



Review Article

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ASHTA AHARA VIDHI VISHESHA AYATANA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

"Health is wealth", is a statement that reverberates the importance of health in an individual's life. But it is ignored that, health is dependent on multiple factors associated with life. Ayurveda explains three Upastambhas, which is to be observed for leading a healthy life. They are Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya, among which Ahara stands the first. Adequate nutrition through diet is very much needed for the maintenance of life, but, health comes up with following of systematic rules and regulations in diet. For this there is a unique approach that is explained in Ayurveda, which is Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana. In this we find the guidelines for healthy dietary habits like choosing of appropriate food, the right processing, the different combination with food, the right quantity etc. Likewise there are a total of eight dietetic rules and conducts that are explained in this context. With the current scenario, it is noticed that, there is a huge spike in GIT disorders and lifestyle related diseases. It is also undoubtedly established fact that, altered diet habits of the modern world are a leading causative factor for it. The necessity for a scientific and stable dietetic regimen for encountering these issues is in great demand. Taking these into account it is wise to look into the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda. Here, following Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana, which have a huge potential in bringing back the normal health of an individual can be taken into account as a solution.

Keywords: Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana, Ahara, Ayurveda, dietary rules.

INTRODUCTION

Each day in life opens up with new advancements at various dimensions. In this ever changing world, food habits are also changing due to the quest for exploring new possibilities for taste and varieties. But with these changes, there is a huge alteration that is happening with our diet pattern also. The busy schedules in work and reduced time for personal attention are also added in daily routine. With the fast run of life we mostly get shifted for outside food and fast food. Here, most of the time we forget what we are and what is necessary for us. As said "we are what we eat", and that sum up all associated factors about our diet. Even though, most of the time we know there are some wrong diet materials and patterns intruding into our diet, we never bother to rectify it. This eventually led the society to become a prey of many diseases affecting the gastro-intestinal tract and other diseases known as life style disorders.

What can help us get back to our health and healthy life style is a point boggling the present scientific community. Even though the diet experts, from all around the world are coming up with innovative formulations, the perfection is still lacking in most of those.

Here, Ayurveda the science of life has the answer. It is time tested and has spread its branches at multiple dimensions of life.

Dinacharya, Ritu Charya, Ratri Charya etc; for instance are some of the examples to show how deep it has foreseen the importance of a systematic structuring of life to preserve health. It also explains the Trio-Upastambhas (Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya) which are considered as the sub pillars of life. Among the Trio-Upastambhas, Ahara ('the diet') is given at most importance. Its formulation is decided on the basis of Agni (digestive fire), Prakruti (nature), Satmyata (suitability) etc of an individual. Above these, there are also explanations on rules that are to be followed in diet for the preservation of health. The dietetic rules that are explained are known as Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana. There are eight dietetic rules explained by Acharya Charaka of which some are, Prakruti (nature), Karana (processing), Samyoga (combination), Rashi (quantum), Desha (place), Kala (time) etc. These are explained further in detail.

Data of Ayurvedic aspects is collected from the classic text books Charaka Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya.

Review of literature

The Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana refers to the observations that are followed while taking Ahara. The term 'Ashta' means eight, 'Vidhi' means process or method, 'Vishesha' means specific and 'Ayatana' means cause. It has eight limbs or rules;¹

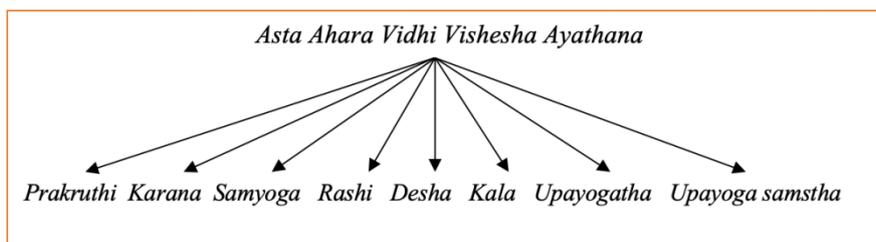


Figure 1: Eight Angas of Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana

Prakruti (Quality)

It means the quality of the Padartha (Ahara Padartha), and it explains about features like Guru (heavy), Laghu (light), Sheeta (cold), Shlakshna (slimy) etc. properties that are inherent in the Dravya. For example, the Ahara Padartha Dugdha (milk) is laghu (light) in property and the transformation of the same into Dadhi (curd); it becomes Guru (heavy). So, the understanding of the properties of a Padartha is done so as to decide or identify what product is suitable for the individual. This is further cross examined with the Prakruthi of the individual based on Vata, Pitta

and Kapha. So, the Ahara which do not vitiate the Doshas in the individual can be identified and added to his diet.²

Karana (Processing)

In the nature, there are different kinds of food materials that are available. Some of them are ready to eat and others which may require some kind of processing so as to make it edible. By processing the Dravya we can change the properties of the material so as to transform it into useable form for humans. This can be done by few methods and that are explained with the table below³;

Table 1: Different processing explained in classics

Type	Process	Example
Jala	Dilution, to change the properties	Preparation of buttermilk
Agni	Cooking, baking, roasting etc.	Preparation of rice and bread
Showcha	Cleaning the desired product	Washing of rice
Kala	The time for a product to become good for intake	Harvesting, and use of the product with respect to time
Manthana	Changing the food properties by churning	Extraction of butter from milk
Samrakshana	Preserving of food by adding preservatives or drying	Preparation of pickles
Vaasana	Adding of fragrance to the food	Use of Ela in preparation of tea
Bhavana	Triturating of the food articles with Swarasa or decoction	Preparation of rasa Aushadhas
Desha Kala Prakarshana	Keeping the food material for maturing	Preparation of fermented batter for preparation of Idli (a South Indian dish)

Samyoga (Combination)

Combinations with two or more Ahara Padarthas which give rise to new properties. The bi-product obtained after the combination of two or more food substance may present with the properties that were not present in any of the combined materials when existed individually. Here, the properties present may be good or bad to health. That is, in some combinations there are chances that it may produce adverse effects like excessive dryness or extreme toxicity etc. So it is important to know the right combination of food. Some examples of adverse combinations are given below.⁴

Example: 1) The combination of honey and ghee in equal quantity can produce toxicity in the body. But these two products taken individually are good for health.

2) The intake of Aanupa mamsa along with black gram or milk or honey or radish is considered to be injurious for health.⁵

Rashi (Quantity)

The quantity of food is another important factor to be considered. The comfortable quantity of food in total and individual quantity have a role in bringing quality and nourishment of the body. The total quantity is explained under the title Sarvagraha (i.e. mamsa, supa, anna, etc in one single bowl or plate) and individual quantity under Parigraha. As we know, the food taken in excess quantity or in less quantity can lead to conditions like obesity and malnutrition.

Rashi explains that, quantity should be calculated on the basis of individual quantity and total quantity of the food after considering the Agni bala, Prakruti, Satyamata etc of the individual and the Prakruti of the Ahara Padartha. The clustering the food materials based on their basic properties, we can classify those under two groups i.e. ‘Guru’ and ‘Laghu’ ahara.⁶

Desha (Place)

With the wide and variant geographical distribution, the possibility of variation in the growth of plants and herbs are high. For example many studies have proved that the phytochemicals concentrations which are present in a plant can vary depending up on the habitat. With this, another factor to be added is the Satmyata of an individual to what he gets to feed on with his habitat.

For examples, think of a hypothetical incident, were a man from south who is accustomed to the food habits of southern style ending up in north part of our country. How he should plan his diet?

Or; Vaidhya who prepares a medicine with the expectation of getting certain level of potency. But do not know, from where the supplier of raw materials collected the raw drugs from. What are the possibilities of his success?

Now, thinking about factors like these will bring the importance of understanding the concepts in Desha.

In Ayurveda, Desha is explained in two contexts, i.e. Bhumi Desha (Jangala, Aanupa and Sadharana) and Deha Desha. A deep understanding of what is suitable for the body and what is best suitable for you at a place, is required to choose food so as to keep your health intact.⁷

Kala (Time)

The time is classified into two, Nityika and Avasthyika. Nityika refers to the general seasonal and daily conditions, and

Avasthyika refers to the disease condition. So, Nityika kala deals with the regimens that are to be followed in the daily base and seasonal basis. For example, Guru Ahara indicated in Hemanta Ritu for managing the increased digestive fire. Example for Avasthyika kala is adaptation of Laghu ahara in Jwara so as to support the weak digestive fire.⁸

Upayoga samstha (Rules for intake of food)

There are certain rules that are to be followed while having food, and that are explained under Upayoga samstha. There are in total, ten rules that are to be followed.⁹ They are;¹⁰⁻¹⁹

Table 2: Ahara Vidhi Vidhanas

Rules	Meaning	Reason
Ushnamashniyath	Consuming warm and fresh food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves taste Kindles the agni Improves the digestive process Vata will be pacified Removes kapha
Snigdamashniyath	Consume unctuous food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves taste Kindles agni Helps in easy movement of food in alimentary tract Vata will be pacified
Matravatashniyath	Consume proper quantity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will keep the normalcy of tridosha Increases the Ayu Clears the stomach in time Will aid the Agni
Jeernamashniyath	Consume only after digestion of previous food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will not provoke doshas Maintains proper status of Agni Clears the Srotas Lightness of the Kostas
Veeryaavirudhamashniyath	Avoid incompetent food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy Agni Tridoshas will be in balance No disease due to derangement of Dhatus
Istadeshaistasarvopakaranamashniyath	Eat at desired place with desired articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pleasantness of mind Avoid emotional strain
Naathidritthanashniyath	Should not eat in hurry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To avoid food entering in wrong passage Will hamper the digestion
Naathivilambithamashniyath	Avoid eating very slowly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food loses the warm nature Do not digest properly Hamper agni Less satisfying May eat in excess
Ahasanajalpantanmanaabunjitha	Eat with concentration and without laughing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the reasons above Laughing while eating may cause the entry food into wrong passage
Aatmanamabhisamikshya	After observing one self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitability of food and desired quantity should be decided by person according to his comfort.

Upayokta (Consumer)

Upayokta/ upabokta are the one who uses or consumes the food. The Upayokta is the one ultimately benefiting out of all these. It is up on his Satyamata, the final choosing is done. He/she decides what is necessary for him/her by considering all other factors.²⁰

DISCUSSION

Due to the changed lifestyle and food habits, the human body is becoming more prone for attack from diseases. The evidences also show that life style disorders like diabetes, hypertension, obesity; CVS, etc. are growing day by day. The food which plays a vital role in the building up of human health is to be given due

attention in every aspect. In Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana we come across those important aspects that should be taken care of while having food. With the understanding of Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana, one learns to understand the food what he is eating by observing it's texture, smell, temperature etc. and the knowledge of how, when, where and with what means to have food is gained. These all indicates a scientific approach of our ancient Acharyas in studying the physical, chemical as well as the psychological aspects of food consumption.

Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana is indeed a unique concept that covered the aspects of dietetics and its relation to the human health. As it is said, a physical, mental and social well-being should be sound so as to claim a person to be healthy; here all

these three dimensions are covered with just food alone as a point of discussion.

CONCLUSION

Diet is one of the important factors for the sustenance of life and health. But the quality of the diet matters the most when it comes the question, how productive is the food consumed is giving you the health you need. Ayurveda classics have rich and abundant information on dietetics. Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshha Ayatana explained by Acharya Charaka is one of the best references available on this context. This indeed explains about the factors that are to be observed while consuming food and the rules for having food. For the modern era, exploring these concepts and application of it in the daily life do hold to be a credible solution for the modern dietetic issues.

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