

## **A Brief Account of the "Ashtavaidyas" in Āyurveda**

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### **Introduction**

Āyurveda, the world's most ancient system of healing and good health, is the complete system of medicine and healthcare known to mankind. Āyurveda is the science of life and relies completely on herbs and natural substances to heal. The word Āyurveda is derived from the Sanskrit word Āyush which means life span and Veda which means knowledge or science. Āyurveda is thus the science of life, knowledge of life or a sensible way of living based on knowledge. It is also a system of medicine in the sense that it systematizes and applies the knowledge about health and disease. Whatever is the aim in life, health is the root cause for achieving it, as otherwise a man becomes a prey to diseases and does not get the aim of life fulfilled. The history of ayurvedic treatment in Kerala was very much related to the Ashtavaidya families. Ashtāngavaidyas or Ashtāngahrudayavaidyas came to be known as Ashtavaidyas.

Ashtavaidyas or the reputed ayurvedic physicians belonging to Kerala, India are called the pioneers in ayurvedic medicinal treatment movement. These Ashtavaidyas were men with a keen vision on life integrated with the life system in plants. They never considered treatment of patients as a sole means of acquiring wealth. History reveals that these physicians were not really the members of eight different families. In Kerala, there were many villages

which belonged to the Orthodox Brāhmin sect called Nampūtiris, who had deep knowledge in different branches of Veda. They had 18 Sabhamadhas. For the treatment of people belonging to each of these Sabhāmadhams, families with proficiency in medicine were entrusted with the job of treatment. Such families came to be known as Ashtavaidyas. Wherever there was a Brāhmin family, there would be an Ashtavaidya family. Of these families, many of them did not have offspring and as a result they had to unite with other families.

From the records it seems that there were 18 such families, which were related to each Vaidikasabhāmadham. These 18 families were:

1. Alathiyoor Nambi
2. Chuntal Moosu
3. Kurumbembilly Moosu
4. Jnarakkal Moosu
5. Elayidathu Thaikkattu Moosu
6. Paduthol Moosu
7. Perinjaavu Moosu
8. Parappur Moosu
9. Pazhanellippurathu Thaikkattu Moosu.
10. Vaduthala Moosu
11. Akalanath Moosu
12. Kuttancheri Moosu
13. Vayaskara Moosu.
14. Chirattamam Moosu
15. Velladu Moosu.
16. Karanthol Moosu.
17. Pulamanthol Moosu.
18. Angadippurathu Moosu.

As some of these families did not have any offspring, the existing 18 families were united to form 9 families. Those families were:

1. Alathiyoor Nambi
2. Elayidathu Thaikkattu Moosu
3. Pazhanellippurathu Thaikkattu Moosu
4. Kuttancheri Moosu
5. Vayaskara Moosu
6. Chirattamam Moosu
7. Velludu Moosu
8. Pulamanthol Moosu.
9. Vaidyamadam.

These ayurvedācāryas preferably employed the methods adopted in the ashtāngas

The Ashtāngas in ayurveda are kayachikitsa, balachikitsa, grahachikitsa, oordhvanga chikitsa, salyachikitsa, damshtalachikitsa, jara chikitsa & vrushachikitsa. Those who had completed higher studies in these Ashtangas and those who offered best treatment in these Ashtangas were known as Ashtavaidyas.

#### **Alattiyur Nambi:**

According to Aithiyamāla, the most important family among the Ashtavaidyas is the family of the Alattiyur Nambi. Their native place is at Alattiyur in Malappuram District. The extraordinary power and deftness in the treatment of the Nambi are said to be the blessings of Ashvinidevas. Later, in the Nambi family, Parameswaran Nambi, brother of Narayanan Nambi took charge of treatment. Narayanan Nambi worked as the chief vaidya in SNA Vaidyasala in Palakkad District. SNA Vaidyasala was founded in 1920.

### **Pulamanthol Moosu:**

The original place of the Pulamanthol Moosu is in Pulamanthol in Malappuram district. They were very famous and experts in ancient medicine. The history of Pulamanthol Moosu is explained in Aithiyamāla. Shiva and Dhanvanthari were their family Gods. Pulamanthol Moosu family members were the doctors of Samutiri kings. All types of treatment including surgery were performed by them. Aryan Moosu and his son Śankaran Moosu were reputed doctors in this family. A vaidyasala by name Rudradhanwanthari was founded by them.

### **Elayidathu Thaikkattu Moosu.**

It is believed that the Elayidathu Thaikkattu Moosu's heritage was ordained by Parasuraman. Their ancestral house is situated at Thaikkattusery near Ollur, Thrissur District. Their miraculous way of treatment is mentioned in the Aithiyamāla. Parameswaran Moosu, a sidhavaidya, who was capable of foretelling symptoms of death belonged to this family. The deep knowledge of Thaikkattu Moosu's family in diagnosing correctly the ailment and their experience in medication made them masters of ayurveda in Thrissur district. Ittiri Moosu, a member of this family, treated poor patients without any remuneration. Neelakandan Moosu of this family got national recognition and was awarded with the 'Padmasree'. He started "Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala." He founded an Ayurveda College in Thaikkattusery to facilitate the study and development of Ayurveda. Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala is a world renowned institution even today. Narayanan Moosu, son of Neelakandan Moosu, and Parameswaran Moosu were reputed doctors in this field. They offered dedicated service at the Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala.

### **Pazhanellippurathu Thaikkattu Moosu**

The ancestral house of Pazhanellippurathu Thaikkattu Moosu is at Pazhanellippuram near Pattambi. The author of 'Sindooramanjari' Narayanan Moosu was one of the reputed scholars of this family. He had a large number of great and scholarly disciples. His son, Vasudevan Moosu, who died at an early age of 27 had exhibited many wonders in the field of treatment. Before his death, he founded the 'Sree Narayana Ayurveda Oushadhasala', in memory of his great father.

### **Kuttanchery Moosu**

Kuttanchery Moosu was an important Vaidya in Kochi royal family. The members of this family after their education sat in meditation for one year at the Nelluvar temple before formally beginning treatment. Their original place was at Kumaranellur, near Vadakkanchery. They had another branch in Akalanam. Now, there is no one in Kuttanchery family offering treatment.

### **Vayaskara moosu**

The original place of Vayakara Moosu is near Kottayam city. Traditionally they were well-versed in Sastras and well experienced in medication. In this family, there was one reputed Vaidya, Vayaskara Achan Moosu. His son Aryan Moosu was also very proficient in medication. His successor N.S Moosu was a scholar and the author of many books. His works in English include Dravyagunavijnanam and Keraliyapanchakarmachikitsa. After the death of N.S Moosu, his younger brother began to reside in the ancestral house. But he could not offer treatment being old. Since his children were not in the field of ayurveda treatment, this great tradition came to an end.

### **Velludu Moosu**

Velludu Moosu has two places, one near Chalakkudy and one near Elamkunnappuzha. By 1902, they left their native place to Maruthorvattam near Cherthala. They later changed their name to Velludu Namboothiri, at present they reside at a place near Vadakkanchery, Oottupura of Kuttanchery Moosu. Now, no member of this family offer ayurveda treatment.

### **Chirattaman Moosu**

Due to the attack of Tippu Sultan, Chirattaman Moosu shifted their residence with family from angadippuram and with the help of the Maharaja of Travancore settled at Maruthorvattam. Aided by their relatives, they built a house there. Later, due to certain reasons, they got alienated themselves from their relatives. As a result, according to the wish of Chirattaman Moosu, they built a house at Olassa near Kottayam. Henceforth they come to be known as Olassa Moosu.

### **Vaidya Madham**

Another well-known family included in Ashtavaidya lineage is Vaidya Matam. Their native place was Mezhatoor, the birth place of Agnihotri. The history of this family is not known but according to Vaidya Matam Cheriya Narayanan Namboothiri, they belong to the family of Karanthol Moosu , which is one among the families included in the 18 Ashtavaidya families.

### **Conclusion**

Even though the tradition of Ashtavaidyas had come to an end, their valuable contribution in the method of treatment had influenced the physicians of Kerala. Since the tradition of Ashtavaidyas is widespread, only a nutshell of history of Ashtavaidyas has been presented here.