

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF AṢṬAVARGA

V. K. JOSHI

Department of Dravyaguna
Institute of Medical Sciences
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi 221 005

(Received 10 March 1980)

The *aṣṭavarga* is a group of eight drugs which is well known in the *Āyurvedic* profession but unfortunately the number of drugs of this group is still controversial and as such, their substitutes are being used at present.

The concept of *aṣṭavarga* is not found in ancient *āyurvedic* texts. It seems to have been evolved gradually in three phases represented by three different traditions.

Caraka Saṃhitā, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya* (the *Bṛhatrayī*) and *Aṣṭāṅga Saṃgraha* are the oldest compendiums of *Āyurveda*. The word *aṣṭavarga* is not found in *Bṛhatrayī* and in *Aṣṭāṅga Saṃgraha* too. It seems that the *aṣṭavarga*, the group of eight drugs was introduced later on.

Paryāyaratnamālā is the first text where the word *aṣṭavarga* and the drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are found. Mādhvakara has described two types of *aṣṭavarga* (P. 1718-19). In another verse, he has also mentioned the *jīvanīya gaṇa* and named it as *madhurādi gaṇa* (P. 1715-18).

The word *aṣṭavarga* is also found in *Vṛndamādhava* (V. 22-9) and *jīvanīya gaṇa* is also described there (V. 11-47).

Cikitsākalikā has mentioned *aṣṭavarga* and the eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* (Ci. K. 59), keeping *kākolyādi-gaṇa* separately. At three places the word *aṣṭavarga* is found (Ci. K. 262-263, 266 and 271).

In *Dhanwantari Nighaṇṭu* *aṣṭavarga* is not described. There *jīvakādi gaṇa* and *jīvanīya pañcamūla* (the five root drugs) are found (M. 7-28 & G. 1-5).

Soḍhala has mentioned the *aṣṭavarga* (Fol 13^b-55) and the eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* (Fol 14^b-15) keeping the ten drugs of *jīvanīya gaṇa* separately (Fol 1^b-13).

In *Śārṅgadhara Saṃhitā*, the *aṣṭavarga* is described (M. 6-19, 21). There is also description of the *jīvanīya gaṇa* separately (M. 6-17, 18).

The *aṣṭavarga* and the *jīvanīya gaṇa* are also found in *Madanapāla Nighaṇṭu* (1-84 and 92).

Kaiyadeva has described two types of *aṣṭavarga* (A. 1-73). Besides this, the *jīvanīya pañcamūla* and *madhurādi* or *jīvanīya gaṇa* are also described at other places (A. 1-61 and 100).

Rājanighaṇṭu has mentioned the eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* (M. 60), keeping *jīvanīya gaṇa* separately (M. 59).

Bhāvaprakāśa has also mentioned *aṣṭavarga* (B.H. 113), keeping *jīvanīya gaṇa* separately (B.G. 55).

The other *nighaṇṭus* after sixteenth century have followed *Bhāvaprakāśa* in this respect.

DISCUSSION

Though the word *aṣṭavarga* as such is not found in *Caraka Saṃhitā*, the drugs of this group are included in *jīvanīya-gaṇa* [Ca. S. 4-(1)], which consists of *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī*, *mudgaparṇī-māsaparṇī*, and *jīvantī-madhuka*. Besides this, four drugs of *jīvanīya-gaṇa* are also found in *jīvanīya pañcamūla* (Ca. Ci. 1-1-44), they are : *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā* and *jīvantī*. Only five drugs of this group alongwith *jīvantī* are found in *cyavanaprāśa*, which is a famous *rasāyana* of *Āyurveda*. These drugs are *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *ṛddhi*, *medā* and *kākolī* [Ca. Ci. 1-(1)-63, 64].

In *Suśruta Saṃhitā* eight drugs of this group are found in *kākolyādi gaṇa* (S. Sū. 38-35). The drugs of *kākolyādi gaṇa* are: *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī*, *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *mudgaparṇī*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *amṛtā*, *karkaṭśrṅgi*, *vaṃśalocana*, *padmaka*, *prapouṇḍarika*, *ṛddhi-ṛddhi*, *mṛdvika* and *jīvantī-madhuka*. This *gaṇa* is also known as *jīvanīya gaṇa* or *madhurādi gaṇa*.

In *Aṣṭāṅga Saṃgraha*, Vāgbhaṭa has followed Caraka because the same verse is mentioned by him in *sūtrasthāna* (A. S. Sū. 15-6).

Besides this, the drugs of this group are also found in *padmakādi gaṇa* (A. S. Sū. 16-6). Originally *padmakādi gaṇa* is *kākolyādi gaṇa* of Suśruta. In *padmakādi gaṇa* Vāgbhaṭa has reduced the number of drugs from eighteen to sixteen by eliminating *vaṃśalocana* and *mṛdvika*. The drugs of *jīvanīya pañcamūla* are the same five as found in Caraka (A. S. Sū. 12-60).

In *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*, the drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are found at two places, i.e. one in *jīvanīya gaṇa* (A. H. Sū. 15-8) and other in *padmakādi gaṇa* (A. H. Sū. 15-12). Originally, *jīvanīya gaṇa* is of *Caraka Saṃhitā* and *padmakādi gaṇa* is of *Suśruta Saṃhitā*. Furthermore, the four drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are also found in *jīvanīya pañcamūla* (A. H. Sū. 6-168-169). The verse has been taken from the *Caraka Saṃhitā*.

Mādhavakāra in *Paryāyaratnamālā** (9th cent.) has added a new information in relation to *aṣṭavarga*. It shows that there were two traditions of *aṣṭavarga*; one group took *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīra-kākolī* and *jīvantī-madhuka*, while, the second group included *ṛddhi* and *vṛddhi* in place of *jīvantī* and *madhuka*, the rest six drugs being common.

By a critical analysis, the first group seems to be the follower of *Caraka Saṃhitā* because all eight drugs are found in *jīvaniya gaṇa* of Caraka. The second group seems to be the follower of *Suśruta Saṃhitā* where all eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are present in *kākolyādi gaṇa* of *Suśruta*. Another possibility may be, both the groups were formed from *kākolyādi gaṇa* of *Suśruta*, where, all the drugs are included.

In *Vṛndamādhava* (9th cent.) the *aṣṭavarga* is found in *vātādhikara* (V. 22-9) and the eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are found in *chāgalādyaghrta*, they are; *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī* and *ṛddhi-vṛddhi* (V. 10-60, 61). At another place, the *jīvaniya gaṇa* is also found (V. 11-47). The drugs of *Jīvaniyagaṇa* are the same as found in *Caraka Saṃhitā*. Furthermore, only five drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are found in *cyavanaprāśa*, they are: *jīvantī*, *ṛddhi*, *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka* and *kākolī* (V. 10-30, 32).

The following eight drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are mentioned by *Tisatācārya* in *Cikitsā-kalikā* (10th cent.) i.e. *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī* and *ṛddhi-vṛddhi* (Ci. Ka. 59). These eight drugs are chosen from *kākolyādi gaṇa* of *Suśruta Saṃhitā*. The word *aṣṭavarga* is also found at three other places (Ci. Ka. 262, 263, 266 and 271). The above cited eight drugs found as ingredients of *cyavanaprāśa* (Ci. Ka. 262, 263) and also of *amṛtaprāśa* (Ci. Ka. 266). The author has also described *kākolyādi gaṇa* (Ci. Ka. 49) but for the number of drugs, it is sixteen only, instead of eighteen. Here, he has deducted *mṛdvikā* and *vṛddhi*, rest sixteen are the same as found in *kākolyādi gaṇa* of *Suśruta Saṃhitā*.

Dhanwantari Nighaṇṭu (10th-13th cent.) has not described *aṣṭavarga* as such but the eight drugs are found in *jīvakādi gaṇa* (Dh. M. 7-28) and four drugs are in *jīvana pañcamūla* (Dh. M. 7-25). The drugs of *jīvakādi gaṇa* are ten in numbers and are the same as described by Caraka in *jīvaniya gaṇa*. The drugs of *jīvana pañcamūla* are also the same as found in *jīvana pañcamūla* described by Caraka.

Ṣoḍhala (12th cent.) has followed *Tisatācārya* in respect of *aṣṭavarga* as he has mentioned the same eight drugs of the *aṣṭavarga*. The drugs of *aṣṭavarga*, he has chosen from *kākolyādi gaṇa* of *Suśruta Saṃhitā*. Although, the *jīvaniya gaṇa* is not found in *Ṣoḍhala Nighaṇṭu*, the ten drugs are found.

Dalhaṇa (12th cent.) has mentioned *aṣṭavarga* as other's view for taking it by the word *madhura* (S. Uttar. 41-45).

*In *Ugradityācārya's Kalyānakāraka*, which is almost contemporary, there is mention of *aṣṭavarga*.

The drugs of *aṣṭavarga* described by Śārṅgadhara (13th cent.) are the same eight drugs (*Sa. M.* 20, 21) as found in *Ṣoḍhala Nighaṇṭu*, keeping *jīvaniya gaṇa* separately (*Sa. M.* 6-17, 18), which is the same as mentioned by Caraka.

Ādhamalla (14th cent.), the commentator of *Śārṅgadhara Saṃhitā* says—The drugs of *aṣṭavarga* are similar to *jīvaniyāṣṭaka* as mentioned by *Suśruta*, but the *jīvaniyāṣṭaka* is not found in the existing editions of the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*.

Madanapāla (14th cent.) has also described the drugs of *aṣṭavarga*, keeping *jīvaniya gaṇa* separately (*M. N.* 1-84 and 90). It seems, he has followed Śārṅgadhara.

In *Rājanighaṇṭu*, the following drugs are mentioned under *aṣṭavarga*—*jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī* and *ṛddhi-vṛddhi* (*R. M.* -60). Besides this, the *jīvakādi gaṇa* is also described containing the same ten drugs as found in *jīvaniya gaṇa* of Caraka. The name of the *gaṇa* is given on the basis of the first drug. This is based on the tradition of *Suśruta*, who has named the *gaṇa* after the first drug.

Bhāvamiśra (16th cent.) in *Bhāvaprakāśa* says: the drugs of *aṣṭavarga* described by him are the same as mentioned by Caraka and others. His *aṣṭavarga* contains: *jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī* and *ṛddhi-vṛddhi*.

In *jīvaniya gaṇa*, he has added two more drugs, i.e. *ṛddhi* and *vṛddhi* and the rest ten drugs are the same as *jīvaniya gaṇa* of Caraka. In this way the number of drugs is increased from ten to twelve.

It is to be noted that Śārṅgadhara has described *jīvaniya gaṇa* according to Caraka, quite separate from *aṣṭavarga*, while *Bhāvamiśra* has included *aṣṭavarga* within the *jīvaniya gaṇa*, thus making the components of *jīvaniya gaṇa* twelve (8+4), while in Caraka it is ten only.

Now when we analyse the above facts, it gives some clue about the evolution of the concept of *aṣṭavarga*. Undoubtedly the source of the *aṣṭavarga* is the *jīvaniya gaṇa* of Caraka which contains ten drugs. The following phases might have taken place successively to give rise to the existing concept.

1. Naturally, at first instance, the first eight drugs of *jīvaniya gaṇa* might have been taken in *aṣṭavarga*. This contains *mudgaparṇī* and *māsaparṇī* along with the six common drugs (*jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā-mahāmedā*, and *kākolī-kṣīrakākolī*). It is to be noted that according to the order followed uniformly by Caraka, *Suśruta* and *Vāgbhaṭa*, *mudgaparṇī* and *māsaparṇī* come within eight. Perhaps, this *aṣṭaka* (groups of eight drugs) of *Suśruta* has been said as *jīvaniyāṣṭaka* by *Ādhamalla*.
2. In the second phase, *mudgaparṇī* and *māsaparṇī* were replaced by *jīvanti*

and *madhuka* and thus they formed *aṣṭavarga* alongwith other six common drugs.

3. Lastly, *ṛddhi* and *vr̥ddhi* dominated the scene and replaced *jīvantī* and *madhuka*. It is to be noted that *ṛddhi* and *vr̥ddhi* could not find place in *jīvanīya gaṇa* of Caraka, though Caraka used *ṛddhi* in preparation of *cyavanaprāśa*. Due place to them was given by Suśruta, who included them in *kākolyādi gaṇa* alongwith other drugs of *jīvanīya* group.

As mentioned in *Paryāyaratnamāla* and *Kaiyadeva Nighaṇṭu* there were definitely two traditions prevalent though there is no mention about the third tradition which favoured *mudgaparṇī* and *māsaparṇī*. It may be that being the earliest one it might have reached oblivion and became out of practice.

The role of geographical factor also cannot be ruled out in this process. According to this, the three traditions* might have developed in the Eastern, Western and Northern region of the country respectively where the variant two drugs are easily available.

There is also another point. Initially Caraka made a group of ten drugs, i.e. *jīvanīya gaṇa*. For practical convenience, he also made a group of five drugs and named it *jīvanīya pañcamūla* in which four drugs of *jīvanīya gaṇa* (*jīvaka-ṛṣabhaka*, *medā* and *jīvantī*) are included. Gradually in course of time the concept of *aṣṭavarga* was evolved to fill up the gap between *jīvanīya gaṇa* and *jīvanīya pañcamūla*. Looking to the number of drugs, it also fits in the midway between ten drugs of *jīvanīya gaṇa* and five drugs of *jīvanīya pañcamūla*.

CONCLUSION

The concept of *aṣṭavarga* is not found in ancient *Āyurvedic* texts. This was evolved gradually on the basis of *jīvanīya gaṇa* of Caraka and *kākolyādi gaṇa* of Suśruta. The concept developed in three phases, which are represented by the three different traditions, as indicated in *nighaṇṭus*. The present popular tradition includes *ṛddhi* and *vr̥ddhi* in *aṣṭavarga* as mentioned by Śārṅgadhara and Bhāvaprakāśa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Prof. P. V. Sharma, Head of the Deptt. of Dravyaguna, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi for his encouragement and scholarly guidance. Thanks are also due to Dr. K. C. Chunekar for valuable suggestions.

*1. With *mudgaparṇī* and *māsaparṇī*.
 2. With *jīvantī* and *madhuka*.
 3. With *ṛddhi* and *vr̥ddhi*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya Saṃhitā* with commentary by Arunadatta, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1925.
- Aṣṭāṅga Saṃgraha* with commentary by Sri Atrideo Gupta, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1951.
- Ayurveda kā Vaijñānika Itihās*, by P. V. Sharma, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, 1975.
- Bhāvaprakāśa Nighaṅṭu* with commentary by K. C. Chunekar, Chowkhamba, Varanasi, edn. 4th, 1969.
- Caraka Saṃhitā* with the *Āyurveda-Dīpikā* commentary of Cakrapāṇidatta, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1941.
- Cikitsā-kalikā* by Tīsatācārya with the commentary of Chandrata, Mitra Ayurvedic Pharmacy, Lahore, 1st. edn.
- Kaiyadeva Nighaṅṭu* with commentary by Sri Kaviraj Surendra Mohan, Dayanand Ayurvedic College, Lahore, 1928.
- Madanapāla Nighaṅṭu*, Luxmivenkateswar Steam Press, Kalyan, Bombay, Sam. 2010.
- Paryāyaratnamālā* by Mādhavakara, Reprinted from Patna University Journal, Vol. II, Patna, 1946.
- Rājanighaṅṭu* and *Dhanwantari Nighaṅṭu*, Ananda Ashrama Mudranalaya, 1925.
- Śāligrāma Nighaṅṭubhūṣaṇam*, Shri Venkateswar Steam Yantralaya, Bombay, *Sambat*, 1961.
- Śoḍhala Nighaṅṭu*, Gaekwad, O.R.I., Baroda.
- Sārngadhara Saṃhitā*, Shri Venkateswar Steam Yantralaya, Sam. 1963.
- Suśruta Saṃhitā* with commentary by Ḍalhaṇa, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1918.
- Yṅdamādhava* with commentary by Shrikanthadatta, Ananda Ashrama Mudranalaya, *Śālivāhana Śakābda* 1943.