

THE QUESTIONS OF KING TUKKOJI:
MEDICINE AT AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
SOUTH INDIAN COURT

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Introduction

King Tukkoji¹ attained the throne of Thanjavur, South India, in 1730, towards the end of his life, and died five years later. For most of his adult life, he was a prince at a dynamic royal court where the political duties of royal reign were fulfilled first by his father Ekoji (r. 1676–d. 1687?), and later by his two elder brothers, Śāhaji (r. 1684–d. 1711) and Sarabhoji (r. 1711–d. 1730). These rulers created a rich cultural milieu at Thanjavur and in the surrounding towns and temple cities of the Kaveri river delta, and patronised poetry, song, drama, and scholarship in many languages and across a range of arts and sciences.

During his long and relatively duty-free life as a younger royal sibling, King Tukkoji patronised many court poets and scholars, and himself

¹Also Tulajā.

wrote several learned works in Marathi and in Sanskrit, including dramas, and texts on astrology, music, and medicine. His medical works have never been published, but manuscripts of them lie in the Thanjavur Palace library. King Tukkoji began his medical treatises by asking a series of probing questions about the purposes of medicine, and the relationship between health and righteousness. The present study explores the social and intellectual background of the Thanjavur court and the king's thoughts on these topics.

A New Dynasty in Thanjavur: Tukkoji's Family

At the very beginning of the seventeenth century, just as British merchant ships were arriving for the first time on the coast of India, and starting to compete with the established Portuguese and Dutch traders, the temple city of Thanjavur in South India was ruled by Raghunātha Nāyaka (regn. AD 1600–1633).

One of Raghunātha Nāyaka's sisters had been given in marriage, as was the custom, to the royal Nāyaka house of Madurai.² On arrival at Madurai, the bride commented to her husband Tirumala that the palace at Madurai was nice enough, but not as great as her father's palace in Thanjavur. For this unfortunate remark, Tirumala stabbed her. This understandably caused a rift between the families. But decades later, in the 1670s, King Cokkanātha Nāyaka of Madurai sent a delegation to King

²The following condensed account is based on the *Tanjāvūri Āndhra Rājula Charitra* a Telugu chronicle of the Nāyaka dynasty of Thanjavur. The text was edited by Prabhākaraśāstri (1914), and is cited from Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1986:§98); cf. Narayana Rao *et al.* 2001:129–36. For discussion of these events see Vriddhagirisan 1942:149–54.

Vijayarāghava in Thanjavur to ask for the tradition of marriage alliance to be renewed with the gift of a Thanjavur bride. Vijayarāghava, enraged by the suggestion that the ancient insult could be forgotten, sent the delegation packing. Cokkanātha, insulted in turn, marched with an army on Thanjavur. As Vijayarāghava and his son were being killed in the battle, all the ladies of his harem, by prior arrangement, killed themselves so that Cokkanātha's victory would be empty. A single four-year old child called Ceṅgalmaladās was smuggled out of Vijayarāghava's palace harem by a washerwoman before Cokkanātha installed his foster brother Aḷagiri on the Thanjavur throne.³

Further years of confusion and disagreement followed. Eventually the Sultan of Bijapur decided to send one of his generals, the Maratha Ekoji, half-brother of the famous Śivāji of Maharashtra, to settle matters in Thanjavur in favour of the smuggled child. After further chicaneries, Ekoji himself took the throne of Thanjavur, initiating a new period of peace and cultural efflorescence.

Under King Ekoji and his influential and cultured wife Dīpāmba,⁴ Thanjavur once again became a vibrant centre of Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and, now, Maratha culture. The court scholar Raghunatha reports in his treatise on the horrors of hell (*Narakavarṇana*) that the Queen herself encouraged him to write in Marathi rather than Sanskrit, because Sanskrit was hard.⁵ Dance, music, and painting flourished, and scholars from all

³Ceṅgalmaladās was a descendant of Vijayarāghava, although the sources do not agree whether he was a son or grandson (Vriddhagirisan 1942: ch. 9).

⁴A brief biographical poem on the queen exists, written by her grandson before 1736. Edition by Srinivasan (1984a).

⁵"Sanskrit is hard, so use Prakrit" (Marathi: *saṃskṛta kaṭhiṇa mhaṇūna prākṛta*). The *Narakavarṇana* was composed between 1701 and 1712. Cited by Gode (1954: 392 n. 1).

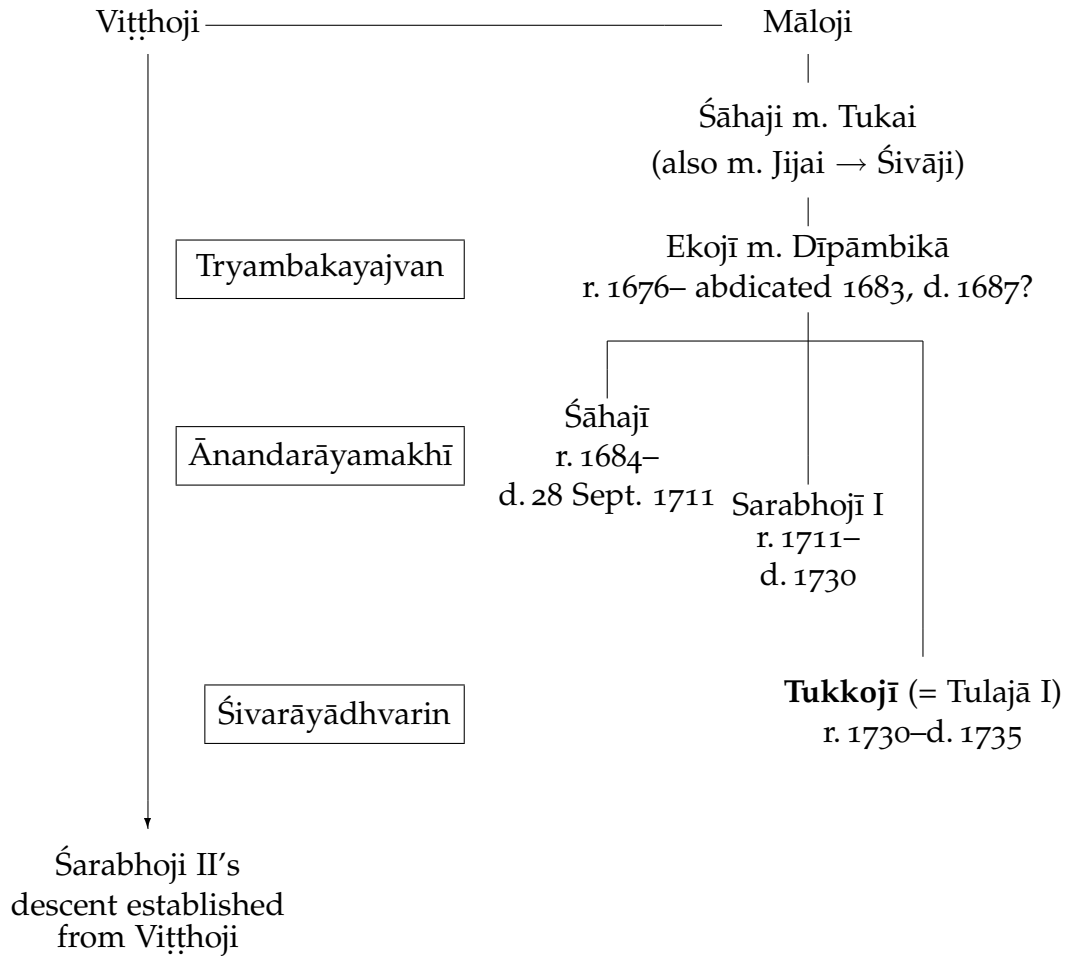


Figure 1: The early Marāṭha Kings of Thanjavur and their key advisors.

over south India began to migrate to Thanjavur to participate in the new court.

King Tukkoji was Ekoji's third son. Ekoji had ruled for nearly a decade, from 1676 to 1683, before abdicating in favour of his first son, Śāhaji. Śāhaji's rule, widely perceived viewed as wise and generous, lasted until his death 27 years later. He defended Thanjavur militarily and produced numerous plays, poems and songs in several languages, but no son. Ekoji's second son, Sarabhoji I, then ruled for nearly two

more decades, assisted by his younger brother Tukkoji, and continued the strong cultural traditions of the court. When Sarabhoji died in 1730, also without a male heir, the kingdom came into the sole hands of Tukkoji, who ruled for a final five years until his death in 1735.⁶

Medical intellectuals at the Thanjavur court

The cultural world in which Tukkoji grew up and spent most of his adult life included a great deal of creative activity by artists and intellectuals in the fields of music, poetry and song. It also included a number of authors who composed works on medicine. It is not clear to me where this interest in medicine originated, but it already seems to have been a feature of Ekoji's court that strengthened under Śāhaji. The royal library in Thanjavur contains over three hundred Sanskrit works on ayurveda. Many of these works are original to this library, and have not been edited, published, or translated.

For example, someone called Kaupālika (fl. 1684–1710),⁷ wrote a monograph on the causes and symptoms of eye diseases.⁸ The first verse of this work is addressed to king Śāhaji, Tukkoji's eldest brother.⁹

Another work, entitled just *Āyurveda*, names its author's parents as Ekoji and Dīpāmbā. It may have been composed by Tukkoji.¹⁰

⁶A short work in praise of Tukkoji survives: the *Tukkojimāhātmya* (Srinivasan 1984b).

⁷Possibly "Kāpālika," as suggested at Sastri (1933:7388).

⁸The unpublished manuscript of the *Netraroganidānam* is described by Sastri (1933:#11044, p. 7388–9).

⁹The one surviving manuscript of this work was owned by a physician named Veṅkājī. It is not impossible that this is the old king himself, Ekoji ↔ Veṅkoji: "*veṅkājīvaidyulasambandham*" Sastri (1933:7389).

¹⁰Sastri (1933:#11189, p. 7440):

A separate work with the same non-committal title, *Āyurveda*, is highly original for being cast in the form of *sūtras*, and is likely to come from the same period.¹¹

The great scholar Raghunātha Hasta (fl. ca. 1675–1712) came to the court of Ekoji in about 1700, and wrote a long treatise on dietetics and related subjects.¹² Another Raghunātha, Raghunātha Paṇḍita Manohara (fl. ca. 1640–1720), arrived at Ekoji’s court in about 1675. Twenty-two years later, in 1697, during Śāhaji’s reign, Raghunātha wrote three medical treatises.¹³

Throughout the forty-year reign of the three brothers, cultural and political affairs at the Thanjavur court were strongly influenced by the court minister Ānandarāyamakhī (d. 1735). Ānandarāya was a powerful and successful military campaigner, and apparently a virtuoso Sanskrit poet and dramatist. I say “apparently” because there have been conflicting claims about the authorship of some of his works. It may be that another court pandit, called Vedakavi, composed some works that were presented under Ānandarāya’s name, although no convincing evidence for this has been published.¹⁴ One of Ānandarāya’s compositions was a

bhosalānvayavārāśibhāsuroiditakaustubhaḥ |
śrīmadekojibhūpālaś cirapūnyaphalāyitaḥ ||
dīpāmbāgarbhasaṃsuktīmuktāmaṇir udāradhīḥ |
dhanyarājanyamūrdhanyamānyasaujanya. . . ||

¹¹Sastri (1933: #11037–38, p. 738 f.).

¹²The *Bhojanakutūhala* (HIML: IIa, 307 ff.).

¹³*Cikitsāmañjarī*, *Vaidyavilāsa* (an expansion of the former work), and *Nāḍījñānavidhi* (HIML: IIa, 309 ff.). No manuscripts of these works are described in the catalogue of Sastri (1933).

¹⁴The claim for Vedakavi rests on the unsubstantiated assertion of Kuppuswamy Sastri (1904). Individual manuscripts in the Thanjavur MSSM Library sometimes contain ownership notes concerning the royal family, and it may be that Kuppuswamy Sastri

clever allegorical drama called *The Joy of Life*. When his new drama was premiered in about 1700, he noted that it was to be performed for the Temple's annual festival:

The Director: Here in the city of Thanjavur the townsfolk and people from the suburbs and further away have crowded in to see the Bṛhadīśvara festival procession... My heart longs to honour with a drama those who are here.[What composition can I present, you ask?] I am the director of a new play called "The Joy of Life." ¹⁵

There is evidence that the Thanjavur temple was the site of dramatic performances almost from its founding: an eleventh-century temple inscription gives instructions for the regular performance of a drama on the life of the temple's founder.¹⁶ And for Ānandarāya, the Temple festival provided an important audience for his didactic play.

The *Joy of Life* is an extended medical allegory:¹⁷ the kingdom of disease under its king, Consumption (*yakṣman*), assails the royal capital of the body. The Soul (*jīva*), the king of the body, is to be driven from his realm. The commander-in-chief of the army of diseases, Jaundice (*pāṇḍu*), claimant to the throne, assembles the diseases of every sort for a council of war. The sixty-four diseases of the eye, the eighteen diseases of the

was basing his comments on such notes. But this is conjecture. Raghavan (1952: intro.) made some arguments about other matters based on such ownership notes. However, it seems – oddly – that there may be no manuscripts of the *Jīvanandanam* in the TMSSML.

¹⁵Duraiswami Aiyangar 1947: 6–7. I owe the felicitous translation of the title to Anthony Cerulli.

¹⁶The play to be performed is the *Rājarājeśvaranāṭaka* (Hultzsch *et al.* (1895–1913: no. 67)).

¹⁷See the plot summary by Zimmer (1948: 61–75). The play has been translated into Italian (Vallauri 1929) and German (Weckerling 1937).

nose and ears, the seventy-four diseases of the mouth, and the five diseases of the heart gather round him. These, however, form but a small part of the vast array of hostile forces. The plot unfolds through layers of political and medical complexity, until finally the King of the City is saved by his faith in god.

The author of the play specifically calls it a “new” production:

Assistant (nodding his head): So what play is going to be performed?

Stage-manager: Certainly, there is a new play under my direction called the *Jīvānandana*.¹⁸

These remarks show that the play was directed at a public audience, not to a readership of other physicians. This makes it an unusual work, since until the nineteenth century, almost all ayurvedic works appear to be written for the use of working physicians and not for the public.¹⁹ Furthermore, the work is called “new” in a way which is clearly meant to be complimentary. At the Thanjavur court, then, in contrast to the deep conservatism of most Sanskrit literary production of earlier times, calling a play *new* was a positive claim and a good advertisement.

Furthermore, it is evident that medicine was a topic of importance at the court, and had been so for several decades if not longer. It would

¹⁸Duraiswami Aiyangar 1947: 7:

Pāripārśvakaḥ: (saśiraḥkampam) kiṃ punaḥ prabandham avalambya/

Sūtradhārāḥ: nanv asti mama Vaśe jīvānandanaṃ nāma Navīnaṃ Nāṭakam/

¹⁹But see my remarks on Lolimbarāja’s popular medical treatise *Vaidyajīvana* (2005: 102 ff.).

therefore have been felt to be quite in order for a king to turn his attention fully to this topic.

Tukkoji's Intellectual Interests and Medical Works

The Thanjavur royal library contains at least two medical manuscripts that were the personal property of King Tukkoji.²⁰ One is a treatise on the medical care of horses, and the other on elephants.²¹ The king also owned two manuscripts on drama and four on erotics.²² The strong interest in erotics makes sense given the fact that neither of his elder brothers had produced male heirs for the family.²³ But the interests in drama, music, and medicine are more intellectually close to the king. He himself composed works in all these fields, as well as two works on astrology.²⁴

In medicine, Tukkoji composed two works, the *Dhanvantarivilāsa* "The

²⁰The following remarks are based on transcriptions that I was able to take from the original manuscripts in Thanjavur during a visit of a few days in October 2005.

²¹MS #11243, the *Aśvaśāstra* of Nakula, and MS #11266, the *Gajāśāstra* of Pālakāpya (Sastri 1933: pp. 7487, 7504).

²²Sastri (1933) MSS: #10672: *Nṛttaratnāvalī* by Jayasenāpati (on drama); #10960: *Pañcakośamañjarī* by Śivanārāyaṇānandatīrtha (drama); #10965: *Ratirahasyam* (erotics); #10986: *Anaṅgaraṅga* (erotics); #10977: *Ratirahasyavyākhyādīpikā* (erotics); #10999: *Smaradīpikā* (erotics).

²³Zysk (2002) provides a useful discussion of the importance of the literatures on *kāma* and *rati* in the context of family life. For a historical treatment of courtship at early Indian courts, see Ali (2004: ch. 6).

²⁴Tukkoji's compositions: Sastri (1933) MSS #10671: *Nāṭyavedāgama* (drama); #10786–10803: *Saṅgītasārāmṛta* (music); #11066–68: *Dhanvantarivilāsa* (medicine); #11069–72: *Dhanvantarisāranidhi* (medicine); #11323–26: *Inakularājatejonidhi* (jyotiṣa; mentions that his minister is Śivarāyādhvarin (Sastri 1933: 7534)); #11327: *Vākyaṃṛta* (jyotiṣa).

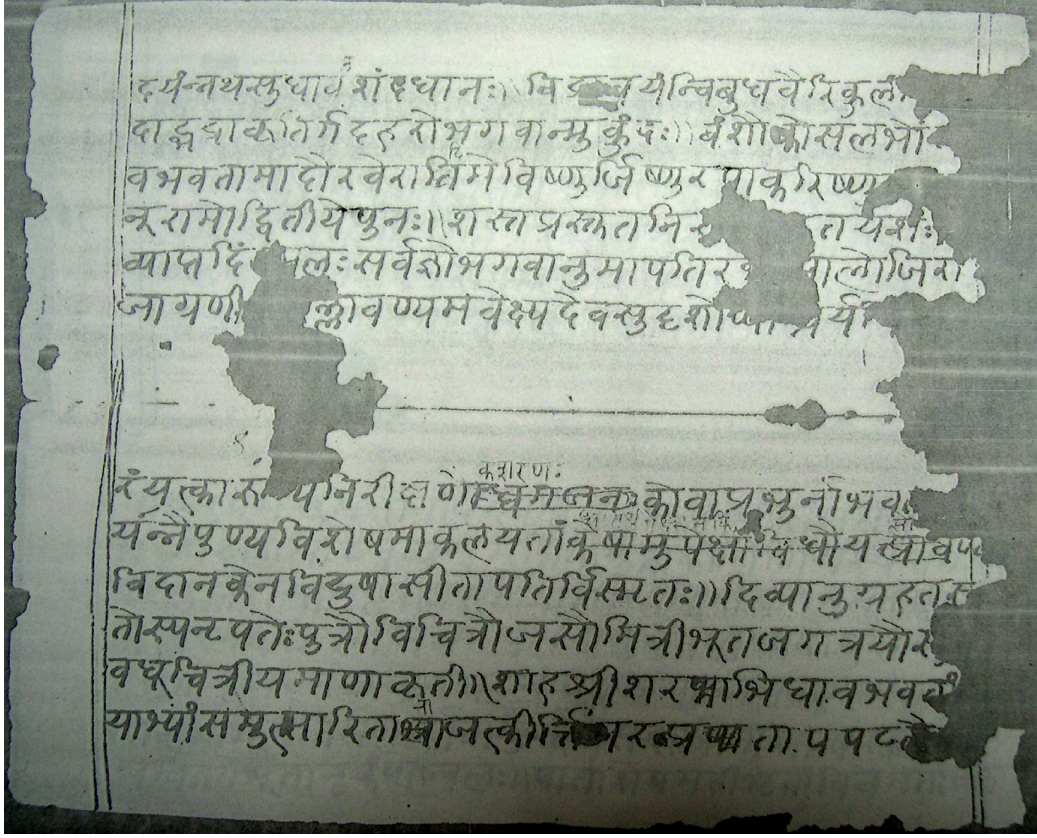


Figure 2: A manuscript leaf from King Tukkoji's *Dhanvantarivilāsa*

Liveliness of the Lord of Medicine” and the *Dhanvantarisāranidhi* “A Treasure Chest of the Essentials of the Lord of Medicine.” The royal library has four manuscripts of each work, neither of which has ever been edited, published or translated

Both works begin with a detailed account of Tukkoji's family and ancestors. He proudly presents the history of the Bhonsale family, of the Solar lineage, starting from Maloji and going through Śivāji to Śāhaji (II), son of Ekoji and Dīpāmbikā (see Fig. 1).

The Dhanvantarivilāsa

The *Dhanvantarivilāsa* then begins by addressing the question as to what the book should be about. Since the basic treatises of medicine treat of certain topics and purposes, the king asks, surely it would be appropriate for the present work to cover the same topics and purposes? This is not acceptable, he says. What is the purpose of the basic medical treatises, after all? It is the achievement of desired goals, and the avoidance of undesired goals. Are we talking about the desired goals of the present world, or of the world beyond? Furthermore, the king raises some traditional objections to the practice of medicine by brahmins on the grounds that it is only concerned with this-worldly matters. So medicine should not be taken up as a study or a practice.

Having stated these objections, the king rejects them. No, he says, there is a legitimate reason to practice medicine. The goal of human life is to achieve the four Aims of Man, Righteousness, Wealth, Love and Liberation.²⁵ And the achievement of this goal depends on having a healthy body. The protection of the body is the work of medicine, and it is done for the sake of achieving the four Aims of Man. The highest self of man is embodied in this body. Of that there is no doubt, says the king. But if the body is destroyed, how can righteousness exist? And if righteousness is destroyed, how can there be action? If action is destroyed, how can there be yoga? If yoga is destroyed, how can there be progress? If there is no progress, how can liberation come about? And if there is no liberation,

²⁵The classical four Aims of Man (Skt. *puruṣārthacatuṣṭayam*: *dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa*) were articulated early and became canonical from at least the second century BC. In the medical context, see especially the discussions of Dasgupta (1969: 411–18), Roṣu (1978) and Wujastyk (2004).

there is nothing. So the body is vital, and must be strenuously protected.

These points are very similar to discussions that occur in the writings of the 11th century Bengali physician and intellectual, Cakrapāṇidatta. Cakrapāṇi was commenting on a statement in the *Carakasamhitā* that is part of a longer description of the behaviour that qualifies as good conduct (*sadvṛtta*), and which should be followed by anyone wishing to remain healthy. Amongst other things, one should adhere to a number of virtues, including kindness or compassion. Caraka says:

And finally, one should have a commitment to celibate studentship, knowledge, generosity, friendliness, compassion, joy, detachment, and calm.²⁶

At first, one might think such a recommendation uncontroversial. But Cakrapāṇi grasps the opportunity to present a short but important argument about the therapeutic use of the flesh of animals in medicine, a practice that is widespread, normal and uncontroversial in the classical medical compendia. How can a physician remain dedicated to the ideals of universal compassion and yet recommend to the patient the consumption of meat, asks Cakrapāṇi. His answer, though interesting, is long and detailed and interesting.²⁷ But the final point that Cakrapāṇi arrives at is this: the purpose of medicine is to preserve health, and not to produce virtue (*ārogyasādhanam, na dharmasādhanam*). Nevertheless, the preservation of the body makes it possible for a human being to pursue the four classical Aims of Man.

²⁶Ca.sū.8.29 (Trikamji Ācārya 1981: 61): *brahmacarya-jñāna-dāna-maitrī-kāruṇya-harṣopekṣā-prasāma-paraś ca syād iti.*

²⁷I have discussed these matters in more detail elsewhere (Wujastyk 2004).

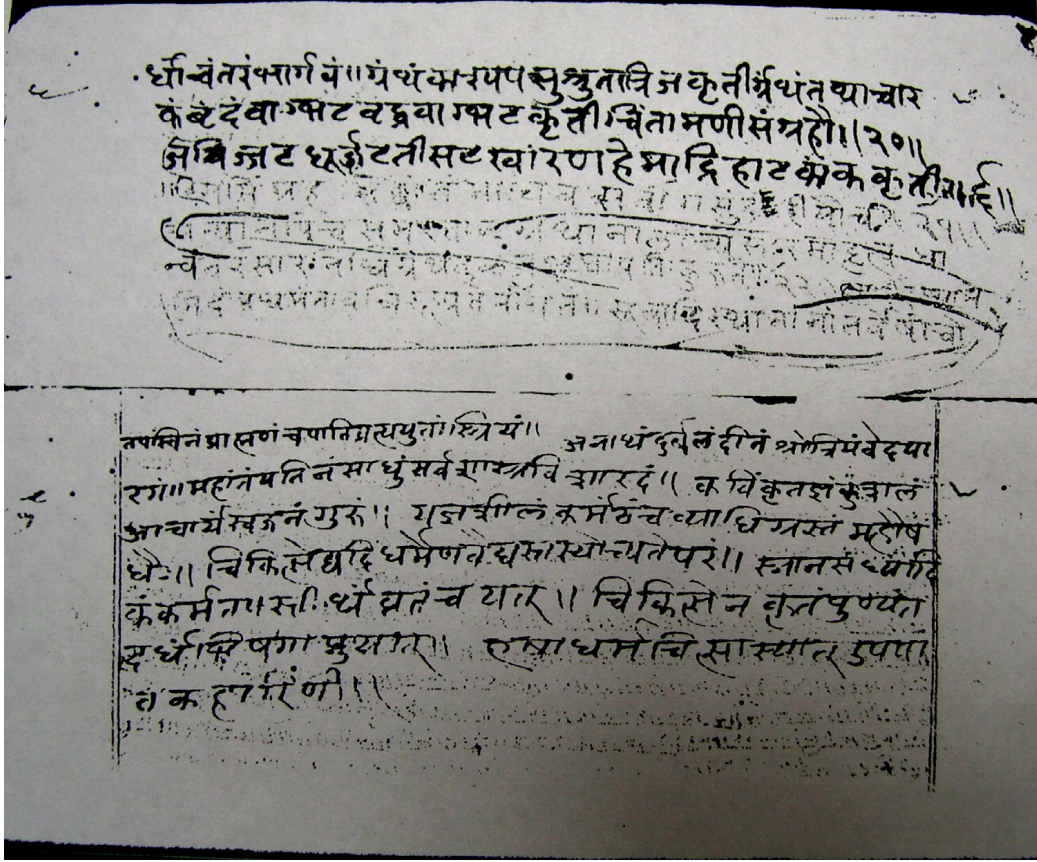


Figure 3: A manuscript leaf of King Tukkoji's *Dhanvantarisāranidhi*

The Dhanvantarisāranidhi

In this work, after the family history, the king gives a long and impressive list of the medical works he has studied (ca. vv.19–21). Then he poses the same question about the purpose of medicine, but he puts the question into the mouth of Vedavyāsa, who is asking Bhagavān for the answer. The Lord answers that medicine is a subsidiary veda to the Ṛgveda.²⁸

The *Compendium of Caraka* contains a passage in which the physician is advised on how to respond, when pressed by questioners on the subject

²⁸rgvedasyopavedoyam āyurvedaḥ prakīrtitaḥ

of which Veda his science belongs to (Ca.sū.30.21). He should answer that he is devoted to the *Atharvaveda* because that Veda prescribes rituals and prayers to enhance and prolong life, and this is the purpose of medicine too. This suggested response appears in a passage dedicated to teaching a physician how to win in rhetorical debates. This suggests that this passage should be read as an insider tip from one physician to another. The physician is being advised to claim allegiance to a Veda because his interlocutor requires it of him, and as part of a didactic strategy, rather than for any more fundamental reason connected with actual historical continuity.²⁹ Once again, King Tukkoji has reached into the tradition for an argument that strikes one as very modern.

Conclusion

The questions of King Tukkoji were cast in a form of Sanskrit which is similar in usage to that of the classical Sanskrit logicians. He seems to have been applying the style of formal logical debate to the basic questions of medicine. He was querying the very basis of medicine, and asking whether it is worth engaging in a science and practice which appears entirely this-worldly.³⁰ His answer, as we have seen, was a qualified “yes”.

King Tukkoji’s questions are an interesting, valuable and unusual way to begin a work on medicine. Our own questions follow: Why did he write two similar works? What is the content of the remainder of them?

²⁹See Wujastyk (2003) and Zysk (1998 [1991]) for more discussion of the historical origins of classical Indian medicine.

³⁰Pollock (1985) discusses similar topics in relation to other *śāstras*.

What prompted him to question the very basis of medical practice? Answers to these questions must await access to the full manuscripts and the opportunity for further study.

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