

RASAYANA IN THE LIGHT OF CHINESE ALCHEMY

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ABSTRACT

It is human nature to aspire for longevity and this desire is found practically among all the peoples of the world. Accordingly if longevity is desired, there must be a system of rejuvenation for one who keeps on remaining young. Longevity then depended upon rejuvenation. The Aryans and the Chinese believed this to be possible by means of drugs. The first medicinal plant the Chinese used was *ephedra*. Later on when the contact between the Aryans and Chinese became more intimate they came to believe that mercurials especially cinnabar was such a rejuvenating agent and a life prolonging drug. The herbal rasa or plant-juice was replaced by mercurials and mercury was now called Rasa. Rasayana system was original and aimed at rejuvenation which naturally led to longevity.

It is human nature to aspire for longevity and this desire is found practically among all the peoples of the world. However the intelligent realized that when man becomes old it is obvious sign of approaching end. Accordingly if longevity is desired, there must be a system of rejuvenation for one who keeps on remaining young. Longevity then depended upon rejuvenation. It was believed that a snake is a long lived creature and the secret lies in its shedding its old skin annually when apparently it becomes young again.

Now the two peoples in ancient times who believed this to be possible

by means of drugs were the Aryans and the Chinese. The first medicinal plant the Chinese used was *ephedra* called *Haoma* in *Avesta* and *Sauma* in Sanskrit as Boyce (1975; 157) records it. In time *Haoma* was abbreviated to *Homa* and *Sauma* to *Soma*. The extract of *ephedra* plant was also called *Soma* and this became the drink of rejuvenation and thereby of immortality. When the Aryans entered India *ephedra* was not easily procurable. They used other drugs above all *Amalaki* (*Phyllanthus emblica*), which is assumed to prolong life. Looking up for references on rejuvenation in ancient literature I find *Rigveda* contains a few references

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which are quite clear, e.g. RV.4.36.3: "In that your aged parents worn with length of days ye wrought again to youth so that they moved at will. 5.74.5:" ye (Asvins) from Chyavana worn with age removed his skin as it were a robe. So when ye made him young he stirred the longing of a dame "116.10:" ye (Asvins) from the old Chyavana, O Nastayas, stripped as it were mail the skin upon his body, lengthen his life when all had left him helpless, *Dasras* (Asvins) made him Lord of youthful maidens. Later on when the contact between the Aryans and Chinese became more intimate they came to believe that mercurials, specially cinnabar was such a rejuvenating agent and a life prolonging-drug. The herbal Rasa or plant-juice was now replaced by mercurials and mercury was now called Rasa. Nevertheless it is to be

understood that Rasayana originally was a mixture of some plant products and its active principle was called Rasa. Rasayana system was original and aimed at rejuvenation which naturally led to longevity. Later came mercurials when mercury was called Rasa-coming to alchemy proper it originated in Chinese as the counter part of Rasayana primarily aiming at rejuvenation. It has been discussed by many a writer while Needham (1976) who reproduces a picture fig. 1 here un-wittingly illustrating what Rigveda 6.74.5 says 'Chyavana removed his skin as it were a robe'. The full verse is quoted above.

The object was to identify Indian Rasayana with Chinese alchemy and the picture offered here unwittingly illustrates the Indian thought.

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"the original Sauma of the Indo-Iranians". Sauma comes near to Haoma the Avesta word. It is Sauma that later became Soma so did Haoma change into Homa in Pehlavi.

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सारांश

चीनी कीमीया के सन्दर्भ में रसायन

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दीर्घायु प्राप्ति की अभिलाषा मानव का स्वभाव है और यह इच्छा संसार के सभी लोगों में क्रियात्मक रूप से उपस्थित रही है। तदानुसार यदि दीर्घायु प्राप्ति की इच्छा हो तो सदैव युवावस्था बनाये रखने के लिये कायाकल्प की एक पद्धति होनी चाहिये। इस प्रकार दीर्घायु प्राप्ति कायाकल्प पर आधारित रही। आर्य तथा चीनी लोगों का विश्वास था कि औषधियों के प्रयोग द्वारा यह सम्भव है। चीनियों ने सर्वप्रथम जिस वनस्पति का प्रयोग किया वह एफेड्रा थी। तत्पश्चात् जब आर्य और चीनी लोगों के आपसी सम्बन्ध और विकसित हुए तब उनका विश्वास इस बात पर दृढ़ हो गया कि पारदयोग विशेषतया हिंगुल ऐसा ही एक कायाकल्प कारक तथा दीर्घायु कारक औषध द्रव्य है। तदोपरान्त वानस्पतिक स्वरस का स्थान पारदयोगों ने ले लिया और पारद रस कहलाने लगा। रसायन पद्धति का उद्देश्य कायाकल्प प्राप्ति था जिसके कारण दीर्घायु प्राप्ति स्वाभाविक थी।