Life Profile

Panchkarma Mahaguru - Vd. P. T. Joshi

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Veteran practitioner Vaidya Prabhakar Tanaji Joshi, popularly known as 'Nana Joshi' amongst the Ayurvedic fraternity was involved in a lifelong mission of propagating, practicing, teaching, and popularizing Panchkarma. The uniqueness of his Panchkarma practice laid in his ease, affordability, and patient-friendly approach. He has bagged the credibility of having trained over 10,000 students of Ayurveda and other systems of medicine. Many of them are famous Panchkarma practitioners in the present day. His sincerity, dedication, and perseverance have made him an absolute authority in Panchkarma practice.

1. Early life

'Pancha' means five and 'Karma or Kriya' means procedures/doings. Interestingly, the number ‘5’ was associated with Vaidya Joshi since birth. He was born on the 5th of January 1936 in a poor family and was the eldest son of Tanaji Dagdu Joshi and Kamalabai. They were residents of a small village in Maharashtra named, Methi Vikharan (Shindkheda taluka, Dhule). Amidst the beauty of the village, Prabhakar grew as an ordinary boy with extraordinary skills of farming. His approach, that developed in his early years, was to implement affordable and easily available treatments at rural level, even in the absence of basic facilities like electricity and quick transportation. The rural background and early grooming with traditional Indian culture helped him to develop this approach. While growing up in the village, his inspiration laid in the ecstatic beauty around him, the plants, the cattle, the trees, and the aroma of the freshly plowed soil! He believed that healthy villages form the backbone of a healthy India; hence, Nanaji’s focus was rendering Ayurveda services in villages.

2. Education

Prabhakarji completed his primary education in a local school and his matriculation from J. R. City High School Dhule. He further pursued his education in Sanskrit and Vedashastra from Sarasvati Paathashala, Dhule. This knowledge of Sanskrit and Vedas helped him in strengthening his core fundamentals in Ayurveda.

After gaining an adequate amount of knowledge in the different Darshan Shastras, Prabhakarji focused on his career and completed his D.S.A.C. (Ayurveda Pravin), from Ayurved Seva Sangha Ayurveda College, Nashik, Maharashtra. His financial difficulties never suppressed his quench to pursue education. He supported himself financially by working as an assistant at a skin specialist.

3. Family

Prabhakarji married Shobha, daughter of Dattatray and Durgabai Pandit, in 1962. The couple was blessed with two sons and a daughter named Manjusha. His sons, Pravin and Chandrashekhar, are both well-known Ayurveda practitioners along with their wives Kirti and Sampada, respectively.

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4. Professional service

In 1969, he joined as a Medical Officer in Dhule Municipality and served sincerely and honestly there until his retirement at 58.

Nanaji’s research work on tuberculosis is very well-renowned [3]. He received a national-level prestigious award named in the memory of Vd Appa Shastri Sathe for the same. He treated many critical tuberculosis patients with Vasa Ghrita and Vamana along with Pippali Rasayanana, at Dhule civil hospital in 1980. Multi-Drug-resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) was a newly emerging challenge in those times. Initially, he treated 15 cases of MDR-TB with classical Vamana procedure. He used 50 ml Vasa Ghrita for Snehana for 5–7 days and later Vamana was given with Madanphala powder. Post this, Vardhaman Pippali Rasayan was used. These patients later responded to conventional treatments. Since then, many students approached him to learn about Ayurveda.

After successful treatment of these patients, many such patients were referred for MDR-TB and some of them were treated with Ayurveda treatment alone. Notably, his clinical judgment about the use of appropriate Vamana was exceptional and very few could achieve such perfections.

With a belief that good, affordable, and effective medicines are the most important tools for an Ayurvedic physician, he started Dhawanari Ayurveda Pharmacy in Dhule. Through this pharmacy, he distributed free medicines to patients in his vicinity for many years. Since there was a very limited access to medicines in the area, this pharmacy was a boon. He used different combinations instead of some classic medicines to make them affordable with desirable efficacy. To name a few, he used Shunti along with sugar as a substitute of Sutshekhar; considering Pittaghna nature of both, Gairik and Amalaki, instead of Kamududha Ras, etc. Some of the patent proprietary medicines from his pharmacy include ‘Kadonil’ for fever and ‘Pachak vati’ for better digestion. These medications are quite popular and are prescribed by many practitioners to this day.

Nanaji’s belief in Ayurveda was so deep that, he understood the diverse potentials of Panchkarma in managing various chronic as well as acute diseases. His belief encouraged him to manage many emergencies through Ayurveda and further made him to pursue his post-graduation from Pune University in 1988. He worked on ‘Role of Panchkarma in acute stages of diseases’ for his dissertation under the guidance of Vd S. D. Jalukar.

Due to his continuous and dedicated contributions, a well-equipped Inpatient Department (IPD) of Panchkarma was established in Dhule. Nanaji always said that “In a municipal corporation hospital, this IPD was one of its kind in the country where many Ayurvedic students can learn the art of Panchkarma irrespective of their colleges”.

Sane Guruji Ayurveda Hospital in Malegaon is an existing example of his contributions in this field. Many students from different parts of India visit these centers for various Panchkarma courses. He served the society by conducting more than 1000 free Ayurveda Panchkarma camps in various rural parts of Maharashtra. His works on Basti treatment stood reckoned for many Ayurveda scholars [1]. During the measles pandemic in India, he treated more than 300 cases.

He popularized medicinal uses of Indian Acalypha for Vamana; Tridax Procumbence, for wound healing, and Solarium Xanthocarpum for dental caries. He was a forerunner of using locally available Abhay Pratimidhi (the herbs that are used in the absence of any other herb) plants. Some of the examples are the use of Carica Papaya instead of Plumbago Zeylanica; Morinda oleifera (Shigru) instead of Boerhavia Diffusa and Emblica Ribes, etc.

He was a thorough practitioner as he was bestowed with the quality of precise understanding of Dosh, Sthana, and Avastha of the disease. Diurnal variations in Doshic status and their correlations with symptoms of patient was a fundamental concept to plan any Panchkarma. For example, an obese patient of ‘Tamak Shwas’ observed by increasing breathlessness after meals, would be treated with ‘Vamanaa’ as against a lean patient of ‘Tamak Shwas’ observed by increasing breathlessness on empty stomach would be treated with ‘Anuvasan’ just after meals.

He mastered the skill of identifying every deep and minute difference in the symptoms and Panchkarma procedures. Good communication with patients, generous teaching and treating techniques made Nanaji a unique Ayurveda practitioner. He was against currently marketed ‘packages’ system of Ayurveda practitioners where Ayurveda treatment is becoming expensive and losing its connect with society. Instead, he emphasized on simple, convenient to use, easily acceptable for community and cost-effective treatment so that it could be affordable to the poorest patient of the society. Simplicity is difficult, especially while achieving success and maintaining it for a longer duration. Simplicity in treatment, Panchkarma, teaching, and overall lifestyle with the highest level of devotion was the hallmark of his life.

5. Ayurveda for people and people for Ayurveda

Nanaji was a firm believer of democracy; he used to say “if a Vaidya opens his science for people without thinking about own earnings, then people will themselves take care of all the needs of Vaidyas.” He started a project on Ayurveda-based maternal care. This project included various home-based remedies for healthy mothers and children. It focused on the avoidance of complications during pregnancy and thereby avoiding the need for an emergency caesarian section. ‘Guidance on season-dependent Panchkarma’ was one of the most important projects conducted from the ‘Arogya Rakshak’ project in rural areas. It was given to the rural population based on their Prakriti. It is remarkable to note that everything was performed with locally available food, diet, instruments, etc. Thus, his work truly expressed the importance of local traditions, herbs, diet, and its utilization for planning a treatment of patients. He always managed the cost of effective treatment to anyone; for example, he used to soak okra (Lady’s finger) in water and give that water to poor patient who couldn’t afford any oil thus, successfully achieving Snehana in many patients. He was very smart in treatment of de-addiction for chronic alcoholics. He used Haritaki Mashi, Madanfal, and Ashwagandha as a Anupan of alcohol in many patients. Similarly, he used outer coating of Haritaki for de-addiction of areca nut. He said that Haritaki is a Karmapavod for Kashay Rasa and hence, can nullify the effects of areca nut without alteration of taste. He used to counsel such patients in a very friendly manner, while respecting their dignity.

6. Lifestyle as an open Gurukul

Life of great people is an inspiration and their lifestyle forms important component of their success. Nanaji always woke up on Brahma Muhurta as per the changes in timings of sunrise. Following of ‘Agni hotra’ on sunrise and sunset was a very important component of daily routine along with daily reading of Ashtang Hrudayam. He used to say that ‘Vagbat’ can guide a Vaidya in difficult cases if a Vaidya follows this on a daily basis. Simple living and high morals constituted most of the parts of his
life. He never expected great honors and money; he was always happy amongst his patients and students. He was a great admirer of those who opposed him for his daring during Panchkarma. He always said that because of opponents one can reach more near to Shastra. Many of his opponents soon became his friends and yet, they used to have debates with him on a dinner table at Nanaji’s house. Respecting the knowledge and accepting differences of opinion were the core component of his dealings with scholars of his generation.

7. A devoted shishya (student)

He was fascinated with various Panchkarma articles by Vd T. M. Gogte who trained him for Panchkarma. Vd T. M. Gogte believed that Kriya means ‘Panchkarma Kriya’.

After attending a few lectures of Vd T. M. Gogte, Nanaji requested him to teach Panchkarma. However, Vd Gogte sternly responded saying, his teachings were not for the people who understood Panchkarma only through books. This stern response and Vd Gogte’s bold clinical expertise inspired Nanaji to become his disciple. Gogteji followed a famous Sanskrit quote “उ त्रिकालानु त्र तिङ्ग” meaning - ‘one, who keeps working, becomes a master’. Guru (Gogteji) and shishya (Nanaji) both lived with this sentence throughout the life.

Exposure to various patient cases in Dhule Municipality and training from his Guru, Vd T. M. Gogte, made him confident to a great extent, which led to the establishment of many training centers of Panchkarma. Initially, when Panchkarma was not so popular among the general public, Nanaji visited patient’s places and convinced them for Panchkarma treatments. He always preached that a Vaidya should be thankful to his patients for allowing him to practice Panchkarma on their bodies. His Guru always referred to his working place as Kashi (pilgrimage) of Panchkarma and so was Nanaji’s belief. This signifies his devotion and purity towards his practice.

8. Vd P.T. Joshi as a Panchkarma guru

Although Vd P.T. Joshi possessed a high intellect, his teachings were easily assimilated by common people and students. Many of his preaching’s have paved way for simple home-based remedies. His easy prescriptions for weight gain involved ‘Shira’ a local sweet dish made from ghee, sugar, and semolina and was used for treatment of malnutrition with minimal medicine. He frequently practiced effectively with minimum requirements. He believed every Vaidya should take Basti at least as a part of season related Panchkarma. He advocated Basti beautifully saying, “Basti dyava, basti ghaya, basti jivacha visava” which means ‘Basti should be given, Basti should be taken, Basti is relief from all the sufferings’ [2].

He believed that Panchkarma exists throughout Ayurveda. He practiced Panchkarma procedures with great confidence and authority. Panchkarma is everywhere; may it be disease or a healthy state, either in an acute or a chronic disease, in Santarpanotha or Apatarpanotha. He explained the relation between Ayurveda and Panchkarma using simple mathematics by quoting, “Ayurveda minus Panchkarma is equal to a big zero”.

A good teacher and a physician are the ones who practice empathy and generosity. He never expected fees from patients or students. Instead, he funded the needs of the students who were admitted to him, to learn Panchkarma. He was a true ‘Apta’ for his students and patients. To his credit, he has published many articles in various national journals on various aspects of Ayurveda. He has edited 5 books on Panchkarma written by his Guru, Vd T.M.Gogte, viz., ‘Yala Mhatant Ayurveda’, ‘Panchakarmacharya Satyakatha’, ‘Astravistruti’, ‘Panchakarma Vyapad –Avastha Vyavastha’, and ‘Ayurvedaayanchya Lalat Resha’. All of them are now translated in Hindi as well as English and attract many Ayurveda aspirants and practitioners. These books are practice-oriented, easy to understand, and are written on the firm foundation of Shastra.

His professional experience of practical Panchkarma and management of its Vyapad (complications) are compiled and published in a book named, ‘Kimaya Panchkarmach’. His disciples have started ‘Prabha Ayurveda Foundation’ for the propagation of Panchkarma and conducted its various trainings throughout the country. Many of his students are now recognized as Gurus from Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth, Delhi.

He always emphasized on his belief that a Vaidya should be a follower of Yoga. He was also a great follower of Vipassana (meditation) and learned it from Vipassana Guru - Satyanarayani Goenka guruji. Vipassana is a unique technique of Yoga to calm the mind. It aids us to see the reality around us with the closest proximity and bestows higher intellect. He held more than 70 excellent Vipassana camps. At the age of 75, Nanaji with his friend Vd Anant Bakre had made a great contributions in exploring and popularizing the place where Lord Dhanwantari gave up his body (Dehotsarga) at a village named Veraval which is situated in Gujrat state of India [4].

9. Awards and endowments

Great persons like Nanaji, never worked for awards. Awards are designed to respect their work. He had all the good qualities to become a great Ayurveda physician, which are Vidya (knowledge of science), Vitarka (understanding), Vidnyan (application of science as per the situation), Smruti (keeping the basics in mind), and Tatpar kriya (precise action). With all these qualities, he was honored with many awards.

Vd P.T. Joshi was a punctual professional, academician, and a great inspirer to all the Ayurveda aspirants. His humbleness, modesty, and gentleness have been reflected in his teachings that are recognized at national and international levels. He played a pivotal role in several organizations like Sawarkar Sahitya Sabha, Ayurveda Seva Sangh, Ayurveda Prasarak Mandal, Satkaryottejak Sabha, Ayurveda Mahassamelan, Dhanwantari Shikshan Samshodhan Sanstha, and Savitribai Phule Pune University as a maulik Siddhant member.

He was also a recipient of more than 40 honors; Bapu Rao Patwardhan Chikitsa Pruraskar from Vaidya Khadivale Shikshan Sanstha Pune, Laskhmi Shrinivas Pruraskar, Ayurveda Maharer Yatra pururaskar, Gujr, Sandu Ayurveda Gaurav Pururaskar, Dhanwantari Pruraskar Baidynath, Ayurveda Dharmabhushan Pururaskar, Life time Achievement by Madhav Baug, Rashtriya shikshan mandal, Pune, and Mama Gokhle samiti Award are a few amongst his many honors, worth mentioning.

Nanaji’s affable nature, his sweet manner of speaking, empathy towards those around him and his principle of nurturing people over money and luxury made people long for his company. His patients, students, fellow doctors and relatives, all felt comfortable around him as they believed that Nana belonged to them. He earned a lot of people throughout his life and treasured his relations.

Vd P. T. Joshi will always be remembered by the virtue of his convincing skills, excellent Panchkarma skills and empathy for poor patients. He will be an ever-cherishing guru, a devoted Shishya, a humble Vaidya with an undoubted faith in Ayurveda. But above all these many qualities, he will always have reminisced as a great human being and a real-life example of ‘राजस्मिनेना नित्यस्त’, i.e., a true authority figure, ‘Apta’.

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