

MEDICO HISTORICAL STUDY OF A SIDDHA DRUG 'VILVAM' (*Aegle marmelos*. Linn)

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ABSTRACT

Vilvam (in Tamil Language) is an important tree and its parts are being used as drugs in Siddha System of Medicine. Its Botanical Name is '*Aegle marmelos* Linn.' it belongs to the Family 'Rutaceae', Sanskrit name is 'Bilva', **English names are 'Wood apple, Stone Apple, Holy fruit tree'** and the **Indian names are 'Bael, bhel, bilwa, belaphal, Bengal Quince'**. This is a medium-sized tree occurring in the plains and upto 1000m. in the hills as well as cultivated throughout the country particularly in sacred grooves. As per the Hindu religion mythology the leaves of this tree are being offered to Lord Shiva by his devotees. As per the origin and historical aspects of Siddha System of Medicine, Lord Shiva is the founder of this System. This article describes about the Medico-Historical study of the drug Vilvam with literature collections from Non-Medical literatures (Vedas, Itihikasas, Puranas, etc). Medical literatures (Siddha, Ayurveda, Traditional Medicines, etc) and Botanical aspects.

Introduction

Vilvam also known by the name 'Shivadruma' which means the tree of Lord Shiva, is considered as an auspicious tree by Hindus. Since ancient times, the leaves have been offered in prayers to Lord Shiva. The three leaflets of this plant are also assumed to be symbolical of three Gunas (Satva, Rajo, Tamo), the three eyes of Lord Shiva, the Thrimurthies (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva). Vilvam being considered as a sacred tree is often cultivated near the premises of temples and private dwellings of Hindus. In Siddha system of Medicine, the root, flower, leaves, fruit, bark are being used as drugs. Vilvam is a semi-deciduous thorny tree belonging to the family Rutaceae. It is considered sacrilegious to destroy it. The medicinal values of this plant have also been

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reported by several researchers. Twelve varieties are cultivated in north India for their fruits.

Historical aspect

The Sanskrit name for Vilvam is 'Bilva'. Vilvam is a sacred tree and its leaves are being used in the worship of Lord Shiva. There is a mythological story behind this practice. Once Lord Shiva had drunk a highly poisonous snake venom with the intention of saving this universe from its ultimate destruction. On seeing this, his wife Devi Parvathy pressed his neck so that the poison would not go down his throat. This led to the accumulation of poison and imparted a blue colour to the neck region. The name Neelakantan which means blue-necked man thus originated. To nullify the poison of the drink Devavydyan, the doctor of Devas suggested to wear a garland made with the leaves of vilvam.

In ancient Sanskrit poems, it is frequently mentioned as an emblem of increase and fertility and it is considered to be very auspicious. Garcia d'orta physician to viceroy of Goa in the 16th century, describes the bael fruit under the name of marmelos de benguala and mentions its use in dysentery. In 1869 it was made official in the pharmacopoeia of India where it is recommended as a remedy in atonic diarrhoea and dysentery in irregularity of the bowels and in habitual constipation.

Vilvam in Vedas

'Vilvam' fruit is mentioned in *Atharvaveda* (20, 136.13) *Maitrayani Samhita* (3.9.3) *Aitareya Brahmana* (2.1) (P.106). According to Taittiriya samhita, the sacrificial post (long stout piece of wood) was made of Vilvam wood.

Vilvam in Puranas and other non-medical literature

Vilvam is a medium sized tree with three leaves together look like the trishul or the trident the emblem of Shiva. These trifoliate leaves signify the three functions of Shiva; creation, preservation and destruction. They also represent his three eyes that is why Vilvam leaves symbolically are believed to be effective in removing the sins of three births. The tree is sacred to Shiva and is worshipped by his followers on the 4th phase moon's wane between the months of maghasirsa and phalgun which is Shivaratri

day. On this day the Shiva-linga is bathed in milk, decorated and wrapped in Vilvam leaves. According to a story from *Brihaddharma purana*, Vilvam tree is formed from Goddess Lakshmi. In Banihi purana and Tantrik folklore, Lakshmi was born as a sacred cow and from her dung arose the Vilvam tree and thus become sacred since the tree is associated with Lakshmi it is also called Sri-vriksha, the tree of prosperity and good fortune.

In *Garuda purana* the Vilvam tree is mentioned as one of the sacred tree. Usually the Shivalinga is seen under the bower of Vilvam tree.

According to certain tribes of India, the tree sprang from the testes of a pig, an animal that is considered unclean. This shows the great gap that exists between the orthodox Hindu thought and that of the tribes. Most tribal people do not consider the tree sacred. The Gauria snake-charmers of Madhya Pradesh believe than an appeal to the Vilvam tree cures snake bite.

In *Ramayana*, it is mentioned that, before the battle of Rama and Ravana, Brahma took Rama to Vilvam tree growing on the seashore to invoke Devi. On the Krishnavami tithi Rama praised Devi and she assured him with a voice from heaven that he would be victorious.

A fallen tree is never used as firewood and though its fruit is highly valued, people from Kerala never eat it as it signifies the head of Shiva. Vilvam leaves are offered to Shiva on Mondays in the month of shravan. Its wood is included in Homa and the wood is said to promote fertility. The tree should be planted on the north side of the house.

In the *Sakta upapuranas*, which contain the puranas like the *Devi-purana*, the *Kalika purana*, the *Mahabhagavata purana*, the *Devi-bhagavata purana*, Vilvam tree is mentioned in many places (nava patrika). Vilvam tree was one of the nine plants used for worshipping Lord Durga. (Studies in the upapuranas)

Vamana purana occupies the 14th place in the puranic lists of the Mahapuranas. In Vamana purana vilvam is mentioned as one of the things used for worshipping Lord Shiva in the month of Sravana. It is also mentioned while describing the nature and while describing the spring season. Water containing Vilvam should be used for bath in the month of asada. Origin of this plant has been mentioned in the hands of Lakshmi.

On the seventh day of Dashehra, the night of the Great worship the Rajput kings performed the Invitation to the Bael Tree considered the most sacred of Dashehra rites. A Bael fruit was picked fresh from the tree and offered to the fierce goddess Chamunda in order to invoke her protection.

In Bengal the goddess Durga is aroused from her sleep during Durga puja by touching a twig from a Bael tree growing in a north easterly direction. It is said that the presence of a Bael and a Ber tree together indicates an underground spring.

People go around the Bael tree before starting something, as the tree is supposed to grant success in new ventures. Vasuman the King of the videhas is said to have regained his lost Kingdom by going round the Bael tree at the temple of Tiruvidaimarudur.

According to *Koorma Purana*, Shiva lives in this tree and its fruits are eaten by people of Ramyaka Varsha. This purana describes the fruit of Shiva's tree as the breast of Goddess of Plenty (Koorma Purana, II., 18.19)

Skanda purana

In the beginning of Creation, Brahma the creator made things for man and the Earth. One of them was the Vilvam tree. A man sat under this tree and began to worship the god Vishnu. Brahma named him Bilva. Pleased with his piety and devotion, Indra, the king of gods, asked Bilva to turn the wheel of administration of the Earth (This was before the kings and queens) Bilva built his house under the Bilva tree and ran the Earth.

Kapila a warshipper of Shiva, came to Bilva's house and they became good friends. One day both of them got into an argument about whether it was better to do penance as the worshippers of Vishnu did or do one's duty in the world as Shiva's followers did. Bilva's temper rose during the debate and he called the diamond weapon given by Indra and cut off Kapila's head. Bilva stopped the administration of the Earth and left the Bilva tree and went to the forest of Mahakala, where he became a devotee of Shiva.

The Bael tree is supposed to be the place of Lakshmi, who is the goddess of fortune and consort the Vishnu. Bilvapatrika (leaves of Vilvam tree) is the other name for 'Lakshmi'. She enters mortal homes and she entered prosper and make them happy. But she never entered a Brahmin's house. The explanation for this is, Brahmins pluck

Vilvam leaves, and offer them to Lord Shiva. Since Brahmins destroy the house of (Vilvam tree) of Lakshmi, She never wants to enter a brahmin's house.

Shiva Purana

According to the Shiva Purana (7 AD) the Vilvam tree is the manifest form of Lord Shiva himself, while all the great tirthas (pilgrimage places) are said to reside at its base. One who worships the Shivalingam while sitting under the Vilvam, claims this great epic, attains the state of Shiva. Washing the head by this tree is said to be the equivalent of bathing in all the sacred rivers. One who performs Bilva pooja with flowers and incense achieves Shiva loka, the abode of pure consciousness, and has happiness and prosperity bestowed upon them. The lighting of the deepak (lamp) before this tree bestows knowledge and enables the devotee to merge in Lord Shiva. The Shiva Purana also claims that if the devotee removes the new leaves from one of the branches of that tree and worships the tree with them, they will be freed from vice, while one who feeds a devotee under the Vilvam will grow in virtue.

Important Hindu Festivals related to Vilvam (Bilva) Tree

Bilva Tri-ratri Vrata	On a Tuesday of Jyestha purnima when the constellation is Jyestha; worship of the bel tree for three consecutive nights as per Hemadri's injunctions in the Skanda Purana; the vow comprises bath with water mixed with mustard seeds, partaking of sacred sattvic food (havisyanna), adorning the tree with two pieces of red cloth and placing the image of Uma-Mahesvara beneath it; homa is performed and 1,008 bilva leaves are offered; Brahmins are fed.
Sravana Krsna Ekadasi	Ceremonial offering of water to the bel tree
Bhadra Sukla Caturthi	Offering of trifoliate leaves of bel to Lord Ganesa
Bilva Nimantrana	Asvina sukla sasthi; summoning the tree-goddess and worshipping the Devi.

Bilva Saptami	Asvina sukla saptami; a twig of bel, bearing two fruits, is offered to Devi.
Bilva Navami	Asvina sukla navami; Bilva leaves are offered to Siva.

Hunter and Vilvam Tree

Another legend tells the story of a **hunter** who climbed a Vilvam tree to escape a hungry lion. The lion sat down beneath the tree and waited for the hunter to fall. As he waited in the tree all night, the hunter plucked leaves from the Vilvam tree to stay awake. The leaves, which are sacred to Shiva, fell on a Shiva linga that happened to be at the base of the tree. Shiva was pleased by the offering, inadvertent though it was, and saved the hunter. This event is commemorated on Mahashivaratri by staying up all night and offering Vilvam leaves.



Shivalinga, Hunter on Vilvam tree and a Killer under the tree

(Courtesy: Plants Myths and tradition in India)

BOTANICALASPECTS

Botanical name – *Aegle marmelos* (Linn) Correa ex Roxb.

Family – Rutaceae

Meaning of Botanical name

Aegle marmelos is the Latin name for one of the Hesperides, the three sisters who helped by a dragon, guarded the golden apples of the goddess Hera. *Marmelos* comes from the Portuguese word *marmelos de* meaning marbled.

Vernacular names

English	- Bael tree, Holy fruit tree. Hindi - Bel, Beng - Bel, Bael.
Gujarati	- Billi, Kan - Belapatri, Mal. - Kuvvalam, Kulakam
Marati	- Bel, Bael
Tamil	- Kuvilam, Vilvam, Sivadurumam
Telugu	- Bilvamu, maredu
Arabic	- Safer Jale hindi
Assami	- Bael, vael
Kashmiri	- Bel
Oriya	- Belo
Persian	- Shul, Beh hindi shull
Sindhi	- Kathori
Unani	- Belgiri
Urdu	- Bel

Botanical description

A moderate sized tree, 6.0 -7.5m high. Branches armed with straight, sharp, axillary, 2.5cm long spines, leaves trifoliate, occasionally digitate, five foliate, leaflets ovate or ovate-lanceolate, acuminate crenate, lateral sessile, terminal long petioled. Flowers greenish white, in short axillary panicles fruit globose, grey or yellowish, rind woody. Seeds many, oblong, embedded in sacs covered with thick orange coloured sweet pulp.



Vilvam tree with fruits and branches

Distribution

Throughout the deciduous forests of India, ascending to an attitude up to 1200m in the western Himalaya and also in Andaman Islands.

Parts used

Root, leaf, fruit, bark

Actions and uses

The roots are sweet, astringent, bitter and febrifuge, useful in diarrhoea, dysentery, dyspepsia, gastralgia, palpitation, seminal weakness, uropathy, vomiting, intermittent fever, swellings and gastric irritability in infants, leaves are astringent laxative and expectorant and useful in ophthalmia, deafness, diabetes. The unripe fruits are bitter, acid, sour, astringent, digestive and stomachic and are useful in diarrhea, dysentery, and stomachalgia. The ripe fruit are astringent sweet, aromatic, cooling, febrifuge, laxative and tonic and are good for heart and brain and in dyspepsia.

Pharmacognosy

Root bark

It is cream yellow to yellowish brown in colour, curved, warty with a number of cracks and fissures on the outer surface, 3-5mm thick. Cork is characterised by a wide zone showing 4-7 stratifications groups of stone cells in phellderms. Concentric groups of fibres extending from one medullary ray to another and prisms of calcium oxalate and circular starch grains are observed. Powder mounted in nitrocellulose gives violet fluorescence. Powder as such gives white with violet tinge fluorescence.

Stem bark

It is grey in colour, flat or channeled with warty, cracked and fissured external surface 4-8mm thick. Cork shows 5-8 stratifications. Groups of stone cells are present in phelloderm and also in phloem. Concentric groups of fibres extending from one medullary ray to another and prisms of Calcium oxalate and circular starch grains are observed. Powder mounted in nitrocellulose gives buff fluorescence. Powder as such gives brownish yellow fluorescence.

Fruit

Fruit sub-gulobose. 5-18 cm in diameter, externally greenish when young, yellowish – brown when ripe, rind about 1.5mm – 3mm thick, hard and woody surface smooth or slightly granular bearing a circular scar at the point of attachment with peduncle, carpels 10-15, central, each containing several hairy seeds embedded in yellowish brown, extremely sticky mucilage, seeds oblong flat, woody and having white hair, fresh pulp of ripe fruit brown, of sticky shreds, dried pulp hard and pale to dark red in colour, frequently breaks away from the rind during, leaving a thin layer attached to it. Odour faintly aromatic, taste mucilaginous and slightly astringent.

Physical constants

Fruit-Total ash- not more than 4%. Acid insoluble ash-not more than 1%. Alcohol soluble extractive-not less than 6% water soluble extractive – not less than 50%.

Root bark	– Total ash – 10.62%
Acid insoluble ash	– 0.96%
Stem bark	– Total ash – 8.62%
Acid insoluble ash	– 0.92%.

Chemical constituents

Marmelosin (imperatorin), alloimperatorin, marmelide, tannic acids, marmin, umbelliferone, skimmianine, isoimperatorin, isopimpinellin, marmeline, skimmin, marmesin, marmesinin, fatty acids and essential oil components are the compounds reported from this plant.

Pharmacological activities

Hypoglycaemic, spasmogenic, antiviral, cardiac stimulant antiemetic, anthelmintic, anti bacterial (Seed oil) antidiarrhoeal, antifungal. Skimmianine showed sedative, hypnotic, analgesic, anti convulsive, antipyretic activities in various experimental animals.

Therapeutic evaluation

Fruit pulp powder was found effective on intestinal parasites particularly on ankylostoma. The drug controlled loose and irregular motion and pain in abdomen. The alkaloid aegeline present in leaves was found efficacious in asthma. One medullary ray to another and prisms of calcium oxalate and circular starch grains are observed. Powder mounted in nitrocellulose gives buff fluorescence. Powder as such gives bronish yellow fluorescence.

Substitutes and adulterants

Bael fruits are occasionally substituted with wood apple (*Feronia limonia* linn) and mangosten (*Garcinia mangostana* Linn)

Propagation and cultivation

Good sandy loam soil, sunny situation warm humid climate are suitable for cultivation of this plant. It is generally propagated by seeds. Sowing is done in June or

July. The development of seedlings is very slow. They require at least a year in the nursery to be fit for transplanting. They should be transplanted in rainy season. It is also propagated by root cuttings, layers and stem cuttings treating with IBA (4000ppm) using quick dip method. In vitro propagation by tissue culture technique has also been found successful.

Medicinal uses of Vilvam

Root

In the treatment against snake venom the root is made into a paste and applied on the eyelids of the person bitten by the snake. The root bark decoction is used in the treatment of intermittent fever, pain in the abdomen and palpitation of the heart. Decoction of the root with sugar is used to check diarrhoea and gastro irritability in infants. Besides, it also improves appetite and relieves nausea. The root extract is also reported to be good to cure urinary troubles.

Leaves

The leaves are widely used as digestive, laxative and febrifuge. It is also reported to be effective for the treatment of tumours, ulcers and certain type of cancers. The leaf extract is applied on the forehead to curb nausea. Similarly a poultice of the leaves is applied to the chest in acute bronchitis. The leaves fried in ghee and mixed with sugar or honey is used to enhance the memory power. The leaves are also reported to be good to prevent premature graying and falling of hairs and hence used to make hair oil. Fresh leaf juice diluted with water is used as a remedy for catarrhs and also used as an ophthalmic lotion. The decoction of leaves is also used to curb asthmatic complaints. Leaf juice mixed with black pepper is used to treat jaundice. The trifoliate leaves have minute translucent glands containing volatile oil. Hence water boiled with Vilvam is used for bathing which removes body odour.

Flowers

The flowers are effective in the treatment of epilepsy. It is good for certain eye diseases and gastric disorders. The flowers ground and mixed with powdered pepper are used to stop vomiting and dysentery.

Fruit

Ripe fruit is good for heart and brain. `Bel sharbat' prepared by mixing the fruit pulp with sugar, water and tamarind juice is very useful for stomach and intestinal disorders. The unripe fruit with fennel seeds and ginger in decoction is used for the effective treatment of piles. The dried and powdered unripe fruit mixed with curd is used to cure chronic diarrhea and irritation of alimentary tract.

Other uses

The rind of the unripe fruit yields a yellow dye. The dried fruits after removing the pulp, are used as containers. An adhesive is prepared from the fruit pulp which is to make varnishes and cementing mixtures. The aromatic wood of Vilvam was used to make special couches for the rheumatic patients.

Ayurvedic Aspects

Other Name

Śrīphala

Properties and Action

Rasa	:	Kaṭu, Tikta, Kaṣāya
Guṇa	:	Laghu, Rūkṣa
Vīrya	:	Uṣṇa
Vipāka	:	Kaṭu
Karma	:	Dīpana, Pācana, Grāhī, Pittakūt, Vātakaphahara, Balya

Therapeutic Uses

Pravāhikā, Agnimāndya, Grahaṇīroga

Important Formulations

Bilvādi Leha, Būhat Gaṅgādhara Cūrṇa

UNANI ASPECTS

Unani name: Belgiri or safarjal Hindi

Temperament: cold and wet

Action

Fresh fruit is laxative

Dry fruit: Astringent, stomachic, digestive, exhilarant

Bark: Antipyretic

Leaves: Antidiabetic

Uses

Fresh pulp is used to remove constipation. Its syrup is used for stomach and intestinal ailments. Dried powder of fruit is used in dysentery, diarrhoea, acute and chronic diseases of stomach, hemorrhages. Decoction of leaves is given for fever, Extract of fresh leaves useful in diabetes.

Unani formulation: Sharbat Belgary.

Siddha Aspects

Other names

Kusabi, koovilam, koovilai, Shivathurumam Ninmali, Madhooram.

Part used

Leaf, flower, unripe-fruit, fruit, root, gums, bark.

Taste

Leaf, flower, unripe fruit, root - astringent

Fruit

Taste – Astringent (Thubarppu) with mild bitterness.

Actions:

Leaf

Diaphoretic

Aphrodisiac

Febrifuge

Flower, fruit, tender fruit

Astringent

Digestive

Stomachic

Fruits

Astringent

Laxative

Stomachic

Root

Aphrodisiac

Properties and Uses

Flower cures mantham, tender fruit cures peptic ulcer. Fruit improves eyesight. Root cures peptic ulcer, dropsy, thirst, fever, common cold, and body pain.

Leaf

The leaves of Vilvam are used for worshipping Lord Shiva. The tender leaves are heated for sometime and tied in a cloth. It is used to give fomentation in redness of eyes.

The leaf juice is mixed with pepper powder and it is given for dropsy, jaundice. This mixture is mixed with water or honey and given for fever and cold.

The leaf juice is mixed with cow's urine and 80-170ml is given for anaemia, dropsy, swelling.

Flower

The flower is made into a Kashayam or the dried powder of flowers can be given for mantham (indigestion).

Tender fruit

Tender fruit is ground well into a paste and 2-6gm is given with buffalo curd for peptic ulcer and dysentery.

Green fruit

The dried powder of green fruit can be given for dysentery. 1-2gm for children 2 - 4gm for adults.

Fruit pulp

The dried powder of fruit pulp can be given for diarrhoea. Dosage 2-4mg

Root

The root is one of the ingredients in Sarapunga vilvathy legium.

Important formulations

Sarapunga vilvathy legium

Pitta Sura kudineer

Vilvathy ilakam

Discussion and conclusion

The Siddha drug vilvam (*Aegle marmelos* linn) has immense therapeutic potential and different parts of this plant are used indigenously for the treatment of many human ailments.

Bel fruit is sub-spherical to pear shaped measuring two-five inches by two-three inches, with a thick hard woody rind which becomes greyish brown on ripening. They are widely used in the treatment of gastro intestinal disorders especially for chronic diarrhoea and piles. 'Bel sharbat' prepared by mixing the fruit pulp with sugar, water and tamarind juice is very useful for stomach and intestinal disorders. The unripe fruit with fennel seeds and ginger in decoction is used for the effective treatment of piles. The combination of five parts of *Aegle marmelos*, viz, root, bark, leaves, flowers and unripe fruits in proper proportion is effective for certain mental disorders.

The leaves are widely used as digestive, laxative and febrifuge. The root of vilvam is one of the ingredients in vilvathy elagam.

In Historical aspect, it has widespread references in Vedas like Atharvaveda and puranas like Garudapurana, vamanapurana, sakta upapuranas, skanda purana, koorma purana, shiva purana etc

The anti-protozoal and anti fungal activity of the leaves was reported by Henry and Brown (1924) and Rana et al. (1997). In a study conducted in ICAR it is reported that the fruit of *Aegle marmelos* is superior to mango in possessing higher percentage of carbohydrate (Rajarajan, 1997).

A study was conducted by Shoba and Thomas (2001) to evaluate the effect of the unripe fruit of *Aegle marmelos* for their anti diarrhoeal potential against castor oil induced diarrhoea in mice. The methanolic extract significantly reduced induction time of diarrhoea and total weight of faeces. The result thus established the efficacy of the unripe fruit of *Aegle* as an anti diarrhoeal agent. The roots, leaves, bark and fruits of *Aegle marmelos* are rich in many bioactive compounds. (Chopra et al. 1986, Thomas et al 2000; Sabnis and Daniel 1990; D'Rozario 1999).

Thus this article highlights the immense medicinal, potential, historical and botanical uses of Vilvam (*Aegle marmelos* Linn.).

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सारांश

सिद्ध औषध 'विल्वम्' का चिकित्सा ऐतिहासिक अध्ययन

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विल्वम् (तमिल भाषा) एक महत्वपूर्ण वृक्ष है। सिद्ध चिकित्सा पद्धति में इसके अवयवों को औषध के रूप में प्रयुक्त किया जाता है। इसका वानस्पतिक नाम 'ईगल मारमेलस' है। यह 'रुटेसी' कुल का वृक्ष है। इसे संस्कृत भाषा में 'बिल्व' तथा अंग्रेजी भाषा में 'वूड एपिल, स्टोन एपिल, होली फ्रूट ट्री' कहा जाता है। इसके भारतीय नाम 'बील, बेल, बिल्व, बेलफल, बंगाल क्वीन्स' हैं। यह एक मध्यम आकार का समतल भूमि एवं पहाड़ी क्षेत्र में १००० मीटर तक की ऊँचाई पर होने वाला वृक्ष है जिसे सम्पूर्ण देश में उगाया जाता है। हिन्दु धर्म की मान्यताओं के अनुसार इस वृक्ष की पत्तियाँ भगवान शिव को उनके भक्तों के द्वारा अर्पित की जाती हैं। सिद्ध चिकित्सा पद्धति की ऐतिहासिक उत्पत्ति के अनुसार भगवान शिव को इस चिकित्सा पद्धति का संस्थापक माना जाता है। प्रस्तुत लेख में विल्वम् से सम्बन्धित चिकित्सा ऐतिहासिक अध्ययन को वैदिक साहित्य, चिकित्सा साहित्य एवं वानस्पतिक साहित्य से प्रस्तुत किया गया है।