



An introduction to Hastyayurveda

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Chanakya in Arthashastra, states that elephants should be eliminated from river valleys with human settlements. Efforts to eliminate them might have led to the capture and domestication. Management of this big, wild, anatomically and physiologically unique, animal cannot be done without the systematic knowledge of its behaviour, life style and disease management. This led to the emergence of a system called hastyayurveda.

Ayurveda, concerned with the alleviation of disease and maintenance of health. It explains body and its states (health and illness) well with tridosa theory.

Body is the conglomeration of dosa, dhatu and mala. Dosas are Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Dhatus are seven viz: rasa, rakta, mamsa, medas, asti, majja and sukla. Sveda, purisa and mutra are malas. A mutually complimenting, balanced functioning of these bodily constituents is manifested as health.

The main source of Hastyayurveda is a book written by Palakapya. Hastyayurveda written in Sanskrit contains more than twelve thousand verses and a few chapters are in prose. The subject matter is presented in the form of conversation between King Romapada, the student, and the hermit Palakapya the master, at Champapuri, Capital of Angarajya.

The chapters (160) of hastyayurveda are arranged in different stanas. The text begins with prayer to

Ganapati, the remover of obstacles. The circumstances that led to the discourse on the subject is detailed in first chapter. The first few chapters are introductory, containing the many legends on the origin of elephants, characteristics of good elephant, methods to learn the subject and number of diseases affecting the animal. Causes, symptoms and treatment of Pakala, Skandaroga, anaha, murcha, siroroga, padaroga etc. are dealt in the first maharogastana, with eighteen chapters. The biggest stana, Ksudrarogastana contains details of nearly fiftyfive diseases. These include mental illnesses, diseases from poisons and disorders of teeth. The qualities of soil in relation with the health of elephant are discussed. Basic principles of ayurveda - Tridosas and Panchabhutas - different food stuffs of elephants, climate in relation to health, and instruments to control elephant are the other subjects. Salyastana deals with matter related to surgery. Treatment of wounds (can be from battlefield, place of work or from the mahout) is dealt in detail. If neglected wound may form a fistula. Certain vital areas of the body, where trauma can be fatal are termed as marma. Various marmas in body are identified and classified in Salyastana. Many anatomical aspects of body like sira, sandhi, pesi and asti are well explained. The last Uttarastana contains treatment modalities such as snehapana, vasti and nasya are detailed. Importance of grass as a food stuff is stressed in one chapter. The medicinal properties of salt, water, milk, ghee, garlic are dealt in different chapters. The contagious diseases that appear in gajasala, qualities of water for elephants are some other topics. In the last chapter named gajasanti elaborates the rituals required for the well being of the elephant.

Hastyayurveda is mainly for captive elephants. Chance to treat a wild elephant is very rare. The freely roaming elephants are captured and brought to very different environment. Food is different and often restricted. This animal gives much importance to the quality of food. Activities are restricted and decided by man. Some times enough rest is denied. So to sum up, whatever they have habituated in forests, is not enjoyed in captivity. This is the root cause of much illness. So Palakapya's approach to the animal is of great compassion. In the appointment of Personnel for elephant management (gajadhyaksha, gajamatya, gajavaidya etc.) their conduct and interest in elephants should be considered. Punishing an elephant must be avoided. One should not speak even a harsh word to an elephant because he can not tolerate any mental agony.

Gajasatra is another text available on the subject. Author is considered as Palakapya. But the style of language and arrangement are quite different from hastyayurveda. Authorship is attributed to Palakapya

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