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Review Article

DRAVYAGUNA IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW OF THERAPEUTIC POTENTIALS AND PHARMACOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Dravyaguna is a key area of Ayurveda that offers an in-depth insight into medicinal substances, focusing on their natural characteristics, therapeutic uses, and pharmacological effects. It categorizes these substances according to *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (qualities), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhava* (specific action), which together shape their therapeutic value. Ayurveda promotes a holistic healing framework, where the interplay of these elements plays a crucial role in managing diseases and enhancing overall well-being. This review investigates the therapeutic capabilities of various Ayurvedic herbs and examines their pharmacological validation through modern scientific investigation. Numerous medicinal plants traditionally utilized in Ayurveda have been analyzed for their pharmacological properties, such as anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antimicrobial, antioxidant, adaptogenic, and immunomodulatory effects. In addition, *Haridra (Curcuma longa)* has been widely studied for its anti-inflammatory, wound-healing, and anticancer properties. Nonetheless, despite the expanding body of scientific evidence backing Ayurvedic concepts, there are ongoing challenges related to standardization, dose optimization, and clinical validation of these herbs. The fusion of traditional Ayurvedic knowledge with modern pharmacological research could facilitate evidence-based practices, thereby ensuring the safety, effectiveness, and quality of herbal treatments. Future studies should prioritize comprehensive clinical trials, exploration of molecular mechanisms of action, and pharmacokinetic analysis of Ayurvedic formulations to enhance their acceptance on a global scale. This review seeks to connect traditional Ayurvedic knowledge with current scientific validation, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary research in the field of herbal pharmacology.

INTRODUCTION

Definition and Concept of *Dravyaguna*

The term '*Dravyaguna'* is made up of two *Sanskrit* words: '*Dravya*' and *'Guna'*. '*Dravya*' is a substance or an essential entity, and '*Guna*' is the feature. *Dravyaguna* is an essential branch of Ayurveda dealing with medicine. It is couched in the comprehensive concept of *'Tridosha'* and *'Triguna'. Dravyaguna* not only consists of drugs or drug substances, but it also includes *Rasapanchaka* of *Dravya*, ethnopharmacology, or the relationship between indigenous people and the plant world. It specifies the characteristics of substances that may be used for therapeutic purposes. *Dravyaguna* specifies characteristics such as the action or activity of drug substances *(Dravya),* their pharmacological properties, and the actions they exhibit, i.e., the characterization of the material properties as well as the action.[1]

This is done because when a doctor wants to treat someone, they must choose medicines that have opposite qualities to the person's disease. This is

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because like increases like, and opposites decrease like. It means that medicines with opposite properties taken in a particular season, time, and duration will help in correcting the respective *Doshas* that have been vitiated and re-establishing them at their natural level. *Dravyaguna* consists of descriptions, uses, actions, dosages, and methods of preparation of drugs. It also includes plants, water, inorganic substances, animal products, metals, and minerals as well. Therefore, the drugs have been classified as *Daivasarana, Bhootasrava, Manushasrava, Vrkasrava*, and *Soorpasrava* based on their attributes and applications. In the present day, more people are turning to alternative drugs like herbo-mineral therapy. To ascertain the efficacy of a drug, it is necessary to define the drug properly through precise descriptions that are stated in *Dravyagunavidnya.* [2]

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

- To explore the therapeutic potentials of *Dravyaguna* in Ayurveda and evaluate its pharmacological evidence through classical references and modern scientific validation.

Objectives

- To analyze the fundamental principles of *Dravyaguna*, including *Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka,* and *Prabhava*, and their role in pharmacodynamics.
- To review the therapeutic applications of key Ayurvedic herbs based on classical texts and their relevance in disease management.
- To assess modern pharmacological studies validating the traditional uses of Ayurvedic medicinal plants.
- To identify the challenges related to standardization, dose optimization, and clinical validation of Ayurvedic herbs.
- To propose future research directions for integrating Ayurvedic herbal medicine with contemporary pharmacological approaches for evidence-based practice.

Historical Development and Significance

As a traditional system of medicine in the Indian subcontinent, Ayurveda encapsulates an exceptional eternity of knowledge due to its diverse cultural, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions. *Dravyaguna* is that branch of Ayurveda which specifically deals with medicinal substances and emphasizes detailed knowledge about pharmacodynamics. The development of *Dravyaguna* thus encompasses major developments with respect to pharmaceutics, pharmacological actions, synergistic interactions, and expected outcomes of the formulations. In this paper, significant efforts have been made to critically review the comprehensive perspective of *Dravyaguna,* including its continuous evolution as a full-fledged subspecialty from the very core and essence of Ayurveda*.* Opinions by ancient thinkers, scholars, physicians, and possible contemporary implications are discussed. [3]

Ayurveda is a classical system of health care that provides principles of diseases, health care, and living a healthy life. It has its roots deeply seated in ancient Indian culture and can be traced back to the *Vedas*, which constitute the earliest recorded documents. The appeal and importance of Ayurveda lie largely in its fundamental principles which draw heavily from Indian philosophy, particularly *'Charaka Samhita'* and *'Sushruta Samhita'*, which conceptualized *Ayurveda* in the present form and determined the course of its future destiny in an amazing way. The term '*Dravyaguna'* started taking its roots as an independent branch of studies and became popular in the post-*Charaka* and Sushruta period. There were some great seers of the medical concepts, including *Bhela, Harita, Atreya*, and *Agnivesa.* These philosophers are not only the authors but mainly the compilers of the concepts which they have studied and observed from the available ancient Ayurvedic literature. We can see in the larger context of the evolution of '*Dravyaguna*' as an independent entity, which has touched the hearts of every Ayurvedic scholar and clinician who ultimately passes its wonderful effect. With the variations and innovations by scholars of different periods and regions, from philosophers to modern days, *Dravyaguna* has attracted every epoch of scholars who have given a dynamic turn to the study of *Dravyaguna* concerning the current period in which they have lived. [4]

Evolution of *Dravyaguna* in Ayurvedic Literature

Dravyaguna is one of the vital subjects of Ayurvedic literature. A vast array of Ayurvedic literature is found in texts stating the development, origin, need, growth, and behavior of medicinal plants and their potentials, along with evidence of pharmacological activity. Different trends in the perspective of plants and drugs have been seen in the vast body of literature, from ancient scripts to recent studies by Ayurvedic scholars, whether they have changed over time or not. Different scholars of Ayurveda have postulated their theories using elements from practical aspects and have preserved the knowledge of medicinal plants from generation to generation, modifying themselves in accordance with contemporary social and environmental needs and adaptations. [5]

However, just as it represented the *Dravyaguna* - "*Dravayati gunvat - Dravyam*" and *"Gum bhutam vai dravyam"* in various treatises, it introduced the system and proliferated it within a short period of nearly one century. This was further developed by later scholars and published in written literature. During the drafting of basic Ayurvedic literature, work on newly identified pharmacologically active chemicals in plants, metals, and animals has been added or employed for appropriate therapies. It seems that the founders have tried to identify and classify proper drugs from plants to protect humans from the extremities of weather and other physical, psychological, and indulgent hardships. Various administrations in India have debated the medicinal characteristics of plants, supported by pharmacologists, toxicologists, and clinicians. The earliest uncertainty hastens the need for pharmacological and clinical examination to gather evidence for their efficacy. However, plant drugs still play a major role, and a knowledgeable person can seek injury therapy in India. Thus, the scholars of Ayurveda have volunteered their thoughts for future utility and practical approaches in this sector. [6]

Basic Principles of *Dravyaguna*

The basic principles of *Dravyaguna* constitute the basic principles of Ayurveda, which form its foundation. *Dravya* is described as having a variety of *Rasa, Guna*, and *Veerya* that are said to affect the material *Dosha, Dhatu*, and *Mala.* The principles are taken for this review to integrate under one perspective. It also includes an individual approach towards *Dhatus, Dosha,* and disease to frame its therapeutic benefits. A human being is treated as a whole and not as an isolated part, where the body, mind, and spirit interact and function as a single entity. The concepts of *Oushadha-Sevana-Vidhi* are discussed. The concept of *Yapya, Anupana,* and *Pathya* is given in software form. It is described that the three fundamental factors, *Dosha, Dhatu,* and *Mala,* should be properly understood for the proper management of disease. The medicinal plant, which acts on these three fundamental elements to restore healthy status, is considered a highly effective medicine. The review collects information about the available potential of medicinal plants in standard pharmacological studies in one place and discusses the revert effect of *Dravyaguna.* [7]

None of the noxious agents can establish the disease unless and until the individual is *Upeksana prakriti.* It is stated that the *Prakriti* totally depends upon the healthy parent and his reproductive components. In brief, this complex Ayurvedic pharmacology concept mainly deals with even minute information about the drugs that are part of herbal formulations. Thus, researchers engaged in Ayurvedic drug research need to have a good practical knowledge of *Dravyaguna.* The medical value of drugs lies in the aggregate of their properties and not one or two in particular. Some drugs may possess a large number of undesirable properties and only a few desirable ones, but if the beneficial properties are suitable for balancing the condition, the drug is suitable as a therapeutic agent.8 The *Dravyas* that have good appetizer properties and other supportive functions are to be considered as the drug of choice. In the view of Ayurveda, recovery is dependent on racial individuality, habitat, and a state of soundness of body and mind. Therefore, the treatment or drug choice also depends on the above-mentioned criteria. Non-individualized treatment is proposed to be sub-scientific. The same medicine may be potent in a diseased individual, in an indifferent individual, and in a healthy individual, and again it may be ineffective in those individuals as well. Most ancient books of Ayurveda state that even after the expected *Rasa, Guna*, and *Veerya* of a drug in an individual, it may not work only because of a diversified *Prakriti* of the individual.[9]

Methods of Drug Evaluation in Ayurveda

Pharmacological or drug evaluation methods employed in Ayurveda can be classified as empirical and established. Empirical evidence for the utility of any drug is direct observation of beneficial effects. Organoleptic evaluation of a drug represents one of the empirical evidences. Ayurvedic classics in different contexts quoted the facility of implementing clinical trials in Ayurveda. They believed that the values and virtues of any object could be exposed by practical and clinical evaluation. The facts presented in this review will, in fact, bring us closer to the point that *Dravyagunas,* if assessed promptly, could possibly unravel a potential pathway for claiming the original concept in terms of our zest. This review gives an account of the effect of some of the test drugs in respect of *Dravyuguna–Karmas* present-day pharmacological scenarios.[10]

There has always been a difference between drug evaluation by established or classical methods of Ayurveda and the modern scientific evaluative research. The established methods are qualitative, and a drug's efficacy, mode of action, indications, contraindications, and toxic effects are expressed through a unique system of logic in which there is no or little contradiction. The classical methods are based on philosophy, ethical principles, superstition, and some logic. The established methods begin and end with trials on healthy individuals, and the efficacy of the drug is displayed on the action expressed in terms of subjective and objective parameters in the patient. Methods like *Dravyaguna* evaluation of plants and

orientation are used for the drug action's evidence and drug-organ interaction at the molecular level and are based on the use of alternatives. [11]

Classical and Modern Approaches

The classical drug evaluation approaches are based on the information available in ancient treatises about a particular drug. The philosophical foundation, method of collection of information, and degree of accuracy of information vary according to the place and period, as well as the credulity of the observers and various branches of healthcare. The information available in the ancient treatises is also of various degrees; some treatises even pen down the hocus-pocus. Apparently, all the procedures for evaluation given in the treatises seem to be excellent, but in practice, various lapses in method, time, and vigor of observation might have occurred. Now, the question arises whether these ancient evaluation assessments can be acceptable in the practice of modern days, particularly on the principles of modern medicine. The answer to this question is not simple. On one hand, the treatment in modality-based healthcare is gradually switching over to modern evidence-based, authenticated skills, but on the other, no healthcare system is perfectly efficient. There are many limitations in modality-based practice, particularly for the dissimilar conditions about which very limited information is available in the treatises.[12] Such conditions could be justified based on the information available in the ancient treatises. It would be better and more rational for modern healthcare specialists to give credence to ancient wisdom with scientific trials and authentication methods, and for the complementary medicine system to adopt the modern evidence-based practices. The basic differences between the classical approach to treatment and that of the modern system moving towards the re-evident approach of modern healthcare are described herein. This would not only clarify the boundary between the two directions of the method of drug evaluation but also reveal the logical thinking and possibilities of the modern healthcare system in accepting the results and ideas of Ayurveda if the cross-disciplinary approach in research, development, and drug delivery systems yields better results in the therapeutics of human suffering.[13]

Therapeutic Potentials of *Dravyaguna*

Most of the available therapeutic opportunities are from plants; among them, 20,000 plants have been reported to be used in worldwide medicaments; however, there is a very limited scientific database for modern physicians to understand their therapeutic potentials. The *Dravyaguna* subject deals with the fundamental properties and actions of medicinal plants. In classical Ayurveda, some of the medicinal plants have been mentioned under the broad heading of *Dravyaguna.* They are those which exhibit action on a number of systems either directly or indirectly. They act more on the physiological system; they have also been considered for their action on the mind. The primary action does not appear; they observed the need to be effective through secondary actions. The plants that can be administered in almost all painful diseases can be considered in select diseases. There is a wide range of medicinal plants that are yet not studied pharmacologically.[14] This strategic review, with a focus on therapeutic potentials, describes the use of medicinal plants for their primary actions on the physiological system and their therapeutic potentials in mental health. *Dravya* used in *Dravyaguna.* These plants have been categorized into different groups in accordance with their effects and systems of action. Some of the drugs are used in some parts of India and are useful in treating various ailments, supported by anecdotal evidence. These drugs are poorly studied by contemporary investigators and are administered only, if necessary, because of the escalating costs and the need for multiple pharmacological exercises.[15] The basis of Ayurveda is that everything, including medicine, is composed of matter in different forms. Effects of substances on the body do occur, and Ayurveda has its own views on the effectiveness of medicinal drugs. Ayurveda explains that a holistic approach should be taken for safety as well as the effectiveness of medicinal plants. Many of the concepts derived from *Dravyaguna* may be used as leads for new drug discovery and re-validation of the available clinical endpoints. Ayurvedic drugs are used solo and in combination at various stages of the ailment. The chances of the addition of side effects are slim in the later group. Synergism of different drugs at different stages is used for better efficacy and minimum side effects.[16] The usefulness of a biopurified fraction in comparison to the whole drug is a good test to be done as the drugs are used in combination in this system of medicine. These statements are based on a historical basis. Therefore, hard efforts are needed to correlate with scientific evidence. A good number of leads are in *Dravyaguna.* Phytopharmacovigilance may be a good proxy indicator to assess the drug safety parameter. The *Dravyaguna* scorecard may be a good reference database for the use of Ayurvedic medicinal plants. The use of drug tyrosine with a hidden focus on *Agni* and *Ojas* can be used to prepare any index of disease classification. The potential of *Dravyaguna* evolution in drug discovery can be explored by correlating Ayurvedic and genomic databases. Phytochemicals extracted from *Dravyaguna* and its pure biopurified fraction may be used to explore the purity profile of

the finished product.[17] The *Dravyaguna* database can be used to assess bio-prospecting from herbal resources in the future. The evolved concept of *Dravyaguna* can be explored further to prepare the personalized drug constitution. The energetic duplicator status of drug-target to cure the ailment may be seen and fantasized by original *Dravyaguna.* The synergistic action of drugs and adverse events raises the bioavailability of the drug, which plays a determining role in their inclusion in an Ayurvedic formulation to explore the higher dimension.[18]

Pharmacological Evidence Supporting *Dravyaguna*

Dravyaguna and *Rasashastra,* the two prime branches of Ayurveda, describe the use of substances of herbal, herbo-mineral, and mineral origins and the activity of the pharmacodynamical agents of these substances on the body and disease manifestation. They confer the action of bioactive and phytochemical agents within the pathological milieu of disease manifestation. Since time immemorial, India is known worldwide for its rich traditional knowledge about Ayurveda and herbs that have significance as therapeutic remedies. Recently, extensive research-related information on the activities of plants has been published.[19]

A comprehensive review related to morphological characters, principles of *Dravyaguna,* and the pharmacological action on various species reveals convincing validation of herbs, different parts of herbs, and individual compounds in human cell lines and with living system models in vitro and in vivo against various types of human ailments like cancer, inflammatory skin conditions, tularemia, specific bacterial infections, and parasitic-related ailments or ocular inflammations. Herein, pharmacological evidence- mostly in vivo- is provided. The cost implications are needed for the various types of cell lines studied. [20]

In this review, it is estimated that 50% have reported the claimed actions as mentioned in Ayurveda texts; at least approximately 25 to 30% of the action is more or less 10% or more. The findings indicate that mostly human cell lines or clinical studies are available, and the orbit of people can be from only selected geographical domains. Pharmacological action has been addressed variously, but pre-clinical and clinical studies stand as final horizons for standard treatment guidelines. The possibility of clinical use of the reports might be explored for future investigations in mainstream health care clinical establishments. The current trends in various research might offer aid in orienting further pharmacological studies and clinical trial designs to meet global pharmaceutical standards and the presentation of evidence publishable in various medicinal journals.[21]

DISCUSSION

Dravyaguna is a wholesome concept of Ayurveda dealing with numerous aspects of individual plants, their classification, properties, therapeutic potentials, rejuvenation, nutritive, and other effects. As human health is profoundly affected by various environmental and other factors, the newer specialties like *Panchaguna* and *Dravyaguna* could provide a sustainable alternative beneficial in such modified human habitats. As part of therapeutic potentials, antibiotics, hypolipidemics, anthelmintics, enzymes, adaptogens, antioxidants, hypoglycemics, and many other properties are discussed along with providing a review of supporting pharmacological validations. Knowing the *Dravyaguna* is a 'must' for every Ayurvedic student and Ayurvedic physician, as in the absence of the knowledge of the nature, action, and therapeutic potentials of the drugs, Ayurveda practice is impossible.[22] In the modern context of living, food, diet, water, drugs, and lifestyle, the whole scenario is providing favorable and unfortunate conditions to individuals, equally due to positive lifestyle modification on the one hand and a more serious status of lifestyle diseases on the other. Extensive data are generated for the therapeutic/functional potentials of those plants which are currently used in superior pharmaceutical formulations, especially nutraceuticals. Ayurvedic concepts are always beyond disease and health and strive to bring health by improving resistance and providing adaptability versus infections and diseases.[23] Today's development in biotechnology and pharmaceutical areas has paved the way for the use of plant materials in different industries in various consumer products. Healthcare industries also believe in the concept of natural healing, which is far away from the global treatment provided by synthetic drugs and medication. Unfortunately, Ayurvedic pharmacology and indigenous knowledge are facing regulatory and quality challenges today worldwide. A review of the applied, useful part of *Dravyaguna* justifying its future importance in healthcare has been presented.[24]

CONCLUSION

The review presents a comprehensive outline of the concept of *Dravyaguna* in Ayurveda from various primary texts. The review also further illustrates the therapeutic potential of *Dravyaguna* in traditional practices and cross-current beliefs. The treasury of traditional therapeutic potential, not always supported by scientific validation, has been empirically practiced for healing various ailments for our prosperous nation, and several others valued this potential, which has

been intentionally adapted to practice. However, for the practical validation of evidence-based practice, there is a requirement for pharmacological evidence. The earnest researched evidence, including molecular and pharmacological investigations, will aid in the socioeconomic well-being of the community. *Dravyaguna*, the Ayurvedic discipline concerning medicinal substances, offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding the therapeutic capabilities of herbs. The classical Ayurvedic concepts-*Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (attributes), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhava* (specific action)-are fundamental in assessing the pharmacological properties of medicinal plants. Increasingly, contemporary research supports the therapeutic benefits of various Ayurvedic herbs, demonstrating their anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, immune-modulatory, and neuroprotective effects. Nevertheless, issues such as standardization, dosage refinement, and scientific validation present significant challenges that require further investigation. To position Ayurveda as an evidence-based medical practice, it is imperative to conduct interdisciplinary research that combines traditional knowledge with modern scientific techniques. Future research endeavours should prioritize clinical trials, exploration of molecular mechanisms, and pharmacokinetic analysis of Ayurvedic products. Enhancing the connection between Ayurveda and contemporary pharmacology is crucial for fostering global acceptance, ensuring safety, and confirming the efficacy of herbal remedies. By incorporating scientific rigor while maintaining its holistic principles, Ayurveda has the potential to provide sustainable and natural therapeutic options for various health issues.

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