

## Rasaśāstra and the Perfect Body

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### Rasaśāstra and the Perfect Body

Within the tantric milieu we find various practices associated with health, anti-aging, and immortality. This paper will examine the twofold accomplishments (siddhi) of the alchemical tradition and how the consumption of ritually prepared substances leads to a perfected body. First, I will explore lohasiddhi, in which the alchemist experiments with mercury, metals, and gems in order to achieve dehasiddhi, the perfection of the body.

This perfect body is not simply an ageless one, but in fact necessity for a higher awareness and enlightenment within the living body. Thus, mercurials were more than medicines. They were, in fact, important tools for spiritual development. Here I will compare alchemical and yogic notions of the dehasiddhi to demonstrate the similarities and uncover the alchemical metaphors sprinkled throughout haṭhayoga texts. While much of yogic teaching focuses on a non-material bodily perfection, i.e. one that is divine rather than corporeal, alchemists believed that they physical body could be made pure enough to be both immortal and concrete.

Finally, I will discuss the purification process to examine the importance of mineral and plant additions to substances. While purification is meant to remove dangerous elements, alchemical recipes almost never call for the use of a single substance. Mercury itself must consume substances like mica, gold, and sulphur to achieve its maximum effectiveness. Purified mercury and other substances are ingested with other medicinal substances, most often vegetable, animal, and alkali substances to strengthen the outcomes of the elixirs and to ease side effects of those taking them.

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