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Ayurveda - The Indigenous System of Medicine in Travancore State, India

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Abstract:

The Travancore State began to take more and more interest in the indigenous medicine from the late 19th century onwards. In Travancore every village had a native practitioner called vaidyan. The vaidyan had a knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs and collected them to make drugs himself. As to the castes of these vaidyans at least the Brahmin, Ambalavasis, Nairs, Ezhavas etc. embraced the occupation. Some of the Namboodiri practitioners traced their medical knowledge to instructions given by Parasurama the legendary conqueror of Kerala. The Ezhavas also claimed that they had been from time immemorial noted for their proficiency in the native medical art. Also among the vaidyans listed in the Travancore Almanac for 1918 about forty-five percent were clearly Nairs. The vaidyans treated patients who belonged to castes difficult from their own. Various communities including inferior castes received medical treatment from the vaidyans. The Travancore state adopted the policy of encouraging indigenous medicine so early was that it was an orthodox state. Towards the end of the 19th cy with the development of nationalism and cultural awakening the nationalists began to claim the effectiveness and superiority of Indian systems of medicine and the All India Ayurvedic congress established in 1907 was one of the results of the movement. In British Malabar this movement was led by P.S. Warriar in 1902 he organized the "Arya Vaidya Samajam" for the revitalization of Ayurvedic medicine. Ayurveda is fifth veda because health of diseased and remaining activities of health end up on virtue Wealth passion and salvation. The emphasis on the maintenance of positive health is a distinguishing feature of Ayurveda. As it aimed at the protection of life it was not only called Ayurveda but also as Lokopakaram. Ashtanga Hrudaya is considered as the most authentic work on Ayurveda apart from Charakasamhita and Susruta samhita. The Travancore government gave special emphasis for the promotion of Ayurveda. The government opened Ayurvedic schools, Ayurvedic Hospital and Ayurvedic College. Ayurveda today is a 3500 crore industry.

In this paper an attempt has been made to emphasize the Ayurvedic system of medicine practiced in Travancore state. Its origin, principal ideas development programmes etc have been analysed, and the reason for promoting Ayurveda the indigenous system of medicine in Travancore - the charitable state.

1. Introduction

The Travancore state began to take more and more interest in the Ayurvedic medicine from the late nineteenth century onwards. In Travancore every village had a native practitioner called *Vaidyan*. The *Vaidyan* had a knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs and collected them to make drugs himself. As to the castes of these *Vaidyans*, at least the Namboodiri Brahmins, Ambalavasis, Nayers, Ezhavas and Kaniyans embraced the occupation. Some of the Namboodiri practitioners traced their medical knowledge to instructions given by Parasurama a legendary conqueror of Kerala. The Ezhavas also claimed that they had been from time immemorial noted for their proficiency in the native medical art¹. Also, among the *Vaidyans* listed in the Travancore Almanac for 1918, about forty-five percent were clearly Nairs.

The *Vaidyans* treated patients who belonged to castes different from their own. Nagam Aiyar described the treatment conducted by a famous Namboodiri vaidyan called Vayakkara Moos as follows. The Moos and his visitors would all sit on the floor of an open front verandah of the *Illam*, while those who would not sit with him would stand in the yard or if they were of an inferior caste, outside the enclosure, but all were before him and in view and he would talk to all who had come. Various communities including 'inferior' castes thus received medical treatment from the *Vaidyans*.² It is however doubtful that the lowest castes, such as the Pulayas and Parayans were treated by these native practitioners. Ward and Conner stated after their survey from 1816 to 1820 that the Pulayas experience little sympathy in sickness.³

The Travancore state adopted the policy of encouraging Ayurvedic medicine so early was that it was an orthodox Hindu State. This policy had two obvious advantages for the state. Firstly, the state could show its charitable aspect through this medicine, which was rather economical in financial terms and could be given even to the 'conservative masses' especially in the rural areas. Secondly, by encouraging indigenous medicine it was at the same time by encouraging Hindu culture, on which the Hindu state was established.⁴ In other words to help revive aspects of Hinduism was undoubtedly one of the most appropriate function of the ruler and the government. Hence it is not surprising that the state responded very quickly and very substantially to the movement to revitalize Ayurvedic medicine.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century with the development of nationalism and cultural awakening, the nationalists began to claim the effectiveness and superiority of Indian systems of medicine and a movement began which aimed at the political authorities' recognition and patronage of indigenous medicine. The All-India Ayurvedic Congress established in 1907 was one of the results of this movement.⁵ In Kerala, particularly in British Malabar, this movement was led by P.S. Warier, who himself was in practice at Kottakkal near Calicut. In 1902, he organized the 'Arya Vaidya Samajam' for the revitalization of indigenous medicine.⁶

This movement and Hindu revivalism more generally was certainly one of the principal factors that influenced state policy towards Ayurvedic medicine in Travancore. In 1889 the government opened an Ayurveda Patasala in Trivandrum,⁷ and later sanctioned a system of medical grants to *Vaidyans* in 1895-96.⁸ The grants were generally given to those who passed out of the Ayurveda Patasala. In 1917-18 an Ayurveda department was created. One of the main functions of this department was the revision of the curricula of the Ayurveda patasala on up-to-date scientific basis to suit modern requirements. The department also appointed a lecturer in Anatomy and Physiology, established a botanical garden and Ayurveda hospitals and opened an Ayurveda pharmacy.⁹ Three years later this patasala became the Ayurveda college. Thus Travancore state began to take an interest in Ayurvedic medicine from the late nineteenth century. The Ayurvedic medicine has been getting more and more prominence as these, unlike allopathic drugs; do not produce drastic side effects.

2. Ayurveda

The term 'Ayurveda' means 'knowledge' (Veda) concerning maintenance of 'life'(ayus). Ayurveda, the eternal science of life has taught to mortals by Lord Brahma. It is born before Atharvaveda and Upanishada.¹⁰ The Hindus first turned their attention to the study of disease and the means of its alleviation. The Vedas are undoubtedly the most ancient of written records in the world. The Ayurveda or Science of life is believed to have formed a part of the Vedas, those that go by the name of the Atharvas. The first great professor of medicine coming after the age of the Atharva veda with whom we are acquainted is Punarvasu of the race of Atri. Atri was one of the well-begotten sons of Brahma, the grandsire of the Universe. He is regarded as one of the sages through whom the Vedas were revealed. He is represented as having lectured on the 'Science of life' into several disciples among which six are mentioned by name. They are Agnivesa, Bhela, Jatukarma, Parasara, Harita and Khartani. Everyone of them compiled a treatise on medicine. Agnivesa is generally allowed to have been superior in point of merit. Punarvasu's lectures were collected and arranged by Agnivesa who accordingly came to be received as the author of the treatise which Charaka subsequently revised.¹¹ The origin of Ayurveda relates to super human in nature.

3. Origin of Ayurveda

When diseases began to trouble the human beings, distinguished sages like Bharadvaja, Kasyapa, Vasishtha and others happened to meet on the Himalaya mountain and the subject of their conversation incidentally turned upon the ills that flesh was heir to.¹² The human body which is the means of attaining the four aims of life namely virtue, worldly pursuits, pleasure and liberation is subject to diseases which emancipate and weaken it, deprive the senses of their functions and cause extreme pain. These diseases are great impediments to worldly affairs and bring on premature death. Hence they thought it was quite necessary to find a remedy for such diseases. They at once recollected that Brahma the creator had taught the science of Ayurveda to Daksh Prajapati who in turn had expounded it to the Asvini Kumars from whom again the knowledge was transmitted to Indra.¹³ The assembled Rishis selected Bharadvaja as the one best fitted among them and requested to acquire from Indra, the knowledge of the science of Ayurveda and thus free them from the scourge of diseases. The great sage accordingly went to Indra who was much pleased with the object of his mission and gladly imparted to him the knowledge of the science in all its manifold details. Bharadvaja then transmitted the knowledge thus acquired to the other sages.¹⁴

By etymology, manifestation of disease, features, bad prognostic features and treatment constantly beneficial and pleasurable status for the final emancipation of purusha (sole of the universe) having trivarga as essence of Ayurveda is considered. According to Kasyapa Samhita Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra should study Ayurveda.¹⁵ Brahmana should study Ayurveda for getting knowledge, for own virtue and for the kindness of mankind. Kshatriyas should study Ayurveda for the protection of the public, Vaisyas for livelihood, Sudras for service and everyone for religion.

Ayurveda is fifth Veda because health of diseased and remaining activities of health end up in virtue, wealth, passion and salvation. The basis is vaata, pitta, kapha. They are also dependent on two gods each. Vaata is dependent upon god Maruta and Akasa, pitta upon Agni and Aditya and kapha upon Soma and Varuna.¹⁶ Vaata is predominant in old age, pitta is predominant in the middle age and Kapha is predominant in early age. Person desirous of long life which is the means for achieving dharma, artha, sukha should repose at most faith in the teaching of Ayurveda

4. The Principal Ideas

The purpose of life is four-fold to achieve dharma, artha, kama and moksha.¹⁷ In order to attain success in this four-fold purpose of life it is essential to maintain life not only in a disease free state but also in positively healthy state of body-mind and spirit. The emphasis on the maintenance of positive health is a distinguishing feature of Ayurveda. In order to maintain positive health, Ayurveda prescribes specific daily routine '*dinacharya*' and also a seasonal regime '*ritucharya*'. In *dinacharya* great importance is given to diet which is to be taken in a proper way with regard to quality, quantity as well as frequency. Emphasis is given to physical exercise and personal hygiene. Equal importance is given to mental health. Strict mental discipline and strict adherence to moral values is considered a pre-requisite for mental health.¹⁸ As it was the science aimed at the protection of life it was not only called Ayurveda but

also as 'Kalyanakaraka' and 'Lokopakaram'.¹⁹ Ashtanga Hrudaya is considered as the most authentic work on Ayurveda apart from Charaka Samhitha and Susruta Samhitha.

5. Ashtanga Hrudaya –the Kernel of Ayurveda

One of the principal texts of Ayurveda is the Ashtanga Hrudaya²⁰ composed by Vagbhata. This contains the Kernel of Ayurvedic medicine and philosophy and stands next only to the two other monumental works the Charaka Samhitha and Susruta Samhitha.²¹ Kerala popularized Ashtangahredayam. The Namboodiris of Kerala practiced Ayurveda from the Buddhist monks.²² Apart from the Namboodiris some Ezhava families also practiced Ayurveda²³ The Ezhavas had a special aptitude for medicine. Socio-religious reformers like Sri Narayana Guru advocated his followers to impart education and to study Sanskrit. The Ashtanga hrudayam attracted the attention of medical men not only within this country but also of neighbouring countries such as Arabia, Persia, Tibet and Germany.²⁴ It is an epitome of Ayurveda catering to the needs of the students, scholars and medical practitioners.

The Travancore government gave special emphasis for the promotion of Ayurveda. Proceedings of the government of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore states that²⁵ "under the empirical practice of the Allopathic school, nearly every disease is becoming a surgical scene, and it is to escape the surgeon's scalpel that the people are turning to the science of Ayurveda. It is for the realization of the wonderful curative powers of the medicines of Ayurveda that the benign Travancore government has established vaidyasalas through out the length and breadth of the state and opened an Ayurveda patasala for giving adequate training in the system to young men of intelligence. 'Prevention is better than cure' better expounding than in the science of Ayurveda. The preventive aspect of Ayurveda is as important as the curative side of it. The system is useful to the poor and the rich alike. The slow but sure method of treatment is more efficacious and less dangerous than the unnatural and inhuman mode of administering poisonous drugs to precipitate a temporary cure. It keeps up the Indian traditions and ideals of life and it wakes up the feelings of patriotism".

The Travancore government has been for years encouraging the system of Ayurvedic medicine which has of late opened the eyes of the Indians in other parts.²⁶ The government opened Ayurvedic School in Trivandrum. As the number of patients who go for consultation and medicine is increasing day by day an Ayurvedic Hospital and Pharmacy has been opened²⁷ on 8 August 1918 in Miss Marse's new building to the south of the Maharaja's college.²⁸ The Ayurvedic Hospital was opened primarily for clinical training of the students of the Ayurveda college.²⁹ It developed into a popular hospital with accommodation for twenty in-patient and out-patient ward. The Ayurvedic Patasala was upgraded to the status of college in 1918 by Kolalthiri Sankara Menon, the then director of Ayurveda and the degrees from here were titled 'Vaidya Sastri' and 'Vaidya Kalanidhi'.³⁰ A course for Diploma in Ayurvedic Medicine (DAM) was setup in 1957 when Doctor A.R. Menon was the Health Minister.³¹

The Arya Vaidya Samajam was established in 1902. The Samajam was later taken over by Vaidyaratnam P.S. Warrier. In 1917 it was opened at Calicut and later it was shifted to Kottakkal in 1924. Another registered organization is Keraleeya Ayurveda Samajam established in 1946.³²

The physicians in Travancore can be classified into two groups, those who studied under Gurukula system and those in the modern institutions. The first group is vanishing and a remarkable increase in the second can be seen in the present scenario. Various commissions were setup for the reformation of Ayurvedic syllabus on the instructions were made by commissions like Usman, Copra and Bhore. After 1957 a basic course on all aspects of Ayurveda correlated with modern science and also a higher course was built upon this basis. Ayurveda colleges and attached institutions were separated during the year 1979 and brought under the control of principals of the respective colleges.³³ Ayurveda today is a 3500 crore industry with 8533 licensed pharmacies and over 7000 manufacturers. Total number of registered Ayurvedic practitioners come to 427504 West Bengal had a great tradition in Ayurveda and the first college started in 1916. Tamil Nadu started the premier institution in 1905. Gujarat Ayurveda University is the only one in the field of Ayurveda and the International Centre for Ayurvedic Studies was inaugurated in 1999. In the field of research CMPR-Centre for Medicinal Plant Research inaugurated by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in Kottakkal. It is the pioneer institute in the area of research for the conservation and popularization of medicinal plants.³⁴

6. Development Programme under Ayurveda

At the end of the first plan there were twenty-two Ayurveda hospitals and ninety-four dispensaries in the state run by the government. There were also seven Taluk Visha Vaidyasalas. During the second plan period fifteen Taluk hospitals and ninety-four dispensaries were started. During 1971-72 there were seventy-three Ayurveda hospitals and 267 dispensaries.

In 1971 a postgraduate centre in Ayurveda has been started in Trivandrum with central assistance to impart postgraduate training. There was a Regional Research Institute and a model demonstration garden of herbs in Poojappara, Trivandrum. There is also a nature cure centre functioning at Varkala.

An amount of Rupees 165 lakhs was the outlay set apart for the development of Ayurvedic system of medicine in the fifth plan. The sixth plan outlay is of the order of Rupees 375 lakhs. The sixth plan proposals include opening of new hospitals and dispensaries starting of marma section in Taluk hospitals³⁵ establishments of Siddha Vaidya dispensaries and providing facilities to the existing institutions. Thus the five year plans concentrated very much on the development of Ayurvedic system of treatment.

7. Conclusion

A pharmaceutical corporation (ISM) was established to cater to the needs of the different Ayurvedic institutions in the state. It was taken over from the co-operative sector and converted into a full government owned company in 1976. Facilities in this corporation are to be expanded for producing medicine in large scale and to distribute it to the public at fair prices. It also established mobile dispensaries under the department of Indian systems of medicine.³⁶ Thus the Travancore government gave much attention for the

development of Ayurvedic system of treatment because the Travancore society realized that Ayurveda is not only a health care system but also a complete approach to living. Through the thousands of years that Ayurveda has been in recorded existence its basic principles have never changed because they derive from universal laws of nature which are of eternally true.

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