

CRITICAL REVIEW ON AYURVEDIC CLASSICAL TREATISE: RASARNAVA

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ABSTRACT

The *Rasarnava* is a foundational 18-chapter (*Patala*) Sanskrit treatise structured as a sacred dialogue between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Stemming from the Shiva Sampradaya, its historical timeline remains debated between the 4th and 12th centuries, with notable modern commentaries enhancing its contemporary accessibility. This review provides a comprehensive analysis of the text's dual focus on spiritual liberation (*Moksha*) and advanced alchemical operations (*Rasa Vidya*). The early chapters establish the philosophical foundations of *Jivanmukti*, emphasizing that spiritual liberation requires optimal physical health achieved through mercurial preparations (*Parada*). Concurrently, the text mandates strict protocols for workshop architecture (*Rasa Mandapa*), ritualistic chanting (*Mantra japa*), and the ethical traits of the instructor

and disciple. Crucially, the technical chapters catalog specialized processing hardware, defining the operational structures of various apparatuses (*Yantras*), crucibles (*Mushas*), and furnaces (*Koshta*). The treatise systematically classifies mineral groups—including primary minerals (*Maharasas*), secondary minerals (*Uparasas*), and metals (*Dhatus*)—detailing their diagnostic traits, purification methods (*Shodhana*), and essence extractions (*Satwapatana*). Ultimately, this review highlights the *Rasarnava* as an invaluable historical repository of ancient Indian iatrochemistry, merging esoteric spiritual philosophies with highly sophisticated metallurgical and pharmaceutical technologies.

INTRODUCTION

The *Rasarnava* is an ancient scriptural treatise structured as a sacred dialogue between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. While its exact authorship is heavily debated, it is traditionally attributed to an anonymous scholar from the Shiva Sampradaya, though some disputed accounts credit Bhairavananda. Similarly, the historical timeline of the text remains unresolved; Acharya Priyavarita Sharma dates it to the 12th century, Siddhinandan Mishra proposes the 10th century, and others argue for an early 4th to 5th-century origin. A notable early edition of the work was printed in 1910 by Sir P.C. Ray through the Asiatic Society of Kolkata, featuring a Hindi commentary named *Rasachandrika* by Dr. Indra dev Tripathi and *Bhagirathi* notes by Pandit Taradatta Panta Ayurvedacharya. The currently available version is the third edition, published in 1995 by the Chukhamba Sanskrit Series Office and printed at the Chukhamba Press in Varanasi. Structurally, the entire treatise is organized into 18 distinct chapters, each designated as a *Patala*.

Material (Book Content)

1st Patal

This text discusses core spiritual concepts like *Adhyatma* (spirituality), *Moksha* (liberation through *Rasa pradhanata*), and *Jivanmukti* (liberation while living). Achieving *Moksha* requires maintaining external and internal physical health through *Rasa* (mercury) and *Rasayana* (rejuvenation therapy), alongside practicing *Dharma*, *Kriya*, and *Yoga*.

The chapter explains the origin (*Rasa utpatti*), viewing (*Parada darshana*), touching (*Sparshana*), consuming (*Bhakshana*), and meditating upon (*Smarana*) mercury, as well as worshipping the mercury lingam (*Parada linga puja*) and the merits of sharing this knowledge (*Rasa vidya dana phala*). It details the properties (*Parada gunas*), taste (*Rasa*), potency (*Virya*), and post-digestive effect (*Vipaka*) of mercury, which help overcome the cycle of birth and death, as well as eradicate geriatric diseases (*Jara roga vinasha*). Finally, it emphasizes that a disciple must serve their *Guru* with pure devotion to attain this sacred knowledge (*Rasa Gyana*), highlighting the vital role of mercury in human life.

2nd Patal

This chapter details the qualities and reciprocal duties of a teacher and a student (*Guru Shishya lakshana and Kartavya*), alongside the layout instructions for a processing workshop or temple (*Rasa bandha mandapa vidhi*).

An ideal alchemy teacher (*Rasa Guru*) must be altruistic, egoless (*Ahankar rahita*), detached from worldly desires (*Lobha maya rahita*), and born into a noble family. They should be free from jealousy (*Irsharahita*), righteous (*Dharma*), truthful (*Satyavadi*), clever (*Chatura*), gentle (*Somya swabha*), pure-minded (*Pavitra vichara*), and capable (*Shaktishali*). Professionally, the Guru must possess deep expertise in medicinal herbs (*Aushadhis*), primary minerals (*Maharasa*), color classifications (*Raaga sankhya*), and mercury processing methods (*Rasa ranjana*).

Conversely, a qualified student (*Shishya*) must understand geography (*Desha*), timing (*Kaala*), and practical operations (*Kriya*). They need to be highly skilled (*Karyakushalta*), compassionate (*Daya*), free from greed (*Lobha maya rahita*), serious-minded (*Gambhira*), and truthful (*Satyavadi*). Finally, they must be proficient in physiognomy (*Samudra shastra*) and dedicated to performing sacred rituals (*Puja*).

3rd Patal

This chapter outlines the architectural regulations and rules for constructing a mercury workshop or temple (*Rasa mandapa*). It details the precise chanting rituals, including the installation of sacred sounds (*Mantra nyasa*) starting with the primordial syllable *Om* (*Pranava mantra*). Dedicated hymns (*Mantras*) are assigned to each ritual object within the facility, and continuous chanting (*Mantra japa*) is strictly mandated during successful mercurial operations (*Rasa siddha*).

4th Patal

This section catalogs the specialized hardware required for mercury processing (*Parada Samskara*). **Equipment (Yantras):** Explains the structures and functions of the swinging apparatus (*Dola yantra*), digestion apparatus (*Jarana musha yantra*), sulfur digestion setups (*Gandhaka jarana vidhi*), and other specialized vessels like *Somanala*, *Garbha*, *Hansapaaka*, and the secret coloring apparatus (*Ranjana gupta yantra*). Heating appliances (*Koshatika*) and curved retorts (*Vakranaala*) are also covered. **Crucibles (Mushas) & Furnaces:** Details the preparation, structural traits, and operational roles of various crucibles, including the diamond crucible (*Vajra musha*), blind crucible (*Andha musha*), and ash crucible (*Bhasma musha*). It also classifies different processing furnaces (*Koshita yantra*).

5th Patal

This chapter applies the aforementioned apparatus to practical mercurial operations, deeply

exploring specialized processes like *Niyama nasamskara* and *Kraamana karma*. **Medicinal Herbs (*Aushadhis*):** Standard processing involves potent botanicals such as *Shatavari*, *Bhringaraja*, *Punarnava*, and *Mandukaparni*. **Celestial Drugs (*Divyaaushadhis*):** To stabilize the inherent volatility (*Chanchalya dosha*) of mercury during incineration (*Paradamarana*) and liquefaction (*Dravana*), divine plants like *Chandali* (*Bryonopsis laciniosa*) and *Rakshasi* are deployed. **Chemical Groups:** The text categorizes supplementary processing agents including the three alkalis (*Trikshara*), five salts (*Panchalavana*), five semi-poisons (*Pancha upavisha*), plant-derived alkalis (*Vruksha kshara*), five major poisons (*Pancha mahavishas*), five processing oils (*Pancha taila*), and distinct biological groupings like the red category (*Rakta varga*) and bile category (*Pitta varga*).

6th Patal

This chapter details the classification, traits, and refinement of specific mineral drugs:

Mica (*Abhraka*): Discusses its mythical origin, types (*Pinaka*, *Dardura*, *Naga*, and *Vajra*), and features. It details boiling herbs (*Swedana aushadhis* like *Tinduka* and *Maricha*), essence extraction (*Satwapatana vidhi*), and 16 distinct liquefaction methods (*Abhraka dravana vidhi*). **Iron/Loadstone (*Kantapashana*):** Covers four distinct varieties, focusing on their purification (*Shuddhi*), liquefaction (*Dravana*), and liquefaction-distillation (*Drutipaat*). **Diamond/Tourmaline (*Vajra / Vaikranta*):** Outlines the properties and purification of diamonds, featuring 16 methods for ash preparation (*Bhasma nirmana*), diamond-softening techniques, and 6 liquefaction methods. For tourmaline (*Vaikranta*), it identifies 7 distinct types and provides 3 specific methods covering purification (*Shodhana*), essence extraction, and liquefaction.

7th Patal

This chapter categorizes key materials for pharmaceutical processing (*Samskaras*), detailing their diagnostic traits (*Lakshanas*) and purification techniques (*Shodhana*): **Primary Minerals (*Maharasas*):** Identifies eight primary minerals—*Abhraka*, *Makshika*, *Vimala*, *Shilajit*, *Chapala*, *Sasyaka*, *Hingula*, and *Srotanjana*. **Secondary Minerals (*Uparasas*):** Identifies eight secondary minerals—*Gandhaka*, *Taala*, *Manahshila*, *Saurashtri*, *Khaga*, *Gairika*, *Rajavarta*, and *Kankusta*. **Metals and Gems (*Dhatu & Ratnas*):** Covers precious metals like gold (*Swerna*), silver (*Rajata*), tin (*Vanga*), lead (*Naga*), iron (*Loha*), alongside diamonds (*Hiraka*) and other gemstones. **Therapeutic Priority:** The author concludes that

diamond (*Vajra*), copper pyrites (*Makshika*), iron (*Loha*), and mica (*Abhraka*) hold the highest clinical value and should be utilized extensively in therapeutic formulations.

8th Patal

This chapter outlines advanced processing procedures for mercury (*Parada*), minerals, metals, and gemstones using specialized herbal combinations. It details color classification (*Raaga sankhya*) within primary minerals (*Maharasa*), secondary minerals (*Uparasa*), metals (*Loha*), and gems (*Ratna*). It further explains specific alchemical practices including the coloring process (*Ranjana kriya vidhi*), base seed preparation (*Bija sadhana vidhi*), seed coloration (*Bija Ranjana nirmana vidhi*), and processed seed creation (*Pakwa bija nirmana vidhi*).

9th Patal

This section describes the digestion of alchemical seeds (*Bija jarana sadhana*) and the preparation methods for corrosive alchemical pastes (*Vida nirmana prakara*). **Standard Paste (*Vida*):** Prepared by triturating green vitriol (*Kasisa*), rock salt (*Saindhava*), black salt (*Kanshi/Sauvira*), mica (*Abhraka*), sulfur (*Gandhaka*), and carbonate of soda (*Sajjikshara*) with the juices of *Malati* and *Shigrumula*, before compounding it with mercury. **Specialized Pastes:** Outlines the formulas for fiery pastes (*Vanhi mukha* and *Jwalamukha vida*), universal essence digestion (*Sarva satva jarana*), and three distinct methods for digesting gold (*Hema jarana vida*).

10th Patal

This chapter focuses on the fundamental nature, processing, and measurement of mercury: **Classification:** Identifies five distinct types of mercury—*Rasa*, *Rasendra*, *Sutaka*, *Parada*, and *Mishraka*—along with their physical attributes (*Rasa lakshana*). **Metrology (*Maana Paribhasha*):** Defines the traditional weight standards used in operations (e.g., 6 *Yava* seeds equal 1 *Gunja*). **Purification:** Highlights the clinical and alchemical benefits of the boiling process (*Swedanadi karma phala*) alongside systematic purification and clarifying methods (*Parada shodhana* and *Nirmali karana vidhi*).

11th Patal

This chapter focuses on digesting and binding mercury to stabilize its volatile nature: **Digestion (*Jarana*):** Classifies mercurial digestion into *Baala jarana* (infant) and *Baddha jarana* (bound). Mica digestion (*Abhraka jarana*) is split into *Samukha* (with an opening) and

Nirmukha (without an opening). **Binding & Formulations:** Details the creation of mercury paste (*Parada pishti*), general binding techniques (*Parada bandha*), fully bound mercury (*Baddha parada*), and all-consuming mercury (*Sarva grasi parada*). It also explains liquefied sulfur (*Gandhaka druti*) and two internal liquefaction techniques (*Garbhadruti*).

12th Patal

This chapter discusses combining processed mercury with mineral elements for therapeutic applications: **Herbal & Mineral Bindings:** Details mercurial binding (*Rasa bandhana*) using equal parts of mica (*Abhraka samajirna*) or sulfur (*Samagandhajirna*), alongside topical mercurial pastes (*Sagandha parada lepa*). **Specific Bindings:** Explains methods like orpiment-mercury binding (*Hartala suta bandha*), general mercurial alchemy (*Rasa karma*), and the application of sacred herbs such as *Mantra simhasani*, *Turasimhasani*, *Chatulaparni*, *Ekvira*, *Raktakanchuki*, and *Hanspaadi*. **Therapeutics:** Introduces anti-aging and longevity formulations (*Mrutyu jara nashaka yogas*) to reverse geriatric disorders.

13th Patal

This section covers the metallic solidification of mercury (*Baddha jarana*) with various metals. It categorizes these bindings into a three-tiered hierarchy: superior (*Uttama*), medium (*Madhya*), and inferior (*Adhama*). It provides operational details on ball-shaped binding (*Pindika bandha*), liquefied metal binding (*Druti bandha*), and specific alchemical formulations utilizing lead and tin.

14th Patal

This chapter focuses exclusively on the fusion of mercury with diamond, known as *Vajra bandha*. This advanced process imparts a transmutation property (*Shata vedhi*) to the mercury. The resulting compound becomes structurally as strong as iron and exerts a similarly powerful, strengthening effect on the human body.

15th Patal

This chapter catalogs the methods for binding mercury (*Parada bandha*) with various primary minerals (*Maharasa*), secondary minerals (*Uparasa*), and metals (*Loha*). It presents detailed techniques for creating color-specific tourmaline bindings (white, red, black, and yellow *Vaikranta bandha*), loadstone (*Kanta*), bismuth/selenium (*Chapala*), and sulfur (*Gandhaka*) bindings. It also describes mercury-sulfur cakes (*Gandha pishtika*), lead cakes (*Naga pishtika*), orpiment bindings (*Talaka bandha*), and various solid mercurial pill

preparations (*Khota bandha*), including plant-based variants (*Vanaspatika khota bandha*).

16th Patal

This chapter defines the technical terminology and prerequisites essential for metallic transmutation (*Dhatuvada*). It covers the liquefaction of bound mercury (*Baddha parada dravana*), general binding (*Rasa bandha*), and the digestion and liquefaction of diamonds and gems (*Vajraadi ratna jarana/dravana*). It also describes coloring methods (*Ranjana vidhi*), the preparation of easily manageable pastes (*Sukha sadhya kalka*), paste binding (*Pishtika bandha*), powder binding (*Churna bandh*), and ancient processing techniques (*Puranaka nirmana*).

17th Patal

This chapter highlights advanced systemic processes for mercury manipulation: **Movement & Penetration:** Explains the flowing process (*Sarana karma*) and its two types, alongside the *Indragopadi* penetration formula (*Kraamana yoga*). **Silver & Copper Processing:** Details the eight-step silver formulation (*Tarashtaka*), silver leaf production (*Tara/Rajata dala nirmana*), and copper purification (*Tamra shodhana*). **Transmutation:** Covers softening formulas (*Mrudukaraka yoga*), quality enhancement (*Varotkarsha*), and two distinct operational methods for metallic transformation (*Rasa vedhavidhi*).

18th Patal

This chapter concentrates on human clinical transmutation (*Parada dehavedha*) and diamond alchemical therapeutics: **Clinical Protocol:** Prior to administering mercurial or rejuvenating tonics (*Rasa/Rasayana*), a patient must undergo the five detoxification therapies (*Pancha karma*). **Clinical Dosages:** Establishes precise dosages for digested calces: 1 *Gunja* (125mg) for gold calx (*Hema jirna bhasma*), 2 *Gunjas* (250mg) for silver calx (*Rajata jirna bhasma*), and 3 *Gunjas* (375mg) for copper calx (*Tamra jirna bhasma*). **Therapeutic Forms:** Explains the health benefits of consuming mercury digested with mica (*Abhraka*) or iron pyrites (*Vimala*). It details diamond calx preparation (*Vajra bhasma*), diamond-mercury formulations (*Vajra jirna parada yoga*), and the creation of mercurial spheres (*Golaka*) and pills (*Gutika*). **Dietary Regimen:** Outlines strict timelines for intake (*Parada sevaana kaala*), dietary restrictions (*Pathya*), and approved foods. It concludes with the preparation of the *Vajranga sundari rasa gutika*, the clinical benefits of holding it in the mouth (*Mukha dharan phala*), and the diagnostic traits of alternative diamond-mercury bonds (*Vajra bandha lakshanas*).

DISCUSSION

This text is among the most ancient treatises dedicated to achieving mercurial perfection (*Parada Siddhi*), providing comprehensive details on mercury and its systemic processing methods (*Parada samskara*). The manuscript highlights mercury binding (*Parada bandhana*) and contrasts metallic alchemy (*Dhatuvaada*) with physical rejuvenation (*Dehavaada*). It places its heaviest emphasis on *Dhatuvaada*, the science of transmuting base metals into gold and silver. Every laboratory process is explained thoroughly using multiple distinct methodologies. This includes specialized processing guidelines for noble metals like gold (*Swarna*) and silver (*Rajata*). The text outlines exact protocols for dyeing mineral substances (*Dhatu Ranjana*) and executing transmutations (*Lohavedha*) to create precious metals. The treatise focuses almost entirely on metallurgical science, omitting general medical treatments or clinical therapeutics (*Chikitsa*).

CONCLUSION

The author systematically explores almost every dimension of *Rasashastra* with meticulous precision and scholarly devotion. The work is deeply grounded in logical reasoning, robust scientific analysis, and indigenous chemical principles. As the oldest surviving treatise on Ayurvedic alchemy, the text holds a foundational status in historical literature. The treatise heavily prioritizes metallurgy and the alchemical transformation of base metals into noble elements. Clinical treatment protocols are largely ignored, which severely restricts the book's direct utility in medical practice. The unique concepts and ancient frameworks detailed in the text offer vast, unexploited opportunities for modern scientific investigations.

Text is currently restricted by the exclusive availability of Hindi commentaries, which isolates it from academic communities outside Ayurvedic alchemy. Translating the treatise into English is a critical necessity to democratize access, allowing international researchers and students to study its contents.

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