

Ayurvedic Concepts in Thirukkural

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Abstract

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian medicine is applauded all over the world for its application in overcoming the maladies of human race. Many medical and non-medical treatises elaborate on various aspects of Ayurveda, though several texts have caught our attention still there are many, which are yet to be explored. Thirukkural is one such ancient scripture in Tamil literature that has gained so much importance and has seen many translations and commentaries into almost all major languages of the world. This paper is an attempt to discuss various references in couplets of Thirukkural with regard to Medicine i.e., Ayurveda and its similarity between concepts like Causes of the disease, Nutritional disciplines, treatment principles and importance of four pillars in the treatment.

Keywords: Ayurveda; Thirukkural; Medicine; Couplets

Introduction

Ancient Indian medicine is applauded all over the world for its application in overcoming the maladies of human race. Many medical and non-medical treatises elaborate on various aspects of Ayurveda, though several texts have caught our attention still there are many which are yet to come into limelight. One such poetic masterpiece is 2,200 year old south Indian Dravidian classic “Thirukkural” [1]. Researchers are now slowly gaining foot focusing on the unpublished and unexplored manuscripts, which deals with the basic principles of this science. CCRAS and other such institutions are imparting stress on such research activities. Apart from the classical Ayurvedic texts, principles of Ayurveda are found in numerous manuscripts written during post Vedic era. A Critical appraisal of one such work “Thirukkural” is being detailed in this article. Thirukkural is one of the ancient scripture in Tamil literature and it is universally accepted and was written by Thiruvalluvar in 2nd century A.D [2]. It is the only Tamil literary work which has gained so much importance and has seen many translations and commentaries into almost all major languages of the world [3]. As Dr. Albert Schweitzer had rightly said “There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find such lofty wisdom” [4]. Thirukkural consists of 133 chapters each containing 10 couplets, collectively to 1330 couplets and were grouped into 3 sections namely Virtue, Wealth and Love. The first part deals with the moral value of human life and has 38 chapters. The second part is on socio economic values of men in a civilized society and has 70 chapters and the third part is on psychological values of life and has 25 chapters. In the second part, the last chapter is dedicated to Medicine (Chapter 95) [5]. The word Ayurveda means Knowledge of Life or Science of Life. Ayurveda is a traditional system of medicine native to India and is in the process of evolving into Integrative medicine. The science originated from Lord Brahma and received by Dhanvantari more than 3000 years ago and is an *upaveda* (auxiliary knowledge) of Atharvaveda. Golden period of Ayurveda ranges from 800 B.C. to 1000 A.D. The three most important treatises in Ayurveda appeared during this period, they are Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Samgraha. Thirukkural came into existence subsequently i.e., after Ayurveda, as the author had explored certain ideas like Life skills, Education, Politics, Medicine, sexual life, etc., in his work. This paper is an attempt to discuss those various instances referred in couplets with regard to Medicine. To explore the medical related information cited in the manuscript “Thirukkural”.

Materials and Methods

1. Thirukkural.
2. Available Ayurvedic texts.

The materials are compared and summarized on the basis of similar existing theories.

Results are based on a qualitative aspect rather than quantitative.

Observation and Discussion

The chapter of Medicine in Thirukkural consists of 10 couplets. Among them the first couplet explains about the causes of diseases. The next consecutive six couplets explain about the maintenance of Health by adopting the right kind of food regimen. Eighth and ninth couplet explains about the method of treatment and the last one explains the importance of four limbs (Chatuspadas) in the treatment of a patient.

Causes of Disease

In the foremost couplet of kural, Thiruvalluvar says that the excess or deficiency of the three life forces viz *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* leads to diseases.

மிகினும் குறையினும் நோய்செய்யும் நூலோர்
வளிமுதலா எண்ணிய மூன்று. (941)

Similarly Ayurveda categorizes three basic types of functional principles (Doshas) namely *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. These principles are essential for basic function of human body. *Vata* is essential for movement, *Pitta* for digestion and *Kapha* for Stability. Imbalance of these principles causes disease. The references pertaining to the causes for increase and decrease of these three functional principles are also available [6].

Nutritional Discipline

Valluvar has explained and given more importance to dietetic regimen for maintaining health in six couplets. Second couplet says

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that the one who takes the food after digestion of previous food will never suffer illness. Third couplet mentions that one who wishes long life should take diet in moderate quantity after being assured of digestion of the previous meal. In the next couplet, the person should take compatible diet only when he is hungry. Fifth couplet says that one who is interested in healthy life should take suitable diet in proper quantity. Sixth couplet explains that the disease will occur if food is taken in excess quantity [4,5]. Seventh couplet says that one who takes large quantity of food beyond the capacity of digestive fire suffers from various diseases.

மருந்தென வேண்டாவாம் யாக்கைக்கு அருந்தியது
அற்றது போற்றி உணின் (942)

அற்றல் அளவறிந்து உண்க அஃதுடம்பு
பெற்றான் நெடிதுய்க்கு மாறு (943)

அற்றது அறிந்து கடைப்பிடித்து மாறல்ல
துய்க்க துவரப் பசித்து (944)

மாறுபாடு இல்லாத உண்டி மறுத்துண்ணின்
ஊறுபாடு இல்லை உயிர்க்கு (945)

இழிவறிந்து உண்பான்கண் இன்பம்போல் நிற்கும்
கழிபே ரிரையான்கண் நோய் (946)

தீயள வன்றித் தெரியான் பெரிதுண்ணின்
நோயள வின்றிப் படும் (947)

In Ayurveda, *Ahara* (Diet/Food) is one among the three pillars/supports of life i.e., *trayopasthambha*. The three supports of life are intake of food, sleep and observance of *brahmacharya*; supported by these three well regulated factors of life, the body is endowed with strength, complexion and growth [7]. Ayurveda aims to maintain health. Health as well as disease is dependent on various factors, among which Diet is the most important one. Hence, Ayurveda emphasizes on the diet and dietetic regimen, as diet is the cause of health as well as diseases. And also Acharya's have explained clinical features of a disease and its management based upon the properties and actions of diet and its regimen which was prevalent during that period [8]. Diet may be healthy or unhealthy. A healthy diet depends upon the variation in quantity, time of consumption, method of preparation, habitat and constitution of body, disease and the age of an individual. Even though a person is taking healthy diet, the amount of diet should not disturb the equilibrium of *Doshas* and *Dhatu*s of the body, gets digested as well as metabolized in proper time is to be regarded as the proper quantity of food. Acharyas have also explained the signs and symptoms of the intake of food in proper quantity, i.e. the diet should not create pressure in the stomach and flanks, no obstruction to the function of heart, no heaviness in the abdomen, there should be proper nourishment of the senses, relief in hunger and thirst, feeling of comfort in regular work like standing, sitting, sleeping, walking, exhaling, inhaling, laughing and talking [9]. Acharyas have explained the concept of *Jirna-Ajirna*. So, one should take diet after the digestion of previous diet is considered as proper time for diet, which is most important factor for the health. By following the proper diet in proper time, it promotes longevity by motivating the Agni and it opens the channels of circulations, produces Pure belching, enthusiasm, elimination of *malas* (Urine and Stool) at the proper time, lightness of the body, appearance of hunger and thirst are the symptoms of good digestion [10]. Symptom of proper digestion is specifically mentioned under the dietetics because intake of food before the previous food

is digested may aggravate all the three *Doshas* leading to serious consequences. Healthy individuals as well as the patients should observe the following, even while using food articles which are more wholesome by nature; one should eat food in proper quantity which is hot, unctuous and not contradictory in potency and that too, after the digestion of the previous meal. Food should be taken in proper place equipped with all the accessories, without talking or laughing, with concentration of mind and paying due regard to oneself.

Paying due consideration to the quality and time, a self-controlled men should regularly take such useful food and drinks as are conducive to the internal power of digestion, including metabolism like an *Ahiitagni* (a men who perform *Yajna*), who takes diet conducive over of digestion being aware of wholesomeness of food and drinks, who resort to meditation of "Brahma" and charity, enjoys bless without any disease during the present as well as future lives [11].

Treatment of Disease

In the eighth couplet, the physician who needs success in treatment should understand the stage of disease, cause of disease and then treat the disease. The next couplet says the physician who treats by understanding the patient's strength, nature of the disease and season will succeed in his carrier.

நோய்நாடி நோய்முதல் நாடி அதுதணிக்கும்
வாய்நாடி வாய்ப்பச் செயல் (948)

உற்றான் அளவும் பிணியளவும் காலமும்
கற்றான் கருதிச் செயல் (949)

Hetu (aetiology), *Linga* (sign and symptoms), *Ousadha* (drug and therapy) are the three principles of Ayurveda [12]. Without the knowledge of *Hetu* (cause of a disease) and *Linga* (sign and symptoms), the implication of *Ousadha* (drug and therapy) is not possible. In the classics, the Acharyas said that "*rogamadou preekshet tathonantaram aoushadam*" it is very essential that before planning any treatment one should have complete knowledge of *Dasha*, *kala*, *Rogibala*, *Rogabala* and *Agni*. To understand the nature of disease, one should adopt three fold (*Trividha pariksha*), six fold (*Shadvidha pariksha*), eight fold (*Astasthana pariksha*) and tenfold (*Dashavidha pariksha*) examinations. To understand the cause and pathogenesis of the diseases, *Nidana Panchakas* are explained. Examination of patient is conducted for the knowledge of lifespan, degree of strength and intensity of morbidity. Detailed examination of the patient is the initial step for planning suitable/appropriate therapy.

Fourfold of Treatment

The last couplet says that four pillars namely Physician, Medicine, medical attendant and patient for responsible for prognosis of a disease.

உற்றவன் தீர்ப்பான் மருந்துஉழைச் செல்வானென்று
அப்பால்நாற் கூற்றே மருந்து (950)

Ayurveda also explains the importance of these four pillars for successful execution of a treatment. They are physician, medicaments, nursing personnel and the patient. The physician is considered as the foremost among them and should possess technical skill, scientific knowledge, purity and dexterity human understanding. Next, comes the drugs and they should possess of high quality, wide application, with high potency and should be available adequately. Attendant or nursing personnel is the third component of treatment and should have good knowledge of nursing, skilled in their art and be

affectionate, clean and resourceful. The fourth component is the patient himself, who should be cooperative, obedient, fearless and able to communicate or describe his ailment. These sixteen qualities are needed for successful treatment [13]. Here within the scope of an article we could discuss only a few things related to the topic, while Valluvar has encapsulated these details in just two lines giving prime importance to treatment; detailed descriptions are available in the classics regarding Cause of the disease, Nutritional discipline, treatment principles and importance of four pillars of treatment. The similarity between Ayurveda and Thirukkural is not only in the concept of medicine, but also with regard to the code and conduct of life, sexual and seasonal regimen etc.

Conclusion

This presentation is a sincere and honest effort to put forth the various references pertaining Ayurveda principles mentioned in one of the well-known Tamil literary classic. We further suggest that this would form a wonderful and invaluable work, if carried out as a research topic which would bring to lime light various aspects, unknown to our present and future generation.

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