

Change and creativity in early modern Indian medical thought

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The great classics of Indian medicine are generally considered to be the compendia composed two thousand years ago, and their study dominates Indian medical history. However, manuscripts of these classic works are relatively rare: for all their fame, they were not widely copied or read. By contrast, Indian manuscript libraries contain thousands of copies of a small Sanskrit medical work entitled “A living for physicians” (*Vaidyajīvana*) composed by the Mahārāṣṭrian physician and poet, Lolimbarāja (fl. 1575/1600). Lolimbarāja married a Muslim woman, and parts of his famous book are written as passionate addresses to her. Other features of his life and work are unexpected, and these will be examined in the context of other trends of the period, and an attempt will be made to account for the extraordinary popularity of his work, which continues to be read, published and translated in India even today.

Lolimbarāja’s work may be contrasted with the vast medical and legal encyclopedia written at almost exactly the same time under the sponsorship of Ṭoḍaramalla (fl. 1565/1589), one of Emperor Akbar’s most famous Hindu ministers. In certain ways, this work pre-figured the legal digests commissioned by Sir William Jones for the purpose of helping the colonial courts understand and regulate their Hindu subjects. The paper will explore Ṭoḍaramalla’s motivations, and will draw conclusions about the social and intellectual life of these and other late sixteenth-century medical authors.