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Prahelikas in Nayopayam Kashayam, Amrutotharam Kashayam and Kalasakadi Kashayam

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ABSTRACT

Sanskrit may be deemed the lingua franca for the study of Ayurveda as almost all Ayurvedic treatises were written in Sanskrit. Sanskrit played a major role in the accumulation and propagation of knowledge in ancient India. Prahelika is a question, riddle like statement, encrypted message or description which is not easily understood first. They are esoteric devices that demand the reader to apply logic and knowledge skills to decipher them. The usage of such esoteric techniques in Ayurvedic texts is quite sporadic in nature and are not found in ancient Ayurvedic classics like Caraka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. During the Samhita kala of Ayurveda (Period of Compendia), advancements occurred in the development of Ayurvedic principles. But, during the Sangraha kala of Ayurveda (Period of Compilations), advancements occurred mostly in the development of new practices and therapeutic formulations. Texts like Sahasrayoga, Vaidyamanorama, Chikitsamanjari etc. which belong to the Sangraha kala have been popular for generations in Kerala. The authors of these Ayurvedic treatises who were proficient in the knowledge of Sanskrit Vyakarana (grammar) and Sahitya (literature) naturally incorporated the literary ideas and devices of Sanskrit which were prevalent during their period. In all probability, the authors might have used esoteric literary devices like Prahelikas to demonstrate their specialized knowledge and to challenge the reader with entertaining wordplay. It may also have been aimed at reserving the practice of Ayurvedic Medicine for a few qualified practitioners. A scrutiny of the Ayurvedic texts of both Samhita kala and Sangraha kala revealed the usage of Prahelikas in the phrasing of few Ayurvedic formulations in Kerala Ayurveda texts which were written in the Sangraha kala. This article specifically aims at analyzing the usage of prahelikas in the phrasing of popular Kerala Ayurvedic formulations like Nayopayam kashayam, Amrutotharam kashayam and Kalasakadi kashayam. The quantity of drugs and their ratios to be taken for the preparation of these formulations are



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not given directly in these verses. The authors of the verses of these formulations have used Prahelikas in their phrasing as literary devices which enhances the learning processes to pique the scientific curiosity of the reader, challenge them and create interest in them.

KEYWORDS

Sanskrit; Prahelika; Nayopayam; Amrutotharam; Kalasakadi; Kashayam



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INTRODUCTION

Sanskrit and Prahelika in Ayurveda

Sanskrit played a major role in the accumulation and propagation of knowledge in ancient India. *Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Artha sastra, Itihasas, Puranas, Darshanas*, Classical texts of ancient Hindu medicine etc. were all written in *Sanskrit*. *Sanskrit* may be deemed the lingua franca for the study of Ayurveda as almost all Ayurvedic treatises were written in *Sanskrit*. The texts, basic principles and terminology of Ayurveda are all firmly rooted in *Sanskrit*. Proficiency in *Sanskrit* is almost a pre requisite for an accurate understanding of the principles, practices and formulations of Ayurveda.

The texts written in Ayurveda may be classified into those written during the *Samhita kala* of Ayurveda and those written during the *Sangraha kala*. The *Samhita kala* (Period of Compendia) of Ayurveda was the Period in which Ayurvedic classical texts like *Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha, Ashtanga Hrudaya* etc. were written. This period was characterized by great advancements in the development and evolution of the fundamental concepts and theories of Ayurveda. This period was from 1000 BCE to 500 CE.¹ *Samhita kala* was followed by *Sangraha kala* (Period of Compilations)

which started in the 5th Century CE and still continues.² During the *Sangraha kala* of Ayurveda (Period of Compilations), there were no new significant additions in the form of development of the original Ayurvedic concepts and theories. Advancements occurred in the form of development of new therapeutic preparations and formulations. It saw the advent of Compilation texts like *Sahasrayoga, Vaidyamanorama, Yogamruta, Vaidyamanjari* and *Chikitsamanjari*. They are collections of formulations that have been popular for centuries in Kerala.

Ancient Ayurveda Vaidyas were a part of the knowledge-oriented classes in society and were proficient in Sanskrit. They also had mastery over the Sciences and literary genres which were extant during their time. Hence Ayurvedic treatises have been greatly influenced by the authoritative sources like *Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Artha sastra, Itihasas, Puranas, Darshanas* etc. A scrutiny of the Ayurvedic texts of both *Samhita kala* and *Sangraha kala* revealed that Ayurveda authors of the *Samhitakala* have utilized *Upamas* (similes) in the texts while Ayurveda authors of the *Sangraha kala* utilized both *Upamas* and *Prahelikas* in the texts. *Prahelikas* (riddle like statements or encrypted messages) are literary devices



used by skillful authors to demonstrate their wisdom and to challenge the reader with entertaining wordplay. *Prahelikas* are found mainly in the context of pharmaceutical formulations. Such encryptions may also have been aimed at reserving the practice of Ayurvedic Medicine for a few qualified practitioners and keeping the non-qualified away from the practice of Ayurveda. A scrutiny of the Ayurvedic texts of both *Samhita kala* and *Sangraha kala* revealed the usage of *Prahelikas* in the phrasing of few Ayurvedic formulations like *Nayopayam kashayam*, *Amrutotharam kashayam* and *Kalacakadi kashayam* in Kerala Ayurveda texts which were written in the *Sangraha kala*. This article specifically aims at analyzing the usage of *prahelikas* in the phrasing of popular Kerala Ayurvedic formulations like *Nayopayam kashayam*, *Amrutotharam kashayam* and *Kalacakadi kashayam*.

Prahelika

As per Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, *Prahelika* is an enigma, riddle, puzzling question.³ According to Oxford dictionary, Riddle is - A question or statement intentionally phrased so as to require ingenuity in ascertaining its answer or meaning.⁴ They are used by skillful authors to demonstrate their wisdom and to challenge and amuse the reader with

entertaining wordplay. *Prahelika* is thus a question, riddle like statement, encrypted message or description which is not easily understood first. They are esoteric devices that demand the reader to apply logic and knowledge skills to solve them. *Sanskrit prahelikas* are quite interesting in that they contain coded information which are firmly rooted in Indian sciences and literature.

Prahelika in Nayopayam kashayam, Amrutotharam kashayam and Kalacakadi kashayam

Ayurvedic authors of the *Sangraha kala* have utilized *prahelikas* in the phrasing of *yogas* like *Nayopayam kashayam*, *Amrutotharam kashayam* and *Kalacakadi kashayam*. These *kashayas* are widely prescribed by Ayurvedic practitioners. But most practitioners don't fully realise the import of the riddles in these verses and how to decipher them. The ingredients and their ratios to be taken for the preparation of these *yogas* are not given directly in the descriptive verses of these formulations. Instead the authors of these verses have used *Prahelikas* as literary devices which enhances the learning processes to pique the scientific curiosity of the reader, challenge them and create interest in them.

Nayopayam kashayam

Nayopayamanamitairbalajeerakanagarai:



*Kwatha: peeta: pramathnati
sameeranabalam balal*

(*Vaidyamanorama*)⁵

Translation –

As per *Vaidya Manorama*, *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*)⁶, *Jeeraka* (*Cuminum cyminum*)⁷ and *Nagara* (*Zingiber officinale*)⁸ are to be taken in quantities corresponding to *Naya*, *Upaya* and *Ayana* respectively. The prepared *Kashaya* is beneficial in *Vataja rogas*.

The decoding of the terms *Naya*, *Upaya* and *Ayana* is to be done to determine the quantities of the ingredients to be taken for preparing the *Kashaya*.

Naya - According to Monier-Williams, *Naya* means conduct, good management, polity, civil and military government⁹. According to Vachaspatyam, *Nayavisarada* is the person having the *Shaadgunya* (6 qualities) told in *Neeti sastra*¹⁰. The 7th *Adhikarana* of *Kautilya's Arthashastra* deals with *Shaadgunya* ie. "Six-Fold Policy". *Kautilya* enumerates the 6-fold foreign policy to be followed by a State while dealing with other Kingdoms. They are *sandhi* (peace), *vigraha* (war), *ásana* (observance of neutrality), *yána* (marching), *samsraya* (alliance), and *dwaidhibhava* (making peace with one and waging war with another) are the six forms of state-policy¹¹.

Thus, in this verse *Naya* stands for *Shaadgunya* and implies the usage of 6 parts of *Bala* in the preparation of the *Kashaya*.

Upaya - *Upaya* means coming near, approach, arrival. It also means – that by which one reaches one's aim, a means or expedient, way, stratagem. *Upaya* also stands for a means of success against an enemy¹². *Amarasinha*, the author of *Amarakosa* has described the *Upaya Chatushtaya* (4 types of *Upaya*) namely – *Sama*, *Dana*, *Danda*, *Bheda*¹³.

The 13th *Adhyaya* of 1st *Adhikarana* of *Kautilya's Arthashastra* has explained 4 stratagems to be used by the King against those in his own state who are discontented – *Sama* (conciliation), *Dana* (by gifts), *Bheda* (by sowing dissension), *Danda* (by punishment)¹⁴.

Thus, *Upaya* stands for *Upaya Chatushtaya* and implies the usage of 4 parts of *Jeeraka* in the preparation of the *Kashaya*.

Ayana- *Ayana* means a path, circulation. It means sun's road north or south of the equator, the half year¹⁵. There are 2 *ayanas* – *Uttarayana* and *Dakshinayana*. *Uttarayana* is the period when sun is seen traversing to the north of equator¹⁶. *Dakshinayana* is the period when sun is seen traversing to the south of equator¹⁷.



Thus, *Ayana* stands for the 2 *Ayanas* and implies the usage of 2 parts of *Nagara* in the preparation of the *Kashaya*.

The decoding of the *prahelika* revealed that 6 parts of *Bala*, 4 parts of *Jeeraka* and 2 parts of *Nagara* are to be taken for the preparation of *Nayopayam Kashayam*.

Amrutotharam kashayam

Nagaramritahareetaki kramat

Nagahastanayananghribhagasa:

Sadhusiddhamudakam sasarkaram

Nasayatyakhiladoshajam *jwaram*
(*Sahasrayogam*)¹⁸

Translation –

As per *Sahasrayogam*, *Nagara* (*Zingiber officinale*)¹⁹, *Amrita* (*Tinospora cordifolia*)²⁰ and *Hareetaki* (*Terminalia chebula*)²¹ are to be taken in quantities corresponding to *anghri bhaga* of *Naga*, *Nagahasta* and *Naganayana*. The prepared *Kashaya* called *Amrutotharam kashayam* or *Nagaradi kashayam* when taken with *sarkara* is beneficial in all kinds of fever.

The decoding of the terms *Amrita*, *anghri bhaga*, *Naga*, *Nagahasta* and *Naganayana* is to be done to determine the quantities of the ingredients to be taken for preparing the *Kashaya*.

Amrita stands for *Pathya* (*Hareetaki*), *Amalaki* and *Guduchi*²². *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*) is indicated in *Jwara*²³. Thus, in this context the Malayalam translators of the text

Sahasrayoga, K V Krishnan and S Gopala Pillai have taken *Amrita* as *Guduchi*¹⁸.

Anghri stands for *Pada*²⁴. *Anghri* means a foot or foot of a seat²⁵. *Anghri bhaga* is thus used metaphorically to mean *Pada bhaga* or ¼ quantity.

The word *Naga* has varied connotations including - relating to serpents, snaky, serpentine and belonging to an elephant, elephantine etc²⁶. In this context, since *Nagahasta* (forelimbs of naga) is also mentioned, the connotation of ‘*gaja* or elephant’ is to be taken for the term ‘*Naga*’ as serpents are limbless. There is an old Hindu belief about *Ashtadiggajas* (*Ashta + dik + gaja*) i.e elephants in eight directions who support the earth and bear the burden of the earth in eight directions. *Amarasinha*, the author of *Amarakosa* has described the names of these eight elephants -*Airavata*, *Pundarika*, *Vamana*, *Kumuda*, *Anjana*, *Pushpadanta*, *Sarvabhouma*, *Supratika*²⁷. The term ‘*Naga*’ here stands for the *Ashtadiggajas* and by extension denominates 8 parts. *Anghri bhaga* of *Naga* means ¼ of 8 parts i.e. 2 parts. Thus, this implies the usage of 2 parts of *Nagara* in the preparation of *Amrutotharam kashayam*.

Hasta means the hand²⁸. The word ‘*Nagahasta*’ thus literally means ‘hands of the elephants’. But here, the author has quite amusingly included the trunk of the



elephant also as a hand. The term 'Nagahasta' here stands for the trunk along with forelimbs of the *Ashtadiggajas* and by extension denominates $8 \times 3 = 24$ parts. *Anghri bhaga* of *Nagahasta* corresponds to $\frac{1}{4}$ of 24 parts i.e. 6 parts. Thus, this implies the usage of 6 parts of Amruta in the preparation of *Amrutotharam kashayam*.

Nayana means the eyes²⁹. The word 'Naganayana' thus literally means 'eyes of the elephants'. In the context of this verse, the term 'Naganayana' here stands for the eyes of the *Ashtadiggajas* and by extension denominates $8 \times 2 = 16$ parts. *Anghri bhaga* of *Naganayana* corresponds to $\frac{1}{4}$ of 16 parts i.e. 4 parts. Thus, this implies the usage of 4 parts of *Hareetaki* in the preparation of *Amrutotharam kashayam*.

The decoding of the *prahelika* revealed that 2 parts of *Nagara*, 6 parts of *Amruta* and 4 parts of *Hareetaki* are to be taken for the preparation of *Amrutotharam kashayam*.

Kalasaakadi kashayam

Kalasaakavijayamahoushadhai:

Sadhitam rasayugakshibhagasa:

Vaarivaarayati sula trid bhraman

Vegineemapi vishoochikam kshanat
(*Chikitsamanjari, vishoochika chikitsa*)³⁰

Translation -

As per *Chikitsa Manjari*, *Kalasaaka* (*Kaidarya* - *Murraya koenigi*)³¹, *Vijaya* (*Hareetaki* - *Terminalia chebula*)³² and *Mahoushadhi* (*Nagara* - *Zingiber*

officinale)³³ are to be taken in quantities corresponding to *Rasa*, *Yuga* and *Akshi* respectively. The prepared *Kashaya* is indicated in the management of *Vishoochika*.

The decoding of the terms *Vijaya*, *Rasa*, *Yuga* and *Akshi* is to be done to determine the quantities of the ingredients to be taken for preparing the *Kashaya*.

Vijaya stands for *Hareetaki*, *Vacha*, *Jayanti*, *Sephalika*, *Manjishta*, *Shamibheda*, *Agnimantha* and *Bhang*³⁴. *Hareetaki* is having *Dipana*, *Pachana*, *Vatanulomana karma* which is useful in the management of *Vishoochika*. Thus, in this context, D Sreeman Namboothiri, the Malayalam translator of *Chikitsa Manjari* has taken *Vijaya* as *Hareetaki*³⁵.

Rasa refers to - taste, flavor (as the principal quality of fluids, of which there are 6 original kinds, viz. *madhura*, sweet; *amla*, sour; *lavana*, salt; *katuka*, pungent; *tikta*, bitter and *kashaya*, astringent)³⁶. Thus, this implies the usage of 6 parts of *Kalasaaka* (*Kaidarya*), in the preparation of *Kalasaakadi kashayam*.

Yuga refers to - an age of the world, long mundane period of years of which there are four viz. 1. *Krita* or *Satya*, 2. *Treta*, 3. *Dvapara*, 4. *Kali*³⁷. Thus, this implies the usage of 4 parts of *Vijaya* (*Hareetaki*) in the preparation of *Kalasaakadi kashayam*.



Akshi refers to – the eye; the number two³⁸. Thus, this implies the usage of 2 parts of *Mahoushadhi (Nagara)* in the preparation of *Kalasadadi kashayam*.

The decoding of the *prahelika* revealed that 6 parts of *Kalasadaka (Kaidarya)*, 4 parts of *Vijaya (Hareetaki)* and 2 parts of *Mahoushadhi (Nagara)* are to be taken for the preparation of *Kalasadadi kashayam*.

CONCLUSION

Sanskrit may be deemed the lingua franca for the study of Ayurveda as almost all Ayurvedic treatises were written in *Sanskrit*. *Sanskrit* remains the common language of Ayurveda vaidyas for the study and understanding of Ayurveda. The authors of the Ayurvedic treatises were proficient in the knowledge of *Sanskrit Vyakarana* and literature and they naturally incorporated the cultural and literary ideas which were prevalent during their period. *Praheleka* may be defined as - a question, riddle like statement or encrypted message. They are esoteric devices which were used by skillful authors to demonstrate their specialized knowledge and to challenge and amuse the reader with entertaining wordplay. *Prahelekas* may have been used by the ancient Ayurvedic authors for coding and interpreting the traditional knowledge of Ayurveda. It may also have been aimed at reserving the practice of Ayurvedic

Medicine for a few qualified practitioners who were proficient in *Sanskrit*. Ayurvedic authors of the *Sangraha kala* have utilized *prahelikas* in the phrasing of Ayurvedic formulations like *Nayopayam kashayam*, *Amrutotharam kashayam* and *Kalasadadi kashayam*. The ingredients and their ratios to be taken for the preparation of these formulations are not given directly in the verses. Only a proper and thorough scrutiny and decoding of the *prahelikas* firmly rooted in *Sanskrit* literature, will enable the reader to decipher the ingredients and their quantities required to prepare the *Kashayas*.



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