

MEDICAL CONDITIONS IN GOA OF 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES : A STUDY OF FOREIGN TRAVELOGUES

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ABSTRACT

When the Portuguese arrived in India, they brought with them new ideas, science, culture, religion and the like till then not much known to the Indian people. Like-wise, they took back to the European countries certain knowledge and practices of India with which the Europeans were not familiar.

This paper makes an attempt to study the prevailing medical conditions existing in Goa in the 16th and 17th centuries, on the basis of the data available in various foreign travelogues. The description of hospitals, sickness and the medicines used by the doctors of the time, whether allopathic or Ayurvedic, are discussed. Whether the Portuguese doctors were influenced by the local *vaidyas*, in treating their patients and, if so, to what extent, is also examined.

The accounts of the travellers Pyrard de Laval (French), Linschoten (Dutch), Pietro Della Valle, and Carreri (both Italian) have been used to assess the conditions of Goa as well as its native people and the Portuguese.

On July 8, 1497, a large part of the population of Libon was gathered on the banks of the River Tagus. The attention of the multitude was focussed on the four vessels of the Indian expedition, S. Gabriel, S. Rafael, Berrio and the goods ship.¹ At the given time the sails were spread and the expedition of Vasco da Gama dropped slowly out to sea. Ten

months later, on May 20, 1498 they cast the anchor before the port of Calicut.²

The discovery of the sea route to India, was the greatest discovery of our times. It changed the history of mankind, the trade and commerce and spread the Christian religion in the sub continent. When asked the

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aim of their arrival, the people with Vasco da Gama replied that they came to fetch Christians and spices.³

The Portuguese has the idea of a Christian Prince in the East called Prester John, with whom they wanted to have friendly relations to fight out the Muslims, who monopolised the spice trade and occupied many of the areas formerly inhabited by the Christians in Africa and Europe. However, they never came across Prester John, who turned out to be a legendary figure.⁴

Another important group of merchants who made fortune out of spice trade with Malabar were the Italians of Genoa and Venice and the later were the most prominent among them. Though they had no direct relation with Malabar, they purchased these oriental commodities from the hands of the Muslim merchants at Beirut, Aleppo, Alexandria and Constantinople to distribute them to all the various parts of Europe.⁵

With the discovery of the sea route, the Arabs and the Republic of Venice were the most effected. The later was deriving its sustenance from the trade dealings and Venice was a very important commercial centre.⁶

When Vasco da Gama went to Calicut, to meet the Zamorin, he confused the temples and deities as, churches and Madonnas statues, so

much so that it is said that he stepped in the church to pray and hear mass.⁷ However, they did not find Christians there, but a couple of Genoese merchants who were surprised to see them and asked "May the Devil take you! What brought you here?"⁸

Vasco da Gama explained to the Zamorin the purpose of his arrival and conditions of Portugal. He extended him a hearty welcome and promised to send his messengers to the King of Portugal. After a second audience the Portuguese were permitted to take out their commodities for sale in the city. However, the first voyage was not successful in establishing definite trade links.⁹ It was left to Pedro Alvares Cabral on his second voyage in 1500 to establish a factory (warehouse) at Calicut, which, however was razed to the ground after a fight between the Arab merchants and the Portuguese.¹⁰

After the discovery of the sea route the Portuguese government started sending expeditions regularly to India, in the beginning every second year and later on every year. The 4th expedition, captained by Francisco de Albuquerque reached Cochin in 1503. He found that Cochin was devastated by the Zamorin of Calicut, in revenge, since the ruler of Cochin was in friendly terms with the Portuguese. Francisco de Albuquerque availed of this opportunity to

establish a fortress to protect the Portuguese residing there. It was constructed with timber at the mouth of Edapilly river.¹¹ The fortress was the beginning of the "fort-factory" system established by the Portuguese along the West Coast of India.

The Portuguese sovereigns were well aware that if they wished to continue with their success and benefits acquired in the trade, they would need healthy men. Being a small nation they would not be able to enter to the manpower requirements of all their establishments which were scattered along the coast and the welfare of their men was thus given priority by the King. We find that as early as March 1505, the Portuguese crown in his instructions to Francisco da Almeida, the Capitao Mor of India, had insisted that he should take good care of the sick in the Portuguese fleet and do his utmost for their welfare.¹² These instructions, however, were found inadequate, for they did not provide for the wounded in the wars, nor for those that had contacted diseases that did not admit of a speedy cure. In order to solve this problem Francisco de Almeida built a hospital in 1506 at Cochin, where the sick and the wounded could undergo longer treatment. The necessary staff, a physician, a surgeon and an infirmarian, along with all that was necessary to nurse the patients back to health was provided. The hospital

was called "Santa Cruz" i.e. Holy Cross.¹³ This hospital was followed by hospitals of the same kind at other Portuguese settlements of Cananore, Chaul and Goa. The one at Goa, the Hospital Real (Royal Hospital) was the harbinger of medical education in Goa.

The discovery of the sea route encouraged many an adventurer traveller to seek new experiences in the Indian Continent, both amongst the Portuguese as well as other European nationals. A number of them left vivid accounts of what they saw and did along their journey and is an evidence of the times bygone. Those interested in knowing the people, customs, manners, flora and fauna, weights and measures of yester years will find interesting and detailed information in the travelogues.

This paper, attempts to make use of some foreign travellers' accounts to assess the medical conditions prevailing in Goa in the XVIth and XVIIth century.

However, before a description of the foreign travelogues it would be pertinent to mention two Portuguese names, who gave us through their works a clear picture of how the native *vaidyas* used to treat patients of different sicknesses, during their times.

Tomo Pires arrived in India in February 1512, and after a few

months was sent to Malaca as a clerk and accountant of the factory and controller of drugs. He returned to Cochin in Feb. 1515. Later he was appointed the Portuguese ambassador to China from 1516 till 1521, when he returned back to India. He wrote down his experiences in his book *Suma Oriental*. In this paper we shall mention only about his impression on the Indian Medicine.

He wrote to the King in 1516 that a new disease was found here in India called "Elephantiasis", which was caused due to the water of the marshy country in which the people had to dip their feet. Those afflicted by this sickness had swollen legs.¹⁴

What surprised him most was the way sick people were treated, which was totally different from that of his own country. According to Pires, the Indian patients wash themselves even though bedridden with fever, and do not eat meat. They have a diet of fish alone. The chief remedy in this case is to play the kettle-drum and other instruments to the patients for 2 or 3 days, and they say this does them good. If the patient has fever they eat fish and keep washing themselves, if they vomit they wash their heads with cold water, and it helps as it stops. If they have catarrh they drink tender coconut water and it stops at once. If they want to purge themselves they take the crushed leaves, or the juice or the seeds

of the "figueira do inferno." A bad wound is treated by pouring warm coconut oil, which is run over twice a day for an hour or two and they are cured.¹⁵

However, Pires noted that the method of treatment with the Portuguese was different, for when they had fever, they eat fat chickens and drink wine and are cured. At that time in Europe the wounds were also treated with hot iron.¹⁶ Pires also noticed the effectiveness of the Indian medicine in some cases as against the European method.

The other Portuguese who gave us a good account about the Indian medicine is Garcia da Orta, a Portuguese physician who came to Goa in September 1534. His experiences are recorded in the well known work "Os Colloquios dos Simples," which is in a dialogue form between him and an imaginary friend of his called Ruano. In this book, he gives a clear picture of the sickness, the symptoms felt and the treatment of the patient, with a comparison between the native and western medicine. He also gives detailed descriptions of the plants and precious stones existing in India, with their uses and therapeutic values.

Orta believed that the native physicians had no knowledge of anatomy and that they cured only according to experience and custom.

This belief might have arisen because probably Orta never had an opportunity to read any Indian medical literature and visit other great Indian Kingdoms.¹⁷

However, he confessed that after making use of his medicines, and not getting satisfactory results, he used the native medicines, which gave good results.¹⁸

Orta spoke highly about the treatment of dysentery and says that although his medicine is good, and he often succeeded with it, yet he felt bound to confess that it does not act so quickly nor its action is so certain as that of the herb which the Malabar is gave.¹⁹

John Huyghen van Linschoten, a native of the province of Utrecht sailed for Goa in the year 1583 in the company of Vincente de Fonseca, who had been appointed the Archbishop of Goa. On his arrival he was appointed his attendant and in which capacity he continued to work until the Archbishop's death, when he was thrown out of the employment, and returned back to Europe. In 1696 he published an account of his investigations and discoveries. The book at once created a sensation, and was at once translated into several languages. It is valuable, chiefly, as a picture of the Portuguese Empire in India and for the routes clearly explained, i. e. from Europe to

Cochin, China, Japan and the Archipelago, on which he had taken pains to gather information.

This is what Linschoten has to say about the native physicians, "there are Heathens physicians in Goa, who carry on their heads hats, a privilege only the Portuguese and rich merchants have. These Heathen physician, does not only cure their own country men, but the Portuguese also for, the Viceroy himself, the Archbishop, and the Monks and Friars do put more trust in them than in their own countrymen, whereby they get great store of money and are much honoured and esteemed."²⁰

Linschoten blames the weather for the sicknesses and diseases in Goa.²¹ He confuses the rainy season in Goa, with winter, and describes how in the last part of April, the rains start pouring with thunder and lightning. During this season a sickness called "Mordxi", which is set upon men, and weakens them, is very common. The sick person casts out all that he has in his body and many a times his life with all. This sickness kills many men, from which they hardly or never escape. The bloody dysentery is very common and dangerous, as the plague with us.²² Mordxi is none other than cholera, and first mention of this frightful disease by an European was made by Garcia da Orta in 1536. In India it was known long before under the

Sanskrit name *Visucika*, and in Marathi as *Modaci*. The most important result to Europe of intercourse with India is certainly the spread of cholera to the North and into Europe.²³

Linschoten also speaks about many continual fevers, which include many disorders, besides the malarious fevers so common in India and especially so at Goa, which was always considered to be a very unhealthy place. These fevers are continuous and with burning sensation and consume men's bodies with extreme heat, whereby within 4 or 5 days they are either whole or dead.²⁴ This sickness is common and very dangerous, and had no remedy for the Portuguese but letting of blood: however, the Indians and Heathens do cure themselves with herbs sanders and other such ointments, wherewith they ease themselves. This sickness consumes many Portuguese every year, some because they have little to eat and less to drink of any meat or drink that is nourishing, and use much company of women, because they provoke them, and such living requires them maintenance.²⁵

About the Royal Hospital set up by Afonso de Albuquerque after conquest of Goa in 1510, Linschoten describes how it is managed by the Jesuit who in attempting to excel his services is even ready to spend money from his pocket, only to have praise and vainglory, than for compassion.

He also observed that men do not hesitate to go to this hospital, inspite of having wife and children, to look after them, because of the excellent treatment given to inmates.²⁶

Regarding the hospital services Linschoten says "these hospitals in India are very necessary for the Portuguese otherwise they would have been consumed away like miserable men, with various sicknesses such as wounds, secret diseases, pockes, piles and many others."²⁷ All those who did not wish to lie in the hospital would be treated by the physicians for their wound or private diseases, for which they could come twice every day for dressing. Secret diseases were accepted like any other disease, and those infected were not ashamed, on the contrary they used to boast over it.²⁸

Linschoten also notes that plague which was a killer disease in those days at Europe, had neither been in India nor it was known to Indians, but poisoning, witchcraft or like, whereby some lose their health and some their lives, is a daily exercise and very common.²⁹ Another common sickness is the stone gravel specially among merry men because of the great quantity of water they drink.³⁰

Linschoten gives a good account of the various spices and herbs available in India, and their uses, medicinal as well as others. A few interesting examples are given to elucidate.

Aloe, the Arabians called it Sebar, the Portuguese Azeure, was dried and then it was known as *Erza Babosa*, i.e. Quil herb. It was used to treat vomiting and was given along with cinnamon, mace or nutmegs. It was also used to treat sores. It is still used by the people even today.³¹

The fruit called Anacardi, is in many places of India, as in Cananor, Calicut, and the country of Deccan, and in diverse other places. The Arabians call it Balador, the Indians Bibo, and the Portuguese Fava de Malaca i.e. Beans of Malaca. They are used with milk against a short breath, for the worms, and for many other things.³²

Myrobalans are heated and dried, when consumed they strenghten the memory, the brain and sinews, sharpen the wits, and are good against cold affections of the head.³³

The Calamo Aromatico, called in Gusurate Vaz, in Deccan Vache, in Malabar Vasabu and in the Concan, Vayean, is used much in India for disease of the mother and pains in the sinews.³⁴

Cassab Elderira is a thin Reed, of a light Gold Yellow colour, with many knots and splinters in the breaking, and within like cobwebbs, white and tough in chewing, and astringent, with a little sharp bitterness is boiled and the water is con-

sumed, to drive down the urine, and for the stone.³⁵

Francois Pyrard of Laval, along-with some French men left Laval, in 1601, on their journey to India. However, they were not successful as the ship "Croissant", in which they were travelling, met with a disastrous end. A few men could survive the tragedy and one of them was Francois Pyrard. They were castaway on the island of Malives, where they were made prisoners by the natives for about 4 years. "Corbin" the other ship accompanying the unlucky "Croissant", was in search of the illfated ship's cannons. On getting information that the ship's castaways, were held prisoners, the French attacked the natives and took away Pyrard and his companions. They, then continued their journey to Chit-tagong, and later on went to Calicut and Cochin, where he was imprisoned by the Portuguese.³⁶ After nine days of torture he was released, and shipped to Goa, alongwith his companions, where he spent some time both in the hospital and in the prison.³⁷

Pyrard's account of the Royal Hospital, the treatment given there and its administration is very interesting. On arrival at Goa, Pyrard could not move on his own as he was sick. Negro slaves were sent by the Hospital to fetch all those who were sick and unable to walk.³⁸ Pyrard was

surprised to see the imposing building, where the Royal Hospital was housed. The hospital was a vast one storey building, near the river front, maintained by the Portuguese king, and donations from well-wishers. In Pyrrard's description the hospital looked more like a palace with high windows and beautiful gardens and well managed lawns.³⁹

On arrival the patients are carried to the hospital's reception counter, where they are kept till the physician, surgeon or pharmacist comes to diagnose the sickness afflicting the patients and sent to respective wards. The patients are lodged in the first floor and when there are too many of them, on the ground floor too. This usually happens when the ships arrive from Portugal.⁴⁰

The administration and management of the hospital is entrusted to the Jesuit priest, who is the director and the highest authority. According to Pyrrard the cleanliness and services rendered in the hospital are not comparable to any other similar place anywhere in the world. It is well administered, very clean, the treatment meted to the patients is excellent. All the assistance required as for doctors, medicine, food, clothing is provided. Even spiritual help is provided for those who need it.⁴¹

The beds are carved and the pillows, mattresses, are full of

cotton; bedsheets are made of silk and fine cotton.⁴²

Other officials of the hospital are Portuguese, who vie with each other to improve their work, and the workers are natives. They distribute the food to the patients and help them whenever required. The Portuguese supervise and check if anything is needed by the patient.⁴³ The slaves do all the manual work, like lifting heavy loads, cleaning the toilets, dust, sweep and mop the floor and wash the clothes.⁴⁴

The doctors, surgeons, pharmacists, barbers and bleeders, are occupied, with only hospital work. They take at least two rounds a day. With them go a number of attendants with thread and clothes for the use of patients.⁴⁵

Patients are segregated in different rooms according to their sickness.⁴⁶ Besides all those who visit the sick are checked for anything they would carry for the patients which would be harmful to them. Guns cannot be carried inside the hospital.⁴⁷

The food is excellent and patient can ask for more if he desires. Clerks accompany the doctors in their round, to take down the food requirements of the patients. The food is served in time, and in China porcelain wares. After the meal an officer asks all

the patients if they have had their meals.⁴⁸

All the items of the hospital are stored in separate compartments. Pyrard says that, there were so many duplicates of each item, that if they were not stored separately, it would be difficult to trace them. There is a clerk "escrivao", who takes note of the belongings and to whom they were given. All the belongings of a patient are kept with the treasurer after preparing a list and in case of death, these are handed over to the Misericordia, or if there is a will the officer executes the same.⁴⁹ Only Portuguese soldiers, unmarried men are admitted to the hospital. Natives, women and children have different hospitals.⁵⁰ Every year around 1500 dead bodies leave this hospital, and an infinite number of patients are registered. When the ships arrive, there are some times more than 3,000, the minimum is around 300 to 400.⁵¹

Pyrard enumerates high fevers and dysenteries as the most common local diseases besides secret diseases. The later exists only where the Portuguese live, for in other parts of India this is not found.⁵² However, it is felt that, Pyrard was wrong in his assessment of secret diseases, for it was found by Varthema that, the Zamorin had this illness in 1505. The disease is also clearly mentioned in Sanskrit medical books, which are

previous to all the events at 1500 under the title of upadamśa.⁵³

The continuous fevers are treated in the hospital by the treatment of *sangrin*, i.e. bleeding of patient, which is used continuously till the temperature recedes.⁵⁴ Syphilis is not considered a shameful disease, and they are proud to have it. It is treated with China root. This sickness is there amongst the christians and they fear it less than the fevers and dysentery.⁵⁵ There is another sickness which is called *Mordechi*; it is accompanied by headache and vomiting the patients shout aloud and most of the time they die. Some people are also subjected to poisoning and witchcraft. When the ships from Portugal come to Goa, the sickness that afflicts the seamen is scurvy and ulcers of feet and legs.

The system of medicine that is used in the hospital is the same as that in Spain, and it is a great honour to be a doctor of this Hospital.⁵⁶

We can therefore, safely conclude that there was an interaction or rather a synthesis of the medical knowledge of the East and the West. This interaction was brought about in the hospitals the Portuguese opened for the treatment of the military personnel, after setting their establishments in India. The European physician found it to his advantage to consult the Hindu doctor when his drugs

failed to bring about a cure and use the medicines prescribed in the Hindu Pharmacopoeia. In his turn, the native physician learned the use of some syrups and distilled water, and other therapeutic prescriptions which were in favour in the West. We find that this synthesis was effected most vigorously in Goa, and the erstwhile Escola Medica de Goa, is a glowing tribute to that synthesis.

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सारांश

१६ वीं तथा १७ वीं शताब्दियों में गोवा में प्रचलित चिकित्सा की स्थिति-विदेशी यात्रा विवरणों का एक अध्ययन

— लीड्स ब्रोवा डा कोस्टा

जब पुर्तगाली भारत आये वे अपने साथ नवीन विचार विज्ञान, संस्कृति, धर्म आदि लाये जिनसे तब तक भारतवासी अधिक परिचित नहीं थे। इसी प्रकार वापस लौटते समय वे कुछ भारतीय विज्ञान तथा पद्धतियों को जिनसे यूरोपवासी परिचित नहीं थे यूरोप के देशों को ले गये।

इस लेख में गोवा में १६ वीं एवं १७ वीं शताब्दियों में प्रचलित चिकित्सा की स्थिति का, विदेशी यात्रियों के यात्रा विवरणों के आधार पर, अध्ययन करने का प्रयत्न किया गया है। चिकित्सालयों, रोगों तथा तत्कालीन एलोपैथिक अथवा आयुर्वेदिक चिकित्सकों द्वारा प्रयुक्त औषधियों के विषय में उपलब्ध विवरणों पर विचार किया गया है। अपने रोगियों की चिकित्सा के सम्बन्ध में क्या पुर्तगाली चिकित्सक स्थानिक वैद्यों से प्रभावित हुए थे या नहीं और यदि ऐसा हुआ था तो किस सीमा तक, इसको भी आंका गया है। विदेशी यात्रियों पैराड डी. लावल (फ्रेंच), लिन्सूछोटेन (डच) पीट्रो डेल्ला वल्ले तथा कारेरी (दोनों इटालियन) के यात्रा विवरणों के आधार पर गोवा, वहाँ के निवासियों तथा पुर्तगालियों की स्थिति का मूल्यांकन किया गया है।