

Medical Treatment and Medicinal Charms Mentioned in the Atharvanic Literature

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Abstract: - The ancient Vedic texts Provides us with valuable information and guide lines on various multi-faced aspects of human life. The present discussion is limited to the medical treatment and medicinal charms mentioned in the Atharvanic literature with specific consideration to Kausikasutra for better understanding of the rites and actions mentioned in Atharvanaveda.

Man is a social animal. He cannot live without society. His life always depends upon the life of others. Therefore to keep up the relationship between man and man or man and society, ancient seers thought of an important end in life i.e. Dharma. The concept of Dharma is variously explained by ancient authors as well as by modern scholars. The famous quotation occurring in the Manusmṛti, states that the Veda is the only source of entire dharma. This Dharma¹ pervades the whole life of man individually and socially. The Veda seems to be collected and divided into four main heads according to the particular purpose of human life. The first three, namely, the Rīgveda, the Yajurveda, and Samaveda, prescribe the sacrifice, the important means to attain the desired object. In ancient times, sacrifice became the centre of religious activities which were regarded as the centre of society. Hence many texts laid down the detailed procedure of sacrifice.

The fourth Veda, namely, the Atharvaveda, (AV) is not primarily connected with the sacrificial rites but with the secular aspect of human life. The word secular, here, means an affair that is not connected with the rigidity of sacrificial rites. Accordingly the Atharvaveda provides us much information relating to magic-both white and black. Naturally it discusses the problems relating to politics, Kingship, Warfare, Philosophy, Agriculture, prosperity, Diseases, Exorcism, Subjugation, etc. It is, proposed here to present some information relating to medicinal charms, diseases and their medical treatments as mentioned in the Atharvanic literature.

It is the desire of every man to achieve whatever he needs and to ward off the evils and bad effects. Therefore, many rites have been prescribed in the Atharvanic Literature. These rites are divided into two classes. i) Santa; that yields the fruits as prosperity,

progeny, healthy life, etc. and, ii) Ghora; that is connected with exorcism, destruction of enemies, the act of subjugation, etc. About 144 hymns occurring in the AV are connected with curing of the diseases and with the healthy life of man. Some of these hymns describe the structure of human body, some discuss the nature of diseases, and some others direct us to get a healthy and long life. This topic has been later developed in the Ayurveda, which is regarded as the Upaveda of the AV. The hymns related to the diseases and long life is designated as Bhaisajya hymns. But as these hymns are not collected together in one chapter, it is necessary to take the help of ancillary literature for the proper understanding of the employment of these hymns.

Bhaisajya – hymns

There are different Parisistas of the AV, but the Kausikasutra (KS)², otherwise called Samhitavidhi is much more helpful than others to understand the rites and actions mentioned in the AV. The fourth chapter of the KS begins with the topic of diseases, treatments and the employment of medicinal charms. At the very beginning, the term Bhaisajya is defined as ‘the act or procedure for removing the symptoms of diseases’³. While commenting on this Sutra, Darila, the only commentator of this Sutra⁴, classifies the diseases into two classes namely – i) occurring due to food etc. ii) occurring due to some inauspicious or invisible forces. According to him the treatment for the diseases in the first class has been mentioned in the text belonging to the

Ayurveda and for curing diseases in the second class, the Atharvanic procedure is to be employed⁵. Kesava, who composed Paddhati⁶, states that the diseases grouped under second variety are to be cured with the help of Atharvanic procedure like offering tying, causing to drink etc.⁷ But it is very difficult to justify the two fold division of the diseases suggested by the commentators because the Sutrakara has not indicated such division of diseases. It seems that the hymns of the AV have described the diseases and their medical treatment without taking into consideration the particular causes. Some hymns are directly addressed to the diseases like Takman, Kasa, Svitra, etc and they are asked to leave the person suffering from the particular disease. Generally, while ascertaining the symptoms of the disease, it is not possible to consider that the particular disease occurred either due to food etc. or due to some invisible unknown causes. One-sided diagnosis of the disease may fall short and therefore the Atharvanic texts co-ordinate both the methods of treatment and the use of medicated materials and the employment of medicinal charms. The procedure of these two methods is well-explained by Kesava in his Paddhati. Therefore with the help of this Paddhati some diseases and their treatments have been considered in the present contexts.

Phlematic humours:

The KS (26.1)⁸ prescribes the procedure for curing the diseases connected with pitha and kapha. If a person is suffering from Vata he is asked to recite the hymn (AV1 12) over

the marrow and drink it. If he is suffering from pith he should drink honey: If he is suffering from vata-kapha he should drink oil. The patient should also snuff the ghee consecrated with this hymn. This hymn is also employed in the rite related to the curing of severe head-ache. The hymn is addressed to the Sun and He is praised to release the person from head-ache and phlegmatic disease spread in every part of his body⁹. It is said in the KS (26.2-8) that the head of the patient is to be covered with the turban of munca-grass. The performer should take the sieve and the ball of munca-grass with his left hand and the bow-string and the hammer with his right hand. He should then take the patient to the place where he contacted the disease. On their way he should pour parched paddy through the sieve. With the recitation of this hymn, the patient should throw the sieve, the turban, hammer and the bow-string and should snuff the ghee.¹⁰

Fever:

It is prescribed in the KS (26.25) that if a person is suffering from fever, the performer should heat the iron-axe on the fire chanting the hymn (AV 1.25). He should then boil it with hot water and pour that water on the body of the patient. This hymn is addressed to Takman, a kind of fever. In the second verse of the hymn a peculiar variety of the fever is mentioned. There it is said 'O' Takman, you are hrudu and knowing all things, you produce a disease like jaundice do you move away from our bodies¹¹. The word hrudu is very difficult to explain. Sayana soments that this fever is well-

known by the Rudu¹² and suggests its etymology from the root Ruh Panini mentions, the root hrud in the Dhatupatha (9.71) which means 'to go'. Therefore hrudu must be the fever penetrated in the body, perhaps identical with influenza. This word has also onomatopoetic relation with the words used in Indian Languages¹³. Commenting on the KS (26.25) Kesava has given the list of various kinds of fever such as Nityajwara, Velajwara, Satuathkajwara, Ekantajwara, Aaturthakajwara, Sitajwara and Caturjwara.

Worms:

One finds references to worm in many hymns of the AV. The hymn (AV 2.31) gives us much information relating to the torturing worms in the stomach. While employing this hymn the KS (27.14-19) prescribes some procedure such as: - the performer should offer black chick-peas mixed with ghee. Then he should collect cow's hair in the hollow and variegated arrow, crush it with a stone, heat it and offer some quantity of that powder on the fire. Having taken the remaining powder on the left hand and churning it with the right hand, he should pour it on the patient while reciting the hymn. The patient is also asked to churn the powder with his two hands. The first verse of this hymn states that there is a huge stone of Indra, the destroyer of entire worms. By means of that stone, I shall crush the worms as the chick-peas are crushed by the crushing stone¹⁴. In another hymn (AV 4.37) relating to worm-disease there is a reference to Ajasrni¹⁵ which is

regarded as the most powerful plant among the other medicinal plants.

Inflammation of the glands:

There are different varieties of glandular disease, and for curing these diseases many hymns from the AV are employed and they give much information relating to some details of these diseases. There is an important hymn (i.e.-AV 6.25) which refers to 55 glands of the neck, 77 of the throat and 99 of the shoulder¹⁶. The KS (30-14-16) prescribes the procedure of curing the inflammation of neck-glands where this hymn is employed. It is said that the performer should collect 55 leaves of Parasu in an earthen pan and heat it on the fire¹⁷. He should take the juice of the leaves with a stick and while scratching the affected parts of the patient, apply it along with the recitation of the hymn. While explaining the word Parasuparna Darila says parasu means leaves resembling the ears of an animal¹⁸, while Kesava says that parasuparna means dry-dung of cow and while heating them one should use iron-flue¹⁹. It is further said that the conch-powder or dog's salive is also used for the application. According to

Darila if conch-powder is used then the leech is put on the wound to suck the impure blood and if the latter is used, then house-spinner is used to suck the blood²⁰.

Jaundice:

It is prescribed in the KS (26.14-17) that one should ask the patient suffering from jaundice to drink the water mixed with the hair of red bull after having consecrated it with the hymn (AV 1.25)²¹. He should also fetch the water, place it on the back of the red bull. He should prepare an amulet out of the hide of red bull, dip it into cow's milk and tie it on the arm of the patient along with the recitation of the hymn. The patient should also drink that milk.

In this way some diseases and their treatments mentioned in the Kausikasutra have been taken into consideration in the present article. The examples can be multiplied with thorough and deep study of the Atharvanic Literature in consonance with that of the Ayurvedic texts. I have tried here to show, how the Vedic texts provide us valuable information relating to the study of different aspects of human life.

REFERENCES

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3. Lingyupatpo Bhaisajym K.S. 25.2
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5. Dwividha Vyadhyah Aharanimitta Aaubhanimittascetitatra Aharasamutthanamayurvedah Carakadipranitah Samanarthah, Adharmasamurtthanamu Sastramidamucyate.
6. This is a manual of the rites prescribed in the KS. I have edited in collaboration, this Paddhati which will be published very soon.
7. Of. Sayana's commentary on the AV 1.1 Papanimittanam tu Atharvanaih. Homabandhana Payanadibhih Upasamanam.
8. Jarayjah (AV 1.12) iti medo madhu Sarpistailam Payayati.
9. Munca sirsaktya uta kasa enam parusparurayivesa yo asya-AV 1-12.3
10. Jayayuja lti suktena ghr tamabhi mantrya nasikanatam dadati – kesava on KS 26.8
11. Hrudurnam Asi Haritasya Deva sa nah Samvidwan Parivrngdhi Takman – AV 12-5-2
12. Rudu iti Prasiddhah.
13. For Example in Marathi – Hud Huda tapi
14. Indrasya ya Mahi Drsad Krmerviswasya tarhnitaya Pinasmi sam krmin Drsada Khalwan Swa-AV 2-31-1
15. Eyamaganno Sadhinam Virudham Viryavti. Ajasrngyataki tiksna Srngi vyrsato AV 4-37-6.
16. Panca ca yah Panacasacca Samyantinantha Abhi. Sapta Ca hay saptatsiaca Samyanti Graivya Nava Ca ya Navatisca samyanti Skandhya Abhi-Hutastah Sarva Nasyantu vaka apacitamiva Abhi.
17. KS 30-14 Pancaca ya iti Pancapancasram Parasuparnan Kastairadipayatr.
18. Parasunam Pancasat Pancadhikah Pasukarna swa Parswavasthah.
19. Gopamsulikanam Pancasat Pancadhika Agnau Prajwaplyadhastayah. Samidha Adadhati
20. Yada sankhenalepanam tada Jalukayadamsanam yada Swajambile Tada Grhako likaya.
21. Kesava on KS. 26-14-Anusuryam (AV. 1-22) Sati Raktavrsabha. Roma Mismuda kamabhi mantrya Payayati. Kamle Bhaisajyam.