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ELUCIDATING THE PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL LEARNING METHODS THROUGH THE LENS OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Traditional knowledge encompasses cumulative knowledge, innovations, and practices that remain relevant for human welfare. Among these, *Ayurveda* represents a vital system of Indian traditional wisdom, contributing to holistic health and the attainment of higher knowledge. Rooted in the Vedic tradition, its goal extends beyond disease management to achieving *wisdom (jnana)*.

The classical texts—*Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*—outline a multidisciplinary learning approach. *Acharya Charaka* emphasizes *Adhyayan* (study), *Adhyapan* (teaching), and *Sambhasha* (discussion) as key methods, while *Acharya Sushruta* highlights experiential learning from diverse sources.

Ayurveda advocates an interdisciplinary approach, stating that knowledge of a single discipline is insufficient for proper understanding. Principles like *Pragnyaparadha*, *Achara Rasayana*, and *Sadvritta* further guide ethical and intellectual development. Thus, Ayurvedic learning ultimately aims at cultivating wisdom through integrated, experiential, and value-based education.

KEYWORDS: *Adhyayana; Adhyapana; Sambhasha; Achara Rasayana; Traditional Knowledge; Ayurveda; Holistic Learning; Experiential Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Sadvritta.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, regarded as the essence of Indian traditional knowledge, has consistently contributed to the holistic well-being of humanity. Traditional knowledge encompasses accumulated knowledge, innovations, and practices that are contextually validated and remain highly relevant for contemporary application. Rooted in the Vedic tradition, which is considered the foundation of universal knowledge, *Ayurveda* integrates life science, philosophy, and healing into a unified framework. It emphasizes not only the maintenance of health but also the attainment of higher wisdom, aligning with the broader goals of Indian philosophical systems.

According to Acharya Charaka, a truly wise individual perceives the entire universe as a teacher, whereas the ignorant perceive it as an adversary. This perspective reflects the expansive and integrative approach of Ayurvedic learning, which encourages openness, observation, and continuous acquisition of knowledge from all possible sources. Thus, *Ayurveda* stands as a dynamic and timeless system, offering profound insights into both individual well-being and intellectual evolution.¹

In earlier eras, vast bodies of knowledge were preserved and transmitted through *Shruti* (oral tradition), ensuring continuity across generations. During the *Samhita* period (200 BC–400 AD), the *Guru–Shishya Parampara* or *Gurukula* system formed the cornerstone of education. In this system, the teacher (*Guru*) resided with students in a *Gurukula*, imparting knowledge through close interaction, discipline, and experiential learning. This method fostered not only intellectual growth but also moral and spiritual development.

Classical Ayurvedic literature, particularly the Charaka Samhita, emphasizes that prior to the commencement of Adhyayana (learning), a disciple must critically examine both the Shastra (scripture) and the Acharya (teacher). Selection should be based on the highest qualities, including authenticity, depth of knowledge, ethical conduct, and teaching competence. This highlights the importance of a sound teacher–text–student relationship as the foundation of effective education. Such a structured and discerning approach ensured the preservation, accuracy, and meaningful interpretation of knowledge, thereby maintaining the integrity of traditional learning systems.²

Examination of the *Shastra* (Treatise):

The *Shastra* should be assessed for its authenticity, clarity, comprehensiveness, and relevance. A valid treatise must be well-structured, logically presented, and capable of conveying accurate and applicable knowledge.

Examination of the *Acharya* (Teacher):

The *Acharya* should possess profound knowledge, practical experience, ethical conduct, and effective teaching skills. According to *Acharya Charaka*, the teacher must be competent, compassionate, and capable of guiding the student toward both intellectual and moral development.

Method of Learning/Obtaining Knowledge:

The process of acquiring knowledge involves *Adhyayana* (self-study), *Adhyapana* (teaching), and *Sambhasha* (discussion), as described in the *Charaka Samhita*. This integrated approach ensures comprehensive understanding through reading, teaching, and scholarly interaction.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES:

AIMS

To critically review the various learning methods employed for knowledge acquisition in *Ayurveda*.

OBJECTIVES

1. To critically evaluate the knowledge acquisition methods delineated in the *Samhita* texts.
2. To explore the core principles underlying traditional *Ayurvedic* learning systems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach to examine traditional and modern learning methodologies. Classical *Ayurvedic* texts, including the *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, were systematically reviewed to identify ancient modes of knowledge acquisition. Relevant literature on contemporary learning methods was also collected from standard academic sources and credible online databases. The learning methodologies derived from both traditional and modern systems were then comparatively evaluated and critically analysed to identify their underlying principles, similarities, and distinctive features.

Ancient Teaching and Learning Skills

In ancient India, education was primarily imparted through the *Gurukula* system, which was also integral to *Ayurvedic* pedagogy. This system emphasized holistic development through close interaction between teacher and student, fostering intellectual, ethical, and practical competence. According to *Acharya Charaka*, knowledge acquisition is based on three fundamental methods: *Adhyayana* (self-study), *Adhyapana* (teaching), and *Sambhasha* (scholarly discussion). These methods collectively ensure comprehensive understanding through reading, teaching, and critical dialogue.

Furthermore, *Acharya Charaka* highlights that for a wise individual, the entire universe serves as a teacher, reflecting the openness and expansiveness of *Ayurvedic* learning. *Vagbhata* describes the stages of learning as *Patha* (reading), *Bodha* (understanding), and *Anushtana* (practical application), emphasizing a progressive and experiential approach.³ This indicates that ancient education prioritized meaningful comprehension and application rather than rote memorization.

Additionally, Lord *Dhanvantari*, regarded as the pioneer of the surgical tradition, symbolizes mastery and excellence in practical knowledge. Thus, the ancient *Ayurvedic* learning system was deeply rooted in experiential, analytical, and value-based education, ensuring the development of both knowledge and wisdom.⁴

Adhyayana (self-study) forms the foundation of knowledge acquisition in *Ayurveda*. The learner is expected to maintain good health, discipline, and dedication toward study. Classical guidelines emphasize early rising, personal purification, offering respect to deities, sages, and teachers, and studying in a clean and focused environment. Learning involves oral recitation of *sutras*, followed by repetition to correct errors and ensure retention.

According to *Vagbhata*, the learning process progresses through three stages: *Patha* (memorization through repeated recitation), *Bodha* (comprehension and analytical understanding with contextual interpretation), and *Anushtana* (practical application of acquired knowledge). This structured approach highlights that true learning extends beyond memorization to meaningful understanding and implementation.⁵

Prabhasan

Acharya Sushruta further emphasizes that knowledge lacking proper interpretation is futile, comparing it to a donkey carrying sandalwood without appreciating its value.⁶

Adhyapana

Adhyapana (teaching) is equally significant. The Charaka Samhita, structured as a series of discourses by Maharshi Atreya, reflects an interactive teaching methodology involving questioning and explanation. The commentary by Arunadatta on Ashtanga Hridaya outlines systematic teaching techniques, including word-by-word explanation⁸ (Padatah), contextual meaning (Arthatah), practical utility (Prayojanatah), addressing doubts (Chodyatah), clarifications (Pariharatah), contextual correlation (Sambandhatah), and subject elaboration (Abhidheyatah). Thus, Ayurvedic pedagogy ensures comprehensive, analytical, and application-oriented learning.

Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and competencies through study, instruction, and experience. It serves as a fundamental mechanism by which the brain encodes, stores, and utilizes experiences to guide actions, thereby promoting beneficial outcomes and preventing harm. In the context of *Ayurveda*, learning is not merely an intellectual activity but a comprehensive cognitive process rooted in higher mental faculties.

Ayurveda emphasizes the pivotal role of *Buddhi* (intellect) in the acquisition and application of knowledge. *Buddhi* is composed of three essential components: *Dhee* (the ability to grasp and comprehend knowledge), *Dhriti* (the capacity to retain and sustain acquired knowledge), and *Smriti* (the faculty of recollection and recall). These three elements collectively ensure effective learning, retention, and application of knowledge in practical situations.

Thus, the *Ayurvedic* perspective on learning highlights a holistic cognitive framework, wherein intellectual clarity, retention, and memory function in harmony to facilitate meaningful and purposeful knowledge acquisition.

Causative Factors of Memory and Ethical Foundations of Learning

In *Ayurveda*, the enhancement of memory (*Smriti*) is attributed to several essential factors that facilitate effective cognition and retention. Classical texts describe eight key determinants of good memory: knowledge of cause (*Karana*), knowledge of form (*Rupa*),

recognition of similarity (*Sadrishya*), understanding of contrast (*Viparyaya*), concentration of mind (*Ekagrata*), repetition (*Abhyasa*), attainment of metaphysical insight, and subsequent partial communication or recollection of events. These factors collectively strengthen cognitive processing and ensure better retention and recall of knowledge.

Sadvritta and Achara Rasayana:

In addition to cognitive factors, Ayurveda emphasizes ethical and behavioural disciplines such as *Sadvritta* and *Achara Rasayana* for the attainment of higher knowledge. *Achara Rasayana* refers to a code of ideal conduct encompassing truthfulness, non-violence, personal and social hygiene, mental discipline, compassion, devotion, and a balanced lifestyle. These practices promote rejuvenation of both body and mind.

Similarly, *Sadvritta* outlines principles of righteous living and moral behaviour, which are essential for maintaining mental clarity and intellectual stability. Together, *Sadvritta* and *Achara Rasayana* play a crucial role in cultivating true wisdom, highlighting that ethical conduct and disciplined living are fundamental to meaningful learning and knowledge acquisition in *Ayurveda*. ⁽⁸⁾⁽⁹⁾

DISCUSSION:

According to Bloom's Taxonomy, learning is categorized into three domains: cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and psychomotor (skills). The cognitive domain focuses on the acquisition and development of intellectual abilities, including understanding, analysis, and application of knowledge. The affective domain relates to emotions, values, and attitudes, shaping an individual's ethical and moral framework. The psychomotor domain involves physical skills, coordination, and the effective use of motor abilities. All three domains are essential for the comprehensive development of a learner.

This holistic framework aligns closely with *Ayurvedic* educational principles, which emphasize balanced growth of intellect, behaviour, and practical skills. Wisdom, in this context, is defined as the ability to discern and apply knowledge appropriately in real-life situations, distinguishing what is true, meaningful, and beneficial.

Furthermore, *Acharya Charaka* highlights *Sambhasha* (scholarly discussion and debate) as a powerful tool for enhancing intellect. Through critical dialogue and exchange of ideas,

learners refine their understanding, resolve doubts, and develop deeper insights, thereby facilitating higher-order cognitive and intellectual development.

Benefits of *Sambhasha*:

Gyana Vriddhi refers to the enhancement and expansion of knowledge, enabling deeper understanding of concepts.

Vaak Shakti Vriddhi denotes the refinement of speech, resulting in mastery over language, articulation, and vocabulary.

Suyasha signifies the attainment of reputation and recognition, which naturally follows from sound knowledge and ethical conduct.

Additionally, *Vishaya Spashtataa* represents clarity of previously unclear subjects, leading to precise, comprehensive, and well-interpreted knowledge.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Adhyayana (learning), *Adhyapana* (teaching), and *Tadvidya Sambhasha* (scholarly discussion) constitute the core components of the Ayurvedic teaching–learning process. As described in the *Charaka Samhita*, these methods collectively facilitate comprehensive knowledge acquisition by enhancing understanding, decision-making ability, coordination, interest in the subject, and self-confidence. Scholarly discussions play a crucial role in refining intellect and promoting critical thinking.

Ancient educational practices also incorporated diverse pedagogical techniques such as structured lectures, guided learning, use of handouts and notes, interactive questioning, mini-assessments, and brainstorming activities. These methods indicate that the traditional system emphasized active learning and student engagement rather than passive memorization.

Furthermore, principles like *Sadvritta*, *Achara Rasayana*, and *Lok–Purusha Samya Siddhanta* form the ethical and philosophical foundation of Ayurvedic education. These concepts guide individuals toward disciplined living, moral conduct, and harmony between the individual and the universe. Ultimately, such integrative learning aims at achieving *Moksha* (liberation), considered the highest form of wisdom and the goal of life.^{8,11}

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