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Review Article

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE CONCEPT OF RASA DHATU

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## ABSTRACT

The five basic elements exist in all matter. Water provides the classic example: - the solids of iced water are manifestation of the *Prithvi Mahabhuta* (earth principle). Latent heat in the ice (*Agni*) liquefies it, manifesting into *Jala Mahabhuta* (water principle). And then eventually it turns into steam expressing the *Vayu Mahabhuta* (air principle) the steam disappears into *Akasha* or space. *Panchikarana* is the process through which invisible *Bhutas* combine with each other and form the visible *Mahabhutas* in such a way that all *Bhutas* are present together in each *Drisya Bhuta* in varying degrees of predominance. Thus in the physical world everything is a combination of *Pancha Mahabhutas* & we cannot see them independently.

*Rasa Dhatu* refers to the primary waters of the body. The word *rasa* means liquid. In the physical body, *rasa* refers directly to the plasma, or non cellular portion of the blood; the lymph, and interstitial fluids. The *Rasa Dhatu*, being made up of the element water, has similar qualities. It is cold, heavy, moist, soft, stable, smooth, flowing, cloudy, gross and dull. These qualities are very similar to *Kapha Dosha*, which is made up of water and earth. Thus, the health of *Rasa Dhatu* plays an important role in determining the health of *Kapha Dosha*.

**Keywords:** *Rasa, Dhatu, Rasagni, Kapha Dosha, Panchamahabhuta*..

## INTRODUCTION

An individual is an archetype of the universe. All the material & phenomenon of the universe are present in an individual. Similarly all those present in the individual are also enclosed in the universe<sup>1</sup>.

The five basic elements exist in all matter. Water provides the classic example: - the solids of iced water are manifestation of the *Prithvi Mahabhuta* (earth principle). Latent heat in the ice (*Agni*) liquefies it, manifesting into *Jala Mahabhuta* (water principle). And then eventually it turns into steam expressing the *Vayu Mahabhuta* (air principle) the steam disappears into *Akasha* or space<sup>2</sup>. *Bhuta* is that which is not born out of something, but out of which something is born. It is the material cause of substances in the world. When we say *Bhuta* we mean that subtle level of existence, where as *Mahabhuta* refers to gross level of existence<sup>3</sup>. *Panchikarana* is the process through which invisible *Bhutas* combine with each other and form the visible *Mahabhutas* in such a way that all *Bhutas* are present together in each *Drisya Bhuta* in varying degrees of predominance. Thus in the physical world everything is a combination of *Pancha Mahabhutas* & we cannot see them independently<sup>4</sup>.

Thus the five basic elements *Akasha, Vayu, Teja, Jala And Prithvi* are present in one substance. This proves that all five elements are present in all matter in the universe<sup>5</sup>. Visualization of the identity of the individual with the universe paves the way for salvation. The body is described as the modified form of *Mahabhutas* hence the description of the identity of the individual & the universe relates to *Mahabhutic* composition only. The multitudes of the human features are ascribed to the proportion of different *Bhutas* each of different nature. *Dhatu*s are the variants of these *Mahabhutas*. The first and foremost *Dhatu* mentioned in classics is *Rasa Dhatu*.

## DISCUSSION

*Rasa Dhatu* refers to the primary waters of the body. The word *rasa* means liquid. In the physical body, *rasa* refers directly to the plasma, or non cellular portion of the blood; the lymph, and interstitial fluids. As watery secretions, *Rasa Dhatu* relates indirectly to breast milk and menstrual fluid. *Rasa* is more than fluid, it is nourishment. Sugar and nutrients mix with the plasma and are carried by *Vyana Vayu* to all of the tissues of the body. As such, when *Rasa Dhatu* is healthy, a person feels satiated. The satisfaction one feels is both physical and psychological<sup>6</sup>.

Physical satisfaction is the sense of health and well-being that every cell experiences when it is well nourished. Psychological satisfaction is the feeling that our most basic needs have been met. As a result, there is a solid foundation for healthy psychological growth. With physical and psychological satisfaction, the foundation is set to be of service to society and fulfill one's *Dharma*. The *Rasa Dhatu*, being made up of the element water, has similar qualities. It is cold, heavy, moist, soft, stable, smooth, flowing, cloudy, gross and dull. These qualities are very similar to *Kapha Dosha*, which is made up of water and earth. Thus, the health of *Rasa Dhatu* plays an important role in determining the health of *Kapha Dosha*. In the formation of the *Dhatu*s, *Kapha* is the *Mala* (waste product) produced by the formation of *Rasa Dhatu*<sup>7</sup>.

When *Rasa Dhatu* is depleted, the qualities of *Kapha* and water diminish. The skin becomes dry and rough, dryness in the bowels produces constipation and dry mucous membranes lose their ability to resist disease, becoming fertile ground for infections. In addition, the secretion of breast milk is diminished in nursing mothers and menstrual flow becomes scanty. In the mind, nothing seems right. There is growing dissatisfaction that can't be easily satiated by changes in the environment. It is *Vata And Pitta Doshas* that are the cause of *Rasa Dhatu* depletion. *Vata Dosha*, made up of air and ether, enters the *Rasa Dhatu* and dries it out. *Pitta Dosha*, made up primarily of fire, enters the *Rasa Dhatu* and burns it out. Activities that reduce *Rasa Dhatu* are those that increase *Vata* and *Pitta Doshas*. Activities such as excessive travel, talking too much, and being very busy as well as diet that lacks in water and oils increase *Vata Dosha*. *Pitta Dosha* increases due to a lifestyle that is too highly focused, competitive, and intense, as well as from a diet that is too spicy hot. Thus, a lifestyle that increases *Vata* or *Pitta Dosha* decreases the *Rasa Dhatu* resulting in dissatisfaction in the mind and the consequences of dryness in the body.

Then *rasa dhatu* is in excess, the qualities of water and *kapha dosha* increase. Excess leads to water retention, swelling, and mucous formation in the body. In women, menstrual flow becomes heavier and lasts longer. The mind becomes dull, cloudy and sluggish, and it lacks luster. The mind is happy but that happiness is superficial. It is dependent upon retaining the material objects of satisfaction. It is *kapha dosha* that increases the *rasa dhatu*, and the *rasa dhatu* that increases *kapha dosha*. The two are inseparable. It is the water element that feeds both of them. *Kapha dosha* increases when a person becomes too lazy or quiet and when the diet is too moist and heavy. In the subtle body, the qualities of water flow through *Svadhishthana chakra* and *ida nadi*, bringing about deeper feelings and drives, such as desire, compassion, and love. When *Rasa Dhatu* is healthy, these feelings and drives are well balanced within the constitutional nature of the individual. As *Rasa Dhatu* becomes depleted, the flow of watery qualities through the *Nadi* and *chakra* decreases, resulting in a decrease in these feelings and drives. When *Rasa Dhatu* is in excess, these feelings and drives increase. However, as they increase beyond their constitutional balance, they become tainted by the attachments and desires of the ego<sup>8</sup>.

Healing *Rasa Dhatu* means restoring the proper quantity and quality of water. The proper quantity is based upon the constitutional tendency of the individual. Those with more *Kapha* in their constitution will naturally have more *Rasa Dhatu*. This makes depletion less likely and excess more likely. Those with more of a *Vata Or Pitta* constitution tend to have a naturally lower amount of *Rasa Dhatu* and are more susceptible to depletion. Those with a *pitta* nature tend to have a little more *rasa* than those with a *Vata* nature, as *Pitta Dosha* naturally contains some water. The quantity of *Rasa Dhatu* depends upon fluid intake. While it is logical that water itself would build the *Rasa Dhatu*, this is not entirely true. *Rasa* is more than water; it is the water that carries dissolved nutrients. Salt and sugar are the most important of these nutrients. Salt, in addition to its many physiological functions, helps retain water in the body. Sugar is the primary nutrient of the body. As a result, taking juice is the best way to replenish *rasa*. Thus, herbal teas that are sweetened with these substances are much better than water alone in rebuilding *Rasa Dhatu*<sup>9</sup>.

The quality of the *Rasa Dhatu* is dependent upon the health of *Agni*, or digestion. *Rasa Dhatu* is produced from the digestion of food and liquid. Food and liquid are initially digested in the digestive system and, according to *Ayurvedic* theory, turned into *Ahara Rasa*, a milky substance similar to chyle. This fluid is then further digested within the *Sleshma Dhara Kala* by the *Rasagni*. The health of this fire determines the quality of *rasa* produced. When the *Rasagni* is ideal, healthy *Rasa Dhatu* is produced along with minimal *Kapha Dosha*. In other words, transformation is efficient and there is little waste product produced. When the *Rasagni* is low, the efficiency of the transformation is reduced. The quantity of *rasa* produced is actually greater but it is of poor quality. In addition, excessive waste is produced so *Kapha Dosha* increases. When the *Rasagni* is too high, it efficiently converts *Ahara Rasa* to *Rasa Dhatu*, but also burns up some of the *Rasa Dhatu* that is being produced. Thus, a smaller amount of *Rasa Dhatu* is produced and there is deficiency. There is also minimal waste. Therefore, *Kapha dosha* is reduced. The state of *Rasagni* is dependent upon *Jatharagni*--the main digestive fire. If *Jatharagni* is healthy, so too will be the *Rasagni*. In order to determine the health of the *Rasagni* it is necessary to observe the results of digestion--the *Rasa Dhatu*. The *Rasa Dhatu* can be observed by evaluating the state of the mucous membranes of the body as well as the quantity and quality of any breast milk or menstrual fluid produced.

It is easiest to observe the mucous membranes by looking inside the mouth, at the lips, or at the eyes. If the membranes are dry, red or inflamed or if the lips are cracked, then *Rasa Dhatu* is depleted. The state of the skin also tells about the state of *rasa*. When *Rasa Dhatu* is severely diminished, sweating is decreased and the skin becomes dry and cracked. If the cause of the depletion is due to *Rasagni* being too strong, there will be signs of excess heat, such as burning and redness of the membranes. This is due to an increase in *Pitta Dosha*. If the cause of depletion is due to *Vata Dosha*, it will have been caused by an insufficient intake of appropriate fluids along with a fluctuating, Unstable *Agni*. There is simply not enough fluid to build adequate *Rasa Dhatu* and, due to the variable nature of *Rasagni*, that conversion is poor. On the

other hand, if the mucous membranes are excessively moist and mucousy, the skin is excessively moist, or menstrual fluids and breast milk are produced in excess, then *Rasagni* is low and *rasa* and *Kapha Dosha* are in excess. In order to raise the state of *Jatharagni* and *Rasagni* and lower the amount of *rasa* being produced, it is important to take in hot spices such as ginger, cumin, and black pepper. These should be taken while reducing the amount of salty and sweet fluids in the diet. In order to lower the state of *Jatharagni* and *Rasagni* and increase the amount of *rasa* being produced, it is important to take in heavy, harder to digest foods such as fats and oils. These foods are classified as having a sweet taste and include many nuts and meats. Nuts contain large amounts of oils and meats contain salty juice (animal *Rasa* and *Rakta*). Food should be cooked in a large amount of ghee and other oils, as well. These foods should be taken with an appropriate, but not excessive, amount of spice. The bitter taste also reduces *Rasagni*<sup>10</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

The *Rasa Dhatu* refers to the primary waters of the body. The word *rasa* means liquid. In the physical body, *rasa* refers directly to the plasma, or non cellular portion of the blood; the lymph, and interstitial fluids. The *Rasa Dhatu*, being made up of the element water, has similar qualities. It is cold, heavy, moist, soft, stable, smooth, flowing, cloudy, gross and dull. These qualities are very similar to *Kapha Dosha*, which is made up of water and earth. Thus, the health of *Rasa Dhatu* plays an important role in determining the health of *Kapha Dosha*.

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