Review on Concept of Potency (Veerya) and its diversity in Ayurveda

Chaithra S. Hebbar¹* and Lalitha B.R.²

¹Department of Dravyaguna, SDM College of Ayurveda, Udupi, India
²Department of Dravyaguna, Government Ayurveda Medical College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract
The present communication details the concept of the Potency in Ayurveda. Potency certifies the applicability of the drug to be used in various conditions of the body both in healthy and unhealthy status. Any drug to act as a medicine essentially should be potent. Potency is an expression of the activity of a drug in terms of the concentration or amount of the drug required to produce a defined effect, whereas clinical efficacy judges the therapeutic effectiveness of the drug. Potency is a good preclinical marker of the therapeutic potential of a drug. Ayurveda mentions a term ‘Veerya’ in context of modus operandi of a drug which indicates the ‘Potency of the drug’. The review establishes that the concept of veerya(potency) in Ayurveda is not just limited to indicate the strength of the drug. The variants in veeryanamely mrudu(slow/dull) teekshna(quick/sharp), guru(heavy), laghu(light), snigdha(unctuous),ruksha(dry), Ushna(hot), sheeta(cold) making it as octa potency(ashtaveerya) or focusing only on ushna (hot) and sheeta(cold) making it as the dual potency (dwividhaveerya) or even in some contexts considering it as 15 types as per Acharya Nimi or even widening the concept of veerya(potency) by viewing it responsible for the 19 karma(pharmacological activities) as per Sushruta opens the diversity or multiplicity in the drug action.

Keywords
Potency, Veerya, Ayurveda, Action, Effectiveness
INTRODUCTION

Subsistence and Globalization of Ayurveda has been possible only due to a strong core, which is provided through its own fundamental principles. DravyagunaVijnana is one of the indispensable subjects in Ayurveda, which has put a limelight to every aspect of the drug actions in the body through a configuration called ‘Rasa panchaka’ (the five units of the drug). This includes the various attributes linked with the drug entering the body namely, Rasa (taste), Guna (attribute), Vipaka (final state of transformation), Veerya (Potency) and Prabhava (specificity in action). The reason and the capacity of a dravya to perform an action is Veerya (potency). It is a property (karmukashaktipradayakaguna) in the dravya (drug), which makes the drug capable of exhibiting the therapeutic effectiveness in the body. Veerya (potency) is considered to be one among seven padartha (matter of priority) in DravyaGunaVijnana, namely Dravya (substance), Guna (attribute), Rasa (taste), Vipaka (final state of transformation), Prabhava (specificity in action) and Karma (drug action). The present paper aims to collect the information about the view of potency in Ayurveda and also its diversity which helps in clinical application thus defining the modus operandi of the drug.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Etymology (Nirukti) of the word veerya:
The etymology of the word veeryais from “Veeravikrantaudhatu”. The strength or energy which is performing an activity via drug is Veerya (potency) of the drug. The word ‘Veerya’ in a noun form also represents manliness, valor, strength, power, energy, heroism, vigor, virility, efficacy.

Etymology of word Potency:
The term veerya may be equivalent to the term ‘Potency’ in modern pharmacology which is a word derived from latin term Potentia meaning the strength/force/power.

Characteristics of Veerya (Veeryalakshana)

Veerya (potency) is characterized by a Karma (drug action). It is also considered as one of the guna (property) in the drug similar to rasa (taste), gurvardiguna (attributes like heaviness), vipaka (final transformative state) and Prabhava (specific action). Karma (drug action) is a resultant performance of the drug. The property or unit of the drug which
acts as an initiative and potential power for achieving a desired effect in the body is its potency. Thus Veerya does not just stand for any one entity, instead symbolizes the initiating force present in totality of a dravya (karmukashaktipradayakagunatvata). The term veerya (potency) signifies the shakti (energy), or utsaha (active participation) and the properties like snigdha (unctuousness), ruksha (dry) etc., possessed by the drug, thus indicating that veerya (potency) is a physical as well as biochemical energy in the drug responsible for the action of the drug and its effectiveness in the body. It is also said as essence of the drug which is either depressed after a certain period or is accentuated by certain processes.

Concept of Veerya in Veda
The knowledge about the concept and applications of rasa (taste) guna (attribute) veerya (potency), Vipaka (final transformative state) and prabhava (specific action), of a dravya (substance) was established during the Veda kala. Even in the vedic period, it was thought that drug acts because of its inherent power. This was termed as Veerya (potency).

Concept of Veerya in Samhitha:
The practitioners of Ayurveda in ancient times have tried to analyze the concept of Veerya and its types in their own way. A detailed discussion by the commentators ensures about its practicability. Following are some points discussed as Veeryavada (theories about the concept of potency). The aims and objectives of all the proposed Veeryavada is not to create any controversy, but was an attempt made by the scientists of Ayurveda working in the field to decode the concept of veerya and project its relation with the drug so that its identity and applicability is clear.

I. Guna Veerya Vada (Theory proposing attributes are potency):
Two schools of thoughts are proposed under GunaVeeryaVada (Theory proposing attributes are potency). Shakti matra Veerya Vada (Theory proposing Energy is potency) by Acharya Charaka and Paaribhashika Veerya Vada (Theory proposing defined property of the substance is its potency) by Acharya Sushruta as well as Acharya Vagbhata. Vridda Vagbhata opines that Shakti veeryavada (Theory proposing Energy is potency) is Shastriya (theoretical) and the Paribhashikaveeryavadais Laukika (practical).
In this school, potency is expressed as power. That power which enables action by the drug is the *veerya* of that *dravya*, and this power may be in form of *rasa* (taste), *vipaka* (final transformative state) etc. any among the five units of the *dravya* (drug). Among these factors singly or in combination dominate, become expressive and then be responsible for the drug action. *Utkrishtashaktisampannaguna* (Highly powered qualities) in the drug is considered as *veerya*. To add on, this theory also established one more data termed as *Bahuveeryavadatha* that the drug possesses infinite potency and thus multifold actions is performed by a drug when in action. *Acharya Charaka* is supportive to this theory. *Acharya Chakrapani* upholds the individuality of the concept of *veerya* (potency) and opines that it is something which is different from *rasa* (taste) *Vipaka* (final transformative state) or the *Prabhava* (specific activity) of a *dravya* (drug). Thus *Shakti rupa* (Form of power) of *veerya* is (potency) supported by *Acharya Chakrapani*. As per the variation in the *shakti* (power) of the *dravyaveerya* (drug potency) can be categorized as three grades namely *teekshna* (highly potent/quick), *Madhya* (medium/moderate) and *Mrudu* (less potent/mild). The grade of power and energy in the *dravya* decides the posology of the *dravya*. Prof. *Dwarakanath* opines that *veerya* (potency) conveys the idea of energy. The energy of a body is its capacity to do a work and total measure of energy is work. Energy may be potential or kinetic.

B. *Paaribhashikaveeryavada* (Theory proposing defined property of the substance is its potency): In this school potency is viewed as those physical properties in the drug which get active and be responsible for the activity in the body leading to therapeutic effectiveness in the drug. *Acharya Sushruta* and *Acharya Vagbhata* support this theory. This school has two opinions about the dominant properties in action. One opinion is named as *Dwividhaveeryavada* (Theory proposing the supremacy of dual qualities—hot and cold) where only *Sheeta* (cold) and *Ushna* (hot) qualities are emphasized as potency and another opinion popular is called *Astavidhaveeryavada* (Theory proposing the supremacy of eight qualities) where *Guru* (heavy), *Laghu* (light), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Ruksha* (dry), *Mridu* (mild/slow), *Teekshna* (sharp/quick), *Sheeta* (cold), *Ushna* (hot) qualities are emphasized as potency.

B.1 *Dwividhaveeryavada*: (Theory proposing two diverse potencies)
As per the principle of Agnisomeeyatatva (Theory establishing the Predominance of Fire and water elements in Universe) even though the Universe is accepted to be panchabhaautika (made up of the five primordial elements), Agni (fire) and Soma (water) tatva (elements) are considered to be more powerful. Soma (water element) has a role in helping in growth and development, and Agni (fire element) is the reason for the transformations occurring in it. Same principle is applied to the Purusha (Man) who is created by the combination of Sukra (sperm) with saumyatatva (predominant with water element) and Artava (Ovum) with agneyatatva (predominant with fire element). Similarly Veerya (potency) of a panchabhauthikadravya (substance formed by five primordial elements) too have a predominance of either fire or water elements and hence will reveal activities of either of the two, fire or water. Agneyadravya (Drug with fire predominance is recognized to be possessed with Ushnaveerya (hot potency) and Soumyadravya (Drug of water predominance) possesses Sheeta veerya. This principle makes it easy to select the specific type of a dravya (drug) for the specific type of a Purusha (man) both in normal and diseased status as after determining staana (equilibrium), vruddi (increase) and kshaya (decrease) of the dosha (primary units of the body). Substances with cold potency increase body strength, Kapha, Vata and are heavy for digestion. Substances with hot potency decrease the sperm activities, Kapha and Vata, increase Pitta and are light for digestion. Drugs of hot potency can produce bhrama (giddiness), kshut (thirst); glani (bodily exhaustion and fatigue), sweda (perspiration), daha (burning sensation) and asupakita (accelerated reactivity or digestion). Drugs of cold potency, on the other hand, causes hladana (cheerfulness and pleasure of mind) jeevana (sustains life) stambhana (imparts strength, sturdiness and steadiness to the body) and cleanses rakta (blood).

B.2. Astavidhaveeryavada (Theory proposing eight diverse potencies)

Acharya Charaka and Acharya Vagbhata mention that during their times, the theory of viewing potency of a drug with eight diversities was also popular namely Guruveerya (heavy potency) for the drug composed of prithvi (earth element) and jala (water element), Laghuveerya (light potency) for the drug composed of agni, vayu and akasa (elements of fire, wind and space).
Snigdhaveerya (unctuous potency) for the drug composed of jala (water element), Rukhaveerya (dry potency) for the drug composed of vayu (wind element) Mriduveerya (mild/slow potency) for the drug composed of jala and akasha (elements of water and space) Teekshnaveerya (sharp/quick potency) for the drug composed of agni (fire); Sheetaveerya (cold potency) for the drug composed of prithvi and jala (elements of earth and water) Ushnaveerya (hot potency) for the drug composed of Agni (fire element).

Acharya Sushruta accepts Picchila (slimy potency) for the drug composed of jala (water elements) and Vishadaveerya (potency of clarity) for the drug composed of prithvi and vayu (elements of earth and wind), in place of Guru (Heavy) and Laghuveerya (light potency) for the drug composed of Agni (fire element). Acharya Sushruta too had considered Guru (heavy) and Laghu (light) as Veerya (potency). Dr. P.V. Sharma, bridges the difference of opinion if any by mentioning that the Picchilaguna (Sliminess) can perform the action of guru (heaviness) and similarly the Vishadaguna (clearness) can perform the activities of laghu (lightness) in the body. Thus substantiation is done.

Astaveerya (eight potencies) had a wide popularity among physicians and the activity was illustrated as follows: Ushnaveerya pacifies kapha, vata; aggravates pitta, causes Dahana—heat; Pacana—digestion of food, assimilation of dhatu (body tissue) healing of vrana (wound), shopha (inflammatory pathology). Murchana—loss of consciousness, Swedana—sweat/diaphoresis; Vamana—emesis, Virechana—purgation, Vilayana—absorption, Bhrama—giddiness, Trashna—thirst, Glani—exhaustion, Laghuta—lightness, Avrashya—decreases the virility/Shukradhatu. Sheetaveerya pacifies pitta, aggravates kapha, vata. Causes-Vishyandana—stopping the flow, Sthirikarana—stabilizing, Prasadana—purifying, Kledana—moistening, Jeevana—life promoting; Stambhana—causing stasis, Guru—heaviness, Balya—strengthening, Snigdhaveerya pacifies vata. Causes-Snehana—oleation, Brahmana—
bulk increasing, Santarpana- health promoting, Vajeekarana- increasing the sexual vigor, Vayastaapana- prevents aging. Rukshaveerya pacifies kapha and aggravates vatadosha. Causes- Sangrahana- accumulation, Peedana- pressing effect, Virukshana- dryness, Upalepana-coating/healing. Guruveerya pacifies vata. Causes- Brahmana- bulk increases, Upalepana-anointing, Laghuveerya pacifies kaphadosha. Causes- Lekhana-ematiating, Mruduveerya pacifies pitta dosha. Causes- Raktamamsaprasadana- saturates raka/mamsa; helps in Susparsha-softening, Teekshnaveerya pacifies kapha. Causes- Sangrahacushana- constipative, Avadarana-tearing, Sravana- secretion, Vishadaveerya pacifies kaphadosha. Causes- Kledaacushana-causing dryness Virukshana- drying Uparohana- promoting healing. Picchilaveerya pacifies vatadosha. Causes- Upalepana-anointing Purana-promoting healing, Brahmana- bulk promoting, Samsleshana- slimy, Vajeekarana- promoting sexual vigor. Following are the statements substantiating the view of astavidhaveeryavadā where, out of twenty physical properties only the eight properties stand up as potency in world of material medica. Samanagragunasarata(essence): The eight physical properties if in a drug , they last longer not letting the destruction of their physical form even when they come in contact with the digestive enzymes; Shaktutkarsha(powerful): The eight types of potencies are most powerful possessions of the drug; Vyavahaaramukhyata(Practicability): The high esteem of eight types of potencies are practically understandable and so clinically implementable; Bahulata (abundance) All among the eight type of potencies are capable of performing multiple or abundant activities in the body and thus effectiveness is appreciable; Upayogita(utility): The clinical application of these eight type of potencies of drugs are utilized commonly in practice; Prabhalata(empowerment): The eight types of potencies can overpower the rasa (taste) etc. other qualities of a drug and show their performance; Eg. if there is teekshna (quick/sharp) potency in sweet tasting drug, the usual functions like upalepa(making a coating) and kaphavardhaka(increase in kapha) are not seen because here the sharpness wins over the taste Madhura rasa yuktaikshura because of sheetaveerya supporting vatavridhi(increase in vata) in the body; Katu rasa yuktapiptali (pungent Piper longum) instead of
increasing the *pitta* because of *mrudusheetaveerya* helping in pitta shaman. Acharya Dalhana accepts that *veerya* (potency) denotes *Shakti* (power or energy) in the drug which is explainable by using terms like *sheetha* – *ushta* etc. He accepts the theory of multiple *veerya* enunciated by Acharya Charaka. Dalhana notes that although there is no third category but *sita* and *ushna* according to the predominance of *Soma* and *Agni* principle, practically there is a scholarly group telling that *Veerya* (potency) can be on the borderline which is termed as *sadharana* representing the *veeryastatus* as *anushnasheeta* (common/intermediate)\(^{34}\).

**b.3. ShadvidhaVeeryavada:** (Theory proposing six diverse potencies)

Acharya Priyavrat Sharma proposed six potencies of the drug namely *Guru* (heavy), *laghu* (light), *Ushna* (hot), *snigdha* (unctuous) and *ruksha* (dry) which are instrumental in increase and decrease of *dosha*, *Guru* (heavy) is capable of *Bruhmana* (Bulk promoting), *Laghuveeryaforlanghana* (ematiating), *Snigdhaveeryafor snehana*(oleation), *rookshaveeryafor rookshana* (drying) *sheetaveerya for stambhana* (coagulation) and *Ushnaveeryafor svedana* (Sudation)\(^{35}\).

**II. Karma veeryavada:** (Theory proposing exhibited activity of the substance is its potency):

Acharya Badantha Nagarjuna proposed that action itself is a character of its potency. He has not accepted the *Gunaveeryavada* (Theory proposing attributes are potency). He observes that, if predominant of *rasadi* (five units of drug) or *guna* (physical property) is accepted as *veerya* (potency), in spite of presence of *rasa* (taste) and *guna* (property) in the drug, the action exhibited is different and not related to either taste or the property of the drug. Also, it is observed that though *rasa* (taste) and *guna* (property) are present in a drug, the *karma* (drug activity) may not be performed by the drug; instead when there is absence of *rasa* (taste) and *guna* (property) *karma* (drug activity) is performed - eg. *Mantra*. He believes that drug can perform an activity without having any relation to *rasasadi* (five units of drug). Hence the activity exhibited by the drug has to be considered as *veerya* (potency). He has has not enumerated the number of *veerya* (potency) with regards to its *karma* (drug activity) but believes *veerya* present with many diversities.\(^{36}\) This theory is supported by Acharya Nimi, diversities of *dravyaveerya*(drug potencies) are fifteen in number, based on the drug action with

**Veerya (potency)** with 19 diversities in form of actions:

*Aushadhakarmukatha* of the *dravya*, in all circumstances is because of the *veerya* only. e.g.---*vamana* (emesis), *virechana* (purification), *ubhayabhagahara* (bidirectional movement of vitiated dosha) *karma*, *samshodhana* (purification), *samshamana* (pacification), *agnideepana* (appetizer) *sangrahana* (cumulative), *peedan* (pressing effect), *lekhana* (scraping effect) *brumhana* (bulk promoting effect), *Rasayana* (rejuvenating effect), *vajeekarana* (increase of libido), *swayathukara* (inflammatory effect), *swayathuvilayana* (anti-inflammatory effect), *dahana* (burning effect), *maadana* (confused and influencing brain) *darana* (stabilizing), *pranaghna* (life threatening), *vishaprashamana* (pacification of toxicity) etc. Also *Veerya* (potency) due to its power can dominate over *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (property) etc factors in the *dravya* (drug), and thus exhibit its action.

**III. Dravyaveeryavada: (Theory proposing the substance in its form is its potency):**

Most of the modern scholars of the field like Dr. Yadavaji Trikamji Acharya believe that *dravyautkrishtamsha* (Active principle) is
veerya (potency) and that is responsible for performance of an action. Acharya Priyavrata Sharma considers active principle as a seat of potency. He believes that the potency in active principle is transferred during the different procedures in pharmaceuticals. The process of transfer of the potency is called veeryasankranthi (transference of power). As per ShivadasaSen the dravya is panchabhaudic and dravyagatasaratishayarupamsha (the essence) is called as veerya. He also considers Veerya(potency) may be Sahaja (natural form) or Kritrima (artificial form). Examples of Guduci (Tinosporacordifolia) and Guduci Satwa (concentrate), Palasa (Butea monosperma) and its Kshara (alkali) etc can be considered where the source of drug is transformed to a new form which is acquired by processing. Also it is observed that whatever process is undertaken for the drug, like kashaya (decoction), gritha (ghee), taila (oil) etc, all those have a definite expiry time mentioned in the classics after which it loses its potency and does not work up to the expectation. Selectivity of the part of the drug also is important issue as the selected part alone will contain maximum potency for specific karma (action). Eg., Dashamoola (ten roots), Triphala (three fruits), Ashokatwak (Bark of Saraca asoca) etc.

**DISCUSSION**

Whatever the substances do, whether by dravyaPrabhava (virtue of their nature) or gunaprabhavat (by virtue of their qualities) or by Dravya-Gunaprabhavat by (virtue of their substantive and qualitative nature) in any given time, in any given place (system or organ), having administered in a given mode, with a given result in view is their action, whereby they act is the potency, wherein they act is the place, when they act is the time, how they act is the mode, what they achieve is the result. There cannot be any action in the body in absence of veerya of the drug. The effectiveness of the drug may be wholesome or unwholesome, but the reason behind is potency of the drug. The documentation in literature since the times of Veda till date about the specificity of the time of collection of the herbs, use of specific parts, the time of administration, different types of processing, preservation techniques, use of different utensils for storage preparation of different extracts, isolation of the active principles etc., all
indicates the recognition of increased potency of the drug.

CONCLUSION

In spite of complimentary inclination of scholars of analyzing potency varies either in form of Guna(drug property), Karma(drug activity) or as Dravya(drug) itself, they have a definite understanding that potency irrespective of its form is essential to reach the target in the body. To achieve the result in form of karma (therapeutic action), the very essential need is that the drug should be potent and thus the relation between the Veerya (potency) and Karma (activity) of the drug is established. Potency though diverse, is a deciding factor to achieve the drug action.
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