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## A Critical Review of Emergence of The Ayurvedic Tradition In *Vedic* Literature

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### Abstract

India is a land of wisdom. It has been gifted with intellectuals who in ancient times were called the rishis (sages) and are now called scientists. These intellectuals transmitted their knowledge orally, for many centuries from one generation to next, in verse form to aid memorization, before they were written down. No other living tradition can claim scriptures as numerous and ancient as those of India. The important amongst these are Vedas, Upanishads, Epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita. These are the crowning glory of the Indian civilization. India rightly declares itself as the proud owner of an ancient living health science Ayurveda. The concepts described in this science are true as much today as they were in the olden days. This science too has its origin in the Vedas. The present study was conducted to briefly review the concepts of ayurveda mentioned in the Vedas and to study their effects on the modern humans. The classical texts were studied and analyzed in depth to find out when, how and in what form the science of healing emerged in the Vedic literature.

**Key words:** Rishis, literature, Vedas, Ayurveda, Traditional medicine

### 1. Introduction

*Vedas* literally mean "knowledge". These are large texts composed in *sanskrit* by ancient sages of India. These are the oldest of literature and scriptures of *Hinduism*.<sup>[1, 2]</sup> *Hindus* consider the Vedas to be *apauruseya*, which means "that which is composed not by men but by superhumans"<sup>[3]</sup>. The creation of *Vedas* is credited to Lord *Brahma*<sup>[5]</sup>. In the Indian epic of *Mahabharata*, the *Vedic* hymns themselves declare that *vedas* were skillfully created by ancient sages, just as a chariot is built by a carpenter. *Vedas* are also called *shruti* ("what is heard") literature. The *Veda* are considered disclosures seen by ancient sages after intense meditation, and texts that have been carefully preserved since ancient times.<sup>[4]</sup>

### 2. Aims & Objectives

1. Briefly review the *Vedic* literature and classical texts available in written form.
2. Provide a brief account of clinical manifestations especially insights from Ayurveda that have a direct influence on the health of individuals.
3. Search evidences that link Traditional Indian Medical Sciences concepts mentioned in *Vedic* Literature scientifically with modern medical advances.

### 3. Materials & Methods

1. *Ayurvedic* Texts and available commentaries related with *Vedic* Literature were explored for the references and understanding the facts related to health science.
2. Classical texts of Ayurveda and other texts were screened for interpretations
3. These references were compiled, analyzed, and discussed for a thorough and in-depth understanding of the concept of origin of Ayurvedic Literature and its originating links with *Vedas*
4. Classical literature (*Samhitas* and commentaries) have been critically analyzed and reviewed.

### 4. Results

#### Ayurveda as a health science:

The *Atharvaveda* contains mantras and verses for treating a variety of ailments. For example, the verses in hymn 4.15 of the recently discovered *Paippalada* version of the *Atharvaveda*,

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discuss how to deal with an open fracture, and how to wrap the wound with *Rohini* plant *Ficus infectoria*, native to India):<sup>[28]</sup>  
— *Atharvaveda* 4.15, *Paippalada Edition* <sup>[28]</sup>

### Hymns used to cure fever and other ailments

Numerous hymns of the *Atharvaveda* are prayers and *mantras* wishing a dear one to get over some sickness and become healthy again, along with comforting the family members. The *Vedic* era assumption was that diseases were caused by evil spirits or demonic forces that entered the body of a victim to cause sickness.<sup>[29]</sup> Hymn 5.21 of the *Paippalada* edition of the text states it.

— *Atharvaveda* 5.21, *Paippalada Edition*, Translated by Alexander Lubotsky<sup>[30]</sup>

### Medication from herbs

Several hymns in the *Atharvaveda* such as hymn 8.7 and the *Rigveda's* hymn 10.97 are a praise of medicinal herbs and plants, suggesting the medicinal and health value of plants and herbs. This seems to be an emerging field of knowledge in ancient India<sup>[31]</sup>

— *Atharvaveda* 8.7, *Shaunakiya Edition* <sup>[32]</sup>

*Acharya Sushruta*, remembered for his contributions to surgery, credits *Atharvaveda* as a foundation.<sup>[33]</sup> Similarly, the verse 30.21 of the *Caraka Samhita*, states its respect for the *Atharvaveda*:

Therefore, the physician who has inquired [in verse 30.20] about [which *Veda*], devotion to the *Atharvaveda* is ordered from among the four: *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*.

— *Sutrasthana* 30.21, *Atharvaveda*

Ayurveda is assigned a place as a secondary *Veda* (*upveda*)<sup>[34]</sup>

Primitive medicine was characterized by vision seeing herbs as natural medicine and believing (mystic faith and magic). These beliefs were widened and developed into thinking experimentation in later ages. There are four *Vedas* from amongst which *Rigveda* is the oldest. Several written manuscripts have been found which prove that Ayurveda as a science has its origin in the *Vedas*. The art of treatment and medicines as described in ayurveda is found to be the same as that found in *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Some medicinal plant names from the *Atharvaveda* and other *Vedas* can be found in subsequent Ayurveda literature.<sup>[39]</sup>

*Susruta*, one of the great Ayurveda *Acharyas* says in his *Samhita* (1.1.5): "Ayurveda is an *upanga* of the *Atharvaveda*, containing 100,000 verses in one thousand chapters. *Brahma* is the author of these verses." The *Atharvaveda* mentions several causes of diseases, both external and internal: possession by demons or spirits, anger of gods, change of season, worms, loss of *tridoshaj* balance, heredity, unwholesome food<sup>[40]</sup>, human anatomy, daily regimen, herbal treatment and surgical procedures are described in the *vedic* literature and the same have been further elaborately detailed in Ayurveda. These concepts have been found to be very beneficial in simplifying the life of the modern man if studied in detail and applied in our daily routine.

### 5. Analysis

The sacred scripture of *Aryans*, the *Vedas*, which dealt with philosophy and rational thinking led to the concepts of reasoning. Advancements were made in Medicine together with religion. A long and healthy life was considered essential for religious performances. This led to great changes in the concepts of treatment, though the influence of mystic faith, magical and religious rites still remained. Examples of these

are found abundantly in the *Atharvaveda* which deals with fasting, charm, spell, offerings, incantations, magic and witchcraft for the treatment of diseases, along with the use of vegetable products, animal substances and metals as catalysts. Bath and exposure to sun-rays<sup>[35]</sup> were recommended for the treatment of diseases. Treatment of diseases by homeopathic medicine have been described in the *Kausika Sutra*<sup>[36]</sup>: e.g. the treatment of patients suffering from jaundice was done by keeping a yellow bird tied near the bed of the patient, treatment of dropsy by spraying cold water on the patient, and treatment of a patient suffering from colic with by using an amulet containing the splinter of a spear.

The *Atharvaveda* classifies drugs into two classes: (i) *Aayuyai* (those which prolong life), (ii) *Bhaishajyani* (those which cure diseases). The *tridoshaj* theory of disease is first described in the *Atharvaveda*. The three *doshas* in their state of equilibrium were recognized as the basic factors for health; and vitiation of any one or more of these in the body caused diseases. *Atharvaveda* gives a detailed account of the symptoms of many diseases. Measures for personal and public health have also been described in the *Vedic* literature<sup>[37]</sup>. Ideas of the physiology of digestion leading to the formation of chyle, its circulation through body channels and an improved knowledge of anatomy are found in the *Vedic* literature. There is a record of 360 bones and bone marrows, 1,440 cells, 2,880 tendons, 700 vital parts, 100 arteries, nine orifices, eight basic elements in the human body<sup>[38]</sup>. Surgery too made progress in the *Vedic* age. Tools, bamboo splinters with sharp edges were used for surgery. The *Vedic* age may thus be regarded as the intermediary period in medicine between the irrational magic medicine of the pre-*Vedic* age and the scientific medicine of the post-*Vedic* or Ayurvedic age that followed it.

### 6. Discussion

*Vedas* are among the oldest sacred texts.<sup>[7]</sup> Transmission of texts in the *Vedic* period was by oral tradition alone. Due to the transient character of the manuscript material (betula bark or palm leaves), surviving manuscripts rarely exceed an age of a few hundred years.<sup>[8]</sup> The Sampurnanand Sanskrit University has a *Rigveda* manuscript from the 14th century<sup>[9]</sup>. There are many older *Veda* manuscripts in Nepal that are dated from the 11th century onwards<sup>[10]</sup>

Types: There are four *Vedas*:<sup>[6]</sup>

1. *Rigveda*
2. *Samaveda*
3. *Yajurveda*
4. *Atharvaveda*

The first three were called "*trayī vidyā*" (the triple science)

#### 1. *Rigveda*

The *Rigveda* is the oldest of the *Vedas*. It consists of 1,028 *Vedic Sanskrit* hymns, 10,600 verses and is organized into ten books (*mandalas*)<sup>[11]</sup>. The hymns are dedicated to gods and goddesses. The books were composed by poets belonging to different groups over a period of several centuries. The *Rigveda* begins with a small book addressed to *Agni*, *Indra* and other gods, all arranged according to decreasing total number of hymns in each deity collection. The number of hymns per book increases. There are similarities between the mythology, rituals and linguistics in *Rigveda* and those found in ancient central Asia and *Hindukush* (Afghanistan) regions<sup>[12]</sup>. Only one version of the *Rigveda* is known to have survived into the modern era<sup>[13]</sup>. *Rigveda* manuscripts were selected for writing in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007<sup>[14]</sup>

## 2. Samaveda

The *Samaveda Samhita* consists of 1549 stanzas, taken mainly from the *Rigveda* [15]. The *samhita* consists of two main parts. The first part includes four melody collections and the second part three "books" (*aarcika*) [15]. The early sections of *Samaveda* begin with *Agni* and *Indra* hymns. The later sections of the *Samaveda* consist of songs.

## 3. Yajurveda

The *Yajurveda Samhita* consists of mantras written in the form of prose [16]. It is a compilation of ritual offering *mantras* that were recited by priests while an individual performed ritual actions before the *yajna* fire [16]. The earliest and most ancient layer of *Yajurveda samhita* includes about 1,875 verses that have their foundation in the *Rigveda*. The *Yajurveda* has been the primary source of information about sacrifices during *Vedic* times [17].

There are two major groups of texts in this *Veda*:

- *Krishna* (Black)
- *Shukla* (White)

**Krishna:** This denotes "un-arranged collection" of verses in *Yajurveda*. It intersperses the *Samhita* with *Brahmana* commentary. Of the Black *Yajurveda*, texts from four major schools have survived (*Maitrayani*, *Katha*, *Kapisthala-Katha*, *Taittiriya*),

**Shukla:** This denotes "arranged collection" of verses in *Yajurveda* [18]. It separates the *Samhita* from its *Brahmana* (the *Shatapatha Brahmana*), while of the White *Yajurveda*, texts from two major schools (*Kanva* and *Madhyandina*) have survived. Many different versions of the *Yajurveda* have been found in different parts of South Asia [19].

## 4. Atharvaveda

This is the text 'belonging to the *Atharvan* and *Angirasa* poets. It has about 760 hymns, and about 160 of the hymns are in common with the *Rigveda*. Some sections are in prose. Two versions of the text – *Paippalada* and the *Shaunakiya* – are available in the modern times [20]. The *Atharvaveda* is sometimes called the "*Veda* of magical formulas" [21]. The *Atharvaveda* has been a primary source for information about *Vedic* culture, the customs and beliefs, the aspirations and frustrations of everyday *Vedic* life, as well as those associated with kings and governance. The text also includes hymns dealing with the two major rituals of passage – marriage and cremation.

### Origin of Ayurveda mentioned In Vedas:

The first recorded forms of Ayurveda as medical science texts evolved from the *Vedas* [22, 23]. Ayurveda is called *upaveda* or "auxiliary knowledge" in *Vedic* tradition. The origins of Ayurveda are also found in *Atharvaveda* [24, 25] which contains 114 hymns described as magical cures for disease. There are various legendary accounts of the origin of Ayurveda, e.g. that it was received by *Dhanvantari* from *Brahma* [26, 27].

It has also been quoted that the writings of Ayurveda were influenced by a lost text written by the sage *Agnivesa*. Ayurveda is one of the few systems of medicine developed in ancient times that is still widely practiced in modern times. *Acharyas* have confirmed that Ayurveda is also part of the *Vedas*. Ayurveda is treated as *Upaveda* of *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Ayurveda is treated as *Panchamaveda* (5<sup>th</sup> *veda*). In Ayurveda there are some "*paramparas*" (Knowledge passed on from Gods) called *Daiva parampara*, *Siddha parampara*

and *Rishi parampara*:

*Daiva parampara* claims that the knowledge of Ayurveda was revealed by Lord *Brahma* and passed on to *Ashwini kumar* through *Prajapati*. *Ashwini Kumar* taught Ayurveda to *Indra*. From *Indra*, Ayurveda was passed on to a Saint called *Bhardwaj*.

## 7. Conclusion

After a critical discussion based on available references and resources, conclusion can be drawn that there are a lot to learn from ancient tradition. Many unsolved questions still remain as to how much knowledge we will be able to draw from this past wisdom. Many new diseases are everyday being identified, explored, explained, and introduced in modern science. Scientists are able to work upon the cause and pathology of diseases up to the DNA level. Ayurveda definitely contains the solution of every problem faced by mankind but we still need to convert the fundamental principles into practical application which links from *Vedas* and then formulate the treatment protocol including advanced integrated medicinal management. Many concepts in Ayurveda are untouched or unexplored till date. It is imperative that unless we link our basic sciences to modern advances our objective of establishing Ayurveda as a global tradition will remain unfulfilled. So it is the time when we research our old manuscripts, go through a thorough study and start applying those concepts and basics in our daily life style. As *Vedas* are an extensive work and no person can claim to have studied it completely, a brief account of the principles mentioned in the texts has been presented here with the objective of providing solutions to all. Still further work remains to be done to fully extract the essence of *Vedas* and ayurveda to provide relief to the ailing mankind.

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