



## Agricultural knowledge revealed in the Atharvaveda.

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### Abstract

Atharvaveda is the store house of almost all branches of knowledge. This is the last and the fourth veda. Sage Atharvan is the seer of this veda. Here agricultural knowledge is revealed mainly in some hymns of the second, third, sixth, seventh and twelfth books. Many agricultural terms are also found in this scripture. Hymns for the prosperity and protection of field, crops and cattle are found in the seventh book. Thus this ancient scripture provides a vast knowledge of agriculture which appears to be beneficial at the present time also. The present paper aims at highlighting the knowledge of agriculture revealed in the Atharvaveda and its present relevance.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Atharvaveda, Hymns.

### 1. Introduction

The most important records of religion and the institutions of the Aryans are the vedas. Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda are considered as trayī. The Atharvaveda is not included in the trayīvidyā, which provides its late origin. This latest veda is divided into twenty books represented by two recensions, viz., Śaunaka and Paippalāda. The trayīs deal with the sacrifices, while the Atharvaveda is not directly connected with sacrificial performances. This veda is connected to the beliefs and religion of the common people. The Atharvaveda deals with a vast sphere of knowledge. Medicine, agriculture, politics, philosophy, history, anthropology all these topics are discussed in this veda. The ancient Indian customs, beliefs and practices relating to the cure of diseases by using traditional medicines; obtaining longevity; obtaining prosperity in agriculture, trade and commerce; maintaining family and social peace; obtaining of love; marriage; easy delivery; better government and politics; arts and industry; witchcraft and black-magic; theosophy; cosmogony; anatomy; astronomy and many other subjects are dealt with in the Atharvaveda. This veda serves as the encyclopaedia of ancient Indian sciences, arts, cultures and traditions.

There are numbers of hymns in the Atharvaveda-

samhitā which bear agricultural knowledge.

For ancient Indian people agriculture was the chief means of livelihood. A glance at the contents of the Atharvaveda is sufficient to see the increasing importance of agriculture in everyday life.

1. There is a clear distinction between the forest products and that of ploughing in verse 5 of hymn II. 4 of the Atharvaveda<sup>1</sup>(AV).
2. Hymn III. 17 is intended for successful agriculture.
  - 2.1 Here the farmers are asked to harness the ploughs, to extend the yokes, to scatter the seeds in the fields<sup>2</sup>.
  - 2.2 Here prayers are chanted to help the farmers in ploughing, in cultivation, for the good health of the draft-animals and for the ripening and growth of crops<sup>3</sup>.
  - 2.3 AV, III.17/7 is intended to rainfall for successful agriculture.
3. In AV, III. 24 there are prayers for the abundance of grains<sup>4</sup>. These hymns are chanted for the fertilisation, ripening and growth of grains.
4. Hymn VI.142 is intended to increase barley. Here barley is asked to rise up like the sky, to become unexhausted like the ocean<sup>5</sup>. The attendants, heaps, bestowers and eaters of barley are wanted

- to be unexhausted<sup>6</sup>.
5. In AV, III. 17, it is mentioned that Indra, the king of gods, holds down the furrow and Pūṣan (cloud) defends it<sup>7</sup>.
  6. In VI. 30, Indra is called sīrapati, the master of the plough<sup>8</sup>.
  7. In X. 5, it is mentioned that Vishnu's stride is stirred up by ploughing<sup>9</sup>.
  8. Hymn XII. 1 extols the earth. In verses 3 and 4 the earth is said to be the one on whom food, ploughings, came into being. According to verse 17 the earth is the all-producing mother of herbs.
  9. Hymn VI. 79 is intended to increase rainfall and procuring increase of grain<sup>10</sup>.
  10. Hymn VI. 50 is intended for exorcism of vermin infesting grain in the field. The grains are protected from borer, hook, mole, snapper, locust and rodents<sup>11</sup>.
  11. AV, VII. 11/ 1 is chanted to protect grain from lightning. Here prayer is made not to destroy the grains by lightning.
  12. AV, II. 26 and III. 14 are intended to the prosperity of cattle for the growth of agriculture<sup>12</sup>. Here prayers are made for peaceful stay of the cattle in the stable and also for their protection from diseases.
  13. In VI. 59 there is prayer to plant arundhati for protection of cattle. The herb arundhati is asked to protect the cows from the hurdle missiles of Rudra, from diseases and to make them rich in milk<sup>13</sup>.
  14. Most importantly many agricultural terms are found in the Atharvaveda. Terms concerning the soil, the agricultural implements and operations, cultivated plants and men and animals employed in agricultural work are present in this veda. Some important terms are cited below—
    - abhri(IV.7/5,6)-it is used to dig up herbs.
    - ābayu (VI.16/1)-name of a plant.
    - ikṣu (I.34/5)-sugarcane.
    - īṣa (II.8/4)-the people of a plough.
    - urvarā (X.6/33; X.10/8; XIV.2/14)- a fertile soil.
    - urvāru (VI.14/2)-cucumber.
    - ulūkhala (X.9/26; XI.3/3)- a wooden mortar.
    - kaṇa (XI.3/5)-corn.
    - kīnāśa (IV.11/10; VI.30/1)-a cultivator of the soil.
    - kr̥ṣi (II.4/5; VIII.2/19; VIII.10/24; X.5/34; X.6/12; XII.2/37)-cultivation.
    - kr̥ṣta (X.6/33)-cultivated.

- kṣetra (IV.18/5; V.31/4; X.1/18; XI.1/22; XIV.2/7)-field.
- taṇḍula (X.9/26; XI.1/18; XI.3/5; XII.3/18; XII.3/29,30)-grain.
- tila (II.8/3; VI.140/2)-sesame.
- dhānya (II.26/3,5; III.24/2,4; V.29/7; VI.117/2; VIII.2/19; XIX.31/5,10)-rice.
- pavana (IV.34/2)-an instrument for purifying grain, a sieve, a strainer.
- phāla (X.6/6,7,8,9,10,33)-a ploughshare; suphala(III.17/5)-a good ploughshare.
- māṣa (VI.140/2)-a sort of bean.
- yava (II.8/3; VI.30/1; VI.142/1,2; XII.1/42)-barley.
- lāṅgala (II.8/4)- a plough.
- yuga (II.8/4)- the yoke of a plough.
- vāha (VI.102/1)-a bull or ox for drawing the plough.
- vrihi (VI.140/2; VIII.7/20; IX.1/22; IX.6/14; XII.1/42)-rice.
- śūrpa (IX.6/16; X.9/26; XI.3/4; XII.3/19; XX.136/8)-a sieve.
- sītā (XI.3/12)-a furrow.
- sīra (VI.30/1; VI.91/1; VIII.9/16)- a plough.

There are many other agricultural terms found to be used in the Atharvaveda. Some terms are used several times. Such as dhānya nine times, phāla seven times, kr̥ṣi six times, kṣetra, yava, vrihi and śūrpa five times and so on. Many synonymous terms are also found to be used. Such as dhānya, vrihi etc. for rice, lāṅgala, sīra etc. for plough and so on.

## 2. Conclusion

From the above discussion it appears that agriculture was equally established with other economic activities at the time of Atharvaveda. At that period of time barley (yava) production had occupied a strong position. The preponderance of rice cultivation is indicated by the terms dhānya, vrihi and śasya. The cultivations of these grains have importance at present time also. The other plants and herbs mentioned in this scripture are also beneficial for the people of all time. The traditional tools of cultivation such as lāṅgala etc. do not lose their values in spite of the introduction of modern instruments. The enthusiasm for agriculture at the Atharvavedic period can influence the present youths who are suffering for lack of employment. The agricultural terms found in this treatise are useful not only for agriculture students but also for farmers and common people.

**References**

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AV, VI.142/2

AV, VI.142/3

AV, III.17/4

AV, VI.30/1

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AV, VI.79/1-3

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