



Review Article

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF AHARA VIDHI VISHESHAYATAN

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda defines health as balance of *Dosha*, *Agni*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*, as well as the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. This definition of health is in coherence with WHO's definition of Health as "A state of Physical, mental, Social and spiritual wellbeing and not merely an absence of disease." Adequate nutrition is the basic need for the healthy life. *Ayurveda* places special emphasis on *Ahara* and believes that healthy nutrition nourishes the body, mind and soul. Nowadays, many lifestyle diseases are increasing day by day due to incorrect eating practices and cookery procedures. In *Ayurveda* classics emphasis has been laid regarding the right way to eating food. Food consumed in the right manner serves as nectar to rejuvenate the body and maintaining the health. *Ayurveda* offers some basic dietary guidelines that include choosing appropriate food, combinations of food, cooking methods, quality & quantity of food, nature of consumer, geographical and environmental conditions etc. *Ayurveda* classics describe all these aspects in a very systematic and scientific manner which is called as *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatane*. These are 8 major aspects of food convention that includes compatibility of food articles which are determinant factors for the maintenance of Health. It gives a fair idea about what? When? Why? How? and Which? Food material should be consumed for promotion of positive health. A thorough understanding of these fundamentals will help in reducing the digestive distress due to lifestyle disorder and achieving the noble goal of maintaining Health.

KEYWORDS: *Ahara*, *Ahar Vidhivisheshayatane*, Basic dietary guidelines, Digestive distress.

INTRODUCTION

In *Taittiriya Upanishada*; it is mentioned that human being has originated from *Ahara*. *Ayurveda* has given emphasis on *Ahara* & included it in *Trayopstambha*, i.e., the tripod of life. *Ahara* is the basic need of human being since, it plays important role in sustenance of life.

Modern Science states that the balanced diet is one which contains a variety of foods in such quantities and proportions that the need for energy, proteins, vitamins, minerals, fats, carbohydrates and other nutrients is adequately met for maintaining health, vitality and general wellbeing. While *Ayurveda* places special emphasis on *Ahara* and states that complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, life, imagination, happiness, contentment, corpulence, strength, intellect etc. all are dependent on *Ahara*^[1].

Ayurveda strongly believes that; the reason for all the diseases lies within our digestive process. Each food article either has *Dosha* aggravating or *Dosha* pacifying action on human body. The improper digestion (*Mandagni*) produces toxins (*Ama*) which leads to majority of diseases^[2]. The relation between the faulty diet and diseases are also well explained in *Ayurveda*.

Nowadays, Many lifestyle diseases are taking place due to lack of or incorrect information about cooking procedures, irregular timings and consuming imbalanced diet and not following the prescribed rules for preparing, preserving and eating food. These Lifestyle disorders are avoidable by following the health promoting regime. In *Ayurvedic* therapeutics; specific diet and lifestyle guidelines are always prescribed to facilitates restoration

of homeostatic bio mechanism and wellbeing. *Ayurveda* classics describe all these aspects in a very systematic and scientific manner which is called as *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatane*. These are 8 major aspects of food convention that includes compatibility of food articles which are determinant factors for the maintenance of Health.

Aharvidhivisheshayatane emphasizes various factors that influence *Ahara*, such as its biological properties, origin, environmental factors, season, preparation, freshness, and provides a logical explanation of how to balance food according to one's *Dosha* and physical needs.

Aharavidhivisheshayatanas specifies the characteristics of food in terms of quality, quantity and time which vary with age, constitution, digestive power, season, disease and also from person to person. One has to consume the diet which is suitable to him in all aspects and deviation from these may cause the disease.

Ayurveda elaborate about these dietetic rules i.e., *Aharavidhivisheshayatana* advocated for health promotion, prevention of illness and also prescribed for management of diseases.

In today's fast paced life; most of the health problems are developed due to some sort of digestive distress. The need of the hour is to explore the potential of these code & conducts of the dietetics in *Ayurveda* and find the ways and means to achieve the noble goal of maintaining Health.

Regarding all above considerations; this article emphasizes the eight important aspects of *Aaharavidhivisheshayatana*.

Materials & Methods

Conceptual study comprises the review of the available literature in the ancient classical texts, scientific journals, dissertations, research paper etc. concerned with this concept.

Review of Literature

Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in *Ayurvedic* therapy. Sometimes, dietary management in itself is a complete treatment. So how we eat maybe just as important as what we eat. Healthy food is dependent upon many factors such as mode of preparation, habitat, combination, time, season of intake, manner of intake, body constitution, *Agnibala* of consumer etc. This diversified aspect of dietetics and nutrition is well elaborated in *Ayurveda* in form of *Aharavidhivisheshayatane*.

These are eight special considerations [3] which are discussed in detail furthermore and are summarized briefly below.

1. *Prakriti* -Qualitative characteristic of food
2. *Karana*- Processing of food
3. *Samyoga*- Combination/ mixing
4. *Rashi* - The Quantity
5. *Desha* - Habitat
6. *Kaala*- Time & Seasonal variation
7. *Upayoga Samstha*- Classical Ayurvedic Rules of eating
8. *Upayokta* -The person who takes the food/ User.

1. *Prakriti* (Qualitative characteristic of food)

It indicates the nature of food substances i.e. the inherent attributes (*Laghu*, *Guru* etc.) of diet. [4]

It is known that each & every individual has got specific physical & mental temperament (i.e. *Prakriti*), in the same way each food & drug substances has also got its *Prakriti* which depends on the heaviness, hotness etc. qualities of particular articles. For example *Masha* (*Phaseolus roxburghii*) is very heavy (*Guru*) and *Mudga* (*Phaseolus mungo*) is light (*Laghu*). In the same way meat of *Shukar* (boar) is heavy and that of *Ena* (deer) is light in nature[4]. *Prakriti* deals with assessment of natural qualities of *Ahardravaya* i.e. While consuming food articles; one must keep in mind whether it is heavy or light for digestion, whether the potency is *Sheeta* or *Ushna*, whether the possible effect on *Doshas* is to mitigate or to aggravate etc.

For example, The individual having symptoms of *Pittavrudhhi* should avoid the spicy food. Thus the nature of the substance must be considered in diet.

2. *Karana* (Processing of food)

Karana means the processing of food (i.e., *Samskara*) [5] It refers to alteration / modification in the qualities of food stuffs by various *Samskaras* i.e., *Jalatomyoga*, *Agnisannikarsha*, *Shaucha*, *Manthana*, *Desha*, *Kala*, *Bhavana*, *Kalapakarsha* and *Bhaajna* [5]. These transformations are to be made in such a way to eliminate the disturbances of *Doshas* and to replenish the *Dhatu*,

henceforth the expected / desirable changes can be achieved.

❖ *Agni Sannikarsh Samskara* (Contact of fire)

Different types of *Agni* results in different change in properties of substances.

For example: Food cooked on Natural wood /Coal fire tends to have better Taste than food cooked on Electric equipments.

❖ *Jal Sannikarsh* (Water contact) & *Shauch* (Cleaning) *Samskara*

Cleaning of food material to eliminate the impurities. Consumption of unhygienic and unwholesome food causes many diseases. Therefore *Shauch Samskara* is advised.

e. g: Rice prepared of dehusked paddy, well cleaned and filtered, becomes *Laghu* (light), On the other hand Rice prepared of unboiled paddy, not cleaned not filtered becomes *Guru* (heavy). [5]

❖ *Manthana* (Churning) *Samskara*

The *Manthan* states for actually churning of the substances which results in transformations of the properties of the substances.

For example: *Dadhi* is said to be heavy for digestion (*Guru*) and also *Shothkrut* i.e., it is responsible for *Shotha*/inflammation. But when it undergoes churning process, it gets converted into buttermilk having *laghu* property i.e., light for digestion and used as the best remedy for *Shotha* [5].

The modern dietetic science well elaborates the mechanics behind food processing in terms of Bioavailability of micronutrients. Several traditional household food processing and preparation methods can be used to enhance the bioavailability of micronutrients in plant based diet. These includes thermal processing, mechanical processing, soaking, fermentation and germination. These strategies aim to increase the physicochemical accessibility of micronutrient, decrease the content of anti nutrients such as phytates or increase the content of compounds that improve the bioavailability [6].

For example

Thermal Processing- Thermal processing may improve the bioavailability of micronutrients such as thiamine and iodine by destroying certain anti nutritional factors e.g., goitrogens and thiamines. [6]

Fermentation- Low molecular weight organic acids e. g. citric acid, lactic acid are also produced during fermentation and have the potential to enhance iron and zinc absorption. [6]

3. *Samyoga* (Combination/ mixing)

Sometimes the action of combination of diet is different from the individual effect i.e., Combination of two or more substances results in the manifestation of special qualities, which cannot be achieved by using the same article separately. The combination altogether produces new qualities so, it should be taken in to consideration that while preparing the food; the ingredient must be compatible to each other and should be properly mixed together.

For example

- **Honey and Ghee:** Combination in equal quantity is not advised. Honey and ghee when taken alone is wholesome to the body but combined in equal quantity, they become toxic.
- Also Milk (*Sheet Veerya*) and fish (*Ushnaveerya*) should not be taken together^[7].

Though, both of them have sweet taste but due to the contradiction in their potency they vitiate the blood and obstruct the *Srotasas*.

In today's era; People doesn't choose nutrients but they choose combination by using available ingredients. It's time to rediscover the art of food combination in such a way that the ingredients become compatible to each other. As the incompatible combination may lead to harmful effects on the body. The concept of incompatible food i.e., *Viruddha Ahara* is well explained in *Ayurveda*^[8].

In modern Science ; there is a special branch known as 'Trophology' which deals with science of Food combination and proposes a nutritional approach that advocates specific combinations of foods as central to good health (such as not mixing carbohydrate-rich foods and protein-rich foods in the same meal)^[9]. Breakdown of protein requires an acidic medium, digestion of protein dense animal protein requires high levels of Hydrochloric Acid (HCl) Since, digestion of carbohydrate dense foods requires an alkaline medium in order to be broken down, high carbohydrate foods that have been mixed with high protein foods will not digest but will sit there fermenting, producing indigestion, bloating and gas. And since, this fermentation of carbohydrates will inhibit the digestion of the proteins, more gas, blotting, discomfort will be produced^[10].

4. Rashi(The Quantity)

Ayurveda mentions the importance of *Aharmatra* and its effect on Digestion. One should take diet in proper quantity. The quantity of food to be taken depends on the digestive capacity of person which varies from person to person and so does the *Matra*. The amount of food without disturbing the equilibrium of *Dhatus* & *Doshas* of the body gets digested as well as metabolized in proper time is to be regarded as a proper quantity. The proper quantity of food activates Digestive functions^[11] while insufficient or excess quantity of food is harmful to health.

The proper quantity of food does depend upon the nature of food article. If the food article is heavy; half of stomach capacity is to be filled up. Even in the case of light food articles, excessive intake is not conducive to maintain the power of digestion & metabolism.^[12]

Ayurveda also explains another aspect of *Matra* such as considering four parts of the stomach; one should take food such that two parts of stomach gets filled by the food consumed, one part to be filled by water or other liquid material and one part should be kept free for the movement of *Vayu* or Gas.^[13]

In the context of *Rashi*; the terms *Sarvagraha* & *Parigraha* have been explained by *Ayurveda*.^[14]

- **Sarvagraha:** Total measurement of the entire meal as a whole i.e., the combined quantity of the rice, meat, pulses, condiments etc.^[14]
- **Parigraha:** Detailed measurement of each article of diet separately.^[14]

The modern Dietetic science emphasizes more on *Parigraha* type of *Matra*. As, it specifies the quantity of Carbohydrates, Fats, Proteins etc. in form of Calories whereas *Ayurveda* gives equal importance to both types of *Matras* i.e., *Sarvagraha* & *Parigraha*.

5. Desha (Habitat)

Habitat is a geographic region. It indicates variations in the qualities of food substances due to difference in soil and climate^[15].

Substance grown in the region of Himalayas are heavy in property while those grown in the dessert or sandy region are light. Similarly, the living beings who consume light articles of food or live in dessert or sandy regions or indulge in many activities are also light in nature.

Ahara should be taken according to both *Bhoomi Desha* & *Dehadesha*. *Deshaparikshana* is one of the vital aspect in understanding patient regarding dietary habits of patients, probability of diseases related to the diet and accordingly treatment and *Pathyapathya* aspect.

6. Kaala (Time& Seasonal variation)

The seasonal regiment in the stage of health & disease must be followed to maintain proper health. Kala is a basic cause for the *Parinaman* of immature substance to get its maturity and maturity to its destruction i.e., *Uttpati-Sthithi-Laya*.

Nityaga and *Avasthika* are two types of *Kala*^[16].

- **Nityaga:** is one in which *Ahara* is consumed according to *Rutusatmya*.

For example: During rainy season, aggravation of *Vata* occurs due to cold climate, Hence *Vatashamaka* sweet, sour, and salty food and drinks are preferred.

During Summer, the Sun with his rays, draws up excessively the moisture of the nature. Hence in that season Sweet, cold, liquid food and drinks are beneficial.

- **Avasthika:** Intake of *Ahara* according to condition of body either Healthy or diseased.

For example, *Langhana* is advised in *Atisara*, Spicy food should be avoided in Jaundice.

Ayurveda also explains the Ideal time for food intake i.e., only when the previously taken food is completely digested.

7. Upayoga Samstha (Classical Ayurveda Rules of eating)

These are the directions necessary for appropriate food digestion.^[17]

Do's

- The food should be tasty, warm, qualitative, unctuous and easily digestible.
- The food should be eaten only when hungry and after the last meal has been digested.

- Should include all the *Rasas* namely *Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta, Kashaya* in daily diet.
- Should eat food which is nourishing and suitable to particular temperament.
- Eating with full concentration and with the thought that this food is going to benefit both body and mind is advised.
- Food should be eaten in pleasant surroundings with all necessary utensils.

Dont's

- Food articles antagonistic in potency or contrary to each other in action.
- Too fast or too slow food eating.
- Laughing, talking, thinking or watching television while eating.
- Taking food during nervous, angry, anxious or in disturbed state of mind
- Long term & too much use of any of six *Rasas*.

8. Upayokta (The person who takes the food/ User)

Finally comes the *Upyokta*. That is the one who uses the *Aharadravyas*. Every person must take into consideration his own constitution, capacity of digestive power, the season, time of day and whether the previously taken food has been digested or not. He is the one who must take in to consideration all this facts of *Ahara* and consume food accordingly.

DISCUSSION

Ahara is one of the three supporting factors of life i.e., *Ahara, Nidra & Brahmcharya*; which plays a key role in the promotion of health & prevention of diseases. Physical, Mental, Social, Intellectual, Emotional and spiritual dimensions of health could be balanced by congenial diet. *Ahara* being a part of daily routine, if one concentrate a little more on dietetic rules along with quality, quantity and mode of intake then overall effect on health can be enhanced.

Nowadays, we are neglecting the digestive capacity, nutritional value of food products, time sense of food intake and are more interested in eating tasty, ready to eat food materials. All these factors leads to manifestation of different metabolic diseases. It is also observed that many diseases are arising merely due to these faulty dietary habits. In this context, concept of *Ashta Aharavidhivisheshayatan* is most ideal in today's lifestyle.

It gives a fair idea about What? When? Why? How? And Which food material? should be consumed. In today's era; due to Urbanisation & Industrialization, the basic inherent properties of gut flora have been changed to certain extent. The concept of *Prakruti & Karan (Samskara)* helps in this aspect, to bring about the new, desirable and adaptable properties in food material. By analysing the *Prakruti* of food material; desirable combinations (*Samyog*) can be made to omit the undesirable or harmful effects of the food material. The concept of *Rashi* as explained above states that food taken in proper quantity gets digested comfortably and promotes the life span. The Concept of *Desha* explains that we must essentially know about the origin as well as properties of food material as the soil has its own effect on

the crop. Hence, the selection of food material can be done which is suitable to one's body constitution. The involvement of *Kala* is on each & every state of *Ahara dravyas* as well as at all stages of *Ahara* consumption. Hence, for achieving maximum benefits of consumed *Ahara*; the *Kala* is to be considered as an important factor. *Upyogsamstha* are the Code & Conducts for taking diet should be followed in today's lifestyle. By considering all above said regulations of food consumption; *Upyokta* i.e., a wise person should understand the good & bad outcome of right or wrong eating.

CONCLUSION

In today's fast paced life, many norms regarding diet & regiment have been compromised which is showing overall declining status of Health in the society. The codes & conducts related to *Ahara* have been forgotten. Therefore, there is a need to enlighten this concept of *Ahar Vidhi Visheshayatan* as explained in ancient *Ayurved* classics. *Ayurveda* deals with both *Swasthyarakshana* and *Vyadhiparimoksha*. The adaptation of the concept of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatan* will be helpful in fulfillment of both these *Prayojanas*.

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