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### Importance of Atharva Veda in Psychology

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#### ABSTRACT

Atharva Veda occupies a unique position among the four Vedas. The other three Vedas deal with matters of other world, the gods, the nature and supernatural, while Atharva Veda is more worldly. It seeks to solve the problems of this world and its common people. It deals with topic like leading a long and healthy life, to avoid sorrow, to ward off illness, to vanquish or win over the enemy, etc. Atharva Veda presents a detailed description of the life style of a very early stage of human society, which has just entered the agricultural stage. The importance of animal wealth cows, oxen, horses is much more. New kingdoms are being established. Men want to live happy healthy lives upto one hundred years. Pandit Bhagwat Sharma Upadhyay, in hindi Vishwakosh, says, “The stress in Atharva Veda is not so much on the use of Karma Kanda or the rituals, as on doing right or wrong, high or low, do-s and don’ts, popular beliefs, and tendencies of life. From this point of view, the importance of Atharva Veda is much more, for the historian, than of the other three Vedas. The first references to puranas, history, gathas etc. are found here. This Veda also points to many such traditions which are not only older than Rig Veda, but really go back to very very old times”.

### 1. Introduction

Of the four Vedas, the Rig Veda seeks to increase knowledge, the Yagur Veda throws light on right type of deeds and duties the Samveda inspires to worship the Ideal Being and the Atharva Veda shows the way to know the individual psyche or self and also to attain power in the world. R.C. Sharma says, “The Rig Veda, the Yagur Veda, the Samveda, bless us for the other world, but the Atharva Veda blesses us for the other as well as for this world”. Atharva Veda is also known as the Brahma Veda or Atma Veda. According to Max Muller, “Brahma meant originally force, will, wish and the propulsive power of creation. Atma means breath or spirit or self. Brahma itself is but self.” Atharva Veda deals with both Brahma and Atma, it is more comprehensive than other Vedas.

According to Satavalekar, “Atharva Veda is specially related to Atma (soul) and Mana (Psyche)”. Satvalekar is of the view that by the Atharva Veda, we get the knowledge of the soul and the ways to attain the energy of the soul (atma-bal), that is why it is known as Atma veda also. The Atharva Veda shows the ways and means to do everything, for example curing illness, victory in war, defeat of enemies through the energy of Mana (psyche). The basic approach of Atharva Veda is mental or psychological. Medicines are

prescribed but are always accompanied by the mantras or mental content. Even for preparing the medicines digging, grinding, pounding of herbs for medicines, separate mantras are provided.

Atharva Veda abounds in practical advice. It seeks to provide solutions to everyday needs and problems of the common man like snake-bite or pains of joints or fevers. The advices are for the attainment of Brahma, i.e. higher plains, then how to achieve atma-bal (ego-strength) and at lower levels, how to vanquish the enemy or ward off invisible creatures like rakshas or pishach. The approach of Atharva Veda is also integrative in the sense that it treats body, mind and soul as an integrated total entity. The means which strengthen the body also strengthen the mind. For example, the Paushtikani sutras pray for “the showering of blessings for a robust (पुष्ट) healthy body and mind” so that one may live upto a hundred sharats (tosra शरदः शता) free of diseases and death.

Henry Lefever says, “whereas the Rig vedic poets loved to dwell upon the wonders and beauties of nature and the greatness of the gods who created and upheld the natural world, those of the Atharva Veda tend to dwell more upon the psychological qualities necessary in the sacrificer.” Thus, on the whole, the approach of Atharva Veda is psychological, practical and integrative.

The aim of Atharva Veda, as declared, is the welfare of humanity. It helps men to live a rich and full life upto hundred years and then attain Brahma. Thus rules and regulations are given to live a full healthy life, and in this context come the diseases and the ways to ward off the diseases. Therapies both mental and herbal are suggested. It is in this context that therapeutics comes under the scope of Atharva Veda. The approach and treatment to matter, thousands of years back, is of course different. To make it more intelligible it has to be put in modern terms as far as possible. Modern terms and concepts are to be fitted there, without distorting the original matter.

Though the reference to rakshas and pichachs are found in Atharva Veda, these seem to be more symbolic terms. For example, the tiniest creatures Krimi (कृमि) are given the name raksha's, so the term rakshas in Atharva Veda seems to symbolize all evil and undesirable elements.

**The Basic Concepts** — Atharva Veda contains some basic concepts which were taken up by Ayurveda and are prevalent even today among the practising vaidyas. These concepts are—

**The Gunas**— According to Atharva Veda the human body is composed of three basic gunas or elements, viz., vata (wind), pitta (bile) and kapha (phlegm). From the birth these three elements are present in every human body in a certain balanced way. This equilibrium of elements has to be maintained throughout life. So, the equilibrium of these gunas or elements means normalcy—no disease or disorder, while any disturbance or disequilibrium of these gunas causes abnormal condition or disease.

**Normality and Abnormality**— Normal means a balance or equilibrium of gunas. Abnormality is a matter of increase or decrease of these gunas, which causes disturbance or disease.

**Mental Health and Mental Disease**— Like body, the mental structure also constitutes three elements gunas or vrittis or the characteristics. These are called sattva (true, pure), rajas (erotic) and tamas (the black, the low). These are the gunas or vrittis of the mind or manas, and are present in all human beings, since birth. These vrittis are also found in a state of equilibrium. As soon as their equilibrium is disturbed, mental disorders emerge. Of these three vrittis, sattva is pure and true. It never gets corrupted, Freud's Rajas denotes sensual pleasures, enjoyment. In Freud's terms it means Eros (काम). Tamas literally means blackness. It is the lowest tendency of evil, of destruction—Thanatos in Freudian terms. Although sattva is pure, true, but having only sattva-vritti is also not normal. Rajas and tamas may increase or decrease in degrees. In both the ways, when there is an excess or when there is a lack of these two vrittis the person becomes abnormal. Normality means having all the three vrittis in a balanced manner. A normal person must have rajas and tamas vrittis in him, but they should

be balanced in the total personality. For example, krodh anger, is a tamasik vritti, but a normal person must possess a certain degree of anger, to fight against injustice, to assert one's rights.

According to Atharva Veda (VIII/211, 9, 12) the doshas or corruption or disturbances of rajas and tamas gives rise to mental diseases, hence these doshas have to be discouraged.

On physical level the human body is made up of three elements viz vata, pitta, kapha, which must be in a certain balanced state for physical health and well-being. Similarly on the, mental level, the human personality has sattva, rajas and tamas vrittis, which also must be in a balanced state for mental health and well being.

Every person has the physical gunas and mental vrittis, but their degrees and combinations are different for each one, and this different combination gives the unique quality or individuality to a person. G.W. Allport in his famous trait theory also puts forward a similar view. According to Allport the traits are the same for all individuals, but their combinations are different and this difference imparts uniqueness to personality.

The gunas and vrittis are found in a balanced state in the normal persons, but when the balance is disturbed, abnormality ensues. Either excess or lack of a guna or vritti causes abnormality. In his famous book *Psychodynamics of Abnormal Behaviour* Brown also puts forward a similar view. According to Brown, "The chief tenet of modern psycho-pathology is that abnormal psychological phenomena are simple exaggerations (i.e. over-developments or underdevelopments) or disguised, that is perverted developments, of normal psychological phenomena."

— Brown, IF, 1940

## 2. Abnormal Behaviour in Atharva Veda

Atharva Veda treats mental behaviour in very broad terms. Many behaviour abnormalities are given in detail. The first kanda, in the seventh sukta, two types of diseases are given, one, adhi—arising out of the body due to wrong diet etc. Second, vyadhi—arising out of shapa or curse or ill-will. The cure for vyadhi is given as mental peace and relaxation. We can compare the modern techniques of relaxation for tension reduction.

Mana is always active always working. The best use of this active state can be by attaining self development and general welfare of people, by keeping mana engaged in meditation. The mana may also suffer from imaginary fears. To ward off these fears (भय) mantras and rituals are used.

The fourth kanda deals with many subjects including beshaja chikitsa, rit-yagya and atma-vidya or how to make mana strong (in modern terms it means ego strength). The sixth kanda contains dushwapna nasha, or how to eliminate

bad dreams, soumanasya or wishing for well-being. It also deals with irshya or irshyalu i.e., jealousy and jealous persons and gives methods to cure one of jealousy (6/18/1-3).

The sixth kanda deals with bad dreams in some details. It states that, “may we be saved from dushswapnas, which arise from anrit (अनृत) or untruthful behaviour” (6/45/3). Then the dream is described as neither living nor dead (i.e. neither conscious nor unconscious) and as creating wonderful images.

**Dushswapnas** are said to be immortal as they never die, but recur in some form or other. Soumanasya-keeping the mind at peace and well wishing—occurs at many places. It also means keeping harmony in body and mind, and having a balanced mind.

It is clear by now that the general objective of Atharva Veda is the welfare of all human beings. It wishes people “to live a long and healthy life for more than a hundred years and then attain Brahma i.e., merge in the cosmic energy”. It is to fulfill this aim that Atharva Veda seeks to remove all the barriers to a good healthy life to attain perfect robust health and to prevent and cure diseases of both body and mind.

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