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Review on concept of *Ojas* in Ayurveda with reference to Immunology

Patil S.¹, A. S. Baghel²

1. PhD Scholar, Department of Basic Principles, Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA), Jamnagar, Gujarat
2. Professor & HOD, Department of Basic Principles, Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA), Jamnagar, Gujarat

Abstract: For any medical science, even though cure of an illness matters much more but prevention is always better than cure. Ayurveda the science of life has given great emphasis on the prevention of diseases. For this many concepts like *Din-charya* (daily regimens), *Ritu-charya* (seasonal regimens) have been described in Ayurveda classics which helps in the maintenance of healthy status by preventing diseases. Concept of *Ojas* in Ayurveda is such a concept which helps body to fight the disease causing factors thus preventing manifestation of diseases (pathogenesis). *Ojas* is considered as quintessence of all the *Dhatus* (body components) and represents the *Bala* (strength) of all *Dhatus*. Thus in Ayurveda *Ojas* is also known as *Bala* (strength) because it provides strength to the body in terms of physical, mental and immunological resistance against the diseases. The concept of immunology as described by ancient Ayurveda scholars is termed as '*Vyadhikshamatwa*' or '*Ojabala*' of an individual. The present review explores some more information about the concept of *Ojas* and its basics.

Keywords: Bala, Immunity, Ojas, Vyadhikshamatwa

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Sunny C. Patil,

Department of Basic Principles, Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA), Jamnagar, Gujarat, India

E-mail – sunnypatil125@gmail.com (contact no. 919664366756)



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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the oldest healing science has its roots in ancient Vedic culture. Ayurveda places great emphasis on prevention of diseases and encourages the maintenance of health through close attention to balance in one's life, right thinking, diet, lifestyle and the use of herbs. Knowledge of Ayurveda principles enables one to understand how to create this balance of body, mind and consciousness according to one's own individual constitution and how to make lifestyle changes to bring about and maintain this balance. *Vyadhikshamatwa* (immunity) is such a principle described in Ayurveda which plays an important role in prevention of diseases. The term '*Vyadhikshamatwa*' is composed of two words viz. *Vyadhi* and *Kshamatwa*. The meaning of the term '*Vyadhi*' is to harm, to injure, to damage or to hurt. The term '*Kshamatwa*' means to suppress or to keep quite or to resist. So, the term '*Vyadhikshamatwa*' means the power of resistance to the diseases. Concept of *Vyadhikshamatwa* was first defined by *Acharya Chakrapani*, the distinguished commentator of *Charaka Samhita*, in a very scientific manner in terms of *Vyadhibalavirodhitwam*- capacity of the body to fight against the manifested diseases (natural immunity) and *Vyadhiutpadpratibandhkatwam*- capacity of the body to not allow manifestation of diseases or pathogenesis.¹ Thus *Vyadhikshamatwa* denotes the resistance power of the body or defence of body against occurrence of any diseases. After analysing the classical texts of Ayurveda there seems a very close relation between *Vyadhikshamatwa* and the concept of *Ojas*.

Generally, the concept of *Ojas* is connected with the concepts of *Bala* (strength) and *Vyadhikshamatwa* (defence capacity or immunity).^{2,3} Etymologically, the word *Ojas* is derived from the Sanskrit root '*ubja*' and '*asun*' suffix which means 'strength'. *Ojas* is defined as the final and excellent essence of *Saptadhatus* beginning with *Rasa* and ending with *Shukradhatu*. *Ojas* is the purest, finest essence formed from all the seven *Dhatus* (body components). *Ojas* is considered as the resistance to decay and degeneration of the body and immunity against diseases. Considering these aspects, an attempt has been made in present review to explore some more information about the concept of *Ojas* and its basics in Ayurveda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this review, literary materials had been compiled, screened, rearranged as per need of the topic and critically analysed from Ayurveda texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Samgraha*, *Ashtanga Hridaya* and also from the commentaries of these texts. Various published research articles related to Ayurveda, immunology, concept of *Ojas*, *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) therapy, *Vyadhikshamatwa* have also been reviewed for the present work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND DISCUSSION

Ojas or *Oja* literally means vitality, vigour, luster, power, bodily strength, energy.⁴ *Ojas* is the essence of all seven *Dhatus*.⁵ *Ayurveda* scholars recognized *Ojas* as the active and potent principle of the body that is responsible for the strength, vigour, and vitality of an individual.⁶ In Ayurveda literature *Bala*, *Prakriti* and *Shleshma*- these terms are used as synonyms for *Ojas*. *Charaka*

has narrated that the *Shleshma* in its *Prakrita Avastha* (normal state) promotes strength, lubrication, virility, immunity, resistance and stability in the form of *Ojas*.⁷ According to *Sushruta*, *Ojas* is the fine essence of all the *Dhatus* and the superfine essence of *Shukradhatu* which is responsible for biological strength, vitality and immunity in the body that makes a person physically active.⁸ As narrated by *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* in the body is situated in heart and is white, yellowish and reddish in colour or it may be of colour of *Ghritha*. It tastes like honey and smells like fried paddy.⁹ *Charaka* has described *Ojas* also as one of the *Pranayatanas* which means if *Ojas* is destroyed, the human life will also perish.¹⁰ Narrating the importance and purity of *Ojas*, *Acharyas* have cited different examples in ancient texts of Ayurveda. *Acharya Dalhana*, the distinguished commentator of *Sushruta Samhita* says, as *Ghritha* is present in a dormant form in milk and can be obtained after proper processing just like that *Ojas* is present in every tissue of the body in dormant form and is manifested as supreme quality after its proper metabolism.¹¹ *Acharya Charaka* says as the nectar is formed from flowers, *Ojas* is formed from all body components.¹² From the above description, it is clear that *Ojas* is formed as a purest secondary component after the metabolism of primary body components.¹³

Formation of Ojas

Various references can be seen in ancient texts of Ayurveda which depict the formation of *Ojas* in human body. *Acharya Chakrapani* explains that *Ojas (Para Ojas)* is present in dormant form in *Shukra* (sperms) and *Shonita* (ovum) of parents.¹⁴ After conception, it is

manifested as the first body component in intra-uterine life.¹⁵ It is termed as *Garbhasara* (basic constituent of embryo) and the embryo is nourished from this essence component.¹⁶ After birth, *Ojas (Apara Ojas)* is formed as essence during the metabolism of each *Dhatu*. It is the unctuous component of each *Dhatu* having its purest form and supreme quality.⁸ There are certain controversies regarding the actual entity 'Ojas' as some ancient scholars had termed *Ojas* to different entities which are altogether different from each other. *Vridhha Vagbhata* the author of *Ashtanga Samgraha* opines that *Ojas* is the *Sara* (essence) of *Shukradhatu*¹⁷ while *Acharya Sharangadhara* considers it as an *Upadhatu* (metabolic by-product) of *Shukradhatu*.¹⁸ *Vagbhata*, the author of *Ashtanga Hridaya* opines that it is a metabolic waste product of *Shukradhatu*.¹⁹ In spite of all these views, looking at the functions and properties of *Ojas* it became evident that *Ojas* is the purest and finest essence which is formed from all the seven *Dhatus* of the body which also is the view of *Acharya Sushruta*.

Types of Ojas

According to *Acharya Chakrapani*,²⁰ *Ojas* is of two types-

1. Para Ojas

As per *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* which resides in *Hridaya* (heart) is known as *Para Ojas*.²¹ It is the supreme type of *Ojas* which is most important for life. Its quantity is *Ashta Bindu* (eight drops). It is highly pure (without any waste ingredients). This *Para Ojas* is responsible for continuation of life; therefore whenever, there is any decrease or loss in the volume of *Para Ojas* it would give rise to grave diseases and instantaneous death of that

person. Therefore the protection of *Para Ojas* should be given utmost importance.

2. *Apara Ojas*

The *Ojas* which is present all over the body is known as *Apara Ojas*. As properties of *Apara Ojas* resembles with properties of *Shleshma*, it is also known as *Shlaishmika Ojas*. According to *Acharya Charaka*, the quantity of *Apara Ojas* in a healthy individual is *Ardhanjali* (half *anjali*- one *anjali* represents the volume equal to that of two hands joined in the form of a cup and is applicable only for that individual. *Anjali Pramana* is the unit of measurement of body fluids employed in ancient Ayurveda texts). Any diminution in the volume of *Apara Ojas* will result in the decrease in strength of the body and manifestation of various diseases.

Qualities of *Ojas*

Acharya Charaka has explained ten qualities of *Ojas* which are similar to those of *Kshira* (milk) and *Ghrita* (ghee) while totally opposite to *Madya* (alcohol) and *Visha* (poison). These qualities include-*Guru* (heaviness), *Sheeta* (cool) *Mridu* (soft), *Shlakshna* (smooth), *Bahalam* (capable of spreading), *Madhura* (sweet), *Sthira* (stable/firm), *Prasanna* (pleasant), *Picchila* (sticky) and *Snigdha* (unctuous).²²

Ojas and Bala

Acharya Charaka states that *Bala*, *Arogya*, *Ayu*, *Prana* and *Ojas* are dependent on *Agni*.²³ *Bala* is further classified into three types as follows-

1. *Sahaja bala*

Sahaja bala is the power of resistance to diseases which exists since birth, thus it is natural or inborn *Bala*. Some individuals are observed as physically strong since their birth whereas some are observed as physically

weak since birth. *Acharya Charaka* while explaining *Sahaja bala* has mentioned that the natural *Bala* of the *Sharira* and *Satva* i.e. body and mind is termed as *Sahaja bala*. *Sahaja bala* can be correlated with constitutional strength of an individual. Thus the natural strength does not require any extraneous factor for its creation and also for its growth. It is a known fact that there are some people who are by nature strong while some others are naturally weak. It can be said that this is due to the *Sahaja bala* which is acquired genetically.

2. *Kalaja bala*

Kalaja bala is the power of resistance to diseases which gets influenced by seasonal traits and age of the person. This *bala* is dissipated and lowest in *Adanakala*. *Adanakala* corresponds to *Shishira*, *Vasanta* and *Grishma ritus* which represent the hot seasons of the year. On the other hand this *bala* is conserved and its highest optimum level is witnessed in *Visargakala* corresponding to *Varsha*, *Sharada* and *Hemanta ritus* that represent the cool seasons of the year. As regards to age, the middle aged person will have the highest *Kalaja bala* while that in old age person will be low.

3. *Yuktikrita bala*

Yuktikrita bala refers to the induction of body resistance against diseases by resort to appropriate nutrition and *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) therapies. To achieve this kind of *Bala* proper diet along with suitable lifestyle modifications plays an important role.^{24,25}

Vitiation of *Ojas*

Acharya Sushruta has defined the causes of vitiation of *Ojas* which include- *Abhighata*

(any injury or trauma), *Kshaya* (malnourishment or impaired metabolism), *Kopa* (anger), *Shoka* (grief), *Dhyana* (excessive thinking), *Shrama* (vigorous physical work or exertion) and *Kshudha* (voracious appetite).²⁶ Due to these causes the *Vata* and *Pitta Doshas* are aggravated. This leads to the quantitative and qualitative depletion of *Ojas*. It is then easily displaced from its prime seat i.e. heart. General clinical features of vitiation of *Ojas* include- *Bhaya* (fearfulness or phobia), *Daurbalya* (weakness), *Vyathitendriyata* (fatigue especially at its sensory and motor organs), *Dushchhaya* (altered skin complexion), *Durmanah* (lack of self-confidence), *Ruksha-Kshamatah* (dry-roughness) and *Kshaya* (remarkable emaciation of body).²⁷

Acharya Sushruta have explained further three specific abnormalities or states of abnormalities in quantity and quality of *Ojas* which are as follows-

1. *Oja visramsas* (Displacement of *Ojas* from its own site)
2. *Oja vyapat* (Qualitative deterioration)
3. *Oja kshaya* (Depletion of quality and quantity)

These three states are increasingly severe and harmful leading to death. These three states are considered as three categories of immune disorders viz. *Oja-vyapat* as immune-aberrations and allergies; *Oja-visramsas* as a state of dislodged immunity and autoimmune disorders; and *Oja-kshaya* as a state of immunodeficiency. Some scholars opine that these states show features of immunity compromised state, immunity suppressed and immunity deficiency syndromes respectively.¹³ Signs and symptoms of each of these states are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Clinical features of vitiation of *Ojas*²⁸

Sr. No	<i>Oja visramsas</i>	<i>Oja vyapat</i>	<i>Oja kshaya</i>
1	<i>Sandhi vishlesha</i> (Feeling of looseness and displacement in joints or synapses)	<i>Stabdha-guru gatrata</i> (Feeling of stiffness and rigidity in body)	<i>Murchcha</i> (Fainting or unconsciousness)
2	<i>Gatra sadanam</i> (Fatigue)	<i>Vata shopha</i> (Unstable swelling due to vitiation of <i>Vata</i> dosha)	<i>Mamsa kshaya</i> (Emaciation and muscle wasting)
3	<i>Dosha chyavanam</i> (Migration of vitiated dosha to other sites)	<i>Varna bheda</i> (Abnormal change in normal complexion)	<i>Moha</i> (Confusion)
4	<i>Kriya sannirodha</i> (Impairment and blockage of all functions in body and mind)	<i>Glani</i> (Lassitude)	<i>Pralapa</i> (Delirium)
5	-	<i>Tandra</i> (Drowsiness)	<i>Marana</i> (Death)

6	-	Nidra (Excess sleepiness)	-
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Ojas and Vyadhikshamatwa

The concept of *Vyadhikshamatwa* in Ayurveda includes two aspects-*Vyadhibalavirodhitwam* and *Vyadhiutpadpratibandhkatwam* which have the meanings as capacity of the body to fight against the manifested diseases and capacity of the body to not allow manifestation of diseases respectively. *Ojas* is responsible for immunity against diseases and also for the resistance to decay and degeneration of the body by preventing progression of diseases. Thus both *Vyadhikshamatwa* and *Ojas* perform similar functions in the body. Also *Vyadhikshamatwa* is not of the same order in all the constitutions; it varies in individuals with regards to their physical, physiological, psychological, nutritional, environmental and individual factors. Similarly *Ojas* which is the factor responsible for prevention of diseases also differs from person to person depending on constitution, *Agni*, *Satva* and so on.

Importance of Ojas

Ojas is responsible for the vitality of the body throughout life. According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* is superior amongst all *Pranayatana* (sites of vitality). In gestational life, *Ojas* is responsible for the vitality of the foetus. It becomes unstable in the 8th month of gestation leading to uncertainty of labour. Therefore, its stability is of utmost importance for full-term birth. *Ojas* is important for maintaining the superior quality of *Dhatus*. Hence it is directly related to superior functions of all the tissues in the body. *Ojas* gives strength to body and mind.

Thus, physical and mental strength depends upon the quality and quantity of *Ojas*. *Ojas* is responsible for the maintenance of *Vyadhikshamatwa* (immunity). It is important for the preservation of health and prevention of diseases. It also plays a vital role in combating disease pathogens if the disease occurs. *Doshas* (regulatory functional factors of the body) are unable to carry functions without the presence of *Ojas*.¹³ *Ojas* is considered as the most refined result of digestion, metabolism, absorption and assimilation. *Ojas* is the sap of one's life energy which, when sufficient, is equated with immunity and, when deficient, results in weakness, fatigue and ultimately diseases. In a nutshell, *Ojas* is the sap of the entire physiology and an important factor for sustaining the healthy life of an individual.

CONCLUSION:

Even though the cure of an illness matters much more but prevention is always better than cure. To prevent the manifestation of diseases Ayurveda has described the concept of *Vyadhikshamatwa* which can be correlated with the modern immunology as both these concepts have similar roles in prevention of diseases. After analysing the various references quoted by different scholars in relation to *Vyadhikshamatwa* it became evident that there is an internal entity known as *Ojas* which is responsible for providing the resistive power against manifestation of diseases. *Ojas* is considered as vital essence of all the tissues which when sufficient in quantity, there is health whereas its deficiency leads to diseases. *Ojas* represents the *Bala* (strength) of all *Dhatus*, thus in

Ayurveda *Ojas* is also known as *Bala* because it provides strength to the body in terms of physical, mental and immunological resistance against the diseases.

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