AHS-3

Medicine in the Atharvaveda

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It should go without saying that the Vedas are the original source of religion, culture and civilization of India. All the Savants and thinkers agree that the Vedas are the corner stone of all Indian (Aryan) thought, philosophy & knowledge. All great ancient thinkers and philosophers from Brahma down to Jaimini opine that the Vedas are as old as the advent of man, and believe that the Vedas are Revelation. Knowledge & wisdom revealed by God for the benefit of mankind at the time of the creation. As the Vedas are divine, they are true. They contain truth & nothing but truth.

Prof. Max Muller says, "I maintain that to everyone who cares for himself, for his ancestors, for his history and for intellectual development, a study of Vedic literature is indispensable".

According to Swami Dayanand Sarswati, the Vedas being the knowledge imparted by God for the benefit & guidance of mankind, contains germs of all knowledge of all kinds useful to man in his life. Also they contain germs of various Sciences and Arts which are now well developed in the world today. He further affirms that the truth of modern physical sciences are discoverable in the Hymns.

In 15th century the conflict between sciences and religion took a horrible shape when Torquemada, the Inquisitor-General, burnt 1,02,220 persons at stake, 6,860 in effigy, and otherwise punished 97,321 men. Galileo, the eminent scientist was the victim of the wrath of the Church, he was persecuted and punished for upholding the Copernican theory that the Earth moves round the Sun, and not the Sun round the Earth. Bruno was burnt for teaching the plurality of worlds. The library of Alexandria was turned into ashes in the 7th century by the dictum of Caliph Omar.

The truth remains that the persecution of Science or Scientists is altogether unknown in the history of Vedic religion. The reason is not far to seek. The very word, 'Veda' means knowledge having been derived from 'vid' to know, and is cognate with the English word 'witi' (wisdom). It has thus the same significance as the word 'Science' derived from Latin 'Scio', to know. In Ancient India all Sciences were believed to be derived from and based on the Vedas. Unfortunately the mediaeval commentators, Sayana, Mahidhara etc., following the degenerate theology of Punnamic time, have fastened on the Vedas the superstitious practices and unscientific beliefs of their own age. It was Swami Dayanand who by his upright and accurate interpretation restored the Vedic religion to its pristine purity and showed that their teachings were in complete harmony with science. And there is no reason why there should be any conflict between true religion and true science. This has further been corroborated by W.D. Brown in his famous book, "The superiority of the vedic religion" says, "the Vedic religion recognizes one but one God. It is a thoroughly scientific religion where religion and science meet hand in hand." Similarly a French Savant Jacolliot in his well-known work, "The Bible in India" writes, Astonishing fact! The Hindu Revelation (Veda) is of all Revelations the only one whose ideas are in perfect harmony with modern sciences."

It is a fact which stands in line with Indian as well as western philosophy that every time you try to look into the vedic hymns, you plunge deeper and deeper into its texts, new spectral colours are seen. Thus you come to know yourself that the Vedas contain wonderful mystery. Rgveda in general and Atharvaveda in particular is an unathomeable hidden treasure of flora and fauna which play a vital role in making man's life healthy and wealthy.

We are well aware that Atharvaveda comprises 20 kandas, 731 suktas and 5977 mantras and its first reading revealed that 135 plants find place in 264 Mantras of 63 Suktas of 10 Kandas. Out of these the present author has selected only 30 medicinal plants for this paper. It may not be out of question if I make a mention here that Swami Sataya Prakash Sarswati, former Professor of chemistry, University of Allahabad, an eminent Scientist and Vedic scholar has enlisted only 78 plants in the 'Flora in the Vedic Texts' and out of these the authentic botanical names of 48 plants only have been identified.

The fundamental difficulty that arises is that the same plant is known under different names in different parts of India & abroad. This becomes a cause of confusion for a man of Medicine for identifying the exact plant to be used for the particular disease. This problem has been solved by the establishment of "International code of Botanical Nomenclature" which has framed rules and regulations under which one and only one name is given to each plant viz., the plant which is known as 'Ark' in Sanskrit, Madar in Hindi 'Ak' in Punjabi, 'Akrho' in Gujarati, 'Mandarmu' in Telgu, 'Shak' in Kanarh, 'Kharak' in Persion and so on, but it is known as Calotropis giganea (Linn) R.Br. in the whole world over.

Thirty very important plants have been identified for this paper, but due to paucity of space only detailed description of 10 plants is being discussed at length. However, information in short of all the thirty plants is being given in a tabular form as under:-
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<th>Ref. of Atharveda</th>
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<td>Swelling, Malaria Tetanus (Lock Jaw)</td>
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<td>Cucumis melo Linn. (Cucurbitaceae)</td>
<td>Swelling &amp; eruptions of skin. Tuberculosis.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>kusha (Kapala)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>arista (Nimba)</td>
<td>Azadirachta indica (Melvaceae)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>putudru (Devodaru)</td>
<td>Cedrus deodara Loud (Conifeae) (Some Equate it with Khadira)</td>
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<td>Pinga</td>
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<td>prsniparni</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>visasrika</td>
<td>Asclepia geminata (Asclepiadaceae)</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>sigru</td>
<td>Moringa pterigosperma Gaertn (Moringaceae)</td>
<td>Eradication of worms, vermin etc.</td>
<td>5.23.13</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>usira (vira/ abhaya/khas -khas grass)</td>
<td>Vetiveria zizanioides (Linn) Nash (Graminaceae) Andropogon muricatus Retz.</td>
<td>Worm eradication</td>
<td>5.23.13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. *Boswellia serrata* Roxb. ex Colebr. (Burseraceae)
   
   The plant is a medium sized tree which exudes oleogum-resin commercially known as ‘olibanum.’ It is frequently used as a fumigant, its fumes of agreeable odor wards off all diseases including *Yaksma* (consumption; tuberculosis) Av. 4.37.3; 19.38.1&2.

   Essential. Oil from resins contains myrcene, dimyrocene and polymyrcene. The gum also contains alldioburonic acid. (Indian J. chem., 1964, 2, 57, 156 and phytosterol; sitosterol (curr.sci., 1963,324)
   
   Ayurvedic uses: Antimicrobial, Astringent, Carminative, Antiseptic, Anti catarrhal.

2. *Acacia catechu* (Linn.f.) willd. (Leguminosae)
   
   The plant is a moderate sized deciduous tree. The gummy extract of the wood is commercially known as ‘Katha’.
   
   *Acacia catechu* has the wonderful property that when *Ficus* species grows over *Acacia catechu*, the medicinal properties of the former get enhanced manifold (Av. 3.6.1). For the *Ficus* sp. the word used in the mantra is *Aasaath*, which means *Ficus religiosa* but it appears to be incorrect for the simple reason that *F. religiosa* grows on land whereas *Ficus indica* is always found on other trees as an epiphyte. Further investigations would make the point clear.
   
   Chemically speaking the gum contains D-galactose, L-arabinose and L-galacturonic acid. On hydrolysis the gum yields alldioburonic acid which is 6-D-glucuronoside- D-galactose (J. Indian. Chem. Soc. 1956, 33, 861); the wood contains and Catechin. (J.Indian. chem., soc.; 1930,279,1931,143)
   
   These compounds are responsible for their therapeutic action; Antiseptic and Astringent and used as treatment for chronic diarrhea, Dysentery, Leucorhoea, etc.

3. *Achyranthes aspera* Linn. *Apamarga* = vikexZ (Amaranthaceae)
   
   *Apamarga* finds its place in three hymns of Atharvaveda (17th to 19th). It is used for all chronic diseases (Av. IV.18.7); disability of limbs and childlessness (Av. IV.17.6) and IV 19.2.; it is also used as an antidote against poisonous medicines; as a treatment for troubles caused by delerium; impotency; diabetes (Av. 4.17.6); piles (4.17.5) and Mental problems.
   
   Chemical constituents found in seeds - hentriacontane and saponin 2% and also oleanolic acid - oligosaccharide saponin, oleaonic acid 1.1% (J. Indian. chem., Soc., 1958, 35, 693)

Ayurvedic uses: As treatment in cough, asthma, painful inflammations, skin diseases, cardiac disorders.

Seeds- emetic, in hydrophobia (chem. news etc.1891,147; Pharm. J.1888,946)

4. *Hordeum hexastichon* Linn *Yavaah* = Barley. = ṛṣ% (Gramineae)
   
   *Yavaah* is one of the most important plants and the medicines obtained are used in the treatment of Jaundice, consumption and mental problems (Av.6.90.2) as per Bhavaprapaska.

   HIV/AIDS The most hazardous disease of the day from which 3.8 million children and adults are suffering in India alone. A perusal of the Atharvaveda mantra 2.8.1-5 would clearly reveal the most dangerous disease *Ksheerya* (keh;). It is nothing but AIDS, because as per M.Moniars-William’s Sanskrit- English Dictionary (page 332 column 2nd) this disease is transmitted when an adulterator seduces other wives; and it is a hereditary and incurable in this life. Further in (Av. 2.8.3) the medicine for uprooting this disease is given as barley + Sesamum indicum (Til) Ayurvedic uses: Astringent, diuretic and emollient.

5. *Ficus religiosa* Linn. *Aasaath* = v’orFk (Moraceae)
   
   The plant is a large deciduous tree with few or no aerial roots. As the name indicates, it is a religious tree, at the same time an important medicinal plant. An aqueous extract of the bark has antibacterial activity against *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*. It is used in the treatment of diseases which create convulsion and trembling (Av. 3.6.3).

   It is a powerful germicidal. According to Av. 3.6.1, the medicinal properties of *asaath* are enhanced many fold if it grows in the fissures of *Acacia catechu*, But it is doubtful if here *asaath* means the ‘pupal’ tree because it commonly grows on land & not on other plants. In my opinion it is *Ficus infactoria*. Which is invariably epiphytic on other trees.

As per Av. 6.11.1, *asaath* rooted on the tree of Sami (‘keh’) ie., Prosopis cineraria syn. Prosopis specigera, according to others this plant is *Mimoso sumo*. It is an important medicine in conducting the ceremony of ‘Pumsavan’. It is being used to perform the ‘Pumsavan’ When a male birth is certain this is administered to woman.

The Bark contains Astrin, used in gonorrhoea Tannins and wax, the fruit bear 34.9% sugars and 7.9% albuminoids.

   Jicula = jivanti = jiti
   (Asclepiadaceae) thokgyk
   The plant is small shrub having a tuft of hundreds of green branches. As per Av.6.59.3 it has the properties of life giving medicine, hence the name. It is used as a treatment of plague & malaria.
   Chemical composition of jicula depicts that alcoholic (50%) extract of roots and leaves show antibacterial activity against certain Gram (+ve) and Gram (-ve) bacteria and is also used against hypertension (Indian J. Pharm., 1958, 241). The plant according to Ayurveda, is used in the treatment of habitual abortion. (Antiseptic, 1958, 487; with India VI, 74) a fructosan (7-8 hexose units) of the insulin type separated from the tubers.

7. Terminalia arjuna (Roxb. ex D.C.) W&A 
   arjuna = vtzqu
   (Combretaceae)
   Arjuna is a large tree with buttressed trunk commonly found growing on the banks of the rivers. Syana and others are of the view that arjuna is one of the basic ingredients of medicine for a dangerous disease named ksetriya, which is considered to be an anomalous word signifying a disease beginning with consumption, skin disease and epilepsy but the present author equates it with the AIDS of to-day (See note on Ficus religiosa). The principal medicine for this disease is prepared from barley, sesame plant and Arjuna (Av.2.8.3).
   According the eminent Vedic scholar, Pt.S.D. Satwalekar, the pathogens contaminating the water get destroyed or driven off if plants like Boswellia, (gulgulu) Salvador (pilu).

Nardostachys (Mansi) etc. grow on their banks (Av. 4.37.3) and in the next mantra it has been said that this holds good for arjuna too (Av. 4.37.4). The bark of this plant contains a cardiac stimulant—Arjunaic acid, saponin and (+) leucophtadin (J Sci. Industr. Res., 1962, 21B, 89) which relieve hypertension; it is a heart stimulant; acts as general tonic in cases of cirrhosis of liver (Indian heart 1951, 305) and also diuretic.

8. Ferula asafoetida Linn. 
   Pinta = fiM=x%
   (Apiaceae)
   According to Av. 8.6.18, Pinta is a herbaceous plant which has powerful germicidal properties and destroys the pathogens which attack the foetus and which kill the child if born.
   Further in verse Av. 8.6.20, it has been mentioned that pinta along with Baja are very effective healers.
   Due to the presence of Ferulic acid, glucoronic acid, galactose & arabinose, the plant is a powerful antispasmodic, useful for nervous and neurotic diseases as hystera epilepsy and hypocondriasis, it is also used as treatment for habitual cough, bronchitis and asthma. It is also used to expel worms; to ward off malaria & to increase the menstrual flow.

9. Utricularia lagopus DC 
   Prsniparni = i'fi.khz
   Syn. Doodia lagopoides Roxb. 
   (Leguminosae)
   Prsniparni has wonderful power of destroying leprosy (Av.2.25.1), it destroys ‘Kanva’, a germ which eats up embryos.

It is also used against abortion and to drive away the germs which cause anemia in the body of the patient. Decoction of the roots and the leaves is used as a treatment of dysentery, as alternative, tonic, as anticatarrhal and for producing abortion. It is also an important antidote of snake poison (Medica Medica of India)

- R.N. Khory II p.235

10. Creatae magna (Lour.) DC. Syn. C. nivula Buch. Ham. Varana = Varuna = oj.k%
   (Capparaceae)
   The plant is a medium sized much branched deciduous car.
   The parts used are the bark and the leaves. According to Av. 6.85.1-3, Varana checks the attack of the causal organisms of Yaksma—consumption; Tuberculosis. In general, we can say Yaksma (1.0%) covers all these diseases which bring about a general condition of bodily decay. Varana has been called as slayer of diseases (Av. 6.85.1); healer of wounds (Av. 6.85.4); drives away consumption (Av. 6.85.5); a treatment of intolerable bad nausea (Av. 6.85.6); protects from contagious diseases (Av. 6.85.8); wards off the poisonous effect (Av. 4.7.1).


Ayurvedic uses: carminative, demulcent, antipyretic, laxative, diuretic, stimulant; as treatment of cough, asthma and bronchitis and used in Snake bite.

Sanaya’s interpretation of the Vedas as the hymnal of an early primitive and largely barbaric society, purely in its moral and religious conceptions, rude in its social structure and entirely childlike in its outlook upon the World that environed it. The ritualism which Sanaya accepted as the part of the divine knowledge and endowed with a mysterious efficacy. It is remarkable attempt by Swami Dayanan who interpreted the hymns is governed by the idea that the Vedas are plenary revelation of religious, ethical and scientific truth. He was of the view that by a true understanding of the sense of the Vedas we could arrive at all the scientific truths which have been discovered by modern research.

Even Prof. Max Muller in his “Biographical essays” writes, “that every thing worth knowing, even most recent inventions of modern science were alluded to in the Vedas,” Shri Aurobindo goes a step further and writes in his essay on “Dayanand and the Vedas, “that the Vedas contain other truths of science the modern world does not at all possess.” It is a well known fact that ancient India developed her logic, mathematics, astronomy, medical sciences, grammar, prosody, aesthetics besides metaphysics and spiritual sciences. Today, our problem is that one who is well versed with Science does not know the Vedic language, the Sanskrit and reverse is also true. This bottleneck must be removed, then and then only the World would witness the Lid off of the hidden treasure of the Vedas.
The Controversy, the author agrees with the plant named above.
It is a mitigator of anger (Av.6.43.1-3) hence protects from stress and strain - the root Cause of a good many diseases. It is germicidal and is given for the treatment of malignaney (Av. 19.29.3 and 19.33.4)


6  Crateva magna (Lour.) DC. Syn. C. nucula Buch. Ham. (Capparaceae)
Varana = Varuna
The plant is a medium sized much branched deciduous 3-leaved caper. The parts used are the bark and the leaves. According to Av. 6.85.1-3, Varana checks the attack of the causal organisms of Yaksma – consumption; Tuberculosis.
In general, we can say Yaksma ( ) covers all those diseases which bring about a general condition of bodily decay. Varana has been called as slayer of diseases (Av. 6.85.1); healer of wounds (Av. 6.85.4); drives away consumption (Av. 6.85.5); a treatment of intolerable bad nausea (Av. 6.85.6); protects from contagious diseases (Av. 6.85.8); wards off the poisonous effect (Av. 4.7.1)

Chemically speaking, the root bark yields Lupeol, triterpene, B-Sito-sterol and Varunal (J. Sci. Industr. Res. 1951, 10B, 195)

Ayurvedic uses; carminative, laxative, diuretic, stimulant; as treatment of cough, asthma and bronchitis.

7  Asparagus racemosus Willd. (Liliaceae)
Salavarah
The plant is an armed, climbing undershrub with apically recurved spines. The parts used are tuberous roots. The name suggests that it wards off 100 diseases. It is powerful germicidal (Av. 19.36.3); treatment of minor and Complicated consumption diseases; over – comes the malignancies (Av. 19.36.6); treatment for Tuberculosis. It is also used as a pain killer (Av. 19.36.2).
The plant contains sarsaparinin - ' saponins or sapogenins' (Indian J. Pharm., 1952.14.131)

Ayurvedic uses: Nervine tonic, galactagogue, diuretic, for tuberculosis, gonorrhoea, leucorrhoea, leprosy, hypertension, abortion & general disability.

8  Soymida febrifuga Adr. Juss Rohini (Meliaceae)
This is used as a header of broken bones or gap caused by wounds (Av. IV.12.1-5). Rohini has also been equated with the red colur of the Sun-rays and thereby it becomes a treatment for hariman Jaundice (Av. 1.2.3). It is an important medicine for Angina pectoris.

9  Oroxyum indicum (Linn.) Benth. Ex Kurz. Jangida = Syonaka
Syn. Bignonia indica Linn.
It is used as dispeller of rheumatism (Av. 2.4.1); to get rid of lock-jaw disease; violent inflammation (Av. 2.4.2)
It is used as treatment of 7 kinds of decays; spondalitis (Av. 19.34.5) malignancies (19.34.10); as an antidote of piercing pain (Av. 19.34.4); against Malaria; plurisy.

Ayurvedic uses: Anti-inflammatory, febrifuge, asthma, rheumatoid arthritis.

10  Pinus longifolia Roxb. Cipadru (Coniferae)
This is the principle remedy of balasa (Swelling) as per Av. 6.27.2. It’s leaves (needles) are rich in vitamin C, E, Carotene and Pinene, Limonene and carene.

Ayurvedic uses: Carminative, diaphoretic, anti-inflammatory, against pevers and urinary diseases.

11  Cucumis melo Linn. Syn. C. Monordica Roxb. Urvarah
This uproots decline or cough from a man affected with consumption (decoction of Roots) Av. 6.14.2. It also dispels joint pain and balasa (Swelling).

Ayurvedic uses: Galactagogue, diuretic, aphrodisiac, for chronic fevers and general debility.

12  Saussurea Lappa C.B. Clarke Kusthain (Compestae)
This aromatic plant is the medicine for all diseases (Av.5.22.9) Kustha is considered to be the principal medicine for fever, headache, tertian, continual fever and that which lasts for a year (Av. 5.22.10) and (Av. 5.22.3) Kustha is also a healing plant.