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Review Article

RASAYANA THERAPY: BOON TO CHECK THE DISEASES OF MODERN CIVILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Oxidative stress is a major contributory factor in the pathogenesis of numerous present-day diseases. Oxidative stress can induce damage at the DNA level, leading to mutagenesis and disease progression. Cell injury may also occur due to factors such as impaired bioavailability, metabolic dysfunction, and psychological stress. *Rasayana,* one of the eight branches of Ayurveda, offers a comprehensive preventive and rejuvenative approach to counteract these mechanisms. *Rasayana* therapy nourishes the *Dhatus*, which can be correlated with cellular and tissue-level nutrition, and acts through the *Atma–Mana–Sharira* complex at the levels of *Rasa, Agni*, and *Srotas*. Classical texts describe *Rasayana* as promoting longevity, strength, intellect, complexion, and resistance to disease, while delaying senility. **Materials and Methods:** This review is based on classical Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with modern medical literature such as Davidson's Principles and Practice of Medicine, standard textbooks, and publications from PubMed and CCRAS. **Discussion:** *Rasayana* therapy encompasses *Ahara, Vihara* (*Achara Rasayana*), and *Aushadha*, selected according to individual needs. Its antioxidant-rich drugs, such as *Ashwagandha* and *Amalaki*, enhance digestion, metabolism, and tissue nourishment, thereby counteracting oxidative damage. **Conclusion:** Preventive healthcare is the need of the hour. *Rasayana* therapy, with its antioxidant, rejuvenative, and holistic actions, represents a promising strategy for health promotion, disease prevention, and healthy aging.

INTRODUCTION

Global Burden of Disease

Chronic non-communicable diseases including cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes mellitus, and chronic respiratory diseases arise due to a complex interaction of genetic, physiological, environmental, and behavioural factors. These diseases account for nearly 41 million deaths annually, contributing to approximately 71% of total global mortality[1]. The increasing prevalence of lifestyle-related disorders underscores the urgent need for preventive and promotive healthcare strategies.

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Oxidative Stress: Detailed Mechanism

Oxidative stress is defined as an imbalance between the production and accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the capacity of the biological system to detoxify these reactive intermediates and repair the resulting damage[2]. Free radicals are unstable, highly reactive molecules generated as by-products of normal metabolism or due to external factors such as ultraviolet and ionizing radiation, environmental pollutants, heavy metals, smoking, and alcohol consumption. Internal factors including excessive physical exertion, psychological stress, and aging further enhance ROS production.

Reactive oxygen species such as superoxide radicals, hydrogen peroxide, hydroxyl radicals, and singlet oxygen can damage cellular membranes, lipids, proteins, lipoproteins, and DNA. Excessive ROS accumulation may initiate lipid peroxidation, impair protein function, induce DNA lesions, and trigger mutagenesis[3]. Although ROS participate in physiological processes like immunity, apoptosis, and cellular signalling, their uncontrolled presence leads to

chronic degenerative diseases, acute conditions such as stroke, and accelerated aging.

Need for *Rasayana*

If oxidative stress is not adequately controlled, it can induce a wide range of diseases and pathological states. Modern medicine emphasizes antioxidant supplementation to counteract oxidative damage; however, a holistic and sustainable approach is essential. *Rasayana* therapy, one of the eight branches of Ayurveda, offers a comprehensive preventive and rejuvenative strategy aimed at maintaining cellular integrity, enhancing longevity, and preventing disease progression[4].

Concept of *Rasayana* in Ayurveda

Definition

The term *Rasayana* is derived from two words: *Rasa* (nutritional essence) and *Ayana* (pathway), signifying the optimal nourishment and circulation of nutrition at both micro- and macro-cellular levels[5]. According to Acharya Sharangadhara, *Rasayana* therapy delays senility and prevents diseases[6].

Classical Classifications

Acharya Dalhana classifies *Rasayana* into three categories[7]:

1. ***Kamya Rasayana***– For promotion of longevity, strength, and wisdom.
2. ***Naimittika Rasayana***– For curative purposes in specific diseases.
3. ***Ajasrika Rasayana***– Daily rejuvenative measures.

Charaka Samhita states that individuals consuming *Rasayana* are endowed with longevity, youthfulness, improved complexion, strength of *Dhatus* and *Indriyas*, enhanced immunity, and optimal mental faculties[8].

Mechanism of Action of *Rasayana*

Rasayana therapy exerts its effects on the *Atma–Mana–Sharira* complex, functioning at three fundamental physiological levels[9]. At the level of *Rasa*, it ensures optimal nourishment of tissues and cells, thereby strengthening the foundational nutritional status and facilitating healthy tissue regeneration[10]. At the *Agni* level, *Rasayana* enhances both *Jatharagni* and *Dhatvagni*, leading to improved digestion and metabolic efficiency, preventing the formation of *Ama*, and promoting effective assimilation of nutrients[11]. At the *Srotas* level, it induces *Srotoprasadana*, which enhances micro- and macro-circulation, improves tissue perfusion and bioavailability, and helps counteract cellular hypoxia and metabolic disturbances[12].

Rasayana therapy is comprehensive in nature and encompasses *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Aushadha*, all of which should be tailored according to individual constitution and therapeutic goals. Under *Ahara*, dietary *Rasayanas* such as *Amalaki* (*Emblica officinalis*), along with milk and ghee, are advocated for regular use due to their established rejuvenative properties[13]. The concept of *Vihara*, particularly *Achara Rasayana*[14] as elaborated by Acharya Charaka, emphasizes ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wholesome lifestyle practices, which themselves yield *Rasayana* benefits even in the absence of pharmacological intervention. The *Aushadha* component includes a wide spectrum of *Rasayana* drugs administered following appropriate *Shodhana* procedures, ensuring deep tissue nourishment, detoxification, and the mitigation of metabolic toxins, including free radicals.

Ayurvedic *Rasayana* Drugs and Their Mechanisms

Among *Rasayana* interventions, several classical drugs have gained significant scientific attention due to their multi-dimensional pharmacological actions. These drugs not only align with the Ayurvedic concept of *Rasayana* promoting longevity, tissue nourishment (*Dhatu Poshana*), and vitality but also demonstrate strong antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory, and neuro-protective effects, thereby bridging traditional wisdom with modern biomedical science.

***Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*)** is a prime *Rasayana* drug known for its *Balya* (strength-promoting) and *Medhya* (cognitive-enhancing) properties. Modern evidence supports these claims through its adaptogenic action mediated by modulation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in reduced cortisol levels. *Ashwagandha* exhibits potent antioxidant activity by upregulating endogenous enzymes such as superoxide dismutase, catalase, and glutathione peroxidase, thereby mitigating oxidative stress[15]. Additionally, it exerts anti-inflammatory effects by downregulating pro-inflammatory cytokines (e.g., TNF-α, IL-6) and inhibiting NF-κB signaling, contributing to neuroprotection and systemic rejuvenation[16].

***Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*)** is described as a *Tridoshahara Rasayana* and is particularly valued for its role in enhancing immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*). It supports *Agni* and clears *Ama*, thereby improving metabolic efficiency and tissue health. Scientifically, *Guduchi* demonstrates strong antioxidant properties through scavenging of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and inhibition of lipid peroxidation. Its immunomodulatory action involves activation of macrophages, modulation of cytokine profiles, and enhancement of both innate and adaptive immunity[17]. Furthermore, its anti-inflammatory effects are mediated via suppression of inflammatory mediators

and oxidative stress pathways, which supports its hepatoprotective and systemic protective roles[18].

***Amalaki* (*Emblica officinalis*)** is a classical *Rasayana* revered for its *Vayasthapana* (anti-aging) effect and its ability to enhance *Rasa Dhatu* and *Ojas*. It is considered one of the richest natural sources of vitamin C along with potent polyphenols and tannins. From a modern perspective, *Amalaki* exerts strong antioxidant activity by neutralizing free radicals and enhancing endogenous antioxidant defense systems. It reduces oxidative damage to cellular components, including lipids, proteins, and DNA. Additionally, its anti-inflammatory effects are mediated through inhibition of inflammatory pathways and cytokine release, thereby contributing to tissue regeneration, improved immunity, and delayed cellular aging[19].

***Shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*)** is also regarded as a *Rasayana* due to its properties. Modern studies highlight its adaptogenic and immunomodulatory properties, which improve the body's ability to cope with stress. Its antioxidant activity reduces oxidative stress at the cellular level, while its anti-inflammatory effects help maintain immune homeostasis. The presence of phytoestrogenic compounds further supports endocrine regulation, aligning with its traditional use in reproductive health and systemic rejuvenation [20].

***Brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*)** is a well-known *Medhya Rasayana*. Scientifically, *Brahmi* exerts neuroprotective effects through antioxidant mechanisms, including reduction of lipid peroxidation and enhancement of endogenous antioxidant enzymes in neural tissues. Its anti-inflammatory action contributes to protection against neuroinflammation and neurodegeneration. Additionally, *Brahmi* modulates neurotransmitter systems, particularly cholinergic pathways, and influences serotonin and dopamine levels, thereby improving memory, learning, and emotional regulation[21].

Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*) -Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*) is traditionally classified as a *Medhya* and *Rasayana* drug with a specific action on the nervous system. Experimental studies have demonstrated its significant free radical scavenging activity, including inhibition of lipid peroxidation and enhancement of endogenous antioxidant enzymes. Its neuroprotective effects are particularly notable in models of oxidative stress–induced neuronal damage, where *Vacha* reduces oxidative injury and preserves neuronal integrity. These findings correlate with its classical indication in improving cognition and mental clarity, suggesting that its *Rasayana* effect is mediated through mitigation of oxidative stress and neuroinflammation [22].

Overall, these *Rasayana* drugs demonstrate a convergence of classical Ayurvedic principles and modern scientific mechanisms. Their ability to modulate oxidative stress, reduce inflammation, enhance immune responses, and promote cellular repair[23] underscores their role as holistic rejuvenators, validating the concept of *Rasayana* as a comprehensive strategy for health promotion and disease prevention.

Table 1: *Rasayana* and modern molecular mechanisms

***Rasayana* Drug**	**Ayurvedic Attributes & Actions**	**Primary Bioactive Components**	**Molecular/ Pharmacological Mechanisms**	**Therapeutic Outcomes**
Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)	*Balya*, *Rasayana*, *Medhya*; enhances *Ojas*; nourishes *Dhatus*; improves stress resilience	Withanolides, Sitoindosides	Modulates HPA axis; ↓ cortisol; ↑ SOD, catalase, GPx; inhibits NF-κB; ↓ TNF-α, IL-6	Adaptogenic, anti-stress, neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory
Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*)	*Tridoshahara*, *Rasayana*; enhances *Vyadhikshamatva*; clears *Ama*; supports *Agni*	Tinosporaside, cordifolioside, alkaloids	ROS scavenging; ↓ lipid peroxidation; macrophage activation; cytokine modulation	Immunomodulator, hepatoprotective, anti-inflammatory
Amalaki (*Emblica officinalis*)	*Vayasthapana*, *Rasayana*; enhances *Rasa Dhatu* and *Ojas*; anti-aging	Vitamin C, tannins, polyphenols	Potent antioxidant; ↑ endogenous antioxidant enzymes; ↓ DNA and lipid damage; anti-inflammatory	Anti-aging, rejuvenative, immunomodulatory
Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*)	*Rasayana*; nourishes *Rasa* & *Shukra Dhatu*; enhances *Ojas*; supports reproductive health	Shatavarins (steroidal saponins), phytoestrogens	Adaptogenic; antioxidant; immunomodulatory; endocrine modulation	Hormonal balance, immune regulation, anti-stress
Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*)	*Medhya Rasayana*; enhances cognition;	Bacosides A & B	Enhances cholinergic transmission; ↓ oxidative	Cognitive enhancement,

	improves *Sattva*; acts on *Manas*		stress; neuroprotection; modulates serotonin & dopamine	neuroprotection, anxiolytic

The correlation between classical *Rasayana* properties and modern molecular mechanisms is summarized in Table 1

Medhya Rasayana

Medhya Rasayana is a unique Ayurvedic concept encompassing a group of herbs and formulations specifically aimed at promoting *Medha* (intelligence), along with, *Ayu vardhana, Roga vinashana,* and *Bala, Agni, Varna* and *Swaravardhana*[24]. The term *'Medhya'* is derived from the root *"Medha,"* denoting intellect and cognitive faculties.

Medhya Rasayanas

1. ***Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica)***
2. ***Yashtimadhu (Glycyrrhiza glabra)***
3. ***Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)***
4. ***Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)***

Drug-wise Modern Evidence

***Mandukaparni*:** In Ayurveda, *Mandukaparni* (*Centella asiatica*) is classified as *Smriti Vardhaka*, *Medhya*, and *Rasayana*. It is known to promote *Buddhi* (intellect) and is mentioned in various formulations for epilepsy, anxiety, and cognitive enhancement[25].

- **In vitro:** Soumyanath et al. (2005) demonstrated that *Centella asiatica* extract promoted neurite outgrowth in hippocampal neurons and enhanced dendritic arborization, indicating its neurotrophic potential [26].
- **In vivo:** Wattanathorn et al. (2008) found that oral administration of Centella extract in rats improved spatial learning and memory. There was increased expression of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and antioxidant enzyme activity, supporting its nootropic effect [27].
- Centella also modulates GABAergic and cholinergic transmission, with studies showing improved anxiety profiles in rodent models.

Mechanism of action: Active components like asiaticoside and madecassoside have been shown to reduce oxidative stress (one of the reasons for Oxidative stress), enhance neurogenesis, and modulate hippocampal plasticity.

i. *Yashtimadhu*: Classically described in Bhavaprakasha Nighantu and Charaka Samhita, *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) is indicated for voice, complexion, strength, and memory. It is categorized under both *Medhya* and *Balya dravya*[28].

Modern Evidence

- **In vitro:** Glycyrrhizin inhibits pro-inflammatory mediators like TNF-α and IL-6 in LPS-induced microglial cultures, suggesting its role in reducing neuroinflammation[29].
- **In vivo:** Rat models demonstrated improved passive avoidance learning and decreased MDA levels, suggesting reduced oxidative stress in the brain [30].
- It has also shown promising results in mitigating the effects of chronic stress and enhancing synaptic density in hippocampal neurons.

Mechanism of action: *Yashtimadhu's* neuroprotective action is attributed to its antioxidant, anti-glucocorticoid, and anti-inflammatory properties. It also modulates HPA-axis activity, thereby reducing cortisol-induced neuronal damage.

ii. *Guduchi*: Known as *Amrita* in Ayurveda, *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*) is celebrated for its rejuvenating and cognition-enhancing effects. It is indicated in *Unmada*, *Apasmara*, and as a *Smritivardhaka* in multiple *Rasayana kalpas* [31].

Modern Evidence

- **In vitro:** *Guduchi* extracts exhibit antioxidant and acetylcholinesterase-inhibitory activity, relevant in Alzheimer's-like conditions.
- **In vivo:** Upadhyay et al. showed that *Guduchi* improved retention time and decreased escape latency in Morris Water Maze tests in rats with scopolamine-induced amnesia32[].
- Studies also show increased dendritic spine density and upregulation of acetylcholine levels in the hippocampus.

Mechanism of action: Bio-actives like tinosporaside and berberine act as adaptogens, enhancing neuroplasticity and reducing stress-induced neuronal damage.

iii. *Shankhapushpi*: Revered in *Rasa Tarangini* and *Yogaratnakara*, *Shankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) is considered the foremost *Medhya Rasayana* for children and elders alike. It enhances *Dhi-Dhruti-Smruti*, balances *Vata*, and calms the mind[33].

Modern Evidence

- **In vitro:** Extracts protect against glutamate-induced excitotoxicity in neuronal cultures[34].
- **In vivo:** Studies show that *Shankhapushpi* enhances memory retention, reduces stress, and improves sleep quality. It reduces plasma corticosterone levels and restores neurotransmitter balance[35].

- It also enhances cholinergic activity by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase and supports neurogenesis.

Mechanism of action: Key compounds like convolvine and convolamine contribute to anxiolytic, nootropic, and adaptogenic actions, enhancing cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience.

The therapeutic efficacy of *Rasayana* formulations is increasingly being substantiated through experimental studies demonstrating their potent antioxidant and cytoprotective effects. These formulations act by neutralizing reactive oxygen species (ROS), enhancing endogenous antioxidant defenses, and reducing oxidative stress–induced cellular damage, thereby aligning closely with the Ayurvedic concept of *Rasayana* in promoting longevity, tissue regeneration, and systemic resilience.

Panchavalkala

Panchavalkala, composed of the bark of five Ficus species, has demonstrated significant antioxidant potential in various in vitro assays. Studies have shown that *Panchavalkala* exhibits strong DPPH radical scavenging, superoxide anion inhibition, and reducing power activity, primarily attributed to its rich content of phenolic compounds and tannins. These bioactive constituents act as hydrogen donors and metal chelators, thereby stabilizing free radicals and preventing oxidative damage to cellular macromolecules. From an Ayurvedic perspective, *Panchavalkala* contributes to *Srotoprasadana* and tissue healing, which can be interpreted in modern terms as improved microcirculation and protection against oxidative injury, particularly in inflammatory and wound-healing conditions[36].

Shirishavaleha

Shirishavaleha is a classical formulation primarily indicated in allergic and respiratory conditions. Scientific evaluations have demonstrated its potent antioxidant activity, attributed to the presence of flavonoids, phenolic compounds, and other phytoconstituents. These compounds exhibit strong radical scavenging activity and contribute to the reduction of oxidative stress and inflammation. The formulation's ability to modulate immune responses and reduce hypersensitivity reactions can be understood through its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory mechanisms, thereby supporting its *Rasayana* role in enhancing *Vyadhikshamatva* (immunity)[37].

Dhanwantaram Kashayam

Dhanwantaram Kashayam is a widely used polyherbal formulation known for its rejuvenative and restorative properties, particularly in neurological and musculoskeletal disorders. Experimental studies have demonstrated its dose-dependent antioxidant activity, including DPPH, ABTS, and nitric oxide radical scavenging effects. These findings indicate its ability to counteract oxidative stress and reduce nitrosative damage. The presence of multiple bioactive phytochemicals contributes to its synergistic antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects, which align with its *Rasayana* action in promoting tissue repair, improving functional capacity, and enhancing systemic resilience [38].

DISCUSSION

Rasayana therapy occupies a unique and comprehensive position in Ayurveda, emphasizing not merely disease management but holistic health promotion, longevity, and enhancement of physical and mental resilience. The present review highlights that the concept of *Rasayana* is deeply rooted in the principles of prevention, rejuvenation, and maintenance of homeostasis, aligning closely with modern preventive and regenerative medicine. The global increase in lifestyle disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, neurodegenerative conditions, and immune-related diseases underscores the urgent need for interventions that act at the cellular and systemic levels, a role effectively fulfilled by *Rasayana* therapy.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, *Rasayana* acts through multiple dimensions- *Rasa, Agni,* and *Srotas*-ensuring optimal tissue nourishment, metabolic efficiency, and unobstructed microcirculation. This multi-level mechanism provides a rational explanation for the broad-spectrum benefits attributed to *Rasayana* drugs. Unlike single-target modern pharmacological agents, *Rasayana* therapies exhibit pleiotropic actions, including antioxidant, immunomodulatory, adaptogenic, neuroprotective, and anti-aging effects. This holistic action profile is particularly relevant in chronic disorders where oxidative stress, inflammation, and immune dysregulation coexist.

The role of oxidative stress in the pathogenesis of various chronic diseases has been well established in contemporary biomedical research. Free radicals and reactive oxygen species cause cellular damage, accelerate aging, and contribute to degenerative changes. The antioxidant and free radical scavenging activities demonstrated by Ayurvedic formulations such as *Amalaki, Panchvalkala, Shirishavaleha,* and *Dhanwantaram Kashayam* provide scientific validation for the classical claims of *Rasayana* in delaying aging and enhancing vitality. These findings indicate that traditional formulations are not merely empirical but are supported by plausible biochemical mechanisms.

Medhya Rasayana drugs deserve special emphasis due to their significant role in cognitive health, mental well-being, and stress adaptation. The

neuroprotective and anxiolytic effects of drugs like *Brahmi, Ashwagandha,* and *Guduchi* correlate well with modern studies showing improvement in memory, learning, stress tolerance, and neuroendocrine balance. In the current era, characterized by increased mental stress, anxiety, and cognitive overload, *Medhya Rasayana* offers a promising, safe, and holistic approach for mental health promotion.

Achara Rasayana, though often underemphasized in clinical practice, forms the ethical and behavioural foundation of *Rasayana* therapy. Lifestyle regulation, mental discipline, social conduct, and emotional balance play a critical role in sustaining the benefits of pharmacological *Rasayana*. This integrative approach reflects the Ayurvedic understanding that health is a dynamic equilibrium influenced by physical, mental, social, and spiritual factors.

Overall, the discussion reinforces that *Rasayana* therapy is not limited to rejuvenation in the geriatric population but is equally applicable across different age groups for disease prevention, health maintenance, and enhancement of quality of life. The convergence of classical Ayurvedic wisdom with modern scientific evidence strengthens the credibility and relevance of *Rasayana* in contemporary healthcare systems.

CONCLUSION

Rasayana therapy represents a cornerstone of Ayurvedic preventive and promotive healthcare, offering a comprehensive approach to enhancing longevity, immunity, cognitive function, and overall well-being. The present review elucidates that *Rasayana* works through multifaceted mechanisms involving optimization of *Rasa Dhatu*, regulation of *Agni*, and maintenance of *Srotas* integrity, thereby ensuring systemic nourishment and metabolic balance. The antioxidant and free radical scavenging properties of various *Rasayana* drugs and formulations provide a strong scientific basis for their role in combating oxidative stress and age-related degenerative changes. Furthermore, *Medhya Rasayana* demonstrates significant potential in promoting mental health, cognitive resilience, and stress adaptation, addressing key health challenges of the modern era.

Rasayana therapy, when practiced in conjunction with appropriate *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Achara Rasayana* principles, offers sustainable and holistic health benefits rather than symptomatic relief alone. Its integrative nature aligns well with current global health priorities that emphasize prevention, wellness, and quality of life.

In conclusion, *Rasayana* therapy holds immense promise as a complementary and integrative strategy in modern healthcare. Future research focusing on standardization, clinical trials, and molecular mechanisms will further strengthen the evidence base and facilitate wider acceptance of *Rasayana*-based interventions at a global level.

Rasayana therapy represents a holistic, evidence-supported approach for preventing diseases of modern civilization. By integrating classical wisdom with modern scientific validation, *Rasayana* offers a sustainable strategy for promoting longevity, resilience, and overall wellbeing.

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