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Place of vāgbhaṭa in ayurveda

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Introduction

Vāgbhaṭa is counted as one of the Bṛhatṛayās, the great three masters of Āyurveda, other two being Caraka and Suśruta. According to his own statement he was born in Sindh and his preceptor was Avalokita. His father Siṃhagupta also was a great scholar of Āyurveda and a successful physician earning the title 'Vaidyapati'. Aṣṭāṅgasaṃgraha gives his name specifically as Vāgbhaṭa, later commentators, Jejjāta (7-8th C.A.D) and Indu (13-14th C.A.D) have used the term 'Bāhaṭa' in the place of Vāgbhaṭa. This is the Prākṛt variant of the term Vāgbhaṭa. Niścalakāra (13th C.A.D) the author of Ratnaprabhā commentary calls Vāgbhaṭa as 'Siṃhagupta tanayaĀ Vāgbhaṭagupta'. This makes us to presume that his full name might be Vāgbhaṭa gupta, similar to the name of his father Siṃhagupta.

Vāgbhaṭa names Avalokita as his preceptor. Avalokiteśvara is the chief divinity of Mahāyāna sects of Buddhism, he is a Bodhisatva (future Buddha) and is being worshipped since the days of emperor Aśokā. Vāgbhaṭa is believed to be a follower of Buddhism. In Rathnaprabhā commentary of Vāgbhaṭa is named as Śaunakaśiṣya - disciple of Śaunaka. Even Jejjāta has mentioned 'Śaunaka matam anuvadatā Vāgbhaṭena' - Vāgbhaṭa following the opinion of Śaunaka. We do not know much about this Śaunaka and his work. Cikitsakalikā, a small book of 400 verses written by Tīsaṭa is available. The colophon at the end of this book mentions Tīsaṭa as the son of Vāgbhaṭa. In the invocatory verse the author mentions the names of many eminent authorities but not of Vāgbhaṭa. He has quoted from the work of Vāgbhaṭa but does not specify his name. Candraṭa, son of Tīsaṭa has written a commentary on his father's work. Even he has not mentioned the name of Vāgbhaṭa in it. Present day scholars have assigned Tīsaṭa and candraṭa to 10th and 11th Century.A.D respectively.

Vāgbhaṭa: A Hinduist or a Buddhist ?

The religion to which Vāgbhaṭa belonged is another topic of debate since plenty of references are found to both Hinduism and Buddhism in his work *Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya* and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*. Taking advantage of this one set of modern Āyurveda scholars assert that he was a follower of Hinduism while another set assert that he was a Buddhist. Mention of gods like Brahma, Dakṣa, Indra, Aśvins, Rudra, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Soma, Sūrya, Durga, Kārtikeya, Vināyaka etc., worship of cow and Brahmanas, conduct of Yañja and offering gifts to gods, Grahās, Brahmanas etc, study of the Veda, Chanting of hymns, observance of Atharvaṇic rites, pilgrimage to holy places etc, legends connected with origin of diseases-eg: Dakṣayajña, Rudrakopa-vīrabhadrajanana, for origin of fever, genesis of Sura (wine) during Samudramathana, creation of Bālagrahās by Rudra to protect Skanda, spiders born from the sweat of Viśvāmitra, non-prohibiting of meat and wine, and many these like indicates that he was a follower of Hinduism. Obeisance to Buddha specifically at the beginning of the text, *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, addressing such as Bhaiṣajyaguru, Buddha, mentions of gods like Avalokita, Aryatāra, Prāṇasabari, Aparājita, Mānibhadra Yakṣa etc, prescribing the chanting of Dhruṇis (protective hymns) like Māyūri, Mahāmāyūri and Bījamantras (secret syllables) before administering medicine and also during treatment, mention of four Aryasatya, four kinds of death, worship of Bodhi tree, adopting the Madhyama mārga(middle path) in all activities show that he was a follower of Buddhism. Acceptance of the work of Vāgbhaṭa (*Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya* especially) as a sacred text in Buddhist countries like Tibet and China.

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From the above statements it becomes clear that Vāgbhaṭa has shown equal reference to both religions. So we may safely say that Vāgbhaṭa was born in a Hindu Brahmin family, educated all Hindu scriptures and well acquainted in its precept and practices. He adopted Buddhism in his later life and became well versed in it also. Hence, the harmonious blend of both religions in his works. It matters little, whether he was a Hindu or Buddhist, the contribution of each religion for Āyurveda is glorious.

Works of Vāgbhaṭa

Important treatises of Āyurveda attributed to Vāgbhaṭa are three in number. They are *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* and *Rasaratnasamuccaya*.

Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha

As the name itself suggests, it is a samgraha - collection or compilation of information of the Aṣṭāṅgas-the eight branches of Āyurveda in one text. The eight branches are, Kāya cikitsā (General medicine), Bālacikitsā (treatment of children), Grahacikitsā (treatment of diseases caused by evil spirit), Ūrdhvāṅgacikitsā also known as Śālakyatantra (treatment of diseases of eyes, ears, nose, throat and head), śalyacikitsā (surgery), Daṃṣṭracikitsā/Agadatantra (Toxicology), Jarā/Rasāyanacikitsā (Geriatrics) and Vṛṣacikitsā also known as Vajikaraṇacikitsā (virilification therapy) are the eight types of treatments.

Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha consists 6 sthanās (divisions) and 150 Adhyāyās (chapters). They are; Sūtrasthāna (40 chapters), Śārīrasthāna (12 chapters), Nidānasthāna (16 chapters), Cikitsāsthāna (24 chapters), Kalpasthāna (8 chapters), UttaraTantra (50 chapters).

Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā

It is identical in most respect with *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* and even owns its origin to it. The author himself says : ‘by churning the great ocean of medical science, a great store of nectar by name *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* was obtained, from that store of nectar has arisen this text separately for the benefit of the less studious’¹. By studying this the physician will be able to understand the Samgraha and become a skillful and efficient physician.

Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya consists of 120 chapters in total, divided in to 6 sections. It is composed entirely in poetry, the total number of verses being 7120 in the extant edition (Harisastry Parardkar Nirāyasaagar, Bombay). This text gained greater popularity than *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* not only in India but also in neighbouring countries. It has the largest number of commentaries in Sanskrit than any other Āyurvedic text. It has been translated into Tibetan and Arabic languages long back.

Rasaratnasamuccayā

This is a text dealing with Rasaśāstra and treatment of diseases using mercurial and metallic compounds along with vegetable drugs. At the commencement of the text it is mentioned that Vāgbhaṭa, son of Siṃhagupta is the author. But it stands in no comparison in the nature of content, composition and standard either with *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* or *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. Based on internal evidences it has been concluded that its author is a pseudo- Vāgbhaṭa a person who has concealed his real name and passed on the book, who can be assigned to 13th C.A.D. and not earlier. So neither he nor

his book is taken into consideration in the discussions concerning Vāgbhaṭa, author of *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*. Some other texts also are assigned to Vāgbhaṭa, by some commentaries, the details of which are the followings.

Aṣṭāṅgavatāra

Jejjīta in his commentary on *Carakasamhitā* has mentioned a text by name *Aṣṭāṅgavatāra*. Arunadatta in his commentary quotes verse from that and says that it is the work of the author of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. Nothing more about this text is known.

Madhyasamhitā

Nīścalakāra in his commentary on cakradatta and Sivādāsasena in his commentary on *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* have quoted many verses and some prose passages from another text which they have called as *MadyaVāgbhaṭa* or *Madhyasamhitā*-middle text of Vāgbhaṭa. These verses resemble very much with those of both *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* and *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* but do not belong to either. This makes it imperative for us to accept the existence of this intermediary text written by Vāgbhaṭa.

Aṣṭāṅganighaṇṭu

This is a small book of about 408 verses, being a lexicon of synonyms of drugs mentioned in the Gaṇās (drug groups) in *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, as the author says in the beginning of the book. But the colophon at the end of one of the manuscript reads as: ‘thus ends *Aṣṭāṅganighaṇṭu* of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya samhitā* written by Bahatacarya. P.V. Sarma opines that it is the work of a person different from the author of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* and places him in 8th century A.D.

Identifying Vāgbhaṭa

Having had a glimpse of the nature of all the texts, the identification of Vāgbhaṭa revolves chitfly around the first two texts, viz *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* and *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*, and whether both the works of one person or of different-persons of the same name. There are two major views on this subject.

Different authurs views

According to this, Vāgbhaṭa son of Siṃhagupta and grandson of Vāgbhaṭa is the author of *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* while the author of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* is a different-person having the same name.

1. Commentators such as Dalha,a, Srika,thodatta, āivad;asena, Hem;dri etc have quote verses of *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* by the name ‘as from v;ddha Vāgbhaṭa’ and verses of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* by the name ‘as from Vāgbhaṭa / Svalpa Vāgbhaṭa or Vāgbhaṭa’ to show distinctness of two persons.
2. Many dissimilarities are seen between the two texts, such as nature and style of-composition, scientific doctrines and practices, religious and social customs etc.
3. Both the texts being almost of the same size, no scholar would waste his time and energy to write more than one book on the same subject. Modern votaries of this view are A.B Keith, M. Winternitz, P.V.Sarma and others.

Common author view

1. Earlier commentators like Candranandana, Indu, Arunadatta, Nīścalakāra, Bhaṭṭa Narahari etc have this view.
2. Incorporation of verses without any change from one text to another also proves common authorship.

¹ AĀi, gahṛdaya Uttaratantra Adhyayam 40

3. There are many instance in ancient times in India that the same author writting more than one book on the same subject, the first one usually big and tough, while the subsequent ones are smallers and earier. Modern votaries of this view are Haridatta sastry, N.S Mous, D.C. Battacharya, Atrideva gupta and others.

Date of Vāgbhaṭa

Modern scholars in their attempt to determine the date of Vāgbhaṭa have gathered plenty of evidence both-internal and external. Taking one or more as the basis, a good number of dates varying widely ranging from 2nd century B.C. to 12th century A.D. have been suggested. But so far no conclusions have been reached.

1. Scrutinising study of political, social, religious, literally and such other conditions depicted in *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* suggest that the text should be assigned to post- Gupta period of Indian ranging between 500-650 A.D.
2. Itsing, the chines pilgrim who was in India during 675 to 686 A.D. states in his travel record that 'these eight parts [branches of medicine] formerly existed in eight-books but lately a man epitomized them and made them into one bundle'. This has been accepted by most of the present day scholars as reffering to Vāgbhaṭa and his book. So they opine that he must be placed at least a century earlier.
3. There are many points of similarity between *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* of Vāgbhaṭa and *Brhatsamhitā* of varāhamihira; both express similar views on some common topic, some medicinal formular are common to both varāhamihira flourshed during 505-587A.D.and probably was a contemporary of Vāgbhaṭa.
4. Ravigupta author of *Siddhasāra* is assigned a period later than Vāgbhaṭananda. His date is now fixed as 650 A.D.

Taking into consideration all reliable evidences, most of the modern scholars of Āyurveda place Vāgbhaṭa in the 7th century A.D. (About 650 A.D)

Conclusion

Vāgbhaṭa shines as a bright luminary in the firmament of Āyurveda of the 7th century A.D. Descendant of a family of physicians he strived hard to preserve and propagate the knowledge of medicine. But for his hard work of collecting the essence of knowledge of all the eight branches of Āyurveda from a large number of ancient texts and preparing comprehensive books, we would have much of the knowledge of many branches. Thus a great compiler, the first one known so far, he set the trend for preparing such books and he was followed by many authors later. He was an embodiment of knowledge of ancient India, standing at the threshold of medieval India and passing on the ancient knowledge to the next generation.

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