OJAS: A CONCEPT UNIQUE TO AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of life with many concepts of its own. One such concept unique to Ayurveda is Ojas, which is the vital force helping in sustenance of the body and rendering the body to be capable of fighting with the diseases. It is the cause and ashraya of Bala which is the only one being capable of defying Dosha. Acharya Sushruta directs the physician to always try to maintain the Bala of the patient which checks the progress of disease if restored. In the present day scenario, stamina of the young generation is very less most of them having spectacles and various other health issues. Hence, an attempt has been made to understand the entity called ojas and suggest treatment for ojakshaya so that the principles may be utilized to enhance oja in the body. The information may be utilised to find out various ojavardhaka dravya and make various formulations out of them.

KEYWORDS: Ojas, Bala, Ayurveda, Ojakshaya.

INTRODUCTION

Ojas is a novel concept put forward by Ayurveda physicians. It is primarily quoted in atharvaveda, where agni which is worshipped for bala, ayu and arogya; is termed as ojas.1

It is analogized with sun at some places which is believed to be functioning in threefold manner throughout universe. Its presence is accepted in whole body and is responsible for health & diseased state. Hence, according to veda, ojas refers to things indicative of strength and vigour in the body and the entities responsible for good health, prevention and cure of diseases.2,3,4
In *purana*, *ojas* was well established and its both quantitative & qualitative assessment were mentioned. Its fluid nature and *bala* as its innate quality also seem to be known during this period.

In *samhita* period, *ojas* is described thoroughly with its physical characters, quality, functions, causes & symptoms of diseased state and its significance in health, disease, prognosis & treatment.

**Etymology of the word Oja**: Hence, the word *Ojas* is made up of Sanskrit *dhatu* ‘ubja’ along with the help of *asun pratyaya* which is used only when it is used for the referring to *bala*. ‘Ubja’ *dhatu* belongs to ‘udadi’ group of *dhatu* which mean ‘arjawa (abja arjave)’ which means to keep others in their proper place & functional state.[5,6]

As per *siddhantakaumudi*, the term *ojas* is made up of ‘urja’ *dhatu* which means to confer power & vitality ‘urja bala prananayoho’.

Hence, it is the substantial entity of the body responsible for the integrity of structure & function of all the tissues and for strength & vitality of human body.[7]

**Definition**: It is the essence of *Saptadhatu* and due to oneness of *Karya Karana*, it is also known as *Sharira Bala*. [8,9,10]

**Different interpretations of Ojas**

1. **Sarvadhatusara rupa**
   Ashtabindu parimita *ojas* which is the essence of all *dhatu*.

2. **Rasa Dhatu rupa**[11]
   - Acharya Caraka[12] & Ashtangasangraha[10] has defined *ojas* as *sharira rasa sneha*. Cakrapani interpreted *sharira rasa sneha* as *sara* of *sharira sara*. It may be taken as *sara* of *sharira rasa* & hence of all *sharira dhatu* because the word *rasa* & *sneha* both may be taken as *sara*. [13]

   - Vipaka kriya of Agni on Mahabhuta Ansha results in production of *Ojas* in *Yakshma rogi*. Actually, here *Rasa* is being produced which is basis of life for *Yakshma rogi*. It may be interpreted that *Rasa* is produced in less quantity due to weakness of *Pachakagni* which results in weakness of other *Dhatu* which is further responsible for less production of
Dhatusararupa Oja. This is expressed as less Ojas is being produced due to weakness of Agni.\(^{[14]}\)

- Vagbhata has clearly stated that Dashamoola Sira originating from Hridaya carry Rasatmaka Ojas. It doesn’t mean that Rasa is Ojas, instead it depicts that Ojovaha Sira carry Rasayukta Ojas. In fact, Rasavaha, Raktavaha and Ojovaha Sira are all same.

- Hemadri also took rasa as ojas.\(^{[15]}\)

3. **Rakta roopa**
   - Dalhana has taken Rakta as Ojas at many places.\(^{[16]}\)
   - Hemadri also took rakta as ojas.\(^{[17]}\)
   - As per modern science, parts of Rakta providing immunity to the body may be considered here.

4. **Prakrita Kapha roopa**
   Caraka has described prakritasleshma as ojas.\(^{[18]}\) He has also used the term sleshmikashhaya for ojokshaya.

Ojas has been accepted in Kaphavarga, Kapha Svaroopa and Utkrishta Bala roopa. Each one has different description. Even then Ojas is taken as Prakrita Kapha. In this context, measurement of Vishuddha Sleshma is 6 anjali and Shlaishmika (Apara) Oja is \(\frac{1}{2}\) Anjali which points at their discreteness and inclusion of Ojas in Sleshma Varga with special form and actions. Also, while Prakrita sleshma is synonymous to Bala while Ojas itself is the cause of Bala. Inspite of having distinct existence from Vishuddha Sleshma, its properties are similar to Sleshma when it is in physiological form\(^{[19]}\) as it is produced from Sleshmavargiya Sukra. Hence, may be called as Prakrita Kapha.

5. **Sariroshma roopa\(^{[11]}\)**
   Sariroshma is produced with the help of Draksha shakara which is also taken as Ojas.

6. **Draksha sarkara roopa**
   Apara Oja may be taken as Draksha sarkara. Best example being pathogenesis of Madhumeha by Caraka which quotes that when Vayu takes Ojas to Basti, then Kricchra vyadhi Madhumeha is produced.\(^{[20]}\)
As per modern science, it is clear that Draksha sarkara is excreted through Mootra in Madhumeha. It is being stored in liver and muscles, released at the time of requirement for producing action of various Dhatu. Hence, it may be taken as Ojas.

7. **Sukra roopa**

- As per Dalhana, the essence of all Dhatu ‘Ojas’ is present in whole body just like presence of Sukra in whole body and presence of Ghrita in milk.[11] Ojas is produced from Sukra only. Hence Ojas may be considered as Sukra.
- Hemadri also took sukra as ojas.[15,17]

8. **Sukrasara, Sukramala, Sukropadhatu, Garbhasya adisara roopa**

*Ojas* is the Sara of all Dhatu and the last of all Dhatu- Sukra is also the most potent and superior one whose Sara is being quoted as Ojas by Vagbhata. He further explained the absence of Mala in Sukra Dhatu as it is very pure.[21]

Ashtanga Hridaya put forward the concept of Ojas as Sukramala.[22] He further indicated that Snehadhikya, Gaurava and Utkrishtata of Rasadi Dhatu increases successively.[23]

Dalhana clarified that sukra does not possesses Mala. It consists of Sarabha only which is Ojas.[24]

Acharya Sarangadhara is the only one to take it as upadhatu of Sukra Dhatu.[25]

Ojas has also been expounded as garbhasya adisara i.e. primordial substance of intrauterine life.[7,10] In fact, its existence is even before fertilization as sara of sperms & ovum, which is essential for fertilization to occur. Fertilization leads to production of garbha i.e. zygote & ojas, the latter being called as garbharasadrasaha which means sara of the first formed rasa dhatu of garbha.[26]

Concluding, Ojas is all Sara Roopa, Mala Roopa & Upadhatu Roopa as only Ojas is produced during analysis of sukra by sukradhatvagnivyapara. Any of the term is mentioned according to the context for eg. in garbhotpatti prakarana, where fertilization results in the production of ojas along with garbha, it is termed as sukramala & garbha is termed as sara. Hemadri elaborates that these terms are relative since ojas is mala of sukra in comparison of garbha but sara in comparison to rasadi dhatu. Hence, the ojas thus formed is said to be garbhasyadisara.
Synonyms
It has been used in the following context:-

1. Dipti, Bala, Prakasha.\cite{27}
2. Dipti, Avashtambhe, Pranabale, Samarthye, Sastradikaushale, Patave (Vachaspatyam)
3. Body strength, vigour, energy, ability, power, etc.\cite{28}
4. Sleshma\cite{8}

_Bala_ is mentioned in its synonyms in _samhita_ also.\cite{18,8}

Few other synonyms include _Dhatusara, Poshaka Dhatusara, Tejus, Saha_.\cite{29}

Various synonyms depict its physical properties, chemical properties, functions, production or distribution mechanisms.

**Production of Oja**

- It is produced at very first amongst living beings\cite{30} by which _sahaja bala_ is initiated. When _shukra_ and _shonita_ fuses during fertilization, _sukradhatu_ (both _sukra_ and _sonita_) _paka_ results in the formation of _sara_ and _mala_\cite{31} as per the rule of _rasadi dhatvagnivyapara_. The _ojas_ hence formed, will do _avashtambha_ & sustain the life of _garbha_. Both of them possess the _sara_ of all _dhatu_ rendering them viability as both produced from sperm & ovum through conception. _Ahara rasa_ derived from mother’s body possessing the qualities similar to that of _ojas_.\cite{31} is responsible for further nourishment of _ojas_ & the growing embryo. Hence, the _ojas_ increases to _ardhanjali_.\cite{1}

After the development of heart in the subsequent period of intrauterine life, _ojas_ enters the heart & related vessels through which it is circulated through the whole body of foetus supporting all the tissues of the foetus.\cite{31} Hence, existence of _ojas_ occurs in all the phases of intrauterine life.\cite{7}

- While describing its production process, _Caraka_ said that _Guna_ present in the body collect _Ojas_ from similar _guna_ just like honey bees collects honey from fruits and flowers.\cite{33}

**Poshana (Nourishment):** Acharya _Caraka_ illuminates that all the seven _dhatu_ and _ojas_ are nourished through _Ahara rasa_.\cite{34} _Sushruta_ also accepts the same concept stating that _ahara_ is responsible for all life as well as _bala, varna_ & _ojas_.\cite{35} Hence, _ojas_ is produced through food substances but here, _agni_ (both _jatharagni_ & _dhatvagni_) has a major role too as although
all the nutritive factors of dhatu, ojas, bala, varna are present in the food substances but it requires proper functioning of agni for its conversion into specific metabolise.\[34\]

Srotas which are the internal transport system of the body also play a significant role by transporting the precursors of the body elements i.e. nutrient fractions to the places where they go through agnivyapara and by transporting them further to the site of sthayi dhatu where are transformed into final products.\[36,37\]

Apart from these, aharaparina makara bhava viz. vayu, kleda, ushma, etc may also be considered among the responsible factors.\[37\]

Guna of the ahara dravya responsible for the formation of ojas are similar to the ahara dravya responsible for formation of kapha dosha and dhatu like rasa, mansa, meda, majja and sukra which are being guru, bahala, snigdha, picchila, manda, sthira, sheeta, slakshna and sthoolaa. Among six rasa, madhura rasa facilitates ojas while among five mahabhuta, prthvi & jala mahabhoota facilitate ojas. Caraka also points at dravya with hridya & strotoprasadakara property being favorable to ojas.\[38,39\]

Types of ojas: Caraka has used the term Para or Pradhana only for ojas, but Cakrapani classified the Ojas into two types in his commentary:-

1. Para ojas (Pradhana): One which dwells in the heart and is predominantly white, yellowish & reddish in colour is para ojas which originates first and after which the body of an organism develops. It is like ghee, sweet in taste like madhu and has the smell of laja at the time of origin. Slight depletion of para ojas causes death.\[40,41\]

2. Apara ojas (Apradhana): It is also known as Sleshmika ojas. The word ‘śleshma’ is derived from “slish alingane” dhatu which means to hold & keep together. Here, the prefix ‘Sleshmika’ before ojas signifies its role in maintaining the integrity of all dosha, dhatu, mala, manas and atma in living beings.

Sthana (~ Seat): Hridaya on which Ayu depends is also the seat of Para ojas. Clinicians call it as Mahat as it shelters Ojas & Artha as it shelters Cetana. Ojas enters into heart & gets mixed with rasa.\[42\] Ten Dhamanee originating from hridaya are known as Mahamoola or Ojovaha through which oja circulates in body along with rasa.\[43\]

All ancient scholars have accepted every organ of the body as the seat of ojas.\[44,45,46\]
Acharya Bhela has described twelve main seats of ojas in the body viz. rasa, rakta, mansa, meda, asthi, majja, sukra, sveda, pitta, sleshma, mootra and pureesha.

**Svaroopa (~form):** Study of svaroopa of ojas is essential for appropriate comprehension of its varied aspects.

Nature (State in which it exists) : It is liquid in nature as it has been enumerated along with other body fluids & measured in *anjali praman*.

Colour: Rakta and Ishit Peetavarneeya Sveta Padartha, Sarpivarna – Caraka.

Sukla varna – Sushruta

Atishveta – Dalhana

Ishat lohita peetakam – Vagbhata

Shyava – Kashyapa

Odour: Only Caraka mentioned it as lajagandi.

Taste: Only Caraka mentioned it as Madhura rasa. In another context, he mentioned it as madhurasa with slight kashayatva.

Consistency: Guru, Seeta, Mridu, Slakshna, Bahala, Sthira, Prasanna, Picchila, Snigdha.

**Guna (~ Properties)**

Ten pairs (total twenty) of shareera guna are mentioned, among which one out of each pair shows anabolic or anticatabolic effect on the body. Ojas has the following guna through which it executes its functions- Somatmaka, Guru, Snigdha, Sheeta, Sthira, Slakshna, Sara, Prasanna, Picchila, bahala, Vivikta, Madhura, Mridu, Mritsna and Uttama Pranayatana. It resides in every part of body and the body is destroyed in its absence.

**Karma (~ Action)**

Ojas has been mentioned as “Pranayatanam uttamatam”. Living beings live as they are content and fulfilled with Oja. Its absence results in absence of life. Being originated from Garbharasa, it is Adisara of Garbha. It preserves and protects life by entering and residing in heart before being circulated in the body. Its destruction leads to destruction of life. Hence, Prana (~vitality) remains in the Oja and provides Sthirata (~ Stability) to the body. It is responsible for bala of the body. It provides protection to the body against diseases, decay & degeneration and also bestows natural resistance against diseases. It may also be said to be responsible for Brimhana on the basis of the concept put forward by
Acharya Kashyap that the body increases in size only when ojas in the body increases & vice versa.\textsuperscript{[50]}

It has a major role in all three stages of life i.e. utpatti, sthiti & pralaya.\textsuperscript{[55]}

**A. In Utpatti**

1. In fertilization: Ojas exists in the sperm and ovum in the form of their sara or essence, in the absence of which fertilization cannot take place.\textsuperscript{[56,57]}

2. In growth & development of garbha: After fertilization, sara of sukra and sonita transforms into a new entity known as garbharasadasaha which is the only source of nutrition of garbha for its growth & development.\textsuperscript{[9]}

3. In viability or non-viability of foetus: Ojas circulates between mother and foetus during the eighth month of pregnancy.\textsuperscript{[58]} The foetus does not survives, if gets delivered when ojas is in maternal body.\textsuperscript{[59,60]}

**B. In Sthiti**

1. In maintaining health: Dosha, dhatu and mala are the fundamental units of the body which sustain the body in its normal state but they cant do so in the absence of ojas even if they are present in their physiological state of equilibrium.\textsuperscript{[56]}

2. In performing actions: All the activities of the body viz. kayika, vachika, manasika can be executed properly in the presence of ojas only.\textsuperscript{[16]}

3. In preventing & fighting against vyadhi: The term ojas represents the status of bala due to the cause & effect relation between the two.\textsuperscript{[61,62]} Vyadhi pratikara Sakti depends upon the bala. Hence, it is not only accountable for vyadhi utpada pratibandhakara but also for vyadhibalavrodhitva.

4. Attaining good health: Good/ Positive health means better than the normal health and is identified by sthiropachita mansata, svara varna prasadana, atibalatvam, manda jara, manda vikara, smriti medha buddhi, kleshasaha, etc.\textsuperscript{[63]}

**Measurement**

In Ayurveda, body fluids are measured in anjali praman. One anjali is equivalent to volume of the cavity formed by hollowing one’s both palms together and befits that individual only. Slaishmika/ Apara Ojas: Ardhanjali\textsuperscript{[32]}

Hridayashrita Para Ojas: Ashta Bindu\textsuperscript{[64]}
Acharya Caraka further clarifies that the pramana mentioned here is param pramana (maximum) & the pramana varies with the fluctuations in the body fluid according to the constitution of the body.

Acharya Gangadhara points at the oneness of ashta Bindu and ardhanjali as bindu implies karsa and eight karsa are equivalent to ardhanjali.

Acharya Vagbhata quoted the quantity of ojas as one prasrita\textsuperscript{[65]} which also means the cavity formed by hollowing one’s own palm and is not the two pala as in Mana Prakarana.

Arunadatta states that ojas is present in all the cells of the body and its six drops are located in hridaya.\textsuperscript{[66]}

Para Ojas is the basis of life. Its destruction leads to destruction of life. Decrease in Apara Ojas produces symptoms of Ojakshaya in the body.

**Factors for Ojakshaya**\textsuperscript{[67,68,69,70]}

1. Abhigatha - Injury
2. Vyayama, Shrama – Excessive physical work than the stamina of individual.
3. Anashana – Not taking any food.
4. Chinta, Dhyana – Regular anxiety or worry.
5. Krodha - Anger
6. Rookshalpa pramitashanam – Intake of small quantity of food, dry food.
7. Vatatapa – Sitting in dry air and in extensive sunlight.
10. Rookshapanam – Prolonged intake of alcohol, which causes dryness.
11. Prajagaraha – Regular awakening at night.
12. Kshudha - Hunger
14. Kshaya - Wasting
16. Bhootopaghata – Recurrent infections
17. Factors producing mental and psychological stress.
Symptoms of Ojakshaya

The symptoms of Ojakshaya in general are\[71\]:-

1. Bibheti
2. Durbala
3. Abheekshanam dhyayati
4. Vyathitendriya
5. Dushchhayo
6. Durmana
7. Rookshaha
8. Kshamashchaiva

There are three types of abnormalities of ojas:\[73\]

1. Visransa – Characterized by Sandhivishlesha (dislocation of joints), Gatranam sadanam (body ache), Dosha cyavanam (displacement of dosha from their sites), Kriya sannirodhashcha (obstruction in execution of physical & mental functions).
2. Vyapada - Characterized by Stabdhagurugatrata (heaviness & loss of functions of the body), Vatashopha (Vatika oedema), Varnabheda (Discoloration of the body), Glani (Malaise), Tandra (drowsiness), Nidra (excessive sleep).
3. Kshaya - Characterized by Moorccha (fainting), Mansakshaya (emaciation of muscles), Moha (confusion), Pralapa (delirium), Maranam (death)

Treatment of Ojakshaya

1. Hridya, Aujasya and Strotoprasadaka ahara vihara should be taken.\[73\]
2. The individual should try to have prashama and gyana.\[73\]
3. Visransa and Vyapada avastha should be treated by increasing the bala of rogi with vishesha kriya which should not work against bala, dosha and agni of sharira.\[72\]
4. Individual presenting with moodhasngya avastha of ojakshaya should not be treated.\[72\]
5. Jivaniya aushadha and ksheera should be used.\[74\]

CONCLUSION

Ojas has not been enumerated among Dhatu and Upadhatu. It is not only the essence of all Dhatu and better than all Upadhatu, but it is also the best in properties and actions.
All dhautu are nourished through Ahara rasa. Fractions of every dhautu is present in subtle form in Ahara rasa which are extracted and transformed into Dhatu through Dhatvagni. Utkrishtatama Teja of these Dhatu is termed as Ojas.

Hence, there may be two kind of beliefs about Ojas:-

1. Best fraction of Ahara rasa which is essentially absorbed by all Dhatu is Ojas. This belief validates the presence of Ojas in Ahara rasa.

2. Ojas fraction from Ahara rasa exists in special form in every Dhatu and works accordingly viz. its fraction staying in Rakta helps in conducting special actions through Rakta. It validates the Teja absorbed from Ahara rasa and expressed in the transformed Dhatu as Vishesh Ojas.

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