



Research Article

Ayurvedic Perspective of Autoimmune Diseases: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

Autoimmune diseases are a diverse group of chronic disorders characterised by the immune system's inability to distinguish self from non-self, resulting in tissue destruction and functional impairment. The prevalence of autoimmune diseases has increased significantly worldwide, creating substantial healthcare challenges. Although Ayurveda does not explicitly describe autoimmune diseases, their pathogenesis can be understood through the concepts of Agni, Ama, Dosha, Dhatu, Srotas, Ojas, and Vyadhikshamatva. Agnimandya leads to Ama formation, which initiates Dosha vitiation, Srotorodha, Dhatu Dushti, and ultimately Ojas impairment. This review explores autoimmune diseases from an Ayurvedic perspective and discusses their etiopathogenesis, Samprapti Ghataka, diagnosis, and management. Ayurvedic interventions, including Nidana Parivarjana, Deepana-Pachana, Panchakarma, Rasayana therapy, dietary regulation, and lifestyle modifications, offer a holistic approach to immune regulation and disease management.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Autoimmune diseases are chronic inflammatory disorders resulting from an inappropriate immune response against the body's own tissues. More than eighty autoimmune disorders have been identified, affecting approximately 5–10% of the global population. Common autoimmune conditions include Rheumatoid Arthritis, Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, Multiple Sclerosis, Psoriasis, Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus, Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, and Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

Modern medicine recognizes genetic predisposition, environmental factors, infections, hormonal influences, and immune dysregulation as key contributors to autoimmunity. Despite advancements in immunotherapy and biologics, most autoimmune diseases require lifelong management and often result in significant morbidity.

Ayurveda emphasizes maintaining equilibrium among Dosha, Dhātu, Mala, Agni, and Ojas. Although autoimmune diseases are not directly described in classical Ayurvedic texts, their pathological processes closely resemble disorders involving Ama, Agnimandya, Ojas Kshaya, and Tridoshaja disturbances. Therefore, understanding autoimmune disorders through Ayurvedic principles provides valuable insights for comprehensive management.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Classical Ayurvedic texts describe numerous disease processes involving chronic inflammation, tissue degeneration, and immune impairment. Conditions such as Amavata, Vatarakta, Kushtha, Grahani, and Raktadushti demonstrate pathological similarities with autoimmune diseases.

Acharya Charaka emphasized that impaired Agni is the root cause of disease. The resulting Ama acts as a toxic intermediary that obstructs channels, contaminates tissues, and initiates pathological processes. Acharya Sushruta described Ojas as the essence of all Dhatus and the basis of strength and immunity. Disturbance of Ojas may lead to susceptibility to chronic diseases.

Recent scientific investigations have demonstrated immunomodulatory effects of several Ayurvedic herbs including Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Amalaki (*Emblia officinalis*), and Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), supporting classical Ayurvedic concepts.

Concept of Immunity in Ayurveda

The concept of immunity in Ayurveda is represented by Vyadhikshamatva. Acharya Charaka defined Vyadhikshamatva as the body's ability to resist disease and prevent recurrence.

Components contributing to immunity include:

- Balanced Doshas
- Proper Agni
- Healthy Dhatus
- Functional Srotas
- Adequate Ojas
- Strong mental health

Vyadhikshamatva not only protects against disease occurrence but also limits disease severity.

Ojas and Autoimmune Disorders

Ojas is considered the supreme essence of all seven Dhatus and serves as the foundation of vitality, immunity, and longevity.

Functions of Ojas

- Maintenance of health
- Disease resistance
- Mental stability
- Tissue nourishment
- Strength and vitality

In autoimmune diseases, chronic inflammation and metabolic disturbances lead to Ojas Vikriti or Ojas Kshaya, resulting in immune imbalance and increased susceptibility to disease progression.

Role of Agni in Autoimmune Diseases

Agni governs digestion, absorption, assimilation, and metabolism.

Types of Agni

1. Jatharagni
2. Bhutagni
3. Dhatwagni

When Agni becomes impaired:

- Food is incompletely digested
- Ama is generated
- Metabolic waste accumulates
- Tissue nutrition becomes defective
- Immune disturbances develop

Thus, Agnimandya is considered a primary pathological factor in autoimmune diseases.

Ama: The Central Pathogenic Factor

Ama is the toxic product formed due to impaired digestion and metabolism.

Characteristics of Ama

- Guru (heavy)
- Snigdha (sticky)
- Picchila (slimy)
- Durgandha (foul-smelling)
- Srotorodhaka (obstructive)

Effects of Ama

- Dosha aggravation
- Dhātu contamination
- Channel obstruction
- Chronic inflammation
- Immune dysfunction

The role of Ama in Ayurveda closely resembles chronic inflammatory mediators and metabolic toxins recognized in modern medicine.

Etiological Factors (Nidana)

Dietary Factors

- Viruddha Ahara
- Excessively heavy foods
- Processed foods
- Excessive dairy products
- Excessive sugar consumption

Lifestyle Factors

- Sedentary habits
- Daytime sleeping
- Sleep deprivation
- Mental stress
- Irregular eating patterns

Psychological Factors

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Chronic emotional disturbances

These factors impair Agni and initiate the formation of Ama.

Samprapti of Autoimmune Diseases

The pathogenesis of autoimmune diseases may be explained as follows:



Samprapti Ghataka

Dosha

- Vata
- Pitta
- Kapha
- Tridosha involvement in advanced stages

Dushya

- Rasa
- Rakta
- Mamsa
- Meda
- Asthi
- Majja

Agni

- Jatharagni Mandya
- Dhatwagni Dushti

Ama

Present throughout disease progression.

Srotas

- Rasavaha
- Raktavaha
- Mamsavaha
- Asthivaha
- Majjavaha

Udbhava Sthana

Amashaya

Adhithana

Disease-specific tissues and organs

Roga Marga

Madhyama and Bahya

Correlation of Autoimmune Diseases with Ayurvedic Disorders

Rheumatoid Arthritis (Amavata)

Clinical features:

- Joint pain
- Swelling
- Morning stiffness
- Restricted movement

Amavata is considered the closest Ayurvedic correlate of Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Psoriasis (Ekakushtha)

Features:

- Scaling
- Dryness
- Chronic inflammation

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

Can be understood through:

- Tridoshaja pathology
 - Raktadushti
 - Ojas Kshaya
- Autoimmune Thyroid Disorders

Associated with:

- Kapha-Vata Dushti
- Agnimandya
- Meda Dhatu imbalance

Multiple Sclerosis**Correlated with:**

- Vata Vyadhi
- Majjavaha Srotas Dushti

Ayurvedic Diagnosis**Trividha Pariksha**

1. Darshana
2. Sparshana
3. Prashna

Dashavidha Pariksha

- Prakriti
- Vikriti
- Sara
- Samhanana
- Pramana
- Satmya
- Satva
- Ahara Shakti
- Vyayama Shakti
- Vaya

Special emphasis should be placed on evaluating:

- Agni
- Ama
- Ojas
- Dosha predominance

Principles of Ayurvedic Management

Nidana Parivarjana

Avoidance of causative factors is the first line of treatment.

Deepana and Pachana

Common drugs:

- Shunthi
- Pippali
- Maricha
- Chitraka
- Panchakola

Benefits:

- Ama digestion

- Agni enhancement
- Improved metabolism

Shodhana Therapy

Vamana

Indicated in Kapha-dominant conditions.

Virechana

Beneficial in Pitta-dominant inflammatory disorders.

Basti

Most important therapy for Vata-dominant autoimmune diseases.

Raktamokshana

Useful in selected inflammatory and skin disorders.

Rasayana Therapy

Rasayana therapy promotes rejuvenation, tissue repair, and immune regulation.

Important Rasayana Drugs

Guduchi

- Immunomodulatory
- Anti-inflammatory
- Adaptogenic

Ashwagandha

- Stress reduction
- Tissue nourishment
- Strength enhancement

Amalaki

- Antioxidant
- Rejuvenative
- Ojas-promoting

Shatavari

- Adaptogenic
- Immunomodulatory

Yashtimadhu

- Anti-inflammatory
- Tissue healing

Panchakarma in Autoimmune Diseases

Panchakarma helps:

- Remove Ama
- Restore Agni
- Correct Dosha imbalance
- Improve tissue metabolism
- Enhance immune function

Commonly employed procedures include:

- Snehana
- Swedana
- Virechana
- Basti

- Nasya

Clinical studies indicate improvement in chronic inflammatory disorders following Panchakarma interventions.

Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations

Recommended Diet

- Warm, freshly prepared food
- Green vegetables
- Whole grains
- Seasonal fruits
- Light digestible meals

Foods to Avoid

- Processed food
- Excess dairy
- Refined sugar
- Cold beverages
- Preserved food

Lifestyle Measures

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Pranayama
- Adequate sleep
- Stress management

3. DISCUSSION

Autoimmune diseases involve complex interactions between genetic, environmental, metabolic, and immunological factors. Ayurveda interprets these disorders through the concepts of Agni, Ama, Dosha, Dhatu, Srotas, and Ojas. Agnimandya initiates the pathological cascade by producing Ama, which contaminates tissues and obstructs physiological channels. This leads to Dosha aggravation, Dhatu impairment, and Ojas depletion.

Unlike symptom-oriented approaches, Ayurveda emphasizes correction of underlying pathology through Deepana, Pachana, Shodhana, and Rasayana therapies. Panchakarma procedures facilitate elimination of accumulated toxins and restoration of physiological balance. Rasayana drugs support immune regulation and tissue rejuvenation.

Integrative approaches combining modern diagnostics with Ayurvedic therapeutic principles may offer improved long-term outcomes in autoimmune disorders.

4. CONCLUSION

Autoimmune diseases can be effectively understood through Ayurvedic concepts of Agni, Ama, Dosha, Dhatu, Srotas, and Ojas. Agnimandya and Ama formation represent the central mechanisms responsible for disease initiation and progression. Ayurvedic management focuses on correcting metabolic dysfunction, eliminating Ama, restoring Dosha balance, strengthening Ojas, and enhancing Vyadhikshamatva. Panchakarma, Rasayana therapy, dietary modifications, and lifestyle interventions provide a comprehensive framework for managing autoimmune diseases and improving quality of life.

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