

Determinants of Vedanta Philosophy in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is one of the oldest traditional systems of medicine that has survived and flourished from ages to date. Ayurveda is a knowledge system dealing with what is required to maintain health and cure diseases. The Ayurvedic view of the inherent freedom of pain and pleasure and the ultimate union of the individual soul with the universal soul is taken from Vedanta. Ayurveda, like Vedanta, is based upon the principle of self-knowledge and aims at self-realization, the constant knowledge of the One or Divine Self in all beings. Also, according to Vedanta, each of the gross elements develops by the combination of all the five primordial elements (tanmatras). Departing from Sankhya, Ayurveda accepts this concept of Vedanta. To attain self-realization Yoga and Vedanta philosophic thoughts had to be incorporated incidentally, into Ayurvedic literature. The 1st and 5th chapters of *Sarira Sthana* of Caraka Samhita contain several quotations indicating the necessity of application of Yoga and Vedanta too in health science in a broader perspective of the concept of health. Ayurveda has utilized almost every important concept of philosophic thoughts one way or the other in order to make itself a complete health science in the true spirit of the term.

KEYWORDS: Caraka Samhita, Sarira Sthana, Brahman, Upanishads, Brahmasutra, Advaita, Purusa, Trsna, Vairagya, Vairagya, Pravrtti, Nivrtti, moksa

INTRODUCTION:

Vedanta philosophy occupies as much a position of pre-eminence in Caraka Samhita as any other philosophy. Eradication of worldly miseries and diseases, no doubt was an important object of Ayurveda, but it never held out that in it lies the panacea to all miseries. Ayurveda knew that miseries are likely to continue as long as the cycle of birth and death existed and the solution to the endless miseries lies in the liberation of the soul and its union with *Brahman* (Absolute). This is the main thrust of Vedanta philosophy also.

A Short note on Vedanta:

Vedanta denoted *Upanishads* in bygone days as the *Upanishads* constituted the last part (stage) of Veda. Vedic literature was found in 3 forms. The first one was *Samhita*, consisting of Vedic hymns; the second was *Brahmana* which provided explanations to the *Karmakanda* and the last one was *Upanishad* which consisted of metaphysical and philosophic discussions and narrations. In fact, Upanishad

developed from *Aranyakas*. Upanishad is also called *adhyatma vidya* (the science of spiritualism). *Purva Mimamsa* is devoted to the *karmakanda* of Veda as its major theme, while Vedanta discusses *Jnana-Kanda* as its crucial theme. A number of Upanishads came into existence at different times, the main theme of all being common – ‘*Brahma vidya*’. The ‘*Brahmasutra*’ or *Vedanta sutra* or *Brahma Sarirakasutra* of *Sariraka Mimamsa* or *Uttara Mimamsa* of *Badarayana* is the result of this effort of compiling unanimous dictums of all Upanishads.

The Chief theme of Brahmasutra:

The main theme of *Brahmasutra* is to determine whether *Jiva* and *Brahma* are one or different and what is the relationship between the two. In search of an answer to this question, many great personalities gave their own interpretations of *Brahmasutra*, which led to the emergence of different philosophical traditions like *Advaita*, *Visistadvaita*, *Dvaita*, *Parama*

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visistadvaita, etc. Among these 'Advaita'vada is foremost.

Non-dualism of Ayurveda:

The Ayurvedic references available in the classics evidently go in favor of non-dualism (*advaitavada*). Vedanta holds that the entire universe is *Brahmamaya* (full of *Brahma* only) and he is the primordial cause of this universe which is *Jadacetanatmaka*. Caraka holds '*Purusoyam lokasammitah*'¹ (An individual is an epitome of the universe).

‘पुरुषोऽयं लोकसंमितः’ इत्युवाच भगवान् पुनर्वसुरात्रेयः।
यावन्तो हि लोके (मूर्तिमन्तो) भावविशेषास्तावन्तः पुरुषे
यावन्तो लोके।।

The '*Purusa*' is nothing but the combination of six dhatus viz *Prithvi, ap, Tejas, Vayu, akasa*, and *brahman*, who is *avyakta*².

तमुवाच भगवानात्रेयः- अपरिसंख्येया लोकावयवविशेषाः,
पुरुषावयवविशेषा अप्यपरिसंख्येयाः.....षड्धातवः
समुदिताः पुरुष इति शब्दं लभते।।

Lord *Atreya* says to *Agnivesa* that one who sees equally the entire universe is in possession of true knowledge³.

भगवानुवाच- शृण्वन्निवेश! सर्वलोकमात्मन्यात्मानं च
सर्वलोके समनुपश्यतः सत्या बुद्धिः समुत्पद्यते।
सर्वलोकं.....षड्धातुसमुदायो हि
सामान्यतः सर्वलोकः।।

If one realizes himself as a spread in the entire universe and the entire universe in himself, he is indeed in possession of transcendental and worldly vision. His serenity of mind based on wisdom does never fade away⁴.

लोके विततमात्मानं लोकं चात्मनि पश्यतः।
परावरदृशः शान्तिर्ज्ञानमूला न नश्यति।।

Vedanta sutra says that *Brahman* is devoid of qualities, having no attributes of any sort, and shapeless, which is similar to '*Nirvikarah parastvatma*' meaning "the supreme consciousness is devoid of attributes", found in *Caraka Samhita*.

Vedanta believes that there is no come back to the soul which has attained *Brahman* which is similar to⁵–

1 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-5/3)

2 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-5/4)

3 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-5/7)

4 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-5/20)

5 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-1/155)

6 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-1/36)

7 (Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-4/33)

अतः परं ब्रह्मभूतो भूतात्मा नोपलभ्यते।
निःसृतः सर्वभावेभ्यश्चिह्नं यस्य न विद्यते।।

Bhutatma ceases to exist after attaining *Brahman* of *Caraka Samhita*.

The theory of multiple *Purusas* as advanced by the *Sankhya* school is rejected by *Caraka Samhita*, which says that the contact of *purusa* with *mahanetc* elements continues so long as he is influenced by *rajas* and *tamas*. The moment he gets rid of these two, he is freed from contacts.⁶

रजस्तमोभ्यां युक्तस्य संयोगोऽयमनन्तवान्।
ताभ्यां निराकृताभ्यां तु सत्त्ववृद्ध्या निवर्तते।।

The absolute soul does not undergo any modification. Its presence in different types of creatures does not bear any distinction. It appears to have distinctions only on account of the specific features of the body and mind of different types of creatures.⁷

निर्विकारः परस्त्वात्मा सर्वभूतानां निर्विशेषः।
सत्त्वशरीरयोस्तु विशेषाद्विशेषोपलब्धिः।।

Even though he is located in one body, he is still present in all bodies. But his field of action is limited to one body alone because of his contact with the mind.⁸

विभुत्वमत एवास्य यस्मात् सर्वगतो महान्।
मनसश्च समाधानात् पश्यत्यात्मा तिरस्कृतम्।।
नित्यानुबन्धं मनसा देहकर्मानुपातिना।
सर्वयोनिगतं विद्यादेकयोनावपि स्थितम्।।

When a house is built with the help of walls in an open space, walls become separating factors. Within a board-spaced house of 4 walls, a number of rooms can be constructed by again putting smaller inner partitioned walls. Now, one gets the feeling that there is a number of spaces different from the board outer space that was present before the apportionment of the house. In fact, it is not space that is many, but the dividing walls are many, and when these inner walls of rooms are removed they will no longer be rooms separate from the broad space of the 4 walled house. When even these outer 4 walls are also removed, it is the walls that are destroyed, not space that becomes one with endless outer space. Similar is the case with the soul. Mind and body act as temporary partition walls to the soul, which is, like space, all-pervasive. Thus the *purusa* that is in *sthulasarira (pancabhuta-samudayatmak)* or *suksmasarira (ativahika or sprksarira)* is no different from *Ekadhatvatmakapurusa* or *avyakta* or *Brahman*.

⁸(Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-1/80)

(Caraka Samhita, Sarirastanam-1/81)

Purusa in *suksma* or *ativahikasarira* is like an audiovisual cassette. Nobody knows what the cassette harbors. Nobody knows that there is a storage of voice and visuals, till it is played on a cassette can be made known. So also, *suksmasarira* cannot be perceived till it gets a suitable substratum *sthasarira*. The moment the cassette is taken out of the player, the instrument becomes a dead one, and the cassette again becomes soundless and visionless.

Vedanta does not accept the prevalence of a separate *mulaprakrti* as the primordial cause, as is considered by *Sankhya*. Caraka also does not accept *mulaprakrti* as is separate *tattva*, but *avyakta* which itself is *brahman* or *ksetrajna* is considered the primordial cause of the universe. It considers⁹-

अव्यक्तमात्मा क्षेत्रज्ञः शाश्वतो विभुरव्ययः।
तस्माद्यदन्त्यत्तद्व्यक्तं, वक्ष्यते चापरं द्वयम्॥

The absolute soul cannot be perceived by anything. He is *ksetrajna* and eternal, universal and indestructible; the soul is omniscient, primary cause, witness, and efficient cause. The following references from Caraka Samhita undisputedly prove that the philosophy of '*purusa*' is non-dualistic in nature.¹⁰

तस्मात् ज्ञः प्रकृतिश्चात्मा द्रष्टा कारणमेव च।
सर्वमेतद्भूरद्वज निर्णीतं जहि संशयम्॥

Further, the *Loka-purusa-samyavada* (concept of similarity between universe and soul) also denotes the monotheistic philosophy of Vedanta. This concept of micro-macro cosmic unity discussed earlier focused on Ayurveda from a holistic health point of view and ultimate liberation from all kinds of miseries.

Role of *Trsna* and *Vairagya* in Bondage and Liberation respectively from all miseries

Relinquishment of worldly enjoyment is *Vairagya*. Worldly enjoyment is technically called '*Trsna*'. Happiness and miseries bring about *trsna* in the form of likes and dislikes, respectively. This *trsna* in turn is responsible for happiness and miseries. It is this *trsna* that gathers factors that serve as a substratum for happiness and misery. Such gathered factors are responsible for the contact of body and mind and in the absence of this contact, there can be no happiness or miseries.¹¹

इच्छाद्वेषात्मिका तृष्णा सुखदुःखात् प्रवर्तते।
तृष्णा च सुखदुःखानो कारणं पुनरुच्यते॥

According to Vedanta '*Vairagya*' is a state of mind with a deep sense of detachment and equanimity between the body and cosmos and having a feeling of oneness with Brahman. This is what is meant by the above-cited reference seen in Caraka Samhita.

Upadha: A unique Term of Ayurveda:

It deserves to be specially mentioned here, that Caraka Samhita gives a special term called '*upadha*' for '*trsna*' (desire). An absolute remedy for the total eradication of miseries is the elimination of desires. Desires are the root cause of all miseries. An ignorant, bound with worldly miseries, provides for himself desires arising out of various objects, just as a silkworm gets entangled and provides suicidal threads for itself. A wise person, who abstains from the objects of senses, considering them as dangerous as burning fire, does not subject himself to any wishful acts and contacts with their objects with the result that miseries never overcome him.¹²

उपधा हि परो हेतुर्दुःखदुःखाश्रयप्रदः।
त्यागः सर्वोपधानां च सर्वदुःखव्यपोहकः॥

The means of obtaining the above is '*Yoga*' which ultimately leads to Moksha.¹³

योगे मोक्षे च सर्वासं वेदनानामवर्तनम्।
मोक्षे निवृत्तिर्निःशेषा योगो मोक्षप्रवर्तकः॥

Pravrtti and Nivrtti (Attachment and Detachment from Worldly Affairs):

Pravrtti is considered the root cause of all miseries. It is attached to various actions. *Nivrtti* is detachment and considered the cause of cessation of all miseries. Causes of *pravrtti* are enumerated and defined in Charaka Samhita, *Sarirasthana*, 5th chapter.

The character of Mukti:

It is not possible to characterize the liberated soul, as he has no contact whatsoever with mental or other sense faculties. So being detached from all sensory contacts, he is considered to be a liberated soul.¹⁴

नात्मनः करणाभावाल्लिङ्गमप्युपलभ्यते।
स सर्वकरणायोगान्मुक्त इत्यभिधीयते॥

However, the synonyms of *moksa* gave some clue to the nature of *moksa* as conceived by Ayurveda. *Moksa* is *vipapa* (free from sinful acts). *Viraja* (free from attachment), *santa* (eternal peace), *para* (absolute), *aksara* (indestructible), *avyaya* (immutable), *amrta* (immortal), *Brahman*, and *nirvana* (the state of extinction of all miseries).¹⁵

¹²(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-1/95)

¹³(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-1/137)

¹⁴(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-5/22)

¹⁵(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-5/23)

⁹(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-1/61)

¹⁰(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-3/25)

¹¹(Caraka Samhita, Sarirasthana-1/134)

विपापं विरजः शान्तं परमक्षरमव्ययम्।
अमृतं ब्रह्म निर्वाणं पर्यायैः शान्तिरुच्यते॥

Consequent to final renunciation, one identifies himself with Brahman and the empirical soul ceases to exist.¹⁶

अतः परं ब्रह्मभूतो भूतात्मा नोपलभ्यते।
निःसृतः सर्वभावेभ्यश्चिह्नं यस्य न विद्यते॥
ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविदां चात्र नाज्ञस्तज्ज्ञातुमर्हति॥

The above description is similar to 'BrahmavitBrahmaivabhavati' (self-realized becomes Brahman only) of Vedanta.

Conclusion:

The philosophic thoughts akin to Vedanta are in tune with the basic idea of achieving the ultimate goal viz Moksa (total emancipation). 'Trsna' as the cause of the birth-rebirth cycle to enjoy the inevitable fruits of action and to attain 'Satyabuddhi' a state of realization of oneness with Brahman by 'Vairagya' (sense of total detachment) were necessary adjuvant to the holistic approach of health science. It is not enough to set the ideal goal. The proper and improper means of achieving the ultimate goal also are needed to educate the people to reach the goal, which has been described rightfully in Ayurveda too. The Ayurvedic view of the inherent freedom of pain and pleasure and the ultimate union of the individual soul with the universal soul is taken from Vedanta. Ayurveda, like Vedanta, is based upon the principle of self-knowledge and aims at self-realization, the constant knowledge of the One or Divine Self in all beings. Also, according to Vedanta, each of the gross elements develops by the combination of all the five primordial elements (tanmatras). Departing from Sankhya, Ayurveda accepts this concept of Vedanta.

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