

# Impact of Colonial Rule on *Ayurvedic* System of Medicine: In Context of *Garhwal Uttarakhand*

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**Abstract:** *Ayurveda* is the oldest medical system of India. It is described in abundance in Indian historical and non - historical literature. *Ayurveda* is called *Upveda* of *Atharvaveda*. The first description of *Ayurveda* is found in *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda*, and the period of their composition is considered to be 2000 BC [1]. Before the colonial rule, *Ayurveda* was the main medical system in India, but after the promotion and spread of modern medicine by the colonial rule, the *Ayurvedic* medical system got marginalized and the modern medical system completely took its place. In the presented research paper, a study of *Ayurvedic* medical system and the impact of colonial rule on it have been presented in the *Garhwal* region of *Uttarakhand*.

**Keywords:** *Ayurvedic*, Allopathy, Yajmani, Himalaya, *Vaidyaki*, Physician, Colonial, *Garhwal - Himalayan*

## 1. Introduction

*Uttarakhand* has two divisions *Garhwal* and *Kumaon*. The oldest reference to *Garhwal* region is found in *Kedarkhand* of *Skanda Purana* and *Vanparva* of *Mahabharata*. *Garhwal* division of *Uttarakhand* extends from *Haridwar* in the south, to the Himalayas in the north, and from the *Tamsa* (Tons) river in the west, to *Baudhanchal* (border of *Chamoli* district) in the east [2]. Presently *Garhwal* is the western division of the North Indian state of *Uttarakhand*. Tibet is in its north, *Kumaon* division in the east and *Himachal Pradesh* in the north - west.

*Ayurveda* was spread in *Uttarakhand* probably along with Buddhism in the first century AD. Due to the promotion of Brahmin religion by *Shankaracharya* in the eighth century, the growth of Buddhism was effectively stopped, due to which *Uttarakhand* also did not remain untouched. In *Jyotirmath* or *Joshimath* After the establishment of *Atharvaveda Peeth*, *Shankaracharya's* followers propagated Hinduism or *Brahminism* in *Uttarakhand*, which left Buddhism confined to the borders of Tibet and Nepal. *Ayurveda* remained in this region with some limited changes [3]. Before modern medical system, treatment of diseases in *Garhwal* was done by physicians and healers. After the establishment of British rule in *Garhwal* and *Kumaon* in 1815 AD, western medical system or modern medical system was introduced for the first time in *Garhwal* and hospitals and dispensaries started coming into existence. Earlier, *Ayurvedic* medical system was the main medical system of the state and *Ayurvedic* doctors were capable of treating and preventing diseases.

### *Ayurvedic* System of Medicine in *Garhwal Himalaya*:

Various types of herbs are found in the Himalayan regions of *Garhwal*, which were in demand in different areas of the country since ancient times. Since ancient times, herbal medicines and musk from the Himalayan region were exported to Egypt and Rome. The Himalayas are a storehouse of medicines, in which plants ranging from *Ashvattha* medicines to those used in all types of diseases are found. Like *Banafsha* (*Viola odorata*) which is useful for cold and cough, *Punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*) which is useful for eye and kidney diseases and *Amaltas* (*Cassia*

*fistula*) which is a laxative, there are many such plants which are grown in this region and are used by folk healers and *Vaidyas* (*Ayurvedic* physician).

In *Garhwal*, along with ancient methods like folk medicine method, faith therapy, *tantra - mantra* etc., *Ayurvedic* medical system was the important medical system. According to legends, the famous *Ayurvedacharya Charak* had come to visit the *Garhwal* Himalayan region to discover and know about the Himalayan flora. In *Pauri* district of *Garhwal*, a peak is named after *Charak* which is called *Charka Danda* (*Charak's Peak*) [4].

By observing the history of *Garhwal*, it is known that many traditions have been prevalent here since ancient times, among which *Ayurveda*, rituals, astrology and tantric practices are prominent. Even today, after a gap of hundreds of years, these traditions are benefiting the *Garhwal* Himalayan regions with their beneficial properties. People of all classes and communities of the *Garhwal - Himalayan* region have knowledge of folk medicine; they have their own folk medicinal methods, which are prevalent orally in the region since ancient times. But the Brahmin class has played a role in keeping the *Ayurvedic* medical system alive in this region due to their knowledge of Sanskrit. Performing rituals and priestly work were the main means of livelihood for Brahmins, due to which it was mandatory for every Brahmin to learn Sanskrit. The knowledge of *Ayurveda* and medicine compiled from the Vedic period is in Sanskrit language and due to the knowledge of Sanskrit; it was easy for the Brahmins to acquire this knowledge. Like astrology, there has been a tradition of transferring the knowledge of *Ayurveda* from one generation to the next.

It also existed as a social system that *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and other castes remained connected with each other in customs and livelihood related practices. This social system is known as *Yajmani Pratha* or *Jajmani* system. The work of worship, performing rituals, astrology etc. was done by Brahmins in return for which *Kshatriyas* or other castes gave them food, clothes, animals, household items and money in the form of *Dakshina* (money given to Brahmins after a feast or ceremony, fee for spiritual services). There were only three classes in the *Garhwal* Himalayas, Brahmins,

*Kshatriyas* and *Shudras* (lower castes), who directly and indirectly helped each other in their livelihood. This is also the source of longevity and integrity of Indian culture. The Brahmins were not only the family advisors and priests of the *Yajman* (host or *Jajman*) but were also their ancestral physicians. In case of any physical pain, disorder, suffering and disease, Brahmins used to resort to the use of herbs, recitation of *puja*, *mantra* - *tantra* and organizing *Yajna* - *Havan* etc. to relieve the suffering of the *Yajman* (host). The *Yajman* (hosts) had unwavering faith in their family physicians. Many villages in *Garhwal* are still known as *Vaidya Gaoun* (Village of physician) and there are many Brahmin castes that are still called *Vaidyas* [5] (Ayurvedic physician).

The villages of *Garhwal* region were divided under the *Jajmani* system. Every village had its own Brahmin, who performed all the functions of the family priest, physician and ritualist for that village. On the basis of the *Yajmani* system in the Brahmin class, the family members of the Brahmins who owned the villages used to serve in these villages from generation to generation [6]. Traditionally, the new generation used to learn the knowledge of *Ayurveda* and medicines while traveling from village to village with their elders. Most of such *Vaidyas* also had knowledge of astrology. Astrology is an essential part of *Ayurvedic* medicine and *Tantric* medicine.

*Tantriks* and *Vaidyas* of *Garhwal* use various herbal medicines generally and some of them keeping in mind the basis of astrology. This is the reason why such manuscripts related to *Ayurveda* are also found in *Garhwal*, in which the combined utility of *Ayurveda* and astrology from the point of view of disease prevention has been described. The doctors here still do their work with the help of these ancient handwritten manuscripts. While on one hand, a mixed form of astrology is seen with *Tantra* and *Ayurvedic* texts, on the other hand, independent texts of *Ayurveda Shastra* are also found in abundance in this area. If astrology is called the cornerstone of *Garhwal* culture, then there will be no exaggeration in it because it is used in various areas of life from birth to death [7].

In the first half of the nineteenth century, *Vaidyas* were the main pillars of the medical system of *Garhwal*. Traditionally, some *Vaidyas* sometimes taught the knowledge of medicine experimentally or orally in their *Yajmani* areas to their *Yajmans* or disciples, most of whom were illiterate or not formally educated. They acquired medical knowledge from their gurus (mentor) or physicians on the basis of practice and experience. In this way, the tradition of transfer of medical knowledge is seen in various districts of *Garhwal* - *Himalayan* regions.

In this way the knowledge of *Ayurveda* was transmitted from generation to generation. The traditional medicine of the Himalayan region also continued to be influenced by the development of *Ayurveda* according to different chronologies. For example, the folk medical methods of the local communities also influenced the pure practice of *Ayurveda* and the promotion of *Unani* in the medieval period also influenced *Ayurveda*, but this method was most affected during the British rule. During the British rule,

hospitals were opened at various places and on the pilgrim routes in this region and through them allopathic medicine was propagated and *Ayurvedic* and folk medicine methods were neglected [8]. Due to which the *Ayurvedic* medical system, which was being followed from generation to generation, reached the verge of extinction. The experts of this method remained limited to those remote areas where there was no facility of modern medical system or allopathic medical system.

### Impact of Colonial Rule on *Ayurvedic* practices of *Garhwal Uttarakhand*

The arrival of the British in India was the beginning of a new era, they brought with them a new era of science and culture. They not only established supremacy over India's indigenous knowledge, science and methods through their modern methods and science, they also captured it. India not only lost its political base but also became a valuable colony for Western science. On the strength of its new colonial power, Western knowledge and science without any opposition stamped the traditional knowledge and science of India and drove it back. The British made full use of their scientific methods to expand their colonial empire in India. Medical science also played an important role in this type of subjugation policy. The effect of which was that gradually India's own ancient medical systems were marginalized and the influence of modern medical systems or allopathy became completely established in the public mind. Modern medicine had an impact on all areas of India, in which *Uttarakhand* was also not untouched. In India and other countries like Ghana and Korea, the term modern medicine is used for allopathic medicine [9].

At the time when the British rule was established in the *Garhwal* region, the medical work in this region was completely dependent on *Ayurvedic* doctors and the health related situation of this region was very disappointing. Apart from leprosy, the main infectious diseases were plague, cholera, smallpox, fever and goitre etc [10]. There was a need for a perfect medical system to rid the public of these harmful diseases. *Ayurveda* and traditional medical systems were not effectively capable of doing this work, due to many reasons. Due to the colonial rule, neither this system received the protection of the government nor was any interest shown by *Ayurvedic* practitioners in new experiments and research.

To ensure that the British themselves did not get affected by these harmful diseases, to deal with this problem, they established modern medical dispensaries, health centers and hospitals as well as made arrangements for vaccination. People took time to accept these modern medicines in rural areas, but hospitals and dispensaries continued to be established in urban centers and army headquarters [11]. So thus, according to the British policy in India, *Kumaon* and *Garhwal* of *Uttarakhand* also started being managed by the British in terms of diseases and medicine [12].

Till 1940, the British government did not take any steps to look after public health and arrange for doctors, but the Pye Fair report in 1940 drew the government's attention towards this. Earlier, some vaccinators had been appointed to vaccinate against smallpox in *Garhwal* and they had

vaccinated almost the entire population in the area. During the pilgrimage period, Assistant Commissioner of *Garhwal*, Baton, started distributing medicines among the pilgrims through vaccinators. In 1940, he sent a report in this regard to the government in which he wrote that he did not have money for the distribution of medicines and medical arrangements among the pilgrims, on which the government gave him permission to appoint a doctor. In this way, the first hospital was established in *Srinagar Garhwal* under a native doctor [13]. After which many medicine dispensaries were established on the pilgrim routes. Sometime in the last century, allopathic hospitals were established in *Pauri*, *Kotdwar* and *Srinagar* and dispensaries in *Kanda* and *Banghat*.

In the last century, many hospitals were established in *Dehradun* alone by the British. Modern hospitals were established at many places in every district including the pilgrims' routes. After 1947, many previously established dispensaries were upgraded and converted into district hospitals, primary and community health centers. After independence, modern hospitals were continuously established in district headquarters, major towns and cities and people's inclination towards modern medical practice continued to increase. People's attention started moving away from the *Ayurvedic* dispensaries and hospitals that were established during the British period and started depending on modern medicines. Due to which the practice of *Ayurvedic* medicine gradually became marginalized.

The people having knowledge of *Ayurveda*, they have also played a big role in the continuous decline of *Ayurveda*. *Ayurvedic* Vaidyas could never come out of their own conservative mentality because they considered it as their ancestral profession and their monopoly on it. Therefore, its training also has been a closed system. Traditional *Ayurvedic* knowledge was passed down ancestrally from one generation to another; hence it was kept as a secret knowledge mainly in the hilly region of *Garhwal*. Even the well - known wealthy Vaidyas here never tried to institutionalize it outside the traditional training and it remained limited to the homes and families of the Vaidyas [14].

However, there were many *Ayurvedic* colleges in the state, and students from different areas kept taking *Ayurvedic* education from them, among which *Dhanwantari Ayurvedic College of Rishikesh*, *Mangaladevi Ayurvedic College of Dehradun* etc. were prominent. From whom many prominent *Ayurvedic* physicians of *Garhwal* emerged. But at that time, due to lack of means of transport and awareness of education in *Garhwal*, very few families could afford to send their children to these institutional study centers. In the later, due to the flow of English education and the need for other sources of employment, the profession of *Ayurvedic* physician continued to lose its roots in *Garhwal* [15].

Modern medicine continued to be promoted by the government as well. *Ayurvedic* doctors themselves oriented their new generation towards the study of allopathy or modern medicine instead of *Ayurveda*. After the 70s in the 20th century, new inventions and continuous new research in allopathy refined it and daily new equipment and

medicines made allopathy more acceptable and accessible in place of *Ayurveda*. The continuous migration of people from villages to cities and towns in search of new education and health related facilities has created employment problems for *Ayurvedic* Vaidyas living in rural areas. Due to which many *Vaidya* families changed their ancestral profession [16].

## 2. Conclusion

The above description confirms that *Ayurveda* was an ancient medical system not only of India but also of *Uttarakhand*. In this system, there has been a tradition of transferring medicinal knowledge from one generation to the next generation. Besides, in the *Garhwal* region of *Uttarakhand*, the profession of medicine was also linked to the *Jajmani* system, hence it was an ancestral profession especially of the Brahmin class. But after the establishment of colonial rule in *Uttarakhand*, it gradually lost its roots and was replaced by modern medical practice.

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