ABSTRACT: Even though most of the aspects of medicine are thoroughly described in Ayurveda, proper division of the branches is needed as in the other systems of medicine. This paper gives the significance of the individual study of aspects on social medicine in this system and attempts to distinguish some of the contexts from the classics meant for this study.

In modern times, medical problems have developed to a very great extent: specialization in various branches has become a necessity. So we have industrial medicine, aviation medicine, medicine for defence services, social medicine and so on. I propose to deal with the subject of social medicine and the concept of Ayurveda thereon. The one object of the science and practice of medicine any where in the world is to see, that persons are physically strong, mentally alert and emotionally stable. The should be progress from one generation to another not only in the physical stamina of the nation, but also in the mental development and intellectual output.

Society, as we know, in any country, is a heterogeneous one. It consists of persons who are highly intelligent, clever and capable and those who are imbecile, incapable and mentally retarded. Besides these two groups, there are many more who form the bulk of the society, who have average physical and mental abilities, this heterogeneity is caused by biological characteristics, with an emphasis on tradition, social habits and economic stability of the society. A nation becomes civilized when the causes of this heterogeneity are investigated and a sympathetic equilibrium is established between innate, heritable, acquired and cultivated tendencies of the society. A nation will be considered civilized if there is stability in health, security in economic condition and wider outlook in moral, cultural and ethical standard.

What then is the position of the medical man, the dispenser of health and longevity, with regard to the social development of a nation? What is the status and position of Ayurvedic physician in this respect an how far these concepts could be made applicable in modern conditions?

The question of social medicine is closely connected wit the science of biology and eugenics. It contributed to the social welfare of a nation by pointing out the hereditary
tendencies of an individual, the development of personality characteristics by providing suitable environment, both for physical and mental developments. The development of an individual does not commence when the individual is born, but even before the conception takes place, there are four important factors which are responsible for the human build and personality. First in the list comes the influence of the germplasm with its inheritance and variation. The third is the normal functioning of the body. The fourth is the tradition by which the conduct of man is standardised and his behavior is influenced. These four points may be compared with what Acarya Susruta says about sarira laksana – characteristics of human being. Susruta says, for an individual, the following are necessary 1) Paternal and maternal factors, 2) food and nourishment, 3) Atma, 4) Satva and 5) Satmya – traditional habits and manners.

The first item is the paternal and maternal factors for which proper conditioning of the parents are necessary, both physically and mentally, Indiscriminate marriages always tell upon the offspring and often they get mentally retarded or become delinquent. From the beginning of creation to the present day, the most intensive biological experience, continues to be the desire to reproduce and so one should be careful on the selection.

The germplasm or the parental reproductive material remains fairly constant from generation to generation. But certain profound changes, caused by prolonged poisoning, as in alcoholism, syphilis etc. have power to affect the character of the embryonic material in its different stages of growth, both in the maternal host and in later life. Some experimentalists have proved that a change in the heredity mechanism could be wrought by various environmental factors. That is, the germplasm is capable of producing one result in certain environment, and quite a dissimilar one in a different environment. This knowledge of genetics could be used for two purposes, firstly, to preserve the purity of the superior nature and secondly to improve the inferior nature by carefully training the mental faculties and by selected mating.

The exact nature of germplasm is not yet known. But it is known that one of its constituents is chromosomes, one half of which is traceable to the mother and the other half to the father. The heritable properties are not attributed to these chromosomes but to another constituent called genes. These are of h nature of chemical molecules, capable of changing their position and nature and thus are able to vary many of the heritable traits. So to preserve the purity of the race, purity in the germplasm and genes is required.

What were the methods adopted in Ayurveda to secure a proper germplasm and avoid wide variability in a particular group? In selecting a bride, both medical science and the Dharma Sastras say, that both the parties should be of the same temperament (Prakrti) and belong to the same group (Varna) and yet should not belong to the same stock (Gotra). In modern biological analysis, a certain amount of variability is essential in mating, as no individual in
wholly bad or wholly good. Such variability could influence the individual to a higher level and therefore would be conducive to the growth of a nation. Even in this selection, to secure variability, the tendency should be for the female not to procure a mate from an inferior stock to her own. It has been found by experiments, that when two different species are crossed, in the earlier stages, developments are purely of a maternal character.

Not only in the selection of a mate belonging to the same group and temperament is essential, but also the age and suitability of the physical condition is of utmost importance. Says Susruta: “That when a girl has not completed sixteen years and when the man is not aged twenty-five mating should not be done”. When the parties do not attain the above said age all the organs do not function to their utmost and so the development of the foetus is impeded. In the same way, consummation is prohibited when persons are very aged and are suffering from chronic diseases of both body and mind.

It is urged now in certain quarters, segregation of people who are imbecile and delinquent should be done as a precautionary measure, so that, indiscriminate mixing up could be prevented. Even if segregation is done, in case of extreme delinquency or mental deficiency, sterilization of the parties had to be done. There may be difference of opinion in the method adopted for such segregation and sterilization, but there cannot be any difference of opinion regarding the inadvisability of the world being peopled by abnormal and subnormal individuals. That was why Susruta was definite in his statement “do not consummate such individuals”. Who should undertake such sterilisation and how it should be done is for the legislators to decide.

The second point that should be considered is the creation of a proper environment during the antenatal period. The enceinte and the foetus should be considered as a single unit from the time of conception till delivery. So, the depression and enthusiasm of the pregnant woman shall naturally have some influence on the embryo. Such environments should, therefore, be created to have pleasant reactions on the mother. The reaction of the mother will be reflected on the embryo and so proper growth is ensured by providing suitable environment. The woman develops certain yearnings, (Dauhrda Laksana) which should be satisfied. Otherwise the offspring will be diseases of maimed. It is said that is the desire of the embryo that is reflected on the mother, this aspect of the question is for psychologists to study further.

In Ayurveda, there is no watertight compartment among the mind, the body and the soul. These three constitute the individual man. The western psychologists, till very recently had the idea, that each emotion and mental activity is something sui generis and there is no connection traceable between one emotion and another. That means, all mental phenomena are independent entities and have no organic connection. In later days, however, certain psychologists have found physiological
connection between the emotions and mental activity. If this theory is accepted, the Ayurvedic view that certain physiochemical reactions of the body cause mental activity and vice versa should be accepted. Arguing from this point, one can proceed that the emotions of the expectant mother not only react on her physical organs, but also strike a sympathetic note on the organs of the foetus, which, for the time being, is part and parcel of the mother. It is only with this view, the Ayurvedic science has enjoined on a pregnant lady, that from the first day onwards she should be happy, well dressed, well adorned and pursuing peaceful and pious avocations. She should neither see nor touch dirty, deformed and diseased objects. These, affect the physical and mental growth of the foetus. We have already said that environment is capable of altering even certain inherited characteristics of the offspring.

The development of the infant, apart from the inherited tendencies, tends to depend on the physio-chemical reactions of the body, which are and could be varied to suit the convenience of the individual. During the time of fecundation depending on the emphasis of the doshas in the spermatozoa and ovum, the temperament (Prakrti) of the individual is determined. This temperament consists of certain physical characteristics, mental and emotional features. There are generally seven temperaments depending on vata, pitta and kapha doshas or the combinations of them. It is an interesting study to find both physical and mental characteristics mainly determined at the time of conception. But as I have said before certain variations can be brought by conditioning suitable environments, the study of prakrti from the standpoint of health and disease is undertaken by certain research Institutes in the country and the results will throw further light on this psychosomatic aspect of a person.

In recent years much attention has been paid by psychologists to what is called child-psychology. It is argued that much of the development of the personality in later life, depends on the conditions provided during the formative period of the child. The development of various psychological complexes, which are anathema to any civilized society, depends on the treatment of the child by parents, nurse and teachers. Susruta in a few rules has taught us some facts of child-psychology. He says “That the child should be comfortably handled. He should neither be frightened nor forcibly be awakened from sleep. He should not be forcibly dragged or thrown as nervous complications would arise. Every day he should be surrounded by people who love him and with whom he has no inhibitions. In this way without causing any hurt to the mind of the child the growth should be looked after every day to develop a strong mind, a healthy and beautiful body”.

Nourishment is an important thing not only in childhood but also at other periods of life. Procuring food, making it edible and using it for nourishment, have been considered as part of education. The modern days any scheme for social reform has a bearing on dietetics. There are various indices and schemes devised to ensure a proper food supply to an individual. The food constituents are analysed and catalogued.
The body requirements are experimented in different periods and states of life and worked out. To find out normal requirements in a given case, all one needs to do is, to apply catalogued findings to the given weight and age. So in the case of growing children, it is essential to know that nutritional deficiency or mal-nutrition it cause mental retardation which result in emotional disturbances. Even in cases, where there is retardation or mental growth due to insufficient food supply to the mother during pregnancy, if early attempts are made to provide wholesome surroundings and protective foods and diet, suited to development of endoorine system, it is possible to make the child normal. It is said, that food deficiencies create an instability in children due to disturbance of adrenal and pituitary bodies. That is why ayurveda makes emphasis of Ahara rasa the nutrient material.

Later in life, attempts should be made to create a personality in the individual. Personality is due to a complex mechanism of the body and mind. It is conceived by some as something higher than the ordinary conceptions of science, and some others opine that personality is not a thing but a value like goodness, beauty and truth. The standpoint of Ayurveda on this question is, that it is a product of both physical and mental development, acquired by respecting traditional values, by study and by education. In other words, it is the embodiment of culture.

In modern science, building up of personality is, on an apriori ground, delegated to the physiochemical reaction of the various body organs. Normally for various crimes committed, cause is sought in intemperance, idleness, irreligion and poverty. So attempts are made to correct these things. They are not without any value there is also another view. Cause and effect are common terms which everybody understands. In the same way in the body from the biological standpoint, energies are taken as causes while the forces and taken as effects. An example may be cited A young girl on account of her intensive certain manifestations of conduct, which ought to be interpreted as irresponsible behavior, but, from a moral standpoint would be considered as unseemly conduct. So, there is difference of opinion between two classes of people. A biologist consider the glandular activity as an abnormal condition and so tries to correct the abnormality and the moralist who considers it as a delinquent act and a social evil condemns it.

The aim of medicine should be to find out the causes for the disorganization in the human body and try to find means by which these could be rectified. If individual could be rectified in this way, the society as a whole stands rectified. The aim of rectifications is not merely in the field of physical disorganization, but also in the domain of emotional and intellectual disturbance because of their interdependence. This is one of the contribution of the Ayurvedic system of medicine to the world. The tridhatu theory controls both the body and mind, the disturbances of which either severally or collectively, cause ill- health and keep the equilibrium at other times.
The modern tendency to impart education without consideration of the person and his temperament is wrong. It is mostly waste of energy and material. To a child which sows marital tendencies, if education more on intellectual pursuits is given it becomes useless. To a person who has got an aptitude for trade and commerce, instructions in the science and art of warfare would be useless. It is only on account of these incompatibilities in education and pursuits in life, civilization is retarded and disharmony arises in society. That is why the aid of medical men is essential to the intellectual development of the nation. The importance of this is recognised by ayurveda.

Scientists are not engaged in finding out the causes of senescience or aging, so that means could be found either to arrest or cure the ravages of time, both in body and mind. Even though the exact nature and the cause of aging id not known, it is presumed by experiments of mammalian life, the certain physiochemical reaction takes place in the body, which prevents the secretions of certain hormones which are essential for the normal functioning of the body, thereby lessening the activity of the organs.

Gerontologists all over the world are constantly attempting to find some panacea by which the symptoms of old age could be postponed. The reasons for this are two fold. One is, that the experience and knowledge gained by elderly people could be useful to the younger generation, provided they are physically able and mentally alert. The second is economical. Elderly people should not become entirely a liability to the family or to the nation; if the signs and symptoms of aging are postponed or prevented to some extent, they may be useful members of the family.

In Ayurveda, out of eight branches of the science, Rasayana (Geriatrics) is one and the other closely associated is Vajeekarana or the science of aphrodisiacs.

To a normal person the treatment which gives enthusiasm in life (urjaskara) is vajeekarana an rasayana. The rasayana treatment gives to a person “long life memory, intellect, freedom from disease, youthful appearance, colour, proper voice, strength to the body and sense organs etc.” Even in Caraka Samhita, (V century B.C.) the treatment of prevent signs of old age is given. Phased sexual activity is considered as on of the things that preserve youthfulness and slows down senescience. But this should be considered from a different standpoint in the case of highly developed individuals whose intellectual and spiritual activity is so great that sex has no meaning in them. Vrshya (aphrodisiac) s only for ordinary persons but not for those who are capable of sublimating sexual energy to higher things (urdharetas). In this connection, it should be remembered that among the factors that contribute to long life, continence of bramhacharya is the most important thing. But in rasayana (geriatrics) by certain kings of treatment and remedies, the youthful vigour is also kept up. This painting of youthful vigour, bodily and mentally, is for ht sake of doing positive service to the nation. That is why Caraka says before one gets the treatment of rasayana, one should get rid of his anger,
passion etc., and be in friendly tune with the creation. Then it would be successful.

The medical practitioners, should realize that the function of a medical man does not stop as a dispenser of remedial measures and curer of diseases. His duties go beyond them. He is a necessity to the society to advise his clients for the proper selection of mates, to advise the children for the appropriate education, depending on their physical and mental strength. He is to provide proper environment to the woman during pregnancy, so that the possibility of the improvement on the hereditary mechanism of the genes may be there. Even in old age, he advises in the choice of nourishment that the individual should have and remedies that would postpone the aging process in him. Thus he becomes an integral part of the family and society.

It should be remembered that better and extensive buildings for hospitals and imposing and magnificent structures for the pharmaceutical concerns would not alone ensure freedom from suffering and disease. The individual should be properly developed in institutions and societies, wherein, body and mind could be formed according to natural laws. Man is the result of heredity and environment, thought and habits and to make him wholesome, is the duty of individual physician to whatever system he may belong to.

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