



The Role of Debate in Ancient Indian Traditional Medicine (*āyurveda śāstra*)

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ABSTRACT

In the ancient Indian tradition we may see that debate or discussion plays a very crucial role in Indian medical science. Debate may be applied to establish truth, to elucidate the problems and to give us a way to solutions. This debate was a well-known technique to infiltrate reality in ancient India. This science of true reasoning was used not only in Philosophy but also it was used in Indian traditional medicine (*Āyurveda śāstra*) that is called '*Carakasamhitā*', religious issues, moral and doctrinal issues etc. As far as debate in ancient India is concerned it was mainly used in philosophical discussions but I want to show its relevance in medical science. In ancient India, debate has been used in versatile pathways. The frame of knowledge on conducting a successful debate was referred to as *vādavidyā* and several manuals dealing with this discipline have been produced. Debate teaches one to think in the right direction. It increases logical, rational, independent and transparent thinking. *Carakasamhitā* represented one of the major ancient Indian *śāstras* of *Āyurveda*. It tried to show the scientific nature of those dialogues and debates and their applications in the field of medical science for the advancement of knowledge.

Introduction

The *Carakasamhitā* is a Sanskrit text about *Āyurveda*, a medicine of India which is based on the *Agniveśasamhitā*, a medical collection by Agniveśa, a sage and a student of Punarvasu Ātreya in



Hinduism, who is believed to have codified the knowledge of his teacher Ātreya and put it together into a treatise known as the Tantra or Agniveśasaṃhitā. This treatise is revised by Maharṣi Caraka between 100 BCE and 200 CE who re-titled it Carakasāṃhitā.

It is a commentary on *Āyurveda*, the science of life, defined as the science of causes and symptoms of diseases, their treatment and maintenance of health. It also covers the origin of medicines, the root causes of pregnancy and childbirth and physical deformities. This treatise includes detailed classification of the disease, its definition, etymology, symptoms and clinical presentation, physiopathology, prediction, course of treatment, medicine, nutrition etc.

The importance of debate in the *Carakasāṃhitā* that is medical science:

Though the Carakasāṃhitā is basically a book on *Āyurveda* but it is based on some principles of philosophy. If we go through this text, we find in this earliest Sanskrit treatise, the techniques of debate, types of debate, the classes of respondents, council or assembly in a debate, debate tactics, debate dynamics, debate utility, etc. are systematically examined. Caraka believed that the process of debating may give us a good physician and good medicines. This philosophy not only produces excellent doctors and medications, but it also fosters positive relationships between medical professionals and medical students. He believed that prior to administering any kind of treatments the proper students (physicians) needed to be selected through a selection process. During this process, one should focus on the conduct and responsibilities of the student, the study and teaching methods, the student's initiation and the directions to teaching, etc. Throughout all of these procedures, *ācārya* Caraka adopted the technique of debate.

Vimānasthāna, the third part of the Carakasāṃhitā, deals with debate along with other topics related to medical field. The relevant teachings are covered under three headings in the Carakasāṃhitā - namely, 1) *karyabinirvrti*, the totality of resources for performing an action, (2) *parikṣā*, the standard of examination, and (3) *Vādavidhi* or *Sambhāṣavidhi* is the debate methodology. A comprehensive investigation of these three topics subsequently follows. For example, it describes the different resources that are to be examined in order to accomplish an action. *Parikṣā* deals with the standards or criteria of examination that includes trustworthy assertion, perception, inference and reasoning. The discussion under the third category i.e. *sambhāṣavidhi* or *vādavidhi* is more detailed. We find in this treatise, *vādavidhi* is divided into two classes: A peaceful debate (*anulomasambhāṣa* or *sandhāyāsambhāṣā*) and hostile debate (*vigrihasambhāṣa* or *vīgraḥasambhāṣa*). In the Carakasāṃhitā, we notice there are mentioned some merits and demerits one should understand before initiating these two types of debates.



1. *Sandhāyā Sambhāṣā* (friendly discussion or peaceful debate):

In the *Carakasamhitā*, we find a friendly debate is held with a person who has the following qualities: 1. The ability to learn and understand, 2. Expressiveness and contradiction, 3. Without anger, 4. Uncensored knowledge without envy, 5. Able to persuade others politely, 6. Endurance and the ability to sweet talk. 7. Ability to speak confidently, 8. Ability to ask questions without hesitation, 9. Ability to answer a sincere questioner in detail, 10. Ability not to be frightened by the fear of lack, 11. ability not to get excited about winning a partner, not to brag in front of others, 12. Ability not to cling for love, 13. Ability not to explain the unknown.

This type of debate aims at to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and insights among scholars and practitioners.

II. *Vīgraḥa sambhāṣa* (hostile debate):

In the *Carakasamhitā*, we find before engaging in the hostile debate, one should be careful about his superiority and for this reason Caraka has advocated the following criteria as precautions.

One should study thoroughly the opponent's speech with the aim of knowing his strength. One should understand the difference between himself and the opponent in respect of merits or advantages that include wisdom, intellect, memory, originality and eloquence on the one hand; and demerits or disadvantages such as irritability, incompetence, weakness, lack of retention and inattentiveness on the other, in order to have the knowledge of superiority and inferiority of himself and the opponent. One should study the nature of the mass also.

Based on these above qualities, Caraka has divided the opponents into three classes, viz., Superior, inferior or equal. This type of debate is held with the aim of victory. Here we find as this debate always aims at victory, *Carakasamhitā* gives instructions about the line of approach to be taken up in this hostile debate in order to avoid defeat.

The relevance of council or assembly in the medical science:

Councils or assemblies that carry out debates, occupy a prominent position in the educational system in various intellectual traditions. The assembly which carry out debates play vital role in the *Carakasamhitā* also. Here one notices assembly of debate is divided from various points of views. From one point of view, *Ācārya* Caraka divided the assembly into two type, viz., assembly of the learned or wise participants and assembly of the ignorant participants. From another point of view, he divided assembly



into three, viz., Friendly (*suhṛtpariṣad*), neutral (*udāsīnapariṣad*) and prejudiced (*pratiniviṣṭapariṣad*).

Friendly assembly and neutral assembly consists of persons endowed with some merits such as attentiveness, wisdom, intellect, memory and expressiveness whereas, prejudiced assembly consists of both learned and ignorant people.

The strategies (*vādopāya*) adopted by the Caraka for doing debate:

Like the assembly, strategies also play important role in any fruitful debate. That's why *Ācārya* Caraka prescribed the following strategies in order to handle the debate according to the nature of the assembly as well as the participants such as respondents or opponents.

1. In the hostile and prejudiced assembly, one should not enter upon debate.
2. In an ignorant assembly, one may enter upon debate with another who lacks capacity of learning, understanding and speaking as well as is not appreciated by reputable persons. In this debate, one should use 'twisted and long-strung word bolts' and should not give scope the opponent to either speak or using difficult words.
3. In a friendly assembly, one can debate with both superior and equal opponent.
4. In a neutral assembly, one should avoid debate with a superior opponent without disclosing his inferiority. But if the opponent is inferior, he should be defeated by the following means:
 - i. If the opponent does not possess scriptural knowledge, he should be defeated by citing long aphorism from the scriptures.
 - ii. If the opponent devoid of erudition, he should be defeated using incomprehensible and long sentences.
 - iii. If the memory of an opponent is weak, he should be defeated by employing 'crooked and long-strung world bolts'.
 - iv. An opponent lacks of ingenuity, should be defeated by using either the same words bearing different senses or the different words bearing the same sense.
 - v. If the opponent does not have speaking power, he should be defeated by the mocking of his half said speech.



- vi. An opponent who lacks skill should be defeated by placing him in an embarrassing situation.
- vii. Person with irritable temper should be defeated by teasing.
- viii. Person with timid nature should be defeated by citing his timid nature.
- ix. Careless opponent should be defeated by putting him under certain discipline.
- x. In an assembly, one should select the topic familiar to him or difficult to his opponent. When the assembly starts, he should maintain silence after speaking to his opponent that: ‘we are not permitted to make any suggestion only assembly will take decision about the debate and its result.’”

Thus, we find all these strategies for entering upon debate proves that Caraka is prudent enough in making a debate successful. Here a point to be noted that Caraka did not concentrate on the family background and religious culture of the debaters. His only concern is intellectual capacity and moral strength.

There are some dialectical terms which are used in debate:

Dialectical thinking was a fundamental part of ancient Indian philosophical discourse. It is a process of argumentation that aims at truth through a method of logical argumentation between two opposite parties. The method was to consider opposing view point and arrive at a solution through a process of critical thinking and discussion or debate. In this way, dialectical thinking facilitated the exploration and quest of new ideas and truth.

In the Carakasamhitā, we find there are forty-four dialectical or logical terms, a thorough knowledge of which is necessary for conducting a successful debate. Here we find, Caraka not only mentioned these forty-four dialectical terms, but provided their definition, characterization, exemplification, classification and sub-classification. The dialectical terms thus enumerated are:

1. Debate (*vāda*), 2. Substance (*dravya*), 3. Quality (*guṇa*), 4. Action (*karma*), 5. Universal (*sāmānya*), 6. Particularity (*viśeṣa*), 7. Inherence (*samavāya*), 8. Proposition (*pratijñā*), 9. Demonstration (*sthāpanā*), 10. Counter argument (*pratiṣṭhāpanā*), 11. Reason (*hetū*), 12. Example (*dṛṣṭanta*), 13. Application (*upanaya*), 14. Conclusion (*nigamana*), 15. Rejoinder (*Uttara*), 16. Tenet (*siddhānta*), 17. Word (*śabda*), 18. Perception (*pratyakṣa*), 19. Inference (*anumāna*), 20. Tradition (*aitihya*), 21. Analogy (*aupamya*), 22. Doubt (*saṁśaya*), 23. Purpose (*prayojana*), 24. Inconclusive reason



(*savyabhicāra*), 25. Investigation (*jijñāsā*), 26. Determination (*vyavaśaya*), 27. Presumption (*arthāprāpti*), 28. Probability (*sambhava*), 29. Imperfect statement (*anuyojya*), 30. Infallible statement (*ananuyojya*), 31. Question (*anuyoga*), 32. Counter question (*pratyanuyoga*), 33. Defective statement (*vākyadoṣa*), 34. Excellent assertion (*vākyaprasāmsā*), 35. Quibble (*chala*), 36. The fallacy of reason (*ahetū*), 37. Delayed statement (*atītakāla*), 38. Criticism (*upālam̐bha*), 39. Refutation (*parihāra*), 40. Violating the proposition (*pratijñāhāni*), 41. Admission of argument (*abhyanujñā*), 42. Imperfect reason (*hetwantara*), 43. Offering irrelevant statements (*arthāntara*), 44. Reason of defeat (*nigrahasthāna*).

Here, we find the list includes almost all the areas of logic and dialectics required in a debate.

In the Carakasamhitā, *vada* is defined as a discourse in which one begins academic discussion with a competing opponent. This is of two kinds, namely- wrangling (*jalpa*) and Cavil (*vitaṇḍā*).

- i. Wrangling (*jalpa*) is a type of positive discourse which aims only defend or attack. In this debate, both parties put logic in support of their own views and expose or contradict the opponent's view.
- ii. Cavil (*vitaṇḍā*) is negative discourse and opposite to *jalpa*. In this debate, the speaker's main intention is to find defects in the opponent's thesis. Here, the speaker does not have any positive approach.

After defining *vada*, Caraka has discussed six ontological terms that constitute the reality. These terms are: substance, quality, action, universal, particular and inherence. Substance is that where qualities and actions in here and which is the material cause of its effect. Caraka accepts nine substances namely earth, water, fire, air, ether, space, time, soul and mind. Amongst these nine substances, the first five i.e., earth, water, fire, air and ether are material substance that constitute the physical world. The rest, i.e., space, time, soul and mind are non-material substances. Among these non-material substances, mind and soul are called spiritual substances by Caraka.

Caraka says, *pratijñā* is the statement or the declaration of a thing that is to be established in a debate. For example, when one says that 'the soul is eternal', he has to establish his claim and his statement is known as *pratijñā*. When one established the proposition (*pratijñā*) in a debating situation with the help of reason (*hetu*), example (*dṛṣṭānta*): application (*upanaya*) and conclusion (*nigamana*), is called demonstration. Caraka provided the illustration example as follows:

- i. Proposition (*pratijñā*): The soul is eternal.



- ii. Reason (*hetū*): Because it is a non-product.
- iii. Example (*dṛṣṭānta*): Just as the ether which is a non-product is eternal.
- iv. Application (*upanaya*): The soul like ether is a non-product.
- v. Conclusion (*nigamana*): Therefore, the soul is eternal.

Thus, *pratijñā* along with the other four members constitute the five-membered syllogism found in the *Nyāya* philosophy also.

Demonstration is the opposite of the Counter-demonstration. When a debater established the counter proposition of his opponent, it is known as counter-demonstration. Caraka has given the following example of the counter-demonstration.

- i. Proposition: The soul is non-eternal.
- ii. Reason: Because it is sensed.
- iii. Example: In the same way as a perceived pot is non-eternal.
- iv. Application: The soul like the pot is cognized by the senses.
- v. Conclusion: Therefore, the soul is non-eternal.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we find that in the *Carakasamhitā*, debate is considered as one of the most effective methods for acquiring right knowledge because it has capacity to enable one to arrive at correct judgments. Debate increases knowledge, contribute to the clarity of knowledge, increases dialectical skills and thereby remove doubts relating to the previous knowledge. Caraka was aware that any medical professional must understand dialectical and logical terminology. However, this understanding of dialectical concepts and reasoning is necessary for other academic studies as well as for being a proficient doctor (that means medical science).

We see apart from Philosophy, dialectical thinking is now being used in various fields such as sociology, psychology and economics etc. We live in the 21st Century and the state of affairs of the 21st Century man and society is well described that this is the time for fancier houses but broken homes. This is the time of double income and more divorce. This is the time of high-rise building and low-rise



character. This is the time of broader highways but narrower viewpoints. This is the time when a man has gone to the moon and come back from there but he finds it difficult to cross the road and meet with the new neighbor. This is the time when a man has broken the atom and he has produced a tremendous amount of energy but he finds it difficult to break prejudice. The list is very long describing the state of affairs of 21st Century man and society but in short, we can say that this is the time when we owe much to show but nothing in the stockroom. We live in such a century. Debate (*kathā*) makes a man aware about whatever has been told already by our ancient Indian thinkers about a certain thing. Let us talk something about goals as a smart professional, smart debater and goals as a great human being. I think that all of us are very much clear in our minds that we all want to be smart professionals and great human beings. We want to live a good business life, we want to live a good personal life, want to live a good social life and we want to live a good family life. So we need to rethink and redesign our goals and rebuilt our lives not just for the betterment of our own kind but for the betterment of society at large.

The first important aspect for a debater is that everybody needs to accept from within that no man is perfect. We should put our eyes to a little lower level. We should accept the best thoughts from all directions to rethink our goals. Debate helps us to rethink about our goals. Through inner dialogue we may come to know whether we have done anything for the betterment of others and for the betterment for society. We may ask ourselves: Whether we have done anything to enrich our environment? If we think only for our growth, for our betterment, for our luxuries life, then we will be treated as animal. This kind of life is nothing more than a life of a donkey or a dog's life or cat's life. This kind of life is not considered as a human life.

Debate helps us to understand that we should have the ability to face the sufferings of life. Sufferings of personal life, professional life, social or family life etc are parts of life. We may think that our life is a package deal from God. Life has its pluses and minuses. So if we may develop the capacity to face our suffering with a smiling face, then we may think our suffering for our elevation. It is important to develop such an attitude. Few people may have that type of attitude through which they can improve themselves by using their sufferings. If the top guy in the country is able to achieve such kind of attitude, he or she can lead the country at the top of success.

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