



Prabhava Revisited

sudipt kumar rath, ashashri shinde, lalit nagar, ringzin lamo, pankaj gahunge, naresh kumar khemani

National Institute of Ayurveda Amer Road, Jaipur (Rajasthan), India – 302002

Correspondence Author:-Sudipt kumar rath National Institute of Ayurveda Amer Road, Jaipur (Rajasthan), India – 302002

Ayurveda, contrary to the popular projection is a complete science revolving around well thought out and comprehensive theoretical underpinnings. Drug action, the epicenter of Rational Therapeutics has also been attempted to be explained and rationalized in terms of five concepts Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka and Prabhava. The first four has been described to be potentially deduced by means of drug's interaction with the body and by and large follows a pattern, whereas Prabhava has been said to be established after observing the drug action on clinical material. The prabhava has also been found to be unique to each drug and do not follow a specific pattern. Charaka, Sushruta, Vagbhatta all have said prabhava to be beyond common logic by using a term Achintya. This Achintya term has been translated and interpreted as inexplicable, empirical and so on giving rise to notion that many of the ayurvedic drugs follow an empirical prescription guideline, thus putting a question mark on the scientific basis of Ayurveda. But, an unbiased and comprehensive analysis reveals that the concept of Prabhava has many facets and acquires different meaning in different situations. The crux behind this concept was found to be rationalization of drug action and to guide the physician in prescribing a drug on that basis. The analysis reveals that Prabhava relates to specific affinity of a drug to a particular site of action and produce mahabhautika changes therein beyond the normal pattern of Rasa, Guna, etc.

Key words – Prabhava, Rasa Panchaka, Ayurvedic Pharmacodynamics, Achintya.

INTRODUCTION

Five fundamental principles viz. Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka & Prabhava collectively known as Rasapancaka explains pharmacodynamics in Ayurveda.[1] Amongst these prabhava has remained an enigma for academicians. Prabhāva has been described as that principle of drug action which overwhelms the other four principles.[2] Caraka's description regarding prabhāva includes the word achintya[3] which when transliterated as inexplicable has fuelled more controversies than actually solving the puzzle evolving around prabhava.

The concept of prabhava has been grossly misinterpreted and misused so as to render the entire Ayurvedic basis of drug action as empirical. On contrary, Ayurveda advocates scientific methods to accept facts as principles and admits the doctrine that there is no chose fugee in science i.e nothing could be final in science. With passage of time all principles in science are susceptible to verifications and consequent modifications. A stream of science should incorporate such changes to keep it current and popular. Such a changing scenario also exists in modern parlance. Despite rapid advancements in modern pharmacology much remains to be explored about drug vs. disease, pharmacokinetics, bio-transformation, selective affinity of drugs to a particular type of tissues.

CLASSICAL VIEW ON PRABHAVA

Etymology

“Prabhavati sāmārthya visishtam bhavati dravyamaneneti prabhāvam”[4]

It is that attribute of a drug which enables it to perform a specific and distinguished action.

Definition

Caraka defines prabhāva as – [5]

“Rasaviryavipākānām sāmānyam yatra lakshyate

Viseshah karmānām caiva prabhāvastasya sa smritah

Vāgbhatta opines in the same manner –[6]

“ *Rasādi sām̐ye yat karma visishtam tat prabhāvajam* ”

Prabhāva can thus be defined as that specific property of a drug on virtue of which it is enable to produce a specific and different action from another drug having same set of rasa, guna, virya & vipāka.

The concept of prabhāva was primarily coined to explain some unique action of certain drugs overwhelming the other four principles of drug action. This can be very clearly deciphered from the examples furnished by Cararka while explaining prabhāva.[7]

“ *Katukah katuka pake viryoshnaschitraka matah*

Tadvat danti prabhavattu virecayanti manvam

Visham vishaghnamuktam yat prabhāvastatra karanam

Urdhvanulomikam yaccha tat prabhāvaprabhāvitam

Maninām dhāraniyām yat karma vividhātmakam

Tat prabhākritam tesham prabhāvo-acintya ucyate.

That is even if danti possesses same rasa, guna, virya & vipāka as those of citraka still it causes purgative action unlike citraka and this specific purgative property is attributed to its prabhāva. Similarly, the counteraction of sthāvara visha on jāngama visha and vice versa is due to the concept of prabhāva. The emetic and purgative effects of various drugs are also said to be due to their Prabhava. The various effects of wearing gem stones are also attributed to their prabhāva. All these above drug actions are said to be acintya i.e inexplicable or inconceivable.

This word acintya has remained a point of controversy on the part of academicians from the very beginning. Going by the strict transliteration acintya pertains to inexplicability or inconceivability of the concept of prabhava. But this interpretation entirely negates the kārya-kāraṇa vāda and severely handicaps the very purpose of establishing rasapancaka.

SUSRUTA'S ACINTYA VIRYA

Susruta has referred to acintya or amimāmsya virya of certain drugs which are famous on virtue of their nature (svabhāva) and direct observation (pratyaksalaksanaphalā). He also dictated the futility of reasoning in a bid to explain such actions rather one should follow literature (āgama).[8]

VIEW POINT OF COMMENTATORS

The nebulous situation involving the word acintya is upto a fair extent had been clarified by the erudite commentators like Cakrapani Datta who explains prabhāva and acintya as [9]

“ *Rasādikāryatvena yannavadhārayitum sakyate tat prabhāvakritamiti sucayati.....* ”

Chakrapani states that prabhava cannot be completely explained in terms of Rasa, Guna, Virya and Vipaka.

Arunadatta in his Sarvāngasundarā comments – [10]

“ *Rasaviryavipākādigunātisāyi dravyasya svabhāvo yah sa prabhāvam.* ”

i.e prabhāva is said to be that attribute of the drug which overwhelms other principles of drug actions like rasa, guna, etc.

In context of acintya virya Cakrapani Datta opines –[11]

“ *Hetubhirityāgamaviruddhaih kuhetubhih āgamanugunaih sadhetubhirbheshajādini sarvānyeva pariksāni* ”

Thus, Cakrapani Datta strongly advocated endeavours pertaining to the explanation of drug actions with the help of reasoning that are in harmony with āgama but not with vague reasons.

CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

Interpretations in the contemporary time have witnessed both positive and negative progress. On the positive front, keeping in line with the scientific approach of Ayurveda efforts had been done to make the concept of prabhāva more transparent by equating it with the concept of isomerism of modern chemistry. It states that two compounds with same chemical composition may differ in properties owing to their structural and orientation differences. Similarly, two drugs having same mahābhautik compositions, which determines their rasa, guna etc. may produce different actions due to difference in mahābhautik configuration.

But, unfortunately prabhāva is also the most misinterpreted and misused word in the present era. The empirical part of this concept has been exploited uninhibitedly to seek an easy refuge to explain drug actions. Newer drugs whatsoever are added to the Materia Medica of Ayurveda invariably have been stated to act empirically by prabhāva. Even the chief action of the drug has become synonymous with prabhāva.

This trend has led to cessation of incorporation of new scientific basis in explaining the drug actions and prabhāva., consequently doing away with the scientific essence of Ayurveda.

DISCUSSION

It is worthy at this point to take notice of the core of scientific method, which states that a man of science observes widely and keenly to garner as many facts as he can. He then analyses and catalogues them under certain categories. These categories viewed from a synthetic point of view suggest some generalization, which includes all the facts so far observed. Based on these generalisations evolves a hypothesis explaining phenomenon basing upon these observations. Even such a hypothesis is merely a claim to be verified. The hypothesis that alone is shown by experiment to work best becomes the accepted theory. This theory even is nothing but the best working hypothesis whose acceptance is tentative or provisional, contingent not only on the continued occurrence of verificatory phenomena but also on concomitant non-occurrence of contrary ones, for there is nothing final in science.

If we look the concept of prabhāva from such perspective then acintya can be interpreted as

- inexplicable
- yet to be explained
- scarcely explicable

The first meaning has upto a good extent been explained by Cakrapāni Datta by stating the relative inexplicability of prabhāva. in terms of rasa, guna, etc. The last two meanings also go hand in hand with the tenet behind the first meaning i.e the riddle of prabhāva is yet to be revealed and it certainly can not be explored in terms of rasa, guna & other principles of drug action rather it has to be explained in terms of some other scientific basis.

Even such an effort is witnessed in the following words of Cakrapāni Datta –[12]

“Nyāyaikasaktivāde ya ca vishasya vishaghnatvam upapattirukta urdhvaadhogāmitvamavirodha laksana sā-ntarbhāgavat prabhāvadeva bhavati”

Therefore Cakrapani following the scientific essence of Ayurveda had endeavoured to solve the riddle of prabhāva by attributing opposite direction of movement in the body as the explanation to the mutual counteraction of sthāvara and jāngama visha. Also he explained the urdhva and adho anulomika action of drugs in terms of guru guna consequent of its mahābhautik configuration. Thus it is quite clear that even the commentators accepted that much has to be explained regarding prabhāva.

The concept of Prabhava is thus can be said to be the specific action of a drug which can not entirely be explained in terms of Rasa, Guna, Virya and Vipaka. Therefore Prabhava can denote actions, that

1. Can not be explained by Rasa, Guna, Virya and Vipaka as seen in case of Danti, Chitraka.

2. Can be explained by the Rasa, etc. but not completely i.e. other drugs having similar Rasa, etc. do not produce the action as seen in the Purgative action of Aragvadhya because not all madhura rasa, madhura vipaka, shita virya dravya produces purgation. Chakrapani stresses that although the utkarshata of Prithvi and Jala mahabhuta is the cause for purgation, but mere presence of this mahabhutas in utkarsha state do not produce purgation. Rather they must be present in an utkarsha state with Virechaka prabhava to cause purgation.[13]
3. Can not be explained by Rasa, etc., but can be explained by other parameters like Gati (distribution) in case of the Vishas. Here the Sthavara Visha acts as a pharmacological block in distribution of Jangama Visha and vice versa. Since distribution is the primary factor in poisoning effects due to the vyavayi and vikashi guna of vishas, this block can be used as a treatment tool.
4. Can not be explained in terms of the Ayurvedic principles like those of gem stones.

The fundamental idea behind coining the concept of Rasa Panchaka was to bring various drugs under categories based on their similar properties and actions. Different tools were used to identify the category to which the drug might belong like Taste, Bio-chemical and Physiological Changes, Pharmacological actions. Based on the similar pattern of observations, the categories were placed under few sub classes like 6 under Rasa, 3 under Vipaka, 20 under guna and 2/8 under Virya. This reveals that all the drugs can be placed under 6 classes on basis of their taste and so on. But for Prabhava, there is no sub class indicating that there is no similar pattern is observed. Therefore, prabhava was a umbrella term coined to denote specific action of the drugs having their own unique individual explanation of the action.

CONCLUSION

The authors suggest that

- Prabhava is the specific action of a drug.
- It can not be entirely explained in terms of Rasa, Guna, Virya and Vipaka.
- But, it is not inexplicable in absolute terms, but requires parameters over and above the Rasa Panchaka for explanation.
- Some actions attributed to Prabhava have already been explained either in terms of classical Ayurvedic principles or contemporary principles.
- Therefore, efforts should be continued to establish cause and effect relationship for the drug actions attributed to prabhava.

REFERENCES

1. Bhava Misra; Bhavaprakasa Nighantu ; Comm. K.C. Chunekar, Ed. G.S. Pandey; Chaukhamba Bharati Academy: Reprint Edn., 1999.
2. Arunadatta; Sarvanga Sundara Commentary on Astanga Hridaya Sutra 9/10; Ed. Bhisagacharya Harishastri Paradakara Vaidya, Chaukhamba Orientalia, 8th edition, 1998.
3. Agnivesha; Charak Samhita with commentry Ayurved Deepika of Chakrapanidutta; edited by Lakshmi Dhar Dwivedi, Chaukhamba Krushnadas Academy Varanasi; Print-2007, Verse no. Su. 26/70.
4. Sharma PV; Dravyaguna Vijnana vol. 1st V. Ayurveda series 3, Chaukhamba Bharti Academy, Reprint 2008. Page.279
5. Agnivesha; Charak Samhita with commentry Ayurved Deepika of Chakrapanidutta; edited by Lakshmi Dhar Dwivedi, Chaukhamba Krushnadas Academy Varanasi; Print-2007, Verse no. Su. 26/67.

6. Vrddha Vagbhata; Ashtang Samgraha, Vrajajivan Ayurvijnan Granthamala-6, edited with Saroj;Hindi Commentry by Dr. Ravidutta Tripathi; Published by Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishtan Delhi; Reprint 2001;Verse no. Su.17/45
7. Agnivesha; Charak Samhita with commentry Ayurved Deepika of Chakrapanidutta; edited by Lakshmi Dhar Dwivedi, Chaukhamba Krushnadas Academy Varanasi; Print-2007, Verse no. Su. 26/68-70.
8. Sushuruta; Sushuruta Samhita with commentry Ayurved-tattva-Sandipika, edited by Kaviraj Ambika Dutta Shastrii, Published by Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan Varanasi; Reprint-2007, Verse no. Su. 41/22-24.
9. Agnivesha; Charak Samhita with commentry Ayurved Deepika of Chakrapanidutta; edited by Lakshmi Dhar Dwivedi, Chaukhamba Krushnadas Academy Varanasi; Print-2007,Verse no. Su. 26/67
10. Vagbhata; Ashtanga Hridaya, Sarvangasudara and Ayurveda Rasayan Commentary of Arundutta and Hemadri, Bhisagacharya Harishastri Paradakara Vaidya editor, Chaukhamba Orientalia, 8th edition, 1998 ah. Verse no. Su.9/26.
11. Chakrapani; Bhanumati Commentary on Sushruta Samhita Sutra 40/20; Sushruta Samhita with Bhanumati commentary of Chakrapani Dutta; Ed. Dr. Gananath Sen; Swamee Lakshmi Ram Trust, Jaipur; 1928.
12. Agnivesha; Charak Samhita with Ayurved Deepika commentary of Chakrapani Dutta; edited by Vaidya jadavaji Trikamji Acharya, Published by Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan ; Reprint-2009, Verse no. Su. 26/72.
13. Chakrapani; Bhanumati Commentary on Sushruta Samhita Sutra 41/06; Sushruta Samhita with Bhanumati commentary of Chakrapani Dutta; Ed. Dr. Gananath Sen; Swamee Lakshmi Ram Trust, Jaipur; 1928.