

CONTRIBUTION OF KERALA TO AYURVEDIC LITERATURE - A COMPARATIVE CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Kerala has a glorious tradition of health care system dating back to several centuries. The traditional medical knowledge, gained from years of critical observations and clinical experiences, has been documented by the great Physicians. Kerala has made significant contribution to Ayurvedic literature. Medical literature of Kerala consists of commentaries on classical text books, books on specialized disciplines of Ayurveda, compendium of formulations and treatment methods and practices prevalent in traditional *Vaidya* families. Critical analysis of these literature representing regional traditions and its comparison with the text books of classical tradition is essential to explore the true worth of these text books.

Keywords: Medical literature, Kerala Ayurveda, Regional tradition

INTRODUCTION

India has a rich tradition of intellectual inquiry and a textual heritage that goes back to several hundreds of years¹. This has been reflected in medical science and its literature too. The history of Ayurveda reveals the evolution of a vibrant and dynamic medical tradition with compendia, medical lexicons, pharmacopoeia, handbooks and manuals of treatment.

The most remarkable fact about Indian medical tradition is that it prevails at two different group levels, namely the classical tradition and the regional tradition². The vast amount of medical knowledge that has come down to modern times is the result of long evolution through trial and error and exchange of know-how between diverse communities and regions. The classical tradition has been modified according to the

environmental and cultural background of the people dwelling in different regions of the country. So it can be said that any enquiry into the regional variations in the learning, understanding, practice and propagation of Ayurveda will surely throw light to the development of these dual traditions. The literature of classical health traditions are highly organized, classified and codified with a theoretical and conceptual foundation, having philosophical and scientific backgrounds. They were written in Sanskrit language. Charaka samhitha, Susruta samhitha, Astanga Sangraha and Ashtangahridaya are the major representatives of the classical tradition in Ayurveda. But in the regional literature the knowledge gained from innumerable number of clinical experiences which has been passed on from generation to generation are documented in regional languages. They are very rich and diverse but not organized or classified. No proper efforts were made critically to study the literature representing regional traditions and practices. These literatures may be critically analysed and incorporated into classical traditions. Such a research on regional literature will definitely enrich the literary data base of the Ayurveda.

History of medical system in Kerala

Kerala is immensely blessed with rich biological and cultural heritage. The natural resource base is complimented with an equally rich and diverse cultural heritage and traditional knowledge system³. Historians have noted that some indigenous system of healing existed in Kerala even before the advent of Aryans and Sanskrit language⁴. As in any other society, medical practice started in Kerala in crude format by the natives then existed, and the Ayurvedic system and Sanskrit literary works that came later refined this system and flourished into new form and content. Ayurvedic practices in Kerala are unique in the sense that they comprise several special methods of treatments such as innovations in *panchakarma* therapies, specialised formulations which are not seen anywhere in classical texts, single drug usage, development of treatment modalities for toxicity, small pox etc.

The foundation stone for such a system was laid down by numerous physicians and scholars who had sound academic knowledge and great clinical acumen.

Among them, the *Ashtavaidyan* of Kerala belonging to 8 Namboothiri families are hereditary physicians of repute. In addition to that some ezhava families and such other sets of people studied Ashtangahridaya thoroughly and practiced the system as their hereditary occupation⁵. The physicians were drawn from different strata of the society. It was never a monopoly of a specific community. Often the treatments were mixed up with different rituals and religious worships. Temples, churches and mosques were centers of therapeutic practices for specific diseases and are considered as divine centers giving protection from evil spirits and mental and physical ailments⁶.

The contributions of these eminent physicians were not limited to application of Ayurvedic principles in treatment, but many of them have also been great contributors to Ayurvedic literature. These literature need not be counted as contribution of a person (author) but can be considered as a collective contribution of a great tradition as such. Most of the textbooks are anonymous in authorship and found to be edited and supplemented through different generations. These texts have an important role in keeping the Kerala tradition of Ayurveda alive and most of them are still considered as hand books in day-to-day clinical practice.

These valuable contributions include commentaries and translations of classical texts, medical dictionaries, compilations of prescriptions of medicines and their practical applications, texts incorporating modern scientific knowledge, independent books related to the eight branches of Ayurveda and allied sciences like *Vrikshayurveda* and *Hashtyaurveda*

Literature of Kerala

Books on panchakarma

Panchakarma (five purificatory procedures) is considered as the hallmark of Ayurvedic treatment. Kerala, in particular has achieved a place of pride in the global arena due to the development and nurturing of innovative techniques which have enriched Ayurveda as a whole and *Panchakarma* in particular. The literatures on panchakarma not only describe the *kriyakrama* which were developed and popularized in Kerala, but they also contain elaborate and practical

descriptions of *kriyakarma* described in classics. These books became very popular owing to the simplicity of presentation and gravity of contents. Some of the important books in this genre are listed below. *Vasthipradeepa* is a book written in Malayalam language by Panavalli Krishnan Vaidyar and published in 1932⁷. As the name suggests, this book describes *vasti* with importance. But it also gives a detailed account of other treatment procedures. *Panchakarmam athava sodhanachikitsa* is another book in Malayalam by Manakkodam Kesavan Vaidyar⁸. It is one of the most authoritative and comprehensive books in this subject. This book has described all *Panchakarma* including *siravedha* and preparatory procedures *snehapana* (oleation) and *swedana* (sudation). The description is in the form of case discussions. He has also mentioned the doubts that may arise during the performance of the procedure and also given the clarification then and there. 'Ayurvedic treatments of Kerala' is an English book written by Vayakara N S Mooss⁹. It elaborates the *Keraleeya Panchakarma* procedures like *Pindasweda* (sudation using medicated cloth bag), *Annalepanam* (application of medicated rice paste on body), *Kayasekam* (medicated oil massage by squeezing oil from cloth), *sirovasthi* (retention of medicated oil on head), *sirosekam* (pouring medicated oil on head) and *sirolepanam* (application of medicated paste on head). *Dharaakalpam* is another book written by physician of Kerala, but the exact authorship is unknown. Sri N V K Varier has mentioned in his book *Ayurvedacharitham* that Yadav Sharma has published this book along with the text *Rajamarthanda* from Mumbai¹⁰. This is also seen as an appendix in other books like *Sahasrayogam*. Written by Putiyedath Raman Menon in 1929, *Sirassekaadi vidhi*, is a book along with *Bhaavaprabodhini* commentary¹¹. It narrates the five procedures of *Takradhara* (pouring medicated buttermilk), *Pizhichil* (medicated oil massage by squeezing oil from cloth), *Njavarakizhi* (sudation using medicated cloth bag) *Njavarateppu* (application of medicated rice paste) and *Talapothichil* (application of medicated paste on head). *Chikitsasangraham* is a book written by the great visionary and founder of Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala, Vaidyaratnam P S Varier and published in 1905 which contains collection of

Panchakarma procedures and medicines¹². The physicians of the yester years were not only instrumental in reviving the *sodhana* (purificatory) treatment, but they also provided us with a legacy of books which even now serve as guides in the practical application of these procedures. It can be said that it is due to the efforts of these physicians that Kerala has turned into a global hub of *Panchakarma*.

Books on drugs / medicinal plants/formulations

The flora and other natural resources systems lead to the development of the unique Ayurvedic formulary of Kerala. *Ayurvediya Ausadha Nighantu* by Tayyil Kumaran Vaidyan contains Sanskrit and Malayalam synonyms, the therapeutic values and the parts used of almost all the medicinal herbs commonly used in Kerala¹³. *Hortus malabaricus* is a comprehensive treatise on the floral wealth of Malabar published in Latin¹⁴. It is an authentic documentation about the ethno-medical knowledge of Malabar and reflects the cultural, social, political and linguistic history of 17th century of Kerala. It was the brain child of Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede, the then Dutch Governor of Cochin. A team of more than 150 experts in various fields like botany, medicine and art worked under his leadership to complete this mammoth work. Itty Achuthan, a renowned physician belonging to a famous traditional *ezhava vaidya* family, is one of the key figures behind the compilation of *Hortus Malabaricus*. 3 *Konkani Brahmin* physicians – Ranga Bhatt, Vinayak Pandit, and Appu Bhatt also lent their expertise to this study. It can be considered as a contribution of Kerala in view of the contents and persons participated in the works¹⁵. This work has been translated to English by Dr K.S. Manilal.

Sahasrayogam is a compendium containing around 1000 formulations and has been used by the practitioners of Kerala as a hand book for day to day clinical practice¹⁶. There are many editions for this book and Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Sidha recently published this book.

Alathur Manipravala is a traditional medical treatise of formulations which has linguistic as well as historical importance¹⁷. The manuscripts of this work were believed to be composed 600 years back and considered as the oldest *Manipravala* work related to medi-

cal science. This book describes formulations for various diseases.

Sindooramanjari (Thrissur thaikkattu Narayanan Mooss) and Rasopanishat consist of medicinal applications of minerals and metals¹⁸

Books on treatment for general disease

Yogamritam¹⁹ and Chikitsamanjari²⁰, which explicate the simple and practical treatments for general diseases throw light on the treatment practices prevalent in the reputed traditional *vaidya* families of Kerala. Chikitsanool and Vaidyamanorama, Sarvarogachikitsaratnam are the other notable works in this category²¹.

Books on Paediatrics

The traditional literatures are rich source on Ayurvedic paediatric care. The most authentic book representing *balachikitsa* tradition of Kerala is Arogyakalpadruma written by Kaikulangara Ramavarier.²² It contains exceptional information regarding the diseases affecting children, their pathogenesis and management. Many innovative treatment procedures and effective formulations are mentioned in this book. A topic of special citation is *prakara yoga* i.e. explanation of different immunomodulatory recipes and procedures to be adopted right from the day after delivery. 'Arogyacintamani' is a paediatric text written in Malayalam based on 'Arogyakalpadrumam' by Mahakavi Vallattol (one of the triumvirate poets of Malayalam literature) who had also a sound knowledge of Ayurvedic system of medicine. The book namely 'Mahasara' published by the Manuscript Library, Madras, contains a lot of information on paediatrics in Malayalam²³. Other famous works are Karappan by Kodungallur Kunjikuttan Thampuran, Vaidyatharakam by Vaidyakalanidhi N Narayan, Balarogachikitsamanjari by Panachirethu Krishnapillai.

Books on Toxicology

Kerala has provided many significant contributions in the field of toxicology. There were expert physicians who can identify the minute differences among poisonous creatures, and had specific remedies for each varied poisons. Literatures on toxicology are based on some scientific works namely Narayaniya, Uddisa,

Ulpala, Mekhala, Kalavachana and Lakshanamrita. Other important available works are Vishajyotsnika by Karat Namboodiri, Prayogasamuchaya by Kochunni Thampuran and Sarvagarala Pramochana by Kuttamath Cheriya Rama Kurup²⁴.

Books on fundamental principles

Brihat Sareera (1942) & Astanga sareera (1926) are the two books describing Ayurvedic Anatomy and Physiology²⁵, written by Vaidyaratnam P.S. Warriar in Sanskrit. This book co-ordinate Ayurveda with modern science by analyzing the basic concepts of Ayurvedic in the light of modern medical science. The book Rasavaisheshika sutra, with 486 *sutra* in 4 chapters, describes the physiological and therapeutic values of the medicinal and dietetic articles. It also relates the existing 6 *rasa* and 3 *dosha*. It was first published in 1928²⁶.

Commentaries

There were many commentaries on classical texts but some of them are not available now. Indu, the commentator of Sasilekha commentary of Astangasamgraha belonged to Kerala²⁷. Pathya is one of the most accepted commentary. Kairali commentary authored by Pulamanthol mooss, Vakyapradeepika by Parameswaran Namputhiri, Sararthadarpanam by Kaikkulangara Rama varier, Bhaskara commentary by Uppottu Kannan vaidyan, Arunodayam written by Govindan Vaidyar are some of the notable commentaries on Ashtanga hridaya.

Other works

Hridayapriya (1865 AD) and Sukha sadhakam (1882 AD) are the works by Vaikom Pachumuthathu, based on Ashtangahridaya²⁸. He was a great scholar and *kottaram vaidya* of Travancore (official Ayurvedic physician) and also established the first institution for learning Ayurveda in Kerala in 19th century.

Kushtarogachikilsadarpanam by K V Krishnan Vaidyar, Ottaparuvinteyum ottamasooriyudeym chikilsa by Vaidyan K V Aipu K, Oushadhacharthu or kudumbavaidyan by Panachirethu Krishnapillai, Sarvasaadhaarana Chikilsa by T Chandrasekhar, Sarvaroga Chikilsanool by John Alexander, Vaidyaratnamala by R Parameswaran Pillai, Santhanachinthamani (Vajeekaranam) by M K

Kunhiraman Vaidyar, Vishoochikasudarsanam by Cholleyil Kunhimami Vaidyar, Ayurveda Prakasika & Prameharahasya Chikilsa by T N Nanupilli Asaan, Aarya Vaidya Chikilsa Margam by P V Ramavarier, Mahasaaram by Dr M K Vaidyar (Ed) are some of the later works .

Comparison between literature of classical health tradition and local health tradition

Literature in classical and local health tradition may be compared based on the domains like period, authorship, language, structure and orientation of the text and content.

Major classical textbooks like Charaka Samhitha and Susritha samhitha have been formulated during Samhitha period (500 BC – 600 AD). Majority of the regional texts are thought to be composed during the medieval period or the ‘age of compilations’ or the Sangraha kala (7th – 17th century)²⁹. Since exchange of knowledge can be well identified among these regional texts, it is difficult to identify the chronological order in which they were written.

Most of the classical textbooks have known authorship (Ashtangahridaya written by Vagbhata,) while most of the regional textbooks of the medieval period are of anonymous or controversial authorship. These are seen as factual documentations compiling the traditional practices running in a family (*astavaidyans* for instance) or specific to a region (*keraleeya panchakarmas*), keenly subjected to additions and updates with each passing generation

Classical texts on Ayurveda were mostly written in Sanskrit language. The regional textbooks of Kerala were written in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Manipravala (judicious mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit) style. Some of the texts show vivid influence of Sidha system of medicine and they are written in Tamil – Malayalam combination. Every regional language has its own variants, few of which are made by mixing different languages e.g; Manipravala, the widely used style during medieval period in Kerala, is an intricate combination of Sanskrit and Malayalam. Many popular texts like Alathur Manipravala, Chikitsamanjari and Yogamritam were written in this dialect. Alathur Manipravalam is believed to be composed during the

14th century AD in the initial periods of the *manipravalam* movement.

A classical text in Sanskrit uses Devanagiri script, whereas regional textbooks of Kerala use Malayalam script. Malayalam script was first printed in the book *Hortus malabaricus*.

In contrast to the classical texts having a well-structured theoretical platform, the medieval textbooks are practical oriented and not necessarily well-structured. The arrangement of chapters in regional textbooks is often different from classical books. The diseases may be arranged in terms of its incidence, regional prevalence, similarity in clinical presentation or treatment and its prognosis. To cite an example, the chapter on *Raktapradara* (abnormal uterine bleeding) is elucidated after *Raktapitta* (bleeding disorders) in regional texts, whereas in classical texts, it is considered under the domain of gynaecological disorders.

The contents of most classical texts include all the eight branches of Ayurveda while the regional texts focus more on specific branches. The socio-cultural and geographical peculiarities of Kerala might have influenced the development of specific disciplines like *Marma chikitsa*, *Visha chikitsa* (toxicology) etc. e.g; The massage therapy owes much to the practice of *Kalarippayattu* (a traditional form of martial art) of Kerala. Knowledge of vital points in the body, complications of injuries to them and methods of correction were taught along with practice of *Kalarippayattu*. This knowledge was later developed as *Kalarichikitsa* (*Kalari* means battle field) *Kathakali*, the dance-drama of Kerala, also demands physical fitness and flexibility of body. These practices might have led to the development of *Marma Chikitsa* as a separate branch of treatment³⁰. Other peculiarities of the contents of the regional texts include the use of locally available drugs such as coconut tree products, innovations in medicinal preparations and formulations like *mukkudi* (a *takra* based preparation) and development of treatment modalities like modified *swedana* (sudation) procedures, and *urovasti* (keeping medicated oil over chest).

The contents of these literatures are to be subjected to keen examination at multiple levels- the quality, cred-

ibility, feasibility, systematic arrangement, and specific regional variations if any.

CONCLUSION

The traditional regional literature are to be scrutinized with respect to the quality of its contents, the uniqueness of its features which makes it superior to the existing textbooks and the specific contributions made by the work to the medical community. Critical comparison of the therapeutic aspects of the two traditions is essential to understand the true worth of these textbooks.

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