

Memoirs of Vaidyas

The Lives and Practices of Traditional Medical Doctors in Kerala, India (4)*

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Abstract

This article presents an English translation of interview with a doctor of traditional Indian medicine (*Āyurveda*), Aṣṭavaidya, V. C. Nā*** Nampūtiri (1929~) in Kerala, India. The contents of the interview are 1. Background and education, 2. History of the family and *Aṣṭavaidyas*, 3. The legacy of Vāhṭa (Vāgbhṭa), 4. Medical texts and manuscripts, 5. Special treatments, *Rasāyana*, 6. Sanskrit and Malayalam literature.

Key words

Ayurveda, Traditional Indian Medicine, Ashtavaidya, Kerala

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Introduction

We would like to introduce here an English translation of one of our interviews. The interviewee is a doctor of traditional Indian medicine (*Āyurveda*), Aṣṭavaidya, V. C. Nā*** Nampūtiri (1929 ~). We have made every attempt to prepare a literal translation of the contents and narrative flow of the interview, which was conducted in Malayalam. To promote a comprehensive understanding of V. C. Nā*** Nampūtiri's ideas, we have organized this translation according to topics that were covered during the course of the interview; we have also supplied detailed explanations of potentially puzzling aspects of the interview in the footnotes. Personal names and place names are shown by initial letters followed by asterisks to protect the privacy of people involved.

The scientific names of medicinal plants, noted in parentheses by the editor are based on those given in P. K. Warrier, V. P. K. Nambiar, and C. Ramankutty (eds.), *Indian Medicinal Plants, A Compendium of 500 Species*. Vaidyaratnam P S Varier's Arya Vaidya Sala Kottakal. Vols.1-5. Madras: Orient Longman, 1993-1996.

This interview was conducted as one of the activities of an Indo-Japanese research project, called PADAM (Program for Archiving and Documenting Āyurvedic Medicine),² which is directed by the authors (Yamashita and Manohar) and supported by JSPS (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science), Mishima Kaiun Memorial Foundation, Japan and Kyoto Gakuen University.

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Data of the interview

Date: 28th August 2001

Place: the interviewee's residence in Kerala, India

Interviewee: V. C. Nā*** Nampūtiri, Aṣṭavaidya, Doctor of *Āyurveda*

Interviewer: P. Ram Manohar

Original Language: Malayalam

Video-record: PADAM VT, G07

¹ Aṣṭavaidyas are traditional physicians of *Āyurveda* and belong to Nampūtiri Brahmin community in Kerala. Cf. Zimmermann [1989], pp.40-48; Namboodiri [2000a] and Vāriyar [2002], p. 488 (English translation p. 312); Yamashita & Manohar [2007-2008].

² <http://padamonline.org/PADAM/Home.html>

Additional Interview

Date: 24th March 2006

Place: the interviewee's residence in Kerala, India

Interviewer: Tsutomu Yamashita and Madhu K.P.

Original Language: Malayalam

Translator: P. Ram Manohar

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Editor's note

[] : Supplementary explanation by the editor

() : Paraphrase of the previous word by the editor

Abbreviations

AHS: Aṣṭāṅgahr̥dayasaṃhitā

AS: Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha

Ci: Cikitsāsthāna or Cikitsitasthāna

ed.: edition

HIML: A History of Indian Medical Literature → Meulenbeld [1999-2002]

Mal.: Malayalam

Ni: Nidānasthāna

Śā: Śārīrasthāna

Skt.: Sanskrit

SS: Suśrutasamhitā

Sū: Sūtrasthāna

Utt: Uttarasthāna or Uttaratantṛa

Interview with V. C. Nā* Nampūtiri****1. Background and education**

I was born in the month of *Mīnam* (Pisces; the 12th Malayalam month; March-April) of the Malayalam era 1105 (A.D. 1929/30).³ The star [of my birth day] was *Pūram* (the 11th asterism of Malayalam calendar). The *Pūram* star of the *Mīnam* month has something special. That was the Arattupuzha (Ārātṭupulā)

³The Malayalam era or *Kollavarṣam* is counted from the date of the foundation of the city of Quilon (Kollam) or the Śiva temple in this town, namely A.D. 824/825. Cf. Gundert [1999] p.309; Parpola [2000] p.97 note 27.

Pūram festival day.⁴ I am currently 71 years old and will be 72 in the ensuing *Mīnam* month.

I was initiated in the world of letters by Krishna Varier (Kṛṣṇa Vāriyār), who held my hands and made me write the alphabet in the sand. This was the system [of initiation into letters] then. He hailed from the same neighbourhood as ours and his offspring are still living here. Back then the method of teaching was to teach the *Siddharūpam*.⁵ Alphabets, the *Siddharūpam* and after that, it was with the first verse of the *Sahasrayoga*.⁶

ghana-caṇḍana-śuṇṭhy-ambu-parpaṭaśīra-sādhitam.
śītaṁ tebhya hitaṁ toyam pācanam tṛḍ-jvarāpaham.
 (The *Sahasrayoga*, *kaṣāyaprakaraṇa* 1)⁷

(For those persons (patients of fever), water boiled with *ghana* (*Cyperus rotundus* Linn.), *caṇḍana* (*Santalum album* Linn.), *śuṇṭhī* (dried ginger), *ambu* (*Plectranthus vetiveroides* (Jacob) Singh & Sharma), *parpaṭa* (*Hedyotis corymbosa* (Linn.) Lam.) and *uśīra* (*Vetiveria zizanioides* (Linn.) Nash) and then cooled is suitable; it digests (the undigested materials), relieves thirst and fever.) (AHS Ci 1.15cd-16ab, Translated by K. R. Srikantha Murthy)

Thus the teaching [of *Āyurveda*] started and this continued in this style for some time. I had only a short session with him (my grandfather). This was followed by a pause, during which time there were no serious teaching sessions. But of course there were some minor poetic works or something like that [to be studied] now and then.

My education started relatively late as compared [to other students]. It was around 12-13 years old, after my sacred thread wearing ceremony (*upanayana* Skt.) and completion of traditional studies (*samāvartana* Skt.), that I was admitted to the second form (present-day 7th standard) at Ottappalam (Orrappālam) High School. I had received private tuition in preparation for admission. I con-

⁴ An annual Ayyappan temple festival day in Arattupuzha (Ārāṭṭupūḷa) located in 14 km south of Thrissur (Tṛṣūr) town. *Pūram* feast is the fertility festival in Malabar, taking place on the day of the *Pūram* asterism in *Mīnam* month in memory of Kāma's death. Cf. Gundert [1999] p.693; Parpola [2000] p.377.

⁵ The *Siddharūpam* is an elementary textbook of Sanskrit language. This textbook is even now used for elementary education of Sanskrit language in Kerala. Panicker [2005].

⁶ A collection of recipes of traditional medicines mainly used in Kerala. *Sahasrayogam* [2002]. Cf. Zimmermann [1989] p.251 note 54.; HIML IIA pp.529-531.

⁷ The *Sahasrayoga*, *kaṣāyaprakaraṇa* 1 = AHS Ci 1.15cd-16ab = AS Ci 1.17cd-18ab.

tinued there for 1 year and then stopped. I had stayed at Ottappalam for 2-3 years, after which I returned [to my home].

Following this, I stayed for some time at Koodallur (Kūṭallūr) where one of the students of my grandfather, Rama Varma Thirumulpad (Rāma Varma Tirumulppāṭu) was living. He had been serving at the Valanjambalam (Vaḷaññampalam) branch of the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy (an Āyurvedic pharmaceutical company based in Coimbatore) for nearly 30 years. He is no more now. I stayed at Koodallur to learn Sanskrit from him. Besides me, one gentleman from Koodallur itself and another person who was his nephew were also there. This continued for 2 years. That too was not completed and I came back [to my home].

Somewhere in between, probably before the Koodallur session, I had studied one or two cantos of the *Śrī Kṛṣṇavilāsam*⁸ under Sri Kunjan Varier (Śrī Kuññan Vāriyar) (1872~1943) of Mankulangara Varriom (Maṅkuḷaṇṇara Vāriyam)⁹. He was father of a famous [Āyurvedic physician], P. V. Rama Varier (Rāma Vāriyar) (1908~1976).¹⁰ Kunjan Varier's house (Mankulangara Varriom) was almost [similar to] a traditional [Brahmin] house (*illam* Mal.).

[Sri Kunjan Varier was] popularly known as Munshi Kunjan Varier (Muṇṣi Kuññan Vāriyar). He was one of the disciples of my great grandfather [and had learned *Āyurveda*]. He (Sri Kunjan Varier) was a very good poet, too. But he passed away suddenly, having woken up fine one morning and fell down abruptly. So this period of education was also interrupted. After this I stayed at Koodallur.

I then went to [the traditional house of a Nampūtiri Brahmin], Manthredath mana (Mantrēṭattū mana). It is here, at Lakkidi (Lakkiṭi) (near Ottapallam) that the famous Kalakkath Bhavanam (Kalakkattū Bhavanam), [the original

⁸ *Śrī Kṛṣṇavilāsam* is a Sanskrit poetry work by Sukumāra, a legendary poet in Kerala. Sukumārakavi viracitamāya, *Śrī Kṛṣṇavilāsakāvyam* [2004]. Cf. Menon [1979] pp.364-365.

⁹ Sri Kunjan Varier (Śrī Kuññan Vāriyar) (1872~1943) was a famous Sanskrit scholar, poet and the author of the *mahākāvya* (classical poem), *Śrī Rāma Varma Vijaya*. See Ramadevi [1998] pp.28-43. 'Varier' (Vāriyan, Vāriyar or honorific plural form Vāriyār) is a class name of Ambalavāsis who perform the temple-services and funeral ceremonies. 'Varriom' (Vāriyam) means Varier's traditional house. See Gundert [1999] p.936; Parplola [2000] p.388. Kunjan Varier's original house (Mankulangara Varriom) was located at Mezathur, Palakkad district in Kerala, near the interviewee, V. C. Nā*** Nampūtiri's house. See Ramadevi [1998] p.28.

¹⁰ P.V. Rama Varier (Rāma Vāriyar) (1908~1976) was an Āyurvedic physician and the founder of Arya Vaidya Pharmacy based in Coimbatore.

house] of the great [poet] Kunchan Nambiar (Kuñcan Nampyār) (1705-1770),¹¹ is situated. There was one Raman Nambiar (Rāman Nampyār) at Kalakkath (Kalakkattū) at that time. He was a disciple of the famous Vidvan Manthitta Nambuthiri (Vidvān Māntiṭṭa Nampūtiri) who had studied the texts of the *Nyāya* school of Indian philosophy (logic) (*Nyāyaśāstra* Skt.) and was a well-known logician. I had studied under him for nearly 3 or 4 years. During this time, my mother fell ill, so I returned home. After my mother was cured of her illness, I went back [to Kalakkath] and stayed there, if I remember correctly, for a little over one year. [In this way], my first *gurukula* (Skt.)¹² [system of education] lasted for more than 2 years.

I was then fetched home as my mother again fell seriously ill. She passed away this time, but before her death she entrusted me to my grandfather with the request of further education for me. Therefore, after my mother's last funeral rites were over, my grandfather initiated steps for my further education. He himself taught me the whole text of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*,¹³ and that was all that he taught. I doubt whether I can confidently say that I have learnt the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam* completely. And to me, this learning can never be completely finished. I am learning even now. Learning is an endless process. In life, right from birth till the end of it, everything is for humans to learn. Of course, one can work simultaneously – that is all.

As I said, I was born in 1105 according to the Malayalam era (A.D. 1929/30). My mother died in the 1125 Malayalam era (A.D. 1949/50). From then, I learnt from my grandfather and accompanied him wherever he went, did what was to be done, wrote prescriptions wherever needed and followed him always. In the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*, nothing is more relevant than the other.

Right from the first chapter, [the contents of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam* are introduced]:

¹¹Kunchan Nambiar (Kuñcan Nambyār) (1705-1770) is a famous satire poet in Malayalam language and the inventor of a verse style and an performing art form called *ōṭṭan tullāl*. Kalakkath Bhavanam is his original home at Killikkurussimangalam (Killikkuriśsimangalam) (popularly known as Lakkidi (Lakkiṭi)), a village near Ottapalam town in Palakkad district of Kerala. See Menon [1979] pp.341-342.

¹²*Gurukula* literally means the house of a teacher and refers to a traditional educational system by which a student lives in his teacher's house and learns a special subject from his teacher.

¹³The *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam* or the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* is one of the classic treatises of *Āyurveda*, attributed to Vāgbhaṭa.

*āyushkāma-dina-rtvīhā-roḡānutpādāna-dravāḥ.
 annajñānānnasamrakṣā-mātrā-dravya-rasāśrayāḥ.
 doṣādiññāna-tadbheda-taccikitsā-dvyupakramāḥ.
 śuddhyādi-snehana-sveda-rekāsthāpana-nāvanam.
 dhūma-gaṇḍūṣa-dṛkṣeka-tr̥pti-yantraka-śastrakam.
 sirāvidhiḥ¹⁴ śalyavidhiḥ śāstra-kṣārāgnikarmikau.
 sūtrasthānam ime 'dhyāyās triṃśac,
 (AHS Sū 1.36-39ab)*

((1) Desire for long life, (2) Daily [regimen], (3) Seasonal [regimen], (4) Prevention of diseases, (5) [Knowledge of] liquid materials, (6) Knowledge of nature of foods, (7) Protection of food, (8) [Determination of] quantity of foods, (9) [Knowledge of] substances, (10) Basis of tastes, (11) Knowledge of *doṣas* etc., (12) Classification of *doṣas*, (13) Treatment of *doṣas*, (14) Two kinds of treatments, (15) Collection of purificatory drugs etc., (16) Oil therapy, (17) Sudation therapy, (18) Emesis and purgation therapy, (19) Enema therapy, (20) Nasal medication therapy, (21) Smoke [inhalation] therapy, (22) Mouth gargle and such other therapies, (23) Eye-washing and such other therapies, (24) Therapies for the eyes, (25) Usage of blunt instruments, (26) Usage of sharp instruments, (27) Venesection, (28) Removal of foreign bodies, (29) Surgical procedures, (30) Caustic alkali and fire cauterization therapies. These are the thirty chapters in the *Sūtrasthāna* (the first volume of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā*).)

There is an order as above and the author, Vāgbhaṭa himself, had ordained it. He is [also called] Vāhaṭa [in Kerala].¹⁵ There is perhaps no Āyurvedic teacher (*ācārya* Skt.) who could edit [a treatise] so spotlessly [as Vāgbhaṭa]. What I quoted above is the order [of the contents of the first volume in the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*] laid down by Vāgbhaṭa in his own verses (*śloka* Skt.). I learnt it in the same order till the end of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*, [but] I was not perhaps taught about toxicology (*agadatantra* Skt.). He (my grandfather) said that there was no need to teach it (toxicology) as there could be no use for it. So, that was dropped. Likewise, ophthalmology (*netracikitsā* Skt.), I also was not taught. I just read over the chapters, that was all. I have studied the rest of the chapters.

¹⁴Variant: *sirāvyadhah*

¹⁵In Kerala, the author of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā*, Vāgbhaṭa is popularly known as Vāhaṭa.

So, for about 7 years, until I was 32 or 33 years old, I went on moving with my grandfather wherever he went and was learning things. There was another gentleman who was my study mate. He was much older than me, say, 12 years older. His traditional house (*illam* Mal.) was Vadakkeppad (Vaṭakkēppāṭṭu) near Thiruvegappura (Tiruvēgappura). He passed away recently. When he came along with his father desiring to learn, he was told that I was being taught and that he could learn with me. We studied together. We went around together, arranging an enema (*vasti* Skt.) here or medicated oils (*sneha* Skt.) there, as the case might be.

If it was necessary to stay at a place [for the benefit of the patient], we would stay there; or if we had to return [to our clinic], we would go back there. In those days, facilities for travelling were very limited. Therefore, we would often stay [at the place of patient]. I was also not as busy then as I am at present; nor did our stays at another place cause any trouble to anybody here [at my clinic]. But today the situation has changed. If I am not here [at my clinic] these days, it would mean trouble to others. That is the only difference between then and now.

In this way, I accompanied my grandfather a little beyond my 32nd birthday. And when I was half past of 32 years old, my grandfather had stopped travelling. He was incapable of it. So he stopped. He died when I was 35 years old.

Now, about me. Speaking about me, what is it that we call “I”? I have my own doubts. I do not give it much importance – just one letter. And by this I mean the ego – the attitude of me. There are two letters for “I” as *aham* [in Sanskrit], but when it becomes *nān* in Malayalam, there is only one full letter and one half letter, totally one and a half letters. Not two letters. Then, it is nothing. “I” ceases to have any meaning at all. That I became a spatula (instrument) is what I have to say about this “I”.

I married at the age of 26 or 27 years old. It was nearby here. I have two daughters and three sons – the eldest two are sons, the next two are daughters. The last one is a son, Vasudevan (Vāsudēvan). The five are my progeny. The second one I taught by myself. His name is Neelakandan (Nīlakaṇṭan). There is a reason for naming him Neelakandan (Nīlakaṇṭan). The name of my grandfather from the maternal side was Neelakandan (Nīlakaṇṭan).

In [our] Vaidyamatham (Vaidyamatham) [family], there was once another famous Neelakandappan (Nīlakaṇṭappan). There was another famous man known as Kunchuvappan (Kuñcuvappan). My second son was called Neelakandan (Nīlakaṇṭan) with the above Neelakandappan in my mind. He is generally known as Kunjikuttan (Kuñṇikuttan). He along with the son of my paternal brother (*appan* Mal.), Krishnan (Kṛṣṇan), would be at the clinic (*vaidyaśālā* Skt.). He too was taught by me – I mean whatever [talents] they show today,

they are all from my wits. In other words, the responsibility for right or wrong things they do rests on me. You cannot insist that everything should be correct. Chances are that they could err and those errors ultimately affect me only, not them. Well, that is the general description [of our family].

Around the 1126 Malayalam era (A.D. 1950/51), I used to go to our clinic every morning after my studies. I remained there for a while, say, until noon, when I would return for meals. I might go again at times or might not at other times. There would be some other things to be taken care of. I lived so far, as one for all purposes – not for any single mission. I would have to attend to different chores. When I used to remain there [at our clinic], one or other [patients] might ask something. I would then prescribe something for the patients.

At that time, [the present-day] clinic was not there. No material was there [as there is today]. The present building also was not there. The only structure from that time is the small building you see in the middle [of the present premise].

You would have heard about M. P. Sankunni Nair (Śaṅkuṇṇi Nāyar) (1917~2006). He was a man of letters – a literary critic, a scholar quite adept at handling [Malayalam] language. He had a gigantic intelligence, yes, he was literally a demon of intelligence. He himself did not know the depth of his intelligence. And so, he is not restful now. He is now 84 years old. It was his father. His father means the nephew of the grandfather of our family. And M. P. Sankunni Nair was the son of this nephew. The name of this nephew was Parameswaran Nambudiri (Paramēśvaran Nampūtiri).

It was he (Parameswaran Nambudiri) who was running the clinic [at that time]. He was here [at the clinic]. I was in the rear side. There were no medicines [here]. Then, by and by, we started to procure things. To switch over to Christian Era, it would be around 1947, 1948 or 1949.

By 1952 or 1953, he (Parameswaran Nambudiri) withdrew from the scene, asking me to start my own lessons. He said that he could not manage for himself. He said: “Nā*** !” – that was how he called me – “Could you run it (our clinic) now? I am tired.”

And with this (his word), the burden of management [of our clinic] fell on me. Gradually, I started going there regularly to treat or advise the patients who turned up, prepare medicines and procure things essential for such treatment. Even today, it is like that. Unlike other medical clinic (*vaidyaśālā*), this clinic does not have all the medicines [in the store].

I prepare medicines that I generally prescribe – nothing more. It is not the case with other clinics. They would have almost all of the medicines. But here, that is not the practice. Here, only medicines that I prescribe are available. Other medicines will not be available – most of the time. It all started like that. I prepared them myself. Then it gradually grew up and is in its present shape.

2. History of the family and *Aṣṭavaidyas*

Now to speak about the history [of our family]. You see our Vaidyamatham (Vaidyamaṭham) family [has been staying] at Mezhathur (Mēlattūr) or Kalanad (Kalanāṭṭu) [in Palakkad district, Kerala], but there is no historic document to say how and when our family came here. No document at all. There are only hearsay stories. Basically, what can be said is one such story. Mezhathur Agnihotri (Mēlattūr Agnihotrī) wanted to perform 100 religious (vedic) rituals in which offerings are presented. You know he actually performed 99 rituals. The story goes that the ninety-ninth ritual was interrupted by Indra.¹⁶

For every ritual, there should be a physician at the vedic ritual (*śālāvaidyā* Skt.).¹⁷ We (Vaidyamatham family) are just the physicians at the vedic ritual. *Śālāvaidyā* (the physician at the vedic ritual) means one who has the authority of

¹⁶Mezhathur Agnihotri (Mēlattūr Agnihotrī) is a legendary figure and assumed as one of twelve children of Vararuci in Kerala. Mahadevan & Staal [2003] pp.18-19 describes him and his deed concerning the Vedic *śrauta* ritual, thus: "... the remarkable figure of Mēlathōl Agnihōtri, by all accounts the father of the Nambudiri śrauta tradition. After oral transmission in a folk tradition, the legends and myths about him appeared in print early in the 20th century in what is generally accepted as a classic about Kerala folk lore, namely Śankunni Mēnōn's Aitihyamāla, "Garland of Legends."

Agnihōtri's story has received much literary expression, but by far the most imaginative treatment of the legend is Sridevi's novel of the same name. Sridevi, herself a Nambudiri woman and a hostess at the Trichur yāga, follows the main outline of the hero of the story: he is one of twelve children of Vararuci, a Brahman with legendary links to the Gupta empire, and a Paraya ("Pariah") woman. Abandoned at birth by a river bank, the infant is rescued and raised as a Nambudiri by a Nambudiri woman. The Brahman-Paraya couple abandon their eleven other children likewise; these foundlings are also raised by people of different castes, thus representing along with the Brahman Agnihōtri a microcosm of the caste society of Kerala. All the children follow their caste functions: Agnihōtri, raised from infancy as a Nambudiri, performs 99 yāgas before age 35 and stops there only at Indra's intervention.

The Nambudiri tradition sees Mēlathōl Agnihōtri as re-establishing śrauta Vedism. It may have a basis in history: Mēlathōl may well be based on a historical figure who led or was associated with the pūrvaśikhā migration from its Cola heartland to Kerala in the fourth or fifth century CE during the Kalabhra interregnum. Tradition places him in the fourth century CE and he does have ties to the Kaveri river in legends. ..." Cf. Sridevi [1999]; Chungath and Nambudiripad [2000]; Śankunni [2004]; Eraly [2006] pp.99-101.

¹⁷See Namboodiri [2000b].

the *vedas*. Otherwise, ones (the physicians from the other *Aṣṭavaidya* families) cannot enter the ceremonial place (*yāgaśālā* Skt.).¹⁸

Do you have any idea of what is meant by the “authority” (*adhikāra* Skt.)? The word, *adhikāra* means the right to learn and to teach [the *vedas*]. Just with the right to learn, one cannot become the one who possess the authority (*adhikārin* Skt.). Only the one who has the right to learn and to teach [the *vedas*] is described as *adhikārin*. We (Vaidyamatham family) [as Brahmins] have the right to learn and to teach the *vedas*.

When you say “Vaidyamatham”, generally there are certain positions assigned [to the Vaidyamatham family members] in the vedic rituals (*yāgās*). When we were placed in that position here, it could be that the term *maṭham* (Mal.) (house of a Brahmin) was used. It is enough just to think as much.¹⁹

There was one vedic ritual (*yāga* Skt.) conducted at Thiruvananthapuram (Tiruvananthapuram or Trivandrum). I had been there for the ritual [as a *śālā-vaidya*] too. I had stayed there for two days. That is the custom and is one of the important points to be said of our (Vaidyamatham family’s) heredity. It could be that Agnihotri had brought us down to Mezhathur. I have already said one thing at the outset that there is no record to show where we came from, and that is correct also – no record for this. There are a few views regarding this aspect, but anyone cannot be sure which one is correct. Can I speak in a broader viewpoint?

But one of the assumptions could be this. Even today, there is [one of the families of *Aṣṭavaidya* called] Ālattiyūr Nampi. There was another Nampi family also – not only Ālattiyūr Nampi – called Kārantōṭṭu Nampi and that was just in the east of [the house of] Ālattiyūr Nampi – the east of Hanuman *Kāvū* (Mal.) (temple) on the west side of the tile factory. The old East India Company was situated there, and you know that is the oldest tile factory that was established here in Kerala. The traditional house (*illam* Mal.) of Kārantōṭṭu Nampi was situated to the west of this company. It (the traditional house) is now extinct.

¹⁸For the authoritative vedic view on the relationship between Brahmin and physician (*bhiṣaj*) or vedic ritual and medical practice, see, for example, the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 6.4.9.1-2: “... The gods said of these two [Aśvins], ‘Impure are they, wandering among men and physicians.’ Therefore a Brahman should not practise medicine, for the physician is impure, unfit for the sacrifice. ...” (Translated by Arthur Berriedale Keith. Keith [1914], p.535). Cf. The *Manusmṛiti* 3.152; Zysk [1991] pp.21-27.

¹⁹One of the *Aṣṭavaidya* physicians narrates about the position of Vaidyamatham family among *Aṣṭavaidyas* and in the hierarchy of Brahmins in Yamashita & Manohar [2007-2008] p.158.

One view is that just before the extinction [of the Kārattōḷ Nampi family], the main person [of the family] who survived there was [moved and] settled down here (Mezhathur). After performing purificatory rites and being conferred on him the right to learn and teach the *vedas*, [then the Kārattōḷ Nampi family became Vaidyamatham family].²⁰ But no one could be certain about it. Nobody knows the truth, as there is no documented evidence for any of this.

Another view is that they (Vaidyamatham family) were the descendants of Indu.²¹ There is only a vague proof for that also, but no one can deny this idea. Indu's commentary (*vyākhyāna* Skt.) is now in print. This was rendered possible by the efforts of (*Aṣṭavaidya*) Vayaskara N.S. Mooss (Vayaskara N.S. Müssü) (1912~1986),²² but it is out of print. As it is out of print, Indu's commentaries

²⁰Namboodiri [2000a] describes: "Of these [*Aṣṭavaidya* families], Kārathol Nambi either became extinct without any male children, or became Vaidyamatham. ... As mentioned earlier, all the families [of *Aṣṭavaidya*] are addressed as Moosses rather than Namboothiris, except Ālathiyoor and Kārathol who are called Nambis. Ashtavaidyans are given a slightly depressed status perhaps because they have to examine dead bodies, perform surgical operations and use and follow Buddhist Granthams (Treatises). However, considerable respect and place are given to them by the Namboothiri community.

Owing to the slightly lower status for Moosses, they are not permitted inside Yāga sālās, a place where Yāgams are performed. It is, however essential to have a physician nearby. This was assigned to Vaidyamatham. It is likely that Kārathol Nambis were upgraded to Namboothiris and brought to Mezhathol for this purpose. Vaidyamatham was said to be the physician for all the 99 Yāgams performed by Mezhathol Agnihothri. The family follows Ālathiyoor Nambi's treatment methods, which points to the possibility of his ancestry to Kārathol Nambi, who was himself trained under Ālathiyoor Nambi."

²¹"Indu was the author of two commentaries with the title Śaśilekhā, the one on the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā*, the other on the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*." in HIML IA p.669.

²²HIML IB pp.737-738 note 261: "The *Śaśilekhā* on the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* has partly been edited: *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya Saṃhitā* with the *Śaśilekha* commentary of Indu, edited by Vayaskara N.S. Mooss, part 1 (*Sūtrasthāna*), Vaidya Sarathy Series, Book No. 13, Kottayam 1956; part 2 (*Śārīrasthāna*), Vaidya Sarathy Series, Book No. 17, Kottayam 1967 (part 2 contains, next to the *Śaśilekhā*, Vāsudeva's *Anvayamālā*); part 3 (*Nidānasthāna*), Vaidyasarathy Series, Book No. S-3, Kottayam 1978; part 4 (*Cikitsasthāna*), Vaidya Sarathy Series, Book No. 18, Kottayam 1978; part 5 (*Kalpasthāna*), Vaidya Sarathy Series, Book No. 19, Kottayam 1972. This edition is based on four MSS, one from Madras, one from Poona, one from the editor's collection, and one from the collection of the *aṣṭavaidya* physician Bālāranya; the last one of these four MSS is complete; the MS from the editor's own library covers Sū.6-U.40 (see his *svalpaprāstāvika* to part 1-5; the MSS are described in the *sūcīpattrā* of part 1). The *Śaśilekhā* on the *Uttarasthāna* has, to my knowledge, not appeared, although

for both the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraham* and the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayam* are not available.²³ Vayaskara N.S. Mooss got both of them printed.²⁴ He had worked hard on these. We should salute him with thousand hands for his efforts, for he took great pains for *Āyurveda*. When he decided to publish Indu's commentaries, he found that there was only one manuscript (*grantha* Mal., Skt.) with them (Vayaskara N.S. Mooss family).

One story goes that there were three copies of the palm leaf manuscript [of Indu's commentary]. Indu was the penname. What the exact name of this person was not known. The title of the commentary was *Śaṣilekhā* (a digit of the moon or moonlight). Then, it should be Indu's work, because only the moon (*indu* Skt.) has the moonlight. That was his penname. Two copies [of manuscript] of this commentary were with Vaidyamatham family and another copy with the other family [of *Aṣṭavaidya*]. This leads to the fact that we have a connection with the tradition of Indu. Otherwise, what could be the reason for the two copies of the commentary being left with Vaidyamatham family? It is not possible. There was only one copy for all other families [of *Aṣṭavaidya*], while Vaidyamatham had the two copies.

To me, he (Indu) seems to be a person of Kerala (Keralite). Indu who had written the commentary, the *Śaṣilekhāvyākhyānam* might be a Malayali. I feel, logically, it should be like that, [but] Vāhaṭa (Vāgbhaṭa) is not a Malayali, no doubt.

I had mentioned earlier about one Neelakandappan (Nīlakaṇṭappan) and Kunchuvappan (Kuñcuvappan). They lived about 130 years ago. It was this Kunchuvappan who said that he was staying at Edappally (Itappalli) [near Kochi]. Some of his disciples are still there. The other copy [of Indu's commentary], he took there as a reference to teach them, but it was lost. Therefore, now there is only one copy [with our Vaidyamatham family]. The only one copy of Indu's commentary of the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayam* is now available.

The other copy is gone. Its original is now with us. That is the earliest copy. One copy of the two copies is now here. Another copy is gone. That is all. That copy (the lost copy) was stealthily taken by someone. And this stolen copy was by hook or by crook, rediscovered. Vayaskara N.S. Mooss published it again. I

the editor planned to publish it. The references are numbered in agreement with Kuṇṭe and Navre's edition of the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā*. The title of the commentary is mentioned in the introductory verses."

²³ After this interview, a new printed edition of Indu's commentary on the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā* was published in 2007. See Bibliography of this article, Sanskrit Texts, AHS (2).

²⁴ The editor could not verify this fact, especially whether Vayaskara N.S. Mooss published Indu's commentary on the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* or not.

actually asked him [about the copy], but he had no idea. I asked him whether it was so and so. He said: ‘No, somebody has taken it and it was new palm-leaf [manuscirpt].’ Then, I said: ‘If it was new palm-leaf [manuscript], it would not be possible to read [and understand] it.’ There are a number of dashes in between [in the copy]. These dashes indicated omissions. When a manuscript gets ruined, one must rewrite it. At the time of rewriting it, if something is not legible, a dash would be used – would be simply inscribed. That space will be left blank and the rest would be written. That was the practice. And by following this practice, in our copies also there would be long dashes – yes, there are dashes. So that would be [dashes] in that copy also. If he did not know this practice, he would write without stopping. Then, when that end and this end are written mixed up, one could not read (understand) it. That could be how it was found. [Vayaskara N.S.] Mooss agreed to my viewpoint. Whatever might have been, the book was published like that. And from this, we find a little proof to guess whether Vaidyamatham belongs to Indu’s tradition.

The other idea cannot also be said to have any logic. [Among *Aṣṭavaidya* families], the Alathiyur Nambi (Ālattiyūr Nampi) [family] and the Karathol Nambi (Kārattōḷ Nampi) [family] were more or less one [family]. They were relatives also. [Their] tradition is also the same. Only the Alathiyur Nambi family and the Vaidyamatham Nambudiri family [who is considered to be renamed from Karathol Nambi] used to prescribe the decoction of the olden days. Only they had the style of twelve *kaḷaṇcū* (Mal.)²⁵ medicinal plants boiled in five *nāḷi* (Mal.)²⁶ of water, reduced to one *nāḷi*, filtered and again reduced to half *nāḷi*. This was how decoctions were prescribed by the Alathiyur Nambi and the Vaidyamatham Nambudiri [families]. They shared that resemblance. So the possibility of a link between Alathiyur Nambi and Vaidyamatham Nambudiri cannot be negated.

²⁵ *Kaḷaṇcu* is a measurement of weight. According to Appendix II, Weights and Measures to Text and English translation of the *Viṣavaidyasārasamucchaya*, one Kazhanchu (*kaḷaṇcu*) is approximately equivalent to 5 grams. *The Travancore State Manual* (Aiya [1989] Vol. III p.215) describes that 1 Panam = 6 Grains (approximately), 13 Panams = 1 Kalanju (*kaḷaṇcu*) = 78 Grains. See Mooss [1983] pp.123-124; Frohnmeyer [1989] p.93.

²⁶ *Nāḷi* is a measurement of volume. According to Appendix II, Weights and Measures to Text and English translation of the *Viṣavaidyasārasamucchaya*, one Nazhi (*nāḷi*) is approximately equivalent to 240 ml. *The Travancore State Manual* (Aiya [1989] Vo.III p.215) describes that 1 Nali (*nāḷi*) = 20 Cubic Inches (approximately). See Mooss [1983] pp.123-124; Frohnmeyer [1989] p.92.

Others (other *Aṣṭavaidya* families) used to say: ‘four *nāli*’ [of water] – didn’t they? You would see them write ‘decoction made in four *nāli* of water and reduced to one *nāli*.’ However, for the Vaidyamatham family, it is not like that. It is decoction made in five units of water and reduced to one unit. For Alathiyur Nambi also, it is like that. Only these families prescribe like this. If you go south, there are a number of people who prescribe like this. So there is a logic behind the two views on the origin of the Vaidyamatham family’s tradition. As a rough idea about our tradition, this is all that can be said. Only so much can be said.

We generally speak of *Aṣṭavaidyas*. They are *aṣṭāṅga vaidyas* (physicians who specialize in all of the eight branches (*aṣṭāṅga* Skt.) of *Āyurveda*). That is not the eight (*aṣṭa* Skt.) families. Many people mistake this for eight families. That is incorrect. Not exactly eight families, there are nearly 10-16 [families] of them.

I shall tell you [some of the names of *Aṣṭavaidya* families] – Alathiyur Nambi (*Ālattiyūr Nampi*), then Karathol Nambi (*Kārattōl Nampi*) just mentioned, and then, Chundal Mooss (*Cūṇṭal Müssü*), but they succumbed to the tradition of Alathiyur Nambi. Then, there was one Parappur Musad (*Paṛappūr Müssatü*). There is one Parappur temple before you reach Trissur. It was near here that Parappur Musad lived. He was an *Aṣṭavaidya*. You said that you have just seen P.T. Narayana Musad (*P.T. Nārāyaṇan Müssatü*). The Parappur Musad family succumbed to this P.T. Narayana Musad family. This one succumbing to another, there was a number of them.

I think there is one book by Kunjukuttan Tampuran (*Kuñcukkuṭṭan Tampurān*), titled *Keralacaritram* (*Kēraḷacaritram*, History of Kerala). It appears that the names or other details of eighteen *Aṣṭavaidyas* [families] have been given there.

In the tradition of these eighteen *Aṣṭavaidya* families, *Aṣṭavaidya* means *aṣṭāṅga vaidyas*. [With respect to *aṣṭāṅga*, it is said]:

kāya-bāla-grahordhvāṅga-śalya-daṁṣṭrā-jarā-vṛṣān.
(AHS Sū 1.5cd)

(Internal medicine (*kāya*), paediatrics (*bāla*), treatment of diseases arising from possession [by evil spirits and so on] (*graha*), treatment of diseases of the head, neck, mouth and sensory organs (*ūrdhvāṅga*), surgery (*śalya*), toxicology (*daṁṣṭrā*), geriatrics (*jarā*) and potency therapy (*vṛṣa*).)

That is all. If you hold that *Aṣṭavaidya* refers to eight families – well, no harm. But we have not divided them like that.

Generally, of these, ophthalmology (a part of *ūrdhvāṅga*) and toxicology (*daṃṣṭrā* or *agadatantra* Skt.) – we do not handle both of these [branches] much. There are others (other families specified) for these [branches]. For ophthalmology, there are other people exclusively. They are not *Aṣṭavaidyas*. They know only about eyes and nothing more. When we speak about ourselves, we should know this branch (ophthalmology) also, though we do not practice it. That is the difference. Likewise, we know toxicology, but we do not practise it. We should know it. It should not be that we do not know it, but you can abstain from practising it or practise it as you like. You should study it. And that is this *aṣṭāṅgam*. So only these points occur to me immediately pertaining to this tradition. Now, if you have any doubts or have anything to say, you can ask.

— Well, was it the Vaidyamatham (Vaidyamatham) [family] itself?

Not certain. No proof to quote. Anyway, for the Vaidyamatham [family], there is a specialty about it. Yes, I feel so.

— Then, did some degradation occur in relation to *Aṣṭavaidyas* [families among Brahmin families]?

Did I not speak about it? What forbids one from entering into the place of vedic ritual (*yāgaśālā* Skt.) is this surgery [of *Āyurveda*]. The surgical treatment (*śastrakriyā* Skt.) – yes, it is the surgery that caused degradation [of *Aṣṭavaidyas* families]. You know that is what deprives one of the authority (*adhikāra* Skt.) or the right to study the *vedas*. It is this deprivation of the authority of the *vedas* (*vedādhikāra* Skt.) that renders one incompetent to enter the place of vedic ritual (*yāgaśālā*). Only the authoritative persons of the *vedas* (*vedādhikārin* Skt.) could enter the place of the vedic ritual. I have already explained what this *adhikāra* means.

— Have practices of surgery not affected the Vaidyamatham [family]?

Generally, the Vaidyamatham [family] does not have the authority to do surgery. [However], there was one [exceptional] surgical procedure called *sirāvedha* (Skt.) (or *sirāvyadha*; venesection or cutting into *sirā* channel)²⁷ that has been remained confined to the textbooks [of *Āyurveda*]. It is my grandfather who took it out. He, my grandfather, started this [surgical procedure called *sirāvedha*]. He did it first on his mother. That is what I have heard. It's only hearsay. I have not

²⁷ For *sirāvyadha*, see AHS Sū Chapter 27; AS Sū Chapter 36; SS Śā Chapter 8.

seen her. I was born during the days of her funeral rites. So that it was impossible [for me to see her]. It is just the story I have heard. She was suffering from a headache. She had trouble with her eyes. Then, she had scolded [her son, my grandfather].

When she spoke like this, [my grandfather] said that he would then try *sirāvedha*. The *sirāvedha* was performed on my grandfather's mother by my father. My grandfather was sitting by her side, indicated the spots where to perform *sirāvedha*, and he made my father do it. That was done cleanly, that is what I have heard. Her headache subsided a little, but her pain in the eyes was not cured. She was very old and died subsequently. That was the first *sirāvedha*. My grandfather was very peculiar in his ways. It is doubtful whether there had been anyone like him in the recent past.

— How is it (*sirāvedha*) performed?

It is stipulated that it is to be done with a device²⁸ of the shape of rice grain. So, he summoned his wisdom. He smashed a glass bottle of required thickness. He selected the clean-cut and sharp end of the glass, took a small wooden stick, split it into two and placed the glass piece in between. He wound it with thread. When it is wound with thread, it would stand like this – like the axe or cleaver. It was with that the first *sirāvedha* was done. Now we do, now we alone do it. We are the only people doing *sirāvedha* presently. Nobody else does it. At least, we have not heard of [any others]. We are not sure whether there is anybody [who does *sirāvedha*]. I would not say 'No', but we are doing it. Now also we do it. Generally, we are not entitled to do it, but recently also we did it. Now, I had a fall and my hand was hurt. Therefore, I am not capable of doing it now. But, then, there are a son of my father's brother and also my second son [who do *sirāvedha*]. He (the son of my father's brother) was taught [by me]. He will manage it somehow. The other day, he had to do it. He did it well. Practice, that is the only way. If you explain it in words, one cannot do it. Nor can you do it with books.

3. The legacy of Vāhaṭa (Vāgbhaṭa)

The legacy of *Āyurveda* that we have in Kerala today is the legacy of Vāhaṭa (Vāgbhaṭa). The spread of *Āyurveda* that you see today was instructed by Vāhaṭa

²⁸ One of the sharp surgical instruments (*śastra* Skt.), *vṛhimukhaśalākā* (Skt.) (a surgical instrument which resembles a grain of rice). See AHS Sū 26.11; AHS Sū 27.33; AS Sū 34.27; AS Sū 36.12; SS Sū 8.3-5; SS Śā 8.9.

Ācārya. Vāhaṭa *Ācārya* was a superhuman; he was progressive and this progressiveness was on account of [his] wisdom.

Vāhaṭa thought that it would be good if the two wings, surgery (*śastrakriyā* Skt.) of Suśruta and internal medicine (*kāyacikitsā* Skt.) of Caraka, were harmonised, and you see it clearly in his books.

Thus, this view of Vāhaṭa was propagated here by groups consisting of *Dhanvantarīyas* and *Bharadvājīyas*.²⁹

So for admitting into the place of vedic ritual (*yāgaśālā*), none from them could be taken. ‘Come, whomsoever wants’ could not also be said. They did not have the authority of the *vedas* (*vedādhikāra* Skt.), because surgery was included in it. Therefore, it has to be presumed that one man was exclusively selected for the purpose. [However] if a question arose, from where was he selected? There could be no reply.

— In the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*, internal medicine (*kāyacikitsā*) is important, isn’t it? It is also important for the Vaidyamatham family?

For the internal medicine (*kāyacikitsā*), I have already mentioned the two terms, *Bharadvājīyas* and *Dhanvantarīyas*. *Dhanvantarīyas* are authorities of surgery. *Bharadvājīyas* are the followers of Caraka [and authorities of internal medicine]. It often comes to question whether Caraka – *Bharadvājīya* is the only family of internal medicine (*kāyacikitsā*) or not. I do not think there is anybody else. There is no one else to claim so much of that tradition. It had already passed over around 1600-1700 years. When one speaks about Agnihotri’s tradition it dates back 1700 years.

If that is computed, you get a little less than 1700 years. That would lead one to conclude that the Vaidyamatham family, which has attained the style of *Bharadvājīya* tradition, has existed for that long [period]. That is how the logic works. In the olden days, there were no other people with this type of internal medicine (*kāyacikitsā*). The root cause for this is that Vāhaṭa had propagated this here. That is the reason for that, but, then, if you speak about completeness [of the *Āyurvedic* texts], only *Caraka[samhitā]* is complete like the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*. If you are to assign first place among medical texts, it is the *Caraka[samhitā]*

²⁹ *Dhanvantarīyas* are the followers of Lord Dhanvantari or the Dhanvantari school of *Āyurveda* represented by the *Suśrutasamhitā*. *Bharadvājīyas* are the followers of Lord Bharadvāja or the Bharadvāja school of *Āyurveda* represented by the *Carakasamhitā*.

And we have identified Patāñjali as Caraka.³⁰ Is it not clear from the verse (*śloka* Skt.)?

yogena cittasya padena vācāṃ malaṃ śarīrasya ca vaidyakena.
[yo 'pākarot taṃ pravaraṃ munīnāṃ patañjaliṃ prāñjalir ānato 'smi.]³¹

(The one who removes impurity of mind by *yoga*, that of speech by grammar, that of body by medicine; to him, the best of *munis*, Patañjali, I would offer my salutation joining and holding out the hollowed open hands.)

It was this physician (*vaidya* Skt.) who appeared as Caraka, “*caraka*” means “one who walks” or “one who moves”. That is Caraka.

And his vision – he has done the presentation relating to *Vaiśeṣika darśana*.³² We must recognize that his interest was in *Vaiśeṣika darśana*. When you go to [read] books (*śāstra* Skt.) [of *Āyurveda*], it is impossible [to understand them] without resorting to the *Vaiśeṣika* system of thought. That is, you have to start from the five elements (earth, air, fire, water and space) (*pañcabhūta* Skt.). And

³⁰There is a traditional theory that Caraka and Patañjali (the author of the *Mahābhāṣya* and/or the *Yogasūtra*) are identical, and a long controversy on this theory has existed among scholars. See HIML IA pp.143-144. P.V. Sharma denied this theory, saying: “Thus, the author of CS is quite different from the authors of the *Mahābhāṣya* and the *Yogasūtra*. The main reasons of this confusion has been their relation with Nāga, composition of *Bhāṣya* (by one on the Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and by the other on the *Agniśa-tantra*) and perhaps their contemporaneity, the first man to create this confusion was probably Svāmikumāra, the author [of] the *Caraka-pañjikā* (7th Century) who was followed by Bhartṛhari, Cakra-pāṇidatta, Bhāvamīśra, etc.” in Sharma [1992] p.182.

³¹James Haughton Woods gives an account of this verse in the Introduction of his translation of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* as follows: “The tradition of the triple activity of Patañjali as a writer on Yoga and grammar and medicine is reinforced as follows:

yogena cittasya padena vācāṃ malaṃ śarīrasya tu vaidyakena.
yo 'pākarot taṃ pravaraṃ munīnāṃ patañjaliṃ prāñjalir ānato 'smi.

This is cited in Ćivarāma's commentary on the *Vāsavadattā* (ed. Bibl. Ind., p.239), which Aufrecht assigns to the eighteenth century. The stanza occurs also in some MSS. just before the opening words of the *Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn's ed., vol. I, p.503) – that is, not under circumstances giving any clue to its date.” in Woods [1914] p.xiv. Preface of the Gulabkunverba's edition of CS, Vol. I (1949) p.88 and p.92 quote the same verse from Vijñānabhikṣu's *Yogavārttika*. HIML IB p.232 note 648: “This quotation is identical with that found in Bhoja's *Nyāyavārttika*.”

³²One of the six systems of knowledge in ancient India.

when you connect it to the five elements, it is practically difficult without resorting to the *Vaiśeṣika* system of thought – really hard. There is no book (*śāstra*) just like the *Caraka[samhitā]*. The *Suśruta[samhitā]* of course has dealt with important points well, but what should I say? There is not the same perfection [in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*] as in the *Caraka[samhitā]*. That is Caraka. Another book that can be called great is the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. And in this case, it is not perfection, not perfection like the *Caraka[samhitā]*. It is great in another way, in its editing. There is no other book so beautifully edited. Considering things like that, the condensation [of the contents].

*vāyuh pittaṃ kaphaś ceti trayo doṣāḥ samāsataḥ.
vikṛtāvikṛtā dehaṃ ghnanti te vartayanti ca.
te vyāpino 'pi hṛnnābhyor adhomadhyordhvasaṃśrayāḥ.
vayo 'horātribhuktānāṃ te 'ntamadhyādīgāḥ kramāt.
(AHS Sū 1.6cd-8ab)*

(*Vāyu* (*vāta*), *pitta*, *kapha* are the three *doṣas*, in brief; they destroy and support (sustain, maintain) the body when they are abnormal and normal respectively. Though present all over the body, they are found (predominantly) in the region, below, middle and above, respectively, of the area between the heart and the umbilicus. They are predominant, respectively, during the last, middle and first stages of the life (span), the day, the night, and (process of digestion of) the food.)

(Translated by K. R. Srikantha Murthy)

How could one condense it more? It is expressed in two stanzas, based on thirty-two letters. Just try to write it – try. See how many words would be there. It would need four times the number [of words]. It may not possible even with four times. I have not seen another one so adept – so concisely packing it all into a crisp verse. That is the greatest skill of Vāhaṭa (Vāgbhaṭa). And now to the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* also. The *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* is more cute.

For [the author of] the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, I have a different view on that than the view of others. I maintain [the opinion] that both [the authors of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* and the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*] are one and the same person.³³ It is not that one is possible? Yes, the same person, not two people. Only one Vāgbhaṭa. No doubt about that thing. You can know it, if you look. Both (the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* and the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*) include the same verses. Yes, same

³³There is a long controversy on whether the author of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* and the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* is the same Vāgbhaṭa or not. See HIML IA pp.640-645.

verses. But, the methodology, that sweetness of the verses, you see it in the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. Where else do you get such beautiful verses? This transcends even Kālidasa's lyrics.

You can see his progressive nature here. I have already said that he is progressive. That you can see in this [verse]:

*ajñātaśāstrasadbhāvān śāstramātraparāyaṇān.
tyajed dūrād bhiṣak pāśān vaivasvatān iva.
(AHS Utt 40.76)*

(Those who know only the (sentences of the) texts of this science, but not the good intention of it (philosophy and ethics) should be avoided from a distance itself, just like avoiding the rope of the Lord of death.)

(Translated by K. R. Srikantha Murthy)

And other things like this could be said only by him. Do you think otherwise? And this is said about what he himself had written – about self, not about another person.

4. Medical texts and manuscripts

Our old palm leaf manuscripts (*tālīyōla grantham* Mal.) are there in our collections – about two-hundred and fifty. Nearly half of the collection is medical texts. The other half consists of *purāṇas* and *kāvyas*, etc. We have arranged to label them in a few months for that [our] library. We have another collection of manuscripts that were left uncared for.

— Are these listed?

We have tried it and have a list. We have written the list and kept it there, but, as the [construction] work of that building is not over, there is lack of facility and space. Funds are problem. Without funds, we can't complete the work. To personally finance it, there is a Trust. We started a Trust in the name of my grandfather. The palm leaf manuscripts are there. We want to publish them – that is our desire. All those things are not moving now. The reason is lack of funds, but people do donate.

These books of ours are of Kerala origin. The *Cikitsāmañjarī* and the *Yogāmṛtam* – all are of Kerala origin. There are a number of them – also the commentaries [of medical texts].

[Here is the book of] Indu's [commentary on] the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayam*, but nobody is here to look for that. Likewise, *Bhela[samhitā]*. The *Kāśyapasamhitā*, the book is here.

— Are they in manuscript-form?

No, No. In book-form. No palm leaf manuscripts. I have not seen *Bhela[samhitā]* in palm leaf manuscript. But that is incomplete, no?

— Yes, incomplete.

But then, it is not so big. Comparatively the *Hārīta[samhitā]* is better. The *Hārītasamhitā* is slightly better than the *Bhela[samhitā]*, but in the *Bhela[samhitā]*, there are a few good recipes. That is not much. The *Bhelasamhitā* is not complete.

Do we say *Vēlans*? These *Vēlans* were regarded as low class (caste) people. *Maṇṇāns* constitutes *Vēlans*.³⁴ It is said that the word *Vēla* has come from the word *Bhela* [of the *Bhelasamhitā*]. *Maṇṇās* generally do medical treatment. Not only paediatrics (*bālacikitsā* Skt.), but also other treatments. They do treatment – and are good physicians, some of them. But their gimmick of treatment and their method of treatment were changed – their language would change. They

³⁴ *Vēlan* literally means 'one having a spear' and a caste of devil-dancers, sorcerers, basket-makers. See Parpola [2000] pp.186, 390. *Maṇṇān* (= *Vanṇān*) is a *jāti* of washermen. See Parpola [2000] pp.80, 367.

Kurup & Kumar [2000] pp.368-369 describe: "There are some lower caste groups who were well-known as physicians, like Mannan, Velan, Kaniyan and Ezhava. The most popular rustic physicians of traditional Kerala like Mannan and Velan reigned from the lowest strata of the society. These groups are two sections of the same origin and Valan is popular in Tamil Sangam literature of the early Centuries of the Christian era. Mannan the polluting group were well known folk dance[r]s and singers of religious rites. ... Mannans and Velans associate their treatment system with black magic. These people used to tie knot on a black thread, and, activating it with the chanting of *Mantras*, tied it to the ailing person. This is supposed to be one expression of exorcism which they enact along with greater ritualistic processes. ... The women folk of Mannan community, was known as Mannathi. They were not only washer women for high castes but also exhibited expertise in labour room assistance. This gynaecological skill extended later to give fomentation for women with medicated hot water, after their delivery. ... Until the days of the European coming the Mannathis acted as the Village gynaecologist and mid-wife, successfully."

would mix up five or six recipes (*yoga Skt.*). There were a hundred ingredients. It is like that. Their system is such. It is said that that is why they are called *Maṇṇāns*. Well, it is from this Bhela, that *Velans* have come, it is said, but I am not sure.

For *Hārīta*, nothing of this type is seen. The *Hārītasamhitā* contains a little more. In that also, there are good recipes. Besides them (medical texts), how many recipes are there in the *Purāṇas* and so on? How many medicines are discussed in the *Agnipurāṇa*? The *Agnipurāṇa* and then, the *Garuḍapurāṇa* – how many recipes are there in these *Purāṇas*?

5. Special treatments, *Rasāyana*

— When was one of the rejuvenation therapies (*rasāyana Skt.*), namely *kuṭīprāveśika* (a rejuvenation therapy in a special room) done?

I have done a rejuvenation therapy in a special room (*kuṭīprāveśika Skt.*).³⁵ This was performed in the 1130 or 1131 Malayalam era (A.D. 1954 or 1955), it seems. I don't exactly remember [the date]. It was performed on P*** V*** Nambudirippad (Nampūtirippāṭṭū). I watched it and I had heard something [about this therapy] before that. I shall narrate it.

That one is called the rejuvenation therapy (*rasāyana*) using fruits of Emblic myrobalan (Indian gooseberry; *āmalaka* or *āmalakī* (*Skt.*); *Phyllanthus emblica* Linn. = *Embllica officinalis* Gaertn.) (*āmalaka rasāyana Skt.*). That was prepared here only and done for head injury.³⁶

At the beginning, we cut a *palāśa* tree (*Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub. =

³⁵CS Ci 1.1.16, AHS Utt 39.5 and AS Utt 49.10 divide the rejuvenation therapy (*rasāyana*) broadly into two kinds, namely *kuṭīpraveśika* and *vātātāpika*. For the *kuṭīpraveśika rasāyana*, AHS Utt 39.6-7 instructs to build a special premise (cottage) at the beginning of the therapy as follows: “At a place located in a town, where the requirements are obtainable, being conformed to the law, free from wind and danger, in the north, at an auspicious point; one should construct a cottage that has three rooms with small windows, is getting away from smoke, heat, dust, fierce animals, women, foolish persons and so on, equipped with the medical instruments and well-cleansed.” (*pure prāpyopakarāṇe dharmya-nirvāta-nirbhaye. diśy udīcyāṃ śubhe deśe trigarbhāṃ sūkṣmalocanām. dhūmātāpa-rajo-vyāla-strī-mūrkhādy-avilāṅghitām. sajjavaidyopakarāṇām sumṛṣṭām kārayet kuṭīm.*) Cf. CS Ci 1.1.17-24 and AS Utt 49.11.

³⁶In this case, it seems that the rejuvenation therapy (*rasāyana*) was, beyond its original purpose, applied to a patient of head injury probably to improve his bodily strength.

Butea frondosa Koenig ex Roxb.), [hollowed the log], placed *āmalaka* fruits on the inside, covered it with cow-dung cakes and burnt it. Then, we took out the fruits of *āmalaka*. That is how it is described.³⁷

This *āmalaka rasāyana* was given to P*** V*** Nambutirippad. That was done under my grandfather's leadership and my father's supervision. I went there and witnessed it. He (my grandfather) put up some coverings in the shape of *kuṭiprāveśika* (a special room for this therapy). That was how he did it. It could not be said whether that was effective or not. However, things were done more or less exactly as they should be. The work was done accurately. The patient used to take only *āmalaka* fruits – nothing else. For the thirty days, only *āmalaka* fruits were eaten – nothing else. I had seen it – seen it by myself.

And something that I have not seen, I have heard. Father used to say that he had seen it. I have heard him saying this. There is a traditional house (*illam* Mal.) by name of P*** – near M***. A certain person (a family member in the traditional house) was suffering from [a disease like] leprosy. His fingers were disfigured. His grandfather – he had conceived of the recipe of the *kuṭiprāveśika rasāyana* – not all of it anyway.

And that (*kuṭiprāveśika rasāyana*) was prepared at K***, nearby here. That was done inside a large chest to keep rice (*pattāyam* Mal.) [instead of a special

³⁷ AHS Utt 39.28-32 runs: “One should cut the upper part of a *palāśa* tree which is free from sickness and is wet; [hollow] the log [of *palāśa*] into two *hasta* in depth and stuff up fresh *āmalaka* fruits. The log should be wholly wrapped by *darbha* grass, smeared with mud taken from lotus-pond, set on fire with cow-dung found in forest and steamed at the place where is free from wind. The one (patient) should eat the steamed *āmalaka* fruits with honey and ghee to his satisfaction. Then, he should drink boiled milk according to his wishes. In this way, the patient should spend one month. For the meanwhile, the patient should avoid things to avoid by effort and should not touch cold water even with his hands. And then, when the eleventh day passes, his hair, teeth and nails will fall out. After that, in a short while, the patient will become a person who is of handsome appearance, has indefatigable power during sexual activity with women, has energy equal to elephants, possesses great wisdom, strength, intelligence and mind, can extend his life span even to a thousand years.” (*nīruj-ārdrā-palāśasya cchinne śirasi tatksatam. antar dvi hastam gambhīram pūryam āmalakair navaiḥ. āmūlaṃ veṣṭitam darbhaiḥ padminīpaṅkalepitam. ādīpya gomayair vanyair nirvāte svedayet tataḥ. svinnāni tāny āmalakāni trṭpyā khāden naraḥ kṣaudraghṛtānvitāni. kṣīram śṛtam cānu pibet prakāmaṃ tenaiva varteta ca māsam ekam. varjyāni varjyāni ca tatra yatnāt sprśyaṃ ca śītāmbu na pānināpi. ekādaśāhe 'sya tato vyatīte patanti keśā daśanā nakhāś ca. athālpakair eva dinaiḥ surūpaḥ strīṣv akṣayaḥ kuñjaratulyavīryaḥ. viśiṣṭamedhābalabuddhisattvo bhavaty asau varṣasahasrajīvī.*) Cf. CS Ci 1.1.75 (*caturthāmalaka-rasāyana*) and AS Utt 49.34.

room]. Ha-ha-ha.

That is how I heard about it. It was inside this chest that he was given *bākucī* (Skt.) (*kārkōkilari* Mal.; *Psoralea corylifolia* Linn.). The *kārkōkilari rasāyana* was done in accordance with the recipe for *kuṭīprāveśika rasāyana*. I heard that this therapy was effective for the suppurating wounds. That was actually done through [the recipe for] *kuṭīprāveśika*. That was just what I heard. I do not have firsthand knowledge.

I was 3 or 4 years old [at that time]. Anyway, that is not in my [direct] memory, but I have heard my father saying that. He, then, used to go there often. During this time, I had heard him saying: when the patient vomited blood once or twice, he (my father) reported it to [my] grandfather, [but they] observed that there was nothing serious. It was the reaction of the medicine. Nothing serious.

It is a very costly treatment, isn't it? The cost is actually for the arrangements. Other than that what is the cost of the recipe? Mainly, it is *āmalaka* fruits. Yes, *āmalaka* fruits are required. Then, one good tree of *palāśa*. This tree should be big enough to obtain enough wood for making a vessel. That is all. But then, there should be a number of inputs. There should be people to pool these. Carpenters should also be called for. Everything has to be arranged. Good *āmalaka* fruits should be procured. It should be brought down. These things over, what is left is ghee and honey. These are kept in a china-jar (*bharaṇi* Mal.) and nothing else.

The cost means for these arrangements. To set up these arrangements will be expensive. Not only expensive, but also the efforts required. Immense efforts. That was there and I had seen it here. Nearby here, there is a temple. In the rear side of the temple, there was one *palāśa* tree. That tree was cut [to make the vessel]. And I remember all that. The top of the *palāśa* tree was cut and opened on all four sides, it was covered with bricks or something like that and filled with cow-dung cakes. It was then plastered with mud and was burnt with fire from underneath. I do remember that. I could witness *āmalaka* fruits being transported from here. But as I had not completed my studies then, I could not enumerate more. It, however, had taken place then.

6. Sanskrit and Malayalam literature

— About your literary contributions?

What? That — ha-ha-ha. Nothing like that, when I feel monotonous, sitting and listening to the patients, all of them come with complaints of troubles of illness.

I imbibe a part of their pains and feel just like it's entering my body. For that pain to fade, for a relaxation, or for reducing the tension, something needs to be done and I write for that. That is all. I will then write. I used to write verses. Then, I have translated the *Bhāgavatam* (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*) [into Malayalam]. And also the *Gītā* (the *Bhagavadgītā*). The *Gītālahari* was the title given to it (the Malayalam rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā*). It is the quintessence of the *Gītā*. It is not just a translation.

— Is it prose?

No, No. It is in verses – Malayalam verses. There are about 172 verses. It appeared in the *Bhakthapriya*.³⁸ One gentleman suggested that I translate the *Devī Mahātmya* too. I initially declined. But when I felt lonely, just for fun, I had an interest in that even earlier.

Not exactly in literature, not for literature, I have some interest in versification. Yes, I have some interest in poetry. So even though nothing would get into me, when somebody said. It would come to mind and I would be doing it eventually. That has been how things have worked. In the same way, I worked on the *Devī Mahātmya* also. I reduced the *Devī Mahātmya* into 116 verses (*śloka*) and did one (translation). Recently, I have translated the *Saundaryalaharī*, also in the same way. I translated the *Saundaryalaharī* – just to see what and how it would end up. Acts like this would help us to give something sweet to our minds, which are empathizing with the pain experienced by patients. So I used to do this. Recently, one gentleman asked me to translate Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* [into Malayalam]. I said I am not capable of doing it. He replied: “You can definitely do it. Simply try.” I have since then started it. For the time being, I have given it up. Nothing difficult. When I did not have engagements, I did nearly 150 verses. It is just four or five days since I started – yes, four days.

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³⁸The *Bhakthapriya* is a monthly magazine in Malayalam published by Guruvayoor Devaswom. See the official website of Guruvayur Devaswom, <<http://www.guruvayur-devaswom.org/bhakthapriya.shtml>> (29 January 2010).

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