



A REVIEW ON CONTROVERSY IN MEDICINAL PLANTS (SANDIGDA DRAVYAS)

Dr. Sreena T. I¹, Dr. Sunita D Ram², Dr.Nripendra Mishra³

¹PG scholar, ²HOD and reader,

Department of Dravyaguna, Govt. Dhanwantari Ayurveda College, Ujjain, M.P,
India

³Reader, Department of Panchkarma, Govt. Dhanwantari Ayurveda College,
Ujjain, M.P, India

ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, one of the major controversies is related to identification of a drug of herbal origin creating hurdles for pharmacopoeial standards of the formulations. Controversial plants or *sandigda dravyas* of *vanaspathi* have their roots in the past. Due to polynomial nomenclature system of medicinal plant names in Sanskrit texts, each classical plant is attributed with many botanical sources. Also nowadays physicians lost their traditional link and were less exposed to field identification, these leads to a reduction in their knowledge. All these may give rise to controversies in identification of plants. Proper documentation of controversial drugs and discussion with experts in Pharmacognosy, pharmacology, traditional *vaidyas*, tribal etc. (a multifaceted study needed) are some steps to get clear these controversies.

KEY WORDS: Controversy, *Sandigda dravya*, *Rasna*

INTRODUCTION

India is a very vast country having various types of people, various languages, so one plant is known by various names in various part of country. There is a proverb in Gujarathi-“*Bar gauye boli badlaya*” at every 12 miles the name of plants are changed¹. Controversy is coined from Latin word controversia-which means “*turned in an opposite direction*” or “*to turn against*”. It also means a confusion which gets repeated over and over again and thus gets established as a status of unresolved matter. *Sandigdha dravya* is the term used in Ayurveda for drugs having controversial identities as sources. Controversial drugs or *Sandigdha dravyas* is a term used for medicinal plants having controversial botanical sources due to polynomial nomenclature system of Sanskrit, non availability of plants and parallel evolved knowledge. In modern era, certain drugs are categorized as controversial drugs as there are confusion to exactly decode the accurate botanical source by names mentioned in Sanskrit as the names are assigned based upon many criteria viz. morphology, therapeutic action, habit, habitat, some analogies etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reasons for controversy

Practically, following are the reasons that are responsible for off-shooting of controversies,

1. Documentation defects in manuscripts

Ancient saints had written their knowledge in Bhurjapatra/ Thalapatra. When copying these, many mistakes may occur. Colossal mistakes made by the copy writers of manuscripts also lead to controversy.

Eg: Talavriksha (Nalikera) in Dhanwanthari Nigandu has become Lathavriksha of Nigandusesha

2. Several synonyms for the same plant

It is the most common cause for the controversy. In *modern botany*, one species of plant will have only one valid name(A binomial name), such a technically precise & uniform system of nomenclature is absent in Ayurveda .Dozens of

names may be found to given to one and same plant(polynomial nomenclature)
Eg *Guduchi* has more than 30 synonyms like *Amrutha*, *Chinnaruha*, *Chakralakshanika*, *Rasayani*, *Madhuparni*, *Chandrasahasa* etc.

3. Similar synonyms for the different plants

Some different plants have similar synonyms which also make confusion in identification. Eg: Lajjalu (*Mimosa pudica*) and Manjishta (*Rubia cordifolia*) has similar synonym *Samanga*. Kadali (*Musa paradisiaca*) and Shalmali (*Bombax ceiba*) have similar synonym *Mocha*. These also lead difficulty in identification of plants.

4. Similar vernacular names for different drugs

More than one plant was used in the same name in different parts of the country and sometimes such drugs do not even belong to the same family. These made more difficulties in the identification of genuine drug. Eg: *Brahmi*- *Bacopa monnieri* (Scrophulariaceae family) and *Centella asiatica* (Umbelliferae family).These plants were used under the name *Brahmi* in different parts of India.

5. Non availability of drugs

The properties of drugs like *Soma*- one of the drugs with high potency since Vedic era, do not anyway coincide with its botanical sources viz. *Ephedra*, *Sarcostemma*, *Ceropegia* etc. This suggests that the plant *Soma* expected by seers has become extinct. Same is the case of rare and endangered species.

6. Substitute due to non-availability of drug

Sometimes certain substitutes were available easily for the *Vaidyas* which enabled them to accept these substitute for original herbs. Several plants in use today are substitute for the genuine ones. Over a period of time *Vaidyas* forget the original source and started claiming the substitute as original. Sometimes practitioners use regional varieties by considering only the morphological similarity Eg: *Sannamukhi* (*Cassia angustifolia*) - Substituted with *Cassia auriculata*

Some other reasons for controversy are:-

- Poor understanding of Sanskrit word in different context
- Different *nirukti* and *paryaya* by different *Nighantukaras*
- Geographical variation
- Influence of local names, local species and drug collectors
- Influence of other systems of medicine (Siddha, unani etc) and collaboration with Ayurveda
- Improper practical knowledge and identification of *Vanoushadhis*

List of some controversial drugs³

| Name of herb | Probable drugs | Suggested herb |
|--------------|--|---|
| Rasna | <i>Alpinia galanga</i> <i>Vanda roxburghii</i> <i>Pluchea lanceolata</i> <i>Withania coagulans</i> <i>Rauwolfia serpentine</i> <i>Inula racemosa</i> <i>Vinca rosea</i> <i>Viscum album</i> <i>Aristolochia indica</i> | <i>Pluchea lanceolata</i> (DC) Oliv & Hiren |
| Pashanabheda | <i>Aerva lanata</i> <i>Aerva javanica</i> <i>Ammania baccifera</i> <i>Rotula aquatic</i> <i>Saxifraga ligulate</i> <i>Coleus aromaticus</i> <i>Bryophyllum callicynum</i> <i>Bridelia montana</i> <i>Homonoia riporia</i> <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> <i>Coleus forskohlii</i> | <i>Saxifraga ligulate</i> Linn. |
| Murva | <i>Clematis triloba</i> Thunb. <i>Maerua arenaria sensu</i> <i>Sansevieria zeylanica</i> | <i>Marsdenia</i> <i>tenacissima</i> (Roxb.) Moon. |

| | | |
|---------------|--|--|
| | <i>Helicteres isora</i> <i>Chenorphanomacrophylla</i> <i>Marsdenia tenacissima</i> <i>Bauhinia vahlii</i> | |
| Ashoka | <i>Polyalthia longifolia</i> <i>Saraca indica</i> <i>Shorea robusta</i> <i>Bauhinia variegata</i> | <i>Saraca indica</i> (Roxb.)Wild |
| Daruharidra | <i>Berberis aristata</i> <i>Cocinium fenestratum</i> <i>Berberis lyceum</i> | <i>Berberis aristata</i> DC |
| Asana | <i>Terminalia tomentosa</i> <i>Pterocarpus marsupeum</i> <i>Bridelia Montana</i> | <i>Pterocarpus</i> <i>marsupeum</i> Roxb. |
| Brahmi | <i>Centella asiatica</i> <i>Bacopa monnieri</i> | <i>Bacopa monnieri</i> Linn. |
| Priyangu | <i>Callicarapa macrophylla</i> <i>Prunus mahaleb</i> <i>Agalia roxburghiana</i> | <i>Callicarapa</i> <i>macrophylla</i> Vahl. |
| Shankhapushpi | <i>Convolvulus pluricaulis</i> <i>Evolvulus alsinoides</i> <i>Canscora diffusa</i> <i>Clitoria ternatea</i> <i>Lavandula bipinnata</i> | <i>Convolvulus</i> <i>pluricaulis</i> Choisy. |

CONCLUSION

Controversies are always a hindrance for the growth of our science in this era of standardization. Some methods which should be followed to minimize controversy are usage of botanical names wherever possible, comparison of pharmacological properties with the *gunas* mentioned in classics and thus the best among them can be selected, proper standardization of herbal drugs & *chikitsayogas* mentioned in Ayurveda. Ethno botanical and ethno medicinal surveys with apt validation studies should be done.

Controversies also lead to production of inefficacious products and affect the treatment adversely. So it's our duty to bring forth a standardized approach for all the herbal drugs by conducting more ethno medical surveys and research works.

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