

## PATIENT-CENTERED THERAPY OF ĀYURVEDA: APPROACHES AND APPLICATIONS

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The applicative aspects of Āyurveda are presented by elaborating on how this ancient system of medicine can safely be used to cure a number of diseases. Āyurveda is endowed with innumerable therapeutic applications to address diseases of various nature i.e. biological, chemical, physical, social, cultural, economic, genetic and behavioral.

### Introduction

Āyurveda, a holistic science of life, envisages a patient-centered therapeutic approach to restore perfect health by eliminating all the pathogenic factors embedded in physiological and psychological realms. For centuries, Āyurveda has been bearing the torch of hope in the management of diseases of unknown etiology, which evade *pratyakṣa jñānam* (sensory knowledge) and may also be rooted in *apratyakṣam* (imperceptible and unquantifiable entities)<sup>1</sup>.

Āyurveda, being an offshoot of *Atharvaveda*, shares the dialectics of the Vedas in general and *Atharvaveda* in particular. The Vedas are the oldest compendium of wisdom that harmoniously blends objective, subjective, and intuitive knowledge. The Vedas are *apauruṣeya* i.e. they are not man-made. They do not have *vaktās* (exponents) but only *śrotās* (listeners or seekers), and they deliver meaning to the listeners or seekers depending on their requirements.

The Vedic concepts are universal in nature; they are beyond space and time. Being an *upaveda* (offshoot) of *Atharvaveda*, the Vedic epistemology and cosmology are integral to Āyurveda. All Vedic philosophical explanations

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in *śaḍarśanas* — *sāñkhya*, *yoga*, *nyāya*, *vaiśeṣika*, *pūrva mīmāṃsā*, and *uttara mīmāṃsā* are applicable to Āyurveda also. The Vedic knowledge systems are to be enjoined for the proper understanding and practice of this life science. Only then, it will become *Vaidika* (related to the Vedas). This philosophical foundation of Āyurveda makes it a normative health science; which prescribes the spontaneous association of social and ethical life, as inevitable for health (*svāsthya*).

The metaphysical foundation of Āyurveda is elucidated by the *brahmāṇḍa-piṇḍāṇḍa nyāya*: the interrelationship between macrocosm (*brahmāṇḍa*) and the man or microcosm (*piṇḍāṇḍa*). The entire edifice of this life science is built upon the firm theoretical foundation of this unique Vedic principle.

#### **Profundities of Āyurveda in Diagnosis, Prognosis and Treatment**

According to Āyurveda, human health is the resultant of the dynamic equilibrium of *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*, otherwise called *tridoṣas*. The manifestation of any disease is associated with the perturbances of *tridoṣas*, either individually or in permutations and combinations. *Vāta* is the basis of internal and external movements of the body. *Vāta* controls the respiratory, circulatory, digestive and excretory functions starting from cellular level to tissue and organ levels. *Pitta* mediates the chemical conversion of food substances into vital substances of the human system. All biochemical processes of the body are under the control of *pitta*. It is invariably associated with heat exchanges, resulting in transformation of digested food substances into organic compounds of the body. *Kapha* means the building up processes of the human system. In short, all functions of the human body can be summed up as vitalization of matter and materialization of life. These processes are simultaneous. *Tridoṣas* control and equilibrate these processes to bestow health and vice versa.

The fundamental duty of the Āyurvedic physician is to re-establish the equilibrium of the *tridoṣas*. The disequilibrium of the *doṣas*, either individually or in various permutations and combinations, is the cause or the *hetu* of the genesis of diseases. *Liñga* is the symptomatology of the perturbances of the *doṣas*. *Auśadha* is the appropriate remedial measure prescribed by the physician on the basis of *doṣa vaiṣamyam* (perturbances of

*doṣas*) to re-establish the *doṣa sāmīyam* (equilibrium of *doṣas*). This process is called the *nidānaparivarjanam* (eradication of the cause and effect).

The most guarded tool of diagnosis in Āyurveda is *Nāḍīparīkṣā* (pulse examination). It can fully bring out the pathogenesis, which includes genetic, predisposing, triggering and perpetuating factors. *Nāḍīparīkṣā* narrows down the diagnostic possibilities, thereby reducing the differential diagnoses to the minimum. It results in the avoidance of unnecessary diagnostic investigations. This can also precisely predict the prognosis.

Pulse — ‘the orchestra of one’s life,’ reveals the following, among many others like, state of the embryo in mother’s womb; evolutionary stages of neo-natal, infancy, and childhood; pleasant and unpleasant periods of patient’s life; status of health from the past to the present day; physiological and emotional make-up of the patient; constitutional bend of the patient as paternal, maternal, or combination of both; cognitive power and pulse examination during sleep on vital days (day of birth, birth star, lunar day) can reveal *pūrvajanma* (previous life) too. *Nāḍīparīkṣā* has a pivotal role in health promotion also.

### Applicative Potentialities of Āyurveda

The author, as a member of the Dattātreya Heritage (oldest Āyurvedic order), and as a practitioner of the classical system of medicine, lists some diseases of unknown etiology, classified as rare, orphan, or incurable in modern medicine, which have been successfully managed by Āyurveda (by the author, himself). Considering the scope of the paper to introduce the applied potentialities of Āyurveda on patient-centric management (or) and cure of diseases; otherwise not-curable by modern medicine, the author limits to itemizing the cases. The details of disease management shall be elaborated in future publications. The diseases are<sup>2</sup>:

1. *Multiple Sclerosis* is an unpredictable and common neurological disorder in young adults, which is characterized by benign to disabling and devastating symptoms. This disease, which was more prevalent in the west, is presently on the increase in the east. It has no cure in modern medicine.
2. *Atypical Hemolytic-uremic syndrome* — *Hemolytic anemia and Hemolytic-uremic syndrome* which can be genetic, acquired or idiopathic, is

characterized by fatal hematological and nephrological complications. Modern medicine does not have a successful treatment for this disorder.

3. *Viral diseases like Chikungunya, dengue fever and others* have been appearing in epidemic proportions. These diseases result in multi-system complications, morbidity and mortality. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), USA, has classified *Chikungunya* as a rare disease.
4. *Guillian Barré Syndrome* is an autoimmune disorder. It is characterized by ascending paralysis, with the disease period extending from few hours to few weeks. Treatment in modern medicine is prohibitively costly, and mostly ineffective.
5. *Hemochromatosis* is an inherited liver disease leading to abnormal accumulation of iron in parenchymal organs culminating in organ toxicity, liver cirrhosis, heart failure, diabetes mellitus and death. This disease, predominantly found in the west does not have complete cure in modern medicine. Treatment procedures are hazardous, demand routine bloodletting, and have unpleasant side-effects, making life miserable.
6. *Sarcoidosis* is an abnormal immune response displaying symptoms of specific inflammation in body tissues. These, heal naturally, or fatally harm the functions of vital organs like lungs, heart, nervous system, liver and kidneys. Modern medicine treats it with corticosteroids with high possibility of recurrence within three years. In advanced cases, it can also result in non-reversal of fibrosis in the lungs.
7. *Chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) / Interstitial lung disease (ILD)/ obstructive sleep apnea*: COPD, with the co-occurrence of emphysema and chronic bronchitis, is the fourth leading cause of death in the USA, and is characterized by progressive difficulty in breathing. In modern medicine, there is no cure for COPD and no treatment to reverse lung damage. There is only symptomatic treatment available.
8. Diabetes micro-vascular complications
9. *Aplastic Anemia*

In all these cases modern medicine can provide only symptomatic remedy with high probability of several systemic complications. There are

hundreds of orphaned diseases which are rare and not treatable by modern medicine, which can be effectively managed by Āyurveda. For antibiotics, Āyurveda has better substitutes. Āyurveda can contribute a lot in the treatment of malignancies, preventive oncology, and palliative care. Currently, we are having more than seven thousand syndromes - of course many more are to be encountered in future. The growing resistance of bacteria, in recent times, is another global threat to human health. In many of these conditions, modern medicine is groping in the dark. This contingency will never arise in Āyurveda because it is a patient-centered healing science.

The uniqueness of Āyurveda is that it remedies each individual differently. This sets it apart from all other systems of medicine particularly the modern medicine, which targets the disease and treats uniformly all persons having the same disease. The lack of individual specific therapeutic measures is the reason why modern remedial measures are discarded periodically, while encountering disastrous side effects. This can never happen in patient-oriented therapy of Āyurveda.

#### **Āyurveda and Emergency Health Care**

This normative science carrying the ancient insights should be appropriately integrated with the advances in science and technology to successfully manage diseases and to deliver evidence-based results. Various tools and techniques of academic modern science, especially of life sciences, can be appropriately made use of in Āyurveda, to the extent that they are in agreement with *śṛti* (direct or indirect acceptance of the Vedas), *yukti* (reasoning acceptable to the Vedas), and *anubhava* (experience of the desired result). Like the Vedas, Āyurveda also has got very liberal and catholic approach to prevailing knowledge systems. The Āyurvedic physician must be well informed of advances in health sciences and must be liberal enough to apply that knowledge. Āyurveda can be further enriched with life support technologies, biochemical investigations, clinical pathology and various imaging techniques of diagnosis like CT scan, MRI scan, ultrasonography and other investigative procedures. If complemented with these techniques, Āyurveda can provide successful emergency management procedures, which are yet to be popularized. However, the scope of this paper is insufficient to elaborate on the author's experience in handling medical emergencies, including intensive health care.

### Conclusion

The growth of Āyurveda was adversely affected by many socio-political and cultural influences in our country, over the last several centuries. Fortunately, the Dattātreya Heritage, the oldest Āyurvedic order, has uninterruptedly carried forward the dynamic processes of *svarūpa rakṣā* (preservation of the literature in its original form), *artha rakṣā* (preservation of the intended meaning of the literature) and *prayoga rakṣā* (the application of the principles enumerated in the *śāstras*). Through the continuous responses of the physicians from this heritage to the health challenges of mankind, they have been able to equip themselves in handling disease prevention (*svastha vṛtta*), cure of diseases (*ātura vṛtta*) and expand it to the management of emergency conditions, industrial disasters, epidemics, traumatic neurological conditions and critical care.

Āyurvedic literary treasures are so vast and wide, and the Āyurvedic concept of pharmacy rationally declared that everything existing in the nature is medicine, if used appropriately. Hence, billions of medical formulations can be prepared to suit any medical contingency, of any person.

In spite of all these, the World Health Organization (WHO) has accorded Āyurveda an inferior status — “alternative system of medicine/complementary medicine;” totally ignoring its incomparable therapeutic potential, which is far superior to modern medicine. The success of Āyurveda is due to its holistic approach and the solid foundation provided by Vedic wisdom. Āyurveda can provide the suffering mankind the safest remedy for leading a productive life and for achieving the ultimate goal of life — *mokṣa* (liberation). It is the need of the hour that we realize the immense potentialities of this healing science and take refuge in the sanctuary of this Vedic science to improve the overall state of world health!

### Further Reading

1. Teaching notes of my beloved Guru, Swami Dattātreya, Athreya Heritage, oldest order of Āyurvedic physicians.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Leading Causes of Death, [Online:Web] URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/FASTATS/lcod.htm>, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011