

A CRITICAL INSIGHT ON NOMENCLATURE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS - AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

‘Namarupajñana’ has been designated as a distinct branch of Dravyaguna vijñana. Charakacharya mentions three facets for this purpose, namely- name, appearance and properties. Knowledge regarding medicinal plants has been found right from Vedic period, Samhita period, later added with enormous inclusions during Nighantu period which has led to the enrichment of Dravyaguna vignana. During olden days, vaidyas were keen observers of nature and coined exact synonyms to designate specific characters of plants. Description obtained from synonyms help in providing multifold information about a plant. They not only define the morphological features but also cover other aspects like properties and actions, resemblance, trade and commerce, mythological background, utility etc thereby giving comprehensive knowledge about a plant. Knowledge of Namarupavijñana proves to be scientific and authentic even to this day since many of the morphological features described in Sanskrit can be correlated to botanical terminologies as per today’s scenario. Raja nighantukara was the first person to mention 7 bases for Dravyanamakarana. On observation, many other criteria can also be found on which Dravyanamakarana is done. Hence, here an attempt is made to throw light on different criteria for Dravyanamakarana in Ayurveda along with its meanings as well as highlighting its importance even to this day. This review upholds the scientific vision of Ayurvedic ancient Acharyas in naming of medicinal plants thereby proving its utility to botanical community even in this modern era.

KEYWORDS: *Namarupajñana, Dravyanamakarana, Synonyms, Nighantu etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Nomenclature of medicinal plants has been an integral part of Ayurveda since Vedic period. Emphasizing on this, Charakacharya mentions three facets for this purpose, namely- name, appearance and properties¹ Charaka insists that one acquire the knowledge of plants from the shepherd, hunter, nomadic tribes etc.

‘Namarupagnana’, a distinct branch of Dravyaguna vignana deals with Nama (name) and rupa(form) aspects of medicinal plants. Knowledge regarding medicinal plants has been found right from Vedic period, Samhita period, later added with enormous inclusions during Nighantu period which has led to the enrichment of Dravyaguna vignana. In the modern era,

plants are named using Binomial Nomenclature which is considered as universal, scientific and unique. Earlier each plant had many synonyms. Therefore, the plant fulfilling the meanings of maximum synonyms was decided upon without any doubt. For example, the identity of *Achyranthes aspera* (Apamarga), also known as shikhari, kharamanjari, kinihi, adhahshalya, pratyakpushpi and mayuraka can be confirmed after studying all the synonyms attributed to it. There is a definite basis for these synonyms. Once the base and method of attributing these synonyms is understood, it becomes easy to recognise the plants. Raja nighantukara was the first person to mention 7 bases for Dravya namakarana. On observation, many other criteria can also be found on which Dravya namakarana is done. Hence, here an attempt is made to throw some light on different criteria for Dravya namakarana in Ayurveda along with its meanings as well as highlighting its importance and relevance even today.

Dravya namakarana according to classics:

Following are few of the criteria along with examples for Dravya namakarana⁵:

1. Based on Swarupa (Habit):

Plant	Meaning
Vrkshaka- Kutaja	It is a tree
Suvarnalatika- Jyotishmati	It is a climber
Yojanavalli- Manjishta	A climber spreading extensively
Vallijam- Maricha	It is a climber
Trunadhwaja- Vamsha	It belongs to grass family
Bhadravallika- Sariva	A twinner spreading extensively
Dandavrukshaka- Snuhi	It is a stick like tree

2. Based on Avayava (Part of the plant):

Phala	
Tula phala- Arka	Fruit is an Etaerio of follicles which has cottony hairs

Vedic Period: As per Vedas, following are few of the criteria on which dravyanamakarana is done².

- ❖ Swarupa
- ❖ Avayava(Parna, Phala, Pushpa, Kanda etc)
- ❖ Udbhavasthana
- ❖ Guna(Rupa, Rasa, Gandhaetc)
- ❖ Karma (Samanya, Vishishta, Rogamulaka)
- ❖ Prashastimulaka

Dhanwantarinighantu quotes- names, one or many are assigned to plants according to habitat, form, colour, potency, taste, effect etc³.

Raja Nighantu mentions- Basonyms and synonyms are assigned to plants on the following seven bases⁴:

- ❖ Rudhi (traditional usage)
- ❖ Prabhava (effect)
- ❖ Deshokti (habitat)
- ❖ Lanchana (morphological characters)
- ❖ Upama (simile)
- ❖ Veerya (potency)
- ❖ Itarahvaya (other factors)

	within.
Vruttophala- Amalaki	It has globose fruit
Dirghaphala- Aragwadha	Fruit is a legume which is very long and cylindrical
Jantuphala- Udumbara	Fruits are infested with maggots
Kshudraphala- Kantakari	Fruit is a berry which is small in size
Yavaphala- Kutaja	Fruits have barley- shaped seeds
Kumbhaphala- Kushmanda	Fruits are pitcher shaped
Erandaphala- Danti	Fruits resemble those of castor
Valka phala- Dadima	Fruit has leathery covering
Kantaphala- Dhatura	Fruit is a large capsule with numerous sharp spines
Drudhaphala- Narikela	Fruits of Narikela are very hard
Mahaphala- Bilwa	Fruit is a berry large in size
Golaphala- Madanaphala	Fruit is a berry which is round in shape
Vruttophala- Maricha	It has a globose fruit
Tula phala- Shalmali	Fruit is a capsule lined within with white silky hairs
Pushpa	
Sadapushpa- Arka	It bears flowers all the year round
Pindapushpa- Ashoka	Flowers occur in dense clusters
Pushpashunya- Udumbara	It has no apparent flowers
Lajapushpaka- Karanja	Flowers resemble parched paddy(Laja)
Girimallika- Kutaja	Flowers resemble fragrant jasmine in mountains
Pita pushpa- Kushmanda	It bears yellow flowers
Ghantapushpa- Dhatura	It bears bell-shaped flowers
Gudapushpa- Madhuka	It bears flowers full of sweet juice
Pratyakpushpa- Apamarga	Flowers are deflexed
Patra/Parna	
Kshiraparna- Arka	It has profuse latex in leaves
Tamrapallava- Ashoka	It has coppery young leaves
Guhyapatra- Ashwattha	It has vulva-shaped leaves
Ghrutaparnaka- Karanja	Leaves are glossy
Balapatra- Khadira	It bears small leaves
Tilaparnakam- Chandana	Leaves are similar to those of sesamum plant
Mandalapatrika- Punarnava	It is a spreading herb with round leaves
Tripatra- Bilwa	Leaves are trifoliate
Shamipatra- Lajjali	Leaves resemble those of 'Shami'
Phanijihwaparni- Shatavari	Leaves resemble those of snake's tongue
Shwajihwapatra- Snuhi	Leaves resemble dog's tongue
Yugmapatra- Kanchanara	Leaves are bilobed
Mula	

Shwetamula- Punarnava	It has white root
Tamramula- Manjishta	Root is coppery when half-dried
Sugandhimula- Sariva	It has aromatic root
Lomashamulika- Haridra	It has hairy rhizomes
Bija	
Chitrabeeja- Eranda	Seeds are mottled
Mani beeja- Dadima	Seeds resemble ruby
Dantabeeja- Dadima	Seeds resemble teeth
Tailabeeja- Bhallataka	It has oily nuts
Chitratandula- Vidanga	Seeds are peculiarly white spotted
Kanda	
Raktakanda- Punarnava	It has reddish stem
Raktangi- Manjishta	Its stem is reddish
Pitadru- Daruharidra	It has yellow wood
Sara	
Pitasara- Asana	It has yellowish heart wood
Nihsara- Kadali	It has no heart wood
Raktasara- Khadira	It has reddish heart wood
Gandhasara- Chandana	It has aromatic heart wood
Krishnasara- Shimshapa	It has blackish heart wood
Niryasa	
Nilaniryasa- Asana	It exudes blue gum
Hemadugdha- Udumbara	It exudes golden colour latex
Kananiryasa- Guggulu	It exudes a gum-resin in the form of particles
Kantaki	
Duhsparsa- Kantakari	It is difficult to touch since plant has thorns
Bahushalya/Jihmashalya- Khadira	It is a wild thorny tree, spines being curved
Adharakantaka- Shatavari	Plant has recurved spines
Kantakadya- Shalmali	It is a thorny tree
Yugmakantaka- Snuhi	A plant with sharp twin spines
Adhahshalya-Apamarga	It has spinous bracteoles and pointed perianth
Shwadamsotra- Gokshura	Fruits are armed with spines which injure the feet of grazing cattle
Twak	
Sheetavalkala- Udumbara	Bark of Udumbara has cold potency
Gudatwak- Twak	Bark is sweet-pungent in taste

3. Based on Prapthisthana(Habitat):

Anaryam- Aguru	It grows in hilly regions of north-east
Kashmira/Madri- Ativisha	It grows in places of high altitude like Kashmir/Madri

Korangaka- Amalaki	It is commonly cultivated in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh
Korangi/Dravidi- Ela	Ela is cultivated in South Indian States
Kairataha- Kiratatikta	It is found in north-eastern region of India
Kalinga- Kutaja	The tree grows in Kalinga region
Malayaja- Chandana	The tree grows in Western Ghats spreading in Karnataka and Kerala
Saimhaham- Twak	Twak plant is very common in Sri Lanka
Magadhi/Vaidehi- Pippali	It is abundantly available in Magadha/Videhadesha
Vindhyaajata- Vibhitaki	It grows mostly in Vindhya region
Kiratini- Jatamansi	It grows in high altitude
Kashmira- Keshara	It is found in Kashmir
Nadeyi- Agnimantha	It grows on river sides
Nadisarja- Arjuna	It grows in vicinity of water streams
Vanyavrksha- Ashwattha	It is commonly grown in wild
Marusambhava- Indravaruni	It is mostly found in desert area
Vanashukari- Kapikacchu	It is grown wildy
Marudeshya- Guggulu	It is a plant growing in arid zone
Outtharapatham-Jiraka	It is cultivated abundantly in northern region
Gramya- Tulasi	It is a herb grown in villages
Jalabrahmi	It grows in watery areas
Shaileya	It grows on mountains

4. Guna:

Shabda	
Tuntuka- Shyonaka	Fruits are hanging and dancing with sound on the tree
Sparsha	
Durgraha- Apamarga	Difficult to hold due to its spinuous bracteoles
Shwadamshttra- Gokshura	Fruits which are armed with spines injure the feet of grazing cattle
Shaakhakantaka- Snuhi	It has spines
Kantalu- Babbula	The tree has spines
Durabhigraha- Kapikacchu	The plant is difficult to handle
Kharamanjari- Apamarga	Flowers have spinuous bracteoles and pointed perianth
Roopa/Varna	
Shukla kanda- Ativisha	Its tuber is white in colour
Raktasara- Khadira	Its heartwood is red in colour
Tamrapallava- Ashoka	It has copperry leaves
Peetamoola- Revandachini	Its root is yellow in colour
Hemavati- Jeevanti	It exudes golden colour substance

Dhawala- Arjuna	It has white bark
Rasa	
Shadrasa- Amalaki	It has six tastes
Tikta- Katuki	Its rhizome has bitter taste
Varatikta- Kutaja	It is a potent bitter drug
Pancharasa- Haritaki	Its fruit contains five rasas
Kandatikta- Kiratatikta	It is bitter in taste
Katugranthi- Shunti	Its rhizome is pungent
Yashtimadhu	Its root has sweet taste
Vrikshamla	Fruit has sour taste
Gandha	
Gandharajam- Chandana	It is foremost among aromatic substances
Utkatam/Bahugandham- Twak	Its bark is highly aromatic
Uragandha- Vacha	Its rhizome has intense smell
Bahulagandha- Ela	Seeds of Ela are highly aromatic
Ashwagandha	It has horse's urine smell

5. Lanchana:

Dhavala- Arjuna	Outer bark is whitish
Chitratandula- Vidanga	It has spotted seeds
Shuklakanda- Ativisha	It has white tubers
Kharamanjari- Apamarga	It has inflorescence with spinuous bracteoles
Triputa- Ela	Its fruit has 3 surfaces
Deerghaphala- Aragwadha	Its fruit is very long
Jantuphala- Udumbara	Its fruits are filled with insects

6. Upama:

Animal names	
Varahakarni- Ashwagandha	It has leaves resembling pig's ears
Vyaghrapuccha- Eranda	Flowers are arranged in beautiful racemes like tiger's tail
Hayahvaya- Ashwagandha	The drug has horse potency
Gavakshi- Indravaruni	Its fruits resemble cow's eye ball
Matsyashakala- Katuki	Its rhizome has fishy scales
Vyaghri- Kantakari	It promotes strong voice like that of tiger
Markati- Kapikacchu	Its fruit is studded with stiff hairs like that of monkey
Mahishaksha- Guggulu	Gum-resin of guggulu has reddish-black colour like that of Buffalo's eye
Gostani- Draksha	Its fruits are shaped like cow's teat
Simhakesaraka- Bakula	Its stamens resemble lion's mane
Phanijihwaparni- Shatavari	It has thin linear leaves like that of snake's tongue
Shwajihwapatra- Snuhi	Leaves are shaped like dog's tongue

Hastidanta- Muli	Root resembles elephant trunk
Simhasya- Vasa	Flowers are bilabiate resembling face of lion
Ahicchatrakam- Shunti	Flowers resemble cobra's hood
Matsyashakala- Katuki	Rhizomes have fishy scales
Others	
Vajrangi- Asthishrunkala	It is a weak plant looking like chain of bones
Kanakahwaya- Dhatura	It has golden seeds
Odanahwaya- Bala	Seeds resemble cereals
Adhyanda- Kapikacchu	Its seeds resemble testicles
Agnika- Chitraka	It is a plant known for its fiery hot nature
Oshtopamaphala- Bimbi	Its fruit resembles the shape of lips
Dhanurbeeja- Bhallataka	Its fruits are obliquely ovoid like a bow.
Krtamala- Aragwadha	Tree looks like adorned by the garland
Chatra- Dhanyaka	It has umbrella-shaped inflorescence

7. Based on Karma:

Kshawaka- Apamarga	It induces sneezing
Shwasaneshwara- Arjuna	It is a potent drug for cardiac disorders
Putrada/Balada- Ashwagandha	It promotes progeny and strength
Karshya- Asana	It cures obesity
Asthisamyojaka- Asthishrunkala	It promotes union in fractured bone
Vayastha- Amalaki	It maintains youthfulness
Varuni- Indravaruni	It is a potent hydrogogue purgative
Kasaghni- Kantakari	It alleviates cough
Shleepadari- Karanja	It is an effective drug for Filaria
Sangrahi- Kutaja	It is an efficacious drug in diarrhea
Kushtaghna- Khadira	It is a potent drug in all skin disorders
Palankasha- Guggulu	It is indicated in obesity
Nishotha- Trivrt	It is a safe purgative useful in edema
Mukhashodhanam- Twak	It is used a mouth freshner
Shwitraghni- Bakuchi	It is a reputed drug for vitiligo
Arushkara/Shophakrut- Bhallataka	Juice of its fruit produces blisters and swelling on touch
Shwasana- Madanaphala	It alleviates respiratory disorders
Pleehaghna- Rohitaka	It is indicated in disorders of spleen.
Jantunashana- Vidanga	It is an unfailing remedy for worms
Mehaghni- Haridra	It is indicated in Prameha

8. Religious/Mythological background:

Chaityadruma- Ashwattha	It is regarded as a religious tree
Bodhivrksa- Ashwattha	Gautama attained enlightenment under this tree
Tapasadruma- Ingudi	It is known as hermit's tree as it is used by them

Yagnanga- Udumbara	It is used in sacrifices
Gayatri- Khadira	It is regarded as holy and used in sacrifices
Devadhupa- Guggulu	It is used as incense in god's worship
Shivapriya- Dhatura	It is liked by Lord Shiva
Bhutavasa- Vibhitaki	It is an abode of evil spirits
Shivesta- Bilwa	It is offered to Lord Shiva
Mangalya- Vacha	It is regarded as auspicious
Devadaru	Tree growing in the land of Devata
Vishnukranta	Flowers are used to worship Lord Vishnu

9. Measurements/Numbers:

Kolam- Amalaki	Fruit weighs 6g (kola pramana)
Karshaphala- Vibhitaki	Fruit weighs 12g (karshapramana)
Chaturangula- Aragwadha	Fruit has depression at every 4 inch distance
Shadgrantha- Vacha	Rhizome of vacha has more than 6 nodes on it.
Tripata- Ela	Fruit is triangular shaped and has three surfaces
Tribhandi- Trivrut	Trivrt has got triangular stem
Chatuhsira- Asthishrunkala	It has quadrangular stem
Bahula- Ela	Seeds are numerous
Saptaparna	Seven leaves arranged in whorls
Pancharekha-Haritaki	Fruit has 5 ridges

10. Commercial Uses:

Vishwadhoopakam- Aguru	It is used in perfume industry
Madirasakha- Amra	It is used in preparation of wine
Gudamoola- Ikshu	It is the source for jiggery
Dantadhavana- Khadira	Its twigs are used as toothbrush
Gandharajam- Chandana	It is used in perfume industry
Vastraranjani- Manjishta	It is used for dyeing cloth
Nagaram- Shunti	It is commonly sold in shops
Ranjani- Haridra	It is utilised for dyeing

11. Rudhi:

Tarkari- Agnimantha	
Pachampacha- Daruharidra	
Bahedaka- Vibhitaki	
Murangi- Shigru	
Haldi- Haridra	
Kinihi- Apamarga	

12. Superlative terms:

Rajavrksa- Aragwadha	Regarded as King of trees owing to its beauty
Shakashreshta- Jivanti	It is regarded as best among vegetables

Phalottama- Draksha	It is regarded as best among fruits
Mahoushadha- Shunti	Universally reputed drug applicable in numerous disorders.
Valliphalottama- Kushmanda	Regarded as best among cucurbitaceous fruits

13. Seasons:

Varshapushpika- Atibala	Flowers blossom in rainy season
Tisyaphala- Amalaki	Fruiting takes place in Pushya masa
Vasantapadapa- Amra	Fruiting takes place in spring season
Pravrushayani- Kapikacchu	It grows in rainy season
Pravrushenya- Kutaja	It bears flowers in early rainy season
Meghamodini- Jambu	It bears fruits in rainy season
Madhuduti- Patala	Its flowers blossom in spring
Varshabh- Punarnava	A perennial herb regenerating in rainy season
Vasanta- Vibhitaki	Its flowers blossom in spring season
Sharada- Saptaparna	It bears flowers in autumn
Sharadi- Sariva	Flowers appear in autumn

14. Itarahwaya:

Devahwa- Devadaru
Shakrahwa- Indrayava
Kakahwa- Kakamachi
Analanama- Chitraka
Varidanamakam- Musta

DISCUSSION

‘Nama’ denotes basonyms (Mukhyana) as well as synonyms (Paryayas). ‘Rupa’ is one of the characters which include morphology. Study of nama and rupa together of medicinal plants constitute the branch known as pharmacognosy (Nama Roopa Vijnana) which deals with cognition (identification) of medicinal plants. New synonyms were coined from time to time. This is evident from going through different texts in historical perspective. For Haritaki- Abhaya and Pathya are used as synonyms by Charaka while Chetaki and Pranadaare seen only in Ashtanga Hridaya not in other two Brhatrayees which proves their later development. The inclusion of synonyms that included later also throws light on particular characters observed during that

period. The synonym ‘Goharitaki’ for bilwa found in Kaiyadeva Nighantu indicates its prevalent use in veterinary practice.

During olden days, vaidyas were keen observers of nature and coined synonyms to designate specific characters of plants. For instance, the name ‘Karbudara’ for Kanchanara coined by Charaka suggests the variegated character of one of the petals. The Latin name Bauhinia variegata is named on the same base. Synonyms were the only tool for describing the plants then.

There are synonyms which describe regarding the **habit** of the plant or identifying feature of the **part used** which gives more clarity about the plant. Yojanavalli, Vrksaka etc are the synonyms which describe the **habit** of the plant. Yavaphala, Pindapushpa, Tamrapallava,

Chitrabeeja etc are synonyms describing different **part used/identifying feature of a plant**.

‘Kashmirajama’ for Kunkuma is used in AshtangaHridayafor the first time which indicates the cultivation of saffron in Kashmir.Kashmiraka, Kairata, Dravidi, Malayaja and Madri indicate the drugs Kunkuma, Kiratatikta, Ela, Chandana and Ativisha respectively depicting their **place of origin**.

Different qualities in a plant which help to identify through panchendriyas are also described by synonyms. Varatikta, Gandharaja, Shuklakanda, Durgraha etc are synonyms which describe the **rasa,gandha, roopa, sparsha etc**.

Lanchana is the criteria wherein which a plant is described based on specific morphological feature of a plant. Shuklakanda, Kharamanjari etc are synonyms describing specific morphological feature. **Upama** is the criteria wherein naming is done based on simile. Varahakarni, Ajamodaetc are synonyms named on basis of simile.

Plants are mainly known for their action since its karma decides its utility. Synonyms defining the karma of a plant are well known. For eg: Kushtaghna for Khadira, Kasaghni for Kantakari, Mehaghni for Haridraetc are synonyms which describe the **karma** of the plant thereby indicating its utility.

Description obtained from synonyms also help in providing multifold information about the plant. They not only define the morphological aspects but also cover other aspects like mythological/religious background, trade and commerce etc.

Yajnanga, Gayatri, Shivapriya, Bodhivrksha etc are synonyms throwing light on **mythological/religious background**. Bahlika in ancient times was an important centre of world trade being situated at the crossroads of all the trade routes. Both Hingu and Kumkuma are denoted by ‘Bahlika’. The synonyms ‘Panya’ and ‘Klitakika’ indicate that the products designated by them were articles of trade and were displayed in markets which highlight their prevalence in **trade and commerce**.

There is one more group of synonyms which are based on **Rudhi**.e those names which do not have specific meaning but have been in traditional use since generation. For eg: Tarkari, Katamkateri etc are synonyms based on Rudhi.

Henceforth, synonyms can be categorized upon other different criteria also.

During Samhita period, Charaka used the synonyms strictly for a single plant which did not denote any other entity leading to confusion. But in due course of time, by the medieval period, a large number of synonyms accumulated for one plant which denoted more than one plant and thus lead to confusion knowingly or unknowingly. For example, Samanga and Manjishta are enumerated separately in different mahakashayas in Charaka Samhita. Samanga is coined as synonym for Lajjalu. Sushruta also mentions them separately, but later on multiple synonyms mentioned in nighantus confused the issue by making them synonymous. Similar is the case of ‘Amrta’ which originally denoted ‘Guduchi’ but gradually was extended to Haritaki and Amalaki by Dhanwantari nighantu and Raja

Nighantu respectively. Similar is the case of 'Vijaya' which initially meant Haritaki but later on extended to Bhanga and many other plants. In such cases, the correct identity could be decided only by context and physician's wisdom (Yukti).

In spite of all these confusions by enormous inclusion of synonyms, description of synonyms provides clear and detailed knowledge of a plant in all aspects thereby contributing potentially to the correct identification of the plants. The treasure of knowledge available in our classics regarding the medicinal plants by their names proves to be scientific and authentic since many of the morphological features described in Sanskrit can be correlated to botanical terminologies as per today's scenario. Thus lot of information can be obtained about a plant through synonyms thereby contributing not only to its correct identification but also for proper utility of the drugs.

CONCLUSION

1. Knowledge regarding medicinal plants has been found right from Vedic period, Samhita period, later added with enormous inclusions during Nighantu period which has led to the enrichment of Dravyaguna vignana.
2. Study of nama and rupa together of medicinal plants constitute the branch known as pharmacognosy (Nama Roopa Vijnana) which deals with cognition (identification) of medicinal plants.
3. Description obtained from synonyms help in providing multifold information about a plant. They not only define the morphological features but also cover other aspects like properties and actions, utility,

mythological background, trade and commerce, resemblance etc thereby giving comprehensive knowledge about a plant.

4. Knowledge of Namarupavijnana proves to be scientific and authentic even to this day since many of the morphological features described in Sanskrit can be correlated to botanical terminologies as per today's scenario and serves as useful information to botanical community even in this modern era.

5. Hence this adds tribute to the scientific vision of ancient Acharyas who have taken lot of effort to gather and give enormous information on medicinal plants through synonyms for the well-being of mankind.

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