



A CONCEPTUAL STUDY REGARDING IMMUNITY IN AYURVEDA

Dr. Anirudha Pathak^{*1}, Dr. Hemalkumar Dodiya² and Dr. Priyanka Verma³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Ayurveda Samhita and Siddhanta, R.N. Kapoor Memorial Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Panchkarma, Govt. Ayurvedic College, Panigate, Vadodara, Gujrat, India.

³Associate Professor, Department Of Rasashastra and Bhaisajya Kalpana, K.J. Institute of Ayurveda and Research, Savli, Vadodara, Gujrat, India.

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Anirudha Pathak**

Assistant Professor, Department of Ayurveda Samhita and Siddhanta, R.N. Kapoor Memorial Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.

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ABSTRACT

It has been estimated that about 6 lacks infant and young children die from RSV annually, and if bacterial co infections are included this number may approach 10 lacks deaths annually. More than 2 million deaths are estimated to result each year the world over as a consequence of diarrheal disease in children of under five years. This statistic shows that children are more vulnerable to infection because their immune system is less or under developed. Ayurveda is a vast storehouse of knowledge relevant to human health, disease, medicines and general health-care. However mutual incomprehensibility of the terms and concepts has been a major impediment in meaningful dialogue between modern scientific medicine and Ayurveda. Some recent concepts of molecular medicine, immunology etc. have been found to have striking similarities with certain concepts of Ayurveda. Therefore, it is being realized that it might be possible to develop a relationship between modern medicine and Ayurveda. Here a comprehensive review of the Ayurvedic classical texts is presented to understand the concept of the Vyadhikshamatva w.s.r. to immunity.

KEYWORDS: Immunity, Vyadhikshamatva, Ojas, Bala, Prakrita Kapha.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional Indian system of medicine and health-care, Ayurveda was developed painstakingly over many centuries through a vast amount of careful observations, experimentation and building up of a coherent theoretical paradigm. During its golden period of growth, this system influenced many other systems of medicine viz. Unani, Siddha, Chinese, Tibetan etc. due to its underlying rational approach. However, in the last few centuries it was gradually eclipsed by the phenomenal success and growth of scientific medicine. Ayurveda also stagnated due to its parochial inward looking approach and a lack of willingness to have dialogue with others, particularly with scientific medicine. Mutual distrust, bordering on hostility, between Ayurveda and modern scientific medicine impeded evolution of a mutually complementary interface amongst them. This has, on one hand, weakened Ayurveda and on the other hand, failed to transfer the benefits of Ayurveda to modern medicine. Only in recent times, Ayurveda has started gaining global recognition as a vast storehouse of important and useful medical knowledge. It is now being recognized that there is need to develop an effective interface between the two systems to complement the respective strengths of each other. However the most exasperating problem in developing meaningful dialogue between

Ayurveda and modern medicine is that they have basic difference in their perceptions as well as theoretical paradigms towards observing the reality – the healthy individual or the patient.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

The Ayurveda treats the patients as a whole. Its aetiology and pathogenesis of any disease condition is based on the Theory of Tridosha i.e. imbalance of the three body humors (Doshas, viz. Vata, Pitta and Kapha). The imbalance in Doshas and the consequent impact on the body components (Dooshyas, viz. Dhatus and Malas) are supposed to be responsible for disease. This in turn is supposed to influence the path physiology (Kriya) of the body. The properties of all the natural and synthetic substances are dealt in terms of their Rasa (taste), Guna (inherent property), Veerya (potency), Vipaka (manifest property) and Prabhava (influence on the body). Management of the patient may require multiplicity of interventions (Poorva karmas, Shodhan and Shaman etc.) but it may not always be possible to point out the exact component of intervention that results in the management of a specific causative factor.

The Ayurvedic concept of Tridoshas as the basis of disease seems to be similar to the concept of disease as

dissonance. The related Ayurvedic concepts of Atiyoga, Ayoga and Mithyayoga appear to be similar to the concepts of excessive interaction, absent interaction and erroneous interaction between receptor molecules and recognition molecules, currently being developed in molecular medicine. Similarly it is being recognized that the central concept of Rasayana Tantra, one of the eight major branches of Ayurveda that deals with the concepts and methodologies of drug designing is Vyadhikshamatva, which is similar to the concept of immunity. The basic principal of Rasayana-designing seems quite similar to current scientific concept of immunomodulation. These realizations indicate that concerted efforts may be helpful in bridging the gap between the concepts and practices of Ayurveda and modern scientific medicine. Such understanding shall go a long way towards integration of the beneficial aspects of the two systems and development of a truly holistic system of human health.

When etiological factors come into contact with the body they try to produce disease. At the same time the body tries to resist the disease. This power of the body, which prevents the development of diseases or resists a developed disease, is called Immunity (Vyadhikshamatva) in Ayurveda.^[1]

It is commonly observed that certain persons do not develop a disease even after coming into contact with the relevant etiological factors, while others become victims of the disease. The reason is that when the resistive power of the body is sufficiently strong it destroys the causes. A beautiful simile is used in Manusmriti to illustrate this fact: when a seed is sown in non-fertile soil it is destroyed, just as fire thrown in a fuel-less or air-less place subsides. In this case, the body is analogous to the land, and infection or "bugs" are like seeds. If the body is filled with Ama and lacking in Ojas, the infection will find it to be fertile ground for spreading, just as land that is fertile will sprout many seeds. If digestion is strong, and Ojas rather than Ama predominates in the body, then the seeds of infection will not be able to take hold, just as seeds will not take root in land that is infertile.

This strength is attainable from three sources-constitutional, temporal, and acquired. Constitutional strength is that gained from the time of the formation of the foetus onwards. Hence it is dependent on the healthiness of sperm and ovum and also on the excellence of time and place. The temporal strength is the one, which is gained from the favourable condition of time, such as youth, and favourable season. The acquired strength is one, which is achieved by the proper combination of diet, exercise, and other regimens.^[2]

Vyadhikshama Sharirani

Individuals having good resistance against diseases. On the other hand, individuals whose physical constitutions are of a type opposite to the eight types mentioned above are capable of resisting diseases. If a person's physical

and mental strength is of a high degree then naturally his immunity is also good and such persons can resist diseases very well.

Persons having proportionate bodies and musculature, compactness of the body, and healthy sense organs are not overcome by the onslaught of diseases. They can withstand hunger, thirst, and the heat of the sun, cold weather, and physical exertion. They can also digest and assimilate food properly.^[3]

Amongst the factors responsible for immunity, the greatest importance has been assigned to the healthy condition of the three tissues-blood, muscle, and bone. In our opinion the reasons for this are Ashtau Nindita (Eight undesirables).

There are eight types of undesirable constitutions: too tall, too short, too hairy, hairless, too white, too black, too corpulent and too emaciated.^[4] These constitutions are considered undesirable because they do not possess sufficient resistive power against diseases. The qualitative and quantitative proportions of the tissues are not proper in them. The measurement by finger (Anguli Parimana) of the body and the compactness of the tissues is also abnormal. In my opinion these eight types of undesirable constitutions are mainly related to some sort of hormonal dysfunction of the body.

Vyadhikshamatva

The most significant concepts developed in Ayurvedic literature. For the first time Acharya Charaka has introduced the term Vyadhishamatva in Ayurveda. It means all Doshas are neither of equal strength nor all the bodies capable of resisting disease equally.^[1] The definition of Vyadhikshamatva given by Chakrapani that Vyadhikshamatva denotes the resisting power of the body, which reacts to arrest the progress occurrence or reoccurrence of diseases. In this definition two significant terms Vyadhi-bala-virodhitva and Vyadhiutpada-Pratibandhakatva have been used in a particular order.^[1]

- **Vyadhi-bala-virodhitva** – reducing the strength of diseases those already manifested.
- **Vyadhiutpada-Pratibandhakatva** – prevention of those diseases to be yet manifested.

Bala

The Vyadhikshamatva mostly depends on Bala that opposes the disorder state of Doshas. Charaka describes that the maintenance of health depends entirely upon the Bala. This strength is attainable from three sources².

Sahaja Bala (Constitutional strength)

It comes from the parents and is inherited. Today in our modern society, many children have allergies to various foods and substances, and appear to be less strong than their parents. These inherited qualities come from their ancestors. According to Ayurveda's theory on genetics, genetic factors are defined at the cellular level. The

entire cell is referred to as Beeja; Beeja Bhaga is the nucleus, and Avayava are the chromosomes. If two parents' genetic makeup is healthy, the same health is seen in the children, whereas if their genetic makeup includes susceptibility to certain diseases, those diseases will be carried over into the next generation. The effect will be at the cellular, nuclear or chromosomal level. As this immunity is inherited, there is not much one can do except to avert the defects through various modalities of Ayurveda. Kalaja Bala (Temporal strength) According to Kalaja Bala, the time of day, season, and one's age are important factors for enhancing immunity: strength is greater in the early morning, spring, and youth than in evening, summer and old age. Kalaja Bala is inclusive of one's time, day of the week and place of birth and their impact, marked or subtle, on immunity. Certain places have stronger and healthier climatic and environmental conditions. For example, places with an abundance of water, ponds, cool and pleasant climatic conditions are Kapha-dominating areas and contribute to stronger immunity.

Yuktikrita Bala (Acquired strength)

It represents acquired immunity, in which disease can be defended against through Ayurveda. Ayurveda focuses on three plans for acquiring or enhancing immunity:

1. Rasayana is health promoting and rejuvenates the whole physiology, producing resistance against disease both physically and mentally.
2. Vyayama is exercise. Daily exercise of up to 50% of one's exertion capacity enhances digestion, strengthens tissue metabolism and promotes immunity.
3. Satmya is suitability. Adapting to wholesome substances and giving up unwholesome substances, to which the physiology has been addicted since birth, also promotes immunity.

Importance of Bala in Dasavidha Pariksha^[5]

The Bala is classified on the bases of working capacity of an individual and is of three types.

- 1) **Pravara/Uttam Bala:** Pravara Bala in which the person is capable of performing all types of physical and mental activity and never feels tired very easily.
- 2) **Madhyama Bala:** The Bala that come in between the Pravara and Avara Bala is known as Madhyama Bala.
- 3) **Avara/Heena Bala:** It is quite opposite to the Pravara Bala; those persons who possess such type of Bala become tired just after a slightest physical and mental activity.

Table 1: Showing Bala according to season (Kala).^[6]

Kala	Bala		
	Uttam	Madhyama	Heena
Adankala	Shishira	Vasant	Grishma
Visargakala	Hemant	Sharad	Varsha

Table 2: Showing Bala according to age (Vaya).^[7]

Kala	Bala		
	Uttam	Madhyama	Heena
Age	Balyavastha	Madhyavastha	Vridhavastha

Table 3: Showing diurnal variation and dominant of Dosha also affect the status of Bala.^[8]

Kala	Bala		
	Uttam	Madhyama	Heena
Dosha	Kapha	Pitta	Vata
Kala	Purvanha	Madhyahna	Aparahna

Table 4: Factors Decreasing the Bala.^[9]

Excessive physical exercise	Fasting
Anxiety	Intake of food in small quantity
Habitual intake of food having only one <i>Rasa</i>	Exposure to wind and sun
Excessive elimination of <i>Kapha, Shukra, Rakta</i>	Old age and fear

Thus physical as well as mental factors also affects the status of Bala. All the above factors are seem to be Vatavardhaka. This causes Dhatukshaya and ultimately Balakshaya.

OJAS

In Ayurveda, Ojas has been considered vital in the defence mechanism of the body. In conditions like diabetes mellitus and malnutrition, where loss of Ojas is a constant feature, people are known to be susceptible to various other interrelated and degenerative diseases or recurrent infections.

As a general rule, those who indulge in an irregular routine and eat unwholesome food tend to suffer ill health. Conversely, those who maintain a regular, healthy routine and take wholesome food generally maintain good health. However, it can be observed that some people can tolerate and overcome disease even after indulging in irregular routine and unwholesome food, managing to live healthily and happily. It can also be noted that though some people follow a regular routine and eat wholesome food, they are still susceptible to disease and suffer ill health. These are unanswered questions that are worthy of investigation and analysis.

Reviewing the textual knowledge of Ayurveda it has come to light that the food and behaviour that enhances Ojas also enhances the strength. This produces stability of body, growth of muscle tissue, interest in medical and physical pursuits, inclination, cleanliness of tone and complexion, correct inclination or cognizance of sense of organs and functions.

Function of Ojas

Ojas plays a vital role in all three stages of life i.e. Utpatti, Sthiti and Pralaya.^[10]

In Utpatti

- (a) In Fertilization
- (b) In growth and development of Garbha.
- (c) In viability or Non viability of Foetus.

(2) In Sthiti Avastha

Dosha, Dhatu and Mala are the fundamental units of the body, among there, Doshas are said to sustain the body in their normal state. but these Doshas even in their physiological state of equilibrium cannot sustain body which is devoid of Ojas.^[11]

It is also said that all the activities of the living body may it be Kayika, Vacika, Mansika take place smoothly if it is contained with Ojas.^[12] This it can be inferred that Ojas influence the function of physical, sensory, psychic and other higher faculties of the body and maintain the homeostatic condition of body.

The word Bala used as the synonym of Ojas is because of the cause and effect relationship existing between Ojas and Bala and hence the term Bala in any context represent the status of immunity.

Ojas Samya and Vaishmya

Increase of Ojas bestows Tusti (satisfaction), Pusti (good nourishment) and Baladaya (improvement of strength, physical, mental and capacity to resist disease). Hence Ojas Vriddhi improves health and prolongs life. So it is considered as ideal to health and to be cherished.^[13]

Ojas Kshaya on the other hand, weaken the body given room to many diseases to develop, shortens life span and even kills the person. Hence this is considered as a serious abnormality and should be prevented from taking place.

As per above details we may safely say that the secretions of endocrinal glands are Ojas. The secretion would be perfect only when the nutrition of the subsequent Dhatus is correct and our inclinations are creative and not luxurious. All glands are operated by pituitary gland and it controls all the glands. It has two major parts. If these function properly, then only human being lives otherwise he dies. On other hand Ojas is considered as the vital essence of all the tissues. It is also known as the vital reserve energy of the body, which depends on the good quality of the reproductive tissues. When Ojas is in good quality and quantity, the strength of the body and its immunity for fighting against the diseases is at its best.

The scripture-writers have believed in two types of Ojas. The first is Ashtabindu Ojas, which is the secretion of pituitary gland and is the chief Ojas. The other is found in half handful quantity and is called secondary Ojas. It flows everyday incessantly. These are the secretions of all glands under the control of pituitary. The blood dominated Ojas goes into digestion and Rasa-dominated, bright white Ojas goes into construction work. The joint

function of both is to protect the body and to conserve the power of life. Living being live till Ojas exists and dies when Ojas is destroyed.

Looking at this clear description we can say that balanced biological Tridosha forces, balanced Agni & state of hormones, excellence of all Dhatu elements and pleasant functioning of sense organs, mind and consciousness with the body's strength contribute to the immunity of the body by way of generating total strength of body (Kshetra Bala).

Therefore for any deficiency or alteration in the quantity and quality of Ojas of a particular Dhatu or Ojas in general which may lead to one or the other immuno compromised disorders or syndromes, which is clearly understood from the references where they have described Ojakshya or Ojonasha as one of the factor of aetiopathogenesis or as one of the main Dhatu disturbance or as complication in the disease like anemia (Pandu), tuberculosis (Rajyakshama), diabetes mellitus (Madhumeha), complicated fevers of brain (Abhinyasa Jvar), alcoholism (Madya Janya Madataya) etc. And also it is described as a condition with its own aetiopathology and stages viz. Ojovisramsya, Ojovypad and Ojakshaya.

Prakrita kapha

According to Acharya Charaka the Shleshma occurring in the body naturally is the strength of the body. That means the Kapha in its natural state promotes strength in the form of Ojas and when in morbid condition, it takes the form of excreta (Mala) and causes misery. So the excellence of the Prakrit Shleshma in the body signifies the excellence of Ojas and indicates a good body immunity.^[14]

In equilibrium state Kapha is considered as a Prakrit kapha and when its equilibrium is not maintained it becomes Vaikrita. In this condition Kapha has lost its natural Karma and Guna. So persons having in the state of Kapha Kshaya or Kapha Vriddhi gets easily suffered with the diseases due to decreased level of Bala or Vyadhikshamatva.

CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of 20th century, the serious limitations of reductionist-mechanistic approach began to be realized in various fields. Attempts began at synthesizing and integrating ideas and observations of different fields into a composite whole. Gradually, a shift from reductionist to holistic approach started influencing every field of knowledge. In the field of medicine, it was realized that human health and its management is a very complex problem. It can only be addressed by evolving a holistic paradigm of medicine and health-care. This realization resulted in reinvestigation of traditional systems of medicine, particularly Ayurveda. It is being increasingly realized now that Ayurveda fundamentally has a holistic approach to human health. As a result, serious attempts to develop interface between Ayurveda

and modern scientific medicine are being made. Further, some recent concepts of molecular medicine, immunology etc. have been found to have striking similarities with certain concepts of Ayurveda. Therefore, it is being realized that it might be possible to develop a dialogue between modern scientific medicine and Ayurveda. It might be possible to specify the Ayurvedic concepts of Dhātu or Mala in mutually acceptable and yet chemically well definable forms. It might also be possible to better comprehend Ayurvedic concepts like Doshas or Dooshyas along with Rasaa, Gunas, Veeryas, Vipakas and Prabhavas of Dravyas in physico-chemical terms. Here a comprehensive review of the Ayurvedic classical texts was presented to understand the concept of the Vyadhikshamatva w.s.r. to immunity. Bala, Oja, Prakrit Kapha etc. are compared with immunity.

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