

Atri – Atreya - The Great Teachers

As in other ancient civilizations, in India the art of healing is said to have divine origin. The creator Brahma composed an exhaustive text on the science of life which is called ayurveda. He taught this science to Daksha who in turn passed it to the Ashwins, the twin gods, and they finally taught Indra, the king of gods.

Humans then sent sages to Indra, to learn from him this science of healing, because mortals needed it most. Indra taught Dhanvantari who established the School of Surgery that produced the great surgeon-teacher Sushruta. The other disciple of Indra was Bhardwaj who founded the School of Medicine. The third group of disciples comprised Kashyap, Vasishta, and Atri, who are all teachers of paediatrics.

Dhanvantari taught Divodas whose disciples were Sushruta, Aupdhenav, Vaitarana, Aurabhra, Paushkalawat, Karveerya, Gopur Rakshit, Bhoja, and others. Bhardwaj taught Atreya Punarvasu, whose great disciples were Agnivesh, Bheda, Jautukarna, Harit, Ksharpani. Agnivesh taught Charaka and Dridhbal. Now, in the Buddhist text *Mahavagga* we find that Jivaka learnt medicine from Atreya. *Navneetkam* or the Bower manuscript mentions Atreya, Parasher, Ksharpani, Bheda, Harit, Sushruta, Kashyap, and Jivaka.

In *Charaka Samhita* there is mention of two Atreyas: Bhikshu Atreya is mentioned in the twenty-fifth chapter of Sutrasthan, and Punarvasu Atreya in the twelfth chapter. Charaka writes that Punarvasu had his abode in the Himalayas. It may be noted that Charaka does not mention the school of Taxila where Jivaka studied. *Charaka Samhita* describes medical seminars in the Himalayan region, and here among the participants it mentions the names of Bhikshu Atreya and Punarvasu Atreya.

In Shalaky Tantra there is mention of a surgeon Krishna Atreya. These are some of the facts, and we find the names of some great masters of Ayurveda, especially Atri and four Atreyas: Dutta, Punarvasu, Krishna, and Bhikshu. Many theories and controversies surround these names. Perhaps great masters were called *Atreya* as a matter of respect since they all had the healing touch of Atri.