

**CRITICAL ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF *RASABHEDĪYA ADHYĀYA* OF
AṢṬĀṄGAHRDAYA: AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONCEPT OF *ṢAḌRASA* AND ITS
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ABSTRACT

Background: *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya* is a fundamental chapter that systematically explains the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa* (six tastes) and their significance in Ayurvedic dietetics, pharmacology, and therapeutics. The principles described by *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* continue to serve as the foundation for understanding the actions of food and medicinal substances. **Objective:** To critically review the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* with special emphasis on the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa*, its pharmacological basis, therapeutic applications, and contemporary scientific relevance. **Materials and Methods:** A narrative critical review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya*, *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, *Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha*, and *Bhāvaprakāśa*, along with published articles retrieved from indexed databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and the Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine. Relevant literature was critically analyzed and synthesized. **Results:** The review highlights that each of the six tastes possesses a unique *Mahābhūta* composition, influencing *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Agni*, and *Mala*. The chapter also explains *Rasa Saṃyoga*, the sixty-three taste combinations, and exceptions (*Apavāda*) that reflect the complexity of Ayurvedic pharmacology. Comparative analysis with other classical texts demonstrates conceptual consistency with distinctive clinical clarity in *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya*. Modern evidence from gustatory physiology, phytochemistry, nutrigenomics, and systems biology provides scientific support for several classical concepts. **Conclusion:** The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* presents a comprehensive and clinically relevant framework for understanding Ayurvedic pharmacology and nutrition. Its principles remain applicable to personalized medicine, rational drug selection, and preventive healthcare. Further interdisciplinary research is required to validate and expand the scientific basis of *Rasa Siddhānta* in contemporary clinical practice.

KEYWORDS: *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya*, *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*, *Ṣaḍrasa*, *Rasa Siddhānta*, Ayurveda, *Dravyaguṇa*, Pharmacology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rasa Siddhānta is one of the fundamental concepts of Ayurveda and serves as the cornerstone of Ayurvedic dietetics, pharmacology, and therapeutics. Among the classical Ayurvedic texts, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya Sūtrasthāna* provides a concise yet comprehensive exposition of the concept

of *Ṣaḍrasa* (six tastes). *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* systematically explains the origin, classification, characteristics (*Lakṣaṇa*), physiological actions (*Karma*), therapeutic applications, and adverse effects of the six tastes, emphasizing their role in maintaining health and managing disease.¹ According to Ayurveda, *Rasa* is not merely a sensory perception experienced by the tongue

but an important determinant of the biological and pharmacological activity of food and medicinal substances.

The six tastes are *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Lavaṇa* (salty), *Kaṭu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), and *Kaṣāya* (astringent) are formed by the predominance of specific *Pañcamahābhūtas* and exhibit distinct effects on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Agni*, and *Mala*. Their appropriate consumption promotes health, nourishment, and physiological balance, whereas excessive or inadequate intake contributes to disease. The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* further discusses *Rasa Saṁyoga* (combinations of tastes), classification of drugs according to their predominant *Rasa*, and important *Apavāda* (exceptions), demonstrating that the action of a substance depends not only on *Rasa* but also on *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, and *Prabhāva*. These principles constitute the scientific foundation of *Dravyaguṇa Vijñāna* and rational drug selection in Ayurveda.

In recent years, advances in taste receptor biology, nutritional science, phytochemistry, and pharmacology have renewed interest in the classical concept of *Rasa*. Experimental studies suggest that taste influences digestion, metabolism, endocrine responses, and immune regulation, supporting many of the observations described in Ayurvedic literature. Despite its clinical importance, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* has received limited comprehensive critical analysis that integrates classical concepts with current scientific understanding.

Therefore, the present review critically examines the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*, with special emphasis on the concept of *Śaḍrasa*, its classical interpretation, pharmacological significance, and clinical relevance. By correlating the teachings of *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* with contemporary scientific evidence, this review aims to highlight the continuing relevance of *Rasa Siddhānta* in evidence-based Ayurvedic practice and to identify future directions for research and clinical application.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This study is a narrative critical review of the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya Sūtrasthāna*, focusing on the concept of *Śaḍrasa*, its classical interpretation, and clinical relevance.

2.2 Literature Sources

The primary source was the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. Supporting references were obtained from *Caraka Saṁhitā*, *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, *Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha*, and relevant peer-reviewed articles indexed in PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

2.3 Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted using the keywords "*Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*," "*Śaḍrasa*," "*Rasa Siddhānta*," "*Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*," "*Dravyaguṇa*," and "Ayurvedic pharmacology." Relevant classical references and contemporary scientific studies were screened for inclusion.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Classical Ayurvedic texts and peer-reviewed English-language articles relevant to *Śaḍrasa* and its pharmacological or clinical aspects were included. Duplicate studies, non-peer-reviewed publications, and literature unrelated to the review objectives were excluded.

2.5 Data Extraction and Critical Appraisal

Relevant information on the origin, properties, actions, therapeutic significance, and clinical applications of *Śaḍrasa* was extracted, organized thematically, and critically analyzed by comparing classical descriptions with contemporary scientific evidence.

Historical Evolution of *Rasa Siddhānta*

The concept of *Rasa Siddhānta* has its roots in the Vedic period, where food and medicinal plants were recognized for their nourishing and therapeutic properties. In the *Caraka Saṁhitā* and *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, the six tastes (*Śaḍrasa*) were systematically described with respect to their *Pañcamahābhūta* composition, effects on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, and disease management. *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* further refined these concepts in the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* by presenting them in a concise and clinically applicable manner. His systematic explanation of the characteristics, actions, combinations, and therapeutic significance of the six tastes established *Rasa Siddhānta* as a fundamental principle of *Dravyaguṇa Vijñāna* and Ayurvedic dietetics. Even today, these principles continue to guide personalized dietary recommendations and rational drug selection in Ayurvedic practice.

4. Overview of *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* is one of the important chapters of *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya Sūtrasthāna*, devoted to the classification and comprehensive understanding of the *Śaḍrasa*. The chapter explains the origin of the six tastes from the *Pañcamahābhūtas*, their properties, physiological actions, effects on *Doṣa* and *Dhātu*, therapeutic applications, and the consequences of excessive consumption. It also discusses *Rasa Saṁyoga* (taste combinations) and exceptions (*Apavāda*), highlighting the role of *Rasa* in the pharmacological activity of food and medicinal substances.

4.1 Position of the Chapter in *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* is the 10th chapter of *Sūtrasthāna* in *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya*. It serves as the

foundation for understanding *Rasa Siddhānta*, which is essential for the study of *Dravyaguna*, dietetics, and clinical therapeutics.

4.2 Objectives of *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*

The primary objective of this chapter is to explain the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa*, their elemental composition, properties, physiological and therapeutic actions, and their role in maintaining the balance of *Doṣa* and *Dhātu*. It also aims to provide the scientific basis for the appropriate selection of food and medicinal substances in Ayurvedic practice.

4.3 Structural Organization of the Chapter

The chapter is arranged in a logical sequence. It begins with the classification and origin of the six tastes, followed by their *Lakṣaṇa* (characteristics) and *Karma* (actions). Subsequently, it describes the effects of each *Rasa* on *Doṣa* and *Dhātu*, the concept of *Rasa Saṁyoga* (63 taste combinations), and important *Apavāda* (exceptions). This systematic organization makes the chapter a concise yet comprehensive guide to the principles of Ayurvedic pharmacology and nutrition.

5. Concept of Rasa

Rasa is one of the fundamental principles of Ayurveda and represents the first perceptible attribute of any food or medicinal substance. It is primarily perceived by the tongue (*Rasanendriya*) and serves as an important indicator of the pharmacological properties of a drug. In Ayurveda, *Rasa* is not limited to taste perception alone but reflects the intrinsic nature of a substance, influencing digestion, metabolism, tissue nourishment, and the balance of *Doṣa*. The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* explains that the therapeutic action of a substance begins with its *Rasa*, making it an essential consideration in dietary planning and drug selection.

5.1 Nirukti (Etymology)

The term *Rasa* is derived from the Sanskrit root "Ras", meaning to taste, relish, or experience. According to Ayurvedic literature, "*Rasyate iti Rasaḥ*"—that which is perceived or relished by the tongue is called *Rasa*.²

Although it is experienced through the sense of taste, Ayurveda attributes broader physiological and therapeutic significance to *Rasa* beyond sensory perception.

5.2 Definition of Rasa

Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa describes *Rasa* as the taste perceived immediately after a substance comes into contact with the tongue.³ Ayurveda classifies *Rasa* into six types (*Ṣaḍrasa*): *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Lavaṇa* (salty), *Kaṭu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), and *Kaṣāya* (astringent). Each *Rasa* possesses distinct properties and produces characteristic effects on the body and mind.

5.3 Philosophical Basis of Rasa

The concept of *Rasa* is based on the *Pañcamahābhūta Siddhānta*. Each taste originates from the predominance of two *Mahābhūtas* and therefore exhibits specific qualities and actions. Since the human body is also composed of the same *Mahābhūtas*, the interaction between *Rasa* and the body determines the effects of food and medicines on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, and *Agni*. Thus, *Rasa* forms an important link between the elemental composition of a substance and its therapeutic action.

5.4 Importance of Rasa in Ayurveda

Rasa plays a central role in Ayurvedic dietetics and therapeutics. It helps in selecting appropriate foods and medicines according to an individual's *Prakṛti*, disease condition, season, and digestive capacity.⁴ Proper use of the six tastes promotes health, maintains *Doṣic* balance, and supports tissue nourishment, whereas excessive or deficient intake may lead to disease. Therefore, understanding *Rasa* is essential for rational drug selection, dietary planning, and individualized treatment.

6. Mahābhūta Composition of Ṣaḍrasa

According to the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*, each of the six tastes is formed by the predominance of two *Pañcamahābhūtas*, which determine its inherent qualities and biological actions. The *Mahābhūta* composition explains why different tastes produce distinct physiological and therapeutic effects.

<i>Rasa</i>	Predominant <i>Mahābhūtas</i> ^[5]	General Action ^[6]
Madhura (Sweet)	<i>Prthvī + Jala</i>	Nourishing, strengthening, tissue-building
Amla (Sour)	<i>Prthvī + Agni</i>	Digestive stimulant, appetite promoter
Lavaṇa (Salty)	<i>Jala + Agni</i>	Softening, digestive, channel-cleansing
Kaṭu (Pungent)	<i>Agni + Vāyu</i>	Drying, digestive, <i>Kapha</i> -reducing
Tikta (Bitter)	<i>Ākāśa + Vāyu</i>	Detoxifying, lightening, <i>Pitta-Kapha</i> pacifying
Kaṣāya (Astringent)	<i>Prthvī + Vāyu</i>	Absorbent, wound-healing, haemostatic

This elemental composition forms the basis of the pharmacological actions of *Ṣaḍrasa* and explains their influence on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Agni*, and physiological functions. Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa uses this principle to establish a rational framework for the therapeutic use of food and medicinal substances in Ayurveda.

7. Critical Analysis of Individual Rasas

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* describes *Ṣaḍrasa* as the primary determinants of the pharmacological and therapeutic actions of food and drugs. Each *Rasa* possesses a distinct *Mahābhūta* composition, *Guṇa*, and physiological effect, influencing the balance of *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, and *Agni*. Their rational use promotes

health, whereas excessive or deficient intake leads to disease.

7.1 Madhura Rasa (Sweet Taste)

Madhura Rasa is predominantly composed of *Prthvī* and *Jala Mahābhūtas*. It nourishes all *Dhātus*, enhances strength, complexion, longevity, and promotes tissue growth. It pacifies *Vāta* and *Pitta* while increasing *Kapha*. Excessive intake may result in obesity, diabetes (*Prameha*), and other *Kapha*-related disorders. Clinically, it is beneficial in conditions of debility, emaciation, and tissue depletion.^[7]

7.2 Amla Rasa (Sour Taste)

Amla Rasa is composed mainly of *Prthvī* and *Agni Mahābhūtas*. It stimulates appetite, improves digestion, enhances salivation, and promotes strength. It alleviates *Vāta* but aggravates *Pitta* and *Kapha* when consumed in excess. Overuse may lead to hyperacidity, skin disorders, and bleeding conditions. It is commonly indicated in anorexia and digestive insufficiency.^[8]

7.3 Lavaṇa Rasa (Salty Taste)

Lavaṇa Rasa originates from *Jala* and *Agni Mahābhūtas*. It improves taste perception, softens tissues, facilitates digestion, and relieves stiffness and obstruction. It pacifies *Vāta* but increases *Pitta* and *Kapha*. Excessive consumption is associated with hypertension, premature ageing, skin disorders, and hair loss. Its therapeutic use is mainly in digestive disorders and constipation.^[9]

7.4 Kaṭu Rasa (Pungent Taste)

Kaṭu Rasa is formed by *Agni* and *Vāyu Mahābhūtas*. It stimulates digestion, enhances metabolism, clears bodily channels, and reduces accumulated *Kapha* and *Meda*. It aggravates *Vāta* and *Pitta* when consumed excessively, causing dryness, weakness, and tissue depletion. It is widely used in metabolic disorders, obesity, respiratory diseases, and Ama-related conditions.^[10]

7.5 Tikta Rasa (Bitter Taste)

Tikta Rasa is predominantly composed of *Ākāśa* and *Vāyu Mahābhūtas*. It possesses detoxifying, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory properties. It pacifies *Pitta* and *Kapha*, improves digestion, and purifies blood. Excessive intake may cause emaciation and aggravation of *Vāta*. Clinically, it is valuable in skin diseases, fever, liver disorders, and metabolic diseases.^[11]

7.6 Kaṣāya Rasa (Astringent Taste)

Kaṣāya Rasa is composed of *Prthvī* and *Vāyu Mahābhūtas*. It has absorbent, haemostatic, wound-healing, and anti-diarrhoeal properties. It pacifies *Pitta* and *Kapha* but aggravates *Vāta* when consumed excessively. Overuse may result in constipation, dryness, and impaired digestion. It is therapeutically indicated in bleeding disorders, ulcers, wounds, and diarrhoea.^[12]

8. Rasa, Guṇa, Vīrya, Vipāka and Their Interrelationship

According to the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya*, the therapeutic effect of a substance cannot be explained by *Rasa* alone. Its overall action is determined by the combined influence of *Rasa* (taste), *Guṇa* (qualities), *Vīrya* (potency), *Vipāka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhāva* (specific action). *Rasa* initiates the immediate pharmacological response after ingestion, while *Guṇa* modifies its functional properties. *Vīrya* governs the dominant biological activity, either heating (*Uṣṇa*) or cooling (*Śīta*), and *Vipāka* determines the final metabolic effect after digestion.^[13]

Although *Rasa* generally predicts the action of a drug, exceptions occur due to the influence of *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, or *Prabhāva*. Therefore, *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* emphasizes that these attributes should be considered collectively during the selection of food and medicines. This integrated approach forms the scientific basis of *Dravyaguṇa Vijñāna* and supports the principles of individualized and rational therapeutics in Ayurveda.

9. Effect of Śaḍrasa on Doṣa, Dhātu and Mala

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* emphasizes that the maintenance of health depends upon the proper and balanced consumption of *Śaḍrasa*. Since each *Rasa* possesses a distinct *Mahābhūta* composition, it exerts specific effects on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Mala*, and *Agni*. The therapeutic action of food and drugs is therefore largely determined by their predominant *Rasa*.

Effect on Doṣa

Each *Rasa* influences the three *Doṣas* in a predictable manner. *Madhura*, *Amla*, and *Lavaṇa Rasa* as alleviate *Vāta* because of their nourishing, moistening, and stabilizing properties. In contrast, *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya Rasas* increase *Vāta* due to their light, dry, and subtle qualities.

Madhura, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya Rasa* spacyify *Pitta* by virtue of their cooling and soothing actions, where as *Amla*, *Lavaṇa*, and *Kaṭu Rasas* aggravate *Pitta* because of their heating nature.

Similarly, *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya Rasa* reduce *Kapha* through their drying, lightening, and channel-cleansing actions, while *Madhura*, *Amla*, and *Lavaṇa Rasas* increase *Kapha* due to their nourishing and unctuous qualities.^[14]

Thus, the selection of an appropriate *Rasa* according to the predominance of *Doṣa* forms the basis of Ayurvedic dietary and therapeutic planning.

Effect on Dhātu

Among the six tastes, *Madhura Rasa* is considered the most nourishing and is responsible for promoting the growth and maintenance of all *Sapta Dhātus*. *Amla* and

Lavaṇa Rasa support digestion and facilitate tissue nourishment by enhancing Agni. Conversely, Kaṭu, Tikta, and Kaṣāya Rasa exhibit Lekhana (scraping), Śoṣaṇa (drying), and Śodhana (purifying) actions, making them useful in conditions involving excessive accumulation of fat, Kapha, or toxins.^[15] However, prolonged or excessive use of these Rasa may lead to tissue depletion and weakness.

Effect on Mala

Śaḍrasa also regulate the formation and elimination of Mala. Lavaṇa Rasa facilitates bowel movement by softening stools, while Kaṣāya Rasa exhibits absorbent properties and is useful in diarrhoea. Kaṭu and Tikta Rasa help eliminate metabolic waste and clear obstructed channels. Balanced intake of all six tastes supports normal excretion of stool, urine, and sweat, whereas imbalance may result in constipation, diarrhoea, or other disorders of elimination.^[16]

Therefore, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* highlights that the judicious use of Śaḍrasa is essential for maintaining the equilibrium of Doṣa, Dhātu, and Mala, thereby preserving health and preventing disease.

10. Therapeutic and Pathological Effects of Śaḍrasa

Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa explains that the effects of Śaḍrasa depend on the quantity consumed, the individual's Prakṛti, digestive capacity (Agni), age, season, and disease condition.^[17] Proper use of the six tastes maintains physiological harmony, whereas their inappropriate use becomes a cause of disease. This principle reflects the Ayurvedic concept that both food and medicine act through the same pharmacological principles.

10.1 Beneficial Effects

The balanced consumption of all six tastes promotes Doṣa Sāmya, strengthens Agni, nourishes the Sapta Dhātus, supports proper formation and elimination of Mala, and enhances Ojas, thereby maintaining overall health.

Each Rasa possesses unique therapeutic actions. Madhura Rasa provides nourishment (Bṛṃhana), promotes longevity, and enhances vitality. Amla and Lavaṇa Rasa stimulate appetite (Dīpana), improve digestion (Pācana), and facilitate the movement of Vāta. Kaṭu Rasa removes obstruction, enhances metabolism, and reduces Kapha and Meda. Tikta Rasa acts as a detoxifying and anti-inflammatory agent, while Kaṣāya Rasa promotes wound healing, haemostasis, and tissue contraction.^[18] The proper combination of these tastes forms the basis of a balanced diet and rational drug formulation in Ayurveda.

10.2 Effects of Excessive Consumption (Atiyoga)

Excessive intake of any single Rasa disturbs Doṣic balance and predisposes the individual to disease. Overconsumption of Madhura Rasa leads to Kapha

aggravation, obesity, diabetes (Prameha), lethargy, and impaired digestion. Excessive Amla Rasa may cause hyperacidity, burning sensation, skin diseases, and bleeding disorders due to Pitta aggravation. Lavaṇa Rasa, when consumed in excess, contributes to oedema, hypertension, premature greying of hair, wrinkling of the skin, and increased Pitta.

Similarly, excessive Kaṭu Rasa causes dryness, weakness, infertility, and aggravation of Vāta and Pitta. Overuse of Tikta Rasa may result in emaciation, tissue depletion, and loss of strength, while excessive Kaṣāya Rasa produces constipation, dryness, abdominal distension, and impaired digestion. These observations demonstrate the importance of moderation and individualized dietary advice in Ayurveda.^[19]

10.3 Effects of Deficient Consumption (Hīnayoga)

Deficiency or inadequate intake of one or more Rasa also adversely affects health. Insufficient Madhura Rasa may lead to emaciation, weakness, reduced immunity, and poor tissue nourishment. Lack of Amla and Lavaṇa Rasas may impair appetite, reduce digestive efficiency, and increase Vāta. Deficiency of Kaṭu, Tikta, and Kaṣāya Rasas may result in Kapha accumulation, sluggish metabolism, poor detoxification, and increased susceptibility to metabolic disorders.^[20]

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* emphasizes that health is best maintained not by excessive preference for a particular taste but by the balanced and appropriate use of all six Rasas according to an individual's constitution, disease status, season, and digestive capacity. This principle remains highly relevant in contemporary Ayurveda, particularly in personalized nutrition and preventive healthcare.

11. Rasa Saṃyoga (Combination of Tastes)

11.1 Concept of Rasa Saṃyoga

The concept of Rasa Saṃyoga described in the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* is one of the distinctive contributions of Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa to Ayurvedic pharmacology. Saṃyoga refers to the combination of two or more Rasas within a single Dravya. Although every substance possesses one predominant Rasa (Pradhāna Rasa), most foods and medicinal plants contain multiple tastes that collectively influence their therapeutic action. Vāgbhaṭa emphasizes that the pharmacological effect of a drug cannot be predicted solely by its dominant taste; rather, it results from the combined influence of all Rasas along with Guṇa, Vīrya, Vipāka, and Prabhāva.

The concept of Rasa Saṃyoga explains the diversity of therapeutic actions observed among medicinal substances. Drugs with similar predominant tastes may exhibit different clinical effects due to differences in associated Rasas. This principle forms the scientific basis of polyherbal formulations and individualized dietetics in Ayurveda, where the selection of drugs

depends on the patient's *Doṣa*, *Prakṛti*, *Agni*, stage of disease, and seasonal variations.

11.2 Classification of Sixty-three Rasa Combinations

Based on the six fundamental tastes (*Madhura*, *Amla*, *Lavaṇa*, *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya*), *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* describes 63 possible combinations (*Rasa Saṃyoga*) using the principles of permutation and combination.^[21]

Type of Combination	Number
<i>Eka Rasa</i> (Single taste)	6
<i>Dvi Rasa</i> (Two tastes)	15
<i>Tri Rasa</i> (Three tastes)	20
<i>Catur Rasa</i> (Four tastes)	15
<i>Pañca Rasa</i> (Five tastes)	6
<i>Ṣaḍ Rasa</i> (All six tastes)	1
Total	63

This mathematical classification illustrates the remarkable diversity of Ayurvedic drugs and diets. Many medicinal plants, such as *Haritakī*, *Āmalakī*, and *Guḍūcī*, exhibit multiple tastes, enabling them to produce broad-spectrum therapeutic actions. Such combinations provide synergistic effects and enhance the overall efficacy of treatment.

11.3 Therapeutic Importance

The concept of *Rasa Saṃyoga* has considerable clinical significance. Most Ayurvedic formulations are prepared by combining drugs with different *Rasas* to achieve a balanced therapeutic effect while minimizing adverse reactions. For example, formulations containing *Madhura* and *Tikta Rasa* simultaneously provide nourishment and detoxification, whereas combinations of *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya* are particularly effective in managing *Kapha* and *Meda* disorders.

Rasa Saṃyoga also supports the Ayurvedic principle of personalized medicine. The physician selects appropriate combinations of tastes according to the patient's constitution, *Doṣic* imbalance, digestive capacity, disease stage, and seasonal factors. From a modern perspective, this concept may be correlated with polypharmacology, where multiple bioactive constituents act on different molecular targets to produce synergistic therapeutic effects.²² Thus, *Rasa Saṃyoga* remains highly relevant in the development of rational Ayurvedic formulations and evidence-based clinical practice.

12. Dravya Classification Based on Predominant Rasa

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* classifies medicinal substances according to their predominant *Rasa*, considering taste as the first perceptible attribute and an important predictor of pharmacological action. Although a drug may possess more than one taste, it is categorized based on the *Rasa* that exerts the greatest therapeutic influence.

Madhura Rasa Dravya possesses nourishing, strengthening, rejuvenating, and tissue-building properties and are commonly indicated in conditions of debility, emaciation, and *Vāta-Pitta* disorders.^[23] *Amla Rasa Dravya* stimulates appetite, improve digestion, and facilitate nutrient absorption, while *Lavaṇa Rasa Dravya* soften tissues, relieve stiffness, and promote bowel evacuation.^[24]

In contrast, *Kaṭu Rasa Dravya* exhibits *Dīpana*, *Pācana*, *Lekhana*, and *Kapha-Medohara* actions and are widely used in obesity, metabolic disorders, and respiratory diseases. *Tikta Rasa Dravya* possesses detoxifying, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and hepatoprotective properties, making them valuable in skin diseases, fever, and liver disorders.^[25] *Kaṣāya Rasa Dravya* are characterized by absorbent, haemostatic, wound-healing, and tissue-contracting actions and are commonly indicated in diarrhoea, ulcers, wounds, and bleeding disorders.^[26]

This classification enables physicians to select appropriate drugs according to *Doṣa* predominance, disease pathology, and therapeutic objectives. It also serves as the foundation of *Dravyaguṇa Vijñāna*, where *Rasa* provides the initial basis for understanding the pharmacodynamic profile of medicinal substances.

13. Apavāda (Exceptions) in Rasa Siddhānta

Although *Rasa* is considered the primary determinant of drug action, *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* clearly states that it is not the sole factor governing therapeutic effects. Certain drugs produce actions contrary to those expected from their predominant taste. Such deviations are referred to as *Apavāda* (exceptions) and represent an important pharmacological concept in Ayurveda.

These exceptions arise due to the influence of other pharmacodynamic factors such as *Guṇa* (qualities), *Vīrya* (potency), *Vipāka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhāva* (specific or unexplained action). Thus, two drugs possessing the same *Rasa* may exhibit different therapeutic actions because of differences in their potency or post-digestive metabolism.

For example, some *Madhura Rasa* substances may exhibit drying or digestive actions because of *Uṣṇa Vīrya*, while certain *Tikta Rasa* drugs produce stronger rejuvenating effects than expected because of their unique *Prabhāva*. Similarly, drugs sharing identical *Rasa* and *Guṇa* may still differ in clinical efficacy owing to variations in *Vipāka* or specific pharmacological properties.

The concept of *Apavāda* demonstrates the scientific depth of Ayurvedic pharmacology by emphasizing that drug action is multidimensional rather than dependent solely on taste. It prevents oversimplification in clinical practice and encourages physicians to evaluate the

complete pharmacodynamic profile of a substance before prescribing it.

From a contemporary perspective, *Apavāda* may be compared with differences in pharmacokinetics, receptor selectivity, active phytoconstituents, and unique mechanisms of drug action observed in modern pharmacology. Therefore, this concept not only enhances the rational understanding of Ayurvedic therapeutics but also supports its integration with current biomedical science.

14. Comparative Review with Other Classical Texts

The doctrine of *Ṣaḍrasa* is a common and fundamental concept in all major Ayurvedic classics. However, each text presents the concept from a distinct perspective depending on its scope and clinical emphasis. While *Caraka Saṃhitā* primarily focuses on the physiological and therapeutic significance of *Rasa*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā* highlights its role in surgery, wound healing, and dietetics. *Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha* provides a comprehensive account that later evolved into the concise presentation found in *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya*, whereas *Bhāvaprakāśa* elaborates the practical application of *Rasa* in *Dravyaguṇa* and dietetics. The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya* is unique because it integrates these concepts into a logical and clinically oriented framework, making it one of the most practical chapters for understanding Ayurvedic pharmacology.

14.1 Caraka Saṃhitā

The concept of *Ṣaḍrasa* is extensively described in *Caraka Saṃhitā Sūtrasthāna*, particularly in *Rasavimāna Adhyāya*. *Ācārya Caraka* considers *Rasa* as the primary determinant of the action of food and medicines and explains that the six tastes originate from different combinations of the *Pañcamahābhūtas*. He discusses their effects on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Mala*, *Agni*, and *Ojas*, emphasizing that balanced consumption of all six tastes is essential for maintaining health. *Caraka* also elaborates on the harmful effects of *Atiyoga*, *Hīnayoga*, and *Mithyāyoga* of *Rasa* and establishes the concept of *Rasa*, *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, and *Prabhāva* as the five determinants of drug action.

Compared with *Caraka*, *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* presents these concepts in a more concise and systematically arranged manner. The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* retains the essential principles described by *Caraka* but organizes them in a sequence that progresses from the origin of *Rasa* to their clinical applications, making the concepts easier to understand and apply in practice.

14.2 Suśruta Saṃhitā

In *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa* is discussed mainly in relation to *Āhāra*, *Śalya Tantra*, and tissue healing. *Suśruta* emphasizes that appropriate dietary taste plays a crucial role in wound healing, postoperative recovery, and tissue regeneration. He describes the

influence of different *Rasa* on *Rakta*, *Māmsa*, and other *Dhātus*, highlighting their importance in maintaining tissue integrity and promoting healing.

Suśruta also explains the effects of *Rasa* on *Doṣa* and disease progression, but his discussion is more clinically directed toward surgical care and nutrition. In contrast, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya* provides a broader pharmacological perspective by integrating dietary principles, drug actions, *Rasa* combinations, and therapeutic applications within a single chapter.

14.3 Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha

The *Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha*, attributed to *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa*, presents a detailed exposition of *Rasa Siddhānta*, which serves as the conceptual foundation for the later *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya*. Both texts describe the *Mahābhūta* composition, properties, *Doṣic* actions, *Rasa Saṃyoga*, and clinical significance of the six tastes. However, *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya* condenses these concepts into a more systematic and easily understandable format without compromising their scientific depth.

The concise style of *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya* reflects *Vāgbhaṭa's* objective of making Ayurvedic principles more accessible to students and practitioners. Consequently, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* has become one of the most frequently studied chapters in Ayurvedic education and clinical practice.

14.4 Bhāvaprakāśa

Bhāvaprakāśa, a later Ayurvedic text, expands the application of *Ṣaḍrasa* in *Dravyaguṇa* and *Āhāra Vijñāna*. *Bhāvamīśra* classifies numerous medicinal plants, fruits, vegetables, cereals, and dietary substances according to their predominant *Rasa* and explains their therapeutic indications in greater detail. Greater emphasis is placed on practical drug identification, dietary planning, and disease-specific applications.

Compared with *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdaya*, *Bhāvaprakāśa* is more descriptive and pharmaco-therapeutic in nature, whereas the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* provides the fundamental theoretical framework on which later Ayurvedic pharmacology is based. Together, these texts illustrate the progressive development and clinical refinement of *Rasa Siddhānta* across different periods of Ayurvedic literature.

15. Contemporary Scientific Correlation

Although the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa* originated more than a thousand years ago, recent advances in biomedical science have provided evidence supporting many of its fundamental principles. Modern research demonstrates that taste is not merely a sensory experience but an important regulator of digestion, metabolism, endocrine function, immunity, and overall health. The multidimensional role attributed to *Rasa* in the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* closely resembles current

understanding of the complex interactions between nutrition, physiology, and disease.

15.1 Taste Receptors and Gustatory Physiology

Modern physiology has identified specialized taste receptor families, including T1R receptors responsible for sweet and umami perception and T2R receptors responsible for bitter taste. These receptors are expressed not only on the tongue but also in the gastrointestinal tract, pancreas, respiratory epithelium, adipose tissue, and immune cells. Their activation regulates salivation, gastric secretion, incretin release, insulin secretion, appetite, glucose homeostasis, and innate immune responses.^[27]

These findings closely parallel the Ayurvedic view that *Rasa* influences the body immediately after ingestion by stimulating *Agni*, regulating digestion, and affecting systemic physiological functions. For example, *Amla* and *Lavaṇa Rasas* stimulate salivary and gastric secretions, *Kaṭu Rasa* enhances metabolism, and *Tikta Rasa* modulates digestive and detoxification processes. Thus, modern gustatory physiology provides a plausible biological explanation for many classical observations described by *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa*.

15.2 Phytochemistry and Pharmacological Actions

The characteristic taste of medicinal plants arises from their bioactive phytochemical constituents, which are responsible for specific pharmacological effects.

- *Madhura Rasa* is commonly associated with carbohydrates, amino acids, and glycosides that possess nourishing, anabolic, and immunomodulatory properties.
- *Amla Rasa* reflects the presence of organic acids and vitamin C, contributing to antioxidant activity and improved digestion.
- *Lavaṇa Rasa* is related to mineral salts that maintain electrolyte balance and stimulate digestion.
- *Kaṭu Rasa* is rich in alkaloids, volatile oils, and pungent principles such as gingerols and piperine, which exhibit digestive, thermogenic, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory actions.
- *Tikta Rasa* is associated with bitter alkaloids, diterpenes, and flavonoids possessing hepatoprotective, antioxidant, antipyretic, and immunomodulatory effects.
- *Kaṣāya Rasa* contains tannins and polyphenols that demonstrate astringent, haemostatic, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and wound-healing activities.

These pharmacological observations strongly support the therapeutic properties assigned to different *Rasas* in classical Ayurveda and reinforce the scientific basis of *Rasa Siddhānta*.^[28]

15.3 Nutrigenomics and Precision Nutrition

Nutrigenomics investigates how nutrients influence gene expression and how genetic variations affect dietary responses. Ayurveda has long advocated individualized nutrition based on *Prakṛti*, *Doṣa*, *Agni*, *Deśa*, *Kāla*,

and *Vaya*. The concept of selecting foods according to their *Rasa* closely resembles the modern approach of precision nutrition, where dietary recommendations are personalized according to an individual's biological characteristics.^[29]

For example, a person with *Kapha* predominance benefits from *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya Rasas*, whereas an individual with *Vāta* predominance requires *Madhura*, *Amla*, and *Lavaṇa Rasas*. Such personalized dietary planning aligns with current efforts to develop nutrition strategies based on metabolic and genetic profiles. Therefore, *Rasa Siddhānta* may be regarded as an early conceptual model of individualized nutrition.

15.4 Systems Biology Perspective

Systems biology considers health as the result of dynamic interactions among multiple biological systems rather than isolated organs. Ayurveda similarly views the human body as an integrated network in which *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Agni*, *Mala*, and *Ojas* function in mutual harmony. The *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya* demonstrates that each *Rasa* simultaneously influences digestion, metabolism, tissue nutrition, immunity, and physiological regulation, reflecting a systems-level understanding of health.^[30]

From this perspective, *Śaḍrasa* functions as a regulatory network rather than a simple sensory classification. The interactions between *Rasa*, *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, and *Prabhāva* resemble the multidimensional interactions studied in systems pharmacology and network medicine. Consequently, *Rasa Siddhānta* provides a holistic framework that complements contemporary concepts of systems biology and integrative medicine, highlighting its continuing relevance for modern Ayurvedic research and clinical practice.

16. Clinical Relevance of Śaḍrasa in Ayurvedic Practice

The principles of *Śaḍrasa* described in the *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya* have immense clinical importance in Ayurvedic practice. *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* emphasizes that the appropriate selection of *Rasa* forms the basis of *Āhāra* (diet), *Auśadha* (medicine), and *Chikitsā* (treatment). Since every *Rasa* exhibits distinct effects on *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Agni*, and *Mala*, its judicious use helps maintain physiological balance and restore health. The concept remains highly relevant in preventive medicine, disease management, drug formulation, and individualized patient care.

16.1 Dietetics (Āhāra)

Ayurveda regards *Āhāra* as one of the three *Upastambhas* essential for sustaining life. The *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya* advocates the balanced inclusion of all six tastes in the daily diet to ensure proper nourishment, digestion, and tissue maintenance.

The proportion of each *Rasa* should be determined according to an individual's *Prakṛti*, *Agni*, age, season (*Rtu*), and disease condition.^[31]

For example, *Madhura Rasa* promotes nourishment and tissue growth, *Amla* and *Lavaṇa* stimulate appetite and digestion, whereas *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya* facilitate detoxification and reduce excessive *Kapha* and *Meda*. Thus, the concept of *Śaḍrasa* provides a scientific basis for balanced nutrition and healthy dietary habits.

16.2 Disease Prevention

The balanced consumption of *Śaḍrasa* plays a vital role in maintaining *Doṣa Sāmya* and preventing disease. Ayurveda considers improper dietary habits and excessive preference for a single taste as important causes of *Doṣic* imbalance and chronic disorders. Appropriate use of the six tastes enhances *Agni*, improves metabolism, strengthens immunity (*Ojas*), and supports tissue homeostasis.

In the current era, where lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and metabolic syndrome are increasingly prevalent, the Ayurvedic principle of balanced taste consumption offers a practical strategy for preventive healthcare. Thus, *Rasa Siddhānta* serves not only as a therapeutic guide but also as a preventive health model.

16.3 Drug Selection and Formulation

In Ayurveda, *Rasa* is one of the primary criteria for selecting medicinal substances. Knowledge of the predominant *Rasa* enables physicians to predict the therapeutic action of a drug and choose formulations according to *Doṣa* predominance, disease stage, and patient constitution. Most classical formulations contain multiple herbs with different *Rasas* to achieve synergistic effects and minimize adverse reactions.

The concept of *Rasa Sāmyoga* described by *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* forms the basis of many Ayurvedic formulations, where the combination of different tastes enhances efficacy while maintaining therapeutic balance. Therefore, understanding *Rasa* is fundamental to rational drug formulation and evidence-based Ayurvedic pharmacotherapy.

16.4 Personalized Medicine

One of the most significant contributions of *Rasa Siddhānta* is its application in personalized medicine. Ayurveda recommends the selection of food and medicines according to an individual's *Prakṛti*, *Doṣa*, *Agni*, *Satmya*, age, season, and disease status, rather than following a uniform approach for all patients.

For instance, individuals with *Vāta* predominance benefit from *Madhura*, *Amla*, and *Lavaṇa Rasas*, whereas those with *Kapha* predominance require *Kaṭu*, *Tikta*, and *Kaṣāya Rasas*. This individualized approach closely resembles the modern concept of precision medicine and

demonstrates the enduring relevance of the *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya* in contemporary healthcare.

17. Critical Appraisal of *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya*

The *Rasabhedhīya Adhyāya* is one of the most scientifically structured chapters of *Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya*. *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* presents the concept of *Śaḍrasa* in a logical sequence, beginning with their origin from the *Pañcamahābhūtas*, followed by their properties, physiological actions, *Doṣic* effects, therapeutic applications, combinations, and exceptions. This systematic arrangement facilitates both academic understanding and clinical application.

A notable strength of the chapter is its integrated approach to pharmacology. Rather than considering *Rasa* alone, *Vāgbhaṭa* emphasizes the combined influence of *Guna*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, and *Prabhāva*, providing a multidimensional explanation of drug action. The discussion on *Rasa Sāmyoga* and *Apavāda* further reflects an advanced understanding of variability in therapeutic responses, which is comparable to modern concepts of polypharmacology and individualized medicine.

Despite its comprehensive nature, certain concepts remain qualitative and require further scientific validation. The exact molecular mechanisms underlying the actions of different *Rasas* and their relationship with modern physiology are still being explored. Nevertheless, the principles described in this chapter continue to provide a strong conceptual framework for Ayurvedic pharmacology, dietetics, and clinical therapeutics.

18. Research Gaps and Future Perspectives

Although the concept of *Śaḍrasa* has been widely discussed in Ayurvedic literature, high-quality scientific evidence validating many of its classical claims remains limited. Most contemporary studies focus on individual medicinal plants rather than the broader pharmacological principles of *Rasa Siddhānta*. Standardized experimental models evaluating the influence of different *Rasas* on *Agni*, metabolism, immune function, gut microbiota, and disease outcomes are still lacking.

Future research should emphasize interdisciplinary approaches integrating Ayurveda, pharmacology, nutrition, molecular biology, systems biology, and artificial intelligence. Clinical trials evaluating *Rasa*-based dietary interventions, biomarker studies exploring *Doṣa*-specific responses, and phytochemical investigations correlating taste with therapeutic activity may strengthen the scientific evidence supporting *Rasa Siddhānta*. Such research will facilitate the integration of Ayurvedic principles into evidence-based and personalized healthcare.

19. CONCLUSION

The *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* of *Aṣṭāṅghrdaya* presents a comprehensive and scientifically organized exposition of the concept of *Ṣaḍrasa*, establishing it as a cornerstone of Ayurvedic dietetics, pharmacology, and therapeutics. *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* systematically explains the origin, properties, physiological actions, therapeutic applications, *Rasa Saṃyoga*, and exceptions, highlighting that the action of food and medicinal substances depends on the integrated influence of *Rasa*, *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, and *Prabhāva*. This holistic approach provides a rational basis for drug selection, dietary planning, and individualized treatment.

The enduring relevance of *Rasa Siddhānta* is increasingly supported by contemporary research in taste receptor biology, phytochemistry, nutrigenomics, and systems biology, which demonstrates that taste has significant effects on digestion, metabolism, immunity, and overall health. These developments offer scientific insights into many of the classical observations described by *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa*.

In conclusion, the *Rasabhedīya Adhyāya* remains a timeless and clinically relevant chapter that bridges classical Ayurvedic wisdom with modern biomedical science. A deeper understanding of its principles can strengthen evidence-based Ayurvedic practice, promote personalized nutrition and therapeutics, and stimulate future interdisciplinary research. Continued scientific exploration of *Ṣaḍrasa* will further enhance its application in preventive, promotive, and curative healthcare, reaffirming its significance in contemporary integrative medicine.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI was used only to assist with language refinement and manuscript drafting. The author independently reviewed, verified, and approved the final content and takes full responsibility for the manuscript.

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