

## THE CONCEPT OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA (IMMUNITY) IN AYURVEDA

**Vd. Ruchira S. Virkar<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Aanand V. Kalaskar<sup>2</sup> and Vd. Shivani R. Bhawarekar<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PG Scholar Rognidan Vikriti Vigyan Dept. Sumatibhai Shah Ayurved Mahavidyalaya,  
Hadapsar, Pune.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Rognidan Vikriti Vigyan Dept. Sumatibhai Shah Ayurved  
Mahavidyalaya Hadapsar, Pune.

<sup>3</sup>PG Scholar Rognidan Vikriti Vigyan Dept. Sumatibhai Shah Ayurved Mahavidyalaya  
Hadapsar, Pune.

Article Received on  
22 February 2022,

Revised on 14 March 2022,  
Accepted on 03 April 2022

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20225-23771

### **\*Corresponding Author**

**Vd. Ruchira S. Virkar**

PG Scholar Rognidan Vikriti  
Vigyan Dept. Sumatibhai  
Shah Ayurved  
Mahavidyalaya, Hadapsar,  
Pune.

### **ABSTRACT**

The covid-19 pandemic crisis has turned the world's attention to immune system, the body's defense force against disease. Ayurveda is an oldest science of life and health care in the world; it is interesting to know that in this ancient ayurvedic texts there are in detail explanations and descriptions about immunity. In Ayurveda the immunity is explained under the term Vyadhikshamatva. Ayurveda system of medicine not only deals with treating the disease but also aims for prevention and plays a larger emphasis on building strength of mind and body to cope with various infections. In Ayurveda, the superior vital essence of all bodily tissues is called as 'Ojas'. Acharya promoted the use of rasayana (Rejuvenation) to enhance

ojas and vyadhikshamatva (immunity). Rasayanas are health promoting and rejuvenating agents which by their empirical effects produce resistance against disease both physically and mentally. Ojas is responsible for good health, better immunity, longevity, intelligence and thought process. For this purpose, use of different types of ojas promoting herbs have been described in Ayurveda which can be immensely helpful in the management of immunodeficiency disorders. Similar to innate and acquired immunity, vyadhikshamatva concept is considered equivalent to immunity (bala or strength) classified as natural (sahaj), chronological (kalaj) and acquired (yuktikrita). The current article critically reviews the available literature to evaluate ancient concepts of vyadhikshamatva and immunity in the

recent era.

**KEYWORDS:** vyadhikshamatva, bala, immunity, Ayurveda.

## INTRODUCTION

The most important thing in relation to health and disease is immunity of the body. Immunity is defined as the capacity of the body to resist pathogenic agents. It is the ability of body to resist the entry of different types of foreign bodies like bacteria, virus, toxic substances etc. Immunity is of two types 1. Innate immunity 2. Acquired immunity. Innate immunity is the inborn capacity of the body to resist pathogens. Acquired immunity is the resistance developed in the body against any specific pathogens after an antigenic stimulus. So this type of immunity is also known as specific immunity.<sup>[1]</sup>

Our immune system is essential for our survival. Without an immune system our bodies would be open to attack from infections. It is our immune system that provides us protection against pathogens. Vyadhikshamatva is described in Ayurveda and this concept is considered equivalent to immunity. In Ayurveda innate immunity may be correlated to sahabala and acquired immunity may be correlated to kalaja and yuktikrita bala. Keen observation substantiates that human being has two different varieties of strengths. 1. The strength required for the growth of the body and to perform routine activities is called energy (Shakti) 2. The Strength required to protect the body against several disease is called resistance (Kshamatva).<sup>[2]</sup> In Ayurveda, Ojas has been described as vital defense mechanism of the body. Ojas is an essence of all dhatus and vyadhikshamatva depends on it. Some food substances are wholesome and suitable for the body as the body can transform those substances into its own (congruent) by virtue of jatisatmya, called hita substances (satmya). Substances which are always suitable and accustomed (to man) by birth like water, ghee, milk, porridge (boiled rice) etc are called hita substances while others which are always unsuitable and causes putrefaction and may be fatal such as fire, caustic alkali, poison etc. Also some others by combinations become similar to poison, are called Ahita substances (Asatmya).<sup>[3]</sup> The following three are the reasons for the ill effects being present in ahita substances 1. Natural inheritance feature 2. Physical or chemical combinations 3.

Refinement (samskara). Some other examples of dravyas 1. Incompatible combination and incongruent exposures (viruddhaaharavihara) 2. Vajrais told by Kashyapa which means incongruent substance which produces antigens due to improper digestion eg; insect,

creatures, etc. 3. Certain drugs (medicine). 4. Microorganisms. 5.

Psychological aversion. 6. The viruddhadravyase.g. equal quantities of honey and ghee. All these causes are responsible for disease production. Hence Vagbhata advised that all drugs in the practice of medicine should be used logically. Not only ahitadiets and medicines provoke the hostile reactions but the viruddhadeeds (vihar) also manifest such mishap e.g. sudden cold water bath after heat exhaustion is virudhha. Charaka defined Ayush(life) as combination of the body, sense organs, mind and soul. In other word, Ayurvedahas given much priority to live a healthy and joyful long life. Concepts related to health and diseases are discussed with detail in nearly all classical texts of Ayurveda. These concepts include knowledge of etiology, symptomology, therapeutics, and reasons behind falling sick and various measures to maintain health.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To review the Vyadhikshamatvaand immunity described in various AyurvedicSamhitas, textbooks, journals, articles and websites for better understanding.

## LITERARY REVIEW

### Concept of Vyadhikshamatva

In Sanskrit, the word 'Vyadhikshamatva'is made up of two words; Vyadhi(disease) and Kshamatva(suppress or overcome). According to Ayurveda, Vyadhiis condition which comes into existence as a consequence of non-equilibrium between Doshas (physiological factors i.e vata, pittaandkapha), Dhatus(tissues systems) and Malas (excretory products of body). These factors, in their normal status are responsible in maintaining the physical and psychological health. The other word, Kshamatvais derived from, or composed to suppress anger, to keep quite or to resist. Therefore Vyadhikshamatwameans the factor which limits the pathogenesis and opposes the strength of disease. ChakrapaniDatta, while commenting on CharakaSamhita, gave his opinion on the term Vyadhikshamatvaand explained the term in two divisions, viz (I) Vyadhi-balavirodhitam: It is the capacity to restrain or withstand the strength (severity) of the disease i.e. strength to resist the progress of disease. (II) Vyadhi-utpadakpratibandhakatva- The resisting power of the body competent enough to prevent the occurrence and re-occurrence of the disease. These sub-types form the resistance which is now a day known as Immunity.<sup>[4]</sup> There are nine factors mentioned in Ayurvedawhich promotes body towards incapability to resist the disease manifestation i.e. factors responsible for decreasing immunity.<sup>[5]</sup>

- 1) Ati-Sthoola(Excessively obese persons)
- 2) Ati-Krishna(Excessively emaciated person)
- 3) Anivishta-Mamsa(Individual having improper musculature)
- 4) Anivishta-Asthi(persons having defective bone tissues)
- 5) Anivista-Shonita(persons with defective blood)
- 6) Durbala(A weak person)
- 7) Asatmya-Aaharopachita(Those nourished with unwholesome food)
- 8) Alpa-Aaharopachita(Those taking diet in small quantity)
- 9) Alpa-Satva(Individuals with feeble mind)

When etiological factors come in contact with the body they try to produce disease. At the same time the body tries to resist the disease power of body, which prevents the development of disease or resist a disease which has occurred is called immunity (Vyadhikshamatva). Various factors which contribute towards immunity are balanced doshas, equilibrium of dhatus, normal agni, patency of srotasets<sup>[6]</sup> along with qualities of blood, tissues, intercellular fluids, lymph.<sup>[7]</sup> Immunity in Ayurveda can be understood by three terms that are Shleshma, Balaand Oja.

### **Shleshma**

Shleshmain normal state is balaand oja,shleshmain abnormal state is malaand papma.<sup>[8]</sup> Function of normal kaphawhich performs the factions like strength, protection, growth, resistance like that of oja.<sup>[9]</sup> Kaphabeing one of the three doshasin our body are said to be responsible for maintenance of homeostasis or equilibrium in the body. Much more than just immunity it includes even physical and mental strength. All mechanisms that help in reducing the vulnerability of an individual to all possible assaults.

### **Bala**

AcharyaSushrutstatesbalaas that which imparts integrity to the muscles, improves the voice and complexion and helps the person to perform his natural functions.<sup>[10]</sup> Three types of bala(vyadhikshamatva) in Ayurvedaare 1.Sahaj,2.Kalaj, 3. Yuktikrita.<sup>[11]</sup>

Sahajbala(innate) is the constitutional strength present since birth. It depends on the health of shukraand artava. According to Ayurvedaconcept of genetics, if both the parent's genetic makeup is healthy, then children too become healthy.<sup>[12]</sup> This concept indicates congenital abnormalities which occur due to abnormal changes at genes or chromosomal level.

Kalajbalais according to time, ritu(season) and age etc which are the factors responsible for enhancing immunity (strength). It is assumed to be greater in the early morning, spring and yuvaawasthathan in evening, summers and old age.<sup>[13]</sup>

Yuktikritabala(acquired) – Ayurvedafocuses on the following plans for acquiring bala or enhancing immunity.

- Proper and suitable ahara(nutritious diet)
- Performing exercise (cheshta) properly
- Using various beneficialyoga<sup>[14]</sup>(e.g. rasayanachikitsa)

Balavardhakabhava(factors which increase strength/immunity) as described by Acharya Charaka– birth in a place where people are naturally healthy or strong, birth in a family history without any immunodeficient disorders, birth at a time when people naturally gain strength (Visargakala), favourable time, excellence among qualities of bija(spermand ovum) and kshetra(uterus), excellence of diet (aharsampat), excellence of physique (sharirsampat), excellence of suitability (satmayasampat), all mental faculties are optimal (satvasampat), natural mechanism (swabhavsanssidha), young age, exercise and other physical activities.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Ojas

1. According to Charaka, (during embryogenesis) the ojaappeared foremost in the human body.<sup>[16]</sup>
2. The essence of saptadhatu(saptadhatumeans the seven bodily tissues from rasato shukradhatu) e.g. rasa(plasma and lymph), rakta(blood cells), mamsa(connective and muscular tissue), meda(body fats e.g. adipose tissue), asthi(bones), majja(bone marrow) and shukra (reproductive systems). is called Ojaand it is the seat for strength, hence called bala.<sup>[17]</sup>
3. In Ayurveda Ojashas been considered vital in the defence mechanism of the body. It resides in the heart (hridaya), but also circulates (vyapata) all over body and maintains healthy status of the person. If this is lost, life also is lost and if it is intact, life also continues.<sup>[18]</sup>
4. In conditions like madhumeha(diabetes mellitus) and shosha(malnutrition), where depleting of Ojas(infection fighting power) is a constant feature, people are known to be susceptible tovarious recurrent infections.

## Types

1. Paraojas: This is ashtabindu in quantity, if decreases then person will die.

2. Aparaojas: which is ardhanjaliojas, if decreases or vitiated manifests abnormalities. It is snigdha and somatmaka (mild and cool) in nature. Though predominantly white in color, has got some yellowish and whitish tinge. Ten great blood vessels connected to heart carry the Rasatmaka Ojas, upon which the whole life process itself is dependent.<sup>[19]</sup>

Substances, which have opposite qualities to those of bodily tissues (or dehadhatu pratyakbhutani), (when gain entry into the body) encounter the opposition by the dehadhatu (bodily tissues).<sup>[20]</sup> It points that immune system of person attacks any antigen, which has gained entry into the body.

### **Hita and Ahita Ahara<sup>[21]</sup>**

Some food substances are wholesome and suitable for the body as the body can inheritably transfer those substances into its own by virtue of Jatisatmya. These are called as Satmya or Hita substances. Water, ghee, milk and rice are few examples of general wholesome food as these are completely suitable for every human. On the other contrary some substance do not suit to the body and cause some adverse reaction.

These are known as Ahita or Asatmya substances. Fire-burns, alkalis-cauterize, toxin-kills are some of the examples of Ahita substance. There are three reasons seen for the ill-effects being present in Ahita substance i.e. natural inherent feature, physical or chemical combination and refinement. Hita, Ahita substance and Vyadhikshamatva Hita ahara is responsible to develop healthy Dhatus and final product of Dhatus i.e. Ojas. So increase in Ojas or Bal ultimately increase Vyadhikshamatva. On the other hand, Ahita substance if taken continuously it leads to improper nourishment of Dhatus which result in decreasing Ojas and Vyadhikshamatva.

### **Relation between Agni (food assimilation power of body) and Vyadhikshamatva<sup>[22]</sup>**

Acharya Charaka in the context of functions of Agni narrated that, Dehagni or Jatharagni (digestive power of stomach) is responsible for life, color (luster of the skin), strength, health, enthusiasm, plumpness, complexion, Ojas (energy), Tejas (gleam of the body), other varieties of Agni and Prana (vitality). Extinction of this Jatharagni leads to death. Its proper maintenance helps a person to live a long life and its impairment gives rise to diseases. Therefore Jatharagni is considered to be the root or the most important sustaining factor of living beings. In this way immunity is influenced by the power of Agni, digestive fire and our ability to digest, assimilate and absorb nutrients in human bodies. In a healthy, strong and immune body, invaders get neutralized or destroyed and expelled out of body. If

Agni is impaired by an imbalance within by the Tridoshaten metabolism will get affected, immune response and natural resistance will also be lowered.

### **Rasayana(Rejuvenation therapy) and Vyadhikshamatva<sup>[23]</sup>**

Rasayana means the way for attaining excellence in all body tissues through some special measures and medicines. Rasayanatherapy is one of eight major specialties of Ayurveda. The concepts of immunity and immunomodulation are extensively explored and used in Ayurveda, particularly in the form of Rasayanatherapy. According to Ayurveda, Rasayana helps in strengthening Oja, Bala and thus increases Vyadhikshamatva. Benefits of Rasayanatherapy Long life (good), memory, great intelligence, perfect health, youthfulness, bright complexion and color, bold voice and magnanimity, increased strength, of the body and sense organs, perfection in speech, sexual power and brilliance are all obtained from proper Rasayanatherapy.

Classification of Rasayana according to method of use are - 1) Kutipravesika rasayana(indoor regimen) and 2) Vatatapikarasayana(outdoor Regimen)

### **DISCUSSION**

Vyadhikshamatva means resistance to diseases or immunity against diseases is of two types i.e. the one which attenuate the manifested disease and other variety prevents the manifestation of diseases. Sleshma in normal state considered as Bala and Oja and function of normal Kapha like that of Ojas. Agni (food assimilation power of body) is important for proper digestion of diet. Proper nourishment of Dhatus will depend on wholesome and unwholesome food. Doshas are vitiated due to continuous taking unwholesome food ultimately affecting production of excellent essence of Dhatus i.e. Ojas. Final and excellent essence of Dhatus beginning with Rasato Shukrais Ojas and that Ojas is said to be Bala. The concept of Vyadhikshamatva is related with Kapha, Bala, Agni and Ojas. Ayurvedic Rasayanatherapy in light of the concepts of modern immunology, particularly the immunomodulation will be quite rewarding. Many research works on the Rasayana drugs are effective in improving immunity and prevent the disease as antibacterial and antifungal.

### **CONCLUSION**

Vyadhikshamatva is described in Ayurveda and this concept is considered equivalent to immunity. Our immune system is essential for our survival. Without an immune system our bodies would be open to attack from infections. It is our immune system that provides us



protection against pathogens. In Ayurveda, Ojashas been described as vital defense mechanism of the body. Ojasis final dhatuand vyadhikshamatvadepends on it. Vyadhikshamtvacan also be enhanced through balanced diet, proper daily regimen and rasayanatherapy.

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