Conceptual study of immunity and immunity enhancing drugs: Perspective of Ayurveda

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Abstract

Concept of origin of disease as well as immunity of body has been explored by every ancient scholar of Ayurveda. The theory of tridosha described in Ayurveda is found to be very scientific which states that both types of normal and abnormal bodily functions are dependent on this functional entity of body which is named as tridosha. Oja present in body is accepted as the immunity or disease resisting power of our body which counteracts the abnormal functioning of tridosha and plays major role in bringing about the normal physiology within the body. Status of oja depends upon the status of dhatus. The immune enhancing substances i.e. the ojo-vardhaka and the Rasayana dravyas makes the body tissues (dhatus) healthy by nourishing them and thus increase the oja (immun power) of the body. These ojo-vardhaka dravyas function by bringing the agni (digestive fire) in normal state. Immunity in the terms of Ayurveda is to fight with disease in any form and the drugs used to enhance the immunity, enhances some particular type of properties in the body through various ways. Selection of these substances, either food or drug, depends upon the prakriti i.e. nature of the human being, desha, kala etc. because their mode of action is in a number of ways like increasing agni, making channels (srotas) patent etc.

Keywords: Ayurveda, oja, immune power, immunity, tridosha, ojo-vardhaka dravyas

Introduction

Ayurveda has its own concept of theory regarding origin of disease as well as immunity of body. In Ayurveda there is a specific theory of Tridosha which states that normal and abnormal both types of functioning of body is dependent on the functional entity of body named as Tridosha. Tridosha are considered as Samvayikarana of all the diseases i.e. disease cannot be generated without vitiation of doshas. [1]. So, doshas are inherent cause of disease. Tridosha comprises of vata, pitta and kapha dosha. These doshas are present in whole body and get interacted with structural component of body named as dhatus. Dhatu are the structural component of body and are also responsible for various types of functions. Vitiation in the dhatus of the body results in the genesis of disease. Vitiation of dhatus occurs through vitiated doshas only. On the other hand, concept of immunity of body is much described in Ayurveda in the form of Oja of body. The Oja is the essence (Sara) of embryo or Fetus (Garbha) [2] and the essence of all the dhatus present in the body [3]. This Oja is responsible for disease resistance of body i.e. immunity [4]. The drugs or dravyas used to enhance immunity of body actually increase the Oja or Prakrita Shleshma in the body. In this article, the concept of Oja has been explored, its role in prevention of disease and mode of action of those drugs which enhances immunity according to Ayurveda.

Aims and objectives

Aim of this article is to elaborate the role of Oja regarding immunity and life in human body as well as to interpret the mode of action of Ojo-vardhakadravyas (immunity providing drugs) by collecting and interpreting the subject matters described in brihattrayi related to Oja and Ojo-vardhaka dravyas.

Material and method

This work is literary research work and for this, Caraka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridaya have been studied. From these literatures, the subject matter related to Oja and related dravyas have been collected, interpreted and represented in a more applicable format.
According to acharya Sushruta, best form of all the dhatus of the body or essence of all the dhatus is called oja and oja is also called bala (power) of the body [5]. Here bala (power) is the power to fight with disease [6]. Best form or essence of dhatu is oja. As ghrita (fat) is present all over milk in the form of essence, oja is also present in all the dhatus in the form of their essence and oja is the sneha of dhatus [7].

### Origin of Oja

According to acharya Caraka, oja is generated during origin of body [8]. Oja is present in the embryo as the garbhasara (essence of embryo) from the beginning of existence of body [9]. Oja is originated as sara (essence) of kala-rupa (semiliquid) rasa (fluid) of garbha (embryo), by fusion of shukra and shomita (sperm and ova) [10].

### Location of Oja in the body

It is located in heart [11, 12, 13]. It is also located in whole body like honey is present in fruits and flowers [14].

### Types of Oja

It is of two types, one is better one called para-oja present in heart and another one is apara-oja present in whole body [15].

### Characters of Oja

Oja is the sneha of sharira rasa (essence of nourishing fluid of body) and life resides in it [16]. It is bala (immune power) which prevents and diminishes diseases [17]. The type of oja present in heart is pure yellowish red in color [18]. Oja maintains the body and end of oja results in end of body [19]. The type of oja present in whole body i.e. apara-oja, possesses color of ghrita, taste of honey and smell of laja [20].

### Properties of Oja

It is nectar (soma), unctuous (snigdha), white (shukla), cool in potency (shita), steady (sthira), movable (sara), soft (mrida), mritisna, vivikta and best in pranayatana (sites of life in body) [21]. Oja is heavy (guru), cool (shita), soft (mrida), smooth (slakshma), spreadable (bahala), sweet (madhura), steady (sthira), essence (sara), slippery covering (picchila) and unctuous (snigdha) according to Acharya Caraka [22].

### Functions of Oja

Oja is one of the pranayatana therefore it bears life, body and power [23]. Acharya Sushruta has mentioned that bala is the synonym of oja and described the function of Bala [24]. It prevents diseases. Bala maintains healthy muscle, in all the movement of body, improves the voice, luster of skin and maintains the function of sensory and motor organs along with mana, buddhi, ahankara [25]. Acharya Caraka also stated that bala is prakriti-shleshma [26]. He classified this immune power or bala. According to acharya Vagbhata, whole life process is dependent on rasatmaka-oja [28]. According to acharya Cakrapani, oja performs following three functions [29].

- Vyadhi-kshamatvam (resistance power to subside the pathogenesis of disease)
- Vyadhitvakrodhitwam (resistance power to decrease the strength of disease)
- Vyadhi-utpadapratibandhatwam (resistance power to prevent the onset of disease)
- Types of Bala (immune power)-

According to Acharya Caraka it is of three types- Sahaja (innate), Kalaja (acquired) and Yukti-krita (artificial) [27].

### Mode of action of drugs related to Immunity

According to Acharya Caraka, consuming the food having excellent properties and having suitable properties to body will increase the Bala (immune power) [30]. Substances having opposite qualities to those of body tissues get opposition by the body tissues [31]. For subsiding any pathogenic condition, those substances are used which have opposite properties to the causative factors [12]. There is also another way in which processed substances are already given to oppose the causative factor [30]. Long life, good memory, intellect, healthy body and mind, young age, lustrous skin, fair color, good voice, healthy sensory and motor organs, clear and correct voice are obtained by human through the use of Rasayana dravyas [32]. Seven dhatus of body get healthy with the use of Rasayana dravyas [33].

### Discussion

Immunity word itself is a very broad term to explain. But in this paper it is tried to explain immunity, immunity enhancing drugs and their mode of action. Immunity simply means the power of body to resist the diseases in various ways. These may include resistance towards genesis of disease, power of fighting to limit the generated disease and power of body to destroy the diseased condition. In the view of modern medical science, there are various factors like skin, acid, macrophages, lymphoid organs, blood cells, antibodies etc. are responsible for immunity of body. There are different levels of immunity in which these factors take part, according to modern science. In the Ayurveda, the factors responsible for immunity are described in the form of properties like uncouthness, coolness, heaviness etc. i.e. whenever and wherever these properties are present in body, will result in immunity of body. These properties collectively called as Oja. In Human body the most abundant and important structural and functional component are seven Dhatus. All these Dhatus are made by ahara rasa through the action of agni and the essence of all these Dhatus is called as Oja i.e. Oja is nothing but group of these properties present in these Dhatus. There is another substance described in Ayurveda having property of providing immunity is Prakriti slesma. This also has the similar property to Oja. According to Ayurveda all the drugs or substance may be classified in two groups-one is destroying the body tissues and the other one is nourishing the body tissues. Former one has the properties of Visha i.e. opposite to the properties of Oja given above and the later one provides immunity. There is another point which has to be considered that the one drug may act as useful in one condition and harmful in another condition. It is true also in the case of drugs increasing Oja. Therefore intake of food or drug according to our body constitution is a factor of enhancing immunity. The drugs or substances increase the body immunity in many ways. They may directly fight to harmful pathogens like, ‘Shirisha’. They may make the components of body healthy so that body itself may be able to prevent the disease, like RASAYANA drugs. They may make channels (srotas) of body healthy, so that foreign bodies or harmful substances could not reside there, like ‘Haritaki’. They may make the body healthy by subside the elevated dosha in the person having particular type of Prakriti, like ‘Guduchi’ increases immunity particularly in pitta prakriti person by subsiding pitta dosha. Immunity can be highly...
increased by maintaining the proper condition of digestive power. Some drugs increase immunity by promoting the formation of Prakriti slesma, like snigdha and usna ahara. Therefore immunity in the terms of Ayurveda is to fight with disease in any form and the drugs used to enhance the immunity, enhances some particular type of properties in the body through various ways.

Conclusion

a. Oja is the best part of the Dhatus and Dhatus are, one of the three most important components of body,

b. Oja and Prakriti Slesma are present in body and perform the function of Bala (immunity) through their properties.

c. Those substances provides immunity which increase Oja by making Dhatus of body healthy.

d. Immunity enhancing drugs or substance act through one/all of the following mode of actions-

- By maintaining the digestive power in proper condition.
- By subsiding the increased state of dosha in person having related prakriti, desha etc.
- By enhancing the quality of seven dhatus through similar properties.
- By enhancing the properties in body similar to the properties of Oja.
- By making the channels (srotas) of body healthy and patent.

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