



Review Article

Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma - Abhinava Jejjata of Kerala – A life profile

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ABSTRACT

Kerala's contribution to Ayurveda practice and literature is held with high esteem by scholars all over the country. Literary works of Kerala comprises of both works which are unique in nature and works which have parallels in other regions of India. Despite these facts, most of these works, except a few like Sahasrayoga have not yet been studied well. The scholarliness of the authors of such works also remains unknown to the current generation. Unless a serious effort is made to study these, the concern is that the wisdom in the regional literature of Ayurveda will be lost as most of these works will become unavailable in near future. This article focuses on the life, works and achievements of Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma, an eminent scholar physician from Kerala. The review is prepared as a life profile based on published documents, oral reports etc. Major works were identified and the parallel to Jejjata was drawn following that. Vachaspathya commentary on Carakasamhita, Hridayollasa commentary on Sushrutasamhita, Vasudeviya commentary on Ashtangahridaya, Vaidyapriya commentary on Sarngadharasamhita, commentary on Yogaratnakara called Vaidyaratnam are some of his prominent works on Sanskrit texts. Apart from authoring some unique Ayurvedic texts in Malayalam he also authored several non-Ayurveda textbooks. These rich regional diversity in the Ayurveda literature and practice worth detailed study by future generations. Value of the works of Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma underlines the concern on regional literature and stresses the need for further studies in similar areas.

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Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma

1. Introduction

Kerala has been a major contributor to Ayurveda through various means, and literature holds an important share in it. A variety of literary works have been composed by physicians of Kerala in Malayalam and Sanskrit languages. Most of these works, except a few, have not received much attention from the Ayurveda community outside Kerala. Aesculapian literature of Kerala, eventhough rich in material, remains understudied till date. They belong to different categories of Ayurveda literature viz., Sanskrit commentaries to Samhita like *Hridayabodhika*, *Kairali* [1], *Samhita* commentaries in Malayalam like *Sararthadarpana*, *Bhavaprakasha* [2], original works in Malayalam such as *Yogaritham* [3], *Yogasarasangraha/Navakhanda* [4], original works in Sanskrit such as *Tantrayukti* [5], materia medica in Malayalam such as *Oushadha-nighantu* [6], Materia medica in Sanskrit such as *Ashtangahridaya-kosha* [7], compendium of formulations such as *Sahasrayoga* [8] etc. Some of these are unique in nature and remain unparalleled in their contribution to Ayurveda literature, while others can be related to similar works in other regional languages of India.

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The authors of these literary works were mostly scholars in both Sanskrit and Malayalam languages and some in English too like the legendary Ashtavaidyan N S Mooss [9]. A look upon their lives makes it clear that, all of them were trained physicians and some remained active in clinical practice while others restricted their activities to literary field alone. Analyzing their works based on clinical and literary contributions is a worthy task. On one hand, it reminds the current Ayurveda fraternity the efforts of previous generations in this area and on the other hand, it might provide some insights into hidden gems among these literary works. This kind of research and review are not commonly taken up by researchers due to voluminous nature of data and sometimes untraceability of details.

Jejjata was a scholar commentator who had composed commentaries on all the three *Brihat-trayi* (*Carakasamhita*, *Sushruta-samhita* and *Ashtangahridaya* – none of which are currently available in full presently) [10]. Kerala had produced a scholar, viz., Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma, in the 19th century who had repeated the feat of Jejjata in Malayalam language. This achievement though remained unparalleled for more than half a century, neither the works nor the author is remembered in present times. Here, life profile of this Ayurveda scholar and his major works are considered in the article. The life profile is prepared as a sort of memoir biography. Importance is given to the researcher's motives in relation to the biographical subject and with emphasis on the stylistic presentation of the biographer's reflections and insights in relation to the factual account of the life.

2. Short biography

Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma (1879–1951) was born in a Brahmin family (Kothanathu illam) in the Ponnani Taluk of the erstwhile Malabar District in British India. His parents were Parameshwaran Moosath and Parvathi Manayamma. He had his preliminary education under his father's brother Keshavan Moosath. Later he joined for higher studies in Sanskrit and Ayurveda in the Pathasala run by Panditaraja Punnasseri Neelakantha Sarma [11]. His uncle, Vachaspathi T C Parameshwaran Moosath [12], the author of four commentaries on *Amarakosha*, fine-tuned his niece in Vyakarana and Ayurveda.

During his stay at Pathasala he started assisting publication works of Guru at Vijnanachintamani press [14]. This laid the foundation for the development of his literary and publishing skills which also helped him take up the job of publisher at the famous Bharathavilasam Press in Thrissur later. Meanwhile he got married to Sreedevi in 1898 and later to Neeli in 1901 and had five daughters and one son with them. In between the demise of his father prompted him to set out on a journey to auspicious places like Varanasi, Panchavati, Haridwar, etc. This journey turned out as a life-changing event, as he utilized this opportunity to interact with several scholars of Sanskrit and Ayurveda in different parts of the country.

Stalwarts of Ayurveda and Sanskrit like Brihatrayeeratna Vaidyaraj Atmaram Vaman Datar Shastri [14], Vachaspattee Rashivadekar Appa Shastri [15,16] were among the scholars with whom he established contact. This exposure led to him participating in the veda-sastra-abhyasa-aadisabha organized by the erstwhile Kolhapur District Board and coming out in flying colours. Following this he was awarded the title 'Pandit' to which he remained fully truthful throughout his life. During this period, he got infected with cholera and had to return to native place (Painkannur, near Valancheri, Malappuram District).

On his return he entered a job at Bharathavilasam Press, Thrissur and got himself involved in literary and publication works. Later he established a hospital/clinic named Bhaskara Vaidyasala at

Rayiranalloor (Nananthezhath illam), Palakkad District. He also taught students Sanskrit and Ayurveda there and at one time had almost twelve disciples. Residents had recognized his services which were offered free of cost, always without any discretion of caste or creed, and according to the needs of the society. He had even made arrangements for preparing medicines to the needy patients which was uncommon at that time. His interventions gained more popularity when he treated and cured patients with smallpox which had cut through the society in those times. Unfortunately, he also lost one of his wives to smallpox.

His illustrious life came to an end in 1951 putting a full stop to a literary career resulting in publication of several translations, commentaries, original works etc. His works are still unnumbered, and the family had unfortunately lost possession of some of his works when the old ancestral home was renovated. Currently, he is survived by a grandson and his family and sadly none of them carried forward his tradition.

2.1. Vachaspathya commentary on Carakasamhita [17]

Foremost among his contributions is this commentary which he co-authored with his uncle Vachaspathi T C Parameshwaran Moosath. Till then (1916), there was no commentary or translation of *Carakasamhita* in Malayalam, and the only sources of the text were the manuscripts of the same in the possession of traditional physicians. This commentary is now out of print, but scanned copies of some of the sthana are available on the internet. The commentary is written in simple language with scholarly insights wherever required. However, the book has been out of favour of readership for the past few decades as it became out of print.

To cite a few examples, while explaining the word *amla* in the verses on the famous *Kolakulathadi yoga*, the commentary specifically mentions the use of buttermilk which may have been in practice then. On comparison, *Cakrapani* commentary explains the interrelationship of pradeha and sagni upanaha with sankarasveda alone. In another context on the auspicious time for vasti in Sidhithana, the commentary elaborates the stars, days, zodiac which are both suitable and unsuitable for conducting treatments. Here, *Cakrapani* commentary had presented the alternate view of *Hareeta* in the mythological angle. Also, clarification is provided on the manifestation of rakta (blood) in krishnavarna (black colour) in vama-vireka atiyoga (complications of emesis and purgation) that it follows the kapha, pitta, mala and rakta.

2.2. Hridayollasa commentary on Sushrutasamhita [18]

This commentary by Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma was composed and published in 1930s. Printing and publication was undertaken by Mangalodayam press, Thrissur. This commentary, eventhough not the first Malayalam commentary of *Sushrutasamhita*, gained recognition and popularity among the scholars of Ayurveda in Kerala. Only a very small portion of the text is now available even as scanned copies in internet. Sutrasthana (from 11th adhyaya to 22nd), Chikitsasthana (2parts - 1st part from 1st adhyaya to 23rd adhyaya and 2nd part from 24th adhyaya to 40th) and Kalpasthana alone could be accessed by the authors.

This commentary is not a mere Malayalam translation of the Sanskrit text, but illustrious wherever necessary. To cite few instances, in the 32nd adhyaya, he clarifies in the beginning itself that the word *sveda* in the context of this adhyaya must be understood as the procedure which generates perspiration and not as sweat. While explaining the term *busa* (husk/bran) under *ushmasveda* in the same adhyaya, he quotes Amarasimha "*kadangaro busam kleebe*" thus providing the synonym and gender of the term. *Abhishyandi* term has been explained with the quotation from

Table 1
Showing the non-Ayurveda works.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Commentary/Translation	Field	Publisher	Year
1	<i>Sreekrishnakarnamritha</i>	Malayalam translation	Devotion	Bharathavilasam Press	1922
2	<i>Sivasahasranamastotram</i>	Malayalam translation	Devotion	Bharathavilasam Press	Not known
3	<i>Aasouchadeepakam</i>	<i>Deepaparakashikavyakhyaya commentary</i>	Ritualism	Bharathavilasam Press	1921
4	<i>Aacharadeepika</i>	<i>Aahnikavyakhyaya</i>	Ritualism	Bharathavilasam Press	1923
5	<i>Randu Prashnavidhikal</i>	Malayalam translation	Astrology	Bharathavilasam Press	1930
6	<i>Muhurtapadavi</i>	<i>Vivaranavyakhyaya</i>	Astrology	P K Brothers	1912
7	<i>Kamasutra</i>	Malayalam commentary	Sexual practice	P K Brothers	1922

Dalhana viz., “*sadyo vyadhikaraneeyaam avasthaam syandayati aapaadayati yat dravyam tadabhishtyandi*” meaning that kind of drug which suddenly precipitates the manifestation of the disease. On examining several such instances in this commentary, reaffirmation of the effort put in by him to make the work more resourceful to the readers becomes evident.

2.3. Vasudeviya commentary on Ashtangahridaya [19]

The repetition of the feat of Jejjata was completed by Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma with the publication of this commentary in 1934. The first edition was published by Peringattuthodiyl Alavi Vaidyan [20] and printed at Jamaliya press, Tirur. Commentary on Utharasthana eventhough composed by him was not published for reasons unknown. Later in 2013, Poorna publications, Kozhikode reprinted the commentaries on Chikitsa and Kalpa sthana. This commentary, the final one among the *Brihat-trayi* commentaries, is considered as the finest commentary composed by him.

The style adopted by the commentator marked a shift in the established model of anvaya (prose order), anvayārtha (prose meaning) etc. and instead adopts a unique approach. It is rich in content with references from other Samhita and commentaries wherever necessary. This commentary also provides an insight into *Pathya* commentary, a rare commentary on *Ashtangahridaya* [21], highly regarded by Ashtavaidya physicians of Kerala [22] by quotations from it. It is also at the same time more scholarly while explaining the fundamentals and pragmatic while explaining the practices. While narrating the etymology of netra in Vasti-vidhi, Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma coins a specific nirukti for vastinetra, viz., *neeyate snehakvathaadi apaanam iti netram*. Also, when commenting on duration in Sirovastividhi, he mentions that in practice instead of continuous 7days of therapy, it is being done on alternate days with siropichu applied on the interval days thus extending the total duration to 14days.

3. Other literary works

Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma did leave his imprint on *laghu-trayi* also with his commentary on *Sarngadharasamhita* [23]. The commentary in Malayalam was named as *Vaidyapriya*. Another noteworthy commentary was composed again in his mother tongue on *Yogaratanakara* [24] and called *Vaidyaratnam*. He continued to immensely enrich the literature by a commentary on *Sukhasadhakam*, a Sanskrit work on Ayurveda written by Vattappilli Sthanika Vaikkam Parameshwara Sarma (Pachu Moothathu [25]). He also co-authored *Balachikitsa Bhasha* (Malayalam) along with Cherottu Thrikkovil Soolapani Varier [26]. *Ashtasthanapareekshayum Marmavibhagavum* (Ashtasthanapareeksha along with Marmavibhaga) was another work composed by him. He had also written a Malayalam commentary on *Anjananidana*, a rare text book [27].

There is no doubt among the Sanskrit and Ayurveda community of Kerala that a person trained by both Panditaraja Punnasseri Neelakantha Sarma and Vachaspathi T C Parameshwaran Moosath could attain the status of a literary genius and great physician. His literary contribution did not stop with aesculapian writing but also extended to other branches such as ritualism, spirituality etc. Some of his noteworthy works in other areas are listed in the table below (See Table 1).

4. Significance of Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma's works

In the modern world, most of our knowledge and culture is known directly from published books, periodicals, newspapers, radio, television, the cinema, and other modern communication forms. In ‘traditional societies’, most knowledge and culture came handed down from previous generations. All the major systems of traditional practice were codified in various texts and organized in consultation with men of learning who read and interpreted the texts. Ananda Wood had made an extensive study on such personalities from various fields of knowledge [28]. Charles Leslie had interestingly pointed out that in the early part of 20th century, the efforts undertaken by the orientalist in translating Sanskrit classics into English and other vernacular languages had transformed traditional medical learning in modern South Asia [29].

It can be clearly understood that Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma belongs to this group, who after getting traditionally educated, played an active part in the literary movements of that time which were concerned with translating and interpreting Sanskrit works in Malayalam and with developing Malayalam and modern Sanskrit literature for Ayurveda. His works point out the deep scholarliness along with his burning desire to write. The irony regarding his contributions is that despite having authored a wide range of commentaries and translations, some of them being pioneer works in the language, they have been sidelined now. Most of his works have become out of print and hence are out of favour of Ayurveda readers. It is a very good example of how the syllabus of Ayurveda academy had altered the readership habits of Ayurveda community and thereby influencing the mainstream literature.

Regional commentaries and texts have gone into deep graves with the modernization of Ayurveda education. The loss is for the science as the current Ayurveda fraternity is kept in dark regarding the valuable information that might be embedded in these regional works. Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma's case is an example and a pointer to the forgotten tons of wisdom in regional Ayurveda literature. Remedial measures for this are already warranted, otherwise the remaining works also will disappear in near future. Literary and social research on identification of similar works and personalities needs to be undertaken by Ayurveda fraternity. Also, efforts to provide access to such works and critical, analytical studies on them could also be made.

There is no doubt among the Sanskrit and Ayurveda community of Kerala that a person trained by both Panditaraja Punnasserri Neelakantha Sarma and Vachaspathi T C Parameshwaran Moosath attained the status of a literary genius and a great physician as Pandit C K Vasudeva Sarma did. He had repeated the feat of Jejjata in Malayalam language by composing commentaries on all the three Brihat-trayi texts (Carakasamhita, Sushrutasamhita and Ashtangahridaya). His commentaries are *Vachaspathya* on Carakasamhita (co-authorship), *Hridayollasa* on Sushrutasamhita and *Vasudeviya* on Ashtangahridaya. His other Ayurveda works are *Vaidyapriya* commentary on Sarngadharasamhita, *Vaidyaratnam* commentary on Yogaratnakara, a *commentary on Sukhasadhakam*, *Ashtasthanapareekshayum Marmavibhagavum*, a *commentary on Anjananidana* and *Balachikitsa Bhasha* (co-authorship), all in Malayalam language. His literary contribution did not stop with aesculapian writing but also extended to other branches such as ritualism, spirituality, astrology etc. He took up the job of editor at Bharathavilasam Press, Thrissur and got himself involved in several literary and publication works. Later he established a hospital/clinic *Bhaskara Vaidyasala* at Rayiranalloor (Nananthezhath illam), Palakkad District where medicines were offered free of cost always without any discretion of caste or creed. His medical services during the times of smallpox which cut across the society are still remembered. He also trained students in Sanskrit and Ayurveda.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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