

Nature Sofia – Doctrine of Signature

Johari VR*

Department of Homoeopathic Materia Medica, Smt CMPH Medical College, Mumbai, India

*Corresponding author: Johari VR, Department of Homoeopathic Materia Medica, Smt CMPH Medical College, Mumbai, India, Tel: 9820108374; Email: drvanita10@gmail.com

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Short Commentary

“Instead of tedious memorization of the various uses of a plant, the doctrine of signatures offers in many (though not all) cases a reliable system of connecting the herb with its remedial use through symbolic association.”-Harris

The doctrine of signature is a philosophy known to mankind from times of Dioscorides and Galen. This doctrine states that herbs that resemble various parts of the body can be used to treat ailments of that part of the body. It was reasoned that almighty must have set his sign upon the various means of curing disease which he provided. This concept is still reflected in the common names of some plants whose shapes and color reminded herbalists of the parts of the body where they seem to have some positive action. The concept was developed by Paracelsus (1491-1541) and published in his writings. During the first half of the 16th century, Paracelsus travelled throughout Europe and to the Levant and Egypt, treating people and experimenting with new plants in search of more treatment and solutions.

This concept was further spread by writings of Jakob Bohme (1575-1624). A plant bearing parts that resembled human body parts, animals or other objects were thought to have useful relevance to those parts, animals or objects. The signature may also be identified in the environment or the specific sites in which the plants grew or the animal resided. The first work on this signature of things was written by Jacob Bohme in “Signature Rerum”.

Since the times of Paracelsus till today, there have been mixed reactions to this subject. In the present era, this concept is still given importance in Homeopathy, which is used as a weapon to criticize Homeopathy by the critics. The influence of this debatable topic is considered as a forerunner of the Similia Principle.

If we were to merely consider the botanical names of certain plants we find the word “wort” an Anglo Saxon word (means Plant) along with their modern name. Some examples are: Tooth wort (similar to tooth), hence useful in tooth complaints; Spleen wort is used for disorders of spleen; Mandrake plant (similar to child), hence useful in infertility.

The analogy of resemblance in the appearance, behavior, habits, and mythological stories behind source is also used to understand the personality or the drug picture. Lachesis, a remedy prepared from snake can be understood by studying the myths and habits of snakes. Snake is associated with Lord Shiva, the blue discoloration, violence, vengeance, malice and effects of poisoning are seen in the remedy.

Calcarea carbonicum is prepared from middle layer of oyster shell which is protected by outer covering. Remedy Calcarea is suited to individuals who seek protection, who try to make their environment as homely as possible. They get aggravated when they fear they are not protected enough. Carbo veg on other end is prepared from wood by

burning. During the process the burning wood is devoid of oxygen. The remedy Carbo veg is useful in conditions accompanied by cyanosis. In order to continue burning the charcoal one needs to fan the wood from close distance; seen exactly in the person requiring Carbo veg. The charcoal seems to be cold at surface though the wood may continue to burn at centre, the skin of the patient is cold to touch but the patient feels heat within.

Glonoine, a mixture of nitroglycerine is a chemical used for making explosives and clear mountain blocks while construction of roads and tunnels. This remedy works wonders in cases of migraine where the patient describes headaches as if head would blow up like a mine. *Pulsatilla* is a small and a delicate plant growing in clusters in sandy soil. The stem sways according to the direction of the wind just like the mood of the person requiring the remedy. Individuals requiring *Pulsatilla* wish to remain in company and just like the sand do not need much water.

Certain remedies have their characteristics in the color of the juice of the plant, like *Chelidonium*–yellow, *Sanguinaria*–red, the Red star fish–all lesions have characteristic red outlines. While some strong smelling plants find the similar odour in the discharges. For example, *Asafoetida*, devil’s dung has very strong smelling offensive discharges. *Moschus*, a remedy prepared from musk of the deer has sensitivity to strong odour and the patient faints easily as a result.

The observations made in nature are also source of study of the Doctrine of Signature. For example, the fact that the birds feeding on berries of *Phytolacca* plant tend to lose flesh is useful data for knowing the weight losing property of the plant. In contrast to *Phytolacca*, *Sabal Serullata* berries are known to help birds and animals feeding on them to gain weight. It is thus used as a tonic for weight gain and also for girls with underdeveloped breast. Physical resemblance of the Cuttle fish with uterus and its appendages has helped us to find its utility in treatment of complaints of female genitalia.

The concept of doctrine can even help in correlating and understanding the personalities of homeopathic remedies from different perspective. When we study *Cocculus Indica*, we learn that the dried berry which is used by fishermen to stupefy the fishes, in its indication has slowness and dullness. It was often found useful in individuals who have the habit or addiction of being glued to any monitor and surrendered to the on screen world. These individuals are unaware of their surroundings and take a very long time to respond to any stimuli. As a result they waste a lot of time and have a feeling that time is passing very fast.

I had conducted a reproving of the remedy *Coffea cruda* as a part of my M.D. Dissertation. The reason for choosing *Coffea* was based on the fact that it has become more popular in the last two decades and we see youngsters hanging out at trendy ‘Baristas’ for business meetings as well as blind dates. There has been a distinct

transformation in attitude in youngsters of the bygone era who would allow the time to take its course to their current counterparts who have no time for regrets and believe in instantaneous gratification. *Coffea* is more indicated in proactive multitalented individuals of today's generation with aptitude for multitasking.

There are lots of non-medicos who have strong belief in this wisdom of nature, at the same time it is also looked down as superstitious

belief. Undoubtedly, we can say that this concept has helped us to introduce many drug substances in homoeopathy. Apart from that, it helps to study *Materia Medica* interesting and easy to relate and remember.