



Review Article

Medicinal Plants of Atharvaveda

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Abstract

The Atharvaveda, the fourth Veda composed around 1200–1000 BCE, is considered the earliest systematic Indian text on medicine and healing. It contains *Bhaisajya Suktās* or “hymns on medicine” that describe diseases, their causes, and plant-based remedies, forming the foundation of Ayurveda. The text shows remarkable insight into health sciences, with detailed descriptions of medicinal herbs and their uses.

Hymn 8.7 praises a wide variety of healing plants — “tawny colored, pale, variegated, red, dusky, and black” — including spreading herbs, bushy plants, creepers, and reed-like species, invoking them to deliver humans from consumption and other diseases. The Atharvaveda classifies plants by form and habitat, reflecting early botanical knowledge.

Examples of medicinal plants mentioned:

1. **Apamarga** (*Achyranthes aspera*) – used for cough, asthma, and digestive disorders.
2. **Pippali** (*Piper longum*) – prescribed for fever, respiratory ailments, and as a rejuvenator.
3. **Kushtha** (*Saussurea lappa*) – valued for skin diseases and as an antiseptic.
4. **Arjuna** (*Terminalia arjuna*) – used for heart-related conditions.
5. **Soma** – a sacred plant mentioned for strength, vitality, and ritual healing.

This study examines how the Atharvaveda integrates empirical plant use with ritual and prayer, presenting a holistic approach to health. Many Atharvan medical terms and plant remedies continue to be used in traditional Ayurveda, demonstrating the text’s lasting impact on India’s herbal medical heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

The Atharvaveda, one of the four Vedas of ancient India, is regarded as the earliest text that systematically deals with medicine and healing. Dating back over 3,000 years, it contains numerous hymns known as *Bhaisajya Suktās*, or "hymns on medicine," that describe diseases, their causes, and cures. Among these, the use of medicinal plants holds special importance. The Atharvaveda mentions a wide variety of herbs, creepers, and trees, praising their power to cure illness and promote health. These verses show that ancient Indians had a deep knowledge of plant-based healing long before modern medicine. Many terms and plants described in the Atharvaveda are still used in Ayurveda today. Thus, the Atharvaveda not only forms the foundation of the Indian medical tradition but also highlights the age-old relationship between humans and medicinal plants.

Our ancient medical system, which is still in vogue as the Ayurvedic system, originated and developed from the Atharvaveda. Many facts of life and culture, education and upbringing, economy and polity, as well as custom and tradition, have roots in the Atharvaveda. According to our Vedas, the causes of most diseases are organisms and poison. The germs and insects are of five types, i.e., visible (*dr̥ṣṭa*), invisible (*adr̥ṣṭa*), creeping insects (*kurūru*), those living in beds, etc. (*algandu*), and those moving fast (*salune*). Both visible and invisible germs and insects should be destroyed (AV: 2.31.2; 5.23.7). There are two types of germs: *Durnama* and *Sunama*. *Durnama* causes diseases and hence must be destroyed. *Sunama* nourishes the body and hence must live there (AV: 8.6.4). The Atharvaveda widely deals with medicine and herbs, their healing properties, and their importance. Herbs are an important source of curing disease. On the basis of their property to cure disease, they have been called *bheṣaja* and *subheṣaja*, meaning "best drugs" (AV: 2.3.1). Medicines were prepared from the extract of these herbs. The extract of herbs has been described as the source of longevity (AV: 3.31.10).

1. Ajasrngi

It is a traditional Ayurvedic Medicinal herb. It acts as a natural Sugar regulator. The root and leaf pastes are often applied topically to reduce swelling, treat joint stiffness and soothe the skin.

1. Apamarga

It is a key herb in Ayurveda used to treat digestive, urinary and skin disorders.

3. Amala (Amla)

Amla is scientifically recognised for its potential to help regulate blood glucose & cholesterol.

4. Arundhati

In the Atharvaveda, Arundhati is a miraculous, life-giving climbing plant known for its restorative properties.

5. Arka

Arka plant known for its expectorant and anti-asthmatic properties. Dried flowers and root bark are frequently used to treat cough, catarrh, and bronchial.

6. Arjuna

The Arjuna tree is revered in Ayurveda as nature's heart tonic. Primarily used to strengthen heart muscles, balance cholesterol levels, and manage blood pressure.

7. Avaka

Avaka Native to the Philippines this plant - a close relative of the banana, is primarily known for its incredibly strong material.

8. Alabu

Alabu Plant managing blood sugar, aiding digestion, promoting weight loss, and reducing inflammation and fevers.

9. Asvattha

Asvattha tree highly valued in the Vedas for its antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

10. Abaya

Abaya tree is traditionally used to soothe the urinary tract, treat chronic cough and help with chronic dysentery.

11. Asuri

Asuri Historically recorded in the Atharva Veda. It is highly valued for its internal and topical healing properties. Asuri Paste is famous as a remedy for skin afflictions including leprosy & persistent rashes.

12. Iksu

Iksu commonly known as sugarcane the root decoction and fresh juice are utilized to manage dysuria painful urination.

13. Udanparna

Udanparna highly effective for building a strong core, toning abdominal muscles, and improving digestive health.

14. Udumbara

Udumbara tree highly valued for controlling heavy menstrual bleeding.

15. Kammak

The large broad leaves are stitched or molded together to serve as sustainable dinner plates and soup bowls.

16. Kamal

Kamal tree Primarily as a Potent natural dye for textiles, topical skin treatment.

17. Karanja

Topical application of Karanj oil and leaf pastes is traditionally used to treat eczema, Psoriasis, scabies.

18. Kustha

Kustha is highly valued for stomach issue.

19. Khadir

Khadir Bark extracts are used to manage diarrhea, dysentery and intestinal Parasites.

20. Guggulu

Guggulu tree prized for managing cholesterol and joint pain.

21. Chipudru

Chipudru used indoors on smooth floors (marble, tiles) to trap dust effectively.

22. Jangom

Jangom treat Sores, ulcers, and Skin eruptions.

23. Jivanti

Commonly used as a natural galactagogue to increase milk Production in nursing mothers.

24. Tila

Its flowers, leaves and wood are widely utilized across herbal Medicine woodworking and urban landscaping.

25. Durva

Durva used to control bleeding detoxify the body, soothe skin conditions and as a sacred offering in Spiritual Ceremonies.

26. Dhanva

It helps to remove chest pain body swelling and headaches.

27. Nyagrodh

used to decoctions to stop nausea vomiting & diarrhea.

28. Panna

Panna known as Saptaparna. Bark decoctions are given to new mothers in India to boost immunity, relieve post-delivery weakness.

29. Pata

Pata usually refers to the Curry Leaf plant Kadi Patta in hindi.

30. Pippli

It used to treat respiratory Infection, Improve digestion & boost metabolism.

31. Prisniparni

Often prescribed to treat diarrhea, bleeding Piles, and irritable bowel Symptoms.

32. Plaksa

Traditionally utilized for its anti-inflammatory and wound healing properties, as well as to treat bleeding disorders, skin ulcers.

33. Bilva

Bilva tree widely used to treat joint Pain.

34. Bhanga

Bhanga tree Primarily used to treat nerve related disorder.

35. Masa

It utilized to treat fevers and digestion.

36. Yava

Yava a highly prescribed Medicinal Plant used to treat lower blood Sugar level.

37. Rajni

Haridra

It used treat urinary tract and kidney-related issues.

38. Rama

It helps to Relieves bloating, acidity and supports gut flora.

39. Vansa

Its leaves and roots are widely used to treat Cough, asthma bronchitis.

40. Varan

Varan traditional medicine for its profound impact on the urinary and digestive systems.

41. Vaikankata

Its Root & bark decoctions are used to manage liver disorders like Jaundice.

42. Shafak

It traditionally used to treat Menstrual disorder.

43. Sana

Sana tree Commonly a reference to the Ashoka tree it used for women's reproductive health & skin.

44. Shinshipa

Mostly used for shade & ornamental Purpose, used to relieve Joint Pain

Medicinal Plants of Atharvaveda

| Sl. No. | Name of the Plant | Reference | Botanical Name | Family |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Ajasrngi / Sami | AV 4.37.6; AV 6.11.1, 6.30, 2-3 | Prosopis cineraria (L.) Druce | Leguminosae |
| 2 | Apamarga | AV 4.17.6, 4.18.7, 4.19.4 | Achyranthes aspera L. | Amaranthaceae |
| 3 | Amula | AV 5.31.4 | Gloriosa superba L. | Liliaceae |
| 4 | Artu | AV 20.131.17 | Oroxylum indicum (L.) Vent. | Bignoniaceae |
| 5 | Arataki | AV 4.34.6 | Acacia polycantha Willd. | Leguminosae |
| 6 | Arundhati | AV 4.12.1, 6.59.1, 8.7.6, 19.38.1 | Sida cordifolia L. | Malvaceae |
| 7 | Arka | AV 6.72.1 | Calotropis procera (Ait.) Ait.f. | Asclepiadaceae |
| 8 | Arjuna | AV 2.8.3 | Terminalia arjuna (Roxb.) W. & A. | Combretaceae |
| 9 | Avaka | AV 8.7.9, 4.37.8-10 | Blyxa octandra (Roxb.) Planch ex Thw. | Hydrocharitaceae |
| 10 | Alabu | AV 8.10.10, 29, 30; 20.132.1-2 | Lagenaria siceraria (Molina) Standl. | Cucurbitaceae |
| 11 | Asvattha | AV 3.6.1, 4.27.4 | Ficus religiosa L. | Moraceae |
| 12 | Abaya | AV 6.16.1 | Brassica campestris L. | Cruciferae |

Plant Table (Rows 13–31)

| Sl. No. | Name of the Plant | Reference | Botanical Name | Family |
|---------|--|--------------------------------|--|----------------|
| 13 | Asuri | AV 1.24.1-4 | Brassia juncea L. Czern & Coss. | Cruciferae |
| 14 | Iksu | AV 1.34.5 | Saccharum officinarum L. | Gramineae |
| 15 | Utthanparna | AV 3.18.2 | Ricinus communis L. | Euphorbiaceae |
| 16 | Oudumbar | AV 19.31.1 | Ficus racemosa L. | Moraceae |
| 17 | Kannkak | AV 10.4.22 | Datura metal L. | Solanaceae |
| 18 | Kamal / Bis. (Kamal nal) / Shaluk (Root) | AV 8.6.9 / AV 4.34.5 | Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn. | Nymphaeaceae |
| 19 | Karanja | AV 20.21.8 | Derris indica (Lamk.) Bennet | Leguminosae |
| 20 | Kustha | AV 5.4.6 | Saussurea lappa C.B. Clarke | Compositae |
| 21 | Khadir | AV 3.6.1, 5.5.5, 8.8.3, 10.6.6 | Acacia catechu (L.F.) Willd. | Leguminosae |
| 22 | Guggulu | AV 2.36.7, 19.38.1 | Commiphora wightii (A.) Bhandari | Burseraceae |
| 23 | Chipudru | AV 6.127.2 | Pinus roxburghii Sar. | Pinaceae |
| 24 | Jangim | AV 19.34.35 | Lannea coromandelica (Houtt.) Merrill | Anacardiaceae |
| 25 | Jivanti | AV 3.14.6 | Leptadenia reticulata W. & A. | Asclepiadaceae |
| 26 | Tila | AV 2.8.3, 6.40.72 | Sesamum orientale L. | Pedaliaceae |
| 27 | Durva | AV 6.106.1 | Cynodon dactylon (L.) Pers. | Graminae |
| 28 | Dharva | AV 5.5.5 | Anogeissus latifolia (Roxb Ex DC) Wall | Combretaceae |
| 29 | Nyagrodh | AV 3.37.4 | Ficus bengalensis L. | Moraceae |
| 30 | Parna | AV 5.5.5 | Butea monosperma (Lamk.) Taub. | Leguminosae |
| 31 | Pata | AV 2.27.4 | Cissampelos pariera L. | Menispermaceae |

| Sl. No. | Name of the Plant | Reference | Botanical Name | Family |
|---------|-------------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 32. | Pipli | AV 5.109.1 | Piper longum L. | Piperaceae |
| 33. | Prisniparni | AV 2.25.1 | Uria picta Desv. | Leguminosae |
| 34. | Plaksa | AV 5.5.5 | Ficus Virens Ait. | Moraceae |
| 35. | Bilva | AV 20.136.13 | Aegle marmelos Corr. Ex. Roxb. | Rutaceae |
| 36. | Bhanga | AV 11.6.15 | Cannabis sativa L. | Cannabinaceae |
| 37. | Masa | AV 6.140.2, 12.2.53 | Vigna radiatus (L.) Wolcz | Leguminosae |
| 38. | Yava | AV 2.8.3, 6.30.1, 6.50.1, 6.91.1, 6.141.2, 6.142.1-2 | Hordeum vulgare L. | Gramineae |
| 39. | Rajni Haridrava | AV 1.23.1; AV 1.22.4 | Curcuma longa L. | Zingiberaceae |
| 40. | Rama | AV 1.23.1 | Eclipta prostrata (L.) L. | Compositae |
| 41. | Vansa | AV 3.12.6, 9.3.4 | Bambusa arundinacea Roxb. | Graminae |
| 42. | Varan | AV 6.85.1 | Crateva magna (Low.) DC | Capparidaceae |
| 43. | Vaikankata | AV 4.7.1, 5.8.1 | Flacourtia indica (Burm. f.) Merr. | Flacourtiaceae |
| 44. | Shafak | AV 4.34.5 | Trapa patans L. | Trapaceae |
| 45. | Sara | AV 4.7.4 | Erianthus munja Jesw. | Gramineae |
| 46. | Sarisaka | AV 3.14.5 | Oryza sativa L. | Gramineae |
| 47. | Shinshipa | AV 20.129.7 | Dalbergia sissoo Roxb. | Leguminosae |

CONCLUSION

The Atharvaveda stands as a remarkable testament to the advanced medical and botanical knowledge of ancient India. Its Bhaiṣajya Sūktās reveal that the Vedic people possessed a deep understanding of medicinal plants, classifying them by form, habitat, and therapeutic use long before the development of modern botany and medicine. Plants like Apamarga, Pippali, and Kushtha were systematically used to treat ailments ranging from fever and respiratory disorders to skin diseases, showing a practical and empirical approach to healing.

What makes the Atharvaveda unique is its holistic vision — it combines plant-based remedies with prayers, rituals, and a profound respect for nature. This integration of the physical and spiritual reflects the Vedic worldview that health is a balance of body, mind, and environment.

The influence of Atharvan plant medicine did not end with the Vedic period. Many of its terms, concepts, and herbal formulations were later codified in classical Ayurvedic texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, and continue to be used in traditional medicine today. Thus, the Atharvaveda is not just a religious text but the earliest written record of India's rich heritage of herbal healing, establishing a legacy that still contributes to healthcare and drug discovery in the 21st century.

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