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DETAILED VIEW ON CLASSIFICATION OF AHARA MENTIONED IN VARIOUS TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Food, following oxygen and water, holds the third position in terms of importance for the survival of living beings. This highlights the significant role of eating in one's life. Ahara, which refers to food in Ayurveda, profoundly impacts both health and sickness. A proper and healthy diet can lead to enhanced well-being, while an unhealthy one can contribute to illness. Food provides sustenance, energy, beauty, and vitality (known as Oja) to living organisms. Ayurveda categorizes Ahara based on factors such as origin, effects, and manner of consumption. Like the pillars that support a building, diet consistently supports the body. A complete and nutritious diet or wholesome food is attributed to the growth of living beings, whereas unwholesome food is linked to the rise of diseases.

Key-words: Ahara, Ayurveda, Health, Food, Body, Pathya, Apathya.

Introduction

Ayurveda, an ancient science, comprehensively understood the specific influence of nutrition like no other discipline. The Taittiriya Upanishad states that human beings emerged from Ahara. Diet is considered one of the fundamental components of life. A poor diet disrupts the body's functioning. Consequently, dietary factors (Apathya) are given utmost importance when discussing the causes of illness. According to Acharya Charak, a nourishing diet can preserve life if followed with dedication. Ahara plays a crucial role in both maintaining and treating one's health. Ayurveda refers to Ahara as the "Mahabhaishajya" or great medicine, as it nourishes essential elements of the body, including vital essence, vitality, and complexion, but its efficacy depends on the proper functioning of Jatharagni.

All living beings in the universe require food for sustenance. Food is considered the stabilizing factor for all living organisms, as there is nothing else apart from diet that can sustain their lives. Food influences various aspects such as complexion, clarity, voice quality, longevity, intelligence, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength, and intellect. Ahara and dietary rules are fundamental factors among the causes of diseases.[2] Although it may not always be possible for everyone to adhere to all the rules due to the demands of a fast-paced lifestyle, awareness regarding this subject is necessary. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid the causative factors of diseases as a significant part of treatment.

Food is essential for the survival of all living organisms on the planet. Every living creature relies on food for its existence. Diet is the only means by which living organisms can sustain their lives. Food has an impact on various aspects such as complexion, clarity, voice quality, lifespan, intelligence, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength, and intellect. Ahara and dietary rules play a significant role in the development of diseases. While not everyone can consistently adhere to all the rules due to the constraints of a fast-paced life, it is important to have awareness about the subject. Therefore, avoiding the causal factors of diseases is a crucial aspect of therapy.

Ayurveda provides detailed guidelines on how to approach Ahara for individuals and groups. This discipline is known as Ahara Vidhi. Food is essential for ojas, teja (slenderness), dhatus (tissues), senses, bala (strength), Tushti (contentment of mind), and Arogya (health).

World Health Day, observed by the World Health Organization (WHO) every year, focuses on the challenges and possibilities related to food safety. Promoting adequate nutrition is one of the eight components of basic healthcare.[3] Ayurveda is not just a medical science but also a holistic life science that emphasizes the prevention, treatment, and management of diseases. Regular consumption of Hita (beneficial), Avirudha (compatible), Satmya (suitable), and Nitya Sheelaniya (wholesome) Ahara keeps a person free from diseases, and therefore, diet should

be planned according to the principles of Asta Ahara Vidhi Visesaayatana. Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata explained Nitya sevaniya Dravyas, which can be likened to a balanced diet.[4] To bring global attention to the nutritional programs of the Ayurvedic system of medicine, significant emphasis must be placed on the role of dietary components in promoting health.

The term "Ahara" has been in existence since ancient times and has been described in various texts and dictionaries. Shabda Kalpa druma states that Ahara refers to something swallowed after eating. According to Acharya Chakrapani, Ahara encompasses anything that is consumed, including both nutrition and medicines. Acharya Gangadhara defines Ahara as anything that is ingested through the tongue and swallowed down the throat, which also includes medications.[5] Based on these

definitions, Ahara refers to any substance taken in through the mouth and swallowed down the throat.

According to Collins Dictionary, "food" refers to any material that can be consumed by a living creature and converted into energy and bodily tissues. Taber's Dictionary defines food as "any substance that meets the nutritional requirements of an organism for growth and physical well-being." [6]

Synonyms [7,8,9,10]

- Jagdha,
- Bhojana,
- Jemana
- Viddhasa
- Pratyasanama
- Bhaksanam
- Abhyavarana

Classification of Ahara According to Various Classics



Figure 1 – Classification of Ahara according to various classics[8,9,10]

Acharya Charak has classified Ahara into various types on the basis of various criteria's

1. **On the basis of origin** [12]

- Sthavaram (Vegetable products)
- Jangama (Animal products)

2. **On the basis of Prabhava**

- Hitam (wholesome)
- Ahitam (unwholesome)

3. **On the basis of nature of intake**

- Ashitam (Eatables)
- Khaditam (Masticable food)
- Pitam (Beverages)
- Lidham (Linctus)

4. **On the basis of Mahabhuta**

- Parthiva
- Apya
- Tejasiya

- Vayaviya

- Akasiya

5. **On the basis of Rasa**

- Madhura
- Amla
- Lavana
- Katu
- Tikta
- Kashaya

6. **On the basis of Virya**

- Guru
- Laghu
- Sita
- Ushna
- Snigdha
- Ruksha
- Manda
- Tikshna

7. On the basis of effect of Ahara on Manas^[13]

- Satvika
- Rajsika
- Tamsika

Classification based on Modern Dietetics:

1. Energy-rich foods: These include carbohydrates, fats, whole grain cereals, millets, proteins, fibers, calcium, iron, B-complex vitamins, vegetable oils, ghee, butter, fat-soluble vitamins, essential fatty acids, etc.

2. Body building foods: These include pulses, nuts, oilseeds, B-complex vitamins, fibers, milk and milk products, calcium, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin B12, meat, fish, iron, iodine, fat, etc.

3. Protective foods: These include vitamins and minerals, green leafy vegetables, antioxidants, fibers, carotenoids, vegetables/fruits, sugar, antioxidants, eggs, milk and milk products, proteins, and fats, etc.

Classification according to Acharya Sushruta based on the effect of food intake:

1. Ekanta Hitakara: Foods that do not have any adverse effects on the body even when consumed regularly, such as water, milk, ghee, and Audana.

2. Ekanta Ahitkara: Foods that quickly harm the body and should not be consumed even for a short period. This includes foods that are always inappropriate and cause digestion-related issues. Examples include Kshara and Visha.

3. Hita Ahitkara: Foods that are safe in certain circumstances but dangerous in others. Examples include meat, mustard oil, etc.

Viruddha Ahara

This term refers to incorrect food intake, which is considered to have opposite qualities to the body's tissues. It is classified as follows:

1. Desa Viruddha: Consuming dry and sharp substances in deserts or unctuous and cold substances in marshy regions.

2. Kaal Viruddha: Consuming cold and dry substances in winter or pungent and hot substances in summer.

3. Agni Viruddha: Consuming heavy foods when digestion is weak and light foods when digestion is strong.

4. Matra Viruddha: Consuming equal amounts of honey and ghee.

5. Satmya Viruddha: Consuming foods that have opposite qualities to what one is accustomed to.

6. Dosa Viruddha: Consuming foods with properties similar to the individual's body constitution but different from their accustomed diet.

7. Samskara Viruddha: Preparing food in a way that causes harm, such as cooking peacock meat on a castor spit.

8. Virya Viruddha: Consuming substances with opposite qualities of hot and cold together.

9. Kosta Viruddha: Giving a mild laxative to someone with a weak digestive system and a strong laxative to someone with a sensitive digestive system.

10. Avastha Viruddha: Consuming foods that aggravate Vata after physical exertion or consuming foods that aggravate Kapha after sleepiness.

11. Krama Viruddha: Eating before the previous meal has been properly digested or eating without hunger or overeating.

12. Parihara Viruddha: Consuming hot foods after consuming pork or ghee and consuming cold foods after consuming ghee.

13. Paka Viruddha: Preparing food using stale or rotten ingredients or overcooking or undercooking the food.

14. Samyoga Viruddha: Consuming sour substances with milk.

15. Hrudya Viruddha: Consuming any bitter-tasting substance.

16. Sampada Viruddha: Consuming immature or putrefied substances.

17. Vidhi Viruddha: Not following proper eating norms.

Pathya And Apathya

Pathya is recommended foods and dietary guidelines:

- Ghee, takra, and navaneet are beneficial.
- Milk and its products, such as goat milk and buffalo milk, are good.

- Pulses like mudga, masura, adhaki are high in protein and easily digestible.

- Light and easily digestible foods like manda, peya, vilepi, and yusha.

- Carbohydrate and fiber-rich grains like rakta-shali, shashtika, shali, godhuma, and yava.

- Avoid excessive salt intake and use saindhav salt daily as it doesn't have side effects.

Apathya is foods to avoid:

- Curd, kurchika, and fish, as they aggravate Kapha and are heavy to digest.

- Alkaline foods, flours, and germinated grains should not be consumed regularly as they aggravate Pitta.

- Dry vegetables, uncooked moolaka, and germinated grains aggravate Vata.

- Fish consumption should be avoided.

Discussion

Ayurveda adopts a scientific approach to healthcare and focuses on maintaining and treating the health of individuals. Its primary objective is to keep a healthy person healthy by emphasizing a diet and exercise routine that benefits both the body and mind. Ayurveda places significant importance on the processing, quality, and quantity of food. The concepts of hāra, Swapna (Nidra), and Brahmacharya all contribute to an individual's overall well-being or "Swasthya." Hāra plays a crucial role in the phases of being healthy, sick, and in recovery. In fact, it is considered more important than medication itself. A balanced diet nourishes the body and keeps it in excellent health, while practicing good mental hygiene allows one to enjoy the full pleasures of life. According to Acharya Kashyap, Ahara (food) is considered the ultimate

medicine, as it has the power to keep a person free from diseases. Even with access to medicine, sustaining life is impossible without eating, which is why physicians regard diet as the greatest medicine. Diet is believed to be the foundation of life, strength, complexion, Ojas (vital energy), growth and development, functioning of the senses, expansion of body tissues, intellect, and health. The six tastes present in food are responsible for the balance or imbalance of the Doshas, which in turn affect one's well-being. Food, in the form of various preparations and combinations, with their specific properties and effects, helps maintain health and prevent illnesses. Ahara is classified into different categories based on its effect on the mind, such as Satvika, Rajsika, and Tamsika.

Conclusion

Ayurveda emphasizes that the digestive system is the root cause of ailments and that each dietary item can either aggravate or pacify the Doshas in the body. Faulty digestion (Mandagni) is the primary cause of most disorders, leading to the formation of toxins (Ama). Ayurveda extensively describes the relationship between a poor diet and disease, and its understanding of Ahara based on qualities, compatibility, Dosha influences, and elemental composition appears more rational and scientific compared to modern perspectives. Diet plays a crucial role not only in disease prevention but also in its management. Following a diet that considers an individual's prakriti (constitution), tridosha (three Doshas), satmya (compatibility), asatmya (incompatibility), and the

elemental composition of food substances is believed to be beneficial.

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