

Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri

G. Rohith Kumar, S. K. Rajesh

Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bangalore, India



Shri Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri

Vaidyamadham is one of the famous Ashthavaidya families in Kerala, the only extant family belonging to the Bharadwajiya group. The family is believed to have been invited to Kerala as Shalavaidyas about 1700 years ago to conduct Yajnas, by none other than the famous Mezhatthole Agnihotri, who conducted 99 Somayagas to re-establish the Vedic Karma and Yagnya culture of India. Shalavaidya is a status conferred on a family of physicians responsible for the health of Yagnya participants. Many past family members were *Rajvaidyas* (Royal Physicians) to Kerala's reigning families. Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri's father and grandfather were both legendary, and consulted by royalty. Even today, members of state and central governments, political leaders, and famous personalities from every walk of life are in touch with the family either for consultation or for treatment. Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri is the present chief Vaidya, or physician, in the family.

His grandfather, Ashtavaidyan Vaidyamadham Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri - 1 (1882–1959), remembered by

Address for correspondence:

Dr. S. K. Rajesh, SVYASA, Prashantikutiram, Jigani, Bangalore - 562 106, India. E-mail: rajesheskay@yahoo.co.in

Received: 12-Apr-2010

Revised: 19-Apr-2010

Accepted: 26-Apr-2010

DOI: 10.4103/0975-9476.65093

many for his astonishing diagnostic skills and simple and effective treatments, was expert in detecting signs of death (*Maranalakshana*). His treatments had the reputation of being 100% reliable and never failing. As a confident and daring physician, he re-established the practice of many complicated treatments. One was *Siravedha*, cutting a vein to release impure blood, a very rare treatment. Another was *Kutipraveshtikam*, complete restoration of youth, which people seem little concerned with today because of its lengthy duration – many months.

His father, Ashtavaidyan Vaidyamadham Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri - 2 (1912–1988), was also a legend in his own lifetime. Sometimes referred to as the “most efficient Ayurvedic physician ever,” he traveled the length and breadth of India to treat patients with complicated chronic diseases. A versatile genius who commanded the highest respect from the leaders of every walk of life, he also delivered lectures on Ayurveda and took part in the discussions and seminars on the propagation of treatments cited in Ayurvedic texts wherever he went. Due to his extensive knowledge of Sanskrit, Vedas, Mythology, ancient Indian culture, and classical arts, he was known as a “living encyclopedia.”

Family history anecdotally recalls famous occasions and incidents illustrating legendary skills of their forbears told through the generations. One such, illustrating Ayurveda's extraordinary powers in the hands of its greatest exponents, concerns the birth of Pareekshith Thampuram, a noted scholar, and one of Kerala's most celebrated rulers. Delivery problems had brought both mother and child's lives into mortal danger. The then Vaidyamadham fortunately arrived at the scene. After obtaining consent from the king, he selected herbs from the palace courtyard and ground them into paste, making two medicines. These he applied to opposite sides of a wooden board, instructing the midwife to expose one side of the board to the queen's delivery channel till birth was complete, and then immediately to reverse the board, as otherwise all her internal parts would prolapse resulting in her death; no medicine was applied externally or taken internally. The child was named Pareekshith (*Pareeksha* means “daring experiment”) because of these circumstances surrounding his birth.

Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri was born on 10th April 1930 and recently had his 80th birthday (28th March 2010, as per the Indian Lunar Calendar, Pooram Nakshatram) for which we offer him the greatest felicitations, and congratulations on reaching his 9th decade. He studied Sanskrit under two famous pundits – Vidvan Kalakkathu Raman Nambiar and Vaishnavanath Rama Namboodiri – as the basis for his studies of Ayurveda, which he began at the age of 20, under his grandfather, Vaidyamadham Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri - 1. For clinical study, he attended Vaidyamadham Vaidhyashala and Nursing Home, or V.N. Vaidyashala as it used to be called before 1981. By the time his grandfather passed on in 1959, he was a fully qualified practitioner of Ayurveda. In 1982, as a tribute to his grandfather's memory, he established the Vaidyamadham Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri Dakshinamoorthy Trust, established with the aims of providing the needy with medical care; rehabilitation of physically and mentally ill persons; creating Ayurveda research facilities; imparting intensive training in different branches of Ayurveda; gathering and maintaining old Ayurveda manuscripts; and setting up a library of Ayurvedic books.

Working with his father and grandfather brought remarkable experiences. For example, in the 1950s, he witnessed *Kuti Praveshika Chikithsa*, the famous treatment using *rasayanas* to reverse ageing and counteract disease, particularly the former, carried out under their supervision. Today, scientific medicine has realized the tremendous potential market for reversing ageing processes and is trying to develop anti-ageing medicines. Here in Ayurveda there is an ancient tradition of the process, and it is still practiced as originally laid out in ancient texts like Charaka Samhita and Ashthanga Hridaya.

His father and grandfather were the major influences in his clinical training. On one occasion, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, the famous vocalist musician, lost his voice completely and was unable to sing a note. Vaidyamadham's father, Vaidyamadham Valiya Narayan Namboodiri - 2, treated him and cured the problem.

As a physician, Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri possesses remarkable abilities, so deeply embedded as to be traits of his practice, e.g., he is one of those Vaidyas who are able to diagnose most conditions on sight, *just by looking at the patient*. Of all health conditions, which he regularly treats, his greatest and most consistent successes have come in treating Arthritis, a field in which he stands apart, and has consequently gained the greatest reputation. His treatments are said to unfailingly bring patients solace and relief.

On one occasion, a case from a medical college diagnosed

as esophageal cancer was sent to him. Severe vomiting prevented the patient from eating or drinking. It was a challenging case because in Ayurveda, most medicines are administered orally. The patient was advised to take 5 to 6 drops medicine hourly – slowly the vomiting stopped to a certain extent. At the next consultation, he prescribed *sputa kashaya*. To take that kashaya (decoction) several do's and don'ts must be followed: no salt, only to drink hot water, milk, sugar, green gram are only permitted. After sometime on this medicine, prepared specially and specifically for this patient, the disease was cured.

On another occasion, he was called to treat the late Thirunavai Moos, a famous Ayurvedic physician, for a stomach disease. When he arrived, his patient was not even responding to questions, but he was able to make a diagnosis anyway: early symptoms of paralysis and blockage of Apana Vayu. With great effort, he was able to give the patient a medicine enabling him to take food, which he had been unable to do for the previous 48 hours. When Sri Thirunavai Moos was almost cured, he enquired what his disease had been, but VMC Narayanan Namboodiri kept silent, so the patient started to share his treatment experiences. He advised VMC Namboodiri to practice Aswini Gayatri Mantra, the prayer to the Ashwins, the divine physicians to the Devas, practice of which frees a physician from all mistakes when treating.

As a physician and humanitarian, VMC Namboodiri is one of today's great luminaries in Ayurveda, a Vaidya whose thoughts and guiding principles continue to sustain its popularity, and acceptance as a unique way of life aimed at achieving *Swasthya*, perfect health, not just as an alternative mode of treatment. He has uplifted the Ayurveda system by strictly following traditional practice without any compromise. The Panchakarma unit in Vaidyamadam closes in the summer season for about one and half months during April–May reopening when the rains start in June. He refuses to prescribe Panchakarma treatment during the hot season because it is difficult for patients to withstand purificatory treatments at that time. Therefore, he would have to compromise their treatment, which he is not willing to do.

Many patients coming to Vaidyamadham want to stay in the nursing home immediately, and take Panchakarma and related treatments. But VMC Narayanan Namboothiri suggests that patients should take medicine for 1 or 2 months' preliminary treatment, during which the vaidya can gain a more subtle understanding of each case. Based on that, further treatments are decided.

With respect to modernizing Ayurveda, Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri is fully aware of the challenges that Ayurveda faces in making its practice and theory accepted today. In

his own domain, he has been instrumental in modernizing the Vaidyasala (pharmacy) and Nursing Home founded by his Grandfather, and expanding them to their present form and style. The pharmacy now has a unit for the production of medicines. These are prepared in strict adherence to the principles and procedures prescribed in Ayurveda texts. More than 700 kinds of medicine are prepared at the Vaidyamadham pharmacy.

Another project of great value to the practice of Ayurveda came when he set up a botanical garden of *rare* herbs and plants. Today, the herbarium has over 100 species of medicinal plants. Current plans are to build traditionally styled cottages inside the herbarium for visitors to see this side of Ayurveda, especially tourists and others interested in its nuances. In such projects, Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri consistently upholds family values and principles to meet desired objectives. He consciously stands for both tradition and modernity.

Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayanan Namboodiri has written and translated many books, for example, two collections of articles appearing in local newspapers and magazines, *The Tradition of Ayurveda in Kerala* and *Longevity in Ayurveda*, the latter being combined with accounts of presentations in Ayurveda seminars; in *Chikitsa Anubhavam*, a set of case histories, “Experiences of Treating Patients through Ayurveda” is the story of a challenging case of multiple sclerosis. Family members of a patient came with great faith in him, despite having been told by the doctors that Ayurvedic medicine or oil would have negative effects. His Ayurvedic diagnosis was “*Sarvangavata* with *Avarana*

Swabhava,” obstruction causing “*Ama Avasta*,” a toxic condition. After giving appropriate medicine, he was slowly able to withdraw steroids. Although still bedridden, the patient improved so that at the end of 3 months, she was able to get up and carry on her daily activities. She then received in-patient treatment which led to another 80% relief; she further continued taking medicine for a longer period and is now restored to health.

Other books include translations into Malayalam of the first 14 chapters of the Ashtangahridaya, entitled *Ayurvedathinte Prathama Padhangal* meaning “The Fundamentals of Ayurveda”; the famous “Palakapyam” treatise on Ayurvedic treatments for Elephants, entitled *Hastiyurvedam*; the *Garga Bhagavatam*; and the Adhyatma Ramayana – the spiritual version of that great work. On his 70th birthday, *Ayurvedavum Deerghayussum*, a collection of essays on “Ayurveda for Longevity” was published. His latest book, *Albathille Ormakal*, “An Album of Memories,” appeared in 2009, a witness to the marvelous preservation of health and faculties attending those who practice Ayurveda as a way of life.

Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayan Namboodiri has many recognitions and awards to his credit. His two most recent major awards have been the Vazhakunnum Award in 2009, and this year in 2010, The Kerala government’s “Ayurveda Acharya” award for contributions to the field of Ayurveda. In conclusion, we offer sincere felicitations to Vaidyamadham Cheriya Narayan Namboodiri on the occasion of his 80th birthday, and wish him many more years of life in health, happiness, and continued productivity.