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Punnaśseri nambi nīlakaṇṭha śarma's contribution to jyotiṣa

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Introduction

Traditional studies in Kerala covers several subjects like Sanskrit *śāstras* and literature. Among the *śāstras*, *āyurveda*, *vāstu* and astrology are remarkable. All these are useful to the public in practical life. Many scholars like Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma had contributed substantially to various realms of Sanskrit wisdom.

Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma was a renowned scholar of Kerala. He was a well-known commentator, physician and astrologer who could calculate astronomical notations. His contributions to all these fields are worth mentioning. His commentaries on the work of astrology are also much useful for students and scholar alike. He was consulted by several people who were interested in his oratory. Thus, Punnaśseri's contribution to astrology and astronomy is worth mentioning.

Education

Punnaśseri began his education at home in early childhood. At the age of five, he became the disciple of Kulaguru Ālangottur Varier. Punnaśseri learned grammar from Chittilapilly Appu Śāstri.

Later he followed *gurukula* education under Tripangottu Kizhakke Pullathu Śankaran (Kunjunni Mussath). He was a renowned scholar in Sanskrit literature, grammar, *alankāra* and *āyurveda*. Śarma studied under Mussath for twelve years. As a student, he was very hard-working, and this later helped him to become an accomplished scholar.

Punnaśseri's father had died in his childhood. His uncle Ezhikkara Nārayana Muss appointed his disciple Chelur Kelavarma Uṇṇittiri for his education. He taught Punnaśseri Sanskrit, *Hora*, *Praśnamārga*, *Jātakādeśa*, *Lilāvati*, *Grahagaṇita* etc.

Punnaśseri had numerous achievements from his early days. At the age of fifteen, he calculated and published a *Pañcāṅga* himself. Since he was living in Pattambi during that time, the work became popular as Pattambi *Pañcāṅga*. Kozhikode *Pañcāṅga* was the only available work at that time. Punnaśseri found mistakes in it and that is why he published a separate *Pañcāṅga* of his own. This shows his pride and prestige and even the scholarship within him. Each of his works generally begins with a benedictory verse on the deity, *Bhagavathy*, *Mahiśāsuramardīnī* and *Īṅgayūr* (Īhāpuram) *kāvu*.

In the field of astrology, his commentaries are more important than independent works. Hence Punnaśseri turned his creativity towards astrological studies and commentary works. Some important works by Punnaśseri are commentaries of *Camatkāracintamaṇi*, *Praśnamārga*, *Pañcabodha*, *Kriyābhāṣya* and *Aśaucapika*. Further, he wrote two volumes, that reflect astronomical principles, published as *Jyotiśāstrasubodhini*. Other noteworthy works of Punnaśseri are the Pattambi *Pañcāṅga* which has been mentioned earlier and *Vārakrama* which was published in the magazines. K. P. Narayana Pisharoti says that Punnaśseri's first Malayalam work may be an article that was published in 1030 of Malayalam Era, through four volumes serialized in *Sāhityacintamaṇi*.

Punnaśseri deals with the topics related to astrology and its relevance in a simple manner. The importance of astrology in *vedāṅga* is like that of the eyes in the human body. Punnaśseri's stand in respect of *śāstra* is highly appreciative. He never stops to think over the different techniques that are perceived by the ancestors, but he deviates to replenish with the modern aspects.

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This was the main reason that inspired him later to propagandize knowledge through a school named *Sārasvatodyotini*. Irrespective of race, caste and creed, all were given admission to the school. “Sarasvatikku tīṇḍalilla” is a famous proverb in Malayalam, which means there is no untouchability in studies.

Works in Jyotiṣa

The works and commentaries of Punnaśseri that deals with astrological studies are *Camatkāracintāmaṇi* related to Horoscope analysis, *Praśnamārga* related to judicial astrology and *Pañcabodha* related to astronomy. Punnaśseri has written simple commentaries contemplated with conceived ideas regarding the three works mentioned earlier. Besides this, he has also compiled an independent work namely the *Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini*, which deals with the simple principles of astronomy. This work has been published in two volumes. *Śāṅollekhana* is a commentary written on *Camatkāracintāmaṇi* and *Uparatnaśikhā* is the commentary written on *Praśnamārga*. Both these commentaries clearly show the sign of the scholarly figure in Punnaśseri.

Punnaśseri not only deals with the topics related to astrology but also with literary and phonological explanations. By commenting on the Sanskrit works, he helped to arouse and brush up the knowledge of his disciples. This is ultimately appreciable and provides scope for further thinking. Punnaśseri was always keen on putting out the facts or matters that are logically incorrect in the text and criticized them. He also put special effort to suggest correct matters.

Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini

In 1921 Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma wrote a work namely *Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini* for the students who want to study the *gaṇita* part of *jyotiṣa*. It deals with the mathematical portion in *jyotiṣa*. The work was published in two parts. The second part was published five years after publishing the first part. This work is immensely helpful to grasp planetary calculations easily.

The first part of *Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini* deals with *Pañcāṅga khaṇḍa*, *Grahagaṇita khaṇḍa* and *Śrāddhanirṇaya khaṇḍa*. *Pañcāṅgagaṇita* is an essential part of astrology. It deals with five major aspects. They are as follows *nāttuvela*, *nāḷ*, *tithi*, *nityayogam* and *gulikasthiti*.

Grahagaṇitakhaṇḍa explains the *gativigatis* of the sun and the nine planets. *Grahagaṇita* is mainly used in the horoscope, *muhūrta* etc. There are two types of *grahagaṇita* ie. *Parahita* and *Dr̥ggaṇita*. *Parahitagaṇita* is used in the computation of birthday, *śrāddha*, *muhūrta* and *dr̥ggaṇita* is used in *jātaka*. There are differences in the basic principles of these two types of *grahagaṇita*. *Grahagaṇita* is difficult in *Pañcāṅgagaṇita*. The third *khaṇḍa*, *Śrāddhanirṇayakhaṇḍa* is to explain the minute variations in the direction of the planets. *Śrāddhanirṇayakhaṇḍa* is more typical than *Grahagaṇita khaṇḍa*. Several *ślokas* have been given as illustrations in all three *khaṇḍas*. The three *khaṇḍas* comprise 183 verses.

The second part of *Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini* consists of five *khaṇḍas*. Hence the name *Pañcabodhakhaṇḍa*. *vyatīpāta*, *mauḍhyam*, *chāya*, *śrngonnati* and *grahaṇa* are respectively discussed in this *khaṇḍa*. This is more difficult to understand for the common people. In this second part method of the *gaṇita* is well defined. This book is a much helpful guide to the students of astronomy and astrology. This work is presently not available.

So, the work *Jyotiśśāstrasubodhini* is an outstanding *gaṇita*

work on both astronomy and astrology, which is particularly useful for the *bhāvacintana* of astrology. This work was printed and published by Bharathavilasam Press, Thrissur.

Śāṅollekhana Commentary on Camatkāracintāmaṇi

The other significant work is *Śāṅollekhana* commentary on *Camatkāracintāmaṇi* of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa. *Camatkāracintāmaṇi* is also famous by the name *Bhāvacintāmaṇi*.

In this work, the author narrates the significance of the planets in the twelve positions or *bhāvas*. This work is full of suggestive ideas which need commentary for an easy understanding. So Punnaśseri wrote a lucid commentary by name *Śāṅollekhana*. This commentary is written in Malayalam. The literary beauty of this commentary is also highly appreciable. This commentary is exhaustive but easy to read and study. Punnaśseri had referred to the different meanings of the same verse with explanations. The ideas are presented in highly poetic and suggestive language. It is an outstanding work that can be enjoyed both as a text on astrology and as a good piece of poetry.

In this commentary, he followed two methods for explaining the meaning of the original text. First in prose order and second is the explanation of ideas in simple and elaborate language. It is a noticeable point that one can be impressive at his using of the literary beauty, grammatical usages, *alaṅkāras*, etc. all through the commentary. He also quotes ideas from other texts for justifying his views.

Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa has used a multiplicity of meaning in many instants of his text. The multiplicity of meaning is established and implicit through Punnaśseri's commentary. He compiled the commentary to help the beginners in astrology for the prediction of horoscope and judicial astrology.

One example regarding the literary beauty of *Camatkāracintāmaṇi*, that Punnaśseri mentioned in *Śāṅollekhana* is given below. In *Camatkāracintāmaṇi* the author says about the position of the moon in the eighth *bhava*—

सभा विद्यते भैषजी तस्य गेहे
क्वाथमुद्गोदकानि ।
महाव्याधयो भीतयो वारिभूताः
राशी क्लेशकृत् संकटान्यष्टमस्थः॥

It means in his house, there will be a meet place of vaidyas, because he is disturbed by illness and every time wants to consult with physicians and Punnaśseri says this meaning is taken only when the moon stands on the eighth *bhāva* without any strength. If the moon is powerful the meaning will be changed, he will be a well-known physician and prepare medicines for patients, in his house. That means he will become a reputed physician. In other sense, he will be consulted even by physicians to clear their doubts. These three senses of meaning are described for one line of the verse and explained by Punnaśseri based on the good and bad positions of the planet.

In certain parts of the commentary, Punnaśseri has proved his efficiency in using grammatical rules for describing the meaning of *ślokas*. In the original text, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa mainly used *Bahuvrīhi samāsa*. So Punnaśseri quoted the *Pāṇinian sūtras* for explaining such works. Here some examples are quoted in *Camatkāracintāmaṇi*. The author says the position of the moon is the second *bhava*—

धने बुद्धिमान् बोधने बाहुतेजाः
सभासंगतो भासते व्यास एव ।
पृथूदारता कल्पवृक्षस्य तद्वद
बुद्धेः स्तूयते भोगतः षट्पदो यम्॥

In this *śloka*, Punnaśseri describes *bāhutejāḥ*, quoting *Pāṇinisūtra*. *Bāhutejāḥ* means hands with glory. Here *Vyadhikaraṇa Bahuvrīhi samāsa* is used for the word. And Punnaśseri says this is not in opposition with *śāstra*. Because even there is no rule in *śabdaśāsana*, but there are such uses to convey the meaning. Thus, saying he justifies his opinion and declares the use of *Vyadhikaraṇa Bahuvrīhi samāsa* is appropriate.

To support his interpretations in *Śāṅollekhana* Punnaśseri quotes some authoritative texts. In *Śāṅollekhana*, Punnaśseri handles a subject by giving emphasis and special importance to every word and its respective meaning. Punnaśseri gives a detailed description in his commentary about the usage of some words and their meanings and style in which they are applied in different texts. To explain the multiplicity of meaning and description of grammar, Punnaśseri has quoted some authoritative texts like *Mādhavīya*, *Brhatjātaka*, *Naiṣadīyacarita* etc. to prove some of his views.

Uparatnaśikhā Commentary on Praśnamārga

Praśnamārga is considered as the most frequently quoted *Jyotiṣa* work in judicial astrology wrote by Panakkād Nambutiri who lived in Edakkad, a place between Kannur and Talassery. The verses are, however, too concise and it is difficult to understand the real nature of such verses without a good commentary. There are two parts in *Praśnamārga*, *pūrvārdha* and *uttarārdha*. Vidvan Kaikkulangara Ramavarier wrote a commentary on *Ratnaśikhā* for the first part *pūrvārdha*. During that time there was no commentary on *uttarārdha*. So Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma wrote a lucid commentary namely *uparatnaśikhā* on *Praśnamārga*, at the request of the students on *jyotiṣa*. The name *Uparatnaśikhā* was his expression of reverence to the commentary work *Ratnaśikhā* on *Praśnamārga* by Kaikkulangara Rama Varier. Punnaśseri uses a remarkable way to explain the verses of *Praśnamārga*. First, he gives the prose order of the verse in Malayalam language and then gives the meaning in a lucid and simple language. This commentary is the best example of his scholarship in astrology.

A commentary on *Aśaucadīpikā* of Parameśvaran Nambūtiri of Malamangalam is also a famous work of Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma. The commentary on *Pañcabodha* and *Kriyābhāṣya* are presently not available. Punnaśseri had also composed several stray verses, praising kings and deities. On the participation in the *Sahrdayasamāgama* conference, he composed many verses in the form of *samasyāpūraṇa*.

Punnaśseri was highly proficient in composing verses, according to context. Such a verse may be cited for illustration—

भो भो बुधास्सदसि मोदभरात्समेत
कायेन दूरपदभागपि मानसेन ।
युष्मत् सह स्थितिमयं विदधान एव
श्रद्धान्त इत्याविकलं हृदिभावयाध्वम् ॥

The following verse was composed by him since he could not participate in the Rajata Jubilee Programme at Kottakkal Arya

Vaidya Sala. He proclaims his wishes for the prosperity of this institution as following—

सृष्टादिकर्मसु सुरानखिलान्
जगति साक्ष्यमिह या प्रतिपद्य देयी ।
ईहाम्बिकार्यभिषगुप्तमशालिका या
अस्यै ददातु परमोन्नतिमीप्सितां सा ॥

Punnaśseri has also prepared many Sanskrit textbooks intended for schools. Several articles in Sanskrit were also written and published by him through his journal *Vijñānacintāmaṇi*.

Conclusion

Punnaśseri Nambi Nīlakaṇṭha Śarma is the most remarkable personage among the Sanskrit scholars of modern Kerala. The works and commentaries of Punnaśseri reveal his scholarship in literary and science subjects. His prose style is lucid and clear. He was engaged in the teaching of both astrology and astronomy. People considered his observations as authoritative in the case of astrological queries. By way of imparting knowledge in astrology, he produced a tradition of his own in astrology. Through continuous investigation and research, he also added his ideas to astrology. Thus, Punnaśseri's contribution to astrology and astronomy is worth mentioning.

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