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REVIEW ARTICLE

CLASSICAL ADVOCATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF GOLD IN AYURVEDA

¹NAVEEN KODLADY, ²PATAGIRI B J

¹Assistant Professor, SDM College of Ayurveda and Hospital, Hassan, Karnataka

²Associate Professor, IPGT&RA, Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar

Corresponding author email address: naveenkodlady@gmail.com

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Abstract

Metals have been an important group of drugs in Ayurvedic medical system. Gold, the noble metal has been used in Ayurveda since more than 3000 yrs and references pertaining to its therapeutic use can be found in the ancient classics like Charaka samhita, Sushruta samhita, Kashyapa samhita etc. Gold is possessed with properties like medhya (intelligence enhancer), vrishya (aphrodisiac), and rasayana (rejuvenation) etc. It is used as an independent therapeutic agent and also as part of various forms of compound formulations like Swarnabhasma, Vasantakusumakararasa, Swarnaparpati, Makaradwaja and Hemagarbha pottali etc. Swarnaprashana, an administration of gold to infants and children is one of popular usages of gold nowadays in India. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to summarize advocations for administration of gold by different Ayurvedic classics.

Key words: Swarna, Swarnaprashana, Swarna rasayana, Makaradhwaja, Rasashastra, Ayurveda

Introduction

Gold, the noble metal has been a therapeutic agent in ancient India before it has been recognized as a therapeutic agent by modern science. Gold is used as an independent medicine in its elemental form as well as bhasma form, and is also used in various formulations as an ingredient. However, use of various anupana (vehicle), a unique and integral part of Ayurvedic prescription has broadened the scope of its medicinal usage. Gold known for intellectual enhancing (medhya), antitoxic (vishaghna) and rejuvenative (rasayana) properties, has been used in the formulations for all age groups, including during the period of pregnancy.

The most popular among the gold administration in ancient India is Kashyapa's prescription of gold in Pediatrics i.e.

Swarnaprashana. According to Kashyapa the gold has to be rubbed with ghee and honey and is to be administered to the baby every day. It increases intelligence, digestive power, vigor, complexion, strength and lifespan. On administration of Swarnaprashana for 1 month the baby's intelligence quotient is expected to be highly increased and becomes more immune. On administration for 6 months the baby's concentration will be remarkably improved and becomes a good listener (shrutadhara).¹ Swarnaprashana for neonatal baby has been considered as one of the shodashasamskaras (sixteen rites) by Kashyapa.

Charaka has given a unique attribution to the action of gold. He terms it to be anti-toxic (vishaghna). He claims that the poison cannot stay in the body of a person who takes gold internally, just like the drop of water put on lotus

leaf.² Sushruta opines that there will be an absence of production of breast milk soon after the delivery due to the obstruction of channels at chest region. Hence the baby has to be given the gold mixed with honey and ghee on the first day.³ Sushruta explains in Medhayushkameeya adhyaya that for good intelligence and long life span one can take gold every day. Vagbhata in the lehanavidhi has given some herbal drugs along with which gold has to be administered. These include vacha (*Acorus calamus* Linn.), vrahmi (*Bacopa monnieri* Linn.), shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) and Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus* Wild). He has given separate rejuvenative combinations with gold termed to be swarnarasayana. The gold administered with milk and amalaki (*Embllica officinalis* Gaertn.) powder can bring back the severely ill into healthy state. Along with Shatavarighrita and honey or with shankhapushpi gold can enhance the life span. With vacha it enhances intelligence and with vidarikanda (*Puraria Tuberosa* DC.) it enhances the vigour.⁴

Rasendracudamani, a prominent rasa classic of 12th century claims gold to be best immune-protector. It claims that gold can prevent possible forthcoming diseases, root out the existent diseases and is a very good anti-dote for all varieties of poisons.⁵

Ayurvedaprakasha, a text of 17th century has given the differential action of Swarna in its bhasma form and in its shodhita form. He claims swarnabhasma (Pakvahema) is rasayana while purified gold (Apakwahema – unincinerated gold) is anti-toxic (Vishaghna) and increases complexion alleviates emaciation and is a good nourisher. He has also given set of herbal drugs to be taken along with purified gold for different actions among which gold rubbed with vacha, honey and ghee increases intelligence. Ayurvedaprakasha has given a highest place for gold in medicine and he claims that even when all purificatory therapies (Panchakarma) also fail, one can choose gold for therapeutics and it

is the better even than Shilajatu rasayana, Bhallataka rasayana, Swarnamakshika rasayana.⁶

Rasayana property of gold has been highly lightened by majority the classical books. Being rasayana it has got positive action on all the dhatus. Along with that, Swarna is attributed with the actions like vrushya (aphrodisiac), brumhana (nourisher), vishahara (antitoxic), hrudya (cardiotonic), kantiprada (increases complexion), vagvishuddhida (clears the voice), ojavivruddhikara (increases the essence of all the dhatus), buddhimedhasmrutikara (increases decisive power, intelligence and memory), yakshmahara (cures tuberculosis), balya (increases strength), swarakara (good for voice), sandhateduritakshaya (treats the worst emaciation), unmadahara and apasmara. Thus Swarna with madhura (sweet), tikta (bitter) and kashaya (astringent) taste, madhuravipaka (sweet after biotransformation) and sheetaveerya (cold potency) acts on both mind and body. It is a tridoshapacifying drug.

The recent text, of 20th century Rasa Tarangini regards Swarna as garbhashtapanamuttamam (good in implantation/Fertility Index Promoter) and pumsavanopayigi (useful in getting baby with desired sex).⁷ Another Rasa text Bruhat rasa rajasundara in Suvarnaprakarana mentions it as bhroona hitam sarvada (always good for foetus/profoetal) and added one of the indications as raktapradara.⁸ Author of Astangasangraha advises the usage of Kwatha of certain herbal drugs prepared in golden or silver vessel for the entire first month of the pregnancy.⁹ Many medicines prescribed in Garbhini rogadhikar and Sutika rogaadhikara contains gold as an important ingredient like Garbhachintamani rasa, Garbhapeeyushavalli rasa, Bruhatsootikari rasa, Sootikavallabha rasa, and Sootikabharana rasa etc. Some of the important formulations of gold mentioned in

AFI,¹⁰ sourced from various Ayurvedic classics are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Certain formulations of gold with their indications

| | Formulation | Indication | % of Au/Au bhasma used | Reference |
|----|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Yogendra Rasa | Bahumutra (Polyuria), Prameha (Urinary disorders), Vataroga, Apasmara (Epilepsy), Pakshaghata (Paralysis/Hemiplegia), Bhagandara (Fistula-in-ano), Arsha (Haemorrhoids), Mutraghraha (Urinary obstruction), Unmada (Mania/Psychosis) | 14.28 | BR (Vatavyadhi 506-512) |
| 2. | Rasaraja Rasa | Pakshaghata (Paralysis/Hemiplegia), Ardita (Facial palsy), Apatantraka (Hysteria with loss of consciousness), Apatanaka (Tetanic convulsions), Badhira (Deafness), MastakaBhrama (Vertigo), Vataroga (Disease due to Vatadosha), Daurbalya (Weakness), Shukrakshaya (Oligospermia) | 13.33 | BR (Vatavyadhi 470-476) |
| 3. | Svarnasindura | Shukrakshaya, Dhatu kshaya (Tissue wasting), Buddhimandya (Low intelligence) | 11.11 | BR (Vajikarana 247-249) |
| 4. | SvarnaParpati | Grahani, Rajayakshma, Antrashula (Intestinal colic), Shukrakshaya (Oligospermia) | 11.11 | BR (Grahani 457-460) |
| 5. | BruhatVatacintamani Rasa | Disease due to Vatadosha and Pittadosha), Bhrama (Vertigo), Pralapa (Delirious speech) | 12 | BR (Vatavyadhi 502-505) |
| 6. | HemagarbhaPottali Rasa | SannipataJvara (High grade fever due to vitiation of all Dosha) | 10 | RSM (Rajayakshma 9: 218-222) |
| 7. | ShwasaKasaCintamani rasa | Shwasa, Kasa (Cough) | 8.69 | BR (HikkaShwasa 85-87) |
| 8. | VasantaKusumakara rasa | Meha (Excessive flow of urine), ValiPalita (Wrinkles in skin and graying of hair), SmrutiBhramsha (Impairment of memory), Karshya (Pthisis), Somaroga (Polyuria in females), Kshaya (Emaciation) | 7.69 | RSS (rasayana vajikarana 80-82) |
| 9. | Sutikabharana rasa | SutikaRoga (Puerperal disease), Dhanurvata (Tetanus / Plenosthotonus) | 7.69 | BBR (p. 8267) |

| | | | | |
|----|----------------------|--|------|-------------------------|
| 10 | Yakruti | Hruddaurbalya (Weakness of the heart), Sannipata Jvara, Svedadhikya (Excessive Sweating) | 7.04 | SYS (Hrudroga) |
| 11 | Sutashekhar Rasa | Amlapitta, Chardi (Emesis), Gulma (Abdominal lump), Kasa (Cough), Grahani (Malabsorption syndrome), TridoshajaAtisara (Diarrhoea due to all Dosha), ShulaShwasa (Asthma), Mandagni (Impaired digestive fire), Hikka (Hiccup), Udavarta (Condition in which there is upward movement of vayu), Rajayakshma (Tuberculosis) | 5.28 | YR (Amlapitta) |
| 12 | Vasantamalati rasa | JeernaKasa (Chronic cough), Vishamajvara (Intermittent fever), Jeernajvara (Chronic fever) | 5.23 | SBM (Jvara 60-62) |
| 13 | Makaradwaja | Hruddaurbalya (Weakness of the heart), Jara (Senility/Progeriasis), Jvara (Fever), Agnimandya (Digestive impairment), ValiPalita, Used as Rasayana&Vajikarana (Aphrodisiac and Nutrient to body and mind with adapto-immuno-neuro-endocrino-modulator properties) | 3.03 | BR (Vajikarana 237-246) |
| 14 | BrahmiVati | Vataroga, SannipataJvara, Apatantraka (Hysteria with loss of consciousness), Akshepa (Convulsions), Santatajvara (Continuous Fever), Hruddaurbalya, Bhrama (Vertigo), Manoroga (Psychological Disorder) | 2.52 | SYS (Vataroga) |
| 15 | MritasanjivaniGutika | SannipataJvara (High grade fever due to vitiation of all Dosha), Apasmara (Epilepsy), Manovibhrama (Delirium), Visha (Poison) | 2.2 | SY (Gutika 66) |

(Note: Media of bhavana (levigation) in the formulation is not included during calculation of % of gold. Hence the percentage is approximate only.)

Abbreviations: Ca – Carakasamhita, Su. – Sushrutasamhita, AS – Astangasangraha, Ci- Cikitsasthana, U – Uttarantra, RC – Rasendracudamani, RT – Rasa tarangini, AP – Ayurveda Prakasha, RRS – Rasendra Sara Sangraha, BR – Bhaishajyaratnavali, SBM – Siddha Bhashajamamimala, SY - Sahasrayoga, YR – Yoga ratnakara, RSM – Rasamrutam, BBR – Bharatabhaishajyaratnakara, SYS – Siddha yoga sangraha.

Discussion:

Gold has been used in Ayurvedic therapeutics since centuries. Elemental gold was administered in the fine powder form or by rubbing on stone in the earlier period. Various anupanas like Vacha, Vidarikanda, Shankhapushpi, ghee and honey are advised to be used as anupana. With the development of specialized branch dealing with herbominerals – Rasashastra- , a newer dosage form of gold was developed in the name of bhasma. Gold is an ingredient in the formulations of all forms of

Rasoushadhies viz. khalveeya rasayana, kupipakwa rasayana, parpati and pottali kalpas. Among the kupipakwa rasayanas, Makaradhwaja is one of well known formulation which involves the use of gold, although there is nil or minimal amount of gold in the end product.

Usually metals are used in Ayurveda only after purificatory process called shodhana. There was no specific purificatory method advised for gold in the period of Brihatrayis. Later, Rasashastra texts have provided specific

methods for its purification. Some authorities claim that there is no need of purification for gold as it itself is a pure metal (shuddhaloha).¹¹

Administration of gold in infants and children was found in ancient classic like Sushrutasamhita, Kashyapasamhita, Astangasangraha and Astangahridaya. Classically, shuddhaswarna is advised to be taken along with suitable anupana for this purpose.

However, in current clinical practice use of Swarnabhasma with anupanas like ghee and honey is commonly found. In addition, certain gold containing formulations like

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Vasanta kusumaraka rasa, Swarna malini vasanta, Bhrihatvata chintamani rasa etc. is prevalent. There is a classical Ayurvedic recommendation to administer gold to the people of all age group.

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