic and Indological

literature is examined to obtain the most comprehensive information about the sage Brihaspati. The major data sources are the Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the Puranas. The minor data source is Ayurvedic books such as Charak Samhita and the Chikitsa Kalika.

Review Of Literature :

Parents of Shukra And Earlier Name

Sage Bhrigu was the father of the Kavya Shukra Ushna. Sage Bhrigu's wife, 'Divya', was the daughter of demon king Hiranyakashipu. Divya and Bhrigu had two sons, Kavi and Twashta.^[2] Shukra was also called 'Ushana'.^[3]

According to the Mahabharata, Bhrigu's son was Kavi, and Kavi's son was Shukracharya, who later became the teacher of the Daityas and Danavas.^[4]

Expertise of Sage Shukra

As per the Mahabharata, sage Shukra was an expert in *Niti Shastra* (Political Science).^[5]

Residence of Shukra

According to the Jaiminiya Brahmana, sage Shukra resided in the *Gandharva loka*. The ancient *Gandharva loka* was from present-day Pakistan to Iran.^[6]

Education And Teachers of Shukracharya

Ushna's father, Bhrigu, first sent him to Sage Angira for primary education. Sage Angira was his uncle and a close relative. But Angira focused primarily on his son, Brihaspati, and saw Ushna as a potential rival for him. On learning this, Bramharishi Angira showed partiality toward Kavi (Shukracharya, the son of the illustrious Bramharishi 'Bhrigu') in imparting the knowledge, and sage Gautama advised Shukra to approach the

lord Shankara to make him his teacher. He suggested that he take a holy bath in the river Gautami Godavari and please Lord Shankara with pleasing rhymes. Accordingly, he pleased lord Shiva and obtained the rare '*Mrit Sanjivani Vidya*' from lord Shankara. The north bank of the river Gautami, where Shukra pleased lord Mahadeva, came to be known as '*Shukra teertha*' (place of worship of Mahadeva).^[7]

Appointment as Danav Guru **(Teacher of the demons)**

Devas appointed Angira's son, Brihaspati, as their chief priest and guide. Danavas appointed Shukracharya as their chief priest and guide.^[8]

Marriage and Progeny of Sage Shukra

The daughter called 'Arani/Shanti' of Daksha Prajapati from wife Prasuti was married to rishi Shukra.^[9] Shukra had four sons from Arani. He also had two more sons called Twashtadhara and **Atri**. All of them were brilliant.^[9]

Apart from her, Shukracharya also married the daughter of Purandar Indra, named 'Jayanti'. From Jayanti, he had a daughter called 'Devayani'.^[10]

As mentioned earlier, Shukra lived in the region of Gandhara, which spans the area between present-day Pakistan and Iran. Shukra's son, Atri, founded the city of Atripattan, which is now known as Atropatene. It is located in modern-day northwestern Iran and parts of Azerbaijan, in the valley of the Caucasus Mountains. The famous *Pauranik* river Atri, now called 'Autrik', flows from there. This area is surrounded by Mount Damavand, which is a distorted form of the names Demavand and Devasthana. This area is now called Tapuriah, which is another distorted form of

Tapobhumi. This mountain is also called 'Alborz', another distorted name for Elburz. This is situated near the south coast of the Caspian Sea, about 70 km northwest of Tehran in Mazandaran province. It has the famous active volcano, which is visited and studied worldwide. The eruption of this volcano took place approximately 5300 BC (about 7500 years ago). This volcano is associated with the ancient Pauranik Pralaya (dissolution of the geographical area), during which seawater engulfed everything. Aditi's eldest son, Varuna (also called Brahma), removed the water from the land, levelled it, and began reshaping the world.^{[11] [12] [13]}

Cursing The Rapist of His Daughter

In the Satyayuga, King Ekshwaku's son Danda received the kingdom between the Vindhya and Shailam mountains. His capital's name was Madhumanta. He appointed sage Shukracharya as his priest. Initially, he ruled righteously. One day, he went to Shukracharya's pleasant hermitage. There, he saw his daughter Arāja. Seeing her, the king got tempted and asked her to gratify him sexually. She said she was the daughter of an illustrious sage, and if he learned of the king's indecent behaviour, he would certainly curse him. But if at all he wants her, then he can approach her father and possess her as a wife, but he should not rape her forcibly. If the king requests her father, he will oblige. But since the king was under the influence of lust, he was not ready to wait and raped her forcibly and went away. When Shukracharya learned of this terrible act, he cursed King Danda that his kingdom would vanish within seven days,

and it did. The heinous crime occurred in Danadakaranya. He asked his daughter to stay there for a hundred years, observing the penance to cleanse her mind. She obeyed her father's order. Shukracharya left from that place. ^[14]

Losing Mother at The Hands of Lord Vishnu

After Hiranyakashyapu's death, his son Pralhada became king of the demon kingdom. He fought Indra for a hundred years but lost. So he crowned his son Bali on the throne and went to the mountain Gandhamadana (near Badrinath, in present-day Uttarakhand, India) to observe penance. Bali also fought with Indra and the army of devas, but he also lost, and the demons took shelter at Shukracharya's place. Using some mantras, Shukracharya kept the devas away for some time, but felt it necessary to acquire more powerful mantras to protect the *daityas* and *danavas*. Hence, he asked *Danavas* to hold on till he gets proficient in powerful mantras at lord Shiva's residence. After his departure, the *daityas* were again attacked by the *devas*; this time, they took shelter at Shukracharya's mother's residence. She gave them protection. Seeing this, Indra requested lord Vishnu to kill her. Lord Vishnu beheaded the mother of Shukracharya with the wheel. Seeing this, sage Bhrgu became very annoyed and cursed lord Vishnu to be born again and again on earth. Later, he aligned the cut head of his wife and chanted mantras and sprinkled that water on her dead body and revived her successfully with his *Brahma teja*. When sage Shukracharya learned of this incident, he became a permanent enemy of lord Vishnu. ^[15]

Penance To Get Mrita Sanjivani Vidya

When Shukracharya approached Lord Mahadeva for the *Mrita Sanjivani Vidya*, Mahadeva guessed his intentions and, to hinder his penance, suggested the hardest penance: a head-low position for one thousand years. Shukracharya gladly accepted the suggestion and began observing the most severe penance. After a thousand years, Lord Mahadeva, pleased with Shukracharya's penance, granted him the desired boon. ^[16]

Accepting Indra's Daughter Jayanti As Wife

Knowing that Shukracharya is observing the hardest penance, Indra, the king of Devas, sent his daughter Jayanti to distract Shukracharya. Jayanti approached the Shukracharya and started serving him like a wife. She used to bring him scented water, prepare his bed, and give him water for gargling and bathing. She served him patiently for one thousand years. Shukracharya did not respond to her for a thousand years. But after getting the boon from lord Mahadeva, he inquired about her. She spoke about her family, her father, Indra, and her brother, Jayanta. Knowing this, Shukracharya granted her permission to live with him for ten years. Shukracharya took her to the hermitage and did not come out for ten years. Knowing this, the *devaguru* Brihaspati posed as Shukracharya before the *daityas* and misled them. After ten years, when Shukracharya came out and saw his duplicate teaching the demons, he tried to make them aware of it. Still, the *daityas* refused to listen and accepted the duplicate Shukracharya as the original. Hence, Shukracharya cursed them to be defeated. Hearing this, Brihaspati deserted the *daityas* and narrated the things to Indra. Taking advantage of the

opportunity, he attacked the *daityas* and defeated them.^[17]

Reviving Daityas with Mrit Sanjivani Vidya

Once, the demon king Andhaka fought Lord Mahadeva. Rudra-ganas (people of lord Shiva) killed many *daityas*. Hence, Andhaka requested Shukracharya to save them from disaster. Shukracharya revived all the killed *daityas* with the help of Mrita Sanjivani Vidya. Seeing this, Lord Mahadeva got angry and asked his commander, Nandi, to bring Shukracharya to him. Accordingly, Nandi caught hold of Shukracharya and presented him to lord Mahadeva. Lord Mahadeva ingested Shukracharya. There, Shukracharya remained for a long time but could not find a way out. Hence, he began to request Lord Mahadeva. Mahadeva asked him to come through the penis.^[18]

Reason for the name being Shukra

It so happened that sage Ushna had possessed all the wealth of God's treasurer, Kubera, by controlling him through Yogic power. Aggrieved, Kubera complained to Lord Mahadeva about this. Hearing this, Lord Mahadeva got very angry and ingested Ushna. In his tummy, Ushna was wandering here and there but couldn't find a way out. So, he repeatedly requested Lord Mahadeva, very kindly, to bring him out. Lord Mahadeva told him to come out through the penis. Accordingly, Ushna came out through the penis and appeared very bright. Goddess Uma told Lord Mahadeva that since Ushna came through his penis, he is now like his son and deserves to be forgiven. Hence, Lord Shiva had forgiven Ushna. Since sage Ushna came out through the penis like seminal ejaculation, he was called 'Shukra'.^[19]

Other Names of the Shukra

As per the Bramhanda Purana, the teacher of demons (Asur Guru) was also called Kavya and Ushna.^[20]

Saving the life of grandson Jamadagni

When Parashurama and his disciple, Akṛtavraṇa, found mother Renuka, she turned to him and beat her chest twenty-one times, saying that Kartaveerya had killed her husband, Jamadagni. Sage Parashurama resolved to travel the world twenty-one times and annihilate all the Kshatriya kings he could find. When Jamadagni was to be cremated, the Shukra, the grandfather of Jamadagni, arrived on the scene and restored the rishi's life with the *Mṛtasañjīvanī* vidya.^[21]

Teaching Mrita-Sanjivani Vidya to Kacha

Indra appointed Brihaspati as the God's priest. Demons appointed Shukracharya as their priest. Brihaspati and Shukracharya were rivals. Demon teacher Shukracharya learnt *Mritasanjivani Vidya* (the art of reviving the dead) from lord Mahadeva, by virtue of which he used to make any dead person alive. In the war between *the Devas (Gods) and the Danavas (demons)*, Shukracharya could revive dead demons. Still, the Devas' teacher, Brihaspati, could not revive the Gods after they were killed by the Daityas (demons). Hence, *daityas* (demons) became undefeatable. This was a matter of great concern to the Gods. Hence, they approached Brihaspati for the solution. Brihaspati suggested sending a learned rishi to Shukracharya to learn this *Vidya* (art). Gods requested that he send his son, Kacha, to accomplish this mission. Left with no choice, Brihaspati sent his son, Kacha, on this mission. At this point, Kacha's grandfather, Angira,

was very old. Kacha introduced himself to Shukracharya and asked to be accepted as his student. Despite knowing that he is the son of his rival sage Brihaspati, Shukracharya accepted him as his student. Kacha won the hearts of Sukracharya and his daughter, Deayani, with his obedient service. Kacha, by observing celibacy, performed all his dutiful works. However, *Daityas*, when they came to know about the reality of Kacha, killed him thrice. But each time Shukracharya revived him with the effect of Mrita Sanjivani art at his daughter's request. At the final time, *daityas* killed Kacha, burnt his body and mixed his ashes in the alcoholic drink of the Shukracharya. Under the influence of alcohol, Shukracharya failed to identify the trick of the demons. However, having left with no alternative, he taught Mrita Sanjivani art to the Kacha who was in his tummy. Kacha, after learning the art, came out by tearing the tummy of Shukracharya and then revived Shukracharya with the power of Mrita Sanjivani art. After learning this art, Kacha asked permission to go home to Shukracharya, which he granted. In the meantime, Shukracharya's daughter, Devayani, developed love for Kacha, but he refused to accept her love. Hence, she cursed him that as long as he goes, the land will turn into a desert with his feet' touch and the art which he mastered will be useless. Kacha told Devayani that he always treated her like a sister. Hence, cannot marry. But she cursed him unnecessarily and only out of lust. Hence, no Brahmin will marry her, and although the art is useless for him, he will teach it to others who can successfully use it then. Later, Kacha taught this art to the Devas and his father,

Devaguru Brihaspati.^{[22] [23]}

Giving Up Alcoholism & Banning It For Brahmanas

Daityas, when they came to know about the reality of Kacha, they killed him thrice. But each time Shukracharya revived him with the effect of Mrita Sanjivani art at his daughter's request. At the final time, *daityas* killed Kacha, burnt his body and mixed his ashes in the alcoholic drink of the Shukracharya. However, having left with no alternative, he taught Mrita Sanjivani art to the Kacha who was in his tummy. Kacha, after learning the art, came out by tearing the tummy of Shukracharya and then revived Shukracharya with the power of Mrita Sanjivani art. When Shukracharya realised that under the influence of alcohol, he failed to identify the trick of the demons and drank Kacha's ash with the alcohol, he made a strong determination to quit alcohol. He further declared that any Brahmin who will consume alcohol even unknowingly will bear the sin of Brahmahatya, and he will be criticised everywhere.

^[24]

Succumbing To the Wish of The Daughter

Once, Shukracharya's daughter Devayani went with princess Sharmishtha and her friends for a water sport in the garden. While they were all bathing naked, they saw Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati riding on an Ox. In haste, they wore the dresses and ran away. Sharmishtha, by mistake, wore Devayani's dress. Knowing this and left with no dress to wear, Devayani scolded Sharmishtha for this nonsense. In return, Sharmishtha also scolded her and insulted her, calling her the daughter of a beggar and an admirer. After saying so, she pushed

Devayani into the well and ran away. Fortunately, King Yayati was passing by and heard the sound from the well. He threw his turban to Devayani to wrap around the body. She came out of the well with the help of King Yayati. She requested Yayati to marry her. Yayati accepted her request. She went home and narrated the whole incident to her father. Shukracharya got angry and decided to leave the kingdom. When Danav King Vrushaparva learned that their teacher Shukracharya was leaving the kingdom in anger, he feared that Shukracharya might curse him or reduce him to ashes with his power. Hence, he quickly approached Shukracharya and asked him not to leave the kingdom; he was ready to do whatever he demanded. Shukracharya told him of his daughter's wish: wherever Devayani wants to see, princess Sharmishtha as her slave (*Dasi*). With no choice, King agreed.^[25]

Marrying Devayani to King Yayati

When Devayani, Sharmishtha, and their friends were playing in the garden, King Yayati once again came to that area for hunting. He saw Devayani again. Seeing him, Devayani was reminded of the earlier story of how he had rescued her and touched her hand. Devayani asked him about his family. King Yayati said that he is the son of the famous king Nahusha. She asked Yayati to marry her, but He said he was a Kshatriya and could not marry her. But if her father, Shukracharya, agrees, then he is ready to marry her. Devayani was Shukracharya's beloved daughter. She insisted that her father marry her to King Yayati. Accordingly, as per the wish of his beloved daughter, he gave her hand to King Yayati. He also sent Princess Sharmishtha as her

slave, but warned the king that he should never think of possessing Sharmishtha. King Yayati married Devayani with full rituals and went to his capital.^[26]

Shukra Cursing the King Yayati

From Devayani, King Yayati had two sons: viz., 1. Yadu and 2. Turvasu. One day, after her menstruation was over, Sharmishtha approached King Yayati and requested him to gratify her. King Yayati cohabited with her secretly. From Yayati, Sharmishtha had 3 sons, viz. 1. Anu, 2. Drahyu, and 3. Puru. Devayani doubted Sharmishtha's sons, but each time she said they were Brahmins. One day, when the boys were playing, Devayani asked them about their father and mother. They indicated towards Yayati and Sharmishtha. Knowing the reality, she became furious and went to her father with tears in her eyes. Seeing her cry a lot and knowing the truth, Shukracharya cursed Yayati to grow old, and senility immediately overtook him.^[27]

Shukracharya Praising The King

Harishchandra

Sage Vishwamitra tested the dutiful king Harishchandra of Ayodhya very bitterly. Sage Vishwamitra asked King Harishchandra to donate his kingdom and forced him to become a Chandala (a person engaged in low-grade work). He made his wife, Taramati, and son Rohitasva be sold in the human trafficking market. Even after bearing so many atrocities, when Indra blessed King Harichandra, he not only forgave the sage Vishwamitra but also gave credit for his success as a king to the people in the kingdom and said to Indra, if he wants to oblige him, then he will have

to oblige the people in the kingdom also. When Shukracharya learned of this incident, as a poet he composed a laudatory stanza in the fame of King Harishchandra about the importance of forgiveness and charity, which is why King Harishchandra became the king of heaven.^[28]

Shukra Getting Eyes Back

Once, during Lord Vishnu's reincarnation as Vamana, Shukracharya stopped King Bali from giving him the land Vamana wanted. At that time, Lord Vishnu pierced one eye of the sage Shukracharya. Since then, Shukracharya was blind in one eye. Hence, he stood on the banks of the Ganga and prayed to Lord Vamana to forgive him and restore his lost eye. Pleased with his prayer, Lord Vishnu touched the Panchajanya conch to Shukracharya's lost eye, and it was revived.^[29]

Dialogue Between Vritrasura and Shukra

When the Devas defeated the demon king Vritrasura and stripped him of all his luxuries, the Danava Guru (demon teacher) Shukracharya asked why he did not feel bad despite the defeat and the loss of his crowning glory. Demon king Vrittrasura replied that due to the influence of truth, he had gained the knowledge of the entry and exit of souls in this materialistic world. Getting entrapped in desires, souls are born and reborn in various species. Dutiful good deeds give an individual a place in heaven, and sinful deeds land him in hell. Sage Shukra asked Vrittrasura how he could explain all this intelligent knowledge, despite being a demon king and the enemy of the Devas. The Demon King replied that, before capturing the throne of Indra, he performed a long penance and, through it, gained true knowledge. Later, when he

committed atrocities on Devas, his sinful acts led to his downfall.^[30]

Contribution To Ayurveda

Graha Shantikarak Dhoopa

Take the 10 drugs enlisted in the list, mix them, and use them for fumigation (*Dhoopana*) to disinfect the atmosphere. Sage Shukracharya advocates this *Dhoopana*.^[31]

Aushanas Agad

There is one more reference to an anti-poisonous medicinal preparation called 'Aushanas Agad' to the credit of Shukracharya. But its exact reference cannot be found.

Discussion :

Shukracharya inherited the great legacy of a widely respected and famous lineage of Sage Bhrigu. The analysis of Shukracharya's life portrays him as a determined and disciplined person who achieves his objectives. He obtained the method of reviving the dead from Lord Shiva through utmost devotion and commitment to the goal. He served as the guide and consultant to the kingdom of daityas and danavas. Despite knowing that his disciple Kachha is the son of his arch-rival, Brihaspati, Shukracharya taught him the art of reviving the dead. This shows that Shukracharya was the most benevolent and impartial teacher of that era. His love for his daughter, Devayani, reflects a typical father's caring attitude towards his daughter.

His rivalry with Lord Vishnu stemmed from the murder of his mother at the hands of Lord Vishnu. Like all other proud sons, Shukracharya also vowed to take revenge for this heinous, cowardly act. His love and respect for his mother portray Shukracharya as a noble son.

Conclusion :

The textual evidence situates Shukracharya as an important figure in the classical Indic intellectual and medicinal landscape, demonstrating his multifaceted role as a rishi, teacher of the Daityas/Danavas, political strategist (*Nitishastra* expert), and contributor to Ayurvedic practice. The attribution of specific remedies and practices, notably the Graha-Śhanti dhoopa (anti-microbial fumigation) and the Aushanas Agad (anti-toxic preparation), indicates that Shukra's persona functioned as an authorising locus for particular prophylactic and antidotal traditions within the broader Ayurvedic canon. Shukracharya's attributed contributions have heuristic value: they underscore the role of ritualised fumigation and antidotal knowledge in pre-modern disease control and toxicology, and invite re-examination of ritual-therapeutic interfaces in classical medicine. For contemporary practitioners and historians, the *Graha-Śhanti dhoopa* merits ethnobotanical and experimental inquiry to (a) identify component plants, (b) test antimicrobial or fumigant properties, and (c) evaluate safety and applicability in traditional public health contexts. Similarly, investigation of the "Aushanas Agad" tradition could inform historical toxicology studies.

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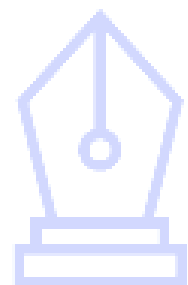
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