

A Bird's Eye View on Ashtanga Sangraha


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Ayurveda has passed down through the centuries as a complete healing system, evolving to meet the needs of the time, and yet remaining committed to its core principles. These fundamental principles are laid down in Ayurveda Samhithas which are the store houses of information. Brihatrayees (the greater trio) are the three treatises occupying the best positions for the authority and authentication with respect to compilation and presentation of Ayurveda in its best form. Ashtanga Sangraha is an authoritative text on the science of medicine in ancient India. The name of the text itself conveys its meaning clearly. It is a collection of information of the Ashtangas - the eight branches of Ayurveda in one single text providing preference to Kayachikitsa. The glory of this book is that it confines only to the three pillars of medical science i.e., Hetu (etiology), Linga (symptomatology), and Oushada (therapeutics). The text is composed in such a way as to be suitable to the present age. Acharya Vagbhata created a great revelation in the medical field through his treatise. This review article focuses on unique contribution of Acharya Vagbhata in Ashtanga Sangraha for the development of Ayurveda.

Keywords: Ashtanga Sangraha, Sthaanas, Vagbhata, Brihatrayee, Ayurveda

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Introduction

Ayurveda the science of life is eternal, permanent, and it has no beginning. The origin of *Ayurveda* was dated back when Lord Brahma recollected the science of *Ayurveda* and revealed the knowledge to *Prajapati Daksha* and from him it was transferred to *Aswins* then to *Indra* and finally to Sage *Bharadwaja*. The period up to *Indra* was called Vedic period.[1] From sage *Bharadwaja* the knowledge of *Ayurveda* was transferred to *Agnivesa*, *Bhela* and other disciples. This period was the golden era of *Ayurveda*, called the *Samhitha* period which extended from the time of Sage *Bharadwaja* to the time of *Acharya Vagbhata*. *Samhitha* period witnessed the development and spread of *Ayurveda* in both India and abroad. Many outstanding treatises were developed in *Ayurveda* during this golden period. Sages like *Agnivesa*, *Bhela*, *Parasara*, *Charaka*, *Susrutha*, *Haritha*, *Vagbhata*; all attained much popularity during this period. Through their eminent works *Acharya Charaka*, *Susrutha* and *Vagbhata* were entitled as the *Brihatrayaas* of *Samhitha* period.

Vagbhata shines as a bright luminary in the field of *Ayurveda*. Descendent of a family of reputed physicians he strived hard to preserve and propagate the knowledge of medicine. We would have lost much of the knowledge of many branches unless he had collected the essence of all the 8 branches of *Ayurveda* by churning a large number of ancient texts. Thus, a great compiler, the first one known so far, he set the trend for preparing such books and was followed by many authors later. He was an embodiment of medical knowledge of ancient India, standing at the threshold of medieval India and passing on the ancient knowledge to the next generation. *Vagbhata* has introduced a distinct method and clearly perceivable system in his work. Though *Vagbhata* has adopted the teachings and doctrines of both *Charaka* and *Susrutha* as his basis, he has given such a clear outline to his subject that the student comprehends it readily and is always able to rely upon the knowledge thus acquired without suspicion and fear. It may safely be said that *Vagbhata* has cleared the way where formerly there were mazes and pitfalls which only a close study could remove. Thus, *Acharya Vagbhata* is rightly counted as one among the *Brihatrayaas* – the great three masters of *Ayurveda* along with *Charaka* and *Susrutha*.

Ashtanga Sangraha of *Acharya Vagbhata* is an ancient authoritative text on *Ayurveda*, studied since many centuries by students, scholars and practitioners of Indian medicine. Because of its archaic style of composition and terse language, certain amount of difficulty is being experienced. This work is intended to provide an insight on *Ashtanga Sangraha* written by *Acharya Vagbhata*.

Aim and Objective

The aim of this study is to provide an insight on *Ashtanga Sangraha* written by *Acharya Vagbhata*.

Materials and Methods

All sorts of references related to *Ashtanga Sangraha* was collected and compiled from various *Ayurvedic* texts.

Discussion

Authorship

The text *Ashtanga Sangraha* itself provides the foremost knowledge about the author. In one of the concluding verses of the text the author furnishes his own whereabouts as follows –“there was a great physician by name *Vagbhata*, who was my grandfather and I bear his name, from him was born *Simhagupta* and I am from him born in the land of *Sindhu*. Having acquired sound knowledge from *Avalokita*, the preceptor and even more from my father, and after studying a large number of texts of medical science, this treatise named *Ashtanga Sangraha* has been written”.

Period of *Ashtanga Sangraha*

A wide range of opinions persists regarding time period of *Ashtanga Sangraha*. Some of views are: 1) first or second century BC 2) second or third century AD. 3) Posterior to *Charaka* and *Susrutha Samhitha* and anterior to *Yajnavalkya*. 4) Between 2nd and 6th centuries 5) 5th or 6th century about 550AD 6) between *Kamasootra* (400AD) and *Varahamihira* (505-587 AD) 7) late in 6th or early in 7th century about 625AD 8) between 7th or 8th century AD 9) between 1010 and 1055AD (during reign of King *Bhoja* of *Dhara*).[2] Based on various internal and external evidences modern *Ayurvedic* Scholars fixed period of *Ashtanga Sangraha* as 6th or 7th century AD. This has to be proved with further clarifications in future.[3]

A view on *Sthaanas* and Number of *Adhyayas*

Ashtanga Sangraha is a voluminous text having 150 *Adhyayas* divided into 6 *Sthaanas* each containing varying number of chapters. The text is composed in both prose and verse, about 9250 together.

The *Sthaanas* are

Table 1: *Sthaanas* and *Adhyayas* of *Ashtanga Sangraha*

SN	Sthaana	Chapter
1.	Sutrasthaana	40
2.	Sarirasthaana	12
3.	Nidanasthaana	16
4.	Chikitsasthaana	24
5.	Kalpasthaana	8
6.	Utharatantra	50
	Total	150

Main contents of each *Sthaana*

1. *Sutrasthaana*:

- The first and foremost *Sthaana* of the text which constitute the whole essence of the text.
- This *Sthaana* explains the origin and propagation of *Ayurveda* and the basic doctrines of *Ayurveda*.
- Principles of health with its personal social and community aspects.
- Prevention of diseases, various dietary regimens and food articles to be adopted in various seasons.
- Causes of diseases and methods of treatments.

2. *Sarirasthaana*:

- Deals with the evolution and composition of universe.
- Development of foetus inside the womb
- Human Anatomy and Physiology
- Physical and psychological temperaments
- Nature of various dreams, good and bad omens
- Fatal signs leading to various diseases and death.

3. *Nidanasthaana*:

- The *Nidanastana* in brief deals with etiology, signs and symptoms, pathogenesis and prognosis of major diseases.

4. *Chikitsasthaana*:

- Elaborates the methods of treatment, medicines, diet, perfect care of the patient etc. of all diseases pertaining to *Kayachikitsa*.

5. *Kalpasthaana*:

- Deals with the method of preparing purificatory recipes.
- Administration of purificatory recipes.
- Management of complications.
- Principles of pharmacy, weights, and measures.

6. *Utharathantra*:

The last section has 50 chapters allotted to remaining seven branches

- *Balachikitsa* - 5 chapters
- *Grahachikitsa* - 5 chapters
- *Urdvangachikitsa*
- *Netraroga Chikitsa* - 10 chapters
- *Karnaroga Chikitsa* - 2 chapters
- *Nasaroga Chikitsa* - 2 chapters
- *Mukharoga Chikitsa* - 2 chapters
- *Siroroga Chikitsa* - 2 chapters
- *Salya Chikitsa* - 11 chapters
- *Damstra/ Visha Chikitsa* - 9 chapters
- *Rasayana Chikitsa* - 1 chapter
- *Vrsa/ Vajikara Chikitsa* - 1 chapter

Translations and Commentaries on *Ashtanga Sangraha*

Translations

Ashtanga Sangraha is translated into many regional languages. Some of them are fully translated including whole *Sthaanas*, but some are partially translated with particular *Sthaana*. Many of the translations are not available now. Its first edition was published by Ganesh Tarte of Bombay in 1888. Later T *Rudraparasava* published the complete text together with Indu commentary from Trichur, Kerala during 1913 to 1924. Next Ramachandra Sastry Kinjawadekar of Pune published some portions of the text with Indu commentary. All these are not procurable now. In 1980 Ananta Damodar Athavale of Pune has published the full text together with Indu's commentary.

Following are the available translations of *Ashtanga Sangraha*

1. English translations by
 - Srikantha Murthy
 - Rama Rao
 - P Srinivas Rao
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha Sutrasthaana* by Vaidya Sri Govardhan Sharma
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha sutrasthaana* by Ramachandra Shaastri
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha Sarirasthaana* by Kinjawadekar
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha Nidanasthaana* by Kinjawadekar
2. Hindi translation
 - Anantha Damodar Athavale
 - Atridev Gupta
 - Kendriya Ayurveda and siddha Anusandhan Parishath
 - *Samkshipta Ashtanga Sangraha* by S V Sukla
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha Sarira sthaana* by Pakshadhara Jha
3. Marathi translation
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha Sutrasthaana* by Prof. Subhash Ranade.
4. Malayalam translation
 - *Ashtanga Sangraha* by M Narayanan Vaidyar.

Commentaries

Ashtanga Sangraha is the only text with the least number of commentaries. The reason for not writing commentary on *Ashtanga Sangraha* remains controversial. It may be due to the non-popularity of the text at that time, or due to missing of written manuscripts. Presently only one commentary on *Ashtanga Sangraha* written by Indu is available. But from the statement of Indu it is clear that there were some commentaries earlier to this. But it is not available. So that opinion is not reliable. Two other commentaries on this work written by Harishchandra and Brahma Suri are available in manuscript form and not yet printed. Another commentary named *Ashtanga Sangraha Vyakhya* is reported to be available in GOML Madras, but is incomplete.

Sasilekha Commentary by Indu

Indu has written a commentary on *Ashtanga Sangraha* in the name of *Sasilekha*. This commentary is quite elaborate and explains the text in great detail. Hence it helps to understand the subject matter very clearly. Indu has written commentaries on both *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hrdaya* in the common name *Sasilekha*. It can be presumed from his own statement that commentary on *Ashtanga Sangraha* was written first and that on *Ashtanga Hrdaya* next.

Indu

Indu the commentator of *Ashtanga Sangraha* has not furnished any information about himself in his commentary. In his commentary on *Ashtanga Hrdaya* he offers obeisance to *Vaagiswari* at the commencement and to *Girijesa*, *Vinayaka*, and *Skanda* at many places.[4] This makes us to presume that he belonged to a Hindu Brahmin family devoted to worship of Siva. In the commentary Indu furnished the names of plants and the names being known only in the region of Kashmir. Based on this it can be inferred that he belongs to Kashmir region.

Period of Indu

Many opinions persist about the time period of Indu. Kshira Swami in his commentary on *Amarakosa* quoted Indu. So, Indu's time is definitely before Kshira Swami. He may belong to 9th or 10th century. But some opines that it is some other Indu who is the author of a *Nighantu*. Dr. Gode has estimated Indu's period to be AD1050. But this does not tally with the external evidence in Hemadri's writings. Hemadri has clearly mentioned Indu to be of a later period than Arunadatta and the period of *Arunadatta* has been derived to be AD 1240. Hence, according to this Indu dates somewhere around AD1250. Commentator Indu himself quotes *Medinikosa*, a work of 12th century and he is quoted by *Niscalakara* and *Hemadri*. So, this person can be assigned to 13th century or even later. We cannot reach on a definite conclusion about the period and place of Indu, may be future studies provide a clear picture.[5]

Conclusion

Ashtanga Sangraha is one of the epic texts in *Ayurveda*.

It is a collection of information of *Ashtangas* – the eight branches of *Ayurveda* in one single text providing preference to *Kayachikitsa*. *Acharya Vagbhata* created a great revelation in the medical field through his treatise. Many controversies and conflicts exist about the time period, place and authorship of the text *Ashtanga Sangraha* and the attributes related to it. This happened because all the *Ayurvedic* treatises are composed in earlier centuries, the details of which cannot be dogged out in the present century. The present day *Ayurvedic* scholars are working hard to derive answers for all these confusions through discussions and researches. This will really add up to the scientific foundation of *Ayurveda*. *Ashtanga Sangraha* continues to remain as a popular treatise in the field of *Ayurveda* with its own honor.

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