



“Annam Vruttikaranam Shreshtham: Importance of diet in Brihatrayi.”

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Abstract:

The diet is one of the most important entity for *Vrutti* (Sustenance of life). The major treatises of Ayurveda (*Brihatrayi*), namely *Charak Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* (sometimes, *Ashtanga Sangraha* also) give logical and didactic explanation for it. The present review was aimed at compiling available information about importance of *Ahara* (diet) from these four treatises. The review can be helpful for understanding various concepts related to food in Ayurveda and can be implied in future studies.

The *Charaka Samhita* with *Ayurveda Dipika* commentary by *Chakrapani*, The *Sushruta Samhita* with *Nibandha Sangraha* commentary by *Dalhana*, The *Ashtanga Hridaya* with *Sarvanga Sundara* commentary by *Arunadattta* and *Ashtanga*

Sangraha with *Shashilekha* commentary by *Indu*, were mainly reviewed for the present study. Supporting materials from ancient and contemporary sources were also reviewed.

The classification of *Ahara* (diet) as well as *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* (dietetic rules) have been reviewed from all four major treatises of Ayurveda. The aim of *Ahara* (diet) has been described in an all-inclusive approach converging to most important i.e. *Vrutti* (sustenance of life). This ultimate approach can be utilized in development of various diet plans for healthy as well as diseased people. As *Ahara* (diet) is the root cause and treatment of almost all diseases, this knowledge can prove to be useful for successful management of various conditions.

Key-Words: *Vrutti, Ahara, Ahara Vidhi Vidhana, Brihatrayi*

Annam Vruttikaranam Shreshtham : **Importance of diet in *Brihatrayi***

Introduction

The bliss and knowledge of 'Brahman' has been elaborated in *Taittiriya Upanishad*. *Annam* i.e. *Ahara* (food) is mentioned as 'Brahman' therein.¹ It says that, all living beings take birth because of food; sustain with the help of it and merge in it afterwards. These characteristics and interpretation denote magnitude of importance of diet in Indian philosophy.

Ayurveda has been a culmination of Indian philosophy in many ways. Being a holistic medicinal system, it has incorporated many exceptional concepts in its ambit. The importance of diet in Ayurveda is undoubted. It is one of the most important entity for *Vrutti* (Sustenance of life).² There are numerous references in its ancient treatises that give logical and didactic explanation for it.

Charak Samhita, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* are classically considered as *Brihat Trayi* (The greater Triad). Sometimes, *Ashtanga Sangraha* is also included in it along with *Ashtanga Hridaya*. All these treatises contain the knowledge essence of entire Ayurveda.

The present review was aimed at compiling available information about importance of *Ahara* (diet) from these four treatises. The review can be helpful for understanding various concepts related to food in Ayurveda and can be implied in future studies.

Methods-

The *Charaka Samhita* with *Ayurveda Dipika* commentary by *Chakrapani*, The *Sushruta Samhita* with *Nibandha Sangraha* commentary by *Dalhana*, The *Ashtanga Hridaya* with *Sarvanga Sundara* commentary by *Arunadattta* and *Ashtanga Sangraha* with *Shashilekha* commentary by *Indu*, were mainly reviewed for the present study. Supporting materials from ancient and contemporary sources were also reviewed.

Results-

Ayurveda aims to maintain the condition of health (*Swasthya Rakshana*) of a healthy person. It also mentions alleviation of diseases (*Vikara Prashamana*) of a diseased person as its motto.³ Thus, the restoration and sustenance of health becomes the supreme purpose. All achievements of life, viz. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, are founded on basis of health.⁴

The principles of Ayurveda also elaborate that, health as well as diseases are dependent on various factors. Among them, food is the most important one.

According to its etymology, the meaning of word *Ahara* is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating. By this definition, both diet and drugs can be included in *Ahara*.

The *Amarkosha* includes other synonyms of *Ahara* such as, *Jagdha*, *Bhojana*, *Lehya*, *Nighasa*, *Nyada*, *Jemana*, *Viddhasa*, *Pratyasanama*, *Bhaksanam* *Abhyavarana*, *Khadanam* and *Nigara*.

The food is said to be cause of stability for all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living

beings. Ahara is said to be *Mahabhaishajya* in Kashyapa Samhita, hence no any other medicament just like diet is available.⁵ In other words, one is capable to make a man disease free only with congenial diet. One is not able to sustain life without diet even if endowed with medicine. Thus, diet is said to be the great medicament that can be prescribed by a physician.

Food is said to be basis of life, strength, complexion, *Ojas* (Vital Power) , growth and development, perspicuity of sense organs , happiness, clarity of voice, luster of skin , pleasure, increase of *Dhatu* (Body tissues), intellect, health etc. In short, entire lives of individuals depend upon food, all the activities of this world, as well as efforts made for eternal emancipation depends upon it. Thus, the person desirous of long life should eat the diet which is congenial, appropriate in quantity and time

Food is the cause of strength, colour and vitality of all living beings. It is dependent on six tastes (*Rasa*) ; that increase, decrease and bring normalcy to the *Dosha*. These functions depend on the tastes, qualities, potencies and taste after digestion (*Anurasa*) of the substance.

The articles of food, the taste, properties, potency, taste after digestion and actions of each one of them separately has been discussed in *Brihat Trayi*. It can be seen that, food items can be prepared in the form of eatables and drinkables; lickable and chewable, by the combination of many substances, adopting many processes and possessing different special effects. Thus, it becomes mandatory for a good physician to possess this knowledge. Else, he will not be

able to advise others on maintenance of health and prevention(of cure) of diseases.⁶

A righteous person can live for a hundred years free from diseases by the having proper and wholesome diet. Food sustains the life of living beings. Professional activities leading to happiness in the world, Vedic rituals leading to abode in heaven and observance of truth, leading to salvation are all based on food.

Only the individual having a healthy body can afford to perform all activities leading to happiness, heaven and salvation, and for the preservation of health intake of food is essential. Hence food is the basic factor for the attainment of all of them.

It has been suggested that, the origin of life as well as diseases is food. The happiness and sorrows in life are eventually caused by wholesome and unwholesome food. In short, the food related factors decide whether somatic and psychological diseases will appear or not in a person.⁷

Charaka Samhita thus elucidates that diet and the dietetic rules are basic factors among the causes for disease.⁸ In Ayurveda, *Nidana Parivarjana* (Correction of the causative factors) is the prime treatment of diseases. It can be said that, following balance in diet and rules associated with it can bring out promotion of health and alleviation of diseases both. The proper diet, taken in proper manner can lead to better health. On the contrary, proper diet if not taken in proper manner can lead to diseases too.

According to *Charaka Samhita*, nothing is non-medicinal in this universe.⁹ There are of

two types of medicines depending on the nature of composition. Food items can be considered under the category of *Dravyabhuta Aushadhi* (Pharmacological interventions) . The various dietetic rules explained along with importance of food can be classified under *Adravabhuta Aushadhi* (Non-pharmacological interventions) as *Upayabhipluta Chikitsa*.

Various factors regarding classification of diet and its relevance has been elaborated in *Brihat Trayi*, as follows-

A) Classification as per its form -

As per *Charaka Samhita*, the articles of food can be classified as per table 1.

Table 1- Classification of *Ahara* (food items) according to *Charak Samhita*¹⁰

Category		Examples
01	<i>Shookadhanya</i>	Cereals
02	<i>Shamidhanya</i>	Pulses and legumes
03	<i>Mamsa</i>	Meat
04	<i>Harita</i>	Coriander, Ginger etc.
05	<i>Phala</i>	Fruits
06	<i>Shaka</i>	Leafy Vegetables
07	<i>Madya</i>	Alcohol
08	<i>Ambu</i>	Water from various sources
09	<i>Gorasa</i>	Dairy products
10	<i>Ikshuvikara</i>	Sugarcane products
11	<i>Kritanna</i>	Cooked foods
12	<i>Aharayogin</i>	Spices and condiments

The *Sushruta Samhita* classifies *Ahara* as per its liquid or solid nature. (Table 2)

Table 2- Classification of *Ahara* (food items) as per *Sushruta Samhita*¹¹

<i>Drava Varga</i>	<i>Annapana Varga</i>
Category	Category
<i>Jala</i>	<i>Dhanya</i>
<i>Ksheera</i>	<i>Mamsa</i>
<i>Dadhi</i>	<i>Phala</i>
<i>Takra</i>	<i>Shaka</i>
<i>Ghrita</i>	<i>Lavana</i>
<i>Taila</i>	<i>Kritanna</i>
<i>Madhu</i>	<i>Bhakshya</i>
<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Anupana</i>
<i>Madya</i>	
<i>Mootra</i>	

Ashtanga Sangraha & *Ashtanga Hridaya* have mostly followed *Charaka Samhita* & *Sushruta Samhita* in this aspect. However, *Ashtanga Hridaya* has incorporated a group called *Bhaishajya- Varga* which includes *Maricha* (*Piper nigrum*), *Pippali* (*Piper longum*)etc. medicinal herbs. It also counted *Purisha* under *Mootra Varga* which was an exclusive thought. The classification otherwise exactly same in both texts. The only difference is that, the class of liquid food item is called *Panam* in *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Dravam* in *Ashtanga Hridaya*.

The classification of *Ahara* (food items) as per *Ashtanga Hridaya* is elaborated in table 3

Table 3- Classification of *Ahara* (food items) as per *Ashtanga Hridaya*¹²

Category	Category
<i>Dravam/ (Panam-A.S.)</i>	<i>Adravam</i>
<i>Toyam</i>	<i>Shookadhnyam</i>
<i>Ksheeram</i>	<i>Shimbidhanyam</i>
<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Pakvannam</i>
<i>Tailam</i>	<i>Mamsam</i>

<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Shakam</i>
<i>Mootram</i>	<i>Phalam</i>
	<i>Aushadhavarga</i>

B) Classification of diet as per other attributes-

1. *Charaka Samhita* has classified *Ahara* (diet) in various ways, as per its principle of multiple division.¹³ Table 4 summarizes all these classifications.

Table 4- Classification of *Ahara* (diet) as per other attributes by *Charaka Samhita*

Sr. No.	Attribute for classification	Type	Description
1	Edible	1	<i>Ahara</i> (Food)
2	Origin	2	<i>Sthavaram</i> (Vegetable products)
			<i>Jangama</i> (Animal products)
3	<i>Prabhava</i>	2	<i>Hitam</i> (wholesome)
			<i>Ahitam</i> (unwholesome)
4	<i>Veerya</i>	2	<i>Sheeta</i>
			<i>Ushna</i>
5	Nature of intake	4	<i>Asheetam</i> (Eatables)
			<i>Khaditam</i> (Masticated food)
			<i>Peetam</i> (Beverages)
			<i>Leedham</i> (Linctus)
6	<i>Mahabhoota</i>	5	<i>Parthiva</i>
			<i>Apya</i>
			<i>Tejasiya,</i>
			<i>Vayaviya</i>
			<i>Akashiya</i>
7	<i>Rasa</i>	6	<i>Madhura</i>
			<i>Amla</i>
			<i>Lavana</i>
			<i>Katu</i>

			<i>Tikta</i>
			<i>Kashaya</i>
8	<i>Veerya</i>	8	<i>Guru</i>
			<i>Laghu</i>
			<i>Sheeta</i>
			<i>Ushna</i>
			<i>Snigdha</i>
			<i>Ruksha</i>
			<i>Manda</i>
			<i>Teekshna</i>

2. According to effect of *Ahara* on body, *Sushruta Samhita* has classified it in to three categories, viz. *Ekanta Hitakara*, *Ekanta-Ahitkara* and *Hita – Ahitkara*¹⁴.

The *Ekanta Hitakara* (always suitable) food items do not harm the body even though used routinely. e.g. water, milk, Ghee etc. They are always suitable and accustomed to body since birth.

The *Ekanta Ahita* (Absolutely unsuitable) food items can harm the body quickly and so can't be used even for short period, which are always unsuitable and perform actions like *Dahana*, *Pachana* and *Marana* etc. *Visha Dravya* can be classified under this category.

Hitahita Ahara (Suitable-unsuitable) are the foods which do not harm when utilized in proper quantity, time, season, admixture, processing etc. They can possibly cause harm in specific conditions when taken in improper quantity, time, season, admixture, processing etc.

3. *Pathya & Apathya Ahara*-

Due to their nature and result of combination they become *Pathya* (absolutely suitable), *Apathya* (absolutely

unsuitable) or *Pathya-Apathya* (suitable – unsuitable).

As Per *Sushruta Samhita*¹⁵, *Pathyatama Ahara* (Absolutely suitable diet) includes different varieties of paddy/rice such as *Raktashali*, *Shashtika*, *Kanguka*, *Mukundaka*, *Panduka*, *Peetaka*, *Pramodaka*, *Kalaka*, *Asana*, *Pushpaka*, *Kardamaka*, *Shakunahrita*, *Sugandhaka*, *Kalama*; millets such as *Nivara*, *Kodrava*, *Uddalaka*, *Shyamaka*; *Godhuma* (wheat), *Yava* (barley), *Venu Yava* (seed of bamboo tree); venison such as *Harina*, *Kuranga*, *Mrigamatruka*, *Shvadamshttra*, *Karala*; birds such as *Krakara*, *Kapota*, *Lava*, *Tittiri*, *Kapinjala*, *Vartira*, *Vartika*; legumes/pulses such as *Mudga*, *Vanamudga*, *Makushtha*, *Kalaya*, *Masura*, *Mangalya*, *Chanaka*, *Harenu*, *Adhhaki*, *Satina*; leafy vegetables such as *Chilli*, *Vastuka*, *Sunishannaka*, *Jivanti*, *Tanduliyaka*, *Madukaparni*; Cow Ghee, *Saindhava*, *Dadima*, and *Amalaka*.

4. *Satmya- Asatmya Ahara* (Habituation or Customization)-

A Substance beneficial to an individual is called *Satmya* and the use of such Substances results in the well-being of

that individual. *Satmya* is of three types, viz. superior, inferior and average. According to another mode of classification it is of seven types, depending upon the administration of individual *Rasas* (six types) and the use of *Rasas* jointly (seventh type). Ingestion of food items having all the *Rasas* is of the superior type of *Satmya*; use of only one *Rasa* is of an inferior type and in between the superior and the inferior types is the average type of *Satmya*¹⁶. The inferior and mediocre types should be slowly changed over to the superior types of *Satmya*. The idea of *Oka Satmya* i.e. to make a substance conducive to the body by its habitual intake has also been elaborated by *Chakrapani* in his commentary.¹⁷

The notion of *Satmya* stands for such factors are wholesome to the individual even when continuously used.¹⁸ The regimen and diets which have become non injurious to the body by habitual use are known as *Oka Satmya*.¹⁹ It has been described that they form part and parcel of body's constitution so much so that even though potentially harmful; they do not actually harm to the body like the poison of a snake.

According to *Sushruta Samhita*, *Satmya* is the use of such things which do not cause harm to the body even though they are different from one's own constitution, habitat, time, season, disease, taste etc.²⁰ Here, *Dalhana* commentary mentions that *Satmya* is that which makes for the well-being of the body. When indulged for the long periods of time, the body becomes accustomed to any food and activities, whether good or bad, healthy or

unhealthy, safe or unsafe. Such things are assessed in respect of the qualities/features of the different factors.

Dietary components as well as the method of their intake both have equal importance, according to *Ayurveda*. Importance of food is commonly observed across conventional medicine. However, the uniqueness of *Ayurveda* lies in emphasizing on manner of eating too.

These dietetic rules can be found in *Charak Samhita* as follows-

-A) *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*²¹

These are the causative factors which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the food or of the method for its intake. These different factors give rise to favourable and Unfavourable effects and are compliant to one another.

The eight factors that determine the utility or otherwise of various types of food are; *Prakriti* (character), *Karana* (Processing), *Samyoga* (Combination strategies), *Rashi* (Quantum), *Desha* (Habitat), *Kala* (Time as age, seasons and conditions), *Upayoga Sanstha* (Dietetic rules) and *Upayokta* (state of individual).

Ashtanga Sangraha has illustrated only seven types of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*.²² these have been elaborated under *Sapta Ahara Vidhi Kalpana*. They are almost in line with description from *Charaka Samhita*. The only difference being mention of *Upayogavyavastha*, which is congregation of *Upyogasanstha* and *Upayokta*.

B) *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*-

These are the dietetic rules²³ which are to be followed while taking the food by healthy as well as diseased individuals. It has been said that, food which is warm, unctuous and in proper quantity, should be consumed only after digestion of previously ingested food. Further, it says that only diet which is non-antagonistic must be consumed. Food must be consumed in a suitable and well-provisioned place.

The ingestion of food must not be speedy or too slow. Meals should be had without talking with others, without laughing. Above all, food must be eaten with the concentration of the mind, after paying due regard to oneself or own self.

Similar description in *Sushruta Samhita* can be obtained. But it is for Unhealthy persons and called as *Dwadasha Ashana Vichara*.²⁴

These twelve aspects include rules regarding *Sheeta*, *Ushna*, *Snigdha*, *Ruksha*, *Drava* and *Shushka* food. It also elaborates situation where two meals, one meal or small quantity food must be taken. Also, the concepts of medicated diet and seasonal diet have been described. Lastly, it has been elaborated that all foods consumed by the healthy person is meant to maintain health and life i.e. *Vrutti*.

Conclusion

In this way, the aim of *Ahara* (diet) has been described in a 360-degree approach converging to most important i.e. *Vrutti* (sustenance of life). This ultimate approach can be utilized in development of various diet plans for healthy as well as diseased people.

As *Ahara* (diet) is the root cause and treatment of almost all diseases, this knowledge can prove to be useful for successful management of various conditions.

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