# NOTES

## *RASĀRṆAVAKALPA* OF *RUDRAYĀMALA* TANTRA

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The manuscript which is presented as a part of tantrik text, *Rudrayāmala*, and found in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was catalogued by Pandit Haraprasad Shastri.[1] Pandit Shastri in his note on this text stated that it dealt with alchemical recipes and mercurial preparations. It was, therefore, considered that a study of this text would be of particular interest and value relating to the alchemical thought and practices prevailing at the time of its composition.

The word *Rasārṇavakalpa* means 'properties of the ocean of *rasa*', applicable to both mercury and plant-juice.

In *Rasārṇavakalpa*, as in other Indian alchemical texts, Bhairava, one of the eight forms of Śiva, reveals the secret of knowledge in the form of a dialogue with his consort Devī (Pārvatī). The text is presented as a part of *Rudrayāmala* tantra.[2] There are eight principal *Yāmala* texts known as *Rudra*, *Skanda*, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu*, *Yama*, *Vāyu*, *Kubera* and *Indra*. They appeared to have flourished in India from *c.* sixth to ninth century A.D. Nevertheless, with the exception of *Brahmayāmala* and some fragmentary portions of the *Rudrayāmala* no other *Yāmala* texts seem to be extant.[3]

On the basis of internal evidences, such as the description of the alchemical properties of earth and water of mountainous regions such as those of Mahendra, Malaya, Amarakaṇṭaka, Nāgamaṇḍala, and rivers like Candrabhāgā, Śoṇa and Narmadā, it may be concluded that the author of *Rasārṇavakalpa* might possibly have been a resident of the Vindhya region, having the boundary of river Candrabhāgā on the west, Śoṇa in the east and Narmadā in the south.

The text has as many as 1,000 verses under 29 divisions. For purposes of analysis the text can be divided into three parts.

The first part (from verses 1–55), which forms an introduction to the entire text, sets forth its main object, viz. (i) *dhātu-siddhi* (perfection of metals), (ii) *ratna-siddhi* (perfection of gems and other precious stones) and (iii) *rasa-siddhi* (perfection of mercury and plant juices).

The second part (from verses 56–230) describes a variety of processes like roasting (*dhamana, puṭapāka*), heating (*tāpana*), steaming (*svedana*), digestion (*pācana*), calcination (*jāraṇa*) and blending (*sāraṇa*) of mercury with vegetable products and mineral substances. The purpose is to 'kill' and 'fix' mercury so that its power of transmuting base metal into gold can be increased manifold. The preparation of a variety of drugs incorporating the processed mercury, having powers to prolong life, restore youth, promote strength and vigour of the body, has also been described. Verses from 78–230 bear close resemblance to those of the 12th chapter, called *Rasabandha* ('Fixation of mercury', verses 8–188) of the well-known alchemical text *Rasārṇava*.[4]

The third part is subdivided into a number of sections, describing the properties of mineral substances, plants and the character of soils of different regions for alchemical purposes.

The names of subdivisions, based on the properties of mineral substances, are as follows:

1. *Gandhikākalpa* (properties of sulphur)
2. *Tālakakalpa* (properties of orpiment)

The names of subdivisions, based on the properties of plants, are as follows:

1. *Aparājitākalpa* (*Clitoria ternatea*)
2. *Brahmadaṇḍikalpa* (*Lampra choehium*)
3. *Aśvagandhakalpa* (*Withania somniferra*)
4. *Jyotiṣmatīkalpa* (*Cordiospermum habicacolum*)
5. *Raktavajrīkalpa* (*Euphorbia antiquorom*)
6. *Uccaṭākalpa* (White kunch)
7. *Kṛṣṇārikalpa* (Kusmaṇḍaki, *Beninkasa cerifera*)
8. *Tṛṇajyolikalpa* (Difficult to identify)
9. *Vīrākalpa* (*Gmelina arborea*)
10. *Devadālīkalpa* (*Andropogan serrata*)
11. *Pīta-Devadālīkalpa* (Yellow variety of *Andropogan serrata*)
12. *Iśvarīkalpa* (Beng. titkānkri)
13. *Kaṭutumbikalpa* (*Gynondropis pentaphylla*)
14. *Kṣīra-kañcuki* (*Lipeocersis serrata*)
15. *Rudravantikalpa* (*Asclepias rosea*)
16. *Somarājikalpa* (*Vernonia arthelmintica*)
17. *Śālmali* (*Salmalia malabarica*)
18. *Śrīvṛkṣakalpa* (*Aegle marmelos*)
19. *Eraṇḍakalpa* (Castor oil plant, *Ricinus cammunis*)
20. *Kolavṛkṣakalpa* (*Coculus indicus*)

The subdivisions relating to soil and water are as follows:

1. *Dakṣinatāmravarṇakalpa* (copper-coloured earth of southern region)
2. *Mayūragirakalpa* (soil of mountainous region of Mayuragira)
3. *Nāgamaṇḍalakalpa* (soil of Nāgamaṇḍala)
4. *Candrodakakalpa* (water exuded from mountain peak on the full moon night)
5. *Viṣodakakalpa* (poisonous water)
6. *Śailodaka vidhi* (rules for applying mineral waters)

The text discreetly emphasizes the role of medicinal herbs in the processing of alchemical substances.

The whole vegetable kingdom seems to have been divided into two categories, medicinal (*divyauṣadhi*) and non-medicinal (*tṛṇauṣadhi*). The non-medicinal plants are regarded to have been devoid of any alchemical properties.

Over 70 different types of plants have been discussed here in respect of their properties. The most important among them applied in a number of mercurial and metallic preparations are given in Table I.

Generally these plants, excepting *Eraṇḍa* and *Niśācara*, find use along with other alchemical substances in the processes leading to mercurial and metallic preparations.

Another important character of the text, as stated before, relates to the alchemical properties of mountainous earth and mineral waters. These are presumed to produce the same effective results like that of the plant juice and other alchemical substances. Besides, the text lays considerable stress on their medicinal properties too, such as rejuvenation, prolongation of life and attainment of immortality. The last seems to have a parallel in the Chinese concept of longevity or immortality.

About 50 different types of transmutation processes have been described in this text for converting base metals into gold and silver by the aid of mercury treated with plant juices and other mineral substances.

The processes discussed here, more or less, correspond to the processes discussed in other alchemical texts, specially *Rasārṇava*.

Like other alchemical texts, *Rasārṇavakalpa* gives an account of the *yantras* or apparatus in connection with the processing of metals, gems, mercury and plants. The apparatus, as found in the text, are (i) *Medinī-yantra* (for the calcination of mercury with mica); (ii) *Pātāla yantra* (for the fixation of mercury); (iii) *Taila yantra* (for the exudation of oil from plants); (iv) *Vālukā-yantra* (sand bath—for the fixation of mercury and minerals); (v) *Vidyādhara-yantra* (for imparting mercury the power of grasping the inherent qualities of metallic substances) and (vi) *Mūṣā* (crucibles, both open and closed, specially for the transmutation of metals).

TABLE I

| Name of plants | Properties |
|---|---|
| 1. *Ajanāyikā* ( ?) | (*a*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*b*) Transmutation of metals (base metals into gold)<br>(*c*) Killing of mercury<br>(*d*) Imparting five stages of mercury |
| 2. *Citraka* (*Plumbago zeylanica*) | (*a*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*b*) Purification and fixation of tin |
| 3. *Devadālī* (*Andropogan serrata*) | (*a*) Killing of mercury<br>(*b*) Fixation of tin<br>(*c*) Melting of metals<br>(*d*) Invigoration of mercury to transmute metals<br>(*e*) Transmutation of metals (copper into gold)<br>(*f*) Rejuvenation and prolongation of life |
| 4. *Eraṇḍa* (*Ricinus communis*, Castor oil plant) | (*a*) Conferring transmutation power on mercury<br>(*b*) Transmutation of metals (lead into silver)<br>(*c*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*d*) Killing of tin<br>(*e*) Rejuvenation |
| 5. *Iśvari* ( ?) | (*a*) Fixation of tin<br>(*b*) Conferring transmutation power on mercury<br>(*c*) Purification of metals |
| 6. *Kaṅkāla Khecarī* ( ?) | (*a*) Calcination of sulphur, orpiment, gold and coral<br>(*b*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*c*) Liquefaction of mica<br>(*d*) Killing of gems |
| 7. *Kuṣmāṇḍaki* (*Beninkasa cerifera*) | (*a*) Transmutation of metal (iron into gold)<br>(*b*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*c*) Brightening the lustre of metal (gold) |
| 8. *Kṣīra-Kañcuki* (Lipeocersis serrata) | (*a*) Invigoration of mercury for producing *nirbīja* (impotent) gold<br>(*b*) Transmutation of metal (copper into gold)<br>(*c*) Conferring quick-transmutation power on mercury |
| 9. *Mātuluṅga* (Citrus medica) | (*a*) Conferring transmutation power on mercury (lead-foils into gold)<br>(*b*) Transmutation of metals (copper into gold; silver into gold) |
| 10. *Nāginī* ( = Nāgadanti) | (*a*) Transmutation of metals (alloy of silver and copper into gold)<br>(*b*) Purification of copper |
| 11. *Niśācara* (*Soma* plant) | (*a*) Killing of tin<br>(*b*) Fixation of mercury<br>(*c*) Dispelling the blackish colour of copper<br>(*d*) Increasing the transmutation power of mercury<br>(*e*) Liquefaction of sulphur<br>(*f*) Brightening of the lustre of metals |

TABLE I—*concluded*

| Name of plants | Properties |
|---|---|
| 12. *Rudanti* or *Rudravanti* (*Asclepias rosea*) | (*a*) Transmutation of metals (copper into gold and silver into gold)<br>(*b*) Prolongation of life |
| 13. *Śāka* (*Tactona grandis*) | (*a*) Transmutation of metals (copper into gold; and silver into gold)<br>(*b*) Melting of metals |
| 14. *Somarāji* ( = Vākuci, *Vernonia anthelmintica*) | (*a*) Transmutation of metals (tin into silver and lead into silver) |
| 15. *Snuhi* (*Euphorbia neriiforia*) | (*a*) Transmutation of metals (lead into gold) |

The language of the text is similar to that of *Rasārṇava* written mainly in *Anuṣṭubh* metre with little variations of *Sragdharā*, *Mālinī* and *Śārdulavikriḍita*.

The date of the *Rasārṇavakalpa* is not exactly known. As stated before a portion of this text (from Vs. 78–230) is found to occur in more or less unaltered form in the *Rasārṇava* which is a work of the twelfth century A.D.

There is also one verse (sl. 370) in this text which is found to occur in the *Rasaratnākara* of Nāgārjuna,[5] namely:

*Kimatra ciṃtyam yadi pītagaṃdhakam*
*Palāśa niṣṭhivita Kalka-marditam*
*Āranyakasyopala-pācitam śubham*
*Karoti tāraṃ triputena kāñcanam*

What wonder is it that yellow sulphur, rubbed with the sediment (*kalka*, also means 'a kind of tenacious paste') ejected from *Butea frondosa* (*Palāśa*) and digested with wild lily, converts silver into gold when roasted thrice over the fire of cow-dung cake ?

In the *Rasaratnākara*, however, in place of words, *kalka* and *mardita*, there occur the words, *rasa* (juice) and *śodhita* (purified).

It is also well known that a large number of verses of *Rasaratnākara* are found repeated in the text of *Rasārṇava* which is obviously a compilation of the earlier alchemical texts.[6]

From a consideration of the foregoing facts the date of the *Rasārṇavakalpa* may be taken to lie between that of the *Rasaratnākara* (*c.* eighth and ninth century A.D.) and *Rasārnava* (twelfth century A.D.).

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Shastri, H. P., Catalogue of manuscripts on Tantra. Published by Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1939.

[2] The principle of Tāntricism lies in the realization of the non-dual nature of the self and the non-self. The non-dual manifestation of reality consists of the two aspects—negative (*nivṛtti*), i.e. static and positive (*pravṛtti*), i.e. dynamic which are represented in Hindu thought as *Śiva* and *Śakti* and in Buddhist thought as *Prajñā* and *Upāya*. (Sashi Bhusan Das Gupta. An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, Calcutta, 1950, p. 3).

[3] Bagchi, P. C., *Cultural Heritage*, Vol. IV, p. 216.

[4] *Rasārṇava*, edited by Prafulla Chandra Rây and Harish Chandra Kaviraja. *Bibliotheca Indica*. Published by Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1910.

[5] Rây, P. (edited). History of Chemistry in Ancient and Mediaeval India, incorporating History of Hindu Chemistry by P. C. Rây. Calcutta, 1950, p. 311, V. 2.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 119.