

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Critical Review of *Ojas*: An Ayurvedic Concept of Immunity

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ABSTRACT

Ojas is a concept in traditional *Ayurvedic* medicine that represents the vital essence or energy within the body, essential for maintaining life, health, and vitality. It is considered the physical and spiritual foundation of well-being, influencing immunity, longevity, and the body's ability to adapt to stress. In *Ayurveda*, *Ojas* is categorized into two main types: *Para Ojas* (primary *Ojas*), *Para Ojas*, which is stored in the heart and governs overall health, and *Apara Ojas* (secondary *Ojas*), which circulates throughout the body and supports bodily functions. *Ojas* is believed to be the product of proper digestion and assimilation of food and experiences, serving as the byproduct of a balanced and harmonious life. A deficiency in *Ojas* can lead to fatigue, weakened immunity, and a range of physical and mental health issues, while an excess of *Ojas* can result in overconfidence or imbalance. Practices such as proper nutrition, meditation, physical activity, and good sleep hygiene are all integral to maintaining and cultivating healthy *Ojas*. Recent research into the concept of *Ojas* suggests potential connections with modern understandings of immunity and vitality, although much of the original *Ayurvedic* framework remains rooted in traditional knowledge. As an essential life force, *Ojas* continues to play a significant role in holistic health practices, integrating mind, body, and spirit. This research underscores the essential role of *Ojas* in *Ayurvedic* health systems and offers insights into the practices that promote its balance, contributing to overall vitality and disease resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ojas, a central concept in *Ayurvedic* physiology, is regarded as the vital energy that sustains life, vitality, and immunity, akin to *Prana* (life force).^[1] This paper delves into the multifaceted nature of *Ojas*, examining its etymology, formation, qualities, functions, and its crucial role in maintaining health and well-being. Derived from the essence of bodily tissues through the process of *Dhaatu Paak* (tissue metabolism),^[2] *Ojas* is categorized into two primary forms: *Para Oja* (higher *Oja*),^[3] which resides in the heart and governs life force, and *Apara Oja* (lower *Oja*),^[4] which circulates through the arteries and supports physical strength. The paper explores the relationship between *Ojas* and strength (*Bala*), emphasizing that *Ojas* is the root of both physical and mental resilience. In addition, disturbances in *Ojas*, including depletion (*Oja Kshaya*),^[5] contamination (*Oja Vyapad*),^[6] and displacement (*Oja Visramsya*),^[6] are examined in terms of their impact on health, leading to disorders such as fatigue, weakened immunity, and organ dysfunction. Factors contributing to *Ojas* depletion,

including physical trauma, emotional stress, and poor dietary habits, are discussed. Furthermore, *Ayurvedic* therapies, such as *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) and *Vajikarana* (aphrodisiac) treatments are highlighted as effective methods for restoring *Ojas*. In *Ayurveda*, *Ojas* holds a significant place. The primary reason for this is that *Ojas* is as essential and beneficial for the human body as *Prana* (life force) itself. The word "*Ojas*" is derived by adding the suffix *asun* to the root *ubj*, where the "v" is dropped, and the root undergoes *guna* transformation, resulting in the term "*Ojas*." According to the *Amarakosha*, "*Ojo Dipto Bale*" means *Ojas* refers to brilliance and strength.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To study the Fundamental concept of *Ojas* in *Ayurveda*.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Materials

For the study of *Ojas* and immunity, all literary studies have been conducted using *Charak Samhita* along with commentary, *Susruta Samhita*, *Astang Hridayam*, other available published journals, and publications.

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3.2. Methods

Conduct a comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts to gather information on *Ojas*.

4. CONCEPT OF OJAS

4.1. Accumulation of *Ojas* in the Body

Acharya Charaka beautifully describes the accumulation of *Ojas* in the body: Just as bees collect nectar from fruits and flowers to create honey, similarly, the qualities present within the human body gather *Ojas* through their functions. In other words, when food essence (*ahaar rasa*) undergoes the process of tissue nourishment (*dhaatu paak*), *Ojas* is produced in the purest form as an essence during the formation of each tissue (*dhaatu*).^[7]

4.2. Formation of *Oja*

The essence of all bodily tissues (*dhatu*) is known as *Ojas*. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Ojas* is the superior essence or vital energy that is extracted from each tissue layer, from *Rasa* (plasma) to *Shukra* (reproductive tissue). In *Ayurvedic* scriptures, *Ojas* is considered to be the true source of strength and vitality in the body.^[4] According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* is the first substance to manifest at the time of conception. This *Ojas* has the appearance of clarified butter (ghee), the taste of honey, and the fragrance of popped rice (*laja*). It is the presence of this *Ojas* in the embryo that allows the vital force (*prana*) to enter and sustain life. After birth, this *Ojas* resides in the heart, providing essential life energy to the body.^[7]

4.3. *Oja* and Strength

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Ojas* itself is also called *Bala* (strength or vitality) based on *Ayurvedic* principles. Thus, for *Acharya Sushruta*, *Ojas* is synonymous with strength. However, *Acharya Dalhana* offers a distinction between *Ojas* and *Bala*. He explains that *Ojas* possesses qualities such as appearance, taste, and potency, which are absent in *Bala*. *Bala* is the force that manifests as physical strength and the power to lift weight, which can be observed through physical activities, such as exercise. *Acharya Chakrapani*, however, describes a cause-and-effect relationship between *Ojas* and *Bala*, indicating that *Bala* arises from *Ojas*. Despite this connection, the distinction between the two is clarified for therapeutic purposes in *Ayurveda*.^[8]

According to *Acharya Charaka* *Bala* (strength or immunity) is categorized into three types in *Ayurveda*: *Sahaja* (Innate Immunity), *Kalaja* (Seasonal Immunity), *Yuktikrita* (Acquired Immunity):

1. *Sahaja* (Innate strength): *Sahaja Bala* refers to the strength that naturally exists in the body and mind according to one's inherent nature. It is the strength that is present from birth.
2. *Kalaja* (Seasonal strength): *Kalaja Bala* is a strength that varies according to the seasons and changes with different stages of life – childhood, youth, and old age. It is a strength that naturally arises with the passage of time.
3. *Yuktikrita* (Acquired strength): *Yuktikrita Bala* is the strength developed through proper diet, exercise, and other health practices. It is a strength that is gained through conscious effort and external means.^[9]
 - *Ushma*:- Foods or medicines that generate heat in the body are referred to as *Ushma*.^[10] *Acharya Chakrapani* advises that the effect of such foods can be tested through physical exertion (exercise strength).
 - *Vyadhikshamatva* (Immunity): This refers to the body's

natural ability to defend against disease. When an illness attacks the body, *Ojas* (the vital essence) protects the body from the invasion of the disease, ensuring immunity.

Not all living beings have the same capacity to resist diseases. *Ojas* plays a key role in enhancing the body's ability to fight diseases. *Acharya Chakrapani* has described two types of this disease-resisting capacity: *Vyadhibalavirodhitva* (Serum) and *Vyadhi-Utpada-Nibandhakatva*. (Vaccine)

- I. (*Vyadhibalavirodhitva*)–(Serum) In this process, a specific strain of bacteria or its toxin is progressively introduced into the body of a horse through injections. As a result, the horse's blood and serum produce antibodies (counter-toxins) against the toxin of that particular strain of bacteria.
- II. (*Vyadhi-utpadaak-nibandhak-tva*)– (Vaccine) In this process, a very small amount of the bacteria or its toxin is introduced into the body. This triggers the production of antibodies against the pathogen, and the body "remembers" this information, enabling it to fight the same pathogen in the future.

4.4. The Form and Qualities of *Ojas*

Acharya Charaka has described the ten qualities or *Guna* of *Oja* in the context of the Treatment of alcohol (*Madyatyaya*). According to him, *Oja* endowed the following qualities or *Guna*: It is *guru guna* (heavy), *sheet* (cooling), *mridu* (soft), *shlakshna* (smooth), *bahal* (dense), *madhura* (sweet), *sthira* (stable), *nirmala* (pure), *pichchhila* (slippery), and *snigdha* (unctuous). In contrast, the qualities of alcohol are the opposite of these. Thus, consuming alcohol leads to the destruction of all the qualities or *Guna* of *Oja* and, consequently, the depletion of *Oja* itself.^[11]

4.5. Nutrition of *Ojas*

According to *Acharya Charaka*, when food is properly digested, the part of it that is absorbed and nourishes the body is called *Rasa* (the essence or nutrient fluid). From this *Rasa*, just as the various tissues, such as *Rasa* (lymph) and *Rakta* (blood), are nourished, similarly, *Ojas* (vital energy or strength) is also continually strengthened.

4.6. Location of *Ojas*

The location of *Ojas* is primarily considered to be the heart. According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* resides in the heart. According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, *Oja*, located in the heart, is the cause of the body's vitality and condition.

4.7. Measurement (*Praman*) and Classification of *Oja*

According to *Acharya Charaka*, the evidence (or measure) of *Shleshmic Oja* (the lesser *Oja*) is considered to be half an *Anjali* (a traditional measure using the palm of the hand).^[12] This evidence refers to the *Shleshmic* (lower or lesser) *Ojas*. On the other hand, *Acharya Charaka* refers to the *Ojas* that resides in the heart as "Para" (higher) *Oja*. According to *Acharya Chakrapani*, *Oja* is of two types: *Para Oja* And *Apar Oja*.

1. *Para Oja* (Higher *Oja*)
Para Oja resides in the heart, dependent on *Prana* (vital life force). The evidence (or measure) of *Para Oja* is considered to be eight *bindu* (a traditional measurement).
2. *Apara Oja* (Lower *Oja*)
Apara Oja is dependent on the arteries related to the heart. Its evidence is considered to be half an *Anjali* (a traditional hand measurement). This *Oja*, in cases of *Madhumeha* (*diabetes*), becomes vitiated and is excreted through urine.

4.8. Tasks of *Ojas*

According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Ojas* is the inherent strength of the body, which provides the capacity to resist diseases. When *Ojas* is depleted, the body becomes vulnerable to various diseases and eventually deteriorates.

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Ojas* contributes to the stability, nourishment, and growth of muscle tissue. It enables the smooth functioning of all physical, mental, and verbal activities without obstruction. It enhances the quality of voice and speech, and both external (motor organs) and internal (sensory organs) faculties perform their functions efficiently.^[13]

4.9. Causes of *Oja Kshaya*

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Oja* is depleted due to various factors, including injuries, tissue degeneration, anger, grief, worry, excessive exertion, and starvation. When *Ojas*, which is primarily influenced by Vayu (air), leaves its natural place in the heart and the arteries, it deprives the body of its vital functions.

According to *Acharya Charaka*, when *Vata* and *Kapha* become weakened, the increased *Pitta* circulates through the body and destroys *Ojas*. As a result, symptoms, such as fatigue, sensory weakness, fainting, and the decline of physical functions occur.

Acharya Charaka has beautifully described the symptoms of *Ojas* depletion as below. When *Ojas* is depleted, the person remains constantly fearful or scared, always immersed in anxiety. The senses become fatigued, the mind is weak (dull), meaning the intellect (*sattva*) is compromised, and the complexion of the body changes. The body becomes dry and emaciated. Thus, a person suffering from *Oja* depletion feels fearful, anxious, and mentally weak, and is unable to withstand difficult situations.

This constant fear or self-deprecation makes the person feel degraded or insignificant.

According to *Acharya Charaka*, the symptoms described for *Oja* depletion are those of *Apara Oja* (lower *Oja*) depletion, as the depletion of *Para Oja* (higher *Oja*) leads to certain death.

4.10. Treatment for *Oja* Depletion

According to *Acharya Dalhan*, in cases of *Oja* depletion (*Oja Kshaya*), it is especially important to use *Rasayana* (rejuvenating) and *Vajikarana* (aphrodisiac) substances.^[7]

4.11. Disturbance or Disorders of *Oja*

The symptoms of *Ojas* increase are described in the *Ashtanga Hridayam*:

When *Ojas* increases, there is a proper growth of the body's *Tushthi* (contentment), *Pushti* (nourishment of the tissues), and *Bala* (strength).^[7]

There are three types of *Oja* disorders (*Vikriti*):

Vyapad, *Visramsa* and *Kshaya*

4.11.1. Symptoms of displacement (*Visramsa*) of *Oja*

The displacement of *Oja* from its natural location (the heart) is called *Visramsa*. In this condition, the joints become dislocated, there is pain in the limbs, the *doshas* (such as *Vata*) become displaced from their natural locations, and physical, mental, and verbal functions do not occur properly.

4.11.2. Symptoms of contamination (*Vyapad*) of *Oja*

In *Oja Vyapad*, *Oja* becomes contaminated and takes on a distorted form. The symptoms of this condition are as follows:

In this state, there is stiffness and heaviness in the body parts, *Vatik* swelling (non-pitting edema), changes in the complexion, fatigue, drowsiness, and sleep disturbances.

4.11.3. Symptoms of *Oja Kshaya*

In *Oja* depletion (*Oja Kshaya*), the quantity of *Oja* becomes diminished. The symptoms include fainting, weakness of the muscle and other tissues, confusion, ignorance, delirium, and ultimately, death.

5. DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, *Ojas* represents the most refined and subtle energy that permeates the body and mind, playing a central role in maintaining health, vitality, and immunity. It is often referred to as the essence or essence of life itself, serving as the foundation of both physical strength and mental resilience. When discussing *Ojas* and immunity, it's essential to understand how these concepts are intertwined and how they can be nurtured to maintain overall well-being. *Ojas*, in *Ayurvedic* theory, is thought to be the product of the optimal digestion (referred to as *Agni*) of food and experiences. It is not merely a substance but also an energetic force that circulates through the body. *Ojas* is closely associated with *immune function*, as it is believed to govern the body's resistance to disease and the ability to heal.

5.1. The Role of Diet in Enhancing *Ojas* and Immunity

One of the core *Ayurvedic* principles for nurturing *Ojas* is through diet. The food we consume directly impacts both the production and quality of *Ojas*. A balanced, wholesome diet supports digestion, which in turn fosters the creation of *Ojas*.

5.1.1. Nourishing foods for *Ojas*

- Fresh, Warm, and Easily Digestible Foods: These are emphasized in Ayurveda as they support *Agni* (digestive fire), which is crucial for the production of *Ojas*. Cooked vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and ghee are particularly beneficial.
- Sweet, Sour, and Salty Tastes: Foods with these flavors are thought to nourish *Ojas* by promoting a calm, stable energy within the body.
- Adaptogens and Immune-Boosting Spices: Ingredients, such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, and ashwagandha are recommended for their ability to enhance immune function and help preserve *Ojas*.

5.1.2. Foods that deplete *Ojas*

- Processed and heavy foods: Diets rich in processed foods, excess sugar, and unhealthy fats can weaken digestion and deplete *Ojas* over time, which in turn weakens immunity.
- Excessively spicy or cold foods: These can disrupt *Agni* and lead to imbalances, reducing the quality of *Ojas* and impairing immune function.

Thus, maintaining a diet that is both nourishing and aligned with one's constitution and seasonal needs is central to supporting *Ojas* and immunity.

5.2. Lifestyle Factors Impacting *Ojas* and Immunity

The impact of lifestyle on *Ojas* and immunity cannot be overstated in Ayurveda. Proper daily routines (known as *Dinacharya*)^[14] are key to cultivating a strong and balanced *Ojas*.

5.2.1. Sleep

Adequate, restful sleep is one of the most important factors for preserving *Ojas*. Sleep allows the body to rest, repair, and rejuvenate, facilitating the production of *Ojas*. Chronic sleep deprivation, on the other hand, weakens immunity and depletes *Ojas*, leading to physical and mental fatigue.

5.2.2. Stress management

Chronic mental stress is one of the primary factors that depletes *Ojas*. Stress disrupts the nervous system and increases the production of stress hormones such as cortisol, which weakens the immune system. Practices, such as *yoga*, *meditation*, and *Pranayama* (breathing exercises) are essential in balancing the mind and body, reducing stress, and preserving *Ojas*.

5.2.3. Physical activity

Moderate, regular physical exercise is important for maintaining *Ojas* and boosting immunity. Exercise helps improve circulation, digestion, and overall metabolic function, all of which contribute to the strength of *Ojas*. However, excessive or overly intense exercise can deplete *Ojas* and lower immunity, especially when combined with inadequate rest.

6. CONCLUSION

Ojas, the vital essence in Ayurveda, is fundamental to health and vitality. It embodies the strength and resilience of the body, serving as the foundation for both physical and mental well-being. From its formation through the nourishment of bodily tissues to its role in immunity, vitality, and overall health, *Ojas* is an essential component that influences every aspect of life. The balance and preservation of *Ojas* are critical to maintaining the body's capacity to resist diseases, sustain energy, and thrive in the face of life's challenges.

The concept of *Ojas* integrates deeply with *Ayurvedic* principles, highlighting the interconnection between the body's physical, mental, and spiritual functions. Its depletion or disturbance can lead to a range of health issues, affecting the body's strength, immunity, and mental clarity. Ayurveda provides clear insights into the causes and symptoms of *Oja* depletion, emphasizing the importance of restoring and rejuvenating *Ojas* through proper diet, lifestyle, and therapeutic practices such as *Rasayana* and *Vajikarana* therapies.

In conclusion, understanding the role of *Ojas* in *Ayurvedic* medicine is crucial not only for maintaining personal health but also for advancing holistic approaches to wellness. By nurturing and protecting *Ojas*, individuals can enhance their vitality, longevity, and overall quality of life, ultimately achieving balance in both body and mind.

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11. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

12. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

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