

## Short Communication

### Personal Physician to His Holiness, Lord Buddha

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Jivaka Kumarvaccha was an esteemed Physician and Surgeon, who not only served as the Personal Physician to Lord Buddha, but also left a legacy of ethical and methodical medical practice. Centuries prior to Hippocrates, Jivaka had already established fundamental principles of treatment and emphasized the separation of religion from medicine. In light of his accomplishments, we remember him as the Father of Medicine and honor his contribution to the field.

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It was an early morning in late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The premises of *Taxila Mahabihar* was deluged in Sunbeams. All the disciples of Athreya Punarvasu, the famous Ayurvedacharya in ancient India stood tense and waited for their turn. It was the final day of their examination after seven years of rigorous training on eight System of Human Physiology. It was the day to testify their *Mahaguru* too. No one was able to answer a question satisfactorily. *Mahaguru* Athreya advised them to ask for the divine help to Dhanyantwari, the Vedic God of Medicine. The *Taxila Mahabihar* was the first documented University of Worldly repute in ancient times. It had produced many scholars like Athreya Punarbasu. Athreya was claimed as the first author of Ayurvedic book. He asked his disciples to go to the nearby Himalaya terrine forest and return with some plants having medicinal properties by dawn. Every disciple was supposed to bring the sample parts of plants which they would have thought to have medicinal property and describe the uses in front of Athreya.

Towards evening most of the disciples came back. But his favourite Jivaka was yet to come. Everyone brought different parts of trees and was eager to explain their usefulness. At last, Jivaka returned from forest in twilight. He had nothing in his hand. *Mahaguru* asked him, "What had happened to you Jivaka? Couldn't you find any tree with medicinal values"! Jivaka bowed his head down; with folded hands he replied to Athreya patiently, "*Gurudeva*, I hadn't found any plant without medicinal property"!

Athreya heaved a sigh of relief to find a person who could serve the country men as the greatest physician in his times.

Hundred years before Hippocrates was born Jivaka described the ways to diagnose 'a patient with disease' instead of describing a disease a patient could suffer from. Unfortunately, the West was merely aware of this legend who was regarded as one of the sixteen *Arahants*, who, according to Buddhism, achieved spiritual enlightenment during life time.

Much of his early life is known from different religious descriptions written centuries after his death but there is a lack of scientific authentication in most cases. Jivaka is known by the Buddhists as the Personal Physician to Lord Buddha. There is a pathetic story behind his birth. He was born of a courtesan named Salavati in the then republic Vaishali. According to the inscription in early part of *The Vinaya Pitaka* or *Mahabhargav* which is regarded as most canonical<sup>1</sup> she abandoned her unwanted child in a garbage dump outside the city of Rajgriha.

While en route, Prince Abhaya found the newborn baby alive in astringent condition; he rescued the baby and gave him a new name 'Jivaka' connoting Life. Jivaka was brought up by the prince in royal premises. After he came to know about his true identity, he felt shattered and engrossed himself in learning medicine. He was sent to *Taxila Mahabihar* to fulfill his mission.

He was the contemporary of Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. His practice of medicine and incorporation of traditional methods into practices is worthy of recounting in present days too. Both of them lived and worked in the same area of Northern India and Sub-Himalayan terrain. Jivaka came across Siddhartha at the juncture of an era which would have been recounted in the following several decades as memorandum of Humanity and Sacrifice. Jivaka, enriched with his talent and wisdom, had taken care of terrestrial body of Lord Buddha and myriads of monks. By his virtue and royal patronage of king Bimbisara, Jivaka Kumarvaccha became a wealthy person in his time. He was a saint in soul and would believe in Sacrifice and Charity. Although

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Lord Buddha never permitted him to join the Sangha, but he regarded him as one of the most enlightened disciples.

The stories inscribed in *Vinaya Pitaka* had glorified him as a Physician with divine power. He treated king Bimbisara suffering from Fistula; cured intractable Headache of a merchant's wife and did some kind of Neurosurgery<sup>2</sup>. He has even cured Lord Buddha at least twice and voiced of hygienic apparel and foods for the monks. Lord Buddha was convinced to see his irrefutable explanation regarding necessity of fresh clothes and foods rather than collecting from dead bodies. Ajatashatru who was infamous for killing his father king Bimbisara was also a patronage of Jivaka. Jivakas' indifference in politics assured his spiritual journey through the path of practicing medicine and devotion. He introduced Ajatashatru with Lord Buddha which had a religious significance in history of India.

Before the death of Lord Buddha in Kushinagar his devotees asked Him, "*Bhagavâ!* what would be thereafter? *Bhagava* replied, "*Suññatâ*" (Nothing). It was his last sermon. The life of Siddhartha itself is greatest teaching of Humankind. Sacrifice is the most enlightened principle among his eightfold path of salvation. He was a congregant of *Karma Yoga* or worshiper of work too. Lord Buddha attained *Nirvana* at age of eighty years after suffering from intestinal infection<sup>1,3</sup>. Every action and words of Siddhartha was hailed as divine and no doubt at juncture of a changing era. He is regarded as *Buddha* or Enlightened one. His Humanly Suffering; Sacrifice; Sermons; Sangha all protrude as greatest examples of mankind.

Here appeared Jivaka Kumarbacha as personal Physician of Lord Buddha. Jivaka was considered as the most down trodden person of the Society. His life as a student, trainee and healer was not only exemplary in his time but in modern times also. His devotion to the subject and treating patient earned respect from all walks of the Society. He accomplished many cortical surgeries and stressed on the fact that surgery comprises of three stages. Pre-operative and Postoperative care were of equal importance as procedure of surgery itself. He advised seven months to lie on same side to his wealthy busy patient after surgery knowingly that seven days was enough! After seven days, patient stood up and said that he did enough. He could not do it anymore!

After Nirvana of Lord Buddha, Jivaka Kumarbacha was the instrumental on organizing first Buddhist council with the king Ajatashatru. Life and sermon of Lord Buddha were taught and memorized and recited over centuries before these had been texted. Mahabhargav, the early and medicinal part of *Vinaya Pitaka* was written in Pali language in 4<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>2</sup>. Other parts had been texted centuries later. Though factual dilution may have a

biasness of accountability of Facts with passage of time, but the strong tradition of mesmerizing Lord Buddhas' *Sutras* or Sermon which are regarded highly divine might have been changed. During his last days Jivaka had written his *Sanhita* or medical manuscripts which still a treasure for us. We got Charak and Sushruta as legendary figures in Ayurveda or surgery before him in ancient India.

From a prodigal son of a royal harlot to become the greatest Physician in the Age of Buddha was not an easy journey. From the common people to the courtiers of the kings, his movement was unfettered. Resultantly he experienced the petty, hateful politics of almost all states. But he was a learner from dawn to dusk. He learned from Tathagata about the ultimate truth of humanity. After acquiring mammoth properties, peoples' love and jealousy, he returned to the forester; to the tree king, which was greatest wealth in his life.

Jivaka Kumarvaccha had dedicated his life in pursuit of truth; in union with the God in his own ways of serving Humankind. Hundred years before Hippocrates in Greece, he was instrumental to put our profession in highest regarded place<sup>4</sup>. The only difference from Hippocrates was his unwillingness to establish a school for the continuation of his teaching. Perhaps this saint thought it was useless to establish his teaching separately from the divine teaching of the Lord Himself.

Therefore, as the illegitimate son of a courtesan as well as the greatest Physician and Teacher of his time, Jivaka Kumarvaccha chose to remain an Arahant, or a Protector of Buddha's physical body, rather than be identified as the Father of Medicine.

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