CRITICAL REVIEW OF DIETETICS IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

For every living organism the Ahar is basic requirement. So in Ayurveda it is considered as one of the Upasthambh along with Nidra and Swapna. Ahar is utilized for replenishment of daily wear & tear of all body entities, for generation of energy to carry out activities, to develop immunity. Whatever may be the purpose of intake of food of a person but it achieves all benefits if it is taken in proper way. Food is the prime requirement of every living. It’s importance never disputed. Contemporary modern science described Ahar in terms of its nutritional values of vitamins, minerals, energy in terms of balanced food. Ayurveda has explained this diet in different view including Ashta Vidha Ahar Vidhi Visheshayaytan, incompatible diet and Dvadasha Asana Vidhi. Ayurveda provides an entire different view. Ayurvedic dietetics places greater emphasis on processing food, its compatibility and rules of food consumption.

KEYWORDS: Ahar Vidhi Visheshayaytan, incompatible diet, Ayurvedic dietetics.

INTRODUCTION

Every living organism needs Ahar for development of body, for replenishment of daily wear & tear of all body entities, for generation of energy to carry out activities, to develop immunity. Whatever may be the purpose of intake of food of a person but it achieves all benefits if it is taken in proper way. Food is the prime requirement of every living. Its importance never disputed. History of dietetics revels that the Vedas which are considered to be first written records of Indian literature contains many references regarding importance of food. In Rugveda it is said that, Purusha is all that contains past, present and future. He is the
governor of body (Atma) and is manifested by Anna. In Taiteriypapanishad, the Anna has been regarded as 'Brahma', as all animates are produced from Anna, after production life is maintained by anna and at the end assimilate in the anna. In Bhagawad Geeta also diet has been accepted as a source for creation of life. Further to achieve success in yogic practices, there is clear cut emphasis focused on appropriate diet, along with other activities.[1]

What is ‘Ahar’?

Whatever is eaten by mouth or ingested is called ‘Ahar’.[2] Whichever is swallowed may be solid or liquid is called Ahar. Charak Samhita states that there is variety of food items human eats. As necessity of swallowing act whatever is undergone process of deglutition is ‘Ahar’.[3] For the day to day routine life of human the term Ahar means food.

In Indian literature lots of importance is given to the Ahar. Not only the concept of Ahar is important but emphasis on the way of taking Ahar is equally important. In Taitariya Upanishada it is mentioned that a man is originated from food (Tai. U. 2-1) Vayu is generated from sky. Teja from Vayu, Jala from Teja, Prithvi from Jala, Plants from earth and Purusha from food is originated. So whatever food we take is utilized for replenishment of all body entities. In Charak Samhita it is stated that the food constituents which are suitable for bio conversion (parinaman) & can nourished the body constituents, they are assimilated. On the contrary when food constituents who are suitable for bio conversion (parinaman) yet are not able to nourish body constituents are not assimilated (viruddhanna).[4] The ingested food is bio transferred into body entities. So along with the process of digestion the directions for taking food are equally important and emphasized in Ayurveda. They are called as ‘Aharvidhivisheshayatan’. Ahar means food, Vidhi means method, Vishesh is peculiar and Ayatanani is abode[6]. It is also termed as Dietetics in Ayurveda or Dietary rules of eating.

All the literature of Ayurveda reviewed to search principles for taking Ahar and emphasized it’s importance to form quality dhatu. Critical analysis is done & interpreted. In context to maintain health of healthy person Ayurveda has described the importance of hitkar Ahar and Ahitkar Ahar. With this concept of Ahar equally importance is given to the discipline of taking food. As the food is like medicine which balance our Dosha, dhatu as well as malas if consume in proper way. Otherwise food becomes harmful to create many diseases. Charaka Samhita describes the eight principles of Ahara vidhi called Aharvidhivisheshayatan[5] to describe the importance of different factors to be considered while consuming Ahar. The eight principles are
Dandekar.

1. **Prakriti** (nature)
2. **Karana** (Sanskar means way of preparation),
3. **Samyoga** (combination of two or more)
4. **Rashi** (quantity)
5. **Desha** (habitat and climate)
6. **Kala** (time)
7. **Upayoga Sanstha** (rules to follow)
8. **Upayokta** (the consumer)

1. **Prakriti** (Nature of food)
   It means natural quality of food, as *Guru, Laghu*. The food which is easy to digest is called Laghu ahar eg. Green Gram. The food which takes a time to digest is called Guru Ahar. While consuming food it is essential to think Prakriti of food material. All other factors depend on Prakriti of food only. The quantity, sanskar, time of consumption all is depend on nature of food. So it comes first in *Aharvidhivisheshayatan*. Same as **Prakriti** (nature/constitution) of the consumer should take in consideration. Depending of constitution of the person his Ahar is selected.

2. **Karana** (Sanskar)
   Karana is also known as *Sanskara*. It means processing of substances which leads to alteration in the inherent properties of substances. The qualities of food are changed after processing like roasting, frying, boiling. This modification is brought about by 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 bolus. The food material like rice, murmura, poha, idali all basically made by rice grains, but all has different qualities as processing is different.

3. **Samayoga** (combination of two or more)
   *Samayog* means combination of two or more things. This combination exhibits special properties which may not possessed by any one of the constituent. 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 antagonistic.\cite{7} So we can say that though *Samyoga* is very useful but it may be harmful too. Fish and milk, Banana and milk, fruit salad all these are unwholesome diet as per Ayurveda.

Taking Milk and fish together is unwholesome diet as milk is *sheet viryatmak* & fish is *usna viryatmak*. Taking together is incompatibility diet (*Viruddhahar*) leads to vitiation of *Rakta* (blood) and *Srotorodha* (obstruction of body channels) and formation of *Ama*.\cite{8} *Ama* is considered as a major culprit in the manifestation of a wide range of disorders. *Ama* may generate immunological reaction which is mainstay in the etio-pathogenesis of many immune mediated disorders. Both milk and fish are the rich source of protein and the combination may generate new type of protein molecules which may exhibit molecular mimicry and generate auto-immunity.\cite{9}

4. Rashi (Quantity).\cite{10}

Rashi means Quantity / Matra. It is the measure of the total mass and of each constituent in order to determine the total consumption of food. Quantitative analysis is done in terms of Sarvagraha & Parigraha. Sarvagraha means quantity of food taken as a whole. *Parigrha* is the quantity of each of its ingredients. Quantity of food is depend on digestive power (*Jatharagni*).\cite{11} of person. Every person has his own capacity of digestion. On the virtue of Rashi of diet it varies with person to person. The appropriate quantity of food is that which is digested in proper time without causing any trouble in daily regime of the person.\cite{12}

The *Ahara* on the basis of qualities can be divided into *Guru* and *Laghu*. The *Guru Ahara dravyas* have *Prithvi* and *Jala Guna* predominant; that’s why they pacify the *Agni* if taken in large amount. So *Guru ahar dravyas* should be taken 1/3 rd or ½ of the *Kukshi*.\cite{13}

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 consumed in more quantity, even though should also taken in proper amount.\cite{14} According to *Vagbhat* half of the stomach is to be filled with solid food, one quarter with liquids and another quarter should be kept vacant for the free movement of *Vata*.\cite{15} When the quantity is not measured that distributed under two heads as *Heena Matra* & *Ati Matra*.\cite{16} The diet which is less than required quantity is called *Heena Matra*. It is seen to result in the impairment of strength and complexion, in the impairment of functions of life, energy, vitiation of the body elements and in the generation of the eighty kinds of *Vata* disorders. The diet which is excessive in
measure (Ati Matra) is considered as Sarvadosha Prakopa, it aggravates all the Doshas. Diet taken in proper quantity balances all Tridosha.

5. Desha (Habitat)[17]

Desha is considered as Bhumi as well as Deha (body). Bhumi Desha and Deha Desha both are the lands which are to be considered while consuming food. Bhumi Desha is classified in three categories according to the climate of that region which affects on the Dosha dominance of the persons residing in the place.

These categories of bhumi desha are Jangla, Anupa and Sadharana Desha. Charaka says that in the Jangala Desha the Vata and Pitta dosha are in predominant in the deha desha, where as in the Anupa Desha there is predominance of Vata and Kapha dosha. According to geographical areas the qualities of food gradients changes depending on site of its origination. It indicates variation in the quantities of substances, due to difference in the soil and environmental conditions. Considering climatic conditions of bhumidesh & doshik predominance of deha desha one has to select diet[18]. For eg. Healthy diet of a consumer depends on the Desha, use of curd in regular diet is good in south India but it provokes diseases in east India. A person in Rajasthan & Punjab can easily digest a higher amount of Ghrita 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 effect.[19]

6. Kala (Time).[20]

This term is used in two senses. Nityag kala & Awasthik Kala. Kala is considered as Nitayaga. Nityag Kala means in relation to seasonal awastha in the form of day & night as well as considering ritu also. So as per biological clock of a person the doshawastha varied. Considering the doshawastha of the day as well as ritu Ahara should be taken according to Dincharya and Ritucharya, which help the body function to acclimatize with the external environment & keep healthy. Avasthika Kala is considered to be Vyadhi Avastha. E.g. in Naveen Jwara, Langhana should be done for 7 days, but if Jwara is Jeerna Ghrit is indicated.

7. Upyoga Samstha (Dietetic Rules)[21]

It simply means the dietetic rules. Acharya Charak has mentioned total ten dietetic rules to follow for Upayokta (Consumer) in Vimansthan first Adhyay. It contains everything related to Diet, how to eat, when to eat, what to eat.
I. *Ushnam Ashniyat*[^22]

For the purpose of good digestion we expect good secretions of saliva & other gastric juices. Ushna food gives proper taste & it stimulates salivary glands to secret saliva. This is the reason the freezed food, steal food or food kept in refrigerator took more time to digest. Hot food stimulates Agni (digestive enzymes), *Vata activities* and reduces Kapha.

The first requisite regarding prepared meal is that it should be taken *Ushna* (*hot*). If one’s taking hot food, feel of proper taste, stimulate the salivation. It’s a first *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan*, so that profuse flow of saliva and gastric Juices are achieved for the next food items.

II. *Snigdham Ashniyat*[^23]

The meal taken should be *Snigdha* (*Unctuous*), The *Snigdha Ahara* causes feel of proper taste, *Agnideepana occurs*. It *facilitate early digestion, Vata anulomna* and helps to carry the digestion smoothly. It helps to strengthen the sense organs & increase the brightens & the skin complexion.

III. *Matravat Ashniyat*[^24]

It means eat in adequate amount. The *Lakshna* by which a person can decide that this is *Matravat* are absence of any cardiac discomfort, no 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. It is always advised to eat in required quantity only. The concept of jatharagni is like a agni in reality & food is like Samidha for it. If Samidha which we add in Agni is in proper quantity, the agni can digest it properly, but if added samidha is more in quantity it disturb the function of Agni & thus formation of Ama takes place, which is a responsible to generate diseases.

IV. *Jirne Ashniyat*[^25]

It simply means eat only 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 dushti of all the Doshas. While the food taken when the previous meal has been fully digested, the humors have returned to their normal places, the Jatharagni get stimulate, 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. It means that food not vitiating any of the body elements & it serves the sole purpose of promoting life.

V. Virya Aviruddham Ashniyata\(^{[26]}\)

Eat those food materials which are not antagonistic in Virya (potency). The consumption of food which is antagonistic in potency is harmful to the body. It generates lots of diseases. For eg. Consumption of fish & milk at a time creates raktadhatu dushti as both are antagonistic in potency. Fish is ushna viryatmak & milk is sheet viryatmak. Virya is the power of substance by which action takes place.\(^{[27]}\)

VI. Ishta Deshe Ashniyata

Eat in a amiable place provided with all the necessary bits and pieces. One eating at congenial place does not get stress in the mind. Therefore one should eat in a congenial place and circumstances. The place must be hygienic, having proper light. In Sushruta Samhita it is mentioned that there is the relation between bhojya desha & bhojan. It should be well constructed, well leveled & pleasant place. Now a day, during construction there is separate place of dining room for this purpose. Pleasant atmosphere at place of eating gives us healthy state of mind.

VII. Ishta Sarva Upakarnam Ashniyata\(^{[28]}\)

In the same way with place use of utensils for cooking & eating is equally important. Always avoid use of copper or some other metallic utensils for preparation or consumption of amla rasatmak ahar dravyas, as there are chances of chemical reaction in between acid, which is one component of amla rasa & metallic utensil.

VIII. Natidrutam Ashniyata Nativilambitam Ashniyata\(^{[29]}\)

Not to eat very fast. Eating fast may chokes food passage & develops vomiting sensation. It is also advised as not to eat very slowly also. Eating very slowly may take lots of time & within period the food in thali become cool. Which hampers the process of digestion.

IX. Ajalpam, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjeet\(^{[30]}\)

Jalpa means to talk. So it is advised not to talk while eating, not to laugh more or very loudly while taking food. It is advised to take diet with concentration. Talking & laughing diverts our mind from meals & food we eat either very fast or very slow.
X. Atmanamabhisamikshya Samyak[31]

Keeping all the above things in mind one should eat in appropriate manner. While choosing diet think of Prakriti of the consumer. Always think that the food is Purnabrahma. Whatever we eat will help us to replenish ourselves.

8. Upyokta (The Consumer)[32]

The consumer is the person who makes use of food. All the food whether it is healthy or unhealthy is depends on Upayokta. As every food is a medicine but whether it is wholesome or unwholesome for the upayokts it depends on the Prakriti of Upyokta. This factor is not considered separately by Vridha Vagbhata, he count this under Upyoga Vyavatsha, So he had given seven Vidhi Vidhan, in place of eight of Charaka Samhita.

These are the dietetic rules as per Charak Samhita for healthy as well as unhealthy persons. Similarly, Sushruta describes 12 factors to be considered during the consumption of food and termed them Dvadasha Asana Vidhi.[33] These are mentioned especially for unhealthy persons. As per condition, one should select his food.

1. Sheet Ahara: indicated in thirst, alcoholic, burning, Raktapitta and in emaciated individuals.
2. Ushna Ahara: useful in the patients with Kaphaja and Pittaja disorders and after Virechan and Snehan (oleation therapy).
4. Ruksha Ahara: useful in obese, diabetics and individual with excess Kapha.
5. Drava Ahara: indicated in dehydrated and weak individuals.
7. Ek-kalika Ahara: Ek-kalika Ahara i.e. one time (once a day) is indicated in the individuals with impared Agni (digestive power).
8. Dvi-kalika Ahara: Ahara, twice a day is indicated in individual with proper Agni.
9. Aushadha Yukta Ahara: the diet mixed with required drugs should be used in those patients, who are unable to take unpalatable drugs.
10. Matraheen Ahara: the individual with impaired Agni and the diseased individual should advise to take the diet in reduced quantum.
11. **Prashamaka Ahara**: the diet advised according to seasonal variation is *Dosha Prashamaka* i.e. pacify all the *Doshas*.

12. **Vrattiprayojaka Ahara**: advised in healthy individuals to promote psychosomatic health.

13. Ayurveda also described some dietary incompatibility (*Viruddhahar*) which should be avoided by all individuals. The dietary incompatibility is of eighteen types, which are as follows.\[34\]

1. *Desha viruddha* (contrary to climate)
2. *Kala viruddha* (contrary to season)
3. *Agni viruddha* (contrary to digestive power)
4. *Matra viruddha* (contrary to measure)
5. *Satmya viruddha* (contrary to adaptability)
6. *Dosh viruddha* (contrary to body humors)
7. *Sanskara viruddha* (contrary to processing)
8. *Virya viruddha* (contrary to potency)
9. *Koshtha viruddha* (contrary to bowel habits)
10. *Avastha viruddha* (contrary to patient’s state)
11. *Krama viruddha* (contrary to order of eating)
12. *Parihara viruddha* (contrary to restrictions)
13. *Upachara viruddha* (contrary to observances)
14. *Paka viruddha* (contrary to cooking)
15. *Samyoga viruddha* (contrary to combination)
16. *Hridaya viruddha* (contrary to palatability)
17. *Sampata viruddha* (contrary to rich quality)
18. *Vidhi viruddha* (contrary to mealtime rules)

For example, heating of honey is *sanskar viruddha* (contrary to processing), intake of milk and fish together considered as *Veerya Viruddha* (contrary to potency). Combination of ghrita & honey is *Samayog Viruddha* (contrary to combination). These are some examples of dietary incapability. Ayurveda asserts that every food is as good as medicine. So there is no good or bad food. The effect of food changes according to the way how you take it. A relaxed and calm mind is recommended to have optimal digestion. It is recommended not to eat with overpowering emotions such as stress, anger and grief etc. as these factors produce irregular and anomalous digestive process and have negative impact on the mind, the center
for all sensory control and perceptions. As per Ayurveda text whatever dietary rules are given that is to be followed to live healthy & long life.

CONCLUSION

Food or diet is the most essential requirement of all living beings. According to Ayurveda both, the healthy as well as diseased persons are affected by food. The diseases that afflict it are the products of food. The contemporary modern science has particularly described *Ahara* according to the nutritional value of its components, in terms of calories as an effect and not described about *Hitṛa, Ahita, Virudhdhanna, Pathya, Apathya Ahara* etc. for each individual. Ayurveda described a wide range of dietetics and nutrition including the *Pathyapathya*, incompatible diets, discipline of food intake like *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayaytan* and *Dvadasha Asana Vidhi*. Thus, Ayurveda provides an entire different view, proposes an entirely different approach to food, diet, and nutrition that is in strong contrast to the conventional Western approach. Ayurvedic dietetics places greater emphasis on processing food, its compatibility and rules of food consumption. Ayurvedic dietetics is the solution to give answers and treatments to many diseases.

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