

A NOTE ON THE VRKṢĀYURVEDA OF PARĀŚARA

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(Received 5 March 1999)

In the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal Vol. XVI No I 1950 pp. 125-138 Nilyendranath Sarkar published a valuable article on the *Vrkṣayurveda* of Parāśara in the Asiatic Society Journal in 1961 on the basis of a manuscript discovered by his father late Jogendranath Viṣagrata. The article attracted the attention of the scholars in India and abroad and reviews were made by Lallanji Gopal in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Bengal Vol. III 1961 and by G.P. Majumdar in the *History of Botany and Allied Sciences*, pp. 249-267. Earl L. Core in his treatise entitled *Plant Taxonomy*, Prentice Hall, Inc also referred to this work.

Roma Sarkar has edited this book (Indian Book Centre, Sri Satguru Pub. Delhi in 1995) with the Sanskrit text based on the manuscript secured by her grandfather with English translation, notes and illustrations incorporating fully the studies of her father. So she has attributed the editorial work to her father along with the mantle taken up by herself. However, the editors have not stated anything about the provenance of the original Ms. I had the privilege of going through the Ms. The actual provenance of the Ms was Coochbehar, West Bengal where late Jogendranath Viṣagrata was posted as the physician of the Maharaja of Coochbehar for quite a long time. Since early 15th century the state of Coochbehar under the rule of the native kings turned into a seat of learning and as a repository of Sanskrit and allied manuscripts of diverse nature. The present Ms. was copied there from a very defective original. The scribe seems to have copied blindly from the defective original as result of which lacuna, spelling mistakes, wrong words and expressions and omissions have crept into the transcript. The transcript is mainly in old country made paper and the calligraphy belongs to the late 17th century. The style of writing ṇa, ṅa, ga, ba, la, and the conjuncts ṅga, tra, pl etc. noticed in this transcript is similar to other Mss of the late 16th-17th centuries. The manuscript collection preserved in the Sāhitya Sabhā Coochbehar bears testimony to this. The text in the *Vijagaṇasūtrīya* section line, 15, notices lacuna in the original which is a clear evidence that the transcript is based on a defective original. The original Ms. probably had no covering folio giving the date, the name of the scribe, the provenance,

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or any invocation of the deity worshipped by the author of the scribe as found in other Mss. Nor has it any colophon giving the particulars of the author and his date. It breaks off abruptly after Ch III of the *Bānaspatyakāṇḍa* noticed here as *Virūdhavallikāṇḍa*. But the most revealing feature of this Ms is that in all the major chapters and in the following sixteen sub-divisions the text begins with the words. '*ityāha parāsaraha*' and the concluding lines contain the remark '*iti parāsarahrte vrkṣāyurvede....*' From the angle of manuscript methodology this is the basic evidence in favour of Parāśara's authorship of the *Vrkṣāyurveda*. Other evidences can be enumerated in the following lines.

The Ms has freely absorbed portions of the texts of Caraka and Suśruta and of the *Manusamhitā*; but while the citations from the Caraka and Suśruta are verbatim, those from the *Manusamhitā* are highly corrupt. This suggests better acquaintance with the tradition of the Ayurvedic texts than that of the Smṛiti. It is written in the style of *sūtra* and *vṛtti* which is pre-eminently seen in the grammatical texts, the philosophical works and the medical treatises of the period varying from the 2nd cent. B. C. to the 3rd cent. A. D. The style of using '*kulaka*' and '*jugmaka*' combinations which often marks the smṛti texts, grammatical texts like the *Mahābhāṣya* and some texts on Nyāya like that of Gautama and of Vātsyāyana also marks the present Ms. The compilatory fashion noticed in the expressions '*bhavanti catra ślokāḥ*' and so on which are seen in the texts like the *Nātyaśāstra* of Bharata and the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya can be noticed in the Mss of the *Vrkṣāyurveda*. The definition of the major chapters, with the addition of the suffix *chaiya* after Pāṇini 4.12.114 which characterize the texts of Caraka. Śusruta and the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* is a prominent feature of this ms. This practice has been noticed first of all in the Brāhmaṇas but became obsolete with Vāgbhaṭa I of the 6th cent. A.D. A large number of obscure and recondite words like the *mṛtsnā*, *illi*, *brjina*, *kikhoṣa*, *khullaka*, *dalva* etc., a few of which are seen in Caraka and in Suśruta; but the majority has no place in the standard works on lexicon like the *Amarakośa*, *Śāśvata*, *Medinī* and *Dharaṇi*, which are usually placed between the 6th cent. A.D. and 9th cent. and A.D. In line 34 of the *Vrkṣāṅgasūtriyādhyāya* this Ms refers to about 35 varieties of leaves while the *Amarakośa* refers to only 15 varieties and omits a few important names like the *Śuktiparṇi*. Amara makes few references to the flowers and creepers as compared with the *Vrkṣāyurveda* and the references in other texts on lexicon are meagre. This seems to suggest that the *Vrkṣāyurveda* represents a full-fledged and complete tradition of arboriculture from ancient times with the result that some words employed in special connotation became antiquated in the time of Amara and other lexicographers. The antique styles of using particles like '*khalu*' and '*api*' and '*eva kvacit*' which are found in the *Gītā* and in some epics are visible in this text. The use of terms denoting the features of the sacrificial apparatuses in the descriptions of the leaves e.g. *juhupatra*, *śrukpatra* etc. is reminiscent of the tradition of using Vedic terminology on particular

occasions preserved in the *Mahābhārata* and in the later epics. The *Samīvargādhyāya* 2nd Chapter contains an observation of great significance which avers that the marks of the creepers belonging to the *Samī* class will be given according to their native features (*prākṛtena nāmnā*) and also in chaste names (*samskṛtena ca*). From this reference it appears that at some time after Caraka and Suśruta the science of arboriculture developed to such an extent that the plants and the creepers were carefully grouped after long observation, their distinctive features were marked, the local connections were studied and designations were given accordingly. This development has wide background covering a long period. We are thus in a position to suggest that the core of the transcript of the *Vṛkṣāyurveda* goes back to as late a period as the 3rd-4th cent. A.D. ante-dating the *Amarakośa* a little later than the work of Caraka who was known as the Court physician of King Kaniṣka.

The name of Parāśara has been mentioned from the hoary past as the propagator of the sciences of smṛti, politics, astrology, meteorology and agriculture. He has been referred to in the *Rgveda*, the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, the *Māhābhārata*, a number of Purāṇas, the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, the *Sūtrasthāna* of Caraka and in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. We come across references to both Bṛddhaparāśara and Parāśara I, Bṛddaparāśara as the founder of school of medicine has been mentioned many times. Ancient sages like Atri, Manu, Viṣṇu, Hārta, Yājñavalkya, Uśanas, Aṅgirā, Āpastamba and Bṛhaspati have been mentioned with reverence as polymaths contributing freely on different topics including Smṛiti, Nyāya, the different systems of philosophy, medicine, agriculture, chemistry, meteorology, veterinary science, and botany. The contribution of these scholars was so wide that Parāśara has been mentioned also as the composer of a science on *Tarkakalpa* (whey). So Parāśara's contributions on arbori-agriculture is within the limits of probability. The word *Vṛkṣāyurveda* means the science of the longevity of the plants (*vṛkṣāṇām āyuhḥ = vṛkṣāyuhḥ, tasyavedaḥ*). Vātsyāyana refers³ to *Vṛkṣāyurveda* as the science on the planting, rearing up, and the nourishment of the trees. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya refers to the *Vṛkṣāyurveda* in Ch 24 of Section 41 where the superintendent of agriculture has been advised to have knowledge of agriculture dealing with the plantation of the bushes and of the trees and the hems from one having the knowledge of the science of the life of the plants.⁴ The *Kāmasūtra* is a little antedated from the *Arthaśāstra* which can be placed in the 1st cent. B. C. The *Kuttanīmatam* of Dāmodaragupta dated about 8th cent. A.D. refers to the *Vṛkṣāyurveda*.⁵ And in establishing Parāśara's authorship of the *Vṛkṣāyurveda* conclusively we have to refer to the chapter on the formation of vapour in the⁶ *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira where the author states that the marks of the rainy season are to be ascertained from the works of Garga, Parāśara, Kāśyapa, and Vajra. By the word 'ādi' Bhaṭṭotpala the commentator includes Vādarāyaṇa, Asita and Devala. This establishes Parāśara's authorship of a

treatise on agriculture. Bhaṭṭotapala cites under vs 32 of the same chapter from Parāśara on the amount of rain required for the soil and in explaining vs 14 of ch 28 which is given to the marks of the creepers and the flowers he cites further from Parāśara to authenticate and support the contention of Varāhamihira. The citation⁷ makes it clear that trees which have unbroken leaves and glossy leaves and abundant fruits and flowers augur well but the opposite is ominous. This evidence goes to prove Parāśara's acquaintance with agro-botany in such a remote age as the 1st cent. B.C. No one is expected to find either a replica of modern Botany in an ancient Ms on agro-botany or to evaluate the same text on the principles of modern botanical science. The text has to be judged in its proper milieu. In eight broad chapters divided into the same number of sections the present text deals with the nature of the soil, the sowing of the seed, germination, the classification of the trees, the limbs and the marks of the flowers. In Ch.V entitled *puṣpāṅgasūtrīyādhyāyaḥ*, lines 39-40 and 58, this work makes a threadbare analysis of the processes of fertilization and of pollination and a description of the shape of an ovary, and in the *rasāṅgasūtrādhyāya*, lines 33-34, the nature of protoplasm with pointed reference to the nourishing fluid in the trees in *dvigamīyodhyāyaḥ* lines 13-14. As regards the concept of sexuality among the plants Indian thinkers primarily considered sexuality as having emanated from the division of the life-force into two channels i.e. *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is the male and *prakṛti* is the female. This idea is to be found in the Upaniṣads which permeated through the entire Indian life, literature and science. The present text, however, refers to the concept of sexuality in two ways. Flowers having the ovary (*bijādhāna* or *barātaka*) were considered female, and those which have not were male. It also states that some trees have both the marks and some flowers too possess both the marks. The text goes further to explain that some flowers contain a single ovary while others have two or more ovaries. Thus the productive and unproductive nature of the plants and flowers is the basis of sexuality in Indian concept. *Amarakośa* makes a subtle distinction between productive and unproductive. The first one⁸ is the differentiating mark and the second one actual bearing of fruits. But Amara's concept cannot be taken as a clear evidence of sexuality in the modern sense. The text of the *Ṛkṣāyurveda* is more clear as it is based on keen observation.⁹

The nature of the seed vessel which is known as *barātaka* has been explained in clear language in the *puṣpāṅgasūtrīyādhyāya*, line 6. From observation it has been stated that some seed-vessels are like tubes, some are round (line 39 ib). The *Śrīpuṣpa* and the *Mañupuṣpa* have been cited as examples of unproductive. The earlier so called because it does not have the seed-vessel and the second so termed because it does not contain the petals and the filaments. Thus the concept of sexuality has been discussed from the point of view of productivity which has been brought in more clear terms in the *Vanauśadhidarpaṇa*, a work of the 16th cent. which refers to the *ketaki* flower (*pandanusodoratissimus*) as *ketakīdvayam*; the male one is termed *śvetaketakī* and the

female as *svaṛṇaketakī*. The *Trikāṇḍacintāmaṇi* a commentary on the *Amarakośa* of the 17th cent. also refers to the *kuṣmāṇḍa* (*Beninkasa hispada*, Thumb) as *kuṣmāṇḍadvayam*. Productivity as the basis of sex has been admitted in the *Rājaniḡḡtu* which describes the male *ketakī* as *viphala*. The clear analysis of sexuality of the plants in the *Vrkṣāyurveda* establishes it as a scientific text on arbori-agriculture and botany in Ancient India. The editors have appended an errata; it would have been better if a photostat copy of the opening leaf of the Ms. were annexed.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts belonging to the Sāhityasabhā, Coochbehar*, Edited D. K. Kanjilal. Published by the Sāhityasabhā, Coochbehar. 1977
2. *History of Indian Medicine, Vol. I*. Edited by G.N. Mukherjee. p. 123
3. *Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana* N. S. P. Edn ch.. 3. 16
4. *The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya* ed by N. S. Venkatacharyya. Pub. by the University of Mysore. 1960.
5. *Kuttanīmatam*, 1.256 N.S.P. ed.
6. *Bṛhatsamhitā*, Ch.21 vs 2 *Garbhalakṣaṇam*. Sarasvati Bhavan Series No. 97, Banaras Śanskrit University .
7. This quotation cannot be traced in the present text as edited by Roma Sarkar as it breaks off after the *Virudhavallikāṇḍa*.
8. *Amarakośa*, II. 13,15.
9. *Bījotpattikāṇḍa*. 4th and 5th Chapters.

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