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The Critical Analysis of *Ashtavidha Virya*

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ABSTRACT

Among the *Rasapanchaka* of any *Dravya* (drug), *Guna* occupies a very important place. A study of the pharmacological aspect of these *Guna* signifies that most of the principles laid down in the *Ayurveda* texts possess the characteristics of the *Gurvadi Guna*. Among the *Karmukatva* (action) of a *Dravya*, potency implies all the qualities of *Dravyas* by which they act viz. *Rasa*, *Vipaka*, *Guna*, *Virya* and *Prabhava*. *Guna* along with *Virya* (potency) indicates the physico-pharmacological properties of *Dravya* (*Dravya*). The concept of *Ashtavidha Virya* is one of the most useful part to evaluate the desire mode of action (*Karma*) of a *Dravya* (drug). That's why this article is compiled to review the critical analysis of *Ashtavidha Virya* with special reference *Gurvadi Guna*.

KEYWORDS

Ayurveda, *Guna*, *Virya*, *Dravya*, *Ashtavidha*



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INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, *Virya* of a *Dravya* (drug) will be considered according to the way of its dominancy in *Karma*. *Acharya Charaka* considered it only two, *Shita* & *Ushna* while some says its eight. *Usna Virya Guna* are *Laghu*, *Ushna*, *Tikshna*, *Ruksha* & *Shita* *Virya Guna* are *Guru*, *Snigdha*, *Shita*,

*Mridu*¹. In *Ayurveda*, though the fundamentals are the *Panchamahabhuta*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala* which form the physiological as well as the pathological conditions of the body, but a mere observation of each of them will infer that the physiological or the pathological conditions of the body are demarcated by the *Gurvadi Guna* (Table 1).

Table 1 *Guna Vivechana*

Sr. No.	Guna	Panchamahabhuta	Rasa	Vipaka	Virya
1.	Guru	Prithvi + Aap	Madhut, Amla, Kashaya	Madhur	Shita
2.	Laghu	Teja + Vayu	Tikta, Lavan, Katu	Amla, Katu	Ushna
3.	Ushna	Agni	Lavana, Amla, Katu	Katu	Ushna
4.	Shita	Vayu+ Aap	Tikta, Madhura, Kashaya	Madhura	Shita
5.	Snigdha	Prithvi+Aap	Madhura, Amla, Lavana	Madhura	Shita
6.	Ruksha	Agni+ Vayu	Katu, Tikta, Kashaya	Katu	Ushna
7.	Tiksha	Agni + Vayu	Amla, Lavana, Katu	Katu	Ushna
8.	Mridu	Akasha+ Aap	Madhura, Tikta, Kashaya	Madhura	Shita

The etymology of the word *Virya* is from “*Viravikrantau*” *Dhatu*. The strength or energy which is performing an activity via *Dravya* is *Virya* of the *Dravya*². In *Chikitsa* (treatment) purpose, *Gunas* play a very major role. As in any pathological condition, there is *Vridhhi* or *Kshaya* of the *Dosha Guna*, the *Aushadhi Dravyas*, in which the *Guna* resides, are used by the physician to bring back the *Dosha* into the *Samaavastha*. The *Rasa*, *Virya*, *Vipak* of a *Dravya* confide upon *Guna*. *Bheshaja* (medicines) are chosen depending upon the above factors. *Gurvadi Gunas* w.s.r. to *Virya* holds an important position in the field of *Ayurveda*.

The term *Virya* may be equivalent to the term “Potency” in modern pharmacology which is a word derived from Latin term *Potentia* meaning the strength/force/power³. The property or unit of the *Dravya* which acts as an initiative and potential power for achieving a desired effect in the body is its potency⁴. Two *Sampradaya* (schools of thoughts) are proposed under *Guna Virya Vada* (Theory proposing attributes are potency). *Shakti Matra Virya Vada* (Theory proposing Energy is potency) by *Acharya Charaka* and *Paaribhashika Virya Vada* (Theory proposing defined property of the substance is its potency) by *Acharya Sushruta* as well as *Acharya Vagbhata*.



Vridha Vagbhata opines that *Shakti Viryavada* (Theory proposing Energy is potency) is *Shastriya* (theoretical) and the *Paribhashika Viryavada* is *Laukika* (practical)⁵. *Yadavaji Trikamji Acharya* believed that *Dravyautkrishtaamsha* (Active principle) is *Virya* (potency) and that is responsible for performance of an action⁶. *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 *Virya Sankranthi* (transference of power)⁷. As per *Shivadasa Sen* the *Dravya* is *Panchabhautic* and *Dravyagata Saratishayarupaamsha* (the essence) is called as *Virya*⁸. He also considers *Virya* (potency) may be *Sahaja* (natural form) or *Kritrima* (artificial form). *Acharya Sushruta* preferred *Guruvadi* eight kinds of *Viryas* while *Acharya Charaka* preferred two kinds of *Virya*, viz., *Ushna* & *Shita*. On other hand, there is no difference in the views of *Charaka* & *Sushruta* except that the former lays much stress on the site of action and specific affinity of *Dravyas* to certain *Dosha*, *Dushya* or *Strotasa* while the later reviews complete pharmacotherapeutic actions and pharmacokinetics of *Dravyas* in the name of *Virya*. As the name of the *Guna*

are *Gurvadi Guna*, as per the literature, we reviewed the first two *Guna* i.e., *Guru* & *Laghu* in detail, while other six *Guna* in brief⁹.

Guru & Laghu:

These terms are used in three contexts- *Matra* (quantity), *Guna* (property), and *Vipaka* (digestion). *Laghutva* has been interpreted as opposite to *Gurutva* as property of *Aakashha*. The *Dravyas*, which are *Snigdha* (lipid soluble) and *Shita* (non-ionised) are absorbed through the gastric and intestinal mucosa. If the *Dravya* molecule is bigger in size (*Guru*), it cannot pass through the mucous membrane but is absorbed through the vesicular transport. Accordingly, the *Madhura Rasa Dravyas* (*Snigdha*, *Shita*, *Guru*) are partly absorbed by way of diffusion across the gastro-intestinal epithelium or by way of the vesicular transport. *Amla Dravyas* are *Snigdha*, *Ushna* (Ionised) and *Laghu* (Small molecule) and they can be readily absorbed through the gastrointestinal mucosa. *Katu*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya Dravyas* are transformed into *Katu Vipaka*, which is *Ruksha* (water soluble), *Shita* (non-ionised), *Laghu* (small molecules) and such *Dravyas* are readily absorbed through the mucosa of the small and large intestines (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparison between *Guru & Laghu*

No.	Parameters	Guru	Laghu
1.	Constituent protoelements	<i>Prithivi+Apa</i>	<i>Tejas + Vayu</i>
2.	Bhautika Classification	<i>Parthiva, Apya</i>	<i>Tejas, Vayavya</i>
3.	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Madhura, Amla, Kashaya</i>	<i>Tikta, Lavana Katu</i>
4.	Physical quality	Heaviness	Lightness
5.	<i>Vipaka</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Katu, Amla</i>
6.	Action on the <i>Dosha</i>	<i>Kaphavardhaka Vata</i> <i>Shamaka</i>	<i>Vata Vardhaka, Kapha</i> <i>Shamaka</i>
7.	Action on the <i>Dhatu</i>	Increases	Decreases
8.	Action on the <i>Mala</i>	Increases	Decreases
9.	Action on <i>Agni</i>	Difficulty in digestion	Easily digested
10.	Therapeutic classification	<i>Snehana Brimhana</i>	<i>Rukshana Langhana</i>

It may be recalled here that the *Virya* (most productive *Guna*) alone cannot discriminate the types of *Santarpana* or *Apatarpana* as they form the common qualities for all the three types of *Santarpana* or *Apatarpana*.

I) *Santarpana-Chikitsa*

1. *Brimhan =Guru-Shita-Mridu-Snigdha-Bahala-Sthula-Pichhila-Manda-Sthira-Shyava,*
2. *Snehana =Guru-Shita-Mridu-Snigdha-Drava-Shukshma- Pichhila-Manda-Sara.*
3. *Stambhana =Laghu-Shita-Mridu-Ruksha-Drava-Sukshma-Manda-Sthira*

Table 3 *Karma* (action) by *Guru* and *Laghu*

<i>Guru</i>	<i>Laghu</i>
<i>Upalepa</i> (Covering)	<i>Lekhana</i> (Emaciation)
<i>Brinhana</i> (Weight gainer)	<i>Kleda Achushana</i> (Liquid absorber)
<i>Sansleshana</i> (Sticky)	<i>Virukshana</i> (Dryer)
<i>Vajikarana</i> (Aphrodisiac)	<i>Uparohana</i> (Healing)
<i>Purana</i> (Filler)	<i>Kaphahara</i>
<i>Vatahara</i>	

II) *Apatarpana-Chikitsa*

1. *Langhana=Laghu-Ushna-Tikshna--Ruksha--Vishada-Shukshma-Sara-Khara-Kathina.*

2. *Rukshana=Laghu-Ushna-Tikshna-*

Ruksha-Apichhila-Sthira-Khara-Kathina.

3. *Swedana =Guru-Ushna-Tikshna-Rukshan-Snigdha-Sukshma-Drava-Sara-Sthira.*

One of the texts say that *Virya* is to be determined from the actions it produces after coming contact with the tongue till it's excretion from the body. The stimulant and depressant actions on the tongue should be explained by *Tikshna* and *Mridu* qualities in the G. I. tract, by *Snigdha* and *Ruksha*, on *Strotasa* by *Ushna* and *Shita* qualifies, and on the *Dhatu*s by *Guru* and *Laghu* qualities, respectively. *Charaka* preferred two kinds of *Virya*, viz., *Ushna* & *Shita*. One of the studies explains that the *Shita Virya Dravya* used for B. M. R. were *Guru* and *Ushna Virya Dravyas* were *Laghu*. He concluded that, the actions of *Dravya* on the *Dhatu* should be explained on the basis of *Guru* and *Laghu Virya*⁹. According to one author, the *Karma* included under the phrase *Guru & Laghu* are described in Table 3¹⁰.



Guru Virya (heavy potency) for the *Dravya* composed of *Prithvi* (earth element) and *Jala* (water element), *Laghu Virya* (light potency) for the *Dravya* composed of *Agni*, *Vayu* and *Akasha* (elements of fire, wind and space). *Acharya Charaka* and *Acharya Vagbhata* mention that during their times, the theory of viewing potency of a *Dravya* with eight diversities was also popular namely *Guru Virya* (heavy potency) for the *Dravya* composed of *Prithvi* (earth element) and *Jala* (water element), *Laghu Virya* for the *Dravya* composed of *Agni*, *Vayu* and *Akasha* (elements of fire, wind and space). *Guru Virya* pacifies *Vata* causes *Bruhana*, *Upalepana*. *Laghu Virya* pacifies *Kapha* *Dosha* causes *Lekhana*.

The *Virya* is of eight kinds viz., *Ushna* (hot), *Shita* (cold), *Snigdha* (moist), *Ruksha* (dry), *Visada* (clarity), *Picchila* (slippery), *Mridu* (soft) and *Tikshna* (sharp). *Acharya Sushruta* accepts *Picchila* for the *Dravya* composed of *Jala* and *Vishada Virya* for the *Dravya* composed of *Prithvi* and *Vayu* (elements of earth and wind) ,in place of *Guru* and *Laghu Virya*. The commentators *Chakarapani* and *Dalhana* have opined that it is because *Acharya Sushruta* has adopted the words *Guru* and *Laghu* in context of *Vipaka* (final transformative status). *Acharya Harana Chandra* feels that

statement of *Acharya Sushruta* might be wrongly interpreted by the commentators. He also stated that no literatures have recorded *Picchila* and *Vishada* as *Virya*. Definitely *Acharya Sushruta* too had considered *Guru* and *Laghu* as *Virya*. *Acharya P.V. Sharma*, bridges the difference of opinion if any by mentioning that the *Picchila Guna* can perform the action of *Guru* and similarly the *Vishada Guna* can perform the activities of *Laghu* in the body. Thus substantiation is done¹¹.

Virya is *Shakti* or potency. It is the capacity of a substance to render the system hot or cold. On this *Siddhanta*, there is again a concept of only two kinds of *Virya*, viz., *Ushna Virya* and *Shita Virya*. This *Virya* accounts for the effects of the *Dravya* from the time of ingestion and as long as it lasts in the body. A *Dravya* provide its influence over body, some extent by *Rasa*, some extent by *Virya*, some extent by *Vipaka* and some extent by *Prabhava*. Sometimes *Virya* overcomes *Rasa* by its power and makes its own tendencies felt. For example sugarcane must remove *Vata* owing to its sweetness; but it really increases it on account of its being *Shita Virya*. *Dravya*, *Rasa*, *Virya* and *Vipaka* are all important, because a medicine produces effects in all these four ways according to its own nature¹².



Guru aggravates *Kapha Dosha*, but alleviates *Vata* and *Pita*; decreases or delays digestibility; but after digestion / absorption, promotes bulk and lethargy. *Laghu* (light) aggravates *Vata* and *Pita* (and *Agni*) but alleviates *Kapha*; helps in easy digestion, while reducing bulk, and promoting alertness¹³. *Virya* (potential *Guna*) restricts the role of *Rasa* and *Vipaka* while explaining the *Dravya* action. *Arundutta* has noted that *Rasa* is not stable because it undergoes changes under the influence of *Jatharanala* (*Agni*). Such is not the case with *Guna* viz *Guru* and the rest. Among the *Rasapanchaka* of a *Dravya* the uniqueness of *Virya* has been stressed by *Shivadas Sena*. He observes: *Shakti* is *Virya*. It alone is capable of performing powerful actions. These actions do not suffer from any limitation due to non-attachment of *Viryas* to *Rasa*. *Virya* is closely correlated to *Guna* viz; *Ushna*, *Shita* etc. Since *Virya* inheres inseparably (*Samavya* in *Dravya*), it is considered to be complimentary to *Rasas*. *Prof C. Dwarakanath* has interpreted *Shita* and *Ushna Virya* as potential and kinetic energies respectively and categorized twenty *Guna* into these two groups.

Charaka furnished that identification of *Rasa*, *Virya* and *Vipaka* by *Nipata* (contact) and *Adhivasa* (inherent residing) and

Nishtakarma or *Kriyaparisamapti*. All these parameter clearly reflect the concept of ingestion/ application (*Nipata*), metabolism (*Vipaka*) and concentration of the *Dravya* in bodily tissues (*Virya*) till excretion of the *Dravya* from the body. The statement made by *Charaka* and *Sushruta* if taken together forms evaluation of *Guna* i.e., by *Nipata*, *Adhivasa* and *Nishtakarma*¹⁴. According to *Acharya Charaka* and *Sushruta* the active property or potency of a *Dravya* when performed is known as *Virya*. The term *Virya* is interpreted as *Shakti* (potency). It has been said that *Virya* is the *Sara* of the *Dravya* which is destroyed after a certain period and is accentuated by certain process. *Dalhana* does not distinguish *Virya* from *Prabhava*. He has defined *Virya*. As a means of inexplicable action, As *Prabhava* producing action for which *Dravya*, *Rasa*, *Guna* and *Vipaka* are incapable and having synonym *Shakti*, *Utpattivishesha*, *Samarthyas* and *Prabhava*. *Dalhana* has confused the issue by saying *Virya* as ‘*Achintya Kriyahetu*’ and making *Virya* and *Prabhava* as synonymous. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, though the types of *Virya* are two, he has mentioned eight *Viryas* in other’s reference also. *Dalhana* too follow the same. Although there is no third category but *Shita* and *Ushna* according to



the predominance of *Soma* and *Agni* in principle, practically there is accepted a group on borderline which is termed as ‘*Sadharana*’ (common or intermediate), example *Kakmachi* (*Solanum nigrum* Linn.). *Dalhana* has distinguished *Agneya* from *Ushna* and clarify it with certain examples such as *Prabha* (lusture) is *Agneya* but not *Ushna*, *Kshara* is *Ushna* but not *Agneya*, *Matsyas* (fishes) are also *Ushna* but not *Agneya*. The examples of *Agneya Dravyas* are *Tila* (*Sesamum indicum* Linn.), *Masha* (*Phaseolus mungo* Linn.), *Sura* (Liquor) etc¹⁵. In one of the study, the assessment parameter for *Guru & Laghu Guna* used would be “*Dravya Ashing Time*”. According to *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, *Guru* is “*Chirapaki*”- the word ‘*Chira*’ means – long, a delay, or for a long time and the word ‘*Paka*’ means – burning, digestion, assimilation etc., i.e, which takes longer time to burn or digest, and *Laghu Dravya* is ‘*Shighrapaki*’ – the word ‘*Shighra*’ means – quick, speedy, rapid, So *Shighrapaki* is that which takes lesser time to burn or digest¹⁶.

Ushna & Shita

After *Guru & Laghu Guna*, let’s take a brief description of *Ushna & Shita*. These are *Guna* used in the sense of *Sparsha* (touch) and in the sense of action for *Virya*. The parameters for the assessment of *Ushna*

Virya are, *Trishna* (thirst), *Bhrama* (giddiness), *Glani* (bodily fatigue or exhaustion), *Sweda* (sweating), *Daha* (burning sensation), *Ashupakita* (accelerates digestion or biochemical reaction), *Vata-Kaphahara*. On the same way, *Shita Virya* will be assess in terms of *Hladana* (cheerfulness or pleasure of mind), *Jivana* (surtains life), *Stambhana* (binding or preventing secretions), *Raktapitta Prasadana* (cleanses *Rakta & Pitta*), *Kledana* (moisturising), *Vishyandana* (wet stuffing). The assessment parameter for *Shita* and *Ushna Guna* would be “*Dravya’s Solution Diffusing Time*” (DSDT). *Shita Guna* causes resistance in the movement of shonitadi dhatu whereas on the contrary *Ushna Guna* causes movement (spreading) of *Rasadi Dhatu*. *Ushna* has *Pravartika* property. On the basis of above quotation the parameter is evolved¹⁶.

Snigdha & Ruksha

Snigdha means smoothness, *Ruksha* means roughness. *Ruksha Virya* will be assess in the form of *Shoshana* (absorption), *Sangrahana* (holding), *Pidana* (pain), *Ropana* (healing). Similarly *Snigdha Virya* will be assess in the form of *Snehana* (oleation), *Kledana* (moisturizing), *Balya* (nutritious), *Varnya* (fairness), *Brimhana* (weight gainer), *Vajeekarana*



(aphrodisiac)¹⁷. Laboratory assessment parameter for *Snigdha & Ruksha Guna* use would be “*Dravya’s Binding Water Volume Method*” (DBWV). *Snigdhatata* is the quality which causes adhesion of powder etc. it is a transient property i.e., it exists in *Jala Mahabhuta* only¹⁶.

Mridu & Tikshna

Mridu is soft and delicate which does not exert devastating effect. Opposite to *Mridu*, *Tikshna* is a property which exerts immediate, strong and painful effect and also vitiates *Pita Dosha*. The potent qualities survived during digestive and metabolic changes are called *Virya*. According to *Charaka*, *Virya* of *Dravya* is to be determined from the actions. It produces in the body right from its coming in contact with the tongue till its excretion from the body. Thus all pharmacological actions of

the *Dravyas* are explained by *Virya*. These includes in to the *Dwividha Virya* viz. *Mridu* in *Shita Virya* & *Tikshna* in *Ushna Virya* (Table 4).

The stimulant actions on tongue due to *Tikshna Virya*. The depressant action on the tongue due to *Mridu Virya*. *Mridu Virya* have *Snehana*, *Stambhana* and *Brimhana* properties. *Tikshna* have *Swedana* and *Langhana* properties. The assessment of these *Virya’s* by their action on these features of body. In one of the study, for assessing these *Virya*, eight *Dravyas* of each *Mridu* and *Tikshna Virya* was given to healthy volunteers for three days and noted their appetite, sleep, BP and Urine. Secondly, for assessing these *Virya’s*, we may take six *Dravyas* of *Mridu Virya* and Six *Dravyas* of *Tikshna Virya* and observe their effect on *Dosha* and systemic effect.

Table 4 *Mridu & Tikshna Guna Vivechana*

	Mridu	Tikshna
<i>Dosha Karma</i>	<i>Vatta Pita Shamana, Kapha Vriddhi</i>	<i>Kaphagna Vata Pita Vriddhi</i>
<i>Dhatu Karma</i>	<i>Dhatu Vriddhi, Rakta PRasadana</i>	<i>Dhatu Kshaya</i>
<i>Mala karma</i>	<i>Shristamalotpatti (increase)</i>	<i>Mala Mutra Sangrahi (decrease)</i>
<i>Anyakarma</i>	<i>Rakta Mansa Prasadhana, Susparshana</i>	<i>Sweda Janana, Avadarana, Stravana</i>
<i>Agni</i>	Increase	Decrease
<i>Mahabhoota</i>	<i>Jala + Akasha</i>	<i>Agni</i>
Action	Softness	Sharpness

DISCUSSION

Aahar Dravya works on the base of *Rasa Pradhanta* while *Aushadhi Dravya* works on the base of *Virya*. The potent qualities

survived during digestive and metabolic changes are, then called *Virya*, instead of *Guna*. What *Guna* are to *Rasa*, *Virya* are to *Vipaka*. As substances are digested and



rendered assimilable, only useful portion is assimilated and qualities of the surplus or useless portion of substances are, therefore dropped. Only the qualities of the assimilated portion of substances show their actions in the body. These potent pharmacotherapeutic qualities are termed as *Virya*. Substances undergo certain chemical changes during digestion and metabolisms. This is what is called *Vipaka*, which is ascertained from the actions it produces in the body. These actions are seen on the *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala* and *Strotasai*. The potent qualities survived during digestive and metabolic changes are, then called *Virya*, instead of *Guna*.

One of the text say that the *Virya* is to be determined from the action it produces after coming in contact with the tongue till its excretion from the body. The stimulant and the depressant actions on the tongue should be explained by *Tikshna & Mridu* qualities, in the G.I. tract by *Snigdha* and *Ruksha* qualities, on *Strotasa* by *Ushna* and *Shita* qualities, and on the *Dhatus* by *Guru & Laghu* qualities respectively. These 8 therapeutic qualities only are the 8 kinds of *Virya* as advocated by *Sushruta*¹⁸.

CONCLUSION

Bheshaja Dravya may act at the point of application i.e., *Nipata*, during

transportation in the body i.e., *Adhivasa*, by reflex effects through nerves by reaching a definite concentration in a particular tissue. *Dwividha Virya* of a *Dravya* is determined based on exothermic or endothermic reaction in the distilled water, appetite, sleep, stool, urine outputs. There is no such difference in the view of *Charaka & Sushruta* except that the former lays much stress on the site of action and specific affinity of *Dravyas* to certain *Dosha*, *Dushya* or *Strotasa*, while the latter reviews complete pharmacotherapeutic actions and pharmacokinetics of *Dravyas* in the name of *Virya*. *Dravyas* that act only at the site of application are said to have local or topical action through *Nipata* by *Rasa & Virya*. *Virya* can also be assessed by *Anumana*, by its effect on appetite, sleep and basic metabolic rate. One of the study proves that, the parameters evolved to assess *Gurvadi Guna* gave above 50% of results. The *Dravya* which do not match in reference to *Virya* description with the standards of *Ayurveda Pharmacopeia of India* might have geographical variations and the information regarding *Guna* is also varied in different *Nighantu*, which has created ambiguity. Though this theory related to *Ashtavidha Virya* would like to be evaluate more and more through other textual

references along with the significant clinical data, to explore the *Ayurveda Siddhanta*.



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