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A REVIEW ON BRIHATRAYI'S PERSPECTIVE ON PATHYA APATHYA: A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR A BALANCED AND HEALTHY LIFE

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ABSTRACT

The Ayurvedic concepts of Pathya (wholesome practices) and Apathya (unwholesome practices), emphasizing their roles in health maintenance and disease management. This study aims to explore the conceptual framework of Pathya-Apathya as described in the Brihatrayi with its clinical significance in the prevention and management of diseases. A literature-based study was conducted through a critical review of classical Ayurvedic texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, to explore and analyze the concepts of Pathya and Apathya beginning with their derivation. Brihatrayi highlights dietary classifications that guide contemporary eating habits, underscoring the importance of food selection, combination, and timing for sustaining digestive health and preventing ailments. Despite the availability of traditional foods, modern processed options threaten nutritional integrity. Additionally, the text stresses that lifestyle practices and adherence to Pathya are critical for combating rising lifestyle disorders. It advocates a gradual transition to healthier habits, suggesting that neglecting diet and lifestyle leads to treatment failures. The Ayurvedic framework integrates nutrition, behavior, and environmental factors, aligning with current preventive and lifestyle medicine approaches.

Keywords: Brihatrayi, Chikitsa, Ekanta Hita, Ekanta Ahita, Pathya, Apathya.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, is primarily concerned with two fundamental objectives. Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam (Maintenance of health in a healthy individual) and Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam (Alleviation of disease of patient).¹ Fulfilment of these objectives is not solely dependent on Aushadha but significantly relies on adherence to Pathya and avoidance of Apathya in daily life. Among the three essential pillars (Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya) of life described in Ayurveda, Ahara (diet) occupies a major role in maintaining health, preventing diseases, and promoting overall physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

The significance of diet is further emphasized by Acharya Kashyapa, who describes Ahara as Mahabhaishajya, highlighting that wholesome food itself serves as a potent medicine. The classification of Ahara into Pathya and Apathya depends on multiple factors: Prakriti (constitution), Kalpana (pharmaceutical form), Kala (time and season of intake), Matra (quantity), and other relevant parameters. Therefore, individualized assessment is essential for determining the suitability of diet.

Acharya Charaka elaborates on the importance of Dinacharya (daily regimen) and Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) in preserving health and preventing disease. He also describes the concept of Ashtavidha Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana (eight specific factors governing dietary intake), emphasizing that neglect of these principles leads to disease manifestation.

In addition to Ahara, Vihara (lifestyle and behavioral practices) plays a vital role in maintaining health. The concept of

Pragyaparadha (intellectual error), which includes violations of ethical, behavioural, and psychological norms, is considered a major etiological factor in disease development. Unwholesome lifestyle practices, improper mental conduct, and unhealthy social behaviors directly influence the progression of diseases and are intrinsically linked to the concept of Pathya-Apathya.

Furthermore, Ayurveda advocates Achara Rasayana, a code of conduct encompassing moral, psychological, and social discipline, as an essential measure for sustaining physical and psychological health. Observance of Achara Rasayana enhances Satva, promotes longevity, and prevents disease without the use of medicinal drugs, highlighting the preventive dimension of Pathya-Apathya. Hence, the present study aims to explore the conceptual framework of Pathya-Apathya as described in the Brihatrayi and to analyse its clinical significance in the prevention and management of diseases.

A literature-based study was conducted through a critical review of classical Ayurvedic texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya to explore and analyze the concepts of Pathya and Apathya beginning with their derivation.

Derivation

"The term 'Pathya' originates from the Sanskrit root 'Patha,' which signifies 'a way' or 'a channel.'"

Synonyms

Pathya is one of the synonyms of Chikitsa and Aushadha indicating Pathya functions as an essential component of Chikitsa and enhances the effectiveness of Aushadha. So, the synonym of Chikitsa and Aushadha can be regarded as the Pathya.

Pathya: Chikitsa, Vyadhihara, Aushadha, Hita, Satmya² Prayschita, Bhishagita, Bheshaja, Shamana, Shashta.³

Apathya: Asatmya, Ahitakara, Anupashaya.

Definition

Ahara or Vihara which is pleasant and wholesome to both Manasa and Sharira is termed Pathya; anything that is unpleasant or harmful to either is regarded as Apathya.⁴

Importance

Acharya Charaka gave equal importance to Pathya Ahara and Pathya Vihara. Emotional disturbances like anxiety, fear, anger, insomnia impair digestion, reducing the benefit of even wholesome food⁵ Therapeutic measures pleasant to the brain promote Tushti, Urja, Ruchi, Bala, and Sukhopabhogta. As a result, the intensity and strength of the disease are progressively reduced.⁶

Acharya Sushruta dedicated an entire chapter, “Hitaahitiyam Adhyayam” to describe wholesome and unwholesome practices.

Acharya Vagbhatta provides a comprehensive framework integrating Pathya-Apathya into daily life, seasonal care, and therapeutic regimens. Its principles guide the selection of diet, lifestyle, and medicinal adjuncts to preserve health, prevent disease, and optimize recovery.

Acharya Harita states that just as a small spark of fire becomes extremely fierce when it falls on a heap of dry wood, a disease

likewise becomes highly aggravated when associated with Apathya (unwholesome diet and lifestyle). In such a condition, therapeutic measures such as Churna, Kvatha, Vati and procedures like Anuvasana lose their efficacy. Pain does not subside, and the disease fails to resolve despite appropriate treatment.⁷ This clearly indicates that indulgence in Apathya nullifies the effects of even well-planned therapies. Hence, Pathya is not merely an adjunct but the very foundation of Ayurvedic treatment. Strict observance of Pathya ensures therapeutic success, while its absence leads to treatment failure.

Acharya Kashyapa stated that health is rooted in food; Pathya food acts as the best medicine.⁸ Even without medicine, if one adheres to the 'Pathya' regimen, disease can be controlled, but without Pathya, even if one consumes a hundred medicines, the disease never subsides.

According to Vaidya Jivanam, a Pathya (wholesome diet and lifestyle) is fundamental to health in Ayurveda. It emphasizes that if the cause of a disease is addressed through appropriate Pathya, medication may be unnecessary for recovery. Conversely, if an Apathya (unwholesome diet and lifestyle) is continued, medicine will be ineffective in curing the ailment.⁹

Concept of Pathya Apathya in Brihatrayi

The classification of the best among Pathya (wholesome) and Apathya (unwholesome) substances across various Varga described in Charaka Samhita¹⁰, Sushruta Samhita¹¹, Ashtanga Hridaya¹² is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Best Among Wholesome and Among Unwholesome

SN	Varga	Pathya			Apathya		
		Charaka Samhita	Sushruta Samhita	Ashtanga Hridaya	Charaka Samhita	Sushruta Samhita	Ashtanga Hridaya
1.	Shuka-Dhanya (Shali and Vrihi)	Lohita Shashtika	Rakta – Shashtika, Shali, Yava, Godhuma	Rakta Shali, Shashtika	Yavaka	Not specifically mentioned	Yavaka
	Kudhanya	-	Kodrava	-	-		-
2.	Shami-dhanya (Vaidala)	Mudga	Mudga, Aadhaki, Masura	Mudga	Masha		Masha
3.	Udaka	Antariksha	-	Gangambu, Antariksha	Nadeya in Varsha Ritu		Samudra, Nadeya in Varsha Ritu
4.	Lavana	Saindhava	Saindhava	-	Ushara		-
5.	Shaka	Jivanti	Satina, Vastuka, Bala Mulaka, Mandukaparni, Jivanti	Jivanti	Sarshapa		Sarshapa
6.	Mriga Mamsa	Aena	Aena	Aena	Gomamsa		-
7.	Vishkira	Lava	Saranga, Lava, Titira, Kapinjala, Mayura	Lava	Kankapota		-
8.	Bileshaya	Godha	-	-	Bheka		-
9.	Matsya	Rohita	Varmi	Rohita	Chilichima		-
10.	Taila	Tila	Tila	-	Kusumbha		Atasi - Kusumbha
11.	Sarpi	Gavya	Gavya	Gavya	Aavika		Aavika
12.	Kshira	Gokshira	Gokshira	Gokshira	Aavika		Aavika
13.	Kanda	Shringvera	-	-	Aalu		-
14.	Phala	Mridwika	Dadima, Amalaki, Draksha, Kharjura, Parushaka, Rajadana, Matulunga	Draksha	Nikucha		Lakucha
15.	Ikshu Vikara	Sharkara	Sharkara	Aavika	Phanita		Phanita

Table 2: Details of Pathya Apathya in Charaka Samhita

SN	Pathya - Apathya
1.	Ajamutra is Kashaya and Madhura in taste; it is Pathya and Tridoshanashaka. ¹⁵
2.	Patients who experienced weakness after undergoing Shodhana procedures should achieve Brimhana therapy exclusively through Pathya Ahara which includes Ghrita, Mamsarasa, Kshira, and Hridya Yusha. ¹⁶
3.	Kurma Mamsa is considered Pathya and Medha-Smriti-Kara, Shoshaghna. ¹⁷
4.	Laja Manda is Pathya for Mandagni/Vishamagni, Bala/Vridhda (children/elderly), and Sukumara (delicate individuals); relieves Kshut/Trishna (hunger/thirst); and aids Mala elimination. ¹⁸
5.	Kshira (milk) as Anupana: Pathya and Amrita- like for exhaustion from Upavasa (fasting), Adhva (travelling), Bhashya (talking), Stri-prasanga (sex), Maruta, and Atapa (wind/sun exposure). ¹⁹
6.	Pathyatama substances, which are Laghu (light), Mridu Virya (mild potency), Svadu (tasty), Gandhavanta (aromatic), and Praharshakari (pleasure-inducing), represent optimal therapeutic dietetics for the patient of Rajyakshma. ²⁰
7.	The simultaneous consumption of wholesome (Pathya) and unwholesome (Apathya) foods together is considered Samashana (improper eating). ²¹
8.	Therapeutic measures require consideration of Desha (place), Kala (time), Pramana (dose), Satmya (wholesomeness), and Asatmya (unwholesomeness) for efficacy. Negligence of these factors converts even beneficial Pathya into harmful Apathya. ²²
9.	When Pathya becomes unpleasant due to prolonged non-use or loss of palatability, leading to Dvesha (aversion) or Aruchi (loss of taste), it should be made agreeable again by adopting appropriate Kalpana-Vidhis described in Paka Shastra. Whether Pathya is administered in the form of Ahara or Aushadha, it should always be prepared in a Ruchikara (palatable and appealing) manner to ensure its acceptance and therapeutic benefit. ²³
10.	Viparita Kala (improper timing or season), Hina or Ati Matra (inappropriate quantity) and Mithya Upachara (incorrect therapeutic measures) can compromise even a well-planned treatment even if appropriate Pathya Ahara-Vihara are followed. ²⁴

Table 3: Disease / Condition Specific Pathya – Apathya Mentioned in Charaka Samhita

SN	Disease / Condition	Pathya - Apathya
1.	Panduroga, Amlapitta, Shosha, Gulma, Udararoga, Atisara, Jvara, Daha, Shotha, Yoniroga, Shukradosha, Mutraroga, Malatranti	Pathya - Ashta Dugdha ²⁵
2.	Exhaustion due to Upavasa, Adhva, Bhashya, Stree, Maruta, Atapa Karma.	Milk as Anupana – Pathya ²⁶
3.	Kshatakshina	Pathya Anna-pana is Sheeta Virya, Hita, Laghu and nourishes Dhatus. ²⁷
4.	Yapya Kasa – Kshataja and Kshayaja	Pathya Ahara Vihara. ²⁸
5.	Obstruction of Vyana Vayu by Udana Vayu	Pathya - Mitam (Limited) and Laghu (Light) Ahara ²⁹
6.	Sthavira (elderly), Durbala (weak), and Kshina individuals with Shukra/Rudhirakshina.	A Basti prepared with the Kashaya of 8 Pala of each (Bala, Atibala, Apamarga, Atmagupta) along with 1 Anjali of half-crushed Yava, prepared as a Kashaya, Guda, Ghrita, Taila, and Lavana, is administered as a Basti. ³⁰
7.	Kshata-Kshina, Shukra Kshaya or Dushti, Vishama Jvara, and women with Yoni Vyapad (gynecological disorders).	Baladya Sneha Basti is considered as Pathyatama. ³¹

Table 4: Details of Pathya Apathya in Sushruta Samhita

SN	Pathya - Apathya
1.	Salila, Ghrita, Dugdha, Odana – Ekanta Hita (naturally beneficial) ³³
2.	Akanta Ahita Dravya are those substances that are inherently and always harmful, like Agni, Kshara, and Visha Dravya, used for Dahana, Pachana and Marana Karma, respectively. The substances also act as Visha by Samyoga. ³⁴
3.	Brahmacharya, Nivata Shayana, Ushnodaka Snana, Ratri Shayana, and Vyayama are Ekanta Pathyatama Vihara. ³⁵
4.	Antariksha Jala – It pacifies Shrama, Glani, Trishna, Mada, Murchha, Tandra, Nidra, and Daha, is certainly extremely Pathya in all Avastha. ³⁶
5.	Ushnodaka – Kapha-Meda-Anila-Amaghna, Dipana, Basti-shodhana, alleviates Shvasa, Kasa and Jvara. ³⁷
6.	Avika Dugdha - Pathya when Vata is predominant or in Vata Kasa. ³⁸
7.	Nari Stanya - Madhura Rasa, Kashaya Anurasa, Sheeta Virya; Pathya for Nasya, Ashchyotana; Jivana, Laghu, Dipana. ³⁹
8.	Aja Ghrita, Pathya for Kasa, Shvasa, Kshaya. ⁴⁰
9.	Kalamegha Taila - Sarvadosha Prashmana, Agni Dipana, Medha Hitakara, Pathya, Rasayana. ⁴¹
10.	When Guda is Purana (More than one year), its qualities become enhanced (Adhika-Guna), and it is considered Pathyatama, the most wholesome form. ⁴²
11.	Yava - always Pathya in Vrana management. ⁴³
12.	Pathya according to Rasa (taste) – Madhura – Ghrita, Madhu, Amla – Amalaki, Dadima, Lavana – Saindhava, Katu – Pippali, Shunthi, Tikta – Patola, Vattarka, Kashaya – Pugaphala, Parushaka. Parisamvatsara Dhanya – One year old grains, meat of middle-aged birds or animals, Aparyushita and Sanskrita Anna, Pakva Phala, Taruna Shaka. ⁴⁴
13.	Khanishka (finely ground meat) is always Pathyakara for persons having Diptagni. ⁴⁵
14.	In individuals purified by Vamana and Virechana, intake of Krita or Akrita Mudga Yusha is always considered Pathya. ⁵⁵
15.	Samita refers to all preparations made from Godhuma. They have Brimhana, Vata-Pittaghna, Balya, Hridya, and predominantly Pathyatama. ⁴⁶
16.	Food prepared with special processing, pleasing Rasa, Manojna, Shuchi, Na Ati Ushna, and Pratyagra – Hita. ⁴⁷
17.	Svedana in Vishtabdha, Langhana in Amajirna, Vamana in Vidagdhajirna – Pathya. ⁴⁸
18.	Two types of Prameha-: 1. Sahaj Prameha 2. Apathyanimitaja - it is due to Aptathya Ahara and Vihara Sevana. ⁴⁹
19.	For a person who has just awakened, who has taken food, who has taken a bath, or who has undergone Vamana (therapeutic emesis), Pana in the form of Tambula Sevana is considered beneficial. ⁵⁰

20.	Vyayama is always Hitakari for strong individuals and for those who consume Snigdha Ahara, and it is considered Pathyatam during Shita and Vasanta Ritu. ⁵¹
21.	It is Hitakara to administer Asthapana Basti prepared with Dugdha processed with the Kalka and Kvatha of Aushadhi belonging to the Utpaladi Gana. ⁵²

Table 5: Disease-Specific Pathya - Apathya in Sushruta Samhita

SN	Disease / Condition	Pathya - Apathya
1.	Chitta Vikara	Pakva Kushmanda – Pathya ⁵³
2.	Ashmari	Kupathya Ahara Vihara ⁵⁴
3.	Bhagandara	Kupathya Ahara Vihara ⁵⁵
4.	Agantuja Vidradhi	Apathya Ahara Vihara ⁵⁶
5.	When Rakta (vitiated blood) is accumulated in the Amashaya (stomach),	Vamana – Pathya ⁵⁷
6.	When Rakta is accumulated in the Pakvashaya	Virechana – Pathya ⁵⁸
7.	Sadhya Visarpa	Vatadi Doshahargana Dravya, Siddha Ghrita, Seka, Lepa – Pathya ⁵⁹
8.	Mamsagranthi / Kaphajanya Vrana	Pathyatama Kashaya for cleansing ⁶⁰
9.	Raktaja Arbuda	Based on Dosha predominance, Ghritapana, Virechana, Raktamokshana, and Laghu Bhojana are Hitakari ⁶¹
10.	Visha Chikitsa	Anjanadi- prescribed doses Pathya for Anjana, Nasya, Pana, Vamana ⁶²
11.	Netra Shula and Lalima	Suhata Lepa – Pathya ⁶³
12.	Pitta Vidagdha Drishti and Shleshma Drishti	Tailavak Ghrita Pana – Pathyakara. ⁶⁴
13.	Karna Srava	Pathya - Tindukadi Panchaka Kashaya as Karnapurana. ⁶⁵
14.	Pittarakta Shiroroga	Asthapana Basti, Virechaka Aushadhi or Virechana Karma, Pathyakari Bhojana prepared from Madhura Pradhana Peya and Khadya Padarthas, and Sneha Basti. ⁶⁶
15.	Kshayaj Shiroroga	Kshaya and Kasanashaka Ghrita – Pathyatam. ⁶⁷
16.	Vata Shleshma Jwara	Hrswamulaka Yusha – Pathya. ⁶⁸
17.	Jvara	Pathya, Laghu Sambhojana – Pathya. ⁶⁹
18.	Chirothita conditions	Peya with 3 parts water – Pathyatama ⁷⁰
19.	In Jvara Gaurava / Kapha predominance	Vamana – Pathya ⁷¹
20.	Chhardi (Vata, Pitta, Kapha, Sannipataja)	Giloya Hima with Makshika – Pathya ⁷²
21.	Vatanulomana in Balavana Rogi	Virechana Dravya with Saindhava Lavana; Pana of Sukhoshna Ghrita and Sitopala – Pathyakari ⁷³
22.	Raktapitta	Vasaghrita – Hitakari ⁷⁴

Table 6: Details of Pathya Apathya in Ashtanga Hridaya

SN	Pathya - Apathya
1	Gradual nourishment after Shodhana (Vamana, Virechana) with Shali, Shashti, Godhuma, Mudga, Mamsa, Ghrita; Hridaya-priya, Ruchikara, Agnivardhaka, enhances Pachana with Dhaniya, Jira. ⁷⁵
2	Purana Guda is beneficial for the heart and considered Pathya. ⁷⁶
3.	Mudgayusha is considered Pathya after Shodhanakarma, Vrana, Kantha Roga, Netra Roga. ⁷⁷
4.	Saindhava has Sasvadu, Vrushya, Hridaya, Tridoshanut, Laghu, Anushna, Drishya Pathyam, Avidahi, and Agnidipana properties. ⁷⁸
5.	Kshara is considered as Apathya, Katu-Lavana Pradhana; Ahitakara for Shukra, Ojas, Keshha, Netra and Hridaya. ⁷⁹
6.	Avoiding Apathya and consuming Pathya - Due to daily intake in small amounts, the practiced Apathya (contraindicated diet and regimen) should also be discontinued gradually, quarter by quarter. If even such small discontinuation has the potential to cause harm, it should be started from the sixteenth part and then stopped in the same sequence, with an interval of one, two, or three days. Following this, the consumption of beneficial Pathya diet and regimen should be commenced in the same gradual manner. ⁸⁰
7.	Sudden shift from Apathya to Pathya may cause disorders. ⁸¹
8.	In Alpamatra, Langhana with Amadosha, is considered Pathya. ⁸²
9.	Samashana – mixing Pathya and Apathya foods. ⁸³
10.	Dugdha, as Anupana, is highly Pathya in these conditions - For those who are affected by Roga, taking Aushadha, Adhva Bhashya, Maithuna, Langhana, exposure to heat or physical work, Balaka (Childrens) and Vriddha (old persons) milk should be given as Anupana. ⁸⁴
11.	When Pathya food is consumed in proper Matra and Kala, it is digested pleasantly. ⁸⁵
12.	In Garbhini Dvihadrayavastha, if the pregnant woman desires an Ahitakara Dravya, it is advisable to administer a Pathya Dravya mixed with a small quantity of the desired Apathya Dravya. If her desire is not fulfilled, it may lead to Garbhasrava or Garbhapata. ⁸⁶
13.	Milk - Pathya for Pitta and Anila; also, for Atisara patients. ⁸⁷
14.	Takra - Pathya for Grahanidosha, Dipana, Grahi, Laghava, and Madhura Paka. ⁸⁸
15.	All Lavana except Saindhava - Apathya for ocular health. ⁸⁹
16.	Consumption of Apathya during Shastra injuries leads to Kshataja Vidradhi. ⁹⁰
17.	In Garavisha Rogi, after immediate Vamana, appropriate Pathya Ahara-Pana should be administered. ⁹¹
18.	During Chyavanaprasha Rasayana, Sevana Pathya Bhojana advised for optimal benefit. ⁹²
19.	In Vataja Vikara, Taila; in Pittaja Vikara, Ghrita; and in Kaphaja Vikara Madhu, used along with Aushadhi is considered beneficial and Pathya. ⁹³

Table 7: Disease-Specific Pathya - Apathya in Ashtanga Hridaya

SN	Disease / Condition	Pathya - Apathya
1.	After Shodhana weakness	Preparations of Shalidhanya, Shashtidhanya, Godhuma, Mudga, Mamsa, and Ghrita should be given. ⁹⁴
2.	Kaphaja, Vataja Arsha (piles)	Grinjanaka Shaka – Pathya. ⁹⁵

3.	Arsha	Surana Shaka – Pathya. ⁹⁶
4.	Eye health	Saindhava - Drishya Pathya, Tridoshanut, Laghu, Agnidipanam Other Lavana – Apathya. ⁹⁷
5.	Grahanidosha	For patients suffering from Grahanidosha, Takra is Pathya because of its Dipana, Grahi, and Laghava properties; due to its Madhura Paka, it does not aggravate Pitta. ⁹⁸
6.	Garavisha	Pathya Anna Pana after Vamana. ⁹⁹
7.	Kshataj Vidradhi	Avoid Apathya. ¹⁰⁰

Pathya - Apathya in Charaka Samhita

Pathya is described as that which is agreeable and wholesome for both Manasa and Sharira, whereas Apathya is defined as its opposite.¹³

The improper use of unwholesome food (Ahita Ahara) does not immediately produce vitiation of the Doshas. Not all unwholesome foods (Apathya) are Tulyadoshakari (harmful), nor are all Doshas equal in strength, and not all bodies possess the same capacity to resist disease. That very unwholesome food (Apathya) becomes more harmful when consumed in excess or under inappropriate conditions of Desha (place), Kala (time), Samyoga (combination), Virya (potency), and Pramana (quantity).¹⁴

The commonly described Pathya-Apathya references from the Charaka Samhita are summarised in Table 2.

The disease- and condition-specific Pathya-Apathya measures in the Charaka Samhita are summarised in Table 3.

Concept of Pathya Apathya in Sushruta Samhita

Some Acharyas opine that no substance can be considered absolutely wholesome or unwholesome, because a substance that is wholesome for Vata Dosha may be unwholesome for Pitta Dosha. However, Acharya Sushruta does not accept this view and clarifies that substances by their inherent nature (Svabhava) and by their combinations (Samyoga) can be of three types: Ekanta Hita (absolutely wholesome), Ekanta Ahita (absolutely unwholesome), and Hita-Ahita (both wholesome and unwholesome).³² The references of Ekanta Hita and Ekanta Ahita substances along with generally accepted dietary, lifestyle, and therapeutic measures from the Sushruta Samhita are summarised in Table 4.

The disease-specific Pathya–Apathya measures described in the Sushruta Samhita are summarized in Table 5.

Concept of Pathya Apathya in Ashtanga Hridaya

Pathya-Apathya (wholesome and unwholesome diet and lifestyle) is established as a fundamental pillar of therapeutics, where the terms Chikitsita, Hitam, and Bhesaja are used synonymously with Pathya to emphasize that right living is itself a form of treatment. The references related to Pathya-Apathya mentioned in the Ashtanga Hridaya are summarised in Table 6.

The disease–condition–specific Pathya-Apathya references outlined in the Ashtanga Hridaya are summarised in Table 7.

DISCUSSION

The Brihatrayi emphasizes that the concepts of Pathya and Apathya (wholesome and unwholesome regimens) are not universally fixed but are determined based on multiple factors. Firstly, for health maintenance, Pathya includes dietary and lifestyle practices that sustain equilibrium of Tridosha, promote proper digestion (Agni), and support Dhatu. Dinacharya (daily regimen), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), and Achara Rasayana are prime examples, as they align in promoting the homeostasis of individuals. Apathya, on the other hand, disrupts this balance

and predisposes the individual to diseases like Atisara, Udararoga, Prameha, Arsha, Kushtha and other disorders, showing that bad habits gradually lead to illness.

Secondly, in the context of disease (Roga), Pathya-Apathya is defined according to the specific Dosha involvement. For instance, substances that aggravate a vitiated Dosha are considered Apathya, whereas those that pacify it are Pathya. Furthermore, the Prakriti of the Rogi (patient) also plays a crucial role.

In Brihatrayi, Ahara Varga (classification of food substances) is systematically described to guide dietary practices in daily life. These sections categorize various food items based on their properties, effects on Dosha, and suitability for different individuals and conditions. Rather than merely listing foods, these chapters emphasize the functional role of diet as a cornerstone of health maintenance (Svasthavritta) and disease management. They highlight that appropriate selection, combination, quantity, and timing of food are essential for sustaining Agni (digestive fire), promoting tissue nourishment, and preventing disease.

Acharya Charaka, Sushruta and Vagbhatta identify the Pathyatama (best) and Apathyatama (worst) substances within each Varga (Table 1) and are considered superior due to their easy digestibility and balanced properties. Dietary guidance in Sushruta Samhita shows a balanced approach rather than strict restriction. Various Shukadhanya, Shamidhanya, Shaka, Mamsa, Ghrita, and Lavana are described as generally wholesome, indicating that Ayurveda supports nourishing and varied diets.

In the present context, categories such as Shukadhanya (cereals), Shimbidhanya (legumes), Phala (fruits), Shaka (vegetables), and Dugdha (milk and dairy) are easily accessible across urban and rural settings. Staples like rice, wheat, lentils, milk, and seasonal vegetables continue to form the backbone of daily diets, especially in countries like India.

However, the challenge lies not in availability but in quality and form. Traditional whole foods have increasingly been replaced or modified into processed and refined products. For example, whole grains are often consumed as polished rice or refined flour, and fresh dairy may be substituted with packaged or preserved alternatives. These alterations can reduce the nutritional value and alter the inherent properties (Guna) described in Ayurveda.

The text, Ashtanga Hridya advocates a gradual approach to lifestyle modification, advising that long-standing unwholesome practices (Apathya) should be discontinued progressively through Padamsika Krama (quarter-wise reduction), while wholesome practices (Pathya) should be adopted in a similarly measured manner to prevent physiological imbalance.

CONCLUSION

A clear message running through the Brihatrayi is that treatment fails when diet and lifestyle are neglected. The relevance of Pathya becomes even more significant in the context of rising lifestyle disorders, including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular

diseases, and stress-related mental health conditions. Modern habits such as irregular meal timings, excessive consumption of processed foods, sedentary behaviour, and sleep disturbances can be interpreted as forms of Apathya. These factors disrupt metabolic balance and contribute to the pathogenesis and chronicity of diseases. Thus, the Ayurvedic concept of Pathya–Apathya offers a holistic framework that integrates diet, behaviour, and environment, aligning closely with current approaches in preventive and lifestyle medicine.

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