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Connecting Systems; Bridging Disciplines

◦ Ayurved ◦ Yoga ◦ Unani ◦ Siddha ◦ Asian Medicine ◦

"Connecting today is a dialogue ."

- Mark Parker

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PRE NOTE

In Search of the Indian Meulenbeld

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You might wonder about the title of this article that expresses my severe agony of what we have lost over last few decades and how we continue to lose command over our rich heritage. On one hand, I feel proud to know of Sanskrit as possibly the most compatible language for the use in IT (Information Technology) industry and applaud the increasing interest in learning of Sanskrit in western universities; and on the other hand, I feel depressed with decline of its use, importance and relevance in the learning and practice of Ayurved.

We observe that the eagerness to learn Sanskrit and from original ayurvedic texts is reducing day by day; it is slowly disappearing. A major downfall of the present education is the loss of basic knowledge of principles of Ayurved and lack of ability to derive its contextual meanings for their multidimensional applications. The future of meaningful learning of Samhitas is in an endangered situation.

We must accept the fact that the experiments

conducted over last five decades for the use of Sanskrit either as an essential subject or by choice have not strengthened knowledge base of Ayurved. In the current institutionalised framework Samhita, Siddhant and Sanskrit are taught as separate subjects. The entire teaching and learning process is developed in such a way that gradually we have gone away from original Ayurvedic Sanskrit texts. The teaching of Sanskrit texts and Samhitas has become less relevant to practice and profession. The newer generation is so much distant from the original texts that they are not even aware of the loss of ability for application of knowledge.

Our learning of Samhitas has become mechanical without conveying its contextual richness.

Our learning of Samhitas has become mechanical without conveying its contextual richness. This has reduced intellectual strength, observational skills and clinical capabilities of Ayurvedic student and thereby of Ayurved, profession as a whole. This has also inhibited our research capabilities and advancement of knowledge. I have personally experienced that the knowledge of texts helps in developing novel approaches to research for innovative outcomes.

Such capability is very vital to take up present day challenges of conventional medicine that relies heavily on experimental evidence. An Ayurvedic physician must rely on vastness of information, deeper understanding and contemporary interpretations of its principles and ability to correlate derived knowledge to address present day complex medical needs. Seemingly simple Tridosha theory requires intelligent and experienced elucidation of a highly complex derivations to address complex biological situations.

We did experience and have proof of gains of Sanskrit as observed from early outcomes of studies and publications just few decades back from Jamnagar and BHU being used extensively even today by Ayurved fraternity. However, there has been a big gap observed particularly during last few decades that is required to be filled; there is an urgent need to accelerate the process by evaluating a contemporary model where technology could be used as amplifier. Life and work of Muelenbeld is a good example.

Jan Meulenbeld

Meulenbeld, a Dutch Professor of Anthropology, a linguistic got interested in Ayurveda, travelled all the way to India, learnt and mastered Sanskrit, an alien language for him and took upon the task to access and study original Sanskrit texts, and their history to interpret and rightly translate those texts to provide the world with enormous amount of refined knowledge. He got interested in Ayurved and Sanskrit language and he began with translation of Madhav Nidan as a part of his Ph.D studies. His work on Madhav Nidan later evolved into deeper studies on different commentaries on the original texts. He persuaded further work on science of diagnosis, Nosology probably the first of its kind. He also considered the other contemporary authors by the name of Madhav, and studied to compare it for similarities and differences in approach and meaning. While working on Madhav his curiosity stretched to texts from Sri Lanka that led to his detailed study of Ravana's Arkaprakasha.

Meulenbeld looked at the subjects of Ayurved in a very different manner for their contemporary relevance.

He wrote several scholarly articles on Ayurvedic Nidan and Chikitsa and narrowed down his attention

on subsets as for Psychiatry or Shitapitta not as a symptom but as a group of diseases as described in several Ayurvedic texts.

He explored various Sanskrit texts with linguistic excellence to elucidate better understanding of basic principles of dravya, guna, ojas and of blood as a dosa, as a vital component.

He searched and undertook studies on not much heard compendia texts like Damodardas's Arogyachnitamani, Lakshmana's Yogachandrika and Saraswatinighantoo. He studied thoroughly plants like Bhanga and kañcata and Shigru from various aspects thereby helped further studies by other experts with his own inputs as Ayurvedic herbal drugs for Cytotoxic activity. He also laboured to provide right botanical (scientific) names to Sanskrit names of plants. My own multi-dimensional extensive work on Manjistha lasting over several years helped me appreciate his huge contribution in this area. He got interested into Sanskrit texts on veterinary sciences. He extended his studies to an Indian scholastic Mahadeva's Sanskrit text Hikmatprakasha that was linked with Unani medicine and translated it.

Having realised the troubles he undertook the survey of Sanskrit medical literature and realising the need of reliable source of information he begun on major task. After years of scholarly labour with passion and commitment in 2002 Jan Muelenbeld submitted '*A History of Indian Medical Literature*'; a colossal 5 volume contribution to Sanskrit Medical Literature' to the Indian Ambassador to the Netherlands when Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands, concluded the ceremony by conferring on him a knighthood in the *Order of the Netherlands Lion*. In 1993 on his 65th birthday, friends and colleagues presented to Gerrit Jan Meulenbeld a volume of studies in his honour, which formed a special issue of the Journal of the European Ayurvedic Society, which had been founded in the meeting in Groningen of 1983. His studies of Sanskrit medical literature have thrown interesting light on history of Indian medicine.

At ICTAM III held in Mumbai in 1990 IASTAM awarded Prof. A. L. Basham Medal to Prof. Muelenbeld together with Keiji Yamada of Japan, for special merit in the study of Indian medicine. This award was the international recognition of a philological method of Ayurveda research in which

a diachronic approach places the development of Indian medicine in a historical perspective. As a young conference secretary I was occupied with organization of the conference. I clearly recollect the eager excitement about his oration that made me attend it; and I was overwhelmed by the dedication of this Dutch linguistic and Psychiatrist to Ayurved and Sanskrit. Let me confess, though fortunate to meet him several times, my personal interaction was limited. I always found him immersed in his work like a *true rishi* unconcerned of matters beyond his own love and search for Sanskrit and Ayurved. He reminded me of stalwarts like Pandit Haridatta Shastri and scholar writers like Ranjit Rai Desai. To me his exposition of Madav Nidan and Charak Samhita are probably the best among the English translations and the range of subjects he covered fascinates me. I was enchanted to learn of his substantiation that blood reckoned as the fourth disease-causing element in addition to wind, bile, and phlegm as four doshas was not due to Greek influence as many believed it to be.

Our academics, teachers and scholars from Sanskrit Samhita, Siddhant departments have a fantastic opportunity to contribute to development of Ayurved as a medical system and a profession with potential.

We need to understand the depth Prof. Muelenbeld offered who translated each word thoroughly. To become a master, one must become a part of the text to understand who has borrowed from where and how the flow of information and knowledge may appear and that will only give depth of interpreting meaning of a word which itself is an art. Muelenbeld not only mastered but created that art. I have yet to know an expert who can come nearer to the lofty standards that

Muelenbeld not only mastered but created that art.

Muelenbeld established

and maintained throughout his life.

Becoming a Knowledge Centre

I am informed that personal library of Prof. Muelenbeld is now being lodged at Wellcome Institute of History of Medicine, London. It is comprised of vast collection, nearly 3400 titles of books, Sanskrit texts, journals and articles and otherwise unavailable publications on medical history and rare editions of classical works collected over lifetime. There is no other similar collection in the world over, it is claimed. This will be a reliable resource for scholars and researchers. We shall remain indebted to him.

I recollect nearly 30 years back my visits and by Vaidya Raman Mistry to the Wellcome Institute and British Library in London to list down select volumes out of the substantial number of Sanskrit manuscripts. That helped me expand my horizons. We have the Institute of History of Medicine at Hyderabad but unfortunately even after five decades it lacks the vision, the rigor and commitment to purpose. Fault is not of the structure. We need to create an environment of academic interest and research requirement to recognise and appreciate the value of our heritage, our knowledge. I wonder how many of concerned academics have ever communicated with this institute. Our academics, teachers and scholars from Sanskrit Samhita, Siddhant departments have a fantastic opportunity to contribute to development of Ayurved as a medical system and a profession with potential. Rather than working in isolation and competing with borrowed subjects and objectives they have strength to become the

most valuable resource for any new development and evolve into highly respected scholastic academics. They must develop academic strength so that they become the centre of reference and pivotal point of knowledge.

The question is can we separate out the interpretation of a subject and its implication? Is it possible to develop specialised outcome through committed meaning of text which can then be provided for multiple interpretations to be utilised for its relevance to a variety of subjects or substantial or clinical or therapeutic application? We must rise to a level of how excellence within a subject of Samhita, Siddhant and Sanskrit may be taught as an independent subject. The holistic nature is required to be practiced in its totality where knowledge of Sanskrit has become wider and vital. The significance of the subject, the richness of language and commentaries and the many means that have been put in a simple Sanskrit book are required to be evaluated and commented upon for its usage.

It is important to realise that Ayurved as a system if it must succeed must remain influenced by the skills of a physician largely dependent on one's ability to interpret principles, knowledge and information in a contextual manner to remain relevant. Awareness

of vastness of knowledge and ability to efficiently animate it for specific application are possible only with faith, commitment, and appreciation of Samhitas.

There is an urgent need to undertake hundreds of studies on Sanskrit medical text in the context of present day illnesses and health practices, therapeutic solutions and scientific developments and provide a strong alternative. Without thorough and efficient system to interpret Samhita texts for its contemporary meaning possibility of increasing the reach of Ayurved and explore high potentials of Ayurved particularly not only in health but medical care will not be possible.

Meulenbeld gives us an example of how to evolve excellence in the tapered down subject of interpreting language, Samhita or Sanskrit. How to develop multidimensional approach to look at a word or a text or a subject and derive its more explicit meaning. Whether diagnostics or herbal drugs he dwelled into the history of Sanskrit medical literature and studied each subject deeply to provide with the best interpretation. His work provided high scholastic and novel dimension for history of Indian medicine and Sanskrit medical literature. His depth, sincerity and commitment are incomparable; I don't think we have this kind of scholars; that is why I say that we need such experts.

Today when the subject of Sanskrit itself as a

part of curriculum is being debated, one wonders about the resultant effect of such a process. The life and work of Meulenbeld provides direction to the hundreds of post graduate students and teachers who are found defining and demanding their standing. We are leaving in digital world today and the world is easy in communication and tools for literary research are aplenty. It beholds on those who are involved with Ayurved studies and research to get inspired by this great scholar and carve out a new path. We should not get drawn into a controversy about role of Sanskrit in ayurvedic education. We should just should put our act together and rest will follow. I would dream of centres where a student or a curious researcher can simply reach out for relevant information or interpretation to develop novel meanings and objectives.

And therefore, I say I am in search of the Indian Meulenbeld. If we fail to develop such kind of dedicated talent, we will be losing Ayurved. Ayurved is in search of innovative ideas and thoughts that emerge out of the deeper meaning of the text for their relevance. There is need to recognise that any learning of Ayurveda without the original textual linkages will also restrict its relevance as a knowledgebase of life or as holistic system of medicine; it will reduce its capabilities to take on challenges of mostly believed to be reductionist conventional medicine. Therefore, there is need for the Meulenbeld from India to define and explore the richness of Ayurved. ○○○

COMPLETE DETAILS OF MEULENBELD'S WORK ON OPPOSITE PAGE

Happenings

Book Launch Ceremony of

"First Coffee-table Book on Ayurveda - Around the World with Ayurveda and Yoga"

by Professor Emeritus Subhash Ranade and Dr. Sunanda Ranade

At the hands of Senior Journalist and former editor of dainik sakaal Shri Vijay Kuvalekar took place on 1st June 2018 at Tilak Ayurved Mahavidyalaya

For Details visit <http://www.ayurved-int.com/>

CALENDER

8th World Ayurveda Congress & Arogya 2018

Re-aligning the Focus on Health

14th to 17th December 2018, Ahmedabad, India

For Details visit - <https://ayuworld.org>