



REAPPRAISING ABHAVA-PRATINIDHI DRAVYA: CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Medicinal substances (*Dravya*) constitute an essential component of *Ayurvedic* therapeutics. The availability, authenticity and sustainable procurement of medicinal drugs are important for maintaining the quality and continuity of treatment. *Ayurveda* addresses the practical problem of non-availability of a desired drug through the concept of *Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya*, wherein an unavailable drug may be replaced by a suitable substitute possessing comparable therapeutic attributes. Classical and later *Ayurvedic* literature document numerous examples of such substitution, particularly in *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, *Purvakhanda*, *Mishraka Prakarana*. The classical approach indicates that substitution is not necessarily restricted to botanical similarity; relevant attributes such as *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya*, *Vipaka* and *Karma* may contribute to the selection of an appropriate substitute. In the contemporary context, medicinal plant scarcity, habitat loss, seasonal and geographical variation, difficulty in authentication and increasing demand have renewed interest in rational drug substitution. Modern pharmacognostic, physicochemical, phytochemical, chromatographic, molecular and pharmacological approaches can provide objective methods for evaluating the suitability of classical substitutes. However, substitution should be distinguished from adulteration and should not be regarded as an unrestricted replacement of one medicinal substance by another. This review reappraises the classical foundation of *Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya*, summarizes selected examples and discusses its relevance to contemporary drug authentication, quality control, conservation and evidence-based *Ayurveda*. [2,8]

Keywords: *Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya*, *Pratinidhi Dravya*, *Ayurveda*, Drug Substitution, *Dravyaguna*, Medicinal Plants, Drug Authentication, Adulteration.

INTRODUCTION

Medicinal substances (*Dravya*) constitute an essential component of *Ayurvedic* therapeutics. The therapeutic utility of an *Ayurvedic* formulation depends not only upon its pharmaceutical preparation but also upon the identity, quality and appropriate selection of its constituent drugs. Availability of medicinal plants and other substances is influenced by geographical distribution, seasonality, ecological changes, scarcity, overexploitation and difficulties associated with authentication. [2,8]

Ayurvedic literature recognizes the practical problem of non-availability of a desired medicinal substance and provides a conceptual framework for its replacement through *Pratinidhi Dravya*, or substitute drug. A substitute is selected with consideration of relevant therapeutic attributes rather than merely on the basis of external resemblance. Later *Ayurvedic* literature, particularly *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, *Yogaratanakara* and *Bhaishajya Ratnavali*, contains systematic descriptions and examples of substitution. [2,3,5]

The concept is particularly elaborated in *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, where *Mishraka Prakarana* contains multiple examples of substitutions to be employed in the absence of specified drugs. These examples are important not only from a classical perspective but also as a basis for contemporary investigation of therapeutic equivalence, quality assurance and sustainable medicinal-plant utilization. [2,4,5]

Accordingly, the present review aims to examine the classical foundation of *Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya*, describe selected examples documented in *Bhavaprakasha* and discuss how modern scientific approaches may be integrated with classical *Dravyaguna* principles for rational evaluation of substitutes.

Classical Foundation of *Pratinidhi Dravya*

The concept of substitution occurs in *Ayurvedic* literature in different forms. Explicit and systematic descriptions of *Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya* are particularly prominent in later *Ayurvedic* literature. The principle is related to the assessment of pharmacodynamic attributes of a drug, including *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (qualities), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), *Karma* (therapeutic action) and, where applicable, *Prabhava* (specific action). [2,5,7]

Thus, botanical similarity is not necessarily an essential criterion for a *Pratinidhi Dravya*. Classical examples include substitutions between botanically unrelated drugs, suggesting that therapeutic function and pharmacodynamic characteristics may be important considerations in the classical framework. [2,3]

Classical Evidence from *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*

Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, *Purvakhanda*, Chapter 6, *Mishraka Prakarana*, verses 138–139, provides a detailed list of substitutions to be considered when specified drugs are unavailable. The verses include numerous examples involving aromatic drugs, medicinal roots, fruits, flowers, minerals and other substances. [1]

Representative examples include *Chitraka–Danti* or *Apamarga Kshara*, *Tagara–Kushta*, *Jatipushpa–Lavanga*, *Kasturi–Kankola*, *Karpura–Sugandhi Musta* or *Granthiparna*, *Kumkuma–Kusumbha Kusuma*, *Shrikhandachandana–Karpura*, *Raktachandana–Navoshira*, *Ativisha–Musta* and *Nagakeshara–Padmakesara*. These examples indicate that classical substitution was not confined to taxonomically related species.

चित्रकाभावतो दन्ती क्षारः शिखरिजोऽथवा । अभावे धन्वयासस्य प्रक्षेप्या तु दुरालभा ॥
तगरस्याप्यभावे तु कुष्ठं दद्याद्भिषग्वरः । मूर्वाऽभावे त्वचो ग्राह्या जिङ्गिनी प्रभवा बुधैः ॥
अहिंस्त्राया अभावे तु मानकन्दः प्रकीर्तितः । लक्ष्मण्या अभावे तु नीलकण्डः शिखा मता ॥
बकुलाभावतो देयं कल्हारोत्पलपङ्कजम् । नीलोत्पलस्याभावे तु कुमुदं देयमिष्यते ॥
जातीपुष्पं न यत्रास्ति लवंगं तत्र दीयते । अर्कपर्णादि पयसो ह्यभावे तद्रसो मतः ॥
पौष्कराभावतः कुष्ठ तथा लाग्डल्यभावतः । स्थैण्यकस्याभावे तु भिषग्भिर्दीयते गदः ॥
चविकागजपिप्पल्यौ पिप्पलीमूलवत्सृतौ ॥
अभावे सोमराज्यास्तु प्रपुत्राड फलं मतम् । यदि न स्याद्धारु निशा तदा देया निशा बुधैः ॥
रसाञ्जन स्यभावे तु दार्वी काथः प्रयुज्यते । सौराष्ट्र्यभावतो देया स्फटिका तग्दुणा जनैः ॥
तालीसपत्रकाभावतो स्वर्णताली प्रशस्यते । भाङ्ग्यभावे तु तालीसं कण्टकारीजटाऽथवा ॥
रुचकाभावतो दद्याल्लवणं पांशु पूर्वकम् । अभावे मधुयष्ट्यास्तु धातकी च प्रयोजयेत् ॥
अम्लवेतसकाभावे चुक्रं दातव्यमिष्यते । द्राक्षा यदि न लभ्येत प्रदेशं काश्मरीफलम् ॥
तयोरभावे कुसुमं मधुकस्य मतं बुधैः । लवङ्गकुसुमं देयं नखस्याभावतः पुनः ॥
कस्तूर्यभावे कक्डोलं क्षेपणीयं विदुर्बुधाः । कक्डोलस्याप्यभावे तु जातीपुष्पं प्रदीयते ॥
सुगन्धिमुस्तकं देयं कर्पूराभावतो बुधैः । कर्पूराभावतो देयं ग्रथिपर्ण विशेषतः ॥
कुङ्कुमाभावतो दद्यात्कुसुम्भ कुसुमं नवम् । श्रीखण्डचन्दनाभावे कर्पूरं देयमिष्यते ॥
अभावे त्वेतयोवैद्यैः प्रक्षिपेद्रक्त चन्दनम् । रक्तचन्दनकाभावे नवोशीरं विदुर्बुधा ॥
मुस्ताचातिविषाभावे शिवाऽभावे शिवा मता । अभावे नागपुष्पस्य पद्मकेशरमिष्यते ॥
मेदाजीवककाकोलीऋद्धि द्वन्द्वेऽपि वाऽसति । वरी विदार्यश्वगन्धावाराहीश्च त्रमात् क्षिपेत् ॥
वाराध्यश्च तथाऽभावे चर्मकारालुको मतः । भल्लातकसहत्वे तु चन्दनमिष्यते ।
भल्लाता भावतश्चित्रं नलश्चेक्षोरभावतः ॥ भा. प्र. पू. ६/१३८-१३९

Source: Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, Purvakhanda, Chapter 6, verses 138–139.

Selected Classical Examples of Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya

The following table presents the substitutions supplied from *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, *Purvakhanda*, Chapter 6, verses 138–139. The table is intentionally presented at the classical drug-name level; botanical identities should be standardized against the specific edition and nomenclatural source used by the author. [1]

Table 1. Selected classical examples of Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya.

Sl. No.	Abhava Dravya	Pratinidhi Dravya
1	Chitraka	Danti or Apamarga Kshara
2	Dhanvayasa	Duralabha
3	Tagara	Kushta
4	Murva	Manjistha
5	Ahimsra	Manakanda
6	Lakshmana	Mayurashikha
7	Bakula	Kahlara, Nilotpala or Padma
8	Nilotpala	Kumuda
9	Jatipushpa	Lavanga
10	Arkaksheera	Arka-patra-svarasa
11	Pushkaramoola	Kushta
12	Langali	Kushta
13	Chavika	Pippalimoola

14	<i>Gajapippali</i>	<i>Pippalimoola</i>
15	<i>Somaraji</i>	<i>Chakramarda</i>
16	<i>Daruharidra</i>	<i>Haridra</i>
17	<i>Rasanjana</i>	<i>Daruharidra Kwatha</i>
18	<i>Talisapatra</i>	<i>Swarnatali</i>
19	<i>Bharangi</i>	<i>Talisapatra or Kantakari Moola</i>
20	<i>Madhuyashti</i>	<i>Dhataki</i>
21	<i>Amlavetasa</i>	<i>Chukra</i>
22	<i>Draksha</i>	<i>Kashmari Phala</i>
23	<i>Kashmariphala</i>	<i>Madhuka Pushpa</i>
24	<i>Nakha</i>	<i>Lavangakusuma</i>
25	<i>Kasturi</i>	<i>Kankola</i>
26	<i>Kankola</i>	<i>Jatipushpa</i>
27	<i>Karpura</i>	<i>Sugandhimusta or Granthiparna</i>
28	<i>Kumkuma</i>	<i>Kusumbha Kusuma</i>
29	<i>Shrikhandachandana</i>	<i>Karpura</i>
30	<i>Raktachandana</i>	<i>Navoshira</i>
31	<i>Ativisha</i>	<i>Musta</i>
32	<i>Haritaki</i>	<i>Amalaki</i>
33	<i>Nagakeshara</i>	<i>Padmakesara</i>
34	<i>Meda and Mahameda</i>	<i>Shatavari</i>
35	<i>Jivaka and Rishabhaka</i>	<i>Vidari</i>
36	<i>Kakoli and Ksheerakakoli</i>	<i>Ashwagandha</i>
37	<i>Riddhi and Vriddhi</i>	<i>Varahi</i>
38	<i>Varahi</i>	<i>Charmakaralu</i>
39	<i>Bhallataka-asahyatva</i>	<i>Raktachandana</i>
40	<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Nala</i>

Need for Substitution of Medicinal Drugs

1. Non-availability of the drug

Certain medicinal plants may be unavailable or extremely rare because of depletion of natural populations, restricted distribution or difficulty in procurement. The classical discussion of the *Ashtavarga* group illustrates the practical problem of obtaining rare medicinal substances. [2,5]

2. Difficulty in authentication

Complex nomenclature, regional names, uncertain botanical identity and similarities among crude drugs can create difficulties in authentication. A documented substitute may be considered when the intended drug cannot be reliably identified or procured. [2,6]

3. High cost

Some medicinal substances are costly or difficult to obtain. Historically, substitution has been considered where another drug is regarded as therapeutically suitable for the intended purpose. [2,5]

4. Geographical distribution

The distribution of medicinal plants varies across geographical regions. A drug available in one region may be difficult to procure in another, creating a practical need for a locally available and appropriately validated substitute. [2,5]

5. Seasonal availability

Some medicinal plants or plant parts may be available only during particular seasons. When the authentic drug cannot be procured at the required time, a documented substitute may be considered. [2,5]

6. Conservation considerations

Overharvesting, habitat loss and increasing demand may place pressure on medicinal plant populations. Rational substitution, when supported by evidence, may contribute to conservation and sustainable utilization. [2,10]

Types of Substitution

1. Substitution based on similar therapeutic action

A drug possessing comparable therapeutic activity may be considered as a substitute even when its botanical identity differs. A well-studied classical example is *Ativisha–Musta* substitution. [2,3]

2. Substitution using another part of the same plant

When the required plant part is unavailable, another part of the same plant may sometimes be considered if comparable therapeutic properties are demonstrated. This requires careful validation because phytochemical composition can vary among plant parts. [2]

3. Substitution with another species of the same genus

A closely related species belonging to the same genus may be considered as a substitute. Taxonomic relatedness, however, should not by itself be treated as proof of therapeutic equivalence. [2,5]

4. Substitution with a species belonging to the same family

A species belonging to the same botanical family and possessing relevant therapeutic attributes may be considered in appropriate circumstances. [2,5]

5. Substitution with a botanically unrelated drug

Classical literature also documents substitutions between botanically unrelated drugs. Such examples demonstrate that therapeutic attributes and intended action may be more important than taxonomic proximity in certain classical substitution decisions. [2,3]

***Pratinidhi Dravya* and Adulteration: An Important Distinction**

Pratinidhi Dravya should be clearly distinguished from adulteration. *Pratinidhi Dravya* refers to the intentional use of a documented or justified substitute when the original drug is unavailable. Adulteration, in contrast, may involve intentional or unintentional substitution by an incorrect, inferior or inappropriate material. Therefore, the mere presence of a substance other than the expected drug does not by itself establish legitimate *Pratinidhi*

Dravya status. The substitute should be correctly identified, appropriately documented and supported by evidence of suitability and safety. [2,6]

Contemporary Scientific Perspective

The classical concept of *Pratinidhi Dravya* provides a useful hypothesis for contemporary scientific investigation. However, a textual reference alone should not be interpreted as proof of complete therapeutic equivalence. Modern evaluation can use a multidisciplinary approach to establish identity, quality, chemical similarity, pharmacological activity and safety. [2,4]

Pharmacognostic evaluation: macroscopic and microscopic characters, powder microscopy and organoleptic characteristics. [2,6,9]

Physicochemical evaluation: moisture content, ash values, extractive values, foreign matter and other relevant quality parameters. [2,6,9]

Phytochemical evaluation: comparison of major phytoconstituents and chemical markers. [2,6,9]

Chromatographic fingerprinting: TLC, HPTLC and HPLC may be used to compare chemical profiles. [2,6,9]

Molecular authentication: DNA-based methods may assist in confirming botanical identity where morphology is insufficient. [2,6,9]

Pharmacological evaluation: comparative studies can determine whether the substitute demonstrates relevant biological activity. [2,6,9]

Toxicological evaluation: similarity in therapeutic activity does not necessarily indicate similarity in safety; therefore, safety evaluation is essential. [2,6,9]

Evidence from Contemporary Studies

One of the frequently discussed scientific investigations of the classical substitution principle evaluated *Musta* (*Cyperus rotundus*) as a substitute for *Ativisha* (*Aconitum heterophyllum*). The study used a multidisciplinary approach involving *Ayurvedic* literature, phytochemical assessment and pharmacological evaluation. The two plants are taxonomically unrelated, yet the investigation reported similarities in selected *Ayurvedic* pharmacological attributes and anti-diarrhoeal activity, providing a model for scientific examination of classical substitution. [3,4]

Subsequent comparative phytochemical work on *Ativisha*, *Musta* and related species further emphasized the need to investigate the chemical basis underlying classical substitution. Other investigations have explored analytical approaches for comparing original and substitute drugs as whole-drug profiles. These studies support the view that individual classical substitutions should be evaluated independently rather than assuming universal equivalence. [4]

Proposed Framework for Evaluation of *Pratinidhi Dravya*

1. Classical identification of *Abhava Dravya*
2. Selection of a documented *Pratinidhi Dravya*
3. Correct botanical and pharmacognostic authentication
4. Assessment of *Rasa–Guna–Virya–Vipaka–Karma*
5. Physicochemical evaluation
6. Phytochemical and chemical-fingerprint comparison
7. Pharmacological evaluation
8. Safety and toxicological assessment
9. Assessment of therapeutic suitability
10. Standardized and documented use

This framework may help transform substitution from an empirical practice into a systematically evaluated therapeutic strategy while retaining the classical basis of drug selection.

DISCUSSION

Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya represents an important example of the practical adaptability of *Ayurvedic* pharmacology. Classical descriptions do not appear to restrict substitution solely to morphological or taxonomic similarity. Instead, therapeutic attributes and actions occupy an important position in the selection of alternatives. [2,5]

The classical examples also demonstrate that substitution can occur across considerable botanical distance. The *Ativisha–Musta* example is particularly relevant to contemporary research because the two drugs are taxonomically unrelated while selected pharmacological characteristics have been investigated comparatively. [2,3]

Nevertheless, contemporary application requires caution. A substitute should not be selected merely because it is easily available, inexpensive or superficially similar. Identity, chemical composition, therapeutic activity, dosage, safety and quality should be evaluated. Medicinal plants can contain multiple constituents whose concentrations vary according to species, geographical origin, plant part, season, cultivation conditions and processing. [2,6]

Thus, *Pratinidhi Dravya* may be regarded as a classical therapeutic proposition that can be subjected to modern scientific validation rather than as an unrestricted replacement principle. [2,3]

Future Perspectives

Systematic documentation and digitization of classical *Pratinidhi Dravya* pairs.

Standardization of botanical and pharmacognostic identities of both original and substitute drugs.

Comparative phytochemical profiling using appropriate analytical platforms.

Comparative pharmacological and toxicological evaluation of original and substitute drugs.

Use of DNA barcoding and molecular authentication where taxonomic ambiguity exists.

Development of reference standards and marker-based quality-control parameters.

Correlation of *Rasa–Guna–Virya–Vipaka–Karma* with contemporary pharmacological observations.

Development of a standardized decision framework for selecting and documenting substitute drugs.

Evaluation of substitution as one possible strategy for medicinal-plant conservation and sustainable utilization.

CONCLUSION

Abhava-Pratinidhi Dravya is a significant concept in *Ayurvedic* pharmacology that addresses the practical problem of medicinal drug non-availability. Classical literature, particularly *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*, documents numerous examples of substitution based on therapeutic attributes. The classical approach indicates that botanical similarity is not always essential and that functional and pharmacodynamic characteristics may contribute to the selection of a substitute. [1,2,5]

In the contemporary era, increasing pressure on medicinal plant resources, authentication challenges and variation in availability have renewed the relevance of this concept. However, legitimate substitution must be distinguished from adulteration and should be supported by appropriate pharmacognostic, phytochemical, pharmacological and safety evaluation. [2,6,10]

A systematic integration of classical *Dravyaguna* principles with modern analytical and pharmacological methods may provide a scientifically robust framework for evaluating *Pratinidhi Dravya*. Such an approach can support continuity of *Ayurvedic* therapeutics while contributing to quality assurance, conservation and sustainable utilization of medicinal resources. [2,3,4]

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