

The first health related book in Nepal

Kaviraj Narapati Sharma Pokhrel had written a book on tuberculosis in Nepali language about 68 years ago. He was the first candidate to pass Ayurvedic Acharya in the first batch during the tenure of Prime Minister Chandra Shamser Rana. Kaviraj Narpati subsequently became a postgraduate in Ayurvedic medicine from Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

This book called “**Chhayarog**” gives a vivid picture about the signs and symptoms of tuberculosis and how to segregate the patient from over crowding and what sorts of nutritious foods to be given. It also advises one to live in a pollution free environment as at a hill station. It gives emphasis about the drinking of goat milk, eating of goat meat and living in the close association of male goats. (Prevalent thought was that the stink emanating from the ‘Boko’ would drive away the infecting bacilli.)

In those days there had been no discovery of antibiotics like streptomycin and so the patients were expected to build up their own resistance to fight the illness. All the signs and symptoms of tuberculosis as we observe today, e.g. the persistence of chronic cough, evening rise of temperature, perspiration at night, blood in sputum while coughing and loss of weight are all described in this book.

This book also describes the details of acid fast bacilli, its size, its nature, colour and how it affects the tissues. Its secondary effect on the gland is noted. It also describes various manifestations of tuberculosis like pulmonary, Koch’s abdomen, tuberculous meningitis and its effects on the bone and joints. Explanation is also given on how to take precautions from this killing disease. The author seems to have gone through the Egyptian literature, Unani literature and Ayurvedic medical treaties.

Tuberculosis is described in detail in Charak Samita and is called “Chhayarog” or “Yakshma” or “Rajyakshma” or “Sosh”. In English literature we call the disease tuberculosis, Phthisis or Koch’s lesion. All these names are described in this book. The author also explains why this disease is worse than cholera or plague because those diseases come only seasonally and do not afflict for a long time while tuberculosis once it infects, it generally lasts throughout the patients life and make life miserable.

These days there is plenty of literature on modern medicine and recent advances in all the fields. However, one should remember that this book was written in Nepal as long ago as 1933 in order to sensitise the people of Dhankuta.

The author was a noted poet of Dhankuta and has published 10 books in Nepali literature. He was the son of Pandit Vedenedhi Sharma and Arundhiti Sharma. He was born on Kachide, Dhankuta in the year 1898 (1955 B.S.) and expired in the year B.S. 2039 at the age of 86 years. This book on tuberculosis is a well written health book in Nepali language and is possibly the very first book on the subject published in Nepali.

Our thanks are to Dr. Ram Prasad Pokhrel for making this book available to Kathmandu Medical College for review and record keeping.

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