RASAYANA CHIKITSA: A COMPLETE THERAPY TO PREVENT AGEING

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the ancient system of medicine in the world. Ayurveda has two basic principles i.e. maintenance of healthy individuals and cure from the diseases. Rasayana Chikitsa is one of the eight branches of Ayurveda which aims at achieving a long and healthy life with fulfilling both of the principles. Rasayana is the term given to special herbs which decreases the ageing process, increases the life longevity, increases the mental as well as physical strength and destroys the disease process. The main purpose of Rasayana Chikitsa is to impede the aging process and delay the degenerative process in the body. It involves clinical effects like Vaya Sthapaka, Ayushya, Medhya, Balya and Jara Vyadhi Nashaka effects and work as immune stimulant, antioxidant, adaptogenic and anti-stress agent etc.

Keywords: Rasayana, Rejuvenation Therapy, Ageing, Jara, Ayurveda
INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the world’s oldest system of health. It is not just a health care system but a complete approach to healthy living. It deals with various aspects of healthy living and various remedies to be adopted in diseased conditions. Ayurveda is practiced in the form of Ashtanga Ayurveda (Eight folds of Ayurveda)

Rasayana/Chikitsa is one of the most important branches which fulfil the first object of Ayurveda i.e. Swasthya Swasthya Rakshanam and Rasayana Chikitsa also aims at rejuvenation and geriatric care. A long healthy life has been the cherished desire of man since antiquity. Man finds the real pleasure of life with full of activity and vigour during the period of youth. He hates old age and never wants to become old. In present scenario, in which people are not able to follow the rules of healthy and happy life due to improper dietary habits, erroneous lifestyle, excessive stress and lack of exercise, the process of ageing is starting very earlier with many psychological and physical illness. Ayurveda has two basic objectives i.e. maintenance of healthy individuals and cure from the diseases. More emphasis is laid down on maintenance of healthy individuals. This can be achieved by the approaches and the methods of preventive and promotive health care system of Ayurveda which includes the entire range of Swasthavritta, Sadavritta, Hitakara Aahara-Vihara and the rejuvenative measures of Rasayana Chikitsa. Rasayana Chikitsa is consist of certain dietary and therapeutic measures like herbal preparations along with lifestyle modifications, which are able to correct as well as improve state of Dhatus (Tissues) by a proper nutrition and thus retard pre-mature ageing to some extent and promote life longevity.

Definition of Rasayana

The term “Rasayana” used in Ayurveda, denotes a specific meaning. It consists of two words viz. ‘Rasa’ and ‘Ayana’. ‘Rasa’ means fluid or juice & ‘Ayana’ means pathway. So, the literal meaning of Rasayana is ‘Path of Juice’. Rasa denotes that thing which moves day & night. Rasa is defined as the Sara (Essence) of Chaturvirdha Aahara. The means of obtaining optimum standard of Rasa is known as Rasayana. Different classics of Ayurveda have defined Rasayana in different words but with the same central theme. Acharya Charaka has described Rasayana as the means by which one gets the excellence of Rasadi Dhatus. On the comments of Acharya Charak’s definition, Acharya Gangadhara has mentioned Rasayana as a particular measure by which one can gain life longevity, memory, vigour, vitality etc. Acharya Sushruta has defined Rasayana as the substance which decreases age process, increases the life longevity, increases the mental as well as physical strength and destroys the disease process.

Benefits of Rasayana Chikitsa

Ayurveda has two basic objectives i.e. to maintain the health of healthy individuals and to cure the diseases of diseased ones. For accomplishing these objectives of Ayurveda, two types of medicines are described i.e. Swathasyorjaskara and Roganuta. The definition of Acharya Charaka regarding Rasayana reveals the fact that Rasayana drugs possess both these activities because a drug which is Swathasyorjaskar will efficiently prevent the occurrence of diseases in persons. Acharya Sharangdhar has clearly indicated that Rasayana drugs prevent ageing and diseases. Acharya Dailhana also stated that Rasayana drugs are Ayushakara in nature that’s why these drugs prevent diseases and old age. While describing the properties of Rasayana, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that on administration of Rasayana, one attains life longevity, memory, intelligence, freedom from disorders, youthful age, excellence of luster, complexion, voice, optimum strength of physique and sense organs, successful words, respectability and brilliance. Appreciating the efficacy of Rasayana Chikitsa, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that if it is administrated as per the directions and normal laid down for the purpose, one may acquire ‘Brahma’ or may attain ‘Moksha’. It has been stated that Devtas and Rishis used to take Rasayana methodically and regularly. As a result, they could beat old age, weakness, emaciation, diseased states and death and used to enjoy age of thousands of years.
**Classification of Rasayana**

There is various classification of Rasayana Chikitsa. Some of them are as follows-

**As per mode of administration of Rasayana: **[17]
1. Kutipraveshika
2. Vatatapika

Kutipraveshika is one in which Rasayana is given with person staying inside a closed Kuti whereas Vatatapin is that in which Rasayana is administrated with patient is exposed to Vata (Wind) and Aatapa (Sun). In other words, Kutipraveshika is an indoor administration while Vatatapin is an outdoor administration of Rasayana.

**As per Mode of Action:** [18]
1. Samshodhana Rasayana
2. Samshamana Rasayana

Samshodhana and Samshamana, both are curative in nature. Samshodhana type of Rasayana expels the aggravated Doshas whereas Samshamana type pacifies the accumulated ones.

**As per purpose of administration:** [19]
1. Kamya Rasayana
2. Naimittika Rasayana
3. Ajasrika Rasayana

Kamya Rasayana is subdivided into Pranakamiya, Shrikamiya and Medhakamiya i.e., to increase the life span, to prolong the life span and to increase the cognitive abilities of mind respectively. Naimittika type of Rasayana is nothing but Rasayana specific to a disease. Ajasrika Rasayana deals with daily intake of milk, ghee etc.

**Indications & Contraindications of Rasayana Chikitsa**

**Indications:** It is mentioned in classics that Rasayana Chikitsa if administrated improperly, it produces several hazardous effects [20]. Rasayana Chikitsa has been indicated for young and middle aged persons after priorunction and evacuation and also people who are healthy, intelligent, having self-control over senses, a good amount of money and sufficient time, can be treated with Rasayana Chikitsa [21].

**Contraindications:** Acharya Sushruta has described seven types of persons who are not suitable for Rasayana such as- Anatmavana (Devoid of self-restraint), Aalasi (Lazy), Daridra (Poor), Pramadi (Careless), Vyasani (Addict), Paapi (Involved in sinful activities) and Bhaishajaapamani (Averse to medicines) [22].

**Ageing (Jara):** Vaya (Age) can be defined as the duration of time since birth to the present for a living individual. In Ayurveda, Ageing is known as “Jara” and defined as “Jeeryati itti jara” i.e. which has become old by act of wearing out. The term Jara is used for senescence period which means the condition of process of deterioration with age. According to Acharya Charaka the span of life is of 100 years. He has divided “Vaya” into three parts [23] i.e. Balyavastha (Upto 30 years), Madhyamavastha (From 31 to 60 years) and Jeernavastha (61 to 100 years). Further Balyavastha has been divided into two types, viz. Aparipakwa Dhatu Balyavastha (Immature stage) lasting upto 16 years of age and Paripakwa Dhatu Balyavastha (Mature stage) lasting upto the age of 30 years. But Acharya Sushruta has divided Vaya in three different categories [24] i.e. Balya (Upto 16 years), Madhya (17 to 70 years) and Vridhha (Above 70 years).

Further Madhya Avastha has been divided in four subparts [25] i.e. Vridhdi (17 to 20 years), Yauvana (21 to 30 years), Sampoornata (31 to 40 years) and Haani (41 to 70 years). Following all these stages a person gets Vriddhavastha / Jeernavastha (Old age) after the age of 60 or 70 years. The old age is defined as by giving it a simile of decaying old house which may collapse during any rainy season [26]. In Jeernavastha (old age), there is diminution of Dhatus (Tissues), strength of sense organs, energy, masculinity, courage, power of understanding, retention, memorising, speech and analysing facts [27]. Apart from this, Acharya Vagbhatta and Acharaya Shrarangdhara have divided life in decades and described decade wise loss as follows –

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It is obvious from the foregoing that ageing is a slow and continuous process which affects various bodily tissues at different times.

**Types of Jara (Ageing)**

Ayurveda categorises aetiological factors for any disease as i.e. Swabhavika, Agantuka, Sharirika and Manasika [30]. Acharya Sushruta has mentioned a group of naturally occurring diseases formed as Swabhava Bala Pravritta which includes Jara (Ageing) also [31]. Acharya Dalhana while commenting on the Swabhava Bala Pravritta mentions that this type of disease occurs due to the power of nature [32]. Acharya Sushruta has divided the Swabhava Bala Pravritta diseases into two group viz. Kalaja & Akalaja [33]. In this way, Jara (Ageing) also can be divided into two groups, viz. Kalaja Jara (Natural ageing) and Akalaja Jara (Premature ageing).

1. **Kalaja Jara (Natural Ageing):** 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 Acharya Charaka but Acharya Sushruta increases this limit upto 70 years [34]. Actually, 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 ‘Pariraksha Krita’ [35], because it occurs at its prescribed age or a bit late due to the carefully following the daily & seasonal schedules described in “Swasthvritta” and by performing the “Shodhana” at the proper time. Thus, Kalaja Jara is possible only if one remains careful towards his health and therefore it may be a slow progressive and without disturbing much the physical health and mental faculties of aged.

2. **Akalaja Jara (Premature Ageing):** The appearance of signs and symptoms of Jara (Ageing) before the age of 60 or 70 years may be described as Akalaja Jara. This type of Jara is considered as ‘Apariraksha Krita’ [36], because it occurs before the prescribed age for not taking the care of “Swasthvritta” (Personal hygiene) and not getting the “Shodhana” (Purification) done at the proper time as mentioned in Ayurveda. According to Acharya Dalhana the main cause of Akalaja Jara is one’s carelessness towards his health [37]. By screening different Ayurvedic texts the Hetus (Aetiological factors) of Akalaja Jara may be summarized as follows [38][39][40] -

(A) **Aaharaja Hetu:**
- Amla, Katu, Lavana Rasa, Kshara, Guru, Raksha, Klinna, Abhishyandi, Puti, Paryushita food articles
- Navashukadhanya, Navashamidhanya, Shush-kamamsa, Tila, Palal, Pishantna etc.
- Different type of Viruddhaahara (Incompatible food), Asatmayaahara (Unwholesome diet), Vishmashana (Improper eating habits), Adhyashana (Overeating) etc.

(B) **Viharaja Hetu:** Atimarga Gamana (Excessive walk), Diva Swapna (Day sleeping), Nitya Stree Sevana (Excessive intercourse), Nitya Madhya Sevana (Excessive intake of Alcohol), Ativayama Sevana (Improper exercise),

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<td>3.</td>
<td>Prabha (Lusture)</td>
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<td>12.</td>
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<td>Jeevana (Life)</td>
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(C) Manasika Hetu: Bhaya, Krodha, Shoka, Lobha, Moha, Manasika Dukha (Mental worries) etc.

Need of Rasayana Chikitsa In Jara (Ageing)
As mentioned earlier that Jara (Ageing) and death are Swabhavika (Natural) phenomenon and Acharya Charaka considered them as ‘Nishpratikriya’,[41] i.e. by nature these are incurable. But in another context, while describing the best Bhavas (Things / Agrya Samgraha) for the various medical problems, Acharya Charaka mentions “Jara Yapyanana”[42] 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. Acharya Chakrapani while commenting on the word Nishpratikriya mentions that the ordinary treatment modalities has got no effect on ageing, but Rasayana therapy (Especially Kutipravveshika Rasayana) is effective against it.[43] It has been clearly mentioned in Charaka Samhita that old Chyawana Rishi became younger after the use of Rasayana Chikitsa[44]. In this way the premature ageing can be treated successfully by the 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 leading to the end of life. Acharya Dalhana also states that Akalaja Jara can easily be cured while Kalaja Jara requires continuous care with Rasayana drugs i.e. it is of Yapya type.[45]

On the basis of foregoing it can be said that the 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 type 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.

Mode of Action of Rasayana Drugs In Ageing
Rasayana drugs are used for preservation of positive health. Acharya Sushruta defines a healthy man as one who has equilibrium of Doshas, normal functioning of Agni, balance state of all Dhatus, beside his soul, the sense organs and mind should be happy and cheerful [46].

Rasayana is a specialized approach of treatment influencing the fundamental aspect of body i.e. Dhatu, Agni, Ojas and Srotas. It is possible that different Rasayana drugs may act with predominance effect at different levels. These comprehensive effects are brought about with the help of the varied pharmacodynamics properties of Rasayana drugs. Rasayana effect is not a specific pharmacological action but is a complex phenomenon operating through a comprehensive mechanism involving the fundamental factors like Rasa Samvahan, Dhatus, Agni, Ojas and Srotas. It may ultimately be led to the achievement of the comprehensive effect of Rasayana as stated by Acharya Charak “Labhopayo Hi Shastanam Rasadinam Rasayanam”[47]. Considering the Ayurvedic concept of physiology it may be presumed that a Rasayana agents promotes nutrition through one of the following the modes-

1. At the level of Rasa: The Rasayana drugs acts at the level of Rasa by improving specific nutritional values of Poshaka Rasa. Probably such type of Rasayana drugs are having Madhura, Gura, Snigdha and Sheeta properties act at the level of Rasa by promoting the nutritional value of the tissue plasma, which in turn helps in obtaining the best qualities of Dhatu.

2. At the level of Agni: Some Rasayana drugs have a fundamental effect at the level of Agni i.e. digestion and metabolism. The drugs which possess the Ushna, Laghu, Ruksha and Katu, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa may act at the level of Agni, vitalizing the organic metabolism leads to an improved structural and functional pattern of tissues and production of the Rasayana effects. Drugs such as Pippali, Guggulu, Rasana, Bhallataka, Rudanti mainly act at the level of Agni, so improve the digestion and create excellence of Saptadhatu. The Rasayana drugs like Vidanga, Chitraka and Haritaki are found to enhance Agni status at level of Jatharagni. Similarly, Amalaki, Anrta, Pippali, Kumari are supposed to be act at level of Dhatvagni which may leads to the excellence of all Dhatus.
3. **At the level of Srotas:** Some Rasayana drugs have a fundamental effect at the level of Srotas i.e. microchannels. These drugs help to better bioavailability of nutrients to the tissues and improve tissue perfusion. The Rasayana drugs having Katu, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa; Vishada, Raksha, Laghu Guna; Ushna Veerya and Katu Vipaka may lead to Srotoshodhana and may help in the evaluation of the Rasayana effect in the body. Guggulu, Rasona, Madhu are best example which acts at the level of Srotas.

4. **At the level of Ojas:** There are certain Rasayana drugs which directly influence the better formation and functions of Oja i.e. bio-immune strength. Drugs such as Jeevaniya Gana, Swarna and Pippali are supposed to induced Bala and Vyadhikshmatva in the individual.

**DISCUSSION**

Ayurveda advocates wonderful approach to delay Kalaja Jara and to avoid Akalaja Jara. Ayurveda gives primary importance to preventive and promotive health care and the maintenance of positive health. The major preventive approaches for maintain and improving the quality of life include individualized specific measures like Dincharya, Ratiricharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Hitakara and Matravata Ahara, Rasayana Chikitsa etc. Rasayana Chikitsa is very effective method for geriatric health care in present time. There is conventional understanding that Rasayana therapy is a kind of geriatric system and should be used in old age. This is not true. Rasayana is not only for geriatrics, but it is the science of nutrition i.e. Poshana and is applicable to all ages from paediatrics to geriatrics. Though its use may prolong life span and impart life longevity. Nutrition is the primary attribute of Rasayana, longevity and ageing issues are one of its secondary attributes.\(^{[48]}\) Impairment of Rasa (Nourishment) results in disease and decay. Rasa should be present in adequate quantity and should be able to penetrate throughout the various cells off the body to penetrate throughout the various cells of the body to provide nourishment. Dhatus undergo a continuous process of decay due to interaction with the Agnis. If this is allowed to continue uninterrupted, ageing comes in early. In youth, Agni helps speed up synthesis of ingredients for growth of cells whereas in old age the destructive activity is enhanced rendering the human susceptible to several types of diseases ultimately leading to death. If this process is somehow arrested, by supplying Rasa in adequate quantity with the power to penetrate, ageing can be delayed. In Ayurvedic texts, it is also stated that the optimum effect of Rasayana therapy can be obtained only if this therapy is used between 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> decades of life “Purve vayasi Madhye Vaa”\(^{[49]}\).

**CONCLUSION**

Rasayana Chikitsa is primarily aimed to prevent premature ageing, handle the sequel of normal ageing and thus enable the person to encompass the benefits of complete span of life and to boost painless death.

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