VÄGBHATA ON MEDICINAL USES OF GEMS

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The paper contains the observations made in the Sanskrit text of Rasaratnasamuccaya by Vāgbhaṭā on the medicinal uses of gems.

INTRODUCTION

There exist many texts in Sanskrit, well known ancient Indian Medical Treatises, one amongst which is the text of Rasaratnasamuccaya by Vāgbhaṭācārya. A commentary in Hindi on the original text has been presented by Pandit Dharmanandasharma.¹ The text deals with various aspects of Āyurveda, the Vedic science of Medicines. The medicinal aspects of gems have been enumerated by Vāgbhaṭā in the fourth chapter of the text under the title Ratnāni. The information, interesting as it is, is of immense importance, specially from the point of view of the recent discovery of the curative properties of mineral lizardite, a variety of serpentine which is used orally with great advantage, with least processing, by the patients affected by the crippling disease of fluorosis.² In Sanskrit literature, of many gems known, only the most important nine gems are given recognition, perhaps due to their medicinal qualities which are simply amazing and exceptional. The gems are mentioned below with their modern nomenclature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit name</th>
<th>Modern name</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vajra</td>
<td>diamond</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māṇikya</td>
<td>ruby</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nilā</td>
<td>sapphire</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puṣparāga</td>
<td>topaz</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marakata</td>
<td>aquamarine</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaidurya</td>
<td>cat's eye</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gomeda</td>
<td>zircon</td>
<td>mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pravāla</td>
<td>coral</td>
<td>shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muktā</td>
<td>pearl</td>
<td>shell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Present address: Geological Survey of India, Karnataka Circle(s) 541, 10th Main, 38th Cross, V Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 500041.
Of the above gems, \textit{vajra}, \textit{māṇikya}, \textit{nilā}, \textit{marakata} and \textit{pusparāga} are considered to be superior gems. Most of the mineral gems are precious and semi-precious minerals and numerous variations occur in nature, a descriptive nomenclature of which has been briefly enumerated elsewhere. Here, the medicinal properties of the gems will be enumerated as given by Vāgbhaṭa in his text \textit{Rasaratnasamuccaya}.

\textit{Vajra}

\begin{quote}
Āyuṣpradaṁ jhaṭṭi sadguṇadām ca vrṣyam
Doṣatraya praśamanānām sakalāmayagham l
Sutendraṁbhadhasadguṇakṛtpradīparan
Mṛtyuñjayaṁ tadamṛtopamameva vajram l32 ll
\end{quote}

The ashes of \textit{vajra} i.e. diamond, impart longevity when administered in the prescribed manner. It is stated to give strength to body and maintain balance of (\textit{Tridosha-vāta, pitta} and \textit{kapha}) bile, wind and phlegm in the human system, removing at the same time all other diseases and presenting a soothing effect of ambrosia. Diamond ashes are mentioned, on administration, to cure even impotency and cause increase of semen. They also cure weakness of heart and effectively remove lung diseases. The diamond ashes have the general effect of intensifying the curative powers of all other medicines when administered along with them.

\textit{Māṇikya}

\begin{quote}
Māuikyam dīpanāṁ vrṣyam kaphavātakṣayārtinuṁ l12 ll
\end{quote}

The ashes of \textit{māṇikya}, i.e. ruby variety of corundum, when administered, give increased digestion, increase in semen, cure diseases of wind and phlegm and also \textit{kṣaya} (T.B.).

\textit{Marakata or Tārksaya}

\begin{quote}
Jvaracchardi viṣaśvāsa sanmipātāgnimāndyanuṁ l
Durnāma pāṇḍu śopaghnam tārksyamojovivardhanam l22 ll
\end{quote}

The ashes of \textit{marakata} or \textit{tārksaya}, i.e. aquamarine, on administration, cure severe fever, vomiting, poisoning, lung diseases, indigestion, anaemia etc. and improve the strength of the body.

\textit{Puṣparāga}

\begin{quote}
Puṣparāgoṁ viṣacchardil kaphavātāgnimāndyanuṁ
Dāhakusitāśrasamanām dīpanāṁ pūcanāṁ laghu l25 ll
\end{quote}

The ashes of \textit{puṣparāga}, i.e. topaz, on proper administration, cure poisoning vomiting, diseases of wind, phlegm and indigestion. They are also stated to cure dryness of body, skin diseases and impurity of blood.
Nilā
Śvāsakāraharam vṛṣyaṃ tridosaghnāṃ sudīpanam
Viṣamaajvaradūnāma pāpaghnaṃ nilamiritam ll 53 ll

The ashes of nilā or īndrānilamāni, i.e. sapphire (variety of corundum), on administration, cure diseases of breath, cause increase in semen, remove imbalance due to variation in bile, wind and phlegm, increase digestion and cure typhoid.

Gomedā
Gomedam kaphapittaghnāṃ kṣayapāṇḍukṣayam karam l
Dīpanaṃ pācanaṃ rucyaṃ tvacyaṃ buddhiprabodhanam ll 56 ll

The ashes of gomeda, i.e. topaz, on administration, remove diseases of bile and phlegm, cure, kṣaya i.e. T.B. and anaemia, increase digestion, increase a sense for taste, remove skin diseases and increase intelligence.

Vaidurya
Vaiduryaṃ raktapittaghnāṃ prajñāyurvalabarthehanam ll
Pītavaapradhānarogaghnaṃ dīpanaṃ malaṅcanaṃ ll 59 ll

The ashes of vaidurya, i.e. cat’s eye, on proper administration, cure the bile impurities of blood, increase intelligence and longevity. They induce digestion and help cleaning the system.

Muktā
Muktāphalaṃ laghu himaṃ madhuraṃ ca kānti
Dṛṣṭyagni puṣṭikaranāṃ viṣahārī bhedi l
Vīryapradān jalanīrdherjanīta ca śuktiḥ
Dipta ca pāktirujam āśu haregavāyaṃ ll 14 ll

Administration of the ashes of muktā (pearl) increase the brightness of the body, strength and capacity of digestion. They are also stated to cure poisonous effect. The ashes of pearl help balancing the tridosas (bile, wind and phlegm) in the system and increase production of semen. The ashes of pearls, specially the natural ones from the oceans, are endowed with extra-ordinary qualities of curing severe cough, body dryness, diseases of heart, diseases of urine and semen etc. and impart strength to bone. They also help in curing kṣaya or T.B.
Pravāla

Kṣayapittāstrakāsaghaṁ dipanōṁ pūcanam laghu ī
Viśabhūtādi samanam vidrumaṁ netaroganūṁ ī 19 ī

Administration of the ashes of pravāla, i.e. coral cure kṣaya, i.e. T.B., the bile impurities of blood, cough, excess of body heat and indigestion. They are also used for curing eye diseases.

The procedures of selection, preparation of ashes and administration have been elaborated in the text and the results of the experiments have not so far been questioned. However, they need be carefully studied and critically examined specially from modern point of view.

It is now known that lizardite, a variety of serpentine mineral, of course relatively rare in its distribution, is a very effective and the only remedy for the crippling disease of fluorosis (proceedings of Fluorosis Symposium, 1977). In view of such curative powers of natural mineral substances, it is necessary to justify or otherwise the claims made in these ancient sanskrit texts.

In his Preface to the text of Rasaratnasamuccaya, Shiv Sharma mentions an instance when the administration of ‘vatsanābh’ purified by āyurvedic and modern methods was injected separately to persons and found the cardiogram of the person injected with the one purified by modern methods showing poisonous effects, thus proving the superiority of the āyurvedic methods. According to Shiv Sharma, the āyurvedic doctor purifies ‘vatsanābh’ by boiling it in the urine of cow which is impure in the modern chemical sense. From this it becomes clear that procedures peculiar to āyurveda, though look to be crude and impure from the modern point of view, is not so when looked from the totality of the systems which is the principle of āyurveda. For that matter, the administration of lizardite mentioned above to remove fluorosis may not be ‘pure’ chemically in the modern sense, but its effect is salutary. The actual way it clears the system from the effect of fluorosis is not at all known and a compound of artificial lizardite, if administered, may not give the same result also. Lizardite appears to work in its natural status effectively, similar to many āyurvedic medicines. The concept of purity of the āyurvedic medicines is different from that of chemically pure substances of the modern scientists.

The use of gems and their products, in medical practice, needs to be studied scientifically. Controlled studies carried over longer duration and on a large number of patients of a particular disease, need to be done and analysed properly to give a proper assessment of their value.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCES

