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Rasashastra; a contemporary form of Ayurveda Medicines – A Critical Review

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Abstract:

Ayurveda is known to be the most primitive health science to the mankind. As various civilizations developed and flourished so did the different sciences which fulfilled their living. As defined in Ayurveda it is the science of life, comprehending all aspects of human life in order to aid the better life quality. Following the nature and making use of many plants for curing and maintenance of sound health was in vogue. In this article the medieval period of Ayurveda and development of Rasashastra in context of advanced or next version of former and making its relevance till date is been discussed.

Keywords: *Ayurveda, Rasashastra, science of life.*

Introduction:

From the dawn of human species the ways and techniques for the betterment of life were searched and got in practice since then. Ayurveda beholds its origin from Veda – the oldest literature known to mankind. The Veda are said to be *Apaurushaya* – impersonal. These are considered to be a divine descend of knowledge. Ayurveda a part of these Veda is said to be many thousand years old. This was termed as period of Vedic medicine and it lasted until about 800 BCE. ^[1] From then onwards various classical Ayurveda treatise were written; like *Charaka Samhita*, *Susruta Samhita*, *Vagbhat* and other. The period was marked from 800 BCE to 1000 CE. ^[1] In these texts there is detailed description of various diseases and their remedies. Primarily the use of various herbs according to their potency (*Virya*), taste (*Rasa*), specific character (*Prabhava*) were in vogue. Many

different combinations for more than two herbs are also mentioned in these literatures. Also some procedures to extract or preserve the active principle of a certain herbs are mentioned viz; *Sneha Kalpana*, *Sandhan Kalpana*.

Medieval period of Ayurveda medicine which can be called as post *Samhita* period laid the foundation of specialized branch of medicine – *Rasashastra*. *Nagarjuna* – is considered the father of *Rasashastra* and the scientific classification and documentation of *Rasashastra* begun in 8th century^[2]

From medieval period till the beginning of modern era i.e. 1600 -1700 century composition and documentation of many *Rasashastra* classical texts were done.

Period	
<i>Vedic period</i>	Pre 2000 BCE
<i>Samhita period</i>	800 BCE to 700 CE
Medieval period	800 CE to 1600 CE
Modern period	1700 CE till now

<i>Rasashastra</i> texts	Author	Period
<i>Rasaratnakar</i> and <i>Rasendra mangala</i>	<i>Nagarjuna</i>	8 th century
<i>Nanditantra</i>	<i>Nandi</i>	8 th century
<i>Rasahridayatantra</i>	<i>Govind Bhagvatpada</i>	10 th century
<i>Rasarnava</i>	<i>Bahiravanandyogi</i>	10 th century
<i>Gorksha samhita</i>	<i>Gorakshanatha</i>	12 th century
<i>Rasendra chudamani</i>	<i>Somdeva</i>	12 th century
<i>Rasaratnasammuchaya</i>	<i>Ras Vagbhata</i>	13 th century
<i>Rasaratnakar</i>	<i>Parvati putra nityanath</i>	13 th century
<i>Anandkanda</i>	<i>Manthan bhairava</i>	13 th century
<i>Rasasara</i>	<i>Govindacharya</i>	15 th century
<i>Rasapadhati</i>	<i>Bindu</i>	13 th century
<i>Rasendrachintamani</i>	<i>Dhunduknath</i>	15 th century
<i>Ayurved prakasha</i>	<i>Madhava upadhyaya</i>	18 th century

Rasashastra – the word literally means the science of mercury in the given context. But as we go through the Ayurveda and *Rasashastra* treaties the meaning of word Rasa can be Taste, Nectar, Extract or mercury (*Parada*). By studying the literal meanings and their applications, we can say that the herbal origin drugs were subjected to defined process in order to get the extract or active principle of the same which was a step forward in medicine. Further the establishment of separate branch by keeping mercury – *Parada* as core of the science and medicine was its advancement. The moto of the science was,

अल्पमात्रोपयोगित्वात्अरुचेरप्रसंगात्: |
क्षिप्रमारोग्यदायित्वात्औषधेभ्योऽधिकोरसः: ||

- Raendrasarsamgraha

In accordance to above given verse the use of inorganic materials and metals in the form of medicine by subjecting those to a specific series of procedures had given result to many magical remedies which are in use till date. A clear shift in the formulations can be noted from Vedic period Ayurveda to *Samhita* period Ayurveda and the formulations designed during medieval – modern day *Rasashastra* period.

Formulations / used drugs	Reference
<i>Brahma Rasayana</i> – use of Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron powder	Ch. Chi. 1
Water treated with <i>Vaidurya</i> , <i>Mukta</i> and <i>Gairika</i> in the management of <i>Rakta pitta</i>	Ch.Chi. 4/79
Use of <i>Gandhaka</i> – <i>Lelitaka</i> in treatment of <i>Kushta</i>	Ch.Chi. 7/70-72
<i>Ushakadi Gana</i>	Su.Su. 38/37-38
Use of <i>Kasisa</i> , <i>Tuttha</i> , <i>Hartala</i> and <i>Manashila</i> with honey in wound healing	Su.Chi. 1/97-98
<i>Ayaskriti</i>	Su.Chi. 10/11

In this period the introduction of mercury – *Parada* in therapeutic use was practiced. Owing to the properties of *Parada* as mentioned in *Rasashastra* texts, it formed the basis of this formulations. As we go through the classification the *Rasashastra* drugs, we find various minerals, metals, poisons, precious stones and naturally formed calcium group drugs.

<i>Rasashastriya</i> drug classification	Group of drugs
<i>Maharasa</i>	<i>Abhraka, Vaikranta, Makshika, Vimala, Adrija, Sasyaka, Chapala and Rasaka</i>
<i>Uparasa</i>	<i>Gandhaka, Gairika, Kasisa, Kankshi, Hartala, Manashila, Anjana and Kankushta</i>
<i>Sadharan rasa</i>	<i>Kampilla, Gauripashana, Navsadara, Kaparda, Agnijara, Girisinsur, Hingula and Mruddarshringa</i>
<i>Dhatu varga</i>	<i>Gold (Suvarna), Silver (Raupya), Copper (Taamra), Iron (Loha), Lead (Naaga), Tin (Vanga), Zinc(Yashada), Bronze (Pittala)</i>
<i>Ratna varga</i>	<i>Ruby (Maanikya), Pearl (Muktaa), Coral (Prawaala), Emerald (Taarkshya), Topaz (Pusparaaga), Diamond(Heeraka), Sapphire (Neela), Zircon (Gomeda), Cat's Eye (Waidurya).</i>
<i>Uparatna varga</i>	<i>Tourmaline (Vaikraant), Sunstone (Suryakaant), Moon stone (Candrakaant), LapisLazuli (Raajaawarta), Garnet (Laala), Turquoise(Perojaa) etc.</i>
<i>Visha varga</i>	<i>Vatsanaabha (Aconite), Arka (Calatropis procera), Snuhi (Euphorbia neriifolia), Datura (Datura stramonium), Langali (Gloriosa superba), Karaveera (Neerium indicum), Gunjaa (Abrus precatorioius), Ahiphena etc.</i>
<i>Sudha varga</i>	<i>Sudha (Lime), Shankha (Conch-shell), Shukti (Oyester shell), Khatika (Chalk), Godantai (Gypsum), Kukkutandatwak (Egg shell), Hastidanta (Elephants tusk)</i>

Subjecting these above mentioned classified drugs of *Rasashastra* to specific and unique procedures transforms these raw drugs to super fine specialty group of medicines.

Procedures mentioned in <i>Rasashastra</i>	
<i>Grahya – Agrahyata</i>	Selection of proper raw material
<i>Shodhana</i>	Purification
<i>Marana</i>	Incineration
<i>Bhavna</i>	Trituration
<i>Dhalana</i>	Molten metal poured in liquid medium
<i>Amrutikarana</i>	Imparting nectar like qualities

As we go through the procedural techniques of above mentioned procedures we come to know that this are not only the steps with literal meaning to be done but steps to convert the inorganic mineral or metal base drug to organic or body absorbable physiologically active medicine with intended pharmacodynamics and kinetics.

Medicines thus prepared are in the form of *Bhasma* (Ash of drugs which can't be converted to original form), *Guti/Vati*, *Rasayan Yoga*, *Kupipakva Rasayana*, *Pottali Rasayana*, *Parpati Kalpa* etc. each form has specific utility and shows therapeutic results in very minute dose.

Inference:

Comprehending the medicine part from Ayurveda and by observing the shift or studying the new terminologies introduced in *Rasashastra* texts we can draw an inference that *Rasashastra* had given a helpful and lasting way of treating various ailments with best possible minimal medicinal dosage form. This had also increased the palatability of medicines, ease to carry them with fast acting drug delivery.

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