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Exploring Varnya Dravya of Kaiyedeva Nighantu: An Analytical Review

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Abstract
In Ayurveda, Varnya Dravyas are herbs that support the enhancement of natural complexion and skin health. These agents function by maintaining the balance of Bhrajaka Pitta, Rakta Dhatu, and Ojas, which are considered key to achieving a radiant appearance. This review critically examines the Varnya herbs described in Kaiyadeva Nighantu, a significant 15th-century Ayurvedic lexicon known for its structured pharmacognostic classification. A total of 27 Varnya herbs have been identified from the Aushadhi Varga, with an emphasis on their Rasa (taste), Veerya (potency), and traditional indications. The pharmacological properties of these herbs suggest their diverse therapeutic actions depending on skin type and Prakriti. Modern research validates their traditional use, demonstrating antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and skin-lightening activities in several formulations. This paper underscores the relevance of classical Ayurvedic wisdom in contemporary dermatological and cosmetic applications.

Keywords
Varnya Dravya, Kaiyadeva Nighantu, Ayurvedic dermatology, Complexion-enhancing herbs, Skin health

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I. Introduction

Beauty is often perceived as a blend of qualities that captivate the senses and uplift the mind. In Ayurveda, this concept is encapsulated by the term *Saundarya*, derived from the Sanskrit root *"ardrikaroti chittam iti"*, meaning that which calms and pleases the mind. Among the various attributes of beauty, *Varna* (the natural tone and texture of the skin) is considered a vital indicator of both inner health and external appearance. Ayurveda regards *Varna* not merely as skin color but as a reflection of the balance of bodily tissues (*dhatus*), mental well-being, and physiological harmony. [1]

The process of restoring and enhancing one's natural complexion is referred to as *Varnya karma*. Classical texts like *Kaiyedeva Nighantu* enumerate numerous *Varnya dravyas*, or complexion-enhancing herbs, that act as both *Antar Parimarjana* (internally) and *Bahya Parimarjana* (externally). These botanicals influence *Bhrajaka Pitta*, *Rakta dhatu*, and *Ojas*, all of which contribute to radiant skin. In an era dominated by synthetic cosmetics, there is a growing need to revisit and evaluate these time-tested herbal agents. This review explores the *Varnya dravyas* mentioned in *Kaiyedeva Nighantu*, aiming to assess their therapeutic relevance in maintaining and enhancing skin health based on both classical descriptions and contemporary research.

Overview of *Kaiyadeva Nighantu*

Kaiyadeva Nighantu, also known as *Pathyapathya Vibodhaka*, is a distinguished Ayurvedic lexicon authored by Acharya Kaiyadeva in the 15th century CE. This classical text belongs to the Nighantu period of Ayurvedic literature, a time when systematic compilations of medicinal substances were prioritized. Noted for its clarity and simplicity, *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* addresses ambiguities related to synonyms and classifications that existed in earlier texts. The work is structured into eight thematic sections called *Vargas*: *Aushadhi, Dhatu, Dhanya, Drava, Kritanna, Mamsa, Vihara, and Mishraka* collectively encompassing plant-based, mineral, dietary, and lifestyle-related substances. Among these, the *Aushadhi Varga* alone includes descriptions of over 500 medicinal plants. The lexicon offers detailed insights into the properties, uses, and therapeutic roles of these substances. Unlike earlier *Samhitas*, which only briefly mentioned herbal medicines, *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* provides a more elaborate pharmaco-botanical understanding. Its contribution to Ayurvedic pharmacopeia lies not only in documenting therapeutics but also in categorizing substances according to their compatibility (*Pathya-Apathya*), thus making it a comprehensive resource for both preventive and curative aspects of Ayurveda. [2]

II. Materials and Methods

This study is based on a conceptual and literary review approach. The following primary and secondary sources were utilized for data collection and analysis:

1. *Kaiyedeva Nighantu*, with specific focus on the *Varnya Dravyas*
2. Authoritative texts on modern pharmacology
3. Peer-reviewed research articles, online academic databases, and relevant web-based resources from the field of health sciences

Methodology

A literary analysis was conducted to explore the *Varnya* properties of medicinal plants as described in classical Ayurvedic texts, with special reference to *Kaiyadeva Nighantu*. This review focuses on the textual insights related to *Varnya Dravyas* presented in *Kaiyadeva Nighantu*, a respected Ayurvedic compilation authored by Acharya Kaiyadeva. The edition used for this study was critically edited by Dr. Guru Prasad Sharma and published by Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi. The text serves as a valuable source for understanding the traditional Ayurvedic approach to skin health and beauty through herbal therapeutics.

Observations

The total number of *Varnya Dravyas* identified in the *Aushadhi Varga* and noted for their complexion-enhancing properties is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Complexion Enhancing Drugs and their properties mentioned in *Aushadhi Varga* [2]

Sr.no	Name	Latin name	*Rasa-Virya-Vipaka*	Indication
1.	*Yashtimadhu*	*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.	*Madhura-Shita*	*Shukravardhana, Keshya, Vrana, Sotha, Visha, Chardi*
2.	*Vata*	*Ficus bengalensis* Linn.	*Kashaya-Shita*	*Yoniroga, Varnya, Vrana, Visarpa*
3.	*Ashwathha*	*Ficus religiosa* Linn.	*Kashaya-Shita*	*Raktavikara, Varnya, Yoniroga*
4.	*Jyotishmati*	*Celastrus paniculatus* Willd.	*Kashya Ushna-*	*Medhya, Netra, Vrana, Visharpa, Kandu*
5.	*Gunja*	*Abrus precatorius Linn.*	*Kashaya-Ushna*	*Indralupta, Rakshas, Graha, Visha, Kandu, Kustha*
6.	*Bhurja*	*Betula utilis* D Don.	*Kashaya*	*Meda, Bhutagraha, Rakshas, Karnaroga*
7.	*Sarja*	*Vateria indica* Linn.	*Kashaya*	*Sweda, Mada, Krimi, Vardhma*
8.	*Haridru*	*Adina cordifolia* Benth & Hook.	*Kashaya-Ushna-Katu*	*Kaphanashaka, Varnya, Vranasodhaka*
9.	*Kumkuma*	*Crocus sativus* Linn.	*Katu*	*Vranavishodhana, Shiroroga, Vamana, Hikka, Krumi,Tridosha*
10.	*Haridra*	*Cucuma longa* Linn.	*Tikta-Ushna*	*Pandu, Vrana, Apachi Etc*
11.	*Lasuna*	*Allium sativum* Linn.	*Madhura-Ushna- Katu*	*Kaphavatanashaka, Ruchikaraka, Hikka, Kasa, Shwasa, Jwara, Kustha, Prameha, Amapinasa Etc*
12.	*Palandu*	*Allium cepa* Linn.	*Madhura-Kinchit Ushna-Madhura*	*Vatahara*
13.	*Shweta Khadira*	*Acacia suma* Kurz.	*Tikta-Shita*	*Varnya, Mukharoga, Raktavikara*
14.	*Chandan*	*Santalum album* Linn.	*Madhura-Shita*	*Trushna, Daha, Raktapitta, Klama, Shosha,*
15.	*Kankustha*	-	*Katu-Ushna*	*Sothga, Udara, Anaha, Gulma, Adhmana*
16.	*Jatipatri*	*Myristica fragrans* Houtt	*Katu-Ushna*	*Kapha, Kasa, Vamana, Shwasa, Trushna, Krumiroga, Visha*
17.	*Trijata (Ela,twaka,tamal-*	*Ela- Elettarua cardamom* Maton. *Twaka-*	*Tikshna, Ushna*	*Deepana, Ruchikar, varnya, vishaghna*

	patra.) *Chaturjatak* *(Ela,twaka,tamal- patra. Nagakesara)*	*Cinnamomum cassia* Blume *Tamal patra-Cinnamomum tamala* Nees & Eberm. *Nagakesara-Mesua ferrea* Linn		
18.	*Prapondarika*	*Saussurea obvallata* (DC.) Edgew	*Madhura-Shita-Madhura*	*Shukrajanana, Varnya, Kapharakta Vikara*
19.	*Parpati*		*Kashaya-Shita*	*Raktavikara, Kandu, Kotha, Visha, Vrana*
20.	*Laksha*	-	*Tikta*	*Kustha, Jwara, Vrana, Urahkshata, Visarpa, Bhagna, Kasa, Visha*
21.	*Kamala*	*Nelumbium speciosum* willd.	*Tikta-Shita*	*Varnya, Raktapitta, Visphota, Daha, Trishna*
22.	*Taruni*	*Rosa alba* Linn.	*Katu-Shita*	*Dipana, Hridya, Varnya*
23.	*Shankhpushpi*	*Convolvulus pluricaulis* Chois.	*Katu-Ushna*	*Apasmara, Lutavisha, Alakshmi, Bhutabadha, Kustha, Krimi*
24.	*Ashoka*	*Saraca Ashoka* Linn.	*Kashaya-Shita*	*Apachi, Trishna, Daha, Krimi, Sosha, Visha*
25.	*Vridhhadaru*	*Argyrcia speciosa* Sweet.	*Katu-Ushna*	*Dipana, Sopha, Aamvata, Vatarakta, Prameha*
26.	*Vidari*	*Pueraria tuberosa* DC.	*Madhura-Sheeta*	*Mutarala, Swarya, varnya, stanya , Balya, Jeevaniya, Rasayani, Vrishya,*
27.	*Varahi*	*Dioscorea bulbifera* Linn.	*Madhura-Shita-Katu*	*Kustha, Prameha, Krimi, Rasayana*

III. Discussion

The textual analysis of *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* reveals a diverse pharmacological spectrum among the 27 identified *Varnya Dravyas*, which are known for their *Varnya (*complexion-enhancing) action. An analysis of these herbs based on Ayurvedic pharmacological principles, particularly *Rasa* and *Veerya*, reveals consistent patterns that help elucidate their role in promoting dermatological health.

1. Distribution by Rasa (Taste)

The most predominant *Rasa* among the listed *Varnya Dravyas* is *Kashaya* (astringent), found in 10 drugs (e.g., *Laksha, Parpati, Ashoka, Vata, Pippala*, *Jyotishmati*, *Gunja*). Drugs with a predominant *Kashaya Rasa* contribute to enhancing complexion through their *kleda-vishoshana* (moisture-absorbing) action, which facilitates *rakta shodhana* (purification of the blood) and ultimately leads to *varnaprasadana* (improvement in skin tone and clarity).

Madhura (sweet) taste appears in 8 herbs (*e.g.*, *Yashimadhu, Prapaundrika, Vidarigandha, Kamala*), which support complexion enhancement by nourishing and strengthening vital tissues such as *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Majja*, and *Shukra Dhatus*. They also help in augmenting *Ojas*, which collectively contribute to promoting radiance and clarity of the skin

Tikta (bitter) *rasa* is present in 5 drugs (*e.g.*, *Haridra, Shweta Khadir, Kamal etc*), which may contribute to their cleansing and Pitta-pacifying effects.

Katu (pungent) is noted in 8 drugs (*e.g.*, *Kumkum, Nagkesara, Jyotishmati*), which activates *Bhrajaka Pitta*, the sub-type of *Pitta Dosha* responsible for skin metabolism and pigmentation.

Some herbs exhibit multiple *Rasas*, further broadening their functional application. For instance, *Varahi* possesses *Madhura*, *Shita*, and *Katu* properties, indicating its *Rasayana* (rejuvenative) and *Varnya* potential.

2. Distribution by Veerya (Potency)

Shita Veerya (cooling potency**)** dominates the group, found in 13 herbs (*e.g.*, *Vata, Chandana, Kamala*). This supports their Pitta-pacifying nature, which is essential in maintaining skin clarity and reducing inflammation-related discoloration.

*Ushna Veerya (*heating potency) is identified in 11 drugs (*e.g.*, *Rasona, Nagakesar, Haridra etc*), stimulate *Bhrajaka Pitta* and enhance the function of *Rakta Dhatu*. Through this mechanism, they contribute to skin nourishment and support the complexion-enhancing effects characteristic of *Varnya Dravyas*.
Varnya karma is influenced by *Udana Vayu* and is supported by *Madhura rasatmaka* (*vatashamaka*) *dravyas* in *vata or vata-pitta prakriti* or dry skin conditions and by *Kashaya rasa dravyas* in *kapha-pitta* or oily skin conditions. Selection of *varnya dravyas* depends on skin type *ruksha twaka* benefits from *ghrita, taila, or navaneeta*, while oily skin requires *kashaya, tikta,* and *katu rasa* herbs like *Khadira* and *Panchavalkala* for *kleda shoshana* and *shodhana*. In cases of *rasa-rakta dhatwagnimandya* or dull complexion, *tikshna* and *ushna dravyas* stimulate *Bhrajaka Pitta* and enhance *Rakta dhatu*.

Evaluation through Modern Researches

1. A topical cream containing 3% *Crocus sativus* extract significantly reduced skin melanin (−24.04%) and erythema (−13.57%) levels in human volunteers over 8 weeks. The extract also showed strong antioxidant activity (81% DPPH scavenging), supporting its skin-brightening and anti-inflammatory effects. [3]
2. Computational analysis of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* phytoconstituents revealed strong antioxidant and dermatocosmetic potential, particularly from glucoliquiritin apioside and glycyrrhizin, which showed stable binding to skin-related molecular targets. These compounds may help improve skin texture and reduce inflammation and signs of aging. [4]
3. *Ficus religiosa* bark, leaf, and aerial root extracts significantly enhanced wound healing and showed strong anti-aging effects by modulating MMP-1 and PCOLCE gene expression. All extracts also exhibited astringent activity, indicating potential for cosmetic skin-tightening applications. [5]
4. *Curcuma longa* extract showed mild inhibition of tyrosinase activity and moderate cytotoxicity against melanoma B16F10 cells, with curcumin itself being highly toxic to cancer cells. These findings suggest potential antimelanogenic and anticancer applications, warranting further investigation. [6]
5. Santalol, the key compound in *Santalum album*, demonstrated significant antioxidant and genoprotective effects by reducing oxidative damage and DNA fragmentation in human skin fibroblast cells exposed to H_2O_2. These findings support its potential role in protecting skin from oxidative stress and aging-related damage. [7]

IV. Conclusion

The review of *Varnya Dravyas* from *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* highlights the Ayurvedic approach to skin health, emphasizing the importance of individualized treatment based on *Prakriti* and other physiological and environmental factors. The action of *Varnya karma* is not uniform; it varies according to *Prakriti (*one's constitution), *Saratva* (tissue strength), and several other factors such as *Dushya* (vitiated tissues), *Desha* (geographical region), *Bala* (strength), *Kala* (season), *Agni* (digestive capacity), *Vaya* (age), *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), *Satva* (mental strength), *Satmya* (habitual suitability), and *Avastha* (stage of disease or health). Recognizing this, classical Acharyas have recommended a wide range of herbs for *Varnya karma*, tailoring their selection to suit these variables. This individualized and holistic perspective, supported by modern pharmacological findings, reinforces the potential of Ayurvedic herbs in promoting healthy, radiant skin in a safe and sustainable manner.

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