



The history of the Indian sacred book (Atharva-Veda) and its Contribution to the Integrative Medicine Model

Paulo Nuno Martins, Interuniversity Center for History of Science and Technology, New University of Lisbon, Portugal, Email: paulonunom@gmail.com

Received 14 August 2017; Revised 21 September 2017; Accepted 7 October 2017

Copyright ©2017 Paulo Nuno Martins. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Available online 28 October 2017 at www.atlas-journal.org, doi: 10.22545/2017/00086

There are four Vedas (the Sacred books of Hinduism). The fourth, the Atharvaveda, cover several topics related with health sciences (diseases, their causes and cures, longevity, and so on), and so this Veda is considered to be a precursor of Ayurveda. This paper seeks to be a study of the contribution of the Ayurveda to the appearance of the Integrative medicine model (synthesis of Ayurveda with Western medicine).

Keywords: Indian Sacred books (Atharva-Veda), Ayurveda medicine, integrative medicine model.

1 Introduction

The Arian race brought to India the Vedas (the sacred books of Hinduism). The fourth Veda, the Atharva Veda, deals with some topics such as Bhaisajya (diseases, their causes and cures) and

Ayusya (supplications for longevity). These have contributed to the appearance of the Ayurveda – the traditional Indian medicine.

The Ayurveda medicine, sometimes called by mind-body medicine [1], argues that the root of some diseases is due to an imbalance of the mind (our personal thoughts and/or feelings) which means that the cure have to be performed by the mind itself and not only through allopathic medicines, surgery and energy radiation, as recommended by conventional medicine (Western medicine). A fundamental component of the Ayurveda medicine (and Eastern medicine) is regeneration and recovery of wholeness (etymologically, “healing” and “whole” come from the same root). The base of this thinking is described in the Vedas that refer to the Theory of Reincarnation (several cycles of birth until the Law of Cause and Effect of Consciousness or “karma” is balanced [2]) as a way for the evolution of the consciousness of the patient, that is, “alignment” of soul, mind and

body. This idea supports an Integrative medicine model (synthesis of Eastern and Western medicine), as argued by several physicians in the contemporary society.

2 The History of Indian Medical Book (Atharva-Veda) and its Relationship with Ayurveda

The Hinduism has many sacred books, such as the Vedas and Upanishads [3]. The Vedas [4] are considered to be an “apaureseya” because the sages who have written them are anonymous. Furthermore, this kind of religious literature is named by “sruti” (“what is heard from God”). Thus, the Vedas are considered to be Divine revelations to sages [5]. There are four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Each Veda has been classified into four types of text [6], namely Samhitas (mantras and benedictions), Aranyakas (texts on rituals), Brahmanas (ceremonies and sacrifices) and Upanishads (texts on meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).

The Atharvaveda (from Sanscrit Atharvavanas (Atharva) and Knowledge (Veda)) [7] was composed in Sanskrit and it is a collection of 730 hymns with about 6000 mantras and divided into 20 books. These books were arranged by the length of the hymns (each one with a similar number of verses) [8]. The Atharvaveda is sometimes called the “Veda of magical formulas” because is considered to be able to remove illness through magic-religious rituals and some homemade medicines. In this regard, I have to mention that Atharvaveda is one of the oldest texts on the “earliest forms of folk healing of Indo-European antiquity” [9]. Furthermore, the Atharvaveda had nine schools, but only two of them have come to current day: the Paippalada and the Saunakiya [10].

The hymns of Atharvaveda cover eight topics, namely Bhaisajya (diseases, their causes and cures), Ayusya (supplications for longevity), Paustika (wellfare), Abhicarika (spiritual progress), Prayascitta (expiatory rites), Rajakarma (political system) and Brahmanya (nature of Brahman or God). In this paper, I will do just the description of Bhaisajya suktas and Ayusya suktas because they deal with the connection between Atharvaveda and Ayurveda. The Bhaisajya suktas deals with the theme of the

health sciences and for this reason is considered to be the precursor of Ayurveda (from Sanscrit Life (Ayur) and Science (Veda)). These suktas contain many prayers to cure diseases, such as fever, leprosy, diabetes, tuberculosis, skin disorders, diseases of the ears, nose and throat and some heart troubles. In this regard, the names of several parts of the human body (anatomy) are referred to Bhaisajya suktas. Furthermore, these suktas claim that some diseases are caused by violation of the Laws of nature or sins committed by the patient. The Ayusya suktas contain contains general requests for longevity and particular demands related to religious life. For example, the caula (tonsure), upanayama (investiture with the sacred thread), raksasutra (tread of protection).

The first seven books of Atharvaveda [11] refers to magic poems to cure some sorts of diseases, while books eight to twelve deal with several topics about healing. The books thirteen to eighteen describe some rituals of human life [12]. For example, the verses in hymn 4.15 of the Paippalada of the Atharvaveda, discuss how to deal with a fracture [13], while the verses in hymn 5.21 of Paippalada of the Atharvaveda claim that some diseases, such as fever [14], are caused by evil spirits who enter into the patient’s body in order to cause disease. In other words, this means that the behavior of the person (the character) influences on personal health and well-being. Furthermore, some other hymns in the Atharvaveda deal with some medicinal plants and herbs that have been applied in Ayurveda.

The Atharvaveda Samhita [15] includes also some others hymns, such as 4.1, 10.7 and 17.1, that deal with metaphysical topics on the nature of existence of mankind. For example, the hymn 10.7 of Atharvaveda defends that the “source of Cosmic order is Brahman”. Furthermore, some hymns of the Atharvaveda, such as 7.52, also claims that spiritual evolution and healthy life are related between them. The Atharvaveda has no Aranyaka, while the Brahmana is related with the Samhita. Furthermore, the Atharvaveda has three Upanishads, namely Mundaka, Manduka and Prashna [16], [17].

The Mundaka is written in form of mantras that are used to teach and meditate on spiritual matters. The Mundaka is constituted by three parts. The first part deals with the distinction between the science of “Higher knowledge” (that describe the spiritual Laws) and the science of “Lower knowledge” (that deal with

the natural Laws), arguing that only through the knowledge of God, the human being can minimize suffering. Thus, the second part refers to Brahman and Atman (the Soul), while the third part describes the practical behavior that needs to be cultivated by the human being in order to experience Paramatman (God). For example, Satya (reliable), Tapas (perseverance), Samyajnana (wisdom) and Brahmacharya (celibate or balanced sentimental life). The Manduka discusses the meaning of the sacred word OM and relate it with the philosophical theory of “states of consciousness” which is presented in Hinduism and Buddhism. The Prashna contains some metaphysical questions that are answered through philosophy, mythology and symbolism.

In historical terms, over the last years, the Atharvaveda has been less studied than the other Vedas. Most positively, some researchers, such as Whitney [18], have made several translations and studies on the Atharvaveda. Furthermore, Bloomfield [19] has highlighted the importance of the study of Atharvaveda in the Vedic tradition. Following Whitney’s and Blommfield’s efforts, Bhattacharya [20] has announced the discovery of several manuscripts of the Paippalada Samhita. In this regard, recently several books of the Paippalada Samhita were translated and edited [21].

On the other hand, the roots of Ayurveda [22] are also in Hindu texts named by Charaka Samhita (an internal medicine treatise) and Sushruta Samhita (a surgery treatise). In this regard, I have to mention that both of them claim allegiance and inspiration on Atharvaveda [23]. For example, the Rishi Sushruta (who made several contributions to surgical practice) referred to the Atharvaveda as a book of “reference” for medical practice [24], being this opinion also supported by Charaka Samhita [25] in the verse 30.21.

The Charaka Samhita [26] consists of eight books, namely the Sutra Sthana (General principles on medical definitions, prevention of health through a balanced life), Nidana Sthana (Pathology on causes of diseases), Vimana Sthana (Specific advices about ethics in medical practice, diet and nourishment of the patient), Sarira Sthana (Anatomy of the human body), Indriya Sthana (Diagnosis based on sensorial response of the patient), Cikitsa Sthana (Therapeutics on treatment of diseases), Kalpa Sthana (Pharmaceutic and toxicology about the preparation of medicines) and Siddhi Sthana (ways to increase

success in healing treatment).

The Sushruta Samhita [27] is divided into two parts. The first is constituted by five chapters (Sutra-sthana, Nidana-sthana, Sarira-sthana, Cikitsa-sthana, Kalpa-sthana), while the second (Uttara-tantra) was added by Dridhabala. The content of these two parts deals with several topics on medical practice.

3 The Contribution of Ayurveda to Integrative Medicine

The Ayurveda [28] (and Eastern medicine) claims that some medical signs are required in order to make a proper diagnosis of the patient. The relationship of mind and body in the human being is performed by the physician of Ayurveda through the “doshas” (vata, pitta and kapha) [29]. For example, a person with an anxious mind (in Ayurveda is designated by “rajas”) might have a nervous breakdown, while a person with a lazy mind (in Ayurveda is designated by “tamas”) might have a depression. In the same way, in Western medical books (from conventional medicine) four mind humours are considered to be important in order to make a proper medical diagnosis, namely the choleric, the phlegmatic, the melancholic and the sanguine. In this regard, I have to mention that the choleric humour corresponds to Ayurvedic pitta type; the phlegmatic humour corresponds to Ayurvedic kapha type; the melancholic and the sanguine humours correspond to Ayurvedic vata type [30].

The Ayurveda also claims that some diseases only might be cured (such as, lung cancer) through the change of behaviour and the “state of consciousness” of the patient (such as, give up smoking) [31], [32]. In this regard, Ayurveda defends that the human being might experience several levels of perception or reality [33] – manifested in the chakras [34] - according to the personal behaviour. The Eastern medicine also defends that the vital energy of the human body (called by “prana”) flows in pathways called by “nadis”. Furthermore, the vital body (constituted by the several “nadis”) is connected with the physical body in the chakras. Thus, the relationship between vital and the physical bodies might contribute to the connection of the Ayurveda with the Western medicine [35]. For example, if a patient “block” movements of vital energy (due to stress or fear), this might contribute to the appearance of

cancer [36]. Recently, it has been suggested some Integrative medicine models (synthesis of Ayurveda and Western medicine) to health care systems that might contribute to cure the patient in an holistic way (body, mind and soul) as defended by the Atharvaveda [37]. One of the advantages of an Integrative medicine model is to find a “rational” explanation of distant and spontaneous cures [38], [39] as well as, the healing of “incurable” diseases which are described in the Indian Sacred books [40]. In this regard, I have to mention an experiment carried out at San Francisco hospital by Byrd [41], where were made prayers (in a random mode) to a group of patients (without the patient’s knowledge) for the recovery of the disease. The result was that patients who have had prayers at a distance recovered more quickly. Thus, the prayer has an effect on the cure of the patient, as defended by the Indian sacred books, referred to earlier.

4 Conclusions

The diagnosis and treatment performed by Western medicine (conventional medicine) focuses exclusively on the physical and biological aspects of the patient. However, the human being has also an emotional, mental and spiritual dimension that need to be taken into account for a full and holistic diagnosis and treatment of the patient [42]. In this regard, the Indian Sacred books, particularly the Atharvaveda (the precursor of the Ayurveda), claim that self-healing [43] depends on a process of self-awareness and spiritual evolution of the human being. Furthermore, the main target of an Integrative medicine model (an evolutionary model of healing) [44] is to cure all dimensions of the human being, as well as to explain in a scientific way the relationship between the health of the patient and the personal spiritual evolution of the human being, as described by the Sacred books of all religious traditions (Vedas, Bible, Qur’ an, Torah).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Goleman, D. and Gurin, J. (1993). *Mind-Body Medicine*. Consumer Reports Books.
- [2] Vivekananda, S. (1998). *Karma Yoga*, Brazilian Editions.
- [3] Witzel, M. (2003). Vedas and Upanishads, In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Gavin Flood.
- [4] Staal, F. (2009). *Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights*. Penguin.
- [5] Muller, M. (2002). *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 42, Oxford University Press.
- [6] Gonda, J. (2009). *Vedic Literature: Samhitas and Brahmanes*, vol. 1, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.
- [7] Bloomfield, M. (1999). *The Atharvaveda*, Harvard University Press.
- [8] Whitney, W. (1853). History of the Vedic texts, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.4, Article v, pp.254-255.
- [9] Zysk, K. (1993). *Religious Medicine: The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine*, Routledge.
- [10] Lopez, C. (2010). *Atharvaveda-Paippalada Kandas Thirteen and Fourteen*, Harvard University Press.
- [11] Griffith, R. (2010). *Atharva Veda*, Books I to VII, E.J. Lazarus.
- [12] Griffith, R. (2016). *Atharva Veda*, Books VIII to XX, Harvard University Press.
- [13] Lubotsky, A. and Griffiths, A. (2002). Paipalada Samhita 4.15: To Heal an Open Fracture With a Plant. *Die Sprache*, 42(1-2): 196-210.
- [14] Zysk, K. (1983). Fever in Vedic India. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103(3):617-621.
- [15] Brown, W. (1978). *India and Indology: Selected Articles*, Motilal Banarsidass .
- [16] Roer, E. (1905-1933). *Mundaka Upanishad and Prashna Upanishad*, Bibliotheca Indica, Vol. XV, No: 41-50, Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- [17] Muller, M. (1962). *The Upanishads-Part II*. Dover Publications.
- [18] Whitney, W. D. (1905). *Atharva-Veda Samhita*, Charles Rockwell Lanman.

- [19] Bloomfield, M. (1896). Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol.16.
- [20] Bhattacharyya, D. and Limaye, V.P. and Gadre, R.N. (1968). *The Fundamental themes of the Atharvaveda, with special references to its Paippaladasamhita*, Acharya V. P. Limaye and R. N. Gadre. Poona: S. P. Mandali.
- [21] Ghosh, A. (2002). *Atharvana: a collection of essays on the Atharva Veda with special reference to its Paippalada tradition*, Kolkata: Sanskrit Book Depot.
- [22] Wujastyk, D. (2003). *The roots of Ayurveda*, Penguin Classics.
- [23] Zysk, K. (2010). *Medicine in the Veda: Religious Healing in the Veda*, Motilal Banarsidass.
- [24] Knapp, S. (2006). *The Power of Dharma*, Rasbihari Lal & Sons.
- [25] Valiathan, M.S. (2002). *The Legacy of Caraka*, Orient Blackswan.
- [26] Sharma, P. (2005). *Caraka Samhita*. Chaukhambha Orientalia. 5 Vol.
- [27] Susruta, S. (2012). *An English Translation of the Sushruta Samhita, Based on Original Sanskrit Text*. Forgotten Books.
- [28] Lad, V. (2007). *A complete Guide to Clinical Assessment*. Ayurvedic Press.
- [29] Frawley, D. (1989). *Ayurvedic Healing*, Salt Lake City, UT: Passage Press.
- [30] Berger, R. (2013). *Ayurveda Made Modern*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- [31] Lad, V. (1984). *Ayurveda: The science of self-Healing*, Santa Fe, N.M.: Lotus Press.
- [32] Verma, V. (1995). *Ayurveda: A Way of Life*. Red Wheel/Weiser.
- [33] Nicolescu, B. (1996). *Levels of Complexity and Levels of Reality*, Bernard Pullman Edition.
- [34] Motoyama, H. (1981). *Theories of the Chakras*, Wheaton, I.L.: Theosophical Publishing House.
- [35] Phalen, K. (2012). *Integrative medicine: Achieving wellness through the best of Eastern and Western Medical practices*. Tuttle Publishing .
- [36] Pert, C. (1997). *Molecules of Emotion: Why You Feel the Way You Feel*, New York: Scribner.
- [37] Snyderman, R. and Weil, A. (2002). Integrative medicine: bringing medicine back to its roots. *Arc. Inter. Med.*, 162 (4):395-397.
- [38] O'Regan, B. (1987). *Spontaneous Remission: Studies of Self-Healing*, Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences.
- [39] Dossey, L. (2001). *Healing beyond the Body*, Boston: Shambala.
- [40] Mukhopadhyaya, G. (2003). *History of Indian Medicine*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 3 Vols.
- [41] Byrd, C. (1988). Positive therapeutic effects of intercessor prayer in a coronary care unit population. *Southern Medical Journal*, 81(1), 826-829.
- [42] Ross, C. (2009). Integral Healthcare: the Benefits and Challenges of Integrating Complementary and Alternative Medicine with a Conventional Healthcare Practice. *Integr. Med. Insights*, 4:13-20.
- [43] Barasch, M.I. (1993). *The Healing Path*, New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- [44] Gaudet, T. (2007). *Integrative Medicine Best Practices - Duke Integrative Medicine: A Clinical Center Model Study*. A Bravewell Collaborative Best Practices Report.

About the Author



Dr. Paulo Nuno Martins, a Chemical Engineer (Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon) and a PhD in History and Philosophy of Science (Faculty of Sciences and Technology, New University of Lisbon). He studied for 3 years Oriental languages and culture (Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic) and he is currently a researcher in History of science at Interuniversity Center for History

of Science and Technology, New University of Lisbon, Portugal (CIUHCT-UNL) (<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2670-3172>). Dr. Paulo Nuno Martins is a member of CIRET (centre international de recherches et d'études transdisciplinaires), Paris.