

HEALTH MAINTENANCE AND RESTORATION: ADVOCATIONS IN AYURVEDA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RASAYANA AND VAJIKARAN

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ABSTRACT

'*Swasthya rakshan*' and '*Vyadhi parimoksh*' literally meaning health preservation and freedom from diseases have been the hallmark of Ayurveda and its principles. Different modalities advocated in Ayurveda like *Rasayana*, *Vajikaran* or *Vrishya ausadhis* aims at health maintenance and disease protection. In today's life style, eating habits, health hazards around, maintaining a sound immunity has become a challenge. It not only remains true for tackling common disorders but also for life threatening disorders like HIV, AIDS and malignant conditions. Strong immune system is an ardent need for one and all. Immunity and Well Being, Immunity and susceptibility to disease, Immunity and early recovery from diseases has been a concern since mankind's inception. That is the reason why there are traditions of seasonal consumption of certain medicinal plants, use of condiments and spices, consumption and administration of medicinal herbal formulations post delivery, during childhood, in elderly age, etc., in different societies. The plants containing *Rasayana* and *Vrishya* properties are relevant in today's context. Several evidence based researches of these plants endorse their *oja vardhak* and *urjaskar* activities. It suggests enough lead of their possible use as immune modulators, enhancers, supportive with chemotherapy and potency to develop new therapeutic modalities. Ethnic herbs, traditional diet, their role in immunity and health quotient is also a subject that demands immense and intense study to further evaluate possibilities in devising disease defense and fighting modalities i.e '*rognivritti janak vyapar*.'

Keywords: Immunity, *Rasayana*, *Vajikaran*, *oja vardhak*, ethnic herbs

INTRODUCTION 1-4

The very purpose of study of Ayurveda according to Ayurvedic stalwarts like Sushrut and Charakis 'Swasthya rakshan and Vyadhi parimoksh' which literally means health preservation and freedom from diseases respectively.⁵Chikitsa is 'rognivritti janak vyapar' i.e all means and measures taken to attain freedom from diseases or abstaining from the disease process whatsoever. Charak while describing chikitsa or treatment has talked of 'Rogopnayan vyapar' i.e measures that curtail or arrests the disease process. Rasayana and Vrishya ausadhis have been advocated in Ayurveda with the primary aim of disease prevention and health maintenance and is even more relevant in today's context.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES: To study the advocations for health restoration and maintenance from an Ayurvedic perspective with evidence based citations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The whole study is based on a literary review collected from Ayurvedic Samhitas and an evidence based review citing a few relevant researches done.

Thus the study is carried out under following heads:

1. *Rasayana* and *Vajikaran* or *Vrishya ausadhis* as health restoratives and health maintainers.
2. A glimpse into *Rasayana* and *Vrishya ausadhis* advocated in the form of single herbs and prepared medicines
3. *Rasayana* and *Vrishya* medicines in today's context
4. Some evidence based citations

1. Rasayana and Vajikaran or Vrishya ausadhis as health restoratives and health maintainers: To elucidate 'rogopnayan vyapar' which means preservation of health and restoring health back in the diseased, Charak has laid down an array of both principles and practical methods to achieve health in four chapters called 'swastha chatushk'. Herein, *Rasayan* is stressed upon as one measure. It has been termed to be 'Vyadhi vidhwanshi' i.e that which is disease destructive. Chakrapani, a noted commentator of Ayurvedic treatises states *Rasayan* is another name of 'Deerghayurup Mahaphal' i.e a long and disease free healthy life. Medicine or *Bhesaj* in general is of two types: i. *Swasthasyaurjaskara*: that which uplifts the best qualities or health factors of a healthy person ensuring and assuring his health and ii. '*Aturasya roganut*': that which cures the diseased.⁶Charak is again of the opinion that there is no element (*dravya*) in this earth that does not have medicinal property and so all plants can be used by virtue of their medicinal potency as a drug (both as health protective and as disease treating mode).⁷Those elements(*dravyas*)are laden with properties like disease alleviating(*doshaprashamanam*),tissue vitiating(*dhatupradushanam*) and health maintaining(*swasthavritta*).

Those *dravyas* or *ausadhas* that can be used as health preservative and promotive (*swasthavritta*) i.e *OJA VARDHAK ausadhas* are *urjaskar ausadhas*. Mention in all treatises of Ayurveda like Charak Samhita, Sushrut Samhita and Astanga reiterates the context in which *rasayana* has been discussed i.e more of a health restorative, promotive and main-

tenance option. *Chikitsa sthan* or the chapter of medicine in Charak Samhita starts with *Rasayan* which again endorses the importance given to health maintenance rather than cure of disease. Sushrut too has elaborated upon *rasayana* in *chikitsa sthana*. Similarly, Vagbhat in *uttara tantra*. *Rasayanas* are those dravyas that enhance the good health factors i.e Oja (best quality of all dhatus or tissues' essence).⁸ Medicines with similar properties are also termed as *Vajikaran* or *vrishya*. Again, Gangadhar, another noteworthy commentator of Ayurvedic treatises places the opinion that *urjaskar ausadhas* includes both *rasayan* and *vrishya ausadhis*. Both *Rasayana* and

Vajikaran have also been defined from the same perspective i.e that which is '*Urjaskar*' in healthy (*swastha*) persons and that which increases *Oja (prasastha bal)*. It reflects that both have similar actions. Commentators like Chakrapani and Gangadhar have similar views. To further endorse this perspective they have cited examples of different medicinal preparations used in some diseases. Properties of *Rasayana* have been enlisted as longevity ensuring, health enhancing, maintainer of youth and strength (*bala*). All these properties are nothing but indicative of maintenance of the body's defense properties i.e immunity maintenance.⁹ *Rasayana* is the mode and means to attain the ultimate nourishment of tissues thereby ensuring perfect health. Commentator Sharangadhar has defined *Rasayana* as '*Vyadhi nashanam*.'¹⁰ It is noteworthy, that *Vrishya ausadhis* or *Vajikaran* apart from having aphrodisiac (*vrishya*) properties also ensures perfectly nourished tissues.¹¹ Both *Rasayan* and *Vajikaran* are responsible for health

maintenance (*urjaskar*). Unlike *Vrishya ausadhis* that are used for health maintenance basically, *Rasayan* helps in alleviating disease primarily i.e '*Vyadhi vidhwanshi*'.

1. A glimpse into *Rasayana* and *Vrishya ausadhis* advocated in the form of single herbs and prepared medicines :

Rasayana is a comprehensive procedure which may consist of *ahaar*, *vihaar*, *achaar* and *ausadhi* directed towards ensuring and assuring health. *Rasayana* is compared to immortality which is again a simile endorsing its potency as body defense.¹² It has been classified into *Kamyas* and *naimittik rasayan* wherein *Kamyas* is advocated for normal persons who desire further improvement in health and vitality. *Naimittika* acts as restorative agent capable of bringing relief from an illness. Few of the *rasayanas* mentioned are :

Haritaki is stated as nourishing (*pushtikarak*), best for longevity (*uttam vayasthapak*) useful in immune compromising conditions like tuberculosis (*yakshma*), anaemia (*pandu*), *kas*, cachexia, loss of weight due to various diseases (*sosh rog*).

Amla is second in line having excellent immune protective and health enhancing property. It is the best *rasayan* and *haritaki* has curative properties (*vyadhiharan*). Use of *amla* is mentioned as a single herb (*kewala amla rasayan*) and in preparation with other herbs (e.g *amalak brahmarasayan*, all indicated for enhancing body's defense and strength. *Endrarasayan* is another preparation which is termed as an ultimate immune enhancer (*paramojaskar*)¹³ *Nagabala rasayan* (containing *Sida rhombifolia*) is advocated in *kshay*, *Bala-*

dirasayan (containing *bala*, *atibala*, *shwet chandan*, *kala agar*, *dhav*, *tinish*, *khadir*, *shirish*, *asan*, *punarnava*.) Similes of these *rasayan*s comparing them to nectar (*amrit tulya*) further stress the basic properties of *rasayana* and *vajeekaran* i.e health maintenance, assuring best quality tissues i.e best *OJA* which is nothing but a perfect immunity indicator.¹⁴ Some *rasayan*s like *Brahmarasayan* ensures *Mahabal* (immense strength). Scattered references of *Rasayana* as protective measure are found in *Bhagvat Gita* (5,16.25), *vayu purana*, 49.34 and *Upanishads* (*sankara and chandogya Upanishad* 8.6.4) *Aiteraya upanishad* (1.2.1) too.¹⁵

Rasayana and *Vrishya ausadhis* are mentioned in certain immune compromised disorders like *kshatashin* (pthisis), *pandu* (anaemia), *kas*. Use of *amlakhi* (*Embelica officinalis*), *haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*), *bhallatak* (*Semecarpus anacardium*), prepared medicines like *sarpi guda*, *yograj* are stated in these conditions.¹⁶

3. *Rasayana* and *Vrishya* medicines in today's context:

In fact, Ayurveda by virtue of specific medicinal modalities like *Rasayan* and *Vrishya ausadhis* aims not only to cure but also rejuvenate the tissues of the body depleting due to age and diseased condition. Use of herbs increases the resistance by increasing the immunity against diseases. For example, Cancer leads to immune compromise and therefore stress to diet regimen is important. From the above perspectives, the plants having *Rasayan* or *Vrishya* properties that are used in the diet of ethnic people cannot be overlooked. Moreover, *rasayan* can be a discipline of life which

can help in improving tissue nourishment leading to healthy growth. *Rasayan* is actually an effect obtained from regular use of good food like milk, green vegetables and other herbs in diet. Plants in Himalayas are considered to be the best¹⁷. The soil here is of the best quality for all *rasayana ausadhis*. For e.g, the ethnic communities in Assam and north eastern region have a food habit very close to nature and there is incorporation of medicinal plants in their diet as well as in their traditional medicine. The clinical application of *Rasayan* therapy provides enough lead to develop new therapeutic modalities for enhancing general body immunity both in normal individuals as well as in people with immune compromised condition due to diseases like Cancer, AIDS, etc., Sushrut has reiterated that the root of every living being, his strength, *oja*, health is diet and in diseased condition, it is this dietary intake that can act as therapy too.¹⁸ This is an answer to the question as to why innumerable researches are being done on ethnic herbs, traditional diet and their role in immunity.

4. Some evidence based citations:

1. Natural Antioxidant Activity of *Boerhavia diffusa* L.grr - Juna Begum, S Suhara Beevy, V S Sugunan ;International journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemical Research 2016,8(1);8-13.

Here antioxidant property was evaluated through in-vitro studies and it was found that the *B.diffusa* extracts have potent anti-oxidant activity against free radicals, prevented bio molecule damage and affords significant protection against oxidative stress.

2. *Tinospora cordifolia* (Willd.) Hook.f and Thoms.(Guduchi)- Avnish K Upadhyay, Kaushal Kumar, Arvind Kumar, Hari S.Mishra International journal of Ayurveda research, March, 2010

Here validation of Ayurvedic pharmacology through experimental and clinical studies was done. Results showed that alcoholic and aqueous extracts of *T.cordifolia* have beneficial effects in immune system and tested for immune modulatory activity. Here also the immunomodulatory activity of guduchi compounds and researches in this arena and its prospects as a drug product for treating diseases have been discussed.

3. Immuno therapy with *Tinospora cordifolia*: a new lead in the management of obstructive jaundice. Indian journal of Gastroenterol 1993, 12,5-8
4. Multifaceted protective role of Rasayan Therapy-Ayurvedic conference on Rasayan 2002.RAV, India.A review of investigation on Chyawanprasa (a preparation consisting multiple herbs like amla having *rasayana* properties).
5. Immuno modulatory activity of Chyawanprash . Brindavanam NB, Bhattacharya N, Katiyan Ck, Narayana DBA (2002). Post studies, it was found that there was decrease in Ig G,C₃ &C₄ levels in patients of recurrent cough and cold. Cytoprotective action in cancer patients showed a protective role against induced tissue damage.
6. Chemical constituents and biological activities of *Garcinia cowa* Roxb: Thunwadee Ritthiwigrom, International Journal of Science and Technology, 7,212-213 (2013). A local Assamese plant's fruit

showed excellent anti oxidant and scavenging properties post studies.

7. Immuno modulatory leads from medicinal plants- Pulok K Mukherjee, Neelesh K Nema, Shantanu Bhadra, D Mukherjee, Fernao C Braga & Motlalepula G Matsabis, Indian J Traditional knowledge, vol 13, no2, April 2014

Here phyto chemistry, pharmacology, therapeutic usage of 55 medicinal plants like *Allium sativum*, *Aloe vera*, *Embelica officinalis*, etc having immune modulatory potentials have been highlighted with references of respective researches along with their results . It is clearly analyzed that the extracts of different plant species have immune modulatory effects through various mechanisms including their effect concerned with different cells like WBCs, macrophages, antigen representing cells, mast cells, natural killer cells.

8. Adaptogenic properties of six rasayana herbs used in Ayurvedic medicine-Rege NN, Thatte UM, Dahanukar SA, Phytoether Res.1999 Jun,13(4):275-91

Here study revealed that all six herbs (*T.cordifolia*, *Asperagus racemosus*, *Embllica officinalis*, *Withania somnifera*, *Piper longum*, *Terminalia chebula*) produced immune stimulation, e.g *Embllica officinalis* strengthened defense mechanisms against free radical damage.

9. Therapeutic application of herbal medicine for cancer patient- Shu-Yi Yin, Wen-Chi Wei Feng -Yin Jian and Ning -Sun Yang. Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine vol2013

Here the beneficial effects of herbal medicines on survival, immune modulation and quality of life of cancer patients. Role of herbal medi-

cines as adjuvant for DC based vaccines, role in enhancing host immunity and review of anti cancer activities have been highlighted by reviewing clinical studies that investigated use of herbal medicines for cancer . e.g (Andrographis paniculata) Echinea Purpureae or Indian kalmegh conferred immunomodulatory effects, Ganoderma lucidum, Dioscorea tuber's immunostimulatory and anti cancer property.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.^{15,19-22}

In fact, time and again Ayurveda, a system of medicine closest to nature, a system which believes in a healthy lifestyle (*swastha vritta*), a system that believes in the right kind of incorporation in the food habit in terms of content has reiterated the role of herbs in a person's health quotient. It has stressed on the importance of health maintenance in normal as well as diseased through the use of herbs in daily diet as well as in therapy. That's why it has introduced or started its treatises on treatment (*chikitsa*) with health maintenance or restorative methods like *Rasayan* and *Vajikaran* followed by disease specific treatment modalities. Researches, lab studies have revealed that *Rasayana* therapy provides enough lead to develop new therapeutic modalities for enhancing general body immunity. *Rasayana* drugs act inside the human body by modulating the neuro endocrino immuno system and have been found to be a rich source of anti oxidants (Brahma and Debnath 2003). These *rasayana* plants are said to prevent ageing, re-establish youth, strengthen life and prevent diseases (Sharma 1983; Ghanekar 1981) This again endorses that they increase the resistance of the body against any onslaught. Herbs

like *Sida cordifolia*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Terminalia chebula*, *Withania somnifera*, *Tinospora cordifolia*, *Boerhavia diffusa*, *Allium safirum*, *Withania somnifera* etc., all have shown effective role in immune function, cellular and humoral immunity modulation. Today, the role of daily food content in the health quotient is understood and so study of ethnic food habit, role of ethnic herbs in immunity is being evaluated and the results obtained can be breakthroughs in treating immune compromising disorders

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