

A Comprehensive Review of Rajayakshma (Tuberculosis) According to Acharya Charaka with Modern Correlation

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Abstract

Rajayakshma, often equated with tuberculosis (TB) in modern medicine, is a significant disease described in ancient Ayurvedic texts, notably the Charaka Samhita. This review aims to explore the understanding of Rajayakshma as detailed by Acharya Charaka, correlating its pathogenesis, clinical features, and treatment with contemporary medical knowledge of tuberculosis. By analyzing classical Sanskrit verses and integrating modern scientific insights, this article provides a holistic view of Rajayakshma, emphasizing the relevance of Ayurvedic principles in current TB management strategies.

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Introduction

Tuberculosis remains a global health challenge, causing significant morbidity and mortality worldwide. While modern medicine attributes TB to the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, ancient Ayurvedic texts have long recognized a similar disease entity known as Rajayakshma. Acharya Charaka's Charaka Samhita dedicates an entire chapter to Rajayakshma Chikitsa (treatment), highlighting its importance in ancient Indian medicine.

The term "Rajayakshma" is derived from "Raja" (king) and "Yakshma" (disease), indicating its status as a "king of diseases" due to its severe and multifaceted manifestations. This review delves into the etiology, pathogenesis, clinical features, and therapeutic approaches to Rajayakshma as per Charaka Samhita, drawing parallels with modern understandings of tuberculosis.

Materials and Methods

This study involves a comprehensive analysis of the eighth chapter of the Chikitsa Sthana (Treatment Section) of Charaka Samhita, titled “Rajayakshma Chikitsa Adhyaya.” The Sanskrit verses were meticulously reviewed, translated, and interpreted to extract relevant information on Rajayakshma. Additionally, contemporary medical literature on tuberculosis was examined to establish correlations.

Etiology (Nidana)

Ayurvedic Perspective

Acharya Charaka identifies four primary causative factors for Rajayakshma:

- Ayathābalaṁārambha (Overexertion beyond one’s capacity):** Engaging in activities that exceed physical limits, such as excessive exercise, heavy labor, or intense sexual activity.
- Vega Sandhāraṇa (Suppression of natural urges):** Deliberately suppressing physiological urges like coughing, sneezing, urination, defecation, and others.
- Kshaya (Depletion of bodily tissues):** Loss of vital body constituents due to chronic illnesses, malnutrition, or excessive fasting.
- Viṣamāśana (Irregular and improper diet):** Consuming incompatible foods, irregular meal timings, and intake of unhealthy or contaminated food.

These factors lead to the vitiation of all three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), causing a systemic imbalance that affects the body’s tissues (*dhatu*).

Modern Correlation

In modern medicine, tuberculosis is primarily caused by the airborne transmission of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. However, several risk factors align with the Ayurvedic etiological factors:

- Overexertion and Malnutrition:** Weakened immunity due to physical exhaustion and nutritional deficiencies increases susceptibility to TB.
- Suppression of Physiological Functions:** Chronic stress and lifestyle factors affecting bodily functions can compromise immune responses.
- Poor Dietary Habits:** Malnutrition and consumption of contaminated food contribute to immune suppression.

Pathogenesis (Samprapti)

Ayurvedic Understanding

The pathogenesis of Rajayakshma involves:

- Vitiation of Doshas:** The causative factors disturb the balance of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.
- Obstruction of Srotas (Channels):** Vitiating doshas block bodily channels, impairing the flow of nutrients and waste products.

- **Depletion of Dhatus:** Progressive loss of bodily tissues, particularly Ojas (vital essence), leading to weakened immunity.

Acharya Charaka emphasizes the role of Prana Vayu (life force) and Ojas in maintaining health. The depletion of Ojas due to the above factors results in the manifestation of Rajayakshma.

Modern Correlation

In TB, the inhaled bacteria reach the alveoli, where they are engulfed by macrophages but may survive and multiply. The immune response leads to granuloma formation and tissue destruction.

- **Immune System Compromise:** Factors like malnutrition and stress weaken immunity, facilitating TB infection.
- **Tissue Damage:** The body's immune response causes inflammation and necrosis, similar to the dhatu kshaya described in Ayurveda.

Clinical Features (Lakshana)

Ayurvedic Description

Acharya Charaka lists several symptoms of Rajayakshma, which are grouped into primary and secondary features.

Primary Symptoms (Pratyatma Lakshana):

1. Kasa (Cough)
2. Swasa (Dyspnea)
3. Jwara (Fever)
4. Raktasrava (Hemoptysis)
5. Agnimandya (Loss of appetite)
6. Arochak (Aversion to food)
7. Kshaya (Emaciation)
8. Daurbalya (Weakness)
9. Atisara (Diarrhea)
10. Parshva Shula (Chest pain)
11. Shiroruk (Headache)

Secondary Symptoms:

- Pratishyaya (Chronic cold)
- Svara Bheda (Hoarseness of voice)
- Aruchi (Taste disturbances)
- Anidra (Insomnia)
- Hridaya Shoola (Cardiac pain)

Modern Correlation

The symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis closely mirror the Ayurvedic descriptions:

- **Cough and Hemoptysis:** Persistent cough with blood-streaked sputum.
- **Fever:** Low-grade fever, often in the evenings.
- **Weight Loss and Weakness:** Due to chronic infection and decreased appetite.
- **Chest Pain and Dyspnea:** Resulting from pleural involvement.
- **Loss of Appetite and Taste Disturbances:** Common in chronic illnesses.
- **Night Sweats and Malaise:** Indicative of systemic infection.

Diagnostic Considerations

Ayurvedic Approach

Diagnosis is based on the thorough assessment of symptoms, dosha involvement, and patient history. Examination of sputum, observation of physical signs like emaciation, and understanding the patient's lifestyle and dietary habits are crucial.

Modern Diagnostics

- **Sputum Analysis:** Detection of acid-fast bacilli through microscopy and culture.
- **Chest Radiography:** Identifying lesions, cavities, and infiltrates in the lungs.
- **Mantoux Test:** Tuberculin skin test to assess exposure.
- **Interferon-Gamma Release Assays (IGRAs):** Blood tests measuring immune response.
- **Molecular Tests:** PCR-based techniques for rapid identification.

Treatments for Rajayakshma (Tuberculosis) Mentioned in Charaka Samhita

The ancient Ayurvedic text **Charaka Samhita**, specifically in the chapter on **Rajayakshma Chikitsa** (Treatment of Rajayakshma), provides a comprehensive approach to managing this complex disease. The treatments are multifaceted, addressing physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Below is a detailed explanation of the treatments mentioned in the Charaka Samhita Rajayakshma Chikitsa Adhyaya.

1. Purification Therapies (Shodhana Chikitsa)

a. Emesis (Vamana) and Purgation (Virechana)

- **Shlokas 87-88:**
 - *"In those with aggravated doshas, Vamana (emesis) and Virechana (purgation) are recommended after proper administration of Sneha (oleation) and Sweda (sudation) therapies, without causing emaciation."*
- **Purpose:**
 - To eliminate the vitiated doshas (especially Kapha and Pitta) from the body.
 - Should be administered carefully to avoid further weakening the patient.

b. Bloodletting (Raktamokshana)

- **Shloka 82:**
 - *"In headaches, chest pain, and shoulder pain, blood should be let out from the diseased person by leeches, Alabu (gourd cups), or Shringa (horns), or by venesection."*

- **Purpose:**

- To remove vitiated blood, especially in cases with Pitta dominance and to alleviate localized symptoms.

2. Palliative Therapies (Shamana Chikitsa)

a. Nasal Medication (Nasya)

- **Shlokas 89-91:**

- “These formulations prepared with *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*), *Vidari* (*Pueraria tuberosa*), and *Madhuka* (*licorice*), prepared with salt and ghee, are to be used as *Nasya* (nasal medications), which are excellent for voice.”

- **Purpose:**

- To strengthen the respiratory system.
- To alleviate symptoms like hoarseness of voice, cough, and nasal congestion.

b. Inhalation of Medicated Smoke (Dhumapana)

- **Shloka 81:**

- “*Nasya* (nasal medication), *Dhumapana* (inhalation of medicated smoke), unctuous substances taken after meals, oils used for massage, and *Basti karma* (medicated enemas) are prescribed.”

- **Purpose:**

- To clear respiratory passages.
- To reduce symptoms like cough and congestion.

c. Medicated Ghees (Ghrita)

- **Shlokas 94-102:**

- Various medicated ghees are prescribed, such as:
 - **Rasnaghrita:** Ghee medicated with *Rasna* for pain relief.
 - **Balaghrita:** Ghee medicated with *Bala* for strength.
 - **Jivantyadi Ghrita:** Prepared with rejuvenating herbs.

- **Purpose:**

- To nourish depleted tissues.
- To enhance immunity and vitality.
- To alleviate specific symptoms like cough, fever, and chest pain.

d. Linctuses (Leha)

- **Shlokas 95-103:**

- Linctuses prepared with herbs like *Pippali* (long pepper), honey, and ghee.

- **Purpose:**

- To soothe the throat.
- To alleviate cough and improve voice.
- To provide nourishment.

e. Herbal Decoctions and Formulations

- **Shlokas 105-110:**
 - Decoctions prepared with herbs like Vasa (*Adhatoda vasica*), Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), and others.
- **Purpose:**
 - To reduce fever and burning sensations.
 - To alleviate respiratory symptoms.

3. Diet and Nutrition

a. Nourishing Foods

- **Shlokas 66-69, 149-159:**
 - **Meat Soups (Mamsa Rasa):**
 - Prepared from animals like goat, sheep, and certain birds.
 - Cooked with spices and medicinal herbs.
 - **Grains and Legumes:**
 - Barley, wheat, rice, Yusha (soups) made from horse gram, radish.
 - **Medicated Milk and Ghee:**
 - Milk decocted with herbs.
 - Ghee processed with medicinal plants.
- **Purpose:**
 - To restore strength and rebuild tissues.
 - To improve digestion and appetite.
 - To balance doshas.

b. Avoidance of Incompatible Foods

- **Emphasis on consuming easily digestible and suitable foods.**

4. Lifestyle Modifications

a. Rest and Avoidance of Overexertion

- **Shloka 63:**
 - *“The physician should treat the patient by assessing the strength and condition, avoiding overexertion.”*
- **Purpose:**
 - To prevent further depletion of energy.
 - To allow the body to heal.

b. Therapeutic Activities

- **Shlokas 184-186:**
 - **Oil Massages (Abhyanga):**

- Using medicated oils to strengthen the body.
- **Bathing (Snana):**
 - With medicated water, as per seasonal recommendations.
- **Exposure to Pleasant Sensory Experiences:**
 - Fragrances, music, and company of loved ones.
- **Purpose:**
 - To rejuvenate the body and mind.
 - To enhance emotional well-being.

c. Psychological Support

- **Shlokas 185-186:**
 - *“Company of friends and beautiful women, listening to songs and musical instruments, pleasant sounds...”*
 - **Purpose:**
 - To alleviate mental stress.
 - To promote positivity and joy.
-

5. Rejuvenation Therapies (Rasayana)

a. Use of Rejuvenating Herbs

- **Shlokas 90-93, 109-113:**
 - Herbs like Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), and Bala (*Sida cordifolia*).
 - **Purpose:**
 - To enhance immunity (Ojas).
 - To promote longevity and vitality.
-

6. Spiritual and Ethical Practices

a. Observance of Virtuous Conduct

- **Shlokas 187-188:**
 - Charity (Dana)
 - Truthfulness (Satya)
 - Non-violence (Ahimsa)
 - Worship of Deities (Devata Archana)
 - Service to Elders and Teachers (Guru Upasana)
 - **Purpose:**
 - To purify the mind.
 - To create positive karma and mental peace.
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7. Symptomatic Treatments

a. Management of Cough and Respiratory Symptoms

- **Shlokas 94-102:**
 - Medicated Ghees and Linctuses.
 - Herbal Inhalations and Nasal Drops.
- **b. Fever Reduction**
- **Shlokas 105-110:**
 - Herbal Decoctions with Antipyretic Herbs.

c. Appetite Stimulation

- **Shlokas 124-131:**
 - **Digestive Stimulants:**
 - Preparations with ginger, long pepper, and other spices.
- **d. Management of Diarrhea (Atisara)**
- **Shlokas 124-131:**
 - **Astringent and Absorbent Formulations:**
 - Decoctions with Bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), Pomegranate, and other herbs.

8. External Therapies

a. Sudation Therapies (Swedana)

- **Shlokas 65-74:**
 - **Fomentation:**
 - Using medicated steam or warm poultices.
- **Purpose:**
 - To relieve stiffness and pain.
 - To promote circulation.

b. Medicated Baths (Avagaha)

- **Shlokas 65, 173-174:**
 - **Bathing in Water Infused with Medicinal Herbs.**
- **Purpose:**
 - To absorb medicinal properties through the skin.
 - To relax the body.

9. Administration of Medicated Enemas (Basti)

- **Shlokas 81, 185:**
 - **Nourishing Enemas:**
 - Prepared with milk, ghee, and herbal decoctions.
- **Purpose:**
 - To directly nourish the colon and tissues.

- To balance Vata dosha.

10. Avoidance of Suppression of Natural Urges

- **Underlying Principle:**
 - Suppression of natural urges like coughing, sneezing, and defecation can exacerbate the disease.
- **Practice:**
 - Encouraging the natural expulsion of waste and secretions.

Summary of Treatment

The treatments for Rajayakshma as per the Charaka Samhita involve a holistic approach:

- **Detoxification:** Through purification therapies to remove vitiated doshas.
- **Nourishment:** Using medicated ghees, meat soups, and nourishing foods to rebuild tissues.
- **Symptom Alleviation:** Herbal formulations targeting specific symptoms like cough, fever, and digestive issues.
- **Strengthening Immunity:** Employing rejuvenating herbs and therapies to enhance Ojas (vital essence).
- **Lifestyle and Psychological Support:** Incorporating rest, pleasant sensory experiences, and supportive relationships.
- **Spiritual Practices:** Engaging in ethical conduct, charity, and devotion to promote mental peace and positive energy.

Note: These treatments are rooted in ancient Ayurvedic principles and should be considered in the historical and cultural context of the text. Modern application of these therapies requires careful consideration, adaptation, and consultation with qualified Ayurvedic practitioners.

Modern Treatment of Tuberculosis

- **Antibiotic Therapy:** Multi-drug regimens over extended periods (6-9 months) to eradicate the bacteria.
 - First-line drugs: Isoniazid, Rifampicin, Ethambutol, Pyrazinamide.
- **Supportive Care:**
 - Nutritional support to address malnutrition.
 - Management of side effects and monitoring drug compliance.
- **Public Health Measures:**
 - Vaccination (BCG vaccine).
 - Screening and contact tracing.
 - Patient education on transmission prevention.

Discussion

Integrating Ayurvedic and Modern Approaches

Rajayakshma's management in Ayurveda emphasizes holistic care, addressing physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Modern TB treatment focuses on antimicrobial therapy but recognizes the importance of supportive care.

Complementary Strategies

- **Nutritional Support:** Both systems acknowledge the role of nutrition in recovery.
- **Immune Enhancement:** Ayurvedic Rasayana therapy parallels modern immunomodulatory approaches.
- **Symptom Management:** Herbal remedies can complement modern symptomatic treatments.

Challenges and Considerations

- **Drug Interactions:** Caution is required when combining herbal and allopathic medicines.
- **Compliance:** Ensuring adherence to long-term treatment regimens is crucial in both systems.
- **Resistance:** Monitoring for antibiotic resistance in modern medicine; awareness of ineffective treatments in Ayurveda.

Future Perspectives

Research into Ayurvedic herbs with antimicrobial properties could contribute to new TB treatments. Collaboration between Ayurveda and modern medicine can enhance patient outcomes, particularly in drug-resistant cases.

Conclusion

Acharya Charaka's descriptions of Rajayakshma demonstrate a profound understanding of a complex disease resembling tuberculosis. The holistic approach of Ayurveda, focusing on prevention, purification, rejuvenation, and nourishment, complements modern medical strategies. Integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary science offers a promising path for comprehensive TB management, addressing not only the infection but also the patient's overall well-being.

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