PRINCIPLES, METHODS AND IMPORTANCE OF LITERARY RESEARCH IN THE HISTORY OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda has been a developing science since prehistoric era, and it has made significant progress through the ages. The development of Ayurveda was restricted from the 17th century onwards and it remained static since then. The beginning of this century provided new inspiration for its revival. However, the development of Ayurveda received necessary support only after independence. There has been active initiative and effort for the development of Ayurveda in general and research in particular. The emphasis on research methodology has also been given and literary research work in Ayurveda will certainly enrich Ayurveda, bringing out the latent potentialities that are lying dormant and unexplored in its vast literature.

Ayurveda has been a developing science since prehistoric era and it has made significant progress through the ages. Beginning from the scattered references in Vedic literature, it was systematised and well presented in the form of Samhitas like Charaka, Sushruta and Ashtangahridaya, and later followed by creation of Madhava Nidana, Sharangadhara and Chakradatta etc., reflecting the contemporary developments in society, literature and science. The development of Ayurveda was restricted from the 17th century onwards and it remained static since then.

The beginning of this century provided new inspiration for its revival. The institutions for training personnel in Ayurveda were established, which helped in emergence of systematic Ayurvedic education in our country. But, in spite of this development, the research in Ayurveda could not make any significant progress. However, the development of Ayurveda received necessary support only after independence.

Various committees appointed by the State and Central Governments, have all from time to time invariably

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made recommendations and stressed the importance of research in various branches of Ayurveda, with a view to ensure its growth and development. Accordingly research on fundamental doctrines of Ayurveda, literary research, clinical research, drug research, research on dietetics and research on psychological aspects were indentified as broad categories of research in Ayurveda. The Udupa Committee (1958) further examined the scope of research priorities under clinical, literary, chemical, botanical, pharmacognostical and basic principles. In this way, though areas and methods for research were indentified by the various committees, still the need for further discussion on the research methodology has been felt. As such a special session on the subject was arranged by CCRIMH in 1973 and then, a seminar was held at Patna in 1976, under the auspices of the Council of State Boards, and Faculties of Indian Medicine for the discussion on various aspects of Ayurvedic research. One of the subjects for discussion at this seminar was "Literary Research and Collection of source materials".

Thus, there has been active initiative and effort for the development of Ayurveda in general and research in particular, since the continuity of the development of Ayurveda can only be maintained through constant research. The emphasis on research methodology has also been given and literary research has been recognised as an important aspect of any research programme. The literary research involves-the revival and publication of ancient classical literature; collection, compilation and documentation of subject-wise references relating to drugs and diseases from ancient classical literature, lexicographic works, contemporary literature and allied modern sciences. These are the few aspects of literary research work in Ayurveda which will certainly enrich Ayurveda, bringing out the latent potentialities that are lying dormant and unexplored in its vast literature.

Principles of Literary Research:

Like any research work, the literary research work in Ayurveda has also to be based on certain principles such as:

1. Honesty and straight forwardness;
2. Accuracy and exactness in matters of facts;
3. A cautious dealing with the facts without indulging in too hasty comparisons;
4. Rejection of the theory, found to be inconsistent with the facts;
5. Diffusion of truth for the benefit of mankind;
6. Old literature not to be discarded, thinking it useless;
7. Importance to all subjects must be given;
8. In the absence of any definite record of indisputable evidences with regard to the chronology relating to the compilation of any ancient important Ayurvedic treatise, it has to be tried to adhere to the least controversial dates after a careful consideration of the balance of reliable evidences.

Doubt and modesty also have often paved added stimuli to further enquiry and discovery of truth.

**Methodology of Literary Research**: Following methods can be adopted for literary research in Ayurveda.

1. **CRITICAL STUDY OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE, METHODICAL COLLECTION OF VARIOUS REFERENCES, THEIR PROPER CLASSIFICATIONS AND SUBJECTWISE COMPILATIONS OF THE MATERIAL IN THE FORMS OF MONOGRAPHS, REFERENCE BOOKS AND TEXT BOOKS ETC.**

The available Ayurvedic literature needs deep study and compilations on various diseases and their remedies, which would provide rich and ready material to research-workers. Books on technical and scientific terminology, dictionaries and reference-books need to be prepared. There is an urgent need of bringing out Ayurvedic classics with commentaries by famous authors. Preparations of standard text-books for students at all levels and in all subjects is also needed.

2. **COLLECTION AND STUDY OF RARE AYURVEDIC MANUSCRIPTS AND THEIR EDITING:**

There has been revival of interest in ancient Indian literature from the end of 18th century when British orientalists like Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal. It took another half-a-century for European and Indian scholars to realise the great value of Sanskrit manuscripts which will then had been sadly neglected, allowed to be destroyed by insects or vagaries of weather or thrown out as debris or even sometimes used to make a fire. In the middle of the last century when the East India Company or the British Government or their officers like Mckenzie, Taylor, Brown began to send out search parties for the salvage of gradually deteriorating and disappearing manuscripts, pioneering work was done by Rajendra Lal Maitra, Haraprasada Shastry, Burnell, and other scholars. Caland, Cordier, Hoernle and Jolly gave special attention to medical manuscripts and reviewed the discovery of new manuscripts or monographs on medical literature. The publication of Bower Manuscript, Bhela Samhita, Kashyapa Samhita, Kalyana Karaka, Shodhala Nighantu and Shabdachandrika etc. was a great step towards creation of a wider scope for Ayurveda. It is high time that the Government of India, the State Governments, the Universities, the National Academy and the
National Institute of Sciences give high priority not only to the care and preservation of Sanskrit Medical Manuscripts or Medical Manuscripts of other Indian languages but also to their study by competent scholars versed both in Ayurveda and Sanskrit, with a view to prepare descriptive catalogue emphasising the special features of the book with reference to historical value or practice of medicine. Besides, there must be an intensive search from village level to the State level for the manuscripts scattered in different areas particularly in the underdeveloped backward areas, agency tracts, old centres of culture now deserted. This search has to be done not merely through official agencies or circulars, advertisements but mainly through field workers, personal visits or personal appeals to modernised descendents of old families which patronised learning or which produced learned men. It is in this manner that Sarfoji built up a magnificent library at Tanjore which has unique manuscripts. In cases where some families are not prepared to part with their manuscripts arrangements have to be made for getting them copied or microfilmed.

As a first step for a study of medical manuscripts relating to India a list of all medical manuscripts scattered all over India must be prepared and later to be supplemented with the list of medical manuscripts in the various libraries in other countries on the basis of available printed catalogues of manuscripts, reports on the search for manuscripts, epigraphical reports etc. and lists of manuscripts in smaller public and private libraries and universities.

As a second step in this direction, a descriptive catalogue of certain selected medical manuscripts is to be prepared to help the research workers.

Thus, the informations gathered are to be analysed, arranged and published under respective heads and also translated into English and other regional languages to enable a larger number of scholars to undertake research and to utilise the new source materials till now unexplored. In this way a good deal of valuable literature can be compiled with regard to the date and place of writers of medicine, types of original sanskrit treatises, popular compilations copied in different parts of India in various epochs of history, the popularity, or the authority of different medical authors, successive commentaries on great treatises, translations of such treatises and compilations and compendiums in regional languages based on Sanskrit literature. It is in this manner that a correct development of medical literature in India can be postulated on the basis of medical manuscripts in India and abroad.
3. COMPILATION OF MATERIAL ON 
AYURVEDA FROM VEDAS 
BRAHMANIC LITERATURE AND 
MEDIEVAL LITERATURE Etc. AND 
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CON-
TEMPORARY SCIENCE OF 
MEDICINE IN DIFFERENT COUN-
TRIES :

For the elucidation and study of 
Ayurveda we are more or less con-
cerend with Vedic and Brahmanic 
literature, the medieval literature, 
Buddhistic medical literature, notices 
of Chinese, Greek and other foreign 
writers/travellers, contemporary litera-
ture and accounts of contemporary 
events, Chinese and Tibetan records, 
Greek literature, Egyptian medical 
papyri containing accounts of medical 
practice which was contemporaneous 
with the Vedic medicine and inscrip-
tions on stone and copper plates and 
natives chronicles etc. All countries 
near and around India would furnish 
us with valuable contributions towards 
a scholar-like knowledge of Ayurveda. 
Thus, it would be easier for the scho-
lars to undertake research according to 
comparative method—a method which 
when utilised will lead to results 
which will be simply astonishing-
results, which then subjected to the 
critical and scientific methods of 
modern research, will yield a harvest 
of scientific findings not imaginable 
by the workers themselves. The task 
is certainly not an easy one; it will 
take years of study and applications, 
and the cooperation of a host of 
scientific workers. This will prove to 
be a newly-opened mine of scientific 
enquiry. Alchemical experiments did 
not secure the philosophers stone 
which would turn all base metals 
into gold, but to the alchemists we 
owe the science of chemistry which 
is undoubtedly more precious than 
what was the subject of their research. 
Travellers who gathered knowledge 
of plants were herbalists, but the 
science of botany had its origin in 
the rude attempts of such men at 
classification and description of the 
vegetable kingdom. In a similar way, 
we should try to collect folk-medicine 
as it exists in different countries and 
we may collect facts about medical 
practice in different countries for 
detecting resemblance between 
such facts or similarity which may 
exist between apparently dissimilar 
systems of the healing art. We must 
try to give a summary of the results 
achieved by scholars by the compara-
tive study of medical science. This 
will reveal the impact of other science 
on the development of Ayurveda. It 
will also give an account of develop-
ment of Ayurveda during different 
periods in different regions.

In a systematic enquiry into the 
state of medical science among any 
ancient race, it may be pointed out 
that the comparative study of con-
temporary science of medicine in 
different countries is often furnished 
with valuable materials as regards the 
state of medicine in a country, and 
this method has been recommended
for cultivation as one of the source of information for a proper estimate and real value of the knowledge contained in the literature of the period. Comparative mythology and comparative philology by scholars in the field of medical science will lead to interesting discoveries, as one and the same idea might have been conceived or the knowledge of one and the same fact might have been acquired almost simultaneously or at slightly different periods of time by people in different countries in a perfectly independent manner. The evolution of human intellect is known to follow more or less the same pattern, everywhere irrespective of any geographical limitations. Thus, history of medicine is a very fascinating subject and covers a very vast field. Henery, E. Sigerist a well known authority on history of medicine, therefore says; “True History is Always contemporary, history, as Benedetto Croce once said, because it is a contemporary interest that drives a man to consult the past. Medical history is not only history but medicine as well. The medical historian while serving truth as historian, is endeavouring to contribute to the progress of medicine.”

4. COMPIlATION OF BIOGRAPHIES OF GREAT MEN OF AYURVEDA, BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND CATALOGUES OR RARE AND IMPORTANT AVAILABLE LITERATURE OF AYURVEDA.

From the study of biographies of celebrated medical men, we may form an idea of the different lines adopted by them as their hobby. Medicine is not a mere mechanical training but the training in medicine is a liberal education. It develops man’s power in whatever directions these powers are later to be utilised. The study of biographies has been used from time immemorial as an aid to the formation of character by stamping moral impression along with interesting ideas on the minds of students.

5. RESEARCH WORKS AND POSTGRADUATE THESES MUST BE EDITED AND PUBLISHED.

The validity and justification of the Research work and post-graduate theses should pass through the competent Expert Committee before undertaking the final publication. The name of the Committee should be given in the introduction of that work.

6. COMPIlATION AND ORGANISA-TION OF THE LITERATURE OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS IN PROPER AND SYSTEMATIC SEQUENCE.

The number of medical works written during different periods is very large. These works contain all the topics or subjects of Ayurveda, or highly special investigations of single topics e.g. medicine, surgery, diagnosis of diseases; description of hundreds of medicinal plants, minerals, animal substances and
thousands of compound preparations with their therapeutic values and dietetics etc. There are also works on the diseases of horses and elephants. It is only from a diligent subject wise or topic wise research into this literature, that we can expect to become acquainted with the knowledge of Ayurveda. It is natural that, we should take keen interest in the revival of our science of medicine.

Literary research thus, with its vast field is very important for the compilation of history of Ayurveda. The history of medical literature forms a very large part of medical history. If any standard book on history of medicine is opened, it may be seen in some parts as if it were not merely a history of books, but a small part of medical activity through all the ages. In every department of human culture a survey of its historical development is essential. This is especially as in case of medicine, if we are to appreciate fully its present status and seek some guidance as to its future line of advancement.

The task before us, therefore, today is to integrate aid learning with the new scientific ideas. Evaluation of past medical knowledge in the light of modern scientific methods is very essential and is bound to yield good results. Exploration of this literature can give many informations which will prove to be very useful for the progress of Ayurveda in future, as Sir Winston Churchill had once said “The longer you can look back, the further you can look forward”.
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पूर्वांतिहासिक काल से आयुर्वेद एक विकासशील विज्ञान रहा है तथा समय के साथ २ इसने महत्वपूर्ण प्रगति भी की है। १७ वीं शताब्दी से आयुर्वेद का विकास एक प्रकार से हुआ गया था जिसके कारण तब से यह स्थिति रहनी थी। इस शताब्दी के प्रारम्भ के साथ इसके पुनर्नवाचन रूप में नयी प्रेरणा जागृत हुई। वास्तव में आयुर्वेद के विकास के लिये आवश्यक प्रोत्साहन स्वतंत्रता प्राप्ति के प्रमुख ही मिला। आयुर्वेद के विकास के लिये सामान्यतया तथा इसमें अनुसंधान के क्षेत्र में विशेषतः पहल की गई। अनुसंधान पद्धति पर भी विशेष ध्यान दिया गया था तथा वाणिज्य अनुसंधान को किसी भी अनुसंधान विषयक कार्यक्रम के लिये एक महत्वपूर्ण अंग के रूप में मान्यता प्राप्त हुई। आयुर्वेद के विशाला वाणिज्य में प्रयुक्तावस्था में तथा बिना खोज के पहली भांतिक शक्तियों को व्यक्त करके यह वाणिज्य अनुसंधान कार्य आयुर्वेद को निश्चित रूप से समृद्ध करेगा।