

Marvelous Physician of Yore: An Introduction to the Story of India's Unspoken Medical Genius

*Sai Sreevatsa Mohan K

Abstract

Medicine in ancient India- Ayurveda is a wonder that is marvelled by the world even today. Ayurveda is the most ancient science of Indian medicine and lifestyle that is still in practice till date. Among the Gods worshipped by physicians in India - Lord Dhanwantari stands out for His immense contributions to the field of medicine and surgery, so too is the case of the Ashwini Kumaras who are considered the physicians of the Gods. They are well known to have performed the most complex surgeries like replacement of the Daksha's severed head with a goat head, and also medical wonders like placing an artificial iron leg of Vishwapala, curing infertility of Vardhimati and many more¹. Lord Rudra - considered as the best among physicians of Vedic age is now known as Lord Shiva and His achievements in medicine are unheard by both the medical fraternity as well as people of India. This article aims at reintroducing Lord Rudra by listing the medical achievements and invaluable contributions of Lord Rudra to the field of medicine, A tribute to the Lord and the application of His contributions which is used even today.

The study undertaken has demonstrated 62 Ayurvedic formulations that are the active contribution of Lord Rudra. The mantras of Sri Rudram, a prayer to lord Rudra has been actively used for various treatments such as reducing the stress levels and improving the cognitive performance. Also, the mantras of Sri Rudram contain innumerable formulations using Ayurvedic herbs which can be effectively tested and used till date. Lord Rudra is one of the unspoken medical geniuses whose contribution to the field of medicine is not acknowledged. His formulations and mantras are valid to date in curing various ailments. However, research must be undertaken by researchers from the disciplines of Indian History, language and medicine to further decode, standardize and use the formulations of Lord Rudra in the Sri Rudram.

Key words -

Rudra, Sri Rudram, Ayurveda, Mahamrityunjaya mantra

Introduction

In 2018, a randomised sample of 30 middle aged women from Thoubal Ningombam in Manipur were selected and their stress levels were assessed pre and post chanting of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra.² Cohen's perceived stress test had been used to measure the level of stress. Statistical analysis had been done by using paired t-test. Finding of this study revealed that Mahamrityunjaya mantra significantly decreased the level of stress and normalized the blood pressure among middle-aged women. Surprising is it? A similar study was conducted by PhD scholars from the department of Yoga regarding various styles of mantra chanting and their effect on the students' cognitive performance.³

The interesting part is that the same Mahamrityunjaya mantra was used for the study and significant positive results were observed for the silent chanting method. The study also gave a detailed analysis using various parameters and also styles of chanting the mantra. Now, we may ask what exactly is this Mahamrityunjaya mantra and what are its medical qualities?

Mahamrityunjaya mantra introduction and relevance

While many researchers are still exploring the various medicinal qualities of this mantra, they have not tried to detail about its origin and usage.

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra appears in the 11th Anuvaka or subdivision of the

*Sai Sreevatsa Mohan K, UG Scholar, SDM College of Ayurveda, Udupi, Karnataka, PIN- 574118
Email - saisreevatsamohan@gmail.com Phone number - 6301626165

Namakam. Let us understand where we find the Namakam.

There are 4 Vedas which we know - Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda . These are the world's oldest written records and they are claimed to have been written around c.1700-1100 BCE which is nearly 3700-4000 years ago.⁴

So the second Veda - Yajur Veda is further divided into two -Krishna Yajur Veda and Shukla Yajurveda. In further division called the Samhitas, there is a Taitreya samhita which features in the Krishna Yajurveda and here there is a prayer called the Sri Rudram.⁵

The Sri Rudram is one of the important prayers used widely in most of the religious ceremonies like abhishekam(pouring of sacred water on the idol of worship). It has two parts - Namakam and Chamakam

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra features in the Namakam (11th Anuvaka). There is, however , a reference of it in Rigveda 7.59.12 too⁶ The topic of the article is apparently about a medical genius. But, until now, we read about a historical and religious philosophical article here. Let us understand the relation between these.

Mahamrityunjaya mantra and Lord Rudra

Well, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is a small part of Sri Rudram. The Sri Rudram describes or is a hymn mainly in praise of a God. Sri Rudram describes His different attributes and names. He is credited to have given 62 medicinal formulations.⁷ His name is supposed to strike terror in the hearts of all fearing Him.

The disease jwara is said to have arisen from His anger.⁸ His compassion is said to cure diseases. The graveyard in many regional languages has been named “Rudrabhoomi”, after Him, suggesting how skilled He was that He with His medical intervention could save lives and thus deciding who goes to the grave. Who is this great physician and what are His contributions?

His name is LORD RUDRA and He is called as prathama bhisak- the first physician.⁹ But then we are talking about a God. Is this a philosophical article on God? Well, Lord Rudra is known to today only as a God. But we need to understand by the end that He is worshipped as a God today due to His immense contributions to society. What were they and who was Lord Rudra? Is He the same as Lord Shiva we know today?

Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva - Same or different ?

People today know Lord Rudra as a synonym or another name for Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is the most widely worshipped deity in Hinduism, He is one among the trinity- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. His abode is described as the ice capped Himalayan mountains. His stories resonate in every Indian household. But is He really the same as Lord Rudra?

Well, we can consider that Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva have similar attributes for which they are worshipped today as the same Lord, but they may not have been a single person. From all the historical evidence and literary evidence we have, we can try and distinguish that Lord Rudra was a different personality and may not be the same person as Lord Shiva.

Difference between Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva

On the very onset, Lord Rudra is said to be a roaring, wild personality in contrast to the peaceful and auspicious frame of Lord Shiva. Unlike Lord Shiva who stands out as one of the main Gods today, Lord Rudra was another Demigod who didn't occupy a very exalted position. The family of Lord Shiva and Lord Rudra are described very differently.

We all know the family of Lord Shiva - His consort Goddess Parvati, His sons- Lord Ganesha and Lord Karthikeya. Lord Rudra's family as told in the Vedas is completely different.

Yajurveda 3 Kandikas.⁵⁷ says- Goddess Ambika was the sister of Lord Rudra. Today Goddess Ambika is a form of Goddess Parvati -Lord Shiva's consort. The consort of Lord Rudra was Goddess Rodhasi. Sayana's commentary on Rigveda 1.39.4 , Rigveda 1.114.6 states that Lord Rudra was the father of the Maruts. The Maruts today are known as Gods of Storm, thunder and wind.¹⁰

The vehicle of Lord Shiva is the Nandi - the bull while Lord Rudra was said to ride on a horse. These were some significant differences between them. If there was such a clear distinction between both, how did people end up confusing Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva?

The confusion however arises as Lord Rudra was called as Shiva in many contexts. Similarly, the later texts like Mahabharata and the Puranas linked both of them by the virtue of their similarities.¹¹ But, then we may get a doubt. What is the relevance of knowing about Lord Rudra and distinguishing Him from Lord Shiva?

Lord Rudra's contribution to Medicine

Well, a man is defined by His achievements and the achievements of Lord Rudra are too vast for us to comprehend. To name a few, He is credited to have given 62 medicinal formulations. His medical skills are considered excellent. There are more than around 1000 herbs He is said to have used.¹² There are many legends that talk of His skill in warfare, hunting and medicine. His name was used as a title too.¹³

For example, in the Rigveda, the Asvini Devatas are called 'Rudras'. Similarly, Mitra-varuna together were called 'Rudra', Agni was

called 'Rudra'. (RV.5.70,2; RV.6.26,5).

He was said to keep villages free from diseases. He was conferred the title, "Vaidyanatha". The science of Rasashastra owes its contributions to Lord Rudra and Lord Shiva. The very origin of 'Parada'(mercury) is said to be the 'Veerya' of Lord Shiva and Lord Rudra's influence can be seen in the Rudra bhaga.¹⁴

In the name of Lord Rudra, the physicians were given a bhaga or share of 1/11th of all the medicines value in money for every medicine sold by a medicine seller!

The Charaka Samhita, Sharira sthana while explaining Loka purusha samya siddhanta, Lord Rudra in the universe is said to exist in the human body as rosha(fierceness).¹⁵ These are just a few instances showing His immense contributions.

Now we may ask, what is the use of studying some historical facts about Lord Rudra and what do we take away from Him in this era? Well, it is beautifully described that "The function of the historian is neither to love the past, nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to understand and master it as the key to the understanding of the present".¹⁶ The History of Lord Rudra must be understood in this sense to utilise it and apply it in the current day. But are we seriously taking this? Are the contributions of Lord Rudra who lived more than 4000 years ago still applicable to today?

Current day application of Lord Rudra's contributions - coded mantras

Let us understand this with examples. The Sri Rudram which is about the glory of lord Rudra is apparently a powerful hymn that is chanted during worship in all Shiva temples of India. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is currently proven by many researches as seen at the beginning of this article to decrease stress levels, to normalise blood pressure levels, to improve the cognitive performance of students and many more. But that is just like any other Mantra. What is the special contribution of Lord Rudra?

Remedy for 'Kshaya'

Take an example of a verse from the Sri Rudram-¹⁷

*"śīvēṇā vachāsā tvā giriśāchChā vadāmasi l
yathā nā-ssarvami jagādayakṣmagm sumanā asāt ll"*

On the onset, the literal meaning is said as: "O' Lord Shiva, as per your words, 'Kshama', who is your charming consort(wife) is the essence of all the worlds. Therefore, as desired by you, we offer our obeisance to that 'Kshama' which is indeed the essence of the world". On a closer outlook, one is stunned by the explanation.

Understanding the medical meaning

Let us understand the above mentioned verse, word by word, phrase by phrase -

The phrase- *śīvēṇā vachāsā* means As told by Shiva, *tvā* means your, *giriśā* meaning from forest, *āchChā* means covered, *vadāmasi* - this word split into two - *vadāma* meaning Badam Almond, *masi* means ink/oil/milk/juice. The word *ssarvami jagādayakṣmagm* is finely divided into *ssarva* meaning nimba (neem), *mi* means measure, *jagād* means consume or eat, *ayakṣmagm* refers to

yakṣma or in disease *rajayakṣma*, *sumanā* means the leaf of neem, *asāt* means juice or oil.

To sum up, it means: "The Supreme God Shiva says that 'Kshaya' can be cured, if the mixture of Badam (Almond) oil, the milk of the Khadira (Acacia catechu), the juice of Nimba (Azadirachta indica) bark and the juice of Neem leaves is consumed for 15 days or till the 'Kshaya' symptoms subside, whichever is earlier".

The author KT Shubhakaran mentioned an important note to recite the above Mantra for 108 times daily and the entire Namakam at least once everyday to ensure that the medicines work. If not, they may not work.

'Kshaya' in Ayurveda is the equivalent to a number of diseases including malnutrition syndromes, Tuberculosis, venereal diseases and many others based on the presentation. The formulation mentioned by the author with the medication can be researched as all the herbs are very potent. Based on the herbs and the useful parts mentioned in the Verse, the author KT Shubhakaran gave his formulation-

Formulation:

- 1) Milk of Khadira - 300 grams.
- 2) Oil derived from Badam (Almond)- 100 ml.
- 3) Neem bark : The outer layer of the Neem bark should be removed. Only the red layer covering the wood should be used - 1 kg.
- 4) Neem leaves- 21 leaves.
- 5) Water- 6 Litres

All the above ingredients are to be boiled till the mixture is reduced to 2 Litres. The mixture is to be filtered using a cotton cloth and consumed in dosage of 6 Table spoonful twice daily to be consumed after food for 21 days.

(Please note that the formulation and details belong to the author and they are just given as a reference. Any improper use is not the responsibility of the article)[17]

The remedies for wounds

Let us understand another verse from Sri Rudram.

*"yā tā iṣu-śśīvatāmā śīva-mbābhūvā lē
dhanūh l*

śīvā śārgvyā yā tava tayā nō rudra mṛdayall"

A literal meaning of this verse:

“Bless us with happiness our Lord, With that arrow of thine, which is holy, With that bow of thine, which is begetter of good, With that quiver of thine, which is sweet”.

So, what is special? It looks like a normal prayer. But there is a different meaning too.

Understanding the medical meaning

Let us understand it word by word, phrase by phrase -

The word *yā* means if, *tā* means you, *iṣu* means arrow, *śīvatāmā* refers to devadaru, *śīva* refers to the healing process, *bḡbhūvā* refers to arising, *tē* means your and *dhamuḥ* refers to bhallataka. *Śīva* is the synonym of various herbs like hareetaki, kana, darbha. *Śārgvyā* means wound, *tava* means your, *tayā* meaning to protect, *nō* means ruk- pain, rudra here indicates fire and *mṛḍaya* means to treat kindly. To sum it up, we get the meaning as:

“If you are wounded by an arrow or any other weapon the pain arising from the wound can be treated by use of the paste of the following drugs- *śīvatāmā* [devadaru- Cedrus deodara]; *dhamuḥ* (Semecarpus anacardium) and *śīva* (Prosopis spicigera, Terminalia chebula, Jasminum auriculatum, Curcuma longa, Desmostachya bipinnata, root of Piper longum, Bile of cattle)”

KT Shubhakaran, in his book, “Shri Rudram decoded” goes on to explain how these plants are to be used for the treatment, the mode of administration, the dosage and the details of the medicine mentioned in this verse.

On the outlook, one can find the wound-healing, stryptic, antiseptic action of these herbs in the verse. Devadaru is a good antibacterial,¹⁸ Bhallataka is an excellent analgesic and antibacterial and anti-inflammatory,¹⁹ Pippali is an excellent bioavailability enhancer as well as antimicrobial.²⁰ Haridra has all the properties - immunostimulant, antimicrobial and antioxidant.²¹ Darbha is an excellent coolant by nature and thus attributes to it's haemostatic action.²² Haritaki too has antibacterial, antimicrobial, antifungal, anti-helminthic and cytoprotective properties.²³

Other remedies from Sri Rudram

We may argue as to what is the use of this remedy in the current day as arrow wounds are very rare. However, the current application can stretch beyond just arrow wounds and can even be applied after proper research to projectile weapon wounds like bullet wounds.

This is not all. The next few verses which follow explain the herbs and treatment for arshas(anal fissure/ fistula and related diseases) hridroga (heart diseases), netra roga(eye disorders), udara roga, kaasa-shwasa (upper respiratory tract infections) and many diseases like infertility, joint pain, snakebite, treatment for pregnant women, treatment of unborn child, increasing sexual vigour and the list is vast. ²⁴

Rules for use in today's medicine

Sri Rudram, the prayer on Lord Rudra is said to be a dual purpose medicine. It is to be recited 11 times, twice a day for 43

days along with administration of the herbs and treatment in the verses. The verses are to be chanted praying to Lord Rudra and if the patient is unable to recite, a person well versed can recite praying to Lord Rudra and touching the affected part with his hand.²⁵

The authenticity of the herbs, the treatments mentioned are the work under research. However, it must be noted that anything documented in the medical field is done either after proper clinical findings or keeping in mind the perfectness of the mode of action in theory. Whatever is the case, it is an absolute marvel that a text of Lord Rudra that is as old as nearly 3500- 4000 years ago is still applicable to date and this indeed proves the genius that Lord Rudra is as a physician.

Questions at the end

Unfortunately, due to historical ambiguities, the society has not spoken of Lord Rudra as the medical genius. Rather, we today know Lord Rudra as another name of Lord Shiva, we know Him just as another Hindu God who is worshipped in temples.

Looking beyond this aspect, we must respect the contributions of Lord Rudra to the field of medicine. But let us ask ourselves - Who exactly was Lord Rudra? What was His time period? What exactly are those 62 formulations attributed to Him? Are they still useful today? Where did He live? How did He attain medical excellence and how relevant is He today in the current medical scenario.

Lord Rudra's formulations and conclusion

A great man said, " Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever".²⁶ Slightly modified interpretation, we can understand that Men may come and go in the centuries but the achievements, service, wisdom passed on by Great Gods like Lord Rudra lives on forever.

The Chandraprabha Vati, Curnaraja/ Sankara Lauha, Vijaya Gutika, Sitabhanji rasa, Putra Prada rasa, Sarvavyadhihara are just few formulations given by Lord Rudra.²⁷ The Chandraprabha Vati continues to be used to date in many Ayurvedic hospitals for kidney disorders like urinary tract infections, renal calculi etc, gastrointestinal diseases like constipation, bloating of abdomen, colic pain etc. It is also used in allergic skin conditions

and reproductive problems like semen defects and others.²⁸

While this is just an introduction to Lord Rudra's greatness, by His grace, let us explore in further articles about the life and medical knowledge of Lord Rudra. Gods are not born, they are made through their immense wisdom and contribution to society. The medical fraternity of today has two valuable lessons from Lord Rudra - Selfless service to society can elevate the doctor to the level of God and the use of currently described medicines in Shri Rudram is the need of the hour.

Conclusion

Lord Rudra is one of the unspoken medical geniuses whose contribution to the field of medicine is not acknowledged. His formulations and mantras are valid to date in curing various ailments. However, research must be undertaken by researchers from the disciplines of Indian History, language and medicine to further decode, standardize and use the formulations of Lord Rudra in the Sri Rudram.

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