Vidyarthimitra Vaidya Madhav Vasudev Kolhatkar

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“All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes to make it possible.” This quote by a British writer is very true of *Vaidyachudamani* Madhav Vasudev Kolhatkar, because his vision for Ayurveda and dream to establish it as the health system of first choice not only in India but throughout the world was unique, when very few were thinking of it.

Born in a family dedicated to *Kirtana* (form of musical worship or group devotion) and *Pravachana* (a religious discourse on lives of saints or stories from epics with intention of spiritual and social uplift), on August 25, 1939, in Pune (India), *Vaidya* Kolhatkar was always associated with ancient Indian knowledge and spirituality. His father

was a well-known *Kirtankara* (religious and spiritual interpreter). After his basic education he completed his master's degree in Sanskrit with specialization in *Vedanta*. *Vaidya* Haribhau Paranjpe, one of his father's friends, insisted on his application to study Ayurveda. He studied for the degree of “*Ayurveda Pravin*” (D.S.A.C.) from Ashtang Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Pune, and joined the same college as an honorary teacher with a salary of only one rupee per month. Concurrently, he started private practice and worked for the establishment of an Ayurvedic product “*Kailasa Jeevana*” developed by his father.

THE SITUATION

The time was an era of darkness for Ayurveda. Clinical Ayurveda practice was deteriorating not only in *Maharashtra* but throughout India. Novel innovations in the field of technology, advancement in basic sciences and technology had come up with new instruments and diagnostic aids. Along with that, first-rate support from Government authorities made modern medicine the first choice. Very few practitioners adhered to the clinical practice of Ayurveda. Modern medicine was influencing Ayurvedic students to a great extent. The mindset of society had been captured by conventional medicine, and only a few patients suffering from chronic diseases, such as asthma, arthritis, and so on, were approaching *Vaidyas* in despairing situations. Influenced by conventional medicine students were not really interested in learning or practicing Ayurveda, nor were they given adequate exposure to Ayurveda clinical practice.

After keenly observing the situation, and unlike many other practitioners, *Vaidya* Kolhatkar made up his mind to fight against all odds and find a way of resolving the situation. The basic problem was the public mindset. In a frustrating situation, to making up your mind to accept challenging cases is itself courageous. Neither doctors nor society were in favor of treating such cases using Ayurveda. There was always fear and suspicion in the minds of the patients, their relatives and doctors, about the efficacy of Ayurveda for acute or terminally ill patients. But he was very confident about the potential of Ayurveda and had the courage to handle such cases. His confidence was based on exhaustive reading and thorough understanding

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of ancient texts with their commentaries, and innovative thoughts on the application of those concepts augmented by the experiences of other senior *Vaidyas*.

HIS VISION AND THE MISSION

As a visionary, *Vaidya* Kolhatkar could understand the potential of Ayurveda even in an ultramodern world. Its unchanging principles, the rationale behind Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment, its holistic approach, individuality, and the potential of *Pancakarma* and *Rasashastra* to handle acute cases are peculiarities of Ayurveda that conventional medicine lacks. He could see the limitations and shortcomings of conventional medicine, and visualize the scope for Ayurveda worldwide. He could even foresee the exact roadmap for the overall progress of Ayurveda. He could read the potential of his fellow *Vaidyas* and upcoming students, and could thus understand the various roles they could play in his vision for the progress of Ayurveda. He inspired and guided them accordingly, motivating them to work in that direction. He not only dedicated his whole life to his mission, but inspired several others to walk the same path, which they are still doing today, 19 years after his sad accidental demise. *Vaidya* Kolhatkar concentrated on the generation of students and guided them to develop desired qualities to be capable of taking up the task.

ROBUST STUDY OF AYURVEDA CLASSICS AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Vaidya Kolhatkar realized that without properly understanding the Ayurveda classics, it would not be possible to implement them in practice. Study of Sanskrit, *Padartha Vidnyana*, *Vyakarana*, *Darshana Shastra*, and other ancient streams of knowledge to understand the philosophical basis of Ayurveda was essential. Also study of commentaries on classical texts was essential in order to bridge the gap between the ancient sages and ourselves. But students were scared of the Sanskrit language. Many lacked even primary knowledge of it. *Vaidya* Kolhatkar tried to convince both students and their parents to take up studies in Sanskrit. He started teaching students to read and understand Ayurvedic classics with the help of commentaries, and also persuaded them to approach Ayurvedic practitioners to understand the logical basis for clinical practice. He was of the opinion that “one should not restrict himself to a specific school of thought and should always try to learn from more and more *Vaidyas*.” He himself was a very good practitioner and had learnt clinical Ayurvedic practice from many eminent Ayurvedic practitioners, including *Vaidya* Venimadhavashastri Joshi (Mumbai), *Vaidya* Chandrashekhar Joshi (Pune), *Vaidyaraj* Atmaramshastri Datar (Sangali), *Vaidya* Shankar

Phansalkar (Pune), *Vaidya* Shreekrishna Karmarkar (Nashik), *Vaidya* P.T. Joshi (Dhule), and many more, not only from Maharashtra but other states as well. Due to his vast knowledge and experience, he was even able to influence highly renowned and experienced *Vaidyas*, and thus acquired deep knowledge from them. Interestingly, each of these great *Vaidyas* would come to regard him as their favorite student. Through this he gained knowledge, name, and fame across India. He became a versatile practitioner with perfection in diagnosis, and a master of various facets of treatment, such as the use of *Rasashastra* drugs and *Panchakarma* therapies.

As a result of thorough exposure to the classics and his own practical experience, *Vaidya* Kolhatkar arrived at a very unusual opinion concerning cyclic changes in the human body and mind. He believed that, along with menses in a reproductive age female there is an additional yearly cycle associated with the date and month of her birth. From his keen observations he noted that some diseases, especially those with symptoms associated with the reproductive system, begin, cease or change during that particular month. More astonishingly, he also noted similar monthly and yearly cycles even in males. Especially when treating patients with psychosexual involvement and hysteria he used to keep this thought in mind. According to him delayed marriages, and sex-provoking atmosphere, is a causative factor for this condition. A cycle associated with month of birth gets set and the symptoms reoccur at monthly intervals. This is an entirely new observation and needs much further study and evaluation.

The case of a patient suffering from chronic constipation illustrates his urge to establish a classic-based reproducible logic behind the treatment. This patient routinely used medications that didn't work, so he decided to reassess the patient to check what else might be missing. He found that the patient didn't sweat at all and decided to use *swedana* treatment (medicated steam bath). For convenience of the patient instead of *swedana* he included *Tribhuvan Kirti Ras* (a formulation which can work as diaphoretic) in his prescription, which worked magically and the constipation was relieved. But *Vaidya* Kolhatkar was happy only when he could find a relevant reference in the classics for this treatment, which he found, stating that inducing *swedana* can provoke easy defecation and urination.^[1] The results achieved by Ayurveda are not miracles, only beyond the framework of modern science. Many more cases like this strengthened the belief of his students in classic.

A PASSIONATE TEACHER

Teaching was in *Vaidya* Kolhatkar's blood, and he used to

deliver 5–6 lectures a day without incurring any fatigue. On the contrary, he felt happy and satisfied with his work. He was expert in the art and science of delivering lectures keeping the level of understanding of the students in mind. Difficult concepts, such as *Prabhava*, *Vichitrapratyayarabdha*, and so on, would appear lucidly clear, and were easily comprehended when he started teaching. He taught all Ayurvedic subjects, including *Sharira*. Moreover, he was a master at teaching *Vyakarana* (Panini's Sanskrit grammar) and *Padartha Vigyana* (basic principles) and was keen to explain the clinical application of these subjects. Being a teacher appointed in the department of basic principles of Ayurveda, he had the opportunity to interact with first year students, newly exposed to knowledge of Ayurveda. He took advantage of it to generate strong belief in Ayurveda, and to make their mindset favorable to practicing Ayurveda. Later, after exposure to practical experience, both the students and their relatives would become strong supporters and propagators of Ayurveda. All his students and their family members had the privilege of receiving free Ayurvedic treatment. It left a very deep mark of respect and passion for him. He was a guru not only in imparting Ayurvedic education, but was a real guide to all his students in every step of their lives. He helped his students in every possible way, even giving them financial support to start independent clinical practice of Ayurveda.

The current promising position of Ayurveda practice in Pune and elsewhere in the State of Maharashtra is mainly the result of his efforts. His students and students' students proudly refer to themselves as students of the "*Vaidya Kolhatkar Tradition*"—a tradition known for its openness, allowing any student to learn Ayurveda from any of its disciples merely from the desire to learn Ayurveda, the promise to practice Ayurveda, and the promise to transfer the knowledge of Ayurveda without any secrecy, as insisted on by *Vaidya Kolhatkar*. Students of this tradition have now spread throughout India.

A PIONEERING RESEARCHER

He was a great thinker whose innovative intellect could read between the lines of Ayurvedic classics. Moreover, he would put any new concepts to practice and try to assess their validity. Thus, he was basically research minded. He had a special vision for research in Ayurveda, and envisaged an ideal Ayurveda Research Institute. He inspired students to enter research and provided them with valuable guidelines. The "*Ayurvediya Triskandha Kosha*" project is a landmark work proving that the visionary was a true researcher in Ayurveda. The science of Ayurveda stands on a triangular knowledgebase, namely, *Hetu* (causative factors), *Linga* (*Lakshana*-symptoms), and *Aushadhi* (treatment) as stated

by Charaka.^[2] *Vaidya Kolhatkar* pioneered the project an encyclopedia of 'the three' which is the "decoding of the classical database of classical parameters for their classical usage."^[3,4] It is of immense help to the researches, practitioners, academicians, and even pharmaceutical industries. Moreover, "*AYUTANIDANA*" and "*AYUTA UPACHARA*" (Ayurvedic Diagnostic and Treatment softwares) are based on the three *koshas*. It was his vision to prepare software of this magnitude. In his passion and dedication lay his ability to transmit the conceptual ideas behind the project to his students and was the main reason why even his untimely accidental death on November 6, 1992, could not stop it. His students made it possible under my leadership just by following the guidelines and roadmap he had laid out.

A LIFETIME STUDENT OF AYURVEDA

In spite of his very busy work schedule and workload in clinical practice, reading Ayurvedic classics was part of his routine. He had made a special vow to read one classic from beginning to end with cogitation every year within the four month holy period of "*Chaturmasa*." From his experience he used to say that reading classics again and again is very important, because same verse can bring different logical ideas and understanding depending on the particular instance and context of reading. Many people use to quote a reference from *Sushruta sambhita*^[5] in support of their attitude to use modern biomedical sciences to understand Ayurveda. *Vaidya Kolhatkar* never agreed with this. According to him the freedom given by Sushruta to learn other sciences referred to sciences available in that era (of the same philosophical background as Ayurveda) and not to the biomedical sciences developed in the last 2–3 centuries. Thus it is illogical to say that Sushruta had biomedical sciences in mind. On the other hand he strongly advocated the study and understanding of Ayurveda within its own framework. He arrived at a strong belief in Ayurveda as a complete science, which even guides students as to how it should be learned. He used to say that "the Ayurveda is an ocean of knowledge and human life is too short to gain a full grasp of it. When is the person going to find time and energy to learn modern sciences? Integration of the two systems will be misleading as the souls of the two are different in the extreme. Ayurveda is based on holism and biomedicine on reductionism and their approaches are the exact opposite of each other. If we ever want to take help from modern medicine we can work in collaboration with expert doctors in that field. Ayurveda students should do their utmost to be expert in their own field. He was always certain that, having a modern diagnosis in mind and using Ayurvedic medication without any logical philosophical thinking, without fundamental holistic

approach of Ayurveda behind it, will result in failure most of the time. He always promoted and insisted his students become experts in Ayurveda, complete *Vaidyas*.

PRATISHTHANA AND GURUKULAM

After the untimely death of *Vaidya* Kolhatkar, “*Vidyarthimitra Vaidya* M. V. Kolhatkar Ayurveda *Pratishthana*” was started by his students, in order to continue to march on the way he had envisaged. The foundation organizes seminars, lectures for students and practicing *Vaidyas*. Eminent scholars are invited to deliver lectures on the occasions of “*Guru Purnima*” and the death anniversary of *Vaidya* Kolhatkar. As a regular activity, groups of *Vaidyas* come together in the morning on particular days of the week, read classics with their commentaries, and share experiences in practice. This gives students an opportunity to understand Ayurveda to the fullest extent. *Vaidya* Kolhatkar always reiterated the importance of transforming students of Ayurveda into soldiers of Ayurveda for its renaissance and always insisted on freeing Ayurveda from dynastic boundaries. On the same line of thought the foundation has inaugurated “*Shri Madhavacharya Gurukulam*”^[6] to strengthen the roots of Ayurveda among students.

Vaidya Kolhatkar wholeheartedly dedicated his life to Ayurveda and continues to be an inspiration and example for his students. He had a very loving and smiling

personality and his students will never forget their golden memories and time spent with him. It is said that “the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” All *Vaidya* Kolhatkar’s students strongly believe in beauty of the dream transmitted by their “*Guriji*,” and confidently say that the future belongs to Ayurveda. The work put into the new “*Gurukulam*” is dedicated to make his dream a reality, and is a real tribute to such a visionary guru.

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