Impact of Colonial Rule on Ayurvedic System of Medicine: In Context of Garhwal Uttarakhand

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Abstract: Ayurveda is the oldest medical system of India. It is described in abundance in Indian historical and non-historical literature. Ayurveda is called Upveda of Atharvaveda. The first description of Ayurveda is found in Rigveda and Atharvaveda, and the period of their composition is considered to be 2000 BC [1]. Before the colonial rule, Ayurveda was the main medical system in India, but after the promotion and spread of modern medicine by the colonial rule, the Ayurvedic medical system got marginalized and the modern medical system completely took its place. In the presented research paper, a study of Ayurvedic medical system and the impact of colonial rule on it have been presented in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand.

Keywords: Ayurvedic, Allopathy, Yajmani, Himalaya, Vaidyaki, Physician, Colonial, Garhwal - Himalayan

1. Introduction

Uttarakhand has two divisions Garhwal and Kumaon. The oldest reference to Garhwal region is found in Kedarkhand of Skanda Purana and Vanparva of Mahabharata. Garhwal division of Uttarakhand extends from Haridwar in the south, to the Himalayas in the north, and from the Tamsa (Tons) river in the west, to Baudhanchal (border of Chamoli district) in the east [2]. Presently Garhwal is the western division of the North Indian state of Uttarakhand. Tibet is in its north, Kumaon division in the east and Himachal Pradesh in the north - west.

Ayurveda was spread in Uttarakhand probably along with Buddhism in the first century AD. Due to the promotion of Brahmin religion by Shankaracharya in the eighth century, the growth of Buddhism was effectively stopped, due to which Uttarakhand also did not remain untouched. In Jyotirmath or Joshimath After the establishment of Atharvaveda Peeth, Shankaracharya's followers propagated Hinduism or Brahmism in Uttarakhand, which left Buddhism confined to the borders of Tibet and Nepal. Ayurveda remained in this region with some limited changes [3]. Before modern medical system, treatment of diseases in Garhwal was done by physicians and healers. After the establishment of British rule in Garhwal and Kumaon in 1815 AD, western medical system or modern medical system was introduced for the first time in Garhwal and hospitals and dispensaries started coming into existence. Earlier, Ayurvedic medical system was the main medical system of the state and Ayurvedic doctors were capable of treating and preventing diseases.

Ayurvedic System of Medicine in Garhwal Himalaya:
Various types of herbs are found in the Himalayan regions of Garhwal, which were in demand in different areas of the country since ancient times. Since ancient times, herbal medicines and music from the Himalayan region were exported to Egypt and Rome. The Himalayas are a storehouse of medicines, in which plants ranging from Ashtavarga medicines to those used in all types of diseases are found. Like Banafshaa (Viola odorata) which is useful for cold and cough, Panarnava (Boerhavia difusa) which is useful for eye and kidney diseases and Amalata (Cassia fistula) which is a laxative, there are many such plants which are grown in this region and are used by folk healers and Vaidyas (Ayurvedic physician).

In Garhwal, along with ancient methods like folk medicine method, faith therapy, tantra - mantra etc., Ayurvedic medical system was the important medical system. According to legends, the famous Ayurvedacharya Charak had come to visit the Garhwal Himalayan region to discover and know about the Himalayan flora. In Pauri district of Garhwal, a peak is named after Charak which is called Charka Danda (Charak's Peak) [4].

By observing the history of Garhwal, it is known that many traditions have been prevalent here since ancient times, among which Ayurveda, rituals, astrology and tantric practices are prominent. Even today, after a gap of hundreds of years, these traditions are benefiting the Garhwal Himalayan regions with their beneficial properties. People of all classes and communities of the Garhwal - Himalayan region have knowledge of folk medicine; they have their own folk medicinal methods, which are prevalent orally in the region since ancient times. But the Brahmin class has played a role in keeping the Ayurvedic medical system alive in this region due to their knowledge of Sanskrit. Performing rituals and priestly work were the main means of livelihood for Brahmins, due to which it was mandatory for every Brahmin to learn Sanskrit. The knowledge of Ayurveda and medicine compiled from the Vedic period is in Sanskrit language and due to the knowledge of Sanskrit; it was easy for the Brahmins to acquire this knowledge. Like astrology, there has been a tradition of transferring the knowledge of Ayurveda from one generation to the next.

It also existed as a social system that Brahmins, Kshatriyas and other castes remained connected with each other in customs and livelihood related practices. This social system is known as Yajmani Pratha or Jajmani system. The work of worship, performing rituals, astrology etc. was done by Brahmins in return for which Kshatriyas or other castes gave them food, clothes, animals, household items and money in the form of Dakshina (money given to Brahmans after a feast or ceremony, fee for spiritual services). There were only three classes in the Garhwal Himalayas, Brahmins,
Kshatriyas and Shudras (lower castes), who directly and indirectly helped each other in their livelihood. This is also the source of longevity and integrity of Indian culture. The Brahmans were not only the family advisors and priests of the Yajman (host or Yajman) but were also their ancestral physicians. In case of any physical pain, disorder, suffering and disease, Brahmans used to resort to the use of herbs, recitation of puja, mantra - tantra and organizing Yajna - Havans etc. to relieve the suffering of the Yajman (host). The Yajman (hosts) had unwavering faith in their family physicians. Many villages in Garhwal are still known as Vaidya Gaon (village of physician) and there are many Brahmin castes that are still called Vaidyas [5] (Ayurvedic physician).

The villages of Garhwal region were divided under the Cajamni system. Every village had its own Brahmin, who performed all the functions of the family priest, physician and ritualist for that village. On the basis of the Cajamni system in the Brahmin class, the family members of the Brahmans who owned the villages used to serve in these villages from generation to generation [6]. Traditionally, the new generation used to learn the knowledge of Ayurveda and medicines while traveling from village to village with their elders. Most of such Vaidyas also had knowledge of astrology. Astrology is an essential part of Ayurvedic medicine and Tantric medicine.

Tantriks and Vaidyas of Garhwal use various herbal medicines generally and some of them keeping in mind the basis of astrology. This is the reason why such manuscripts related to Ayurveda are also found in Garhwal, in which the combined utility of Ayurveda and astrology from the point of view of disease prevention has been described. The doctors here still do their work with the help of these ancient handwritten manuscripts. While on one hand, a mixed form of astrology is seen with Tantra and Ayurvedic texts, on the other hand, independent texts of Ayurveda Shastra are also found in abundance in this area. If astrology is called the cornerstone of Garhwal culture, then there will be no exaggeration in it because it is used in various areas of life from birth to death [7].

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Vaidyas were the main pillars of the medical system of Garhwal. Traditionally, some Vaidyas sometimes taught the knowledge of medicine experimentally or orally in their Yajmani areas to their Yajmans or disciples, most of whom were illiterate or not formally educated. They acquired medical knowledge from their gurus (mentor) or physicians on the basis of practice and experience. In this way, the tradition of transfer of medical knowledge is seen in various districts of Garhwal - Himalayan regions.

In this way the knowledge of Ayurveda was transmitted from generation to generation. The traditional medicine of the Himalayan region also continued to be influenced by the development of Ayurveda according to different chronologies. For example, the folk medical methods of the local communities also influenced the pure practice of Ayurveda and the promotion of Unani in the medieval period also influenced Ayurveda, but this method was most affected during the British rule. During the British rule, hospitals were opened at various places and on the pilgrim routes in this region and through them allopathic medicine was propagated and Ayurvedic and folk medicine methods were neglected [8]. Due to which the Ayurvedic medical system, which was being followed from generation to generation, reached the verge of extinction. The experts of this method remained limited to those remote areas where there was no facility of modern medical system or allopathic medical system.

Impact of Colonial Rule on Ayurvedic practices of Garhwal Uttarakhand

The arrival of the British in India was the beginning of a new era, they brought with them a new era of science and culture. They not only established supremacy over India's indigenous knowledge, science and methods through their modern methods and science, they also captured it. India not only lost its political base but also became a valuable colony for Western science. On the strength of its new colonial power, Western knowledge and science without any opposition stamped the traditional knowledge and science of India and drove it back. The British made full use of their scientific methods to expand their colonial empire in India. Medical science also played an important role in this type of subjugation policy. The effect of which was that gradually India's own ancient medical systems were marginalized and the influence of modern medical systems or allopathy became completely established in the public mind. Modern medicine had an impact on all areas of India, in which Uttarakhand was also not untouched. In India and other countries like Ghana and Korea, the term modern medicine is used for allopathic medicine [9].

At the time when the British rule was established in the Garhwal region, the medical work in this region was completely dependent on Ayurvedic doctors and the health related situation of this region was very disappointing. Apart from leprosy, the main infectious diseases were plague, cholera, smallpox, fever and goitre etc [10]. There was a need for a perfect medical system to rid the public of these harmful diseases. Ayurveda and traditional medical systems were not effectively capable of doing this work, due to many reasons. Due to the colonial rule, neither this system received the protection of the government nor was any interest shown by Ayurvedic practitioners in new experiments and research.

To ensure that the British themselves did not get affected by these harmful diseases, to deal with this problem, they established modern medical dispensaries, health centers and hospitals as well as made arrangements for vaccination. People took time to accept these modern medicines in rural areas, but hospitals and dispensaries continued to be established in urban centers and army headquarters [11]. So thus, according to the British policy in India, Kumaoon and Garhwal of Uttarakhand also started being managed by the British in terms of diseases and medicine [12].

Till 1940, the British government did not take any steps to look after public health and arrange for doctors, but the Pye Fair report in 1940 drew the government's attention towards this. Earlier, some vaccinators had been appointed to vaccinate against smallpox in Garhwal and they had
vaccinated almost the entire population in the area. During the pilgrimage period, Assistant Commissioner of Garhwal, Baton, started distributing medicines among the pilgrims through vaccinators. In 1940, he sent a report in this regard to the government in which he wrote that he did not have money for the distribution of medicines and medical arrangements among the pilgrims, on which the government gave him permission to appoint a doctor. In this way, the first hospital was established in Srinagar Garhwal under a native doctor [13]. After which many medicine dispensaries were established on the pilgrim routes. Sometime in the last century, allopathic hospitals were established in Pauri, Kotdwar and Srinagar and dispensaries in Kanda and Banghat.

In the last century, many hospitals were established in Dehradun alone by the British. Modern hospitals were established at many places in every district including the pilgrims' routes. After 1947, many previously established dispensaries were upgraded and converted into district hospitals, primary and community health centers. After independence, modern hospitals were continuously established in district headquarters, major towns and cities and people's inclination towards modern medical practice continued to increase. People's attention started moving away from the Ayurvedic dispensaries and hospitals that were established during the British period and started depending on modern medicines. Due to which the practice of Ayurvedic medicine gradually became marginalized.

The people having knowledge of Ayurveda, they have also played a big role in the continuous decline of Ayurveda. Ayurvedic Vaidyas could never come out of their own conservative mentality because they considered it as their ancestral profession and their monopoly on it. Therefore, its training also has been a closed system. Traditional Ayurvedic knowledge was passed down ancestrally from one generation to another; hence it was kept as a secret knowledge mainly in the hilly region of Garhwal. Even the well-known wealthy Vaidyas here never tried to institutionalize it outside the traditional training and it remained limited to the homes and families of the Vaidyas [14].

However, there were many Ayurvedic colleges in the state, and students from different areas kept taking Ayurvedic education from them, among whom Dhanwantari Ayurvedic College of Rishikesh, Mangaladevi Ayurvedic College of Dehradun etc. were prominent. From whom many prominent Ayurvedic physicians of Garhwal emerged. But at that time, due to lack of means of transport and awareness of education in Garhwal, very few families could afford to send their children to these institutional study centers. In the later, due to the flow of English education and the need for other sources of employment, the profession of Ayurvedic physician continued to lose its roots in Garhwal [15].

Modern medicine continued to be promoted by the government as well. Ayurvedic doctors themselves oriented their new generation towards the study of allopathy or modern medicine instead of Ayurveda. After the 70s in the 20th century, new inventions and continuous new research in allopathy refined it and daily new equipment and medicines made allopathy more acceptable and accessible in place of Ayurveda. The continuous migration of people from villages to cities and towns in search of new education and health related facilities has created employment problems for Ayurvedic Vaidyas living in rural areas. Due to which many Vaidya families changed their ancestral profession [16].

2. Conclusion

The above description confirms that Ayurveda was an ancient medical system not only of India but also of Uttarakhando. In this system, there has been a tradition of transferring medicinal knowledge from one generation to the next generation. Besides, in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhanda, the profession of medicine was also linked to the Jajmani system, hence it was an ancestral profession especially of the Brahmin class. But after the establishment of colonial rule in Uttarakhanda, it gradually lost its roots and was replaced by modern medical practice.

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References

[4] Information gathered by research field work.
[6] Information obtained by interviewing various Ayurvedica practitioners during research field work.
[15] Ibid.