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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 *dhatu*. The immune enhancing substances i.e. the *ojo-vardhaka* and the *Rasayana dravyas* makes the body tissues (*dhatu*) healthy by nourishing them and thus increase the *oja* (immune 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, *dasha*, *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 *dhatu*. *Dhatu* are the structural component of body and are also responsible for various types of functions. Vitiation in the *dhatu* of the body results in the genesis of disease. Vitiation of *dhatu* 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 *dhatu* 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 *brihatrayi* 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.

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Literature review:

• Definition of Oja

According to *acharya Sushruta*, best form of all the *dhatu*s of the body or essence of all the *dhatu*s 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 *dhatu*s in the form of their essence and *oja* is the *sneha* of *dhatu*s^[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* (semi-liquid) *rasa* (fluid) of *garbha* (embryo), by fusion of *shukra* and *shonita* (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 (*mridu*), *mritasna*, *vivikta* and best in *pranayatana* (sites of life in body)^[21]. *Oja* is heavy (*guru*), cool (*shita*), soft (*mridu*), smooth (*slakshna*), 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, 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 *prakrita-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)
- *Vyadhibalavirodhitvam* (resistance power to decrease the strength of disease)
- *Vyadhi-utpadapratibandhakatvam* (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^[32]. There is also another way in which processed substances are already given to oppose the causative factor^[33]. 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*^[34]. Seven *dhatu*s of body get healthy with the use of *Rasayana dravyas*^[35].

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 ways 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 unctuousness, 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 *Dhatu*s. All these *Dhatu*s are made by *ahara rasa* through the action of *agni* and the essence of all these *Dhatu*s is called as *Oja* i.e. *Oja* is nothing but group of these properties present in these *Dhatu*s. There is another substance described in Ayurveda having property of providing immunity is *Prakrita 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 *pittaja 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 Prakrita 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

- Oja* is the best part of the *Dhatus* and *Dhatus* are, one of the three most important components of body.
- Oja* and *Prakrita Slesma* are present in body and perform the function of *Bala* (immunity) through their properties.
- Those substances provides immunity which increase *Oja* by making *Dhatus* of body healthy.
- 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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