

Bheṣajapaddhati : A Critical Study

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Bheṣajapaddhati is a short treatise on Āyurveda written by one Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri of Killikuruśsimangalam, near Lakkidi. The other details of the author are obscure, but it is to be supposed that he was staying with his guru and wrote the book under his directions and guidance.¹ Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri begins the work, paying homage to his Guru and Lord Siva of the local temple for blessings.

śrīmaṇḡalaikanilyam bhiṣajamadhīśam
sarvajñamātmagurumapyamṛtāśanānām /
śrīnīlakaṇṭhamabhayapradamātmabhāja
micchānukūlaphaladam gurumānatosmi // ²

I salute Śrī Nīlakaṇṭhah, my teacher, who is the abode of all auspiciousness, who is the Lord among the physicians, who is omniscient and who is the giver of all fruits as per the aspiration of the disciples like Siva who is the soul abode of all auspiciousness, who is the best among the physicians who is omniscient, who is the lord of Gods and who fulfills all aspirations of the devotees.

In the next verse the author pays homage to his *Iṣṭadevata*, The Lord Viṣṇu, and to his succession of teachers (*ācāryaparampara*) of Āyurveda along with his immediate teacher

śrīśam padmabhavam prajāpatimaham vāstoṣpatiṇcaśvinā-
vātreyādimuniśvarān kṛtamahātantrāgniveśādikān /
ācāryān praṇipatya vāhaṭamapi śrīnīlakaṇṭham gurum
vakṣye bheṣajapaddhatim guṇanika siddhyai gurorājñayā// ³

After having offered my salutations to the Lord of Laksmi, Brahman the creator, Indra, Aśvin brothers, the sages Ātreya etc; including Vāhaṭa who have comprised great treatises on Āyurveda and having saluted my Guru Śri Nīlakaṇṭhah , I composed this work called *Bheṣajapaddhati* , on the direction of my teacher in order to attain perfection in the field of Āyurveda.

In the last verse also Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri makes mention of Acyuta, his *Iṣṭadevata* , by whose grace he got the ability to compose this work.

eṣāpaddhatiracyutāśrayatayā vāṇī satām sammatā/

*doṣaghnī ca bhavennṛnamaviduṣām karma prakāśātmikā //*⁴

As this venture is carried out by the grace of Lord Visnu, it will be acceptable to the knowledgeable people. Moreover it will help the ordinary people to get enlightened about the treatment.

Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri being a Sanskrit scholar with poetic talents has no difficulty to give vent to his technical knowledge in beautiful verses. *Bhesajapaddhati* is a summary of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* which itself is the most concise ayurvedic text dealing with all topics. Formerly students had to memorise all the 120 chapters of this *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* but thanks to the efforts of Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri the gist of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* has been given in . *Bhesajapaddhati* , Noticing this Paṇḍitarājan Trkkovil Acyuta Vārrier observe thus:

Perhaps the author predicted the difficulty of the present day students in memorising the whole book and condensed the more important parts in as few verses as possible into four small chapters.⁵

Bhesajapaddhati contains four small chapters, technically called four *khandas*. The first *rogavicāra khaṇḍa* (discussion of diseases) consists of sixty-four verses. Among these five verses dealing with the composition of the human body.⁶ Then in eight verses the seven Prakṛis (natures).⁷ are dealt with. In the next fifteen verses explaining the author explains the symptoms of the Tridoṣas (three humours) in both the states of equilibrium and absence of the equilibrium.⁸

Then the thirteen verses deals with names and symptoms of diseases.⁹ In the next fifteen verses *vikṛtivyijñānīya* (knowledge of bad Prognostics)¹⁰ is dealt with.

In short the fundamental principles of Āyurveda mentioned in the *sūtrasthāna*, the *śarīrasthāna* and *nidānasthāna* in *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* are included in this short *khaṇḍa*.

The second *khaṇḍa*., named *bheṣajavikalpa khaṇḍa* contains thirty-nine verses. Among these the first fifteen verses are devoted to give the properties, *rasa*, (taste) *vīrya*, (efficacy) *vipāka*, (change) and *prabhāva* (potency) of commonly used *dravās* (liquids) and *dravyas* (materials).¹¹ The next two are devoted to cooked articles of food.¹² *Dravyas* are classified according to their *rasas* (taste) and *guṇas* (qualities) in another eleven verses.¹³ The preparation of decoction and other medicines is hinted in three *ślokas*.¹⁴ In the next eight verses *svasthavṛttam*, (routine for health) *ṛtucaryā* (seasonal regimens) *ragānulpādanīyam* (prevention of diseases) and *mātrātiśīya* (partaking proper quantity of food) are concisely dealt with.¹⁵ It can be says that some important portions of *sūtrasthāna* and *kalpasthāna* are thus included in this chapter.

In the third *khaṇḍa* named as *kriyābhedakhaṇḍa* consisting of thirty one verses the functions of *dosas*, *dhatu*s, and *malas* are explained briefly. In the examination of the patient importance of *dūtavyijñānīyam* (knowledge about the messenger) is stressed.¹⁶ The essence of Āyurveda treatment, *langhana*, *bṛmhana*, *śodhana* and *śamana*, the *pañcakarmās* and the *upakarmās* are mentioned briefly. Several chapters of *sūtrasthāna* and one in *śarīrasthāna* in the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* are summarized here.¹⁷

In the fourth *khaṇḍa* named as *upakramakhaṇḍa* consisting of 101 verses the treatment of *kāyikarogas* is mentioned in the first eightythree verses. Among these sixteen are devoted for fever,¹⁸ four for *rakatapitta* (bleeding) and allied diseases,¹⁹ seven for bronchial troubles,²⁰ eight for *gulma* (abdominal tumours)²¹ and eight for leprosy.²²

Original verses from *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* are commonly used in the summary.²³ The treatment of certain diseases is given in one or two verses only. Diseases above neck are dealt with in eight verses and other diseases mentioned in Uttarasthāna of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* in another eight verses.

It can be generally said that the author does not give necessary importance to the treatment of several diseases.

Is *Bhesajapaddhati* a Kerala work ?

There are so many internal evidences to believe that it is a Kerala work authored by a Keralite named Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri . The foremost reason is that Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri has included Vāgbhaṭa also in the guruparampara and that he used *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* as the basis for his work.²⁴ Both Vāgbhaṭa and *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* are authentic in Kerala .It can be see that in some places he adapted verses of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* according to the environment of Kerala. For example *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* mentions about six *ṛtus*.

māsairdvisamkhairmaghādyaih
kramāt ṣaḍṛtavah smṛtah /
śīśirothavasantaśca
grīṣmavarṣaśaraddhimāh // ²⁵

Beginning with māgha the six combinations of two months, are regarded as six seasons namely *Śīsira*, *Vasanta*, *Grīṣma*, *Varṣa* *Śarat* and *Hemanta* respectively.

But three *ṛtus* are mentioned in *Bheṣajapaddhati* in connection with the three doṣas (humours)

varṣaśaradvasanteṣu
vātapittakaphacchidah /
kriyā kāryā viśeṣeṇa
vīkṣya doṣaphalam sadā // ²⁶

During the seasons namely, *Varṣa*, *Śarat* and *Vasanta*, special treatment should be given after examining the *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha* of the individual thoroughly.

In the introduction to the text *Bhesajapaddhati*, Panditaraja Ṭṛkkovil Acyuta Vārrier says that in the manuscript got from the Ṭṛkkovil Uzhuttira- Vārrier, a few Malayalam verses are seen, which too are included in the text.

niśākatakinellikkāteccipāccotti gopikā
ekanāyakarāmacca mebhīh kvātham pramehaham /
nīrūrivairiteliśukapuḷikkuruttol
mukhaviḷārpasayumampalari sakāntā /
cemmaṇṇiśadvayahimadvayamattinīril
saptāhapiṣṭamitu mehagaṇam bhinatti // 27

The decoction prepared out the following two cure diabetes (1) Turmeric, (2) Water purifying seed, (3) Dry embilic myrobalam (4) Root of the jungle – flame tree (5) Bark of chungu (6) The root of salacia reticulata wight (7) The root of aerva lanata, (8) The bark of the root of salacia reticulata wight, and (9) Vetiver.

It is remarkable to note that the author quotes the following verses from *Sahasrayoga*.²⁸

panaviralkaṭalāṭi cuḷḷirambhā
bhasitasametajalena pālinālum /
azhakilitu nihanti kaṇṇi śopham
harihariyoriva kalmaṣam prasādah // 29

The solution prepared out of the ashes of the following; flowers of palm, root of the prickly chaff-flower plant, root of the long leaved berleria, root of the plantain mixed with equal quantities of milk and water cures śopha diseases like the benefits of blessing of god Viṣṇu and Śiva.

This is also a quotation from *Sahasrayoga*.³⁰

Mention of coconut oil and the qualities are described in *bheṣajavikalpakhaṇḍa*
mūtram rūkṣakaṭūṣṇatīkṣṇalaghu dhānyāmlaṇṇca madyāni vā
tailam vātakaphāpaham guru vasā naimbam tathātauvaram /

airañḍam kaṭivātajit daśanaśūlaghnaśca kerodbhavam

sarvam vātakaphāpaham śravaṇaśūlaghnaśca rājībhavam // ³¹

Urine which is *rūkṣa* (astringent), *kaṭu* (acid), *tīkṣṇa* (saltpitre), and *laghu* (light), rice soup or liquor or gingely oil destroys all type of diseases, due to *vāta* and *kapha*. *Vasa* (oil taken out of heat) etc are *guru* (hard) (that is not easily digestable). Neem oil is sour. Castrol oil destroys rheumatic diseases especially of lower region of body. Coconut oil cures tooth ache. Mustard oil destroys all diseases due to *vata* and *kapha* and cures ear pain.

Also

kṣīradrumodarakaravākhadirāsaneṣu

jambvarjunadviśabārījatusarjaphenāh /

kerādripuṣpajavītatagairikādyāh

patthyādvayendrasuṣavī pramukhāh kaṣāyah // ³²

In the *upakrama khaṇḍa khandā* also there is a reference to coconut as an ingredient of medicine as follows.

doṣeṣu sannipatite vivaśe śārīre

naṣṭasmṛtau nakhamukhādiṣu taila lepah /

sastaśca pānamapi bhodhanamindriyāṇām

nasyam supakvamiha kerajanimbajaśca. // ³³

When the *dosas* are manifest, the body is in an unconscious state and the memory has failed, the application of gingely oil on the nails, face etc; or the drinking or inhaling of the boiled coconut oil and neem oil are able to bring back the senses to consciousness.

Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri has given a special preparation of medicine with coconut flowers for *aśṛgdaram*. He mentions that it is the special medicine of his *guru*.

aśṛgdarepyevamihātimātra

pravṛttarakta praśamāya peyam /

japāpayah kerajapuṣpasāram

sitāmadhubhyāmiti me gurūktih // ³⁴

According to my teacher the excess bleeding due to asṛgdara (enlargement of rectum) can be cured by the intake of the decoction prepared out of the flower stalk of red coconut tree, the buds of white Hibiscus added with sugar and honey.

Mention of coconut water for treatment is given in *upakrama khaṇḍa* .

*kṛcchreṣu pittaṭṭavanātmāsumūtravṛddhyai
kvātham pibellaghu tṛṇātmakapañcamūlaih /
sakṣīramājyamapi tairmadhurañca peyam
kerāmbunājyatilakairabhiṣecayettam // ³⁵*

The difficulty in passing urine due to the excess of *vāta* and *pitta* can be cured and the urine can be increased by the consumption of decoction of the following ingredients namely, root of Desmodium, root of psuedathia viscido, poison berry, land caltrops etc. The dhara therapy by using coconut water, ghee or gignely oil is good for this disease.

Again

*vātaśleṣmasu dāśamūla salilam
peyamañca dhānyāmlatah /
svedah kerajanimbatailavasayā-
bhyango vyavāyādayah // ³⁶*

The urinary disease arising of the excess of vata and *kapha* element can be cured by the intake of dāśamūlasalila or *perspiration by rice soup* and apply coconut oil or Neem oil or Vasa for massage.

Another point suggesting the Keralite authorship is that the manuscript for *Bhesajapaddhati* has been recovered from Kerala and three verses are given in Malayalam language and another one in *Maṇipravāla*. ³⁷

In the concluding portion of the *Bhesajapaddhati* it is said that there are some medicines which are not mentioned in basic authentic texts. It seems that those were the special preparation

of his Guru. In one of the verses he mentions about *kāyaseka* which is known as *pizhicchil*, a peculiar technique evolved in Kerala āyurveda.

*chinne bhinne ca bhagne vapuṣi janijasthānamāyojyasamyag-
bhadhvā sekādi kuryādyadi tu nipatite śeṣagātrāni rakṣet. //* ³⁸

When the limbs of the body are fractured or broken then the parts are to be joined their respective places and bound carefully and *pizhicchil* therapy can be done. If a part of the body is fallen (cut off) then the rest of the limbs should be protected.

Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri used the word *asana* for eating. This is a word commonly used in Kerala for *āhāra* (food), while describing Dinacaryā (daily routine). It is interesting here to note that Kerala cākyārs used this word abundantly and there is a particular topic named *asana* in *Kūtiyāṭṭam*.

*uthāyoṣasi śuddha ātmavihitam smṛtvātha kṛtvā harim /
natvā snānamathāśanañca śayanādīni svakāle bhajet //* ³⁹

After waking up very early in the morning, do the following regularly in each day. (1) Pray to Hari, (2) think about one's own duties, (3) then take bath and food and go to bed at the proper time.

A few slokas from this text and a few from the standard recipes prevalent in Kerala are reproduced as such.

In the last but one verse Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri says that the work is based upon *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*.

*bheṣajāni suvijñeyanyaṣṭāṅgahṛdaye nṛnām
manonayā viśatyasminnityeṣā paddhatismṛtā //* ⁴⁰

Primarily one should have thorough understanding of medicines prescribed in *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*; and later one can enter into this text '*Bhesajapaddhati*'

Dr. C.R Agnives after examining the medicines prescribed in this text observes that the tablets like *nīrūryādigulika* mentioned in this are prevalent only in Kerala. This also conforms to the view that it is a Keralite work. Most of the medicines prescribed in this text have been using by the Āyurvedic physicians of Kerala for common diseases like Diabetics, and fever. etc.,

From the above evidences it can be categorically concluded that Puruṣottaman Nambūtiri is a Keralite. He is not only a physician but also a master of Sanskrit language. He has abridged many *Astangahrdaya* slokas in lucid and simple Sanskrit language with out loosing the essence.

REFERENCES

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3. Ibid., I – 2
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