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Traditions, Transitions, and Transformations: The Evolution of Veterinary Healthcare in Kerala

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The concept of 'one health, one world' marks the inter connectedness of human health with other living organisms and the environment. The historical perspective of animal healthcare highlights the changing roles of animals in human life and the growing importance of organized health care systems. As human societies had close contact with the animals, the symbolic possibilities of veterinary healthcare began to emerge close to religions around the world. During this period, human and animal healing practices developed along nearly parallel paths. Since human medicine had progressed much earlier, veterinary medicine lagged somewhat behind in gaining its own distinctive scientific status.

Although it is not very advanced compared to modern veterinary science, veterinary medicine as a separate field of knowledge had developed in ancient India, China and Egypt in prehistoric times. In Egypt the first veterinarian to be recorded in history at that time was Urlugaledinna from Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C. The ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, compiled around 2100 BC, regulates the fees of physicians for various types of veterinary services and the penalties for malpractice. For example, Hammurabi's Code 224 specifies the fees for major surgeries, and Code 225 specifies the fines to be paid by a physician in the event of death or injury during surgery. By 2600 B.C., the Egyptians knew about more than 200 animal diseases and their treatment and care as evidenced in the writings of the Egyptian physician Imhotep.

The word 'veterinary', which means animal medicine, comes from the Latin word 'Souvetaurinari ', refers to a person who looked after livestock such as

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pigs, sheep, and cows preparing for animal sacrifices. It was the Roman writer Columella who first used the term 'Veterinarius' in the first century A.D.

The therapeutic philosophy of Hippocrates, who is recognized as the father of modern medicine, is also applied in veterinary medicine. However, it is the Greek philosopher Aristotle who was the first to apply experimental medicine to animals and who was the first to engage in the comparative study of animal and human diseases. In his book *'Historia Animalium'*, he makes detailed mention of more than a dozen animals and their physical characteristics.[1]

The modern development of veterinary medicine, which was made possible by the combination of printing and the spread of knowledge, occurred after 1600C.E..Veterinary science began to be recognized as a separate scientific field in the 18th century. This was primarily due to the large number of horses needed for the armies. Therefore, there was a need for a large number of veterinary surgeons. The Italian Giovanni Mario Lanzi discovered the Rinderpest epidemic in 1711. During this time, it is recorded that 60,000 cattle died of the disease in Holland alone. The following year, Bernardino Ramazzini developed a vaccine against rinderpest and widely vaccinated cattle. During this period specialized educational institutions emerged to differentiate and nurture veterinary science from the animal-human treatment that had been carried out together until then. This was a crucial stage which was institutionalized with the establishment of the first veterinary science school in Lyon in France, in 1762. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, established in London in 1844, enhanced the status of the profession.Considerable changes were happened in the development of veterinary science and its practice and research in the coming centuries.

The historical development of animal welfare in India has evolved from ancient philosophical teachings to modern constitutional principles and detailed legislative frameworks. India's approach to animal protection is shaped by religion, culture, ethics, colonial influences, scientific progress, economic realities and judicial interpretations. The earliest expressions of animal

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welfare in the subcontinent emerged from spiritual and philosophical traditions from various religions that emphasise compassion towards animals.

The Vedas give the message that animals should be protected and kept healthy.Several *mantras* in the Vedas contain details of animal medicine and herbal practices. About twenty stanzas of the *Atharva Veda* are directly related to veterinary medicine. References to veterinary medicine are mostly found in the sixth stanza.[2] The period of Ramayana also witnessed notable developments in the animal healthcare.The important writers on the science of medicine, such as Shalihotra, Rajaputra and Marga Sarman, composed their works during this period. Shalihotra wrote a special book called 'Haya Ayurveda', which was based on his experience in treating horses and mainly concerned with animal treatment and care. Another famous animal physician on the Indian subcontinent around 1000 BC was Palakapiya who wrote authoritative texts like *Hastyayurveda* and *Gajaayurveda,* based on his experience in treating elephants.[3] Nakula and Sahadeva are considered experts in the breeding, maintenance and treatment of animals in the horse and elephant wings of the army. Nakula is believed to have written the book *Ashvachikitsa* around 1000 BC.

Ashoka, one of the most influential rulers in Indian history, promoted Buddhist ethics and encouraged protection of animals through state policies. His edicts represent some of the earliest written evidence of state-sponsored animal protection. A special hospital or specialist institution for veterinary medicine was first established in India by Ashoka. It is believed that Ashoka established the first such hospital in Surat.

The Many pre-colonial kingdoms adopted local customs that discouraged unnecessary harm to animals. Temples and monastic institutions often sheltered animals or provided sanctuaries. Some rulers issued local decrees to prevent cruelty towards certain species, particularly cows and temple elephants.The most significant institutional developments in animal welfare began during British rule.In the 1860s and 1890s, anti-cruelty regulations were introduced in colonial India. After independence, India began to develop a

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comprehensive legal system for animal welfare. The Wildlife Protection Act 1972 transformed India's conservation landscape.[4]

Admittedly, a debate was taking place during the late nineteenth century over the question of whether veterinary medicine was part of the larger public health administration. However, by the 1880s, growing concerns over linkages between animal and human disease and over the ill effects of consume infected meat had allowed veterinarians to make some ingress into the public health administration.[5]

The history of veterinary medicine in Kerala represents the intersection of indigenous medical traditions, colonial scientific interventions, and post-independence institutional expansion. From early Ayurvedic animal healing systems to the establishment of specialized veterinary universities, Kerala's veterinary sector has undergone profound transformations. Recent COVID-19 pandemic has reiterated the importance of 'one health' in response to emerging health challenges. It is an urgent requisite to assess the 'one health' approach integration and implementation level in Kerala in the context of emerging zoonotic diseases.[6]

While looking towards the indigenous foundations of veterinary medicine in Kerala, Ayurvedic scriptures such as *Mṛgayurveda* and *Hastyayurveda* were used as the earliest basis for animal healthcare in Kerala. These treatises provided detailed descriptions of diseases of cattle, horses, and elephants, diagnosis through observation, herbal and mineral formulations,surgical techniques etc.[7] Kerala's distinctive contribution to ancient veterinary practice lies in elephant care, integral to temple rituals and royal processions.In various parts of Kerala, these texts were adapted by traditional physicians, who applied region-specific botanical knowledge and ethno-veterinary practices. Another classic treatise written in Sanskrit on elephant lore in Kerala is *Matangaleela*, the play or game of elephants, written by Thirumangalath Neelakanta Mooss. [8] Kerala's elephant care tradition continues to influence modern elephant medicine worldwide.

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During the colonial period European contacts introduced scientific veterinary practices into the princely states of Travancore, Cochin, and the Malabar region of the Madras Presidency. The British administration prioritized veterinary services primarily to maintain cavalry horses, bullocks used for transportation and livestock in plantations.[9] The introduction of the Western veterinary science was an important landmark in the history of the animal husbandry. The beginning of animal vaccination was an important milestone which ushered in the process of immunization for the animals. [10]

Travancore, a prominent princely state had established formal veterinary service by the end of 19th century and Trivandrum Veterinary hospital was started in 1905. In 1908, when Agriculture department was formed in the State, veterinary and fisheries establishments of Travancore were brought under the same.

As per the Annual Veterinary Report of the Government of Travancore 1926–1935, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the emergence of the first documented Veterinary Institutions like Veterinary dispensaries in Thiruvananthapuram, Quilon, and Alappuzha. Livestock breeding farms and Disease control programs, especially against rinderpest were conducted.[11] Mr. G. Krishna Pillai, Veterinary Assistant to the Director, was in charge of the veterinary department. There were, 5 veterinary hospitals and 7 veterinary dispensaries in Travancore by 1925. The number of cases treated in these institutions were 12,653 of which 638 were treated as in-patients. The number of operations performed were 3,199.

By the 1930s, vaccination campaigns and rudimentary laboratory diagnostics began reshaping animal health management. Slight out-breaks of foot and mouth disease, rinderpest and anthrax in different parts of the State were attended promptly and brought under check by the adoption of preventive and remedial measures. The system of grants-in-aid to native vaidyans who were competent to treat ordinary ailments of cattle was continued during the year. The four vaidyans who received such grants treated 3,406 cases. A veterinary

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compounder's class was conducted for six months during the year and 7 boys were trained as compounders.

The Travancore Almanac and Directory for 1917, refers to certain rules prevailed in the the government veterinary hospitals and the scale of charges for the treatment of animals brought to the Hospital by the public. Horses, ponies, and cart-bullocks 1/2 Rupee per head for advice, and cost of medicines supplied. Cattle, sheep, goats and dogs 1/4 Rupee per head for advice, and cost of medicines supplied.

Cattle for agricultural purposes belonging to poor ryots or others unable to pay the charges for treatment will be treated free of charge. The Veterinarian will satisfy himself that such relief is given only to those really deserving. This exemption refers only to animals treated as out-patients. Animals will be admitted as in-patients at the hospital during treatment according to the extent of accommodation available. An additional charge of 4 and 1/2 *annas* a week will be charged for such accommodation. No animals suffering from diseases contagious or infectious will be admitted as in-patients. No animals will be admitted or allowed to be removed from the hospital without the permission of the Veterinarian.The hospital will be open daily from 7 to 10 A. M. and from 4 to 6 P. M.[12]

In Malabar region, under Madras Presidency, Calicut Veterinary Dispensary was started in the last decade of 19th century. Additional dispensaries were established in Palakkad, Manjeri, Kannur, Kasaragod, etc.Malabar had no local veterinary school and students were trained at Madras Veterinary College established in 1903.

In the princely state of Cochin, a veterinary hospital was started its operations in August 1904 under the name Cochin Veterinary Hospital, Thrissur. As per the Report on The Administration Of Cochin 1929-30 the total number of animals treated in Veterinary Hospitals was 18,403 (518 in-patients and 17,885 out-patients). The total cost of maintaining the institutions was Rs. 22,359.[13]

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A royal correspondence of 1936 shows that the Diwan of Cochin state insisted the Senior Veterinary Inspector to attend the Second meeting of Animal Husbandry wing of Board of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry held at Madras.[14]

The Veterinary Department in the Cochin state was under rapid esxpansion. From 9 hospitals in 1938, by 1942 the number of Veterinary institutions including Dispensaries has increased to 20. At present the Veterinary Department attached to the Agricultural Department with Personal Veterinary Assistant to assist and the Director of Agriculture. But it is proposed to bifurcate these two Departments and to place it under independent head of its own.The designation of PVA will be changed into Veterinary Superintendent.[15]

With the establishment of the Veterinary College at Mannuthi in 1955, students were provided with facilities for studying animal diseases at this hospital. The Veterinary Hospital, which was under the Kerala State Animal Husbandry Department established, in 1956 later it was brought under the Veterinary College and with the formation of the Kerala Agricultural University in 1972, it took over the control of the hospital.This hospital, which is affiliated to the Mannuthi Veterinary College, provides practical training to veterinary undergraduate and postgraduate students and also provides training to veterinary students from Thrissur and nearby districts.[16]

During the year 1947-48 there existed 12 Veterinary Hospitals, 12 Veterinary Dispensaries and 12 Stockmen stations in the state of Cochin. Of the 12 dispensaries, one in is newly opened at Mala in the year 1948. M.M. Kunjappa Menon, was the Director of Veterinmry Services throughout the year.

The second batch of 11 compounders who were selected to undergoes the Stockmen Training for one year has successfully completed their course in 1948 and were posted as Stockmen compounders in places where Veterinary aid was deficient. By the completion of the training of these 11 candidates, the Stockmen Training Institute was discontinued.

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In all the Veterinary institutions together 59205 new cases, were treated, during the year 1948. In the same year altogether 4905 operations and 13226 inoculations against epidemics were performed. As a result of the vigilant work of the Field staff none of the outbreaks of contagious cattle diseases assumed in epidemic form during the year. The mostdeadly epidemic of Rinderpest has been so completely rooted out by mass inoculation that it did not appear in the year. The expenditure of the Veterinary Department for the year 1948 came to Rs.12,53,06--12--0 and the receipts were Rs.149--5--6. [17]

The Veterinary Surgeon, Trippunithura and his Body Guard Jemadar have to accompany the Commandant for Purchase of horses for troops during his Journey to Calcutta or Bombay. The status of Veterinary Surgeon in virtue of his Education, Profession and grade of pay being not only equal, but of higher degree to that of the sub-commissioned officers of the Cochin state forces. As per Indian Army regulation, all sub-commissioned officers are eligible for II class and Non-commissioned officers for Inter Class Railway accommodation. It is considered therefore that Veterinary Surgeon and Jemadar may be allowed to draw single second class railway fare for their Journey.[18]

The functions, institutions and schemes of government related to the matters included in the 3rd, Schedule of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 has been transferred to the Grama Panchayat as per G.O (P) 189/95/LAD dated 18/09/1995 (Annexure-1). The Veterinary Dispensary/Hospital and the Veterinary Sub centers thus stands transferred to the Grama Panchayats with effect from 2nd October 1995.[19]

The Indian Veterinary Council Act was passed in 1984 to regulate veterinary practice and to provide, for that purpose, for the establishment of a Veterinary Council of India and State Veterinary Councils and the maintenance of registers of the veterinary practitioners and for matters connected therewith. In 1998 Second Government Veterinary College of the Kerala State was established at Pookode, Wayanad. Kerala Veterinary & Animal Sciences University (KVASU) was established in 2010.

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In Kerala, there is a strong network for animal healthcare. It includes 210 veterinary hospitals, 47 Veterinary Poly Clinics, 883 Veterinary Dispensaries, 14 District Veterinary Centers, 9 Mobile hospitals/dispensaries at district level, 13 clinic labs at district level,4 diagnostic labs and other related healthcare institutions.[20] As per the Survey of the Directorate of Animal Husbandry in 2018, there were 1069 veterinary hospitals/Dispensary in Kerala. After the merger of Travancore & Cochin in 1949, veterinary services were unified.[21]

In Kerala, the growth and development of the Veterinary Sector in the last few decades are remarkable. In animal husbandry, animal health section is responsible for dealing with the health care of animals. The application of the principles of human law with reference to veterinary medicine has assumed great importance in recent years. Following repeated zoonotic outbreaks veterinary and human medical sectors collaborate more closely. Continued investment in One Health, wildlife medicine, and biotechnology will likely shape the next century of veterinary development in the region and position it as a significant center of veterinary expertise in India. The evolution also underscores challenges but overall points to a robust system capable of addressing both rural livestock needs and advanced research.

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