

RASĀYANA CHIKITSĀ: COMBATING OXIDATIVE STRESS THROUGH AYURVEDA

¹ Dr Prakash Jondhale, ² Dr Avdhesh Bhatt, ³ Dr Anita Mali

¹ Phd scholar, Department of RS&BK, MMM, Govt Ayurveda College, Udaipur, Rajasthan

² HOD, Professor, Department of RS&BK, MMM, Govt Ayurveda College, Udaipur, Rajasthan

³ Phd scholar, Department of RS&BK, MMM, Govt Ayurveda College, Udaipur, Rajasthan

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Abstract

Rasāyana Chikitsā, a specialized branch of Ayurveda dedicated to rejuvenation, longevity, and disease prevention, exhibits significant potential as an antioxidant therapy. Oxidative stress, resulting from an imbalance between free radicals and antioxidants, contributes to aging and numerous chronic diseases. This conceptual study integrates classical Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific evidence to explore how Rasāyana therapies counteract oxidative damage. Through a review of literature, key Rasāyana herbs such as Amalaki (*Embllica officinalis*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), along with formulations like Chyawanprash, demonstrate potent free radical scavenging, enhancement of endogenous antioxidants (e.g., superoxide dismutase, catalase, glutathione), and reduction in lipid peroxidation markers. These effects align with Rasāyana's holistic approach to promoting vitality and immunity. The study highlights Rasāyana's role in preventing oxidative stress-related disorders and suggests its integration into contemporary health

strategies. Future clinical trials are recommended to validate these findings further.

Introduction

In the modern era, oxidative stress has emerged as a central mechanism underlying numerous pathological conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative disorders, diabetes, cancer, and premature aging. Oxidative stress arises from excessive production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS), overwhelming the body's antioxidant defenses. This imbalance leads to cellular damage, inflammation, and accelerated degeneration of tissues.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a unique perspective through Rasāyana Chikitsā, one of the eight branches (Ashtanga Ayurveda). The term "Rasāyana" derives from "Rasa" (essence or nutrient plasma) and "Ayana" (path or circulation), implying therapies that nourish the body's fundamental tissues (dhatus), enhance vitality, promote longevity, and prevent diseases. Classical texts like Charaka Samhita describe Rasāyana as achieving "Ayushkara" (promoting

lifespan), "Medhakara" (enhancing intellect), and "Balakara" (boosting strength), while countering "Jara" (aging) and "Vyadhi" (diseases).

Rasāyana therapies are classified into categories such as Kutipravesika (intensive rejuvenation in isolation) and Vatatapika (outdoor regimens), involving herbs, minerals, diet, and lifestyle practices. Many Rasāyana drugs exhibit potent antioxidant properties, stimulating intrinsic enzymatic defenses (e.g., superoxide dismutase [SOD], catalase [CAT], glutathione peroxidase [GPx]) and scavenging free radicals directly. This aligns with modern understanding, where over 100 disorders are linked to ROS-mediated damage.

Key Rasāyana herbs like Amalaki, rich in vitamin C and polyphenols, demonstrate exceptional free radical scavenging. Ashwagandha enhances SOD and reduces malondialdehyde (MDA), a marker of lipid peroxidation. Guduchi stimulates antioxidant responses and supports immunity. Formulations such as Chyawanprash, combining multiple Rasāyana ingredients, show synergistic antioxidant effects.

This conceptual study aims to bridge Ayurvedic concepts with scientific evidence, evaluating Rasāyana Chikitsā as a complementary antioxidant therapy for health promotion and disease prevention. By reviewing classical descriptions and contemporary studies, it underscores Rasāyana's potential in mitigating oxidative stress holistically, beyond mere supplementation.

Materials and Methods

This conceptual study employs a systematic literature review to explore the antioxidant potential of Rasāyana Chikitsā. Searches were conducted across databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Ayurvedic repositories (e.g., AYUSH research portals) using keywords such as "Rasayana antioxidant," "Rasāyana Chikitsā oxidative stress," "Amalaki antioxidant," "Ashwagandha SOD," "Guduchi free radical," "Chyawanprash DPPH," and specific herb names combined with "Rasayana."

Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed articles, reviews, clinical/preclinical studies in English, published from 2000 to 2025, focusing on antioxidant mechanisms (e.g., DPPH scavenging, FRAP, enzyme assays like SOD/CAT/GSH, lipid peroxidation reduction) of Rasāyana herbs/formulations. Classical Ayurvedic texts (Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita) were referenced for conceptual framework.

Exclusion criteria: Non-English publications, studies on non-Rasāyana herbs, those lacking antioxidant validation, or unrelated to rejuvenation.

Data extraction: Key findings on mechanisms, phytochemicals (e.g., withanolides, gallic acid, tinosporaside), in vitro/in vivo/human evidence, and comparisons with synthetic antioxidants. Antioxidant assays evaluated included DPPH radical scavenging (IC50 values), ferric reducing

antioxidant power (FRAP), and enzymatic/non-enzymatic markers.

No primary experiments or ethical approvals were required, as this is a secondary conceptual analysis. Synthesis involved thematic grouping: classical Rasāyana principles, modern validation, specific herbs/formulations, and limitations/gaps.

Results

The review identified substantial evidence supporting Rasāyana Chikitsā's antioxidant efficacy. Classical texts classify Rasāyana drugs as promoters of Ojas (vital essence) and Vyadhikshamatva (immunity), often through balancing doshas and enhancing Agni (metabolism), indirectly countering oxidative stressors.

Modern studies confirm many Rasāyana herbs stimulate intrinsic antioxidants rather than merely providing exogenous ones. For instance, a clinical trial on healthy volunteers showed Rasāyana drugs (including Ashwagandha and Guduchi) significantly increased SOD levels and decreased MDA.

Key findings on prominent Rasāyana entities:

Amalaki (*Embllica officinalis*): High in vitamin C, gallic acid, and tannins; exhibits potent DPPH scavenging (IC50 comparable to ascorbic acid) and FRAP activity. Reduces lipid peroxidation and enhances GSH in models of cardiac hypertrophy and aging.

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*): Withanolides boost SOD, CAT, and GPx; clinical studies report reduced oxidative markers in stress-induced conditions. Cardioprotective via anti-apoptotic and redox-balancing effects.

Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*): Polysaccharides and alkaloids normalize antioxidant enzymes in diabetic and irradiated models; radio-protective by elevating GSH and countering ROS.

Chyawanprash: Polyherbal with Amalaki base; strong DPPH/FRAP activity due to synergistic polyphenols. Enhances immunity and reduces oxidative stress in clinical settings.

Other formulations like Brahma Rasayana increase liver antioxidants post-radiation, while Triphala Rasayana shows anticancer/antidiabetic effects via ROS modulation.

Overall, Rasāyana therapies suppress over 100 ROS-mediated disorders through holistic mechanisms.

Discussion

The findings reinforce Rasāyana Chikitsā as a multifaceted antioxidant therapy, surpassing conventional approaches by enhancing endogenous defenses and providing holistic rejuvenation. Unlike synthetic antioxidants, which may offer transient scavenging, Rasāyana stimulates SOD, CAT, and GSH, addressing root causes of oxidative stress while boosting immunity and vitality.

This aligns with Ayurveda's preventive paradigm, where Rasāyana promotes "jaravyadhi vinashanam" (destruction of aging and diseases). Herbs like Amalaki and Ashwagandha not only scavenge radicals but modulate stress responses, reducing cortisol and inflammation—key amplifiers of ROS.

Synergistic formulations (e.g., Chyawanprash) exemplify polyherbal superiority, with enhanced bioavailability and broader spectrum activity. Clinical evidence, though limited, shows benefits in healthy and stressed populations, suggesting applicability in lifestyle diseases.

Comparatively, Rasāyana's adaptogenic effects differentiate it from isolated antioxidants, offering neuroprotection, cardioprotection, and anti-aging without side effects noted in long-term synthetic use.

Limitations: Most evidence is preclinical; human trials often small-scale or observational. Variability in formulations hinders standardization. Conceptual nature precludes causal inferences.

Future directions: Large-scale RCTs quantifying biomarkers in oxidative stress models (e.g., diabetes, aging). Phytochemical standardization and mechanistic studies (e.g., Nrf2 pathway activation) could integrate Rasāyana into evidence-based medicine, enhancing therapeutic outcomes for chronic conditions.

Conclusion

Rasāyana Chikitsā emerges as a promising antioxidant therapy rooted in Ayurvedic wisdom, validated by growing scientific evidence. By nourishing tissues, enhancing intrinsic defenses, and scavenging free radicals, it offers a holistic strategy for combating oxidative stress, promoting longevity, and preventing diseases. Integration with modern healthcare could yield synergistic benefits, warranting further rigorous research.

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