

**MODERN CONCEPT OF RASAYANA (REJUVENATION THERAPY) AND ITS UTILITY IN PRESENT ERA: A REVIEW**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite advancement in medical science with the invention of sophisticated investigative tools and deep knowledge of human physiology and its structure, there had been no significant control over diseases, rather new health issues are emerging and in many cases with no remedial solution. These disorders are either metabolic, genetic or infectious in origin. Being a part of the healthcare delivery system, the time has come to reanalyze the system of health management and look back at the philosophy of prevention and preservation as the first step to the treatment. Every system of medicine emphasizes treating the disease but in Ayurveda, treating a disease is always secondary rather, maintaining and preserving health which is the first objective of healthcare plans. Maybe, for this reason, utmost importance has been given for maintenance and sustenance of health in Ayurveda considering physical, mental, and sexual aspects.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Health management, investigative tools.

INTRODUCTION

A long and healthy life has been canonized by human beings since antiquity. *Ayurveda* is an antediluvian science of life with the dual motto of maintaining the health of a healthy person and alleviating disorders of diseased¹. *Ayurveda* remains a vital health care system even in today's metropolitan advanced world that is suggestive of its intensity and latent strength. Even in the primaeval classical period *Ayurveda* was already a well-developed science of medicine and was practised in the form of *Astanga Ayurveda* i.e., medicine with eight specialities viz. *Kayachikitsa*, *Shalaky Tantra*, *Shalya Tantra*, *Visha*, *Bhoota*, *Kaumara*, *Rasayana* and *Vajikarana Tantra*². The bifold aim of *Ayurveda* can be very well furnished through the special branch *Rasayana*³.

To achieve this goal, daily regimen and seasonal regimen, code of conduct of diet and social behaviour are mentioned in *Ayurveda* along with the implication of *Rasayana*. *Rasayana* is one of the comprehensive disciplines of *Ayurveda*, which comprises a specialized use of herbs, herbomineral formulations, food articles, and lifestyle along with self-discipline with social etiquette to achieve the optimum state of tissues and systems of the body so that there is the least effect of etiological factors on the body. In other words, it can be stated that *Rasayana* is a way to achieve homeostasis and thus retarding the process of ageing phenomenon and prevention of diseases. In healthy conditions, *Rasayana* can be understood as nutritional dynamics for rejuvenation of the body and psyche. Ageing in *Ayurveda* is considered a disease occurring due to the natural process of degeneration and thus, preventing premature ageing and healthily making ageing is also considered under the aspect of *Rasayana*.

Looking at the multifaceted approach of *Rasayana*, it can be said that a deep analysis of health parameters, its assessment, and its maintenance was the first approach of *Ayurveda*, and thus, treatment in *Ayurveda* is defined as all such activities in the form of diet, lifestyle, or medicines which target at *Dhatu Samya* (achieving the state of homeostasis) and not merely treating the disease.

Preservation of health and occurring of disease as per *Ayurveda* depends basically on how a person maintains quality and quantity of food, along with

food habits, lifestyle, psychological status, and effect of environmental conditions. Thus, the quality and quantity of food play a major role in the health preservation with due consideration of the status of *Agni* (digestion and metabolism mechanics) and suitability of individual depending on his *Pra-kriti* (body constitution). Considering this fact, healthy food habits and nutritious food have been considered as *Ajasrika Rasayana* (*Rasayana* in the form of food) which includes nourishing suitable healthy food. Thus, awareness among the society about the role of healthy food and food habits has to be reintroduced keeping in mind the present lifestyle of the people. As per *Ayurveda*, milk, ghee (clarified butter), honey etc. are a few examples of such *Ajasrika Rasayana*, and this can be practised in judicious manner in healthy individuals.

Further, as per *Ayurveda* with advancing of age, there are certain organ- or system-related changes and replenishing of these structures may postpone many age-related health issues, and thus, *Rasayana* that is age-specific can be prescribed for particular age groups, which can ultimately retard age-specific conditions to some extent and can promote longevity. Thus, a plan for *Rasayana* therapy right from birth shall be introduced in the routine immunization schedule.

Etymology (*Nirukti*):

The word *Rasayana* (*Rasa* + *Ayana*) appertains to nutrition and its transportation in the body. *Ayana* also may be understood as *Apayana* according to *Yogindranatha* and ergo, *Rasayana* may be taken as the approach or the measure to carry through replenished and excellent *Dhatu* within the body. Hence, it becomes evident that protocols that are utilized for the subsistence of *Dhatu* or dispensing strength to the latter are addressed as *Rasayana*. *Rasayana* therapy effectuates the normalcy of *Rasa Dhatu* and consequently sustains other *Dhatu* in equilibrium for a longer period⁴. Thus, as a result, obviates ageing and provides longevity which can be intimated as *Vayasthapana* or *Jaranashana*. *Rasayana* also augments individual resistance power against diseases.⁵

Classification of *Rasayana*

Acharya Sushruta has illustrated a thorough classification of *Rasayana*. Commentator *Dalhana* has ameliorated it further⁶. In *Charaka Samhita*, no such

absolute classification of *Rasayana* is given, but a detailed narration of methods of *Rasayana* Therapy is available in it⁷.

Conforming to the mode of administration, purpose, mode of action, contents, usage and scope of various measures, *Rasayana* may be classified as follows:

RASAYANA UTILITY IN PRESENT ERA

The concept of *Rasayana* had invoked a good deal of scientific enthusiasm way back in the late '60s. Few herbs have been explored for their specific biological effects on a different dimension of health. Summarising these studies, there is clinching evidence on the multi-dimensional effects of herbs with *Rasayana* attributes.

Anabolic Effects

foremost investigations on *Rasayana* drugs were deliberate to elicit their role on metabolism and tissue building. Herbs like *Gambhari* (*Gmelina Arborea*) have shown a positive hint in this direction. Regular authority of such drugs was found to improve nitrogen balance and thus promote tissue building.

Antistress and Adaptogenic Effects

The process of living is subjected to many paradoxical situations. One such paradox is stress. To be precise, every living organism in this universe is positioned in some or other kind of stressful situation. It is practically difficult to define the normal or abnormal values for stress and the quantum of it is highly variable. Over and above what matters the most is one's own threshold of tolerance. If you have a good tolerance, stress can do something really good for you. Therefore, we look at the means of improving our own tolerance and a *Rasayana* drug could come to your rescue to some extent, perhaps.

Pharmacological investigations on *Aswagandha* (*Withania somnifera*) and *Silajatu* point to this unique biological effect of *Rasayana* drugs. Accordingly, a drug with *Rasayana* quality can benefit the uses in two distinct ways. Firstly, it can neutralize the negative effects of stress on physiology and restore homeostasis. This effect is generally termed the Anti-stress effect. Secondly, a long-term administration of such drugs may enhance one's own tolerance levels and help to cope-up with stress better. This particular effect is termed as an adaptogenic effect. The word "Adaptogenesis" found its place in the medical terminology only, after understanding some of these *Ayurvedic* drugs.

Immuno Modulatory Effect

Immunity (*Vyadhi kshmatva*) is another biological phenomenon with varied implications. In its first place, the immune system works to fight back any kind of external invasions on the body e.g., on invasions by microbes. The immune system is a multi-localational, multicomponent defence system guarding the body as a whole. Again, today's understanding goes immune system may also play a paradoxical role in the body. For example, when it works in a balanced manner it guards the body against invasions by microbes. When this defence system mechanism goes weak-the body suffers infections. You may need a drug, which can stimulate the immune cells to work more effectively.

On the contrary, the immune system under selected circumstances may go berserk and can start doubting our own tissues and invade them ruthlessly. Such an abnormal phenomenon may lead to the development of a class of disease entities called "Auto-Immune Disorders." In such kinds of complex problems, one may need to suppress the hyper acting immune complexes.

Rasayana herbs are contemporary continuously explored for their effects on the immune system. Available validations show that these drugs can be used to modulate immune functions. On one hand, they may work to ameliorate immune functions and build you firm deep within, or they might pacify an angry immunity cell to be within its limits on the other. Thus, a *Rasayana* drug favours the host in both ways.

Nootropic Effects

Certainly, *Ayurveda* was magnetized with the idea of enhancing mental capabilities, and so we come across a specified term "*Medhya Rasayana*." This term refers to a specified group of drugs that work upon the mind, the "*Medha*" some of these herbs were also explored for their effect mainly on memory and learning abilities. *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monieri*), *Sankhapuspi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) etc. fall in this category. While these probes the acclaimed effects to some extent, we may have to go a long way to understand their real role on memory and intelligence.

Prof. Bhattacharya (of IMS, BHU, Varanasi) worked extensively on the subject. And in his own words "*Medhya Rasayana* may turn an idiot to a normal person but may not change a normal person to a

genius." Thus he feels that those drugs are capable of improving mental faculties in an abnormal situation to some extent but may not have a real promise for normal persons. But the reality remains, memory and intellect are not just confined to the brain. If we realise precisely every cell has its own intellect. And no one knows the practical effect of *Medhya Rasayana* drugs on this omnipresent cellular intellect as of now. Oxygen creates another paradoxical situation for a living cell to face with. There has been a tremendous understanding today on the rampaging effects of oxygen free radicals if generated in excess of the demand. The body takes care of these excess free radicals, by producing certain kinds of enzymes to some extent. When these natural mechanisms become inadequate, the concentration of free radicals go up in the tissues and lead to various diseases. Today, oxygen-free radicals are implicated in a wide range of diseases starting from minor allergies to cancers.

Antioxidant Effect

Rasayana drugs are now discovered to help the physiology in overcoming such oxidative injury. Present understanding goes that a *Rasayana* drug enhances the natural enzymatic defence mechanism of the body. While most *Rasayana* drugs exhibit antioxidant activity, they are likely to have some kind of tissue specificity.

This thought remains a hypothesis as of now and the specific site of action for each of the *Rasayana* drugs is yet to be identified.

Anti-Aging Effects

Administration of *Rasayana* drugs appears to be associated with the prevention of ageing also. There have been only a few investigations in this direction, and they are too inadequate to prove or disprove ancient thoughts. Available evidence faintly indicated that *Rasayana* drugs could influence the secretion of a hormone DHEA the deficiency of which is implicated in the process of ageing. Neurotransmitter substances such as Norepinephrine, Acetyl Choline or Dopamine (Dopamine is also named as DHEA Dihydroxy phenylalanine) are released in stress conditions. Stress on every cell causes the ageing process.

Ayurvedic Concepts of Aging (Jara) and its Prevention with Rasayana

The particular *Rasayana* has to be selected for each individual appropriately in consideration of his

Vaya, Prakriti, Satmya, Satva, State of Agni, Dhatus, Srotasa & environmental factors like Desa & Kala etc.

Acarya Caraka has divided "*Vaya*" into three major parts⁸.

(i) *Balyawastha* 1-30 yrs.

(ii) *Madhyamawastha* 31-60 yrs.

(iii) *Jirnawastha* 61-100 yrs.

Further *Balyawastha* has been divided into two -

(i) *Aparipakwadhatu Balyawastha* 1-16 yrs.

(ii) *Balyawastha Viwardhamanadhatu* 17-30 yrs.

Acarya Susruta has divided '*Vaya*' into three major parts⁹

(i) *Bala* up to 16

(ii) *Madhya* 16-70

(iii) *Vrdha* above 70

Acarya Caraka's statement- "*Labhopyo Hi Sastanama Rasadinama Rasayanama*"¹⁰.

Nutrition is the primary attribute of *Rasayana*, longevity and ageing issues are one of its secondary attributes.

Acarya Susruta and *Vagbhatta* have suggested that the optimum effect of *Rasayana* Therapy can be obtained only if this therapy is used between 3rd & 5th decades of life "*Purve Vayasi Madhye wā*"

The reason is simple, if there occur irreversible ageing changes, the *Rasayana* may not be that effective. Thus, early adult and middle age is the best period for *Rasayana* Therapy to have a maximum of anti-ageing effects like *Vayasthapana, Ayuskara & Jaranasana*. This issue is described more elaborately by *Acarya Sarangdhara* according to whom a person loses his

1. *Balya*, 2. *Vrddhi*, 3. *Chavi*, 4. *Medhā*, 5. *Twaka*, 6. *Drsti*, 7. *Sukra*, 8. *Vikrama*, 9. *Buddhi* and 10. *Karmendrya* in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd... up to 10th decades of life respectively. Thus, specific *Rasayana* drugs will have to be selected and administered in respective age groups.

Healthful longevity has ever been the cherished desire of man. Man finds the real pleasure of life full of activity and vigour during the period of youth. He hates old age. Ayurveda can tackle the health problems of the aged more efficiently because it has got one separate branch termed *Rasayana Tantra* (Rejuvenation Therapy)

which is mainly devoted to the promotion of both physical and mental health and prevention of *Jara* (Aging) and disease." The *Ayurvedic* texts have also given due thought to the process of ageing and related health problems. According to *Ayurveda*, the *Jara* (Aging) is a natural phenomenon like hunger, thirst & sleep. *Ayurveda* divides the whole span of life into 3 parts viz.

- (i) Balya (Childhood)
- (ii) Madhya (Young & Middle age)
- (iii) Vrdha (Old Age)

Acarya Susruta has beautifully defined old age by giving it a simile of a decaying old house that may collapse during any rainy season. By implication, it means that the declining tissues (*Dhatu*) of the aged persons are unable to tolerate the physical and mental stresses and strains, which earlier in childhood or young age might have passed without leaving any visible scar and in old age any such phenomenon may lead to serious illness or death. Therefore, the aged persons require more attention and care particularly from the physicians so that they may remain physically and mentally sound during the last decades of their life.

Etymology of Jara

The word *Jara* is derived from "Jarsh" Dhatu, which is meant for diminution of age.

"Sabda Kalpa Druma" States that the flaccidity of body tissue occurring due to age is called *Jara*.

Aetiology of Jara (Aging)

Ayurveda categorises aetiological factors for any diseases as

- (i) Swabhavika
- (ii) Agantuka
- (iii) saririka
- (iv) Manasika

Acarya Susruta has mentioned a group of naturally occurring diseases formed as *Swabhava Bala Pravṛtta* which includes *Jara* (Aging) also. Acarya Dalhana while commenting on the *Swabhava Bala Pravṛtta* mentions that this type of disease occurs due to the power of nature (*Prakṛti-sakti* Jata). According to Acarya Cakrapani the *Swabhava* or nature of an individual depends upon the invisible factors hereditarily carried on by that particular race in which he is born.

The word *Prakṛti* (Nature) here denotes both the nature of a particular species and the nature of an

individual within the species. For instance, the onset of ageing varies in different species and similarly within one species also the nature of an individual varies according to *Desa* (Habitat), *Kala* (time & environment), *Prakṛti* (temperament) and heredity and accordingly, *Jara* may appear early, timely or late with its less, moderate or more symptoms.

Acarya Susruta has divided the *Swabhava Bala Pravṛtta* diseases into two groups' viz. *Kalaja* & *Akalaja*. In this way, *Jara* (Aging) is also divided into two groups viz.

1. *Kalaja Jara*
2. *Akalaja Jarā*

1. *Kalaja Jara* (Timely Aging)
The appearance of *Jara* (ageing) at the appropriate age i.e., above 60 years may be termed as *Kalaja Jara*. This is considered accordingly to Acarya Caraka but Ācārya Susruta increases this limit to 70 years. Actually speaking 2 it is not a disease but the phenomenon which starts much earlier at about the age of 40 years. This type of *Jara* is considered as *Pariraksan Kṛitta* because it occurs at its prescribed age or a bit late due to carefully following the daily & seasonal schedules described in "*Swasthavṛtta*" and by performing the "*Sodhana*" at the proper time. Thus, *Kalaja Jara* is possible only if one remains careful towards his health and therefore it may be slowly progressive and without disturbing much the physical health and mental faculties of the aged.

II. Akalaja Jara (Untimely Aging)

The appearance of signs and symptoms of *Jara* (ageing) before the age of 60/70 years may be described as *Akalaja Jara*. This type of *Jara* is considered as *Apari Raksana-kṛita* because it occurs before the prescribed age for not taking the care of "*Swasthavṛtta*" (personal hygiene) and not getting the "*Sodhana*" (purification) done at the proper time as mentioned in *Ayurveda*.

According to Acarya Dalhana the main cause of *Akalaja Jara* is one's carelessness towards his health. By screening different *Ayurvedic* texts the hetus (aetiological factors) of *Akalaja Jara* may be summarised as follows.

Process of Aging in Different Body Tissues

The question may arise whether the ageing starts simultaneously in all the tissues and organs, or it affects them at the different years of age. The close perusal of the available literature reveals that "*Astanga*

Samgraha" is the first treatise, which has thrown some light on this problem. It has been mentioned that one particular thing is being lost after passing each decade of life. After passing the first decade of life, the childhood also passes, after the second decade the growth stops, after the third decade *prabha* (complexion) vanishes, after the fourth decade *medha* (intellect) starts declining and at the end of the fifth decade the *Varna/Kanti* (lusture) is lost. Similarly, at the end of the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth decades of life *Sukra* (semen including sperms), *Aksi* (vision), *Sruti* (hearing), *Mana* (mind) and functions of remaining special senses and motor organs are lost respectively.

Acarya Sarangadhara has divided the 120 years of life into 12 decades, and decade wise loss accordingly to him has been shown in the following table. *Acarya Bhavaprakasa* has also expressed similar views.

It is obvious from the foregoing that ageing is a slow and continuous process that affects various bodily tissues at different times. Some may doubt whether *Prabha* or *Chavi* (body glow) is to be included in the ageing process but there may not be two opinions regarding the inclusion of declining in *Medha* (intellect), the part of ageing. In this way, the process of ageing according to Ayurveda begins in the fourth decade of life. Their process enhances and it affects one by hereafter the one the functions of vital tissues and special senses like vision, *Sukra*, hearing etc.

Management of Jara (Aging) with Rasayana

First of all, the question arises whether the ageing process is reversible or not? And if it is reversible then how to achieve it? In this regard, the following facts mentioned in *Ayurveda* may be taken into consideration.

As mentioned earlier *Jara* (ageing) and death are *Swabhavika* (Natural) phenomenon and *Acarya Caraka* considers them as *Swabhava Nispratikryaha*. i.e., by nature, these are incurable. But in another context, while describing the best *Bhava* (Things/*Agrya Sangraha*) for the various medical problems, *Acarya Caraka* mentions "*Jara yapyanama*" which means *Jara* (ageing) is on the top amongst the diseases which cannot be cured but the patient may be kept symptoms free by proper treatment.

Acarya Cakrapani while commenting on the word "*Nispratikrya*" mentions that ordinary treatment has got no effect on ageing, but *Rasayana* Therapy (specially *Kutipravesika Rasayana*) is effective against it. It has been mentioned in *Caraka Samhita* that old *Cyavana Rsi* became younger after the use of *Rasayana* Therapy Similarly in *Vedic* literature references of Rejuvenation of *Rsi Vandan* is found. In this way, premature ageing can be treated successfully by *Rasayana* therapy. However, *Rasayana* is also not a complete cure of the *Jara* as it can just check or delay the ageing process for some time and as soon as the effect of *Rasayana* vanishes, the process of ageing starts again leading to the end of life.

As mentioned earlier *Acarya Dalhana* is of the view that *Akalaja Jara* can easily be cured while *Kalaja Jara* requires continuous care with *Rasayana* drugs i.e., it is of the "*Yapya*" type.

Based on the foregoing, it can be said that ageing can be checked and retracted to some extent by the timely and proper use of *Ayurvedic* principles of daily and seasonal schedules. *Rasayana* Therapy is effective for both *Kalaja* and *Akalaja* types of *Jara* by means of treating *Akalaja Jara* and retarding the *Kalaja Jara* maintains the physical and mental health of the aged, so that they may remain relevant to the society even in their last decades of life.

Ways to Combat Aging

The newer discipline of modern medicine states that ageing occurs due to malfunction of the DNA-repair mechanism and if it could be reversed it would slow down the process of ageing. Ageing, like cancer and so many genetic neurological disorders, occurs due to DNA damage. Genetical damage occurs due to alterations in its structure, breaking of its strands. Though damage to DNA in the body is a continuous process, the cells keep them repairing. But Aging retards such a capacity. The accumulated DNA damage results in wrong kinds of signals and wrong proteins being synthesised, when the proteins do not function properly the cell dies.

The repair of the DNA involves many enzymes & proteins. The defect lies in the DNA polymerase (beta) molecules which carries out the synthesis of the patch to be repaired. The dysfunction of this enzyme causes ageing in the brain neurons. Somehow correction of this defect may give chance that DNA repair capacity can be resurrected in the ageing

neuron. These processes are still in experimental stages, but another theory of ageing is the free radical theory. Free radicals may also damage DNA. There is evidence that various exogenous & endogenous antioxidants are capable of inhibiting free radical formation.

So, antioxidant therapy seems to be a very important preventive measure in order to lessen tissue damage and genetic damage also. These antioxidants help in maintaining the balance between ROS generation and its eradication.

One of the contributing factors to the decline of cognitive function is the damaging effect of free radical exposure. Free radicals are atoms or groups of atoms that can cause damage to cells by a process called oxidation, which impairs the immune system and leads to infection and degenerative diseases. Environmental pollution, radiation, processed food and smoke are significant contributors to the release of free radicals. They are also produced in the human body through sun exposure and stress. Antioxidants play a major role to retard this process. Vitamin A, C, E, B-complex are well-established antioxidants. The probable mode of action of *Rasayana* drugs could be through chelation of free radicals (ferrous ions) and also as a chain breaker. It has been reported by scientific studies that *Rasayana* drugs are potent antioxidant drugs.

DISCUSSION

In today's era, human life has been affected by drastic changes in atmosphere, diet and lifestyle and thus, the biggest challenge for humanity is to survive in this changing environment and compete with the pace of life. Further, newly emerging infections and metabolic disorders have posed challenges to healthcare systems. To meet this challenge, awareness among the masses regarding the preventive use of *Rasayana* as prophylactic can be introduced. Some *Rasayanas* are also disease-specific and are used in specific disease states as they induce specific immunity and bio-strength to combat a particular disease. Such *Rasayana* is called as *Naimittika Rasayana*. The tissue-specific *Rasayana* drugs can be administered along with the treatment of the underlying disease to enhance the tissue strength and disease-combating power so that faster and better relief may be provided, and recurrences may be prevented.

Like a person with prediabetes, a state can be given simple herbs like *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia* (Willd.) Hook. f. and Thoms.), *Amalaki* (*Emblia officinalis* Gaertn.) and thus can prevent diabetes. There can be many other *Naimittika Rasayanas* that may be identified by an appropriate trial and few research in the past have proved their immunomodulating actions. Clinical trials at IPGT and RA Jamnagar have shown that the use of appropriate *Rasayana* drugs such as *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), *Guduchi* and *Pippali* (*Piper longum*) to the treatment of allergic disorders such as eczema, urticaria, allergic rhinitis, and bronchial asthma helps for better and faster relief and prevents recurrences. Similarly, to combat autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis or cancer or pulmonary tuberculosis, advocating the *Rasayana* drug as an adjuvant to ongoing medicines can also provide encouraging results and improve the quality of life of patients. Furthermore, in stress-induced conditions such as anxiety and insomnia or neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and senile dementia, administration of *Medhya Rasayana* (nootropics) provides a marked improvement in the quality of life of patients.

CONCLUSION

The findings of all these studies indicate that *Rasayana* has a definite role to play in the maintenance and preservation of health, and appropriate use of *Rasayana* can help to bring down the prevalence of many diseases, ultimately reducing the healthcare burden. Time has come when more focus shall be done on preventive aspects of diseases, and thus, the present policy of the healthcare system shall deal with awareness among the mass about *Rasayana* utility. Quality of life is important for an individual, and thus, research in Ayurveda shall also focus on identifying key areas of application of *Rasayana* and sufficient evidence shall be generated with guidelines so that *Rasayana* therapy can be included in the national health policy and Ayurveda can contribute for the betterment of humanity.

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