Life Profile

Life profile of Vaikath Parameswaran Moothath, a polymath

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 May 2018
Received in revised form
11 January 2019
Accepted 14 January 2019
Available online 4 March 2019

Royal dynasties gave special diligence to identify and venerate the talents of all sectors. Parameswaran Moothath, is one of the pioneer scholars who held a spectacular part of the cultural life of Travancore in the 19th century. The present article is intended to highlight the contributions of Parameswaran Moothath.

Parameswaran Moothathu, popularly known as Vaikath Paachu Moothath, was a renowned scholar in the field of Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Malayalam and History. The first Autobiography in the Malayalam language and Kerala Bhaasha Vyaakaranam the text on Malayalam grammar is under his credit [1]. In the beginning of autobiography from the word “for the remembrance” (ormakkai), depicts it as a memoir [2]. The author also had a proficient artistic skill in which he had drawn a self-portrait by seeing the image in the mirror. Govt. Ayurveda College, Thiruvananthapuram, one of the pioneer institutions of Ayurveda was earlier a traditional Paata-shaala (School) initiated by him to propagate Ayurveda.

Vaikath Paachu Moothath was born on 25 Edavam, 989 (June 1814 AD) as the son of Neelakandan Moothath, at a Shivadwija Griha named ‘Padinjaredam’ in Vaikom of the present Kottayam district [2]. Parameswaran Moothath was affectionately addressed as ‘Paachu’ by his parents. The gracious personage made him respectable among the rulers of Travancore and Kochi. The family lineage alludes about his brother named Neelakandan Moothath, born in Kolla Varsha 994 (1819 AD), was a great scholar in Paataka (A traditional temple art form of Kerala in which stories from Hindu Puranas are narrated) and Sanskrit. With heartfelt grievance he mentions the demise of his mother and his brother, Narayanan in the years Kollavarsha 1021 (1846 AD) and Kollavarsha 1045 (1870 AD) respectively. After the posthumous rituals of Narayanan, Paachu Moothath and his brother, Neelakandan Moothath, were adopted by Vattappalli Madom and has been renowned by the title ‘Vattappalli sthanika’ during this period. During the stay at Sucheendram, Vaikath Paachu Moothath had lost his wife, father, brother, Neelakandan and nephew. After the decease of his first wife, he married again and was blessed with two issues.

After the basic education till twelve years, he was shifted to Triprayat (present Thrissur district) by his uncle Kunjunni Moothath, who was his first guru in Sanskrit. The perusal of a portion of Sreeramodanta (A grammatical textbook for Sanskrit) and few of the nouns and verbs in Sanskrit were during this epoch. From his autobiography it is evident that he utilized his knowledge in Portrait and Paataka (A traditional temple art form of Kerala in which stories from the Hindu Puranas are narrated) to look after his family. During the feast at temples, there was an opportunity for him to perform Paataka and to earn generous income [2].

From Kolla Varsha 1001 to 1012 (1826 AD to 1837 AD), Paachu Moothath resided in Thrissur, Perumam and Vaikom. During that period he attained dexterity in Kayva (poetry), Natak (drama), Alankara (literature) and fair acquaintance with Vyakarana Source: Photograph taken from Trivandrum Govt. Ayurveda college auditorium.

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Peer review under responsibility of Transdisciplinary University, Bangalore.
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(grammars), Nyaya (Logics) and other Sastras under Thazhakat Kannan Pothuval. At the age of 23, under the tutoring of Vidwan Thanburan he expertized Ashtadhyyayi, Koumudi and Tattwabodhini (texts on Sanskrit grammar) for two years. During the catamena Parameswara was afflicted with a serious ailment and had to return back to Vaikom for treatment. In this stay at Vaikom for one and half years he educated grammar and Darshanas to some students. In Kolla Varsha 1016 to 1017 (1841 AD to 1842 AD), he revisited Kodungaloor to complete his education but due to untoward condition of his ailment he couldn’t complete the education. For the relief of his ailment he was completely devoted to almighty and recited Bhajans (prayer) at Perumtrikovil (Mahadeva temple in Kerala) in Kollavarsha 1017 (1842 AD). During this time, he attained erudition in other texts of Vyakara (Sanskrit grammar) from Rangachari (Sanskrit scholar) [3].

Treatments and the bhajans did not give any relief and various physicians gave different interpretations and advice for his ailment. Due to forlorn treatment modalities, he decided to learn the text Ashtangahridaya to know more about his disease. For the purpose of study he migrated to Tirunakkara and started learning Ashtangahridaya from Choziyhat Aphan Nambodiri Kann 2nd, 1018 to Thulam 29th 1018 (September 1843 AD to October 1843 AD). As the ailment worsened, he could not complete the text as he had to return back to Vaikom for continuing the Bhajanam. Parameswara’s deep faith in Lord Shiva of Vaikom was evident in most of his masterpieces as he believed that Lord shiva is the curator of this deadly disease. Valiya Bhajanam (avoiding food and sleep) performed by Paachu moothath for a year is a simple example for his extreme devotion for almighty. During this period, he studied Vedanta texts from Chola desha Shastri and Astrology from Vattappalli Moothath and wrote books in praise of Lord Shiva of Vaikom.

In 1021 (1846 AD), he lost his mother however, in the same year was invited by Diwan Sankara Vazirjar in Kochi for treating his ailment. After completing the treatment of Diwani, he returned to Vaikom and stayed for more than 4 years with his father. Kochiyil Valiya thamburan (ruler of kochi) invited him for treating his injuries due to fall from horse. There he was awarded with most prestigious ‘Veerashrungala’ (A form of bracelet given by the rulers to honor the person) by the king for his service. In the year 1030 (1855AD), Paachu was invited to Thrivithhamoor royal family for their treatment. As he was an efficient physician, the royal family asked him to stay back at Thrivunanthanapuram. He stayed in Thrivanthanapuram from 1030 to 1045 (1855 AD to 1870 AD) by treating the royal men and teaching Sanskrit, Ashtangahridaya and Darshanas for many disciples. The rulers of Travancore and Kochi facilitated him for his expertise in treatment. With the permission of Royal men of Travancore, he continued his stay at Thrivanthanapuram and started teaching Ayurveda. In the year 1045 (1870 AD) he went to Suchindram look after the administrative and the spiritual activities of the temple.

Vaikath paachu moothath was not only a great physician in Ayurveda but also a skilled administrator. For the maintenance and renovation of Suchendra temple, Vaikath paachu moothath took action for conducting a Lottery with the permission of Hon’ble Maharaja, a first venture in India. During his stay at Travancore in Kollavarsha 1043 (1868 AD), he made a working model of the globe on the basis of the Astronomical aspects in Astrology (Jyotisha) that got recognized and appreciated by the Maharajas of Travancore, Aiyilyam Trirunal and Vishakh Thirunal.

In Kollavarsha 1057 (1882 AD), the health condition of Paachu moothath worsened. His indisputable mastery is evident from the prediction of his own demise time. The successful life of a great luminary personality ended in the age of 69, on Chingam 4, 1058 (August 18, 1882) at Vattappalli Madom, Suchendram.

1. Literary contributions of Vaikath Paachu Moothath

Paachu mooothath was proficient in all six Sastras - Vyakara (Sanskrit grammar), Tarka (Logics), Meemamsa philosophy, Vedanta philosophy, Vaidya (medicine), Jyotisha (Astrology). With the object of perpetuating the fruits of his long study and meritorious researches, he wrote a number of valuable works as desired by people who preferred abridged editions to elaborate works. Out of these books, Hridayapriya and Sukhasadhaka were his contributions to Ayurveda.

1.1. Hridayapriya

Knowledge necessary to educate the people about the purpose of human science and to take advantage of the applications in the texts Hridayapriya and Sukhasadhaka is one of noble work done by Paachu mooothath. Life history, mentions that he had acquired knowledge in many sastras as it was necessary to meet his livelihood. After this inspirational learning, he had decided to concise the contents of the Ashtangahridaya and created the Hridayapriya as a handbook of Ayurveda. This literature consists of four khandhas in which the subject matter of 120 chapters of Ashtangahridaya is concised to 48 chapters in Hridayapriya. The fourth Khanda named as Yoga Khandha having 12 chapters which deals with Oshadha Yogas found in Ashtangahridaya, Sahasrayoga, Yogamrutha etc and a few of the Yogas practiced by the local physicians of that time. The completion of this great work was on 21st Dhanu 1040 (January 1865 AD) [4].

In Ashtangahridaya, Vagbhata explained the Jwara Chikitsa as the first chapter in Chikitsa. But Hridayapriya explained Doota Lakshana and Vikrutti Vijnanaey before Jwara Chikitsa whereas Vagbhata explains it in Uthara sthana. This might be because he considered that the knowledge to differentiate curable and incurable diseases is mandatory for a physician before he initiates any treatment.

The construction of Hridayapriya differs from Ashtangahridaya by additions and omissions of few topics and by the division of chapters and main heads. Ashtangahridaya divides the text into Sthanas, while Hridayapriya divides it to Khandas. There is a total of more than 7000 Slokas in Ashtangahridaya whereas in Hridayapriya there are only around 4000 Slokas.

For example, in Ashtangahridaya, Vagbhatacharya explains both Madayyata and Aras as two separate chapters, but in Hridayapriya these two are combined together to make a single chapter. Similarly, merging of chapters was found in Visarpa masoorika visphota kushthaadi adhyaya, Vataakata Vrana bhagnaadi adhyaya, etc. These deletions and rearrangements may be due to clinical relevance. In Hridayapriya, there are addition of Slokas that are not in Ashtangahridaya. Also in some versus, the first line was the same as that of Ashtangahridaya but the second line was different.

For example in Hridayapriya pradham kanda 1st chapter Ayushkameeya adhyaya verse [5].

“Sukham ca nityam bhavateetyato vachmeeha taanyapi
Himsaasathyayathaaakaamam paashoonya parushaanrutam
Sambhinaadlaapam vyapaadaamabhidhnyam druk viparyayam
Paapam karmeti dashadhaa kaaya vaak maanasaiuthyoyet”
(For the organisms who aims comfort the following ten sins should not be committed by the body, the gab or mind — violence, theft, infidelity, tale-bearing, abusive, speaking untruth, uttering rubbish, tendency to ahrn, longing for others belongings, atheism)

The first line was different from Ashtangahridaya but the remaining was as same as Ashtangahridaya sutra sthana second
chapter Dinacharya Adhyaya. There are some medical formulations
told in Hridayapriya like Upodaka, Sunishannakam, Tripaadikaa
etc., which were not found in any of the Bruhat-trayees, they may
be the locally available drugs in Kerala at that time. Oushadayoga of
Masthu was mentioned in Hridayapriya which was not seen in any
of the Bruhat-trayees.

1.2. Sukhasadhakam

Sukhasadhakam is an Ayurvedic text that contains all the
important topics of Ashtangahridaya. It consists of 12 Khandas. The
Pradhama Khanda deals with the evolution of Ayurveda and 2–11
Khandas deals with various diseases like Rakthapitta, Arsas, Moo-
trakricha, Paandu, Vaata, Visarpa etc. and their treatments. The
12th Khanda explains about Garbha. Sri C K V Sharma had written a
commentary on this text. Subramaniam Moothath had written a
brief life history of Vaikath Paachu Moothath in the preface of
Sukhasadhaka and published in 1998. There was a reference in this
text mentioning about the completion of the text was on chingam
22nd 1057 (September 5th1881), Monday.

In Sukhasadhaka the number of chapters is more as compared to
Ashtangahridaya and Hridayapriya. For the easy finding and un-
derstanding, the author had divided the concepts into brief chap-
ters, so that the number of chapters became more as compared to
other two texts.

As Sukha sadhaka deals mainly with Chikitsa he divides it into
many small chapters to get more attention on the subject matter
even though the content of the chapter is lesser than Hridayapriya
and Ashtangahridaya.

These two books Hridayapriya and Sukhasadhaka had acquired
popularity prior to their publication at that time. This reflects their
recognition and popularity among masses.

Ramavarma Maharaja Charithram (text on grammar), Raaja-
sooya Prabandham Vyakhyanam (commentary for the major work of
Melpathur Narayana Bhattachiriri), Thiruvithamkooor Charithram
(history of maharajas of Travancore kongdom), Sukha bodhakam
small capsule of a Big text on Asoucha), Nakshatra maalaa, Kaa-
siyathra prabandha (It was a text written based on his Kaasi yatra),
Malayala Vyakarana, Balabhooshhanam [It is a text on ethics, Pu-
ranas as well as Jyothisha. It was Published in Kolla Varsha 1042
(1867 AD)], Kaasisathra vivaranam, Muchukunda moksha and
Kuchela vrutha (Aatakadha) (This text was written for performing
an art form Kathakali), Kerala Visesa Mahatmya these were some of
the books collaring his credit [4].

Vaikath parameswaran moothath was a multi-faceted person
who has acquired a lot of encouragement and appreciation from the
rulers of Kerala and lived for the sake of good and happiness for all
the persons related to him. He is one of the talented persons in
Sivadwija community who has the equal acquaintance in language,
literature, culture, and science and lead a service-oriented life.
Thus, he was an epitome of unbelievable scholarship beyond ab-
solute wisdom. We must really appreciate those eminent person-
ailities having proven their excellence in various fields of knowledge
in this present era of specialization. A verse in Susruta Samhitha
says “He who learns any one science only, will not be able to arrive
at a correct decision, hence a physician should be the master of
many sciences”.

Paachu Moothath is an eminent personality who was a scholar
in multiple fields of knowledge and hence his life story is indeed an
inspiration for the future generation. The best way to pay our
respect for such personalities is it is to imbibe their values and
traits. Every follower should be able to adopt the finest parts of
bygone. So let this be a small reminder of this great personality who
has demonstrated immense expertise in the entire constituency for
knowledge.

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