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SCIENCE, RELIGION AND ETHICS: THE RELIGIOUS ETHICAL BASIS OF INDIAN SCIENCE OF MEDICINE

Sreekumar Nellickappilly*

Abstract: It is often said that in Ayurveda, the Indian science of medicine, the scientific concerns are muddled up with religious and metaphysical convictions. This paper tries to show how while retaining the experiential route of science intact, *Ayurveda* shares certain important concerns with religion and philosophy in India. It affirms that this ultimately has helped *Ayurveda* successfully avoiding the problems associated with multiple ontologies—owing to a separation of science from values. This paper will examine some important religious assumptions that play vital role in the conception and practice of the science of *Ayurveda* and how such approaches contributed in developing and integrating a strong code of medical ethics into the practice of medicine. The first section of the paper will bring out the experiential route of *Ayurveda*. The second section examines the concepts of disease and health/wellbeing in *Ayurveda*, in order to bring out the ethical outlook ingrained in it. The third section will analyse some fundamental postulates of Indian ethics and attempts to show that with the Vedic conception of *Rita*—cosmic moral order—*Ayurveda* uniquely defines itself as a way of physical, mental and ethical living, which aims at a very comprehensive notion of wellbeing.

Key words: *Ayurveda*, science, Indian medicine, Indian ethics

CIENCIA, RELIGIÓN Y ÉTICA: LOS FUNDAMENTOS ÉTICOS RELIGIOSOS DE LA CIENCIA MÉDICA INDIA

Resumen: Se dice a menudo que en *Ayurveda*, en la ciencia de la medicina India, se encuentran entremezcladas las preocupaciones científicas con convicciones religiosas y metafísicas. Este artículo trata de mostrar que, manteniendo intacta la ruta experimental de la ciencia, *Ayurveda* comparte ciertas preocupaciones importantes de la religión y la filosofía en la India. Afirma que esto definitivamente ha ayudado a *Ayurveda* a evitar con éxito problemas asociados con ontologías múltiples, debido a la separación de la ciencia con los valores. Examina algunos presupuestos religiosos importantes que juegan un papel vital en la concepción y práctica de la ciencia de *Ayurveda* y cómo tales aproximaciones contribuyeron a desarrollar e integrar un fuerte código de ética médica en la práctica de la medicina. La primera sección del artículo presenta la ruta experiencial de *Ayurveda*. La segunda, los conceptos de enfermedad y salud/bienestar en *Ayurveda* para extraer los aspectos éticos integrados. La tercera analiza algunos postulados fundamentales de la ética India y trata de mostrar que, con la concepción Védica de *Rita*—orden moral cósmico—, *Ayurveda* se define de forma única como un modo de vida físico, mental y ético, que apunta a una noción comprensiva del bienestar.

Palabras clave: *Ayurveda*, ciencia, medicina India, ética India

CIÊNCIA, RELIGIÃO E ÉTICA: OS FUNDAMENTOS ÉTICOS RELIGIOSOS DA CIÊNCIA MÉDICA INDIANA

Resumo: Afirma-se com frequência que, na *Ayurveda*, a ciência da medicina Indiana, encontram-se mescladas as preocupações científicas com convicções religiosas e metafísicas. Este artigo objetiva mostrar que, mantendo intacto o caminho experimental da ciência, *Ayurveda* compartilha certas preocupações importantes da religião e da filosofia na Índia. Afirma que isso definitivamente tem ajudado a *Ayurveda* a evitar problemas associados com as ontologias múltiplas—separando a ciência dos valores. Examina alguns pressupostos religiosos importantes que julgam ter papel vital na concepção e prática da ciência de *Ayurveda* e, como tal, aproximações que contribuem para o desenvolvimento e a forte integração do código de ética médica na prática da medicina. A primeira parte deste artigo apresenta a rota experiencial de *Ayurveda*. A segunda, as concepções de enfermidade e saúde/bem-estar na *Ayurveda* para, então, identificar os aspectos éticos integrados. A terceira analisa alguns postulados fundamentais da ética Indiana e mostra que, com a concepção Védica de *Rita*—ordem moral cósmica—, *Ayurveda* se define de forma única como um modo de vida físico, mental e ético, apontando uma noção compreensiva de bem-estar.

Palavras-chave: *Ayurveda*, ciência, medicina Indiana, ética Indiana

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Introduction

Ayurveda, the Indian science of medicine, probably had its origin in the healing practices of the Indus-valley people of the Harappan civilization (2700-1700 B.C.E). Like many other ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the healing system of this culture was also inextricably connected with the culture's religious beliefs and practices and probably even on magic(1). There are archeological evidences that indicate the prevalence of surgical practices in this pre-*Aryan* civilization(2). Later with the establishment of the *Vedic* civilization, the pre-*Aryan* practices were integrated into a more comprehensive system of medicine. Meera Roy(2) observes that, while pre-*Aryan* elements led to the development of certain medical practices in *Ayurveda*, Indo-*Aryan* medical elements facilitated the growth of certain concepts and theories. The adoption of hygienic rules and regulations as part of medical practice, application of vapour bath in medical treatment and utilization of animal and material substances in medical prescriptions are some of the instances of borrowing by *Ayurveda* from the Indus-Valley culture. According to her, the Indo-*Aryan* medical elements facilitated the growth of concepts and theories that describe the cosmo-physiological speculations about the three basic constituents of living organisms (*vata* or wind, *piitta* or bile and *kapha* or phlegm), ideas about the aetiology of diseases and belief in the association of medical treatment with god-physicians.

The *Vedas*, originally composed between 1500 BC to 600 BC, contain references to an advanced science of medicine. The *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*, the earliest and the latest among them –contain several references to this science. The *Rig-Veda* contains a prayer dedicated to the Aswinies, the twin divine physicians of Indian mythology, seeking protection from diseases, and it specifically refers to the notion of *tridadhu*(3). The concept of *dhatu* (tissue) is one among the three most important clusters of ideas in the *Ayurvedic* tradition, the doctrine of *tri-doshas* (three humours) and *mala* (waste products) being the other two(4). The ancient Indians have developed this science, incorporating their insights and knowledge about the animal kingdom, chemistry and other scientific pursuits with their peculiar mythological convictions, spiritual assumptions and religious practices(2).

Historically locating the foundations of *Ayurveda* in the (religious) healing practices of the Indus-Valley people

and in the *Vedic* scriptures suggest how religious and mythological concerns were integrated with scientific pursuits. On the one hand, the scriptures deal not only with scientific pursuits, but also with moral prescriptions, magic, ritualistic practices and many other intellectual, religious and social concerns. The word *Veda* literally means knowledge, and here it is employed in the broadest possible sense to include all the wisdom and insights of the ancient Indians concerning life and the cosmos. To separate the scientific endeavors in order to appreciate their peculiar features is a difficult task. On the other hand, all the sciences carry this *Vedic* legacy and consider several assumptions and convictions that sound religious and spiritual in nature as having an important place in their respective pursuits.

To understand *Ayurveda* as a science, we may have to appreciate three factors. First, the experiential basis of this science, which is to be found in the fundamental epistemological position adopted by *Ayurveda*, that has been developed by the Indian logicians and philosophers of science. There is a detailed analysis of the philosophical foundations of the “causal explanation” method adopted by sciences in order to acquire knowledge. Secondly, comes the theoretical presuppositions and fundamental concepts of *Ayurveda*. This can be referred to as the ontology of *Ayurveda*, as there are presuppositions about many theoretical entities and their mutual relationships. The basic cosmo-physiological assumption about the three basic constituents of living organisms, viz. *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, which is central to *Ayurveda*, is an example for this. Finally, the intimate and intrinsic ways in which a moral point of view is ingrained into such epistemological and ontological assumptions make *Ayurveda*, not just a science, but a way of physical, mental and spiritual living, which aims at the eradication of all kinds of sufferings including diseases. There is no epistemology which is independent of speculations about a spiritual self and moral life to be lived by the embodied self in this world. The conception of knowledge, therefore, is not confined to empirical scientific knowledge, but is extended to incorporate moral wisdom as well. The philosophy of life propagated by *Ayurveda* is complete only with a conception of life that comprehensively covers the physical, mental and the moral ways of living in a natural and social environment.

This paper attempts to bring out three things. The first section will show, how, in spite of its entanglement with

religious and moral concerns, *Ayurveda* emphasizes an experiential route that keeps its status as a science intact. The second section will examine the ways in which *Ayurveda* as a science of curing diseases understands human life and its well-being. This section will explain the fundamental ethical outlook of *Ayurveda* which suggests that it is not just a science that addresses the psycho-somatic wellbeing of the individual, but also an ethical way of living that aims at elevating the individual to the highest potentials of his being. The third section attempts to expose the four fundamental postulates of Indian ethics—the belief in the fundamentality of suffering in our corporeal existence, belief in *karma* theory, belief in an eternal soul and the conviction about the highest spiritual emancipation in life. Through *Karma* theory, *Ayurveda* reiterates what almost all Indian philosophical traditions believe, that each one of us are responsible for our present life, which is characterized with a unique mixture of sufferings and enjoyments. We enjoy or suffer by virtue of the moral force of our own actions performed in the past, both in the present and previous lives. The belief in an eternal soul reaffirms this responsibility aspect and the idea of spiritual enlightenment establishes that ultimate freedom from sufferings comes only by the attainment of spiritual emancipation.

***Ayurveda* as a Science**

The term *Ayurveda* is derived from the two words, *ayus* and *veda*: *ayus* means life and *Veda* means knowledge or science. The term *ayus* is derived from the root 'I', which means "to go" which indicates the continuity of existence. Hence *Ayurveda* is the science that aids continuous existence(2). As a science it deals with animal and vegetable medicines and provides a detailed account of the chemical properties and medicinal value of hundreds of species of plants. This vast knowledge is the result of persistent careful observation and systematization carried out by generations of physicians in ancient India. Even when it occasionally slips into metaphysical and religious contemplations, the sciences in India, particularly *Ayurveda*, had maintained the experiential root that defines its status as a science intact.

But as a result of its entanglement with the religious outlook, *Ayurveda* firmly subscribes to the belief that it is of divine origin, originally departed by Lord Brahma, the creator God of Hindu mythology. It also believes

in the *karma* theory, by which one's past *karmas* (actions) are responsible for one's present life and hence for one's state of health as well. Again, as mentioned above, in its conceptions of wellbeing, it doesn't stop with an idea of psycho-somatic wellbeing, but envisages an ideal of spiritual emancipation which is frequently referred to in the Indian religious and philosophical traditions as *moksha* or *kaivalya*. Occasionally this calls for a conception of eternal soul. Caraka, one of the ancient masters of *Ayurveda* and the author of *Caraka-Samhita*, a fundamental textbook, elaborately discusses the concept of soul along with the concepts of body and mind.

On the other hand, as a science *Ayurveda* strongly affirms that it is possible to overcome all kinds of sufferings with the right knowledge of things and the world. It locates its basis on an epistemology of sense experience. As Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, one of the prominent philosophers of modern India notes, the only discipline that promises to be fully secular and contains clear potentials of the modern understanding of natural science is medicine(5). *Ayurveda* affirms the value of this experiential basis of their knowledge system as perennial. Chattopadhyaya, observes that, the theoretical achievements of ancient Indian sciences were ignored and often misunderstood mainly because they were strangely muddled with many features of the counter-ideology. But according to him, *Ayurveda* has already taken the momentous step from magico-religious therapeutics (the pre-Vedic and Vedic origins) to rational therapeutics. He argues that the distinction between *daiva-vyapasraya bhesaja* (God-dependent medical practice) and *yukti-vyapasraya bhesaja* (reason-dependent medical practice) is repeatedly drawn in the *Caraka-Samhita*, which makes clear that the rational therapeutics alone represent the technique of *Ayurveda*(5). To understand what is intrinsic to Indian science, we have to examine its epistemological presuppositions, which will reveal its experiential basis.

The inferential process followed by the ancient Indian epistemologists is at the center of the scientific methodological approach of *Ayurveda*. The Indians called it *Anumana*, which is a process of ascertaining, not by perception or direct observation but through the instrumentality or medium of a mark, that a thing possesses a certain character. It is based on the establishment of an invariable concomitance between the mark and the character inferred(6). This invariable

concomitance is called *Vyapti*, which is ascertained by observation and experiments. Srinivasa Murti points out that the observation of agreement in presence (*anvaya*), as well as the agreement in absence (*vyatireka*) between two phenomena, with the non-observation of the contrary (*Vyabhicharadarsanam*) is the foundation of our knowledge of *vyapti*(6). The unconditionality of the concomitance needs to be established in order to ascertain *vyapti*. Since nature does not always supply us with positive and negative instances of the right kind of help to establish or reject theories, we may have to employ the method of indirect proof (*tarka*) to obtain the negative evidence. The method of indirect proof is employed to strengthen the universal proposition based on positive instances of uninterrupted agreement(7). Both the principles of causality as well as the uniformity of nature are established by means of repeated observations and *vyapti* based inferences. Srinivasa Murty observes that, this Indian method is a combined Formal-Material, Deductive-Inductive inference and hence is more comprehensive than Aristotle's or Mill's analysis of syllogism(6).

The employment of an observation method is repeatedly emphasized in ancient texts like the *Charaka-Samhita*. As M. S. Valiathan(8) points out, the method of observation was perennial in the development of *Ayurveda*. The sick animals and birds choosing to eat selected plants which they normally never consume had caught the attention of ancient observers who sought to apply similar remedies in human situations. He says that, Charaka even refers to the lore of shepherds and forest dwellers and though the *Atharvan* hymns are invocatory in nature, the science of medicine, when it is practiced was never confined to magic or priestly hocus-pocus, even in the *Vedic* age(8).

This enables the pursuit of knowledge of the scientist a rational-logical process, which is different from many other forms of enquiries. But in the Indian context, such scientific pursuits were never essentially separated from other forms of enquiries. The substantive reason that unites all human concerns is never fragmented in India, as it happened in Europe with the advent of modernity(9). In other words, the cognitive is not separated from the conative and the aesthetic and the concept of "wellbeing" in *Ayurveda* is intrinsically related to the notion of life –and its fundamental objectives and means– where the disentanglement of the intellectual from the ethical and material from the

spiritual are impossible. To understand this we have to examine how *Ayurveda* conceives diseases and what ultimately is its conception of wellbeing. This will reveal the relevance of the fundamental ethical postulates mentioned above in the very conception of *Ayurveda* as a science of healing.

Disease and Wellbeing in *Ayurveda*

Ayurveda, as mentioned above is the science that deals with the sustenance or continuation of life. Hence one important concern of *Ayurveda* is the removal of *rogas* or diseases. It adopts the *Sankhya-Vedanta* cosmology –both are schools of philosophy that belong to the orthodox Hindu tradition– in order to explain the nature of the physical world and also the human soul which plays an important role in the process. According to the *Sankhya* school, the whole of reality consists of two principles: the partless and qualityless souls (*Purusha*) and nature or the root principle of matter (*Prakriti*). To explain the human individual, *Sankhya* employs both these principles. The principle of matter is constituted of infinite *gunas* or qualities, which are further classified under three broad classes based on their predominant characteristic feature: *sattva* (intelligence-stuff), *rajas* (energy-stuff) and *tamas* (mass-stuff). They are substantive entities or subtle substances and not abstract entities(10). The *Sankhyans* affirm that, the principle of matter in its "natural condition" exhibits an equilibrium of these three *gunas*, which is disturbed due to the arrival of *Purusha*, the principle of consciousness. The evolution of the embodied self –the individual– happens as the result of such an apparent union of the soul and matter.

The most significant aspect about *Ayurveda* lies in its conception of the individual whose healthy life is its prime concern. *Ayurveda* here brings together material, social and spiritual dimensions of life. A human being has twelve components: the three *dosas* or humors, the three *gunas* or constituents of nature, the five senses and *atman* or soul(11). Hence the conception of wellbeing too refers to the wellbeing of the body, mind and soul. There is a concept of fundamental objectives of life for individuals, widely subscribed to by all systems of thought and schools of philosophy in ancient India. This is known as the doctrine of four *purusharthas* (human goals). They are: *dharma* (righteousness or duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire for pleasure) and *moksha* (spiritual emancipation). The first three are for the

body and mind and the last one, which is treated by the spiritual traditions as the most important one, consists in the realization of the soul. *Astangasamgraha*(12) one of the very important texts of *Ayurveda* composed by Vaghbata, says:

*Dharmarthakamamokshanam vighnakaribhiramayai
Nareshu peedyamanushe puraskruthya punurvasum
DhanvanthiriBharadwajaNimiKasyapah
Maharshayo mahatmanasthata Lambayanadayah
Sakratumupajagmu saranyamamareswaram*

(When humanity was troubled by those diseases which prevent them pursuing *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, the great sages like Dhanvanthiri, Bharadwaja, Nimi, Kasyapa and Lambayana have approached Indra the King of Gods.)

In the conception of the living organism (human body in particular), *Ayurveda* conceives it as constituting of three *doshas*, and the 'natural condition' of the body is said to be a state of equilibrium of these three *doshas*. When this natural equilibrium is disturbed –due to several external and internal reasons– we encounter diseases. Restoration of the natural harmony of the humours in the body will restore the natural condition of the body, which can be understood as *Arogya*, (health or wellbeing), a state of existence which we will become aware of only when we lack this harmony. A human being in *Ayurveda* is a union of matter and soul, where the mind plays an important role, as it is not strictly separated from matter or body and is constituted of the three *gunas* of the root material nature. Hence the mind is not different from the body and the treatment for the body aims at treating the mind as well.

Diseases and their causes are understood in terms of three aspects: functional, physical and moral. Functionally, disease is caused by a state called *dhadu vaishamya*, or imbalance of the three *dhadus* or *doshas* (humours). The aggravation of a disease, therefore, depends on the extent to which the three humours are deranged(2). The properties of the substances used as drugs aid the curing process by rectifying the deranged humours. With regard to the causes the imbalance of *doshas*, *Ayurveda* adopts a psycho-somatic approach, which has very strong moral implications. Apart from the normal physical causes like climatic conditions, the desires for material pleasure and passions are considered as causing and aggravating diseases. In other words, *Ayurveda* recognizes certain moral factors too as the causes of diseases. *Astangasamgraha*(12), begins with

a prayer to the *Eka vaidya*, or the unique absolute physician, whose grace is essential for the curing of the diseases. It says:

*Ragadiroga sahajassamoola
Yenasu sarve jagathopyapaastha
Thamekavaidyam sirasa namami
Vaidyagamajnamcha pitamahadin*

(With whose grace, those diseases which are the results of the desires and passions and which are natural to the body are cured, I salute that unique absolute physician. Salutations to all those grand predecessors who imparted the science of medicine.)

It recognizes the relationship many diseases have with the *ragas*, or passions and desires. They are *raga* (clinging to sensual –physical and mental– pleasure), *dvesha* (aversion to physical and mental pains), *lobha* (desire to possess), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (arrogance) and *matsaryam* (hatred). These are the root causes of diseases. With the administering of drugs one can get rid of the bodily manifestation of diseases, but the root causes may remain dormant. This can be removed only by adopting the right and balanced mental attitude towards life. One has to overcome the extremes of passions and desires.

According to the Indian metaphysical (religious and philosophical as well) traditions, the root cause of all sufferings is ignorance about the real nature of self. Vaghbata, the author of *Astangasamgraha* and *Astangahridaya*, was a Buddhist and hence the reference to *Apurva Vaidya* (unique physician) aims at Lord Buddha, whose spiritual teachings urge man to overcome all sufferings by the removal of desires which are caused by ignorance. The *Sankhya* system of philosophy proclaims that the ultimate form of ignorance is the fundamental confusion between *Prakriti* and *Purusha* or matter and soul. Passions and desires reside in the body which is material and hence is constituted of the *gunas*, while the *Purusha* which is pure spirit and pure consciousness is absolutely devoid of all passions and changes. Due to ignorance the pure soul is wrongly identified with matter and hence appears to be subjected to the different kinds of sufferings. As a result, the individual acts and approaches the world with passions and desires, which lead to various forms of physical as well as mental imbalances that ultimately cause diseases. Only the spiritual knowledge bestowed by the unique physician can free us from this, as ordinary physicians can only remove –that too only

temporarily— the physical manifestations and not the root cause of diseases. To eradicate the root cause—the *ragas*— one needs to elevate spiritually, by realizing the fundamental unreality of all pleasures and pains and by rising beyond all such dichotomies.

Practically, the process of treatment starts with the assumption that, disease is the result of the imbalance of *dosas*. Hence to attain health, one needs to regain the balance, by means of rearranging life to facilitate it. The physical and chemical properties of the drugs aid the patient in regaining the balance in the body which is called *samyavastha*. But even after the bodily manifestations of the imbalance are overcome, the tendencies remain dormant, mainly as the result of past actions or *karmas* (we shall discuss this aspect in the next section). Moreover, the *dhatu samya* or the state of health is a psycho-somatic state and so long as the mind clings to the passions and desires (*ragas*), wellbeing in the real sense is unachievable. Hence the overcoming of passions plays the most important role in the positive rearrangement of life and subsequently of the deranged *dosas*. The seat of all these passions is the mind (*citta*) (12), which is a subtle form of the body. Hence the control and regulation of the mind—and the passions—is vital in the comprehensive form of treatment suggested by *Ayurveda*. *Astangasamgraha*(12) adds:

Trishnadirgamasadwikalpasisirasam
Pradveshachanchalphanam
Kamakrodhavisham vitarkadarsanam
Ragaprachandekshanam
Mohasyam swasariarakodrasayam
Chittoragam darunam
Prajnamanthrabalena yasmitavan
Buddhaya tasmai namah.

(I salute the Buddha, with whose discriminatory wisdom alone one can conquer the mind which is a serpent, whose length is proportional to its desires, whose false conception is its forehead, whose hatred is its moving hood, whose doubts are its teeth, whose passions are its terrific eyes, whose delusion is its face and who resides in its body).

This control of the mind, according to the *Yoga* and other systems of Indian philosophy, leads to the state of *vira* or *Vairagya*, which indicates detachment from the sensual world and its enjoyments and sufferings. The comprehensive mode of treatment suggested in

Ayurveda envisages attaining this. Hence it has the following steps as integral parts of treatment.

1. Proper food: *Ayurveda* considers even food as a medicine. Traditional *Ayurveda* thus prescribes an ideal diet which includes those items which are appropriate to the climatic conditions and those which do not disturb the *dosa* equilibrium in the body. There are three types of food: that which is of the nature of *satva*, of *rajas* and of *tamas*. The gross portion of food evolves into *mala* (excreta or waste product), the subtle portion to *manas* or mind and the portion in between them to *dhadus* and the gross body. Hence the power of food to influence the body and mind makes it very important in the scheme of *Ayurvedic* treatment. In order to conquer the *ragas* (passions), which are the root causes of diseases, one needs to purify the mind with the purity of food. *Rajas* is responsible for all mental disturbances and the right kind of food aids purifying the mind from this excess(13).
2. The different types drugs, which are expected to aid the body achieving equilibrium.
3. Achieving a balanced mental state, devoid of passions and desires for sensual pleasure. One should keep away from enjoying pleasures which are prohibited, asserts *Astangasamraha*(12).
4. The right attitude towards others as well as to the environment. This is articulated in the concept of *dharma* or duty by the Indian tradition. This *dharma* is treated as the principle of life and *Astangasamraha*(12) affirms: “All beings desire for comforts and act for them. But this is unachievable without observing *dharma* (duty). One who aspires for the comfort of health ought to observe *dharma*”. This ultimately calls for the cultivation of *vairagya*, or detachment from the world of sensual pleasure.

Ayurveda does not distinguish between these different stages or kinds of treatments: by medicines, food, mind control, moral attitude. Instead, it makes all these different elements integrated into a way of life. We shall now see what constitutes the basis of the ethical approach of *Ayurveda*. In order to understand this we now analyse the fundamental postulates of Indian ethical thought and examine their relevance in *Ayurveda*.

Suffering, Karma, Soul, and Emancipation: Four Fundamental postulates of an Ethical Theory

There are four fundamental postulates of Indian ethics: the universality of suffering of worldly existence, the belief in *karma* theory or the law of moral causation, (sum of person's actions in one of his successive states of existence, viewed as deciding his fate for the next), the eternity of soul, which justifies moral accountability and the possibility of spiritual emancipation (and the overcoming of all sufferings) by the removal of ignorance by means of right knowledge.

The doctrine of the universality of suffering says that the existence of the embodied self is essentially characterized by sufferings. The term *samsara* is used to characterize the life in the world of the embodied self. *Samsara* is the beginningless series of births and deaths and the bondage to embodied life in the spatio-temporal world. It also indicates the imprisonment of the pure soul in an impure body, due to ignorance(14). All pleasures and pains are momentary. We have a natural inclination to seek pleasure and avoid pain, which is termed as *kama*. This is a futile exercise, as corporeal existence is characterized by both pleasures and pains and to avoid one and to search for the other is not possible. Buddhism develops its four great principles –the *Arya Satyas*– in association with this idea. It equates the worldly existence with *dhuka* or sorrows/sufferings. The second one affirms that since every effect has a cause, *dhuka* too has a cause and that is ignorance. The third one states that it is possible to overcome suffering and fourth one prescribes the means by which this is achieved.

According to the philosophical traditions, there are three types of sufferings: *Adhyatmika*, the sufferings of one's own body and mind; *Adi-bhautika*, the suffering due to other living beings; and *Adi-daivika*, the sufferings due to supernatural agencies(14). *Ayurveda* conceives disease as a *dhuka*, which can be overcome through the right kind of medicines and the right form of living. But the effectiveness of treatment depends on physical, mental and supernatural causes of the disease. Many of these causes can be eradicated through the administering of right medicines, adoption of right diet and the right (following *dharma*) way of living with perfect control over passions. But one's own past *karmas* (sum total of past actions and their moral

force) will still have some impacts on one's life, which will result in sufferings and enjoyments in the present and future lives. These *karmic* forces influence in the form of inner dispositions (*vasanas*) that manifest in the form of various tendencies that prompt one to act. The control over mind and the cultivation of detachment (*vairagya*) are suggested in order to overcome these impacts. Such a conception of *karma* and its impacts presuppose a notion of soul, which is eternal and which transmigrates. This concept implies moral accountability. The individual is thus accountable for his/her acts and he/she alone can overcome the impact of his/her *karmic* forces by conquering his/her mind which is the seat of passions and tendencies through which the *karmic* forces are activated. The fourth postulate is the most important one, as it is projected by many spiritual traditions as the final goal. It consists in transcending all passions and desires and achieving a state of existence where one is unaffected by all those desirable as well as undesirable changes the rest of the world undergoes.

The role of Ayurveda as a science that aids curing diseases is vital here, as in a disease affected state, human beings cannot pursue their fundamental aspirations which include, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Hence the fundamental objective of the science of *Ayurveda* is to facilitate the pursuit of *purusharthas*, and since spiritual emancipation (*moksha*) is the highest goal among them, it is the fundamental objective of *Ayurveda* as well.

These are the postulates of morality, which are foundational to the conception of science as well. While the spiritual traditions conceive the notion of sufferings exclusively from the light of the highest spiritual goal, *Ayurveda* understands it by equating it with various psycho-somatic diseases. The solution to the problem of sufferings is sought in the fulfillment of the spiritual life by religion, while *Ayurveda* focuses on the more immediate physical and psychic causes for diseases and supplements the pursuit of the highest ideal with a removal of the impediments to its pursuit in the form of diseases. The science based on observation and experiments does not contradict the religious pursuits, rather complements it by contributing to improving the conditions that facilities them. What enables this in the Indian context is the entanglement of the three kinds of words –and subsequently three forms of discourses– the word of the question (philosophy and science), the word

of the legend (poetry) and the word of the reconciliation and the promise (religion). As Hans George Gadamer observes, only in the history of the western civilization and culture that these three forms of discourses and the word have been distinguished and developed through continuous interchange of ideas with one another(15). Such a disentanglement is absent in the Indian civilization –both historically as well as conceptually– as all the intellectual and other human concerns –sciences, arts, religion, social sciences, philosophy– share a common functional framework. This framework decided the fundamental assumptions, objectives and operational procedure of each of these endeavours and determined their ontological presuppositions and epistemological presumptions.

This strong unified ethical framework which legitimizes the very sanctity of the various pursuits is a *Vedic* legacy. The *Vedic* outlook is dominated by a conception of cosmic moral order, which is technically designated as *Rita*. According to this, there is a cosmic moral order that pervades and prevails the universe, which refers to and accounts for both the natural cosmic order as well as moral behaviour of the individuals in the society. As Kireet Joshi(16) observes:

...there is, at the summit of consciousness, a power of action which arranges forces and activities of the universe by an automatic harmony of relationships, movements and results. The right law of this automatic harmony is *Rita*. The *Rita* itself is founded in the truth of the Reality and of the universe, (*satyam*), and its field of action is the totality which is the infinite vast (*brihat*).

The all-pervasiveness of *Rita* is further reiterated by a conception of cosmic reality. The hymn 10.129 of the Rig Veda, which is also known as the ‘hymn of creation’ metaphorically describes how the whole existing universe has come about. It says that an absolute being (*Tat Ekam*), which is identical to *Satya* or Truth, existed eternally. With this the *Rig Veda* affirms the unity of all existence, living and non living. “From Fervour kindled to its height Eternal Law (*Rta*) and Truth (*Satyam*) were born:

Thence was the Night produced, and thence the billowy flood of sea arose”, proclaims the *Rig Veda*(3). The unity thesis is affirmed in many ways. The hymn 8.58.2 of the *Rig Veda*(3) says:

Eka evagnir bahudha samiddha
Ekah suryo visvam anu prabhutah
Ekaivosah sarvam idam vibhaty
Ekam vaidam vi bahuva sarvam

(One fire burns in many ways; one sun illumines the world; one dawn dispels the darkness of night; All that exists is One and It has taken all these various forms.)

These *Rig Vedic* assumptions remain as the core of the *Vedic* cosmology, which exerted significant influence in the formation of theories in religion, science, ethics and philosophy. The unity of Truth and Law, and subsequently the fundamental unity of all being, is manifested in *Rita*, both at the micro as well as at the macro levels. The fundamentality of *Rita* is repeatedly reiterated as it is conceived as the law of truth, and the sole law to which the individual and the collectivity are called upon to give their ultimate allegiance(17). All human endeavours are therefore, in a sense, attempts to cope up with this law of truth and all enquiries –scientific, moral, aesthetic, political, social etc.– aim at understanding this law from different perspectives.

The ancient Indians have developed a concept of *dharma*, in the light of these insights. *Dharma* is equated with *Rita*. It is a regulatory principle, which guides the lives of all people. Since it is a principle of life, it has applications in all human endeavours viz, political, economic, social, scientific, artistic, religious and spiritual. These different spheres, though are functionally divided, are fundamentally united in terms of the all pervading order of *Rita*. *Ayurveda's* conception of the being of man –as constituted of three *dosas*, three *gunas*, the senses and the soul– reflect this cosmic order in the microcosm, as it envisages a state of balance between contradicting forces. The state of *dhātu samya* (equilibrium of the *dosas*) and subsequently the conception of health or wellbeing are understood in terms of such a conception of order and harmonious existence, which is understood as the “natural condition” of the body. The natural condition therefore, reflects the cosmic –natural and moral– harmony in the microcosm.

The influence of this *Vedic* legacy which consists in the idea that all that exist –living and non living– are regulated by *Rita*, and hence they reflect the cosmic harmony in their natural condition, exerts a strong moral force on all human actions. It makes the realiza-

tion of this harmony, not only important in the different spheres of human action, but also the ultimate human aspiration. This moral force, as mentioned earlier, encompasses the domains of 'is, can and ought', and is understood as *dharma*. *Ayurveda* aims at human wellbeing, which as discussed above physical, mental

an spiritual dimensions. It therefore, prescribes a life which follows *dharma*, in words and deeds. The proper administering of medicines and proper diet need to be supplemented by the proper conduct. The ultimate aim of *Ayurveda*, is not freedom from physical pains, but a liberation from all sufferings.

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