



Review Article

**SOWA-RIGPA (AMCHI/BUDDHIST MEDICINE): A REVIEW**

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ABSTRACT

*Sowa-rigpa* is known as *Amchi* or Buddhist medicine or Tibetan system of medicine which is primarily based on Buddhist philosophy. It is the fact that basic concepts of *Sowa-Rigpa* and Ayurveda are almost same and it seems that there is inter-relation among these two traditional systems of Indian Medicine. The description of *Tridosha*, *Panchamahabhuta*, seven *Dhatus*, three *Malas*, week wise embryological development are same. In *Sowa-Rigpa*, it has been mentioned that we all are sick due to ignorance as according to Buddhist philosophy, Ignorance is the cause of sufferings. The relation between ignorance and suffering as per the *Sowa-Rigpa* may be the unique concept which may show the path for human-beings to eradicate all human sufferings i.e., ultimately to walk on the path of Nirvana which is the goal of Buddhist philosophy and *Moksha* according to Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

*Sowa-Rigpa* is the traditional systems of Indian medicine which is commonly known as *Amchi* or due to ignorance, it is called as Tibetan medicine but originally it is Buddhist medicine and it is practiced in Himalayan regions particularly Leh, Ladakh and other parts of the country such as Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Sarnath, Bodhgaya, Kushinagar etc. The *Sowa-rigpa*, a system of medicine was given official recognition recently (25.08.201) through the Indian Medicine Central Council Amendment Bill 2010.<sup>[1]</sup> It is the human tendency to be healthy and as per the WHO, around 80% of the total population of the world are dependent on traditional systems of medicines for their treatment. Every country has its own traditional systems of medicine as like in our country, there are number of traditional systems such as Ayurveda, *Yoga*, *Unani*, *Siddha*, *Sowa-Rigpa* etc. and the fact is that there is inter-relation among these traditional systems which needs to be find out with the scientific mindset for the well-beings of all mankind. The practitioners of *Sowa-Rigpa* are known as *Amchis*.

*Amchis* have not only social respect but also spiritual respect as the representatives of *Sangyas-smanla* (medicine Buddha) and their services for ailing beings are priceless.<sup>[2]</sup> Siddharth Gautam Buddha was the historical personality and not the mythological personality. Gautam Buddha was born in the Lumbini garden in the middle of the sixth century (563 BC) about six hundred years before the birth of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Siddharth Gautam Buddha was also known as the *Bhaishajya-Guru*.

***Bhaishajya-Guru*:** The Buddha named Master of Healing, is an important member of the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist pantheon. Concepts of healing played a fundamental role in early Buddhism: *Śākyamuni* Buddha was sometimes given the epithet "supreme physician," and the Buddhist teachings were termed the "king of medicines" for their ability to lead beings out of suffering.<sup>[4]</sup> The *Sowa-Rigpa* deity, the *Bhaishajya guru*, commonly called the medicine Buddha, signals the singular aspect of *Sowa Rigpa* as having been rooted in the philosophy that directly flows out of the teachings of the Buddha. The philosophy of Buddhism answers to existential sickness of men, at times latent, and at other coming to the surface. *Sowa-Rigpa* is a system programmed to heal mankind in a holistic mode, taking man's mind and body together.<sup>[5]</sup>

The twelve vows of medicine Buddha upon attaining enlightenment, according to the medicine Buddha *Sutra* are:<sup>[6]</sup>

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1. I vow that my body shall shine as beams of brilliant light on this infinite and boundless world, showering on all beings, getting rid of their ignorance and worries with my teachings. May all beings be like me, with a perfect status and character, upright mind and soul, and finally attaining enlightenment like the Buddha.
2. I vow that my body be like crystal, pure and flawless, radiating rays of splendid light to every corner, brightening up and enlightening all beings with wisdom. With the blessings of compassion, may all beings strengthen their spiritual power and physical energy, so that they could fulfill their dreams on the right track.
3. I vow that I shall grant by means of boundless wisdom, all beings with the inexhaustible things that they require, and relieving them from all pains and guilt resulting from materialistic desires. Although clothing, food, accommodation and transport are essentials, it should be utilized wisely as well. Besides self-consumption, the remaining should be generously shared with the community so that all could live harmoniously together.
4. I vow to lead those who have gone astray back to the path of righteousness. Let them be corrected and returned to the Buddha way for enlightenment.
5. I vow that I shall enable all sentient beings to observe precepts for spiritual purity and moral conduct. Should there be any relapse or violation, they shall be guided by repentance. Provided they sincerely regret their wrong-doings, and vow for a change with constant prayers and strong faith in the Buddha, they could receive the rays of forgiveness, recover their lost moral and purity.
6. I vow that all beings who are physically disabled or sick in all aspects be blessed with good health, both physically and mentally. All who pay homage to Buddha faithfully will be blessed.
7. I vow to relieve all pain and poverty of the very sick and poor. The sick be cured, the helpless be helped, the poor be assisted.
8. I vow to help women who are undergoing sufferings and tortures and seeking for transformation into men. By hearing my name, paying homage and praying, their wishes would be granted and ultimately attain Buddhahood.
9. I vow to free all beings from evil thought and its control. I shall lead them onto the path of light through inculcating them with righteousness and honour so that they will walk the Buddha way.
10. I vow to save prisoners who have genuinely repented and victims of natural disasters. My supreme powers will bless those who are sincere and be freed from sufferings.
11. I vow to save those who suffer from starvation and those who committed a crime to obtain food. If they hear my name and faithfully cherish it, I shall lead them to the advantages of Dharma and favour them with the best food that they may eventually lead a tranquil and happy life.
12. I vow to save those who suffer from poverty, tormented by mosquitoes and wasps' day and night. If they come across my name, cherish it with sincerity and practice dharma to strengthen their merits, they will be able to achieve their wishes.



Author Visited Vishwashanti Stupa (Gridhrakut Mountain) in 2014, situated at Rajgir, Dist. Nalanda, State-Bihar.



Siddharth Gautam Buddha was also known as Bhaishajya-Guru



### Buddhism and Sowa-Rigpa

The Buddha is said to be the originator of the Tibetan system of medicine, i.e., *Sowa-rigpa*. In the basic treatises on Tibetan medicine, the Buddha is described as the source of all knowledge pertaining to medicine, and it was he who pronounced this science through his devoted disciples.<sup>[7]</sup> The fundamental textbook *Rgyud-bzi* of *Sowa-Rigpa* is believed to be taught by Buddha; therefore, it is closely linked with Buddhist philosophy. Ignorance gives rise to three basic root of sickness *Nespa-gsum* (*Tri-dosha*) i.e., *Dod-chags* (desire/lust) root cause of lung (Air, *Vata*), *Zes-dang* (anger) root cause of *Mkris-pa* (Bile, *Pitta*) and *Ti-mug* (mental darkness) root cause of *Pad-kan* (Phlegm, *Kapha*). The Buddhist *Tantra* and *Mantra* ritual plays a very important role in the treatment of patients. It is mentioned in *rgyud-bzi* that when Buddha taught this text as manifestation of *Tang srong-rigpai-yeshes*, physicians of different medical systems were present; i.e., Gods, *Rishis*, Buddhist and non-Buddhist and all of them understood his teachings as their own system. Another text mentions

that when *Bhrahma* remembered medical science for the first time, he re-called the medical teachings of Buddha *Kashyapa* in an earlier Aeon, thus it seems that Buddha *Kashyapa* is the medical teacher of *Bhrahma*.<sup>[8]</sup> Buddha himself is sometimes referred to as *sMai-bla*, meaning 'Chief among Physicians'. In this capacity, he is depicted holding a *Myrobalan* fruit, or a spring from the *Myrobalan* tree, in his hand. In Tibetan, this fruit is known as *Dugbcom*, meaning 'which renders poison inactive', or when referred to as a symbol of the healing art-as *dug-sel* ('which expels poison'); finally, it is sometimes known as the *bDud-rtsi*, or food of the god, a term applied to remedies generally.<sup>[9]</sup> It is said that Tibetan medicine is a traditional system of medicine which has been practiced for over 2500 years. Tibetan medicine originates from the pre-Buddhist Bon era of Tibetan history. During this time there was extensive medical knowledge in Tibet and medical study was based on the four Bon medical texts known as *gSo-rig Bhoom-Shi*. This period in Tibetan medical history lasted from sixth century BC to

seventh century AD.<sup>[10]</sup> *Sowa-Rigpa*, along with Buddhism, crossed the frontiers of Tibet as Tibetan art, culture and science spread through the neighboring Himalayan regions of Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, China, Himalayan regions of India and Central Asia. In India *Sowa-Rigpa* has been in practice all over Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, Lahul and Spiti, and Ladakh.<sup>[11]</sup> Along with the sermons of Lord Buddha, Baudha Bhiksus of India carried with them, among others, the knowledge of Ayurveda and propagated it among their disciples in Tibet. Sanskrit treatises on arts and sciences were translated into Tibetan by teams of Indian and Tibetan scholars under the patronage of various rulers of that country. Besides there were a free exchange of scholars of medicine between India and Tibet so much so that even scholars having no connection with Buddha dharma were invited to their country for the propagation of Ayurveda.<sup>[12]</sup> India being the birthplace of Buddha and Buddhism has always been a favorite place for learning Buddhist art and culture for Tibetan students, many Indian scholars were also invited to Tibet for propagation of Buddhism and other Indian art and sciences. This long association with India had resulted in translation and preservation of thousands of Indian literatures on various subjects like religion, sciences, arts, culture and language, etc. in Tibetan language. Out of these about twenty-five texts related to medicine are also preserved in both canonical and non-canonical forms of Tibetan literature.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Sowa-Rigpa and Ayurveda:** The majority of theory and practice of *Sowa-Rigpa* are similar to Indian medical system Ayurveda, followed by few Chinese principals and then prevailing Tibetan folklore. The first Ayurvedic influence was observed in Tibet during 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD but it became popular only after 7<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of Buddhism in Tibet. Thereafter this trend of exportation of Indian medical literature, along with Buddhism and other Indian art and sciences was continued till early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>[14]</sup> *Sowa-Rigpa* is a medical system formulated in terms of a profound philosophy. Irrespective of whether 'Gyud shi' is classically the text of *Sowa-Rigpa* as having been taught by the Buddha himself or not, the undeniable fact is that *Sowa-Rigpa* views life and existence in the light of the Buddhist principle, implying positivism and a pragmatic manner of approach.<sup>[15]</sup> There are so much similarities in the basic concepts of Ayurveda and the *Sowa-Rigpa* such as *Mahabhutas*, *Tridosha*, *Mala*, six types of *Rasas* etc., but compared to Ayurveda, in *Sowa-Rigpa*, there is detailed description of 63 types of *Loong* i.e., *Vata Dosh*, 47 types of *mKhris-pa* i.e., *Pitta Dosh* and 43 types of *pad-Kan* i.e., *Kapha dosha*.

The detailed description of three principal energies (*Loong*, *mKhris-pa* and *Bad-Kan*, i.e., *Vata*,

*Pitta*, *Kapha* respectively) according to *Sowa-rigpa* is as follows.<sup>[16]</sup>

**A. Loong:** In Tibetan *Loong* means mobility. This subtle flow of energy circulates throughout our body carrying blood and nutrients. It also helps the respiratory system, sensory organs and bodily growth. *Loong* is very much connected to the air element. In the *rGyud-bzhi* there are 63 different types of *Loong*.

#### Five Main Types of Loong

- 1. Loong Srog-dzin** is known as the life-grasping *Loong*. This *Loong* is located in the brain and it moves from the pharynx down to the esophagus. Its function is to help the swallowing of food, spitting, sneezing, eructation, inhalation and to focus the mind.
- 2. Loong Gyen-rgyu** is known as the upward moving *Loong*. This *Loong* is located in the thorax and it moves in the nose, tongue and throat. Its function is to help speech, clarity of memory and mental diligence.
- 3. Loong Khyab-byed** is known as all-pervading *Loong*. This *Loong* is located in the heart and is responsible for blood circulation and the carrying of nutrients throughout the body.
- 4. Loong Me-mnyam** is known as fire-accompanying *Loong*. This *Loong* is located in the stomach and it moves in the small intestine and the large intestine.
- 5. Loong Thur-sel** is known as downward cleansing *Loong*. This *Loong* is located in the rectum and it flows through the large intestine, bladder, genitalia and the thighs.

Five main types of *Loong* i.e., *Loong Srog-dzin*, *Loong Gyen-rgyu*, *Loong Khyab-byed*, *Loong Me-mnyam*, *Loong Thur-sel* may be co-related with the *Udana Vayu*, *Prana Vayu*, *Vyana Vayu*, *Samana Vayu*, *Apana Vayu* respectively according to *Ayurveda*.

**B. mKhris-pa:** In Tibetan *mKhris-pa* means flame. The main function of *mKhris-pa* is to keep in balance the bodily temperature, to aid digestion and absorption, and to give vitality to the body. In the *rGyud-bzhi* there are 47 *mKhris-pa* disorders, and here I will describe the five main *mKhris-pas*.

#### Five types of mKhris-pa

- 1. mKhris-pa Jyoo-byed** is known as digesting *mKhris-pa*. It is located in the small intestine and its main function is to digest food and drink.
- 2. mKhris-pa sGrub-byed**, known as accomplishing *mKhris-pa*, is located in the heart and its main function is to motivate our minds.
- 3. mKhris-pa mDangs-sgyur** is known as colour-changing *mKhris-pa*. It is located in the liver and its main function is to promote and maintain the red coloring of essential nutrients in the blood and muscle tissues.

4. **mKhris-pa mThong-byed** is known as sight *mKhris-pa*. It is located in the eyes and is responsible for vision.

5. **mKhris-pa mDog-gsel** is known as complexion-clearing *mKhris-pa*. It is located in the skin and its function is to clear and promote skin lustre by giving it a healthy and wholesome color.

Five types of *mKhris-pa* i.e., *mKhris-pa Jyoo-byed*, *mKhris-pa sGrub-byed*, *mKhris-pa mDangs-sgyur*, *mKhris-pa mThong-byed*, *mKhris-pa mDog-gsel* may be co-related with the *Pachaka Pitta*, *Sadhaka Pitta*, *Ranjaka Pitta*, *Alochaka Pitta* and *Bhrajaka Pitta* respectively according to *Ayurveda*.

C. **Pad-Kan:** In Tibetan *Bad* means earth and *Kan* means water. The main function of *Bad-Kan* is to balance our bodily fluids, help mix food in the stomach, keep the mind stable and lubricate our joints. In the *rGyud-bzhi* 43 different types of *Bad-Kan* are mentioned.

#### Five types of Pad-Kan

1. **Pad-Kan rTen-byed** is known as supporting *Bad-Kan*. Its location is in the thorax and its function is to control our thirst and to help support the other four main types of *Bad-Kan*.

2. **Pad-Kan Myag-byed** is known as mixing *Bad-Kan*. Its location is in the stomach and its function is to break down foodstuffs into a semi-liquid form.

3. **Pad-Kan Myong-byed** is known as taste receptor *Bad-Kan*. Its location is on the tongue and its function is to distinguish the six primary tastes of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent.

4. **Pad-Kan Tsim-byed** is known as satisfying *Bad-Kan*. Its location is in the thalamus and its function is to satisfy the power of the five senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch.

5. **Pad-Kan Byor-byed** is known as connecting *Bad-*

The data about embryological development as available in 'Gyu-zhi' is given below:<sup>20</sup>

S. No.	Pregnancy Week	Development of the Embryo
1.	1 <sup>st</sup> week	After the combination of the sperm and ova, the zygote becomes mucilaginous and looks like milk when it is mixed with curd.
2.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Week	This jelly-like consistency becomes thicker, which in Tibetan is called <i>nur-nur-op</i> ( <i>nur nur-po</i> ) and in Sanskrit parlance, this is known as " <i>Kalala</i> ".
3.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Week	The embryo takes the consistency of curd, and it is stated that the <i>Pumsavana kriya</i> (writes for the change of the sex of the foetus) should be performed during this week. In Ayurvedic literature, this is stated to be carried out during the third month of pregnancy.
4.	4 <sup>th</sup> Week	The embryo becomes either round or like a tumour, or an elongated one. If it takes a round shape, then the foetus is a male one: if it takes the shape of a tumour, the foetus becomes a female: and if it takes an elongated shape, then the foetus becomes hermaphrodite. This is different from the description available in Ayurvedic literature.
5.	5 <sup>th</sup> Week	The navel is formed
6.	6 <sup>th</sup> Week	This navel is connected with some vital vessels
7.	7 <sup>th</sup> Week	The sense organ eye comes forth

*Kan*. Its location is in the joints and its function is in the movement of the joints and movements such as stretching and contracting.

Five types of *Bad-Kan* i.e., *Bad-Kan rTen-byed*, *Bad-Kan Myag-byed*, *Bad-Kan Myong-byed*, *Bad-Kan Tsim-byed*, *Bad-Kan Byor-byed* may be co-related with the *Avalambaka Kapha*, *Kledaka Kapha*, *Bodhaka Kapha*, *Tarpaka Kapha*, *Shleshaka Kapha* respectively according to *Ayurveda*.

#### The Seven Bodily Constituents<sup>17</sup>

- Essential nutrients from ingested foodstuffs
- Blood
- Muscle tissues
- Fatty tissues
- Bone
- Marrow
- Regenerative fluid

Above mentioned are seven *Dhatu* and three *Malas* below according to *Ayurveda*.

#### There are Three Eliminating Functions of Waste<sup>18</sup>

- Elimination of feces
- Elimination of urine
- Elimination of perspiration

The description of *Acharya Jivaka* is similar in *Ayurveda* and *Sowa-Rigpa*. The most famous of all the legendary healers of India is almost certainly Prince *Jivaka*, the (Three fold King of Physicians), whose life story is also recorded in Tibetan sacred scriptures, where he is referred to as the 'Young Physician'. He grew up at the court of King *Bimbisara* (approx 538 to 486 B.C.), who had his residence in *Rajagriha*, the capital of *Magadha*.<sup>19</sup>

In Ayurvedic literature, *Maasanumasika Garbhavkranti* i.e., month wise developments in embryo is given, but in Tibetan literatures, week wise development has been mentioned.

8.	8 <sup>th</sup> Week	The head takes the shape
9.	9 <sup>th</sup> Week	The trunk and upper as well as lower limbs take shape
10.	10 <sup>th</sup> Week	Two shoulders and two hips emerge
11.	11 <sup>th</sup> Week	The remaining nine sense organs emerge
12.	12 <sup>th</sup> Week	Some vital organs, which are five in number, are found
13.	13 <sup>th</sup> Week	Six viscera are formed
14.	14 <sup>th</sup> Week	The femur and humerus bones are formed
15.	15 <sup>th</sup> Week	Legs, hands and forearms are formed
16.	16 <sup>th</sup> Week	Twenty digits come out
17.	17 <sup>th</sup> Week	Veins and tendons connecting the internal and external organs are formed
18.	18 <sup>th</sup> Week	Flesh and fat are formed
19.	19 <sup>th</sup> Week	Large glands, which are sixteen in number and ligaments are formed
20.	20 <sup>th</sup> Week	Remaining bones and bone marrow arc formed
21.	21 <sup>st</sup> Week	Outer skin is formed
22.	22 <sup>nd</sup> Week	The openings of sense organs become patent
23.	23 <sup>rd</sup> Week	Small hair and nails grow
24.	24 <sup>th</sup> Week	The different organs of the abdominal and thoracic cavity are clearly formed
25.	25 <sup>th</sup> Week	Movement of wind inside the body of the foetus takes place
26.	26 <sup>th</sup> Week	The mind is manifested and the memory becomes clear
27.	27 <sup>th</sup> Week to 30 <sup>th</sup> Week	All the organs formed previously become well demarcated
28.	31 <sup>st</sup> Week to 35 <sup>th</sup> Week	All the organs formed previously become expand
29.	36 <sup>th</sup> Week	A substance called zi-dang ( <b>gzi-mdangs</b> ; ojas) moves from the mother to the child and <b>vice</b> versa. When it moves from the mother to the child, the mother becomes sad and child happy: and when it moves from the child to the mother, the child becomes sad the happy
30.	37 <sup>th</sup> Week	The faculty of intellect develops
31.	38 <sup>th</sup> Week	The foetus is normally expelled from the womb of the mother

As like in Ayurveda, *Trividha Rugnapariksha* (*Darshan, Sparshan, Prashna*), in Tibetan medicine also diagnosis is divided into three sections:<sup>[21]</sup>

- Visual observation
- Touch
- Questioning

Description of six types of *Rasa* according to the *Sowa-Rigpa* is given below which is as like in Ayurveda.

#### Relationship Between The Five Elements, Six Primary Tastes And Three Post-Digestive Tastes.<sup>[22]</sup>

Five elements		Six primary tastes	Three post-digestive tastes
Earth and water	generate	Sweet taste ( <i>mNgar-ba</i> )	Sweet
Earth and fire	generate	Sour taste ( <i>sKyur-ba</i> )	Sour
Water and fire	generate	Salty taste ( <i>Lan-tsha</i> )	Sweet
Water and air	generate	Bitter taste ( <i>Kha-ba</i> )	Bitter
Fire and air	generate	Pungent taste ( <i>Tsha-ba</i> )	Bitter
Earth and air	generate	Astringent taste ( <i>bsKa-ba</i> )	Bitter

#### DISCUSSION

The basic fundamentals of Ayurveda are based on Indian Philosophical Sciences such as *Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva Mimamsa, Uttar Mimamsa, Charvaka, Jain* and *Bauddha*. The *Sowa-Rigpa* is Buddhsit medicine based on the teachings of the Buddha. From the above information it is clear that there is no difference in the treatment perspective of *Sowa-Rigpa* and Ayurveda. Therefore, it would be beneficial to combine *Sowa-Rigpa* and Ayurveda for

eradication of all human sufferings which is the need of an hour during the era of Holistic approach. If these two systems of medicine are brought together, they will be complimentary and supplementary to each other and will handsomely contribute to the world of science in giving relief to the ailing humanity.<sup>[23]</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

It is the fact that except Homoeopathy, all traditional systems of AYUSH, i.e. Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, *Sowa-Rigpa* are inter-related to each other and in other words we can say that these are the scattered fractions of the Buddhist medicine spread all over the country and in the neighboring countries also which needs to be connected so that missing link will be found for the wellbeing of all human beings.

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