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**TOBACCO IN ANCIENT INDIAN  
LITERATURE**

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## TOBACCO IN ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE \*

**A. R. Panchamukhi**

India, with hoary antiquity, has a rich heritage of philosophy, science, social thought, art, architecture and other fields. The ancient seers of the country had given thought to the problems that the society faces with the same seriousness as the issues relating to the unknown. There is rich literature on various aspects of human life both in the most ancient language of Sanskrit and also in the written and oral literature in several regional languages of the country. We come across references to and discussions of various social issues like crime, addiction, pollution, etc. in this vast literature. The objective of the present paper is to outline briefly the nature of the thinking on one of the social issues like the tobacco consumption, which is termed both as a social and an individual problem, as perceived by the thinkers of the past, who expressed their views in the language of Sanskrit. While this paper deals

with the views expressed in Sanskrit, attempts are made to compile views on tobacco expressed in other regional languages also. The implicit purpose of these attempts is not only to unearth the forgotten literature of the past, but also to see if ancient thinking can offer some guidelines for tackling the current day social problem and menace of addiction to the materials of health hazard, like smoking, chewing, snuffing, etc of tobacco and tobacco products.

### TOBACCO IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE

In Sanskrit Literature, tobacco is known by the names tamakhu (क०व०ह०), tamrakuttah (क०व०प०३०#), tamrapatrika (क०व०प०३०), dhumapatakam (अ०र०३०) etc. Rajavyavahara-kosa (३००, HÆ-ÜÈV/41³VT²) of Raghunatha Pandit refers to the various names of tobacco in Sanskrit

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literature ( A l ° Æ ì Ô L w · O > w · > O > @ K ° V h · A l { ° – r Ô í ³ ° ß ) . Tobacco is a kind of plant, the powder of dried leaves of which are being used for smoking, chewing etc. This plant is said to contain an intoxicating constituent like nicotine which is injurious to health.

Very few references about tobacco are found in Sanskrit literature. This may be due to our ignorance about the words by which the tobacco might have been referred to in the ancient Indian literature. From the available references about tobacco in Sanskrit and other Indian literature of regional languages, it may be inferred that tobacco was familiar in India from quite an early period, even before 17th century. However, some historians believe that this plant was introduced into India in about the beginning of the 17th century and is considered as a migrated plant from America.

As stated above, tobacco is an intoxicative plant which is hinted in the verse  
 i · È L [ · Ç È K A S H L ° í ³ È / K Ô A K T \$  
 K V M · G H A L C A V M L j ³ A È í ³ ° ß \$ \$  
 22 \$ \$ – i È M T W 4 E C a µ . 39. Here, the

word Suradikam may include tobacco also.

Apastambadharamsutra prohibits certain articles from selling- ° ä · Ô V A S ³ 4 j V A S ³ 4 W A S W A S L C { w ù L Ü A L Í [ Ô V Ô Í ³ K V M P E Í ³ Ü T È r [ ° ß C C I A M A S — \$ \$ 12 \$ \$ – r È k 1 – r ] > [ 7 .

Here the word “Kinvam” is interpreted as j · ³ 4 / r P Í U ³ È K > H A L i.e. an intoxicant. This may refer to tobacco also.

A verse from an unknown source narrates threefold uses of tobacco viz. smoking, chewing and inhaling as sternutatory.

K V h · # Ç È A # E V Y # í ³ [ A < W E C A D V \$  
 ä ³ K O B A Q V A T O Ó Q V A T O S V W A E a \$ \$  
 – j X K M E V E ³ V M #

It is very amusing to note here that in Kaliyuga the tobacco is regarded as a holy river Ganga and the use of tobacco is of three types - one used in Hukka (smoking pipes), other as Thukka (as a chewable food along with pan-supari) and the third one as sternutatory.

In Subhasitaratnabhandagara



tobacco leaves is neither tasty, nor is it a medicine, neither fragrant nor attractive, people have become its victims. How can one explain why people go on consuming this substance of no attractive qualities except in terms of the weakness of getting addicted ?.

j·rG{rē}jīkKā·jA·rhwjūKT  
 Èā.Vūāā|·>Kā·j{LAĀVĪS \$  
 jōūj·AĀVĀL<ĪEKĀÈÛGVI#  
 j°Kāh·ÈĀKJHKL<ĪEKŪĀAVT  
 ³ĀÈKV \$\$5 \$\$

j·rG{rē}jīkKā = j·rG{āwō}jīkKā  
 (ÈÛG·#)  
 = j·p>rG{āāwū,ō|Ā  
 jērē}jīkKā (Kāh·#)  
 Èā.Vūāā|·># = Èā.V#Èā.īV#  
 īEV;Gō#KĀL,īĪL/ĀL  
 K;×ĀSōā|·># ājōð(#  
 (ÈÛG·#)  
 = Èā.V#ōK#KĀVĀT  
 j°ō(# (Kāh·#)  
 j{LAĀVĪS = j{LĀP>ŪK·VĪVÈ,KĀ  
 jĀĀLjĒA<ĪEKĪÛG·# \$  
 = j{#hē}j{#KĀ jĀĀL  
 jōVĪS °TĀL<ĪEK (Kāh·#)\$  
 j·AĀVĀL = j·AĀVĪUKĀĀĀ<V,ĀL  
 <ĪEKj# (ÈÛG·#) \$

= j·AĀV  
 ©lGT{ā jèĀÛ Ā×Ā  
 <<°GL  
 <ĪEK (K°Vh·#) \$  
 ¶@íU³ ŌG# r|KāVĀV#  
 ×Kā° [°ÈriKĪS  
 īMĪ³|ĀĀG\$  
 rĪí³Ā<ĪrĪPTEĪ³ĒrĪHKTĀĀV  
 KĀĪŪŌK \$ \$  
 KĀVĪV/KĀh·#  
 j{LAĀVĪS>°TĀĀS\$  
 ×·YŪVĀŪV ÈÈ[YŪVĀĀ²°ĪK°ōV  
 jHKLĪŌŪGĀ# \$\$6 \$\$

Here tobacco is equated with favours from Vishnu,- the God of Gods.

When tobacco is chewed along with betel leaves, betel nuts and limestone, the teeth become strong and the lips become reddish.

Sri Krsna sucked Putana's breasts, which were full of Kalakuta poison. While sucking a drop fell down on the ground from the mouth of Krsna which was called as tamakhu (tobacco). So devotees of Visnu always praise, salute and use tobacco with great honour alongwith their friends cosnidering it as leavings of offerings to God.

(à;ÄÇ>ý>#) .

<AV#i³xÜKvhw{eèi·KIÜE/A#  
 ñÜW/RS\$  
 í³xÆ YÜL öïO>AV¾@ ã  
 Èè KÜ ÈÜÈÖKL  
 qd³ [PAÜ¾A# \$\$  
 OK·ÜIA/4ÈAÔÈÈAÈJÀOLIP;GV  
 AèKv#S\$  
 ñíDíK¾ i[VôEiãh[.wEK¾I  
 ¾jãÖWV&eº \$\$7\$\$

This verse is in the form of a dialogue between a person and tobacco. Tobacco introduces itself as an army-chief of the king Kali and works for the unity of all as per the order of his king.

The use of dried powder of the tobacco leaves for smoking and chewing is mentioned clearly in the above mentioned seven verses of Subhasita Ratnabhandagara. There is no clear mention about the other use of it as snuff.

There is another work known as Yogaratnakara in which the characteristic, use and medicinal properties of tobacco are mentioned. Yogaratnakara is a medical compendium composed between 1625-1750

A.D. and published by Anandasrama, Pune in 1900 A.D. The verses about tobacco from this compendium are-

Al°VPÆVT Al°ÜU°û©  
 iUèÝrÔû© Alj¾# \$  
 Kvhw{Ç> [³VAI¾ÔE³V¾# \$\$1\$\$

ièièvTièè #jltèçk.ôE[³# \$  
 ôE¾V>[ÜVçÖI KÆE³DKI¾S \$\$2\$\$

K¾ÔK·KÇVÔLi³aüE¾L¾#S\$  
 Üj¾V¾OÜI³V¾E¾L¾V¾S \$3\$

ÜKæ·M¾i¾Li¾KvK¾èè¾S\$  
 ÖW¾EÖE¾E¾I¾O¾S¾V¾E¾S \$4\$

èèè¾I¾Ü¾A¾OL¾K¾S\$  
 è¾V¾M¾O¾Ü¾Ç¾·I¾¾K¾V¾S \$5\$

K¾A¾A¾K¾È¾E¾O¾E¾·I¾¾K¾S\$  
 Ö¾V¾I¾E¾O¾K¾G¾O¾K¾È¾O¾ \$6\$

Ü¾A¾E¾Ü¾Ü¾Ü¾V¾È¾E¾¾S\$  
 ¾O¾Ü¾¾A¾L¾I¾V¾E¾E¾¾K¾ \$7\$  
 -AV¾A¾¾¾

“Tobacco is also known as a smoke-plant. It has big leaves with grayish colour. Flowers and fruits grow in bunch. Each fruit has a number of seeds in it and

these seeds are small and long in size.”

“The powder of tobacco-leaves is warm and pungent in taste; it removes phlegm wind, cough, stomach-wind, etc. It helps in smooth motion, removes tooth ache, kills germs in the teeth and banishes itching on the skin. Thus, some of the current beliefs about the medicinal qualities of tobacco, seem to have been the heritage of this old thinking of the people.”

“Despite the above few good qualities, the tobacco affects health adversely. The use of tobacco develops drunkenness, bile and giddiness. Sometimes, vomiting may also be the result of its consumption. Constant use of tobacco diminishes the strength of eye-sight and makes semen virile and more burning.”

“Tobacco is used against scorpion bites and the poison can be driven out through inducing vomiting in the victim, which is termed as Vamana method. Similarly, the wind (ÜK) phlegm (Û[TÖ°) inside the body can be controlled by ‘Rechana’ inhaling of tobacco powder.”

## SMOKING, CHEWING AND INHALING IN AYURVEDA

In many works of Ayurveda viz. **Caraka Samhita, Susruta and Astangahrdaya**, we find a detailed description about smoking and chewing of a powder and inhaling a liquid both prepared from the mixture of some medicinal plants. The three methods like smoking, chewing and inhaling have been in practice in India since good olden days as measures to maintain good health. The names of medicinal plants and their quantity in preparing either powder or liquid are given in detail in these works of Ayurveda. Apart from this, the time of use, method of use, eligible and ineligible persons, the effect of use etc. are also mentioned in these works. The tobacco-users will be benefited if three things as mentioned in the works of Ayurveda are known to them. Therefore, relevant information from some Ayurvedic works are reproduced below-

### 1. Inhaling Smoke of special types

Ôdÿ(133ÜKVNÖÜVAG, ì9T \$  
 äC>TÖA©, VÄLÈT-19Lj&YÜAS

\$\$ - μύ>VLwdöÆ j1ô×òvãT μL  
21

A discerning man should smoke in order to drive out the diseases from his body generated due to the excess phlegm and wind.

Smoking is of five types they are 1. Prayogik 2. Snehik 3. Vairecanik 4. Kasaghna and 5. Vamaniya. This classification of smoking into five types is made on the basis of inhaling the smoke.

**Medicinal plants used in preparing smoke**

ÈTÇÍVÈPWLÇUÈÁVÍP²4á#S\$  
PÈP4ÇÈLÍÇLÍMÍP²4Í³9S\$  
QVÁÍ³A.ÁÍ³VJè\*wgwíwç²í³#S\$  
ìWVAVDÜLÍÁÜÜÖ [YVAVÍÇ#².×#S\$  
ÜALj, P4L°·KLÁIALÍ³°[VYÍ[T \$  
q[Üj>Í³², í³D°².í³iè(°òÈ© \$\$  
Èy>ÈI·HÄ>HÇ³VGLÜÈKÁJÈÄV3S\$  
μwÖ>JÈKLI.³AVÖXw [VLE³S \$-  
Ç4³ jL. j1ôPòã μ. 5

Harenuka, Priyangu, Prithwika, Kesava Nakha, Hribera, Candana, Patra, Usira Padmaka, Dhyamaka, Madaka,

Mamsi, Guggula, Agura, Sarikara, Nyagrodha, Udumbara, Aswattha, Plaksa, Lodhratwacha, Vanya, Sarjarasa, Musta, Saileya, Kamala, Utpala, Srivestaka, Sallaki, Suka, and Barha.

Equivalent names of these plants in english or regional languages should be known, so that the exact plants, if available even now, can be traced out and with the mixture of these plants, the powder or solution prepared for generating smoke will be more effective on use.

**Effects of proper Smoking**

ÀTALVHAWW, ÈjãÈ>XÜP3A# \$  
ÇPÍ³VÈ ÇPÍ. #j·WÈAÜ²VÈ# \$\$15 \$\$  
-j·q·KÈÈÍ³YjVòãT μQÆ - 40  
wVÁLE²4#²[LÇJAVÜKÍVÁ \$  
ÍÇVÈ²[LÍ³VJÜÈ²VÜVÍTWfÈ#  
\$\$24 \$\$  
ÖKÁI [PÁVJÜ#JVKVÍPÇÈÖVY.# \$  
rÈKÍV[GAWAÇÖK²[LAVÇI³# \$\$  
È·VAVÈHÍÜ#HÜ²#VÖ·K·HÍ \$  
Û[ÇPÍ³VÍÜÜW [LÖÈÈÈÍV \$\$  
HÈVÁLE·ÁÜÇÍ³VÁLÍKÁLÖV \$  
ÜK·ÇÈKLVÖI·T·VÍÈVÈKÈ·K \$



Al °rVãVKß rP²VÓÆLÈK  
 í [L <ÜÈK ©VÈAí³ °ß \$  
 È²/ATÈÍ³V\VAÈÈÈAGL×Ü/4#O \$\$  
 äcüK³aVAVATIEJAM&Edj,ÔK# \$  
 AllÜWÍ³V&AFAA#×E#È²/ATK#  
 \$\$ 29 \$\$

-@4³ j1Ô. µ. 5

The above said quotations from Susruta and Charak Samhita of Ayurvedic Science state that heaviness in the head, headache, ear-ache, eyepain, cough, toothache, nose sore, sore throat, fall of head hair etc. can be stopped by proper smoking of the smoke prepared from medicinal plants. Man becomes pleasant with the proper use of smoke prepared from medicinal plants.

**Bad effects of improper smoking and odd time smoking**

ÌÈA°VIML°ÍÔÛ³WÈÍÓ È²/ATP°ß\$  
 µ³V\TIOÈK&A#í·³AVÍÓ>ÜAS \$\$  
 -@4³ j1Ô÷ãµL 5.

³WÈÍÓVÈA°VIML°ÍÔÛ³WÈÍÓÈ²/ATP°ß\$  
 A°VÍ³V\TIOÈK&A#í·³AVÍÓ>ÜAS \$\$  
 -µ>VÈÈE j1Ô÷ãµL 21.

If smoking is done in excess and in odd times it may cause many complications like deafness, dumbness, hemorrhage etc. and it may result into unconsciousness.

ÌÈA°VIML°ÍÔÛ³WÈÍÓÈ²/ATP°ß\$  
 µ³V\TIOÈK&A#í·³AVÍÓ>ÜAS \$\$  
 -@4³ j1Ô÷ã µ5

Inhaling the smoke through the mouth and letting it out through the nose affects eyes.

From the above discussion it is clear that one must be aware of the adverse effects of improper smoking. When the smoke prepared even from medicinal plants, if not used properly, creates many complications, then what can be said about the use of smoke of tobacco which contains toxic constituents like nicotine.

**Sternutatory**

Sternutatory is a medicine or a powder or a solution prepared from medicinal plants. There are five types of sternutatory.

ÌÈA°VIML°ÍÔÛ³WÈÍÓÈ²/ATP°ß\$

āVÈj í³VÖÆVL ö@ÆK áÈK  
 ā×Æ°ß \$ KÖß ÈâÈÜAL -  
 È²¼VTEÛ¼T©ãL ×ãTèãL ©  
 \$ KÖßÈâÈÜA°Èr r•AV \$  
 KMòV - ā×ÆL  
 È²¼VTÈÛ¼VT©ãL  
 rPÈK°²VT { &Ûr@O>#  
 rPA°ãL © \$ KT¥• ā×ÆL  
 rPAVãL, È²¼VTEÛ¼VT©ãL  
 © ā×ÆÈÛí³ñr#, rPÈK°²{#,  
 È²¼VTEÛ¼VT©ãLÈÛí³ñrVT&Ûr@O>#  
 rPA°ãL © KKV T ā×Æ²éö#  
 r•AV ÈãÆÈ°K# \$\$ 21 \$\$  
 - j•q•K, ÈÖÈÍ³ÝjV×òvã µL -  
 40

**Benefits of sternutatory**

āVÈj í³VÖÆVL ö@ÆK áÈK  
 ā×Æ°ß \$ KÖß ÈâÈÜAL -  
 È²¼VTEÛ¼T©ãL ×ãTèãL ©  
 \$ KÖßÈâÈÜA°Èr r•AV \$  
 KMòV - ā×ÆL  
 È²¼VTÈÛ¼VT©ãL  
 rPÈK°²VT { &Ûr@O>#  
 rPA°ãL © \$ KT¥• ā×ÆL  
 rPAVãL, È²¼VTEÛ¼VT©ãL  
 © ā×ÆÈÛí³ñr#, rPÈK°²{#,  
 È²¼VTEÛ¼VT©ãLÈÛí³ñrVT&Ûr@O>#  
 rPA°ãL © KKV T ā×Æ²éö#  
 r•AV ÈãÆÈ°K# \$\$ 21 \$\$  
 - j•q•K, ÈÖÈÍ³ÝjV×òvã µL -  
 40

Proper use of sternutatory powder,  
 strengthens the eyesight, nose and ears will  
 never be affected. The hairs never become  
 white or gray but remain black and head hairs  
 never fall down even in old age and they  
 grow well.

**Bad Effects**

jÈKÙÈKÙGALWAA°rjÈß\$  
 jÈKÙÈKÙGALWAA°rjÈß\$  
 jÈKÙÈKÙGALWAA°rjÈß\$  
 jÈKÙÈKÙGALWAA°rjÈß\$  
 jÈKÙÈKÙGALWAA°rjÈß\$  
 -@í³#²@¼òã, 1

Here, the use of sternutatory powder  
 with either strong or mild smell is said to be  
 affecting the nose. The sternutatory powder  
 prepared from tobacco is very strong and  
 contains toxic elements. Hence it may affect  
 the nose and other mouth organs if not used  
 properly.

**Tobacco in Smritis**

We referred to few smritis in order  
 to find out whether any mention is made of  
 about tobacco in them. Most of the smritis  
 do not contain the references about tobacco  
 by the names that are familiar today. The  
 names by which the tobacco might have been  
 referred to in the smritis may not be familiar  
 today. Such ignorance about tobacco has  
 made it difficult for the researchers to  
 ascertain whether the tobacco was a familiar  
 plant in Ancient India or was a migrated plant  
 in 17th century as some modern historians

say.

To my surprise I traced out a quotation on tobacco while referring to one smriti of a sage called Lougaksi. While explaining the prohibited foods during manes ceremony the Lougaksi smriti says as given below:-

í·³² GAÄÜXÜGÍ³VOÈ,Í³GAÄÜP# \$  
**KVH·³AÍ³ÜVÄÜ²VÜL,ÄÜP³ \$**  
 Í³ÜGÄ²WÈP²VGA²VÈP²T \$\$  
 @VÈ³VÈP²GA²VÈP²VÜP³ \$  
 ä²³LÄÜK²VÈK²VÈP²VÜP³ \$

urPVÆYÆ°ÜV`ävTEK KxÆ  
 rPV²ãK# r·ã# \$  
 VÈKELLMÜ[KTIIV;GT²ÄB \$\$  
 KÈSÜP²A²ÈEJA²ÄÄALKT²ÄÜ\$  
 Ü²ÄÄ²#ÈÈ²·²-VIÜV#r·WÈL³# \$\$  
 í·³VÄÜ>²PÖGLÈÜV²Z²P²C\$  
 ²WÄV²P²V;G²·WÄV²C²·-VT²ÜÈK  
 ÄÄÄV \$\$  
 - [VÄVÈ²²ÜÈK,WEÄÄÄV,ÄÄÄ²³E

The rice baked on a fire of tobacco sticks is prohibited for manes-ceremony. The word **tamrakuttakavahnou**-means in the fire of tobacco-sticks (Taamra-Kuttaka=tobacco). The meaning of Kusagni supports this interpretation of tamrakuttakagni. In the said smriti the reasons for such prohibition are not mentioned.

With this reference of Laugaksi smriti my presumption of tobacco being home plant is reinforced since the author Laugaksi of this smriti might have lived before 7th century A.D. [I have come to this conclusion regarding period of the author - Lougakshi, on the statement of Sri N. Anantranga chari the author of Sahitya Bharati who stated that the smritis in verse-form were written upto 7th century]. Then onwards collection of different smritis was in practice. Lougaksi smriti is in verse-forms. Hence the tobacco must have been known to ancient Indians of 7th cent. A.D. at least though not earlier.

### Conclusion

**The essence of the various quotations stated above and the discussion may be listed as follows -**

1. Tobacco was known in Ancient India much earlier than 17th century A.D.
2. Smoke inhaling acts as a medicine if properly used.
3. Improper use, use at odd times or continuous use of tobacco creates