

only a particular part of the world (i.e. America-centric).

Overall, this volume brings together a diversity of information and issues related to reptilian toxicology from various perspectives, although not for the first time. One can recall here SETAC's (The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry) 904 pages detailed 2000 volume *Ecotoxicology of Amphibians and Reptiles*, edited by D. W. Sparling, G. Linder and C. Bishop. The present book will become a good companion for the above. I started reading this book as a general herpetologist and by the time I reached the last page, I realized how important it is not only for herpetologists or toxicologists, but also to a wide community of biologists, as pointed out at the beginning of this review. However, this volume has a few shortcomings. For instance, some of the tables have not been carefully compiled and checked in the production. Errors are common. Fortunately, now the author(s) as well as publisher have realized these errors and are distributing corrected tables as supplementary sheets along with new purchases. The volume is devoid of coloured illustrations and few more flow charts that could have made understanding easy and reading enjoyable. Also, the book is expensive, considering the quality of production, putting it beyond the reach of many researchers, especially young research students.

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3. Das, I., *A Photographic Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of India*, Ralph Curtis Publishing Inc., Florida, USA, 2002, p. 6.
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**The Legacy of Suśruta.** M. S. Valiathan. Orient Longman, Chennai. pp 830. Rs 875.

*The Legacy of Suśruta* by M. S. Valiathan is an epic volume of over 800 pages and is similar to his earlier publication, *The Legacy of Caraka*. The present volume consists of thematically arranged material, covering exhaustively all chapters of the original text with tabular presentation of data, a special feature of this important work. This version is a rich guide to the Brihatrayi text *Suśruta Samhitā*, one of the most important classic on ayurveda. This *Samhitā* is unique in many ways besides its commendable objectivity of approach in describing the concepts, theories and doctrines and their applications. *Suśruta Samhitā* is a treatise on the anatomy and surgery of the pre-Christian era. Hence without a study of *Suśruta Samhitā*, any study of classical ayurveda would remain incomplete. The literary evidence of the high surgical skill, instrumentation and para-surgical procedures like Kṣārakama, Agnikarma and Raktamokṣaṇa during Suśruta's time is the hallmark of our surgical inheritance. A comprehensive ayurvedic definition of swāsthya, the perception of continuum of three major forces of Nature, namely the moon, sun and air with the Tridoṣika bio-triangle of the living body is unique to Suśruta. It is only Suśruta who so precisely describes the six stages of evolution of a disease, i.e. Ṣaṭkriyākāla based on the pathophysiological rhythm of Doṣas, depicting the specific opportune time for therapeutic intervention.

Most ayurvedic *Samhitās* do not appear thematically organized in their presentation, a style which makes their pursuance difficult for a beginner. The ayurvedic *Samhitās* are a legendary encyclopaedia evolved over a long time and carry the impact of more than one authority or redactor. The superimpositions and additions are not difficult to identify. *The Legacy of Suśruta* is an account of the available text of *Suśruta Samhitā*, which is claimed to be the reduction of the original *Suśruta-Tantra*, which might have been written well before 600 BC. In order to overcome and account for obvious anachronisms, it is more than necessary to realize that the present form of the *Suśruta Samhitā* could be a work of around 1st century AD and is attributed to one Nāgārjuna, who seems to be of unknown identity. Precise historical evaluation is difficult.

Valiathan's book is written in a lucid language with an obvious effort to present the entire subject matter of *Suśruta Samhitā* thematically organized and

supported by tabular presentation of literary data illustrated with many useful tables, charts and diagrams. The author seems particularly cautious in his objectivity and scientific approach, without compromising the sense of historical perspectives. The common trend of over-toned interpretation of ancient descriptions, obvious in most of the contemporary books, seems to have been avoided in Valiathan's book. He attempts to limit himself to what the original text writes, and does not add much that is undue from his side.

The book describes *Suśruta Samhitā*'s subject matter in 15 sections divided into 87 chapters covering all chapters from the original *Samhitā* text representing almost the complete *Suśruta Samhitā*. However, the comprehensive introduction spread over 39 pages and the epilogue at the end of the book are highlights of this work. Forty-five figures and over 300 tables spread across the text make this book richly illustrated and lucid. Every chapter is appended with a list of original textual references from the *Samhitā* and keeps the book intimately linked with the text of *Suśruta Samhitā*, making it easier to refer to the Sanskr̥ta text when needed. The list of botanical names of medicinal plants of *Suśruta Samhitā*, the glossary of technical terms of ayurveda and the word index added in the book are of help in the study of this book in particular and the subject of ayurveda in general.

The preface and over 40 quotes from *Suśruta Samhitā* display important verses in Sanskr̥ta script with parallel Romanized versions and theme meaning. These quotes are legendary statements depicting the zenith of health science of the Suśrutarian era. However, quote 15 under this head seems to have some discrepancy, warranting correction.

In summary, Valiathan's book is a well-conceived scholarly work on an important ayurvedic classic, presenting a realistic account of the text with careful evaluation of the work of Suśruta and his time. It is obviously the most reliable and readable study guide to *Suśruta Samhitā* in particular and ayurveda in general. The book is useful to students and scholars of ayurveda, medical historians, professionals and researchers. It provides the best reading for those who do not belong to the formal ayurvedic fraternity, but are interested to know and work with it.

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