

### Chapter III

#### IDEAS OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

##### Cārvāka's view of life

It should be of interest now to consider the ideas of medicine and health in the schools of Hindu philosophy. A noble ideal of physical culture was set up in the Atharvaveda (XIX.60). Prayers for health, a full span of life and protection against old age is to be come across in the RgVeda (X.186.1, I.89.9, and I, 71-10). The ideal picture of life in the RgVeda (VII.59.12) is that of a ripened fruit.

Death is to be accepted with equanimity. There is hardly any idea of escaping the facts of life. With these remarks we may then turn to have a look at the philosophical schools. The Hindu materialists are called Lokāyatikas. They are also called Cārvākas, after the name of the founder.

They consider perceptual evidence as authority. The four elements of earth, air, fire and water are combined and transformed into the human body. At the time of death, the earthly element of human being returns.

and relapses into the earth, the waterly elements returns into the water and so on. So the elements are dissolved from where it arises, it is said to be destroyed.

According to them pleasure is the aim of life. It is true that pleasure is never pure, never free from pain. Still the amount of pleasure in this world is greater than that of pain. We should not forego the chances of pleasure for fear of the pain that may be found with it. Everyone wants to make long life and become frightened at the very name of death. One should live in pleasure as long as he lives. However heterodox this idea may seem, it is there in the RgVeda (II.21.6), where it is said that our days should not be just days, but fair, bright and happy. They have no belief about the existence of the outer world than this, neither heaven nor hell. According to them soul and body are identical. After death a soul will not get the reward of his past act. When once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again. Cārvākas think that present enjoyment should never be sacrificed for the sake of future pleasures. Future is always uncertain. The present enjoyment is the only reality. One should live in pleasure as long as he lives. One should take butter (ghṛta) even though he runs in debt, so goes the popular adage.

The Jaina view of Life :

The chief feature of Jainism is ahimsā. The practice of ahimsā is based on love and kindness to all living beings. It involves the activities of mind, speech and body. According to them, man should avoid causing injury to other beings through the bodily activity, through speech and through mind. Lest any life be destroyed, some Jains sweep the ground as they go, walk veiled for fear of inhaling a living organism, strain water and reject even honey. But it is true that ahimsā in the strict sense cannot be practised.

Everything is transitory and changeable. Our body, all our objects of pleasure, wealth and youth all are fleeting like dreams, or cotton particles in a whirlwind. Even the gods are subject to death. So this world is full of misery and there is nothing which can support us in it. To Jainism life is a calamity to be avoided at all costs.

We are all different from one another by our surroundings, Karma, by our separate bodies and by all other gifts which each of us severally enjoy.

To achieve the highest goal one should practice the ten dharmas (virtues) of self-control (ramyama), truthfulness (sūnrata), purity (sauca), chastity (brahma), absolute want

of greed (akincanata), asceticism (tapas), forbearance, patience (Ksānti) mildness (mardava), sincerity (riuta), and freedom or emancipation from all sins (mukti) can alone help us in the achievement of the highest goal.

When the self is able to realize its own intrinsic purity and perfection it becomes (paramātman) the supreme spiritual being which is the goal of religious life. Thus every soul can attain godhead when it is perfect. The Jainas do not believe in one ever-perfect being like the God of other religions.

### The Buddhist view of life

According to Buddhists, whatever originates in time has also an end in time. Whatever is existent is momentary. Every moment all objects of the world are suffering dissolution and destruction but yet things appear to persist, and destruction cannot often be noticed.

To the Buddhists existence is pain. All things pass away like they had never been. None can resist the universal supremacy of death. Death is the law of all life. All fulfilment of desires is attended with pain. The remedy for all the woes (such as, tormented by thought, cheated by chance, defeated by the forces of nature, the horror of death) of earth

lies in getting out of it.

There is nothing human or divine that is permanent. There is no eternal soul which migrates, but Kaman does. By our action we are laying the foundation of happiness or misery of another individual that is to come into being after our death as a result of our Kaman. Through nirvāna a man can free himself from the ills of life, and this painful world that is enveloped in the flame of desire.

### Sāṅkhya and Yoga

Sāṅkhya and the Yoga, like the Buddhist hold that all experiences of this world are sorrowful. The way of eradicating the root of sorrow is the practical enquiry of the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

According to them, pain is the essence of bodily existence. The earthly life is full of three kinds of pain. The first kind, called ādhyātmika, is due to intra-organic psychophysical causes and includes all mental and bodily sufferings. The second ādhibhautika is due to extra-organic natural causes like men, beasts, birds, throws etc. The third, ādhidaiivika, is due to supernatural causes like the planets, elemental agencies, ghosts, demons etc.

Therefore some means must be discovered by which all experiences may be shut out for ever. Pain cannot be rooted out by the remedies prescribed by the science of medicine or the scriptures. Death cannot be the end of all pain and sufferings. Because the Karma of the present life determines the particular kind of future birth (as animal or man). He has to suffer the fruits of those Karmas which have already ripened. Wherever there are gunas there are pains. Pleasure is also the result of sattva guna but liberation transcends all gunas. Through liberation complete cessation of pleasure and pain is possible.

So long as citta (mind) and Purusa are associated with each other, the suffering will continue. Citta must be dissociated from purusa. The highest form of matter is citta. The aim of the yoga is to free the individual from the surrounding matter. This cessation of the modification of the Citta through meditation is called 'Yoga'. But withdrawing the citta from its natural functions, we overcome the pain of the world and escape from saṁsara. It is the state of Yoga when there is neither pleasure nor pain.

### Yoga-Astāṅga Yoga

Yoga advocates control over the body the senses and the mind. It does not want to kill the body on the other hand

it recommends its perfection. A sound mind needs a sound body. Sensual attachment and passions distract the body as well as the mind. They must be conquered. To overcome them, Yoga gives us the Eightfold Path of Discipline (Astaṅga Yoga) :

Prāṇāyāma is among them. Prāṇāyāma means control of breath and deals with regulation of inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath. It is beneficial to health and is highly conducive to the concentration of the mind.

### Hathayoga

Yoga practices have undergone diverse change in diverse schools. But none of these are similar to Sāṅkhya. Rather the Yoga practices has grown in accordance with the doctrines of the Saivas and Sāktas and has formed a peculiar form as the Mantrayoga. They have turned in another direction called Hathayoga, which are supposed to produce mystic and magical feats through constant practices of elaborate nervous exercises, which are also associated with healing and other supernatural powers. The Yogatattva Upanisad says that there are four kinds of Yoga, viz., the Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Hathayoga and Rajayoga.

## Nyāyā and Vaishesika

The system Nyāyā is allied to the Vaishesika system which is regarded as 'Samānatantra' or similar philosophy. Vaishesika develops metaphysics and ontology. But regarding the earthly life they have common opinion. The world is full of sorrow. To a wise person everything is sorrow (Sarvaṃ dukhaṃ vivekinaḥ). Pleasure is always mixed up with pain. The wise therefore is never attached to the pleasures of life which only leads to further sorrows. To escape from Saṃsāra is to attain the highest good. The highest good is deliverance from pain and not the enjoyment of pleasure. All activity good or bad, binds us to the chain of saṃsara and leads to some kind of birth, high or low. Only through liberation cessation of birth is possible. Both agree that bondage is due to ignorance of reality and that liberation is due to right knowledge of reality.

Our purpose in collating the ideas of life and death as found in the Hindu systems of thought has been to take into account the notions that have been at work in the cultural psyche. And it is the cultural psyche that moulds and to some extent determine the medical care of each country.

India has an ancient tradition of medical care known as āyurveda. Its authors are highly venerated, and

are given the honours of philosophical thinkers. Āyurveda presupposes the Sāṃkhya metaphysics, which means that for āyurveda man's life and death follows a cosmic pattern, and therefore medical care should be in accordance with it. It may be worth our while to look at the salient features of āyurvedic thoughts.

Medicine was the most important of all the physical sciences which were cultivated in ancient India, was directly and intimately connected with the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika physics and was probably the origin of the logical speculations subsequently codified in the Nyāya-sūtras. The literature contains, moreover, many other interesting ethical instructions and reveals a view of life which differs considerably from that found in works on philosophy. Their speculations regarding embryology, heredity and other such points of general enquiry are likely to prove interesting even to a student of pure philosophy.

Susruta says that Āyur-veda (the science of life) is an Upāṅga of the Atharva-Veda.

Caraka, in discussing the nature of Āyur-veda, says that there was never a time when life did not exist or when intelligent people did not exist, and so there were always plenty of people who knew about life, and there were always medicines which acted on the human body according to the

principles which we find enumerated in the Āyur-veda. Āyur-veda was not produced at any time out of nothing, but there was always a continuity of the science of life. The science of life has always been in existence, and there have always been people who understood it in their own way. Caraka distinguishes Āyur-veda as a distinct Veda, which is superior to the other Vedas because it gives us life, which is the basis of all other enjoyments or benefits, whether they be of this world or of another. It was traditionally believed that there was a Veda known as Āyurveda which was almost co-existent with the other Vedas was entitled to great respect, and was associated with the Atharva-Veda in a special way. It seems, however, that the nature of this association consisted in the fact that both of them dealt with the curing of diseases and the attainment of long life, the one principally by incantations and charms, and the other by medicines.

The moral impact of medical care is evident when Caraka counts penance (prāyas-citta) as a name of medicine (bheṣaja) and Cakrapāṇi, in commenting on this, says that as prāyas-citta removes the diseases produced by sins, so medicines (bheṣaja) also remove diseases, and thus prāyas-citta is synonymous with bheṣaja.

Caraka uses the word "Āyur-veda" in the general sense of "science of life". Life is divided by Caraka into four

kinds, viz. Sukha (happy), duhka (unhappy), hita (good) and ahita (bad), Sukham āyuh is a life which is not affected by bodily or mental diseases, is endowed with vigour, strength, energy, vitality, activity and is full of all sorts of enjoyments and successes. The opposite of this is the asukham āyuh. Hitam āyuh is the life of a person who is always willing to do good to all beings, never steals others' property, is truthful, self-controlled, self-restrained and works with careful consideration, does not transgress the moral injunctions takes to virtue and to enjoyment with equal zeal, honours revered persons, is charitable and does what is beneficial to this world and to the other. The opposite of this is called ahita. The object of the science of life is to teach what is conducive to all these four kinds of life and also to determine the length of such a life.

Jayanta the author of Nyāya Manjari argues that the validity of the Vedas depends on the fact that they have been composed by an absolutely trustworthy person (āpta). As an analogy he refers to Āyur-veda, the validity of which is due to the fact that it has been composed by trustworthy persons (āpta). That the medical instructions of the Āyur-veda are regarded as valid is due to the fact that they are the instructions of trustworthy persons.

This shows the high esteem in which medicine was held in India.

Āyur-veda was primarily concerned with three questions, viz. how diseases originated, how they were known, and what were their cures.<sup>1</sup> It was in this connection that the principle of causality was first from a practical necessity applied in Āyur-veda.

### Āyur-veda Ethics

If these physical causes can be warded off, then a man may continue to live until the normal length of his life, one hundred years, is reached, when the body machine, being worn out by long work, gradually breaks down. Medicines may, however, in the case of those who are not cursed by the commission of sins of great enormity prolong the normal length of life. It is here that Caraka and his followers differ from all other theories of Karma. The theory is not accepted in any Indian system of thought except that of Caraka. Caraka thinks that it is only the extremely good or bad deeds that have this immutable character. All other effects of ordinary actions can be modified or combated by our efforts. Virtue and vice are not vague and mysterious principles in Caraka and the separation that appears elsewhere between the moral and the physical sides of an action is not found in his teaching.

Freedom of human will is almost wholly admitted by Caraka, and where the fruits of previous actions are not of a

confirmed character, they can be averted or improved by our efforts. His is the ideal of living one's life in a manner that is most conducive to health, long life and proper enjoyment. Our only care should be that we do not commit any mistake in eating, drinking and other actions of life which may directly or indirectly (through the production of sins) produce diseases and sufferings or jeopardize our life and enjoyment in any way.

#### Good life in Caraka

"Good life" in Caraka means not only an ethically virtuous life, but a life which is free from diseases, and which is so led that it attains its normal length. Moral life thus means a life that is free from the defect of prajñāparādha. It means wise and prudent life, for it is only the want of wisdom and prudence that is the cause of all physical, social, physiological, moral and spiritual mischiefs. To be a good man, it is not enough that one should practise the ethical virtues : a man should practise the physical, physiological and social virtues as well. He must try to live a healthy and long life, free from diseases and sufferings and free from reproaches of any kind. Physical diseases are to be cured by medicines, while mental diseases are to be cured by right and proper knowledge of things, self-control and self-concentration.

A good life, which is the ideal of every person, is a life of peace, contentment and happiness, free from desires and troubles of all kinds. It is a life of prudence and well-balanced judgment, where every action is done with due consideration to its future consequences and where all that may lead to troubles and difficulties is carefully avoided. It is only such a life that can claim to be good and can be regarded as ideal. A merely moral or virtuous life is not our ideal, which must be good in every respect. Any transgression, be it of the rules of hygiene, rules of polite society, rules of good citizenship, or any deviation from the path which prudence or good judgment would recommend to be wise, may disturb the peace of life. A scheme of good life thus means a wise life and observance of morality is but one of the many ways in which wisdom can be shown.