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NATURAL MEDICINES PRESCRIBED IN THE VEDAS

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Abstract:

The Atharva **Veda** is deemed to be an encyclopedia for medicine and Ayurveda (the science of life) is considered as Upa Veda (supplementary subject) of the Atharva Veda. A high quality of Medical Knowledge was prevalent in ancient India. The present day Archaeological evidences of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa impart the high civilization in matters of sanitation and hygiene. An analysis of the material in the Vedas reveals that, all the four Vedas replete the references regarding various aspects of medicine. The Atharva Veda is deemed to be an encyclopedia for medicine "Interalia", and Ayurveda (the science of life) is considered as Upa Veda (supplementary subject) of the Atharva Veda. A few glimpses of medical Science as prevalent in the ancient India have been presented here.

Keywords: Atharva Veda , Ayurvedic, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Yoga, Mantras, Therapy etc.

Introduction:

Ayurvedic medicine is the most ancient of the Indian systems of medicine. It is a system of health care and its origin is in the oral advices on living, contained in the Vedic metaphysics. It is widely considered to be the oldest continuously practiced system of medicine. The earliest discussion on medicine is found in the Rig-Veda. But it is in the Atharva Veda and in the later ayurvedic texts of Caraka and Susruta of the classical period that we find a systematic discussion on medicine.

The term '**Ayurveda**' is formed with two words **Ayus** and **Veda**. The word ayus means life, oblation giving long life, longevity, duration of life, life principle; and Veda means knowledge. Ayurveda means knowledge of long life. According to Caraka, life itself is defined as the combination of body, sense organs, mind and soul. Ayurveda is concerned with measures to protect ayus, along with therapeutic measures that relate to physical, mental, social, and spiritual harmony.

The word Bhesajam means healing, curing and medicine also. The root is *ji* which means **victory** and the *victory over diseases is Bhesaja*. There are a very large number of references in the Vedic literature about Bhesaja. (AV, 11.6.14, Samkhyayana srautasutra, 16.2.1, Gopatha Brahman, 1.3.4) Atharva Veda is also known as Bhesaja Veda. The word bhesaja is used several times in different case-endings, like bhesaja, bhesajam, bhesajasya, bhesaja, bhesajaman, bhesajani, bhesajebhyah, bhejajau, bhesaji, bhesajim etc. In Atharva Veda the references are .1.4.4, 1.5.4. 1.63 ,2.3.1, 2.3.3, 2.7.1, 3.7.6, 4,14,3, 5.30.5, 6.21.1, 6.24.3, 6.57.1,6.83.1,6.103.3,7.39.1,7.80.4,8.2.5,8.6.3,8.7.22,10.4.6,11.6.9,19.35.1,20.141.5 etc. The word Bhesaja occurs in all the chapters of the Atharva Veda without exception.

There are so many powerful plants saved in this village by cow, horse, man and beast (AV, 8.7.11). Animals and birds are said to be helpful for a man in discovering and preserving the herbs for medicines. There is a reference in Atharva Veda that an eagle is a discoverer and hog is a preserver the herbs (AV, 5.4.1). In the entire period animal is the first practical instrument to prove a medicine in proper way. Atharvan and Angirasa both are gods and seers from them herb is generated. According to Gopatha Brahman Angirasa is the founder of mantravidya and Athravana is medicine (G.B, 3.3.4) In Tandy Brahmana Athravana is referred to as a doctor. (Bhesajam va atharvani..., 10.7.20) Caraka a great physician said all the physician must have read Atharva Veda (Caraka, 1.30.20-21). In Purana literature Ayurveda is known as the fifth Veda. (Brahmavaivarta purana, 1.16.9-10) The Osadhi hymns of Rig-Veda seen by the seer Atharvanbhisag is quite popular (RV, 10.97). There are so many hymns in Atharva Veda where seers are praying to herbs to cure human beings. The word Bhisak is used for a doctor who is also known as Rakshoha and Amivacatana. (RV, 1.2.7) Amivcatana means the remover of disease. Rakshoha is Indra and amivcatana is Agni.

Eight Kinds of Vedic Treatments:

The earliest classical **Sanskrit** works on Ayurveda describe medicine as being divided into eight components (Skt. *aṅga*). This characterization of the physicians' art, "the medicine that has eight components" (Skt. *cikitsāyām aṣṭāṅgāyām* , is first found in the Sanskrit epic the *Mahābhārata*. The components are:

- *Kāyachikitsā*: general medicine, medicine of the body.
- *Kaumāra-bhṛtya* (Pediatrics): Discussions about prenatal and postnatal care of baby and mother, methods of conception; choosing the child's gender, intelligence, and constitution; and childhood diseases and midwifery.^[26]
- *Śalyatantra*: **surgical techniques** and the extraction of foreign objects
- *Śhālākyaatantra*: treatment of ailments affecting ears, eyes, nose, mouth, etc. ("ENT")
- *Bhūtavidyā*: pacification of possessing spirits, and the people whose minds are affected by such possession
- *Agadatantra/Vishagara-vairodh Tantra* (Toxicology): It includes subjects about epidemics, toxins in animals, vegetables and minerals. It as well as contains keys for recognizing those anomalies and their antidotes.
- *Rasāyantantra*: **rejuvenation** and tonics for increasing lifespan, intellect and strength
- *Vājīkaraṇatantra*: **aphrodisiacs** and treatments for increasing the volume and viability of semen and sexual pleasure. It also deals with infertility problems (for those hoping to conceive) and spiritual development (transmutation of sexual energy into spiritual energy).

Main texts:

There are three principal early texts on Ayurveda, the **Charaka Samhita**, the **Sushruta Samhita** and the **Bhela Samhita**. The dating of these works is historically complicated since they each internally present themselves as composite works compiled by several editors. All past scholarship on their dating has been evaluated by Meulenbeld in volumes IA and IB of his *History of Indian Medical Literature*. After considering the evidence and arguments concerning the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, Meulenbeld states (IA, 348), "The *Suśrutasaṃhitā* is most probably the work of an unknown author who drew much of the material he incorporated in his treatise from a

multiplicity of earlier sources from various periods. This may explain that many scholars yield to the temptation to recognize a number of distinct layers and, consequently, try to identify elements belonging to them. As we have seen, the identification of features thought to belong to a particular stratum is in many cases determined by preconceived ideas on the age of the strata and their supposed authors." The dating of this work to 600 BC was first proposed by Hoernle over a century ago, but has long since been overturned by subsequent historical research. The current consensus amongst medical historians of South Asia is that the Suśrutasaṃhitā was compiled over a period of time starting with a kernel of medical ideas from the century or two BCE and then being revised by several hands into its present form by about 500 CE. The view that the text was updated by the Buddhist scholar [Nagarjuna](#) in the 2nd century CE has been disproved, although the last chapter of the work, the Uttara Tantra, was added by an unknown later author before 500 CE.

Anatomy:

Many hymns in the Atharva Veda describe the wonderful structure of man (AV, 10.2, 10.8, 11.8). They stress the oneness, the wholeness of man, the strong interaction between the various aspects of body and mind, the connection with the cosmic body and mind.

Atharva Veda accepts that man has at least three sheaths namely matter, life energy and mind. These three sheaths are empowered by cosmic power Agni, Vayu and Indra respectively.

Atharvaveda is a good text where the knowledge of anatomy is discussed. Different parts of the body are discussed. (AV, 10.2.1-8) A physician must have knowledge about the limbs. The nerves and their flow is knowledgeable point of a doctor. (AV, 6.138.4) There are so many references in Atharva Veda about human limbs. (AV, 2.7.12, 7.50.9, 11.8.11, 12.6.59, 1.17.1, 2.33.6,)

The correlation among the Sthula sharira, Suksma Sharira and the mind is **jivatma**. Life energy is interested in longevity and health. If the desire is not fulfilled then it creates a sorrowful environment. It creates physical and mental disorders. To avoid the problem of sadness and achieve joy (ananda) Vedic seers pray to gods. (RV, 1.105.7) But at the same time, they speak of herbs and many other material elements that are to be applied for curing ailments.

The description of a human body in terms of nine lotus petals and the three gunas (qualities) appears in Atharva Veda W.D. Whitney said, "The lotus flower of nine doors, covered with three strands (guna), what soulful prodigy (yaksa) is within it, that the Brahman knowing know."

"free from desire, wise, immortal, self-existent, satisfied, with sap not deficient in any respect knowing that wise unaging, young soul one is not afraid of death". (AV, 10.8.43-44).

In some other hymns (10.2.31) human body is described as a nine gated city, i.e. namely two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two organs of evacuation and mouth. Three gunas or psychological qualities are well known later as tamas (inertia), rajas (partially controlled or uncontrolled activity) and sattva (balanced dynamism). It is clearly mentioned that the soul is seated within such a body (AV, 10.2.32). Several verses clearly describe the various parts of the body. (AV, 10.2.1-14) Two heels of man, flesh, seven apertures in the head, ears the nostrils, brain, fore head, hind head etc..

Vedic practice of medicine is based on a clear division of the branches viz. Anatomy, physiology and the diseases, and medicine.

Medicines for Diseases: A very large number of diseases have been discussed in the Vedas. Here we are presenting a sample selection.

Fever :

The word takman is used for fever in Atharvaveda. Takman is the main disease in the Atharva Veda. There is a large discussion with five suktas. Fever is takman. There are different names for fevers of different durations. For two days fever name is ubhayesu, for three day fever name is tritiyaka, for a long period name is sadandi and for a year fever is hayena .God like Agni, Soma, Varuna, drive the fever by their power.

Fever is a disease that spreads in regions. Seer says when the fever is eager he will go to the balhika's place. With his family fever will come. Balasa is brother, cough is sister, and scab is the cousin of the fever. After the cure fever also comes back again. After 2 days, 3 days or seasonally and annually fever comes. It is also referred that fever comes in summer, cold and rainy seasons.

Kustha plant is used to destroy fever. The prayer is to the plant kustha. The kustha plant has a power to remedy sickness, pain in the head, affliction in the eye, and ailment of the body.

Internal Pain (Colic):

The word Bisuchi used for Internal Pain (colic) in Atharvaveda is a disease of stomach (VS,19.10) The pain in sharp like a arrow. The pain is in heart. There are charms against internal pain due to the missiles of Rudra. M.Bloomfield said, this disease is colic and Rudra is prayed to releases from this. The hymns like this, "the arrow that Rudra cast upon thee, into limbs and into thy heart, this here did we know draw out away from thee", "from the hundred arteries which are distributing along thy limbs, from all of these do we exorcise firth the poison," (RV, 6, 90, 1-2)

Urinal Problem or Diabetes:

The word asrava used for Urine (diabetes) in Atharva Veda. There are many hymns where prayer is made to the god Parjanya (cloud) for regulation of flow of urine. Hymns are also there against constipation and retention of urine. The word asrava is used for urinary disease, the painful urination like diabetes. (AV, 1.2.4) The herb munja (reed stalk) is the remedy of this disease.

Seer says, "I split up thy urinator, like the weir of tank so be thy."(AV, 1.3.7)

Cough :

The word kasa is used for Cough. The cough arises from hurtful changes of wind, bile or phlegm and also in bad weather. The cough and head ache entered each joint. So after cough body pain will come. This is the cloud born and wind born. The vanaspati removes the pain step by step and then comfort the entire body. (AV, 1.2) The cough flies away from mind, earth and ocean as Sun rays fly away swiftly.

Jaundice :

Kamila and hidroga described in Atharva Veda are known as jaundice. The God is Sun who removes this disease. The seer Brahma is prayed against heart disease and jaundice. Whitney said, "Both of them go up towards the sun, thy heart born and yellowness, with the color of red bull, with that we encase." "with red color we enclose thee in order to length of life, that this man may be free from complaints , also may become not yellow" (AV, 1.22.1-2)

In Rig-Veda (1.50.11-12) there is a prescription for removing heart trouble and jaundice. It runs as follows- "rising this day o rich in friends, ascending to the loftier heaven, Surya remove my heart disease, take from me

this my yellow hue (jaundice). To parrots and to starling let us give away my yellowness, or this yellowness let us transfer to haritala trees.”

Bone fracture:

There is a sukta in Atharvaveda about the disease Balasa (AV, 4.6). Bhrugupingala is the seer of the disease balasa. The bone dissolving, joint dissolving, settled heart disease, all the balasa cause thou to disappear, that is seated in the limbs and the joints. (AV, 6.14.1)

Headache :

The word sirshamaya is used in the Vedas for a disease or morbid affection of the head. In Atharvaveda this is mentioned as headache.

The Vedic seer Bhruvangira prays to remove the diseases like headache, head-ailment, ear-ache, vilohita (a kind of disease perhaps bleeding of nose) from human body (AV.9.8.1).

The sage said that the disease can be removed by incantation therapy.

Leprosy: [Kilasa]

Rig-Veda (5.53.1) mentioned that kilasa is the vehicle of the Marut. A kind of spotted deer is this. In Atharva Veda (1.23.1-2) it is mentioned as one kind of white color. The remedy of leprosy is discussed in the Vedas. A nightly born herb named Asikniis is said to be capable of curing leprosy. The leprosy spot what is gray is driven away by this and white spots also fly away. “The leprosy which has originated in the body and upon the skin, the white mark begotten if corruption, they also destroy with charm (SBE, vol-42, p16). The other herb named asuri is said to be a remedy for leprosy. Asuri has destroyed the leprosy and made the skin in color (Av, 1.24.2). The svtakustha is cured by syama tulsi and rama tulsi. (AV, 1.31.1)

Krimi:

Krimi is a micro germ. There are many references about krimi.(AV,2.31.,1.31.3-4,2.3.1) Sun bath is important for the cure of krimi. Sun is the master to demolish the krimi. Ultra violet rays of the Sun demolish the germs. For demolish the krimi there are a hymns named ‘krimighna;.(AV,5.23)

Tuberculosis:

In the Vedas Tuberculosis is known as Rajayaksma or ksayaroga. Much energy is discharged from the body in this disease. Words papayaksma (t.s., 2.3.5.2), ksaya (sat.br. 7.10) and papma (AV, 5.22.12) are used to denote this disease. Discharge of energy of a man creates Rajayaksma. The name used is jayanya for Rajayaksma. (paksijayanya patati sa avishati purusa (Av,7.76.4). Having wings the jayanya flies, it enters into human body. The Rajayaksma is of two types namely, aksata and suksata. The medicine is anjana and oblation. In house, to remove this perform oblation. Mantracikitsa is also a cure of Rajayaksma.

Hereditary diseases :

The word kshatriya is use in the Veda for hereditary disease. According to the bloom field, the word sketriya is interpreted by the Atharvaveda quite unanimously as in hereditary disease.9SBE, Vol-42,P286) The

hymns are designed to drive it away,(AV,2.8,2.10,and 3.7) This is one of the family diseases. According to taittiriya brahmana (2.5.63) diseases has been arising while in the womb” is kshetram.

Yaksma:

In the disease of yaksma the body is unfit to do work. There are various types of yaksma found in Vedas. In Yajur Veda it is mentioned that there are 100 types of yaksma.(YV,12.97) It is basically divided into two groups, Rajayaksma and ajnata yaksma.(AV,3.11.1) Rajayaksma is known as TB. It covers the whole body. (RV,10.163.4-5,Av,2.330) In yajurveda it is define as three types, rajayaksma, papayajmaa and jayanya. Medicine is the herb like anjana and gugullu.

Jayanya:

Jayanya is a kind of disease related to pitta. It is a part of yaksma. The ointment is the medicine. There is a prayer that, the ointment born of the earth excels in giving life to men (AV,19.44.3) The herb is collected from mountain.

Galaganda:

Apacit one of the insect creates the disease glaganda. In Atharva Veda it is discussed that there are 55,77 and 99 types of the disease galaganda. (AV,6.25,1-3) By the disease pain is create in the neck, shoulder and in the throat. The apacits are red, black and white in color.

Causes:

There are so many causes by which the different diseases are created in the body.

1. seasonal: Diseases arise from harmful changes of wind, bile or phlegm. Bloomfield points out that wind, cloud, rain etc. are conceived as the causes of fever, headache, and cough. So the diseases are cloud borne and wind borne.
2. Negative force (demons): Demons are often held as responsible for causing diseases.
3. Incantation (abhicara): employment of spell for evil purpose. Vedic gods are pray to destroy the evils.(AV,19.39.1)
4. Curse (shapa): There are references to show that Curses are often believed to bring upon diseases (AV,5.30.4) and Gods are propitiated to strike off the curses (AV,19.39.1,2.7.2,1.26.3). There are hymns inviting Indra, Agni Varuna , Yama for freeing men from curses.(AV,6.96.2) Soma is also requested to purify the eye, mind, speech.(AV,6.96.3)
5. Gods: There are so many references refer that the gods are generate disease when they; become unhappy. (AV,1.0.3,2.10.1,4.16.7,16.44.8) The reference is fever and cough are the weapons of Rudra.(!V,11.2.11)
6. Worm and Germs: Generally worms are the origin of the diseases. (AV,2.13,2.32,5.23) The word yatudhana is used for worm and germs. Gods are referring to grind yatudhana and save the human beings from different

diseases. (16.36.1) There is a hymns in Atharva Veda(2.31.5) refers that, the worms that are in the mountains, in the woods, in the herbs, in the cattle, within the water, that have entered our selves (tanu) .(W.D. Whiteny,Vol.1,p74) Germs: Germs are spreads through water, air etc. (5.29.6-7) Worms are spread a poisons virus . The bacteria of germ in environment create diseases. The bacteria are not visible any time.

7. Cloud: The god parjanya means cloud is also creates diseases. Fever and cough are created by cloud.

8. Inbalance of tridosa : In the human body, inbalance of bata , pitta and cough create diseases. There are adiscussion in Atharvaveda that Agni is the lord of Pitta, Water is Lord of cough and Wind is for bata.

Treatment

Vaidic styles of prescriptions can be broadly classified into the following categories :

1. Surgery. 2. Medicine 3. Gem therapy. 4. Mantracikitsa

Salya (surgery)

Asvinikumaras, the twin brothers, are the founders of surgery. There are so many suktas where Asvinikumars are referred to as surgeons.

Mantra Treatment:

In Atharva Veda there are some hymns where they chant hymns to cure diseases .This is mantra cikitsa (sound therapy). Kukur, algandas one type of worm are grind up with sound.(AV,2.3.1)Kanva, Atri, Jamadagni, Kasyapaare famous in mantra cikitsa. By chant hymns they treated the patients.(AV,2.32.3)

Daivi cikitsa: Lord Prajapati is nurse I order to length of life.(AV,6.68.2)

Water therapy: Water is prayed as a medicine.(AV,1.5.4)

Sunray: Heart disease and jaundice is cures by the ray of the sun. (AV,1.22.1)

Gem (Amulet) therapy: The amulet (Mani) also the medicine for diseases. The treatment of Angirasis gem therapy.the gems are made in herb namely mani.(AV,18,5.1.,19,36,14)The jangida is the amulet of thousand fold valiance and protects us about on every side (AV, 2.4.2) Witch craft spoiling is this amulet, like wise niggard spoiling, likewise shall the powerful jangida prolong our life-time.(AV,2.4.6) Parna maintain wealth, strong by strength slaughter in our rival, force of the gods, milk of the herbs it quicken with splendor unremitting. Parna amulet gives length of life for a hundred years (AV, 3.7.4). Sankhamani born from the wind out of the atmosphere, out from the light of lighting, this gold born shell of pearls protect us from distress.(AV,4.10.1)By the shell we over power diseases misery. All healing shell of pearl protect us from distress.(AV,4.10.3)

Yoga Practice:

During just later vedic period, Yoga Practice was the main treatment to keep our body healthy and ever strong.

Yoga improves **strength**, balance and **flexibility**. ...

Yoga helps with back pain relief. ...

Yoga can ease arthritis symptoms. ...

Yoga benefits heart health. ...

Yoga relaxes you, to help you sleep better. ...
 Yoga can mean more **energy** and brighter moods. ...
 Yoga helps you manage **stress**. ...
 Yoga connects you with a supportive community.

The Physicians:

In the Vedic period Atharvan and Angirasa are seers, gods as well as physicians. The Vedic god Asvinikumar is well known as deva vaidya. There are also so many hymns where Agni (AV, 10.4.16) and Indra (6.10.3) are described as physicians. Also other gods are strongly attached as doctors. Angirasa and his generation is known as Athavani (AV,11.4.16) They are said to destroy demons of diseases with the medical plant ajasringi.(AV,4.36.1) The sage Agasti used so many medical herbs to drive away the demons of diseases.(AV,2.32.3)

The God Agni, that is, fire is the natural force that heals. The force is both physical and psychological. Agni is the up going substance. The cold is cured by the treatment of fire. In Yayurveda it is said “agnihimasya bhesajam”{YV,23.10}. This is also said that agniskrintu bhesajam.(AV,6.106.3) Agni and Indra both grind up the worm.(AV,5.23.1)

Another major curer is the Sun. Apacita a noxious flying insect is like a bird (suparna) which is removed by sun. The remedy depends upon the sun and the moon. (AV,6.83.1) Bloomfield first mentioned that the apacita is a pustule or sore. The commentary directly identifies the apacita with the gandamala,” scrofulous swelling of the glands of the neck” and explain all the processes implied in the hymn as referring to such.(W.D.Whitney,vol.1,p.84)

But by far the greatest of all the mythological physicians is Asvini. Rig Veda rishis are ecstatic in praise of the healing power of the miracle physician Asvini, who restored matchless eye of rijasva.(RV,1.116.6) Asvini, the son of Ricatka, with his medicinal power raised high the water from the bottom of well for drinking of Sara and made a sterile cow swell milk for exhausted Sayu.(RV,1.116.22) Asviniis replace the head of Dadhici with a horse head and also gave the previous form.(RV1.116.6) The most powerful physician Asvini knows all the method of medicine. An impotent man is able to give a son to his wife by the treatment of Asvini. (V, 1.116.14) Asvini liberated a quail from the mouth of a wolf. He also knows the eye surgery. He made an imploring poet to see. (RV, 1.116.14) A leg of Vispala has been broken like a wing of a bird in the battle of khala at night. Immediately Asvini restored an iron leg for Vispala to run the race for hidden treasures.9Rv.1.116.15) Asvini kumararas, the twin sons of Asvini said to be the first physicians. Asvini is famous in surgery. Asvini is removed the outward appearances as it were an armory, from the aged Cyaban (RV, 116.10) Asvini extended the life of an abandoned one he become able to a husband of youthful maidens. (RV, 1.116.10)

Different Vedic gods are also introduced as doctors. The word Bhisak means physician. This word is used of the god Agni, Indra, Varun, Rudra, Marut, Apa, In the Atharvaveda Agni is a physician, a maker of remedy, ‘by thee may gain the cow, horse, man’.(AV,5.29.1) In Rig-Veda Marut is referred to as a bhesaja.(ya vo bhesaja marutah...,RV,2.33.13)

Conclusion

In the Vedic medicine we analyzed the style of prescriptions. There are different stylistic approaches. There are some verses where the word Aushadhi is used but leaves the particular nature of the medicine unclear.

Also, there are so many hymns which mention the name of the medicines but do not mention the diseases for which they are to be used. Without the previous knowledge of the properties of herbs and plants it is difficult to use them as medicines. A large number of suktas only dictate the diseases to go away. Apparently, it is expected that the power contained in the verses would cure a sick person or the gods would grant the prayers and help the patient get well. May be, this type of verses are related to sound therapy; or that the presiding deity of the mantra is expected to cure by his/her internal qualities. Sometimes, the assumption is that the disease was caused by the evil influences of some demon and spirit and Supernatural power of the medicine may cure the disease. On the whole, it may be said that the approach of the Vedas to Medicine is proto scientific. A large part of it is based on magic, but there are definite instances showing clear signs of a rationalist attitude towards human ailments and their cure.

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