

Acharya D. S. Antarkar: A Vaidya with a vision

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D. S. Antarkar (June 24, 1929 to June 25, 2004)

Vaidya D.S. Antarkar was animated by a life-long mission to rationalize, investigate and modernize Ayurveda. He was exemplary in synergizing clinical experience with a quest for evidence-based Integrative Ayurveda (IA). His diligence towards this objective was manifest in his being a revered Guru, an astute clinician and a zealous investigator.

Dhondo, the eldest son of Sadashiv Antarkar - a priest, was born and grew up in a beautiful small village 'Dugave' of Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra. The village had a tranquil surrounding and abundant natural wealth. While his two younger siblings were busy playing in the courtyard of their house with make-believe toys made out of mango and jackfruit tree leaves, Antarkar was either engrossed in playing tabla or attempting carpentry. However, very early in life, he had to leave the secure surroundings of his home. He moved to Mumbai with his younger brother as their village provided only primary education. They stayed with their uncle in a joint extended family under one roof, at

Worli. He adapted to the transition from a small village with surrounding bountiful greenery to a busy hustle and bustle of a metropolis like Mumbai. Soon he excelled in his studies. At school, he developed an aspiration to be a physician, with an interest in science.

In 1947, at the age of 18, he joined the reputed R.A. Podar Ayurvedic Medical College in Worli, Mumbai. It was his conscious choice as the college during that period provided integrated education of Ayurveda with modern medicine. Teachers from both the systems of medicine taught their respective subjects with mutual trust and respect. Antarkar was a dedicated student who thoroughly enjoyed learning the dual disciplines of ancient Ayurveda classics and modern medicine. Soon this joy of learning became a call of duty and responsibility when in 1949 came the news of the sudden demise of his father. Sadashiva had instilled values of integrity, sincerity and humane service; a life-long love of learning and scholarly pursuits were additional heritage. At a young age, Antarkar had to bear the responsibility of looking after the extended family, and education of his younger siblings.

Immediately after graduation in 1951, he took up a teaching assignment at Podar College as Anatomy Demonstrator, a position in which he continued until 1959. Courageous and determined, Antarkar did not waver from his path and continued his post graduate studies for two more years to obtain his Acharyaship. His love for learning was infectious for many. Inspired and encouraged by him, Kusumtai Antarkar, his wife, joined Sion Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya after their marriage and completed her graduation while she was the mother of their first son. Kusumtai, with great admiration and respect for her husband and Guru, recalls how her husband saw to it that his wife did not have to engage herself in daily household duties. Antarkarji's wider appreciation of humanities, art and music is seen as he often fondly talked about his brother Professor Shivram Antarkar's pioneering contributions to education and research in philosophy at Mumbai University. Rajendra Antarkar, his elder son, a well-known tabla percussionist has taken to music and plays for All India Radio. Gauri, his granddaughter says, 'My Ajoba (grandfather) talked to me with a child's enthusiasm about wonders of biomedicine.'

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D.S. Antarkar, gold medalist in Kaya Chikitsa, had to wait for eight years before he could become a full-fledged teacher in the subject at Podar Medical College. He pursued his dual interest in education and clinical work by teaching Anatomy from 1951 to 1959 and actively practicing Ayurveda in his own private clinic. This meant working from 8.00 am to 9.30 am in the morning in his clinic, teaching at the college from 10 am to 5 pm, and again serving at the clinic from 6 pm to 8 pm. His teaching in both subjects of Anatomy and Kaya Chikitsa was very popular. His many students, now teachers, professors and principals at Ayurvedic Colleges, vividly recall how Antarkarji responded to their queries, sometimes even after midnight. In turn, his students have committed to his path in the study of Ayurvedic fundamentals and therapeutic research. They have contributed immensely to the field of IA and evidence-based medicine.

D.S. Antarkar was a disciplined, meticulous and punctual professional, and an academician whose leadership role was recognized nationally and internationally. He played a pivotal role in several organizations like Maharashtra Board of Research in Ayurveda, and professional bodies like National Integrated Medical Association (NIMA), Maharashtra Prantik Vaidya Mandal and Ayurveda Vidnyana Mandal.

Vaidya Antarkar had always insisted on empirical verification of sutras in the classical texts. In 1971, Antarkar's burning desire to investigate and undertake scientific research in Ayurveda found an echo when Dr. Bal Joshi of Ciba Research Center approached him to clinically screen standardized Ayurvedic plants for antihyperglycemic activity. Dr. Ashok Vaidya, who had just returned from Yale Medical School, joined the endeavor. Their fruitful collaboration led to a renaissance in Ayurvedic research. Around thirty Ayurvedic plants/drugs were screened for antidiabetic activity; four proved to be promising leads, and were later taken up in the CSIR NMITLI program.^[1]

The first double-blind, placebo-controlled randomized clinical trial with Arogyavardhini and *Picrorhiza kurroa* was conducted in viral hepatitis, with significant results.^[2-4] This led to a global interest in hepatoprotectives of Ayurvedic origin.^[5] Picroliv was later developed as a drug by the Central Drug Research Institute. *Mucuna pruriens*, which contains L-dopa and other active ingredients, was successfully tried in patients with Parkinson's disease.^[6] During the study the bioavailability of L-dopa was demonstrated.

In collaboration with scientists from BARC, Antarkar showed that arsenic, mercury, copper and other minerals used in herbo-mineral Ayurvedic drugs need proper standardized preparation as they may play an etiological role in conditions like childhood cirrhosis.^[7] With others he investigated *in vitro* acid neutralizing capacity of diverse

Ayurvedic drugs containing different bhasmas, as they were found to be clinically useful in acid-peptic diseases.^[8]

Antarkar had a deep interest in how Ayurveda can be applied to management of epidemics and its role in primary healthcare.^[9] During an epidemic of bacillary dysentery in Maharashtra he and his team took up the challenge of management and control of the epidemic. With commonly used remedies for Pravahika, he obtained significant control of the epidemic by adding Lajamanda. At the ICMR symposium on appropriate technology for primary healthcare, his paper with Ashok Vaidya made a seminal contribution by listing Ayurvedic plants and drugs for common rural diseases.^[9] His interest in malaria led to interesting pilot studies with Sudarshan Ghanavati, *Swertia chirata* and *Alstonia scholaris*.

Commiphora wightii (Guggulu) was shown to be hypolipidemic by Dwarakanath and Satyavati.^[10] However, less attention was given to investigation of its antiarthritic activity. The phase I study with Yogaraj Guggulu, in healthy volunteers, showed dose-related side effects.^[11] Later an integrated Rheumatology clinic was initiated with V.R. Joshi at Podar Hospital, and continued at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Swami Prakashananda Ayurveda Research Center (SPARC) with Aniruddha Joshi. This led to efficacy with high dose usage of Guggulu and even discontinuation of corticosteroids in some patients.^[12,13] This work has been continued further by Ashwinikumar Raut.

After retiring from Podar Institutions, Antarkar was invited to join SPARC as a Dean. At its center, a multidisciplinary team of Vaidyas, Medical Specialists and basic scientists actively pursued the project of Ancient Insights and Modern Discoveries. Their efforts eventually led to the new path of Reverse Pharmacology in Traditional Medicine as defined in the 2006 Sir Ramnath Chopra Oration.^[14] At SPARC, a monograph on Selected Medicinal Plants and a review of Guggulu were major contributions.^[15,16]

Antarkar continued his teaching not only for Ayurvedic students, but also for students of Life Sciences. His guidance was sought by several academic institutions for research projects on Ayurveda. The resulting platform has provided significant value addition to the ongoing renaissance in research and thesis work at diverse Ayurvedic and biomedical institutions. This indeed is a true 'Guru Dakshina' to Acharya Vaidya D.S. Antarkar.

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