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A Review on Medhya Karma of Selected Ayurvedic Drugs Based on Dravyaguna Principles

Angad Kumar Kushwaha[*1], Sarita Kumari[2], Mahendra Prasad Singh[3], Raman Ranjan[4]

[*1]Dr. Angad Kumar Kushwaha, M.D. (Ayu), Department of Dravyaguna, Government Ayurvedic College, Patna, Bihar, India

[2]Dr. Sarita Kumari, M.S. (Ayu), Medical Officer, Government Ayurvedic Dispensary, Forbesganj, Araria, Bihar, India

[3]Dr. (Prof.) Mahendra Prasad Singh, Professor, Department of Dravyaguna, Government Ayurvedic College, Patna, Bihar, India

[4]Dr. Raman Ranjan, Associate Professor, Department of Dravyaguna, Government Ayurvedic College, Patna, Bihar, India

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Angad Kumar Kushwaha

Email ID: dr.angadkushwaha@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Medhya Karma, referring to the enhancement of intellect, cognition, and memory, is a fundamental therapeutic category in Ayurveda. Several Medhya Dravyas are traditionally recognized for their efficacy in promoting mental functions and neuropsychological health. This review critically analyzes the Dravyaguna aspects (Rasa, Guna, Veerya, Vipaka, and Karma) of selected Medhya herbs including Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica), Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri), Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis), and Jyotishmati (Celastrus paniculatus), correlating classical Ayurvedic principles with contemporary neuropharmacological research. Emphasis is placed on their nootropic, adaptogenic, and antioxidant properties that align with the concept of Medhya Karma. This integrative analysis provides a deeper understanding of these herbs and promotes their rational application in managing cognitive disorders and enhancing mental performance.

Keywords: *Medhya Karma, Dravyaguna Vigyan, Bacopa monnieri, Centella asiatica, Cognitive function, Ayurvedic Pharmacology, Nootropics*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health and cognitive decline are increasingly being recognized as major global public health challenges, especially in the context of the rapidly aging population and the rising incidence of stress-induced neuropsychiatric disorders. According to the World Health Organization, over 55 million people worldwide are living with dementia, and this number is projected to rise sharply in the coming decades [1]. Moreover, cognitive impairments such as memory loss, attention deficits, and disorders like Alzheimer's disease and depression are becoming more prevalent, particularly due to modern lifestyle, environmental pollutants, and chronic psychological stress.

In response to these challenges, there is growing interest in traditional systems of medicine such as Ayurveda, which offer holistic, natural, and preventive approaches to cognitive health. Among the various concepts in Ayurveda aimed at promoting mental well-being, the use of Medhya Dravyas—herbs that specifically enhance *Medha* (intellect, cognition, and memory)—holds a prominent place [2]. These Medhya Dravyas are described as substances that nourish the *Majjadhatu* (nervous tissue) and improve the higher mental faculties such as *Dhi* (learning), *Dhriti* (retention), and *Smriti* (recall).

The Charaka Samhita, a foundational Ayurvedic text, identifies four primary Medhya Rasayana herbs: *Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica)*, *Yashtimadhu (Glycyrrhiza glabra)*, *Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)*, and *Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)* [3]. These drugs are indicated not only for enhancing mental capacity but also for preventing and managing disorders such as *Unmada* (psychosis), *Apasmara* (epilepsy), *Manodaurbalya* (mental fatigue), and even age-related cognitive decline.

From a pharmacological perspective, Ayurvedic herbs are classified and understood using the principles of Dravyaguna Vigyan, which is the Ayurvedic science of pharmacology. This system provides a detailed analysis of a drug based on five key parameters:

- **Rasa (Taste)** – Influences the initial perception and physiological response.
- **Guna (Qualities)** – Such as *Laghu* (light), *Snigdha* (unctuous), or *Teekshna* (sharp), determining the drug's behavior in the body.
- **Veerya (Potency)** – *Sheeta* (cooling) or *Ushna* (heating), which influences the doshic interaction and strength.
- **Vipaka (Post-digestive effect)** – Determines the ultimate result after digestion and metabolism, such as nourishing or eliminative effects.
- **Prabhava (Specific action)** – The unique and sometimes inexplicable action that cannot be attributed to the above four factors [4].

This multidimensional approach allows Ayurveda to explain the deep, often systemic, effects of a herb—not only in the physical body but also in the mind (*Manas*) and higher consciousness. For instance, herbs with *Tikta Rasa* and *Sheeta Veerya* are believed to pacify *Pitta* and promote calmness and clarity in mental function, while *Sattva-vardhaka* herbs enhance the qualities of clarity, wisdom, and mental steadiness [5].

Modern pharmacological studies have begun to validate the Medhya action of several classical herbs. For example, Bacopa monnieri (Brahmi) contains bacosides that enhance synaptic activity and neuroplasticity, supporting learning and memory [6]. Similarly, Centella asiatica (Mandukaparni) has shown promising effects in enhancing neuronal dendritic arborization and improving spatial memory, due to its triterpenoid constituents [7]. Shankhapushpi exhibits anxiolytic and adaptogenic properties, improving mental alertness and emotional stability [8]. These effects align closely with the classical Ayurvedic understanding of *Medhya Karma*.

The modern world has witnessed a significant surge in the demand for natural nootropics and cognitive enhancers that are safe, non-addictive, and sustainable for long-term use. Medhya herbs, with their dual properties of Rasayana (rejuvenation) and Manas-vardhana (mind promotion), offer an excellent therapeutic solution. They not only protect the nervous system from degeneration but also promote mental growth, emotional balance, and intellectual functioning.

This review aims to conduct a comparative and integrative analysis of selected Medhya Dravyas, specifically focusing on their Dravyaguna characteristics and aligning those properties with modern neuropharmacological findings. By analyzing classical Ayurvedic texts and recent scientific evidence, this paper seeks to deepen the understanding of Medhya Karma, support its clinical applications, and promote its relevance in contemporary cognitive health management.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review is based on:

- Classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Bhavaprakasha, and Nighantus.
- Modern peer-reviewed scientific publications from databases like PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar related to the pharmacological effects of the selected herbs.
- Comparative analysis of traditional Dravyaguna attributes with neuropharmacological findings.

The selected drugs for this review include:

1. Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica)
2. Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)
3. Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)
4. Jyotishmati (Celastrus paniculatus)

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica)

Classical References:

Mandukaparni is described as Medhya, Rasayana, Balya, and useful in Unmada and Apasmara [2]. It is mentioned in Charaka Samhita as one of the four chief Medhya Rasayanas.

Dravyaguna Attributes:

- **Rasa**: Tikta, Kashaya

- **Guna**: Laghu, Snigdha
- **Veerya**: Sheeta
- **Vipaka**: Madhura
- **Karma**: Medhya, Rasayana, Prajasthapana, Hrudya

Modern Correlation:

Centella asiatica is known for neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory, and cognitive-enhancing effects. Triterpenoids such as asiaticoside and madecassoside improve neuronal dendrite growth and memory [3].

2. Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)

Classical References:

Referred to as a potent Medhya Rasayana, Brahmi is indicated for Manovikara, Apasmara, and Smritibhramsha [4].

Dravyaguna Attributes:

- **Rasa**: Tikta, Kashaya
- **Guna**: Laghu, Snigdha
- **Veerya**: Sheeta
- **Vipaka**: Madhura
- **Karma**: Medhya, Rasayana, Nidrajanana

Modern Correlation:

Bacopa contains bacosides, which enhance neurotransmitter modulation and synaptic transmission. Studies show improvement in working memory, learning ability, and anxiety reduction [5].

3. Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)

Classical References:

Shankhapushpi is widely regarded as Medhya, Balya, Rasayana, and Hridayya in Ayurvedic lexicons like Bhavaprakasha and Dhanvantari Nighantu [6].

Dravyaguna Attributes:

- **Rasa**: Tikta
- **Guna**: Laghu, Snigdha
- **Veerya**: Sheeta
- **Vipaka**: Madhura
- **Karma**: Medhya, Rasayana, Hridayya

Modern Correlation:

Modern studies support its role in reducing mental fatigue, improving concentration, and enhancing memory. Flavonoids and alkaloids in Shankhapushpi act as cholinergic agents [7].

4. Jyotishmati (Celastrus paniculatus)

Classical References:

Known as "Intellect Tree", Jyotishmati is cited in Nighantus as Teekshna, Medhya, and Vatahara [8].

Dravyaguna Attributes:

- **Rasa**: Tikta, Katu
- **Guna**: Laghu, Teekshna, Snigdha
- **Veerya**: Ushna
- **Vipaka**: Katu
- **Karma**: Medhya, Vatahara, Deepana

Modern Correlation:

The seed oil contains celastrine and paniculatine, which enhance neuronal conduction and synaptic plasticity. Experimental models suggest improved learning, retention, and neuronal regeneration [9].

4. DISCUSSION

The concept of Medhya Karma in Ayurveda is multi-dimensional, involving the promotion of memory, intellect, comprehension, and emotional stability. The reviewed drugs exhibit such properties through their unique Dravyaguna profiles, which influence Tridosha balance, Sattva enhancement, and Dhi-Dhriti-Smrti functions. (Table.1)

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Medhya Dravyas

Herb	Rasa	Guna	Veerya	Vipaka	Medhya Karma Actions	Modern Nootropic Effects
Mandukaparni	Tikta, Kashaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Rasayana, Smriti vardhak	Neuroprotection, Memory enhancer
Brahmi	Tikta, Kashaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Medhya, Nidrajanana	Learning, Anti-anxiety
Shankhapushpi	Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Hridayya, Rasayana	Cognitive booster
Jyotishmati	Tikta, Katu	Laghu, Teekshna	Ushna	Katu	Deepana, Medhya	Synaptic modulation

The role of Medhya Dravyas in enhancing mental and cognitive faculties has been widely acknowledged in Ayurvedic classics. These herbs, known for their Rasayana and Medhya properties, aim not only at promoting intellectual functions like Dhi (learning), Dhriti (retention), and Smriti (recall), but also at maintaining overall neuropsychological stability. From a Dravyaguna standpoint, their efficacy can be traced to the inherent properties like Rasa, Guna, Veerya, Vipaka, and Prabhava, which guide their pharmacodynamic behavior.

Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica) is described in Ayurvedic literature as a Medhya Rasayana. Its predominant Tikta (bitter) and Kashaya (astringent) Rasa, Laghu (light) and Sara (flowing) Guna, Sheeta Veerya, and Madhura Vipaka support its cooling, calming, and neuro-tonic effects. The Sheeta Veerya plays a critical role in pacifying Pitta and Vata, the Doshas often vitiated in mental disturbances. The Madhura Vipaka contributes to nourishing the brain tissues, thereby strengthening cognitive functions. Mandukaparni is believed to enhance circulation to the brain, reduce anxiety, and aid in memory consolidation.

Yashtimadhu (Glycyrrhiza glabra), another prominent Medhya herb, is known for its Madhura Rasa, Guru (heavy) and Snigdha (unctuous) Guna, Sheeta Veerya, and Madhura Vipaka. It exerts a stabilizing and nourishing action on the nervous system. Its unctuous nature supports Ojas and helps in stabilizing emotional and psychological disturbances. Yashtimadhu's action on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis is often interpreted in modern terms as an adaptogenic effect. This aligns with its Ayurvedic description as a Rasayana that promotes longevity, immunity, and mental clarity.

Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia) is a potent Rasayana with a unique pharmacological profile. It possesses Tikta and Kashaya Rasa, Laghu and Snigdha Guna, Ushna Veerya, and Madhura Vipaka. Despite having Ushna Veerya, Guduchi is Tridoshaghna, especially effective in balancing Vata and Pitta. Its Medhya action is attributed to its ability to detoxify the system (Ama-pachana), rejuvenate the tissues, and support proper digestion and assimilation, which are essential for mental well-being. Guduchi strengthens the nervous system by improving cellular immunity and combating oxidative stress, which may have implications in preventing age-related cognitive decline.

Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis) is regarded as a specific Medhya Rasayana, particularly beneficial for memory, concentration, and speech. Its predominant Rasa is Tikta and Kashaya, with Laghu and Snigdha Guna, Sheeta Veerya, and Madhura Vipaka. It acts as a brain tonic and is often indicated in conditions like anxiety, insomnia, and mental fatigue. The Sheeta Veerya helps calm the mind, reduce excessive excitation of the nervous system, and support emotional balance. It is said to act on Majja Dhatu and nourish it, which is crucial for enhancing mental faculties.

From a Dravyaguna perspective, all these herbs share common attributes like Sheeta or Madhura Vipaka, Tridosha balancing action, and Rasayana property, making them ideal candidates for managing psychological and neurodegenerative disorders. Their specific Prabhava (unique action) – whether it is calming, nourishing, or adaptogenic – enables them to address diverse aspects of mental health.

In clinical and therapeutic contexts, Medhya Dravyas are often used in polyherbal formulations to achieve synergistic effects. The combination enhances their Rasayana and Medhya actions, allowing a multidimensional approach to psychological care. For instance, Brahmi, Vacha, and Ashwagandha are also frequently co-prescribed for their neurotonic and anti-stress properties, complementing the action of the four classical Medhya Rasayanas.

Moreover, the efficacy of these herbs is highly influenced by their **Anupana (**vehicle), **Samskara** (processing), and the **individual's Prakriti** (constitution). For example, Yashtimadhu with milk is more nourishing, while Shankhapushpi in syrup form is soothing and more palatable for children or the elderly. These considerations further personalize the approach of Ayurvedic pharmacology in mental health management.

5. CONCLUSION

The Medhya Dravyas reviewed—**Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica), Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri), Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)**, and **Jyotishmati (Celastrus paniculatus)—**demonstrate potent cognitive-enhancing effects rooted in Ayurvedic pharmacology. Their **Dravyaguna** profiles—defined by Rasa, Guna, Veerya, Vipaka, and Prabhava—highlight their targeted action on **Manas** (mind) and **Majja Dhatu** (nervous tissue), supporting their traditional use in promoting memory (Smriti), intellect (Dhi), and mental stability (Dhriti).From a modern standpoint, these herbs exhibit **nootropic, neuroprotective, anxiolytic,** and **antioxidant properties,** making them valuable in managing **memory disorders, learning difficulties, stress-induced cognitive dysfunction,** and **age-related neurodegeneration.** Their action on neurotransmitter modulation, synaptic plasticity, and anti-inflammatory pathways bridges classical Ayurvedic knowledge with modern neurobiology.Integrating Medhya Dravyas into contemporary healthcare frameworks requires **standardized formulations, pharmacological validations, and clinical evidence.** Future interdisciplinary research focusing on **mechanistic insights, bioavailability, and long-term efficacy** will enhance their therapeutic scope in managing **psychiatric and neurodegenerative conditions** like Alzheimer's disease, anxiety disorders, and ADHD.In essence, the study of Medhya Karma through the lens of Dravyaguna not only validates ancient wisdom but also offers sustainable, holistic solutions to modern cognitive health challenges.

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