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Review Article

AHARA VIDHI (DIETETICS): CONCEPTS OF FOOD INTAKE IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Health as well as diseases is dependent on various factors. As *Acharyas* had described that *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacarya* are *Triupstambha* (three sub pillars), which support the body itself. Here *Ahara* has been placed first, which shows that it is most important to maintain and sustain the life. Man has always been interested in *Ahara* and the history of man to a large extent has been a struggle to obtain proper diet. *Ahara* supplies bio-energy to body. This bio-energy is supplied by proper and adequate nutrition in the form of its essential constituent's viz. Proteins, Carbohydrates, Fats, Minerals, Vitamins and Water. In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara*, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance. Food plays a decisive role in development, sustenance, reproduction and termination of life. Through centuries, Food has been recognized as an important factor for human beings, in health and diseased state. *Ahara* is not only needed for the continuity of life, but also for *Bala*, *Varna*, *Upacaya* etc. In other medical sciences, food is considered important, but not the manner of eating. The *Ahara Vidhi* (Dietetics) is an ancient, empirical and elegant art, it is the heritage of Indian culture that can be clearly observed in *Ayurvedic* views.

Keywords: Ahar-vidhi, *Visesayatana*, Hita-ahar, Ahita-ahar, Season.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda has emphasized diet as one of the essential part of healthy life. It is likely that no other science has described the unique effect of diet as thoroughly, as *Ayurveda* described thousand years ago. *Ayurveda* has given detail discipline and process to take the *Ahara* for an individual and in general both. This discipline is titled as *Ahara Vidhi*, where all the law about the diet and the drinks are given.

Basically *Ayurveda* is having an introducing concept that the health and the disease both are the product of *Ahara*, only the distinction is *Hita Ahara* constitutes the health and *Ahita Ahara* dis-constitutes the health. *Acharya Charaka* has given a single lined sutra regarding the *Vidhi* of diet, which contains a lot for a person who wishes to lead a healthy life. The person who wants to be free of different *Rogas* should eat *Hitakar Ahara* in appropriate amount on appropriate time¹.

Wholesome diet is a main cause for the growth and development of the body, on the contrary, unwholesome diet is cause of several diseases², So in our classics diet is having a very important place, but to be a wholesome diet does not

means only the food items, but it includes so many factors, which are titled as "*Ahara Vidhi*", where the law of do's and don'ts about the diet and drinks are given. A wholesome diet requires a lot more than just having nutrients and our ancient *Ayurvedic* texts have laid an immense emphasis on all aspects of *Ahara* and *Ahara Vidhi*.

Asta-Ahara Vidhi Visesa Ayatanani (Eight aspects of Dietetics)

Ahara Vidhi Visesayatana means the factors responsible for wholesome and unwholesome effect of the *Ahara* and methods of *Ahara sevana* (Special rule for diet intake).

These eight factors should be considered before taking food³:

1. Prakriti, 2. Karana, 3. Samyoga, 4. Rashi, 5. Desha, 6. Kala, 7. Upyoga- sansatha, 8. Upyokta.

This makes the octalogue of diet and dietetics.

Prakriti (Natural Qualities)⁴:

It means natural quality of food, drugs i.e. inherent attributed like *Guru*, *Laghu*. These are the innate properties of substances. On the basis of nature⁵, Green Gram, Common Quail and Grey Partridge are *Laghu*, while Black Gram, Meat of Pig, Buffalos are *Guru*.

Nowadays, many hybrid foods are in use e.g. Wheat, Rice, Sugarcane, Watermelon, Mango, Maize etc but in hybrid food articles all the natural qualities are not present. So *Prakriti* is a factor which gives the complete knowledge about anything, that's why it has been described first among the eight factors.

Karana (Processing of Substances)⁶:

Karana is also known as *Sanskara*. It means processing of substances which leads to alteration in the inherent properties of substances. This modification is brought about by dilution, application of heat (vaporization, distillation and sublimation), clarification, emulsification, storing, maturing, flavoring, impregnation, preservation and the material of receptacle.

As by processing, *Vrihi* which is heavy to digest, becomes light when transformed in to *Laja* after frying, on the other hand, flour of roasted grains becomes heavy when processed in to cooked bolus⁷.

Samyoga (Combination)⁸:

Samyoga means combining together of two or more substances. This chemical combination exhibits special properties which none of the constituent ever possessed. For example -the combination of Honey and Ghee, Honey and Ghee taken alone is wholesome to the body but combined together, they become toxic. Similarly, Honey and Ghee in equal quantity, Honey and rain water in equal quantities, honey and Lotus seed are antagonistic⁹. So we can say that though *Samyoga* is very useful but it may be harmful too. A few examples of its usefulness are Guda and Curd in combination are more useful as it is having Snehana, Tarpana, Hridaya and Vataghna effects¹⁰. Milk with Ghee used regularly is the best Rasayana¹¹.

Rasi (Quantity)¹²:

Rasi is the measure of the total mass and of each constituent in order to determine the effects of the right and wrong doses. Quantity of food taken in its entirety is *Sarvagraha* and the Quantity of each of its ingredients is *Parigrha*.

A person should have his diet in proper amount; it means that a person should have diet according to his digestive power (*Agni*)¹³. The *lakshana* of appropriate amount of food is that it should be digested in proper time without causing any problem in the natural *Prakriti* of the person¹⁴.

The *Ahara* in gross can be divided on the basis of *Guru* and *Laghu*. The *Guru Ahara dravyas* have *Prithvi* and *Jala Guna* predominantly; that's why they pacify the *Agni* if taken in large amount so they should be taken 1/3rd or 1/2 of the *Kukshi*. On the other hand *Laghu Ahara Dravyas* predominantly have *Vayu* and *Agni Guna*, which intensify the *Agni*, so they are considered to be least harmful even if they are eaten to a surfeit though they should also taken in proper amount¹⁵. As per *Vagbhata* half of the stomach is to be filled with solid food, one quarter with liquids, another quarter should be kept vacant for the free movement of *Vata*¹⁶. The absence of measure is laid down under two heads¹⁷-

1. Heena Matra 2-Ati Matra

The diet which is deficient in measure (*Heena Matra*) is seen to result in the impairment of strength, complexion and plumpness, in the impairment of functions of life, virility and vitality, in vitiation of the eight body elements and in the incidence of the eighty kinds of *Vata* disorders.

The diet which is excessive in measure (*Ati Matra*) is considered as *Sarvadosha Prakopka*, it aggravates all the *Doshas*,

Desa (Habitat)¹⁸:

Habitat is a geographic region. It indicates variation in the quantities of substances, due to difference in the soil, use and climate. One can acclimatized to the different type of localities by using opposite qualities substance e.g. use of hot substances in Marshy land and cold Substances in deserts¹⁹. In the present context, *Desha* is considered as *Bhumi Desha* and *Deha Desha*. both the lands as well as the patient constitutes *Desha*. So far the *Deharoopa Desha* is considered, the *Doshas* are distributed in three different regions of the body. Our classics says that the first region of the body which extends from *Hridaya* to complete upper portion is place of *Kapha Dosh*, the second region extending between the *Hridaya* and *Nabhi* is place of *Pitta Dosh* while the third region extends from *Nabhi* to extreme down and have *Vata Dosh*.

Bhumi Desha too is grouped in three classes according to the preponderance of different *Doshas*, on the cause and effect relationship with the climate of that region i.e. Sun, Wind etc. These are *Jangla*, *Anoopa* and *Sadharana Desha*. *Charaka* says that in the *Jangala Desha* the *Vata* and *Pitta* are in predominance, where as in the *Anupa Desha* the predominance of *Vata* and *Kapha* is witnessed²⁰.

Wholesomeness of diet also depends on the *Desha*, because if a person is in Rajasthan, he can easily digest a higher amount of *Ghrta* and other *Guru Dravyas* but when the same person have been in south India, he cannot digest the same type of food items. Use of dry and sharp substances in deserts and unctuous in Marshy land is having antagonistic effect²¹.

Kala (Time)²²:

Time is used in two senses, time in the general sense and time in the sense of stage. The sence of stage is used in relation to disease (*Avasthika Kala*) and the general sense is used in relation to seasonal wholesomeness (*Nitayaga Kala*), in form of day and night. Life as a whole starting from intrauterine period till death is the entire time dynamic. Peoples are bound to face major and minor changes in every moment of life and thereby, *Doshas* are also accordingly varied.

In *Swastha-avastha*, *Kala* is considered as *Nitayaga*. In this condition *Ahara* should be taken according to *Dincharya* and *Ritucharya*, which help the body function to acclimatize with the external environment. In *Rugnavastha*, *Avasthika Kala* is considered by *Vyadhi Avastha*. E.g. in *Naveen Jwara*, *Langhana* should be done for 7 days, but if *Jwara* is *Jeerna Ghritapana* is indicated.

Upyoga Samstha (Dietetic Rules)²³:

It simply means the dietetic rules. It contains everything related to Diet, how to eat, when to eat, what to eat.

Upyokta (The User)²⁴:

The user is he who makes use of food, habituation depends on him. Creating wholesomeness by habitual intake of things comes under *Upyokta* and known as *Satmya* which differs person to person. As the *Prakriti* of *Ahara Dravyas* is considerable factors, the *Prakriti of Upyokta* is also considered for wholesomeness of diet. This factor is not considered separately by *Vridha Vagbhata*, he count this under *Upyoga*-

Vyavastha, So that he given seven *Vidhi Vidhan*, in place of eight of *Charaka Samhita*.

These are the factors described in our classics which are the foundation of Dietetics. After describing these 8 factors, we must look some other rules which are described in our classics. These are called as *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* which indicates the method of taking *Ahara*²⁵. These are—*Usna*, *Snigdha*, *Matrvat*, Is consumed after the digestion of previously ingested food, *Virya Aviruddha Ahara*, Is to be taken into *Iste Dese* where it provided with *Ista Sarvopakarana*, Not to be taken speedily, Not to be taken too slowly, Taken without talking with others, Taken without laughing, Taken with the concentration of the mind.

Usnam Asniyat²⁶:

The first requisite regarding prepared meal is that it should be taken *Usna* (hot). If one's taking hot food, feel of proper taste, Stimulate the Agni (digestive power), *Vata Anulomana* and Reduction of Kapha are achieved.

The specific sequence of *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* is practically very important. Besides the whole meal being *Usna*, it must begin with *Usna Anna*, so that profuse flow of saliva and gastric Juices are achieved for the next food items.

Snigdham Asniyat²⁷:

The meal taken should be *Snigdha* (*Unctous*), The *Snigdha Ahara* causes feel of proper taste, , *Agnideepana*, *fascilitate early digestion*, *Vata anulomna* and It makes the body Plump, Strengthens the sense organs, increases in the brightens the complexion.

Matrvat Asniyat²⁸:

It means eat in adequate amount. The *Lakshna* by which a person can decide that this is *Matrvat* are,²⁹ Freedom from distress in the stomach, Absence of any cardiac discomfort, The non-distension of sides, Freedom from excessive heaviness of the stomach, Gratification of the senses, Subsidence of hunger and thirst, Sense of ease in the standing, sitting, lying down, walking, inhaling, exhaling, talking. Easeful digestion and assimilation of food in the evening and the morning, the imparting of strength, complexion and plumpness.

Jirne Asniyat³⁰:

It simply means eat after digestion of the previous meal. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, the digestive product of the previous food, i.e. undigested *ahara rasa* gets mixed up with the *Ahara Rasa* of food taken afterwards, it provokes all the *Doshas* (humor).

While the food taken when the previous meal has been fully digested, the humors have returned to their normal places, the gastric fire is kindle, hunger is born, the channels are clear and open, the eructation from the mouth is healthy, the stomach is clear, the peristaltic movement is normal and when the urges for evacuation of flatus, urine and feces are well attended too, that food not vitiating any of the body elements, serve the sole purpose of promoting life.

Virya Aviruddham Asniyata³¹:

Eat those food articles which are not antagonistic in *Virya* (potency). Eating the food that is not antagonistic in potency one will not afflicted with disorders born of incompatible dietary. *Virya* is the power of substance by which action takes place; nothing can be done in absence of the *Virya*³².

Iste Dese Ista Sarva Upakarnam Asniyata³³:

Eat in a congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances. One eating at congenial place does not get depressed in the mind by the depressing emotions produced in unpleasant environment, similarly with appurtenances. Therefore one should eat in a congenial place and circumstances.

In *Sushruta samhita* there are some specific guidelines for *Desa* for *Bhojana*, the place where food to be prepared and where should be stored before serving³⁴. He advised to take food in such a place that is devoid of unwanted people, The place should be free from the defects of construction, the defect of ventilation and light can affect the health directly and indirectly. It should be properly leveled. The place should be pleasant also which can provide calm and healthy state of mind.

Now days we can see special dining rooms in the houses of affluent class. Everyone always tries to keep the dining place pleasant.

Na atidrutum Ashniyat³⁵:

Do not eat hurriedly. One should not take food too hurriedly. If food is taken to hurriedly it enters into a wrong way or it is not properly placed, as food taken in hurry can obviously affect the power of digestion by increasing the *Vata*.

Na ativilambitam Ashniyat³⁶:

Do not eat too leisurely. One eating too leisurely is not satisfied even if he eats much. The food would become cold and there will be irregularity in digestion.

Ajalpana, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjita³⁷:

Do not talk or laugh while eating, one who talks and laughs while eating is liable to suffer the same disorders as the one who eats too hastily. In this most important one is that the food should be eaten with concentration. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too slowly or too hastily.

Aatamanamabhisamiksya Bhunjita³⁸:

Eat rightly, considering your constitution. The food will agree with me, this food will not agree with me, such knowledge makes for the determination of what is wholesomeness for each individual. This one is very important, as rules of *Ahara* are definitely wholesome, but they are general rules. They should be applied by considering own self.

These were the dietetic rules for both healthy and unhealthy persons but *Sushruta* has given *Dwadasa-Asana-Pravicharana*³⁹ especially for unhealthy peoples. These *pravichara* facilitate the use of different type of *Ahara* and *Ahara Vidhi* according to the status of health of a person but whenever a person takes food.

Proper Time of Meal:

It is a very important aspect regarding dietetics that when to take food. In classics mentioned that the proper time for giving *Ahara* to a person is when he gets free of stool, urine, and eructation's, and feel his body and sense organs light and free. When he gets free action of heart as well as natural courses of his bodily *Vayu*, when he feels hungry and has got relish for food and when his *Kukshi* becomes light⁴⁰. Once food is taken, it should not be taken again before one *Yama*, as it infers with *Raso-utpatti* and creates *Ama*. But the food should be taken

before two *Yama* because if person fast for more than two *Yama* he will experience *Bala Kshaya*.

One who known the place, digestive power, strength and period when ever observes hungry, should give the food according to congeniality with the gap of one or two *Kala* (periods). After the digestion of *Rasa*, *Dosha* and *Mala* one should consume food without giving consideration to time. Proper belching, clarity, enthusiasm, proper evacuation of urges, lightness of body, hunger and thirst are the features of proper digestion. In seasons where the nights are lengthy, one should consume food in morning only and when days are lengthy food should be taken in first *Prahara* at night and in afternoon. Seasons where days and night are of same length food should be taken at indicated time⁴¹.

Ahara Vidhi for taking different types of food items:

Considering the sequence of taking different food items, *Acharyas* were very much particular. According to them, one should first take sweet dish, then food item containing *Amla Lavana*, *Katu* and other *Rasa*⁴². The sweet food item firstly would naturally go to subdue the *vayu* located in stomach, *Amla* or *Lavana rasa Pradhan aahara* taken in middle would rose up the *Agni* in *Agniyasaya*. While *Katu* rasa would tend to subdue the *Kapha*.

The person should take fruit like pomegranate etc. at the beginning then the *Peya Padartha*,⁴³ The solid food item should be taken at the onset, while some classics give the contrary view for this. in fruits, the *Amalaka* has the greatest *Dosa* eliminating properties so recommended at the outset, middle and close of meal. but *Mrinalam* (item of lotus plant), *Bisam* (lotus bulb), *Saluka*, *Kanda* and Sugarcane should be taken at the beginning of a meal and never at its close⁴⁴.

Acharya Susruta has described methods of par taking of diet (*Ahāropacāra*) as items of *Ahāra* should be served in the successive order of increased sweetness. One should wash his mouth with water often in between the dinner; when his tongue is clean, relish for food will be greater than ever before; the tongue is becoming satiated with sweet taste in the beginning itself will not be able to appreciate other tastes, hence it should be washed in between⁴⁵.

Item taken in the beginning of meal should be *Guru*, *Snigdha*, *Madhura*, food having *Manda* and *Sthira* properties like coconut, mango, and sweets. In the middle of meal, one should take *Shukta* etc. *Amla* food items at the end one should consume *Laghu*, *Ruksha*, *Katu*, *Tikshna* and food items which are of mild laxative in nature. *Saindhava lavana* and *Ardrika* are always palatable before meal as it is *Pathya* aggravates *Agni*, increases taste of food, cleans tongue and throat.⁵⁴

Arrangement of food items when we serve meal⁴⁶:

- Infront:
 - Soup of pulses in attractive and wide bowls and utensils,
 - Rice in fanciful trays and other food articles which are to be licked.
- On the right side
 - All types of fruits, dry fruits and other *Bhaksya* and dried food items.
- On the left side
 - All the *fluid food* items, Soup of meat, Drinking Water, *Panaka*, Milk, Soup of pulses.

- In between left and right
 - Eatables prepared from Jaggery, *Ragsadva*, *Staka* etc. should be served at midway between the food items described above.

The arrangement of soup is in front as it is generally used as starter and to look attractive is kept in fanciful bowl. The fluid items will be taken in between and will require less effort to pick up so are on the left side, as usually humans are right handed. The food items which are heavy to pick up as fruits and hard eatables are kept in the right side so that they can be easily picked up. Rest of the items is eaten in very less amount and act as fillers of food as Jaggery, *Ragsadva*.

Before taking food person should remember:

Acharya Charaka says, that partake not of a meal without wearing a jewel on the hand, without having had a bath or clad in tattered clothes, without saying yours prayers, without offering to the household gods and the manes, without first feeding to elders, guests and dependants or unscented, without cleansing hands, feet and face or with unclean mouth, with the face towards in north or listlessly, or waited on by an un devoted, unmannerly, unclean or hungry attendant or in improper vessels, in an improper place or at an improper time or amidst a crowd, or without first offering to *Agni*, or without be sprinkling the food with sanctified water or without saying spiritual chants over it or while reviling any one, nor eat food of a vile description, served by ill wishes, nor consisting of stale articles with the exception of flesh, greens, dry vegetables and fruits⁴⁷.

After taking Food the Person Should Do:

After taking meal one should wash his hands to clean his hand, with a proper instrument should clean teeth so the food pieces hided in teeth come out which prevent their purification and foul smelling from mouth & then mouth must be cleaned with water.

There is increase of *vayu dosha* in body after digestion of food, during digestion process there in increase in *Pitta*, *Kapha* gets increased immediately after taking food so to pacify *Kapha*, *Dhumpana*, *Kashaya*, *Katu dravya* like betel nut, cubeba, camphor, Lavanga, nutmeg should be taken. Betel leaves along with other *Katu*, *Tikta* & *Kasaya Dravya* cleans the mouth & pacify *Kapha*. After taking meal one should sit like a king i.e. in straight posture. Then he should walk at least 100 steps slowly and they lay down with left supine position. After taking meal listen the music or should perceive favorable *Shabda*, *Sparsh*, *Rupa*, *Rasa*, *Gandh*, so that the food remains properly in stomach and gets digested⁴⁸.

CONCLUSION

Our classics are store-houses of valuable thoughts. To earn the profit of perfect management, these concepts should be proved in today's context. The dietetic field is having many such precious concepts of Ayurveda. Diet is considered as the basic most cause of life. Not only diet but also method of diet intake has important role in the continuity of healthy life. The rules and methods of diet intake are mentioned by Acarya Caraka as *Asta-Ahara Vidhi Visesa Ayatanani*, *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*, and by Acarya susruta as *Dwadasa-Asana-Pravicharana* and *ahara vidhi in sutra sthan chapter 46*. The application of these

rules is effective in maintenance of health as well as in the curative aspect for many diseases.

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