

# The Concept of Surgery in Ancient India with Special Reference of *Suśruta Saṁhitā*

Submitted by-

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## Abstract

Āyurveda is the only known method of treatment that has helped in sustaining the health of the Indian people traditionally for over thousands of years. Every nation, has its own traditional method of treatment. These traditional methods of treatment take care of their overall health i.e., physically, mentally and spiritually. Āyurveda is the root treatment method in the field of veterinary medicine also, and hence it is evident that basic Āyurvedic principles are effective for all human beings. The Vedas depict various treatment methods, these methods are shown to adopt by Aśvindevas, Lord Indra etc. For their awe inspiring treatment methods described in the *R̥gveda* are vague. The methods adopted to rejuvenate life, eyesight, hearing, youth etc. are still undefined and unattainable to the basic human knowledge. Indian medical science is popularly known as Āyurveda which means 'the Veda of life.' The beginning of medical science goes back to the age of Vedas. The Vedic sages, who wanted to live for hundred full years with prosperity and good health, developed a holistic approach in the field of healthcare and medical systems, which emphasizes the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of a human being. Āyurveda means the science of life, the origin of most forms of natural and alternative medicine. It is inclusive of *Āchāra* (the life style), *Vicāra* (the thinking process) and *Āhāra* (the dietetics).

## Introduction:

Āyurveda is divided into eight main branches such as *Śalya tantra* (major surgery), *Śālākya tantra* (minor surgery), *Kāya cikitsā* (treatment of diseases of the body), *Bhūtavidyā* (demonology), *Kumārabhṛtya* (paediatrics), *Agadatantra* (toxicology), *Rāsāyana* (elixir) and *Vājīkaraṇa tantra* (aphrodisiac). Physiology, Pathology, Material Medication, Therapeutics, Paediatrics, Hygiene, Dietetics, the science of pulse, Veterinary science, the treatments of elephants and horses, cattle, ornithology etc. were the different branches of Āyurveda developed in Ancient India. Atreya, Hārīta, Kāśyapa, Agniveśa, Bhela and Jīvaka are the ancient scholars, who are named by traditions. The Indian medicine is the *Caraka Saṁhitā* of Caraka in the first century A.D. Caraka, Suśruta and Vagbhata are prominent contributors to the Āyurvedic literature. *Suśruta Saṁhitā* of Suśruta, *Astaṅgaśārīram* of Vāgbhata, *Mādhavanidānam* of Mādhavakara, *Āyurvedadīpikā* of Cakrapānidatta are some other important works in this field. Āyurveda has a well developed school of surgery. Suśruta was most probably the first surgeon in the world to deal systematically, exhaustively and elaborately with the entire subject of surgery

including gynaecology, obstetrics, eye diseases, plastic surgery, artificial limbs etc. Surgical instruments are also described. Vagbhata had classified diseases into seven distinct groups. He has given a complete list of various diseases. Āyurvedic teachings were recorded as sūtras, succinct poetical verses in Sanskrit, containing the essence of a topic and acting as aide's memoire for the students. Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, reflects the philosophy behind Āyurveda and the depth within it. Sanskrit has a wealth of words for aspects within and beyond consciousness. The very word *Āyurveda* means superior knowledge about *Āyusa* which actually means the state of integration of the physical body consisting of the five sensory organs, the five organs of action, the mind and the invincible life force, which is called *Prāṇa* by Indians.

*Āyurasmin vidyatenenavayur vindati ityayurvedah*

The above definition of Āyurveda expressly implies that it not only helps in the amelioration of diseases but generates in the body sufficient immunization mechanism for preventing their resurgence, thereby making the man stronger, better and healthier. Such a thing is possible in Āyurveda because it identifies the human body with nature through the Pañcabhūtas. No other system of medicine has this dual advantage, which makes Āyurveda a unique prescription for a completely disease free society.

The *Suśruta Samhitā* is acknowledged as one of the greatest of its kind in Sanskrit literature; and is especially important from the surgical point of view. The glory of first transforming the art of surgery into a practical science, during the remote antiquity, must go to Suśruta, the author of the original *Suśruta Samhitā*. There are so many references in the Vedas regarding the remarkable surgical techniques of the celestial physicians the Aśvin twins. When Vispala lost her leg in a battle, they made an artificial leg with iron and fitted it to her. Aśvin fitted iron legs to Vispala, daughter of the king Khala and made her fit for the battle.

### **Schools of Surgery in Ancient India:**

Tradition traces medicine from a mythical, through a semi- mythical, to a historical beginning. According to this tradition, Indra taught the science of medicine to Atreya and the Science of surgery to Dhanvantari. This may be taken to understand that Atreya, the physician, and Suśruta, the surgeon were understood to be the first founders in their respective departments of medicine as a science. Dhanvantari taught surgery to six disciples: Aupadhenava, Aurabhra, Pouskalavata, Gopuraraksita, Bhoja, and Suśruta, each of whom wrote a *tantra* on surgery. These tantras constitute the earliest medical literature and formed the basis of teaching in the medical schools. Caraka refers to the existence of various schools of medicine and various treatises on medicine before his time. Mentioning that various treatises on the profession of physician were in circulation, he then discusses the essentials of a good treatise on medicine. The origin of Āyurveda is related by Dhanvantari to Suśruta. The other surgeons and tantras of Dhanvantari schools or *Śalya tantra* are: *Suśruta tantra*, *Pauṣkalāvata tantra*, *Vaitarṇa tantra*, *Bhūja tantra*, *Karavīra tantra*, *Kapila tantra*, *Gopurarakṣita tantra*, *Bhālulukīya tantra*, *Aupadhenava tantra*, *Aurabhra tantras* and *Gautama tantra*. On the other hand Surgeons and tantras of Sālākya departments are: *Nimi tantra*, *Videha tantra*, *Gārgya tantra*, *Gālavya tantra*, *Satyāki tantra*, *Karala tantra*, *Bhadra Śaunaka tantra*, *Cakṣuṣya tantra* and *Kṛṣṇtreya tantra*.

Āyurveda is a subsidiary branch of the Atharvaveda. According to the legends it was composed in one hundred thousand śloka and a thousand chapters, by Brahma before the creation of man. In consideration of the short lives and the limited intellectual capacity of human beings, he divided it into eight chapters, viz., Śalya tantra, Śālākya tantra, Kāya cikitsā, Bhūta vidyā, Kumārabhṛtya, Agada tantra, Rāsāyana and Vājīkaraṇa tantra. Now for the good of mankind it is my duty to impart this knowledge to those who seek it in this world.

Both Caraka and Suśruta describe Āyurveda as an *upahga* or an upaveda connected with the Atharvaveda: and acknowledge it as the source of their medical knowledge. So Āyurveda must have been in existence prior to the establishment of the schools of Atreya and Suśruta.

### Suśruta's Concept of Surgery:

Suśruta was the great sage surgeon, philosopher and teacher of Ancient India. He is renowned all over the world for his contribution to surgery in general and plastic surgery. His contribution to surgery is reviewed in this paper. The Golden Age of surgery in ancient India rests largely on the accomplishments of Suśruta. His monumental treatise on surgery, *Suśruta Samhitā* established him as the Father of Indian surgery. He was the first surgeon to systematize surgery by dividing it into separate fields. He is known as the originator of plastic surgery, cataract operation, laparotomy, and vesicle lithotomy. Suśruta's fame rests for the most part on the famous compilation known in Sanskrit as the *Suśruta Samhitā*, or, the collection of Suśruta. He is renowned all over the world for his contribution to surgery in general and plastic surgery in particular rhinoplasty. Suśruta's fame rests for the most part on the famous compilation known in Sanskrit as the *Suśruta Samhitā*. The collection of Suśruta is existed almost two millennium ago. In its day was almost certainly the most advanced school of surgery in the world. There is no agreement on this point Suśruta's time has long been a controversial subject among many medical historians. The date has never been definitely set for lack of direct evidence. The original autographic manuscript of *Suśruta Samhitā* has not survived. Extant are only copies and revisions of revisions. One of the most important documents in connection with ancient Indian medicine is the Bower manuscript, housed in the Oxford University library. Because many later Vedic hymns are ascribed to Suśruta, it follows that he must have flourished during the latter part of the Vedic age, which would place him around 1000 B.C. Hoernle contends that a larger portion of the Atharvaveda admittedly belongs to a period as early as 1000 B.C. since the hymn in question is included in the older portion. Johnston Saint suggests that Suśruta was a contemporary of Buddha (600 B.C.) because of the style of language used. The treatise compiled by Suśruta, the various commentaries on it by different authors and other related literature are used as primary sources. His conception of surgical instruments, the description of their quality, methods of manufacture and their usage are very unique, as there were no earlier comprehensive descriptions of similar surgical instruments by any surgeon, not only in India but also the whole world. Suśruta was perhaps the first surgeon in the world to describe different types of surgical instruments including endoscopes.

**Suśruta Samhitā:**

*Suśruta Samhitā* is mainly devoted to surgery. It also includes medicine, pathology, anatomy, biology, ophthalmology, hygiene etc. Suśruta attempted to arrange systematically experiences of older surgeons, and to collect scattered facts about medicine into a workable series of lectures or manuscripts. Suśruta divided his *Samhitā* into six parts, covering all the branches of medicine, including hygiene, midwifery, ophthalmology, toxicology, psychosomatic ailments etc. Suśruta considers surgery the first and foremost branch of medicine and states: 'Surgery has the superior advantage of producing instant effects by means of surgical instruments and appliances.' Hence, it is the highest in value of all the medical tantras. It is eternal and a source of infinite piety, imports fame and opens the gates of heaven to its votaries. It prolongs the duration of human existence on earth and helps men in successfully fulfilling their missions and earning a decent competence in life. The *Suśruta Samhitā* pays special attention to surgery. The *Suśruta Samhitā* is in two parts, the *Purva tantra* in five sections and the *Uttara tantra*. The work primarily deals with Śalya and Śālakya, two of the eight divisions of Āyurveda. As defined in the *Suśruta Samhitā*, Śalya treats of the extraction of arrows and other foreign bodies from wounds caused by them. It also teaches the use of blunt instruments, cutting instruments, together with the diagnosis and treatment of inflammation. Śālakya treats of diseases of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and other parts of the body above the clavicle. Thus, the *Suśruta Samhitā* is the most important source of information on surgery in ancient India. The whole *Samhitā*, devotes itself to the science of surgery and does not fail to include the salient portions of other disciplines too. The succinct and sombre style and the overall superiority of the work primarily deal with Śalya and Śālakya, two of the eight divisions of Āyurveda. As defined in the *Suśruta Samhitā*, Śalya treats of the extraction of arrows and other foreign bodies from wounds caused by them. It also teaches the use of blunt instruments, cutting instruments, together with the diagnosis and treatment of inflammation. Śālakya treats of diseases of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and other parts of the body above the clavicle. Thus, the *Suśruta Samhitā* is the most important source of information on surgery in Ancient India.

**Conclusion:**

The modern surgery has developed very much and we should not forget that Suśruta had attained so much of perfection even in that time when the rest of the world had not known even what surgery was. East has to learn much from the West, but the West too may have something to acquire from the East. With the facilities available to us must try to revive the Ancient glory of the art and science of surgery, so that it may come up again and serve the suffering humanity as it did before. The interest of Āyurveda has significantly increased in the modern period. Āyurveda is of great significance even during these times. Almost all the surgeries that are done in modern surgery (allopathic) can be done by Ayurvedic surgeons, but their major obstacle is the legal restrictions due to pre-surgery Anesthetics. Āyurvedic surgeons from states like Karnataka, Maharashtra etc., conduct amputation surgeries such as Hernioplasty, Hernioraphy and Appendicitis etc. Even during these times, whereas only piles surgery is done in the state of Kerala. IRS and Chryotherapy are the only surgeries for piles that are conducted here. These do not come under the definition of surgery laws as; these are done under the principles of Physics. It can be observed that the basic principles and systems that were suggested

by Suśruta, are still being followed by the modern Allopathic Surgeons during pre surgery preparations. In ancient days Triphala liniment was applied on the area where the surgery was being done and wiped with linen, whereas today, antiseptics are applied and wiped with cotton. The softer spot was chosen for conducting surgery from the area where the surgery was to be conducted and even today, in modern medicine the same principle is applied. Surgeons of Āyurveda claim that Āyurvedic surgeries are less expensive than Allopathic surgery and they also point out that there are no side effects in Āyurvedic post-surgery medicines that are used for healing the wounds. Similar to other departments of Āyurveda treatment, medicines to enhance the immunity of the human body are prescribed after surgery. Suśruta in the very beginning cautions his students that one should not be contented with his own medical knowledge, but should enrich with knowledge from other fields.

ekam śāstram adhyano na vidyat śāstrainscayam.

tasmāt bāhuśrūtaṁ Vianiyat cikitsakaḥ.

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