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Principles of Dravyaguna

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Abstract

The existence of medicine shows its prehistoric antiquity. The knowledge regarding medicinal value of plants has been collected in a course of several centuries. The acceptability of alternative medicine particularly the herbal medicine has now become a critical need of time. In this article fundamental of Dravyaguna (Ayurvedic Pharmacology) has been taken in accounts so that one can understand the action of various drugs properly. It is the time when Ayurvedic concept should be proved on modern parameters. Ayurvedic pharmacology is being dealt with these terms- Rasa (taste), Guna (Properties), Veerya (active principles), Vipak (Biotransformation) and Prabhav (Specification).

Key words: 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.

Panchamahabhutas (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 (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. *Virya* (Potency)
6. *Prabhava* (Specific potency)
7. *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:- as Applicatory or Paradi gunas.

1. There is no substance which can not be used as drug.
2. All drugs are composed of *Panchamahabhutas*.

- **Gunas**

Guna (quality or property) is defined as that which is inherently exist entinsubstance and is non-inherent cause (of its effect). *Gunas* are fourty 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. <i>Guru</i>	-	Heavy
2. <i>Laghu</i>	-	Light
3. <i>Shita</i>	-	Cold
4. <i>Ushna</i>	-	Hot
5. <i>Snigdha</i>	-	Unctuous
6. <i>Ruksha</i>	-	Rough
7. <i>Manda</i>	-	Dull
8. <i>Tikshna</i>	-	Sharp
9. <i>Shlakshna</i>	-	Smooth
10. <i>Khara</i>	-	Course
11. <i>Sandra</i>	-	Solid
12. <i>Drava</i>	-	Liquid
13. <i>Mridu</i>	-	Soft
14. <i>Kathina</i>	-	Hard
15. <i>Sthira</i>	-	Stable
16. <i>Sara</i>	-	Unstable
17. <i>Sukshma</i>	-	Minute
18. <i>Sthula</i>	-	Gross
19. <i>Vishada</i>	-	Nonslimy
20. <i>Pichhila</i>	-	Slimy

Psychic qualiteis

These are six in number such as *Sukha* (pleasure), *Duhkha* (pain), *Ichcha* (desire), *Dvesha* (aversion), *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.

1. *Paratva*
2. *Aparatva*
3. *Yukti*
4. *Sankhya*
5. *Samyoga*
6. *Vibhaga*

7. *Prithaktva*
8. *Parimana*
9. *Samskara*
10. *Abhyasa*

- *Paratva* - is whole someness.
- *Aparatva* - is unwhole someness.
- *Yukti* – 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 *bhagashograham* (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**

Rasa is the object of gustatory sense organ and is located in *dravya*. *Rasa* is manifested by permutation and combination of *panchamahabhutas* in *dravya* and as such is dependent on it. On the other hand, from *rasa* one can infer the particular *bhautika* composition of the *dravya* generally. Thus, though subjective it is a reliable means for the same. *Charaka* says that *Aap* and *Prithivi* are material cause of *rasa* in its origin while the other three *bhutas* serve as instrumental cause in their variations. Commentators on the basis of double 'cha' interpret that *Aap* and *Prithivi* too 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 also from inference on the basis of its characters such as effect on salivation etc.

Rasa's are six in number - *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent).

- **Madhura Rasa**

- It pacifies *Vata* and *Pitta* and increases *Kapha*, promotes strength and helps excretions.
- If it 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**

- It increases *kapha* and *pitta* and pacifies *vata*, decreases semen, is carminative, appetizer and digestive.
- Its excessive use 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**

- It 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, 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**
 - It 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, *rasa* and *dhatu*s by roughness.
- **Kashaya**
 - It 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 *dhatu*s take place.
 - *Stambhana* (checking) effect of *kashaya* is specific due to its *shita* and *prithivi mahabhuta* 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.

- **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 example *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 describes 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 is *laghu*. *Guru* is *Madhura* and *Laghu* is *katu* including *amla-vipaka*. Thus the view so *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 there on.

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**

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 drugs act as instrument. Again he has established logically the cause-effect relationship between *Veerya* and *Karma* on the law of agreement in presence (*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.

In common practice, grossly it is represented by the active fraction of drug which is the concentrated essence of the *panchamaha 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 particular 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 *panchamahabhutas*.

- **Prabhava (Specific Power)**

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 *Vridhha Vagbhata* that *Prabhava* is *Swabhava* (nature) exceed in gall. This specific nature leads to specific action like emesis, purgation etc.

For example, 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 *virya* 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 sameline – ‘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*.

- **Karma (Action):-**

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

Karma is instrumental cause in conjunction and disjunction, these cannot take place without *karma*. The word ‘*kriya-lakshanam*’ means that which is indicated by movement as said by *Charaka* – ‘*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 *karma*. For example danti on ingestion, stimulates movements in living intestines resulting in purgative action. In emesis etc. also the similar phenomena are observed. Like *Guna*, *Karma* is also located in *dravya*. *Charaka* defines *Karma* as follows – ‘*Karma* is that which is the cause of conjunction and disjunction, is located in *dravya* and does not require any other factor as its cause. *Karma* does not require any other *karma* for its operation as it has been said in the *Vaisheshika sutra* that *karma* is not caused by *karma*. *Chakrapanidatta* has explained it as follows – *dravya*, though

cause in conjunction and disjunction, when created requires *karma* for its above activity where as *karma* when emerged operates immediately without requiring any other cause (like dravya).

In *Ayurvedic* parlance *karma* means performance of desirable measures such as *panchakarma*.

Inter-relation of basic principles of *Dravyaguna* in mode of drug action. Before entering the drug action following points must be kept in mind because they are basic fundamentals:

- Concept of *Loka-purusha-samyā* (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 *Prana* sustains by non-antagonism the body made of *Panchbhutas*.
- External *prana* – diet, agneya, saumya, vayavya, dravyas, day, night, air, sound, touch, sight, taste and smell.

Following principles affect the drug action:

1. In general drug possessing *Madhura rasa*, will have *Madhura vipaka* and *shita Veerya*. Similarly *Amla rasa* will have *Amla vipaka*, *Ushna Veerya* and *Katu rasa* will have *Katu Vipaka* and *Ushna Veerya*. Drug having *lavana rasa* will have *madhura vipaka* and *Ushna Veerya*. But drugs containing *Tikta* and *Kashaya rasa* possess *katu vipaka* and *shita veerya*.
2. Naturally when *Rasa* etc. are of in equal strength, *Rasa* is subdued by *Vipaka*, both by *Veerya* and all by *Prabhava*.
3. 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.
4. Even in case of inequality of strength *rasa* etc performs their own action due to their inherent property.

• Conclusion:-

Rasa (Taste of Substance), *Guna* (Properties), *Vipaka* (Final Transformation), *Veerya* (Active Principle) and *Prabhava* are properties which reside in *dravya* which exerts action on this basis. While exploiting the drug action one has to keep in mind all these factors considering their relative strength. *Rasa* is the basic thing which is overpowered by *Vipaka* which again is subdued by *Veerya* and *Prabhava* stands above all.

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