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CONCEPT OF BALA IN AYURVEDA: A NARRATIVE REVIEW WITH SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda interprets every concept through multiple layers of understanding, allowing each physiological and anatomical entity to be viewed from diverse angles. *Bala* is one such multidimensional concept. In contemporary context, *Bala* closely parallels the notion of immunity and is linked with entities such as *Ojas*, *VyadhiKshamatava*, and *Kapha Prakrita Karma*. In Ayurvedic diagnostics and therapeutics, *Bala* serves as a foundational determinant, as its expression is influenced by the balanced state of *Agni*, *Aahara*, *Dosha*, *Prakriti*, *Sarata*, and other physiological attributes. Since immunity governs the susceptibility, course, and resolution of diseases, *Bala* and immunity exhibit a strong interrelationship. Classical texts make it evident that *Bala* significantly contributes to the determination of *Sadhya-Asadhyatwa*, the interpretation of *Arishta Lakshana*, and various components of *Nidan Panchaka* including *Hetu*, *Poorvaroop*, *Rupa*, and *Samprapti*. Hence, the assessment of *Bala* forms an essential element of clinical evaluation. Therapeutic planning and selection of treatment modalities also depend considerably on the level of *Bala*, making it crucial for deciding the appropriate *Vyadhi Chikitsa*. Ayurvedic literature further asserts that *Bala* cannot be accurately judged merely by observing external body build. A person with a well-developed physique may not always possess adequate functional strength, whereas an individual with a lean body frame may demonstrate exceptional stability and endurance. Given that *Bala* plays a decisive role in assessing disease severity and prognosis, the establishment of objective and clinically applicable parameters for its assessment is necessary for its effective use in clinical practice.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Kriya Sharrer, *Bala*, Ritu.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of healing, is grounded in the concept of Dhātu Samya, which signifies the maintenance of bodily equilibrium through suitable lifestyle practices. When an individual follows appropriate daily and seasonal regimens, homeostasis is preserved and the body naturally develops enhanced resilience and strength. In Ayurvedic thought, Bala represents the essential attribute that fortifies both Sharīr (physical body) and Mana (mind). The term encompasses multiple components responsible for nourishment, stability, and vitality- such as Oja, Vyādhikshamatva, Balya, Sara, Balavridhikara Bhava, and Prakṛita Sleshma.

Assessment of Bala cannot be made merely by observing one's external build. Ayurveda acknowledges that a person with a robust physique may not necessarily possess superior strength, whereas someone with a slender body may demonstrate remarkable endurance- illustrated metaphorically through the ability of a small ant to carry loads heavier than itself (1). A similar paradox is reflected in the clinical setting. Individuals with Avara Sattva Bala often magnify minor symptoms, while those with Pravara Sattva Bala remain composed even during severe illness (2). Such contrasting responses may sometimes mislead a physician when interpreting the true extent of a patient's condition.

Therefore, the evaluation of both Dehabala (physical strength) and Manobala (psychological strength) becomes crucial for accurate assessment of disease severity, planning of therapeutic measures, and structuring of appropriate dietary guidelines. The present article aims to elucidate and synthesize the Ayurvedic perspective of Bala, thereby enabling practitioners to better estimate disease progression and prognosis.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A supplementary exploration focusing on the scientific perspective of Bala was conducted by reviewing information from classical Ayurvedic texts as well as contemporary research literature. Relevant studies were identified through searches in scholarly databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and others. The search strategy included keywords like *Immunity AND place of birth*, *Immunity AND time of birth*, *Immunity AND season*, and similar combinations to gather comprehensive scientific evidence.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

The term Bala has been used across Ayurvedic literature to signify both *physical* and *psychological* strength, depending on the context, highlighting its wide functional

significance. Ayurveda describes Bala as the inherent capacity of an individual to carry out various types of activities. It is also regarded as an indicator of Utsaha (sustained and vigorous effort) and Upachaya (growth and constructive metabolic processes).

According to Acharya Charaka, Prakrita Kapha is closely related to Bala and Oja, whereas a vitiated form of Kapha is considered Mala and becomes a causative factor for disease. Acharya Sushruta also states that Oja and Bala are comparable entities, possibly because both share similar attributes; an increase in one reflects an enhancement in the other. Since Kapha Dosha governs nourishment, growth, stability, and cohesion of bodily structures—functions that directly contribute to Bala—this association is logical.

However, Dalhana presents a different viewpoint. He explains that Bala and Oja are not identical in all respects. Oja is a *Dravya* possessing Rasa, Guna, Vipaka, and Varna, making it a perceivable entity responsible for nourishment and development. In contrast, Bala lacks these properties and cannot be directly observed. Instead, it is inferred (Anumana) through functional assessments such as Bharavahana Shakti (capacity to bear weight).

From this perspective, Bala may be understood as the *functional expression* or *practical manifestation* of Oja in the body.

Classification of Bala

The concept of Bala has been classified in Ayurveda through various approaches, including the time of its origin and the level of strength it imparts. Bala comprises two primary components: Dehabala (physical strength) and Manobala (psychological strength).

Manobala is divided into three categories depending on the predominance of Sattva, Raja, and Tama, representing good, moderate, and poor psychological strength, respectively. Similarly, Dehabala is categorized as Pravara (excellent), Madhyama (moderate), and Avara Bala (least) (7), or as Uttama (highest), Madhyama, and Heena Bala (deficient) (8).

Individuals possessing Pravara Bala can efficiently perform diverse physical activities and tolerate mental stress without noticeable disturbance. In contrast, those with Avara Bala fatigue quickly even with mild exertion and become anxious under minimal psychological strain. Persons with Madhyama Bala exhibit an intermediate capacity—they can manage mild to moderate stress but cannot withstand excessive exertion.

Further, Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata classify Bala into three fundamental types: Sahaja, Kalaja, and Yuktikrita (9–10).

Sahaja Bala (Innate immunity)

Sahaja Bala refers to the physical and psychological strength present in an individual from birth. It naturally increases as the Dhatus grow and mature with age. Owing to this inherent component, some individuals exhibit robust immunity while others may have comparatively weaker resistance. Sahaja Bala is influenced by the maternal and paternal Bala at the time of conception, as well as the mother's dietary habits during pregnancy.

This form of Bala represents the natural passive immunity with which every person is born. It aligns with the concept of innate immunity in modern science, including the activity of neutrophils, dendritic cells, complement pathways, and maternal immunoglobulins transferred through the placenta and breast milk.

Kalaja Bala (seasonal or chronological immunity)

Kalaja Bala varies according to age as well as seasonal changes. An individual's strength in adulthood is greater compared to childhood and old age. These differences arise due to the nourishment status of the Dhatus at various stages of life—well-formed and fully nourished in adulthood, but undergoing degeneration in old age, leading to a decline in Bala.

Seasonally, Bala is lowest during Adana Kala (summer solstice), which includes Shishira (late winter), Vasanta (spring), and Greeshma (summer). Conversely, Bala is at its peak during Visarga Kala (winter solstice), encompassing Varsha (rainy season), Sharad (autumn), and Hemanta (early winter). These fluctuations are attributed to the relative dominance of the sun and moon during summer and winter.

This classical concept has been validated scientifically. A study by Jangid C. et al., 2009 demonstrated distinct seasonal variations in an individual's Bala, with maximum, medium, and minimum strength observed during Hemanta, Vasanta, and Varsha Ritu, respectively (11).

YuktikritBala(acquired immunity)

Yuktikrit Bala denotes the physical and psychological strength developed through one's conscious efforts, including appropriate Ahara, Vihara, and Aushadha—such as proper diet, lifestyle practices, physical exercise, and therapeutic measures. Consumption of nourishing substances like mamsa, ghrita, and pulses, along with adherence to a wholesome dietary regimen and disciplined living, contributes to the enhancement of Bala.

Specific therapeutic modalities like Rasayana (which rejuvenates and fortifies all Dhatus) and Vajikarana (which nourishes Shukra Dhatu and promotes vigour) also play a significant role in strengthening the individual. Taking foods to which one is accustomed further improves Bala, while consumption of substances with opposite qualities may stimulate antigenic responses within the body.

This explanation reflects the concept of acquired immunity as understood in contemporary science—where strength and resistance develop through exposure to antigens, adaptive responses, and immunization.

Balavriddhikara Bhava (Factors Responsible for the Enhancement of Strength)

Acharya Charak has enumerated thirteen key determinants known as Balavriddhikara Bhava, which contribute to the augmentation of Bala when they exist in an appropriate and balanced manner. These include: Desha (habitat), Kala (time of birth), SukhaschaKaalayoga (favourable seasonal and temporal influences), Beejakshetra-guna-sampat (optimal qualities of the gametes and the uterine environment), Aahara-sampaccha (wholesome and well-accustomed dietary habits), Shareera-sampaccha (a well-developed body with maintained homeostasis), Satmya-sampaccha (adaptation to beneficial lifestyle practices), Sattva-sampaccha (sound mental strength), Svabhava-samsiddhi (inherent natural attributes), Youwanam (adulthood), Karma (appropriate physical activity), and Sanharsha (a state of contentment or cheerfulness) (12).

Each of these factors exerts a specific influence on the development of various types of Bala. For instance, Beejakshetra-guna-sampat and Svabhava-samsiddhi predominantly contribute to Sahaja Bala, while determinants such as Kala and Youwanam largely influence Kalaja Bala. Similarly, aspects like Aahara-sampaccha, Satmya-sampaccha, and Karma play a pivotal role in strengthening Yuktikrita Bala.

These traditional determinants can be correlated with contemporary scientific observations, providing a broader understanding of how environmental, nutritional, genetic, behavioural, and psychological factors collectively shape an individual's immunity and resilience.

1. BALAVAT-PURUSHE

Bala of a person is influenced by the inherent strength of the parents (matruja-pitruja-bhava). According to Charak, the Bala of a child born to strong parents is superior compared

to that of children born to normal or weak parents. Certain communities, such as Punjabi or Sindhi families, are traditionally considered to produce naturally Balavana parents (6).

2. BALAVAT-DESHE

The place of birth or habitat (Desha) also influences Bala. Regions such as Punjab and Sindh are considered conducive for naturally strong individuals. Sadharana Desha, having a balance of water and plants, maintains a state of sama-dosha, sama-dhatu, and sama-mala, which contributes to the birth of Balavana persons (6,7).

3. BALAVAT-KALE

Seasonal variations affect Bala. Charak categorizes seasons into Adana Kala (Shishira, Vasanta, Grishma) and Visarga Kala (Varsha, Sharada, Hemanta). During Adana Kala, the power of sun increases, which may reduce Bala, whereas in Visarga Kala, the dominance of sheeta (cold) and moon rays enhances Bala. Bala is highest at the end of Visarga Kala and at the beginning of Adana Kala (8).

4. SUKHASCHA-KALAYOGA

Favourable time or climate (Sukhascha-Kaalayoga) supports the balance of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha dosha in the body, particularly in sheetarutus like Shishira and Hemanta, excluding rutu-sandhikala. Charak emphasizes the role of Prakruti, which is formed during Shukra-Shonita-Jeeva-samyoga in the Garbhashaya. Proper Kala and balance of dosha-dhatu-mala at this stage lead to Uttamaprakruti, which enhances Bala (9).

5. BEEJA-KSHETRA-GUNA SAMPAT

Bala is influenced by the excellence of gametes (Beeja) and the uterus (Kshetra).

- **Purusha Beeja (sperm):** Shuddha Shukra is unctuous, dense, slimy, sweet, non-irritating, and white, similar to crystal, indicating purity (10).
- **Stree Beeja (ovum):** Shuddha Stree-Artavalakshana is characterized by menstrual discharge resembling Gunja fruit, lotus, lac, or Indra-Gopa, indicating unpolluted quality (11).
- **Kshetra:** A nirdosha (well-formed) uterus ensures proper nourishment and development of the fetus. Proper Beeja and Kshetra lead to saratva of Shukradhatu and production of healthy progeny (6).

6. AHARA-SAMPAT

Quality and combination of diet influence Bala. Proper intake of wholesome foods such as Rakta-Shali, Mudga-Yusha, Saindhava, Amalaki, Yava, Antarikshajala, Dughdha, Ghruta, Mamsa-Rasa, and Madhu, along with adequate rest, exercise, and use of Rasayana-Yogas, maintain and enhance Bala (6,12–14).

7. SHARIRA-SAMPAT

Excellence of physique (Sharira-Sampat) is a critical factor. Charak describes:

- **Sama-Mamsa:** Evenly distributed muscular flesh
- **Sama-Pramana:** Ideal body measurements using anthropometry (height, breadth, length)
- **Sama-Samhanana:** Compact body with well-demarcated bones, joints, muscles, and blood

Other factors include Drudhaindriya (strong senses), Vyadhi-resistance, tolerance to heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and Vyayama, along with proper digestion and metabolism (15–16). Majja-Sarata, Sarva-Sarata, and Satva-Sarata are also included (14).

8. SATMYA-SAMPAT

Satmya refers to the suitability or wholesomeness of substances for an individual. Continuous use (Abhyasa-Satmya) of specific foods like Ghruta, Ksheera, Taila, Mamsa-Rasa, and all six Rasas enhances tolerance to heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and Vyayama. Satmya is classified as:

1. **Pravara:** Superior – consumes all Rasas
2. **Madhyama:** Moderate – consumes more than one Rasa
3. **Avara:** Inferior – consumes only one Rasa

Other aspects include Rutu-Satmya (seasonal suitability) and Desha-Satmya (geographical suitability) (15–17).

9. SATTVA-SAMPAT

Sattva-Sampat denotes excellence of intellect and mind. It is classified based on strength: Pravara, Madhya, and Avara. Pravara-Sattva-Purusha (Sattva-Sara-Purusha) can tolerate

various disease states, regardless of body size. Mental constitution of parents, especially maternal Ahara-Vihara during pregnancy, influences Satva (6,14,18–19).

10. SVABHAVA-SAMSIDDHI

This factor refers to inherent nature or disposition. Bala exists in the body and mind since birth. Four factors at the time of Shukra-Shonita-Jeeva-Samyoga—Purusha and Stree Shukra, uterine state, maternal Ahara-Vihara, and constitution of Panchamahabhuta—determine lifelong Dosha dominance and Balaka's Bala (2).

11. YUVANA

Youthfulness (30–60 years, Madhyama Vaya) enhances Bala. In adulthood, Sharira exhibits balanced Bala, Virya, Pourusha, Parakrama, Grahana, Dharana, Smarana, Vachana, Vidnyanashakti, and fully nourished Dhatus without degeneration, predominated by Pitta Dosha (20).

12. KARMA (EXERCISE)

Physical activity (Vyayama) develops Bala by improving body lightness, work capacity, stability, resistance to discomfort, digestion, metabolism, and dosha alleviation. It also promotes bodily nourishment, symmetry, agility, firmness, and reduction of excess fat (14,21).

13. SAUHARSHA (Cheerful Disposition)

Prasanna-Atma, Indriya, and Mana contribute to mental wellbeing. Happiness promotes strength by enhancing tolerance to physical and mental challenges, supporting overall health (6,22).

ASSESSMENT OF BALA IN AYURVEDA AND CONTEMPORARY MEDICAL SCIENCES

The assessment of **Bala** in an individual holds significant therapeutic importance, as it forms the basis for determining the appropriate drug dosage, severity of diseases, and the line of treatment. Classical Ayurvedic texts emphasize that a physician should evaluate **Bala**, **Dosha**, **Ayu**, and **Aushadha Pramana** to determine the most suitable management strategy for any disease.

Two primary criteria are commonly used to assess **Bala**: **Vyayama Shakti** and **Dashvidha Pariksha**.

Dashvidha Pariksha

The **Dashvidha Pariksha** encompasses:

- **Prakriti** (physical constitution)
- **Sara** (excellence of Dhatus or tissue elements)
- **Samhanana** (compactness of organs)
- **Pramana** (measurements of different body parts)
- **Satmya** (acclimatization to wholesome diets)
- **Sattva** (psychic conditions)
- **Aahara Shakti** (ability to ingest food and digestive strength)
- **Vyayama Shakti** (strength in performing exercise)
- **Vaya** (age) (30)

These parameters can serve as **objective indicators** for evaluating Bala.

Contemporary Assessment Parameters

In modern medical science, additional methods can complement the assessment of **Bala**, including:

- **Harvard Step Test (HST)**
- **Physical Fitness Index (PFI)**
- **Maximal Oxygen Consumption (VO2 max)**
- **Weight-bearing capacity**

Since **Bala** is also associated with **immune function**, immunological parameters can further support its evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The concept of **Bala** in Ayurvedic physiology represents a **multidimensional construct**, encompassing both physical and psychological strength, the ability to generate antibodies in response to antigen exposure, and the capacity to resist disease manifestation. The **Bala** of an individual is influenced by a complex interplay of multiple factors, including **Dhatu Sarata**, **Prakriti**, dietary and lifestyle practices, and inherent qualities.

Recent studies have highlighted correlations between immunity and factors such as **place of birth, time of birth, seasons, dietary habits, and psychological factors**. Most of these investigations have considered each factor independently; however, future research could explore the **combined multifactorial impact** on the development of immunity.

Clinically, the assessment of **Bala** is significant, as it informs **Rogibala**, predicts disease prognosis, guides the choice of treatment modality, and assists in determining the **type and dosage of drugs**. The use of **objective parameters** for evaluating **Bala** can enhance the understanding of disease pathophysiology and optimize therapeutic strategies in both Ayurvedic and contemporary medical contexts.

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