



**“SUSHRUTA – A WARRIOR WHO CHANGED HIS CAREER” A
CRITICAL REVIEW ON THE VARNA OF ACHARYA SUSHRUTA**

***Dr. Narayan K. R.**

India.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Narayan K. R.

India.

ABSTRACT

Vedas have been our supreme adobe of knowledge since the time of our existence. They are believed to be originated from the revelations of various sages who dedicated their life to the path of acquiring knowledge through intense meditation. In Mahabharata, the creation of vedas is credited to Lord Brahma. Hindus consider vedas to be *Apaurusheya*, which means “not of a man but, Superhuman” and also Impersonal and Authorless. There are four vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda,

Samaveda and Atharvaveda, each concentrating on specific knowledge. Ayurveda is considered as the compilation of medicinal knowledge that was scattered in the vedas. The knowledge received from the vedas are accepted as it is without requisitioning or rethinking because they are the result of years of meditation and self-realization from many sages. The complete knowledge about origin, existence and survival of all living beings including human beings are available in these eternal sources of knowledge. In Vedas, human beings were categorized based on their inherited characters and interests, not merely on their birth and family. Based on this human being were divided into 4 categories which were called “*Varna*”.

1. Brahmana – Priests, scholars and teachers.
2. Kshatriya – Rulers, warriors and administrators.
3. Vaishya – Agriculturists and Merchants.
4. Shudra – Laborers and service providers.

Also in Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 18: Verse 41), we find references of categorizing people into these 4 types based on their Nature and Gunas. The intrinsic qualities alone decided the Varna of an individual and not birth alone. Even though the Brahmana varna was mainly assigned for the field of education, the right to study was not restricted to other three varnas. A misconception about this is seen in the present time as it is believed that all the rishis i.e

saints are from brahmana varna, but it is not so because vedas clearly states that a person is categorized based on his intrinsic characters, interests and capabilities. In the present context an attempt has been made to infer the varna of Acharya Sushruta as it is not mentioned anywhere clearly and try to clear the dilemma between considering sushruta as a Brahmana or a Kshatriya.

KEYWORDS: Acharya Sushruta, Veda, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Varna.

Indirect References about Sushruta's Varna

1. Acharya sushruta has written Sushruta Samhita, in which he has mainly concentrated on the surgical management of various diseases which involves cutting, piercing, bloodletting etc. which requires Courage and a strong mind to perform them. In the vedic period, those people who had these qualities were put under the varna of Kshatriya. So, Acharya sushruta did possess these qualities of a Kshatriya.

2. 34th Adhyaya of Sushruta samhita sutra sthana (Yuktaseniya adhyaya) deals about the importance of a King and various ways to protect him from Enemies, Poisoned food etc. Here he talks about the qualities of a King that separates him from other common men.

पुरुषाणां नृपाणां च केवलं तुल्यमूर्तिता ।
आज्ञा त्यागः क्षमा धैर्यं विक्रमश्चाप्यमानुषः ॥

King and a common person are similar only in their external features but the King is superior in qualities like his Commanding power, sacrifice, forgiveness, patience and valour.

Here he tries to glorify the qualities a kshatriya should possess to become a successful king and to lead his kingdom successfully.^[1]

3. Sushruta possessed detailed knowledge about 107 Marma points (points that result in death when injured) present in the body. It is important here to note that the knowledge of Marma points was also taught among the Kshatriyas as a part of training in warfare skills. Areas to be protected from injury and areas to target on an enemy's body were demonstrated and taught for all Kshatriyas in order to make them a good soldier.²

4. Acharya Sushruta learnt ayurveda from Divodasa Dhanwantari, who was the King of Kasi and who was inturn a Kshatriya.

In 2nd Chapter of sushruta samhita sutra sthana (Shishyopanayaniya adhyaya), sushruta states that –

ब्राह्मणस्त्रयाणां वर्णानामुपनयनं कर्तुमर्हति, (राजन्यो द्वयस्य, वैश्यो वैश्यस्यैवेति)
शूद्रमपि कुलगुणसम्पन्नं मन्त्रवर्जमनुपनीतमध्यापयेदित्येके ॥

i.e A Brahmana can do upanayana (Take up a student for teaching) of 3 varnas i.e Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya.

Similarly, Kshatriya for 2 varnas – Kshatriya and vaishya and Vaishya can do upanayana for only vaishya.

Shudra can be taken for upanayana by other varnas, only if he possesses all required qualities like Suitable age, qualities, hygiene etc. But, he should be taught excluding the Mantras of the science.^[3]

Acharya Dalhana also states the same while commenting on this verse.^[4]

ब्राह्मणस्त्रयाणामित्यादि। अन्ये त्वस्याग्रे 'राजन्यो द्वयस्य, वैश्यो वैश्यस्यैव' इति पठन्ति, स च निबन्धैरनार्थकृतः। शूद्रमपि कुलगुणसम्पन्नमित्यादि कुलगुणसम्पन्नमिति सम्पन्नशब्दः कुलगुणाभ्यां प्रत्येकं सम्बध्यते, कुलसम्पन्नमायुर्वेदाध्यायिकुलसंयुक्तं, गुणसम्पन्नं वयःशौचादिशिष्यगुणसंयुक्तम् ॥

So, Divodasa Dhanwantari being a Kshatriya taught sushruta the science of ayurveda, who was also from the Kshatriya Varna. If sushruta was a Brahmana, Divodasa Dhanwantari couldn't have taken sushruta for the process of upanayana. (राजन्यो द्वयस्य, वैश्यो वैश्यस्यैवेति)

Direct References about Sushruta's Varna

1. Acharya Dalhana in Nibandha Sangraha – his commentary on Sushruta Samhita states that – (Su.Su 1/3 Dalhana)

औपधेनवादयः सुश्रुतान्ताः सप्त शिष्या ऊचुः उक्तवन्तः। प्रभृतिशब्देन भोजादयः। अन्ये तु 'गोपुररक्षितौ' इति नामद्वयं मन्यन्ते, इत्यौपधेनवादयोऽष्टौ; प्रभृतिग्रहणान्निमिकाङ्कायनगार्ग्यगालवाः; एवमेतान् द्वादश शिष्यानाहुः। ननु, प्रश्नकर्तृताया

सुश्रुतस्य मुख्यत्वादादावस्य नामग्रहणमुचितं स्यात्, कथमौपधेनवादिनामान्यादावुक्तानि? सत्यं, देवर्षयस्ते **राजर्षीणां** पूज्या इति न दोषः॥

Aupadenava, Aurabhra, Vaitarana, Paushkalavata, Karaveerya, Gopurakshita and Sushruta are the disciples of Divodasa Dhanwantari. The word Prabhriti here refers to other disciples of kasi raja viz, Nimi, Kankayana, Gargya and Galava.

Dalhana adds, among all the students of Divodasa Dhanwantari, though Sushruta is the active one and one who is asking queries to Dhanwantari, why his name is mentioned at the last and all other disciples name in the beginning. He himself answers his question and says – As all others except Sushruta are Devarshis and Sushruta is a Rajarshi, hence his name is mentioned in the last.^[5]

The word meaning of **Rajarshi** in Sanskrit is

(Ref: Shabdakalpadruma, Shabda stomamahanidhi)

1. राजा ऋषिरिव श्रेष्ठत्वात् ॥
2. राजवंशे भवः यत् ॥
3. राजवंशोद्भवे ॥
4. राज + ऋषि

i.e Person belonging to a Royal lineage (राज वंश) and One who is superior among all the राजऋषिs. One who is from a different varna i.e Kshatriya varna(राज) but has become a saint (ऋषि) with years of meditation and giving up all worldly pleasures is called a राजर्षी.^[6]

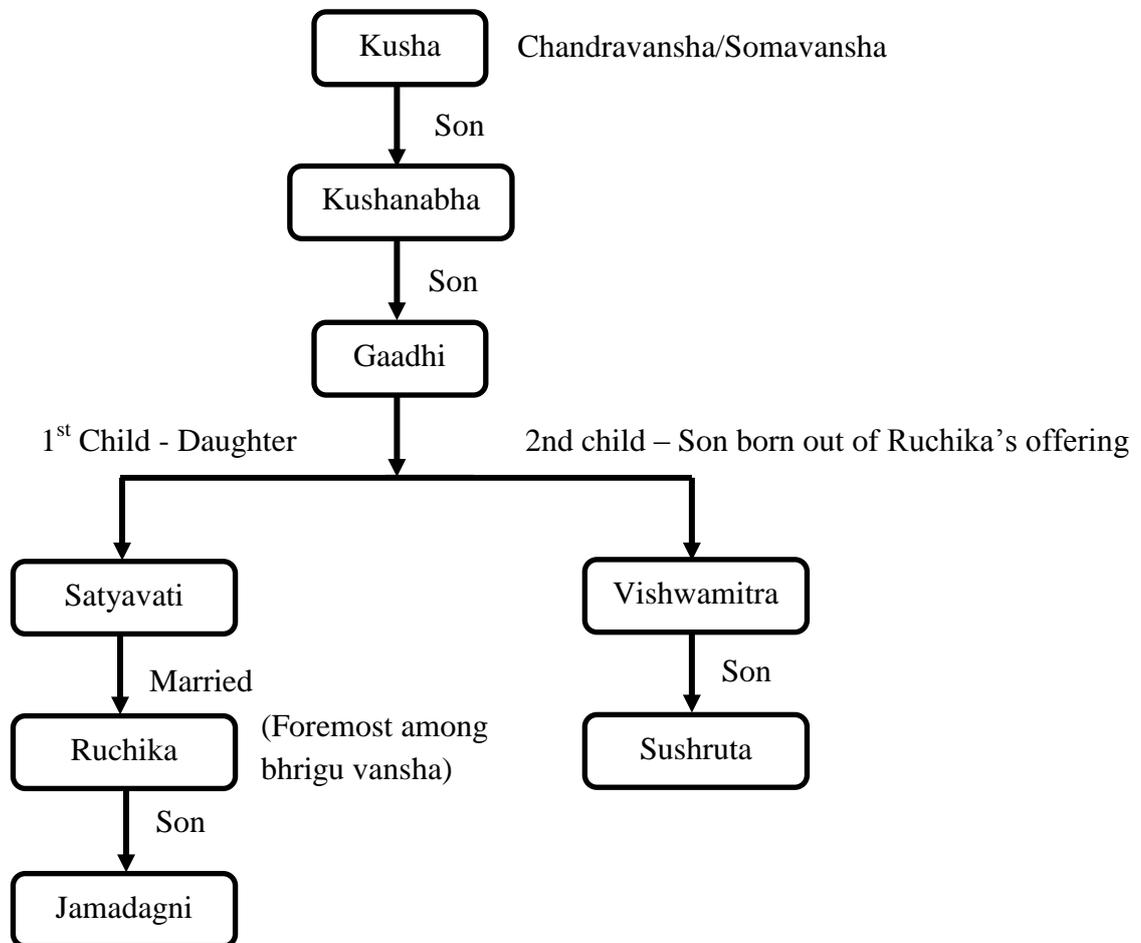
3. Vishwamitra – the father of Sushruta was also a kshatriya. Vishwamitra belongs to Chandravansha/Somavansha. He was basically a kshatriya and the king of Kanyakubja kingdom. Vishvamitra was a valiant warrior who belonged to Amavasu Dynasty. He was the great-grandson of a great king named Kusha, hence he was also called *Kaushik*. As he was the son of Gaadhi, hence was also referred as *Gaadhisuta/Gaadhija/gaadhinandana*.

The story of Vishwamitra gives us a hint of why sushruta possesses qualities of a brahmana even though he originally belonged to a kshatriya family.

The story of Vishwamitra's birth, as told in the Vishnu Purana, is that

King Kusha's son is Kushanabha, Kushanabha's son is Gaadhi and Gaadhi had a daughter named Satyavati. Satyavati was married to an old Brahmana known as Ruchika who was foremost among the race of Bhrigu. Ruchika desired a son having the qualities of a Brahmana and so he gave Satyavati a sacrificial offering (charu) which he had prepared to achieve this objective. He also gave Satyavati's mother another charu to make her conceive a son with the character of a Kshatriya at her request. But Satyavati's mother privately asked Satyavati to exchange her charu with her. This resulted in Satyavati's mother giving birth to Vishwamitra, son of a Kshatriya Gaadhi with qualities of a Brahmana and Satyavati gave birth to Jamadagni, father of Parashurama, a Brahmana with qualities of a Kshatriya. Vishwamitra, A celebrated sage, who was born a Kshatriya, but by intense austerities raised himself to the Brahmana varna, and became one of the seven great Rishis.^[7]

Later, Sushruta born to Vishwamitra also possessed qualities of a Brahmana even though he was a Kshatriya.



CONCLUSION

From all the above points we can infer that Acharya Sushruta basically belonged to Kshatriya varna who later learnt the science of Ayurveda from Kasi raja Divodasa Dhanwantari and went on to become a Shalya Shaastra pracharaka and treat patients suffering from shastra sadhya vyadhis. Sushruta a warrior after learning the science of Ayurveda, knowing its importance and need of propagation of the science, focused on documentation of the preaching of Dhanwantari and compiled them in the form of Sushruta Samhita. This is how a warrior changed his career for the science of Ayurveda.

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6. Shabdakalpadruma, Shabda stoma mahanidhi.
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