

**CONCEPT OF DRAVYAGUNA IN AYURVEDA– A REVIEW**

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**ABSTRACT**

Prehistoric antiquity is seen in Ayurveda having innumerable medicine. The understanding regarding therapeutic value of plants has remained accumulated in a way of several centuries. The suitability of options medicine especially medicine has now come to be a critical need of time. In these articles basic of Dravyaguna (Ayurvedic Pharmacology) has been taken in accounts so that one can see the action of various drugs properly. It is the time when Ayurvedic concept must be proved on modern parameters. Ayurvedic pharmacological medicine is being dealt with these terms- Rasa (taste), Guna (Properties), Veerya (active principles), Vipak (Biotransformation) and Prabhav (Specific action).

**KEYWORDS:** Dravyaguna; Rasa; Veerya; Alternative Medicine.

**INTRODUCTION**

The word 'Dravyaguna' means the science dealing with properties and actions of drugs. This is counterpart of modern pharmacology. It would be necessary, at first, to understand the fundamentals of Ayurveda in general before one can grasp the concepts of Dravyaguna. Panchabhutas (Akasha, Vayu, Agni, Jala and Prithivi) are regarded as physico-chemical basis of the material objects. When life evolved, out of these five, three came forward to control and regulate the biological functions. These three (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are known as tridhatu

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(tridosha in pathological state) having specific functions of Vikshepa (movement). Adana (assimilation) and Visarga (growth) respectively.

Primarily based on this fundamental background, the following concepts were developed to explain the drug action.

1. Dravya (Substance-drug & diet)
2. Guna (Property)
3. Rasa (Taste)
4. Vipaka (Final transformation)
5. Veerya (Potency)
6. Prabhava (Specific potency)
7. Drug karma (Action)

## **DRAVYA**

‘Dravya’ means drug in this context. It is the substratum of properties and actions. Drug was studied extensively and intensively in ancient times. In Rigveda, we find the ‘Oshadhisukta’ (Hymns on herbs) dealing with nature and classification of drugs. Charaka has classified drugs from various angles, e.g., according to source, effect on doshas, composition, properties, actions, etc. A marvelous piece in the Charaka-Samhita is the description of fifty groups of drugs according to their main action. Similar classification is found in the Sushruta-Samhita where thirty-seven groups of drugs are defined according to their effect and therapeutic uses. In this connection, two broad propositions are established.

There is no substance which cannot be used as drug.<sup>[1]</sup>

All drugs are composed of five bhutas.

## **GUNA**

Guna (quality or property) is defined as that which is inherently existent in substance and is non-inherent cause (of its effect). Gunas are forty-one in number and are classified into four groups-somatic, psychic, physical and applicative.

They are further elaborated as follows.

Somatic, also known as gurvadi, are twenty in number which can be arranged in pairs one opposite to the other such as.

1. Guru – Heavy

2. Laghu – Light
3. Shita – Cold
4. Ushna – Hot
5. Snigdha – Unctuous
6. Ruksha – Rough
7. Manda – Dull
8. Tikshna – Sharp
9. Shlakshna – Smooth
10. Khara – Course
11. Sandra – Solid
12. Drava – Liquid
13. Mridu – Soft
14. Kathina – Hard
15. Sthira – Stable
16. Sara – Unstable
17. Sukshma – Minute
18. Sthula – Gross
19. Vishada – Non slimy
20. Pichhila – Slimy

Psychic qualities: – These are six in number such as ichcha (desire), dvesha (aversion), sukha (pleasure), duhkha (pain), prayatna (will) and buddhi (determinative intellect). Physical or material qualities: – These are five in numbers such as shabda (sound), sparsha (touch), rupa (vision), rasa (taste) and gandha (smell). They are specific objects (artha or vishaya) of five sensory organs.

**Applicatory or paradi gunas are ten such as**

- |                      |                    |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>1- Paratva</b>    | <b>2- Aparatva</b> | <b>3- Yukti</b>    |
| <b>4- Sankhya</b>    | <b>5- Samyoga</b>  | <b>6- Vibhaga</b>  |
| <b>7- Prithaktva</b> | <b>8- Parimana</b> | <b>9- Samskara</b> |
| <b>10- Abhyasa</b>   |                    |                    |

**Paratva** is wholesomeness while **aparatva** is unwholesomeness.

**Yukti** is rational and effective combination of multiple factors.

**Sankhya** is accurate marking.

**Samyoga** is non-eternal combination of two or more factors.

**Vibhaga** is viyoga (disjunction), vibhakti (excision) and bhagasho graham (division).

**Prithaktva** is separateness or difference in terms of place, time, class and individuals.

**Parimana** is estimation in terms of measurement or weight.

Samskara is processing for refinement.

**Abhyasa** is constant use or practice.

## **RASA OF DRAVYA**

Rasa is the object of gustatory sense organ and is in dravya.

Rasa is manifested by permutation and combination of bhutas in dravya and as such is dependent on it. On the other hand, from rasa one can infer the bhautika composition of the dravya generally. Thus, though subjective it is a reliable means for the same. Charaka says that ap and priathivi are material cause of rasa in its origin while the other three bhutas serve as instrumental cause in their variations. Commentators based on double 'cha' interpret that ap and Prithivi to act as agents in variation and the other three bhutas also in origin.

Rasa is perceived through nipata (contact with the gustatory sense organ).

Thus, rasa is known from perception and from inference on the basis of its characters such as effect on salivation etc.

Rasas are six in number – madhura (sweet), amla (sour), lavana (salty), katu (pungent), tikta (bitter) and kashaya (astringent).

Madhura Rasa pacifies vata and pitta and increases kapha, promotes strength and helps excretions on the other hand if this is used excessively it causes disorders like prameha etc. While its non-use may cause disorders due to aggravation of vata and pitta.

As said above, madhura rasa has effects on dosha, dhatu and mala. Effect of dravyas and gunas on dosha, dhatu and mala should be examined carefully.

Amla Rasa increases kapha and pitta and pacifies vata, decreases semen, is carminative, appetizer and digestive. By excessive use, it causes amlapitta (acid gastritis) etc. and its non-intake may cause agnimandya (diminution of digestive fire) etc.

Dipana-pachana effects are due to its action on agni. That is why due to non-use it leads to loss of appetite etc.

Lavana Rasa increases kapha and pitta while pacifies vata, destroys semen, is carminative, appetizer, digestive and moistening. Used in excess it vitiates blood and causes oedema etc and if not used loss of appetite etc and vatika disorders take place 'Vishyandi' (moistening) is the specific feature of salt.

Katu Rasa increases vata and pitta while decreases kapha, destroys semen, checks (movements of) wind, stool and urine and stimulates digestive fire. If used excessively it generates disorders caused by vata and pitta and if not used at all disorders caused by kapha arise. Due to aggravation of vata it causes constipation and obstruction in urine. Due to igneous nature, it stimulates digestive fire.

Tikta Rasa pacifies kapha and pitta while increases vata, is absorbent and cleans channels. If used in excess vatika disorders and if not used kaphaja, pittaja and raktaja disorders arise. Due to predominance of vayu in its nature it absorbs moisture and rasa etc dhatus by roughness.

Kashaya pacifies kapha and pitta while increases vata, along with checking and depressing digestive fire. By excessive use it causes vatika disorders etc. and by non-use kaphaja and pittaja disorders and loss of dhatus take place. Stambhana (checking) effect of kashaya is specific due to its shita and parithiva nature and because of this leads to loss of appetite. That is why it is prescribed in diarrhoea and not in grahaniroga where appetizers are required.

## DRUG VIPAKA

'Vipaka' is the term for final transformed state of drugs after digestion. In most cases, the rasas pass on as such and there is no change in their nature but in certain cases there is a definite change with consequent different vipaka which determines the future course and action of the drug. For instance, Shunthi (dry ginger) is pungent (katu) in taste but is transformed in madhura vipaka which determines its action on that basis.

It is of three types according to taste and effect on doshas – madhura (sweet), amla (sour) and katu (pungent) and two types according to properties-guru (heavy) and laghu (light).

Charaka has described three types of vipaka according to the rasa emerged at the completion of digestion and the effect on three doshas Sushruta has criticized this view and has held that because of being only two groups of five bhutas-guru and laghu-there can be only two vipaka- guru and laghu. When there is predominance of Prithivi and jala it is guru and in that of the other three bhutas it laghu. Guru is madhura and laghu is katu including amla-vipaka. Thus, the views of Charaka and Sushruta, apparently contradictory, can be synthesized.

Madhura vipaka increases kapha and semen and helps excretions. Amla vipaka increases pitta, decreases semen and is carminative. Katu, vipaka increases vata, decreases semen and is constipative.

According to Charaka's view actions of the three types of vipaka have been said as vipaka is inferred from actions and thus the knowledge of action is essential for knowing the type of vipaka. Here actions of three types of vipaka are described on dosha, dhatu and mala. Madhura, amla and katu increase kapha, pitta and vata respectively. Madhura promotes semen while the other two decrease it. Katu vipaka obstruct the excretion of faeces and urine while the other two promote it. The knowledge of vipaka from the increase of doshas is evident and so from that of semen. If some drug is carminative the vipaka may be either madhura or amla which can be further differentiated by their action on semen. If it promotes semen, it is madhura otherwise amla. In the same way, if some drug decreases semen its vipaka can be decided by its action on mala, if it carminates it would be amla otherwise katu. Vipaka is chief as the fate (or further course) of the substance depends thereon.

The ingested substances produce good or bad effects according to vipaka. It is only after final transformation that substances exert accordingly wholesome or unwholesome effect on body.

## **VEERYA OF DRUG**

Veerya is shakti (power or potency) which is the means of action (of a substance).

Shakti (power or potency) is nature of veerya and means of action its purpose. That is why charaka has said – Veerya is that by which drug acts as instrument. Again, he has established logically the cause-effect relationship between veerya and Drug karma on the law of agreement in presense (anvaya) and absence (vyatireka) by saying that none can act without veerya and all actions are caused by veerya. Sushruta also says – veerya is chief as drug action depends thereon. Thus, drug is the active agent, veerya is the instrument and pacification of dosha etc action. Hence the definition of veerya may be laid down as 'the

quality of substance which is instrumental in the action caused by dravya' as stated by Vopadeva in his Prakasha commentary on the Siddhamantra (of Keshava)

In common practice, grossly it is represented by the active fraction of drug which is the concentrated essence of the five bhutas (comprising) the substance.

The power is located inherently in the active drug, there also it is concentrated in a particular portion having essence of panchabhuta and known as active fraction. Thus, the active fraction of a drug is the substratum of the power as stated by Shivadasha in his commentary on Dravyaguna – veerya is power which is in the form of the concentrated essence of five bhutas.

### **DRUG PRABHAVA**

This specific power is based on the specific nature (bhautika composition) and exerts specific action. It is known from the specific nature initiated by specific combination (of bhutas) as said by Vriddha Vagbhata that prabhava is Svabhava (nature) exceeding all. This specific nature leads to specific action like emesis, purgation etc.

For instance, the specific natural composition comprising of the specific bhautika composition of the active fraction of danti causes specific action e.g., purgation whereas chitraka devoid of it does not possess that power. Some dividing power as of two types based on explicable and inexplicable actions say that the power behind explicable action is veerya while that causing inexplicable one is prabhava. This is not correct because in scripture power is said as of two types according to generality or specificity. General power is known as veerya while the specific one is prabhava. This has been stated by Charaka clearly as follows 'where there is similarity of rasa, veerya and vipaka but specific difference in action it may be taken as caused by prabhava. Vagbhata also follows the same line – 'The specific action in spite of similarity in rasa etc is caused by prabhava'. In these definitions there is no mention of explicable or inexplicable. Wherever there is some case like that it can be included in prabhava because of its specific action as has been said by Charaka in case of wearing of gems. Here the word 'achintya' has been used in the context of wearing of gems and not as a part of the definition of prabhava.

## DRUG KARMA (ACTION)

Drug karma (action) is defined as that which is the cause of conjunction and disjunction, characterized by movement (or activity) and located in dravya.

Drug karma is instrumental cause in conjunction and disjunction, these cannot take place without Drug karma. The word 'kriya-lakshanam' means that which is indicated by movement as said by Charaka- 'Drug karma is movement initiated by conscious will'. It may be elaborated further as follows- In living organs or tissues response caused by conscious will, a quality of self, in the form of movements is Drug karma. For instance, danti, on ingestion, stimulates movements in living intestines resulting in purgative action. In emesis etc. also the similar phenomena are observed. Like guna, Drug karma is also located in dravya. Charaka defines Drug karma as follows – 'Drug karma is that which is the cause of conjunction and disjunction, is in dravya and does not require any other factor as its cause. Drug karma does not require any other Drug karma for its operation as it has been said in the Vaisheshikasutra that Drug karma is not caused by Drug karma. Chakrapanidatta has explained it as follows – dravya, though cause in conjunction and disjunction, when created requires Drug karma for its above activity whereas Drug karma when emerged operates immediately without requiring any other cause (like dravya). In Ayurvedic parlance Drug karma means performance of desirable measures such as pancha Drug karma.

## DRUG ACTION

Before entering the drug action following points must be kept in mind because they are basic fundamentals.

Concept of Loka-purusha-samya (macrocosm-microcosma-continuum)

Properties are similar in substances and the body and as such normally, increase and decrease in the body are caused by substances.

The internal prana strength of the person combined with the qualities of external (Bhaya) prana sustains by non-antagonism the body made of five bhutas.

External prana – diet, agneya, saumya, vayavya, dravyas, day, night, air, sound, touch, sight, taste and smell.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

## PRINCIPLES OF DRUG

In general drug possessing madhura rasa, will have madhura vipaka and shita veerya. Similarly, amla rasa will have amla vipaka, ushna veerya and katurasa will have katu vipaka



and ushna veerya. Drug possessing lavana rasa, will have madhuara vipaka and usna veerya. But drugs containing tikta and kashaya rasa possess katu vipaka and shita veerya.

Naturally when rasa etc. are of in equal strength, rasa is subdued by vipaka, both by veerya and all by prabhava

In case the rasa etc. are of unequal strength, the potent overcomes the weaker one, which is governed by the rule of nature as the stronger overpowers the weaker in case of incompatible combination.

Even incase of inequality of strength rasa etc. performs their own action due to their inherent property.<sup>[4]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Properties Of Dravya Like Rasa, Guna, Vipaka, Veerya (Active Principle) and Prabhava are qualities which reside in dravya which exerts action on this basis. While describing drug action one must keep in mind all these factors considering their relative strength. Rasa is the basic thing which depends on all the other properties of dravya.

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