

SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE OF VEDAS

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Abstract

The derivational meaning of the very word Veda is - the fountain - head and illimitable store house of all knowledge. This derivation, in effect, means, connotes and implies that the Vedas contain within themselves all the knowledge needed by mankind relating not only on the so called spiritual matters but also to those usually described as purely secular, temporal or worldly and also to the means required by humanity as such for the achievement of all-round, complete and perfect success in all conceivable directions and that there can be no adjectival or restrictive epithet calculated (or tending) to limit that knowledge down in any sphere any direction or any respect whatsoever.

The very word Veda has this derivational meaning, i.e., the fountain-head and illimitable store - house of all knowledge. This derivation, in effect, means, connotes and implies that the Vedas should contain within themselves all the knowledge needed by mankind relating not only to the so called spiritual (or other worldly) matters but also to those usually described as purely secular, temporal or worldly and to the means required by humanity as such for the achievement of all - round, complete and perfect success in all conceivable directions and that there can be no adjectival or restrictive epithet calculated (or tending) to limit that knowledge down in any sphere, any direction or any respect whatsoever.

In other words, it connotes and implies that our ancient Indian Vedic lore should be all- round, complete and perfect and be able to throw "the fullest necessary light on all matters which any aspiring seeker after knowledge can possibly seek to be enlightened on.

It is generally believed that Sanskrit is a language like any other except that it is more complicated and dead for all purposes. At best, people are willing to admit that it has a great literature and a cultural value at the other end, there are people who consider it as a mysterious combination of words to create a religious atmosphere through prayers, chanting, incantations, etc. But Sanskrit is much more than that and possesses within itself many of the

attributes of a great and useful language. It is both a science and an art combined in one.

As a language, Sanskrit has a degree of permanence which no other language has. In olden days, when teaching was oral, there was a need to keep information in tact and pass them on from generation to generation accurately. This led, on one hand, to a strong emphasis towards versification, poetry and phonetics. On the other side, formulae were devised of inventing and converting words in such a way that chances of distortion were kept at a minimum. After Panini's grammar, Sanskrit language was so much standardized that further linguistic development was not possible.

By a general consensus the world over, it is well recognized that Sanskrit literature, as it exists today, is the least distorted of all the languages. The Rgveda and other literary compositions have come to us as accurately as they were at the beginning.

Only in Sanskrit language we get the sophistication to express the same thought in many ways; what in mathematics is known as 'onto' or 'many-to-one', mapping. For every statement, there is more than one meaning to that statement, and that give certain iridescence to the language. This gives rise to prose, poetry, music, dance etc. It also leads to a process by which imagination is brought in as in mythology. If we concede that mythology is a language no, "a higher language that ordinary words

cannot express,” then Sanskrit language must have a high degree of sophistication since Sanskrit mythology is vast, rich in imaginative symbolism and even profound at times.

Sanskrit reflects the aspirations and thoughts of the people who use it. In Sanskrit, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata each and every character reflects some aspect of life, even modern life. The statement in the epic Mahabharata that *यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित्, व्यासोच्छिष्टं जगत् सर्वम्*¹ is no exaggeration, nor the saying. The clothes might have been different but the thoughts are identical.

However, Sanskrit is just not merely a language; ‘It is the poetic testament of the genius of a race and a culture and the living embodiment of the thoughts and fancies that have moulded them.’² It represents a total integrated culture which is known as Indian culture. Indian culture is everything that has come to us from Srinagar to Kanyakumari.³ There is a common culture in this country which is visible when one studies Sanskrit because the marks of Sanskrit are found every where. This culture is so powerful viable that it has remained alive and unbroken over a period of nearly five thousand years. It is a singular idiosyncrasy of Sanskrit language that the very word (samskriti) means culture.

Sanskrit was once a very effective vehicle for conveying scientific thoughts and has a rich scientific literature apart from works of art, philosophy, religion, law etc. Like all ancient people, the thinkers of the Vedic age lived in close amalgam with nature and environment.

They obtained their food, fabricated their implements and searched remedies for illness from plants and animals around them. To these they gave some names to identify them, observed their growth and performance and studied their properties. The Vedic literature bounds in plant wealth. In the days of yore, our Aryan forefathers settled in the land of five rivers, as the pioneer heralds of civilization. They used to recite the Vedic hymns in praise of the Su-

preme Creator for his merciful manifestations in the medicinal plants which were important for restoration of public health. The earliest reference to the medicinal use of plants can be traced to Rgveda, perhaps the oldest repository of human knowledge. Ayurveda discusses the remedial properties of various drugs in detail. The following preliminary data bear witness to vast resources of research in Vedic plants. In Vedic writings broadly, the plant world is divided into trees, shrubs, herbs, creepers and grasses.³ Vrksa denotes trees in Rgveda⁴ and Virudh and Osadhi is the term for minor vegetable carpet of herbs⁵ The medicinal plants possessed tremendous healing power where as those classified under Virudh did not display curing properties⁶ Grasses are Tṛṇas⁷ In Atharva Veda⁸ present an elaborate classification of plants. Nyagrodha characterizes Ficus indica which sends down growing root like branches from their robust horizontal twigs. The vegetational types are; Khila Khilya is the waste land, gavyuti means grassland for grazing of cattle and dhanvan specied the desert.⁹ Plants were classified on the basis of their external form, medicinal properties and environmental associations. At least in some cases the Hindu sages were also using a binomial system of nomenclature of plants. Different categories of plants are distinguished in the Vedas, namely : alasala — which spread on the ground pratanvati — creeper; stambini — a bushy plant ; vratati — a gigantic climber ; amsumali — a spreading herb ; sasa — an erect herb ; visakha — a shrub with spreading branches; and vrksa, vana and druma — trees. The main plant organs are expressed in Rgveda.⁹ These are: fruit - phala ; flower - puspa ; twig - valsa ; stem - kanda ; panicle - tula and root - mula. In the Rgveda sakha is the branch of a tree but vaya is more often used.¹⁰ In Rgveda¹¹ the world valsa (=twig) occurs as satavalsa (having hundred twigs) and sahasre valsa (having a thousand branches).

Evidences from the early Vedic profiles (2500 B.C.) permeate that the science of medicinal plants were well developed in those days. Susruta Samhita

contains a comprehensive chapter on therapeutics. Caraka Samhita gives a description of the materia medica known to the ancient Hindus. Since disease, decay and death always co-exist with life, the primitive man utilized as therapeutical agents those plants which he could procure easily. Vedas, the oldest books of knowledge in the library of mankind offer wonderful records of such medicines. According to these, soma, madhu and sura, the fermented juices of the plants, were highly extolled and even worshipped. Soma is cited in a hymn as: "The strength of this ambrosia (amrita) do we give this man to drink. Moreover, I prepare a remedy so that he may live four hundred years." Even Rauwolfia, which has now been rocketed to world wide popularity finds a devoted mention in ancient and monumental manuscripts where the plant is called sarpagandha in Sanskrit as an (rāmabāṇa) antidote against insanity. This plant is acclaimed as a useful therapeutic weapon against high blood pressure and psychiatric disorders.

There is ample proof of applications of various recipes of Indian herbs in curing many a malady and realization of herbal charms led to the development of Āyurvedic system of medicine. Caraka and Śuśruta Samhitās constitute two important sections dealing with drug plants of ancient India. With the arrival of Western therapy, glories of Āyurvedic medicine rapidly declined. But recently there is a revival of reference to the plant products as it has no side effects. In this reference some very common medicinal plants are :

1- Epiphytic Herb (Sita Tali)- It is a long and strong, thin, string like stem clinging all around the host-tree firmly. It is valuable in the case of urinary disorders and diseases of the genital organs.

2- Droseraceae Herb (sun-dew) - In Hindi it is called Nukhajali. Its plant is very fragrant, leaves are hairy. The paste of the leaves is used to reduce gold to powder. The gold is embeded in the paste and burnt. The entire gold is reduced to powder and used in medicine.

3- Datura metal linn - Shrub. In Hindi known as Dhatura, in English it is called Thorn apple. Its leaves, seeds and roots are poisonous. The smoking of the leaves relieves asthma. Dried seeds are also used for the same purpose. Its smoking is good in chronic coughs. Leaves are applied to relieve pain and swelling. Fresh juice of leaves used in glandular swellings, ear-ache, gout and inflamed breasts. Roots used in insanity and epilepsy. Seeds boiled in milk and ghee used for impotence, both externally and internally. The tincture of dhatura is a useful and cheap substitute for opium.

4- Poaceae - Herb. In Sanskrit and Hindi known as Doorvā. Its roots are used in chronic fever, cold; infusion of the grass is useful in irritation of the urinary organs. Fresh juice of doorvā stops bleeding. Decoction of roots is effective in secondary syphilis etc.

5- Asclepiadaceae - Climber natural plant. In Hindi it is known as Karanta. The plant is used to cure rickets in children.

6- Croton tiglium - Tree. In Hindi it is called Jayaphala and Jamalgota. Its seed oil is anthelmintic. The oil is used in incipient apoplexy and in dropsy. Its oil is used in rheumatism also. The plant has intense physiological action and is highly poisonous. All plant parts have medicinal value.

7- Burseraceae - Tree. In Sanskrit it is known as Guggula tree. It has been used in Āyurveda from the vedic times of several centuries ago. In the Vedic times (and even today) it was believed that even the evil spirit could be driven out by burning the resin exuded by the Guggul tree. The tree yields a valuable resin which is more used in medicine. The resin is burnt and used for medicinal ointments for chronic ulcer and in the treatment of diseased bones. The resin is used in rheumatic and nervous disorders, skin diseases. Mixed with other materials it stimulates hair growth. It is one of the most versatile materials of Āyurveda.

8- Connaraceae - Shrub. It is known as Kureel. The pulp surrounding the seeds is applied to

the eyes as a remedy to sore eyes. Paste of the root is a remedy to syphilis. Root and stem are used in rheumatism scurvy, diabetes and pulmonary complaints. It promotes the development of foetus in the uterus.

9- Apocyanaceae - Shrub. In Sanskrit it is called Karamardaka. In Hindi it is known as Karaunda. The fruits and roots are used in medicinal preparations. This is a rubber yielding plant.

10- Asteraceae - Herb. Its Sanskrit name is Kusumbha, in Hindi known as Kusum. Its powdered seeds made into a poultice used to allay inflammation of the womb after child-birth. Its flowers cure jaundice.

11- Nauclea Cadambba - In Sanskrit and Hindi known as Kadamba. The fresh juice of the bark is useful in inflammation of the eyes. Tender shoots taken internally cure dysentery and increase digestion.

12- Nelumbo nucifera - It is an aquatic herb. In Sanskrit it is known as Kamala. Its seeds are demulcent and nutritive. Filaments and flowers are cooling, sedative, astringent and diuretic.

13- Nerium oleander - Shrub. In Hindi it is known as Kanera. It has two varieties-one white and other with red flowers. It's highly poisonous plant. The root and the root bark are powerful diuretic and cardiac tonic. It is used in cancers, ulcers and leprosy. Its root causes abortion. Leaves and roots used in rheumatism. The plant parts taken internally cause death.

14- Punica granatum - small tree. In Sanskrit it is known as Dadima and in Hindi- Anara. In English known as pomegranate. It's a reputed Indian medicine. Juice of green fruit used in piles, juice of flowers in bleeding from the nose, bark and flowers in dysentery, decoction of rind in diarrhea and

dysentery, decoction of flower buds used in bronchitis and vaginal discharge. It is a revitaliser for body due to various causes and diseases. It is also an excellent remedy for all ills arising out of excessive alcoholism and intoxication, leading to loss of senses or swooning or vomiting and dysentery.

15- Tabernaemontana divaricata - Shrub or small Tree. In Sanskrit and in Hindi it is known as Tagara. Its leaf-juice cures ophthalmia. Root paste is used in eye- diseases. Decoction of flowers used in eye- diseases. Root bark is used to cure swellings.

Thus there are hundreds of nature plants which are useful for the life of human being since the very beginning of human life or cosmos. So at last we can say that Vedas also teach the technique by which life can be lived at its healthiest and best.

References :

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