



Review Article

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CONCEPT OF PUNARJANMA (REBIRTH) IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Health is the best source of virtue, wealth, gratification and emancipation. *Dharma, Artha, Kaam* and *Moksha*, also called the *Purushartha Chatustaya*, form the blueprint for human fulfilment. The concept of *punarjanma* is devised from Vedic literature, explained in *Darshanas* and popularized by mythology, whereas its evidence is available in Ayurveda. In modern science, no one believes in the existence of the soul or the concept of rebirth. Still, a lot of research has been undergoing to think about whether any such entity exists after death or, even if it exists, how the transmigration of the soul occurs. In *Charaka Samhita*, while discussing how *Atma* (Soul) transmigrates from one *Sharira* to another *Sharira*, the reason quoted for the transmigration of *Atma* is because of the *Purva Janma Krta Karma*. The Preaching of salvation itself provides evidence of rebirth. To believe in the theory of reincarnation, Acharyas said that the person must have faith in the *shastras* even when they have not perceived or experienced it. So in this article, an effort has been made to explore the hidden truth behind this concept.

Keywords: Daivavyapashraya, Jatismara, Karma, Moksha, Rebirth, Reincarnation.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is related to therapeutics based on herbal and mineral drugs. It also deals with the philosophy of life and living. Ayurveda states that its true intention is to maintain physical and mental health and eliminate *trividhadukha*, i.e. *adhyatmika*, *adidevika*, and *adhibhautik*, explained in *sankhya darshan* and the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. *Acharya Charaka* has explained *sharir* (body) as the union of *Chetana* (Atma) and *panchmahabhoota* in a specific proportion that maintains the equilibrium of the body¹. The unification of sperm (*Shukra*), ovum (*Shonita*) and the soul (*Atma*) in the womb is designated as *garbha* (embryo). It represents the combination of five *mahabhoots*, i.e., *akash*, *vayu*, and *agni*. *Jala* and *Prithvi* are associated with *Chetna* (*Atma*).² Thus, the *chetana* constitutes the sixth *dhatu* and is also responsible for embryo formation. *Acharya Charaka* also believed in the concept of *sukshma sharir*, which comprises 17 *tatva* is, *budhi*, *ahankara*, 11 *indriya* and 4 *sukshma bhoot*, except for *akash*. *Panchbhautik sharir*, excluding *jeevatma* is *mrut sharir* (dead body). After death, the physical body shed down and consolidates with the earth elements, whereas the subtle body (*Sukshma sharir*), which includes mind, senses, 4 fine elements, *ahamkar* and soul (*Atma*), quits the body and transmigrates from one physical body to another physical body as long as the attachment of soul remains with the *rajas* and *tamas guna* of the mind and physical body.³ This transmigration of the *Atma* (soul) from one body to another is called *Punarjanma*, a debatable topic and yet to be discovered by science as very few people believe in the concept of rebirth. At the same time, some people foresee or predict things to happen in the future. Few of them can remember the exact happenings of

their past lives, although they have never come across such situations of the past in their present life. The sacred scriptures and holy books mandate that *punarjanma* happens for every soul until it attains *moksha* (salvation). Disinterest or alienation from current events is *apavarga* (salvation). *Vipapa* (free from sins), *viraja* (free from attachments), *shanta* (serene), *para* (absolute), *akshara* (indestructible), and *nirvana* are all characteristics of the state of *moksha* (the state at the extinction of all miseries).⁴ In ancient scriptures, several references are evident about *punarjanma*. In *Bhagwat Geeta*, the conversation between Sanjay and *Dhritrashtra* is an example of *ati-indriyedarshan*, evidence of clairvoyance and clairvoyance.⁵ *Acharya Charaka* has stated that the *sadhya vyadhi* will achieve *asadhyatva* due to the *poorvajanamkrita karma*.⁶ One of the causes of *Yoni Vyapat* (Gynaecological Disorders) is *Daiva/Purvajanma Krta*.⁷ *Acharya Charaka* has quoted that the *Purvajanma Krta Karma* is called *Daiva*.⁸ The *Utpatti* (formation) of *Garbha* is taken by the *Atma/Mata/Pita* and depends on the *Purvajanma Krta Karma*.⁹ *Acharya Charaka* has prescribed *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* to the *Klaibya* patients.¹⁰ The root cause of the vitiation of these factors, *vayu*, *jala*, *desha* and *kala*, is *adharm* (unrighteousness). Sins of the present life or the misdeeds of the past life are at the root of the vitiation of all these factors.¹¹ In *Charaka Samhita*, while discussing how *Atma* (Soul) transmigrates from one *Sharira* to another *Sharira*, the reason quoted for the transmigration of *Atma* is because of the *Purva Janma Krta Karma*.¹² The reason for congenital defects/sexual disorders is vitiated *vayu*, and this vitiation is caused by *purvajanma krita karma* (past deeds).¹³ In holy scriptures, it is given that whoever is born is sure to die, and after death, *punarjanma* takes place.¹⁴ In the sacred texts, it is mentioned that *Atma* is *Avinashi*, *ajanma*,

shashwat and *avyaya*, and after death, the Atma (Soul) leaves the body and enters another body.¹⁵ The reason quoted for *Stri* giving birth to *Vikruta Praja* (abnormal progeny) is because of the *Purvajanma Krta Karma Phala*.¹⁶ *Acharya Sushrut* has stated that food undergoes the process of digestion and gets transformed into *anna rasa* by the action of *Agni*. The action of *ahara rasa* is dependent on the *purvajanamkritakarma* (*tarpayati, vardhayati, dharyati, yapyati*).¹⁷ *Acharya Charaka* stated that *Ichha* (desire) for the *Douhrdini* is due to the desire of the fetus in 4th month of intrauterine life, which is *Anubhuta* to the fetus in the *Purvajanma* and is taken by the mother.¹⁸ In *Charak Samhita*, it is mentioned that the reason for multiple pregnancies (twins, etc.), differences in physique, physiology and psychology of twins are caused by the improper division of the zygote by *Vayu* by the *karmic* deeds of the soul of the fetus.¹⁹ *Punarjanma*, or reincarnation, is a spiritual/ philosophical concept that means that the soul, after death, discards the worn-out body and begins a new life in a new body, where the soul evolves from time to time. It simply means retaking birth without getting *Moksha*.²⁰

Moksha

In *Ayurveda*, *Moksha* is the absence of rebirth. The mind is three-fold (*sattvik, rajasik and tamsik*). When there is the absence of *rajas* and *tamas* in mind and strong deeds (potent present or past actions) get destroyed when there are no more physical or mental contacts, there is no rebirth process. This situation leads to salvation.²¹ The *Bhagavad Gita* recognizes salvation (*moksha*) as the supreme goal. The *Bhagavad Gita* defines *moksha* as achieving an individual's natural condition by letting go of its imposed state. Beyond good and evil, salvation is the ultimate and highest state. It has no moral responsibilities. In the condition of salvation, there is no ego, volition, or desire. It is a condition devoid of all traits and modes. It is a peaceful situation. It is a state of obtaining the highest level of being as well as the state of exceeding death.²²

Three Desires

Acharya Charak has explained three important desires, 1. The Desire for life, 2. The Desire for Wealth, and 3. The Desire for another world after death. The third desire is the aspiration for a life after death in the other world. There is some scepticism regarding the desire for a virtuous existence after death. What will happen after death? Does reincarnation occur? And why do there seem to be doubts regarding reincarnation? There are two types of people, one who believes in perceptible things and do not believe in invisible things and others who believe in both visible and imperceptible things. But there is scepticism about reincarnation because of differences in opinion. Among the "believing" *Acharyas*, some believe in the role of the *paranirman* (impersonal soul), some in *swabhava* (personality or nature of the individual), some attribute the role of 'parents or ancestors', while some on *yadruchha* (free will or external powers responsible for sudden occurrences of events in the universe). To believe in the theory of reincarnation, *Acharyas* said that the person must have faith in the *shastras* even when they have not perceived or experienced it. The things that can be directly perceived are fewer, and the unknown things are many, which are attained by means of *anuman* of scriptures and evidence.²³ The process of rebirth continues until the strong deeds of either present or past life get destroyed. This can be proved by *chaturvidha pramana*.

Punarjanma Sidhi by Chaturvidha Pramana

In reference to *punarjanma*, *Acharya Charak* stated that *Padartha* could be classified into 2 types; *Sat* (truth/existence) and *Asat* (false/nonexistence) in this *panchbhautik* universe, and these can be examined by four *pramana* – *Aptopdesha*, *Pratyaksha*, *Anumana* and *Yukti*.

Aptopdesha: Evidence of Reincarnation by Ancient Authorities of Ayurveda

In *Ayurveda*, great importance has been given to the verse stated by the *Apta* person (authorities). *Apta* people are enlightened, knowledgeable and free from psychological *doshas* (*rajas* and *tamas*). By virtue of this, they possess knowledge of the past, present and future. With bestowing of this, their words are considered absolute truth without any doubt. The sermon given by the *Apta* people provides evidence of salvation and rebirth. The Preaching of salvation itself gives evidence of rebirth.²⁴

Pratyaksha: Evidence of Reincarnation Through Direct Observation/Perception

The similarities and dissimilarities observed in the universe provide evidence of reincarnation. The children of the same parents show differences in colour, voice, body build and patience. Many children take birth on the earth simultaneously, but some children are born in the *pravara* (high) class while some are held in the *avara* (lower) class. Each child of the same parent may have differences in *Aishwaryavanta* (wealthy), happy and long life, while others may have *daasta* (poverty), miserable life and short life.²⁵ Some children may have deformities even though the parents do not have any deformities. Among two children of the same parent, one may have appealing features while the other may not have the same. The reason behind these differences is past deeds of the previous life.²⁶

Anumana: Evidence of Reincarnation Via Inference

The proof of reincarnation is explained in Evidence of Reincarnation Through Direct Observation/Perception; based on those facts, rebirth is accomplished by inference. There are two types of deeds (*karma*); *Samanya karma* and *Anubandhik karma*. The result of *samanya karma* is enjoyed on a daily basis, while *anubandhik karma* is unavoidable, eternal and keeps on accumulating is also known as fate. Rebirth takes place based on this karma. Every individual must bear the results of all auspicious and inauspicious *anubandhik* deeds. This evidence is similar to inferring the future fruit from seeds and seeds from the fruit.²⁷

Yukti: Evidence of Reincarnation Through Reason/Experiment

Yukti is a type of evidence used to establish the *Punarjanma* idea. An individual is born by the union of *Panchamahabhuta* and *Atma*. *Atma* is immortal, and it moves from one body to another body. As the *atma* leaves one body, it immediately enters another body along with *Shukra, Shonita, panchbhoota, mana* and *buddhi*. *Atma* transmigrates from one body and enters another as per the dominant deeds of the present life. *Kriya* occurs when *Karta* and *Karana* are combined, and *Phala* indicates whether *Karma* has been performed. There will be no fruit without seeds if there is no *Karma*.²⁸

Karma, as per Ayurveda

The life span of a human being is 100 years in *kalyuga*, as told by *Acharya Charak*.²⁹ *Acharya Charak* has explained the concept of deeds (*karma*) which can be classified into two types based on *bala abala* (strength). One is predetermined (done in a previous life), called *Daiva*, and the second is *purushkar karma* which we perform during our present life. Here the effect is based on human effort. If both this karma is *vishama*, *vyadhi utpatti* takes place. For every cause, there is an effect. Thus, the *nidan* (etiological factor) forms the cause to produce the effect as a disease. The *Karya Karna Siddhanta* (cause-effect theory) has limitations in certain diseases where the cause (*karana*) is not visible for the

manifestation of a disease. Such conditions are considered to be manifested from *punarjanma karma*, i.e., *daiva*.

Daiva

Daiva is considered *Adrishta*.³⁰ What is done in a past life (Previous life deeds) is *Daiva*, where the effects are predetermined.³¹ *Daiva* is compared with *buddhi (brahma)*. Deeds of previous life that, in turn, depend upon the *dharma* and *adharma karma* done by that person. The term "*Daiva*" has been used in reference to the unseen karma that is connected to our past life (*Adrista*).

Purushakara

The deeds in this life are called *Purushakara*, which includes the proper following of *ahara and vihara* according to one's *desh, kaala, and prakriti*.³²

The *bala and Abala of daiva and Purushakara* determines the *niyatha and aniyatha of ayu*. The *bala and Abala* of these depend on *dharma* (righteous deeds). It is said that unrighteous deeds of previous life led to the onset of disease with unknown/ idiopathic causative factors. For such conditions, *daivavyapashraya chikitsa* (spiritual/divine therapy) is a key treatment principle in our classical texts.

Effect of Daiva - Purushakara in the determination of Ayu

The life span of individuals depends upon the *bala and Abala* of both the *daiva* (previous life deeds) and *Purushakara* (present life deeds). If *daiva* and *Purushakara* are in *uttama samyoga*, then it leads to *nischita rupa (niyata), Sukhakara and deerghayu* (long life). If they are *hina samyoga* then leads to *anischita rupa (aniyatha), dukhakara and alpaayu*. *Daiva* (fate) and *Purushakara* (deeds done in the present life) in an unbalanced way cause diseases, while in a balanced state leads to *Arogya*.³³

Niyatayu is stipulated *ayu* with respect to the *yuga*. According to the *Kali Yuga* age of an individual is 100 years because each *Yuga* has its particular *niyatha ayu* (definite ayu). Even though the actions of the previous life are no more present in the existing life, their effects still manifest themselves in this life, and the nature of these effects determines the actual span. A weak *daiva* (previous life's actions) gets subdued by a strong *Purushakara* (action during the present life) and vice versa.³⁴ The *daiva karma* may be conducive to long life. Diseases occurring due to past actions do not respond to therapeutic measures. They are cured only after the results of past actions are exhausted.

Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa

It forms the key aspect in ayurvedic treatment principles, especially in conditions where *nidana* (causative factors) is difficult to elicit and are considered incurable by virtue of an invisible factor termed *daiva*. These are also called *purvajanmkrita karmaj vyaadhi* (a disease resulting from past life deeds). *Daivavyapashraya chikitsa* (spiritual/ divine therapy) is the treatment method for correcting those deeds. It includes the adoption of *mantra* (chanting), *aushadhi, mani* (wearing gems), *mangal, bali, uphara* (gifts), *homa* (fire rituals), *niyama* (following spiritual rules), *prayachitta* (reconciliation), *upwasa* (fasting), *pranipata*.³⁵ *Acharya Charak* has recommended *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* for treating *Klaibya* (impotence).

Jatismara (Claimed memories of previous life)

Acharya Sushrut has explained the concept of *Jatismara* in *Sushrut Sharir Sthan*. *Sattvika, rajas and tamasa* are the three attributes of the human mind where *rajas and tamasa* are considered contaminants of the mind, i.e. *manasik dosha*. If an individual has a *sattvic* mind which is endowed from his previous life, he can recall the events of his past life. Such individuals are

called *jatismara*, who can recall memories of their past incarnation. Most of them had a history of unexpected/sudden death in their past lives. Hence this validates the occurrence of rebirth and provides a wider perspective to *punarjanma* research.³⁶ For nearly 25 years, Dr Satwant Pasricha of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences has studied the idea of reincarnation. She claims that regardless of caste, religion, social standing, or gender change, behavioural tendencies from a prior birth were strongly predicted in the subsequent life by her research. Out of 500 or so people who experienced rebirth symptoms, 68% remembered their history.³⁷

Evidence of Punarjanma mentioned in Samhitas

1. In *Bhagwat Geeta*, the conversation between Sanjay and Dhritrashtra is an example of *ati-indriyedarshan*, evidence of clairaudience and clairvoyance.
2. *Acharya Charak* quoted that the *Purvajanma Krta Karma* is called *Daiva*.
3. Some scholars believe of ayurveda that the term '*vidhi*' has been used to indicate past deeds.³⁸
4. In *Charaka Samhita*, while discussing how *Atma* (Soul) transmigrates from one *Sharira* to another *Sharira*, the reason quoted for the transmigration of *Atma* is because of the *Purva Janma Krta Karma*.
5. According to *SwabhawoparamaVada* (theory of natural destruction) explained by *Acharya Charak*, there is no cause for *Vinasha* or destruction. This can be correlated with *Punarjanma*. If the *Karmaphala* of previous birth gets *Sampanna*, then in the present life, the person may die without any proper cause at a younger age.³⁹
6. *Acharya Charak* has stated that the *sadhya vyadhi* will achieve *asadhyatva* due to the *poorvajanamkrita karma*.
7. *Acharya Charaka* mentioned that the *Utpatti* (formation) of *Garbha* is taken by the *Atma/Mata/Pita* and dependent on the *Purvajanma Krta Karma*.
8. *Daiva/Purvajanma Krta* is one of the causes of *Yoni Vyapat* (Gynaecological Disorders).
9. *Acharya Charak* stated that the reason for *Ichha* (desire) for the *Douhrdini* is quoted as the fetus in the 4th month, *Anubhuta* to the fetus in the *Purvajanma*, and the mother takes that.
10. The reason quoted for *Stri* giving birth to *Vikruta Praja (santana)* is because of the *Purvajanma Krta Karma Phala*.
11. In *Charak Samhita*, it is mentioned that the reason for multiple pregnancies (twins, etc.), differences in physique and other characteristics of twins are caused by the improper division of the zygote by *Vayu* and also by the karmic deeds of the fetus.
12. The difference in the twins is due to past deeds and uneven division of the union of sperm and ovum; one among the twins has better development in the womb while the other is poorly developed.
13. The vitiation of air, water, land, etc., which destroys the entire country, is due to karma. "Sins of the present life or the misdeeds of the past life are at the root of the vitiation of all these factors.
14. *Acharya Sushrut* has stated that food that undergoes the process of digestion gets transformed into *anna rasa* by the action of *agni*. The action of *ahara rasa* is dependent on the *purvajanamkritakarma (tarpayati, vardhayati, dharyati, yapyati)*.
15. If the past deeds are not good, then the formed *rasa* will be *vaikrita* (vitiated), and it could lead to diseases caused by *rasavahasrotodushhti like ashraaddha, aruchi, vairsya, hrillasa, tandra, angamarda etc.*⁴⁰
16. *Acharya Charak* has mentioned the cause for *kilas* (Leucoderma) is *Purvakrit karma*.⁴¹

17. The root cause for *agantuja unmada* (Psychiatric Disorders), as mentioned by *Acharya Charak*, is *Purvakrita karma*.⁴²
18. *Acharya Charak* stated that sinful acts (*dushtkrita karma*) done in the previous birth are one of the causes of haemorrhoids.⁴³
19. Usually, the soul lives with the mind. If the soul gets dissociated from the mind, salvation has been attained, and no further rebirth occurs.⁴⁴
20. *Acharya Charak* states *mana* is 'aupaduka', which means, inside the embryo/fetus, the mind interacts with the other body. The mind links the body and the soul. Therefore, normal behaviour and habits change as we approach death. When any one attribute (*sattvik, rajasik, tamasik*) dominates the mind in one's life, the same continues to dominate in the next life also, like if the individual's mind was characterized by the purest form of attributes (*sattvik mamas*) in the past life, then he can remember his past life. It is due to the continuity of the same mind that the person can remember things from his past life.⁴⁵
21. In the sacred texts Bhagwat Geeta, it is mentioned that *Atma* is *Avinashi, ajanma, shashwat and avyaya*, and after death, the *Atma* (soul) leaves the enters another body.
22. In the holy scriptures Bhagwat Geeta, it is given that whoever is born is sure to die, and after death, *punarjanma* takes place.
23. In astrological predictions, the person whose Jupiter planet is sitting in the fourth house in his birth chart, then such person is considered a former member of his own family. This person is reborn in his own family.⁴⁶

DISCUSSION

In modern science, no one believes in the soul or rebirth. However, much research has been done to determine whether soul transmigration happens or if such an entity exists after death. The study of Satwant Pasricha indicates that previous birth behavioural patterns were strongly indicated in the next life, irrespective of caste, religion, social status or gender change. To believe in the theory of rebirth, the person must have faith in the *shastras* even when they have not perceived or experienced them. Ayurveda acknowledges past karma, the cumulative actions of previous lives, or *daiva*, as a factor in the pathogenesis and acknowledges the limitations of medical science. At the point when we see individuals whom we have never met, in some cases, we experience passionate feelings for someone and fly off the handle with the other. This may be due to reincarnation, in which all of the people with whom we had positive relationships in the previous birth will also be liked in this birth.

Conversely, those with whom we did not have positive relationships in the previous birth may not bond well with us in this life. These instincts coming in this birth without having met them before can be due to *punarjanma*. The concept of *punarjanma* can be used in various clinical situations to treat diseases (*Daivavyapashraya*, divine or spiritual therapy) that are predetermined and caused by actions from previous lives. Different philosophies provide evidence to support the idea of *punarjanma*, but some people do not accept it.

Punarjanma (reincarnation) is not a soft topic; it is scientifically validated using relevant research. It has a wide range of clinical applications in predetermined diseases that occur as a result of past life deeds. The excavation of Karana (cause) is essential for the presumption of the course of the disease and the efficacy of therapeutic measures. In diseases where Karana (cause) is not elicited, the concept of *Daivasiddhantha* concerning *Punarjanma* must be implemented to review the treatment aspects from a newer perspective.

CONCLUSION

Being a soft subject, rebirth, or *punarjanma*, has always been contentious. A few people are called *apunarbhavadi* (rejectors of rebirth theory) because they did not accept the idea of *punarjanma* or *parlokagaman*. The opinion of *apunarbhavadi* has been refuted by the *Acharyas*, and the rebirth theory has been accomplished with the help of four *pramanas*, according to *Ayurveda*. It is possible to conclude that one's acceptance or rejection of *Punarjanma* cannot be compelled in this instance, as the belief in *Punarjanma* depends upon one's thinking here. One cannot be forced to accept or reject the *Punarjanma*. Concerning the subject of reincarnation, everyone ought to have high hopes.

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