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Qualities of Physician in Light of *Charaka Samhita* - A Literary Study

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ABSTRACT:

In Ayurveda, among the four limbs of healthcare system, physician is considered as the most important and principal among others. A successful health care service is primarily dependent on the proficiency of a physician having all the necessary qualities as mentioned in the ancient compendiums. *Charaka Samhita* being the most important text among all the resources of Ayurveda has given much emphasis on the various aspects of a *Bhishaka or Vaidya* (physician) - right from his basic qualities, advanced qualities, ideal role in healthcare service, his character and so many other things. Along with these aspects, this compendium also has elaborate description about various categories of physician - both ideal ones and the counterfeits. Along with health care system, as an essential tool for medical education, *Charaka Samhita* has also discussed the various aspects of an ideal teacher - his qualities, character and duties - which are essential for making a person a competent physician. All this ancient knowledge will help us to understand better about the ideal character of a physician as it should be in today's society.

Keywords: *Bhishaka, Vaidya, Chikitsa Chatuspada, Charaka Samhita,*

INTRODUCTION

According to all major compendiums of *Ayurveda*, healthcare system is stood upon the four fundamental pillars namely *Bhishaka* (physician), *Paricharaka* (attendant / para medical staff), *Dravya* (medicaments) and *Rogi* (patient), among which *Bhishaka* is considered to be the most important and principal among rest of the others ¹. Among the different fundamental textual resources of *Ayurveda*, *Charaka Samhita* is regarded as one of the most important resources along with the other two - *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridayam*. The original author of *Charaka Samhita* has been regarded as *Maharshi Agnivesha* who had written this treatise on the basis of the

teachings of his preceptor *Atreya Punarvasu* - so both the personalities thought to be contemporary and lived around 1000 B.C.². Later this treatise was edited by *Acharya Charaka* who lived around 300 - 200 B.C.³. The final shape has been given by *Acharya Drirhavalala* who redacted this compendium around 4th century C.E. and revised this treatise completely according to the need of time and introduced 41 chapters into it, which was part of the original compendium but got lost with the passage of time and was unavailable at the time of him ⁴. *Charaka Samhita* being the most ancient and important compendium of *Ayurveda* has given much emphasis on the various aspects



of a physician like his essential qualities, advanced qualities, duties and his role in health care system. *Chikitsa* is a term which has been used by *Acharya Charaka* to denote the therapeutic procedure as well as the entire healthcare system. Various information regarding different aspect of a physician like his character, basic qualities, optimum qualities, his role in health care system, categorization based on qualities and many other aspects have been elaborately described throughout the entire compendium of *Charaka Samhita* right from the very first chapter of *Sutrasthana*. *Acharya Charaka* has often referred *Chikitsa Chatuspada* (four pillars of health care system) as *Bhishakadi*⁵ - that is ‘*Bhishaka et al*’ or we can say ‘*Bhishaka* and others’, which indicates the supremacy of *Bhishaka* among the four pillars of health care system. While discussing the *Dashavidha Parikshya Bhava* (ten important topics for examination of patient) *Bhishaka* has been referred as *Karana* or the principal causative factor for achievement of maintenance of the equilibrium of *Dhatu*⁶ - by which maintaining the healthy state of body as well as alleviation of diseases can be achieved, both of which are considered to be the chief objectives of *Ayurveda*⁷. In relation to the various qualities and characters of a physician, *Acharya Charaka* has used different terminologies like *Bhishaka*⁸, *Vaidya*⁹, *Chikitsaka*¹⁰, *Parikshaka*¹¹ etc. referring a physician among which *Bhishaka* and *Vaidya* are most frequently used. Apart from describing fundamental qualities, *Acharya Charaka* has described various categories of physicians based on their qualities and functions. Throughout the entire compendium we can find mentioning of different types of physicians like *Prajnamani Bhishaka*, *Uttama Bhishaka*, *Chikitsa Karma Yogya Bhishaka*, *Bhishagvara*, *Pranabhisara Vaidya*, *Raj Vaidya*, *Chhadmachara Vaidya*, *Partirupaka Vaidya*, *Siddhasadhita Vaidya*, *Jivitabhisara*, *Mriyuanuchara Vaidya* etc. We will discuss about them in the later section of this study. Now a days, entire medical system is being divided into two broad sections - one is health care providing section which deals with physicians providing basic health services to the patients and other one is medical education which deals with educating and training persons seeking to become physicians. This very aspect can be seen in the vision of *Acharya Charaka* where he has clearly described the essential qualities needed for a physician to treat his patients as well as the more profound qualities needed by a physician to teach his students to make them a successful physician. He often refers the teacher physician as *Acharya* and described the various aspect of his character, qualities and how to scrutinise him

for his knowledge as well as expertise¹². For example, in 30th chapter of *Sutrasthana* of *Charaka Samhita*, *Acharya Charaka* has laid down eight different questions to access the knowledge and expertise over the subject of an *Acharya* - a physician who also happens to be a teacher¹³. Similarly, *Acharya Charaka* has also vividly described about the decision-making capacity of a physician while discussing about the treatment of *Sannipatika Udara*¹⁴. In the above context, this study was conducted to analyse the various basic and advanced qualities of an ideal physician as well as the different classifications of physicians based on their qualities and role in patient care as described by *Charaka Samhita*.

Analytical Study

The Essential Qualities of a Physician:

Acharya Charaka has given a clear description about the essential qualities of a physician in two places of *Charaka Samhita*, one in the 9th chapter of *Sutrasthana* and another in the 8th chapter of *Vimanasthana*. The four essential qualities of a physician are: 1. *Shrute Paryavadatwam* - excellence in medical knowledge 2. *Vahusho Drishtakarmata* - an extensive practical experience 3. *Dakshyam* - dexterity and 4. *Shoucha* - purity of mind and character¹⁵. While commenting on the above qualities of a physician the great commentator of *Charaka Samhita*, *Acharya Chakrapani Dutta* opined that, “excellence in knowledge can be had by attending on preceptors and studying scriptures. Purity in a physician helps the patient by dint of its spiritual force. Reputation as infallible in prescribing medicines is also one of the qualities of a physician which is included in the four qualities mentioned above”¹⁶. Further while referring *Bhishaka* or the physician as the *Karana* or causative factor for the achievement of the maintenance of the equilibrium of *Dhatu*, *Acharya Charaka* has emphasised more on some elaborate qualities of a physician like - 1. *Paryavadatshrutata* - knowledge of medical texts in their entirety 2. *Paridrishtakarmata* - practical experience 3. *Dakshyam* - skill or dexterity 4. *Shoucha* - purity 5. *Jitahastata* - infallibility of prescriptions 6. *Upakaranavatta* - all the requisite equipment 7. *Sarvaindriyaupapannata* - possession of normal sense faculties 8. *Prakritijnanata* - knowledge of various natural manifestations and 9. *Pratipattijnata* - presence of mind¹⁷. Among these nine qualities, four has been mentioned as essential qualities previously. Thus, we can assume that, in addition to the four essential qualities, these five more advanced qualities are also necessary for a physician to be able to play his role as the most important

factor for bringing the equilibrium state of *Dhatus* or to say to protect the healthy state of a healthy person and to alleviate the diseased state of a diseased person. While discussing these qualities, *Acharya Charaka* has cautiously said that, a physician who is desirous of bringing about the state of equilibrium of *Dhatus* (i.e. to deliver treatment correctly) should, first of all, examine himself with a view in respect to the above mentioned qualities to ascertaining if he is competent enough or otherwise to handle the case (patient) ¹⁸. Apart from these essential qualities, *Acharya Charaka* has also mentioned several other qualities which are also crucial to make oneself a true physician. These are - 1. *Vidya* - knowledge 2. *Vitarka* - critical and rational approach 3. *Vijnan* - insight into other allied sciences 4. *Smriti* - good memory 5. *Tatparata* - promptness in duty and 6. *Kriya* - perseverance ¹⁹. A physician equipped with all these qualities never misses his target i.e. cure of diseases ²⁰. Moreover, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned some more advanced qualities like - 1. *Vidya* - knowledge 2. *Mati* - pure intellect 3. *Karmadrishhti* - practical experience 4. *Abhyas* - continued practice 5. *Siddhi* - success in treatment and 6. *Ashraya* - dependence on an experienced preceptor ²¹. *Acharya Charaka* has stated that any individual if possessed with any one of the above qualities can be referred as *Vaidya* or physician and who possesses all of these qualities deserves to be called ‘an excellent physician’ who can give comforts to all living beings ²².

In *Charaka Samhita*, *Sutrasthana*, 28th chapter, *Acharya Charaka* has described nine different qualities of a physician as an examiner of patient and referred him as *Parikshaka*. These qualities are as follows: 1. *Shruta* (knowledge of subject gained from listening preceptors) 2. *Buddhi* (intellect to differentiate real from unreal) 3. *Smriti* (excellent memory) 4. *Darkshyam* (dexterity) 5. *Dhriti* (analytical power) 6. *Hita Nishevana* (observance of wholesome regimen) 7. *Vaka Shuddhi* (correctness of speech) 8. *Shama* (tranquillity of mind) and 9. *Dharyam* (patience) ²³. A physician possessed with these qualities can examine a patient properly without any error and lay down the line of treatment. The similar properties are also essential for a physician who would like to act as an ideal teacher for his students and can examine his students for their proficiency in the subject.

Supremacy of Physician by virtue of His Qualities:

Although the four limbs of healthcare system in all together equipped with all the sixteen essential qualities are

responsible for success in treatment, yet the physician is considered as the most important and superior factor among rest of the others by all the scholars of *Ayurveda*. According to *Acharya Charaka*, a physician occupies the most important position among *Chikitsa Chatushpada* by virtue of his following qualities: 1. *Vijnata* - the physician is considered to be the most knowledgeable being among other factors 2. *Shasita* - the physician is considered having the capability to control other factors and 3. *Yokta* - the physician has the rear ability to apply the rational thought in preparation of prescription and deciding the course of treatment ²⁴. *Acharya Charaka* further justifies his view about the supremacy of physician by giving two different examples: 1. “as the vessel, fuel and fire are the helping factors for the cook in the process of cooking and for the victory, a conqueror needs favourable topographical position, army and weapons; similarly in the success of treatment the patient, attendant and the medicament are helpers only to the physician” ²⁵ and 2. “as the clod of earth, the wheel, the thread etc. are of no use in the making of a pitcher without the help of the potter, so without the physician, other three factors (patient, attendant and the medicaments) don’t serve the purpose” ²⁶. *Acharya Chakrapani* while commenting on the supremacy of physician among the four limbs of treatment opined that, “it is only the physician who is capable of bringing the other three factors, viz. the patient, the attendant and the medicament to right usage. Even if, these three factors are deficient in certain qualities, the physician can by virtue of his imagination, knowledge and concentration render them useful. The three factors (even if otherwise useful) may turn out to be completely useless in the absence of a well-qualified physician” ²⁷. Stressing upon the importance of having the proper qualities of a physician, *Acharya Charaka* further prudently said - “as the remaining three limbs / factors of treatment depend upon the quality of the physician, a physician should always try to enrich his own qualities” ²⁸.

Qualities of a Physician as Teacher:

While discussing the various aspect of learning medical science, *Acharya Charaka* has described various essential qualities to be examined for selection of a suitable preceptor. A physician who wants to establish himself as an ideal teacher or preceptor must possess these qualities as these are essential qualities which help to infuse the medical knowledge to an ideal disciple as the seasonal cloud helps bring good crop in a fertile land ²⁹. These qualities as described in *Charaka Samhita* are as follows -

1. *Paryavadatshrutam* - an ideal teacher is he who is well grounded in scriptures 2. *Paridrishtakarmanam* - he must have equipped with practical knowledge 3. *Dakshyam* - skilful 4. *Dakshinam* - whose prescriptions are infallible 5. *Shuchi* - has purity of mind and character 6. *Jitahastamupakaranavantam* - who possess all the necessary equipment for treatment and who is deft in practical experiences 7. *Sarvaidriyaupapannam* - who is not deficient in respect of any of the sense organs 8. *Prakritijna* - who is acquainted with human nature 9. *Pratipattijnam* - who possess special insight into the sciences 10. *Anupaskritavidya* -whose knowledge is not overshadowed by the knowledge of other scriptures 11. *Anahamkritam, Anasuyaka, Akopanam* - who is free from vanity, envy and anger 12. *Kleshakshama* - who is hard working 13. *Shishyavatsalam* - who is affectionate towards his disciples and 14. *Adhyapakam Jnapanasamartha* -who is capable of expressing his views with clarity ³⁰. If we compare between the qualities of an ideal physician and the qualities of an ideal teacher entitled to teach medical sciences, we will find that the essential qualities for an ideal physician are included in the essential qualities of an ideal teacher. With addition to the primary qualities of a physician there are much higher qualities in terms of knowledge, character, prophesy and attitude towards students should be present in an ideal teacher. This clearly indicates towards the fact that, for becoming an ideal teacher who is entitled to teach medical sciences for students one should become an ideal physician first.

The optimum qualities one can achieve as a teacher has been described under the qualities of *Aapta* in *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana*, 11th chapter. *Aapta* are the highest class of people who are the epitome of pure and unbiased knowledge. They are the ultimate authority of any subject. They always guide the world towards the right path of knowledge. Under the qualities of *Aapta*, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned - 1. *Rajastamobhyam Nirmukta* - those persons are absolutely free from the predominance of *Rajas* and *Tamas* by virtue of ‘*Tapojanana*’ - power of penance and knowledge 2. *Yesham Trikalamalam Jnanamavyahatm Sada* - those persons are always in possession of an uninterrupted knowledge pertaining to past, present and futures ³¹. *Acharya Charaka* has further referred *Aapta* as *Shishhta* and *Vibuddha* ³². The great commentator *Acharya Chakrapani Dutta* has given the clear explanation of these three terms. According to him “elimination of defects arising from the predominance of *Raja* and *Tamas* is known as *Aapati*. Those in possession

of *Aapati* are known as *Aapta*. One who directs the whole world as to the performance of virtuous acts and abstinence from sinful ones is known as *Shishhta*. One who has well understood what is to be understood is known as *Vibuddha*” ³³. From this explanation it should be clearly understood that a physician when reaches the pinnacle of pure and unbiased knowledge by virtue of his rigorous practice and transforms his whole character to an enlightened and gentle one will be called *Aapta* and regarded as the highest class of teacher.

Classification of Physician based on Qualities:

Acharya Charaka has described various category of physicians based on their qualities and role in patient care - both good and bad throughout the entire compendium of *Charaka Samhita*, especially in *Sutrasthana* and *Vimanasthana*. As we know that *Guna* or quality determines the specific *Karma* or functions, so a physician’s role in healthcare system is also dependent on his specific qualities. In *Ayurveda*, *Karma* or functions often referred as *Guna* or quality. So, the categories of physicians which are based on their functions are actually based on their qualities. In the following section the authors will try to through light on such categories:

- ***Pranabhisara Bhishaka and Rogabhisara Bhishaka*** : In 29th chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has grossly classified all the physicians into two broad category - one is called *Pranabhisara Bhishaka* (the physicians who are the saviours of life) and the other one is called *Rogabhisara Bhishaka* (the physicians who act as aggravator of diseases and lead to death of patients) ³⁴. *Acharya Charaka* has described detailed qualities of them as below:
 - **Qualities of *Pranabhisara Bhishaka***: *Acharya Charaka* has described the qualities of this category of physicians in two different places - A. According to *Sutrasthana* 29th chapter the person who possess the knowledge of 1. *Pranayatana* (ten important sit of Prana or life) 2. *Indriyani* (sensory organs) 3. *Vijanana* (technical knowledge of Ayurveda) 4. *Chetana* (soul) and 5. *Amaya Hetu* (causative factors of diseases) should be referred as *Pranabhisara Bhishaka* ³⁵. B. According to *Sutrasthana* 9th chapter the physician who is *Pravritta* (duly engaged) in following four objects like 1. *Shashtra* (study of the scriptures) 2. *Sastrartha Vijnanane* (mastering the actual implication of knowledge) 3. *Karma* (the right application of therapy) and 4. *Darshana* (practical experience by observing others) should be referred as *Pranabhisara Bhishaka* ³⁶.

- **Qualities of Rogabhisara Bhishaka:** A physician who is responsible for aggravation of diseases and thus leads to the patient to death is associated with the following qualities: 1. *Shruta Vahishkrita* (devoid of textual knowledge) 2. *Drishta Vahishkrita* (devoid of practical experience) 3. *Kriyakala Vahishkrita* (devoid of knowledge about the time of administering the therapy) 4. *Matrajnana Vahishkrita* (devoid of knowledge of dosage). Such physicians are referred as ‘*Mrityu Anuchara Vaidya*’ i.e. messenger of death³⁷. In the 29th chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has described detailed features of character of both the categories of physician for proper identification of them³⁸. But to keep this study compact those features are not discussed here.
- **Chhadmachara Vaidya, Siddhasadhita Vaidya & Vaidyagunayukta Vaidya:** In 11th chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has described three types of physicians with their specific qualities and characteristics as follows:
 - **Quality of Chhadmachara Vaidya:** Those who come to be known as physicians simply by virtue of the exhibition of the physician’s box containing certain drugs, medical books, by bluffing and posing as physician belong to this category. They are also referred as *Pratirupaka Vaidya* i.e. counterfeit physicians³⁹.
 - **Quality of Siddhasadhita Vaidya:** Those who attribute their association to persons accomplished in wealth, fame and knowledge are come to be known as physicians even though they are not so. Persons belong to this category are to be regarded as feigned physicians⁴⁰.
 - **Quality of Vaidyagunayukta Vaidya:** Those who are accomplished in the *Prayoga* (administration of therapies), *Jnana* (knowledge of texts) and *Vijnana* (knowledge of therapeutics) are endowed with *Siddhisiddha* (infallible success) and can bring out *Sukha* (happiness) to the patients come to this category. They are the genuine physicians. They are often referred as *Jivitabhisara*. They are associated with all the essential and higher qualities of a physician⁴¹.
- **Prajnamani Bhishaka:** In the first chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has mentioned a type of physicians who pretend to be a wise physician, without knowing the principles governing its applicability, prescribe a medicine for the patient who is distressed, lying on bed and have faith on the physician. This type of mischievous physician is a sinner, devoid of virtuous act, the messenger of death, even talking to him will lead a man to hell⁴².
- **Uttama Bhishaka:** In the first chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has described the qualities of the best physician. One who knows the principles governing their correct application in consonance with the place, time and individual variation, should be regarded as the *Uttama Bhishaka* or best physician⁴³.
- **Chikitsa Karma Yogya Bhishaka:** In the second chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that, only the physician endowed with *Smriti* (memory), having adequate knowledge of *Hetu* (causes of diseases and healthy state) and principles of propriety, self-restrained and having presence of mind is entitled to practice medicine though the combination of various drugs⁴⁴.
- **Bhishakavara:** The word ‘*Vara*’ means best, so the term refers to best physician. In the fourth chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has mentioned the criteria of a best physician in this way- “the one who is acquainted with the internal use as well as external application and prescription by combining of all these drugs (500 *Kashayas* as described in that chapter), alone is the best physician”⁴⁵.
- **Raj Vaidya:** The physician who is eligible to be appointed as the chief court physician of the king has been referred as *Raj Vaidya*. A physician who would be appointed as the *Raj Vaidya* should have all the essential qualities of a physician along with some specific higher qualities as described by *Acharya Charaka* in two different places. A royal physician should be the best in the business as he would be the chief consultant of the king. So, the features and qualities described under the *Raj Vaidya* or royal physician should be regarded as essential qualities to be possessed by a physician who would be regarded as the best in the practice. In the 9th chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that, the physician who possesses authentic knowledge about four essential aspects of a disease like - *Hetu* (causes of disease), *Linga* (clinical manifestation of disease), *Prashamana* (alleviation of disease) and *Apunrabhava* (prevention of disease) should be appointed as *Raj Vaidya* or royal physician of the king⁴⁶. Again, in the 6th chapter of *Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana, Acharya Charaka* has described the essential qualities of a royal physician from a different perspective as - “a physician who is *Sarva Roga Viseshajna* (expert in knowledge of all the diseases), *Sarva*

Karya Viseshavit (expert in all the therapeutic procedures) and *Sarva Bhashaja Tatwajna* (expert in knowledge of all the drugs) should be entitled to be appointed as royal physician" 47.

Thus, in different places of *Charaka Samhita*, the qualities of different categories of physicians have been discussed elaborately. Apart from the above example, there are many sporadic instances of description regarding the various aspect of an ideal physician and an ideal preceptor of physicians. All these different classifications of physicians have been summarized in a flow chart as depicted in figure 1.

DISCUSSION

Out of the four limbs, physician is the most important limb of healthcare system. Right from the diagnosis of diseases up to the success of a therapeutic procedure as well as the application of medicaments depends on the proficiency of physician. Many other classes of people may have more knowledge regarding the identification of drugs but a physician always remains superior to them because of his extensive knowledge about the properties and usage of those drugs. An ideal physician is always blessed with his rare capability of *Yukti* (reasoning) by which he becomes able to interpret the manifestation of a disease, the application of various drugs and preventive methods of diseases. Keeping in mind the most important role one physician has to play in the healthcare system or *Chikitsa Karma*, *Acharya Charaka* has elaborately mentioned the various qualities which are essential to establish a physician as a true saviour of life. Side by side, he has also described various characteristics along with identifying features of different class of spurious persons who pretend to be a physician. Along with that, he has also described the various advanced qualities and sophisticated aspects of character of a physician who has to play the role of preceptor for his disciples. Thus, by studying *Charaka Samhita* we can come across the various different aspects of a physician - his qualities, his role a saviour of life, his importance in healthcare system, his role as an ideal teacher along with the characteristics of his counterfeits. All this ancient knowledge will help us to understand better about the ideal character of a physician as it should be in today's society.

CONCLUSION

Many categories of good physicians are mentioned subtly to fulfil the motto of Ayurveda, such as Vaidya Genuine physician, *Praanaachaarya*- possessing spiritual attitude,

Praanaabhisaravaidya- ability to handle critical conditions, *Raja vaidya*- expert in preventing poisonous diseases etc. All of the attributes described in *Charak Samhita* are desirable not only for Ayurvedic physicians but for all physicians regardless of pathy, but knowledge of the classics, critical approach, perceptive comprehension, acute memory, perseverance, and practical knowledge should be required in all physicians.

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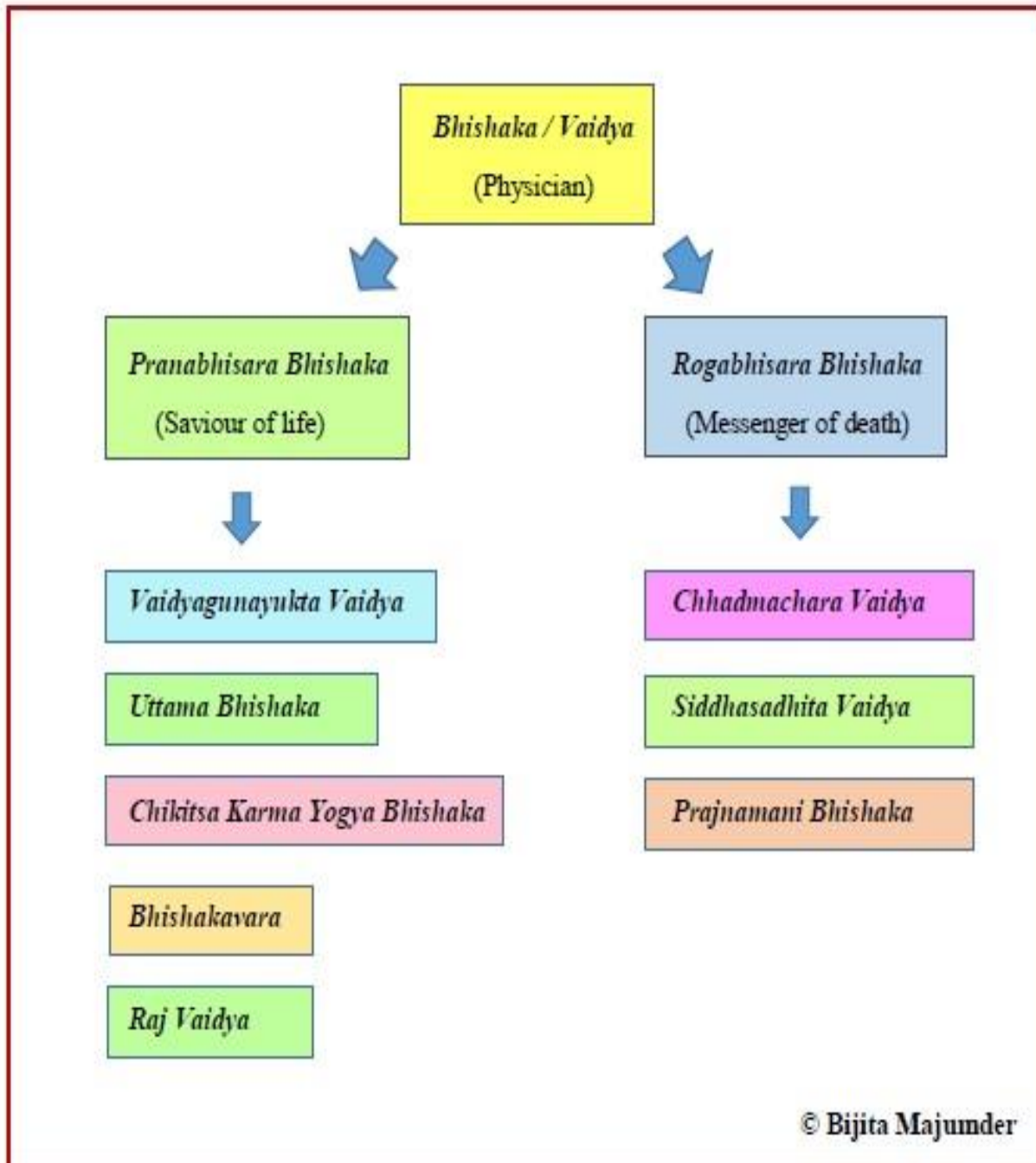


Figure 1: Classification of Physician as described in *Charaka Samhita*