

## From Sūkta to Science: Bridging Ancient Ayurvedic Insights with Contemporary Medicinal Plant Research

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### Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to highlight the significance of evidence related to natural and herbal medicine found within ancient texts and to explore its relevance to contemporary medical practices. This research examines the descriptions of various ancient plants and herbs as documented in these texts. Primary data have been drawn from a wide range of ancient literature, extending from their earliest origins up to the Gupta period. The collected information has been systematically coded and analyzed to extract meaningful insights into the medical knowledge recorded in these writings. Particular attention is given to the Ṛgveda, where a specific hymn, the AuṣadhīSūkta (10.97.1–23), is identified. In verse 10.97.4, the word "Mātaraḥ" is noted, symbolizing the nurturing qualities of herbs, akin to the care of a mother for her child. Furthermore, verse 10.97.9 references "Iṣṛti" and "Niṣṛti," terms that allude to the healing properties of herbs in treating injuries and wounds. A detailed analysis of these and other related verses is presented within this study. The study makes valuable insights for future research in ancient medicinal herbs.

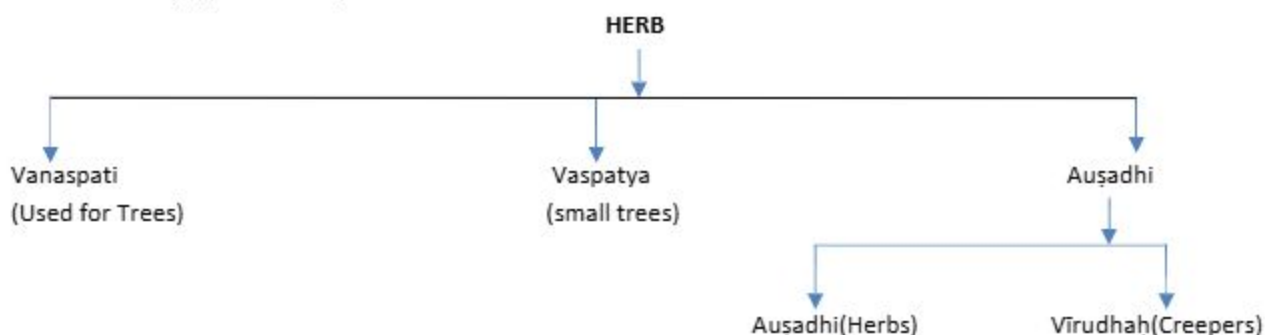
**Keywords:** AncientLiterature, Herbs, Health, Diseases, Medicine, Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, Rāmāyaṇa, Atharvaveda, Medicinal plants, Aṣṭādhyāyī, Upaniṣad, Kalpasūtra, Mahābhāṣya, Nirukta, Jain Literature, Caraka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, Vṛkṣāyurveda, Āyurveda, Cikitsā.

### 1. Introduction

In ancient India, the primary goal of life was Mokṣa (liberation) which can be possible after following the Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth), and Kāma (pleasure) (Dubey et al., 2018, p.362-73). All of these were believed to be attainable through a long life of 100 years. Such a lifespan could be achieved through the use of medicinal herbs.

The Ṛgveda, one of the oldest Indian texts, mentions Aśvin Kumāra as the god of health, renowned for his ability to cure diseases (Ṛgveda 1.3). This suggests that ancient humans had a significant awareness of herbal knowledge, and ancient literature serves as evidence of this understanding.

There are many types of herbs, which are mentioned here:



The term Vānaspati is used for all types of vegetation in which Vānaspatya is used for small trees and Auṣadhi is for small plants (Dvivedi, 2000, p.61 & Rāmananda, 2017, pp.726-731).

In the Ṛgveda, the term *Vanin* is used for vanaspati-

*Tamoṣadhikṣaḥ Vaninaśca. (Ṛgveda 7.4.5)*

In the text Atharvaveda, The Five Parts of Vīrudhaḥ is described as Soma, Darbhaor Kuśa, Bhaṅga, Bhāṅg, Yava, and Sahas or Shaktivardhana Chāval in Atharvaveda.

*Vanaspatīn Vānaspatyān Oṣadhīrūta Vīrudhaḥ* (Atharvaveda 8.8.14)

In Chapter 4 of CarakaSaṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna, it is mentioned that there are two types of herbs: Virecana (purgatives) and Kaṣāya (astringents). There are a total of 600 types of purgatives and 500 types of astringents. The astringents are further divided into 10 classes and 50 subclasses, detailing a total of 500 herbs in the subclass section (Dubey, S.D. et al., 2020, p.06).

In ancient India, Trees and plants were used as natural remedies. People at that time recognized their benefits and utilized them to treat various illnesses. Evidence of this practice can be found in ancient texts. However, today people often prefer English medicines over our traditional natural remedies, which can be detrimental to our health and well-being.

Vṛkṣa Vanaspati is mentioned in various ancient texts, which can be discussed here (Śarmā, Priyavrat, pp.200-216).

**Table 1: Vṛkṣa Vanaspati in ancient texts.**

Ancient Text	Total no. of Vṛkṣa- Vanaspati
<i>Rgveda</i>	67
<i>Yajurveda</i>	82
<i>Atharvaveda</i>	288
<i>Brāhmaṇa Grantha</i>	129
<i>Upaniṣad</i>	31
<i>Mahābhāṣya</i>	109
<i>Nirukta</i>	26

### 1.1 History of research/Previous work done:

Various works are focusing on Vedic literary data. Numerous texts within Vedic literature contain references to herbs. Notable contributors to this field include Dr. Kapil Dvivedī, Prof. Rūpa Kīśora Śāstrī, Priyavrat Śarmā, Dr. Pragati Siṅghal, Dr. Umeśa Kumār Siṅgha, D. Rhema Solank, The report from the Education Department of Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Rākeś Śarmā, Dr. Dhananjaya Vāsudeva Śāstrī, Dr. Bhūvala Rāma, K.L. Niṣāda, among others.

### 1.2 Objectives:

The following article will explore the use of plants in traditional medicine and offer recommendations to our society on how we can learn from these historical practices.

## 2. Methodology:

This research utilizes primary data collected from various ancient texts and literature, spanning from its origins until the Gupta period. The results have been coded and tabulated to derive meaningful insights into medical practices found in these ancient writings. Additionally, this study focuses solely on primary texts, including the *Upaniṣad*, *Kalpasūtra*, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *Mahābhāṣya*, *Nirukta*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*, *Vrikshayajurveda*, *Brāhmaṇ* writings, and the *Rgveda*.

The main emphasis is on ancient history, specifically from its beginnings until the Gupta period, and we will explore how the findings of this research can be applied in the modern world.

## 3. Medicinal Evidence in Literature:

The research identified traces of ancient medicinal plants in historical texts, such as the *Upaniṣad*, *Kalpasūtra*, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *Mahābhāṣya*, *Nirukta*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*, *Vrikshayajurveda*, *Brāhmaṇ* writings, and the *Rgveda*.

Research found numerous herbs in the literature that are still in use today. These herbs can be seen below (Dvivedi, 2000, pp.65-66):

- *Vātavṛkṣa* is called *bodhidrum* because Buddha gained knowledge there.

- *Aśoka* is called *Aśoka* because ended the sorrow of *Sītā*.
- *Dadrughna* (For the treatment of herpes.)
- *Arśoghna* (For the treatment of Piles)
- *Kuṣṭanāśinī* (For the treatment of leprosy and other skin-related conditions.)
- *Dantavādhana* (Tooth Cleaner-babool)
- *Phenila* (Rīṭhā, soapberry)
- *Kārmīn* (Mojapat, Kela, Thin-skinned)
- *Bahupāda* (Fig Tree/Gūlar Tree)

### 3.1 Ṛgveda:

Notably, the *Ṛgveda* includes a *Sūkta* called *AushdhiSūkta* that consists of 23 *mantras* (10.97.1 to 10.97.23) highlighting the significance of herbs.

In 10.97.1, the origins of these herbs are discussed. 10.97.4 and *Yajurveda* 12.78, herbs are called *Mātaraḥ*, because herbs save us like our mother.

*Oṣadhīrīti Mātaraḥ* (Ṛgveda 10.97.1)

The same mention can be seen in *Atharavaveda* and *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* 10.6 as well.

*Ṛgveda* 9.5.10/9.11.3 and *Atharavaveda* 5.24.7 /6.96.1 /8.1.17 mentions that the *Soma* is the king and saviour of Herbs, giving us Strength, force, speed, and beauty.

*Ṛgveda* mentions the process of Photosynthesis.

Adhukṣat Pipyuṣībhiṣam Ūrja Sūryasya Sapta Raśmibhiḥ (Ṛgveda 8.72.16)

It means herbs gain strength from the seven rays of the sun.

### 3.2 Yajurveda:

Ancient humans recognized the importance of the ecosystem. They understood that trees produce oxygen, as noted in the *Yajurveda* (*Vanaspatiḥ Śamitā* - 29.34). The oldest literature, such as the Vedas, also highlights this awareness. The Vedas identify five essential parts of trees, herbs, and plants, each serving distinct purposes.

According to *Yajurveda* 12.8, herbs appeared before all three eras. The person who collects these herbs is known as a *Bhīṣak* (physician) (*Yajurveda* 12.8).

### 3.3 Atharavaveda:

The text mentions various herbs with medicinal properties:

- A herb found at *Bālmīk*, which is effective in treating diarrhea (*Atharavaveda* 2/3/1-6).
- Another herb known to cure leprosy, epilepsy, and other ailments, derived from deer's tongue and skin (*Atharavaveda* 3/7/3).
- Additionally, there is *Śatavīrya* and *Durva* Se *Diliyushya*, recognized for their role in promoting health and well-being (*Atharavaveda* 3/77/1-8).
- The herb *Vṛṣapta* is mentioned along with medicines like *Vṛṣa* and *Śubhya* (*Atharavaveda* 4/4/18).
- Another verse describes a remedy for leprosy (*Atharavaveda* 6/95/1-3).
- 6.19/35/7-3 presents the destruction of dust caused by the smell of guggul incense. This clarified version should make it easier to understand the various herbs and their therapeutic benefits.
- Verse 18 mentions about Sexual enhancement.
- There is a mention that tree herb gives us lives.

*Virudhaḥ.... puruṣajīvanīḥ* (*Atharavaveda* 8.7.4).

The same mention is found in another verse as well-

*Ugrā yā viśadūṣaṇīḥ...Oṣadhīḥ* (*Atharavaveda* 8.7.10).

- 6.10.1-3 lists various types of herbs, including *Pippalī*, *Apāmārga*, *Priśniparnī*, *Rohiṇī*, and *Aśvattha*. *Pippalī* (*Piper longum* L.) is specifically used for treating *Vāta* disorders (*VātaVyādhi*) and mental disorders like *Unmāda* or *Upsmara*. *Apāmārga* is used for treating *Sudha* (a type of skin disease), *Tṛṣṇā* (excessive thirst), and *Unpatyata* (infertility).



- 4.37.4-6 mentions *Aśvattha*, *Nyāgrodha*, *Arjuna*, *Pīlkan*, *Kārkārī*, *Ajāsṛṅgi*, *Aghat*, and *Arakati*. These herbs can help to purify water.
- Finally, In 8.7.10, there is a mention of a herb that can release toxins, powerful and harmful, those that cleanse poison. Also, those that destroy weakness and ailments, expelling inauspicious forces; these are the herbs that heal and cure.

*Unmuçantīr vivarūṇā ugrā yā viśadūṣaṇīḥ.*

*Atho balāśanāśanīḥ kṛtyādūṣaṇīśca yāstāiḥ yantavoṣadhīḥ (Atharavaveda 8.7.10).*

The auxiliary Veda of the *Atharvaveda* is called *Ayurveda*, which contains traces of ancient herbs. In 8.7.6 there are mentions of *Arundhatī*, *Puṣpā*, and *Madhūmatī*.

*Jīvalām na dhāriṣā jīvantīmoṣadhimaham.*

*Arundhatī munnam yantī puṣpā madhūmatī miha huveasmā ariṣṭatātaye (Atharavaveda 8.7.6).*

### 3.4 Brāhmaṇical texts:

- **Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa** states that herbs provide energy to our strength.
  - Statement 1<sup>st</sup>-*Prāṇo Vanaspatiḥ (Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa 12.7).*
  - Statement 2<sup>nd</sup>-*Sa (Vanaspatiḥ) u vai piyo bhājanaḥ (Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa 10.6).*
- **Aitareya Brāhmaṇa**
  - Statement: *Prāṇo vai Vanaspatiḥ (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 2.4&10).*
- **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** states that *Oṣadhī* can demonstrate the illness (The herb is an antidote).
  - Statement: *Oṣam dhyeti tat oṣadhayaḥ samabhavan (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.2&4.5).*

### 3.5 Other Texts:

Ancient humans were capable of performing surgery on themselves, as documented in texts like the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, *Caraka Saṃhitā*, and *Ashtanghridaya*, which detail various surgical procedures. Many plants were used for medicinal purposes.

According to *Sāyana*- those whose fruits ripen are called *Oṣadhī*-

*Oṣaḥ pākāḥ phalapākāḥ yāsu dhīyate iti oṣadhayaḥ (Dvivedi, 2000, p.60-61).*

### 3.6 Yāska (Nirukta 9.27):

*Yāskam* mentions that herbs provide energy to the body and remove pollution.

*Oṣadhayaḥ oṣad dhayantīti vā.*

*Oṣatyenā dhayantīti vā.*

*Doṣam dhayantīti vā. (Dvivedi, 2000, p.60-61)*

### 3.7 Corroboration of Literary and Recent Evidence:

The research can corroborate ancient literature with current as well. These herbs are mentioned in literature, and they have been used by humans until now.

The following are mentioned below:

- *Ghr̥ta-kumārā (Aloe barbadensis)*
- *Sarpagandhā (Rauwolfia serpentina)*
- *Brahmī (Bacopa monnieri)*
- *Tulasī (Ocimum sanctum)*
- *Guggul (Commiphora mukul)*
- *Āmlā (Emblica officinalis)*
- *Aśvagandhā (Withania somnifera)*
- *Arjun tree (Terminalia Arjuna)*
- *Haridrā (Curcuma longa)*
- *Nimba (Azadirachta indica)*, etc. are some examples of the list of the medicinal plants that were part of our ancient medicinal system (Dubey et al., 2020, p.6).

#### 4. Findings and Results:

Research indicates that in ancient India, people utilized various medicinal herbs that contributed to both physical and mental health. Additionally, the healthcare system was closely connected to mythology, which helped sustain ancient healthcare practices and promote longevity. We can easily see evidence of it in ancient texts viz. *Rgveda* etc and the contemporary world as well.

Herbs such as *Vinca rosea* and *Taxus* species are widely used in the treatment of various cancer types. Vincristine and paclitaxel, isolated from these plants, demonstrate strong anticancer properties (Dubey et al., 2020, p.6). The herbs are composed of five elements in ancient literature (panch tatwa): *Prthvī* (Earth), *Āpas* (Water), *Agni* (Fire), *Vāyu* (Air), and *Ākāśa* (Aether or Space) (*Atharvaveda* 4.23.6, 12.1.17, 12.1.57, 3.23.6, 11.4.17, 4.27.2, *Rgveda* 9.65.19, 8.72.16, 10.88.10, *Yajurveda* 6.2).

#### 5. Discussion:

Significant research has been conducted by various scholars, however, very few have explored the connection between archaeological findings to current sources. In this study, the author utilizes ancient literature as a primary source alongside current data. By corroborating these sources, the conclusion is drawn that ancient humans were well-informed about medicinal herbs, which contributed to their remarkable lifespan of up to 100 years.

#### 6. Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is clear that ancient texts possessed significant knowledge of medicinal herbs, which remains relevant in today's context. Research supports this through both literary and contemporary sources.

The *Rgveda* references the *Aśvin Kumāra* as the god of health (1.3) and includes a *Sūkta* known as the *Aushadhi Sūkta*, comprising 23 *mantras* (10.97.1 and onward) that emphasize the importance of herbs. Vedic and Brahmanical texts refer to herbs as *Mātaraḥ*, signifying their healing properties and nurturing qualities similar to those of mothers. Throughout the Vedic texts, various types of herbs are mentioned.

The *Atharvaveda* provides remedies for ailments such as leprosy, diarrhea, and epilepsy. It also discusses herbs used for sexual enhancement, naming several, including *Aśvattha*, *Nyāgradha*, *Arjuna*, *Pīlkhan*, *Kārkārī*, *Ajāśṛṅgi*, *Aghat*, and *Arakati*. Furthermore, the text describes the qualities of these herbs and refers to Ayurvedic medicines such as *Arundhatī*, *Puṣpā*, and *Madhūmatī*.

Ancient literature contains medicinal knowledge that is still applicable today. Some of the medicines mentioned include *Aloe barbadensis*, *Rauwolfia serpentina*, *Bacopa monnieri*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Commiphora mukul*, *Embolica officinalis*, *Withania somnifera*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Curcuma longa*, and *Azadirachta indica*.

Ultimately, research suggests that ancient peoples revered nature and possessed extensive knowledge of herbs, which likely contributed to their longevity, possibly averaging a minimum of 100 years. This herbal knowledge should be utilized in the modern world. The findings indicate that contemporary society should study ancient literature to uncover this rich herbal knowledge and apply it today.

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