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ŚĀŚVATA AYURVEDA: CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE OF ITS SCIENTIFIC BASIS — A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background: Ayurveda is traditionally described as *Śāśvata*, signifying an enduring and universally relevant science of life. Its classical foundation is based on the understanding of life, health, disease, causation, prevention, and therapeutic management. The concept of *Śāśvat* is explained through *Anāditva* (absence of beginning), *Svabhāva-saṃsiddha-lakṣaṇatva* (dealing with phenomena inherent in nature), and *Bhāva-svabhāva-nityatva* (eternal continuity of natural manifestations). **Aim:** To explore and analyse the concept of *Śāśvata* in Ayurveda and examine the classical foundations contributing to its enduring scientific relevance. **Materials and Methods:** A conceptual narrative review was undertaken through critical analysis of classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Caraka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya,* and *Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha*, along with relevant classical commentaries and contemporary scientific literature. The analysis focused on the philosophical principles of *Tridoṣa, Pañcamahābhūta, Sāmānya–Viśeṣa, Kārya–Kāraṇa,* and *Karma*, together with the epistemological framework of *Āptopadeśa, Pratyakṣa, Anumāna,* and *Yukti*. **Results:** The review indicates that the *Śāśvata* nature of Ayurveda is primarily associated with the continuity of its fundamental principles rather than the unaltered preservation of every

historical practice. Classical Ayurvedic concepts describe enduring relationships between causes, effects, natural attributes, physiological regulation, environmental interaction, and therapeutic action. The epistemological framework further demonstrates an integrated approach to knowledge acquisition through authoritative knowledge, direct observation, inference, and rational clinical reasoning. The enduring principles of Ayurveda therefore provide a conceptual framework that can be interpreted and applied according to changing biological, environmental, and clinical circumstances. **Conclusion:** *Śāśvata Ayurveda* may be understood as a perennial knowledge system whose foundational principles demonstrate continuity, universality, and contextual adaptability. Its scientific foundation lies not merely in the antiquity of its literature but in the systematic relationship between observation, inference, rational reasoning, authoritative knowledge, and clinical application. Thus, the *Śāśvata* nature of Ayurveda represents the continuing relevance and contextual application of its fundamental principles while allowing critical evaluation of their contemporary utility.

KEYWORDS: Śāśvata Ayurveda; Ayurvedic epistemology; Classical foundations; Evidence-based Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, traditionally regarded as the science of life, is described as *Śāśvata,* denoting a body of knowledge that is enduring and universally pertinent to the maintenance of life and health. The term *Śāśvata* refers to that which is eternal, constant, and independent of temporal, geographical, or generational limitations. According to the Ayurvedic tradition, the fundamental principles underlying life, health, and disease are rooted in the inherent nature of the universe. Consequently, their relevance persists despite variations in time, environment, and human circumstances. The classical Ayurvedic texts conceptualize Ayurveda not simply as a system of disease treatment but as a comprehensive discipline concerned with *Āyu* (life), its beneficial and detrimental determinants, the conditions associated with happiness and suffering, and the maintenance and promotion of longevity.[1]

The eternal nature of Ayurveda is expressed in the classical statement
"So Ayam Ayurvedah Śāśvato Nirdiśyate Anāditvāt Svabhāva-Saṁsiddha-Lakṣaṇatvāt Bhāva-Svabhāva-Nityatvāccha".[2]

This statement attributes the *Śāśvata* character of Ayurveda to its beginningless nature, its foundation in naturally established principles, and the enduring characteristics of existing

entities. Ayurveda is therefore considered eternal because it addresses phenomena and principles inherent in nature, which persist independently of historical periods.[1]

The continuity of life and the enduring nature of knowledge concerning its maintenance further support this understanding. Knowledge pertaining to the factors that promote or adversely affect life remains relevant as long as living processes continue to exist. Similarly, the understanding of health and illness, including their causes, clinical manifestations, and therapeutic approaches, represents an ongoing body of knowledge without a definitive beginning. These interconnected aspects constitute the essential scope of Ayurveda[1]. Accordingly, the present study examines the concept of *Śāśvata Ayurveda* through classical Ayurvedic literature, with particular emphasis on the fundamental characteristics that underpin its continuity and enduring relevance.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

To explore and analyse the concept of *Sasvata* in Ayurveda and its enduring scientific foundation as described in the classical Ayurvedic Literature.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design

A conceptual narrative review based on critical analysis of classical Ayurvedic texts and relevant contemporary scientific literature to explore the enduring and scientific foundations of *Śāśvata* Ayurveda.

Classical sources

Primary Ayurvedic sources includes:

Charaka Saṃhitā

Suśruta Saṃhitā

Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya

Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha

Relevant classical commentaries, particularly *Āyurveda Dīpikā, Nibandha Saṅgraha and Sarvāṅgasundarā.*

Concept of *Sasvata* (Eternal/Universal) in Ayurveda

The three fundamental principles—knowledge of *Hetu* (causes), *Liṅga* (signs and symptoms), and *Auṣadha* (therapeutic measures)—which are devoted to the welfare of both the healthy

and the diseased, are eternal and sacred. These were comprehended by *Pitāmaha (Brahmā)*.[2]

Ayurveda is stated as *Sasvata* (eternal) for three reasons.

1. It has *Anaditvat* (no beginning).
2. *Svabhava Samsiddha Laksanatvat* (It deals with such things which are inherent in nature).
3. *Bhav Svabhava Nityatvat* (Such natural manifestations are eternal)

The Philosophical foundation of Ayurveda

1. *Anāditvāt* (Beginningless Nature)

The continuity of life and the transmission of knowledge concerning its maintenance are regarded as uninterrupted processes. Ayurveda explains the factors responsible for health and illness, including their causes, manifestations, and management, within this continuous framework of knowledge. The absence of a discernible beginning in these processes forms the basis of the concept of *Anāditva*.

Cakrapāṇi interprets the first reason for the eternality of Ayurveda by beginning his explanation with the expression *"Na hi."* According to this interpretation, the eternal nature of Ayurveda is established not merely through the existence of written texts but through the continued relevance of its subject matter and the uninterrupted transmission of its knowledge. The fundamental concern of Ayurveda is *Āyu* (life), which is understood in the classical tradition as a continuing process. Within the philosophical framework of Ayurveda, the transmigration of the *Ātman* from one body to another after death further illustrates the continuity of life.

Similarly, Ayurvedic knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next, preserving an enduring understanding of the factors that contribute to well-being and those that lead to suffering. Since life and the knowledge concerning its preservation are considered beginningless, Ayurveda is described as *Śāśvata*. This interpretation may also be understood through the relationship between *Vedya* (the object of knowledge), *Vedana* (the process or content of knowing), and *Veditā* (the knower). Their interconnectedness within the classical philosophical framework contributes to the explanation of Ayurveda's eternal character.

2. *Svabhāva-Saṁsiddha-Lakṣaṇatvāt* (Characteristics Established by Nature)

The second reason for the eternality of Ayurveda is explained through the expression *Svabhāva-Saṁsiddha-Lakṣaṇatvat*, which refers to characteristics or principles established by

the inherent nature of things. In his commentary, Cakrapāṇi introduces this explanation with the expression *"Eṣa ca."* In this context, knowledge of *Āyu* also encompasses an understanding of the factors associated with happiness and suffering, health and illness, and their respective determinants.

Ayurveda describes *Hitāyu* (beneficial life), *Ahitāyu* (harmful life), *Sukhāyu* (happy or comfortable life), and *Duḥkhāyu* (unhappy or suffering life). These categories reflect its comprehensive approach to understanding life and the conditions that influence its well-being. The principles underlying these aspects are considered rooted in the inherent nature of existence and therefore remain relevant irrespective of changes in time and circumstances.

From this perspective, Ayurveda is regarded as eternal because it deals with naturally established characteristics and relationships. Its enduring relevance arises from the continuity of the phenomena it seeks to explain rather than solely from the preservation of textual knowledge.

3. *Bhāva-Svabhāva-Nityatvāt* (Eternity of the Inherent Nature of Existing Entities)

The third explanation, *Bhāva-Svabhāva-Nityatvat*, concerns the enduring nature of the intrinsic characteristics of substances. *Cakrapāṇi* elaborates on this principle by referring to substances possessing attributes such as *Guru* (heavy), *Laghu* (light), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Rūkṣa* (dry), *Śīta* (cold), and *Uṣṇa* (hot). According to Ayurvedic principles, substances with similar attributes tend to produce augmentation, whereas those possessing dissimilar attributes tend to bring about diminution.

For example, the regular consumption of substances possessing *Guru* qualities may promote heaviness in the body, whereas the use of substances characterized by *Laghu* qualities may contribute to lightness. Similar principles of augmentation and diminution apply to other attributes as well. These relationships illustrate the classical Ayurvedic understanding of the effects of similarity and dissimilarity.

The eternality of this principle lies in the constancy of the underlying relationship between the attributes of substances and their effects. Although the condition or quantity of a substance may change, the classical explanation maintains that the principles governing augmentation and diminution remain consistent. *Cakrapāṇi* also refers to *Svalakṣaṇa*, denoting the distinctive characteristics of substances. In the context of the *Mahābhūtas*,

examples include *Kharatva* (roughness) associated with *Pṛthvī Mahābhūta* and *Dravatva* (fluidity) associated with *Ap Mahābhūta*. These characteristics illustrate the classical philosophical understanding of the inherent properties of substances[2].

Śāśvata in *Suśruta Saṁhitā*

Āchārya Suśruta describes Ayurveda as *Śāśvata* in the statement:

"Tadvidaṁ śāśvataṁ puṇyaṁ svargyaṁ yaśasyam āyuṣyaṁ vṛttikaraṁ ca iti[3]*"*

In this context, *Śāśvata* conveys the meaning of that which is eternal, enduring, and continuously relevant. The term emphasizes the lasting significance of Ayurvedic knowledge and its role in promoting and sustaining life.

Āchārya Dalhaṇa, in his commentary, explains *Śāśvata* in terms of Imperisability and indestructibility, while also interpreting it as that which is eternal. From this perspective, Ayurveda is considered *Śāśvata* because its knowledge tradition continues through successive generations.[3]

Immediately following this description, *Suśruta* discusses the traditional transmission of Ayurvedic knowledge. The classical lineage is described as:

Brahmā → Prajāpati → Aśvinī Kumāras → Indra → Dhanvantari/Suśruta

This lineage represents the traditional understanding that Ayurveda is not merely the creation of an individual author but a body of knowledge transmitted through an established succession of teachers. Its stated purpose is *Prajāhita* (the welfare of humanity), emphasizing the preservation of health and the well-being of society.[3]

The philosophical foundation of Ayurveda as a *Sasvata* Science

Ayurveda is founded upon fundamental philosophical principles that explain the nature of the human body, the universe, health, disease, causation, and therapeutic action. These principles are not restricted to a particular historical period; rather, they provide a systematic framework for understanding life and its continuous interaction with the nature/environment. The enduring applicability of these fundamental principles forms an important basis for understanding Ayurveda as a *Śāśvata* (eternal, continuous, and perennial) science.

1. Concept of *Tridosha Siddhant*

The *Tridoṣa Siddhānta* is one of the fundamental principles of Ayurveda. The *Tridosha* theory described in the Samhitas forms the cornerstone of Ayurvedic physiology and pathology. *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* are functional principles that collectively govern the human body, mind, and disease processes as well as therapeutics also. They are not merely humoral factors but dynamic entities reflecting physiological regulation, environmental adaptability, and psychosomatic integration. A comprehensive review of Samhitas, classical commentaries, and modern research reveals several thematic insights.

According to *Charaka Samhita*, *Tridosha* are the *Sharira dharanam doshah* (fundamental regulatory forces of the body), whose equilibrium sustains *Samyavastha* (health) and *Vaishamya* (disequilibrium) leads to disease. Sushruta emphasizes their role in *Prakriti*(constitution), *Vikriti* (pathology), and *Chikitsa*(treatment). *Vagbhata* highlights their circadian, seasonal, and age-related rhythms, aligning the concept with chronobiology.

2. *Panchamahabhuta* Siddhant

The *Pañcamahābhūta Siddhānta* explains that both the human body and the external universe are composed of the fundamental principles of *Pṛthvī, Āpa, Tejas, Vāyu*, and *Ākāśa*. This establishes the concept of an intrinsic relationship between the individual (*Puruṣa*) and the external environment (*Loka*).

The physical forms and environmental conditions may continuously change, but the fundamental relationship between the individual and the material universe remains relevant. This principle provides a philosophical basis for understanding the composition, properties, actions, and interactions of substances. Therefore, the *Pañcamahābhūta Siddhānta* represents a universal and continuing conceptual foundation within Ayurvedic thought.[5]

3. *Samanya- Vishesa Siddhant*

The *Sāmānya–Viśeṣa Siddhānta* is based on the fundamental principle that similarity tends to increase or promote similar qualities, whereas dissimilarity tends to decrease or oppose them. This principle forms an important basis for understanding physiological growth, pathological aggravation, and therapeutic management.

The principle of increase through similarity and reduction through opposition is applicable to the interaction between food, lifestyle, environment, body, and medicine. Although the specific substances and circumstances may vary across time and place, the underlying

principle of similarity and dissimilarity remains conceptually relevant. This universality makes *Sāmānya–Viśheṣa Siddhānta* an important philosophical basis for the *Śāśvata* nature of Ayurvedic principles.

4. Karya- Karana Siddhant

The *Kārya–Kāraṇa Siddhānta*, or the principle of cause and effect, forms an essential foundation for understanding health and disease in Ayurveda. Every effect is understood in relation to its causes and contributing factors. Similarly, disease is not considered an isolated event but the consequence of specific etiological factors and pathological processes.

The relationship between cause and effect is fundamental to the understanding of natural phenomena. Although the particular causes of diseases may change with changing lifestyles and environments, the principle that effects arise through identifiable causes and conditions remains applicable. Ayurvedic diagnosis, prevention, and treatment are therefore fundamentally based upon identifying, avoiding, modifying, or counteracting causative factors.

5. *Karma Siddhant*

The *Karma Siddhānta* explains action as a fundamental principle associated with movement, change, transformation, and the production of effects. In Ayurveda, *Karma* also has practical relevance in understanding the actions of drugs, therapeutic procedures, diet, lifestyle, and bodily functions.

Every action produces an effect according to its nature, conditions, and context. This principle forms an important basis for understanding therapeutic intervention in Ayurveda. The appropriate application of a particular *Karma* produces a desired therapeutic effect, whereas inappropriate action may result in undesirable consequences. Thus, the principle of Karma establishes the importance of rational and purposeful action in maintaining health and managing disease.[6]

Evidence-Based Foundation of Ayurveda

The concept of *Śāśvata* should not be understood merely as “everything written in the *Saṃhitā* must remain unchanged.” Rather, the fundamental principles are enduring, while their application is examined according to circumstances. This is supported by *Charaka Saṃhitā.*

Epistemological concept of Ayurveda

Ayurveda possesses a systematic epistemological foundation for acquiring, examining, and applying knowledge. Ayurvedic knowledge is not based solely on tradition or authority; classical Ayurveda recognizes multiple methods for understanding reality, disease, patients, drugs, and therapeutic outcomes. These include *Pratyakṣa* (direct observation), *Anumāna* (inference), Yukti (rational reasoning), and *Āptopadeśa* (authoritative knowledge). In addition, continuous observation and clinical experience play an important role in the practical application and evaluation of Ayurvedic principles. Together, these methods provide an important foundation for understanding the evidence-oriented nature of Ayurveda.[7]

1. *Aptopadesa* (Authoritative Knowledge)

Āptopadeśa means the authoritative statement of an *Āpta. Āptopadeśa* provides continuity of the foundational knowledge of Ayurveda across generations.

Therefore:

Śāśvata → preservation of fundamental knowledge → *Āptopadeśa* → transmission through generations.

However, authoritative knowledge is not intended to function independently of observation and reasoning. Classical knowledge is interpreted and applied with the assistance of *Pratyakṣa, Anumāna*, and Yukti. Thus, *Āptopadeśa* provides a foundational body of accumulated knowledge that can be examined, interpreted, and applied according to the clinical context.[8]

2. *Pratyaksa* (Direct Observation)

Pratyakṣa refers to knowledge obtained through direct perception and observation. Caraka defines *Pratyakṣa* as knowledge obtained through or that which is directly apprehended by the senses and mind. A physician who wants to examine the patient and diagnose the disease through *Pratyaksha* (direct observations) method of examination should examine with his own senses (all senses except the one relating to the gustatory organ, i.e., taste), in the body of the patient.

3. *Anumana* (Inference)

Anumāna is inferential reasoning that depends upon rational consideration/*Yukti*. *Caraka* gives clinical examples where something cannot be directly perceived and therefore must be

inferred. Certain physiological and pathological processes cannot always be directly perceived. Their existence and nature may therefore be understood through observable signs and their relationship with underlying causes or processes.

For example, the physician may infer the condition of internal bodily functions by examining external signs, symptoms, and clinical manifestations. Inference thus extends knowledge beyond what can be directly observed.[8]

4. *Yukti* (Rational Reasoning)

The intellect perceives things by combination of multiple factors, valid for past, present and future is termed as *Yukti* (reasoning). This is helpful in fulfilling three basic objects of human life (dharma, i.e. duties, weal Importance and applications of four-fold Examination.

In Ayurvedic practice, the physician considers factors such as *Doṣa, Dūṣya, Deśa, Kāla, Bala, Prakṛti, Agni, Vaya*, and the nature of the disease before selecting an appropriate treatment. Therefore, *Yukti* represents a systematic process of clinical reasoning and therapeutic decision-making.[9]

DISCUSSION

Although Ayurveda is described and transmitted by successive teachers, this does not necessarily imply that the science itself originated with a particular individual. Consequently, some scholars may attribute a beginning to Ayurveda on the basis of its association with individual preceptors. However, according to the classical Ayurvedic interpretation, its fundamental principles are not considered to have originated at a specific point in time. Just as heat is an inherent characteristic of fire and fluidity is associated with water, Ayurveda is understood to be rooted in the intrinsic nature of existence rather than being solely a product of human invention.

The subject matter of Ayurveda, namely *Āyu* (life) and its various determinants, is considered continuous and enduring. The continuity of life is accompanied by the transmission of knowledge concerning its preservation and the factors influencing its well-being. Ayurveda addresses not only life itself but also the conditions of health and illness, their manifestations, and their effects on human existence.

Furthermore, Ayurveda describes measures for alleviating the suffering associated with disease as well as practices intended to maintain and promote health. In the classical

philosophical framework, substances and their attributes may be understood in terms of both permanence and transience. For instance, *Ākāśa* and other fundamental causes are discussed in relation to their enduring nature, whereas their effects may undergo change. A similar distinction is applied to the attributes of substances: certain characteristics are considered relatively enduring, while others, such as taste, may vary according to the substance and its condition.

Although particular manifestations may be transient, the continuity of the underlying principles governing them is considered enduring. Accordingly, naturally occurring factors may contribute to the manifestation or alleviation of disease. Ayurveda examines the relationships between these factors, their effects, and the therapeutic measures employed to restore or maintain health. From this classical perspective, the enduring nature of the principles underlying life, disease, and treatment provides the basis for describing Ayurveda as *Śāśvata*.

The fundamental principles of *Tridoṣa*, *Pañcamahābhūta*, *Sāmānya–Viśeṣa*, *Kārya–Kāraṇa*, and *Karma Siddhānta* constitute important conceptual foundations of Ayurveda. Their continued significance lies not in assuming that every traditional practice remains unchanged or universally applicable, but in examining how these principles inform the classical understanding of life, health, disease, causation, and therapeutic intervention. Their contemporary relevance should therefore be assessed through appropriate textual interpretation and scientific evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Brahmā is traditionally regarded as the primordial source of Ayurvedic knowledge, while *Bharadvāja* is described as having acquired this science from Lord Indra. However, these accounts of knowledge transmission do not necessarily imply that Ayurveda originated at a particular point in time. Rather, they represent the traditional succession through which Ayurvedic knowledge was communicated. Similarly, the principle that substances possessing similar attributes promote augmentation, whereas those with dissimilar attributes facilitate diminution, is explained in terms of naturally occurring relationships rather than processes dependent solely on human intervention. Such inherent regularities are considered among the classical explanations for the enduring nature of the science of life.

The evidence-oriented foundation of Ayurveda may be examined through its integrated

framework of knowledge acquisition and clinical reasoning. *Pratyakṣa* (direct perception) enables the observation of phenomena, while *Anumāna* (inference) facilitates the interpretation of findings through logical reasoning. *Yukti* (rational reasoning) supports the integration of multiple factors and their interrelationships, whereas *Āptopadeśa* (authoritative testimony) provides access to established knowledge transmitted through reliable sources. Clinical observation and systematic evaluation of therapeutic outcomes can further contribute to the assessment of Ayurvedic interventions.

Thus, Ayurveda may be understood as *Śāśvata* within its classical philosophical framework because its foundational principles offer a continuing conceptual basis for interpreting life, health, disease, and their determinants. Its enduring significance need not imply that every traditional practice remains universally applicable or immune to revision. Rather, the concept of *Śāśvata Ayurveda* highlights the continuing relevance of its fundamental principles and the need to examine their application in changing biological, environmental, and social contexts through critical analysis and appropriate scientific evaluation.

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