

## DRAVYAGUNA IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW OF THE PHARMACODYNAMIC ROLE OF GUNA AND RASA

**Dr. Mahendra Chintaman Ther**

(MD Dravyagunavigyan)

Assistant Professor (Dravyagunavigyan)

Bhojraj Bhondekar Ayurved Mahavidyalaya Sirsi, Bhandara (Maharashtra)

### Abstract

The science of *Dravyaguna Vigyana* in Ayurveda forms the foundational framework for understanding the pharmacological and therapeutic attributes of substances. It encompasses a comprehensive study of *Nama Jnana* (nomenclature), *Guna Jnana* (qualities), *Rupa Jnana* (form), and *Yukti Jnana* (rational application), focusing on both medicinal and dietary substances. *Dravya* refers not only to a physical substance but also to its inherent properties that influence its pharmacodynamic and therapeutic behavior. Central to this doctrine are five key principles: *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (qualities), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhava* (specific action), which together determine the drug's action on the body. Among these, *Guna* and *Rasa* play a vital role in influencing biological responses and guiding the selection of appropriate therapeutic agents. *Rasa*, derived from the Panchamahabhutas (five great elements), provides immediate sensory insight into a substance's action, while *Guna*, the qualitative attributes, govern its functional role in maintaining or restoring homeostasis. This review attempts to consolidate classical and contemporary Ayurvedic perspectives on *Guna* and *Rasa*, emphasizing their clinical significance in diagnosis, drug selection, and treatment planning. By revisiting ancient wisdom with modern interpretive insight, the article highlights how the understanding of these attributes can enhance the precision of Ayurvedic therapeutics. The integration of *Dravyaguna* principles with clinical application underscores the unique and holistic approach of Ayurveda in ensuring health and treating disease.

**Keywords :** Gunas, Rasa, Panchamahabhutas , Dravyaguna ,Karma.

### Introduction

*Dravyaguna*, as described in Ayurveda, refers to the inherent properties of substances that are responsible for their specific actions. The branch of *Dravyaguna Vigyan* encompasses comprehensive knowledge about the nomenclature (*Nama Jnana*), nature (*Rupa Jnana*), properties (*Guna*), and therapeutic actions (*Karma*) of various substances. This discipline forms the scientific foundation for understanding the pharmacological and therapeutic effects of Ayurvedic drugs. Furthermore, the biological characteristics of dietary elements (*Ahara*) and other entities such as toxins (*Visha*) can also be interpreted through the lens of *Dravyaguna*.

The pharmacological behaviour of substances in Ayurveda is deeply influenced by their *Panchabhutic* constitution, which is composed of the five fundamental elements *Akasha* (ether), *Vayu* (air), *Agni* (fire), *Jala* (water), and *Prithvi* (earth).<sup>1</sup> The variation in the predominance of these *Mahabhutas* imparts distinct properties (*Guna*) to each substance, which in turn determines their therapeutic applications. Accordingly, different drugs are employed for different purposes based on their unique elemental compositions.<sup>2</sup>

The *Guna* of a substance plays a pivotal role in modulating the *Tridosha Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—and thereby contributes to the restoration and maintenance of health. Since each substance exhibits specific pharmacological actions depending on its inherent properties, understanding the mode of action requires a comprehensive knowledge of these characteristics.

In Ayurveda, the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic properties of a substance (*Dravya*) are primarily defined by five key attributes: *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Vipaka*, *Virya*, and *Prabhava*.<sup>3</sup>

- **Guna:** Refers to the inherent qualities or properties that determine the behaviour of a substance.

1

2

3

- **Rasa:** Denotes the taste perceived by the tongue, which is also indicative of certain pharmacological actions.
- **Vipaka:** Represents the final metabolic transformation that a substance undergoes post-digestion, influencing long-term effects on the doshas.
- **Virya:** Indicates the potency or the active principle responsible for the immediate therapeutic action.
- **Prabhava:** Refers to the specific or unique effect of a substance that cannot be explained by the above attributes alone.

Together, these parameters provide a holistic framework for understanding the complex interactions between medicinal substances and the human body in Ayurvedic pharmacology.

All the characteristics of substances or drugs (*Dravya*) namely *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya*, *Vipaka*, and *Prabhava* induce specific biological actions in the human body and contribute to therapeutic outcomes in various health conditions. These attributes collectively interact with and influence the *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, *Agni*, and *Srotas*, thereby initiating physiological responses that culminate in pharmacological actions and clinical benefits.<sup>4</sup>

The therapeutic efficacy of a substance in Ayurveda is largely determined by its ability to restore balance in *Doshas*, replenish *Dhatus*, regulate *Agni*, and clear obstructions in *Srotas*. Thus, the science of *Dravyaguna* forms the basis for understanding the mode of action and clinical applications of Ayurvedic drugs, particularly in conditions arising from doshic imbalances, tissue depletion, digestive disturbances, and channel blockages.<sup>5</sup>

The qualities of *Dravya* play a fundamental role in restoring and maintaining the balance of biological entities within the body. Ayurvedic drugs, as forms of *Dravya*, help pacify imbalances in *Dosha*, *Agni*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* through the synergistic influence of their *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya*, and *Vipaka*.<sup>6</sup> These properties not only contribute to therapeutic effects but may also cause adverse outcomes in cases of toxicity, overdose, or the improper use of incompatible substances (*Viruddha Ahara*).

Hence, both the beneficial and harmful effects of a substance can be attributed to its inherent properties collectively known as *Dravyaguna*. Among these, *Guna* (inherent qualities) and *Rasa* (taste) are particularly significant, as they have a profound impact on the pharmacological action of a substance. In this context, the present article places special emphasis on *Rasa* and *Guna* to explore their relevance in Ayurvedic pharmacology.

### Concept of Rasa:<sup>7</sup>

*Rasa* refers to the taste perceived by the tongue and is one of the primary attributes of a *Dravya*. Ayurvedic texts classify *Rasa* into six categories: *Madhura* (sweet), *Lavana* (salty), *Amla* (sour), *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), and *Kashaya* (astringent). Each *Rasa* possesses distinct physicochemical properties that contribute to specific biological actions or pharmacological effects.

The influence of *Rasa* extends directly to the *Doshas*, either pacifying or aggravating them, thereby playing a vital role in maintaining or disturbing physiological balance. This relationship is illustrated in Table 1, which depicts the specific effects of different *Rasas* on *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*.

**Table 1: Effect of Different Rasa on Dosha Balance<sup>8</sup>**

Rasa (Taste)	Effect on Dosha
Madhura (Sweet)	Pacifies Pitta Dosha
Amla (Sour)	Increases Pitta Dosha
Lavana (Salty)	Pacifies Vata Dosha
Katu (Pungent)	Increases Vata Dosha

4  
5  
6  
7  
8

Tikta (Bitter)	Pacifies Kapha Dosha
Kashaya (Astringent)	Pacifies Kapha Dosha

### Pharmacological Significance of Rasa in Ayurvedic Therapeutics:

Each *Rasa* (taste) in Ayurveda not only imparts sensory perception but also plays a significant role in the pharmacological action of drugs through its effects on *Doshas* and physiological systems. The therapeutic potential of each *Rasa* is summarized below:

- **Madhura Rasa (Sweet Taste):** *Madhura Rasa* enhances complexion, promotes longevity, and pacifies *Pitta Dosha*. It is particularly beneficial in managing disorders arising from *Pitta* aggravation.
- **Amla Rasa (Sour Taste):** *Amla Rasa* is useful in conditions like anorexia and loss of appetite. It improves digestion, relieves constipation, and supports the circulatory system. It possesses *Dipana* (appetizer) and *Pachana* (digestive) properties, and acts as a natural carminative.
- **Katu Rasa (Pungent Taste):** *Katu Rasa* is effective in pacifying *Vata Dosha*. It stimulates digestion, aids in metabolic detoxification, and clears bodily channels, making it beneficial in the management of *Aam* and toxin accumulation.
- **Kashaya Rasa (Astringent Taste):** *Kashaya Rasa* is particularly useful in *Pittaja* disorders. It exhibits *Stambhana* (astringent and absorptive) effects, prevents bleeding and diarrhea, and also contributes to skin complexion enhancement through its drying and contracting properties.
- **Tikta Rasa (Bitter Taste):** *Tikta Rasa* is valuable in treating digestive disturbances, infections, excessive thirst, nausea, and vomiting. It is especially effective in conditions related to *Kapha Dosha*, due to its cooling, drying, and detoxifying effects.
- **Lavana Rasa (Salty Taste):** *Lavana Rasa* acts as a carminative and appetizer, improves digestive strength, and helps maintain electrolyte and salt balance. It is beneficial in *Vatika* disorders and exhibits a *Vishyandi* (unctuous and spreading) nature, which facilitates tissue nourishment.

### Concept of Guna and Its Influence on Doshas:<sup>9</sup>

In Ayurvedic pharmacology, *Guna* refers to the inherent quality or property of a substance (*Dravya*). These qualities are crucial determinants of the physiological and therapeutic behavior of a drug. Classical Ayurvedic texts enumerate several *Guna*, among which the most prominent include: *Guru* (heavy), *Laghu* (light), *Ushna* (hot), *Shita* (cold), *Ruksha* (dry), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Tikshna* (sharp), *Kathina* (hard), *Mridu* (soft), *Vishada* (clear), and *Sukshma* (subtle).

These *Guna* exert distinct biological effects, both individually and synergistically, and play a vital role in balancing or disturbing the *Tridoshas* *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. Each *Dosha* has an affinity for certain *Guna*, which either pacify or aggravate it depending on the nature of interaction:

- **Kapha Dosha** is influenced by *Guru* (heavy), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Shita* (cold), *Sandra* (dense), *Slakshana* (smooth), and *Manda* (dull) *Guna*. These qualities tend to increase *Kapha* when present in excess.
- **Vata Dosha** is associated with *Tikshna* (sharp), *Ushna* (hot), *Sukshma* (subtle), and *Ruksha* (dry) *Guna*, which can aggravate *Vata* when dominant.
- **Pitta Dosha** corresponds with *Laghu* (light), *Shita* (cold), *Tikshna* (sharp), and *Ushna* (hot) *Guna*. These qualities modulate *Pitta* depending on their intensity and combinations.

### Biological Actions of Key Guna and Their Therapeutic Significance<sup>10</sup>

In Ayurvedic pharmacology, the *Guna* (inherent qualities) of a *Dravya* play a crucial role in determining its biological effects and therapeutic applications. Each *Guna* influences bodily functions and contributes to either the

<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup>

maintenance of health or the treatment of disease, depending on the individual's doshic balance and pathological state. The following highlights the biological actions of some important *Guna*:

- **Guru Guna (Heavy Quality):** *Guru Guna* exerts a *Bruhana* (nourishing) effect, promoting weight gain and tissue development. It is beneficial in conditions of emaciation and is known to increase *Kapha Dosha*.
- **Laghu Guna (Light Quality):** *Laghu Guna* imparts lightness and facilitates the circulation of substances through the *Srotas* (body channels). It helps to relieve blockages and enhances physiological mobility and distribution.
- **Shita Guna (Cold Quality):** *Shita Guna* possesses *Sthambhana* (astringent and stabilizing) properties. It is useful in managing fever, calming inflammatory symptoms, particularly in dermatological conditions, and inducing a cooling, calming effect on the body and mind.
- **Ushna Guna (Hot Quality):** *Ushna Guna* has *Swedana* (sudation-inducing) properties and is effective in alleviating symptoms of cough and cold. It stimulates *Pitta Dosha* and enhances *Agni* (digestive fire), thereby improving metabolic functions.
- **Snigdha Guna (Unctuous Quality):** *Snigdha Guna* is responsible for *Snehana* (oleation). Substances with this quality counteract dryness, pacify skin disorders, and help retain moisture within bodily tissues, making them useful in *Vata* disorders.
- **Ruksha Guna (Dry Quality):** *Ruksha Guna* induces dryness and opposes the unctuous nature of *Kapha* and *Snigdha*. It is used therapeutically in conditions of excess oiliness or moisture in the body.
- **Tikshna Guna (Sharp Quality):** *Tikshna Guna* exerts a *Shodhana* (cleansing and detoxifying) action. It enhances digestion, treats anorexia, sharpens metabolic processes, removes sluggishness, and aids in toxin elimination.
- **Picchila Guna (Slimy/Mucoid Quality):** *Picchila Guna* provides a *Lepana* (coating and protective) effect, useful in tissue protection and mucosal stability.
- **Sukshma Guna (Subtle Quality):** *Sukshma Guna* facilitates *Vivarana* (penetration into microchannels), enhancing the subtle action of drugs, especially in deep-seated or minute structures.

These *Guna*, whether acting independently or in combination, form the basis for selecting Ayurvedic drugs in the management of diseases. The careful assessment of the dominant *Guna* in a substance allows for the formulation of personalized and targeted therapies based on the nature and severity of the pathological condition.

## Conclusion

*Dravyaguna Vigyana*, a fundamental branch of Ayurveda, provides a scientific framework for understanding the properties and actions of various substances including drugs (*Aushadha*), food (*Ahara*), and other natural materials. The therapeutic efficacy of these substances is attributed to their inherent characteristics: *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (quality), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), *Virya* (potency), and *Prabhava* (specific action). When administered, these attributes collectively influence the biological system and contribute to specific pharmacological responses.

The *Guna* such as *Guru*, *Laghu*, *Ushna*, *Shita*, *Ruksha*, *Snigdha*, *Tikshna*, *Kathina*, *Mridu*, *Vishada*, and *Sukshma* play diverse roles in modulating physiological functions and treating pathological conditions. Likewise, the six *Rasa* *Madhura*, *Lavana*, *Amla*, *Katu*, *Tikta*, and *Kashaya* directly affect the *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, *Agni*, and *Srotas*, thereby restoring balance and promoting health.

A comprehensive understanding of these attributes allows Ayurvedic practitioners to select appropriate therapies tailored to the individual's constitution and disease state. Thus, the science of *Dravyaguna* remains an indispensable tool in the rational application of Ayurvedic therapeutics.

## References

1. Acharya J.T., Charaka Samhita of Agnivesha (with 'Ayurveda Dipika' commentary by Cakrapanidatta), Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi, 2000.

2. Sharma S.P. Ashtanga Samgraha of Vrddha Vagbhata, (with Sasilekha' commentary by Indu), Chowkhanmba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 2006.
3. Paradakar H.S., Astanga hrdayam of Vagbhats, (with commentaries 'Sarvangasundard' of Arunadatta & 'Ayurvedarasayana' of Hemadri), Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, 2005.
4. Charaka Samhita Vol. III Edited and Published by Dr. Ram Karan Sarma and Vaidya Bhagwan Dash, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, Reprint 2008. Cikitsasatha, Rasayanaadhyaya 3 pada, Sloka no.36- 40, Page no.47.
5. Charaka Samhita Vol. I Edited and Published by Dr. Ram Karan Sarma and Vaidya Bhagwan Dash, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, Reprint 2008. Sutrastana, Annapanavidhi, Sloka no.326, Page no.558.
6. Shailaja Srivastava, Sarangadhara Samhitha of Sharangadhar acharya Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi 2013, Madhyamakanda, Avalehakalpana-pg no.208, shloka no.1.
7. Mohan H. 6th ed. Lucknow: Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers (P) Ltd; 2010. Text Book of Pathology; pp. 6– 7.
8. K. Nishteswar, Panchapadarthas of Dravya Vis a vis Drug action, Jyothismati, TTD's S.V. Ayurveda college, Tirupati, 2013.
9. Dr. Anant Ram Sharma (2008). Sushruta Samhita (Purvardha And Uttarantra). Chaukhamba Bharti Academy.
10. Charaka Samhita Vol. VI Edited and Published by Dr. Ram Karan Sarma and Vaidya Bhagwan Dash, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, Reprint 2008. Kalpastana, Madanakalpa, Sloka no.19, Page no.20.