

History of Surgery in India—II

This is a second and the concluding article of the series written by Mrs. Saroj Vesuvala, Nursing Superintendent, Hindu Rao Hospital, Delhi. The first one appeared in the November issue of the Journal. In this article she has listed other qualities and interest which Susrta had apart from being an excellent Surgeon. He had wide knowledge about Chemistry, Pharmacology, Biology and Atmospheric influences on the body etc.

Surgical operation

SUSRUTA'S art of Surgery was considered a most original surgical marvel. Records show that he performed excision, incision, sacrifice, puncture, probing, removal of foreign body, extraction and reduction of swelling.

He treated fractures, dislocations and performed amputations. He operated upon patients with hernia, piles, fistula and performed abdominal operations and removed cataract.

His major achievements were in the field of plastic surgery of nose. He used ant heads as stitching material. The big ants bit the cut ends after being brought together. The surgeon then cut off the body of the ant, leaving behind the mandibles as clamps which were well tolerated by the body. This idea was later taken up by the Arabs.

Surgical Instruments

Susruta enumerated 101 types of blunt and 20 types of sharp instruments. He said that surgical instrument should be prepared out of good iron, should be moderate in size, should be capable of being firmly grasped and their ends should not be frightful to look at.

Effects of Various Seasons on human body

Describing the influence of different seasons he said that during

rain and autumn, plants possess an acid saline and sweet taste. Plants and animal gain strength and energy. During winter, they lose strength and vigour. Humid air dulls the appetite in human beings and gives an acidic reaction in the G.I. Tract, leading to excess bile production. In Autumn, the excessive bile is liquified by the rays of sun giving rise to bilious diseases.

In the cold season, sun rays become weak and frosty, air makes human being numb and heavy. There is accumulation of phlegm in the in the body. In spring, phlegm is liquified and could cause disease (APH). In summer, hot sun rays dry up moisture from the body and lead to accumulation of wind (Vayu). He advised his students to check all these before they treated the symptoms of the disease.

Wind and its effects

He also showed that the wind coming from different directions has different effects on the human body. The east wind cool, sweet, charged with salt, increases blood and bile and gives acidic reaction in the G.I. tract. It aggravates wounds, ulcers or the effect of any poison. This is beneficial to fatigued and nervous people. The south wind is light and sweet, is ante-acid in reaction. It gives vigour to the eyes, increases strength, soothes blood and bile. The west wind is dry and rough and dries up fat and phlegm, diminishes strength. The north wind is cold, crisp and healthy. It increases excretion from all orifices of the body.

Classification of animal kingdom

He classified the animal kingdom into four broad divisions : (i) Animals born out of moisture and heat like worms, insects, ants etc. (ii) Those which have placenta attached at birth—man and other animals (iii) Born out of eggs, reptiles and birds. iv. Burst forth from ground, frog etc.

Metals and their compounds

Susruta gave properties and uses of various metals and their compounds.

Gold acts as tonic and imparts rotundity to the body. It is cooling, antitoxic and invigorates the eye sight and it has a sweet taste.

Silver : It has an acidic taste, is laxative and cooling in potency, destroys bile and wind.

Copper has sweet and astringent taste and is corrosive, laxative and cooling in its potency.

Bronze : It is bitter, subdues phlegm and wind, allays thirst and subdues deranged bile and phlegm.

Zinc and Lead have a saline taste and destroy worms in the body.

Pearls, Corals, Diamonds, Sapphires, Lapis-Lazuli are beneficial to eye sight.

Susruta "Samhita" was translated into Arabic before the 8th Century A.D. It was called "Kitab show shoon-e-Hindi" or "Kitab-i-Susruta." Susruta attained a respectable role in the eyes of the people and had an indispensable place in Surgery and in training of medical students.

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