

## ANIMAL HEALTH CARE IN ANCIENT INDIA

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The greatest physician recognized in the Vedas is the God. The *Asvini Kumars* are considered to be the physicians of the Gods. There are mentions about the surgical and therapeutic skills of the *Asvini Kumars* and they did miracles and could replace the head of a man with that horse. It is likely that the same physicians attended both man and animals, especially during early Vedic period. *Asvini Kumars* the well known physician of deities were also expert in *Pashu-Chikitsa*. They learnt the veterinary knowledge from sage *Dadhichi* who has acquired this knowledge from Lord *Indra*. India has been fortunate enough to have more than 5000 years old civilization and that too a continuous one. Among the literary sources, Vedic literature is the oldest, which includes four Vedas, (*Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samveda* and *Atharvaveda*), *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Brahmanas* and great epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*). There had been evidence on the existence of literature on veterinary science in *Rigveda* (2000-4000 B.C.), when the physician attended upon humans and animals indiscriminately. The medical and surgical skill of these doctors must have been most primitive. The *Yajurvedic* people considered elephant as a valuable sacrifice to some of their deities (*Yajurveda* XXIV 29&30).

The nucleus of veterinary science (*Pashu Ayurveda*) existed in *Atharvaveda*, it is a repository of therapeutic hints and prescriptions to attain the longevity of man's life upto hundred years i.e. *Jigivisheth Shatum Samaha* (*Yajurveda*, XL, 2). *Atharvaveda* consists of 20 sections (Kands). In this Veda 114 hymns are devoted to medical subjects. Section VI of *Atharvaveda*, which deals with the human medicine, also deals with veterinary science (*Atharvaveda*, VI, 59; 11, 26,1,11,14). In *Atharvaveda*, cow has been described as the mine of properties, thus revealing the importance of cow in that era (2000 B.C.). It was only during *Atharvaveda* period that the elephant became more popular amongst man. The earliest available works on elephantology were *Hasti-Ayurveda* and the *Gajasastra*. Both were attributed to sage *Palkapya*. The *Hasti-Ayurveda* is a work in prose and verses, while the *Gajasastra* is completely in verse form. The knowledge of identification of the medicinal plants and its uses were mandatory for the clinicians. To strengthen this point *Atharvaveda*, mentioned that the king should punish such clinicians who were unaware of these facts or if they were engaged in production of certain spurious/ toxic medicines. While mentioning all this there is a specific mention that the government should protect the place where these medicinal plants are found or grown. In the *Atharvaveda* there are mention of remedies of the ailments according to it there are four kind of remedies, which are considered to protect the life as well as they help in increasing the life span of the individual these are

1. the drugs of angirasas (juices of plants and herbs).
2. the drugs of the *Atharvans* (a part of the mantra therapy)
3. the divine drugs in the form of prayers and mental yoga.
4. the drugs of human artifice and contrivance.

The veterinary science the animal husbandry activities have been mentioned in a Atharvaveda. In the post vedic literature came up *Asva-Ayurveda* - about horses; *Hasti – Ayurveda*- about elephants; *Gau- Ayurveda*- about cows and *Shyenka- Ayurveda*- about hawks. The veterinary science has been mentioned in *Charaka samhita*, chapter II verses 10-26. It has further been elaborated in *Harita samhita*. Dairying is mentioned in *Gau-Ayurveda*. It has been mentioned that cattle should graze freely so that they achieve a successful mating and their further breeding. *Atharvaveda* has a specific mention about the conservation and breeding of cattle.

Similarly, in *Brahmananda Purana*, Maharishi Vyas said “all cows are the embodiment of Lord Vishnu; and Keshav resides in their limbs”. *Garud Purana* mentions a number of Ayurvedic medicines used against ailments of animals. The *Agni Purana* regarded the sage *Palkapya* as the expositor of the elephant science (*Agni Purana* chapter 287). *Vayu Purana* mentioned that horse traders brought good horses from Gandhara and Sindh to Benaras for sale.

**Salihotra**, the oldest and the greatest veterinarians we ever had composed three texts in Sanskrit. Out of these *Haya-Ayurveda* is the most important one which deals with equine husbandry. He is regarded as ‘the father of veterinary science’ in India. The sage Atreya said that there are twenty types of parasitic pathogens excluding saprophytes. The line of treatment for parasitic disease comprised of: a) extraction of parasites, b) control of factors responsible for production of parasites and c) avoiding contaminated surroundings.

*Asva-Chikitsa* and *Nakul Samhita* composed by *Nakula* also throw light on the husbandry and treatment of horses. Historical evidences of *Mauryan* period (322-232 BC) are in the form of texts like *Arthashastra* composed by *Kautilya* and a book “*Indica*” by *Magasthenes*. Buddha period (600 BC) biographies like *Buddha Charita* authored by *Asvaghosa* reveal the fact that Lord Buddha was a great animal lover and conserver. Inscriptions, as those of *Ashoka*, provide information on the veterinary and animal husbandry practices in those times. Most of the ancient coins have pictures of bulls engraved on them. Cave paintings as those in *Bhimbetka* of Madhya Pradesh depict many animals of that era like bison, bull etc. Sculptures and monuments provide a good deal of historical information about animal husbandry practices in ancient India.

*Palkapya* (700-400 BC) was the ultimate authority on elephants in India. He dealt with the anatomy, physiology, disease and management of elephants in detail. *Kautilya* quoted him in *Arthashastra* He is famous for his *Hast-Ayurveda* (sometimes called *Gaj-Ayurveda* or *Mahapada*). It has 20,000 slokas, dealing with elephant medicine and surgery. It is dedicated to Lord *Ganesha* and is divided into four parts. 1) *Maharogasthana*-or major diseases-18 chapters, 2) *Kshudrarogasthana*-or minor diseases-72 chapters, 3) *Salyasthana*- or surgery-34 chapters and 4) Supplement of *Matareria-medica*-36 chapters. Apart from him other authorities referred to in that period are *Viresena*, *Vrihaspati*, *Nilkanth* and *Vyas*. Indian fables and writings also point to the primitive medicine that have been originally learnt from the observations of the behaviour of lower animals

In spite of the profound interest of sages like, *Angiras*, *Jamadagni*, *Vasistha*, *Kashyapa*, *Atreya*. *Vamdeva*, *Sonakaya*, *Pulaya* etc. In no way systematic and independent treatises on various species of animals were kept. In the *Gautam samhita*, the *Asva-Ayurveda* and the *Hasti-Ayurveda* are the only treatise on animal species found till now.

Sage *Gautama* composed the *Gautam Samhita* which dealt with the treatment and management of cow. The second one, relating to science of horse and was composed by the sage *Salihotra*, while the third one which dealt with the elephants was authored by the sage *Palkapya*. There are evidences of cultivating the elephant science by some other sages also among, whom the names of the sage *Vyas* and sage *Vaisampayana* may be mentioned (*Charaka samhita*, pp68-70).

In the later *Vedic* (1000-600 B.C.), *Buddhist* (600B.C.) and *Maghadha* (400 B.C.) period, horse riding became common. During the *Gupta* dynasty (300-550 AD) in *Samudragupta's* army horses became more important war animals than elephants because of their speed and easy manoeuvrability. He also performed *Asvamedha* yagna to proclaim his imperial power and issued a gold coin depicting a horse. *Skandagupta* (455-467 AD) was shattered by *Huns*, who were expert horse riders. The *Kannauj* empire (606-647AD) had also mentioned the use of saddled horses in warfare.

In the *Mauryan* age (322-232 BC), equine husbandry made a tremendous progress. Horses were used for riding and for war in chariots. During the regime of King *Ashoka*, many well equipped veterinary hospitals were built, probably the first ever in the world in 238 BC. . During the *Ashoka's* reign, Veterinary hospitals were state institutions and medicinal herbs were made available for treatment. Veterinary doctors were and horse trainers were assigned free endowment. *Kautilya's Arthasastra* presents an excellent picture of hygienic and well ventilated animal houses attached with these veterinary hospitals. Further, Alexander the Great, when invaded India, acquired some of the important indigenous skills utilized by Indians to cure the diseases particularly snake bite. He appreciated the skill of traditional healers and eventually many herbs were taken away under the advice of his Guru, the Aristotle He also indicated that the advanced toxicological and herbal research centers existed in Taxilla University where eminent scholars from different parts of the world were investigating the value of Indian herbs in the management of diseases of man and animals.

According to evidence with Indian scholars, *Dhanvantari's* direct disciple *Sushruta* belonged to 600 BC made great improvement in the general techniques of surgery and performed many new and major operations. *Sushruta Samhita* testifies to the great scientific knowledge of the ancient great Indian surgeons. *Sushruta Samhita* most translated into Arabic (*Kitab-I-Susrud*) before the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Charaka, another renowned physician who composed *Charaka Samhita*, had also devoted chapter II to veterinary science. Perhaps the practice of animal and human treatment acquired status of separate profession during later vedic and epic period with the emergence of prominent veterinary experts including *Salihotra*, *Palkapya*, *Rajpaputra* and *Nakula*. According to professor Smith Cors, *Salihotra* lived in early vedic period (1800B.C). He acquired knowledge of *Haya Ayurveda* from Brahma. He was the first known veterinarian in India. Infact he gave his name to veterinary medicine (*Salutri*) and to veterinary doctors (*Saluter*) in India.

## SUMMARY

Animals received good medical care in ancient India. Physicians treating human beings were also trained in the care of animals. Indian medical treatises like *Charaka*, *Sushruta*, and *Harita Samhita* contain chapters or references about care of animals. The greatest and most revered teacher of veterinary science was *Salihotra*, the father of veterinary science followed by Palkapya and Atreya. Almost all aspects of surgery and medicine including veterinary ethics were dealt-in ancient medical veterinary treatises.

