

Review on History of Visha vidhya in Ayurveda toxicology

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Abstract: In India the state Kerala with its geographical peculiarities provided a firm platform for popularising Agada Tantra- the Ayurvedic branch of toxicology. The treatment had two forms one based on Mantra or sacred spells and other based on medical care. Former was termed as Visha vidhya and latter was known as Visha vaidhya. The medicine based treatment is still in practice but former method with mantras or spells are not in practice. The possible rationale behind the action of chanting Mantra or spells in treatment have not been discussed in published papers. Hence this paper is thus an attempt to review the details of Visha vidhya from the available literature and discuss the possible mode of its action so as to make it useful while administering medicines.

Index Terms: Toxicology, Ayurveda, Mantra, Visha, History.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the state of Kerala in India, Visha chikitsa or Ayurveda toxicology was practiced in two forms, namely Visha vidhya and Visha vaidhya. The former emphasized mantra or chanting spells while the latter gave importance to medication and other related procedures[1] Currently Ayurveda care is not widely used in toxic condition emergency management. Despite the invasion of the natural ecosystems by humans, the number of poisoning cases is reducing. Modern medical science has advanced as the first line of treatment. These factors added up to displace the once-adored position of Visha Chikista. Though the Visha Vaidhya is in practice, the practice of visha vidhya has become restricted to the dwellings of a select few seers of this science.

In the modern era, even the fact that treatment was possible with the help of mantra is being viewed under suspicion. But the text Susruta samhita Susruta's verses in Kalpa Sthana say: "Mantra can ward off the action of poison quicker than that of medicine" He further explains that, if mantra becomes unsuccessful due to the improper following of the instructions, then the anti-poisonous medicaments should be adopted.[2]

Also, in the context of administering the prativisha(counter poison) in poisoned condition, in the text Ashtanga sangraha the author Vagbhatta says that "if a physician is helped by Mantras [i.e. if he has Mantra siddhi] the counter poison will not behave erratically." [3] These statements clearly show the importance which was given to Mantra in treating poison cases. Through this paper an effort is made to understand how mantra could support the visha vaidhya tradition or medicine administration in current scenario.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VISHAVIDHYA

The practice of visha vidhya has a long and rich history. It can be clearly understood from the structure of mantras which are being used. These Mantras have a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil versus. i.e., it was in practice even before the evolution of Malayalam from Tamil. [E.g. guru vazhka guru nathan vazhka....-a mantra mentioned in text Jyotsnika] Cherulli Pattar and Nanjunda Nadhan are considered as the main propounders of Visha Vidhya, which rose as a Dravidian tradition of Kerala Visha vidhya. Later on, when Aryan culture spread in our state, their traditions with Sanskrit mantras also got rooted.[1] Visha vidhya was so well developed that for each kind of poison there was a particular type of mantra and the number of times to repeat a mantra was based on the condition of the patient. This has been explained in detail in Jyotsnika and references of specific Mantras are also available in books like Ayurveda Prakasha .

III. MASTERING OF MANTRA

The Mantra is to be learnt directly from the guru and it requires many years of continuous upasana to master it. The disciple, on being attenuated by the preceptor, should chant the mantra repeatedly for one Akshara Laksha (i.e., a lakh times the number of syllables in the mantra). Only after such repeated learning with correct accentuation of Mantra, [considering the udatha, anudatha, svaritha etc 18 types of pronunciation], by following strict rituals, and attaining proper Mantra Sidhi should a person start using it to heal. So a person who does not have control over his senses cannot succeed in Visha chikista. In the initial stages the disciples stay with the guru when he does the treatment, repeat the Mantra after him and thus perceive the methods of healing directly from the guru.[1]

IV. THE PRACTICAL LEVELS OF MANTROCHARANA

In visha vidhya, Mantra is used in various procedures. In the text Visha jyotsnika, procedures like Sthambhana (arresting the spread of poison); Samhara (removing the poison), Sankramana (makes a stage of poisoning transfer from one person to another) etc. are being mentioned. Also particular 'Mandalas' or spheres like Akasha, agni, vayu, thoya and bhoo, have been explained for the purpose of visualization involved in each of these procedure. The colours and shape being attributed to them are;

Table 1 Details of visualization while chanting *Mantra*

Name of mandala/sphere	Colour attributed	Shape of mandala/sphere To be visualized
Bhoo	Yellow	4 cornered
Thoya	White	Half moon
Agni	Red	3 cornered
Vayu	Black	Circular
Akasha	Multi coloured	Circular

Each of these mandalas are attributed a specific sign and deity, e.g.; the sign of Bhoo Mandala is Vajra and deity is Indra.[4] Such a detailed explanation on visualization methods covering all the minutest aspects itself shows the systematized study of ancient scholars behind it. By chanting mantra, a stage of deeper concentration with one-pointedness of mind and body is attained by a physician. From that stage, he visualizes the specific mandala with its colour and other features and the Beejamantra or spell specific for the procedure. The specificity of Mandalas depends on the nature of treatment adopted. e.g.; for the samhara and sthambhana process Bhoo Mandala is to be visualized. After that he proceeds further in visualization, using other specifications described for the procedure. Later, he does the Kriyas (action with intention) specific for the patient's condition.[4]

V. POSSIBLE ERRORS OR LIMITATIONS IN CHANTING MANTRA

The mantras, which are divine in origin, have the effect of providing instantaneous relief from poisoned condition as compared to medicines.[2] But the requisitions said for it are: avoidance of such factors as stree (relation with women) and mamsa (meat), following a lifestyle with a diet of hitahara (conductive food), proper hygiene, sleeping on a bed made of Kusha grass, and abiding by auspicious customs and ceremonies. [2] The food favourable for a person practicing visha vidhya has been said as that which includes mainly ksheera (milk), shaka (leafy vegetables), yava (barley) and yavagu (gruels).[3]

The mantras which are not chanted as per these indications and those which are chanted with a defect in svara (sound of chanting) or varna (the proper syllable used) will not be successful; if such a condition arises the Agadakarman (anti-poisonous medicaments) are to be adopted.[2]

VI. DISCUSSION ON MODE OF ACTION OF MANTRA IN OUR BODY

The action of mantra could be viewed under different angles:

How Mantra helps in attaining a Higher Energy level

On chanting the mantras the physician tunes his body system to a higher realm. In this stage, regulation in his breath provides proper air supply to the cells and his mind attains a deeper level of one-pointed concentration. At this stage his brain tunes to a right brain domain and reaches a stage of deeper relaxation [emitting alpha and theta waves]. As the human brain captures and copies the frequencies that it is exposed to, this stage of relaxation could be subsequently aroused in the patient.[5]

Mantrocharana regulating the Energy field

Proper chanting of mantras creates particular energy vibrations in the energy field of the physician. This could directly affect the energy field of the patient through a resonance effect and help in correcting the altered rhythms of his field. In addition to this, the physician could be transferring the energy to the patient through the specific kriyas [specific acts which he performs] or through the medicine that he administers.

How Relaxation counteracts the effects of Poison

If such a relaxation state could be aroused in a patient, then the stress responses in his body would be reduced. The physical relaxation can reduce the peripheral circulation and thus the spread of poison could be reduced. In most poisoned conditions, complications mainly occur due to the exaggerated stress responses. Acute stress responses which resulted in high aldosterone production triggered the pace of circulation further and thus enhanced the spread of poison.

Added Benefits of Patient's Belief in Recovery:

Another action of Mantra can occur directly from the point of view of the belief created in the patient. The chanting of Mantra makes him feel that some important procedures which aid in his recovery are being performed. Then he would have more belief in the action of medicine in his body. This placebo effect will automatically help him reach a relaxed state of mind to facilitate the action of medicine.

VII. CONCLUSION

To explain the principles of Ayurveda in the language of modern science is a hard task. No matter, if the mantra is chanted or reflected in the mind, it could help the person to attain a deeper level of concentration wherein one-pointed thoughts arise in him. With the help of these converged thoughts and other specified techniques of visualization he would be able to materialize the healing of the patient. In the present-day scenario incorporating manthrocharana while administering medicine can thus help in increasing the effect of the medicine.

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