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SALIENT FEATURES OF DHANVANTARI, A LESS-KNOWN AYURVEDIC TREATISE

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ABSTRACT

Salient features of a less-known ayurvedic treatise, Dhanvantari are reported in this communication. Occurrence of some iatrochemical formulations ascribed to Charaka, Dhanvantari and Krishnatreya is a special feature of this text. Clear instructions are given in this treatise on the pre-treatment of patients, types of adjuvants, bio-activators and post-prandial drinks to be administered with the medicines and dietary restrictions. As phirangaroga and ashtasthanapariksha are described, it can be concluded that Dhanvantari was composed in 16 or 17 century A.D. Some inter-relationships of the Dhanvantari School of Ayurveda and Tamil medicine are also discussed, implying the need for a re-examination of the concepts of the history of Ayurveda.

Introduction

Sanskrit literature contains a sizeable number of treatises on Ayurveda. Drawing inspiration from the classical compositions of the Ātrēya and Dhanvantari schools of thought, many scholars contributed compendia, translations of which are available in the regional languages. During the course of a literature survey we came across the Malayalam version of one such text entitled Dhanvantari^{1,2}. It was originally published in 1938 with the śītikandhīya commentary of Kāvūṅgal Nilakanṭha Pillai, a Sanskrit scho-

lar. As Dhanvantari is a less-known ayurvedic text, an attempt is made in this communication to highlight some of its salient features, which qualify it for further study.

Plan of the text

The author does not reveal his identity anywhere in the text. Before starting the classification of fevers, he invokes the blessings of Pañcānana, a terrifying form of Śiva. The concluding stanzas, typical of many Sanskrit texts are missing in Dhanvantari, which ends with the recipe of a cosmetic formulation (2:440**).

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The opening chapter of the text deals with omens, diagnostic techniques, interpretation of dreams, signs of imminent death, qualities of land, characteristics of vegetable drugs and definition of weights and measures. This is followed by classification of diseases and guidelines for their treatment. After describing the characteristics of each sub-group of the disease, the author enumerates the single drug remedies, compound herbal formulations and iatrochemical preparations useful in its management. There are 129 such chapters which begin with the classification of fevers (jvararōganidāna) and end with treatment of sexual debility (vājīkaraṇa). There is no chapter on rejuvenation (rasāyana). The author presents the medical knowledge as if Dhanvantari narrates it to Śiva.

Classifications of diseases

The nosological aspects of Dhanvantari are based mostly on Mādhavanidāna³. However, at some instances the author ventures to incorporate information from other sources as well. Thus, many fevers like bhautika, mandhara, kṛṣṇamandhara, ěkāhika, dvyāhika, tryāhika, caturāhika, pāncāhika, pākṣika and māsika are also included (1:49-115). Mention is also made of agramāṃsa, akṣispandana, asvōdana, bahumūtra, ěkāṅgaspan-dana, granthīśūla, kharasparśa, mahāsvōda, mūtrātisāra, sarvāṅgaspan-dana, śphastambha and suptavāta. Some

of these diseases were first reported in post-Vāgbhaṭa texts like Gadani-graha, Paryāyaratnamāla, Rasaratna-kara etc⁴.

Diagnosis of diseases

For identification of diseases the author recommends the aṣṭhasthāna-parikṣā or examination of pulse (nāḍi), urine (mūtra), feces (mala), tongue (jihva), eyes (nētra), general appearance (rūpa), voice (śabda) and skin (sparśa) of the patient. Nāḍiparikṣā is believed to have been adopted from Tamil medicine⁵ and mūtraparikṣā was first described in Ayurveda by Vangasena in Cikitsāsārasaṃgraha dating from 11 century A.D.⁴ As the rudiments of the concept of aṣṭhasthānaparikṣā are traceable in Kāyastha Cāmuṇḍā's Jvaratimirabhāskara of 16 century⁴, Dhanvantari can be assigned to 16 or 17 century. This is supported by the observation that in the phalaśruti of Bṛhadvidyādhara-bhraṃ, Kṣudhāvatīguṭikā, Mahāgulma-kālānalarasaṃ, Rasāyanāmṛtalōhaṃ and Sowbhāgyaśuṅṭhīmōdakaṃ, the author makes an allusive reference to the Jvaratimirabhāskara (1: 429-430, 2: 26, 31, 247, 250-251).

Medicinal formulations

Herbal preparations

Some of the recipes of Dhanvantari are found to have been adopted from Cakradattaṃ which dates from 11 century.⁴ The use of *Terminalia arjuna* (Roxb.) Wight & Arnot (arjuna)

in heart disease and *Crataeva nurvala* Buch.-Ham. (varuṇa) in urolithiasis was first recommended by Cakrapāṇi-datta^{6,7}. Occurrence of recipes of several simple formulations is a marked feature of this text.

Mercurial preparations

Dhanvantari recommends numerous mercurial preparations in the treatment of almost all diseases. Many of the formulations are attributed to Candranātha, Gahananātha, Nityanātha, Viśvanātha and other iatrochemists who flourished in the medieval period.⁸ Table 1 lists the references to such formulae. Interestingly enough, some mercurials are ascribed to Aśvinikumāra, Caraka, Dhanvantari, Kṛṣṇātrēya, Nārada, Śiva and Viṣṇu. These observations are significant in the wake of absence of references to mercurials in present day versions of Suśruta Saṃhitā and Caraka Saṃhitā.

It is generally believed that mercurial preparations are administered without considering the destabilisation of the tridōṣa⁴. However, Dhanvantari is replete with references to many mercurials which are indicated in specific dōṣa states. This suggests that attempts were made by later authors to integrate iatrochemistry with classical ayurvedic doctrines. References to such formulae are provided in Table 2.

Botanical Aspects

Due to interaction with Greco-Arabic and Chinese medicines, many new plants were incorporated into the ayurvedic pharmacopoeia^{4,9}. *Aloe barbadensis* Mill. (kumāri), *Crinum latifolium* L. (sudarśana), *Creton tiglium* L. (jaipāla), *Echinops echinatus* Roxb. (uṣṭrakāṇṭaka) and *Papaver somiferum* L. (ahiphōna) are some such plants found in the formulae of Dhanvantari. Interestingly, *Cannabis sativa* L. (bhaṅga) occurs in 15 formulations, 11 of which are aphor-disiacs.

Description of Phiraṅgarōga

Dhanvantari describes phiraṅgarōga (syphilis) first reported in Ayurveda by Bhāvamishra¹⁰. Verses from Bhāvaprakāśa are obviously reproduced with little variation to describe the aetiology, prognosis and secondary and afflictions of the disease (2:199-201). Rasakarpūra, Saptaśālivaṭi and a few powders including that of *Smilax china* L. (cōpacīni) are indicated exactly as in Bhāvaprakāśa (2:206-208).

Influence of tantra and other religious elements

Elements of tantra and other religious practices are found in Dhanvantari. Some examples are cited below.

- 1) Amṛtāṅkuralōhaṃ is to be consumed after paying homage to the deities, spiritual masters and the learned (1: 374-376).
- 2) Aṣṭādaśaśatikaprasāriṇī tailaṃ is effective only if consumed after performing Viṣṇupūja (1: 344-346).
- 3) Candraprabhāvaṭi is especially effective if consumed after performing Śivapūja (1: 163-165).
- 4) Pūja of Ravi (Sun) and Guru (Jupiter) should be performed on an auspicious day before consuming Catusamalōhaṃ (1: 425-426).
- 5) Nāyikācūrṇaṃ should be consumed in the early morning while meditating on the Yōginī form of Durga (1: 136-137).
- 6) Before starting the preparation of Śaṅkadrāvaka one should perform Yōginīpūja and Bhairavapūja according to established procedures (2: 97-98).
- 7) Pūja of Sarvāṅgasundararasam and Viśveśvararasam should be performed before consuming the same (1: 217, 381-382).
- 8) The aphrodisiac (Śatāvarīmōdakaṃ) should be consumed after performing Śivapūja and Dhanvantarīpūja (2: 409-410).
- 9) Pūja of Gaṇapati, Yōgīśvari, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Sūrya should be performed

before consuming Śūlavajriṇī vaṭi (1: 423-424).

10) All diseases will be cured if Trailōkyacintāmaṇirasam is consumed while performing pūja of Śrī Pārvati and Sūrya (1: 368-369).

11) Human urine is recommended as an adjuvant for administering Bhūta-bhairavarasam (1: 299-300). Sharma (1984) is of the opinion that use of human urine is related to tāntrik rites¹¹.

Discussion and Conclusions

On the whole Dhanvantari seems to have been composed in the post-Bhāvamishra period, apparently with the intention of serving as a comprehensive guide to practitioners. It gives clear instructions on the pre-treatment of patients, types of adjuvants, bioactivators and post-prandial drinks (anupāna) to be administered with the medicines, dietary restrictions and precautions to be taken with mercurials.

Interestingly, the text contains some information which should serve as stimuli for further research on the history of Ayurveda. The celestial twins- Aśvinikumāra, Caraka, Dhanvantari and Kṛṣṇātrēya are said to have designed some iatrochemical preparations (Table 1). In this context it may be mentioned that Tṛṇāraṇandā's Āyurvēdasaukhya contains passages on pulse examination ascribed in

Caraka Saṃhita⁴. Such evidences cast doubt on the validity of the opinion of some medical historians that iatrochemistry and pulse examination were later introductions to Ayurveda due to its interaction with exponents of Chinese, Greco-Arabic and Tamil medicines^{9,10}. How such elements disappeared from the original versions of the classics needs to be investigated. Painstaking study of the extant medical literature of Arabic, Pali, Persian, Sanskrit, Tamil and Tibetan languages is required to solve some of these riddles.

In the chapter on the nosology of *aṅṅavṛddhi*, the author states that "as suggested by Suśruta and others, *vardhma* afflicts persons who had recovered from an attack of *phiraṅgarōga* (2:128-129). This suggests that a *phirangaroga*-like malady might have been known to ancient authors. Such a statement is meaningful in the light of the fact that the recently-described AIDS is very much comparable to a clinical condition that stems from diminution of *ōjas* and the resulting vitiation of *vāta* and *pitta*, even though a specific name was not assigned to the clinical entity^{13,14}.

Considering all the internal evidences it can be concluded that Dhanvantari was composed by an anonymous scholar of the Dhanvantari School of Ayurveda. Many secondary

evidences suggest that the school had links with Tamil medicine.

Dwarakanath remarks that a scholar of the Dhanvantari School was the guru of Koṅkaṇavar, the 16 century ascetic revered in the Tamil medical tradition^{5,15}. A Tamil medical treatise entitled *Tanvantari Vaityaṇi* is still in use and formulae of many mercurials like *Jvaracintāmaṇirasam* and *Piratāpalāṅkēśvarakuḷikai* are present in it¹⁶. Koṅkaṇavar's guru was said to have been an accomplished *tāntrik*¹⁵ and interestingly many elements of tantra are available in Dhanvantari as well. While references to Caraka, Suśruta or Vāgbhaṭa are missing in Tamil medical works, some texts of the system contain introductory verses paying tribute to Dhanvantari. The *tanvantari vaṅakkam* (homage to Dhanvantari) in *Tēraiar Makākariśal* is a proof of it¹⁷.

Not many texts on therapeutics are attributed to Dhanvantari. However, Kamat refers to Dhanvantari Grantha and Dhanvantari Pañcaka in the appendix to his study of the *Dhanvantariya Nighaṅṭu*¹⁸. One Dhanvantari *Cikitsāraṇavaṇi* is reported to be in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar¹⁹. It will be interesting to ascertain whether these texts have any characteristics in common with Dhanvantari, the subject of the present study.

TABLE 1

**IATROCHEMICAL FORMULATIONS ATTRIBUTED TO
HISTORICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL PERSONALITIES**

No.	Name of personality to whom the formula is ascribed	Name of Formula	Reference
1.	Aśvinikumāra	Kuṣḍharākṣasatailam	2 : 235-236
2.	Candranādha	Śricandrāmṛtalōham*	1 : 235-236
3.	Candranādha	Śūlavajriṇivaṭi	1 : 423-424
4.	Candranādha	Śiraśūlādrivajjarasam	2 : 376
5.	Caraka	Sōmanātharasam	2 : 79-80
6.	Dhanvantari	Mṛtyuñjayalōham	2 : 109-110
7.	Gahananādha	Śrinṛpativallabham	1 : 145-146
8.	Gahananādha	Krimidhūlijalavavarasam	1 : 183-184
9.	Gahananādha	Kāsasamhārabhairavarasam	1 : 229
10.	Gahananādha	Gulmakālānalarasam	2 : 26-27
11.	Gahananādha	Agnikumāralōham	2 : 108
12.	Gahanānanda	Prāṇavallabharasam	1 : 191-192
13.	Gahanānanda	Prāṇavallabharasam*	2 : 32-33, 109
14.	Gahanānanda	Rasāmṛtarasam	1 : 202
15.	Gahanānanda	Tārakēśvararasam	2 : 57
16.	Gahanānandanādha	Candrasūryātma karasam	1 : 193-194
17.	Gahanānandanādha	Gulmaśārdūlarasam	2 : 32
18.	Gahanānandanādha	Kālānalarasam	1 : 181-182
19.	Gahanānandanādha	Kāñcanābhra kam	1 : 220
20.	Gahanānandanādha	Sōmēśvararasam	2 : 76-77, 85-86
21.	Gahanānandanādha	Vātavidhvamsanarasam	1 : 365-366
22.	Kṛṣṇātrēya	Caturmukharasam	1 : 318-319
23.	Kṛṣṇātrēya	Yōgeñdrarasam	1 : 320
24.	Nārada	Lakṣmivilāśarasam	1 : 103-105
25.	Nityanātha	Gulmavajriṇivaṭika	2 : 29
26.	Sūrya	Kṣudhāsāgararasam	1 : 177
27.	Viṣṇu	Nityōdayarasam	1 : 238-239
28.	Viśvanātha	Viśvēśvararasam	1 : 381-382

*Contains no mercury.

TABLE 2

IATROCHEMICAL FORMULATIONS INDICATED IN SPECIFIC DŌṢA STATES

No.	Name of formulation	Remarks	Reference
1.	Abhrakavaṭika	Cures pain of vāta-kapha origin	1 : 138-139
2.	Amṛtārṇavaṇṇ	Cures atisāra of single, double or triple dōṣa combination	1 : 126-127
3.	Amṛtārṇavarasaṇṇ	Cures kāsa of vāta origin	1 : 228
4.	Bṛhadicchābhēdirasaṇṇ	Cures vitiation of kapha	2 : 7-8
5.	Bṛhalkāñcanābhrakarasasaṇṇ	Anupāna to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṇṇ	1 : 220-221
6.	Gulmakālānalarasaṇṇ	Cures vāta gulma	2 : 26-27
7.	Hṛdayārṇavarasaṇṇ	Cures kapha hṛdrōga	2 : 36
8.	Jvarakēsarīrasasaṇṇ	Cures pitta jvara if administered with sugar	1 : 102
9.	Jvarārīrasasaṇṇ	Cures kapha-pitta diseases	1 : 82
10.	Kanakāvatiṇṇ	Cures arśas of vāta or kapha origin	1 : 162
11.	Kāñcanābhrakarasasaṇṇ	Cures kāsa of kapha-pitta origin	1 : 212
12.	Krimidhūlijalaplavarasaṇṇ	Kills worms of pitta or vāta-pitta origin	1 : 183-184
13.	Laghvānandarasaṇṇ	Cures vāta disease with giddiness and burning sensation	1 : 195-196
14.	Lakṣmivilasarasasaṇṇ	Cures vāta-pitta jvara	1 : 103-105
15.	Lōkēsvararasasaṇṇ	Adjuvants and anupāna are recommended for diseases of vāta, pitta or kapha origin	1 : 217-219
16.	Madhyamasarvajvaraharalōhaṇṇ	Cures jvara of vāta, pitta, kapha and sannipāta origin	1 : 107
17.	Mṛtyuñjayalōhaṇṇ	Anupāna to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṇṇ	2 : 109-110
18.	Mṛtyuñjayarasasaṇṇ	Cures vāta-pitta jvara if administered with coconut water or sugar. Cures kapha jvara if administered in honey.	1 : 100
19.	Palāsādivaṭi	Bhāvana to be done in pañcapittarasasaṇṇ if it is to be administered in pitta diseases.	1 : 366-367
20.	Pāṣāṇavajrarasaṇṇ	Anupāna to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṇṇ	2 : 65
21.	Pittakāsāntakarasasaṇṇ*	Cures kāsa of pitta origin	1 : 228-229
22.	Prāṇavallabharasaṇṇ	Dose is to be increased after assessing vitiation of kapha	1 : 191-192

No.	Name of formulation	Remarks	Reference
23.	Rājamṛgāṅkarasaṃ	Cures consumption of vāta-kapha origin	1 : 213
24.	Sarvāṅgasundararasaṃ	Cures vāta-pitta jvara and many diseases of vāta or kapha origin	1 : 217
25.	Sarvāṅgasundararasaṃ	Cures piercing pain of kapha-vāta origin	1 : 430-431
26.	Sōmēśvararasaṃ	Cures vāta pramēha	2 : 76-77
27.	Śrīkhaṅṭhavaṭi*	Cures diseases of kapha-vāta origin	1 : 364
28.	Svacchandabhairavaṃ	To be administered on the basis dōṣakōpaṃ	1 : 233-234
29.	Svalpamṛgāṅkaṃ	Anupāna to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṃ	1 : 219-220
30.	Śvāsakuṭhāraṃ	Cures śvāsa, kāsa and kṣaya of vāta-kapha origin	1 : 251
31.	Tikṣṇamukharasaṃ	Cures pitta arśas if administered with sugar	1 : 161-162
32.	Trailōkyacintāmaṇīrasaṃ	Honey & powder of <i>Piper longum</i> L. are bioactivators if the medicine is to be administered in vāta-kapha diseases.	1 : 368-369
33.	Tripurabhairavarasaṃ*	Also cures oedema due to vāta	1 : 97
34.	Vaidyanāthavaṭi	Adjuvant is to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṃ	1 : 98
35.	Vaidyanāthavaṭika	Cures distresses of vāta-kapha or kapha origin	1 : 137-138
36.	Vātakulāntakaṃ	Anupāna to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṃ	1 : 300-301
37.	Vidyādharaḥbhraṃ	Dose to be selected on the basis of dōṣakōpaṃ	1 : 424-425
38.	Vidyādhararasaṃ	Cures kapha gulma	2 : 30-31
39.	Yōgēndrarasaṃ	Cures diseases of vāta-pitta origin	1 : 320

*Contains no mercury.

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इस लेख में एक अप्रसिद्ध आयुर्वेदीय ग्रन्थ 'धन्वन्तरि' की प्रमुख विशेषताओं का विवरण प्रस्तुत किया गया है। इसकी एक प्रमुख विशेषता यह है कि इसमें कतिपय ऐसे रसयोगों का उल्लेख मिलता है जो बरक, धन्वन्तरि तथा कृष्णात्रेय द्वारा बनाये गये माने जाते हैं। इस ग्रन्थ में रोगियों के लिए चिकित्सा-पूर्वकर्म, औषधियों के साथ प्रयोज्य विभिन्न प्रकार के सहायक वस्त्रों, अन्नपानों, जीवनीय द्रव्यों तथा भोजनोपरीत पानार्थ उपयुक्त भर्त्यों एवं पथ्यापथ्य खात पान के विषय में स्पष्ट निर्देश दिये गये हैं। फिरंग रोग तथा अट्टरपान परीक्षा का इस में उल्लेख मिलने से यह माना जा सकता है कि 'धन्वन्तरि' की रचना ईसवी 16 वीं या 17 वीं शताब्दी में हुई होगी। आयुर्वेद के धन्वन्तरि सम्प्रदाय तथा नामिल चिकित्सा पद्धति के परस्पर सम्बन्धों की भी दशाति हुए आयुर्वेद के इतिहास में सन्वर्धित धारणाओं पर पुनर्विचार की आवश्यकता की ओर ध्यानार्कषित करने का प्रयास किया गया है।

- डॉ. सुरेशकुमार

एक अप्रसिद्ध आयुर्वेदीय ग्रन्थ 'धन्वन्तरि' की प्रमुख विशेषताएँ

भारत