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Review Article

A REVIEW ARTICLE REGARDING ENHANCING IMMUNITY THROUGH AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a vast storehouse of knowledge relevant to human health, disease, medicines and general health-care. However mutual incomprehensibility of the terms and concepts has been a major impediment in meaningful dialogue between modern scientific medicine and *Ayurveda*. Some recent concepts of molecular medicine, immunology etc. have been found to have striking similarities with certain concepts of *Ayurveda*. Therefore, it is being realized that it might be possible to develop a relationship between modern medicine and *Ayurveda*. Destroy the disease and check the further spread of the disease are the two facets of *Vyadhikashamatava*. Checking the spread of the disease as well as lowering down the intensity of the disease requires increased resistance of the body. *Rasayana*, *Jeevaniya*, *Balya*, *Vayasthapniya*, *Deepan*, *Pachan* drugs, *Ahar-Vihar*, *Anupan*, *Lehan* Procedure, *SuwarnaPrashan* and *Karnavedhan* are tremendous tools for enhancing immunity. Here a comprehensive review of the *Ayurvedic* classical methods are presented to enhance the immunity.

Keywords: Immunity, *Vyadhikshamatva*, *Rasayana*, *Lehan*, *Samskara*.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 20th century, the serious limitations of reductionist-mechanistic approach began to be realized in various fields. Attempts began at synthesizing and integrating ideas and observations of different fields into a composite whole. Gradually, a shift from reductionist to holistic approach started influencing every field of knowledge. In the field of medicine, it was realized that human health and its management is a very complex problem. It can only be addressed by evolving a holistic paradigm of medicine and health-care. This realization resulted in reinvestigation of traditional systems of medicine, particularly Ayurveda. It is being increasingly realized now that Ayurveda fundamentally has a holistic approach to human health. As a result, serious attempts to develop interface between Ayurveda and modern scientific medicine are being made. Further, some recent concepts of molecular medicine, immunology etc. have been found to have striking similarities with certain concepts of Ayurveda. Therefore, it is being realized that it might be possible to develop a dialogue between modern scientific medicine and Ayurveda.

When etiological factors come into contact with the body they try to produce disease. At the same time the body tries to resist the disease. This power of the body, which prevents the development of diseases or resists a developed disease, is called Immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*) in Ayurveda¹.

This strength is attainable from three sources-constitutional, temporal, and acquired. Constitutional strength is that gained from the time of the formation of the foetus onwards. Hence it is dependent on the healthiness of sperm and ovum and also on the excellence of time and place. The temporal strength is the one, which is gained from the favourable condition of time, such as youth, and favourable season. The acquired strength is one, which is achieved by the proper combination of diet, exercise, and other regimens².

Immunity depends upon the maintenance of the equilibrium of *Doshas* and the healthiness of tissues and channels. Similarly the strength of the body is related to immunity and it also depends upon the healthiness of tissues. These realizations indicate that concerted efforts may be helpful in bridging the gap between the concepts and practices of Ayurveda and modern scientific medicine. Such understanding shall go a long way towards integration of the beneficial aspects of the

two systems and development of a truly holistic system of human health.

RASAYANA

The modern scientific medicine is gradually realizing that mere presence of causative agent in the environment or its entry into the body does not always result in the disease. The most important in relation to health, disease and cure is the immunity of the body. Immunomodulation i.e. modulation of immune response through selective use of immunomodulators is currently being considered the most potent method in the management of health and disease by modern medicine. Recent advances in understanding the neuro-endocrine-immune axis and the influence of nutrition, exercise and circadian rhythms on it, are bringing modern medicine nearer to Ayurveda. The concepts of immunity and immunomodulation appear to have been extensively explored and used in Ayurveda, particularly in *RasayanaTantra*. It is a specialised treatment influencing the fundamental aspects of the organs i.e. *Dhatu*, *Agni* and *Srotamsi*, leading to overall improvement in the organism, which affords prevention of ageing, resistance against diseases, bodily strength and improvement in mental faculties. The mode of action of *RasayanaDravyas* can be considered through the following three ways:-

- ❖ By improving the nutritional value of the *Rasa Dhatu* (*Asthayee*), in turn by improving the *Dhatu* (*Poshana*) (*Dhatuvardhak*)³ e.g. *Dugdha*, *Ghrita*, *Shatavari* etc.
- ❖ By improving the *Agni* (*Vyapara*) (*Agnivardhak*)⁴ in the body, there by responsible for proper *Dhatunirmana* in the body like *Chitraka*, *Bhallataka* etc.
- ❖ By *ShrotaShodhana* in the body, this improves *Dhatu* (*Poshana*) (*Kriya*) like *Guggulu*.

Drugs that improve the quality of *Rasa Dhatu*s and thereby of the entire body are the *Rasayanas*. The prescribed procedure include not only drugs but also daily routine including exercise, diet and nutrition beside mental attitude and discipline one of the therapeutic strategies in *Ayurvedic* medicine is to increase body's natural resistance to the disease causing agent rather than directly neutralizing the agent itself. In the words of *Charaka*, with *Rasayana*, "one obtains longevity, regains youth, gets a sharp memory and intellect and freedom from disease, gets a lustrous complexion and the strength of a horse."⁵

Sushruta is more specific, describing a *Rasayana* as one which is anti – ageing, increases the life span, promotes intelligence and memory and increases resistance to the disease "presumably infections and therefore, indicating potential immunostimulant effects."⁶

Rasayana therapy has been classified by *Charaka* into two groups: a) *Kutipravesika* (Indoor) *Rasayanavidhi* and b) *Vatatapika* (Outdoor) *Rasayanavidhi*. According to the requirement of an individual the *Rasayana* drugs are divided into three groups, viz. *Kamya*, *Naimittika* and *Ajasrika* *Rasayanas*. According to the mode of action the *Rasayana* drugs are divided into *Shodhana* and *Shamana* types. *Achara* *Rasayana* is just like a code of good conduct and habit. This is a non-drug approach to *Rasayana*. In this,

without using a pharmacological recipe, one can gain all the benefits of *Rasayana*.

These above definitions give conclusive idea that *Rasayana* is the therapy which provides optimum quality of the bodily tissues by which it promotes the physical and mental health well-being and preventing from ageing and disease and enables to live a longer period of youthfulness.

Thus by acting on above three levels *Rasayana* drugs ultimately increases *Vyadhikshamatva*. Therefore, administration of *Rasayanadrugs* is helpful in improving the immunity and general well-being of patient.

JEEVANIYA, BALYA AND VAYASTHAPANIYA DRUGS

Jeevaniya

This plants also appear to have promise action as immunomodulators. *Jeevaniya* drugs are those which promotes life. *Ayurveda* say that there is a daily wear and tear in the bodily functions. This wear and tear is prevented by the *jeevaniya* group of drugs.

Balya

The Agents which increase the vitality of the physical body are called as *Balya* drugs. This vitality is believed to be the basis of life itself. *Balya* drugs could be general or specific e.g. *Arjun* – to Heart.

Vayasthapanana

The *Vayasthapanana* drugs on other hand, although mentioned as a separate class by *Charaka*, have not been well defined apart from being called agents which establish or maintain youthfulness.

Deepak and Pachak

Today the immune system is the pace- maker of the life. This is because it is hypothesised that it has a bidirectional link to several organ system in the body and may be an important regulator, along with the nervous (somatic and autonomies) and endocrine systems, in the homeostatic mechanism of the body, particularly during stressful situations and ageing. Hence drugs acting on the immune system i.e. *immunomodulators*, are likely to influence many systems in the body, with far ranging effects including "strengthening" (*Jeevaniya*), "Vitalising" (*Balya*) and life maintaining (*Vayasthapaniya*).

Indeed there are two more concepts in *Ayurveda* that deserve in depth investigation since it is likely that they may reveal an Immunostimulant potential of the plants just as *Rasayana* or *Balya* concepts have done so far.

"*Ama*" are immunologically active, but nutritionally insignificant, complexes generated in the intestine due to improper digestion of food. "*Ama*" has been implicated by the *Ayurveda* to be the part of the pathogenesis of several disease like RA, ulcerative colitis etc. all of which we know have immunological background.

Deepak and *Pachak* Gana cannot be included as classical immunostimulants but they can be called as Immunoactive agents, since they are described as modifying immune related disease.

Several plants prescribed in *Ayurveda* as anti-allergic agents. It is likely that this activity can be attributed to T suppressor cells. Thus these drugs would qualify as Immuno modulator agents. e.g. *picorrhiza kurroa*, *piper longum*.

AHARA DRAVYAS

It is well known that *AharaDravya* supply materials from which the body builds up its structural and functional elements. Likewise the *Dosha*, *Dhatus* and *Ojas* also produced and nourished by *AharaDravya*. *Ahar* is said to be *Ojovardhaka* and *Balavardhak*⁷.

In *KashyapSamhita* it has been stated that *Madhura*, *Snigdha*, *Sheeta*, *Laghu* and *HitaAhar* is *Ojaovardhak*. So this type of *AharDravya* should be used in children⁸.

RASAS

Charaka while describing properties of *Rasas* has mentioned that intake of *Madhura* and *Amla* rasa produces more strength in the body⁹.

For the enhancement of power *Vagbhata* states intake of *Rasas* season wise¹⁰

Ritu (Season)	Rasas
Shita (winter), Varsha (Rainy)	Madhur, Amla, Lavana
Vasanta (Spring)	Katu, Tikta, Kashaya
Grishma (Summer)	Madhur
Sharad (Autum)	Madhur, Tikta, Kashaya

ANUPANA

Post-Prandial drinks helps in easy digestion resulting in the promotion of longevity and strength¹¹

Condition	Anupana
Vatavikara	Snigdha and Ushna
Pitta vikara	Madhura and Shitala
Kaphavikara	Ruksha and Ushna
Dhatukshayajanyavikara	Mamsa rasa
Krishna	Sura
Sthula	Honey - Water

LEHANA

The term *Lehana* means the act of licking or lapping up with the tongue. Children are very susceptible to the infections. There are so many traditional measures available to combat it and protect from the hostile environment in which drug is mixed with honey or *Ghrta* are given. The process is called *Lehana*. So it is the ideal way of administering drugs in children because it increases the palatability of the drug taken with it and can be easily taken up. This is the most accepted mode of the drug administration to child.

The likeables are usually in the *leha* form. Usually the *lehas* are palatable and easy for consumption. The smaller kids will always have difficulties and reluctant in taking the medicine in the tablet, *Churna*, or *Kwatha* form. Incomparable to this *Lehana* form with added *Madura* drugs easy to administer. Further the *Lehana* may be Routine procedure or the method by which the body supplements are introduced. As we know that growing child require the extra caloric food as it is busy with playing other activities throughout. In the meantime the rate of growth and development is very faster in the first few years of life. To meet the demands of the body in toddler there is need of some extra amount of the fats, amino acids and the carbohydrates which is supplied by *LehanaDravya*.

In this chapter so many single drugs and also compound drugs (*Yog*) has been given for *Lehana Karma*¹².

1. *Brahmi*, *Mandukparni*, *Triphala*, *Chitraka*, *Vacha*, *Satapuspa*, *Satavari*, *Danti*, *Nagbala*, *Nishotha* should be used separately mixed with *Madhu* and *Ghrta*.

2. *Manjistha*, *Triphala*, *Brahmi*, *Bala*, *Atibala*, *Chitraka* should be used in the form of powder in an equal quantity mixed with *Madhu* and *Ghrta*.
3. *Ghrta* medicated with *Kustha*, *Sarshapa*, *Pippali*, *Triphala*, *Vacha* and *Saindhava* is effective recipe for renovating the intelligence.
4. *AbhayaGhrta*
5. *SamvardhanGhrta*.

STANYA (BREAST MILK)

Breast milk is the most ideal and natural food for the human baby. *AcharyaKashyap* defines pure breast milk as that with which the baby thrives well and both the mother and baby remains happy, healthy and free from any ailments. It promotes growth and development and acts as a tonic for the tissue¹³. Breast milk is *Satmya* for children. It's like a life and provide nourishment increase growth and strength. It also increases *Ojas* that is *Bala* of the body¹⁴.

By above explained properties one can conclude that the baby kept on exclusive breast feeding for 6 months, can improve his body immunity or *Vyadhikshamatva* which prevent the baby from many diseases.

SANSKARAS

Sanskara mean those religious rites and ceremonies which sanctify the body, mind and intellect. So that the person may become fit for the society. In other words *Sanskara* means *Gunantaradhan* which is used for transforming the qualities. Physician can also assess the growth and development of child during performing the *Sanskara*.

SwarnaPrashana

Kashyapa explained the method which should be followed by the *Lehana*. In this regard he explains the method of doing the *SwarnaPrashana*. Patient should sit and see the *Poorva Disha*, take *Swarana* and rub it against the hard surface like stone with water and then mix with *Madhu* and *Grita* and given for licking. This is called as *SwarnaPrashana* and this will going to increase the Lifespan, *KalyanaKaraka*, *Managala*, *Vrishya*, *Varnya* and *GrahaRoga Nashaka*¹⁵. This increase the *Agni*, intelligence and the *Bala* of the person. If this is taken for one month continuously child becomes *ParamaMedavi* and devoid of diseases. When taken for six month it will make the child *Shruthadhra* (able to retain once heard matter). In this context it is clear that the benefits of the *Lehana* are almost equal to the *Rasayana*. But the special stress has been given to *MedhyaRasayana* effects like *Medhavi* and *Shrutadara*. As we know the process of body growth is directly proportional to the growth of the CNS.

Acharya Kashyap has mentioned the benefits of *SwarnaPrashan* by stating that it promote intellect, health, complexion and strength (*Bala*).

KarnavedhanSanskara

According to *Acharya Sushruta* there are two purposes for which *Karnavedhana* should be done¹⁶.

1. *Raksha* (to improve *Vyadhikshamatva*)
2. *Bhushana* (for cosmetic purpose)

The injury produced by piercing the ear may initiate antigen antibody reaction, which provide active immunity to the child. The place described by *Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* for piercing the ear is the same which is used for treating cardio-respiratory problem by acupuncture.

So from above references we can say that piercing of ears of a child protect him from many disease. Wearing of ornaments adds to the prosperity longevity, grace and prevents from evil spirits. It is also conductive to *Ojas*.

CONCLUSION

“Children are one third of our population and all of our future”. In this period attempt should be done to prevention of disease and to enhance physical, mental and social well-being of children so that each child may achieve the genetic potential with which she/he born. Destroy the disease and check the further spread of the disease are the two facets of *Vydhikashamatava*. Checking the spread of the disease as well as lowering down the intensity of the disease requires increased resistance of the body. *Rasayana*, Jeevaniya. Balya, Vayasthapniya, Deepan, Pachan drugs, Ahar-Vihar, Anupan, Lehan Procedure, Suwarna Prashan and Karnavedhan are tremendous tools for enhancing immunity.

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