



Research Paper

Review of Immunity From Ayurvedic Prospective

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ABSTRACT

It's fascinating how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the immune system and sparked interest in ancient systems of medicine like Ayurveda, which have long-standing knowledge on immunity. In Ayurveda, immunity is elucidated through the concept of Vyadhikshamatva, which emphasizes the body's ability to resist diseases and maintain health. Ayurveda doesn't just focus on treating diseases but also prioritizes prevention and strengthening the body and mind to cope with various infections. Central to this is the concept of Ojas, which represents the superior vital essence of all bodily tissues. Ojas is crucial for good health, immunity, longevity, intelligence and mental clarity. Acharyas, or ancient scholars, advocated the use of Rasayana (Rejuvenation) therapies to enhance Ojas and Vyadhikshamatva. Rasayanas are health-promoting and rejuvenating agents that enhance resistance against diseases, both physically and mentally. They play a significant role in managing immunodeficiency disorders by promoting Ojas and bolstering immunity. Similar to modern concepts of innate and acquired immunity, Vyadhikshamatva in Ayurveda encompasses natural (sahaj), chronological (kalaj), and acquired (yuktikrita) forms of immunity or strength. This holistic approach to immunity in Ayurveda integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, aligning with the comprehensive understanding of health and disease prevention.

KEYWORDS: vyadhikshamatva, bala, immunity, Ayurveda

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I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding immunity is indeed crucial for maintaining health and preventing diseases. Both innate and acquired immunity play significant roles in protecting the body against pathogens. In Ayurveda, the concept of immunity aligns closely with the idea of "Vyadhikshamatva," which emphasizes the body's ability to resist diseases.[1] This concept encompasses both innate strength (sahaja bala) and acquired strength (kalaja and yuktikrita bala).[2] Ojas, described as the vital defence mechanism in Ayurveda, is integral to maintaining immunity and overall health. Ayurveda emphasizes the significance of consuming "hita" substances, which are compatible with the body and support its functions. Conversely, "ahita" substances, which are incompatible, can lead to illness. Ayurveda recognizes various factors that can compromise immunity, such as incompatible combinations, improper digestion, certain medications, microorganisms, and psychological factors.[3] It underscores the need for logical and balanced use of medicines and advises against practices that disrupt the body's natural equilibrium.

Concept of Vyadhikshamatva

The breakdown of the term "Vyadhikshamatva" into "Vyadhi" and "Kshamatva" provides insight into its meaning in Ayurveda. "Vyadhi" refers to disease, while "Kshamatva" denotes the ability to suppress, overcome, or resist. Therefore, "Vyadhikshamatva" encompasses the capacity of the body to limit the progression of disease and oppose its strength.

Chakrapani Datta, in his commentary on Charaka Samhita, further elucidated on Vyadhikshamatva, delineating it into two aspects:[4]

1. Vyadhi-balavirodhitam: This aspect involves the capacity to restrain or withstand the severity of the disease, essentially the strength to resist the progression of the disease.

2. Vyadhi utpadak pratibandhakatva: This refers to the resisting power of the body, competent enough to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of the disease.

These subtypes collectively form what is now recognized as immunity. Essentially, Vyadhikshamatva encompasses both the ability to withstand the onslaught of disease and to prevent its occurrence or recurrence.

In Ayurveda, there are nine factors identified that can diminish the body's ability to resist disease manifestation, thereby decreasing immunity.[5] Identifying and addressing these factors is crucial in maintaining optimal health and bolstering immunity.

- 1) Ati-Sthoola(Excessively obese persons)
- 2) Ati-Krishha(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)

Various aspects of immunity as described in Ayurveda, including the roles of Shleshma, Bala, and Oja, as well as the influence of factors like Agni (digestive fire) and diet on immunity.

Shleshma, Bala, Oja : [6,7] Shleshma, when in its normal state, contributes to strength and vitality. However, when imbalanced, it can lead to the production of Mala and Pampa, contributing to disease. Bala refers to the strength and integrity of the body, with three types described in Ayurveda: Sahaj (innate), Kalaj (related to time and age), and Yuktikrita (acquired through diet, exercise, and therapies). Oja, considered the essence of the seven bodily tissues, plays a vital role in defence mechanisms and overall health.

Factors influencing immunity : [8,9] Various factors influence immunity, including genetic makeup, environmental factors, diet, lifestyle, and mental well-being. Birth in a healthy environment, proper diet and exercise, and a sound mind contribute to Balavardhakabhava, which enhances strength and immunity.

Relation between agni and immunity : [10,11] Agni, or digestive fire, is crucial for the assimilation and absorption of nutrients, which in turn affects immunity. Proper maintenance of Jatharagni (digestive fire of the stomach) supports vitality, strength, and overall health. An imbalance in Agni due to Tridosha disturbance can lead to decreased immune response.

Rasayana therapy and immunity : [12,13] Rasayana therapy, a rejuvenation therapy in Ayurveda, is aimed at strengthening Oja, Bala, and overall vitality, thereby enhancing immunity. Rasayana treatments are classified into indoor and outdoor regimens and are believed to promote longevity, youthfulness, and overall well-being.

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive understanding of immunity and provides holistic approaches, including diet, lifestyle and therapies, to enhance immunity and promote overall health and longevity. Rasayana therapy, in particular, is recognized for its ability to rejuvenate the body and bolster immunity.

II. DISCUSSION

Vyadhikshamatva or resistance to diseases, encompasses two types of immunity: one that attenuates manifested diseases and another that prevents their manifestation altogether. In Ayurveda, the concept of immunity is closely associated with the balance and function of certain physiological factors. Shleshma, or Kapha, in its normal state is considered as Bala (strength) and Oja (vital essence). The proper functioning of Kapha, akin to that of Oja, is essential for maintaining health and immunity. The digestive fire, Agni, plays a pivotal role in the assimilation of food, ensuring proper nourishment of the Dhatus (tissue systems). Wholesome food supports the production of excellent essence of Dhatus, known as Ojas, while unwholesome food can vitiate the Doshas, ultimately affecting Ojas production. Ojas, considered as the final and excellent essence of Dhatus, is vital for overall health and immunity. It begins with Rasa (plasma) and culminates in Shukra (reproductive tissue), representing the pinnacle of vitality. The concept of Vyadhikshamatva is intricately related to Kapha, Bala, Agni, and Ojas in Ayurveda. Ayurvedic Rasayana therapy, aimed at rejuvenation and longevity, aligns with modern immunology concepts, particularly immunomodulation. Research on Rasayana drugs indicates their effectiveness in improving immunity and preventing diseases by exhibiting antibacterial and antifungal properties. Therefore, leveraging Ayurvedic principles, particularly those related to immunity and Rasayana therapy, can offer valuable insights and strategies for enhancing overall health and resilience against diseases.

III. CONCLUSION

Vyadhikshamatva, as described in Ayurveda, is indeed equivalent to immunity. The immune system is vital for our survival, as it provides protection against various pathogens. In Ayurveda, Ojas is considered a crucial aspect of the body's defence mechanism. Ojas represents the final essence of the Dhatus (tissues) and plays a significant role in maintaining overall health and vitality.

Enhancing Vyadhikshamatva or immunity, in Ayurveda involves various approaches, including:

1. **Balanced diet:** Consuming a diet that is wholesome and supports the production of Ojas is essential for maintaining immunity. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of consuming fresh, natural foods that nourish the body and support its natural balance.
2. **Proper daily regimen:** Following a disciplined daily routine, known as Dinacharya, helps maintain balance in the body and promotes overall well-being. This includes practices such as waking up early, performing self-care routines, and following regular meal times.
3. **Rasayana therapy:** Rasayana treatments are rejuvenating therapies in Ayurveda aimed at promoting longevity and enhancing vitality. Rasayana herbs and formulations are believed to strengthen the body's immune system and enhance Vyadhikshamatva.

By incorporating these Ayurvedic principles into daily life, individuals can support and strengthen their immune systems, thereby enhancing their ability to resist diseases and maintain optimal health.

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