



Review Article

CONTRIBUTION OF ACHARYA NAGARJUNA IN SUSRUTA SAMHITA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

*Acharya* Nagarjuna was a famous Buddhist Alchemist. Research scholars have faith in more than one Nagarjuna who contributed in the field of philosophy, alchemy, medical and Tantra and few scholars supporting for only one Nagarjuna who as expert in all subjects. In Ayurveda fraternity, it is general belief that *Acharya* Nagarjuna has composed the *Uttarasthana* (*Uttaratantra*) of *Susruta Samhita* but there are some references which indicates that *Acharya* Nagarjuna has contributed in *Purvardha* also. In *Uttarasthana* (*Uttaratantra*) of *Susruta Samhita* there has not mentioned any Alchemy whereas in *Maha Kushtha Chikitsa* (*Purvardha*), *Ayaskriti* has been used which clearly indicates that *Acharya* Nagarjuna has not only contributed in the *Uttarasthan* but also in the *Purvardha* of *Susruta Samhita*. *Balagraha*, *Kayachikitsa* and *Bhutavidya* have been described in the *Uttarsthana* of *Susruta Samhita*. There are many literatures available in Buddhism which has been contributed by *Acharya* Nagarjuna. If we are having deep knowledge of the Buddhist literature such as *Mulmadhyamikakarika*, *Yuktisastika* etc. which has been contributed by *Acharya* Nagarjuna then it will be easy to know the exact contribution of *Acharya* Nagarjuna in *Susruta Samhita* as well as in Ayurveda. This article deals with the historical study of *Acharya* Nagarjuna, a great personality and his contribution in *Susruta Samhita*.

**KEYWORDS:** Alchemist, *Susruta Samhita*, Atharva-Veda, *Uttaratantra*, *Veda*.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that *Acharya* Nagarjuna was a Buddhist. Research scholars have faith in more than one Nagarjuna who contributed in the field of philosophy, alchemy, medical and Tantra and few scholars supporting for only one Nagarjuna who was expert in all subjects.

*Ayurveda* is the traditional system of Indian medicine which was recalled by *Brahma* as mentioned in *Ayurvedic* treatises. *Brahma* passed this knowledge to *Daksha Prajapati* and later passed to *Ashwins* and then to *Indra*. *Indra* taught Ayurveda to *Dhanvantari*, the surgeon of gods embodied asking *Divodasa* of *Banaras* (*Kashiraja*). This school of thoughts is known as *Dhanvantara-Sampradaya* i.e. the school of surgery. It is said that *Acharya* Nagarjuna redacted the *Sushruta-Samhita* and possibly added *Uttaratantra* in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In 10<sup>th</sup> century, *Acharya Chandrata*, son of *Tisata* did the *Pathashuddhi* and renewed the *Sushruta-Samhita* on the basis of commentary done by *Jejjata*.<sup>[1]</sup>

*Acharya* P.V.Sharma in his book "Ayurvedaka Vaigyanika Itihasa" discussed about the development

of *Sushruta-Samhita* in four steps i.e., *Vridhdha Sushruta*, *Sushruta*, Nagarjuna and *Chandrata*. It is considered that *Sushruta-Samhita* was compiled by *Kashiraja Divodasa Dhanvantari*, *Sushruta*, Nagarjuna, and *Chandrata* who were the preceptor, composer, redactor and amender respectively.

But in the beginning of first chapter of *Uttarasthana* of *Susruta Samhita*, it is clearly mentioned that-

*Adhyāyānāmśateviśeyaduktamasakṛnmayā|*  
*vakṣyāmibahudhāsamyaguttare:'rthānimāniti || 3||*  
*idānīmtatpravakṣyāmitantramuttaramuttamam|*  
*nikhilenopadiśyante yatra rogāḥprthagvidhāḥ||4||<sup>[2]</sup>*

(It has been stated by me, many times during the course of expounding the hundred twenty chapters (described so far) that more details (on many topics) will be furnished in *Uttarasthan*, hence I will now describe that *Uttarsthana*, the last section which is most important).<sup>[2]</sup>

Above reference shows that *Acharya* Nagarjuna has not only composed *Uttarasthana* of

*Susruta Samhita* but also contributed in the 120 chapters i.e. *Purvardha* of *Susruta Samhita*.

## Historical background

There are some historical facts which indicates the importance of to look into the background of *Ayurvediya Samhitayas* through Buddhism because the so-called great authors were Buddhist like *Acharya* Nagarjuna.

Dr. Jyotir Mitra, in his book entitled "A Critical Appraisal of *Ayurvedic* Material in Buddhist Literature" (1985, The Jyotiralok Prakashan, Varanasi) stated that "One of the problems connected with the history of *Ayurveda*, the appearance of the full-fledged system in the earliest texts, the *Samhitas* of *Caraka* and *Susruta*. It can reasonably be assumed that numerous medical treatises must have existed in the ages preceding the composition of these *Samhitas* but, since this literature has not been preserved, historians of Indian medicine are completely dependent on stray references in later medical texts and particularly on non-medical literature for the collection of data which can be shed light on the way the classical system as embodied in the *Samhitas* has evolved. He also said that the Buddhist Pali canon and its commentaries, as well as a number of extra-canonical texts, are a rich source of information on subjects related to the development of the classical system of Indian Medicine.

In the Bower Manuscripts, it is stated that *Acharya* Nagarjuna has contributed in medical works along with elaboration of *Susruta Samhita*. "The Bower MS comes from the Buddhists as is precisely shown by the several references to *Bhagava*, *Tathagata*, and Buddha etc. in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> parts. Traces of Buddhistic tendency are found in *Vagbhata* and this explains its transplantation to Tibet; besides the whole hearted reception of Indian medicine in Tibet leads to conclude the existence of Buddhistic medicine in India. The detailed statements of the Buddhist I-tsing (671-695A.D.) on the condition prevailing at the time of Indian medicine (medicinal herbs, the *Tridosas*, diagnosis etc.) agree with the contents of our *Caraka* and *Susruta*, as well as of the Bower MS; I-tsing even quotes from Sutra on medicine preached by Buddha himself. *Caraka* is said to have been the court physician of the Buddhist king *Kaniska* (circa 100A.D.) and the well-known Nagarjuna who is placed in the same period is said to have composed, along with other medical works, an elaboration of *Susruta Samhita*, since a recipe engraved on a column in *Pataliputra* is attributed to him. The great importance of the Bower MS for the history of Indian Medicine lies in the fact that it has certainly proved the existence of the Indian Medicine

already in the 4-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and thereby has removed all doubts about the faithfulness of Arabic accounts."<sup>[3]</sup>

## *Acharya* Nagarjuna & Alchemy

Many research scholars around the world studied about the life and work of *Acharya* Nagarjuna. Max Walleser in 1923 concluded his survey as followed: "The systematic development of the thought of voidness laid down in *Prajnaparamitasutras* is brought into junction with the name of a man of whom we cannot even positively say that he is the author of the works ascribed to him: this name is Nagarjuna."<sup>[4]</sup>

Regarding the place of residence of Nagarjuna, three options have been supposed such as Vidarbha, Nalanda and Nagarjunakonda. Nalanda is supported by Tibetan tradition of *Guhyasamajatantra* transmission lineage and probably mixed with Siddha Nagarjuna.<sup>[5]</sup>

*Nga-wang-pel-den* (a Mongolian scholar of 19<sup>th</sup> century) on discussion of *jam-yang-shay-pa's* work identified *be-dalya* (prophecy of *Lankavatara sutra*) as Vidarbha of Maharashtra.<sup>[6]</sup> P.S.Shastri suggested that it could be 'Dehali' near to Nagarjunakonda site.<sup>[7]</sup>

*Acharya* Nagarjuna, who is sometimes called the Second Buddha, is considered by many to be the most influential and widely studied philosopher in Mahayana Buddhism.

*Acharya* Nagarjuna is considered as the father of Alchemist. Various alchemical works are attributed to an author bearing the name of Nagarjuna.<sup>[8]</sup> Many scholars believe that Nagarjuna (alchemist) was a scholar of eight century different from *Madhyamika* philosopher. Kumarajiva's work given credit of elixir of invisibility and Prabandhacintamani tells us about an ointment for flying. Whereas *Kathasaritsagara* and *Brhatkathamajari* have story of Nagarjuna's alchemical feat of producing an elixir of immortality.<sup>[9]</sup> *Rasaratuakara* of Nagarjuna as celebrated Tantric treatise on alchemy. Many other works like *Kaksaputatantra*, *Arogyamanjari*, *Yogasara* and *Yogastaka*<sup>[10]</sup> are also affiliated with him. Many works are attribute to Nagarjuna in both Tibetan and Chinese sources. Best known to us are 'five collections of rules. They are:

1. Mulmadhyamikakarika
2. Yuktisastika
3. Sunyatasaptati
4. Vighravavyavartani
5. Vaidalyaprakarana<sup>[11]</sup>

Based on the above-mentioned references, we can say that *Acharya* Nagarjuna, being an alchemist may have contributed *Ayaskriti* as mentioned in

*MahaKushtha* chapter of *Chikitsasthana* of *Susruta Samhita*:

### Description of Ayuskrti in Susruta Samhita

*Ata ūrdhvamayaskṛtīrvakṣyāmaḥ-tikṣṇalohapatrāṇi tanūni lavaṇavargapradigdhāni gomayāgniprataptāni triphalāsālasārādikaśāyena nirvāpayet ṣoḍaśavārān, tataḥ khadirāṅgārataptānyupaśāntatāpāni sūkṣmacūrṇāni kārayedghanatāntavaparīsrāvītāni, tato yathābalaṃ mātrāṃ sarpirmadhubhyāṃ saṃsrjyopayūñjīta, jīrṇe yathāvyādhyānamlamalavaṇamāhāraṃ kurvīta, evaṃ tulāmupayujya kuṣṭhamehamedahśvayathupāṇḍurogonmādāpasmār ānapahatya varṣaśataṃ jīvati, tulāyāṃ tulāyāṃ varṣaśatamutkarṣaḥ, etena sarvalauheśvayaskṛtayo vyākhyātāḥ*<sup>[12]</sup>

### Now we will describe Ayaskrti-formulae of iron

Thin sheets of *Tikṣṇaloha* (magnetic iron) are smeared with paste of drugs of *Lavaṇavarga* (salt group), then heated in the fire of cow dung heaps and immersed in the decoction of *Triphala* and drugs of *Salasaradigaṇa* for sixteen times; afterwards the sheets are heated in burning coal of *Khadira* tree, when they become cool, they are made into powder and filtered through thick cloth. This nice powder is licked with ghee and honey in suitable dose, depending on the strength of the body. After its digestion, foods appropriate to the disease may be partaken without adding sours and salt. By consuming one *Tula* (4kg) of this powder in this manner, persons get cured of leprosy, diabetes, obesity, dropsy, anemia, insanity and epilepsy and lives for hundred years. The powder should be increased by one *Tula* (4kg) year after year. Thus, was described the method of preparing and using *Ayaskrti* from all metals.<sup>[12]</sup>

*Trivṛcchāyāmagrimanthasaptalākebukaśāṅkhinītilvaka triphalāpālāśaśiṃśapānāṃ svarasamādāya pālāśyāṃ droṇyāmabhyāsicya khadirāṅgārataptamaya:piṇḍaṃtrisaptakṛtvo nirvāpya tamādāya punarāsicya sthālyāṃ gomayāgninā vipacet, tataścaturthabhāgāvaśiṣṭamavatārya paritrāvya bhūyo:gnitaptānyayaḥpatrāṇi prakṣipet, sidhyati cāsmiṃ pippalyādicūrṇabhāgaṃ dvau madhunastāvaddhṛtasyeti dadyāt, tataḥ praśāntamāyase pātre svanuguptaṃ nidadhyāt, tato yathāyogaṃ śuktimṃ prakuñcaṃ vopayūñjīta, jīrṇe yathāvyādhyāhāramupaseveta | eṣauśadhāyaskṛtirasādhyāṃ kuṣṭhaṃ pramehaṃ vā sādhyati, sthūlamapakarṣati, śophamupahanti, sannamagnimuddharati, viśeṣeṇa copadiśyate rājayakṣmiṇāṃ | varṣaśatāyūścānyā puruṣo bhavati | śālasārādīkvāthamāsicya pālāśyāṃ*

*droṇyāmayodhanāṃstaptānirvāpya kṛtasamṣkāre kalaśe:'bhyāsicya pippalyādicūrṇabhāgaṃ kṣaudraṃ guḍamiti ca dattvā svanuguptaṃ nidadhyāt, etāṃ mahauśadhāyaskṛtiṃ māsamardhamāsaṃ vā sthitāṃ yathābalamupayūñjīta |*

*evaṃ nyagrodhādāvārevatādiṣa ca vidadhyāta.*<sup>[13]</sup>

Fresh juice (or decoction) of *Atrivrt*, *Śyāma*, *Agnimañtha*, *Saptalā*, *Kebuka*, *Śāṅkhinī*, *Tilvaka*, *Triphalā*, *Palāś* and *Simsipa* is poured into a big pot of *Palāśa* wood. Then, balls (sheets) of iron are made red hot in the burning coal of *Khadira* wood, and immersed in the juice (decoction) for seven times. Next, these balls (sheets) are heated in fire of cow dung heaps and immersed in the same juice/decoction. When only one-fourth part of the juice remains, it is filtered and iron sheets taken out and heated well many times and converted into powder. One part of this powder is added with two parts of powder of drugs of *Pippalyādigaṇa* and equal quantity of honey and ghee, then filled into a iron vessel and kept hidden (in a heap of husk) for some days. Afterwards it is taken out and used daily in the dose of either one *Sukti* (20gms) or *Prakuñca* (40 gms), depending on the strength; after its digestion, foods suitable to the diseases may be consumed. This *Auśadhaayaskṛti* cures *Kustha* (leprosy) and diabetes, makes obese persons thin mitigates dropsy, augments weak digestive fire; it is specially advocated for patients of pulmonary tuberculosis. By this recipe, persons attain a life of hundred years.<sup>[13]</sup>

### Description of Acharya Nagarjuna in Telugu literature

*Acharya* Nagarjuna's intention was to convert lower elements to gold, what all alchemists of that period were interested. Archeological (Sastri, 2010) and literary evidences indicate that he had set up his school of alchemy in *Sripurvata*, ie., present *Srisailam* and Nagarjuna Konda area, which is mountainous *Nallamala* forest area and became well known for the *Rasaśāstra* and one big cave was converted as his laboratory and number of his disciples worked there.<sup>[14]</sup> This is described by a Telugu poet of 14th century named *Gaurana* in his book *Navanātha Caritra* (*gourana*, 1984, pp.293-296) written in poetic form of *Dvipada*, or couplet such as-

*nā siddha nāgārjunākhyundu gaṇaka bhāsillu rasavādapātavam bamara ba(pa)sidi gāvimcu napparama vikhyāti nesage jagamella nidiyarudanag aba(pa)nasa campaka pāribhadra rasāla sāla timduka gaindhasāla himtāla tāla kharjūra ketaka picumamda mamdāra samvīra madhura mākam da kam dārālagaru kataka punnāga nāga kesaralumga nāramga pūga pūga sobhitambulai..... tarigaramboppu nātata guhāmtaramu jocci vāralu*

munnu śodhimci cūci vaccine priyamāra vasiyimci yamdu rasamu lārunu, nuparasamulenmidiyu pasarulu, main dulu, pāśāmamulunu, ga (ka) luvambulunu jālagā samakūrci....gurunāthu talaci tadguruvu bhajimci vāra bhais ajādi daivamulaku mrokki nērcina mamdulanniyu vaici yagni g(k)ūrci putambugrakkuna be(pe)tta napudu vesa nūduvārunu visuvaka rasamu pasarulu g(k)alipi pālpad a nūru vāralanu vomdagā mūsala savariincuvāru monasi krammata putambulu pettuvāru kalayamga nūdina kanakam bu divisi yelamamai b(p) enubrovulīdceduvārunai sambhramincu nayyayi panula nāsannulai śīsyulamdaru melaga bolivo tājeyabūnina kāryamalavada phalasiddhi naindina hrudaya nalinambu vikasimpa nāgārjunumdu.<sup>[15]</sup>

(That Siddha Nāgārjuna, with power of alchemy, converting into gold using a rare process, became famous. He used number of plants/trees like jackfruit, *Campaka*, *Pāribhadra*, *Rasāla* (mango), *Sāla*, *Tinduka*, *Gandhasāla*, *Hintāla*, *Tāla*, *Kharjūra* (dates), *Ketaka*, *Picumanda*, *Mandara*, *Samvīra*, *Madhura*, *Mākanda*, *Kandarāla*, *Agaru*, *Kataka*, *Punnāga*, *Nāgakesara*, *Lunga*, *Nāranga*, *Pūga* etc., They entered into the cave, which was examined before by his disciples. They have kept there already six *Rasas*, eight *Uparasas*, juices of plants, medicines, *Pasāṇas* / hard stones / rock stones which contain arsenic etc., and the grinding stones (mortar and pestle). They prostrated before the teacher and then the Gods representing medicines. Then they put all these medicines and then arranged different types of fires (*Putās*), blowers blowing, some were grinding in the grinding stones the mercury and the juices of plants, some were correcting/shaking the crucibles (*Mūsas*) again putting the heaters or *Putās* and the obtained gold heaps were removed by some, like that all his disciples are carrying out their duties properly and Siddha Nāgārjuna successfully transformed into gold and was very happy).<sup>[15]</sup>

He had written a great Sanskrit book on *Rasaśāstra*, entitled *Rasa Ratnākara/Rasendra Mangala* (Sarma, 1999). A large number of metals and their processing methodologies have been described in this book, which became a base for later Ayurveda approach of medical science.<sup>[16]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

We are living in the era of developed science and technology. It is the need of time to do critical study of historical background of *Ayurveda*. According to Buddhist sources, *Acharya* Nagarjuna was a famous Alchemist and being an Alchemist, he may have contributed in *Purvardha* of *Susruta Samhita* i.e. in 120 *Adhyayas* as above mentioned in *Maha Kushatha Chikitsa*.

Regarding the influence of Buddhism on Ayurveda it is said that Buddhist ring is audible in *Charaka* as well as *Susruta*, but *Vagbhata*, he was himself a self-declared Buddhist. So that is the very important role the Buddhist played in the development of Ayurveda today. *Athar vedic* period started in first century. There was a very change in the practice of medicine. Essentially in relation to the practice of medicine, not so much in the theory medicine and that is the disappearance or the largely the disappearance of mantras and rituals. Now, this was because of the influence of Buddhism which was the dominant religion in India during those 1000 years. Buddhism not only influenced of *Ayurveda*, a practice of medicine, but influenced every other aspect of human endeavor during this period. Everywhere Buddhism was a great influence and medicine could not remain immune from this change.<sup>[17]</sup>

Regarding the *Ayurvedic* period, "The two-great works of this period are the *Charaka* and the *Susruta*. In them we find the study of the subject to have made a distinct advance and to have been evolved out of the chaotic state it was in during the Vedic period."<sup>[18]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that unless and until we have the deep knowledge of *Acharya* Nagarjuna's composed literature such as *Mulmadhyamikakarika*, *Yuktisastika*, *Sunyatasaptati*, *Vigrahavyavartani*, *Vaidalyaprakarana*, it is difficult to say that he has only supplemented *Uttarasthan* of *Susruta Samhita*. He may have contributed in *Purvardha* i.e., in 120 *Adhyayas* of *Susruta Samhita* also because he was a famous Buddhist Alchemist.

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