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# THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF DRAVYAGUNA ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA

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## ABSTRACT

Dravyaguna deals with study of medicinal herbs & drugs, their origin, nature, properties & effects upon human beings. It finds its parallel in the modern science of pharmacology. It's a complete science of herbal plants. Dravya is a word derived from dru, denoting tree or plant. In Ayurveda dravya denotes any material used as curative agent. Its derivation from dru, meaning plant, suggests that in the beginning plants or plant products were the susbstances used mostly as curative agents. Other substances entered the field later. This is natural, as the flora and fauna are the substances, which are in the easy reach of men, and among them plant material can be collected easily.

**KEYWORDS:** Dravyaguna, Medicinal, Plant, Ayurveda, Natural, Material.

## INTRODUCTION

In Vedas, the ancient Indian repositories of knowledge, there are Some references which indicate that man learnt from animals the knowledge of the curative action of herbs on ailments. The following passage from Atharvaveda requests the plants, known to animals to come to the aid of man. "Well doth the wild boar know a Plant, the mungoose knows the Healing Herb. I call, to aid this man, the Plants which Serpents and Gandharvas know." (A V-VIII-7-23)

The next lines also indicate that animals have the knowledge of medicine. In these hymns, different types of animals are included. "Plants of Angirases which hawks, celestial Plants

which eagles know; Plants known to swans and lesser fowl, Plants known to all the birds that fly, Plants that are known to sylvan beasts,-I callthem all to aid this man." (A V-VIII-7-24)

All these hymns suggest the view that the knowledge of materia medica is based on or is derived from actions of animals to relieve their suffering.

The derivation and use of the word dravya, as already said, is based on the early usage of plant material as medicine. However the curative factors found in Vedas may be categorized into four types.

(a) Substances derived from plant kingdom
(b) Atharvan hymns
(c) Divine factors like stotras and yagas (sacrifices)
(d) Methods based on the experiments by human beings.

These divisions form the basis of different curative procedures mentioned in Ayurvedic classics. It is laid down in Ayurveda that the cure of 'diseases is by medicines, charms, chantings, offerings (sacrifices) and worship of gods. Thus herbal material as well as divine forms of medicines have their origin in Vedas. Another division into five categories of substances used as medicines is also found in Vedas. Herbs are common among them.
(1) Prakritika (natural resources)
(2) Khanija (minerals)
(3) Samudraja (materials obtained from the sea)
(4) Pranija (animal products)
(5) Udbhijja (vegetable products).

The sun, moon. and water fall in the first category. Lead, etc are khanijas. Shells etc are samudrajas, while mrigashringa (horn of stag) etc are pranijas. Plants and vegetable products fall under udbhijjas. Among the curative factors the four classes except udbhijjas are referred to very briefly. Udbhijjas are described in detail. Toe words used as synonyms for udbhijjas are virudh, bheshaji and vanaspati. Plant kingdom thus appears to be very important in Vedas among the therapeutic agents. The therapeutic efficacy of herbs is praised very much in Vedas. Animals and birds. as already stated. are praised in Vedas as the creatures, having the knowledge of curative efficacy of herb s. Others praised as having this knowledge are brahmanas, sages, gods, and also the wild tribes; these have the knowledge of both good and

bad effects of herbs. In the beginning men used to collect the herbs, whenever there was a need for them to cure the ailments. With the passage of time, the need for preservation of herbs was felt to cure the ailments at times when the herbs were not available. Collection and preservation of herbs and their sale is also indicated in Vedas. Some herbs were termed as apakritas i.e. those that cannot be obtained by purchase; some herbs were obtainable by payment of money and some by exchange. In Rigveda, mention is made of gold ornaments as well as of ayodhatu. It is believed that ayodhat u first indicated copper and later it was differentiated from iron, which is mentioned in Atharvaveda as shyamayas. The 'Oshadhisukta' in Rigveda is the first literary source giving a. scientific and -rational outlook on material medica. Originally two divisions of plants viz: oshadhis and vanaspatis were there and they led to the later four divisions. Small plants were oshadhis and big ones were vanaspatis. The division into four types is found in Atharvaveda. The Udbhijja substances are again subdivided into four categories. They are vanaspati, vanaspatya, virudh and oshadhis. Vanaspatis are plants which have fruiting without flowering; those having both flowering and fruiting are vanaspatyas. Plants wearing away after fruiting are oshadhis, Virudhs are creepers. This four type division appears to be a gradual development of the two-type division. In Rigveda and Yajurveda, the number of herbs mentioned is not more than hundred. This number increased by three times in Atharvaveda.

**Classical literature:** The four types of substances with the sub-divisions in the Vedic period were further developed and the substances were classified into more divisions based on several other aspects. The original basis for the classification was size and then the flowering and fruiting stages. Later the keen observation of the qualities and effects formed the basis for classification, The view that certain materials are useful in certain ailments was later developed into the broad idea that in the world, there is no substance, which has no therapeutic value. In Vedas, however, we find that nonherbal materials - Sun, Moon, water etc. are also described as curative factors. Specially water is descri bed with different types according to its source and is practiced as bhaishajya (medicine), equal to nectar and very wholesome. The general use of herbs in the early days later led to the use of specific parts of the herbs for different ailments. This is evident from the descript ion of different parts of herbs in Charakasarnhita. After giving the four divisions of herbs, as already mentioned, i.e. vanaspati, vanaspatya, virudh and oshadhi, parts of herbs used as therapeutic agents are given, under the name audbhidagana, This gana (group) includes the following parts: Mula (root), tvak (bark), sara (pith), niryasa (exudation), nala (stalk), svarasa (juice), pallava

(sprouts), kshara (alkalis), kshira (milk), pha la (fiuit), pushpa (flowers), bhasma (ash), taiJa (oil), kantaka (thorn), patra (leaves), shunga (buds), kanda (bulbs) and off-shoots. -Ch. S.-Su. 1-73-74.

It appears that each and every part or herbs was tried and experimented upon. Classification of plant kingdom was also according to the therapeutically important part of the plant, such as phalini (plants with the fruit as important part). mulini (plants with root as important part). Similarly, non-herbal substances also acquired importance in materia medica. After audbhidagana, next are mentined mahasnehas (principal kinds of oils-unctuous substances), lavanas (salts), eigbt types of mutras (urines), and kshiras (milks).

Apart from these developments from the Vedic period, another point is also significant. Birds, animals, and wild tribes were praised as those having the knowledge of herbs in Vedas. But in Charakasamhita only wild tribes, cowherds etc are mentioned:

"The goat-herds, the sbepberds and cowherds and other foresters are acquainted with the names and forms of plants. No one can claim to have a perfect knowledge of pharmacology by the mere acquaintance with the names or even with the forms of herbs. If one who knows the uses and actions of herbs, tbough not acquainted with their form, may be caIled a pharmacologist, then what need be said of the physician who knows the herbs botanically, pharmacologicaIly and in every other respect? He is the best of physicians who knows the science of the administration of drugs with due reference to clime and season and who applies it only after examining each and every patient individually." -Ch. S.-Su-l-120-123.

The mention of birds and animals is absent. Even the ajapas, gopas, avipas and other wild tribes are also named only for the identification of herbs. The knowledge of qualities and effects of the herbs is not attributed to them. The development of the knowledge of materia medica made the birds and animals disappear from the field and also made the knowledge of wild tribes limited to identification of herbs. Apart from this. Agnivesha further states that mere knowledge of the name and form of the (identification) herb is of no use. He even prefers a person without the knowledge of identification, but with that of the effects and uses of herbs and drugs. The different classifications of herbs in Charaka sarnhita suggest the gradual development of dravyaguna. As already seen, it indicates the absence of mention of the knowledge of wild tribes for identification, particular use of different parts of the plants, classification of plants according to the significant part of the plant, as the gradual

development. In the next chapter, herbs are classified and grouped as shirovirechanas (errhines) and purgatives etc. In the fourth chapter the mahakashayas (the great decoctions) are classified under the following fifty groups based on their qualities and therapeutic effects.

**Description of dravyas in groups**

Groups or vargas are found for suka and sami dhanyas (grains), phala, (fruits) pushpa (flowers) shaka and mamsa (leafy vegetables and meat). In Charakasamhita only one gorasa varga is devoted for dealing with milk and milk products. In Sushruta samhita separate vargas find place for milk, curd, buttermilk and ghee, In later nighantus also separate vargas are found. Butter is also dealt with in a separate group in some nighantus. There is only one varga for all herbs and drugs used as therapeutic agents in classics except Sushrutasamhita, where one group for anupana (vehicle for medicine) is also added. In later works on meteria medica i.e.: nighantus, herbs and drugs are discussed in several groups according to their different views. Among them some are significant as their classification is different and unique. Siddhamantra describes the substances in divisions like vataghna, pittaghna etc; one udasinavarga is also there. Bopadeva in his Hridayadipaka described the substances into the following eight groups: chatushpada, tripada, dvipada, ekapada, and dvinama, ekanama, nanartha and mishra. Paryayaratnamala is purely of medicoliterary value, giving the synonyms of the herbs and drugs. Shivakosha of Shivadatta misra gives the synonyms in alphabetical order. Shadrasa nighantu is a work of unknown author and classifies the substances into six groups according to the predominant rasa.

**Rasa theory:** Another important development in dravyaguna is evolution of the concept of rasa, guna, virya, vipaka and prabhava. It is difficult to trace the origin or state of these concepts prior to the available medical classics in which all these are stated and discussed. The ancient Indian Philosophies follow the panchabhuta theory and the medical science is also based on this. The three humours-the main principles involved in the life, health and disease are also constituted by the five elements. The curative agents are also panchabhautikas. The rasas numbering six are also based on the five elements.

The number of rasas as well as viryas appears to have been decided after careful examination and discussions. Charak a samhita mentions the views of different authorities about the number of rasas. Bhadrakapya and Shakuntaleya put forward the theories of one and two rasas respectively, whereas Purnaksha Maudgalya stressed the three rasa theory. Hir anyaksha Kaushika was the supporter of four rasas. The theories of five, six, seven and eight

rasas were evolved respectively by Kumarashiras Bharadvaja, Varyovida. Nimi, and Badisha. Kankayana propounded the theory of innumerable rasas. Atreya Punarvasu decided in favour of six rasas, propounded by Varyovida and this has become the final theory and was accepted by later authorities. In Sushruta samhita, discussions are found as to which of the different constituents of drugs-rasa, virya or vipaka is important. but the number of rasas is not found as a matter for discussion. Does this suggest that by the time of Sushrutasamhita, the controversy over the number of rasas was over and the six rasa theory was established, whereas at the time of Atreya the different theories of rasas were still in vogue? If the other samhitas were extant, much light could have been thrown on this aspect. Similarly in Charaka samhita the theory of eight viryas and existence of one vipaka and individual vipakas are also mentioned. The action of the drug in some cases was not explainable on the basis of the rasas, viryas or vipaka. To explain such cases of exceptional nature in the action based on their rasas etc, on the humours or diseases, the theory of prabhava appears to bave emerged. All the actions' of drugs, which were unexplainable to the established actions were attributed to prabhava-influence of the drug.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Vedas mention that knowledge of dravyaguna is learnt from animals, gods, sages etc. Herbs were divided first into two and later into four types according to the size and flowering and fruiting pattern. In classical literature, animals are not mentioned as source of knowledge of herbs. Cowherds and foresters know only the identification. Importance to the identification disappeared and that to the knowledge of uses of herbs increased. Herbs were described and studied as a whole in the beginning. Then particular parts of the plants were studied for their actions. Later, herbs were classified according to their actions. The knowledge developed and all substance are known to have medical value and described in materia medica. The medieval works on materia medica adopted different types of classification of substances.

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