

IMMUNITY: AN AYURVEDIC VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Immunity is the capacity of the body to resist the pathogenic agents. It represents the capacity of an individual to defend their health against physical, mental & environmental challenges. In *Ayurveda*, the concept of immunity is very wide. Immunity or *vyadhikshamatwa* means not only the defense from the disease, but *Ayurveda* considers the equilibrium state of *dosha*, *saptadhatus*, *agni*, *mana*. There are many factors involved in body's resistance power to a disease. These factors are mentioned in *Ayurvedic* classical texts. By strengthening these factors, we can enhance the disease resistance power of a body as well as can maintain the equilibrium state of *doshadibhavas*. *Oja*, *shukra*, *bala*, *shleshma* are the important contributing factors for building *vyadhikshamatwa*. *Oja* is responsible for good health, better immunity, longevity, intelligence. *Ayurveda* explains many ways to boost up healthy state of body and mind to increase the resistance power of body to any disease. One of those ways is the *rasayana* therapy. It is best for health promoting and rejuvenating. This article is a review on the things explained in *Ayurveda* about *vyadhikshamatwa*.

Keywords: immunity, *vyadhikshamatwa*, *oja*, *shukra*, *bala*, *shleshma*.

INTRODUCTION

Immunity is defined as the capacity of body to resist the pathogenic agents. It is the ability of the body to resist the entry of different types of foreign bodies like bacteria, virus, toxic substances etc.

Immunity is of two types

1. Innate / non-specific 2. Acquired / specific

1. Innate immunity is inborn capacity of the body to resist the pathogens. By chance, if the organism enter the body, innate immunity eliminates them before the development of any disease. It is also called as natural immunity.

2. Acquired immunity is the resistance developed in the body against any specific foreign

body like bacteria, viruses, toxins, vaccines or transplants tissues.

According to *Ayurveda*, the main purpose is the prevention of health in healthy individual and eradication of disease from unhealthy body.¹

Charaka Acharya tells about characteristics of a healthy person. Person who is having balanced proportion of muscles, compactness, excellent sensory faculties never suffer from diseases. These people can easily withstand hunger, thirst, heat of the sun, cold and physical exercises. *Agni* performs normal digestion and metabolic activities.²

Chakrapani mentioned the definition of *vyadhikshamatwa* for first time.³ *Vyadhikshamatwa* i.e. resistance power of the body to disease is of two types: One which reduces the *bala* of *vyadhi* and the other one prevents the manifestation of disease.

The persons who are more prone to any disease are mentioned by *charaka Acharya*.⁴

1. over obese individual
2. over emaciated person
3. Whose muscles & blood are diminished markedly.
4. Debilitated person.
5. One who consumes unwholesome food.
6. One who consumes less amount of food.
7. Whose mental faculties are weak.

Individuals having opposite type of physical constitution are capable of resisting diseases.

Aims & Objectives-

To study the concept of immunity from an *Ayurvedic* view.

Materials & Methods :

It is a review article. The article is based on various references of *vyadhikshamatwa* from *Ayurvedic* texts & references regarding immunity were collected.

Contributing Factors for *Vyadhikshamatwa*:

According to *Ayurveda*, the word *vyadhikshamatwa* is not only applicable for prevention or for fight from disease, but also applies to equilibrium state of *dosha*, *dhatu*, *agni mala* and mental power.

The following are some factors on which the *vyadhikshamatwa* of body depends on.

1. *Aahara*
2. *Agni*
3. *Dosha, dhatus, mala*.
4. *Desha and kala*.
5. *Bala*
6. *Balavridhikara Bhava*

7. *Oja*

8. *Shleshma*

1. *Aahara*: Wholesome food is the only sole cause for the growth of living being.⁵

Wholesome food consumption makes the body healthy preventing it from the diseases.

2. *Agni*: Strength, health, longevity are dependent on the condition of *agni*.⁶

3. *Dosha, saptadhatu, mala* : *Dosha*, *dhatu* and *mala* are the main factors for the foundation of the body. *Virya* is the best among promoters of strength.⁷

4. *Desha and kala*: *Vayu* (air), *jala* (water), *desha* (land) and *kala* (season) are the four *jana-padhvamsa* factors. These can affect disease resistance power of body. Mass people get affected with diseases due to vitiated air, water, land and season and destroy the *vyadhikshamatwa* of people.

5. *Ayurveda* explains three types of *bala* :⁸

- ***Sahajabala***: It is an inherent characteristic property of an individual present since birth.
- ***Kalajabala***: Dependent on season and age. Gaining of strength is observed in *visarga kala* and middle age is considered as of full strength.
- ***Yuktikritabala***: Depends on healthy practices related to diet, activities.

Bala is one of the important contributing factors for *vyadhikshamatwa*. If *balakshaya* occurs, death can also occur.

6. *Balavridhikara Bhava* :⁹ i.e. the factors promoting strength

1. Birth of a person in a country where people are naturally healthy and strong.
2. Time factor which is conducive for *dhatu* and helps promotion of strength. There is more strength in *dhatu* during *visarga kala*.
3. Excellency among qualities of *bija* and *kshe-tra*. (Sperm & ovum, uterus)
4. Excellence of diet.

5. Excellence of physique.
6. Excellence of suitability.
7. All mental faculties are superior.
8. Natural mechanism.
9. Young age.
10. Exercise and such other physical activities.

7. Oja:

The essence of all seven dhatus is called as oja. Oja is among the ten *pranayatana*, means among the ten things in which *prana* lies.¹⁰ Oja is the best *pranayatana*.

Charakaacharya says, during embryogenesis the *oja* appeared foremost in the human body. It is the seat for strength, hence also called as *bala*.

There are two types of Oja.

1. *Para Oja* -*Ashtabindupramana*
2. *Apara Oja* -*Ardhanjalipramana*.

If the *Para Oja* decreases, then person will die. If *apara Oja* decreases or gets vitiated, manifest three kinds of abnormalities:¹¹

- *Ojokshaya*
- *Ojovyapada*
- *Ojovisransa*.

8. *Shleshma*: *Shleshma* performing its normal functions is said to be *bala* or *oja*. If it gets vitiated then the *shleshma* is said to be *mala* or *papma*.¹² *Shleshma* in normal state provides compactness, stability, heaviness, immunity, resistance to the body.

Deteriorating factors for *vyadhikshamatwa*:

1. ***Vegdharana***: Holding or suppression of natural urges is the root cause for any disease and is responsible for deteriorating *vyadhikshamatwa*.
2. **Mental factors**: *Vishaada* or sadness is best factor among increasing diseases in the body.¹³

If *chinta* (stress), *shoka* (sorrow) etc. mental factors are there in mind while taking food, then the food taken in proper time and

proper amount also cannot be digested. Hence, leading to *agnidushti* and further invites to many diseases.

3. ***Vydhikarshita***: *Ayurevda* explains *ashtau-mahagada* i.e. eight fatal diseases said to be great because of their incurable nature. These diseases cause *bala* and *man-sakshaya*, giving rise to opportunistic infections. Diseases like *prameha*, *rajayakshma* having *ojodushti* leads to deterioration of *vyadhikshamatwa*.

4. ***Vardhakya***: Naturally, the *bala* is less in old age because of *dhatukshaya*. This *balakshaya* suppress immunity.

5. ***Aadanakala***: Naturally, *bala* is less in *aa-danakala* as there is predominance of sun in this *kala*.¹⁴

6. Free radical:

Free radicals are derived either from normal essential metabolic processes in the human body or from external sources such as exposure to X-rays, ozone, cigarette, smoking, air pollutants & industrial chemicals. Research also suggests that free radical damage to cells leads to the pathological changes associated with aging. Free radicals have a significant influence on aging, that free radical damage can be controlled with adequate antioxidant defense, and optimal intake of antioxidant nutrient may contribute to enhanced quality of life. According to *Ayurveda*, *pitta dosha* is responsible for transformation and for aging process. *Rasayan*s are believed to play important role as an antioxidant therapy. The drug *amalaki* (*Emblia officinalis*) is best for preventing aging process.

Bhavaprakasha mentioned properties of *amalaki* as it balances *tridosha*, pacifies *pitta dosha* by its *madhura* and *sheeta* properties. *Amalaki* fruit is rich source of vitamin C.

Enhancement And maintaining of Vyadhikshamatva :

The following are some factors mentioned in Ayurvedic classical texts that can build up health ,maintain equilibrium of dosha, dushya,agni, mental stability.

1. Following garbhini paricharya during pregnancy.
2. Vyayama
3. Satmyaahara
4. Rasayana
5. Vajikarana Yogas
6. Drugs
7. Trayopastambha
8. Swasthavritta palana

1. For healthy foetus, following garbhinimasanumasika paricharya is beneficial.
2. **Vyayama** :Regular exercise creates lightness in the body, increase the ability to do work, enhance the digestive power, gives stability to body and increases the mental stability.¹⁶
3. **Aahara** :Wholesome food is the only sole cause for the growth of living being.Regular consumption of food having all six tastes promotes strength. Food consumption according to aaharavidhi also gives strength to body. Lohitashali, mudga, saindhava, jivantishaka, Aeneyamrugamansa, gavyasarpi,mrudwika are excellent food items among their food class.¹⁷ Shashtikashali, mudga , saindhavalavana, ghrita, jangalamansa ,madhu are the food items that to be consumed daily.¹⁸
4. **Rasayana** : The word rasayana is made up of two words : Rasa & Ayana. Rasa means the saptadhatus viz. rasa, rakta, mansa, meda, asthi, majja and shukra. Ayana means path or channel. So, rasayanas are those that bring about proper uptake,

growth and improvement of essential saptadhatus. Use of rasayanas results in dirghamaayu, smriti, medha, aarogya, tarunavaya, prabha, varna, voice, strength etc. (Charak Chikitsasthana 1/1/7-8)

Various drugs, diet & regimens which promote longevity by delaying aging and preventing diseases.

According to Charaka Acharya, Rasayana is classified into :¹⁹

1. kutipraveshika

2. vatatapika

3. Achara rasayana :

To follow a particular code of conduct in routine life, which keeps oneself to attain good mental and spiritual health.

Acharya Sushruta divided rasayana into: ²⁰

1. sarvopaghatashamaniya: (rasayana formulation which counteracts various disease processes)
2. Medhaayushkamiya: (rasayana which increases intellect and longevity)
3. Swabhavyadhipratishedhniya: (Delaying onset of swabhavika diseases.)
4. Nivrittasantapiya.

Taking rasayana is helpful to increase the immunity of the person to keep him away from opportunistic diseases.

5. Vajikarana Yogas:

Vajikaranayogas not only give strength to shukradhatu but helps to acquire strength by fulfilling necessary deficiencies in all deficient dhatus.

6. Drugs:

Regular consumption of milk and ghrita is having rasayana property.²¹

There are many rasayana drugs explained in classical texts that prevents aging process, strengthens the saptadhatus, prevent the body from various diseases.

Some of the rasayanadravyas are :

Amalaki

Haritaki

Guduchi

Shatavari

Guggulu

Yashtimadhu .

Charakaacharya mentioned *Vaya Sthapanagana* for boosting *vyadhikshamatwa* and for prevention of aging.²²

These are the drugs mentioned in *vayasthapanagana*:

Amrita, abhaya, dhatri, jivanti, shatavari, mandukparni, punarnava, yukta, shweta, sthira.

6. Trayopastambha .²³

Aahara, Nidra, Bramhacharya are the three building blocks of human body.

As we have seen, *aahara* plays major role in forming *vyadhikshamatwa*.

Pathyakara aahara leads to healthy and balanced state of mind and body.

Nidra is said to be *bhutadhatri*. Proper sleep is necessary for normal functioning of body.

Sukha- dukha, pushti – karshya, bala – abala are the factors depends upon sound sleep.

Bramhacharya palana is necessary for creating healthy *shukradhatu*. *Shukra* is the ultimate excellent outcome of food. So, one has to preserve it because its diminution leads to development of many diseases or even death.²⁴ *Bala* depends upon *shukradhatu*. The disease *rajyakshma* occurs due to excess of *shukradhatukshaya*.

7. Swasthavritta Palana :

Following *dinacharya, ritucharya, Aaharavidhi, Acharavidhi* helps the body and mind to prevent from diseases and increases the strength of body.

Adopting *shodhana* according to *ritu* in *swastha purusha*. *Abhyanga* is also important for boosting *vyadhikshamatwa* and for preventing aging process.

DISCUSSION

The concept of *vyadhikshamatwa* can be correlated with the immunity concept of modern science. Immunity is the defense mechanism of the body. It is the body system which prevents the body from various pathogenic agents. Innate and Acquired immunity are the types of immunity. Innate immunity is the inborn capacity of body to resist the pathogens. Innate immunity represents the first line of defense against any type of pathogens. Gastrointestinal tract having enzymes and the acid in the stomach as the mechanism of innate immunity. Lysozyme present in the saliva destroys bacteria. Skin protects the body from various organisms by its innate immunity mechanism. Lysozyme secreted by the skin destroys the bacteria. Acidity in urine and vaginal fluid destroy the bacteria.²⁴ Innate immunity can be correlated with '*Sahaja bala*'. *Sahaja bala* is the inherent characteristic property of an individual present since birth. Acquired immunity is the resistance developed in the body against any specific foreign body. It is not present since birth. Acquired immunity obtained either from the development of antibodies in response to exposure to an antigen, as from vaccination, or an attack of an infectious disease, or from the transmission of antibodies. It can be correlated with the *Kalaja* and *yuktikrita bala*.²⁵ These are obtained by healthy practices related to diet, physical activities etc. Modern science use vaccination and other supplements like vitamins for boosting up immunity. Ayurveda having wide approach towards *Vyadhikshamatwa*, the *Ayurvedic* science tells us many things as discussed above, for prevention from disease as well as to boost up resistance power of body to defend any disease. Excellent *vyadhikshamatwa* increases resistance power of the

body. Hence, the disease can not attack the body or if attacked the power of the disease will be less. i.e the disease will be of *alpa-bala*.

Often the patients tell us about their immunity that they get frequently attacked by infections or any diseases. In such patients having frequent attacks of organisms, a physician should think about daily regimen of the patient by history taking.

By following proper regimen as described in *Ayurvedic* classical texts, we surely can boost up the *vyadhikshamatwa*.

CONCLUSION

With the help of *Ayurveda*, one can enhance the *vyadhikshamatwa*. And can maintain the equilibrium state of *dosha*, *saptadhatus*, *mala*, *agni* and *mana*. For attaining good *vyadhikshamatwa*, one should use various regimens and follow conducts as described in *Ayurveda*.

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