



## Review Article

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### AN AYURVEDIC COMPREHENSION ON THE LIAISON AMIDST RASA (TASTE) AND KARMA (ACTION) OF A DRAVYA (SUBSTANCE)

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#### ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic Interpretation of Shad Rasa (Six Tastes) is one among the consummate theories of this sage old wisdom. It has a comprehensive stretch and applicability in almost all dimensions of the science. This understanding regarding appreciation of each taste, their qualities, potentials and attributes remain unparalleled even when equated with the advanced and contemporary researches. Each among the Shad Rasa is explained in the classics with a set of guna, (attributes) and Karma (actions). This article intends to theoretically comprehend on the Concept of Rasa (taste) possessed by a dravya (substance) and it's relation with the Karma (action) exhibited by it.

**Keywords:** Shad Rasa, Guna, Karma, Dravya

#### INTRODUCTION

Madhura (Sweet), Amla (Sour), Lavana (Salty), Katu (Hot), Tikta (Bitter) and Kashaya (Astringent) are the six tastes explained in Ayurveda. Jala and prthvi Mahabhuta are the basic substratum for the manifestation of the taste. The remaining three Mahabhutas viz. Tejas, Vayu and Akasha are responsible for the further manifestations of qualities of the Rasas<sup>1</sup>. As per the concept of panchendriya dravya<sup>2</sup>; specifying the material constituents corresponding to the five sense faculties, taste is the object of gustatory sense organ. When the two substratum of Rasa (taste) are analysed, Jala assumes the primary description as it is deliberated as the principal substratum.

The taste as such, is not manifested while the water is in the atmosphere. As it falls on the ground it gets impregnated with the PanchaMahabhutas (five basic elements) impelled by the atmosphere itself and thus the manifestation of taste occurs. The culminating point is thus reached when the water comes in contact with the Jangama and Sthavara entities upon falling on the ground. This stage is also considered to be the manifestation of six tastes<sup>3</sup>.

The Akasha, Vayu and Agni bhutas are thus considered to be Nimitha Karanas or efficient causes for the manifestation of specific qualities of Rasa. These three basic elements have their effects jointly and severally leading to their manifold manifestations of taste like sweet, sweeter and sweetest. In fact; the direct relation between the taste and the Jala Mahabhuta apart, Rasa is definitely allied with the prthvi Mahabhuta for its further manifestations.

#### Rasas in Ayurveda

In par with the views of the preceptor Atreya, who annulled the outlooks regarding the manifold classifications of taste by different schools of thought, Charaka Samhita presents the six-fold classification of taste; viz. Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta and Kashaya<sup>4</sup>. In this classification Madhura Rasa occupies the primary position as it is liked by all living and also since it play an imperative role in the diets of all living beings.

Specific attributes of Rasa may be rational or empirical. A wise and proper consumption of Rasas will help in maintenance of health. Incorrect employment of Rasas by their non-utilisation, excessive utilisation, and wrong utilisation can result in the vitiation of doshas and thereby resulting in ill-health<sup>5</sup>.

In the described order of Rasas, viz. Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta and Kashaya, the first among the Rasas i.e. Madhura is described to deliver the maximum bala or strength to the body. This aspect of providing strength to the body decreases further down the order and reaches the minimum in Kashaya Rasa. Thus Kashaya Rasa provides minimum strength to the body<sup>6</sup>.

A dravya may possess more than one Rasa, the pradhana Rasa or primary taste and the anu Rasa or the secondary taste, which is perceived after kayaagni paka. Though the Rasas gets classified as pradhana and anu rasa and also based on samsarga, taratamya, and parikalpana the number of Rasa remains unchanged and will be only six<sup>7</sup>.

#### Origin of Rasas from panchamahabhutas

Among the six tastes; Madhura Rasa abounds in the qualities of Jala Mahabhuta, Amla Rasa by Prthvi and Agni Mahabhuta, Lavana Rasa by Jala and Agni Mahabhuta, Katu Rasa by Vayu and Akasha Mahabhuta, and the Kashaya Rasa by Vayu and Prthvi. According to Susrutha, Lavana Rasa is dominated by prthvi and agni Mahabhuta. This apparently goes against the observations of charaka. So, like the individuals belonging to the sthavara and jangama diversity possessing different Varna and Akriti owing to the individual variations of Mahabhutas; the Rasa are also six in number due to the predominance or otherwise of the Mahabhutas. This predominance and minority of Mahabhutas are also dependant on the six seasonal variatons<sup>8</sup>. As Lavana Rasa is composed of Agni and Jala possessing hot and cold properties respectively, the resultant Lavana is supposed to have a mixture of both Ushna - Sheeta properties. But instead, Lavana is hot in potency. Chakrapani clarifies this concern explicitly by explaining that not all the qualities present in the Mahabhuta constituting the composition of the dravya

need to be manifested, by nature they manifest only some of their inherent qualities and not all. A similar example can be cited in consideration to Saindhava which is predominated by Agni Mahabhuta; a corresponding heating property. The presence of Agni and Jala Mahabhuta in Lavana Rasa can be inferred or assumed by the Ushnatwa and Vishyandakara property respectively.

The Mahabhutas combine in a different way and the diversity of their manifestation are guided by some imperceptible factors, which can only be inferred from the manifested effect of the substance. This combination and their effects cannot be easily comprehended. Many times they need to be ascertained from the (Agama) scriptures.

No rational reasoning can be made out to explain why the individual Mahabhutas in isolation other than Jala do not cause any other Rasa. The presence of an inherent factor in the five Mahabhutas which is responsible for combination and manifestation of their various effects is to be assumed. The five Mahabhutas constitute the efficient cause for the manifestation of the specific types of Rasas like Madhura etc. It is therefore immaterial to say whether all the Mahabhutas possess Rasa; as the agni for example do not possess any Rasa but still it is an efficient cause for the manifestation of Rasas like Amla.

The seasonal variations result in the predominance or otherwise of qualities of the five Mahabhutas and bring about the manifestation of various Rasas. The predominance in qualities of Jala Mahabhuta in excess during the Hemanta Ritu will result in the production of sweet taste in the drugs and diets. The predominance of Vayu and Akasha Mahabhuta in Sisira Ritu results in the formation of Tikta Rasa. Apart from the Ritus; even the day and night can have its effects on the manifestation and combinations of Mahabhutas resulting in their predominance or otherwise. This does not indicate that all the drugs and diets in Hemanta Ritu will be having Madhura Rasa always. There is a possibility of manifestation of other Rasas as well, depending on the effect of other imperceptible factors<sup>9</sup>.

Susrutha explains the Rasa Samanyatha by detailing the inherent relation between the pancha Mahabhutas and Sabda, Sparsha, Roopa, Rasa and Gandha. He describes Akasha as to possess Sabda guna, Vayu with sabda and sparsha guna, Tejas with Sabda, Sparsa, and roopa gunas, Apa or Jala with Sabda, Sparsha, Roopa, and Rasa gunas, and Prthivi with Sabda, Sparsha, Roopa, Rasa and Gandha Gunas. This concept is detailed to explain the Paraspara Anupravesha of Bhutas or their mutual co-existence. Once there is an increase in the Akasha Mahabhuta in a dravya its guna i.e. Sparsha also will be increased. Rasa is mainly predominant of Apya Mahabhuta. This concept is detailed to explain the paraspara anupravesha of Bhutas or their mutual co-existence. Because of their mutual combination, mutual help and admixture, there is the presence of all bhutas in all substances, and this can be inferred by more or less qualities of Bhutas forming the substances. Similarly, Rasa after combining with the remaining bhutas and undergoing Vidagdha (ripening) becomes divided into six kinds which further get divided into sixty-three kinds by mutual combination<sup>10</sup>.

#### Flow of rasas

Rasas abounding in the qualities of Agni and Vayu have a tendency to move upwards. This is because of the lightness and upward mobility of the Vayu and upward flames of the Agni. The Rasas abounding in the qualities of Jala and Prathvi, on the other hand have a tendency for downward movement because of the heaviness of Prathvi and downward flow of Jala. The Rasa abounding in both the categories of dravyas mentioned above share both the qualities<sup>11</sup>. Vayu is not only mobile but also light,

so like cotton owing to the lightness combined with the mobility it has an upward movement generally<sup>12</sup>.

A careful analysis on this action of Rasas points out to the mode of action of Vamana Virechana etc dravyas. Those dravyas which are generally predominated with Agni and vayu mahabhutas will be the drugs of choice to initiate the expulsion of doshas through Vamana Karma. Similarly, those Dravyas with predominance of Jala and Prthvi can be chosen for inducing the expulsion of Doshas through the Virechana Karma. Correspondingly, those dravyas with qualities of both the group will be inducing both Vamana and Virechana Karmas<sup>13</sup>.

#### Understanding attributes of a dravya through rasa

Substances which are Madhura in Rasa and Vipaka do possess Sita Virya. Substances which are Amla in both Rasa and vipaka are of Ushna Virya. Substances which are Katu in both Rasa and Vipaka are also of ushna Virya. The Karma of such dravyas like, dosha prakopa, dosha prashama etc. are generally due to Rasa present in the dravya. Eg: Karma of Kshira, madira and Marica<sup>14</sup>.

Indu the commentator explained the examples as follows: Milk being Madhura in Rasa and also in the Vipaka possesses Sita Virya. It tends to increase Kapha and mitigate Vata and Pitta, just as sweet taste does this actions. Madira is Amla in Rasa and Vipaka and possesses Ushna Virya. It tends to increase Vata and mitigate Pitta and Kapha just as Amla Rasa does. Maricha is Katu in Rasa and Vipaka and possesses Ushna Virya it tends to mitigate Kapha and increase Vata and Pitta just as Katu Rasa does. Thus it can be considered that Rasa is the deciding factor<sup>15</sup>.

But if there is a Rasa Sangara (mixture of Rasas) then the Karmas are quite different. Certain examples are also cited by Vaghata to explain this more evidently. Some of the examples are Madhu (honey) though Madhura mitigates Kapha by its Katu vipaka, increases Vata by its Katu Rasa, Rukshta and Sita Virya. Similar is the case of yava (Barley). Meat of animals living in marshy places though Sita increases Pitta due to their ushna virya. Taila (Sesame oil) causes obstruction of faeces and urine mainly by being Katu vipaka.<sup>16</sup>

#### DISCUSSION

Some drugs having Amla Rasa are samgrahi, eg: Kapitta; some are laxative eg: amalaka. Even though drugs having Katu Rasa are generally avrushyua still Lasuna, pippali and Sunthi having Katu Rasa are Vrushya. Similarly, drugs having Kashaya Rasa are generally of Sita Virya and Sthambana but Haritaki is an exception to it; it is ushna virya and Laxative. Thus it is not possible to explain the properties of all drugs and diets simply in terms of Rasa because individual drug having identical tastes vary in relation to their gunas<sup>17</sup>.

There cannot be an attribute within another attribute. So for Rasa being an attribute of Dravya; cannot possess any attributes as such. The attributes mentioned above in fact relate to those of the dravya, ahara etc. which constitute the substrata for the Rasas. Rasa being themselves attributes of dravya cannot have attributes of their own. The reason why these attributes are ascribed to Rasas is that the attributes like unctuousness etc. do invariably follow the Rasas like Madhura etc. and it is through the intrinsic association of the former with the latter that unctuousness, coldness etc. may also be associated with drugs and diets. Thus it should be understood that these attributes are ultimately the attributes of matter and not of the Rasas and these attributes are secondarily associated with the respective Rasas as evident from the context and their therapeutic utility<sup>18</sup>. They are attributed to the Rasas because of intimate co-existence (Sahacharya Upacharat).<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The six Rasas explained in Ayurveda are themselves attributes of Dravya. Each among the Shad Rasas is a combination of two Mahabhutas having a particular Mahabhuta in predominance. Thus the Karma of a Dravya possessing a particular Rasa can be deciphered by understanding the Panchabhoutika constitution of that particular Rasa. The Gunas and Karmas ascribed for a Rasa are actually pertained by the Dravya that possesses it. These Gunas and karmas are generally attributed to the Rasas because of their intimate co-existence in the Dravya and also because they are recognized easily.

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