

Vitamin D and the Indian Epics

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The great Indian epics contain multiple accounts of varied diseases and disorders. Examples pertaining to osteocrinology, such as Manthara, Kubja, Shakuni, and Ashtavakra, have been described earlier¹. Here, we highlight two examples of positive bone health.

What was the boon that Samba and Dadhichi received? Was it vitamin D that helped Samba cure his leprosy, and gave Dadhichi indestructible bones? Was it vitamin D that spurred the creation of the Konark Temple, and the Vajra weapon that vanquished the asuras?

THE KONARK TEMPLE

The Konark Temple is a revered architectural beauty, located on the eastern coast of India, in the state of Odisha. Also known as the Sun Temple, or Black Pagoda, its name is derived from the Sanskrit words “kon” (angle) and “ark” (sun). Dedicated to the Sun God, Surya, the temple is located near the Chandrabhaga Beach².

Legend has it that Samba, Lord Krishna’s son, was disfigured by leprosy. This was due to a curse uttered by his father. To negate the curse, he prayed to the Sun God for 12 years. The Konark Temple was built at the site of his prayers³.

The endocrine explanation of this centuries old phenomenon has been unearthed relatively recently. Long before the word “vitamin” (vital amine), was coined by Casimir Funk (1912)³, Niels Ryberg Finsen had been awarded the Nobel Prize (1903) in Physiology/Medicine. He used ultraviolet light to treat cutaneous tuberculosis, and noticed that he himself felt energetic when exposed to sunlight⁴.

Samba’s recovery can be explained by a similar phenomenon. Leprosy and tuberculosis are Mycobacterial diseases. As *Mycobacterium leprae* is a slowly growing

species, it may have needed a longer exposure to “sunlight” derived vitamin D to achieve cure. The Konark Temple therefore serves as a testimony to the healing power of vitamin D. It also reminds us of the importance of outdoor activities, sunlight exposure, and faith in the Almighty.

THE VAJRA (WEAPON) OF INDRA

The sage Dadhichi, son of Atharvan (author of Atharvaveda), is another example of positive osteocrine health. Dadhichi’s ashram is thought to have been at Misrikh, Naimisharanya forest, in modern day Nimsar, Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh⁵.

Various legends are associated with his life. Upon chanting the Mrityunjaya prayer, Dadhichi received three boons from Lord Shiva: indestructible bones, immortality, and freedom from distress. It is noteworthy that such prayers were conducted outdoors by bare-chested devotees, and resulted in significant vitamin D exposure.

During a war between the Devas and Asuras, Lord Vishnu informed Indra that the only weapons strong enough to slay Vritra, son of Tvastar, were those that would be made from the thunder-containing bones of Dadhichi. Upon knowing this, Dadhichi gave up life. His bones were then used to make the Vajra (weapon) that was used to kill Vritra in the Vajrayudha.

Another version is as follows: Tasked to safeguard the weapons of the Devas, Dadhichi dissolved them in sacred water and drank them. Upon understanding that these arms were now part of his skeleton, he burnt himself in a fire. His spine was used by Vishvakarma to prepare the Vajrayudha that defeated the Asuras.

SUMMARY

These two examples highlight the importance of vitamin D in systemic as well as bone health. Such historical anecdotes enhance the joy of learning and understanding the beautiful subject of endocrinology.

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