

MEDICINAL TREES AND PLANTS OF THE ATHARVAVEDA AND THEIR USES IN VARIOUS DISEASES

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Atharvaveda the fourth Veda is known for the treatment of medicine that has helped in sustaining the health of the people in ancient time. Every nation has their traditional method of treatment, which exists till date. This traditional method of treatment takes the care of the people's health physically, mentally and spiritually. Vedic physician Aswinas, Indra etc., adopted the method of treatment from *Rgveda*.

In Vedic age, mainly in *Atharvaveda* mantras and prayers are used along with medicine. Science of medicine is started in the age of Vedas. The Vedic people who desired to live for hundred years with prosperity and good health; they developed a holistic approach in the field of healthcare and medical systems. This emphasizes the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of a human being. *Atharvaveda* contains a detailed description of various aspects of medical Science. In *Atharvaveda* description of anatomical structures of human digestion and metabolism, blood circulation, diseases causative factors, primitive measures, treatment with herbs, minerals and surgical techniques etc. have been described.

Atharvaveda describes various body-aches, physical disorders and sickening ailments.¹ No plants are useless. A distinctive part of Vedic medicine is its varied description of the local plants. These are mainly occurring in the Atharvevedic hymns. *Atharvaveda* provides the name of plants and their uses in various diseases. This paper is an attempt to highlight all these aspects.

Medicinal herbs and plants of the *Atharvaveda* and their uses

- (1) *Apāmārga* (*Achyranthes aspera* Linn. *Amaranthaceae*) : This plant is found in all over India. It is a road-side plant which is known as *biyoni-sāvotā* in Assamese. In the 4th *kāṇḍa* of the *Atharvaveda*² it is addressed as *Sahadevi* by *Sāyana* in his commentary and Seer *Śukra* praises this herb to wipe out all kinds of evils and witchcraft etc. The Etymological meaning

of the word *apa- mārḡ* is “to wipe out”.³ *Sāyana* at AV.VI, 59, 1 explains *Arundhati* as *Sahadevi*.

Cf., Śarma yacchatvaosdhiḥ saha devīrarundhati/ (AV., VI.59.2)

Various types of diseases, enemies, demons and sins are wipe out by the influence of *Apāmārga*.⁴ Now a days it is used as a drug of choice for urinary difficulties like calculus (the stone like formation in certain part of the body) and irritation in the bladder and the urethra. It is also used in various other diseases like anorexia, colic (pain of the bowels), ear infection, bronchitis and skin diseases. In ancient time *apāmārga* is the first medicine to be used to counter pain and swelling associated with a scorpion bite. The blossoms of *apāmārga* are used against serpent’s poison.⁵

- (2) *Arundhati* : The name *Arundhati*, appears to be the name of a climbing plant having healing properties⁶. The plant *Arundhati* is also known as *rohiṇi* and *lākṣā*⁷ and used for stopping the release of blood from the injury caused by weapon.⁸ Bloomfield states that the plant is used to cure external injuries, and fractures of bones. *Sāyana* and *Kauśika*⁹ say that the wound is caused by a weapon and it is cured by the plant *Arundhati*. Bloomfield also says that the word *ruh* means “cause to grow”. Therefore, it is used as the remedy and the disease in which the lost parts of the body are ready to grow.¹⁰ The plant *rohiṇi* joins bone with bone, hair with hair, skin with skin and marrow with marrow.¹¹ *Atharvaveda* says that *Arundhati*¹² makes the cow-stall in milk, and the man (*puruṣa*) free from disease (*Yakṣmā*).
- (3) *Karira* : (*Capparis decidua (Forsk.) Edgew./ aphylla Roth Capparidaceae*) *Kauśika* prescribes the use of *Karira* grass is used against worms.¹³
- (4) *Kuṣṭha (Saussurea lappa Clarke Compositae)* : The plant *Kuṣṭha* occupies an important place in *Atharvaveda* as medicinal plant next to the Soma plant. According to the medical book *Kuṣṭha* is costus speciosus, or arabicus. It is the killer of all water born diseases. In the *Atharvaveda*, in three hymns¹⁴ *Kuṣṭha* plant is praised due to its healing properties. The original birth place of *Kuṣṭha* plant is the high peak of the *Himālaya* (kasmir, sindhu region etc.)¹⁵ It is a medicine

against fever.¹⁶ It also removes diseases like, *Yakṣmā*, *takman*, headache, and evil of the eyes and body.¹⁷ In the *R̥gveda*, there not found the name of the plant *Kuṣṭha*.

- (5) *Guggulu* (*Commiphora mukul* Engl./ *Balsamodendum m. Burseraceae*): The plant *Guggulu* is used as the medicine of *Yakṣmā*. One who breaths the odour of *gugglu* plant the *Yakṣmā* scatter away from him like antelops from a wild beast.¹⁸ The born place of *guggulu* is in *Sindhū* (Indus) river.
- (6) *Nili* (*Indigofera tinctoria* Linn. *Papilionaceae*): This plant is described in two hymns of the *Atharvaveda* as a dark-coloured plant.¹⁹ This plant is used against white leprosy or *śoetakuṣṭha*. It is believed that in the *Atharvaveda* the darkness of the plant *Nili* removes away the white spot of the body of a man. In these hymns white leprosy is called as *kilāsa* and gray spots are called *palita*. Warding away this disease *haridrā*, *rāmā*, *kṛsnā* are used along with plant *nili* or *asikini*. A paste prepared from these plants or their leaves would give black colour to the skin.²⁰ *Kauśika* describes detail use of the *nili* plant in 26.22-24. Another plan *āsuri* or *syāmā* is also mentioned as the medicine of leprosy. *Sāyana* says that *āsuri* is another name of the plant *nili*.
- (7) *Pāthā* (*Securinega leucopyrus* (Willd.) Muell-Arg. *Euphorbiaceae*): In the *Atharvaveda* hymn VIII.2 describes the medicinal power of the plant *Pāthā*. It is used in prolonging one's life. There *jivalā*, *naghāriṣā*, *jivanti* are also praised by seer *Brahmā* for longevity of life.
- (8) *Pipali* (*Piper longum* Linn. *Piperaceae*): *pipali* is used as remedy of all kinds of diseases. It is mainly used to cure wind-diseases and evil eyes. It cures the injuries caused by missiles and blows. *Sāyana* says that it also cures wind-diseases means *vātikṛta* or *vātaroga*.²¹
- (9) *pr̥ṣṇiparni* (*Cyperus* sp. *Cyperaceae*): The plant *pr̥ṣṇiparni* is employed as devourers of the embryo in the womb. *Keśava*, at *Kauśika sūtra* 26, 36 prescribes it as a far more general remedy for one who overtakes the misfortune such as miscarriage and demons of various shorts. *Pr̥ṣṇiparni* is the same with *lakṣmaṇā*, a plant having red spots on its leaves, in which the form of a child is claimed to be seen. It is credited

with the power to cure barrenness of women. It also known as *putradā, putrajanani*.²²

- (10) *Nitanti* : This plant mentioned in the AV.VI.136 used for the growth of hair. The commentary explains the plant addressed to be the *kācamācu* etc. It is used in hair-falls, fasten, black, strengthen and increase the hair. This herb which is *Jamadagni* dug for his daughter, as hair increaser that one *Vitahavya* brought from Asita's house.²³
- (11) *Gangidā* (*Grewia populifolia* Tiliaceae) : This plant is used against a variety of diseases, fever (*takmana*), internal sores (*balāsa*), and other minor manifestations, or symptoms, designated as *gambhā, visarā,* and *visarika, āsarika* and *prishtyāmayā*.²⁴
- (12) *Varaṇa* : *Crataeva nurvala/ religiosa/ magna* Hook & Forst. *Capparidaceae*. This herb mentioned in AV.VI.85 as the healer of *Yakṣmā* which has entered in the body of a man.
- (13) *Soma* (*Sarcostemma acidum* Voigt/ *brevistigma* W&A./ *Asclepias acida* *Asclepiadaceae*): *Soma* the king of all plants, describes in the AV.IV.1 as the remover of poison. Drinking of *soma* makes the poison harmless. The Brahman was born first with ten heads, with ten mouths and drank *soma* and he made the poison sapless.²⁵
- (14) *Ābayu* : AV.VI.16 is addressed to the plant *ābayu* whose juice and gruel are eaten for curing eye –diseases. The juice of this plant is very sharp. *Vihalha* is the father and *Madāvati* is the mother of this plant.²⁶
- (15) *Śami* : The plant *śami* is used as the medicine against fall of hair and baldness of a man.²⁷ It is also used some other diseases.
- (16) *Mūñja* (*Saccharum/ Erianthus arundinaceum* Retz. *Gramineae*) : The disease is called *āsrāva* (Flux) and the remedy against it is mentioned to be the *mūñja* grass.²⁸

Conclusion

Dependence of man on plant resources, especially for the medicinal purposes, is as old as the human civilization. People throughout the world use medicinal plants and have their

effectiveness due to their inherent medicinal properties. Relatively, expensive allopathic treatment may lead people both in rural and urban areas, depending on the herbal medicines. Atharvavedic plants were used to cure lots of deadly diseases. But some of the Atharvanic medicines were not just the use of medicinal herbs but it always requires the recitation of mantras, the magic charms also.

References :

- ¹ AV., IX.8.1-21
- ² *ibid.*, IV.17-19
- ³ Bloomfield. M., SBE., p.393
- ⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.*, XIII. 8,4,4
- ⁵ Shende. N.J. The Religion and Philosophy of the *Atharvaveda.*, p.35
- ⁶ AV., IV.12.1
- ⁷ *Kauśika Sūtra*, 28.14
- ⁸ AV., IV.12
- ⁹ *Kausika Sūtra.*, 28.5,6,14
- ¹⁰ Bloomfield, SBE 42, p.386
- ¹¹ AV., IV. 12
- ¹² *ibid.*, VI.59.2
- ¹³ *Kauśika Sūtra.*, 28.20-26
- ¹⁴ AV., V.4; VI.95; XIX, 39
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, V.4.2
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, V.4.6
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, V.4.6-10
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, XIX.38.1-2
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, I.23/24
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, I.23.1-3
- ²¹ *ibid.*, VI.109.1-3
- ²² *ibid.*, II.25.1
- ²³ *ibid.*, VI.136, 137
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, II,4, 2; XIX, 34,10
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, IV, 6.1
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, VI, 16,1-2

²⁷ *ibid.*, VI.30.2-3

²⁸ *ibid.*, I.2.4

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