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## Thought of health science and ayurveda in Buddhist Literature: A brief review

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### Abstract

One of the unforgettable religious reformers born in the world in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC was Goutam Buddha. Historians called him the greatest child of the epoch and the greatest gift of India. We know that Buddha propagated Bodhigyan for the welfare of human beings in the world. His preaching evoked overwhelming response from people. The main purpose of his first religious message was to elaborate truth. He thought that human beings needed to get rid of ignorance, lust and addiction. Hence his religious preaching is known as *Dharmachakraparbaratnasutra*. It includes four important aspects of life namely cause of sorrow, universal awakening (samuday), prevention of rebirth (nirodh) and the way of prevention of rebirth (nirodhmarga). These are known as four Arya satta or greatest truths. According to him, life is sorrowful and joy and sorrow are short-lived. He also pointed out four reasons of sorrow namely rebirth, senility, disease and death. Prevention of rebirth brings an end to sorrow. So prevention of rebirth is Nirvana. For the realization of four greatest truths or Arya satya, one needs to follow and practice Ashtangikmarga. Among Ashtangikmarga, the most important ones are speaking truth (sabakya), doing good (sakarya) and honest living (sajibika). According to Buddha, these factors regulate human body and mind. Besides, good thinking, good sense and consciousness also regulate mind. Human beings gain wisdom (Pragya) through strong determination and enlightened vision. In Buddhist religion, good manners (Sil), heart (Chitta) and wisdom (Pragya) have specific meaning. In Binay Pitak, Sil stands for morality. The man with strong morality is a real Brahmachary. According to Satta Pitak and Abhidharma Pitak, Chitta regulates mind. According to Satta Pitak, Pragya helps one to know the self. Another religious message of Buddha emphasizes that the five elements, which constitute human life namely body, sense, feeling, different states of mind and consciousness, are devoid of soul therefore they bring sorrow. In the opinion of Buddha, consciousness is the cause of sorrow and Ignorance creates thirst. Nirvana is not related to religious sacrifice (Yagna) or worship. Buddhist belief emphasizes that every human being needs to be Atmadeep. Human beings must be healthy and free from disease. This article has focused on this aspect of Buddhism.

**Keyword:** Nirvana, aryasatya, ashtangikmarga, shil, chitta, pragya, trishna, jibana, sorrow (duhkha), root (jarā), disease (byādhi), death, healing, good health

### Introduction

The reference to health science is found in Buddhist literature. It is reflected in the teaching the discussion on health and therapy is found in Buddha's teaching and life-history. Mention may be made of the book named *Tripitak* and the story of *Jataka* in this context. *Tripitak* is a part of *Tripitak Sutatpitak* which includes *Kayaddak Nikay* (system). In the opinion of Buddhists, it is a very popular Buddhist text. It highlights mainly ethics and Buddhist principles. Its instructions are easily understandable. It is free from all kinds of complexity. In it, a discussion of the then mode of treatment has been elaborated. According to Buddha, human body is prone to disease and decay. This message of Buddha in *Dharmapada* moves people. It is a fact that human body decays with death. What must people do? Do they always think about death or enjoy every moment of life? If one asks a banker where one should make savings to get considerable profit. He will certainly answer that one should make savings for one's good health at first. It is said: "Śarīram adya khalu dharmasādhanam". Only a healthy man can follow Chaturbarga and attain salvation. One can practice religion only when one is healthy. Everybody should think about sound physical and mental health. One must study for this. According to *Kautilya*, if one has surplus money, one can invest it agriculture, animal-breeding and commercial transaction. One may invest in company stocks too. One must maintain composure and remain free from anxiety while making investment.

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On must take care of one's health all the time. Although medical science is quite advanced nowadays, common people do get proper treatment because it has become expensive. "(Dhammapada, 11/03, p. 94.) / Basu, Charu Chandra. Anu. Dhammapada, Jaravarga, Eleventh Chapter, Mahabodhi Society, Calcutta, 1904

While thinking about common people, Lord Buddha engaged himself in making discussion on health science in order to help Indians affected with senility and different kinds of disease. He informed his disciples of the formation of human body. According to him, body is made of bones covered with flesh. There lies the seed of old age, death and hypocrisy inside the body. First of all he talked about external features of body comprising bones and flesh." Dhammapada, 11/05, p.96. Basu, Charu Chandra. Anu. Dhammapada, Jaravarga, Eleventh Chapter, Mahabodhi Society, Calcutta, 1904.

Then he suggested ways to overcome hunger, thirst, disease and lust in order to stay fit. In his message, he referred to the context of good health every time. He stated in Dharmapada: "Jighacchā paramā rōgā saṅkhārāparamā dukhā." (Dhammapada, 15/7, p. 51) / Bhikkhu, Shilabhadra. Dhammapada. Mahabodhi Society, Calcutta, 1351.

Hunger is a critical malady, life is painful and getting rid of pain is happiness. Man is always burning with the fire of hunger and food is the fuel. Man has the capacity to overcome all kinds of pain, hunger, but hunger leads him to death. Hence he instructed people to desist from extreme hunger on one hand and too much intake of food on the other hand. Both come in the way of long life. He said," Ārōgya paramā lābhā santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanam. Bis sāsa paramā krāti nirbāṇaṃ paramaṃ sukham." (Dhammapada, 15/8. p. 51) / Bhikkhu, Shilabhadra. Dhammapada. Mahabodhi Society, Calcutta, 1351.)

While stating the benefit of good health, Buddha advised people to pay attention to health studies. He instructed people to live a healthy life and be content with everything. In his opinion, contentment is the great wealth. So he told everybody to be restrained, genial, truthful and kind. Lack of restraint makes man sinner. For this reason, he told everybody to desist from greed and violation of religion. Besides it, he advised people to have those friends who give good advice. In his view, only Nirvana can bring about salvation of man. He told everyone to follow his instruction properly for this purpose.

We know that four Arya Satta is the base of Buddhist religion. It includes the message of health science and fitness. Four Arya Satta comprises Sorrow or pain, source of pain, prevention of pain and diagnosis of pain. One who becomes aware of four Arya Satta can overcome all kinds of pain. By knowing Arya Satta, one makes one's character strong and maintain good health. He always drew people's attention to senility, sorrow, disease and death. According to him, happiness comes after overcoming sorrow and thirst is the root of sorrow. Thirst brings misfortune to man. Buddha taught us to get rid of thirst. He talked about physical, verbal and mental purity of everyone. In this way, one can maintain good health.

In his view, when the world burns constantly, there is no question of joy and laughter and nobody can look for light in utter darkness. According to Lord Buddha, good health is necessary for Nirvana, religious faith and contentment. In Dharmapada, Lord Buddha draws people's attention to health. He said, in his view, body is the house of disease and it leads to death. He emphasized the need to protect body from getting old and diseased. In his opinion, human life is precious, life is

dear to all and death is baneful. Hence it is necessary for everybody to try to attain Nirvana in good health. He advised us to keep ourselves free from disease and get rid of greed. He described hunger as critical disease. He advised us to restrain tongue and do good works with restrained mind and body. Lord Buddha condemned excessive intake of food leading to excessive thirst. That is why Lord Buddha advised his disciples to chant a hymn in order to avoid taking excessive food. He said:

"Paṭisaṅkhā yōnisō piṇḍapātaṃ paṭi sēbāmi.  
Nēba dabāya, na madāya na maṇḍanāya, na bibhūsanāya.  
Yābadēba imas sa kāyas sa ṭhitiyā yāpanāya.  
Bihansuparatiyā brāhmacāriyānu g gaḥāya, iti.  
Purāṇaṅca bēdanam paṭihaṅkhāmi, nabaṅca bēdanam.  
Na uppā dēs sami yātrā ca mē bhabis sati.  
Anabajjatā phāsu bihārō cāti."

He advised all Buddhist mendicants to keep in mind that they must take food sensibly with full concentration. They should keep in mind that they take food not for display of strength or for handsome look, but for keeping themselves fit in all respects. Food appeases our hunger and at the same time it paves the way for appetite afresh. He always advised moderate diet. In his view, moderate does not harm our health. It has been learnt from the book of Sitangshu kumar Barua on Buddhist System of Medical Treatment published by Romeli Barua in 1995 (*Baruṃyā, sitāṅśu kumāra. Baud'dha sāhitye cikitsā byabas'hā. Prakāśaka rōmēli baruṃyā, prathama prakāśa 1995, caṭṭagrāma, bānlādēśa. Pṛ. 5*) That how Lord Buddha was conscious of physical fitness of people and made various efforts. In his *Udyan Sakha* Lord Buddha explained that he understood various features of body and became aware of all kinds of thirst and so he was not going to be misled by bodily features and feelings. Hence he was able to emphasize that physical fitness is quite beneficial and happiness lies in Nirvana. According to human beings cannot avoid old age and disease, but they have to take care of their health. Death is inevitable and it destroys five elements constituting the human body. Hence only Nirvana is the final goal of life and only physical fitness can lead us to the ultimate goal. He reminded his disciples of the importance of physical fitness again and again (Dhammapada). (Dhammapada, 153-154) jātaṅka nidānakathā, jātaṅka, prathama khaṇḍa, pṛ. 76. Bhikṣu, śilabhadra. Dhammapada. Mahābōdhi sōsā'itī, kalakātā, 1351.)

#### It needs to be cited here

"Janmajanmāntarēra pathē, phiriṃyāchi, pa'ini sandhāna,  
punaḥ punaḥ duḥkha pēyē dēkhā taba pēyēchi ēbāra,  
ē gṛhakāraka! Gṛha nā pāribi racibārē āra;  
bhēnēchē tōmāra stambha, curamāra gṛhabhittacaṃ,  
sanskārabigatacitta, ṭṛṣṇā ādi pā'iyāchi kṣaṃya."  
(Bud'dhadēba. Satyēndranātha ṭhākura. Caturtha  
sanskaraṇa, pṛ.47)

Aswaghosh's writings on the life and philosophy of Lord Buddha ranked high in world literature. In his writings many things about Buddha's view on health science and mode of treatment have been discussed. One of the popular stories about it is as follows: One day Suddhodana wanted to know from the chariot-driver about the person, who looked pale and thin and had swollen belly, crying repeatedly for mother. The chariot-driver replied to him: "The man made of elements has

been affected with disease which often overcomes even the strongest man. Usually everyone is affected with disease in the world. Human beings are accustomed to disease and even find joy in it". (*Bud'dhacarita*, 3/40-44.) Lord Buddha realized that human beings were so ignorant that even after being affected with disease they found joy. He became thoughtful. Later on his advice regarding the remedial process shows his followers the way to keep themselves free from disease. (*Bud'dhacarita*, 3/40-44.)

Aswaghosh has mentioned in the fifth chapter of *Sundarnanda* the advice given to Nanda by Lord Buddha. According to Buddha, there is no crisis like disease and there is no danger like death. He has said further that the person who sleeps most of the time in his house is prone to old age and disease. He is compelled by the doctor to take medicine with bitter taste. Buddha has repeated said that the body provides shelter to disease and is subdued by senility. It is also as weak as froth. If man is too much inclined to food, drinks and movement, his body is endangered. Man cannot be proud of his strength. It is vulnerable to heat, cold, disease, hunger and senility. When the body is the assembled form of bones, flesh and blood and at the same time it is subdued by disease and hunger, there is no scope of speculating about human strength.

In Buddhist literature, many discussions centre round the impact of elements and various kinds of disease. In this context, I would like to refer to the book of Sitangshu Bikas Barua who focused on Buddhist writings highlighting the impact of elements and therapeutic methods. In this regard, he cited lines from *Binoy Pitak's Mahabarg, Chalbar, Angatanikay and Sanskrit Nikay and Milind Parsan*. In his opinion, disease is caused by gas cough, bile, some kinds of fluid. Change of season, excessive stress, convulsion in a part of the body and indigestion besides, it has been mentioned in Buddhist literature that the impact of element is the main cause of disease. For this reason, Lord Buddha has pointed out forty two kinds of undesirable items. It includes 20 elements found in the earth, 12 elements found in the water, 4 *Tezdhathu* and 4 elements found in air. The elements related to earth include hair, nail, teeth, bodily hair, skin, muscle, fiber, bone, bone marrow, kidney, heart, liver, colon, spleen, viscera, inner attributes, stomach, Karish (feces) and head. The elements found in water include bile, cough, pus, blood, tear, fat, cholesterol, spit, lymph, rheum, sweat and urine and *Tezdhathu* includes regret, burning sensation, feeling of aging and digestives. The elements of air comprises 6 kinds of air which causes hiccups, urine and feces, gas inside stomach, expansion and contraction of artery and process of breathing. These forty two elements cause disease. (Baṛuṃyā, sitānśu kumāra. *Baud'dha sāhityē cikiṭṣā byabas'hā*. Bānlādēśa, 1995, p.34.)<sup>[3]</sup>

Sitangshu Bikas Barua has also referred to the discussions on different parts of body in various texts of Buddhist literature namely *Khdddakapāṭha, paramat'thajyōti, mahāsatipaṭ ṭhāna sutta, bisud'dha mārga and sanyukta nikāya*. In *Kaigatasmriti*, mention has been made of thirty two kinds of bodily aspects namely hair, bodily hair, nail, teeth, skin, flesh, muscle, bone, bone marrow, kidney, heart, liver, colon, spleen, lungs, internal aspects, viscera, stomach, bile, cough, pus, blood, lymph, sweat, fat, fatty acid, tear, spit, Karish, rheum and urine. In Buddhist literature, seven kinds of test have been suggested for human body. The test is concerned with speech, thought, complexion and shape of the affected person and the affected part, condition and characteristics of disease. *Kayagatasmriti* imparts us the fundamental

knowledge of human body. (Baṛuṃyā, sitānśu kumāra. *Baud'dha sāhityē cikiṭṣā byabas'hā*. Bānlādēśa, 1995, p. 7-18.)<sup>[3]</sup>

The discussion on the use of medicine for recovery from disease and herbal treatment found in *Binoy Pitak's Mahabarga* is considered to be a concrete example of Ayurvedic treatment during the time of Lord Buddha. In ancient time, Lord Buddha prescribed medicine made of five items namely fat, oil, honey, jiggery and Ghee for his disciples affected with autumnal disease. In his view, these five items provide the required diet to man. He told his diseased disciples to have these items day and night. However, after some time, the followers of Buddha became thin, pale and weak and their veins became conspicuous. Thereafter, Lord Buddha prescribed the fat of Bear or pig with the five items for his followers affected with disease. Apart from these, he also prescribed the mixture of the extract of ginger, turmeric, root of banyan and some other plants. He also mentioned the therapeutic use of lemon, basil, pointed gourd, cotton fruit and Girimallika. According to him, black pepper, Myrobalan, gooseberry etc also can be used as medicine. He referred to the used of black salt, common salt and Seandhav salt for medicinal use. In Buddha's time, cow-dung and resin were used as a remedy for itching and scab. In order to cure trouble in eyes, eye-salve like Krisnanjan, Rasanjan and collyrium and Girimati were used at that time. They were sometimes mixed with sandal for sweet smell. For the head related disease, hair-oil and snuff were used and for arthritis, some kinds of herbal oil were used as remedy. Even treatment of certain kinds of disease like goiter and gangrene was done through operation. The use of ointment and cotton bandage was prevalent at that time. Sometimes compression was done with mustard-peel. In caase of snakebite, ash, soil and urine were used as remedy. Vetiber was used for gastric disease and sulphur was used for skin disease. Lord Buddha treated his followers himself sometimes for their recovery and such instances were mentioned in writings related to Buddha. (Baṛuṃyā, sitānśu kumāra. *Baud'dha sāhityē cikiṭṣā byabas'hā*. Bānlādēśa, 1995, p. 35-37.)<sup>[3]</sup>

We come to know about the doctors in Buddha's time in *Binoy Pitak's Mahabroga*. One of them was Ashok Gohar. Mention is made of some ancient doctors in the book called *Malind Parson*. They were *Narad, Dhanbantari, Angiras, Kapila, Atula, Purab, Katyan and Konodragnisam*. These sages knew about the origin and nature of disease and prescribed remedy accordingly. The most honoured of them all at that time was *Jibak*. He revealed his keen intelligence through his knowledge and activity even in his puberty. He could acquire knowledge of any subject in a short time and retain it at the same time. He was the doctor who attended on Lord Buddha. He obtained the knowledge of Health Science from the doctors of Takshasila. It has been learnt from Buddhist literature that *Kumar Bhutsa Jibak* was a well-known doctor during the time of Lord Buddha. He took lesson of Health Science from Atar at Takshasila. He was brought up by Abhoy, the son of Bimbisar, the king of Magadh. *Jibak* attended on members of Buddhist cult, Bimbisar, the king of Magadh and Ajatsatru. He was efficient in treating children. Hence he is known as *Kumar Bhutsa*. However, some scholars are of the view that he was called so because he was brought up by Abhoy., the son of *Bimbisar*.

*Jibak* was skilled in treating disease related to head and performing operation. He showed his efficiency in treating *Fistula* and *Jaundice*. During the days of Lord Buddha, *Jibak* used to treat the followers of Lord Buddha at his best. At that



time five kinds of disease broke out in Magadh. Those were leprosy, abscess, skin disease, tuberculosis and asthma. He treated those kinds of disease patiently. Once when Lord Buddha suffered from wound in his leg stoned by a Jain monk named Debdatta, *Jibak* treated the wound by applying a kind of herbal ointment three times every day. He operated the abdomen of Saesthiputar and stitched the spot of operation after cleaning the internal parts of abdomen. Saresthiputar recovered within a few days. He treated jaundice with the help of herbal products containing fat. It has been learnt that the powerful king named Pradyot was affected with jaundice. As the king was not ready to take the item containing fat, he was advised by *Jibak* to take such an item after processing it for removing its taste and smell. He was finally cured of jaundice. *Jibak* also performed operation in the head of a court official to cure him of cerebral disease. He cured Fistula of King Bimbisar. In this way, *Jibak* became a renowned doctor of Buddhist era. (Bidyālaṅkāra śāsibhūṣana. *Jībanī kōṣa bhāratiya aitihāsika*. Trṭīya khaṇḍa, p.700.)

### Conclusion

To sum up, I would like to state that the word Ayurveda is the combination of two words “Aiyu” and “Veda”. Aiyu means life and Veda means knowledge. Ayurveda implies knowledge related to human body. It has been stated in the scripture: “Śārīramādyā khalu dharmasādhanam”. In other words, it is necessary to keep fit in order to perform religious rites. The good health is required to attain Purusartha. Disease comes in the way of Prusartha. Good deeds need to be done for the sake of good health. Let me cite the following lines in this context: “Dharmārthakāmamōkṣāṇāmārōgya mūlam uttamam. Rōgāstasyāpaharttāraḥ śrēyasō jībitasya ca.” At length, I would like to wind up my discussion by stating that the health science developed at the time of Lord Buddha followed the traditional mode of treatment practiced in ancient India. The traditional way of treatment has continued from ancient time without interruption like the flow of stream of Mandakini. On the one hand, Lord Buddha propagated the message of pity, friendship, and joy and on the other hand, he advised people to have complete physical fitness. Lord Buddha devoted his whole life for the welfare of human beings. He realized the necessity of getting rid of all kinds of sorrow to attain happiness. Only healthy man is able to gain pleasure. Buddha wanted to stress the necessity of physical, mental and oral health again and again in his message. Above all, he spread the message of a disease-free world and suggested different methods of remedy.

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