

The Ayurvedic Science of Water: Classical Insights for Modern Wellbeing

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Abstract—Water is an essential element in human health and a cornerstone of Ayurvedic healing. The *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, one of *Ayurveda*'s foundational texts, dedicates the fifth chapter *Dravadravya Vidhi Adhyaya* to discussing the qualities, types, and therapeutic uses of water, classified as *Jala Varga*. This article explores the diverse sources of water as described by *Acharya Vagbhata*, interprets classical *shlokas*, highlights the physiological and therapeutic impacts of different waters, and bridges the knowledge with modern hydration practices. It emphasizes the timing, purification methods, and health implications of water intake, encouraging a holistic approach to wellness. The classical Ayurvedic understanding of water reveals how its properties change based on source, season, and method of storage factors often overlooked in modern hydration science. By revisiting ancient wisdom through the lens of *Ayurveda*, this article aims to promote sustainable and individualized water usage for preventive health, detoxification, and enhanced digestion.

Index Terms—Ayurveda, Jala Varga, Ashtanga Hrudaya, Water Therapy, Ayurvedic Nutrition, Drava Dravya, Water Properties, Classical Texts, Hydration in Ayurveda.

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, water is more than just a thirst quencher it is a *Mahabhuta* (great element) integral to bodily function and balance. *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, compiled by *Acharya Vagbhata*, gives a scientific and philosophical description of water under *Drava Dravya Varga* in its fifth chapter. The ancient wisdom categorizes water not only by its source but also by its qualities (*guna*), effects (*karma*), and suitability according to time, season, and body constitution (*prakriti*).

II. JALA: THE ELEMENTAL ELIXIR

In the Ayurvedic worldview, *Jala* (water) is not merely a physical substance but a life-sustaining

cosmic principle a carrier of *Ojas* (vitality), *Shodhana* (purification), and *Prakriti-samyak* (homeostasis). It is one of the five *Mahabhutas* (great elements), specifically associated with the *Apya Mahabhuta*, and is vital in maintaining the structural and functional integrity of all living beings. From cellular hydration to mental clarity, water plays a fundamental role in the sustenance of life. The *Tarka Sangraha*, a classical text of Indian logic and metaphysics, describes *Jala* as fluidity.

Liquidity is the natural property of water. This fluidity is symbolic not only of its physical movement but also its energetic adaptability allowing water to support digestion (*Agnisandhukta*), transport nutrients (*Rasa-vaha srotas*), and eliminate waste (*Mala-prasthavana*).

Acharya Vagbhata, in *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, goes further to classify various types of *Jala* based on source and season, emphasizing their effects on the *Tridoshas* (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha). The fifth chapter (*Drava Dravya Varga*) outlines not only the physical properties of water such as *sheetala* (cooling), *snigdha* (unctuous), and *laghu* (light) but also its physiological actions like *deepana* (appetizer), *trishna nivarana* (thirst quenching), and *dosha shamana* (dosha pacification).

दीपनं पाचनं कण्ठ्यलघूष्णं बस्तिशोधनम् ॥

Ashtanga Hrudaya, Sutra Sthana 5/16

अनभिष्यन्दि लघु च तोयं क्वथीतशीतलम् ।

पित्तयुक्ते हितं दोषे व्युषितं तल्लिदोषकृत् ॥

Ashtanga Hrudaya, Sutra Sthana 5/18

Water is the very life of all beings; it sustains and supports their existence. Pure water alleviates diseases. In Ayurvedic cosmology, water is also associated with *Chandra* (moon) and the mind (*Manas*), symbolizing its cooling and stabilizing properties. Just as the moon governs tides, water

governs the emotional and physiological tides of the human body.

In today's world, where hydration is often reduced to mere water quantity, this classical Ayurvedic approach reminds us of the quality, timing, and source of water each influencing the body's doshic balance and health. Thus, understanding water (*Jala*) is not merely a scholastic exercise but a practical guide for intelligent and personalized hydration in everyday life. About the nature of water Charak states that:

"शीतं शुचि शिवं मृष्टं विमलं लघु षड्गुणम्"

Charak Samhita. Sutrasthana 27/198

This statement saying that generally the water is cold, pure, benevolence, pleasant and clear.

III. TYPES OF WATER

Acharya Vagbhata and other Acharyas classify water based on origin such as: uncontaminated water and contaminated water.

1. Rainwater (Varsha Jala/ Gangambu)

Acharya Vagbhata called gangambu it means an uncontaminated rain water, this water is purest among others, especially when collected in a clean area before it touches the ground. In the text he mentioned that:

जीवनं तर्पणं हृद्यं ह्लादि बुद्धिप्रबोधनम् ।
तन्व्यक्तरसं मृष्टं शीतं लघ्वमृतोपमम् ।
गङ्गाम्बु नभसो भ्रष्टं स्पृष्टं त्वर्केन्दुमारूतैः ।
हिताहितत्वे तद्भूयो देशकालावक्षेपते ॥

As. Hru. 5/2

The rain water enlivening the whole living being, generates satiation, and give pleaser in all conditions. It refreshing and stimulates our mind. This water cures the diseases of pitta, rakta and visa. Describe more about the benefits of rain water he states that, the rice cooked with rain water neither makes too slimy nor its colour will changed.

येनाभिवृष्टममलं शाल्यन्नं राजते स्थितम् ।
अक्लिन्नमविवर्णं च तत्पेयं गाङ्गम् ॥

As. Hru. 5/3

The great Acharya Charak also praise the qualities of rain water, such as:

शीतं शुचि शिवं मृष्टं विमलं लघु षड् गुणम् । प्रकृत्या
दिव्यमुदकं ... ॥

(Charak Samhita, Sutra Sthana 27/198)

In this statement he says that, By nature the rain water six qualities namely Shita (Cold), Shuchi (Purity), Shivam (Benevolence), Mrushta (Pleasantness) and Vimala (Clearness).

2. Contaminated Water

The rain water contaminated after it has fallen down on the earth. This contaminated water also drinkable water source other than rain water. That why the acharya said:

तदभावे च भूमिष्ठमान्तरिक्षानुकारि यत् ।
शुचिपृथ्वसितश्वेते देशेऽर्कपवनाहतम् ॥

As. Hru. 5/5

Regarding water's contamination acharya charak mentioned that:

श्वेते कषायं भवति पाण्डुरे स्यात्तु तिक्तकम् ।
कपिले क्षारसंसृष्टमूषरे लवणान्वितम् ॥
कटु पर्वतविस्तारे मधुरं कृष्णमृत्तिके ।
एतत् षाड्गुणमाख्यातं महीस्थस्य जलस्य हि ।
तथाऽव्यक्तरसं विद्यादैन्द्रं कारं हिमं च यत् ॥

(Charak Samhita, Sutra Sthana 27/200)

With these verses charaka explained that:

- If it falls on the earth of Shweta (white) colour, it becomes Kashaya Rasa (Astring n taste).
- If it falls on Pandura (Yellowish white) earth, it is Tikta Rasa (Bitter in Taste).
- If it falls on Kapila (Brown) earth, it is Kshara (Alkaline).
- If it falls on Usara(Salt) soil, it is of Lavana Rasa (Salt in Taste).
- If it falls on the Parvata Vistara (Mountain Valley) it is Katu Rasa (Pungent in Taste)
- If it falls on the Krushna (Black) soil, it is Madhura Rasa (Sweet in Taste).

These are the six properties of rain water fallen on the ground. Tastes are not manifested in the rain-water, hailstone or snow water.

IV. SAMUDRAMBU

सामुद्रं, तत्र पातव्यं मासादाश्वयुजाद्विना । As. Hru. 5/3
Acharya Explain that except Gangambu all other kinds of water are known as Samudrambu (Sea water). This water should not be used for drinking except in asvayuja masa i.e. month of Sep. – Oct. because of the

presence of the star Agasthya, which de-toxicates the poison existing in the other types of water.

Evaluating water by *Sushruta*

Acharya Sushruta gives a clear and practical way to understand different types of water by observing their source, movement and appearance. His explanations help us identify which kind of water is suitable for everyday use and which requires purification. He also connects these qualities with their effects on the doshas. *Sushruta* states:

शीतलमनिलार्तीनां वृष्यं हार्यं मनःप्रियम् ।
नवम् सलिलमाहुस्तु निर्मलं लघु शोषणम् ॥
(Su. Su. 45)

This verse describes fresh clean water as cooling, pleasant, light and soothing. It supports Vata disorders and brings clarity to the mind. New, uncontaminated water is considered the ideal form for regular consumption. He also mentions the drawbacks of stagnant or impure water:

“पुराणं सलिलं रूक्षं क्लेदि मात्रं गुरु स्मृतम् । (Su. Su. 45)

Here, he explains that old or stored stagnant water becomes heavy, causes dampness and is harder to digest. This is why *Ayurveda* discourages drinking long-stored, uncirculated water unless boiled or purified.

1. River Water (*Nadi Jala*)

Fast-flowing river water is described as the best among earthly waters because constant movement keeps it naturally filtered.

“तत् वारि निर्मलं शीतं लघु दीपनम् त्रिदोषहरम् ॥”

(A.H. Sutra 5)

This means river water is clean, cooling, light and supports digestive fire. Because of its movement, it is less likely to accumulate impurities and is generally safe when collected from an unpolluted region.

2. Well Water (*Kupa Jala*)

Well water is usually stable and heavy because it does not flow. *Sushruta* notes that it may absorb minerals from surrounding soil.

It becomes suitable for drinking when purified by filtration or boiling. When fresh and clean, it can benefit individuals with stronger digestion, but in a

polluted or stagnant well it may aggravate Kapha and slow down Agni.

3. Pond or Lake Water (*Sarasi Jala*)

Water from ponds or lakes is considered the least favorable due to its still nature. Lack of movement allows microorganisms and impurities to accumulate. *Sushruta* explains that such water increases *Kapha*, heaviness and sluggish digestion. If used, it must be thoroughly purified through boiling, filtering or adding herbs like cumin or coriander.

4. Snow Water (*Hima Jala*)

Snow and ice water are very cold and light. They reduce Pitta quickly but may disturb Agni and Vata if consumed regularly.

This kind of water is suitable only for people with high heat or inflammatory conditions, and even then, it should be taken mindfully.

V. PURIFICATION METHODS DESCRIBED IN AYURVEDA

Both *Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* stress purification before drinking when water quality is doubtful.

Common methods include:

- Boiling (*Ushnodaka*) – removes impurities and makes the water easier to digest
- Filtering through cloth, sand or natural materials
- Herbal treatment (*Dhanyaka*, *Jala-neti* herbs, *Tulsi*)
- Storing in copper or clay vessels to improve its energetic quality

Boiled water, in particular, is praised as therapeutic:

“उष्णोदकं पाचनं कण्ठ्यं” (A.H. 5/16)

Warm water supports digestion, clears channels and helps in removing *Ama*.

1. Water Intake: Time and Method

Ayurveda gives simple guidelines:

- Morning: lukewarm water to activate Agni
- Before meals: small quantity to reduce excess hunger
- With meals: small sips help digestion
- After meals: avoid heavy drinking as it weakens Agni
- Bedtime: only if required

2. Modern Relevance

Many classical ideas align with scientific findings:

- Copper-vessel water has antimicrobial effects
- Warm water supports gut motility
- Flowing water is naturally oxygenated and lighter
- Stagnant water has higher contamination risk

VI. CONCLUSION

Understanding water through the *Ayurvedic* lens brings a deeper appreciation for something we use every day. The *Acharyas* remind us that water is not just a universal drink but a substance whose qualities shift with movement, season, soil and storage. When chosen mindfully, it supports digestion, calms the *doshas* and keeps the body light and clear. The classical teachings of *Vagbhata*, *Charaka* and *Sushruta* show how simple practices—like boiling, filtering or storing in natural vessels—can make water more suitable and healing. Even today, their guidance matches many modern observations about purity and hydration. By following these principles in daily life, we connect with nature’s rhythm and support long-term wellbeing. Water, when understood properly, becomes a gentle yet powerful tool for health.

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