

YOGAMRUTAM - AN INSIGHT INTO KERALA'S MEDICAL TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The contribution made by Kerala to the theory and practice of Ayurveda is substantial. *Yogamrutam* is a therapeutic treatise which has been used traditionally by the renowned practitioners of Kerala. It is an epitome of Kerala's literary tradition and clinical expertise. The text was written in *Manipravala* style and contains many cheap, easily available, highly effective drugs and formulations. Various simple treatment procedures have also been mentioned. It is an excellent resource to Ayurvedic practitioners

Key words: *Yogamrutam*, Kerala Ayurveda, Ayurveda literature, *Manipravala*

INTRODUCTION

Kerala has made a unique role in the process of nourishment of Ayurveda¹. The medieval period marks as a phase of renaissance of ayurveda, where the science attained new zeniths of glory both in terms of literature, practices and pharmacopeia. . Owing to the unparalleled clinical wisdom of the legendary *vaidyas* and their self-dedication towards the up-liftment of the science, this period saw a drastic surge of scientific literatures² - both conceptual and clinical. Majority of these books were either translations or commentaries of the classics - the *brhat trayees*, whereas a few were improvised versions, written in the light of the authors understand-

ing of the classics. There were also handbooks compiling the popular formulations and essential treatment methods followed by the traditional physicians. Towards the later part of the century, more books pertaining to the contemporary sciences like *hashtyayurveda*, *vrkshayurveda* and *astangas* of ayurveda also emerged³.

Yogamrutam is one among the renowned contributions of Kerala to the Ayurvedic literature. A compilation of *Yogas* and methods of treatment prevalent in the reputed ancient families of physicians⁴, the structure of the book qualifies it as a handbook for day-to-day clinical practice. In addi-

tion to this, the book also contains footnotes recording the clinical observations and experiences of these physicians, substantiating the endeavor of the book as being a practical manual. Written in *Manipravala* (judicious mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit) style, somewhere in the 17th century⁵, the identity of the author remains behind the veil. Yet the author in the beginning of the text gives clue regarding his nativity - a village named *Chellur*. According to historians this may be the present day *Perinchellur* of Kannur District in Kerala⁶.

It was a common practice among ayurveda physicians to record their clinical experiences in regional language for the benefit of the young physicians in the family. This book seems to be such a compilation of clinical experiences of Ayurveda physicians of well known families. The usage of words like *dharippan bhishakh balakanam/pragatbhatam yanthi bhishakh kumara*⁷ points to this possibility. Later these might have been compiled and documented.

Diverse editions of *Yogamrutam* by different authors and same edition by different publishers are available. The earliest among them was written by Sri Uppottu Kannan Vaidyar, an eminent physician of North Malabar⁸ and published in 1861. Sri Vanchi Setu Lakshmi Series published two editions of the book - one by Sri K Sambashiva Sastri in 1930 and second by Sri L A Ravivarma. Sri Chathu Kutti Nambyar Vaidyar edition was published by Kannur Sri Sadan Publishers in 1960; and Sri Sriman Namboodiri made another edition which was published by Vidyarambham Publications in 1994⁹. There are certain notable differences in content of these editions especially in the number and arrangement of chapters. For instance, the use of *mantra* in conditions like *vishachikitsa*¹⁰ and the citation of *sidha-prayoga* at the end of certain chapters¹¹ are worth noting.

Salient Features

Owing to the profuse exchange of knowledge among the contemporary texts like *Alathoor-*

Manipravala, Sahasrasyoga, Vaidyamanorama, Chikitsamanjari and *Yogamrutam*, it is difficult to classify the content of any of these texts as its unique contribution¹². The text lays stress on the clinical aspect of the science and not the conceptual realm. The author specifically addresses the text a practical manual only to be used after acquiring sufficient scholarship in the basic principles of Ayurveda¹³. The *Asthangas* of Ayurveda have been described in 70 chapters from *Jwara chikitsa* to *Visha chikitsa*. *Rasayana prakarana* (rejuvenative therapy), *unmada* and *apasmara* (ailments of the psyche and cognition) are not mentioned, may be due to their relatively less application in common clinical practice. Yet, separate chapters have been devoted to describe the treatments for *Bhaktharodha, Sukrasrava Masoorika, Krisa-sthool Asrugdara, Somaroga, Vayukshobha, sitapitta, Agnimandya* and *Athyagni* - many of which are only scarcely dealt with in the classical texts. Treatment for *Phiranga roga* is mentioned as *Kozhi-paranki*.

This book contains more than one thousand drugs and formulations including single drugs and locally available drugs, which have been described extensively and are mentioned in their vernacular names. Another specialty of this book is the absence of *Arishta kalpana* (fermented formulations)¹⁴. The formulations mentioned in the book include cheap, easily available, highly effective drugs like use of *malkarimpunchi* (ginger, sugarcane and puffed rice) in *arochaka* (loss of appetite)¹⁵, fresh juice extract of *thenginpookkula* (flower of coconut) in *raktha pradara* (menorrhagia)¹⁶, External and internal application of *Varata geha* (mud dauber/potter wasp home) in vomiting¹⁷. Many of these are given at the end of a chapter as *sidha prayoga*. *Karaskara ghritha* in *janusopha* (pathological swelling of the knees)¹⁸, *Chukkuchundamrutadi kashaya* in *jwara* (fever), *Kirathadi kashaya* in *jwara*¹⁹, *Karaskara ksheeradhara* (medicated milk poured in a single stream) in *Vrana* and *Vatasonita*²⁰, *aviltholadimorkanji* (medicated gruel)²¹, *Rasna suntyadi ka-*

*shaya*²² are some of the noted formulations in the text which are used in common clinical practices. Apart from these, many drugs have been used in their vernacular names and scientifically identified later like *kadalavanakku* (*Jatropha curcas*, *Euphorbiaceae*), *kozhuppa* (*Portulaca oleracea* var, *Portulacaceae*), *tartaval* (*Spermacoce hispida* *LRubiaceae*), *pachilaperumal* (*Malaxis acuminata* D.Don, *Orchidaceae*), *upputheli* (*Asystasia gangetica* *Acanthaceae*), *manganari* (*Limnophilia aromatic*, *Scrophulariaceae*), *poithalachi* (*Naravelia zeylanica* linn), *putayav* (*Rhaphidophora pertusa* Roxb)²³, etc in various contexts. There are still a vast number of drugs whose botanical identity is yet to be explored and validated.

Some formulations of the classical texts have been modified with the additions or deletions of drugs. 17 varieties of *shadanga pana*²⁴ (water medicated with six drugs) eg : with *ekanayaka* in *premeha*, with half part *useera* in *dahajwara*, with *guduchi* in *vatarakta* and 40 types of *mukkudi* (medicated butter milk) eg : *Jeeraka tulasyadi* in gastric ulcer²⁵ are described in various contexts. The book also describes modified methods of preparing formulations such as *Kalyanaka ghritha* prepared using juice of ginger, turmeric and milk in anemia²⁶, *Thikthaka* or *Mahathikthaka ghritha* modified with *paranthi kashaya* in skin ailments²⁷, Ghee prepared with *Nimbadi kashaya* and *guggulupanchapala churna* as *kalka* in *Bhagandara* (fistula in – anem)²⁸. Such modified preparations of *ghrita* are used effectively by the traditional practitioners of Kerala.

Treatment procedures

In contrast to the *panchakarmas* elaborated in the classics, in this textbook much emphasis has been given to *swedana* procedures like *dhara* (medicated oil/liquid poured in a single stream), *abhyanga* (body massage), *shastika pindasweda* (bolus of boiled *shastika* rice), *tapasweda* (sudation using heated objects) using leaves of calotropis and jack-fruits. These have been outlined as simple procedures which can be used by the physicians at outpa-

tient level with ease and great effectiveness. The treatment procedures are prescribed according to the condition of disease. *Dhanyamla* (specially fermented medicinal preparation) *dhara* is indicated in the first stages of *Pakshaghata*, *Kateegraha* and *Sarvangavata*²⁹; *kshiradhara* (pouring medicated milk) is indicated in *rakthapitta* and *Asrugdara*. Whole body *takradhara* (pouring medicated butter milk) is indicated in *jwara* associated with *jatara vrana* in children and in *premeha*³⁰. Similarly, *Shastika pindasweda* is indicated in *Kasa*, *Yakshma*, *Swasa*, *Asmari*, *Pakshaghata*, *Grudhrasi*, *Sarvangavata*, *Yoniroga*, pregnancy³¹ etc *Kshiradhuma* (medicated milk based steam) is indicated in *arditha*, *shirashula*, *ardavabhedak*³²; *urovasthi* (keeping medicated oil over chest) is indicated in *bhaktarodha swasa*, *arochaka*, *jihvasthambha* and *chardi*³³. Application of oil on head, which was a part of Kerala Ayurveda treatment tradition, can be seen in various contexts.

Regarding the *panchakarmas*, *Vishuchika*, *Masoorika*, *Kushta*, *Pilla netraroga*, *Padmakandakam*, *Garam* are the only 6 diseases in which *vamana* (medicated emesis therapy) is indicated³⁴. *Virechana* (medicated purgation therapy) and *nasya* (application of medicine through nose) are indicated in almost all diseases. A separate chapter has been devoted to drugs used for *virechana*. Castor oil in buttermilk is indicated in *vridhi* which is not seen in other classical texts. The use of breast milk for *nasya* in various diseases and *Jalookavacarana* (leech therapy) in *bhagandara* and *indralupta*³⁵ are also worth noting.

DISCUSSION

Medical literature in Ayurveda has been enriched during pre-modern times by the contributions from different regions of the country. Kerala has got a prime place in the evolution of such a regional tradition in Ayurveda. *Yogamrutha* stands as a witness of such a vibrant and dynamic medical traditions. Imparting this knowledge to the medical

community will pave the way for further clinical research. These different regional traditions should be scientifically analyzed and incorporated into classical system.

CONCLUSION

The treasure house of formulations and procedures in this text are the result of years of observations and experience of great physicians. They can work wonders when properly studied and applied. So *Yogamrutam* is truly comparable to the divine nectar or *Amrut* that emerged out during the churning of the ocean.

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