

MEDICAL PHILATELY:

Lord Dhanvantri - Hindu God of Medicine

Lord Dhanvantri is a name epitomizing the ancient system of Indian Medicine called Ayurveda, the science of life. The name Dhanvantri is shrouded in many myths and legends.



As per Srimad Bhagvatam, a work depicting various incarnations of Lord Vishnu, Dhanvantri made his first appearance during Samudra Manthan (churning of ocean) millions of years ago. Demigods and demons (asuras) churned the ocean with the help of Vasuki (the serpent) and the great Mandara Mountain. One of the fourteen Ratnas or jewels which emerged out of ocean was Lord Dhanvantri, who appeared with a pot of nectar (amrta) in his hands. Amrta was consumed by demigods who then became victorious over demons. Samudra manthan, one of the most famous episodes in Puranas is even today celebrated after every twelve years during Kumbha mela festival.

Human suffering moved Dhanvantri so much that he desired to be reborn on earth. He made his second appearance, when King Dirghatma of Kasi (Varanasi) practised great austerities for a son. Born as prince of Kasi, he was known as Kasiraja and Divodasa Dhanvantri. He had divine powers of healing. According to Sri mad Bhagvata Purana, it was Dhanvantri who revealed Ayurveda to the world. He is worshipped even today as the patron God of all branches of medical science. He systematically divided Ayurveda into eight divisions (astangas), each division representing a speciality. These specialities are Kayacikitsa (internal medicine), Balacikitsa (Pediatrics), Bhutavidya (Psychiatry), Salkayatantra (ENT and ophthalmology), Salyatantra (Surgery), Visatantra (Toxicology), Rasayantantra (Pharmacology) and Vajikaranatantra (therapy for male sterility and impotence).

This system of medicine was further popularized, taught and handed down generations by his disciples, among whom Susurata was the foremost. Surgical procedures like rhinoplasty and lithotomy taught by Dhanvantri to Susurata became world famous. Various modern scholars have marvelled at the heights scaled by Indian medicine in those times. Dhanvantri's teachings are recorded in the Agni Purana 279-28 through the teachings of his famous disciple Susruta. A voluminous glossary and materia medica in nine sections, known as Dhanvantri Nighantu though ascribed to Dhanvantri was probably written later. This is considered the most ancient of medical glossaries that are available. The name Dahnvantri represents a gift from God to remove human suffering. As an incarnation of Lord Vishnu in his first appearance on earth, he ensured the victory of good over evil. More importantly he showed us the path of alleviation of human suffering through Ayurveda during his second appearance as Kasiraja. Today Allopathy has realized its limitations and also the usefulness of alternative medicine in some diseases. Ayurveda stresses the importance of overall promotion of human health and not just the curative aspect of medical science.

As a salutation to memory of this great divine personality, Dhanvantri award is given each year by Government of India to someone who has made significant contribution to the field of medical sciences. The 30 P postal stamp shown in the photograph was brought out by Nepal in 1977.