



## VAGBHATA: THE LEGENDARY AND VISIONARY OF AYURVEDA

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<https://doi.org/10.46607/iamj2608112020>

(Published online: November 2020)

### Open Access

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Article Received: 30/10/2020 - Peer Reviewed: 09/11/2020 - Accepted for Publication: 11/11/2020



### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an eternal system of medicine serving humanity since long back. *Brahma* composed the *Brahma-Samhita* consisting of one thousand chapters and one lakh verses before creation of the living beings. It shows the utility of this science of life and that's why *Brahma* transmitted this knowledge to *Daksha-Prajapati*, *Daksha-Prajapati* to *Ashwins* (*Nasatya* and *Dasra*) and *Ashwins* to *Indra*. According to *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*, different seers and sages in the leadership of *Punarvasu Atreya* approached *Indra* to learn Ayurveda. These seers and sages brought this knowledge to the earth for the welfare of suffering humanity. *Punarvasu Atreya*, *Divodasa Dhanvntari* and many other seers taught Ayurveda to their disciples and consequently *Agnivesha-Tantra* (later became popular as *Charaka-Samhita*), *Sushruta Samhita*, *Bhela-Samhita*, *Harita-Samhita* and many other *Samhitas* were composed. It was the initiation of writing the *Samhita* (classical texts) of the Ayurveda on the earth. These *Samhitas* became very much popular in due course of time. The transmission of the knowledge of Ayurveda did not stop here and remains continue. In this series, a learned scholar and visionary of Ayurveda, *Vagbhata* appears who wrote the text comprising of *Ashtanga Ayurveda*. *Vagbhata* dedicated himself to design such a text which includes *Ashtanga-Ayurveda* according to the need of the age and he succeeded. Due to excellence and gravity of the text, his classic (*Ashtanga-Samgraha* / *Ashtanga-Hridaya*) has been considered among the *Brihat-trayi* (greater-trio) of Ayurveda. Some of the scholars consider *Ashtanga-Samgraha* of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* as a third classic among the *Brihat-trayi* while many others accepted *Ashtanga-Hridaya* of *Vagbhata* as a third classic among *Brihat-trayi*. Two other classics of *Brihat-trayi* are *Charaka-Samhita* and *Sushruta-Samhita*. Although *Vagbhata*

faced struggle to get popularity of his text because in those days the texts written by seers and sages only were accepted and studied. *Vagbhata* compiled and rearranged the subject matter meticulously discussed in already available *Samhitas* namely *Charaka-Samhita*, *Sushruta-Samhita* and many others and in due course of time became popular. We see the chronological development of the concepts and practices in the texts of *Vagbhata*. Several *Vagbhatas* are mentioned in the histories who have written text on different streams of learning. There are three significant works on Ayurveda by *Vagbhata* viz. *Ashtanga-Samgraha* by *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*, *Ashtanga-Hridaya* by *Vagbhata* and *Rasaratnasamuchchaya* by *Rasa-Vagbhata*. This research paper deals with various aspects related to *Vagbhata*, his personality and contributions.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, *Vagbhata*, *Ashtanga-Samgraha*, *Ashtanga-Hridaya*, *Samhita*.

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is an eternal system of medicine serving humanity since long back. *Brahma* composed the *Brahma-Samhita* consisting of one thousand chapters and one lakh verses before creation of the living beings. It shows the utility of this science of life and that's why *Brahma* transmitted this knowledge to *Daksha-Prajapati*, *Daksha-Prajapati* to *Ashwins* (*Nasatya* and *Dasra*) and *Ashwins* to *Indra*. According to *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*, different seers and sages in the leadership of *Punarvasu Atreya* approached *Indra* to learn Ayurveda. These seers and sages brought this knowledge to the earth for the welfare of suffering humanity. *Punarvasu Atreya*, *Divodasa Dhanvantari* and many other seers taught Ayurveda to their disciples and consequently *Agnivesha-Tantra* (later became popular as *Charaka-Samhita*), *Sushruta Samhita*, *Bhela-Samhita*, *Harita-Samhita* and many other *samhitas* were composed<sup>1</sup>. It was the initiation of writing the *Samhita* (classical texts) of the Ayurveda on the earth. These *Samhitas* became very much popular in due course of time. The transmission of the knowledge of Ayurveda did not stop here and remains continue. In this series, a learned scholar and visionary of Ayurveda, *Vagbhata* appears who wrote the text comprising of *Ashtanga Ayurveda*. *Vagbhata* dedicated himself to design such a text which includes *Ashtanga-Ayurveda* according to the need of the age and he succeeded. Due to excellence and gravity of the text, his classic (*Ashtanga-Samgraha* / *Ashtanga-Hridaya*) has been considered among the *Brihat-trayi* (greater-trio) of Ayurveda. Some of the scholars consider *Ashtanga-Samgraha* of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* as a

third classic among the *Brihat-trayi* while many others accepted *Ashtanga-Hridaya* of *Vagbhata* as a third classic among *Brihat-trayi*. Two other classics of *Brihat-trayi* are *Charaka-Samhita* and *Sushruta-Samhita*. Although *Vagbhata* faced struggle to get popularity of his text because in those days the texts written by seers and sages only were accepted and studied. *Vagbhata* compiled and rearranged the subject matter meticulously discussed in already available *Samhitas* namely *Charaka-Samhita*, *Sushruta-Samhita* and many others and in due course of time became popular. We see the chronological development of the concepts and practices in the texts of *Vagbhata*. Several *Vagbhatas* are mentioned in the histories who have written text on different streams of learning. There are three significant works on Ayurveda by *Vagbhata* viz. *Ashtanga-Samgraha* by *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*, *Ashtanga-Hridaya* by *Vagbhata* and *Rasaratnasamuchchaya* by *Rasa-Vagbhata*. This research paper deals with various aspects related to *Vagbhata*, his personality and contributions.

### Aim and objective of the study

The main aim and objective of this review paper is to focus upon the personality of *Vagbhata* and his contributions in the field of Ayurveda.

### Materials and Methods

The subject matter related to personality and contributions of *Vagbhata* is collected, compiled and analyzed on the basis of thorough study of relevant Ayurvedic literature.

### About Vagbhata

Vagbhata was the son of Simhagupta and grandson of Vagbhata. His father was a Brahmin and his preceptor Avalokita was a Buddhist. He had his education from preceptor Avalokita and his father. Vagbhata, the author of *Ashtanga-Samgraha* (AS), is known by the name *Vahata* also. The author himself mentions in the colophon of the chapters of AS that he was the son of *Simhagupta* and was a namesake of his grandfather. Thus, *Vagbhata* appears to be the original name which was later modified into *Vahata* particularly in south India. Since *Vagbhata* was the disciple of Buddhist teacher- *Avalokita*, Buddhist gods and goddesses are mentioned in his text with reverence. On the basis of this fact, some of the scholars believe that *Vagbhata* was a Buddhist but mention of Vedic practices and worship of Vedic gods and goddesses, cow, *Brahmins* prove him to be Vedic follower. P. V. Sharma concluded that *Vagbhata* was born in a *Brahmin* family and was the follower of Vedic religion but observed equal respect towards Buddhism since he was a disciple of a Buddhist *Guru*.

Aufrechts Catalogus Catalogorum mentions ten *Vagbhatas* viz. 1. Author of *Vahata-Nighantu*; 2. Author of *Vagbhata-Smriti-Samgraha*; 3. Son of *Simhagupta*, grandson of *Vagbhata* and author of *Ashtanga-Hridaya* (AH), *Vamanakalpa* and *Vagbhatiya*; 4. Father of *Tisata*, author of *Chikitsa-kalika*; 5. Minister of *Malavendra* and father of *Deveshwara*; 6. Son of *Nemikumara*, a Jain author of *Alankaratilaka*, *Chhandonushasana*, *Vagbhatalankara* and *Shringaratilaka*; 7. Author of *Padartha-chandrika*, *Bhavaprakasha*, *Rasaratnasamuchchaya* and *Shastradarpana*; 8. Author of *Vagbhata-kosha*; 9. *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*, quoted in *Todarananda* and *Bhavaprakasha* and 10. Author of *Vagbhatalankara*. Harishastri Paradakara and Nandakishor Sharma mentioned eight *Vagbhatas* apart from the author of *Ashtanga-Samgraha* and *Ashtanga-Hridaya*. Gurupada Haldar in his *Vridhdhatrayi* mentioned four *Vagbhatas*<sup>2</sup>

There are three works ascribed to the authorship of *Vagbhata* viz. *Ashtanga Samgraha* (AS), *Ashtanga-Hridaya* (AH) and *Rasa-ratna-samuchchaya*. The author of *Rasa-ratna-samuchchaya* is definitely different

one. The other two works i.e. *Ashtanga-Samgraha* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* are ascribed to the authorship of *Vagbhata*. In *Ashtanga-Samgraha*, the author has given some information about his birthplace, father and teacher<sup>3</sup> but the same is not found in *Ashtanga-Hridaya*. There is also difference with regard to style and language, subject matter and its detail.

There is controversy regarding the author of AS and AH. Some of the scholars are of the view that author of both the AS and AH is identical whereas many others accept different authors. By later commentators the author of AS is referred as *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* and that of AH as *Svalpa-Vagbhata* or *LaghuVagbhata* or simply *Vagbhata*. The epithet '*Vridhdha*' generally indicates that the author of AS is older or earlier than that of *Laghu Vagbhata* of AH. Relying on this the Indian historians generally place *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* earlier than *Laghu-Vagbhata*. Nevertheless, in European circle of scholars an idea has come up that reverses the Indian concept totally. According to this, *Laghu Vagbhata* precedes *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*. The theme has been discussed at length by Hilgenberg and Kirfel in the Introduction to their German translation of the AH and also by C. Vogel in the introduction to the AH<sup>4</sup>.

*Chandranandana*, the commentator of AH is confused about the identity of two *Vagbhatas*. He takes them as one. *Arundatta* and *Indu* follow him. On the other hand, *Dalhana*, *Vijayarakshita*, *Shrikanthadatta*, *Hemadri* and *Shivadasa Sen* recognize them as different distinguishing one of them with the epithet '*vridhdha*'. *Indu* says the author of AS as *Vahata*. *Shrikanthadatta* uses the word '*Samgrahakara*' instead of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata*. The epithet '*Vridhdha*' is seen with many other authors or texts such as *Sushruta*, *Kashyapa*<sup>5</sup> etc.

Gananath Sen, Yadavji Trikamji, Harishastri Paradakara, Atridev Gupta and many other scholars of modern period established the identity of the author of AS and AH on the basis of similarity of language and style, same name of the father and rearrangement of the Ayurvedic text according to *Ashtanga-Ayurveda*. Jyotishachandra Saraswati, P.V. Sharma, Dr. Hoernle and many others are of the opinion that both

*Vagbhatas* are different. Prof. Banwari Lal Gaur in his book on *Sutrasthana* of AH says that there is no need to debate on this issue as the high quality literary language and use of specific words justify the author of AH to be different from that of AS<sup>6</sup>. There is difference in style and subject matter available in both the works. AS is in prose and verse while AH is written in verse. The language is more sophisticated and literary in AH. There is difference in subject matter also such as age of man fit for producing offspring is 25 years in AS whereas 20 years in AH, *marma* are of 5 types in AS while 6 types of *marmas* in AH. AH enumerates one more type of *marma* i.e. *Dhamani marma*. There is difference in number of each type of *marma* also. Thus it appears, as concluded by P.V Sharma, there were three stages in relation to *Vagbhata*; first: only AH was known and popular, second: both the AS and AH were known as the work of same author ; and third: the authors of both the works were known to be different. This historical development appears to be nearer to the fact and it is clear that two *Vagbhatas* are different and are known as *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* and *Vagbhata*, *Vagbhata-I* and *Vagbhata-II* or *Gadya-Vagbhata* and *Padya-Vagbhata*<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Date of *Vagbhata***

There is difference of opinion regarding the date of *Vagbhata* like that of identity. The different views range from 2 century BC to 13 century AD. The views are as follows- according to Kunte- 2 century BC, Jyotishachandra Saraswati- 1 century BC AS; 5 century AD or little earlier AH, Gurupada Halder -2-3 century AD, Jamnagar Charak-Samhita edition- before 4 century, Paradakar, N. K. Sharma, Yadavji Trikamji, Gananath Sen and Atridev- first half of 5 century, Hornle, Winternitz, Keith and Mukhopadhyaya - 625 AD for *Vagbhata-I*, 8-9 century for *Vagbhata-II*, *Maharashtra-Gyankosha* and Jolly- before 8 century, Filiozat-7-10 century, Cordier-1196-1218 century A.D<sup>8</sup>.

*Vagbhata* has not mentioned the name of *Bhattara Harichandra*. *Bhattara Harichandra*, a commentator of *Charak-Samhita*, has also not mentioned the name of *Vagbhata*. *Indu* and *Jejjata*, the commentators of

*Vagbhata*, have mentioned the name of *Bhattara Harichandra* which shows that he was earlier to both the commentators. Possibly *Bhattara Harichandra* and *Vagbhata* were contemporary that's why could not mention the name of each other. *Bhattara Harichandra* was the *Rajvaidya* of the king *Sahasanka* who was popular by the name *Chandragupta-II* and his time period is between 375-413 A.D. Therefore, the time period can be accepted the same being his *Rajvaidya*. *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* has mentioned about the *Shakas* and *Shakanganas* in his text AS which shows that the time period of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* should be the ruling period of *Shakas*. *Varahamihira* (505 A.D.) has quoted one formulation in his text *Brihat-Samhita* similar to *Vridhdh-Vagbhata*. Itsing, a Chinese traveler came to India in 7<sup>th</sup> century, mentioned the name of AS. In *Madhava-nidana* (7-8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.), many verses of AH are described. On the base of above facts, the time period of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* (*Vagbhata-I*) can be accepted near about the ruling period of *Chandragupta-II* (end of 4<sup>th</sup> century or early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD). So, the time period of *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* can be assumed between 400-475 A.D. and *Vagbhata* (*Vagbhata-II*) in between the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Hence it becomes clear that *Vagbhata* was predecessor to *Varahamihira*, Itsing and *Madhavakara*<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Birthplace of *Vagbhata***

Author of AS clearly mentions "*Sindhushulabdhanjanma*" means he was born in *Sindhu* region. He has mentioned the *Sindhu* river, *shakas* and *shaka*-women suggests that he certainly spent some years in *Sindhu* region. But it seems that later he migrated to other place as he has mentioned that one should not live in a place which is not ruled by a king and which is inhibited by people who do not follow *dharma*; but should live in a place where food is abundant and water, herbs, firewood and other things are also available, safety is assured, natural and beautiful landscapes are nearby and which is an abode of enlightened scholars. These attributes point to Ujjain and mention of *Avantisoma* and *Avantibhumi* support to conclude that *Vagbhata* migrated to Ujjain and settled there<sup>10</sup>. If we accept the view that *Vagbhata* was the grandson of



*Vridhha-Vagbhata*, then the same nativity can be accepted.

### Contributions of Vagbhata

*Vagbhata* was a first legendary and visionary to start the compilatory works on Ayurveda-*Samhitas*. He was first among humans whose text could get place among most authentic set of *Samhitas* popularly known as *Brihat-Trayi* (greater trio) of Ayurveda. He realized the problem of his generation in the learning of Ayurveda. He saw that the available *Samhitas* are enriched with the knowledge of one or two specialties of Ayurveda and are very lengthy. So, it requires a lot of time to have the knowledge of entire Ayurveda and life span of individual is decreased in due course of time. Therefore, he planned to write such classical text by which one can get the required knowledge of *Ash-tanga-Ayurveda* at one place. In this regard AS and AH are two major works which goes into the credit of Vagbhata-I and Vagbhata-II respectively. Vagbhata composed the text, which is free from repetition, neither too brief nor too elaborative, free from any kind of contradictions, reveals the clear meanings of the mysterious subject matter and in conformity with the age<sup>11</sup>.

Text of *Vridhha-Vagbhata* possesses unique approaches such as correlation of the features of *dhatu-vridhhi* with that of *doshas* e.g. *shleshmavikara* in *Rasa-dhatu-vridhhi*, *pitta-vikara* in *rakta-dhatuvridhhi*, five types of *kaphadosha*, several new drugs have been mentioned in the *Agrya-prakarana* e.g. *Vasa* is the best for *Raktapitta* disease, *Kantakari* for *Kasaroga*, *Laksha* for *Sadyahkshata*, *Haridra* for *Prameha*, *Guggulu* for *medoroga* and *vata-vikara*, *Chitrak* and *Bhallataka* for *Shushkarsha*, *Kutaja* for *Raktarsha*, enumeration of *Madhyama-Panchamula* and *Jivaniya Panchamula*, feature of season on the base of month, ecliptic and characteristic features, description of *Ritusandhi*, *Sarvarthsiddha-Anjana*, average time needed for the digestion of diet and medicines, twelve types of *Shastra-karma* (surgical practices), twenty six surgical instruments while *Sushruta* mentions only twenty surgical instruments, *Shiva-gutika* in *Rasayana-prakarana*, *Padalepas* for *vajikarana* purpose and clinical use of *vishas*<sup>12</sup>.

Text of *Vagbhata* (AH) possesses unique approaches such as definition of *Vipaka*, dose of medicine in *Bheshaja-kalpa*, single specific action of *Dhatus* and *malas*, seven *Sadyaha-snehana yogas* in *Snehadhya*, enumeration of *dhamani-marma*, certain new formulations in *chikitsa* such as *Suranapaka* in *arsha*, *Dadimashtaka-Churna* in *Atisara*, *Ayaskriti* in *Udararoga*, *Mandura-Vataka* in *Pandu-roga* and so on<sup>13</sup>. Number of commentaries in Sanskrit and Hindi have been written on AH which shows the gravity and significance of the text. It has been translated in other languages also. There is also popular saying that *Vagbhata* is the best physician in *Kaliyuga* and his work is best on the subject of *Sutrasthana*.

### DISCUSSION

There is mention of different *Vagbhatas* in the history which shows that this name was very much popular in those days. The author of AS and AH are *Vridhha-Vagbhata* and *Vagbhata* respectively. It was in practice during Gupta period that the name of grandfather was given to grandson and it may be with *Vagbhatas* who authored Ayurvedic text AS and AH. Second controversy is regarding the date of *Vagbhata* because the ancient authors did not mention the date of birth. It may be due to the reason that they did not believe in introducing themselves in detail. They were devoted to work not towards the name and fame. Therefore, the date of *Vagbhata* decided in this article is on the base of internal as well as external evidence. *Vridhha-Vagbhata* has mentioned his birthplace as *Sindhu* region but *Vagbhata* did not mention. Some of the scholars are of the opinion that as the author of both the AS and AH are identical, therefore author has stated about the birth place in his early writing i.e. AS and did not feel it essential to mention in his later writing i.e. AH.

In spite of all the controversies, the contributions of *Vagbhata* cannot be ignored because he changed the mind sets of the people and established that both the text written by seers and sages and ordinary man can be equally useful. He has followed the existing *Samhitas* but rearranged text in such a nice way that it became the choice of *vaidyas* for getting the knowledge

of *Ashtanga-Ayurveda*. He has started the new dimension of thoughts. At one place, he stated that a good thought and information is welcomed by public otherwise why *Bhela-Samhita* and *Harit-Samhita* are not studied similar to *Charaka-Samhita* and *Sushruta-Samhita*. He has also stated that an effective medicine given by anyone either he is seer or ordinary man, definitely acts. These thoughts of *Vagbhata* reveal that he has struggled a lot to establish his classics.

## CONCLUSION

After thorough study and discussion, it can be stated firmly that AS and AH are the authentic text or classics of Ayurveda written by *Vridhdha-Vagbhata* and *Vagbhata* respectively. The gravity and significance of the text of *Vagbhata* is the cause behind its inclusion in *Brihat-trayi* of Ayurveda. It shows that *Vagbhata* was endowed with the great vision. He has contributed a lot in the area of fundamental doctrines, description of medicines, surgical practices and description of systematic required knowledge of *Ashtanga-Ayurveda* through his text. Thus, he was really a great legendary and visionary of Ayurveda.

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**Source of Support: Nil**

**Conflict of Interest: None Declared**

How to cite this URL: Murlidhar Paliwal et al: Vagbhata: The Legendary And Visionary Of Ayurveda. International Ayurvedic Medical Journal {online} 2020 {cited November, 2020} Available from: [http://www.iamj.in/posts/images/upload/5125\\_5130.pdf](http://www.iamj.in/posts/images/upload/5125_5130.pdf)