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A REVIEW ON GREATNESS OF HIMALAYA AS PER CHARAKA SAMHITA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the life science, is said to be having a divine origin. Right in the beginning of *Ayurveda Samhitas*, *ayurvedavatarana*, the descent of *Ayurveda*, is documented. The three significant references connect to the Himalayas as the place where it descended or from where it fell. The Himalayas are the mountain ranges in the northern part of India, ranging approximately 1600km. In ancient literature of *Ayurveda*, the Himalayas features in many contexts. This article tries to compile, analyse, and interpret the literature connected to Himalaya concerning Charaka Samhita.

Keywords: Himalaya, Himalayas, *Charaka Samhita*, *Divyaushadhi*, *Aushadha bhumi*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is life science. Every aspect of human life gets connected to *Ayurveda*, and every branch of science has a role in health, evident in *Ayurveda* literature. Just as the leads of mathematics, physics, chemistry, statistics, agriculture, pesticides, metallurgy and many other sciences have their leaders in *Ayurveda*, geography also has it. In *Ayurveda Samhitas*, references to many geographical places are available. For example, *Himalaya*, *kailsa*, *Sahya*, *Vindhya*, *Konkana*, *Kashmir*, *saindhava*, *souveera*, *bahleeka*, *gandhara*, *sourashtra* so on and so forth. Among all these, Himalaya is mentioned in more contexts than any other. Himalaya is a Sanskrit word meaning abode of the Snow, as the mountain ranges are studded with glaciers.

Geography of Himalayas

Himalayas (Himalayan ranges) extend from the Indus in the northwest to the Brahmaputra in the east, nearly 1600 miles along the northern border of the Indian subcontinent. The mountain system, averaging 200 to 250 miles in width, rises sharply from the Indo-Gangetic plain. The Himalayas had their origin in a series of earth movements or powerful lateral thrusts acting from the direction of Tibet towards the old stable crystalline block of the Indian Peninsula in the south. The earth movements raised the deposits laid down in the shallowness of the Tethys Sea to form the mountain mass from Kashmir to Assam.

Physically the Himalayas form three parallel zones:

- (1) The Great Himalaya / The Himadri
- (2) The Inner Himalaya, also known as Middle or Lesser Himalaya, and
- (3) The Sub-Himalayan foothills/The Shivalik

The Great Himalaya is the highest zone and consists of a great line of snowy peaks with an average height exceeding 20,000 feet.

The Great Himalayan region is one of the few remaining isolated and inaccessible areas today. Small, clustered settlements occupy some high valleys in the Great Himalaya. To the north of the Great Himalaya are several ranges: the Zaskar, Ladakh, and the Kailas. The Karakoram range also lies on the Tibetan side of the Great Himalaya.

The Inner Himalayas are about 50 miles wide, and it borders the Great Himalayan range in the south. The Inner Himalayas possess a remarkable height uniformity, between 6,000 and 10,000 feet. The Inner Himalayan area is a complex mosaic of forest-covered ranges and intervening fertile valleys. These comprise Nag Tibba given off from Dhaulagiri, the Dhauladhar range from the neighborhood of Badrinath, the Pir Panjal range (the largest of the Inner Himalayan ranges), and the North Kashmir range from the Zoji La, separating the Jhelum and Kishanganga Rivers. The three outer parallel fields are the Mahabharat stretching through Nepal, the Mussoorie range between the Ganges and the Sutlej, and the Ratanpir in southern Kashmir separated from Pir Panjal by the Punch River. The outermost and lowest zone is the Shivalik range made of Tertiary rocks, and it is continuous with the plains of India. It results from the latest phase of the elevatory movement responsible for the mountain system. Its width gradually narrows from about 30 miles in the west until it nearly disappears in Bhutan and Assam. A characteristic feature is the large number of longitudinal, flat-bottomed valleys known as "duns," usually spindle-shaped and filled with gravelly alluvium¹. Such a vast geographical place is mentioned in many contexts in *Charaka Samhita*, narrated under different subtitles.

Himalaya is a critical, historic place

It all starts with the origin or descent of *Ayurveda*. In the context of *Ayurvedavatarana*, the first reference to Himalaya features. When the common man in the society began ailing from diseases, that hurdled attaining *purushartha*. The sages convened an assembly in the Himalayas to find a solution. Ultimately, they

decided that *Bharadwaj* be sent to *indra* to descend *Ayurveda*². In *Rasayana adhyaya* of *Charaka Samhita*, the *yayavara* (wandering) sages came down to low land, established societies and began *gramyadharmas*. Inadvertently laziness was set in them, and they became vulnerable to diseases. Sensing this change, *rishis* like *Bhrugu*, *Angirasa*, *Atri*, *Vasistha*, *Kashyapa*, *Agastya*, *Pulastya*, *Vamadeva*, *Asita*, *Gautama*, etc. back to their old abodes in the Himalayas³. In *siddhi sthana*, the abode of lord *Dhanesh* is said to be Himalaya⁴. *Dhanesha* is the lord of wealth, also known as *Kubera*. *Kubera* is said to be *Ganadyaksha* or the head of *yakshaloka*. *Yakshaloka* is in Himalaya.

The debate on several *rasas* is documented in *sutrasthana*⁵. The place where that debate was held is said to be *chaitraratha vana*. Here *Atreya*, *Bhadrapya*, *Sakunteya*, *Purnaksa Maudgalya*, *Hiranyaksa-Kaushika*, *Kumarasiras Bharadvaja*, *Varyovida*, *Nimi*, *Badisa*, *Kankayana* assembled. *Vishnu Purana* refers to the presence of *Chaitraratha* at the origin of *alaka*. *Alaka* is *alakananda* river having its origin in Himalaya. *Punarvasu atreya* has a synonym of *chandrabhagi*⁶. This synonym is that *Atreya* is said to be born or lived at the place of origin of the *Chandra Bhaga* River. *Chandrabhaga* River is today *Chenab* that also originates from the Himalayas.

Charaka Samhita offers a discussion between *punarvasu atreya* and *agnivesha*; the diseases like *atisara*⁷, *udara*⁸, *visarpa*⁹, *yonivyapat*¹⁰ are narrated to *agnivesha* in the Himalayas. Among these, *Visarpa* and *udara* are explained explicitly in *Kailasa*. *Kailasa* mountain is located near *Lake Manasarovar* and *Lake Rakshastal*, close to the source of some of the longest Asian rivers: the *Indus*, *Sutlej*, *Brahmaputra*, and *Ghaghara*.

Punarvasu Atreya travelled to *Kampilya*, *Panchaganga*, *Himalaya*, and his students. Meanwhile, he expounds on the disease, which was more prevalent in that region, to his students, *Raktapitta* in *Panchaganga*. *Panchaganga* is the present area of the Greater Punjab region of India and Pakistan. It has a scorching climate, and hence people here are more prone to bleeding disorders. In the treatment, it is quoted that patients of *Raktapitta* should dwell in the caves of the Himalayas to pacify the *pittadosha*¹¹, which again is reiterated in *chikitsa* of *trushna*, another *pitta pradhana vyadhi*¹².

Himalaya and wildlife

In the *shuka dhanya* context, *Charaka* introduces *Rama* as an animal. *Chakrapani* elaborates it as a big animal found in Himalaya, (*rama himalayemahamrugah*)¹³. Looking at the wildlife in the ranges, *Rama* is said to be Kashmir deer. The Kashmir Deer, or *Hangul Cervus elaphus hanglu*, is a deer. It is one of the four easternmost subspecies of Red Deer found in Asia and is endemic to the mountains of Kashmir in the north-western Himalayan region. The only viable *Hangul* population is confined to *Dachigam National Park*. Over the years, their habitat was destroyed, and they are now one of the critically endangered species. The appearance of this animal has a light rump patch on the body while the inner sides of the buttocks are greyish white. Its coat colour is brown with speckling to the hair.

Himalayan potamology and biodiversity

Mountains have the greatest value as they are the source of all the world's major rivers. Those of the Himalayas are no less important in providing the ecosystem services that have thus far sustained a massive population of people and high levels of biodiversity. The Himalayas are recognised for their ecosystem services to the Asian region and the world to maintain slope

stability, regulate hydrological integrity, and sustain high levels of biodiversity and human wellbeing¹⁴. The scientific study of rivers is potamology. Himalaya is an abode for many rivers, including *ganga*¹⁵. The rivers originating from the Himalayas and with their water dispersed, falling from hills, hitting hard rocks and stones is said to be sacred and conducive for human use¹⁶. At the same time, it is also documented in *Sushruta Samhita* that Water from the Himalayas is unique, natural, composed of minerals and has a mildly alkaline pH very similar to that of the human body. Himalayan water is considered sacred for its purity, and it sustains the lives of hundreds of millions that live along the banks of the rivers that flow from the mountains. At the same time, it is also documented that water from rivers arising from the Himalayas produces heart disease, swelling diseases, headaches, filariasis and goiter¹⁷. Himalayan water is *Prithvi* and *Jala bhuta* predominant along with *rasas* such as *madhura*, *amla* and *lavana*. *Kapha dosha* is predominant as it is *anupa desha* and people who drink this water are more susceptible to *vyadhi* caused by vitiation of *Kapha dosha*. Water from the Himalayan region travels through the mountain's sand, silt, and rocks. In some places, human activities stagnate and are polluted, causing the growth of viruses, microorganisms, and bacteria. By ingesting this contaminated water, it causes above mentioned diseases. Due to iodine deficiency, goitre is associated with mountainous regions, mainly in temperate and subtropical areas.

The Himalayas as the abode of medicinal plants

Wild plant raw material is in great demand worldwide for use by pharmaceutical companies, ethnomedicinal practitioners, and various traditional medicines. India is one of the world's major exporters of raw herbal drugs, and the Himalayas are renowned for their vast storehouse of medicinal plants. It is estimated that close to 15 % of the approximately 70,000 known plant species have medicinal properties, which means that over 10,000 plant species are used in medicine at one time or another. Over 5700 traditional plant-based drugs are listed in the Chinese Pharmacopoeia. On average, 50 % of the plant species of any ecosystem in India are used by various communities in ethnomedicine. The tribal people use over 7500 plant species in primary healthcare, and over 2000 species are also used in the Indian traditional system of medicine. India possesses vast cultural and geographical diversity, and the communities of each region offer their unique way of practising indigenous medicine¹⁸.

Charaka says that the Himalayas are the best habitats for medicinal plants¹⁹. Himalaya is less interfered by human activities, it is free from pollution, and as it is a hilly region, there won't be any industry which produces waste. Forest soil is dark brown, which is ideally suited for growing trees, and on north-facing slopes, there is relatively thick soil supporting the growth of dense forests; the land is fertile and rich in water resources.

The Himalayas in India lie towards the north, and there is a belief that the moon, the guardian of the north, is the ruler of the plant kingdom. Therefore, plants grown in the Himalayas and the northern region are considered the best quality and their use is advocated. The cool weather and presence of glaciers help keep plants intact with phytochemicals. Himalaya also provides natural refrigeration to herbs. *Haritaki* and *amalaki* are the best *rasayana dravyas*, and these should be collected from the Himalayas in the specified season as the potency of these fruits is maximum²⁰.

In *rasayana adhyaya*, a set of herbs is quoted to be divine (*divyaushadha*). The plants include *aindri* (*Citrullus colocynthis*), *brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*), *payasya* (*Ipomoea digitata*), *ksira pusp* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), *sravani* (*Sphaeranthus indicus*)

Linn), *vidari* (*Pueraria tuberosa*), *mahaashravani* (*Sphaeranthus amaranthoides*), *shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*), *jivanti* (*Leptadenia reticulata*), *punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *naga bala* (*Sida veronicaefolia*), *sthira* (*Desmodium gangeticum*), *vaca* (*Acorus calamus*), *chatra*, *atichatra* (*madhurika*), *meda* (*Polygonatum verticillatum*), *mahameda* (*Polygonatum cirrhifolium*). All these are utilised in preparing a formulation that increases strength, vitality and virility²¹. Even the drug *haimavati* is named after Himalaya²².

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda is a unique science that is highly dependent on nature. The Himalayan mountains' nature, climate, and ecology have been known to ancient sages. The acharyas of *Ayurveda* have rightly identified the value of the Himalayas in connection with medicinal plants and the qualities of rivers originating from the Himalayas. Himalaya is now reckoned to be a biodiversity hotspot. We must retain the rich fauna and flora of the Himalayas while making the best use of resources available there for the health of mankind.

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