

ANCIENT AYURVEDIC MEDICAL RITUALS AND HEALING TRAITIONS IN VEDIC TEXTS

Manu Sharma¹

The word Ayurveda comes from the Sanskrit words Ayus 'life' and Veda 'science'. Literally translated, Ayurveda is the science of Life. Ayurveda is a collected wisdom of ages and sages, and is extremely relevant to today's world. Ayurveda is, first and foremost, a science of preventative living through the application of accrued wisdom. Ayurveda offers Effective Treatments. Diseases arise as a result of improper Food and Regimen. This result in the derangement of the tri- doshas- Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Most ailments, both physical and mental, were attributed to malevolent spirits and cures consisted of rituals, charms, mantras, medicines and surgical intervention. According to '*Ashtanga Hridaya*', there is nothing in the universe, which cannot be used as medicine. But each and every substance cannot be used as medicine and it needs to be transformed into a definite form to render it fit to be used as medicine. In this Research Paper I will discuss the medical rituals and healing traditions in Atharva Veda, Caraka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtangahrdayam, Ashtangasamgraha, Bhela Samhita and Kashyapa Samhita.

INTRODUCTION

The Vedas are earliest Indian records of holy writings consisting of religious hymns and were sourcebooks of later philosophical principles. There is no authentic record of medicine used by primitive man. But in Rigveda, there is a reference of Indo-Aryans using the juice of 'Soma' Plant as a medicinal agent. In Vedic literature, there are also references of preparations like *Swarasa, Kalka, Madya, Sura, Phanta, Lehya, Churna* and so on. Special preparations for nasal installation of medicine are also known to man during Vedic periods.

Apart from medicinal preparations, various dietic preparations were also mentioned in Vedic literature. In Kausika Sutra, a supplement to Vedic literature, there are description of about 50 varieties of herbs. In Vishnu dharma dietic preparations were classified into: *Bhojyam, Bhakshyam, Lehyam, Chooshyam and Peyam*.

Drugs mentioned in Vedic Literature:

RIGVEDA- *Kimsuka, Khadira, Durva, Kamala, Somala, Pippali, Amalki, Karanja*

YAJURVEDA- *Saktu, Parivapa, Madhu, Godhuma, Masura, Mudga, Masha, Tila, Priyangu*

ATHARVAVEDA- *Apamarga, Arka, Aswattha, Arjuna, Khadira, Tila, Yava, Pippali, Prisniparni, Bilwa, Udumbra, Ikshu, Laksha, Sahadeva, Soma, Guggulu, Munja*

The earliest medical references are Vedic hymns. Vedic medicines are mainly derived from two Vedas the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda. Out of four Vedas,

¹ Assistant Professor, School of Arts and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, E-mail: manuwaytogo@gmail.com

the fourth Veda i.e. the Atharva Veda is the earliest record of medical knowledge during Vedic period. So the science of Ayurveda is a sub branch of Atharva Veda. It contains many hymns, prayers and charms for the treatment of diseases to be used with herbal medicines. Most of the Vedic healing verses occur in the Atharva Veda. Over 100 of its hymns are devoted to conditions like fever, leprosy, consumption, heart disease, headache, rheumatism, epilepsy etc. Natural forces like the sun and water and human contrivances were all used therapeutically in the Vedic era.

In Atharva Veda, medical rituals are documented in details. Rituals are used for the cure of certain disease but it is mentioned as a norm. In Atharva Veda, certain rites which are to be performed for the cure of disease are mentioned. In chapter four of Kausika Sutra of Atharva Veda '*Bhishak*' was mentioned as physician. The term '*Vaidya*' was not mentioned in ancient text, it is found only in Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is not only a medical science but it is a science of life. It is also called holistic science as it takes into consideration all the aspects of life- body, mind, sense organs and soul. It is not only a healing art, but a medical system. It also teaches beneficial and harmful effects of food, exercises and yoga.

Ayurveda is the Upveda of Atharva Veda. Some common hymns are found in Rigveda and Atharva Veda but Atharva Veda is more related to Ayurveda. For example in Atharva Veda it is mentioned that a medical practitioner should show his affiliation towards Atharva Veda. Alone Atharva Veda only describes the various ways of treatment like- Daana, Swastan, Mangala, Hom, Niyam, Praayshchitta, Upavasa, Mantra and so on. All this is connected with Atharva Veda.

In Ayurveda various medical rituals and traditions are mentioned for the cure of diseases. Basic eight branches of Ayurveda have been documented in Atharva Veda.

SHALYATANTRA- SURGICAL TECHNIQUES

Sushruta was a great Indian surgeon and is the author of the book Sushruta SaChitâ, in which he describes over 300 surgical procedures, 120 surgical instruments and classifies human surgery in eight categories. He described surgery as the first and foremost speciality of the system. He describes various surgical procedures including abdominal operations like those for intestinal obstruction and stones in the bladder. Because of his numerous contributions to the science and art of surgery he is known by the title "Father of Surgery." Sushruta was the first surgeon to develop cosmetic surgery. He is also known as the "Father of plastic surgery" as he was the first person to describe and practice plastic surgery. He performed rhinoplasty in the similar way by plastic surgeons of today's era. There are references to accidental loss of leg of Vispala and she was immediately given an iron leg-prosthesis to walk with.

SHAALKYA TANTRA- EAR, NOSE AND THROAT DISEASES

Sushrut describes around seventy-two eye diseases along with surgical operations for such conditions as cataract and pterygium

KAYA CHIKITSA- GENERAL MEDICINE

Ayurveda group all human being into seven different types of constitutions (Prakriti) according to the predominance of biological humors (Doshas) and group them into seven psychological constitutions. In the course of treatment, physician takes note of the aggravation of problem (Doshas), the tissues damaged (Dushya) environmental influences, patient's vitality, digestive power (Agni), constitution, age, psychological factors, personal inclination and diet. Ayurvedic medicines derived from the metal, mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms are used but they are subject to various and complex processes of purification and oxidation before becoming suitable for internal usage. The special therapy of Pancha Karma, the five purification practices, is also used in this treatment.

BHUTA VIDYA- PSYCHIATRY-A SCIENCE OR TECHNIQUE DEALS WITH CAUSES WHICH ARE INVISIBLE DIRECTLY

Ayurveda is equally concerned with mental diseases and their treatment. Treatment methods include not only diet and herbs, but also yogic methods for improving the condition of the mind. There is ample of research on this branch in the Atharva Veda and Ayurvedic texts.

KAUMARABHRITYA- PEDIATRICS

This branch deals with prenatal and postnatal baby care and with the care of mother before conception and during pregnancy. Ayurveda describes methods for conceiving a child of the desired sex, intelligence and constitution. Various diseases of children and their treatment come under this branch.

AGADATANTRA- TOXICOLOGY

This branch deals with toxins of the vegetables, mineral and animal kingdom. The concept of air and water pollution and how they are likely to arise in particular times and places has been given due consideration. Such pollution is said to be the cause of various epidemics and the collapse of civilizations

RASAYAN- DOCTRINE OF REJUVENATION

This therapy is used to prevent diseases and for promotion and prolongation of a healthy life. As mentioned above, Pancha Karma therapy is an essential prerequisite for rasayana. A code of right conduct in life has also to be observed as part of the rejuvenation process.

VAAJIKARAN- THE SCIENCE OF APHRODISIACS

This branch deals with the means of increasing sexual vitality and efficiency. For achieving health and intelligent progeny, the therapy of rasayana and Vajikarana are closely interrelated Vajikarana medicine also acts as rejuvenative. There are several mantras in Atharva Veda which are known as Vaajikaran mantra which brings youth back. These mantras which can be connected in the other branches of Atharva Veda and roots of all this tradition and branches are found in the Atharva Veda.

There are two tradition in Ayurveda. Firstly, tradition of Dhanvantari by Sushrut and Secondly tradition of Bhootvidya.

In Dhanvantari tradition, elaborate description of surgical operation, plastic surgery is mentioned.

In Bhuta Vidya tradition, chanting of various mantras are mentioned to eradicate evil spirits, demons. In the Veda, all diseases are the deceased demons. All those demons have to be pacified, removed from the body. So there are certain mantras and prayers. In those mantras, sometime they pray, sometime they threat, sometime they offer.

Ayurvedic texts prescribes a number of remedies and mantras which pacify the deity who remove the demon. All these elements are mentioned in Atharva Veda and Ayurveda. Ayurveda firmly believes in life after life, previous births, sins committed in the previous births and results in present births. It also speaks about the diseases which are caused by sins in this life or previous life These disease are known as 'Agantuk', external disease caused by external factors, explained by Carak and other texts. Such drafts which are caused by 'Abhichar' (witchcraft) and 'Adharam' that is sinful.

There is also one more cause which is elaborately explained in the 'Charaka Samhita' known as 'Prajnapradha', i.e. volitional transgression which means that the person knows that what is good and what is bad but does not behave properly, does not do good acts and commit sin. He does not think in a proper way. So the cause of all diseases not only 'Agantuk', but all diseases is 'Prajnapradha'. For example, a person realize cold weather in his present day life and but does not wear warm clothes, this is minor 'Prajnapradha'. But there are major 'Prajnapradha' too.

Sage Kashyap also makes a distinction between two types of treatment which are based on 'Aushadh' and 'Bheshaj'. 'Aushadh'- A mixture of substances that promotes appetite and so on. 'Bheshaj'- A pacifical rite involving the bird offering, fast, giving gifts and so on. So, these words refers indirectly to rites of nature of 'Atharvanik' acts. 'Atharvanik' rites which are mentioned in 'Charaka Samhita' in which Charaka speaks of three types of medicines- 'Daiva Vyapashraya', 'Yukti Daiva Vyapashraya' and 'Satva Avajaya Chikitsa'.

'Daiva Vyapashraya'- recourse to the divine, religious rites and divine therapy

‘*Yukti Daiva Vyapashraya*’- resource to reasoning and done by a physician with proper planning

‘*Satva Avajaya Chikitsa*’- Controlling the patient’s mind from unwholesome deeds and thoughts

In ‘*Ashtang Sangraha*’ there are mention of three types of medicines. ‘*Hetu Viprita*’, ‘*Vyadhi Viprita*’ and ‘*Ubhyarthakarin*’

‘*Hetu Viprita*’- counteracting the causes of the diseases

‘*Vyadhi Viprita*’- counteracting the symptoms of the diseases

‘*Ubhyarthakarin*’- serving both the purposes and according to the text, it includes divine therapy

Some references in ‘*Harit Samhita*’ are given in which certain diseases which we find in Atharva Veda and Ayurveda. Names of the diseases which are very close like-

Yakshamana- it is general ailment but later on it means wasting pulmonary disease. It has connection with *Rajayakshamana* which is also mentioned in the Vedas as Tuberculosis. Sometimes there are legends about *Rajayakshmana*. Then we have a word ‘*Kasa*’ i.e. ‘*Kapha*’, ‘*Apachita*’ that is the Vedic name of the disease swellings. But the more common name is ‘*Gandamala*’, ‘*Vidradh*’ in Atharva Veda and ‘*Vidradhi*’ (abscess) in Ayurvedic texts.

There is reference to fever and it is interesting to know that in Vedic texts we do not find the word ‘*Jvara*’ which is commonly use for fever in Ayurvedic texts. We come across only once in Atharva Veda that too in a compound called ‘*Andha jvara*’. But it does not necessary mean something like fever, something like suffering with limbs. So the word ‘*Jvara*’ is not found in Vedic texts. On the contrary there is a frequent reference to fever which is called ‘*Takaman*’ (V, 22, VI, 20, I, 25. *Atharva Veda*) very peculiar word in Atharva Veda. Generally it is believed that it has the root from the word ‘*Taka*’ which is used to cause pain. This word is surprisingly absent in Ayurvedic texts as ‘*Jvara*’. It must be a particular type of fever. Although the hymns describe certain symptoms and generally scholars believe that ‘*Takaman*’ is something like malarial fever. But the application of these mantras includes various types of fever. There are some writings from Atharva Veda on the tenure of fever like one day fever, two days fever, fever coming after three days, coming after four days as ‘*eka*’, ‘*dwo*’, ‘*tritiya*’, ‘*chaturthik*’ or seasonal fever like ‘*Shardam*’ in autumn and so on. There are similar types of diseases of fevers in the Ayurvedic texts. So there is continuity in disease and continuity in the remedies as well. In the Atharva Veda there are certain hymns which pray this fever disease as demon to go away to Vahlik region other regions, and other faraway places because it must have come from there (V, 22). The origin of this disease is somewhere in Vahlik countries or in some other North-Western provinces in India. So there are prayers in ‘*Kaushika Sutra*’, for the cure of this fever ‘*Takaman*’, there are certain remedies and acts which are to be performed in the accompaniments

in the recitation of those peculiar hymns. For example, what kind of remedies we find in '*Kaushika Sutra*' (26, 25), it says while muttering the hymn '*Yadagnih*' (Atharva veda-Shaunak-25), the priest heats an axe drenches it into water and then sprints this water over the patient. So, heating the axe, putting into water, making it warm and sprinkling on patient with water. Another remedy is '*Kushthalingarucha*', in which the priest mixed the powder of '*Kushtha*' with butter and the paste apply on patient by means of his hands not moving it back in the same direction just like massage. Third remedy is with the hymn '*Agristkaman*' (Atharva Veda 522). The priest makes the patient drink water mixed with parched grains '*Laaja*'. Another remedies with the same hymns, he pours the remnant of the clarified butter into the fire obtained from forest fire by means of Copper vessel which is place over the head of the patient.

Another hymn '*Namoruray*' (7116), having tied like the birds, a frog with green stripes like reed by means of blue and red thread under the bed together with his legs, the priest makes the patient lie on the bed and pours water upon him in such a way that it fall down upon frog (VII, 116 Atharva Veda). So tying a frog to the bed with the blue and red thread as mentioned, one fails to understand what kind of scientific logic is there. But it is not the scientific or magical element. It is all symbolism. For example heated axe symbolizes the fever '*Agni*' and this type of magic is called homeopathic magic. It means one have particular symptom or similar type of remedy. So heated axe symbolizes fire and represents fever, the act of drenching it into water indicates the transfer of fever into water. Actually in Ayurveda, removing the diseases many times describes as transfer of diseases. So they used to transfer the diseases in the birds, in water or taking some offering and placing it far away according to the disease, eradicating the diseases. All the acts are symbolic. The water is sprinkled on the patient so that his fever will transfer to the water.

There is a mention of '*Kushtha*' (V, 4, XIX, 39, Atharva Veda) which is always connected with fever in Vedic texts. In Ayurvedic texts '*Kushtha*' does not have so much relation with fever. The powder of the plant mixing with butter creates cooling effect and is applied on the patient. '*Laaja*' parched grains (VI-91 Atharva Veda) also symbolizes the heat and that water is to be given to the patient to drink so that disease will be transferred to that water and it will go away through the discharge of urine. The forest fire is brought home as an antidote of the fever that has spread in the village because there is always analogical thinking in Vedic times. '*Grama Aranya*', '*Grama Pashva-Aranya Pashva*' so for the cure of the fever which is spread in a village, forest fire is brought in the village and then it is given to the patient. A Copper vessel is associated with the heat and remainants of the clarified butter when it poured into the water through the Copper vessel from the head of the patient, it takes the fever away from his body. So these are symbolic acts and rites.

In Ayurvedic texts, there are chapters on the treatment of '*Jvara*' described as formidable. A similar description is found in Ayurveda. It means that in ancient times there are variety of fevers. There are certain types of fever called '*Agantuk*' (external type) because of '*Abhichar*' (cause by curse) or some kind of witchcraft or caused due to the wrath of some deity, for which various treatments were also described in Ayurvedic texts. Those remedies also involve intent invocation to various deities. There are references of *Vishnu*, *Brahma*, *Shankar*, *Agni*, *Ashvino*, *Himalaya*, *Ganga*. There are various rites which describes offering rites with siddha mantras. There are various rites which are mentioned in connection with '*Bhuta Vidya*'. There are remedies with fasting. Major remedy is called *Nasya*, ointment, a special Ghee called '*Mahapaishachik Ghrit*'. There are certain plants called '*Sursa*' which is to be brought to home on auspicious day and it is to be tied on the hand of the patient and that plant supposed to remove the fear of fever called '*Bela jvara*', '*Bhuta jvara*'. Also there is mention of the root of '*Apamarga*' (IV- 17, IV-18, IV-19, VII-65 Atharva Veda) . There are various varieties of diseases and fevers with remedies mentioned in '*Charaka Samhita*' and elsewhere.

There are also name of various diseases mentioned in Atharva Veda called '*Paishacha*', various demons, rakshasas, sages like Attri, Kanva and all which devour the patient. Similar descriptions are given in Ayurvedic texts. Ayurvedic texts speaks three types of diseases, particularly in connection with the diseases of the child. Some demons are violent, they try to victimize the child, so it is called '*Himsa*'. Sometimes they want to have pleasure, it is called '*Rati*'. And sometimes they want to have a kind of honour called '*Archa*'. So there are three purposes of disease demons- '*Himsa*', '*Rati*' and '*Archa*' and two types of disease like desire and honour. When desires can be fulfilled the demons can be pacified, if the disease demon have to kill the child, he is to be controlled by performing sacrifice with the recitation of siddha mantras and in order to get relief from the possession of demon, child have to be anointed old ghee and is to bathe with water specially prepare for the purpose.

There is a practice called '*Dhoopna*'. Many other practices mentioned in '*Bhuta Vidya*' to be performed. There are many mantras in Vedic texts. Some of them we find in Vedic texts. Some of the mantras are connected with domestic rites called '*pumsavanam*' (III- 23, VI-11 Atharva Veda) the rite to be performed for progeny or for the male child. They are connected with various samskaras. So these mantras are also used for example, famous mantra '*Vishnuryoni Kalpayatu*' which is used for '*pumsavanam*' samskara rite.

There are certain '*Ishties*' prescribed. There is one *Ishti* for the birth of male child. We are reminded of '*Putrakamishti*' in Ramayana and '*Putramantha*' in '*Brihadaranyopnishada*'. There are certain mantras in connection with a woman in labour (*Rini*) and also '*Sutikagaar*' (operation theatre) with various Shanti rites (Swasten rites). Certain mantras like '*Gachcha subages swasthani*' i.e. O good

womb, may you go to your own place. All these mantras do not necessarily belong to Vedic tradition. There are certain mantras found in later tradition. Certain later mantras are in connection with Prakrit and Pali languages as hybrid Sanskrit mantras. All these mantras had been collected in those days from various folk traditions. There are certain folk rites and folk deities which are reflected in Ayurvedic texts.

There are many mantras for removing poison (IV-6, IV-7, VI-13, VI-12, VII-56 Atharva Veda). There is a special branch called '*Agadhtantra*'. '*Agadh*' means antidotes for removing poisons. For example *Charaka* prescribes a mantra for antidote called '*Mahagandhahastin*'. So these antidotes are to be prepared for the removal of the poison. While preparing the drugs, administering the drug, there are certain mantras prescribed. There is one antidote in *Ashtang Hridaya*. *Ashtanga Samgraha* mentioned number of antidotes to be performed with the recitation of mantras. Also in surgical operations some rites play an important role. A patient suffering from various wounds also should be guarded by demons by offering them '*bali*' (sacrifice) and presents. In the morning and evening, protection rites, blessings from four Vedas to be performed. There are certain amulets (II-9, II-4, XIX, 34, XIX-35 Atharva Veda) called '*Pratisara*' in Atharva Veda. There are non-Vedic mantras and Dharinis.

All these mantras have been migrated to other countries along with the Ayurveda. Ayurvedic texts are translated in ancient times in Chinese and Tibetan. In Tibetan, we have living tradition of Ayurveda which is mostly influenced by Indian Ayurveda. They translated *Ashtanga Hridaya* of Vagabhatta mostly because Vagabhatta the author was Buddhist probably. So they translated *Ashtanga Hridaya* and developed their own medicines. They also included some Yunai and Chinese medicines. They also have the same theory of '*Tridosha*'- '*Vata*', '*Pitta*', '*kapha*'. So these texts are heavily influence by Ayurveda. In Tibet, even now when they go to Himalayas to collect the herbs in July-August, they still recite the mantras in Tibet. While preparing the medicines, they chant the mantras during the complete procedure. It is the influence of Ayurveda. Nowadays these practices are not followed in India. But in Tibet tradition, they have continued with this practice. So the tradition of '*Atharvanik*' elements still continues in Tibetan tradition.

References

- Prasad, P.V.N.R. (2008). Bhaisajya Kalpna Vijana, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Krishnadas Academy
- Subhash Ranade and Rajendra Deshpande, (2001). History and Philosophy of Ayurveda, Pune: International Academy of Ayurveda.
- Bhaskara Govinda Ghanekara, (1997). Vaidyakiya Subhasjta Sahityam, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, pp -3.
- Chandrabushan Jha, (2007). Ayurvediya Rasa Shastra, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Surabharti Prakashan, pp -25.

Sushruta and Sushruta Samhita, (2007). Ambika Dutt Shastri (Ayurveda tattva Sandipika Commentary), Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan.

Website references

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/av.htm>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/av/avbook01.htm>