

MEDICAL SCIENCE IN ANCIENT INDIAN CULTURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ATHARVAVEDA

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ABSTRACT

A high quality of Medical Knowledge was prevalent in ancient India. The present day Archaeological evidences of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa imparts 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 encyclopaedia 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.

The ancient India was the birth place of many great sciences. It attracted the attention of the entire ancient world and streams of inquisitive men travelled long distances to come to India to learn. Ayurveda, the Science of life was one of the sciences, which earned great fame for India and which influenced considerably the knowledge of medicine of other ancient nations of the world also.

Though the dawn of historical period in India is counted from the

7th Century B.C. but, historical facts are found to be definite only after the 5th Century B.C. The History of Science and Technology in India as per the present day Archaeological evidences, begins with the Indus Valley Civilization. This period is usually called the pre-vedic period.

The excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro bear ample evidences to the proficiency reached by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization in matters of sanitation and hygiene. Both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro

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appear to have been built according to a careful plan. There were baths, lavatories, drains, fresh-water tanks, court yards and bed rooms etc. The main drains could be cleared by lifting large, specially made brick manhole covers. The whole concept of town planning shows a remarkable concern for sanitation and public health which was perhaps without parallel in those days, soakage pits took the eventual sewage.¹

Excavations of these sites have brought to light several therapeutic substances like Shilajit, remedies for Diabetes and Rheumatism etc. Impressions of skulls on which cranial surgery had been performed were also excavated from these sites. These things in parts the high quality of the medical science that was prevalent in those days².

Ayurveda, the Indian Medical System is one of the great developments in the Vedic period followed by centuries of slow and cautious

evolution.

The Vedas

The earliest sources of our knowledge of Indian Philosophy and medicine are the four Vedas, the sacred books of Knowledge belonging to the period of 1500 to 800 B.C.³ Ayurveda is considered to be the Upa-veda or supplementary subject of the Atharva Veda. An analysis of the material in the Vedas reveals that all the four Vedas are replete with references to various aspects of medicine. The Gods like Rudra, Agni, Varuna, Indra and Maruthi were designated as the Celestial physicians at that time.

The medical lore contained in the Atharva Veda is not inconsiderable. There they appear among seven hundred thirty one hymns, charms and incantations. The Atharva Veda VIII, 7, appears as a charm bestowing longevity; the devini-ties to whom it is addressed are the herbs men-

1. Pre Historic India, Piggott.s., P. No. 168.

2. Fundamentals of Ayurveda Medicine, Bhagwandas (1984) Bansal & cor, K/16, Naveenshadra, Delhi 32, P-8

3. Science and Philosophy of Indian medicine, Udupa K. N., etal (1978) P.No.11.

tioned in the hymn", explains that the hymn is used in a remedial rite against consumption (Yakshma) and all other diseases.

Thus, at the time of Atharva Veda there were physicians and an elaborate pharmacopoeia for treating the diseases. The praise of the Atharwan as the physician par excellence, superior to all medicines prescribed by other physicians, implies the existence of two systems of Medicine side by side.

1. The system of charms prescribed by the Atharwan (priest physician)
2. The system of drugs prescribed by ordinary medical practitioners.

The Panchagavyas (Five products of the Cow), Honey and fats as a suitable vehicle (Anupana) for the remedies.

In X:2:1-33, a hymn entitled "the wonderful structures of man", in which the several parts of the Skeleton are carefully enumerated. In II.33 almost all the important organs of the body are enumerated.

In X:8:43, a reference is made to

lotus with nine gates. The comparison of the heart to a lotus, In I:17:3 described

"Thou sira of the lower part, remains,

thou of the upper part remains;

so thou of the middle part,

so thou small, so thou big Dhamani,"

With regard to this verse, Dasgupta, says "a knowledge of the distinction between Veins and arteries, in the modern sense of the terms, was known at that time". The division of Dhamanis, Siras and Snayus seems to have been based on their relative fineness, the thicker canals were called Dhamanis, the finer ones were called Siras, and the still finer ones Snayus.¹

The flow of certain fluids in the body, described in X:2:11,

"Who stored in him floods moving in all diverse directions and formed to flow in rivers pink, rosy red, and coppery dark running in all ways in a man, upward and downward.....

The intimate relation between the heart and the brain seems to have

1. A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol.II, Dasgupta S.N., (1932) P.No. 289.

been dimly apprehended. Atharva Veda I:12:3 mentions five classes of diseases.

1. Atharvanic people recognised a threefold classification of all diseases those produced by wind, by water and fire later developments in Ayurveda, considered the threefold classification of all diseases as to the three Doshas Viz: Vata, Pitta and Kapha.
2. Diseases produced by possession by demons and evil spirits.
3. Diseases due to Worms.
4. Diseases due to Sorcery (the use of magic powers derived from evil spirits).
5. Kshetraja (hereditary) diseases.

Krimi (organisms) were explained in detail in the Vedas. In Atharva Veda II:31:2, the organisms were classified into Dris-hya (Macro) and Adrishya (Micro), which were in water, earth, sky, houses. Mainly Atharva Veda I:28:4 to XIX:66:1, about 98 varieties of Krimis and Krimi janya

Vyadhis (diseases produced by bacteria, worms, insects) and treatment for different bacteria manifested diseases were explained.

XIII:1:32 hymn reveals that "The rising Sun is prayed to destroy the infective organisms".

This connotes the ultra violet rays present in the Sunlight was known to Atharvanic people. Here, it is stated that pathogenic bacteria live mostly during darkness and die during sunrise.

Atharva Veda stated herbal remedies like Ajashringi (IV: 32:2) Prishni parni (II:25:2), Apamarga (IV:18:8) etc. as anti-bacterial and Shankha (IV:10:3), prathisar (VIII:5:8) etc. Manidharana as preventive (protection from bacteria).

There is abundant literature available for the aetiology, diagnosis, differential diagnosis, complications, management of Takma (Fever).

Synonyms And Varieties Of Jwara (Fever)

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|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Abhrajā (I:12:3) | - | Due to clouds (Kaphaja Jwara) |
| 2. Vataja (I:12:3) | - | Due to Vitiation of Vata (wind) |
| 3. Shushma (I:12:3) | - | Due to emaciation. |
| 4. Parusha (V:8:5) | - | Due to rukshatwa (dryness) in the skin. |
| 5. Anga. (IX:8:5) | - | In Limbs. |
| 6. Angabhed (IX:8:5) | - | Due to body pains. |
| 7. Sheeta (V:22:10) | - | Due to cold. |
| 8. Roor (V:22:10) | - | Due to Paittik (Bile). |
| 9. Trithiyak (V:22:13) | - | Fever manifested on 3rd day. |
| 10. Vitrithiyak (V:22:13) | - | Fever manifested on 4th day. |
| 11. Sadandi (V:22:13) | - | Continuous. |
| 12. Sharad(V:22:13) | - | Due to specific effects of autumn season. |
| 13. Varshik (V:22:13) | - | Due to specific effects of rainy season. |
| 14. Grishma (V:22:13) | - | Due to specific effects of summer season. |
| 15. Vishwa Sharad (IX:8:6) | - | Spreading type diseases (Malaria due to specific effects of Autumn season. |
| 16. Aruna (VI:20:3) | - | Fever with red coloured pustules i.e. Masurika (small pox). |
| 17. Babhru (VI:20:3) | - | Yellow fever. |
| 18. Vanya (VI:20:3) | - | Due to forestry. |
| 19. Chyavan (VII:116:1) | - | Fever with over sweating. |
| 20. Nodan (VII:116:1) | - | Intermittant. |
| 21. Avritha (VII:116:2) | - | Vishamajwar (Typhoid) |
| 22. Ghrishnu (VII:116:1) | - | Due to injuries or hurt. |
| 23. Hayan (XIX:39:10) | - | Due to indigesation of Vreehi (a kind of rice). |

Complications of Fever

1. Shirovedana (I:12:2)
2. Shleshma (V:22:2)
3. Kasa (V:22:3)
4. Hikka (V:22:10)
5. Kshaya (V:22:11)
6. Kamāla (V:22:12)
7. Twak Kathinyata (VI:30:3)

Management

1. Jangidi herb (XIX:34:10) - Presently the species is extinct.
2. Kushtha (V:4:1) Saussurea lappa.
3. Anjana (IV:9:8)

Atharva Veda speaks clearly about the different types of Kasa (pulmonary) diseases, Kasa (I:12:3, V:22:10), Kaas (V:22:10), Kasika (V:22:12) Kasa is the complication of Jawara (V:22:10) and also explained its management (VI:105:- (1-3).

Atharva Veda vividly explained the Rajyakshma in the name of Jayanya (VII:76:5), papma (V:22:12) and discusses very elaborately about two main causative factors, varities (VII:76:4), and complications (VII:76:3).

Causes

1. The disease is communicable from diseased persons to others through roga Jeevanu (Tuberculus bacillus).
2. Loss of Semen, due to excessive sexual intercourse.

Varities

1. Akshath - Without any ulceration in phupphusa (Lungs).
2. Sukshath - Ulceration in phupphusa (Lungs).

Complications

It effects the Asthi (bones), Amsa (shoulder blade), Mamsa (muscle), Virya (semen) and leads to the body emaciation.

Yakshma roga chikitsa is covered in III:11:3-5. This is said to lead to death and found to be common among people of durachara (bad habits). A Bovine type of tuberculosis is recognised and to eradicate it, mamsa-ghrita doopanam of cowsheds is suggested.

This diseases can be controlled by Yagnam for Agni devata is suggestive of improving Jatharagni (Hydro chloric acids) so that the Dhathu poshana (tissue nourishment) will

be maintained. This disease is communicable from husband to wife is evident from the fact that the males are more predominantly effected (98%) because of Vyavayam (sexual intercourse) where in millions and trillions of spermatozoa represents nascent amino acids which otherwise would have been useful to body for protection are lost resulting the disease due to debilitating immunity.

Atharva Veda, IV:9:3, speaks Kamala (Jaundice) as

1. Harima - due to Yellowish discolouration of skin.
2. Haritha - due to loss of Blood which leads to Aneamia.

The following hymns reveals the three types of treatment for Kamala.

1. "Both shall go up towards the sun, thy heart-burn and thy Yellowness". I:22:1
2. "With the colour of the red bull, with that we enclose thee, with red colour we enclose thee, for full length of life, that this man be free from defeats, and become not yellow". I:22:2.
3. "Those whose divinity is the Redone, the cows that are red, form after form (i.e. Limb after Limb), vigor after vigor, with them we en-

close thee". I:22:3.

These hymns reveals;

1. Surya Chikitsa: (Treatment with the sun rays)

Transferring the diseases to the Sun. If the patient exposes to the sun rays, the yellowish skin colour may change due to the ultra violet rays (vit-D) of the sun.

2. Treatment with red colour cow's milk:

It removes the Yellowness and develops the haemoglobin.

3. Oushadha chikitsa (IV:9:3)

1. Anjana mani
2. Jangidi Mani

These manis eliminate the Yellowness of the body.

Kushtha (Leprosy & allied skin disorders) is explained in Atharva Veda, I:23,24: as Kilasa and palitha. Kilasa is the name of 'white leprosy' in the Atharva Veds I:23:1. It resulted in the appearance of grey (palitha) and white (shukla, shvetha) spots all over the body.

The aetiology of Kushtha is stated in I:23:4. It effects the asthi (bone tissue) mamsa (muscle tissue), meda

(Adipose tissue) etc. dhathus (basic tissues of the body).

1. Asikni, Nakthajata (I:23:1),
2. Shyama
3. Brahma (I:24:4) etc. are the herbs mentioned for its treatment.

Mutra Krichra is mentioned in II:3 Very elaborately. The most delicate operation described is the probing of the Urethra which was prescribed to relieve of patient suffering from the retention of urine.

Atharva Ved, II, III; speaks the Kshetriya (Hereditary) diseases (The diseases able to passed down from one generation to another through the parents) and also their treatment.

1. Kshetriya nashani veeruth - II:8:2

2. Mrig shringi (a horn of the deer) - III:7:1

3. Apamarga - IV:18:7

4. Jal (Water) - III:7:5

5. Arjuna - II:8:3

6. Yava (Barley) - II:8:3

7. Tila - II:8:3

Atharva Veda mentioned the following disease in brief

1. Balasa (Kapha) -V:22

2. Unmad (mania/psychiatry) - VI:11:1,2,3

3. Shalya (Surgery) -III, IV, V.

4. Garbhadan (Obstetrics) -III:23:2,3; V:25:1,8;VI:114.

5. Vajeekarana (Aphrodisiacs) - IV:4:1,8; VI:101:3.

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सारांश

प्राचीन भारतीय संस्कृति में चिकित्सा विज्ञान विशेषतः अथर्ववेद के संदर्भ में

—ए. नारायण

प्राचीन भारत में बहुत उच्च कोटि का चिकित्सा विज्ञान प्रचलित था। मोहन्जदडो तथा हड़प्पा के पुरातात्विक प्रमाण स्वच्छता—व्यवस्था एवं स्वास्थ्य—विज्ञान के सम्बन्ध में उच्चतं सभ्यता के द्योतक हैं। वेदों में उपलब्ध सामग्रों के विश्लेषण से पता चलता है कि चारों वेद आयुर्विज्ञान विषयक विभिन्न पक्षों से सम्बंधित संदर्भों से भरे हुए हैं। अथर्ववेद को आयुर्विज्ञान का विश्वकोश समझा जाता है तथा आयुर्वेद को अथर्ववेद का उपवेद माना जाता है। प्राचीन भारत में प्रचलित आयुर्विज्ञान की कुछ झलकियों को यहां प्रस्तुत किया गया है।