



Editorial

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Historical insights on 'Quacks' in Ayurveda

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India has a great legacy of ancient knowledge of healthcare - 'Ayurveda' since the time immemorial. But unfortunately this science has been defamed and exploited by the medical mafia: the 'quacks' (unqualified Ayurveda practitioners including faith healers), who at many times are illiterate but they flourish and pretend to be Doctors or 'Vaidyas' (physicians) and misguide the people by prefixing 'Dr.' or 'Vaidya' before their names and suffixing the degrees like BAMS or MD at their clinic/dispenseries' sign board. They are found everywhere in India, running their clinics in big cities/villages/small towns and even many times at roads by the name 'Khandaani dawakhaana', and large number of unaware or desperate people fall prey to them. Upsurge in renewed interest, appreciation and acceptability of Ayurveda around the world can act as a great hunting ground for all such crooks, who may be savvy in using technology and self-promotion, but have questionable credentials. Poet Galib thus describes the unenviable plight of sufferers whose ailment worsened after unauthenticated medication from a half-trained doctor: "...Marz Badhta Gaya, Jyon Jyon Dava Ki!" Present article attempts to limelight the disapproval or condemnation of such quacks as per ancient Ayurveda literature.

"Ku Vaidyah: Nripa Doshathah"

That quote from Sushruta Samhita means quacks arise if the King is incapable. Such quacks flourish and go about at large only at the connivance of the King (administrators).^[1] Thus the quacks thrive due to Government failure, as the Health Department is busy carrying out "development work" and did not have manpower for the task of carrying out raids. Sushruta strongly condemns them.

Interestingly, the term applied to such a charlatan and ignorant cheat in Sanskrit is "Kuvaidya" or "Kuhaka", the latter meaning - cunning or sinful man. The English term of "Quack" having the same connotation suggests its evolution from the original "Kuhaka".

Charaka Samhita also flays and dispels quacks or persons impersonating as physicians with strong words. Charaka advised the patients that they should not take medicines prescribed by pseudo-physicians, as their prescriptions are dangerous than poison. They have quoted: "A wise patient desirous of longevity and health should not accept any medicine prescribed by a physician ignorant of the Ayurvedic principles of treatment. Sometimes, one might escape (death), even when thunderbolt of Indra has fallen on his head, but one can never survive if he takes medicines prescribed by a physician ignorant of the principles governing its application. If the one pretending to be a wise physician, without knowing the principles governing its applicability, prescribes a medicine for a patient, distressed, lying (on bed), having faith (in the former's prescription), he, the mischievous one is a sinner, devoid of virtuous acts, the messenger of death (as it were), even a talk with him will lead a man to hell."^[2]

Charaka further added: "Pseudo-physicians (quacks) in the garb of doctors try to catch the patients as the bird catchers catch their pray in the net. They are far away from the textual knowledge about the time of administering the therapy and its dosage. They are like the messengers of death on the earth; hence they should be boycotted. A wise patient should avoid such of the egoistic pseudo-physicians, the worst among idiots who have taken this profession only to earn their livelihood. They are as dangerous as snakes satiated with the wind" Thus, Charaka describes the common traits of fake doctors. They are unlearned and lack experience or knowledge of medicines and treatments. They will boast their skills before uneducated people. The principle advice of Charaka to ordinary people is to avoid a vaidya (physician) who shows off their knowledge. Avoid them like poisonous snakes.^[3]

Having warned against inviting their services, Charaka goes to describe the ignorance and hollowness of

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these pretenders and how they avoid the presence and contact of the really learned physician, lest they be exposed. Charaka quoted how to find out the pseudo-physicians among other genuine ones: "Those who are not acquainted with the science as a whole or know it partially, gets frightened by the very sound of the medical scriptures, like the male bustards quails at the mere sound of the bow-string."^[4] "Taking advantage of the weakness of others any animal may play the wolf; but when it comes across a real wolf, its true nature is exposed. Similarly an ignorant individual, because of his garrulous nature tries to bully the ignorant ones, but he breaks down when a real scholar is met with. A man deprived of wisdom and knowledge of the science like an old *babbru* (large-brown mongoose) hidden in its own bristles (hairs) shrinks to speak anything in debates as a man of low-family does. Ignorant Individuals who are egoistic and garrulous usually speak too much, though with much of inconsistency." Such is the case with pseudo-physicians.

"Saintly individuals who are well versed in the science usually speak less, but what they say is relevant to the topic of discussion."^[5] "Those who are not well versed physician, resort to dogmatic views, take excuses for lack of time or sudden illness, try to show their ability by demonstrating books, equipments etc., use harsh and abusive language and speak ill of others during debates. These quacks are like noose of *Kaala* (god of death). They should therefore be shunned."^[6]

Considering the detailed description available in the texts, it seems that the ancient society also had a wholesome dread of medical quacks, and the ancient Acharyas have fulfilled their responsibility in this respect in a laudable measure.

Quackery is one of the grave concerns for Ayurveda in current times. There should be rigorous regulations for punishing quacks who try to practice medicine/Ayurveda without proper learning and imperial licence. I would like to plea the 'system' makers, higher officials and common Ayurveda folks to wake up, as the main streamlining of Ayurvedic system of medicine is only possible after passing through the thicket of reforms, which Ayurveda needs severely.

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