

Short Medical Biography

**A REMINISCENCE OF A LEGENDARY LEADER OF  
ĀYURVĒDA - RĀJAVĀIDYA BĀVABHĀĪ ACALAJĪ  
DHŌLAKIYĀ (1824-1893)**

**Pathak Namyata\* & Ashok B. Vaidya\*\***

**ABSTRACT**

Less than two centuries ago, an efficient *Rasavaidya Bāvābhāī Acalajī Dhōlakiyā* travelled on horseback across Western India to treat the princes and the downtrodden alike. As a *Rājavidya* to multiple kingdoms, he convinced the princes to establish pharmacies which would manufacture quality Ayurvedic medicines. Exhorting the local doctors to incorporate *Āyurvēda* in their practice, he comprehensively documented his methods and experiences in his book '*Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā*', which was recently published by the Jamnagar University. His life story gives an interesting insight into the world of medicine as influenced by the contemporary economic and political milieu in the pre modern medicine era. Scientific documentation of such work and biographies provides an easy access to a vast experiential base such that modern scientific approaches can be applied to evolve futuristic integrated medicine.

**Keywords :** Experience based medicine, *Jhaṇḍū Bhaṭṭa*, *Rasavaidya*, *Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā*, syphilis, *Rasaśālā*, *Ariṣṭa lakṣaṇa* / prognostic markers

**Introduction**

In 1825, Lord Macaulay wrote to the Queen of England of a plan to subvert the people of India through an educational and cultural conquest by systemically downgrading the Indian way of life and learning.<sup>5</sup> Macaulay forcibly shut down the *Gurukula*, the ancient centres of learning and had not yet set up new schools to replace them. A generation of children was growing up in darkness. Amidst the gloom, there was a child who would become one of that century's greatest healers.

*Bāvābhāī Acalajī Dhōlakiyā*, a *Rājavidya* to six Indian kingdoms established

---

\*Junior Research Fellow & \*\*Research Director, Kasturba Health Society-Medical and Research Centre, ICMR Advanced Centre for Reverse Pharmacology in Traditional Medicine, K Desai Road, Vile Parle (W), Mumbai - 400056, India.

six *Rasaśālā* across Gujarat and Maharashtra and wrote two major books that remained unpublished during his lifetime. He travelled mostly on horseback from Kashi in the east to Jamnagar in the west; from Udaipur in the north to Mumbai in the south, treating the rich and the poor.

He left behind a legacy and his school of thought that his six sons and other disciples applied in their practice and took to the next level by travelling further and managing the pharmacies that he had established. In his travels, he exhorted local doctors to follow the scientific principles of *Āyurvēda*.

Tradition in India equates a *Vaidya* to God, '*Vaidyō nārāyaṇō hariḥ*'. Not only the royal houses of Western India, but thousands of her impoverished children looked up to him as the final authority. Balancing his spiritual quest and his entrepreneurship uniquely, he used his large income generated from the princes to treat the poor at minimum cost or free.

His book, the '*Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā*' was recently translated from Sanskrit to Gujarati by *Vaidya Vināyaka V. Thakkara*, Ex-Vice Chancellor of Gujarat Ayurveda University, Jamnagar and published in 2006. Dr. A.J. *Bakṣī*, a pioneer in Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals and chemistry, published the book despite a severe financial crunch. The other book, '*Hastāmālaka*' is unpublished and probably lost.

Graced by the blessings of Lord *Śiva* due to his sincere and devout *Rudra upāsana*, *Vaidyarāja Bāvābhāi Acalajī* played the pivotal role of a lifesaver and a guide to whosoever sought his wisdom and healing touch. Like his renowned peer *Vaidya Jhaṇḍū Bhaṭṭajī*, *Bāvābhāi* too salvaged the system of *Āyurvēda* at a time when allopathy had not yet turned into Modern Medicine. Yet, his contributions have not yet received the kind of attention his stature and work have deserved nationally or internationally.

For service, education and research in *Āyurvēda*, there often is an exclusive emphasis on *Bṛhatrayī* and *Laghutrayī*. But we forget that before the advent of modern medicine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a robust system of healing existed in India. A system though not successful in treating tuberculosis through anti- mycobacterials, it had a spectrum of modalities which included immune enhancement, appetite stimulation, detoxification and nutraceutical support and rejuvenation. Various forms of arthritis, sensory - motor disorders, various acute and chronic gastrointestinal ailments, skin disorders, allergies and the like which still elude modern medicine were treated then and now by *Vaidya*. Those pioneering *Vaidya* of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century shaped our aspirations for the future building on our more distant past. Musing out

their contributions has been detrimental to the possible integrative research based on that vast experiential base for globalising Āyurvēda.

### Initiation into Āyurvēda<sup>2,6</sup>

*Rājavidya Bāvābhāi Acalajī*, was born as *Vijayaśaṅkara Acalajī Dhōlakiyā* to a contractor of the kingdom of Jamnagar in May 1824 AD. Around that time, as stated earlier, the British ridiculed Indian systems of learning and forced them to close down. Yet, their educational system had not yet replaced the disappearing *Gurukula*.

Born into this void, *Bāvābhāi* joined his father in his business at a tender age of eight. He moved from job to job, never really happy working for someone else. At 20, when a fiercely self-reliant *Bāvābhāi* found himself drawn to Āyurvēda, the ancient system of healing was crumbling and few Indians lived beyond 30. At this time, his meeting with his teacher - *Vīṭhthala Bhaṭṭajī*, father of *Jhaṇḍū Bhaṭṭajī* - seemed fated, for few masters truly understood the ancient science enough to translate into clinical success. Among his peers in *Vīṭhthala Bhaṭṭajī's* classroom were the well-known *Prabhurāmajī*, *Indrajī* and the five sons of his teacher. He and *Jhaṇḍū Bhaṭṭajī* loved and respected each other deeper than siblings. Over the eight years that he spent with *Bhaṭṭajī* family - they searched for herbs and medicinal plants together; sharpened their therapeutic skills; and learned from local ethnobotany. Using classical texts like the *Bṛhatrayī* and *Laghutrayī*, *Rasaratna Samuccaya*, *Rasa Ratnākara*, *Rasēndra Cintāmaṇi* and *Pathyāpathya Nighaṇṭu*, they discussed difficult cases, diagnosis and management of diseases. They conducted expensive *Rasaśāstra* experiments taking weeks to months to prepare metal based medicines imbued with potentizing herbs and their specific pharmaceutical property. Indian alchemy *Samśkāra* of *Pārada* were also carried out. His grandson, Mumbai-based Dr *Nīlakantha Dhōlakiyā* distinctly remembers seeing the *Śivalīnga* of solidified mercury, or *Baddha Pārada* in his house.<sup>1</sup>

*Bāvābhāi* also delved into the depths of spirituality under the guidance of his *Guru*, *Daṇḍī Svāmī Tōkarānandajī*. Revered by the Prince of Jamnagar, *Tōkarānandajī* taught *Bāvābhāi* the *Rudra upāsana* - an intense and self transforming worship of Lord *Śiva* - for two years. It is believed that the study of *Aparā vidyā* of Āyurvēda was guided by the rigorous worship of the divine or *Parā vidyā* which led to spiritual growth, enhancing the healing prowess of the devotee.

*Bāvābhāi's* devotion impressed his guru, who recommended him as an official royal *Vaidya* to *Jāmasahēba*, the Prince of Jamnagar. In the court of the Prince, in the presence of his teachers, *Tōkarānandajī* and *Vīṭhthala Bhaṭṭajī*, he was asked to

show properties of a *Rasāyana*. His demonstration was intended to please a warrior prince; he prepared a bullet made from *Rasāyana* that could pierce seven earthen pans when shot. The prince appointed him as a *Rājavidya*. And soon, the 22 year old embarked on a journey that was to see him become *Rājavidya* for many other kingdoms as well.

### A Peripatetic *Rājavidya*<sup>2,6</sup>

The travels and travails of a *vidya*, when the Indian trains and roads were barely developed makes an interesting chapter of *Bāvābhāi*'s life.

When Udaipur's king, *Mahārāṇā Svarūpasimha* grappled with *Ūrustambha*, a sensory-motor disease of the lower limbs in 1856, his doctors could not cure him. He turned to *Bāvābhāi* for advice if this was curable. He got a frank response, 'As this is congenital, it is not curable, but we can treat the complications.' Due to his clarity of concepts, forthrightness and successful treatment of other courtiers; the *Mahārāṇā* appointed him as *Rājavidya* and issued an order of princely compensation of Rs.2000 a year, bonding even his heirs to this command.

When the *Mahārāṇā* suffered from a *Viṣama Jvara* or malaria, *Bāvābhāi* advised a remedy containing poison. Afraid to take such medication, he asked *Bāvābhāi* for an alternative. *Bāvābhāi* suggested the *Daivavyapāśraya* mode treatment by charity. He asked the *Mahārāṇā* to donate one thousand villages and cows to a thousand Brahmins and it worked. In 1865, four years after the *Mahārāṇā* died and his heir *Śambusimha* had taken over the kingdom, *Bāvābhāi* returned Jamnagar where he got involved in the management of *Jhaṇḍū Bhaṭṭajī's Rasasālā*. But it did not end his association with Udaipur, which was going to span four generations of Udaipur hierarchy.

He was summoned by *Mōṅhībā*, Queen Mother of Gondal, to treat her anaemic son *Bhagavatasimha*, that began a 13 year stay in Gondal, until 1886. Many Ayurvedic physicians were to take advantage of his expertise. When *Bāvābhāi* healed the prince of Kashi of his *Sangrahaṇī* or chronic sprue; he was honoured in a full courtroom and inducted on the payroll of Kashi. *Bāvābhāi* had also cured the ailing *Thākōra* of Rajkot from a blood dyscrasias. Deeply obliged he offered a place for the establishment of the famous '*Rudra Prasāda*' pharmacy in 1877 in the centre of his kingdom. *Girijāsankarajī*, *Bāvābhāi*'s son looked after its workings. Similarly, due to the request of the *Thākōra* of Limbdi, *Yaśavanta Simha* was setup a pharmacy in Limbdi.

The new heir to the Udaipur throne, *Mahārāṇā Sajjanasimha* suffered from intractable fistula-in-ano. When *Bāvābhāi* cured him, he, like *Śambhusimha* extended the full remuneration to *Bāvābhāi* even for the preceding years of *Bāvābhāi*'s absence. A pharmacy was established in the heart of Udaipur. Unfortunately *Sajjanasimha*'s fistula recurred and despite *Bāvābhāi*'s disapproval he sought surgical intervention which led to his death. A few years later, his successor *Mahārāṇā Fatēhasimha* once again requested *Vaidyarāja* to treat his ministers. *Bāvābhāi* was yet again given the pending state pension.

Tired of the numerous attempts of a cure for his painful rheumatic condition of *Āmavāta*, the *Thākōra* of Palitana, *Mānasimha* desperately summoned *Bāvābhāi*. Not only did *Bāvābhāi* cure him, but the remission was also quite quick. He was given a large sum of money even though he was already on the official payroll of the state.

*Thakkara Mūlaji* a businessman, invited *Bāvābhāi* to treat high profile patients in Mumbai when his son was cured of *Udāvarta*. On his third visit to Mumbai, he is reported to have cured Prof. *Maṇilāla Nabhubhāi* of his refractory tertiary syphilis within a year. *Bāvābhāi* was an expert in treating syphilis with *Rasakarpūra* and *Dālaciknō*. This was much before Paul Ehrlich's discovery of Salvarsan and Neosalvarsan for syphilis.<sup>1</sup> *Vaidya Sāra Saṅgraha* also refers to the use of organic arsenical preparation for syphilis in the year 1869 AD.

He was annually compensated by the following kingdoms - Rs.3000 from Jamnagar, Rs.2000 from Udaipur, Rs.1500 from Bhavnagar, Rs.2500 from Gondal, Rs.1200 from Limbdi, Rs.2000 from Palitana, Rs.500 from Dhrol and Rs.500 from Jamnagar *Vaiṣṇava Mandira*.

*Bāvābhāi* was well acquainted with the recognition of *Ariṣṭa lakṣaṇa* which are bad prognostic markers. If he expected the patient was nearing his end, he would only treat after informing his family. That added to the faith of his patients in him and as rightly mentioned in *Āyurvēda*, it increased his reputation as a reliable healer. His intuitive awareness also helped the precognitive precision.

#### **Family, Disciples and Personal Life<sup>2,6</sup>**

He had married twice, the second marriage followed the demise of his first wife. He had a son *Ambāsaṅkara* and a daughter from his first marriage and 6 sons from his second, three of whom were visually challenged sons; namely *Śivaśaṅkara*, *Bālaśaṅkara* and *Viśvanātha*. Yet they practiced in Mumbai, Gondal, and Kutch

respectively. His other sons *Girijāsaṅkara*, *Phūlaśaṅkara* and *Maṇīśaṅkara* were his normal progeny who practiced in Kutch, Udaipur and Mumbai respectively.

*Bāvābhāī* was an avid reader of literature and a master of *Mantraśāstra* and *Yōgāśāstra* who was sought out by other authorities. Wherever he went, he was always on a lookout for valuable books. When he spent a year in Kashi, he exchanged his handwritten book - *Rasaratna Maṇimālā* for other such books like *Ātaṅka Timira Bhāskara* which were in possession of a *Vaidya* residing there.

The fact that he conducted the sacred thread ceremony of all his sons only in Kashi reflected his firm belief in the ways of the Hindu tradition. *Bāvābhāī* had knowledge of astrology and *Svarōdaya*. His faith in Lord *Śiva* was undeterred right from his younger days. In 1943, *Bāvābhāī* undertook the *Agnihōtra* and extravagantly conducted the *Mahārudra yajña*. On undertaking the *Agnihōtra*, one is supposed to constantly maintain the sacred fire alive in his home for the rest of his life.

### **Social Influence**

Venerated by kings, he was entrusted to communicate a proposal of marriage between the princess of Dhangadra and the prince of Udaipur. And though the alliance was never forged, the prince had requested him to stay back to treat patients in Udaipur.

When the Prince of Gondal, *Bhagavatasimha* went to Rajkot to study medicine, he was entrusted in *Bāvābhāī's* care. *Bhagavatasimha* later became a proficient doctor and received his degree from London. Although a modern doctor himself, he was deeply influenced by the man who had cured his anaemia and healed many others, using the ancient science of *Āyurvēda*. He about this medical system in his book entitled, 'A short history of Aryan Medical Science' which was published in New York.

He was invited by the princes of Nathdwara and Bhavnagar to setup pharmacies in the respective kingdoms. *Āyurvēda* received a major boost wherever these were established.

There were ceremonies of honour conducted even by kingdoms where he was not a royal *Vaidya*. Before he left for Kashi, he was honoured in Nashik. On his return, he was felicitated in the court of Jaipur. When in Mumbai on *Ṭhakkara Mūlajī's* request, *Jhavērilāla Umāśaṅkara Yājñika* organised a tribute of honour for *Bāvābhāī*, and yet another pharmacy was installed in Mumbai managed by his son *Bālaśaṅkarajī*.

## Lasting Legacy<sup>2,6</sup>

**Disciples:** Out of his six sons who were trained as *Vaidya*, *Śivaśaṅkarajī*, *Girijāśaṅkarajī* and *Bālaśaṅkarajī* were outstanding practitioners. His son *Vaidya Śivaśaṅkarajī Dhōlakiyā* despite his unseeing eyes was a sharp clinician and a dedicated teacher who taught students regularly for 30 years each afternoon for a couple of hours. Well known even amongst the modern medicine practitioners of Mumbai, and the difficult and refractory cases were referred to him. He was 'Śrutadhara' i.e. someone who remembered everything that was read to him once. A *Nāḍī Cikitsaka* by practice, he recognised not just diseases, but also patients by their pulse. He practiced in Mumbai till 1942 when he returned to Rajkot for the last 10 years of his life. It was by the efforts of two of his students who were indebted to him, that the process of publication of the *Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā* was initiated and pursued. His elder son *Bālaśaṅkarajī* was also considered as one of the leading doctors in Mumbai. His great grandson, *Padmaśrī* Dr. *Kandarpa T. Dhōlakiyā*, from the lineage of *Girijāśaṅkara* is considered as one of the best orthopaedic surgeons in the East who had an active practice till his demise three years ago.

The well known *Vaidya* 'Svāmī Caranātīrtha' or *Jivarāma Kālidāsa Śāstrī* of Gondal was one of his disciples. Amongst his other disciples, *Kṛpāśaṅkara* practiced in Mumbai, *Kāñjī Mādhavajī* in Gondol, *Mallabhāī* in Bhavnagar, *Kāmēśvara Śivaśaṅkara* served the Bhavnagar royal family and *Harajīvana Śivaśaṅkara* was engaged in Nathdwara.

**Pharmacies:** Six pharmacies were established by him first in Jamnagar, then in Rajkot - 1932, Palitana- 1942, Wadhvan - 1943, Mumbai -1945, Bhavnagar - 1946. Rajkot was an important pharmacy named 'Rudra Prasāda' which was managed by *Girijāśaṅkara* before he shifted to the Palitana pharmacy. Bhavnagar pharmacy was run by his disciple *Kāmēśvara* and then his nephew *Mallabhāī* for many years. *Bālaśaṅkara* was incharge in Mumbai. These pharmacies maintained high standards of traditional quality of Ayurvedic drugs and *Bhasma*.

**Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā<sup>4</sup>** - has three *Khaṇḍa* (sections) and 1108 *Ślōka*. The *Pūrva Khaṇḍa* consists of the description of the ingredients, equipments, basic procedures of purification and the details of the *Pārada saṃskāra*. The *Madhyama Khaṇḍa* details the physiological, pathological and diagnostic parameters for the knowledge of the disease. The *Uttara Khaṇḍa* enlists the *Rasakaḷpa* classified on the basis of diseases.

The prime attraction of this book is the collection of 229 *Rasakalpa* whose efficacy has been experientially verified by *Bāvābhāi. Rasarāja Sundara, Rasa Śānkara, Rasa Ratnākara, Yōga Cintāmaṇi, Bhāva Prakāśa, Rasa Kāmadhēnu, Rasa Mahōdadhi, Rasa Candrōdaya, Yōga Pradīpa* and *Śārṅgadhara Saṁhitā* have been used as references while writing this magnum opus. There is an urgent need to evaluate the relevance of *Rasakalpa* for the current medical problems.

### **Beyond The Royal Honours**

As a *Rājavidya*, he was more than just a practitioner. In all those kingdoms he graced by his service, his confidence in his method of treatment inspired many established *Vaidya* and doctors of these kingdoms to incorporate *Āyurvēda* in their practice. He also initiated the spread and translation of Ayurvedic texts. The translation of *Nighaṇṭu Ratnākara* into Marathi was inspired by him. Through his influence on the medical fraternity across kingdoms and the students he trained, it is overwhelming to estimate staggering number of lives he must have touched directly or indirectly.

### **The Evening of His Life**

When *Bāvābhāi* was invited to Kutch in 1893, he had a premonition that it would be his last travel. On his arrival, he experienced respiratory discomfort and announced that he would not be able to see the next dawn. Isolating himself at midnight, he deeply meditated prior to his death at 7.00 a.m. next morning. His last rites were performed with the honour of a statesman, spending Rs.30000 in those times. A legendary *Vaidya* had merged with his *Śiva*.

He exemplified all the qualities of a *Rasavidya* - he was efficient, bold, courageous, yet kind, gentle and giving. He was in the times of inefficient transport and poor communication instruments. Yet through his extensive travel and work he accomplished what very few could have achieved. He was a physician, a teacher, a social guide, an administrator, an entrepreneur and a spiritual seeker. One can only guess how resourceful the multi-faceted *Bāvābhāi* must have been.

### **Conclusion: Relevance to Modern Āyurvēda**

It is vital that the contributions of our recent past are not lost into oblivion. Not merely for the sake of documentation, but for the cause of medicine at large. There are experience based potential leads that may help open unknown doors for the understanding of bio-physio-chemical nature of the human body. A dynamic historiography of the notes of these legendary *Vaidya* is a priority to be addressed to



through the Golden triangle approach, Reverse Pharmacology and Integrative Research on the experienced remedies; we may contribute innovative approaches and products to Global medicine. A plea is made to unearth the forgotten chapters of Āyurvēda from 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century so as to facilitate Āyurvēda becoming mainstream medicine.

### REFERENCES

- 1 Anonyms 2007 Dr. *Nilakanṭha Dhōlakīyā*, great grandson of *Bāvābhāi Acalajī Dhōlakīyā* - Personal Communication.
- 2 Anonyms - The Gujarat Portrait Gallery: A collection of the portraits and biographical sketches of Leading Men in Gujarat.
- 3 Anonyms 1908 Biography: Paul Ehrlich The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, (online) available from URL: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/medicine/laureates/1908/ehrlich-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1908/ehrlich-bio.html).
- 4 Anonyms 2005 *Bṛhat Rasaratna Maṇimālā* - Introductory Booklet, Gujarat Ayurveda University, Jamnagar, India. Pp.13-20.
- 5 *Vaidya* A.D.B., *Vaidya* R.A. & Nagral, S.I. 2001 *Āyurvēda* and a different kind of evidence: From Lord Macaulay to Lord Walton (1835-2001). JAPI, 49: Pp.534
- 6 *Vijayaśaṅkara* urfe 1917 *Vaidya Kalpa Taru*  
*Bāvābhāi Acalajī*  
*Dhōlakīyā*

## सारांश

### लघु चिकित्सक जीवनी आयुर्वेद के एक प्रसिद्ध मार्गदर्शक का संस्मरण राजवैद्य बावाभाई अचलजी ढोलकिया (१८२४-१८९३)

पाठक नम्यता एवं अशोक बी. वैद्य

लगभग दो शताब्दियों के पूर्व एक कुशल रसवैद्य बावाभाई अचलजी ढोलकिया राजाओं और गरीबों का समान रूप से इलाज करने के लिए घोड़े पर सवार होकर पश्चिमी भारत में यात्रा करते थे। बहुत से राज्यों के राजवैद्य के रूप में उन्होंने गुणयुक्त आयुर्वेदिक औषधियों के निर्माणार्थ राजाओं से अनुरोध किया कि वे उत्तम रसशालाएँ स्थापित करें, जो गुणवान आयुर्वेदीय औषधियों का निर्माण करे। उन्होंने स्थानिक डॉक्टरों को प्रोत्साहन दिया कि वे उनके व्यवहार में आयुर्वेद को शामिल करें। उन्होंने अपने अनुभवों का सार अपने ग्रन्थ बृहद् रसरत्न मणिमाला में प्रलेखित किया जो हाल ही में गुजरात आयुर्वेद विश्वविद्यालय, जामनगर द्वारा प्रकाशित किया गया है। उनका जीवन आधुनिक चिकित्सा के पूर्व के युग की वैद्यकीय दुनिया और उस पर पड़ने वाले आर्थिक और राजनीतिक प्रभाव की एक दिलचस्प अंतर्दृष्टि है। इस प्रकार के प्राचीन अनुभवों और आधुनिक विज्ञान का संगम वैद्यकीय शास्त्र को नवीन दिशा देने की क्षमता रखता है।