

Udoy Chand Dutt: Prominent Indian Materia Medica Promoter

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Abstract

Udoy Chand Dutt, a prominent promoter of the Indian materia medica lived during the nineteenth century. No account of his life history and career has become available. It is on record that he worked as Civil Medical Officer at certain stations in colonial Bengal. He may have studied at the Calcutta Medical College; he developed interest in Indigenous Drugs of India. He examined *Nidāna*, a Sanskrit work compiled by Mahadub Kur, a Śūdra, several centuries earlier. Dutt found it to contain clear and concise account of the diseases and injuries known to Hindu physicians up to the time when it was written, and he translated *Nidāna* into Bengali, in around 1874. Udoy Chand Dutt got better known for the *Materia Medica of the Hindus* which he published in 1877, covering the mineral, vegetable and animal *Materia Medica*; the long introduction provided a useful material, and Glossary on Indian Plants which he prepared with help from George King of Royal Botanical Garden, constituted an important part of the work.

Key words: Ashutosh Sen, Binod Lall Sen, George King, Kanny Lall Dey, Mahadub Kur, *Materia Medica of the Hindus* and its revised Edition, *Nidāna*, Pulin Krishna Sen.

1. INTRODUCTION

In my studies on investigators and propagators of Indian Indigenous Drugs, at different archival centres within the country and abroad, a useful material has been collected. This has been supplemented with information obtained through correspondence. On reaching the stage that no further material seemed to be accessible, I settled down to write on works and careers of persons who made names in the field of Indian *Materia Medica*.

Several of the Britishers were engaged on the study of Indian indigenous drugs during the nineteenth century. It has been noted that 'The establishment of Medical Colleges and Schools in this country, also advanced our knowledge of indigenous drugs. The graduates who the colleges

turned out directed their attention to the subject. Kanny Lall Dey, Udoy Chand Dutt, Moodeen Sheriff and several others were not slow in recognizing the importance of the study of indigenous drugs (Basu, 1892, pp.225-229).' A study on Kanny Lall Dey has been carried out (Singh, 2015, pp.410-419).

In several of the publications, references have been made to notable work of U. C. Dutt (Basu, 1891, pp.199-203; *Indian Medical Gazette*, 1892, pp.271-273; Dey, 1895, pp. 25-28; Sen, 1972, pp. 44-70; Singh, and Joshi, 1982, pp.313-325). However, nowhere there is coverage on life and career of Dutt; even there have become available only a few references to his work. On this background this short communication has been prepared for the purpose of record.

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Udoy Chand Dutt was a Civil Medical Officer and there are mentions about his placement at Noakhally (Dutt, 1874, p. 260)¹ and Serampore². He may have studied at the Calcutta Medical College at some stage. He translated *Nidāna* into Bengali (Dutt, 1874, p.26) but gained prominence through his work on *The Materia Medica of the Hindus*³ in English.

Before proceeding further a mention may be made to his study confirming powerful haemostatic activity of the milky juice of *Jatropha curcas*, which had been used traditionally for the purpose of arresting bleeding from wounds (Dutt, 1874, p. 260).

2. NIDĀNA AND ITS TRANSLATION

Nidāna, a Sanskrit treatise on Hindu medicine, had been compiled by Mahadub Kur, a Śūdra, who had lived several hundred years earlier (Dutt, 1874, p.26). This was prepared for the benefit of the ordinary class of students, who, for certain reasons, had no access to the more learned classics of Caraka and Suśruta. It was expected that this might be accepted as one of the text-books of Hindu medical schools. The work gave a clear and concise account of the diseases and injuries known to Hindu physicians up to the time when it was written, including their diagnosis and prognosis. It was based on clinical experience and, as a didactic record of facts and was as such considered to be very valuable. But certain explanations were based on outdated theories and doctrines. Udoy Chand Dutt visualized that *Nidāna* could be as useful to teach vernacular medical students about the diseases, leaving the

treatment to a separate book, in Bengali, in light of the scientific progress which had taken place later. In the first place Dutt considered translation of *Nidāna* into Bengali; the translation he prepared was reviewed in the *Indian Medical Gazette* (Dutt, 1874, p.26). It was a critical examination of contents of the text and its production.

3. THE MATERIA MEDICA OF THE HINDUS

The Materia Medica of the Hindus by Udoy Chand Dutt was first published in 1877. A copy became available to me at the Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi; I was allowed to get some selected pages photocopied. The preface provided some important information. 'The work was not a literal translation of any particular treatise from standard Sanskrit medical works.' The writing was undertaken with the impression that it would prove an acceptable basis for further researches on indigenous medicines.

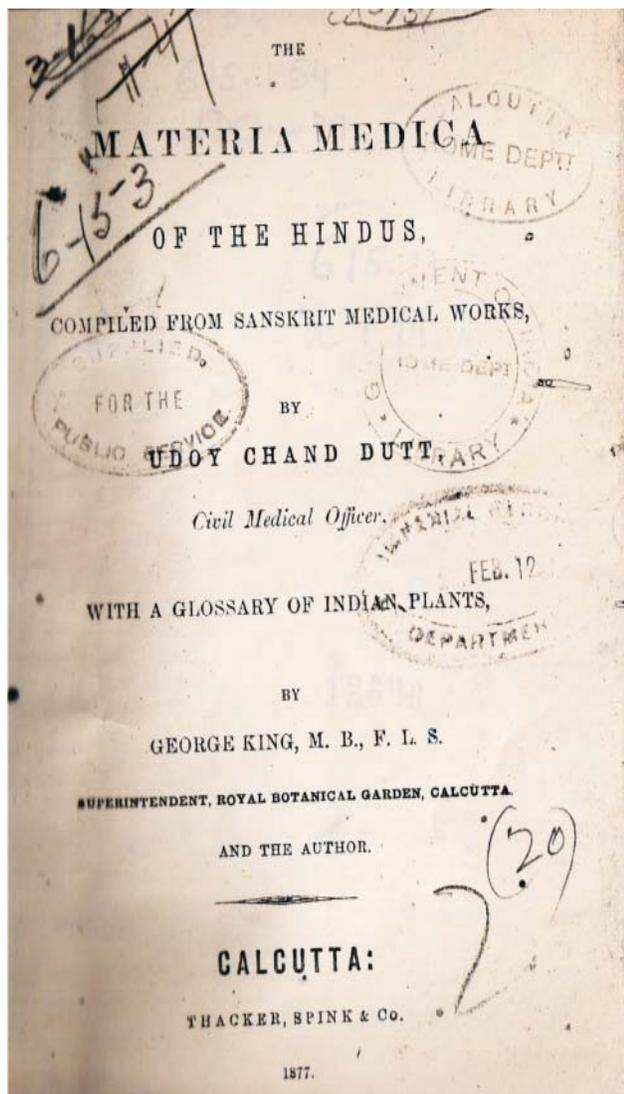
The first part of the work gave an account of the mineral medicines used by the Hindus, the mode in which they were prepared for use, their chemical composition, and the principal combination which they were employed in different diseases. For the vegetable materia medica, the correct scientific names of the plants were employed, and got identified in the Royal Botanical Garden. Next came the animal *Materia Medica*.

The Glossary on Indian Plants mentioned in Sanskrit medical works, with Bengali, Hindi and Latin synonyms, prepared by George King of the Royal Botanical Garden and the author, formed an important part of the work.

¹ At the time Baboo Dutt was Civil Medical Officer, Noakhally.

² Dutt, Udoy Chand. *Materia Medica of the Hindus* with a Glossary of Indian Plants by George King. Revised Edition with Additions and Alterations by Kaviraj Binod Lall Sen, Kaviraj Ashutosh Sen, and Kaviraj Pulin Krishna Sen (*Kavibhushan*). Chowkhambha Saraswati Bhawan, Varanasi, 1980, p. xviii+356. On the title page Dutt's position is put as Civil Medical Officer, Serampore. Preface to the Second Edition, p. iii-iv, by Kaviraj Ashutosh Sen and Kaviraj Pulin Krishna Sen of Calcutta, November, 1922

³ The book was accessed at the Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi; photocopies could be made of selected pages.



Title page of the *Materia Medica of the Hindus* (1877)

In a long introduction running to 22 pages attention was drawn to material objects and classification of medicines, the properties of the material objects and the action of medicines on the human system, weights and measures, forms of medicines, and on the different modes in which medicines were applied.

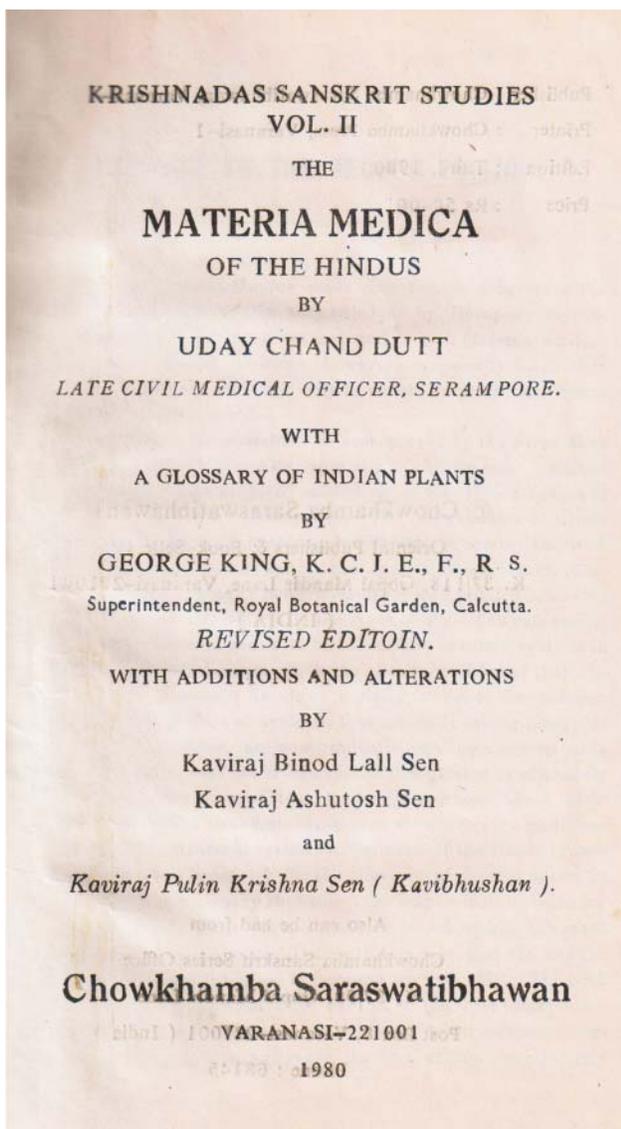
Soon after publication of the Dutt's work; there appeared a critical review in the *Indian Medical Gazette*,⁴ examining the contents in light of the developments which had taken place on the chemical constituents in natural products and the pharmaceutical preparations in usage. However, the publication was considered to be a valuable addition to the Indian medical literature.

Another contemporary review of the book was in the *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*.⁵ Therein it was stated, 'Although the author modestly describes the book as a compilation from standard Sanskrit medical works, he has evidently brought very considerable personal knowledge to bear upon it, availed himself of all possible sources of information and exercised great discrimination in distinguishing between practical uses of the drugs and those which are only occasional, or in many cases only theoretical. The author has evidently taken great pains also to make the work as trustworthy as possible, having given original Sanskrit text in foot notes, so that the reader may be able to compare it with the translations given.'

In later years, there was prepared a revised edition of Dutt's publication of which two prints became available, between the two there has been some discrepancy. However the essential features are unaffected. Both run to 356 pages, but in the original the total number of pages has been 354 (Dutt, 1877). In preface of the Revised Edition no mention is made of the particular additions and alterations. As such it is difficult to make any considered comments on the subject, unless one makes page-by-page comparisons between the original and the revised edition, which I am not in a position to carry out, since no complete copy of the original is available to me.

⁴ Editorial, *The Materia Medica of the Hindus*, *India Medical Gazette*, 12 (1877): 188-190

⁵ *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*, 37 (1877-78): 618-619



Title page of the *Materia Medica of the Hindus* (Revised Edition, 1980)

In the Preface to the Revised Edition⁶ it was stated 'The book was universally received with favour as the best contribution ever made to the literature on the subject on the indigenous drugs of India, and within a few years the first edition was entirely exhausted. Though there was great demand for this valuable work, a second edition was not brought out owing to the untimely

death of the author.' This is an indication about the approximate time of passing away of Uday Chand Dutt; he may have expired in early 1880s.

Later, lecture by Kanny Lall Dey at the Indian Medical Congress in 1894 and suggestions he made brought back focus on the Indian Indigenous Drugs. There was fresh awakening on the subject, and Revised Edition of the *Materia Medica of the Hindus* by Uday Chand Dutt was published.

While closing it may be mentioned again that no reference, other than those cited above on Uday Chand Dutt has become available.

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⁶ Dutt, U. C. *The Materia Medica of the Hindus* with a Glossary of Indian Plants by George King with Additions and Alterations by Kaviraj Binod Lall Sen & Kaviraj Ashutosh Sen. Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1989, p. xviii+356. The Preface to the Second Edition, p. iii+iv, by Kaviraj Binod Lall Sen and Kaviraj Ashutosh Sen, January 1900. Though the authors of the Preface were varied but the contents of the Preface were same

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Appendix



Uday Chand Dutt (1834-1884)

