Ayurveda in Rajtrangni-Kalahana’s treatise of ancient Kashmir

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Received 8 November 2005; revised 14 September 2006

In the paper, information about Rajtarangini compiled throws light on the development and prevalence of Ayurveda in Kashmir. The paper related to eight main disciplines of Ayurveda (Astanga Ayurveda), medicine, Pancakarma, surgery, etc. have been described according to chapters (tarangas) of Rajtarangini. There is a reference of Dandalasaka and Sitajvara, which have been described as epidemics while Ksaya (tuberculosis) has also been mentioned. References of plastic surgery, trauma and surgical removal of the embedded foreign body have also been included.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Rajitrangni, Kashmir
IPC Int. Cl.: A61K36/00, A61P17/00, A61P29/00, A61P31/00, A61P31/02, A61P39/02

Ayurvedic practices in Indian subcontinent are much older than written historical descriptions. From time to time review of ancient Indian literature brings out description of Ayurvedic practices in this part of land through individual and institutional practices. Ayurveda had been backbone of healthcare activities in past. No doubt its practices were exploited even in war or at the time of natural calamities in ancient India. Kashmir region of this land though cut off from the plains continued to be ruled by Hindu dynasties till fourteenth century when Muslim Invaders from central Asia annexed this part. The description of political and social set up of Hindu rulers of Kashmir is well compiled in a monumental book of Kalahana on ancient Kashmir namely, Rajtrangani. Though this book is more a description of rule and misrule, exploits, wars and political set of Hindu rulers, it also sheds some light on Ayurvedic practices during the regions of these rulers extending from 2448 BC till 1148 AD.

Rajtrangani

Rajtrangani, River of Kings brings before us the earliest history of Kashmir. Written in middle of twelveth century in the age when the crusaders of Europe were fighting in West Asia, Rajtrangani in blend of authentic chronicle and imaginative poetry. In it there is too much of palace intrigue, murder and treason, civil war and tyranny and adulterous queens. Rajtrangani in a rich storehouse of information of political, social and to some extent economic doings of kings of ancient Kashmir. It consists of Sanskrit poems compiled in 8 cantos, called Trang or wave. The book is written by Kalahana. Kalahana started writing this book in 1148 AD and concluded in 1150 AD. Kalahana was closely associated with the region of King Harsha Dev, who ruled Kashmir from 1089 to 1101, as he was son of Harsha’s Prime Minister Champaka. Kalahana also witnessed the region of Kashmir King Sursala. Kalhan was a Brahmin and a devote disciple of Lord Shiva. The book emits description of few early rulers of Kashmir due to non-availability of authentic data.

Ayurveda in Rajtrangani

The popularity and practices of Ayurvedic system of healthcare was established in Ancient Kashmir. Written Ayurvedic literature provides references to holding of conferences of learned Ayurvedic sages to decide controversial Ayurvedic concepts in Kashmir. Ayurvedic practices were practiced in ancient Kashmir for promoting and restoring health is well described in some Trangs of Rajtrangani. Description of Kayachikitsa, Shalya Chikitsa, Ras-Shastra and Panchkarma, etc. practices are available through verses of Rastrangani Not only this, in Trang 3/461 there is description of establishment of hospital in ancient Kashmir during the region of King Randatya and Queen Ranaramba:
Scattered over various Trangs the description of Ayurvedic practices in Rajtrangani makes sufficient reference to existence of the same. A few are being elucidated here:

In fourth Trang of Rajtrangani, there is description of spread of an epidemic Luta during the region of king Bheemsen. The infected patient had eruptions over the body and disease used to spread by contact. Fever was important symptoms of this disease and disease was often fatal. To protect uninfected people the infected patient was often thrown out of town. There is also a reference that disease was Pitta dosha vitiation induced, which depicts Ayurvedic basis of understanding of pathogenesis of disease:

Dandalsak resembles partially to complete intestinal obstruction or paralytic ileus with grave prognosis without surgical help even today.

In Tarang 8, there is reference to death of ten thousand soldiers in the army of King Jai Singh due to Sheet Jwara, which spreaded like an epidemic characterized by chills (sheet) and jwara (fever):

In this Tarang, there is also description of Yakshma infecting Sureshwarin Devi wife of king Dhanya:

Yakshma, is a disease specifically described in Ayurveda, which in characterized by wasting of body tissues, fever and blood in sputum. Its description has near similarity to modern day lung tuberculosis. The description in Tarang 4/398 that Yakshama results due to excessive sexual indulgence matched similar belief of Ayurveda. The eighth Tarang of Rajtrangani also describes surgical practices and care while describing the surgical dressings of war injured soldiers:

Going through Rajtrangani, one finds reference of practices of Rasayana and Vajikarna therapies of Ayurveda in ancient Kashmir. Tarang 7 describes the use of fish soups by king Kalash to improve his sexual potency:

oz.kiękŒpua 'kY;ks}ja iF;/kukiZ.ke~'kL={krkuka Irра dkj;UlO;yksD;r~A

(Tarang 8-8/740)
In Rajtrangani, there is reference to believe that plastic surgery and repair surgical practices were too practiced by vaidyas of ancient Kashmir. Vaidyas used to treat mutilated noses, ears and cut throats of soldiers in the king Lalitaditya:

By Kotivedi Ras Siddhi he used to convert metals into gold in such as huge quantity that it could fill the entire vacant space of universe.

Thus, Rajtrangani provides sufficient evidence of Ayurvedic practices in ancient Kashmir much before the Ayurvedic text available today were written. It is also evident from the written description that role of the physicians was played by Brahmans who occupied highest positions as royal physicians. This trend continued even in the time of early muslim ruler of Kashmir, Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin in fifteenth century. Fifteenth century under Zain-ul-Abidin's age witnessed significant development in the field of medicinal and technical educations as well. Abul Fazl tells us that Sultan often personally administered medicinal remedies. Shirya Bhatta, the Royal physician was unrivalled in the science of medicines of his age and special favours, which he received from Sultan, were a source of great encouragement to study medicines. Ayurvedic and Unani Systems of Medicine were in vogue. A medical manual was compiled by Mansur-bin-Mohammad bin- Ahamd bin-Yusuf bin -Ilyas called, Kifayah-i-Mujahidiyya. Narhari was another most distinguished figure associated with science of medicine in ancient Kashmir. He composed the famous medical glossary, Rajnighantu in Kashmir in 1450 AD. It is during these time music was applied to treat diseases. During this time, midwives were imported to Kashmir and maternity services established in hospital.

In the end it can be concluded that Rajtrangani, the book written regarding sociopolitical scenario of ancient Kashmir puts light on Ayurvedic practices in ancient Kashmir. Though it does not specifically deliberate on the health services status in ancient Kashmir. There is no doubt that Ayurveda was only healthcare system practiced in Ancient Kashmir.

References
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