



Role of Buddhist Thought in the evolution of *Ayurveda*: An integrative Review

Corresponding Author

1. Dr. Prakash Pingalsur

3rd Year Post Graduate Scholar, Department of PG Samhita and Siddhanta, Government Akhandanand Ayurveda College and Hospital, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

2. Dr. Ajitsinh K. Gohil

Assistant Professor, Department of PG Samhita and Siddhanta, Government Akhandanand Ayurveda College and Hospital, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

3. Dr. Manmohan Gupta

Reader, Department of PG Samhita and Siddhanta, Government Akhandanand Ayurveda College and Hospital, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

4. Dr. Harshilkumar Patel

3rd Year Post Graduate Scholar, Department of PG Samhita and Siddhanta, Government Akhandanand Ayurveda College and Hospital, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

5. Dr. Daxabahen Shah

3rd Year Post Graduate Scholar, Department of PG Samhita and Siddhanta, Government Akhandanand Ayurveda College and Hospital, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

ABSTRACT :

Buddhism and *Ayurveda*, two of India's most enduring intellectual traditions, developed concurrently over many centuries. While Buddhism mainly addresses the liberation of the mind and *Ayurveda* focuses on bodily health, detailed study shows significant convergence in their values, principles, and philosophical frameworks. This review analyzes the multidimensional influence of Buddhist thought on classical *Ayurveda* literature, with particular emphasis on the works of *Vagbhata*, author of the *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. Drawing upon primary classical sources, the review identifies parallels in concepts such as *Dukkha Nivritti* (relief from suffering), the Middle Path (*Madhyama Marga*), ethical conduct (*Sadvritta* and *Pancha Sheela*), the theory of *Karma* and rebirth, the body-mind relationship (*Nama-Rupa and Sharira*), and the epistemological acceptance of *Pratyaksha* and *Anumana*. Rather than ascribing these similarities to coincidence, the analysis contends that Buddhist philosophy strongly influenced the development of *Ayurveda* thought during a formative period of scholarly exchange in ancient India.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Ayurveda, Vagbhata, Madhyama Marga, Dukkha, Karma, Nama-Rupa, Sadvritta, Pancha Sheela, Indian Philosophy*

Influence of Buddhism on *Ayurveda*

Ayurveda developed alongside other Indian philosophical systems, leading to mutual philosophical influence among these traditions. Involvement with diverse branches of knowledge improves the understanding of any particular discipline. Among these traditions, Buddhism was one of the most influential schools of thought in the Indian subcontinent for over a millennium. Its principles and theories demonstrably influenced numerous philosophies, including *Ayurveda*.

Numerous concepts in *Ayurveda* closely parallel Buddhist principles, signifying a strong influence of Buddhism on *Ayurveda* thought. The authors of *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, Vagbhata I and II, are believed to have adhered to Buddhism. *Vridha Vagbhata* is explicitly described as a Buddhist and is identified with the scholar referenced by Yijing as the author of the compendium on the eight branches of medicine. “*Bahata*” is regarded as the Prakrit form of *Vagbhata*, while Sanghagupta, the father of *Vagbhata*, corresponds to *Simhagupta* in Sanskrit.

The *Ashtanga Hridaya* is also considered to have been composed by a Buddhist scholar. It was subsequently translated in Tibetan and is believed to have been written within a century of the *Ashtanga Sangraha*.

Buddhist philosophy developed not only as a religion but also as a comprehensive philosophical system, primarily concerned with liberation from suffering (*Dukha*), encompassing both physical (*Sharirika*) and mental (*Manasika*) dimensions. This focus closely is consistent with the *Ayurveda* objective of sustaining physical and psychological well-being.

The influence of Buddhism on *Ayurveda* is especially clear in the works of *Vagbhata*. In the invocatory verse of *Ashtanga Sangraha*, Gautama Buddha is directly mentioned, whereas indirect references appear in *Ashtanga Hridaya* through names such as *Jina*, *Jina Suta*, *Samyak Sambuddha*, and *Bhaishajya Guru*, all associated with Buddhism. Additionally, the recommendation to follow the *Madhyama Marga* (Middle Path) further demonstrates Buddhism's philosophical influence on *Ayurveda*.

Mangalacharana of Astanga Sangraha obeisances to Buddha:

*Trishnadeerghamasaddhikalpashirasampradwesa Chanchatphanamkamakrodamvisham
Vitarkadasanamragaprachandekshanam || Mohasyamswasharirakotarashayam Chittoragam
Darunamprajnamantra Balena Ya: Shamitavan Buddhaya Tasmei Namah ||*

— *Ashtanga Sangraha, Sutrasthana 1*

This Sutra is significant to understand the influence of Buddhism on the treatise. *Vagbhata* I, author of the *Ashtanga Sangraha* and a follower of Buddhism, pays homage to Gautama Buddha in the opening *Mangalacharana Sutra*.

The imagery in this Sutra reflects the concept of Nagabuddha, which is widely recognized in Buddhist culture. The verse compares the unstable and harmful nature of the mind to a multi-headed serpent, symbolizing mental disturbances and their harmful effects. This concept implies that mental disorders precede and help in the development of physical illnesses.

The Sutra further clarifies that, through wisdom, spiritual excellence, and profound knowledge, the Buddha overcame the restless and destructive "mind-serpent," thereby attaining enlightenment. As a result, Lord Buddha is revered as the supreme physician (*Bhishak*) across all traditions of medical knowledge and healing sciences [1].

In Ashtanga Hridaya's First quotation :

*Ragadi Roga Sahaja Sammula Yoneshu Sarve Jagatopyapasta: | Tamekavaidyam Shirasa Namami
Vaidyagamanjnascha Pithamahadeen ||*

— *Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 1*

In this verse, *Vagbhata* offers reverential salutations to the exceptional figure who overcame *Raagadi Rogas*, which are diseases or afflictions arising from attachment, desire, and other mental disturbances. Gautama Buddha is referenced indirectly in this context.

A comparable concise form of *Mangalacharana* is also present in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, closely resembling the invocation in *Ashtanga Sangraha* and conveying nearly the same meaning.^[ii]

Role of Dharma for happiness and the importance of Health

Dharmartha Kama Mokshanam Arogyam Moolamuttamam ||

— *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 1/15*

Sukharta Sarvabhutanam Mata: Sarva: Pravruttya:|

Sukham Cha Na Vina Dharmattasmaddharma Paro Bhavet|| A.Hr 2/20

Gautama Buddha placed considerable emphasis on health and well-being. Similarly, Charaka asserted that health is the foundation for attaining *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*. Both traditions regard good health as essential for leading a meaningful and balanced life.

Happiness is identified as the ultimate aim for every individual; however, both traditions claim that genuine happiness must be attained through righteous and ethical means^{[iii][iv]}.

Epistemological Parallels: Pratyaksha and Anumana

A particularly important point of convergence between Buddhism and *Ayurveda* concerns epistemology, the theory of knowledge acquisition. Buddhism, as a tradition committed to rational inquiry, recognizes two principal means of valid knowledge: *Pratyaksha* (direct perception) and *Anumana* (logical inference). The tradition deliberately avoids exclusive reliance on scriptural authority or tradition.

Remarkably, a similar emphasis appears in *Charaka Samhita*:

Dwividha Tu Khalu Pareeksha Jnanavatam – Pratyaksham Anumanam Cha ||

— *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8/83*

Although *Ayurveda* formally recognizes four *Pramanas* (valid means of knowledge), *Charaka* assigns particular importance to these two, which are also privileged in Buddhist epistemology. This parallel indicates that the *Ayurveda* tradition, as reflected in these texts, prioritized systematic observation and reasoned inference over inherited authority, an orientation closely aligned with Buddhist thought^[v].

Karma, Rebirth, and the Ethics of Action

Both Buddhism and *Ayurveda* hold that the quality of an individual's present life is influenced, at least in part, by actions performed in previous lives. Buddhism places *karma*, or intentional action, at the center of its explanation for rebirth and continued existence within the cycle of *Samsara*. Unmindful, unwholesome actions perpetuate suffering, while mindful, wholesome actions foster the prerequisites for liberation.

Charaka's Samhita engages with a remarkably similar idea:[vi]

Nirdishtam Daivashabdhenā Karmayāt Pourvadaiḥikam ||

— *Charaka Samhita, Sharirasthana 1/116*

The term '*Daivika*,' sometimes translated as 'divine causation,' is interpreted in this context as referring specifically to the consequences of actions performed in previous lives. This interpretation indicates that certain diseases and constitutional tendencies cannot be fully explained by present-life causes alone, as they bear the imprint of past *karmic* accumulation.

Another passage from *Charaka* makes a related point about the importance of righteous conduct[vii]:

*Na Pareeksha Na Pareekshyam Na Kartha, Na Cha; Na Deva Na Rishaya Siddha: Karma Karmaphalam
Na Cha ||*

— *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 11/14*

This verse emphasizes that *karma* and its consequences are real, and that no external authority, including gods or sages, can override the outcomes of one's actions. This perspective expresses a fundamentally Buddhist sentiment, bringing out the tradition's emphasis on personal moral responsibility as the foundation of well-being.

Dukkha Nivrutti

According to *Ayurveda*, the primary purpose is to preserve the health of healthy individuals and to cure diseases in those who are ill. The ultimate aim is to relieve suffering (*Dukha*) and to promote happiness and well-being.

Charaka Samhita explains:

“Pratikula Vedaniyam Dukham | Anukula Vedaniyam Sukham ||”

This distinction indicates that unpleasant experiences are classified as *Dukha*, while pleasant and favorable experiences are regarded as *Sukha*. *Sukha* denotes a healthy and balanced state, whereas *Dukha* signifies physical or mental distress.

Gautama Buddha similarly emphasized that good health is essential for practicing Dhamma and attaining a meaningful life. *Ayurveda* likewise asserts that Arogya (health) forms the foundation for achieving *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*.

Description of *Sadvritta* / *Pancha Sheela*

Himsasteyaanyathakamam Paishunya Parushanrute // *A Hr.Su.2/21*

Deha Pravrittirya Kachidvidyate Parapeedayal Stree Bhoga Asteye Ahimsadya Tasyan Vegan Vidharayet //
Ch.Su.7/29

The principles of *Sadvritta* outlined in *Ayurveda* closely parallel the concepts of *Pancha Sheela* and *Ashtanga Marga* in Buddhism.

References from *Ashtanga Hridaya* and *Charaka Samhita* highlight ethical conduct such as *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, *Asteya*, proper control over desires, and avoidance of harmful speech and actions.

Gautama Buddha regarded *Ahimsa* as the central principle of life, representing compassion, kindness, equality, service to all beings, and freedom from suffering. Buddhist philosophy highlights both individual welfare and social harmony.

Buddha also advocated righteous conduct via practices such as *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, *Asteya*, and proper moral behaviour, considering these universal ethical principles. Comparable teachings are present in *Ayurveda* under the concept of *Sadvritta*. Both systems claim that observance of these moral values enables individuals to attain happiness and well-being in both this life (*Ihaloka Sukha*) and the hereafter (*Paraloka Sukha*)^{[viii][ix]}.

Service to Human, is the Prime Aim

Vimukhannartina: Kuryannavamanyena Nakshipet //

— *Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2/2*

Both Buddhism and *Ayurveda* teach that individuals should be helpful even toward adversaries or those who do not reciprocate kindness. Emphasis is placed on performing righteous and beneficial actions with sincerity, without attachment to outcomes or expectations of reciprocation. The real worth lies in good effort, compassion, and moral conduct, rather than in the results of the action^[x].

Importance of Control of Mind

Loba Shoka Bhaya Krodhamano Vegan Vidharayet /

Nairlajja Eershyatiraaganam Abidyayascha Buddhiman //

— *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 7/27*

Charaka asserted the necessity of controlling the mind and regulating negative emotions, including *Lobha*, *Shoka*, *Bhaya*, *Krodha*, *Mana*, *Eershya*, *Atiraga*, and *Avidya*.

The *Charaka Samhita* explains that a wise individual should restrain these harmful mental tendencies, as they mainly arise from ignorance and insufficient understanding.

This concept closely parallels Buddhist teachings, which hold that mastery over the mind and freedom from negative emotions are crucial for attaining peace, wisdom, and liberation from suffering^[xi].

Nama–Rupa and the Concept of *Sharira*^[xii]

shareeram Satvasanjna Cha Vyadhinam Ashrayi Mata: // *Ch.Su.1/45*

Dosha Dhatu Malam Mulam Hi Shareeram // *Su.Su.15/3*

Shareerendriya Satva Atma Samyogadhari Jeevitam // *Ch.Su.1/42*

Satvatmaa Shareeram Cha Trayam Etat Tridandavat // *Ch.Su.1/46*

Panchamaha Bhute Shareeri Samavaya Purusha// Ch.Su.1/16

*Nija Agantu Vibhagena Tatra Roga Dwida Smrita:/ Tesham Kaya Mano Bedat Adishtanamapi Dwida//
A.Hr.Su.1*

Buddhism articulates the concept of *Nama–Rupa*, wherein mind (*Nama*) and body (*Rupa*) collectively constitute the foundation of human existence. A comparable concept is recognized in *Ayurveda* as well.

Charaka states in *Charaka Samhita* that the body and mind are the main seats of diseases. The combination of *Sharira* (body), *Indriya* (senses), *Satva* (mind), and *Atma* (soul) sustains life. Similarly, the body is described as being formed by *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala*, while the *Purusha* is constituted by the *Panchamahabhutas*.

Ayurveda classifies diseases into two primary categories: *Nija* and *Agantuja*, and further explains that diseases may originate in the body (*Kaya*) or the mind (*Manas*). This classification reflects the Buddhist understanding of the interconnection between physical and mental aspects.

This concept is further supported by modern science, which broadly classifies diseases into somatic (physical) and psychic (mental) disorders.

Madhyama Marga

Anuyayat Pratipada Sarvadharmeshu Madhyamam// As.Hr.Su.2/30

Samadosha Samadhatava Samagnischamalakriya: Prasannatmendriya: Mana: Swasta Ityabideeyate //

Buddha advocated following the Middle Path, which entails avoiding both extremes of excess and deprivation of basic needs. This principle is directly acknowledged by *Vagbhata* in *Ashtanga Hridaya* 2/30. The Middle Path is a scientifically relevant and widely applicable concept in contemporary contexts [xiii].

Mahabhuta's

Bhutaishchaturbhi : Sahita: Susukshmarmanojabo Dehamupeti Dehat /

Bhutani Chatvari Tu Karmajani Yanyatmaleenani Vishanti Garbham/

Sa Veerya Dharmaparaparani Dehantaravyatmani Yati Yati // Ch.Sh.2/31-35

Sarvamdravyam Panchaboutikamasminnarte// Ch.Su.26/10

Tatra Pritivyapetejo Vayvakashanam Samudayat Dravyabinivrutti// Su.Su. 4

Gautama Buddha recognized only four *Mahabhutas*, as these can be directly perceived through the senses (*Indriyarthas*). In contrast, *Ayurveda* generally acknowledges five *Mahabhutas*. However, in the *Sharira Sthana* of the *Charaka Samhita*, only four *Mahabhutas* are mentioned in the discussion of the concept of *Sukshma Sharira*.

According to Buddhist philosophy, *Akasha Mahabhuta* is excluded because it cannot be perceived in a physical, physical form through the senses. Therefore, Buddhists deny its independent physical existence[xiv].

Panchendriyas:

Tatra Chakshu : Shrotram Ghranam Rasanam Sparshamiti Panchendriyani // Ch.Su.8/18 [xv]

Panchendriy Adishtani - Akshini Karnei Nasike Jihva Twak Cheti // Ch.Su.8/10

Charaka Samhita describes the five sense organs (*Panchendriyas*) as *Chakshu* (eyes), *Shrotra* (ears), *Ghrana* (nose), *Rasana* (tongue), and *Sparsha* (skin), and specifies their physical locations as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin, respectively.

Similarly, Buddhism regards the sense organs as essential parts of the physical body and considers them instruments connected to the mind. Gautama Buddha accentuated the importance of regulating and controlling the senses. Buddhist teachings claim that an uncontrolled mind reacts impulsively to external stimuli, whereas a disciplined mind remains calm and unaffected. Via practices such as *Dhyana* (meditation), people can gain mastery over the mind and effectively regulate the sense organs, thereby achieving a peaceful and balanced life.

Swa Shareerasya Medhavi Krityeshwa Vahino Bhavet || Ch.Su.5/103[xvi]

Charaka also emphasized that a wise individual should stay cautious and disciplined in all actions to maintain health and mental stability.

Buddha further taught that desires (*Ichha*) and cravings (*Trishna*) are the root causes of suffering and misery. This concept remains universally relevant, as disappointment arises when desires are unfulfilled. The teaching stresses the importance of limiting attachment and preserving mental balance.

Unlike many Indian philosophical systems, Buddha did not accept the concept of a permanent *Atma* (soul). Instead, he articulated the concept of "*Aham*," or ego/self-centeredness. According to this perspective, if the self possessed complete control over the body, suffering, aging, and death could be prevented by personal will. However, since no individual can prevent aging or death, Buddhism rejects the notion of an eternal, controlling *Atma*.

The observed similarities between Buddhism and *Ayurveda* indicate that Buddhism exerted a significant influence on the development of *Ayurveda*. Both traditions evolved concurrently and contributed to each other's philosophical development.

Conclusion

Buddhism and *Ayurveda* share the objective of liberating human beings from suffering, whether physical or psychological. Both systems stress an ideal way of living as the foundation for establishing a healthy and peaceful society. Their principles, ethical values, and philosophical approaches show considerable similarities in this context.

Although *Ayurveda* possesses unique theories and concepts, it has also adopted and incorporated ideas from multiple philosophical schools. The influence of various Indian philosophical schools, including Buddhism, is evident throughout classical *Ayurveda* texts.

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