



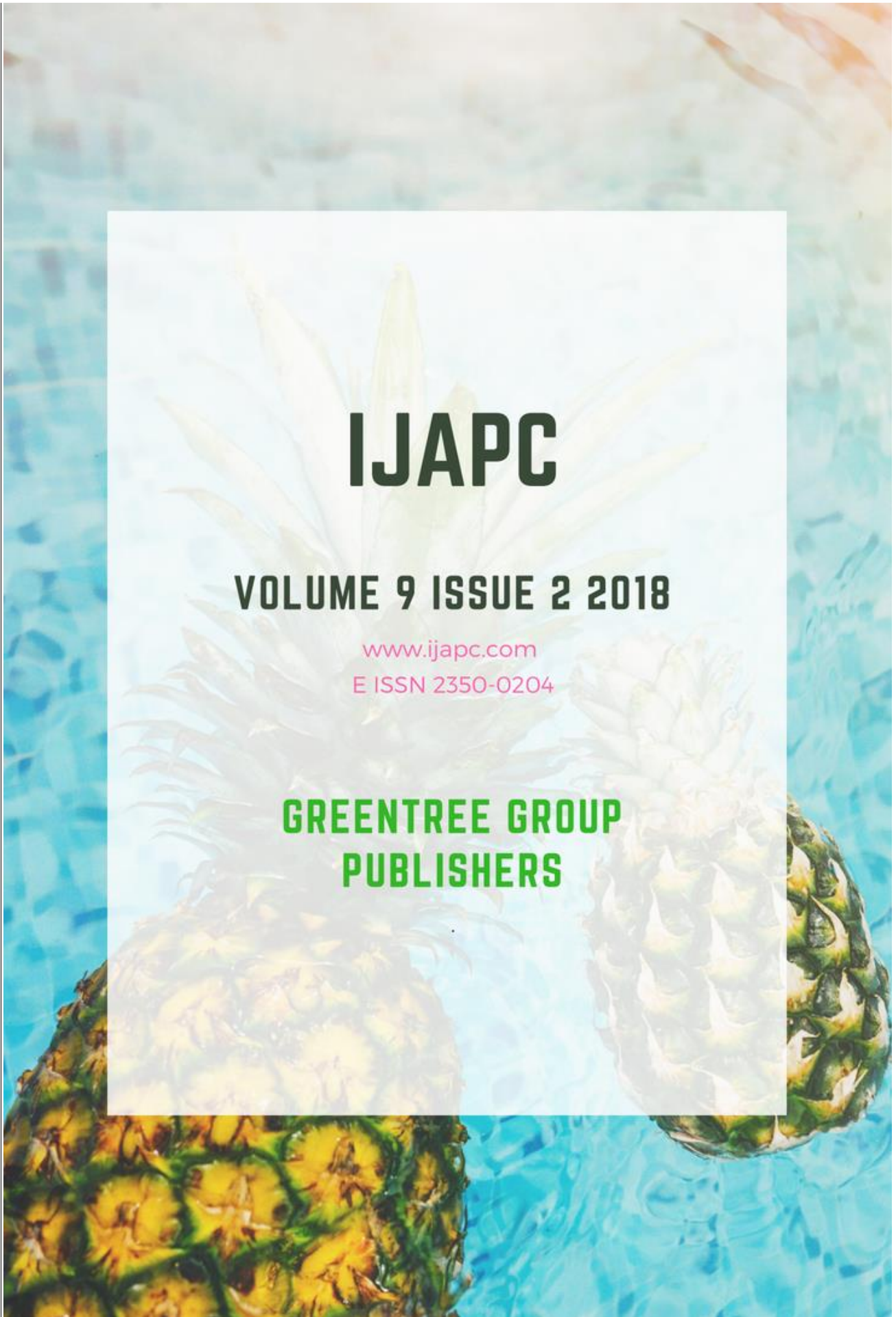
# IJAPC

**VOLUME 9 ISSUE 2 2018**

[www.ijapc.com](http://www.ijapc.com)

E ISSN 2350-0204

**GREENTREE GROUP  
PUBLISHERS**





## Ayurvedic Medical Education in Ancient India

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### ABSTRACT

Education system has changed substantially during the Pre-Vedic era to the current day. The transformation of the same has also been seen as a paradigm shift in the world of medical science too. The science of *Ayurveda* has been refined through years of practice also has undergone waxing and waning during time. The modern medical science by implementing its reductionism had got fame in medicine profession in giving an immediate result and the same reductionism's are the keys to understanding the science. Ayurveda on the other has focused on the causation of disease and to treatment the same in order to attain health.

### KEYWORDS

*Ayurveda, Education, Ancient India*



**Greentree Group Publishers**

Received 02/07/18 Accepted 07/09/18 Published 10/09/18



## INTRODUCTION

Wise people learn from their own mistakes; wiser people from the mistakes of others. Based on Macaulay's ideas the first three medical colleges were set up by the East India Company in 1857<sup>1</sup>. Based on this idea we rote promoted learning, students being taught by indifferent faculty resulting in mediocrity. We punished original thinking and failed to create humanitarian doctors. We have been pushing students into parallel coaching institutions before they get into medical schools to rote learn the premedical subjects to pass the "so-called" entrance tests, again throttling their thinking capacity. Aptitude of the entrance to become healers is never tested.

Medical education in India is crying for reforms. We need to first educate society about the troubles of the present system. Before that first we will discuss about our system of education of *Ayurveda* in ancient India.

### Conditions of Life in Ancient India:

#### ➤ Aryan Culture

The Aryans who 1<sup>st</sup> entered India were remarkable for their many virtues and strength of intellect. The Vedic Rsis were dynamically multitasking of composing hymns, performed sacrifices, fought wars and also ploughed fields. For a long time

their martial spirit was kept alive by the necessity of holding their own against the enemy. Easy reach of the mild climate and fertile soil of the country made the struggle for existence in India an easy one. The towering mountains and the seas shutting the country off for a long time became unique character of Indian culture. The peculiar ecological conditions of India made her inhabitants more meditative and philosophical.

The general conditions of the country as a territory of plenty and fertility, peaceful environments of the forest dwelling Rsis, support of the princes and the spirit of scientific research, inquiry, imagination and thinking about the Rsis. These combined together contributed greatly to India's later greatness in the field of knowledge in general and art and science in particular.

#### ➤ The Rsis Scholars

From the establishment of the vedic period, there was a class people known as Rsis who were the real exponents of Aryan culture and who dedicated their lives to scientific inquiry in thinking, imagination, reasoning and generalization.

These Rsis were the proto-types of our modern scientific research scholars. These Rsis scholars lived quiet forest, which is superlative places for study and meditation



.There they discussed their points of view about problems of life from that of other people. The forest Ashramas (dwellings) gradually grew to be the centers of the highest Aryan learning. Though deeply absorbed in metaphysical studies, the Rsis' experience of wordly life won them high reputation as teachers for the younger generation.

The ancient Aryan people who inhabited this country were gradually divided into 4 classes, the Brahmanas or priestly class, the Ksatriyas or the martial class, the Vaishyas or the agricultural and commercial class and the kshudras or the serving class.

### ➤ **The Brahmanas**

Brahmans became the dispensers of religion of laws and of medicine. In ancient India, the Aryan literature was highly cherished and fully cared by the princes and opulent individuals for the patronage of literature and religious influence. Such encouragement operated powerfully as an incentive to the study and literary execution of scholars. It was the endeavor of the influential class to encourage education and poetry as well as medicine and religion. The former enhancing the intellect of the rising generation and immortalizing in verse the grandeur of their patrons. The latter explaining the treatment of the body in health and disease and the

means of ensuring happiness to the individual after death.

The 1<sup>st</sup> three classes of people were compelled to undergo a long period of rigorous studentship. The compulsion was not governmental but for stronger one the compulsion of religion social convention. It was unthinkable for a member of these three classes, known as *Dwija* or twice born, to evade the obligation to study, which was enforced both as matter of religious duty as well as social convention. Any violation of this obligation brought upon the offender the terrible penalty of being declared an outcaste and debarred from all the privileges of a member of the Aryan community.

The value of knowledge and consequently of education was fully realized by the early ancestors of our race whom we have come to know as Rsis or seers. In the words of one of these the great author of the *CharakaSamhita*<sup>2</sup>.

“All ills of humanity are rooted in ignorance and all progress and happiness in unclouded knowledge. Knowledge was indeed so highly prized by these Rsis that they dedicated their whole lives to the pursuit of learning, living in forest hermitages away from the distractions of the world. It was their firm faith that if man was ever to attain immortality it was through knowledge alone



(विद्ययामृतम्अश्नुते).They loved knowledge above allthings, above even kingship and wealth.

Thus when Yama (यम), God of death gives boon of an incredibly long life, with all the appurtenances of luxury and opulence to the young student Naciketas (नचिकेतस) the latter declines the gift with the saying that the soul of man is not satisfied by material acquisition (नवित्तेनतर्पणीयोमनुश्यः) and insists on knowing the answer to the riddle of man's survival of his bodily death.

The wife of the sage Yajnavalkya (यादृन्ववल्क्य) speaks in a similar vein when her husband prior to understand her, offers to bequeath his earthly possessions. Says "If you give me the whole earth with its riches, would it make me immortal?" On the other hand sage replying that there is no hope of immortality through wealth (अमृतत्वस्यनाशास्तिवित्तेन) the high souled Maitreyi announces that she has no use for such perishing gifts and wishes to be taught the secret of immortality.

The value our early ancestors as seen from the above mentioned Maitreyi story, set on the acquisition of knowledge. They considered the achievement of knowledge and through it that of immortality or deliverance of the soul from the cycle of birth and death, as the final end of human existence. They regarded not as the

expression merely of a coming together of material atoms but as the expression of a unique assemblage of body, senses, mind and soul as Charaka puts it (शरीरिन्द्रियसत्त्वात्मसंयोगः)<sup>3</sup>.

Consistently with this view of man's nature and destiny, the Rsis evolved a system of education which was education in the true sense of the word. It was an education, which had a aim of drawing out of the latent capacities and potentialities of the whole man in the individual. It sought to rebuild up the whole man and enable him to lead as good and useful for life as possible according to the existing condition of time and place.

"It is the science of life which teaches mankind what constitutes their good in both the worlds".

These ideas of education were translated into actual practice over the long era of the golden age of Aryan culture. It extended from 2000 years and elaborate educational organization was built up which succeeded in making the highest fruits of education. It should be available to the humblest member of the society. This marvelous achievement was made possible not by recourse to state aid or compulsion but by the establishment of the religio-social convention because of which thorough education was been



received by every member of Aryan community.

## **AYURVEDIC EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA**

Universal Education in Ancient India:

Before knowing about medical achievements and institutions of ancient India, first let us know ourselves with the standards and spread of general education among the people during this period. When a country is backward it cannot be medically advanced, unless we be sure that in ancient India general educational level of the people was reasonably high.

### **Educational Systems and Institutions**

In India indigenous ideal of education has always been treated as a sacred process. That process activated the individual's inner growth. Education itself was taken in its literal and true sense as the educating and developing of latent capacities, potentialities and the personality of the people.

### **REASON BEHIND STUDYING MEDICINE**

Outlining the objectives or ends which medical education sub serves, Charaka says "It is to be studied by Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. By the Brahmanas for benefiting all creature, by Kshatriyas as sub serving their role of

protectors and by Vaihsyas as a means of livelihood. In general by all with the object of attaining virtue, wealth and pleasure<sup>4</sup>.

Now whatever endeavor a practitioner of this science makes towards the relief of the ailments affecting those who walk in the path of righteousness or those who propagate righteousness or his mother, father, brothers or relations in whatever measure he meditates on expounds or practices the spiritual truths enshrined in this science of life all that constitutes the higher virtue of his life.<sup>5</sup>

Again whatever store of wealth or patronage is able to secure from his association with kings and merchant princes by which he can ensure for himself an easy and comfortable life.

Dealing with this question as to who and why medicine should be studied, Kashyapa declares "Medicine should be studied by Brahmana for the sake of the knowledge of truth ,acquiring spiritual merit for himself and of extending help to humanity. By the Kshatriya for the sake of safe guarding the people. By the Vaisyas for the sake of a livelihood and by the rest for the sake of service. All may study it for the sake of living the good life".

In another great classic, the Sushruta Samhita, we find Sushruta approaching the great Dhanvantri with the request "For the sake of affording relief from suffering to



humanity in its pursuit of happiness, for sake of prolonging our own lives and for the sake of general good of the people, we would like to hear the science of life from which accrues to man his good both here and hereafter. It is for this that we are here as your disciples”<sup>6</sup>

In the same book, we again find Dhanvantri declaring “The purpose of the medical science is release from suffering to those who are in the grip of disease and maintenance of wellbeing as regards those who are healthy”<sup>7</sup>

He further defines Ayurveda thus “Medical science is eternal, sacred and bestower of heaven, fame, longevity and subsistence”<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSION

These references it can be seen that there were three main objectives which induced people to take up the study of medicine.

➤ The 1<sup>st</sup> objective, which is the one that is generally the sole objective in this commercial age, is the earning of a livelihood and the people that took up the medical calling from this incentive were in those days naturally recruited from the Vaishya or the merchant class.

➤ The 2<sup>nd</sup> objective was the acquisition of fame and prestige and the people to whom this objective had the strongest appeal were chiefly from the Kshatriya,

characterized by bold, authoritative and adventurous spirit. Some of these were reigning princes and were able to spread the fruits of their medical knowledge to whole populations and their bold, heroic and enterprising spirit may have initiated many bold experiments especially in surgery.

➤ The 3<sup>rd</sup> and most important class of people was that which took up the study of the medicine with the objective of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake or of serving humanity from motives of mercy are the Brahmanas and. It is mainly from this class that the teachers, research scholars & missionary doctors were recruited. The remarkable progress of medicine during the golden age of Ayurveda was due to the selfless and pioneering spirit evinced by Brahmana teachers and Buddhist sadhus.

➤ All these 3 classes of medical practitioners, though motivated by different impulses shared in common was ideal to human life namely Dharma, Artha and Kama. Though each worked in its own particular way they all served the country and in greater or lesser measure enhanced its well-being and glory.



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