SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND OF CLASSIFICATION OF RASADRAVYA

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ABSTRACT

Rasashaastra is a specialized branch of Ayurveda dealing mainly with materials which are known as ‘Rasa dravyaas’. The products dealt under this discipline are an important component of Ayurvedic therapeutics. Considering the importance of this discipline in Ayurvedic therapeutics and the fact that there is dearth of comprehensive review on the subject an attempt has been made in this review to provide a brief but all encompassing coverage of different aspects related to it. The subjects covered in the review are: historical background of the evolvement of Rasashastra as a specialized branch during different time periods; different aspects of classification ‘Rasa dravyaas’.

KEYWORDS: Rasashastra, classification.

INTRODUCTION

Classification of Rasadravya

In Rasa Shastra Parada (Mercury) is not included in any group and kept independent considering its high importance in Rasa sashtra. The remaining drugs of mineral origin are included in Loha, Maharasa, Uparasa, Sadharanarasa, Ratna and Uparatna groups. The details are as follows.

Loha group

In ancient times Gold, Silver etc Metals known as Dhatus in common language are included in Loha group and those Minerals which contain any Metals are also known as Dhatus (Ores). In Kautilya artha sashtra of Chanakya (33 rd Chapter) Swarna, Raupya, Tamra, Tikshna, Trapu, Sisa and Vaikrant are found described as Lohas. These seven Metals are said to have their Minerals and are known as Swarna dhatu, Raupya dhatu, Tiksna dhatu,Tamra dhatu,Trapu dhatu,Sisa dhtu,and Vaikranta dhatu.

In Rasarnava six Loha are described and these have been classified in Suddhaloha, (Gold and Silver) Sadharana Loha (Copper and Iron) and Putiloha (Lead and Tin) groups. Thus Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron, Tin and Lead (these six drugs) are known as Lohas since ancient times. Later on Rasa siddhas have separated and obtained Zinc Metal from Kharpara and included it also in Loha group in about 15th to 16th cent A.D on the basis of its utility and popularity. Indian
Rasa siddhas have also obtained Varanaga (Antimony) from Srotanjana, Kankshi satva (Aluminum) from Sphatika (Alum) and Chapala satva (Bismuth/Selenium) from Chapala. Though these are also Lohas (Metals) but on account of their limited use for Alchemical purposes these could not become popular as Lohas. Thus in Ancient times Metals are known as Lohas and Minerals are known as Dhatus. But later on the term Dhatu was also found used for pure Metals known as Lohas in Ancient times on the basis of their Usefulness in therapeutics and on this basis now a days Metals are commonly known as Dhatus.¹

Maharasa group

In Rasamava Makshika, Vimala, Silajatu, Chapala, Rasaka, Sasyaka, Hingula and Srotonjana are the eight drugs known as Maharasas.

According to Rasendra Chinthamani Somadeva has included Abhraka, Rajavarta, Vaikranta, Sasyaka, Vimala, Silajatu, Tuttha and Makshika in Maharasa group. Here Tuttha is for Karphara and in place of Chapala, Hingula and Srotonjana Somadeva has included Abhraka, Vaikranta and Rajavarta. Thus there is a difference of opinion with regards to the drugs of Maharasa group since Ancient times.

Uparasa group

According to Rasamava

Gandhaka, Haratala, Manashila, Sphatika, Kasisa, Gairika, Rajavarta and Kankusta are the eight drugs known as Uparasas. But in Rasendra Chudamani Gandhaka, Talaka, Sphatika Manashila, Souviranjana, Kankusta, Kasisa and Gairika are included in Uparasa group. Here Rajavarta is replaced by Souviranjana. In Ayurveda Prakasha the number of Uparasa group of drugs is not limited to eight only. In this text Gandhaka, Hingula, Haratala, Abhraka, Manashila, Srotonjana, Tankan, Rajavarta, Chumbaka pashana, Sphatika, Shanka, Khatika, Gairika, Kasisa, Kharpura, Varatika, Sikata, Bola and Saurasti etc many drugs are included in Uparasa group. But there is also difference of opinion amongst Rasacharyas.²

Sadharana Rasa group

It is found mentioned in Rasendra Chudamani, which had included Kampilla, Malla Navasara, Kaparda, Agnijara, Girisindura, Hingula and Mriddarsringa in this group.

Ratna group

In this group following nine gems have been included in almost all the texts such as Hiraka, Pravala, Mukta, Tarkshya, Vaidurya, Gomeda, Manikya, Nilamani and Pushparaga.
Upratna group\textsuperscript{2}

In this group Vaikranta, Suryakantam, Chandrakanta, Perojaka, Rajavarta and Sphatika are included. Thus it is evident from the above description of Classification of Mineral drugs that in Ancient Rasa literature there is no complete unanimity as regards to the drugs of Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharana groups. Further these terms do not carry a definite meaning also more over in Ancient Ayurvedic Classics like Charaka and Sushruta these terms are not found referred, though most of these Mineral drugs included in different groups are found mentioned in Ancient texts however the terms referring Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharana groups are not seen in Ancient texts. It is further observed that in these groups in addition to Mineral drugs a few Animal products like Sankha, Agnijara etc are also included hence in the present times the drugs used in Rasashastra needs a fresh Classification based on sound reasoning\textsuperscript{1}

According To Modern Classification of Rasa Dravya

The ancient chemists after classifying mercury as the rasa after which this branch has been named, classified the other metals, minerals and gems into dhatu, Upadhatu, Ratna, Uparatnas, Maharasa, uparasa, Sadharana rasa and Sudha varga.

Maharasa\textsuperscript{2}

- After rasa, the next important group of minerals and their importance in formulations after rasa are named as Maharasa.

- There are eight Maharasas. They are as follows:
  - Abhraka
  - Vaikrant
  - Makshika
  - Vimal
  - Shilajatu
  - Sasyaka
  - Chapala
  - Rasaka

Uparasa\textsuperscript{2}

- In rasashastra, the minerals are divided into many groups: maharasa, uprasa and sadharana rasa, dhatu, upadhatu, ratna and upratna, etc.

- After maharasa comes the category of uprasa. It consists of the eight constituents:
  - Gandhak
  - Gairik
After the classification of minerals into Rasa and Maharasa, the ancient alchemists divided the next category into Sadharana rasa i.e. ordinary compounds which are as follows:

- Kampillak
- Gauripashana
- Navsadar
- Kaparda
- Agnijar
- Girisindura
- Hingula
- Mriddarsringa

Dhatus²

- Dhatu includes the group containing metals like gold, silver, etc. and previously they were termed as loha varga.
- The word loha originates from ‘luh’ which means ‘to extract’.
- Thus all the metals are extracted from the ores and also those who extract all the diseases from the body are called metals.

**The metals described are:**

- **Swarna** (Gold)
- **Rajata** (Silver)
- **Tamra** (Copper)
- **Loha** (Iron)
- **Vanga** (Tin)
- **Naga** (Lead)
- **Yasada** (Zinc)

These are seven Dhatus.
Upadhatu

- The classification after Dhatus is Upadhatu.
- There are 7 Upadhatu:
  - Swarna Makshika (Copper pyrite)
  - Tutha (Copper sulphate)
  - Kharpara (Zinc ore)
  - Kasisa (Ferrous sulphate)
  - Anjana (Galena)
  - Shilajatu
  - Gairika (Red ochre)

Ratna (Gems)

- Ratna means precious stones.
- They have a great effect on the human beings and their health and have astrological importance.
- Each gem has a specific effect on a particular planet and in turn on the human body.
- The ancient people realizing its importance on the humans and of the curative powers have described them.

There are nine gems (navaratna) which are as follows:
  - Manikya (ruby)
  - Pushparaga (topaz)
  - Taksharya (emerald)
  - Mukta (pearl)
  - vajra (diamond)
  - Neelam (sapphire)
  - Vaidurya (cat's eye)
  - Gomeda (sardonyx)
  - Pravala (coral)

Upratna

- After the classification of gems, the stones, which were having qualities less than the gems like hardness, luster and transparency, classified into Upratna.
- Upratna means minor gems or semiprecious gems.
- Examples:
  - Rajavrta
Substances containing calcium are termed as sudha. These are grouped into a group termed as sudha varga.

This group consists of:

- Choorna sudha (Quick lime)
- Khatika (Chalk)
- Samudraphen (Cuttle fish)
- Shukti (Oyster shell)
- Shankh (Conch)
- Kapardika
- Dugdhapashan (Talc)
- Godanti (Selenite)
- Mrugashrunga (Deer-horn)
- Kukkutandatwak (Egg shell)

Scientific background of Classification of Rasa dravya.

According to Damodar Joshi:

Classification of Rasa dravyas is based on the importance of the Utility of the dravyas towards Rasa (Mercury). That means those, which are highly useful with Potentiation, are grouped in Maharasa. Those, which are comparatively little less Useful, are grouped in Uparasa and those, which are still less useful in ordinary way, are grouped in Sadharanarasa. Another fundamental principle is Rasa Bandhana. The third fundamental principle is Paksha chinnata and Mukha karna of Rasa. Fourth fundamental principle is their characteristics like Metal hardness in Ratnas, Uparatnas.
Abhraka, Vaikranta etc drugs have been grouped in Maharasa because these drugs are considered highly useful for enhancing the potency of Mercury.

The drugs Useful in various processes of Mercury irrespective of their sources (Mineral/Plant/Animal) are incorporated in Rasa sashtra. Generally these drugs will be more potent and effective in lesser Dosage.

Hingula is considered as source for obtaining Mercury but while Classifying Rasadravyas it is found included in Sadharanarasa group because very little Hingula is used for Rasa karmas/ Samskaras.

The Herbal and Animal products like Kampillaka, Kankusta and Agnijara have been included in the Rasa dravyas groups. On the basis of their effects on Mercury process and it’s Potentiation.

According to S.G.Hiremath

Fundamental principles for Classification of Rasa Dravya

a) Method of preparation.

b) Equipments used.

c) Heating pattern as well as amount and duration of heat.

d) Form of the preparation.

According to S.K. Dikshit

Lohavedha and dehavedha had been the vital points for using Mercury to rid of the vicious cycles of life and death keeping this objective in mind the Classification of the Mercury fit for fulfilling the above aim. The drugs, which were very important for making the Lohavedha of the Mercury, were placed in first group called Maharasa. Then for fulfilling the need of Dehavedha the Classification Uparasa group was done. These were the fundamental principles adopted for the classification of Rasa dravyas.

According to Sriram Savrikar

Rasa dravyas are having separate identity for example Metals are grouped as Loha/Dhatus considering their Metallic properties where as Ratnas are grouped on the basis of their attractiveness, ignoring their effect on Human body. While Visha dravyas are categorized on the basis of their Poisonous nature and Rasa dravyas are classified on the basis of Rasayana property. The Rasa dravyas are further grouped into subgroups Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharanarasa considering the superiority of dravyas in relation to Rasayana property.

According to Rasarathna samuchachya

Rasa dravyas were mainly included in following classes
The prefix *Maha* means great, the prefix *Upa* means secondary and the prefix Sadharana means common or ordinary.

**According to C.B.Jha**

Classification of Rasa dravyas into Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharanarasa is based on the therapeutic and alchemical Utility of dravyas the drugs of Maharasa is very Potent for both the purposes.

**CONCLUSION**

1) Rationality behind the Utility of Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharanarasa towards Mercury (*Rasa*).

2) Importance of Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharanarasa in Lohavadha.

3) Rationality behind including Hingula in Sadharanarasa.

4) Role of Herbal and Animal products (which are included under Maharasa, Uparasa and Sadharanarasa) in Mercurial Processing.

5) Rationality behind similarity of Rasa Dravya Classification by different Authors.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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