

## YOGIC LIFE STYLE AND GERIATRIC CARE- A REVIEW ARTICLE

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## ABSTRACT

Yogic life style stands as an answer to solve the problem of healthful longevity including mental development and resistance against disease. That is why; *vajeekaran* therapy has been included as one of the eight major divisions of *Ashtang* Ayurveda. Yogic life style helps to promote and preserve health and longevity in the healthy, and to cure disease in sick. We all want to look forever young and increase our life span by staying healthy, *Rasayans* & *vajeekaran* or *vitalizers*, as they are called, do exactly the same. They replenish the vital fluids of our body, thus keeping us away from diseases. They refer to the nutrition and its transportation in the body. Such a state of improved nutrition is claimed to lead to a series of secondary attributes like longevity, immunity against diseases along with mental competence and delaying of aging. Thus, yoga and *pranayama* are considered as useful in geriatric care.

**Keywords:** *yogic lifestyle, rasayana, geriatric care.*

## INTRODUCTION

“Old age”-The very term conjures up images of a frail, hunched wrinkled body, with a toothless dribbling mouth and uncontrollable bladder and bowels, hardly surprising then that many of us having an early, dignified death as compared to a prolonged dependent life. But is the above motion an unquestionable truth?

The Statics- Though growing old is a part of the life cycle, emerging demographic trends indicate an unusual phenomenon of population a strong group of above 65 years of age is building up to further challenge the medical world and pressurize the government as an elderly person costs the Health Services, Nine times as much as a young individual. According to estimation, India currently has 75 million persons over 65 years of age coming to around 5.7% of the population. In well developed countries the percentage is even higher as tabulated below.

- 1] USA [12%]
- 2] JAPAN [10%]
- 3] U.K [15.1%]
- 4] CANADA [10%]
- 5] AUSTRALIA [10.1%]

In 1947, the average Indian life expectancy was just 30 years. The same is now 62.8 years owing to improved public health care & awareness with male-62.1 years, female-62.7 years. Incidentally Kerala is the state with the highest population of Senior Citizens in India i.e +60 group. This implies that, an individual once, born is likely to enjoy a reasonable duration of life. This optimistic scenario for the next century may come true, but it should be remembered, that increased survival will be associated with increased risk of non-life threatening but disabling chronic diseases.

These facts & figures also converge to light the growing importance of a relatively

new branch of medicine- “Geriatrics” a subject which until recently, remained submerged under other compelling priorities such as infection disease, malnutrition etc. Geriatrics has always been an integral and inseparable part of *Astangha Ayurveda*. In fact, the two specialties, *Rasayana* & *Vajeekarana*, were meant to tackle the problems of ageing or *Jarajanya Vikaras*<sup>1</sup> which are classified under *Swabhavika Vyadhis*. *Swabhavika Vyadhis* is a unique mode of classification which reflects an unusual combination of two phenomenon’s-

- 1] Physiological process
- 2] Pathological changes

*Charaka* & *Vangabhat* named the very first chapter of this Samhita granthes, ‘*Deerghjivitiyam*’ & ‘*Ayushkamyian*’ respectively, wherein the measures to be adopted so as to gain a longer & healthier life were enumerated. The objectives of Purusharthas can be attained through the “*hitayu & sukhayun*”<sup>2</sup> concept of Ayurvedic philosophy- ‘*Hita*’ being healthy living while ‘*Sukha*’ is comfortable life both being conducive to Psycho-somatic equipoise.

Yogic lifestyle- ‘Yogic lifestyle alone would endow us equanimity amidst all skillful’. As per Bhagwat Gita<sup>3</sup> & Patanjali Sutra<sup>4</sup> too indicate the significance of the phenomenal world towards *Apvarga* or Existential Liberation. It is therefore, in order to understand Yogic lifestyle with the purpose of exploring its propriety as remedial measure for old age disease or Geriatric care.

The practice of yoga does not focus on physical posture to improve the body but also deal with all the aspect of our being and our life. The common secrets of people longevity and health have been found to be –

- 1] A low calorie diet with minimal protein and fat, chiefly of vegetable origin.
- 2] Physical work
- 3] A pollution free atmosphere.

### **Pathophysiology of Ageing:-**

Ageing- Ageing is defined as a progressive failure of the body’s homeostatic adaptive responses. It is a general response that produces observable changes in structure & function leading to increased vulnerability & decreased viability to environmental stress & disease, similar view as described in Sarangdhara samhita.<sup>5</sup> Charaka which describe “*Dhatupaka*” encapsulated the continuous degenerative process occurring in the human body in the statement.<sup>6</sup>

Theories of ageing: –

- 1] *Genetic Molecular Theories*- Somatic cell mutation just like germ cells, leads to DNA changes. This leads to irreversible deterioration in the functional activities of the cell.
- 2] *Cellular Theories*- The wear & tear that the cells & tissues of the body are subjected to, could only be partially overcome by rest & repair. With time, even this restoration process become less efficient, leading of lowered stress tolerance, the ultimate effect of which is complete breakdown.
- 3] *The Collagen Theory*- With increasing age the amount of collagen also increases & become more cross linked.
- 4] *Free Radical Theory*- Oxygen, though crucial to life processes, produces highly reactive substances called free radicals, as by-product of ATP. Free radicals produced in the mitochondria themselves especially their DNA, leads to DNA alterations & mutation leads to ageing & age related degenerative diseases.
- 5] *Neuro Endocrine Theory*-[Programmed Cell Death Theory]- It postulates that all somatic cells have a built in biological clock, or a genetically controlled lifespan, after which they would die, no matter how favorable the circumstances.

The Process of Ageing as Seen By Ayurveda:- Transformation is the hallmark of time. Everything that is living undergoes various changes

before it is worn out completely. This cycle of changes is known in Ayurveda as “*Parinama*”<sup>7</sup> which takes place under the constant influence of “*kala*” of the time factor. In other words, *Kala* is responsible for *Parinama*. In this context, *Parinama* being ageing, the sequential events of childhood, teenager, adolescent, young adult, old are all consequential eventualities of time factor. Therefore, Ayurveda recognized *Kala* or *Parinama* as the potential causative factor of degenerative disease entities. *Jara*, being a *Swabhavabala Pravritta Roga*<sup>8</sup>, occurs due to the above mentioned cause of disease called *Kala/Parinama*.

The effect of time is bound to happen and is “*Nishpratikriya*” i.e., unavoidable<sup>9</sup>. However, if one adheres to certain modes of life, one can expect smooth sailing. The same is stressed by *Chakrapani*, while commenting on whether lifespan of an individual predetermined. He compared the human body to a *Ratha*[chariot]. The full lifespan of the *Ratha* is subjected to its proper maintenance or lubrication, as well as the conditions of the roads it has to traverse. Otherwise it is bound to deteriorate early. He concluded that the *Ayu* is not pre-determined but is dependent on various endogenous and exogenous factors that interplay in the human body.

The components of *Ayu* are *Shareer*, *Indriya*, *Satwa* and *Atma*. Since *Atma* is a supreme entity, immune to the cycle of birth, death and disease. The other 3 components of *Ayu* i.e.

1] *Shareera*

2] *Indriya* and

3] *Satva*

1] **Shareera:** Ageing is ultimately cellular in nature. Cells require a precisely determined microenvironment to operate optimally. Such an environment requires integrated functioning of all Ayurveda as a state of ‘*Samayata*’

i.e. equipoise state of 1] ‘*Doshas*’ the functional factors 2] ‘*Dhatus*’ the structural components & 3] ‘*Malas*’ the excretory products. This ‘*Samayata*’ is seen to be progressively disturbed with age. The above three sustain the body in collaboration and co-ordinations with accessory components such as *channels, vessels and neurons* etc<sup>10</sup>.

Obviously, their equilibrium is deranged in geriatrics. *Vikrita Vata*, *Vishamagni* and *Ksheena Kapha*, *Rasa* itself is malformed and does not perform its function of “*preenana*” to the rest of the *Dhatus* and the body<sup>11</sup>.

This leads to sequential weakening of the process of nutrition at cellular level. The effect of this is further *Dhatukshaya*. This is the emaciated condition that is generally identified with ageing, leaving just a bony cage of a body devoid of replenished tissue elements. This is described by *Susruta* as “similar to an old rumbling house collapsing with the onset of rain”<sup>11</sup>.

Therefore, the improper *Rasa Dhatu* sets off a chain of malformations of subsequent *Dhatus*. Malformed *dhatu*s degraded *Ojas*. Since *Ojas* is the essence of the *Sapthdhatus* described and is held responsible for all preservative as well as disease-resistant functions, its maintenance plays a crucial role in age-related diseases<sup>12</sup>.

The last among the *Tristoonas* is *Mala*. The term *Mala* has been defined as “to cleanse” or “to purify”. Though, being the vehicle of elimination of toxins alone does not seem to be the function of the *Trimalas*. The function of *Puresha* being “to uphold” or “support”, *Malas* also seem to play a vital role in the maintenance of body dynamics, as the elimination of waste products is an index of life activities. The *Dosha Dhatu* and *Mala deficiet* entities lead to *Balakshaya*.

2] *Indriyam*- The governing *Vata* and the nourishing *Kapha* are deranged in old age.

Dementia is a prominent feature encountered in geriatrics, in addition to the sense organs, the functional body parts are also observed to be affected adversely in geriatrics.

3] *Satva- Manas[satva]* is one of the location of disease. Ideally, the *Manas* should be dominance of *sattva* for it to gain the ability to sustain emotional assaults. Many of the mental disease develop due to deficit in *satva*.

*Chikitsa Yojana* [Jara-Ankusham]-“*Jara*” is an inescapable part of life. In fact, it is the conglomeration of the richness of one’s experience of living. *Jara*, the old age, is of two types:

- 1] *Kala-Jara* [Timely old age]
- 2] *Akala-Jara* [Untimely or early setting in of old-age].

The former type of *Jara*, i.e. *Kalajara* is *Swabhava* or *Sahaja* in nature, which is cherished by everyone. The latter type is unnatural. This type of *Jara* induces a set of social problems, and mental agony terminating in “social stigma”.

“*Swabhavo Nispratikriya*”. This dictum of *Charaka* should be understood in the sense that natural ageing cannot be avoided altogether. However, the onset and manifestations of age-specifically used by *Charaka* while enumerating the benefits of oleation.

“*Jarankushas*” are

- 1] To avoid unnatural ageing and
- 2] To delay natural ageing, just like controlling an elephant on the rampage [*jara*] with the help of a spear [*Ankusha*].

The most appropriate method to attain optimum health naturally is the system and science of yoga. Yoga is not merely a series of physical postures or meditative practices; it is lifestyle which can be lived by everyone, not necessarily those who are *Sannyasi*, *Sadhu* or renunciates. It is a form of understanding or realizing our interaction in life, trying to im-

prove them, trying to understand the needs of the body, the need of the mind and also the needs of the spirit. This is the concept of a yogic lifestyle: living according to the laws of the body and the laws of nature through-

- 1] *Dincharya*, *Ratricharya* and *Ritucharya*- For health & longevity.
- 2] *Yoga*, *Asana* and *Satkarma*- For physical and mental health and purification.
- 3] *Acharya Rasayana/ Sadvritta/ Yama Niya-ma/Brahmacharya*- For physical mental & social health.

There include equilibrium of psychosomatic elements by adopting the *Hita* practices and avoiding *Ahita* practices.

***Dincharya***:-

- 1] Waking at *Brahama Muhurta*, after having sound sleep.
- 2] Using twigs of *Arkaadi dravyas* for cleaning teeth.
- 3] Application of *Anutaila Nasya* during *Varsha, Sarat & Vasanta Ritus*-For avoiding graying of hairs, slowing of ageing.
- 4] Usage of *Gandusha & Abhyanga* with oil- Avoidance of hair fall, tooth decay & improved muscle tone.
- 5] *Vyayama & Udwartana* -It bestows muscle tone with skin health.

***Ratricharya***:-Light meals with milk should be taken with at least 6 hours of sound sleep.

***Ritucharya***:- lifestyle modification according to specific season.

***Ritusandhicarya***- *Asatmyajanya Rogas* occurs during the transformation of seasons, to be avoided by slowly blending the regimen of one season into the other.

***Yoga, Asana and Satkarma***- During old age *vata prakopa* is found, so in treatment it should be pacified. For this *Pawanmuktasana*<sup>13</sup> series of yoga is good option to choose.

***Pawanmuktasana***:- The word *Pawan* ‘wind’ or ‘*prana*’, *mukta* means ‘release’, *asana* means ‘pose’. Therefore *Pawanmuktasana*

means a group of asana that remove any blockages preventing the free flow of energy in the body and mind. It opens up all the major joints and relaxes the muscles of the body. These groups of asana can be practiced by any one; beginner or advanced, young or elderly. This group of asana should not to be performed by person suffering from high blood pressure or serious back conditions like Sciatica and Slipped disk.

Spinal complaints- *Advasana; Jyestikasana.*

Slipped disk- *Makarasana; Matsya Kridasana.*

Respiratory system- *Makarasana; Ushtrasana; Supta vajra asana.*

Digestive system- *Vajrasana; Padadhirasana.*

**Pranayamas** (breathing exercises) were considered as the most effective for the elders to maintain the physical health and psychological balance to maintain stress free life.

**Diet-** Yogic diet ideally follows a *sattvic* or pure food diet. A balance of fresh, fruit, vegetables, cooked whole grains, milk, legumes and nuts, seeds using a combination of both raw & cooked foods. These foods increase *sattva* in the body because they are light, simple & supply all the necessary nutrients. They increase our physical and mental vitality making it easier to experience clarity, lightness & peace of mind. If we try to eat slowly change the body chemistry, renewing the digestive system & taking away any strain. Ideally we should eat the remaining energy can be used for more productive uses.

Nowadays, very few people retain strength & vitality till the middle age. More and more people we come across look much older than they actually are. Taking about ageing, there are several factors that leads to ageing [apart from age]- misuse of the body, over-exaggeration of the mind, non-nutritious foods, poor working posture, sedentary lifestyle as so on. The body is designed to heal & repair itself with the aid of proper nutrition.

The body requires two vital materials to complete this energy & raw material. These two requirements are needed to maintain the cell's proper functions. The body is made up of cells & all cells are living. All living thing need food hence each cell needs the proper food & energy to keep it strong. Cells die & replace themselves at various intervals.

**Achara Rasayana/ Sadvritta/ Yama Niyama/Brahmacharya:-**

**Rasayana therapy:-** Rasayana is the therapy which destroys age related diseases<sup>14</sup>. Incidentally the aims of modern geriatrics also is on the same lines, the essence of which is

- 1] To enable the aged to lead full and active lives.
- 2] To prevent disease.
- 3] To mitigate debility.
- 4] To minimize pre-death dependence.

Rasayana was explained by Shusrut as that which stabilizes age, deriving the best of nutrition of a drug and bestows long life, strength and vigor, is called *Rasayana*. Thus Rasayan therapy is that which ensures the proper supply and nourishment to various organs and sub-organs of the body, through body channels purification mechanism<sup>15</sup>.

**Achara Rasayana-** *Achara Rasayana* describes the mode of living, behavior and conduct like the *Sadvrittam*. This conduct is imperative to a person wishing for longevity.

**Vajeekarana Therapy**

This description of *Vangbhata* clearly establishes the utility of *Vajeekarana Chikitsa* in the management of geriatric disorders "*Dhatukshaya*" is the ultimate feature in old-age, and *Vajeekarana* drug improves the quality of semen in a systemic and phased manner by correcting the *Rasadi dhatus* in order<sup>16</sup>. Therefore most of the *Vajeekarana dravyas* invariably contain *Rasayana* the prohost and pro-active elements. But in yogic lifestyle benefits of *vajeekaran* attained not by elements but

through sexual abstinence, which is essential in yogic lifestyle so they do not need any *Va-jeekaran dravyas*.

In the ultimate analysis of yogic life style, the following benefits occur in the geriatric population.

- Long life
- Increase in memory power
- Good health
- Young looks
- Glowing skin
- Modulated voice
- Calmness
- Resistance to disease

The possible mechanisms by which yogic life style action can be interpreted with modern aspects are as follow:

1. Antioxidant action
2. Immunomodulatory action
3. Hematopoietic effect.
4. Adaptogenic action
5. Antiaging action.
6. Anabolic action
7. Nutritive function
8. Neuroprotective action

## CONCLUSION

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 of the body to provide nourishment. *Dhatus* undergo a continuous process of decay due to interaction with the *Agni*. If this is allowed to continue uninterrupted, ageing comes in early. This process is somehow arrested, by supplying *Rasa* in adequate quantity with the power to penetrate, ageing can be delayed. Thus, yoga is considered as a mind-body therapy which brings both psychological and physical well-being in all age group including elders. Though, elders are unable to practice yoga asana regularly mainly due to diminishing

physical strength and energy. Hence, *achara rasayana*, diet, *pranayama* therapy for elders helps in improving the quality of life and self-efficacy, self- competence and to maintain physical fitness. Thus, yogic life style considered as a cheapest means of gaining new strength and energy for the elders in the modern technological era to have a stress free life.

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