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# On the Concept of Etiology in Ayurveda

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## 【要旨】

「アーユルヴェーダ」とは、単なるインド式オイルマッサージを指すのではなく、もともと「医学」を意味する言葉である。アーユルヴェーダ文献には、病気や不調の治療法はもちろん、予防のために、その原因についても詳細に書かれている。アーユルヴェーダ文献の中で挙げられている病気の原因は様々である。インド医学では、ヨーロッパと異なり3つの体液（風、胆汁、粘液）が体内を巡ると考えるが、体液の乱れはそれ自体が身体の不調であると同時に、病気の原因ともなる。また、主な病気の原因として3つが知られている：五感と対象の不適切な結合、的確な判断力の阻害、変化（季節）であるが、これら3つには、それぞれ、過多、過小、誤用の3つの性質がある。さらに、カルマ（前世の行い）や、比較的后代の理論であるアーマ（胃の中の未消化の食物）なども病気や不調を引き起こす要因と見なされている。本論文では、チャラカ、スシュルタ、ヴァーグバタが著した初期アーユルヴェーダ文献を中心に、こうした病気の原因が各文献においてどのように説明されているかを論じた。

## Introduction

The term *āyurveda* has been well known as sesame oil massage to be practiced at aesthetic salons since the end of last century. It is true that sesame oil massage is part of Ayurvedic treatment, but the original meaning of *āyurveda* is something else: this Sanskrit word is a Tatpuruṣa compound of two nouns, *āyus* 'life' or 'health' and *veda* 'knowledge' to mean 'the science of health or medicine'<sup>(1)</sup> or medical science. Ayurvedic texts elaborate on not only treatment of disorder but also how to prevent disease, expounding what may cause ailments.

It is repeatedly suggested in Ayurvedic texts that, to stay healthy, one should do every effort to prevent diseases according to the nature of the cause of the

disease one suffers from.<sup>(2)</sup> This paper is intended as an investigation of the possible causes of disease in Ayurveda, referring to original Sanskrit medical literature.

There are many factors that are supposed to cause ailments. The imbalance of humours (*doṣavaiṣmya*), which is itself an ailment; overuse, underuse and abuse of the three fundamental causes of diseases, namely the inappropriate conjunction of senses with their objects (*asātmyendryārthasamyoga*), the violation of good judgement (*prajñāparādha*) and the change of the seasons (*pariṇāma*); undigested food (*āma*); action good or bad, done in one's previous life (*karma*) — these are all counted as causes of illness in Ayurveda.<sup>(3)</sup>

In this paper I refer to the three Ayurvedic texts known as the 'great three', namely the *Carakasamhitā* (dated between the first and the fifth centuries),<sup>(4)</sup> the *Suśrutasamhitā* (dated between the fourth and the sixth centuries) and the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* of Vāgbhaṭa (probably about 600 A.D.), all of which form the early Ayurvedic texts.

## 1. Imbalance of the three humours

In Ayurveda diseases are often connected with the *doṣas* or humours. Three humours are known in Ayurvedic texts: *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (bile) and *śleṣman* or *kapha* (phlegm). They do not do any harm nor cause ailments unless they are irritated, imbalanced (*doṣavaiṣmya*) or in an improper state.

Vāgbhaṭa in his *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* expounds the nature and action of the three humours both in their natural state and when they are either increased or attenuated (sū. 11). Corrupt humours corrupt the *dhātus* or body tissues together with the savours, and consequently there arise diseases (sū. 11). Otherwise they help the body in many ways. The *Suśrutasamhitā* elaborates upon the diseases caused by the irritated winds<sup>(5)</sup> after explaining how these winds work in their natural state (ni. 1). According to the *Carakasamhitā* (sū. 7.39-41), which tells us about the balance and imbalance of the humours, those people who have equal amount of bile, wind and phlegm from the time of conception are, on the one hand, free from disease. On the other hand, those who are seen to be windy, bilious or phlegmatic always suffer from ailments.

The ways to get rid of the excess humours prescribed in Ayurvedic texts such as vomiting, oiling and massage seem to be the means to clean up the body system so that it can remove unwanted humours.

As mentioned above, the humours do not cause disease if they are in their own proper location, not irritated, not increased nor decreased; on the contrary,

they sustain body. The body tissues and the savours are affected by the humours and the humours are affected by some other factors. The imbalance of humour (*doṣavaiṣaṃya*) is itself in a way a disease. For instance, the accumulation of wind may cause ‘emaciation, blackening, a desire for heat, trembling, retention of the faeces’<sup>(6)</sup> and so forth (the *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdayasaṃhitā* sū. 11).

## 2. Three fundamental causes of disease

There are three fundamental causes of disease: *asātmyendryārthasaṃyoga*, *prajñāparādha*, and *pariṇāma*. Each one of the three fundamental causes is of threefold nature: *atiyoga* (excessive use or overuse), *ayoga* or *hīnayoga* (non-use or underuse), and *mithyāyoga* (abuse). The *Carakasamhitā* (sū. 11) elaborates on the triad of causes of disease, each subdivided into three.

### 2. 1. *Asātmyendryārthasaṃyoga*

The term *asātmyendryārthasaṃyoga* signifies ‘inappropriate (*asātmya*)<sup>(7)</sup> conjunction (*saṃyoga*) of the five sense faculties<sup>(8)</sup> (*indriya*) with their objects (*artha*)’. *Asātmyendryārthasaṃyoga* is the doctrine of how the senses work; if a sense faculty is connected with its object inappropriately, it makes one ill. The inappropriate conjunction of each sense faculty is threefold as mentioned above. For example, to see exceedingly strong light is counted as overuse of the faculty of sight. Underuse of this faculty is not to see anything at all. To see something horrible is abuse of the faculty of sight. All of these will cause illness.

### 2. 2. *Prajñāparādha*<sup>(9)</sup>

The term *prajñāparādha* signifies ‘crime against wisdom’, ‘lapse in judgement’ or ‘violation of good judgement’. Action counted as *prajñāparādha* is of three kinds: ‘the use of speech, mind or body’<sup>(10)</sup> (the *Carakasamhitā* sū. 11.39), and each kind of *prajñāparādha* is subdivided into three, namely *atiyoga*, *ayoga* or *hīnayoga*, and *mithyāyoga*.

Dasgupta (1932: 416) gives examples of actions that may be counted under *prajñāparādha*, which include ‘to set things in motion, to try to stop moving objects, to let the proper time for doing things pass by’, and his listing goes on. The examples of abuse of speech given by the *Carakasamhitā* include ‘betrayal, lying, inappropriateness, quarreling’<sup>(11)</sup> (sū. 11.39).

The *Carakasamhitā* explains how to abandon bad habits to which one is used to and to cultivate a good practice (sū. 7.37-38):

‘The sequence should consist of a quarter portion of the two when there is increase [of good habit] and decrease [of bad habit]. It should be separated by one day; after that in the same way [separated by] two [days] and [then] three days. The faults that have been diminished gradually become non-reproducible; the virtues that have been accumulated gradually become unshakeable.’

According to the *Carakasamhitā* (sū. 7.51), good judgement is violated in the external diseases that arise from possession, poison, wind, fire, fighting and so forth.<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore, one should give up the violation of judgement and follow the right conduct in order to prevent the external diseases (sū. 7.53-54). Thus *prajñāparādha* as an etiological integrity serves as a fundamental moral cause. With this notion one is in some sense responsible for physical ailments that one suffers from. This idea is clearly stated in the *Carakasamhitā* (ni. 7.22): one should think himself alone as the cause (*karṭṛ*) of his happiness and misery.

In the *Carakasamhitā* (vi. 3) the cause of the outbreak of catastrophic epidemics is improper behaviour rooted in *adharma*,<sup>(13)</sup> which is interpreted as demerit, commission of sins or transgression of righteousness:

When the chief persons if a country, city or locality transgress the righteous course and lead the people in an unrighteous manner, the people also in their conduct continue to grow vicious and sinful. And, as a result of the misdeeds of the people of the locality, the gods forsake that place, ... and epidemics break out.<sup>(14)</sup>

According to Weiss (1980: 115), *prajñāparādha* is the source of both *adharma* and *asatkarman*, which cause catastrophe. Thus *prajñāparādha* is not only the cause of personal ailments but also the causative factor of the outbreak of epidemics.

### 2. 3. *Pariṇāma*

The term *pariṇāma* signifies ‘change’, standing for season (*kāla*). *Atiyoga* of a particular season is the excessive appearance of the normal features of the season; *ayoga* is the non-appearance of the normal features; *mithyāyoga* is the appearance of features that should belong to another season.

In the case of one of these, one should behave appropriately for the season. For instance, one should keep warm if it is excessively cold for winter (*atiyoga* of winter). Such treatment is termed *viparītōpāsana* ‘opposite (*viparīta*) behaviour’<sup>(15)</sup>

(*upāsana*)’ in the *Carakasamhitā*. According to this notion of treatment by opposites, one should behave in a way that is contradictory to the particular condition, in other words, one should counteract it.

### 3. *Āma*

Besides the three fundamental causes of disease, there are still some other causes, and *āma* is one of them. The doctrine of *āma* is a later idea that appears in the *Āyurvedasūtra* written by Yogānandanātha in the sixteenth century.<sup>(16)</sup> According to this doctrine, it is *āma*, something ‘row’ or ‘undigested’ in the stomach that causes disease. The unprocessed food becomes bad and works like a poison, and causes every problem. Indeed the later tradition often focuses on *āma* or crude matter as the main cause of disease.

Before the *Āyurvedasūtra*, the *Śārṅgadharasamhitā*, which probably dates back to the eleventh century,<sup>(17)</sup> refers to *āma*<sup>(18)</sup> as one of the factors that makes the pulse heavier (1.3.):

‘A weak digestive fire or diminished body tissues make the pulse even more feeble. ... when it has crude matter in it, it gets heavier and heavier’.<sup>(19)</sup>

The term *āmaya*, which is a derivative from *āma*, is known to have been used to denote disease even in early Vedic literature such as the *Śathapata Brāhmaṇa* (13, 3, 8, 4.3.)<sup>(20)</sup> and also in early medical literature such as the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* (e.g. sū. 58.13).<sup>(21)</sup> Nevertheless the doctrine of *āma*, which must be a very old idea,<sup>(22)</sup> never formed the central idea of the Ayurvedic texts until the sixteenth century.

### 4. *Karma*<sup>(23)</sup>

According to Leslie (1996: 11), the *dharmaśāstra* texts clearly say that physical problems are the result of bad *karma*. In this context the effect of *karma* is immutable. According to Dasgupta (1932: 402-3) and Weiss (1980: 90-113), Caraka redefined the concept of *karma* so that he could avoid the conflict between the ‘deterministic implication’ of the *karma* doctrine and the medical efficacy. Here the efforts of virtuous conduct can amend the fruits of *karma* unless it is extremely strong; the traditional view that only the fruits of unripe *karma* are to be destroyed by true knowledge is not followed by Caraka.

According to Weiss (1980: 109), *karma* serves a dual function as a causative

factor in the Ayurvedic etiology; *karma* is not only the cause of the ‘diseases that do not fit the recognisable *doṣa* pattern, but also the cause of ‘those disorders that do fit the patterns’ but resist treatment<sup>(24)</sup> because such ‘resistance is itself pathognomic’.

## 5. *Karma* and *prajñāparādha*

It seems that one of the most remarkable characteristics of the Ayurvedic etiology is the notion of etiological integrity, which is developed in the *Carakasamhitā*. This notion is represented by *prajñāparādha*, violation of good judgement. By introducing the concept of *prajñāparādha* as a causal factor in etiology and emphasising its moral nature, Caraka ‘redefined’ (Weiss 1980: 110) the doctrine of *karma* without rejecting it as a cause of suffering. The shift from *karma* to *prajñāparādha* seems to reflect the notion that one is responsible for one’s own suffering both here and hereafter.

## 6. Other causes of disease

There are some other causal factors of ailments counted in Ayurvedic texts. Suśruta includes demonic possession which is in some sense a counterpart of Caraka’s *prajñāparādha*. Caraka advises us not to suppress natural urges such things as born of urine, faeces, semen, wind, vomiting, sneezing and so forth (sū. 7.3-25) while he tells us to suppress urges of actions rash and dishonourable conduct.<sup>(25)</sup>

## Conclusion

In Ayurvedic texts quite a few factors are counted as causes of illness. The three humours — wind, bile, and phlegm — play a very important role in the body: they help the body in many ways, but once irritated or imbalanced, they will cause illness. Among the other causes of disease explained in this paper, *prajñāparādha* ‘violation of good judgement’ and *karma* are both somehow connected with traditional Indian ethics.

## Notes

(1) Monier-Williams 1979: 148c.

(2) E.g. the *Carakasamhitā* sū.7.26, 54:

‘One desirous of his own good here and hereafter should suppress these urges of actions

rash and dishonourable relating to mind, speech and body'. (sū. 7.26)

'... A wise man should do as soon as possible that which he observes to be good for him'.

(ibid. 54)

- (3) C.f. Surendra and Prasad 2013. They also enumerates and explains causes of disease in Ayurveda, the humours in particular, with special reference to Western medicine.
- (4) According to Wujastyk (1998: 39), the only external evidence for the date of Caraka is the mention of a physician named Caraka in texts of late fifth century, which associates Caraka with Kaniṣka.
- (5) Five kinds of winds are enumerated by him (Su. ni. 1.12): *prāṇa*, *udāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, and *apāna*. Wujastyk (1998: 162) interprets them as fore-breath, up-breath, mid-breath, intra-breath and down breath respectively.
- (6) Wujastyk 1998: 278.
- (7) *Asātmya* is opposite to *sātmya*, which means 'affinity', 'appropriateness'. That which is *sātmya*, which may be either activities, food, sensations, or experiences, is something that one can always do and always does one good, but it must be in accordance with one's constitution (*prakṛti*) and seasons.
- (8) The five sense faculties are as follows: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching.
- (9) According to Weiss (1980: 112), while the *Carakasamhitā* elaborates on *prajñāparādha* as one of the three fundamental causes of disease, both the *Suśrutasamhitā* and the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* lack the concept of *prajñāparādha*.
- (10) Wujastyk 1998: 68.
- (11) ibid.: 69.
- (12) The mental defects such as envy, grief, fear, anger, pride and hatred are also caused by the *prajñāparādha* (the *Carakasamhitā* sū. 7.52).
- (13) Weiss 1980: 113-15, Dasgupta 1932: 408-9.
- (14) Dasgupta 1932: 409.
- (15) Or, regimen or practice.
- (16) Jolly 1951: 185.
- (17) Meulenbeld 1974: 428.
- (18) Vāgbhaṭa (probably about 600 A.D.) also mentions *āma* in his *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* (sū. 13.25, 27).
- (19) Wujastyk 1998: 315.
- (20) According to Böhntlingk and Roth (1868), *āmaya* is used only at the end of a compound.
- (21) Böhntlingk and Roth 1868. According to them, the *Suśrutasamhitā* uses this word to mean disease in five places.
- (22) This idea is also found in Medieval Europe. Thus Ayurveda and classical Greek medicine have this doctrine of 'undigested food' in common.
- (23) While the *Carakasamhitā* counts karma to be a causative factor of disease, Suśruta does not include karma in his list of causes of disease in 1.24 (Weiss 1980: 93).
- (24) Cf. the *Carakasamhitā* śā.1.117: diseases born of karma destroy (*ghnāḥ*) treatment and go to the state of pacification only after the fruit is exhausted.
- (25) Cf. Weiss 1980: 110.



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**Sanskrit texts and translations**

*Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasaṃhitā*

*Aṣṭāṅgahrdayam, śrīmadvāgbhaṭṭaviracitam, śrīmadaruṇadattaviracitayā 'sarvāṅgasundarākhyā' vyākhyayā hemādriprāṇitayā 'āyurvedarasāyanāhvayā' tīkayā ca samullasitam ... Aṅgā moreśvara 'uṇṭe, Kṛṣṇaśāstrī Navare, ityetaiṣca pūrvam saṃskṛtam*. Reprinted. Varanasi 1995.

*Carakasamhitā*

*The Charakasamhitā of Agniveśa, Revised by Charaka and Dridhabala with the Āyurveda-Dīpikā*

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*Suśrutasamhitā*

*Suśrutasamhitā, śrī Ḍalhaṇācāryaviracitayā nibandhasaṃgrahākhyavyākhyayā nidānasthānasya śrīgayaḍāsācāryaviracitayā nyāyacandrikākhyapañjikāvyākhyayā ca samullasitā ... Ācāryopāhevena trivikramātmajena yādavaśarmaṇā ... saṃśodhitā*. Ed. Trikamji. Fifth reprint. Varanasi 1992.