

From Allopathy to Ayurveda! Kaviraj Jamini Bhushan Ray, a Pioneer of a New Path

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Madhyom News Desk: The house at 29 Fariapukur Street had been lying neglected for a long time when, suddenly, repair work began. The building was whitewashed. Tables, chairs, and benches started arriving by van. What was going on? Rumours spread that some *baidya*—an Ayurvedic physician—was planning to open a medical college there.

Within a few days, the college began functioning. Students started arriving, and free medical treatment was also offered. The founder of the college himself would come there every day to treat poor patients.

The year was 1916. At Fariapukur, the Ashtanga Ayurveda College and Hospital had been established. It was the first Ayurvedic educational institution not only in India but, indeed, in the whole of Asia. The man behind it was Dr. Jamini Bhushan Ray (Kaviraj Jamini Bhushan Ray), better known to everyone as J. B. Ray.

He took Ayurvedic medicine in Bengal to an entirely new level. Yet many people are now on the verge of forgetting his name.

Jamini, Inspired by Nationalism

The year was 1879. Jamini Bhushan was born on July 1 in what is now the Khulna district of Bangladesh. His father, Panchanan Ray, was a well-known *Kaviraj* of Khulna.

Although he grew up in eastern Bengal, he later moved to Calcutta to pursue his education in Sanskrit. He lived in a rented house in Bhowanipore while continuing his studies. After passing his undergraduate examination with good marks, he enrolled in postgraduate studies as well.

Having completed his Sanskrit education, he entered Calcutta Medical College in 1902. At the same time, he continued studying Ayurveda under his father.

In 1905, Jamini Bhushan passed the Bachelor of Medicine examination with a gold medal and became a specialist in gynaecology and midwifery.

Although opportunities were available to him for employment in hospitals under the British government, he chose not to follow that path. He decided that, like his father, he would become an Ayurvedic physician.

Practitioners of Ayurveda say that, had Jamini Bhushan Ray (J. B. Ray) not been there, this system of medicine might perhaps have disappeared from the country altogether.

Leaving Allopathy for Ayurveda

To many, Jamini Bhushan's decision to move away from conventional medicine and devote himself to research in

Ayurveda seemed foolish. But if one looks at the matter from his perspective, a different path becomes visible.

The system of medicine now widely practised in India — allopathy — came to the country through British rule. Ayurveda, however, had been practised in India for many centuries before that. It was in Ayurveda, he believed, that the roots of the country's culture lay.

He also believed that although allopathic medicine could bring about rapid recovery, it was often difficult for it to control chronic illnesses. Ayurvedic medicine, on the other hand, could gradually cure even diseases considered difficult to treat.

Jamini Bhushan therefore began studying under the famous physician Mahamahopadhyay Kaviraj Bijoyratna Sen.

Many people tried to dissuade him. They advised him that Western medicine offered far greater opportunities for earning money. But he ignored their advice and followed the path he had chosen.

He did not fail. History bears witness to that.

Establishment of the “Vaidyaraj Pharmacy”

Jamini understood that money would be necessary if Ayurveda was to be given a modern form.

Alongside his studies, he therefore began practising medicine at a Marwari hospital. His monthly salary at the time was forty rupees.

Within a short period, his reputation spread throughout India. Invitations began arriving from the royal households of Baroda, Gwalior, and Cochin.

Measured by present-day standards, one could say that he became the equivalent of a millionaire of his time.

Yet a luxurious life never attracted him. Instead, he used his money to establish the “Baidyaraj Pharmacy” for the poor. Ayurvedic medicines were manufactured there using modern methods, and poor patients received those medicines free of charge.

Ayurvedic treatment was provided there in a systematic manner.

Devoted to the Service of Humanity

Ray died in 1926 at the age of only forty-seven.

Before his death, he donated all his movable and immovable property for public welfare. He donated not only the Ayurvedic medical research laboratory and museum that he had established, but also his large garden house situated on twelve bighas of land at Patipukur.

Seven years after his death, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy established a tuberculosis hospital at that garden house. It became known as the Patipukur TB Hospital.

Curiously, the birthday of this legendary Ayurvedic physician was also July 1. Yes, Bidhan Chandra Roy too was born on the same date. It seems an extraordinary coincidence.

Jamini Bhushan Ray's contribution to medical science cannot be denied even today. Whether in the diagnosis and treatment of children's diseases or in toxicology, the books he wrote have remained authoritative works.

Jamini Bhushan Ray also helped show the way forward in the treatment of ENT—ear, nose, and throat—disorders.