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Vyadhikshamatva: Conceptual and Holistic Approach to Immunity in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly changing, stressful lifestyle, uncertain climate and unhealthy habits of health conscious generations results in poor immunity and invitations for diseases. Ayurveda deals with healthy and disease states of life. In either state vyadhikshamatva (immunity) plays a vital role. Hence concept of vyadhikshamatva is of great importance for holistic approach towards individuals. In Charak samhita reference of Vyadhikshamatva is found in Vividhashitapitiya adhyay; but no specific explanations are available. Vyadhikshamatva being basic and fundamental principle in ayurveda it is described in detail by Chakrapani and Gangadhar in their respective commentaries. Vyadhikshamatva is well defined for the first time, by Chakrapani in very scientific manner in terms of "vyadhibala virodhitavam" and "vyadhyutpad pratibandhakatvam". Vyadhikshamatva in ayurveda implies a resistance against loss of proportion, coordination, and inter relationship amongst the individual's dhosha, dhatu, mala and agni. It is not merely immunity against any specific disease or infectious agent for which in western medicine there is provision of immunization. Present article throws a light on concept of Vyadhikshamatva, its aspects and commentaries, importance, role in today's era and comparison with modern concept of immunity.

KEYWORDS

Vyadhikshamatva, Immunity, Avyadhisaha Sharira, Ayurveda, Bala



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INTRODUCTION

Ancient system of medicine; Ayurveda has always given preference to maintain the health rather than to cure the disease. In today's era world has accepted the fundamental concept of ayurveda "*Swasthasya swasthya rakshanam; aturasya vikaraprashamanam cha*" - Charak Samhita, Sutrasthan 30/26 i.e. Health of a healthy person should be maintained and those who are sick be treated by hitakar Aahar ,Vihar, and Aushadha. But due to unhealthy and faulty eating habits, rapidly changing life style, decrease of patience along with less tolerating capacity; health loses its position in priority list of a person. This leads to occurrence of a disease.

CONCEPT OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA-

The word *Vyadhikshamatva* is composed of two words- 1. *Vyadhi* -means disease, non-equilibrium state of physiological entities and 2. *Kshamatva* -means tolerance or to resist. So *Vyadhikshamatva* means the capacity of body to act against disease which means it can prevent as well as fight against disease. The term *Vyadhikshamatva* is found in Charak samhita Sutrasthan 28th adhyay viz. *Vividhashitpitiya adhyay* but not explained in detail. *Vyadhikshamatva* is well defined and explained with its types by commentators specially Chakrapani.

The entity which is acting as a protecting force behind individual's health is *Vyadhikshamtva*. Even after multiple exposures individuals differ in tolerance capacity to different diseases. This can be attributed to a concept called *Vyadhikshamatva*, which is a variable entity with respect to person, place and time.

In ayurvedic terms *Vyadhikshamatva* can be defined as the capability of *sharira* (body) to prevent the *utpatti* of the *Roga* and also to resist almost all types of *Vyadhis*.

Immunity is defined by Oxford dictionaries as the ability of an organism to resist a particular infection or toxin by the action of specific antibodies. When immunity in general is thought, it is prevention of disease and hence immunization protocol is followed without fail.

When *hetus* come into contact with the body; these try to create disease. At the same time the body tries to resist the disease. This power of the body, which prevents the development of diseases or resists a developed disease, is called *Vyadhikshamatva*¹ in Ayurveda. Some of the practitioners try to co-relate this concept to Immunity concept in modern medicine. It is commonly observed that certain persons do not develop a disease even after



coming into contact with the specific *hetus*, while others become victims of the disease. The reason is that when the resistive power of the body is sufficiently strong it destroys the causes².

Immunity depends upon the maintenance of the equilibrium of *Doshas* and the healthiness of *Dhatu*s and *Srotas*as. Similarly the strength of the body is related to immunity and it also depends upon the healthiness of *agni*, *dhatu*.

In Charak Samhita ***Balavruddhikara bhavas*** are mentioned which may be considered to be responsible; for the ideal *vyadhikshama sharira*.

These ***Balavruddhikara bhavas***³, are related to the healthiness of tissues, as:

1. Birth in a country where people are naturally strong
2. Birth at a time when people naturally gain strength
3. Favorable disposition of time (pleasant and moderate climate).
4. Excellence of the qualities of the sperm and the ovum.
5. Excellence of the ingested food.
6. Excellence of the physique
7. Excellence of mind.
8. Favorable disposition of the race and species
9. Exercise
10. Cheerful disposition during sexual indulgence

These factors contribute to healthiness of body and mind as well. So indirectly help in building *Vyadhikshamatva*.

TYPES OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA-

Chakrapani quoted two types of *Vyadhikshamatva*⁴. ***Vyadhikshamatvam nam vyadhi bala virodhitvam vyadhyutpada prathibhadakatwam-*** Chakrapani tika (Cha. Su.28)

1) ***Vyadhibala Virodhitvam*** - action taken against disease or strength to stop the progress of disease i.e. Improving the strength against a specific disease, which can be achieved by *Naimittika Rasayana*. Maybe correlated with *Yuktikrut bala* or artificial immunity or acquired immunity.

2) ***Vyadhyutpada Pratibandhakatvam*** - as capability of preventing diseases or as strength of the body is strong enough to stop the occurrence and re-occurrence of disease. May be correlated with *Sahaja bala* or innate immunity.

CONCEPT OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA IN AYURVED

Vyadhikshamatva can be well understood with the help of synonyms used in one or other aspect like 1. *Vikaravighatakar bhava*⁵, 2. *Bala*⁶ 3. *Ojas*⁷ 4. *Shleshma*⁸ 5. *Satmya*⁹ 6. *Rasayana*¹⁰ etc. Some Vaidyas consider "bala" alone as a synonym for *Vyadhikshamatva*.

1. ***Vikaravighatakarbhava*** means when the resistance power of the body is sufficiently strong enough to destroy the cause, there will be no manifestation of diseases. The *bhavas* that create the defensive



mechanisms against diseases are called as *vikara vighataka bhava*.

Vyadhikshamatva is a process which acts as a result of presence of *Vikarvighatkar bhava* even after *Paraspar anubandha* of *Nidan*, *Dosha*, *Dushya*. Hence, *Vikarvighatkar bhava* are the main reason for *Vyadhikshamatva*.

2. **Bala** - is only power that controls *doshas* or *rogas* (disease). *Bala* usually referred as strength. Also used as a synonym for *Vyadhikshamatva*. *Bala* is the output state of equilibrium of *dosha*, *dhatu* and *mala* in our body, thus it is an important functional identity of body. There are three types of *bala* mentioned in ayurveda: 1. *Sahaja*: congenital (by birth) or natural

2. *Kalaja*: with respect to time, season, age
3. *Yuktikruta*: acquired.

Sahaja bala comes from the parents and is inherited. The effect will be at the chromosomal level. As this immunity is inherited.

Kalaja bala is inclusive of the time of day, season, age, and place of birth, geographical variation for example, places with an abundance of water, ponds, cool and pleasant climatic conditions are *Anup* or *kapha*-dominating areas and contribute to stronger immunity. Also, strength of any person is greater in youth, the early morning and spring, than in old age, evening and summer.

Yuktikruta bala is acquired by specialized activities. It represents acquired immunity through which disease can be defended.

3. **Ojas** is the final and excellent essence of *dhatu*s beginning with *rasa* & ending in with *shukra*. *Ojas*, the quintessence of all the tissues of the body is known as *ojas* because, it is the final and excellent essence of all seven *dhatu*s. *Ojas* is our vital energy. It is the ultimate essence of *dhatu*s combined together. *Ojas* is the main determinant of our immune status and hence our resistance to disease.

4. **Shleshma / kapha** - . Equilibrium state of *kapha* promotes strength, that's why normal *kapha* is used as synonym for *bala/vyadhikshamatva*. Presence of *ojas* in our body can be compared to functions of normal *kapha*.

5. **Satmya** -Use of all six *rasas* in diet creates maximum strength in the body whereas consumption of one or two *rasas* gives rise to minimum *bala*. This directly affects the *Vyadhikshamatva* of a person. Similarly use of *aahar*, *vihar* and *aushadha* opposite in qualities to *desha*, *kala*, *roga* and *prakruti* is termed as *satmya*.

6. **Rasayan** - *Rasayana* is a health promoter and rejuvenator. It is the therapy given/ taken to obtain best qualitative and quantitative *rasadi dhatu* thereby giving rise to excellent *Vyadhikshamatva* because of excellence of *ojas*. It strengthens the



individual's capabilities at both physical and psychological levels. Thus it provides resistance against different physical as well as mental ailments. So *rasayana* will surely help in improving *Vyadhikshamatva* of an individual. Though in *samhitas* it is not directly mentioned; how *Vyadhikshamatva* originates or what should be considered as a good *vyadhikshama sharira*, certain *shlokas* from *samhita* state that, in certain *shariras* (living bodies) *vyadhikshamatva* is less. By studying this "*vyadhi akshama* -No or *alpa vyadhikshama*" *shariras* ; one can come to a conclusion that *shariras* opposite to them can be considered as good *Vyadhikshama sharira*.

VARIABILITY OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA IN DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS-

It is observed that many people with appropriate daily and seasonal habits also develop disease and some people, though indulging in improper diet and behaviour hardly develop any disease. Charak has further described two types of *Sharira* (individuals) - *Vyadhisaha* and *Avyadhisaha* which are similar and can be easily correlated to *Vyadhi kshamatva* and *akshamatva*.¹¹

AVYADHISAHA SHARIRA:

Persons incapable of resisting diseases: (a) *Atisthoola* - Excessively obese persons (b) *Atikrisha* - Excessively emaciated persons

(c) *Anivishtha mansa* - Persons having improper musculature (d) *Anivishtha rakta* - Persons having defective Rakta (Blood) (e) *Anivishtha asthi* - Persons having defective *Asthi dhatu* (bone tissues) (f) *Durbala* - Very weak persons (g) *Asatmyaharopchita* - Persons nourished with unwholesome food (h) *Alpahari* - Persons taking diet in small quantity. (i) *Alpasatvayukta* - Persons with feeble mind Individuals taking *alpa*, *ahita ahara* and objectionable food are also very weak due to improper nourishment of *dhatu*s. Those with feeble *sattva* are also weak due to interdependency of *sharira* & *sattva bala*¹².

VYADHISAHA SHARIRA: Persons capable of resisting diseases- They are just opposite to above. Proportionate musculature, compactness of the body and healthy *indriyas* prevent the onset of disease; help to withstand hunger, thirst and heat of the sun, cold weather and physical exertion; assist in digesting & assimilating the food properly¹³.

**VYADHIKSHAMATVA AND
MANOBALA-** Along with *sharir bala*; *vyadhikshamatva* also depends on *manobala*. If a person has good *sharirabala* but has poor *manobala* then generally they have poor *vyadhikshamatva* and this is explained by Charak by term *alpa sattvaani*. Even in *Chikitsa Chatushpad*



abhiruta is a *guna*(quality) mentioned. In Charak Samhita "*vishado rog vardhananam*"¹⁴ (Agrya) can be related here. While explaining *prashasta rugna* (commendation of patient) - *satvavan rugna*¹⁵ is mentioned by Samhitakar.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda science different varieties of food, medicines and procedures are mentioned to maintain healthy status of life and for long life span by improving *vyadhikshamatva*. Two types of *Vyadhikshamatva* basically depends on many factors, such as *Deha Prakriti, Ahara, Desha, Kala, Vaya* etc. but the *Prakriti* is being a constant phenomenon throughout life it never changes further it constantly influences *Vyadhikshamatva*. *Kapha* dominant *prakruti* is described as more *vyadhikshama* as compared to other *prakritis*.

It is possible to increase *Vyadhikshamatva* at the time of conception, during gestational period and even after birth. Apart from internal factors, the external factors used after conception for healthy progeny are the good quality of food (*Ahar*), adaptability of food and environment (*Vihar* according to *Dinacharya* and *Rutucharya*), mental relaxation, good sound sleep (*Nidra*) as per directions of Ayurveda.

After birth, proper conduct of daily and seasonal regimes plays a vital role in *Aarogya* as well as *Vyadhikshamatva*. The vitiated *Doshas* during particular season should be removed through *Shodhana* as a preventive measure before the occurrence of any disease. In *Vasanta Ritu Kapha* is to be expelled through *Vamana* while *Pitta* is to be expelled through *Virechana karma* in *Sharad Ritu*. *Vata dosha* being *Tantrayantra dhara* it has to be managed with *Basti karma*, throughout the year especially in *Varsha ritu*. Both sub-types of *vyadhikshamatva* as mentioned in text can be correlated to the non-specific and specific immunity of the present day.

1) *Vyadhibala virodhitwam* - specific immunity. 2) *Vyadhyutpad pratibandhakatwam* - non-specific immunity. Western medicine which focuses on diseases (like polio, rubella), specific infections or depends mostly on immunizations and boosters to prevent diseases, whereas the efforts made to improve *vyadhikshamatva* can protect you from in general all disease and not specific disease. Ayurveda deals in balancing the state of body and mind as well. The western medicine defines immunity as the state of having sufficient biological defenses, to avoid infection and diseases; whereas in Ayurveda it is about how to stop the manifestation of disease along with fighting



against the disease. It includes the curative and preventive aspect too. One should wisely adopt these into his lifestyle so as to make his body & mind strong enough to deal with all the physical and mental stresses of the modern era.

CONCLUSION

Vyadhikshamatva which can be compared with immunity is of prime importance to maintain homeostasis of the body. Proper understanding of the versatile functions of *vyadhikshamatva* is possible with the prior knowledge of concepts like *bala*, *ojas*, *vikaravighatakar bhavas*, *rasayna*, *kapha* which in turn are helpful for the better management of various ailments. These all factors can be considered as very important for regulation of *vyadhikshamatva*.

Bala is directly proportionate to *vyadhikshamatva*, more the *bala* more is *vyadhikshamatva*. *Ojas* is pure extract of *dhatus/body*. *Vikara vighatakar bhavas* are *bhavas* that create the defensive mechanisms against diseases. *Rasayanas* are rejuvenators.

Certain procedures like **JATAKARMA**,^{16,17,18} & **KARNAVEDHAN**¹⁹ **SAMSKARA**, **LEHANA** **KARMA**²⁰, **SUVARNA PRASHAN**²¹, **DHOOPANA** karma²² are

described to create surprising effects like *vyadhikshamatva*.

Vyadhikshamatva is one of those topics which are well explained by commentators due to its importance and practical application in our day to day life.



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