



Ojas in Ayurveda: Classical Concept, Physiological Significance and Pathological Implications

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ABSTRACT

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Ojas is one of the most fundamental concepts described in Ayurveda and represents the supreme essence (tejas) of the seven dhātus. It is regarded as the substratum of life and the basis of strength (bala), immunity (vyādhi-kṣamatva), vitality, and systemic stability. Classical Ayurvedic texts including Caraka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya describe Ojas as existing in two forms: Para Ojas, located in the heart in the quantity of eight drops, and Aparā Ojas, which circulates throughout the body.¹⁰¹² The preservation of Ojas is essential for survival, while its depletion leads to severe physiological disturbance and death.¹² Three pathological states—Ojo-vyāpat, Ojo-viśraṃsa, and Ojo-kṣaya—are described in classical literature.² Modern biomedical interpretation suggests that Ojas may represent an integrative physiological principle related to immune competence, neuroendocrine regulation, and systemic resilience.³⁴ This review analyzes classical Ayurvedic descriptions of Ojas with Sanskrit references and discusses their relevance in the context of contemporary biomedical science.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda describes health as a state of equilibrium among doṣa, dhātu, and mala, maintained by vital physiological principles. Among these, Ojas is regarded as the essential life-sustaining substance responsible for vitality, strength, and resistance to disease.¹²¹³

Classical Ayurvedic texts emphasize that the presence of Ojas ensures physiological stability, whereas its depletion results in systemic collapse and death.¹²



Materials and Methods

This work is a conceptual narrative review based on classical Ayurvedic texts and modern biomedical literature.

Classical Sources

Caraka Saṃhitā²⁵⁶⁷ Suśruta Saṃhitā¹⁹¹⁰ Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya¹²¹³

Modern Sources

Peer-reviewed biomedical literature focusing on

Immunology, Psychoneuroimmunology, Systemic inflammation

Physiological resilience³⁴¹⁴⁻²⁰

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Etymology and Conceptual Meaning

The word Ojas is derived from the Sanskrit root “uj”, meaning vigor, strength, or vitality.¹²

Definition

रसादीनां शुक्रान्तानां धातूनां यत् परं तेजः ।

तत् खल्व् ओजः स्मृतं देहे सर्व-बल-समुद्भवम् ।

— Suśruta Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 15/7¹

Meaning:

The supreme essence of the dhātus from rasa to śukra is called Ojas, which is the source of all strength in the body.

Thus, Ojas is: The ultimate essence of the seven dhātus, The biological substratum of strength, The sustaining principle of life (prāṇa-ādhāra).

2. Synonyms of Ojas

Classical synonyms include:

Bala – Strength

Prāṇa – Life force

Dhātu-tejas – Radiance of tissues

Rasa-śeṣa – Essence of rasa

Jīvana-śoṇita – Vital blood

These synonyms emphasize the integrative physiological significance of Ojas in maintaining life and vitality.¹²¹³



3. Different Views Regarding the Nature of Ojas

3.1 Ojas as the Eighth Dhātu

Since the dhātus sustain the body and Ojas also sustains life, some scholars consider Ojas to be the eighth dhātu. It is described as the supreme essence of all dhātus, especially of śukra.

3.2 Ojas as an Upadhātu (Secondary Tissue)

Some authorities, including Śārṅgadhara, state that while the dhātus nourish and structurally maintain the body, Ojas primarily sustains life (prāṇadhāra). Therefore, it is regarded as an upadhātu.

3.3 Ojas as a Mala (Waste Product) of Sukra

A minority view considers Ojas to be a mala. However, this interpretation is not widely accepted because classical texts state that depletion of Ojas results in death, which is inconsistent with the concept of a waste product.

3.4 Ojas as a Mala of Kapha

Some scholars classify Ojas specifically as a waste product of Kapha due to similarities in qualities.

3.5 Ojas as an Upadhātu of Kapha

Others consider Ojas to be a secondary tissue derivative of Kapha, again based on their comparable properties.

3.6 Ojas as the Supreme Essence of Dhātu Transformation

Certain authorities emphasize that Ojas is formed as the final and highest metabolic essence during the transformation of all dhātus.

3.7 Ojas as a Distinct Life-Sustaining Substance

Some scholars describe Ojas as a unique and independent substance endowed with specific qualities essential for vitality, systemic stability, and survival.

Despite differing classifications, the prevailing classical view affirms Ojas as a vital and indispensable principle of life rather than a mere structural derivative or waste product.

4. Nature and Properties (Gūṇa)

ओजस् तु तेजो धातूनां शुक्रान्तानां परं स्मृतम् ।

— Caraka Saṁhitā²

Meaning:

Ojas is the supreme essence of dhātus ending with śukra.

Classical Properties:

Slightly reddish-yellow or golden, Unctuous (snigdha), Cool (śīta), Smooth and soft, Clear and transparent, Sweet in taste (madhura).



Ojas, while reflecting qualities of Kapha like stability and nourishment, is a more subtle and essential essence that sustains life and promotes overall health.¹²¹³

5. Types of Ojas

5.1 Para Ojas

हृदयस्थं परं ओजः अष्ट-बिन्दु-प्रमाणकम्।

तस्य नाशे ध्रुवो मृत्युः ॥

— Suśruta Saṃhitā¹⁰

Location: Heart (Hṛdaya)

Quantity: Eight drops (Aṣṭa-bindu)

Nature: Extremely subtle

Function: Direct sustainer of life

Loss of even one drop leads to immediate death. Thus, Para Ojas is indispensable for survival.

5.2 Aparā Ojas

Circulates throughout the body

Quantity: Approximately half to one anjali

Comparable in quality to normal Kapha

Also termed Śleṣmika Ojas

Functions: Maintains immunity, Supports tissue integrity, Preserves systemic strength.

This circulating Ojas supports physiological resilience and disease resistance.²¹³

6. Dhātu Metabolism and Formation of Ojas

Ahāra Rasa (nutrient essence)



Rasa Dhātu



Rakta Dhātu



Māṃsa Dhātu



Meda Dhātu



↓

Asthi Dhātu

↓

Majjā Dhātu

↓

Śukra Dhātu

↓

SUPREME ESSENCE

↓

OJAS

↓

Bala • Immunity • Vitality • Longevity

This sequential metabolic transformation culminates in the production of Ojas, representing the highest level of tissue refinement.²⁷

7. Assessment of Ojas through Dhātu Sāra

Since Ojas is the finest essence of the seven dhātus, its status can be inferred through the evaluation of Dhātu Sāra (tissue excellence).

The term Sāra denotes the optimal strength and functional efficiency of a tissue. Assessment of Dhātu Sāra helps determine patient strength, prognosis, and recovery potential (Caraka Saṃhitā, Vimānasthāna 8/102–111).

Indicators of Dhātu Sāra

Tvak Sāra

Smooth, soft, lustrous skin with good complexion.

Rakta Sāra

Reddish eyes, lips, tongue, and palms with radiant appearance.

Māmsa Sāra

Well-developed muscles and strong body build.

Meda Sāra

Lustrous hair, nails, teeth, and smooth bodily functions.

**Asthi Sāra**

Strong bones, joints, nails, and teeth.

Majjā Sāra

Well-built body with stamina and vitality.

Śukra Sāra

Pleasant appearance, vitality, and reproductive strength.

Sattva Sāra (Mental Excellence)

Characterized by:

Good memory, Courage, Emotional stability, Wisdom and clarity of mind

Thus, Dhātu Sāra examination provides an indirect clinical assessment of Ojas, reflecting vitality and resistance to disease.

8. Functional Significance of Ojas

Ojas supports:, Physical strength (śārīrika bala), Mental stability, Tissue nourishment

Immune defense, Maintenance of complexion, Longevity¹²

Classically, Ojas is directly equated with strength:

बलं हि ओजः²

Meaning: Strength itself is Ojas.

In modern interpretative frameworks, Ojas may be correlated with: Immune competence, Endocrine balance, Neuro-immunological resilience, Systemic homeostasis.

9. Pathology of Ojas (Oja-Vikṛti)

Three major pathological conditions are described:

Ojo-Vyāpat (Vitiation)

Ojo-Viśraṁsa (Displacement)

Ojo-Kṣaya (Depletion)

9.1 Ojo-Vyāpat (Vitiation of Ojas)

Occurs when Ojas becomes contaminated by aggravated doṣas.

Symptoms:

Heaviness of body, Fatigue, Drowsiness,

Discoloration, Edema, Reduced vitality



Seen in conditions such as:

Prameha (including Madhumeha), Pāṇḍu, Chronic systemic disorders

9.2 Ojo-Viśraṁsa (Displacement of Ojas)

Occurs when Ojas is displaced from its normal seat due to doṣic aggravation.

Clinical Features:

Loosening of joints, General debility, Displacement of doṣas, Impaired physiological functions, Obstruction in bodily activities, This reflects systemic instability.

9.3 Ojo-Kṣaya (Depletion of Ojas)

Most serious pathological state.

Causes:

Excessive physical exertion, Inadequate nutrition, Excess fasting, Grief, fear, anxiety

Trauma, Tissue depletion, Chronic disease

Symptoms:

Loss of strength, Fading complexion, Sensory weakness, Loss of luster, Severe debility.

These disturbances are associated with systemic diseases and tissue depletion.²

Destruction of Para Ojas leads to immediate death.

10. Ojas in Major Diseases

10.1 Prameha

Vitiated Ojas is expelled through urine, especially in Madhumeha.

10.2 Pāṇḍu

Pitta-induced tissue vitiation leads to impairment of Ojas, causing pallor and

10.3 Rājyakṣmā

Progressive dhātu-kṣaya culminates in Oja-kṣaya, presenting with emaciation, chronic weakness, and loss of vitality.

10.4 HIV/AIDS (Modern Correlation)

Can be interpreted as profound Oja-kṣaya marked by immune depletion, recurrent infections, weight loss, and systemic debility.

10.5 Chronic Systemic Disorders

Autoimmune diseases, malignancies, and chronic inflammation reflect

Oja-duṣṭi These conditions reflect reduced vitality and impaired physiological resistance.²



10.6 Kṣaya and Cachexia

Nutritional deficiency and chronic infection lead to dhātu depletion and secondary Oja-kṣaya, manifesting as weakness and low disease resistance. Modern research recognizes that immune function depends on integrated interactions between metabolic, endocrine, and neural systems.¹⁴¹⁵

10.7 Psychosomatic Disorders

Stress can suppress immune function and increase susceptibility to disease, which parallels the Ayurvedic concept of Ojas depletion caused by emotional stress, fear, or grief.¹⁷

11. Philosophical and Physiological Interpretation

Ojas represents:

The integrative principle of life

The biological expression of tissue excellence

The functional equivalent of vitality and resilience. It bridges Dhātu metabolism, Immune integrity, Mental stability.

Life-force (Prāṇa)

Thus, Ojas is not merely a tissue product but a systemic life principle.

DISCUSSION

The concept of Ojas reflects an advanced understanding of systemic vitality and physiological resilience in Ayurveda. Classical descriptions indicate that Ojas maintains immune competence, tissue integrity, and mental stability.¹²¹³

Modern biomedical research demonstrates that immune function is influenced by multiple factors including inflammation, stress responses, and metabolic regulation.¹⁴¹⁶

Psychoneuroimmunology further supports the idea that psychological and physiological factors interact to regulate immunity, paralleling Ayurvedic descriptions of Ojas.³¹⁷

Therefore, Ojas may be interpreted as an integrative biological principle representing systemic resilience and immune competence.

CONCLUSION

Ojas represents the supreme essence of dhātus and the substratum of life in Ayurveda. It governs strength, immunity, vitality, and longevity. Preservation and enhancement of Ojas constitute the primary objective of Rasāyana therapy and preventive healthcare. Integrating classical Ayurvedic knowledge with modern biomedical science may contribute to improved understanding of systemic resilience, immunity, and holistic health.

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