

SOURCES FOR ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE ON  
VETERINARY SCIENCES

D. N. GARG\*

Department of Veterinary Public Health and Epidemiology  
Haryana Agricultural University  
Hisar 125004

INTRODUCTION

Modern history begins where the history of ancient India ends. Thus, the birth of Lord Buddha (567-487 B.C.), and the beneficent reign of the great Aśoka (273-232 B.C.) mark not only the beginning of modern times but also the end of India's 'Golden Age'. In the cases of other sciences much pioneering work was done and much of the ancient works therein have been translated by eminent scholars, and printed. It was the veterinary field alone which remained unexplored till 1939, primarily because such information was in Sanskrit (and also in Tamil, Telugu, Canarese) and veterinarians who knew good Sanskrit were very few. Imperial Council of Agricultural Research (now Indian Council of Agricultural Research) was impressed with this fact and in Dec., 1937 had sanctioned an investigation into 'The efficacy or otherwise of indigenous system of treatment of cattle in India'. The Council also authorised collection and collation of all useful information of indigenous veterinary medicine from manuscripts and other sources. The scheme worked from May to Nov., 1939 under A. Krishnaswamy of Civil Veterinary Department, Madras, who published several articles related to ancient Indian veterinary lore, its authors, age and antiquity. This presentation is largely based on the information available in previous publications.<sup>1-9</sup>

GENERAL INFORMATION

Krishnaswamy mentioned that of all the places visited, the Sarasvati Mahal Library, Tanjore (Thanjavur) provided him with the most valuable information. In his articles entitled 'The Veterinary Science in India, Ancient and Modern, with Special Reference to Tuberculosis' and 'Veterinary Surgery and Surgical Instruments of Ancient India', he traced the birth, growth and general development of the medical and veterinary sciences in all their aspects in ancient and medieval India.<sup>2,3</sup> Again in his articles on the history of 'Animal Husbandry in Ancient India', he

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\*National Fellow of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi.

tried to show how the early Aryans (2400-1500 B.C.) in India were a race of agriculturist, depending solely upon agriculture and livestock for their livelihood.<sup>5-7</sup> The Aryans regarded animals as their foremost care.

Profuse information on elephants and horses, their diseases and control, is available in ancient Indian literature on veterinary sciences. It has been mentioned that during the course of an expedition to Mewar in the reign of Shahjahan, a voluminous Sanskrit work on horses by an author named Śālihotra was recovered from Chittur. By order of Emperor Shahjahan, it was translated into Arabic by Saiyad Abdulla Khan Bahadur Feroze Jung. This translated book is *Kitāb-ul-Vitrat*. The original Sanskrit work was considered lost and later this Arabic work was translated into English. Two copies of this English translation are now available, one in British Museum, London and the other in Berlin Library. However, Krishnaswamy found that a portion of the Sanskrit work was available in Sarsvati Mahal Library, Tanjore in the name of *Aśvāyurveda Siddhayoga Saṃgraha*. The other portion may probably be available in Kashmir or in Nepal. This Sanskrit work was also translated into Tibetan and exists in Tibetan garb in the encyclopaedia called *Tanggyur*, which is mentioned in Cordier's list of Tibetan manuscript. Thus, the Tanjore library gives information on veterinary sciences, which is not available anywhere else in India.

#### AUTHORS ON ANCIENT INDIAN VETERINARY LITERATURE, THEIR WORKS AND AGE

Among the original and authentic authors on Indian veterinary science are found the names of Śālihotra, Pālakāpya, Rājaputra, Vaiśāmpāyana, Vyāsa, Nakula, Sahadeva, Garga, Mrgasarmā, Bṛhaspati, Nārada, Gaṇa, Jayadatta Sūri, Dinapathi, Malladeva Paṇḍita, Siṃhadatta, Nala, Vatsya, Śukra, Manu, Kauṭilya and Parāśara ; and among the authors of later date come Jayadeva, King Indusena, Bhoja, Śāraṅga-dhara, Someśvara, Vahada, Bāsavamantri, Gīrvana, Yuddhavikrama, Viśvanāth Vājpaye, Sivarāma Bhupathi, Dīpaṅkara, and the poet Rudradeva. Each one of them is reported to have contributed a valuable book on veterinary science ; but many of these works are now lost either in part or in full but some fragments of a few of them are still available here and there, in libraries and oriental institutions where old palm-leaf manuscripts are preserved. Of all the authors mentioned, the names of Śālihotra as the authority on horses, and Pālakāpya on elephants stand preeminent. The exact period when these sages lived is difficult to determine, but evidence goes to show that they lived in a very remote age.

#### *Age of Śālihotra :*

Śālihotra is said to have lived in Śālutar, a country near Gāndhāra, the modern Kandahar. In one of the manuscripts entitled *Aśvāyurveda Siddhayoga Saṃgraha* (P.P.S. No. 11251 and Burnell's Catalogue No. 12302, S. M. Library, Tanjore), the

authorship of which is ascribed to Śālihotra, the author describes himself as the son of the Sun God, as having learnt the science of horses from Brahmā himself and as having taught it to his disciples. Elsewhere, in another manuscript, Śālihotra is described as the son of one Hayaghoṣa. In the latter, which is in the form of a dialogue between Śālihotra and Suśruta, Suśruta is described in some places as the third son of Śālihotra, and in others as his disciple. In the eighth or the last part of a book called *Śālihotra* (available in the Madras Oriental Manuscripts Library), Suśruta is described as the son of Śālihotra. In the *Mahābhārata*, Suśruta is described as the son of the sage Viśvāmitra. Śālihotra was the teacher of Suśruta, who is considered the father of Hindu surgery and whose work *Subruta Saṃhitā* is proved by Professor Dietz to be of considerable antiquity.

The antiquity of Śālihotra can again be inferred from the fact that he has been quoted by Hemadri in *Vratakāṇḍa*. Some portions from his work have been quoted in the *Agni Purāṇa*, the *Matsya Purāṇa*, and the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*. This tends to prove that Śālihotra's work is pre-Purāṇic. Śālihotra is again mentioned by Sarvānanda in his commentary called *Tikāsarvasya* of *Nāmalīṅgānubāsana*, the dictionary of Amarasimha. Moreover, many other authors on horses, who are equally antique and authentic begin their writings by paying respect to Śālihotra as the originator of the science. Thus, Śālihotra is the foremost and indeed the father of all Indian authors on veterinary science.

Śālihotra's work on horses appears to be a very comprehensive one, consisting of eight parts (16,000 *ślokas* in 120 chapters) dealing with practical farriery. It is a complete guide to the science of horses, dealing with their breeding, training, feeding, watering, stabling, grooming, and their care in health and disease; with an elaborate description of several diseases they are susceptible to and their treatment. The entire work is not extant. A portion of it, however, is available at Tanjore, and other portions in stray parts are reported from Calcutta, Lucknow, Baroda, and Nepal.

#### *Age of Pālakāpya :*

Next in importance is Pālakāpya, the first and the most ancient author on elephantology. There is some controversy about the date and authenticity of his work. Burner in his catalogue says that Pālakāpya's *Haṥhyāyurveda* is no doubt a very modern compilation, even later than the *Sarasamgraha* on horses. No reason, however, has been assigned by him for his conclusion. But Edgerton, Professor of Sanskrit, Yale University, USA, remarks in the introduction to his book *The Elephant Lore of the Hindus*, 'All known texts agree in attributing the founding of scientific elephantology to a mythical sage, Pālakāpya. They likewise agree in making him reveal this elephant lore to an apparently mythical Romapāda, the king of *Aṅgas*, whose name is not otherwise known' etc. The

name of Romapāda, the king of *Aṅgas*, occurs in the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, where it is stated that king Daśaratha had invited to Ayodhyā the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, the son-in-law of Romapāda. It is therefore, clear that Romapāda was a contemporary of king Daśaratha, and that Pālakāpya's book on elephantology must be older than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This points to the fact that the age of Pālakāpya and his work is the early epic period. Again in the ninth *skanda* of the *Bhāgavata*, we find a reference to king Romapāda. Suśruta, the father of Hindu surgery, is reported to have learnt his art from Dhanvantarī, the Vedic father of medicine, and from Pālakāpya in certain other places. This controversy has been reconciled by some eminent scholars by assuming that Dhanvantarī and Pālakāpya are one and the same person. It certainly shows that the sage Pālakāpya also belongs to a very remote past. In an earlier part of this article, it has been mentioned that Suśruta was the disciple of Śālihotra. From this it may be conceded that Pālakāpya and Śālihotra had been contemporaries.

The work of other ancient persons, their availability, probable period and source is compiled in Table 1. The work of Śālihotra and Pālakāpya has also been listed in the table. The list has been prepared as per the probable order of antiquity of the authors. It is evident that the works of authors on Veterinary Sciences in ancient India can be classified in three periods as below :

(i) *The Vedic Period* : when Vedas were composed. The *Atharvaveda* contains the treatise on medicine and some information on veterinary sciences belongs to this period.

(ii) *The Epic Period* : during the early part of which the *Āyurveda* or the science of knowledge of life came to existence. To this period Śālihotra, Pālakāpya, Rājaputra, Mṛgaśarmā, etc. the first and original authors on veterinary science, belonged. In the later part of the period, *i.e.* in the age of *Mahābhārata*, Nakula and Sahadeva flourished.

(iii) *The Period of Purāṇas and Sūtras* : The several purāṇas wherein copious information on veterinary matter is available are the *Matsya*, *Garuḍa*, *Agni*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Viṣṇu* and *Līṅga Purāṇas*. Several books on polity like *Manu Saṁhitā*, *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, *Bṛhaspati Mata*, *Parāśara Saṁhitā*, and *Śukranṛti*, wherein much information on Veterinary matters exists, belonged to this period.

In conclusion, it may be surmised that veterinary cult existed in one or the other form in ancient India and a collection of ancient veterinary literature now available, and a systematic search for such work as not traced so far would be of great interest and advantage to the veterinary profession.

TABLE I  
*Compilation of Ancient Veterinary Literature and Related Information*

Author	Work/Book	Period	Availability with source/comment
1. Not known	<i>Atharvaveda</i>	Vedic Period (c. 1500-1200 B.C.)	* Available, contains some information on veterinary matters
2. Śālihotra	<i>Asvāyurveda Siddhāyoga</i> <i>Saṃgraha</i>	Epic Period (Pre-purāṇik)	(i) Some portion of original available in Sarasvati Mahal Library, Tanjore. Other parts available in Kashmir, Nepal, Calcutta, Lucknow, Baroda. (ii) English translation—2 copies; available in British Museum, London, Berlin Library. (iii) Translated in Arabic, <i>Kitāb-ul-Vitrat</i> , by Saiyad Abdulle Khan Feroz Jung. (iv) Translated in Tibetan, exists in Tibetan garb in encyclopaedia called <i>Tangyur</i> .
3. Pālakāpya	<i>Haṣṭhāyurveda</i> (Book on elephantology)	Epic Period ( <i>Rāmāyāna</i> )	* Available.
4. Rājaputra (Buddha)	Author on elephantology	Early epic period	Book is not available, but search among available manuscripts in Kashmir, Nepal and amongst Jains of Gujrat may be useful.
5. Nakula	<i>Vaidyaka Sarvasva</i> i.e. all about medicines <i>Asva Cikitsā</i> , i.e. treatment of horses	Epic period ( <i>Mahābhārata</i> ) " " " "	Not available. Available.
6. Sahadeva	<i>Vyādhisindhu Vimardana</i> , i.e. The cure of ocean of diseases	Epic period ( <i>Mahābhārata</i> )	Not available

TABLE 1 (Contd.)

Author	Work/Book	Period	Availability with source/comment
7. Mrgśārmā	Work not available	Early epic period	Lost
8. Nārada	Work not available	"	Lost
9. Bṛhaspati	<i>Bṛhaspatimata</i>	Early epic period	Available in Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras.
10. Vyāsa (Vaiśāmpayana)	<i>Aśvāyurveda Sāra Sindhū</i> i.e. Treatment of horses <i>Gajśāstram</i> , i.e. The science of elephants <i>Gajalakṣaṇa Cikitsā</i> , i.e. Treatment of the ailments of elephants	Epic Period	Book of Vyāsa available in S. M. Library, Tanjore.
11. Garga	Work on treatment of horses, referred to in book on medical science <i>Pṛyoga</i> <i>Ratnākara</i> and in <i>Matsya</i> <i>Purāṇa</i>	Epic period	Original palm-leaf manuscript available in Ravenshaw College Library, Cuttack (Orissa).
12. Gana	<i>Aśvāyurveda Siddhoyoga</i> <i>Saṃgraha</i>	Epic period	Available in S. M. Library, Tanjore; Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras.
13. Jayadatta Sūri	<i>Aśva Vaidyaka</i>	"	Available in print.*
14. Malladeva Paṇḍita	<i>Aśvāyurveda Sāra Sindhū</i>	Epic period	Available in S. M. Library, Tanjore.
15. Dinapathy, Simpadatta, Nale	Work not traced	Age and authenticity not exactly known but as old as of previous others	Not available.

TABLE 1 (Contd.)

Author	Work/Book	Period	Availability with source/comment
16. Bāsavamantri	<i>Śvatatava Ratnākara</i>	?	Gives information about fowl, sheep, goat, dogs, serpents. Availability not known.
17. Not known	<i>Purāṇas—Matsya, Garuḍa, Agni, Brāhmāṇḍa, Viṣṇu, Līṅga</i>	Purāṇic period (?)	Valuable information on Vety. matters exists in all of them. English translation in print available, some in HAU, Hisar library. Original available.*
18. Śukra	<i>Śukranūtisāra</i>	12 or 14 A.D. (?)	Gives standard confirmation of animals. Availability not exactly known*.
19. Cānakya	<i>Kauṣilya-Arthasāstra</i>	Mauryan period (324-187 B.C.)	Contains valuable information. Availability not specified.
20. Manu	<i>Manu Samhitā</i> <i>Parāśara Samhitā</i>	(200 B.C.—200 A.D.)	Laws of Manu, Extant.
21. Kālidasa	<i>Raghuvamśam</i>	5th Century (Gupta period 320-550 A.D.)	Gives description of Nature. Also gives some information of veterinary interest e.g., as in śloka 73 of Canto V. Available*

\*Exact place/library of availability not specified.

## REFERENCES

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