

THE OJAS–TEJAS–PRANA AXIS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF VITAL FUNCTIONAL HOMEOSTASIS IN AYURVEDIC PHYSIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda conceptualizes health as a dynamic equilibrium sustained by subtle functional regulators that integrate bodily, metabolic, and neuropsychological processes. Among these, Ojas, Tejas, and Prana occupy a central position as determinants of vitality, resilience, and systemic coherence. Rather than representing isolated entities, this triad functions as an interdependent regulatory axis governing nourishment, transformation, and life force. Ojas reflects the cumulative essence of tissue metabolism and underlies immune competence, structural stability, and emotional endurance. Tejas represents the refined functional aspect of metabolic intelligence, directing digestion, thermoregulation, enzymatic activity, and cognitive discrimination. Prana acts as the primary mobilizing and coordinating force responsible for respiration, circulation, neuromuscular activity, sensory integration, and

higher neural regulation. This narrative integrative review systematically examines classical descriptions of Ojas, Tejas, and Prana from authoritative Ayurvedic texts, including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Aṣṭang Hṛdaya*, and interprets their functional interrelationships through contemporary perspectives of immunology, metabolism, and neurophysiology. The analysis demonstrates that balanced interaction among these three principles is essential for maintaining physiological stability, adaptive capacity, and psychosomatic resilience, whereas their disturbance contributes to multisystem dysfunction.

By synthesizing classical Ayurvedic knowledge with modern systems-oriented interpretations, this review proposes the Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis as a coherent functional model of vital homeostasis. The framework offers conceptual relevance for understanding stress adaptation, chronic disease susceptibility, and preventive healthcare, reinforcing Ayurveda’s enduring contribution to integrative and systems-based health science.

KEYWORDS: Ojas; Tejas; Prana; Ayurvedic physiology; Immunity; Metabolic regulation; Systems biology; Psychoneuroimmunology.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the classical Indian system of medicine, offers a comprehensive view of life that extends beyond the physical body to encompass mental, social, and conscious dimensions of health. Rather than limiting physiological inquiry to structural or biochemical parameters, Ayurvedic science emphasizes functional and regulatory principles that sustain vitality, adaptability, and coherence within the living system. This holistic orientation provides a distinctive framework for understanding health as an emergent property of balanced internal regulation rather than the mere absence of disease. Within this paradigm, *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana* are recognized as core determinants of life and functional integrity. These concepts are not abstract metaphysical constructs but represent subtle, operative realities that underpin physiological stability and vitality. *Ojas* is associated with nourishment, tissue resilience, and immune competence; *Tejas* governs transformation, metabolic activity, and perceptual clarity; while *Prana* facilitates movement, respiration, neural communication, and the integration of mind–body processes. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe these entities as refined expressions corresponding to *Kapha*, *Pitta*, and *Vata* at a subtler level of organization. While the *doshas* regulate observable physiological processes, the Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis functions as a foundational substrate that sustains life force and systemic coherence.^[4,8] In recent decades, growing global interest in integrative and holistic healthcare has prompted renewed scholarly engagement with such classical frameworks. Contemporary health challenges—including chronic inflammatory conditions, immune dysregulation, metabolic disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, and stress-related pathologies—often reflect disturbances in systemic regulation rather than isolated organ dysfunction. In this context, the Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis offers a meaningful model for interpreting health as a dynamic state of equilibrium, resilience, and adaptive capacity.

This review aims to examine the classical foundations, functional attributes, and

interrelationships of *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana*, while critically exploring their relevance within contemporary physiological, integrative, and systems-oriented health perspectives. Despite frequent textual references, the coordinated functional integration of *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana* has not been systematically synthesized as a unified physiological axis in existing literature.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As this study aimed at conceptual synthesis rather than quantitative evidence mapping, PRISMA guidelines were not applied.

Methodology and Review Approach

This integrative review is grounded in a comprehensive qualitative examination of classical Ayurvedic literature supported by contemporary interpretative sources. Primary Ayurvedic texts, including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Aṣṭāṅg Hṛdaya*, *Aṣṭāṅg Saṅgraha*, along with relevant *Nighantus*, were systematically reviewed to identify textual references pertaining to *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana*. Classical commentaries authored by authoritative scholars were additionally consulted to enhance conceptual clarity, contextual accuracy, and fidelity to traditional interpretations. Secondary literature comprised peer-reviewed review articles, conceptual papers, and standard textbooks addressing Ayurvedic physiology, integrative medicine, and functional health models. These sources were used to contextualize classical concepts within contemporary scientific discourse. A thematic qualitative analysis was employed to extract and categorize descriptions related to the definitions, origins, physiological roles, pathological alterations, and mutual interrelationships of *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana*. The extracted themes were critically synthesized to develop a coherent and integrative functional model of the *Ojas–Tejas–Prana* axis. No experimental, observational, or clinical data were generated or analysed in the present work. As a narrative integrative review, the study emphasizes conceptual synthesis and interpretative analysis rather than quantitative assessment. The objective is to elucidate the functional significance of the *Ojas–Tejas–Prana* axis as a foundational regulatory framework in Ayurvedic physiology and to explore its relevance to contemporary integrative and systems-based health perspectives.

Interrelationship: The *Ojas–Tejas–Prana* Axis Concept of *Ojas*

Ojas in Ayurvedic Physiology

In Ayurvedic thought, *Ojas* is regarded as the most refined and vital essence (*sāra*) derived from all *dhatu*s, representing the culmination of optimal digestion (*Agni*), metabolism, and

muscular power to encompass immune resilience, mental stability, and adaptive capacity. Adequate *Ojas* ensures the body's ability to withstand internal and external stressors, whereas its deficiency predisposes individuals to recurrent illness, fatigue, and reduced recovery potential. This functional association aligns closely with modern concepts of immunological robustness and homeostatic reserve, further supporting the relevance of *Ojas* as a foundational regulator of health and vitality.

“□ □ □ □ □ □ च ”

(Ch.Su. 17/76)

Bala as an Expression of Ojas

In Ayurveda, *Bala* encompasses physical strength, resistance to disease, and psychological endurance, reflecting the organism's overall capacity to withstand stress and maintain functional stability. Within this framework, *Vyadhikshamatva* (disease resistance or immunity) is understood as a direct functional expression of well-nourished *Ojas*. Individuals with adequate *Ojas* are described as possessing enhanced vitality, greater resilience to illness, and improved recuperative ability following physiological or psychological challenges. This association highlights *Ojas* as the foundational substrate supporting immune competence, adaptive capacity, and sustained health. From a contemporary physiological perspective, this concept parallels the idea that optimal immune function and stress tolerance depend on integrated metabolic, neuroendocrine, and immunological reserves. The Ayurvedic emphasis on preserving *Ojas* therefore reflects an early recognition of the importance of systemic resilience in disease prevention and recovery.

Qualities of Ojas

Acharya *Charaka* delineates specific inherent qualities (*gunas*) of *Ojas* that reflect their stabilizing and sustaining role within the body. These qualities collectively signify nourishment, cohesion, clarity, and endurance, underscoring the subtle yet pervasive influence of *Ojas* on both physical and mental domains. The classical description of these attributes provides valuable insight into how *Ojas* supports structural integrity, functional harmony, and psychological balance. When these qualities are preserved, physiological processes remain coordinated and adaptive; when compromised, vulnerability to disease and degeneration increases. Such descriptions offer a qualitative framework for assessing vitality and resilience, which remains relevant in contemporary discussions of holistic and integrative

Functionally, *Ojas* plays a central role in maintaining tissue integrity, supporting lubrication of organs, coordinating physiological activities, and sustaining overall vitality. Classical descriptions emphasize that *Ojas* acts as a stabilizing substratum that preserves coherence among bodily systems. Depletion of *Ojas* (*Ojakshaya*), as described in the *Charaka Samhita*, manifests fatigue, dryness, fear, mental confusion, tremors, loss of complexion, and diminished endurance, ultimately leading to systemic collapse if uncorrected. Ayurveda also recognizes *Ojas* as a crucial link between body and mind. Psychologically, balanced *Ojas* is reflected in contentment, patience, emotional resilience, clarity of perception, and mental stability. The *Ashatang Hridaya* associates adequate *Ojas* with the predominance of *sattva*, whereas its depletion results in fear, anxiety, mental instability, and loss of enthusiasm. These descriptions highlight *Ojas* as a foundational determinant of psychosomatic resilience, closely paralleling modern concepts of stress tolerance, emotional regulation, and immune–neuroendocrine balance.

Concept of Tejas in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, *Tejas* is described as the subtle, luminous essence of *Agni* and represents the refined functional aspect of *Pitta dosha*. While *Agni* governs gross digestion and metabolic transformation, *Tejas* operates at a subtler level, directing metabolic intelligence at cellular, tissue, sensory, and cognitive planes. Classical texts describe *Tejas* as the principle responsible for transformation, perception, discrimination, and illumination, both physically and mentally. According to the *Charaka Samhita*, *Agni* exists in multiple forms—*Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*—and the efficiency of these metabolic fires is sustained by *Tejas*. Through this role, *Tejas* ensures proper digestion, absorption, assimilation, enzymatic activity, and cellular metabolism, concepts that closely align with contemporary biochemical and metabolic processes. The *Sushruta Samhita* further associates *Tejas* with classical *Pitta* functions, including digestion, vision, complexion, thermoregulation, and intellect. Its role is particularly emphasized in *Alochak Pitta*, governing visual perception, and *Sadhaka Pitta*, which influences intellect, memory, courage, and emotional clarity. Ayurveda consistently links balanced *Tejas* with optimal functioning of *buddhi* (intellect), *Medha* (retention), and *Viveka* (discrimination)^[3,4,6] When *Tejas* is in equilibrium, digestion is efficient, metabolism is optimal, tissues are well nourished, and the mind remains sharp and clear. Such individuals exhibit good appetite, stable body temperature, radiant complexion, emotional balance, and cognitive clarity. Conversely, excessive *Tejas* resulting from aggravated *Pitta* manifests as inflammatory conditions, hyperacidity, burning sensations, irritability, anger, fever, and

tissue degeneration. Classical descriptions of *daha*, *Jwara*, *Amlapitta*, and inflammatory disorders reflect the pathological expression of uncontrolled metabolic heat and oxidative stress.^[9,11] Deficient *Tejas*, on the other hand, results in *Mandagni*, poor digestion, incomplete metabolism, accumulation of *āma*, cold intolerance, dull complexion, and impaired cognitive performance. Such states are attributed to weakened *Agni* and compromised metabolic intelligence. Thus, *Tejas* serves as a critical bridge between physical metabolism and mental processing, underscoring Ayurveda's holistic understanding of transformation at both somatic and psychological levels.

Concept of Prana in Ayurvedic Samhitas

In Ayurveda, *Prana* is regarded as the primary life-sustaining force responsible for maintaining both *Sharira* (body) and *manas* (mind). It is considered the foremost among the *Vāta doshas* and governs all vital activities essential for survival. The *Charaka Samhita* clearly states that among all forms of *Vayu*, *Prana* holds a supreme position and is indispensable for life. Functionally, *Prana* governs respiration (*swasa–praswasa*), circulation, cardiac regulation, neural activity, sensory–motor coordination, and mental processes. The *Aṣṭang Hṛdaya* describes *Prana* as residing in the head (*murdha*), where it controls intellect, heart function, and sensory organs, establishing its close association with higher neural centers, consciousness, and perception. Ayurveda does not view breath merely as a mechanical act but as the carrier and expression of *Prana* itself.^[1,3,13,14] Balanced *Prana* ensures vitality, enthusiasm, adaptability, alertness, clarity of intellect, and proper sensory functioning. Charaka emphasizes that equilibrium of *Vāta*, particularly *Prana*, preserves *Ojas* and promotes both physical and psychological well-being. Disturbance of *Prana* (*Prana vaigunya*) leads to anxiety, fatigue, giddiness, sensory dysfunction, impaired coordination, and psychosomatic disorders. Classical descriptions of deranged *Prana* closely resemble modern understandings of anxiety disorders, fatigue syndromes, autonomic dysregulation, and neurofunctional impairments.^[10,12-14]

Functional Integration of the Ojas–Tejas–Prana Axis

Ayurveda conceptualizes life as the integrated functioning of multiple subtle and gross principles rather than isolated physiological entities. Among these, *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana* constitute a vital functional axis governing vitality, metabolism, immunity, and consciousness. Classical texts consistently emphasize their mutual interdependence and dynamic regulation. *Prana* functions as the initiating and mobilizing force, directing

movement, communication, respiration, and sensory integration. *Tejas* serves as the transformative and regulatory principle, ensuring metabolic efficiency, thermoregulation, and cognitive discrimination. *Ojas* acts as the sustaining and stabilizing force, providing nourishment, structural integrity, immunity, and psychological resilience. Disturbance in any one component inevitably affects the others. Aggravated *Prana* disrupts metabolic rhythm and cognitive stability; excessive *Tejas* consumes *Ojas*, leading to inflammation and immune depletion; diminished *Ojas* fail to support stable *Prana* flow and constructive *Tejas* activity. Health, therefore, is described as a state of harmonious interaction among these three principles, while disease arises from their functional disintegration.^[9,16,21,22]

Table 1: Functional Overview of the Ojas–Tejas–Prana Axis.

Ojas	Essence (<i>sāra</i>) of all dhatus; seat in <i>Hṛdaya</i> ; sustains <i>Bala</i> and <i>Vyadhikshamatva</i>	Tissue integrity, nourishment, lubrication, immune resilience, anabolic stability	Emotional stability, patience, endurance, fearlessness, mental clarity	Immune competence, biological reserve, stress tolerance, neuroendocrine–immune integration
Tejas	Subtle functional aspect of <i>Agni</i> and refined expression of <i>Pitta</i>	Digestion, metabolism, enzymatic activity, thermoregulation, cellular transformation	Intellect (<i>buddhi</i>), discrimination (<i>Viveka</i>), perception, memory	Metabolic regulation, oxidative balance, enzymatic control, cognitive processing
Prana	Chief <i>Vāta</i> subtype; sustainer of life; resides in <i>Murdha</i>	Respiration, circulation, neuromuscular coordination, sensory integration	Alertness, enthusiasm, adaptability, mind–body coordination	Neural regulation, autonomic balance, bioenergetics, psychophysiological integration

Conceptual Synthesis

The Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis represents a continuous functional spectrum rather than isolated entities. *Prana* acts as the kinetic and communicative force, *Tejas* as the transformative and discriminative force, and *Ojas* as the nourishing and stabilizing force. Together, they form the physiological and psychological foundation of life as envisioned in Ayurveda. Preservation of this equilibrium through appropriate diet, lifestyle regulation, mental discipline, and therapeutic interventions remains central to Ayurvedic strategies for health promotion, disease prevention, and longevity.

RESULTS

- The integrative analysis of classical Ayurvedic literature indicates that *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and *Prana* together constitute a comprehensive and coherent model of vital functional physiology. Rather than functioning as isolated principles, these three entities operate as an interconnected axis that governs immunity, metabolism, neurological regulation, psychological resilience, and higher integrative functions of consciousness.
- The findings of this review demonstrate that *Ojas* serves as the foundational substrate for immune competence, tissue integrity, and emotional stability, reflecting the body's capacity for nourishment and resilience. *Tejas* emerges as the central regulator of metabolic efficiency, enzymatic activity, thermoregulation, and cognitive processing, enabling both physical transformation and perceptual clarity. *Prana* functions as the primary organizing and mobilizing force, regulating respiration, circulation, sensory integration, neuromuscular coordination, and mind–body communication.
- The mutual interdependence of these three principles provides a systemic explanation for disease manifestation, progression, and recovery. Disturbance in any single component affects the functional balance of the entire axis. Notably, the *Ojas–Tejas–Prana* framework demonstrates conceptual convergence with contemporary models of neuroendocrine–immune integration, metabolic homeostasis, and psychosomatic regulation, supporting its relevance within modern health sciences.

DISCUSSION

The *Ojas–Tejas–Prana* axis offers a uniquely integrative framework that complements and extends contemporary physiological models. While modern biomedical science often examines immunity, metabolism, and neural regulation as discrete systems, Ayurveda conceptualizes their coordination through subtle functional principles that operate simultaneously across physical and psychological domains.^[4,8,9,12,15,17] From an interpretative perspective, *Ojas* may be correlated with immune resilience, anabolic processes, and stress tolerance; *Tejas* with metabolic rate, enzymatic regulation, thermogenesis, and cognitive discrimination; and *Prana* with neural regulation, bioenergetics, respiratory control, and sensory–motor integration. These correlations do not imply direct equivalence but highlight functional parallels that may inform integrative research.^[9,12,15] Importantly, the OTP axis emphasizes restoration of balance rather than suppression of isolated symptoms. Classical Ayurvedic interventions—including dietary regulation, sleep hygiene, mental discipline,

ethical conduct, *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana* therapy, Yoga, *Pranayama*, and meditation—are designed to preserve *Ojas*, regulate *Tejas*, and stabilize *Prana*. The growing interest in mind–body medicine, psychoneuroimmunology, and integrative health research further validates Ayurveda’s emphasis on subtle regulatory systems. In this context, the OTP axis offers a valuable conceptual bridge for interdisciplinary inquiry into chronic disease management, mental health, aging, and wellness promotion.^[16-21] This review is conceptual in nature and relies on classical textual analysis and interpretative synthesis. The absence of experimental or clinical validation limits direct biomedical generalization. Future interdisciplinary studies integrating biomarkers, systems biology, and clinical models are warranted.

CONCLUSION

The Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis represents a profound and integrative model of vital functional physiology in Ayurveda. Rooted in classical Ayurvedic wisdom, this triadic framework conceptualizes health as a dynamic equilibrium of nourishment, transformation, and life force. *Ojas* sustains structural stability, immune competence, and emotional resilience; *Tejas* ensures metabolic efficiency, thermoregulation, and cognitive clarity; and *Prana* governs movement, respiration, neural integration, and consciousness. The harmonious interaction of these three principles is essential for physical vitality, mental clarity, adaptive resilience, and longevity. Disruption of this axis leads to systemic imbalance and disease, underscoring the importance of preventive, restorative, and integrative approaches to healthcare. By re-examining the Ojas–Tejas–Prana axis through contemporary physiological and integrative perspectives, Ayurveda offers enduring insights into health, healing, and the regulation of life processes. As such, the OTP axis remains not only a cornerstone of Ayurvedic physiology but also a timeless framework for understanding human health in a holistic and system-based manner.

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