



OJA: THE CONCEPT OF VYADHISHAMATVA (IMMUNITY) IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of immunity in *Ayurveda* is a captivating and many faceted subjects. It is interesting to observe that the ancient *Ayurvedic* texts show a vivid description of the foundations of immunology thousands of years ago in the past. *Ayurveda* describes the defence function in a holistic manner under the terms *Vyadhikshamatva* and *Oja*. *Vyadhikshamatva* i.e. Immunity as it is known in *Ayurveda* literally means resistance against disease. *Oja* is the essence of *dhatu*, which gives strength to the body and takes care of well being of body. It is difficult to define *ojas* as per modern methodology. This article however attempts to throw light on the concept of immunity vis-a-vis *Vyadhikshamatva*.

KEYWORDS: *Vyadhikshamatva*, *Oja*, Immunity, *Bala*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the holistic system of medicine of its kind, was primarily designed to promote good health, based on personal and social background and secondarily to cure the ailments of the diseased ones. *Ayurveda* is a highly evolved system of medicine resting upon proven theories and well documented clinical concepts. The concepts related to health and diseases are discussed with detail in nearly all classical texts of *ayurveda*. These concepts include knowledge of aetiology, symptomology, therapeutics, various measures to maintain healthy status and reasons behind falling sick. The concept of immunity in *Ayurveda* is a fascinating and vast subject. The body's resistance is of tremendous importance in daily welfare of living beings. There is a concept of immunity explained in ancient *vedic* literatures: *Manusmriti*, *Mahabharata* and *Panchtantra* called as "*Beej Bhumi Theory*". It states that our body is like land and infections are like seeds. If the body is filled with *ama*(toxins) and lacking in *ojas*(immunity), the infection will find it to be fertile ground for spreading, just as land that is fertile will sprout many seeds. Thus, immunity acts as resistance to *rogas*.

Aim: *Ayurvedic* texts describe the factor of immunity in terms of *Vyadhikshamatva*. *Vyadhikshamatva* literally means resistance (*kshamatva*) against disease (*vyadhi*) which is considered as the natural or acquired biological defense of an individual against disease. This power is indication of the presence of a determinant factor of immunity called as *Oja*.

Definition of OJA:- *Oja* is a Sanskrit word which stands for "Vigour". It is the ultimate saturated part from all *dhatu* and determinant of our strength, vigour and vitality and thus for our immune state.

Acharya Sushruta describes *Oja* as *paarmteja* of the *saptadhatu* and as the *bala* or biological strength of individual. The presence of *Oja* in the body is relevant as like *Ghee* present in milk itself.

Formation of OJA:- The formation of *Oja* is best ever explained by ancient scholars. Just as thousands of honey bees collect nectar from each and every flower into their hives to form essence part honey, similarly *oja* is the nectar or essence cumulatively collected by metabolism of various physiological processes occurring at *dhatu* level in the body. In the intra-uterine period, *ojas* is present in *shukra* and *shonita* in the form of *sara*³. After the formation of *garbha* by combination of sperm and ova along with soul, *oja* is present in the form of *Garbha sara* in *Kalala* stage.

According to some scholars, *ojas* is formed after digestion of *rasa dhatu* and before formation of *rakta dhatu* in *saumya* form.

Characteristics of OJA

Acharya Charaka has explained following characteristics of *oja*-

Colour: White, Red or Yellow.

Appearance: Resembles to *Ghrta*.

Taste: Like *Madhu*.

Smell: Like *Laja*.

Charaka ^[5]	Sushruta ^[6]	Ashtang hridaya ^[7]
Guru	Somatmaka	Snigdha
Shita	Shukla	Somatmaka
Mridu	Sara	Ishat lohita Pitakam
Shlakshna	Vivikta	
Bahal	Mrutsna	
Madhur	Pranayana-	
Sthira	Uttamam	
Prasanna		
Pichhila		
Snigdha		

Types

Oja is of two types-*Para oja* and *Apara oja*. *Para oja* is said to be located in the heart and its loss leads to death. *Apara oja* is distributed throughout the body. *Para oja* is said to be of 8 drops in body and *apara oja* is about *Ardhanjali pramana*.

Immunity: The word immunity means the state of protection from infectious disease. The immune system evolved as defense system to protect animals from invading microorganisms and malignant disorders. Immunology is a branch of biomedical science that covers the study of all aspects of the immune response in all organisms. The study of the molecular and cellular components that comprise the immune system, including their function and interaction, is the central science of immunology. Ayurvedic system of medicine not only deals with treating the diseases but also aims to prevention of the disease. *Vyadhikshamatva* (Immunity) is described in Ayurveda and this concept is considered equivalent to immunity.

DISCUSSION

Immunology has its roots also in Ayurveda science which is referred through *Oja* or *Vyadhikshmatva*. *Vyadhikshmatva* in an individual is an attribute of his inherent vital immune strength. The so designed defensive mechanism is the basis of *ayurvedic* theory of *Svabhavoparamavada*. *Vyadhikshmatva* i.e. resistance to diseases or immunity against diseases is of two kinds i.e. one which attenuate the manifested disease (*Vyadhibalavirodhitvam*) and other which prevents the manifestation of disease (*Vyadhiutpadakapratibandhaktava*)^[9] The *oja bala*, however, has been categorised into three types which are *Sahaja Bala* (Primary natural bio strength and immunity), *Kalaja Bala* (Acquired immunity through environmental factors such as age, climate etc), *Yuktikrita Bala* (Artificially induced acquired bio strength and immunity).

Innate or natural or non-specific immunity is well done by providing different barriers to the entry of foreign agents into our body. Acquired or adaptive or specific immunity having components which adapt themselves to

each new disease encountered and are able to generate pathogen specific immunity. Thus, these both components can be correlated to *Vyadhikshmatva* Nonspecific immunity which is provided through several physical, chemical and cellular approaches. As it is the natural resistance with which a person is born, so it can be correlated to *sahaja bala* which is also an inherent characteristic property of an individual present since birth. On the other hand, acquired immunity, which can be natural and artificial, depends on the fact that whether immunity is induced in the host or passively transferred through an immune host. Passive immunity which is acquired through transfer of antibodies or activated T-cells from immune host can be correlated with *Kalaja bala* which is dependent on season and age. Also, acquired strength which is dependent on healthy practices related to diet, activities etc. can be related to *Yuktikrita bala*.

CONCLUSION

Thus, in *ayurveda*, the superior vital essence of all bodily tissues is called 'OJAS'. It is responsible for good health, better immunity, longevity and thus acts as defence of human body against diseases and infirmity. *Vyadhikshamatva*, *Bala*, *Prakriti*, *Kapha*, these types of words are used as a synonym of *Ojas*. As *Oja* is the resistance to diseases, thus it can be correlated to the concept of immunity. The status of *oja* in body is important and thus one cannot continue without *Oja*.

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