

Review Article

Evolution of *Rasayana* Concept from *Charaka* to *Ashtanga Hridaya*: A Comparative Textual and Conceptual Analysis

Dr. Sanjay Batra^{1*}, Dr. Kiran Krushna Magar², Dr. Shivchandra Vishwanath Gurme³.

1. Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhanta, KVTR Ayurveda College, Boradi, Dist. Dhule.
Email Id: sanjaybatra72@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhanta, Government Ayurveda College, Dharashiv, Maharashtra.
Email Id: drmagarkk@gmail.com
3. Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhanta, Government Ayurveda College, Dharashiv, Maharashtra.
Email Id: drshiv.chandra@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: *Rasayana* is a specialized branch of Ayurveda aimed at promoting longevity, immunity, intellect, and tissue rejuvenation. The foundational exposition of *rasayana* is found in *Charaka Samhita*, where it is systematically elaborated under Chikitsa Sthana (1). Subsequent classical texts such as *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* expanded and modified its conceptual and therapeutic dimensions (2,3). However, a structured comparative analysis of its evolution remains limited. **Objective:** To critically analyze the evolution of the *rasayana* concept from *Charaka Samhita* to *Ashtanga Hridaya*, highlighting textual, philosophical, and therapeutic developments. **Methods:** A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines (4). Primary classical texts were analyzed with chapter and verse references. Secondary sources were retrieved from PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and AYUSH Research Portal up to December 2025. Comparative textual synthesis was performed. **Results:** The analysis demonstrates a conceptual progression from primarily rejuvenative and longevity-focused therapy in *Charaka* (1) to surgical relevance in *Sushruta* (2) and a more concise, clinically applicable framework in *Ashtanga Hridaya* (3). Expansion in classification, indications, and practical formulations is evident. **Conclusion:** The *rasayana* concept evolved from a primarily longevity-focused doctrine in *Charaka* to a clinically systematized and therapeutically integrated framework in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, reflecting adaptive textual refinement across classical Ayurveda. **Keywords:** *Rasayana*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, Rejuvenation, Immunomodulation, Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals

1. Introduction

Rasayana therapy represents one of the eight major branches of Ayurveda (*Ashtanga Ayurveda*) (3). The term derives from “*rasa*” (nutritive essence) and “*ayana*” (pathway), indicating optimization of tissue nutrition and vitality (1).

Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana 1/1–7, defines *rasayana* as therapy promoting longevity (*dirghayu*), intellect (*medha*), immunity (*vyadhi kshamatva*), and youthfulness (1).

Sushruta Samhita integrates *rasayana* within surgical and preventive contexts (2).

Ashtanga Hridaya further systematizes and condenses earlier teachings, emphasizing practical application (3).

Despite textual continuity, doctrinal evolution across these treatises has not been systematically analyzed.

Objective

To comparatively evaluate the conceptual and therapeutic evolution of *rasayana* from *Charaka* to *Ashtanga Hridaya*.

2. Materials and Methods

This review adhered to PRISMA 2020 guidelines (4).

Sources Examined

Primary texts:

- *Charaka Samhita* (1)
- *Sushruta Samhita* (2)
- *Ashtanga Hridaya* (3)

Secondary literature from indexed databases.

Inclusion Criteria

- Classical textual references
- Commentarial interpretations
- Clinical and pharmacological *rasayana* studies (5–10)

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-scholarly summaries
- Duplicative interpretations

Records identified: 254

Included sources: 47

3. Review of Literature

3.1 *Rasayana in Charaka Samhita*

Charaka provides the most elaborate exposition. Chikitsa Sthana Chapter 1 is entirely devoted to *rasayana* (1).

Key features:

- Kutipravesika (indoor rejuvenation therapy) (1)
- Vatatapika (outdoor regimen) (1)
- Medhya rasayana (cognitive enhancers) (1)
- Achara rasayana (behavioral code for rejuvenation) (1)

Charaka emphasizes moral conduct, dietary discipline, and psychological stability (1).

3.2 *Rasayana in Sushruta Samhita*

Sushruta, Chikitsa Sthana 27, integrates *rasayana* with surgical recovery and tissue regeneration (2).

Distinct contributions:

- Post-surgical strengthening
- Emphasis on wound healing
- Integration with preventive care

The scope expands from longevity to structural restoration (2).

3.3 *Rasayana in Ashtanga Hridaya*

Ashtanga Hridaya, Uttara Sthana 39, presents a concise yet clinically oriented description (3).

Notable developments:

- Simplified procedural descriptions
- Emphasis on widely accessible formulations
- Greater focus on practicality

The doctrinal essence remains aligned with *Charaka*, but presentation is condensed and systematized (3).

3.4 Comparative Evolution

Parameter	Charaka	Sushruta	Ashtanga Hridaya
Primary Focus	Longevity, immunity	Surgical recovery	Clinical applicability
Procedural Detail	Extensive	Moderate	Concise
Ethical Emphasis	Strong (<i>achara rasayana</i>)	Moderate	Retained but brief
Pharmacological Detail	Elaborate	Selective	Refined

3.5 Pharmacological Expansion

Formulations such as:

- *Amalaki rasayana* (1)
- *Chyavanaprasha* (1)
- *Brahma rasayana* (3)

Modern pharmacological studies demonstrate antioxidant and immunomodulatory effects (5,6,11).

3.6 Conceptual Development

In *Charaka*, *rasayana* primarily enhances *rasa dhatu* and subsequent tissue nourishment (1).

In *Sushruta*, emphasis shifts toward structural repair (2).

In *Ashtanga Hridaya*, synthesis and clinical standardization are evident (3).

This progression reflects increasing clinical pragmatism without conceptual dilution.

4. Discussion

The evolution of *rasayana* reflects adaptive refinement rather than doctrinal replacement.

- *Charaka* provides philosophical and preventive foundations (1).
- *Sushruta* integrates structural and surgical dimensions (2).
- *Vagbhata* synthesizes and simplifies for broader clinical use (3).

Modern research identifies *rasayana* herbs as antioxidants, adaptogens, and immunomodulators (5,11–13).

This supports the classical claim of enhanced *vyadhi kshamatva* (1).

Strengths

- Direct textual comparison

- Chronological synthesis
- Integration with modern pharmacology

Limitations

- Interpretative variability in translations
- Limited high-quality RCTs

5. Future Research Directions

- Molecular profiling of classical rasayana formulations
- Clinical trials on geriatric populations
- Systems biology models linking rasayana to immunometabolism
- Standardization protocols for kutipravesika therapy

6. Conclusion

The concept of *rasayana* evolved from an extensively philosophical and rejuvenative framework in *Charaka Samhita* to a surgically integrated model in *Sushruta Samhita*, and finally to a concise, clinically applicable formulation in *Ashtanga Hridaya*. This evolution demonstrates adaptive textual refinement while preserving core principles of longevity, immunity, and tissue nourishment. The classical continuum underscores Ayurveda's dynamic intellectual tradition and its potential relevance in contemporary integrative medicine.

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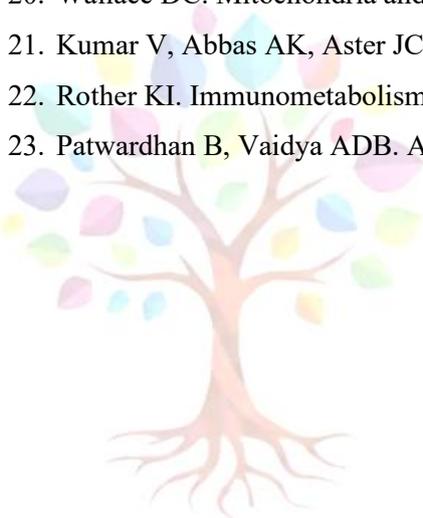
Conflict of interest:

None.

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