



Review Article

## CONTRIBUTION OF SRISAILAM IN THE HISTORICAL PROGRESS OF AYURVEDA DURING MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, an ancient medical science on earth which was already a highly developed science with its manifold specialized practice in pre Buddhist era. It was gradually declined in the medieval period due to many political reasons. *Rasa sastra*, a branch related to Ayurveda which deals with herbomineral medicines developed during medieval period. Srisailam is considered to be centre for many Buddhists, Tantrics and Siddhas. Because of the efforts of Siddha yogis like Acharya Siddha Nagarjuna, Ayurveda again flourished with new branches (*Rasa sasthra*) & new drugs (*Rasoushadhis*). These medicines are prepared by *Parada* i.e., mercury and other metals as main ingredients along with some other herbal drugs available in the Nallamala and river banks of Krishna near Srisailam. At present also different varieties of medicinal plants, metals and minerals abundantly available at Srisailam and surrounding areas which are very much useful in treating many chronic as well as dreadful diseases.

### INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the science of life is one of the most ancient systems of Medicine in the world. It is the *Upaveda* (branch) of *Atharvana Veda* and also considered itself as *Panchama Veda*. Ayurveda is highly developed science has been practiced in ancient times in the form of eight major clinical specialties of medicine viz., (1) *Kayachikitsa* (medicine), (2) *Salya Tantra* (surgery), (3) *Salakya* (diseases of eye, ear, nose throat), (4) *Koumarabhrithya* (paediatrics, obstetrics & gynecology), (5) *Bhuthavidya* (psychiatry), (6) *Agada Tantra* (toxicology), (7) *Rasayana Tantra* (nutrition, rejuvenation & geriatrics), (8) *Vajikarana* (sexology).

Ayurveda is having holistic approach and considered health as the equilibrium state of physical body along with the sensorial, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Ayurveda is having two main objectives i.e., (1) To maintain the health of a healthy person. (2) To cure the disease of a diseased person. The holism of Ayurveda not only considers the holistic concept of the individual life but also encompasses the whole universe as one unit. The individual living being is considered as just a part of the whole world and cannot exist in isolation. The human being is a miniature replica of the Universe and the two maintain existential continuum.

Ayurveda mainly having two sets of authentic books consisting of three books each i.e., (1) *Bhrihathrayi* - *Charaka Samhitha* (600 BC), *Susrutha Samhitha* (500 BC) and *Samhithas of Vagbhata* (600AD); (2) *Laghuthrayi* - *Madhava Nidana* (900 AD), *Sarangadhara Samhitha* (1300AD) and *Bhavaprakasa* (1600AD). There are evidences to suggest that Ayurveda was not limited in India and had also spread in several other parts of the world in some form or other. Following the classical age Ayurveda seems to have flourished well till the medieval period, after which followed the phase of decline of Ayurveda and its practice similar to other aspects of Indian Art, Science and Culture due to political reasons. However after Independence Ayurveda revived and establishing

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as one of the major official systems of medicine in India as well as some other countries of the world.

### **Influence of Medieval Period on Ayurveda**

#### **Buddhism**

In the medieval period the practice of Buddhism became more wide spread in Asia, a new understanding of human health arose. Surgical intervention in the Buddhist tradition was considered to be too invasive for the human body. The practice of surgery slowly began its decline in favor of new herbal formulas being developed for the application of internal medicine. Herbal medicines were effective, but in case of chronic conditions surgery was the one and only choice. To overcome this invasive and dangerous procedure, *Rasa sastra* was evolved which is an alchemical fusion between mineral, metals like mercury, sulphur, copper, iron etc and herbal compounds. These new, highly potent formulas developed which could be administered in very small quantities with fast acting, tasteless, odorless and truly miraculous in its efficacy and potency.

#### **Tantrism**

The condition of India during the medieval period (800 AD to 1500 AD) was very chaotic and even pathetic. The great empires have disintegrated and invaded by many other foreign kingdoms. They being invaders cared for nothing and burnt down institutions of learning along with their precious libraries and executed scholars. Scholars became few, many of them migrated to villages for fear of persecution. A few scholars here and there taught their sons or disciples the knowledge they had and such instances helped to keep the knowledge in families as hereditary tradition. The medieval heterodox society was in search for new methods of obtaining pleasure and power made for the upsurge of Tantrism and its different cults among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and many others.

The important principles of Tantrism are that, all the things in the universe can either be male or female. Tantrism did not confine itself to the field of religion only, but even entered in to the field of some sciences like *Loha vidya* (metallurgy), *Rasayana vidya* (alchemy), Yoga etc. Mercury (*Parada/Rasa*) was named as semen of Lord Shiva and identified as male principle; Sulphur (*Gandhaka*) was called as the seed/ovum of Goddess Parvathi and identified as the female principle. By worshipping these two substances, combining them and subjecting them in to eighteen processes along with admixture of herbs, minerals, salts, poisons etc, a *Rasayana* (elixir) could be prepared which would not only transform base metal in to gold but also the mortal human body in to an immortal one. The tantric alchemists in sixth and seventh century soon learnt Ayurveda and began to

use these mercurial compounds as medicine. Tantric Schools of Saivism like Yamila and Bhairava also had their centers on the Srisailam hill.

#### **Siddhar/ Siddha Sampradaya**

There have been various traditions of Siddhas: Ancient Alchemist siddhas of south India (18 Siddhas Starting from Agastiyar, Kagapujandhar etc); the nomadic Buddhist Tantrics of Bengal adopts in *Vajra Yana* techniques (Maha siddhas, Siddhacharyas); the alchemist & yogis of medieval India (*Rasa siddhas*); and the north Indian hoard (*Ganas*) of Natha siddhas, following the cult founded by Matsyendranath and developed by Gorakshanatha. Though there are many classifications among Siddhas there is no strict demarcation between various *Siddha sampradayas*. The title Siddhas, Mahasiddhas, Natha & Yogi is used by all interchangeably. Surprisingly the Siddhas were saints, doctors, alchemists and mystics all at once. One of the major aims of all the Siddhas was to attain a state of deathlessness. That is their goal was deliver the body free from ravages of age and disease.

The origin of Siddha medicine is attributed to Lord Shiva; hence this system of medicine is called Saiva Sampradaya. Besides prevention cure of illness the siddhas aimed at rendering the body immortal conquering death realizing *Jeevan- mukthi i.e., Sadeha* Salvation. Alchemy was not the main objectives of the Siddhas. They worked with minerals/metals to develop drugs which might arrest the decay and degeneration of the body. They obviously considered that this goal could not be achieved by drugs which themselves have tendency to decay. Hence minerals/metals were chosen which unlike herbal drugs, do not lose their potency by passage of time and can be easily stored and may be used in small convenient doses.

#### **Acharya Siddha Nagarjuna**

In between 100 B.C. to 8<sup>th</sup> century, there were many people with the name of Nagarjuna like *Rasa siddha* Nagarjuna (Minister of Bhodhi satwa), Bhodhi satwa Raja Nagarjuna, Anandakara Nagarjuna, Susrutha Samhitha redactor Nagarjuna (*Darsanika* Nagarjuna), Badantha Nagarjuna, *Rasa siddha* Nagarjuna (*dwitheeya*), *Rasa siddha* Nagarjuna (*Triteeya*) etc.

Among them Acharya Siddha Nagarjuna who was a famous alchemist, ancient scholar and Buddhist sage who is considered as teacher of *Rasa vidya* and also considered to be one among 84 Siddhas. He belongs to 8<sup>th</sup> century. According to some scholars, he was born in Bhrmhin family, later converted as Buddhist sage by Bhodhi Satwa and joined at Nalanda math. He went to learn Alchemy (gold preparation) (*Loha Siddhi*) from another saint on the advice of his

Guru Acharya Sarabh, to overcome the drought developed in Nalanda and surrounding area.

**Characters of Siddha/Rasa charya:** According to *Rasa sastra Grandhas* the *Siddha lakshanas* should be like this – The Alchemic Siddha should be a highly learned person (*Jnanavan*), respected by all (*Sarva-Manyā*), well versed in the science of mercury (*Rasa sastra Kovida*), proficient in processing mercury (*Rasa karma koushala*), highly competent in his task (*Daksha*), free from greed, lust, hatred and other weaknesses (*Dhira Vira*), Dear to Shiva (Shiva Vatsala) and Devoted to Devi (Devi Bhaktha). His intentions should be pure and noble and blessed by his Guru. Else; the entire process would end fruitless (*Nishphala*).

### Objectives of Rasa-Sastra

The actual development of *Rasa Sastra* as an independent branch of learning and therapy was started from the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In this context *Rasa* means the 'elementary mercury', *Sastra* means 'Science'. *Rasa Sastra* literally means "The Science of Mercury". The term *Rasa* in this context is ordinarily reserved for Mercury though it also covers any minerals and metals in generic sense. So the entire subject deals with the mineral material medica are called *Rasa sastra* and all the medicines of this category are called *Rasoushadhis*.

According to Sri Govinda Bhagavathpada as mentioned in his text *Rasa Hridaya Tantra*, there are two main objectives: (1) *Loha vedha/ Rasa Vada/ Dhatu Vada* (2) *Deha Vedha/ Rasayana Vada*. *Rasa sastra* is not meant only for *Dhatuvada* (alchemy or gold/ silver making) purposes with a view to remove poverty from the world but it is essentially meant for *Dehavada* which by making the body very strong, free from diseases and stable for longer duration with the use of mercury and sulphur compounds prove highly helpful to achieve '*Mukti*' means emancipating or liberation from the world through continuous *Sadhana*.

### Mythological Aspect of Rasa Sastra

*Rasa Sastra* is considered as a spiritual science with many facets to see and understand. In olden scripts of *Rasa sastra*, it is mentioned that *Rasa Sastra* was taught by Lord Shiva Himself. Mercury (*Parada*) having many powerful effects in *Loha Siddhi* and *Deha Siddhi*. It is considered holy because it is believed as the semen of Lord Shiva. The element which binds Mercury i.e., Sulphur is considered as Menstruum or Ovum of Goddess Parvathi. For those who make *Rasa kalpa* it is said that they should have an image of the Shiva lingam made of mercury in the laboratory. This is called as *Rasa Lingam* and is very auspicious to look at, touch and worship. It is said that eating, touching,

giving, meditating upon and adoring of mercury are the five different ways of worshipping it, all of which tend to destroy great vices.

As mentioned in *Rasa Rathna Samuchaya* (1/60-66) there are five mercurial wells situated on earth with a depth of 100 *Yojana*. Among them (1) *Poorva dishasthitha* (east), where *Swetha varna parade* is available. (2) *Dakshina dishasthitha* (south), where *Rasendra neela varna parade* available. (3) *Paschima Disasthitha* (west), *Sootha* variety of *Parade* with *Peetha varna* available. (4) *Uthara disasthitha* (north), *Raktha varna parada* available. (5) *Madhyama upasthitha* (middle) *Misritha varna parade* available with the name *Misraka* with *Dosayukta*, but on doing *Asthadasa parada samskaras* this mercury become pure and gives all the *Siddhis* by using it.

### Srisailam in the Antiquity of Ayurveda

Srisailam is situated in the range of Nallamalai hills. Through the range extends pretty a long distance covering Thirumala to Ahobilam in the south and Nagarjuna konda and Srisailam in north. The name Srisailam popularly attributed to the last mentioned hill. The temple of Srisailam is considered as one of the most ancient Shiva kshetras in India. The presiding deities of Srisailam, Lord Mallikarjuna is one of the twelve Jyothirlingas and Goddess Bhramaramba Devi is one of the eighteen Mahasakhti peethas are manifested in one campus, which is one and only of its kind.

In Ayurvedic literature Srisailam is having an important role in the historical development of Ayurveda, especially in the medieval period the new branch of Ayurveda i.e., *Rasa sashtra* developed at Srisailam and surrounding places. Nallamalai region is considered as treasure for medicinal plants as well as metals and minerals.

- According to ancient scriptures, "the person who utilizes the herbs and minerals available here in a proper manner, that person attains strong physique, strong mind and lives for 100 years".
- In Ayurvedic/ *Rasa sastra* Scriptures Srisailam was well known with the names of Srisaila, Sriparvatha and Srigiri. The medieval period many *Rasa sastra grandhas* are written by many Yogis and Siddhas. Among them in *Rasa Ratnakara* and *Ananda kanda*, the description of Srisailam observed elaborately in separate chapter and believed that these *Grandhas* written at Srisailam only.
- The treatise *Rasaratnakara* of *Nithyanatha*, for instance states that there existed a chemical (*Rasa Sala*) laboratory at Srisailam where experiments were made regarding alchemy.
- The importance of Srisailam (*Sthala prasasthya*) was highlighted in *Rasa Ratnakara* and *Ananada*



*Kanda* as- “whatever it is there in Srisailam, nowhere can find; what ever existed in other places, everything can get at Srisailam” that means everything is there at Srisailam.

- Description of different places of Srisailam and surrounding places was explained very clearly like *Ghanta Matham, Kadali Nanadana Vanam, Dadima Nanadana Vanam* etc and their importance in attaining Siddhi.
- Description of *Tripuranthakam (Poorva dwara to Srisailam)* and its surrounding mysterious places and their role in attaining *Siddhitwa* are available in scriptures.
- Description of minerals, metals, different types of soils, plants explained which are used in *Rasa tantra* by *Rasa siddhis*.
- Description of unique and miraculous drugs which were manufactured at Srisailam in those days was vividly explained.

### Srisailam – Reasons for the Selection as Centre (Hub) for *Rasa Sastra* in Medieval Period

- The one and only place where Lord Shiva (Jyothirlinga) and Goddess Parvathi (Sakthipeetha) under one shrine, whom *Rasa sastra* considered as God of *Rasa sastra*.
- During medieval period the influence of Buddhists, Tantrics and Siddhas was more at Srisailam and also clear-cut evidences (pictures on *Prakara*) are there regarding the stay of these people at Srisailam during medieval period.
- Acharya Siddha Nagarjuna, a great Guru of *Rasa Sastra* said to have attained Siddhi at Ghanta Matham which is situated behind the temple compound. There is belief that this is the right place to attain *Siddhitwa*. Even Buddhist monk and Chinese traveler Faxian, Xuanzang mentioned that Acharya Nagarjuna resided on the Srisailam Mountain.
- History tells that among *Nava Nadas, Gorakshanada*, who knows the preparation of Gold, resided at Srisailam and practiced *Rasa siddhi*.
- According to Hindu *Puranas* Srisailam is considered as centre point for earth.

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- May be sufficient availability of mercury during those periods for the *Rasa* preparations.
- Abundant availability of metals, minerals and medicinal plants in Srisailam and surrounding river banks of Krishna.
- Distinct schools of medicine were developed with the earliest civilization, which settled along with the rivers and river valleys. So this may be one of the reasons for the development of new branch i.e. *Rasa Sastra* in Indian system of medicine in the river banks of Krishna.
- In Hindu *Puranas* it is mentioned that whatever good deeds done at Srisailam will be benefitted by thousand times. This belief may lead to select Srisailam as a centre for *Rasa sastra*.

### CONCLUSION

There is a belief that *Siddha sampradaya* is still practicing at Srisailam and surrounding places by *Siddha yogis*. At present also Srisailam is most suitable place for the development of Ayurveda due to its richness in flora and fauna.

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