

Charakokta Concept of Aahara - A Major Upastambha of Life**Sanjivani Robert Dabre**

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Author Correspondence: drsanjurobert@gmail.com**Abstract:**

Charaka Samhita, one of the major treatises of Ayurveda, focuses on *Swasthya-Rakshana* in *Swastha* individuals as well as *Vikaraprashamana* in patients. *Aahara* is considered to be one of the sub-pillars of life along with *Swapna* and *Brahmacharya*. *Charaka Samhita* has mentioned the importance of *Aahara* in maintenance of health as well as treatment of various diseases. A proper diet maintains the physiological homeostasis of the body as well as proves supportive in combating diseases. *Ayuktiyukta Aahara* can cause various diseases whereas *Yuktiyukta Aahara* provides sustenance to the body, remains important for disease prevention and even therapeutics too. The present study was carried out to critically review the concept of *Aahara* (diet) in given in *Charaka Samhita*. *Charaka Samhita* with its *Ayurveda-Deepika* commentary by Chakrapanidatta along with the other classical texts of Ayurveda and their major commentaries were reviewed as primary source of information.

Aahara has been classified based on its source into twelve classes, based on the forms of ingestion, *Aahaara* is classified

into 4 types. It is also classified according to *Rasa*, *Veerya*, *Vipaka*, *Guna*, *Prabhava*, etc. The classification is also based on effects is *Hitakara* (wholesome) and *Ahitakara* (unwholesome) *Aahara*. *Charaka Samhita* has provided guidelines regarding health promoting eating practices under *Ashta-Ahara-Vidhi-Vishesh-Ayatanani* (Eight attributes related to diet consumption) which are responsible for deciding wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of the diet.

Keywords: *Aahara*, *Hitakara Aahara*, *Ahitakara Aahara*, *Ashta-Ahara-Vidhi-Vishesh-Ayatanani*

Introduction:

Charaka Samhita is one of the major texts of Ayurveda focuses on maintenance of a health in healthy individuals as well as treatment of diseases in patients. *Aahara* is mentioned as one of the *Upastambha* or sub-pillars of human body by major texts of Ayurveda.¹ According to Acharya Charaka, *Prana* (the source of life) for all living beings is *Anna* (food) and *Loka* (the whole world) seeks *Anna* (food). *Varna* (complexion), *Prasada* (clarity), *Sauswarya* (good voice), *Jeevita* (long life), *Pratibha* (talent), *Sukha* (happiness), *Tushti* (satisfaction), *Pushiti*

(growth), *Bala* (strength) and *Medha* (intelligence) are all established in food.² The nurturing of the body depends on various factors such as *Guna* (quality) and *Matra* (quantity) of food, *Sanskara* (processing techniques utilized), *Ashana Vichara* (way of consumption), and even the *Upayokta* (user) itself. A proper diet maintains the physiological homeostasis of the body as well as proves supportive in combating diseases. Diet, therefore, remains important for disease prevention and even therapeutics too.

The word meaning of *Aahara* is 'any substance ingested via mouth and passed to the alimentary canal'.³ *Aahara* (diet) is given precedence among the *Traya-Upastambha* (three supportive pillars) of life. It is '*Vrittikaranam Agryam*' (major sustainer of life). The quests of life depend on good health which in turn depends on *Aahara*. *Anna* (food) and *Pana* (beverage) that possess *Ishta – Varna – Gandha – Rasa – Sparsha* (appropriate colour, smell, taste and touch), *Vidhi Vihita* (according to dietary rules) such as taken in *Ishta Matra* (the right quantity), *Ishta Kala* (at the right time), *Rutu* (season) and *Desha* (habitat) are *Prana* (a source of life / vitality) for all living beings. *Pathyakara Ahara* (wholesome food) is *Indhana* (the fuel) that maintains *Agni* (process of digestion and metabolism), causes *Sattva Urja* (revitalizes the mind), *Sharira-Dhatu-Vyuhakara* (promotes proper distribution of body elements), *Bala* (strength), *Varna* (complexion), and *Indriya Prasadana* (proper functioning of the sense-organs).⁴ According to *Charaka Samhita*, "*Hitahara Upayoga* (ingestion of wholesome food) is the only cause of *Purusha – Vriddhi* (the nourishment of body) whereas *Ahitahara* (unwholesome

diet) causes numerous diseases."⁵ (*Charak Sootra* 25/31)

The present study was carried out to critically review the concept of *Aahara* (diet) in given in *Charaka Samhita*.

Methods: *Charaka Samhita* with its *Ayurveda-Deepika* commentary by Chakrapanidatta along with the other classical texts of Ayurveda and their major commentaries were reviewed as primary source of information. Scholarly articles, books etc. were also referred wherever needed.

Conceptual Study:

According to *Charaka Samhita*, those food articles that maintain *Prakruti-Sthapana* of *Sharira Dhatu* (an equilibrium state in body elements) and help in *Sameekarana* of *Vishama Dhatu* (eliminating abnormalities in the path to equilibrium) can be considered as *Hitahara* (wholesome food), while those that act in the *Viparita* (opposite) manner are considered *Ahitahara* (unwholesome food).⁶ (*Charak Sootra* 25/33)

Dietary articles are categorized based on their sources, forms, effects on health, frequency of consumption and attributes as:

Classification based on source as are as:
Shukandhanya (cereals): *Raktashali*, *Mahashali*, *Kalamah*, *Yavaka*, etc.,
Shamidhanya (pulses & legumes): *Mudga*, *Masha*, *Chanaka*, *Masura*, etc.,
Mamsa (meat): *Shasha*, *Mruga*, *Matsya*, etc.,
Shaka and *Harita* (vegetables & leafy vegetables): *Patha*, *Sunishannak*, *Changeri*, *Upodika*, *Tanduliyaka*, etc.,
Phala (fruits): *Mrudwika*, *Kharjura*, *Parushaka*, *Amra*, *Priyala*, etc.,
Harita (salads): *Ardraka*, *Surasa*, *Dhanyaka*, *Yavani*, etc.,
Madya (fermented drinks): *Sura*, *Madira*, *Arishta*, *Jagala*, *Sura*, etc.,
Ambu (water from various sources):

Divya, Nadi, Vapi, Kupa, Tadaga, etc., *Gorasa* (milk and milk products): *Go, Mahisha, Chhaga, Avik, Manushya*, etc. *Dugdha, Dadhi, Navneeta, Ghrita, Iksuvikara* (sugar-cane products): *Guda, Gudasharkara, Madhusharkara, Makshika, Bhramara, Kshaudra, Pauttika* – *Madhu, Kritanna* (food preparations): *Peya, Manda, Vilepi, Odana*, etc. *Aharayogi* (Spices and condiments): *Taila, Shunthi, Hingu, Lavana* etc.⁷

Based on the forms of ingestion, *Aahaara* is classified into 4 types, namely *Ashita* (eatables like rice, etc.), *Leedha* (foods that are licked like honey, etc.), *Peeta* (drinks like water, milk, etc.) and

Khaadita (foods that are masticated like *Mamsa*, etc.).⁸

According to the predominance of *Pancha-Mahabhoota*, *Aahara* can be classified as *Parthiva, Aapya, Agneya, Vayaveeya*, and *Aakasheeya*. *Aahara* can be classified depending on *Shadrada* as *Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta*, and *Kashaya*. *Sheeta* and *Ushna Veerya, Madhura, Amla* and *Katu Vipaka* can also be the criteria for the classification of *Aahara*.⁹

Classification based on effects is *Hitakara* (wholesome) and *Ahitakara* (unwholesome) *Aahara*.¹⁰

Table No. 1: classification of *Aahara* based on effects

Sr. No.	<i>Aahara-Varga</i>	<i>Pathyatama Dravya</i>	<i>Ahitatama Dravya</i>
1	<i>Shuka-Dhanya</i>	Lohita-Shali (red rice)	Yavaka (wild barley)
2	<i>Shami-Dhanya</i>	Mudga (green gram)	Masha (black gram)
3	<i>Jala</i>	Antariksha Udaka (rain water)	Varsha-Nadeya (river water in rainy season)
4	<i>Lavana</i>	Saindhava (rock salt)	Ushara (saline soil water)
5	<i>Shaka</i>	Jivanti (<i>Leptadenia reticulata</i> W.S.A.)	Sarshapa (mustard leaves)
6	<i>Mruga-Mamsa</i>	Aineya Mamsa (antelope)	Gomamsa (beef)
7	<i>Pakshi</i>	Lava (common quail)	Kapota (young dove)
8	<i>Bileshaya</i>	Godha (iguana)	Bheka (frog)
9	<i>Matsya</i>	<i>Rohita</i>	<i>Chilichima</i>
10	<i>Ghrita</i>	<i>Go-Ghrita</i>	<i>Avika-Ghria</i>
11	<i>Dugdha</i>	<i>Go-Dugdha</i>	<i>Avika-Dugdha</i>
12	<i>Sthavara Sneha</i>	<i>Tila Taila</i>	<i>Kusumbha Taila</i>
13	<i>Kanda</i>	<i>Shrungabera</i>	<i>Aluka</i>
14	<i>Phala</i>	<i>Mrudvika</i>	<i>Nikucha (Atrocarpus nikucha Roxb.)</i>
15	<i>Ikshu-Vikara</i>	<i>Sharkara</i>	<i>Fanita</i>

Charaka Samhita has provided guidelines regarding health promoting eating practices under *Ashta-Ahara-Vidhi-Vishesh-Ayatanani* (Eight attributes related to diet consumption): The factors responsible for deciding wholesomeness

or unwholesomeness of the diet.¹¹

1. **Prakriti** : Natural/inherent attributes of the dietary articles
2. **Karana**: Processing of dietary articles, which result in transformation of the substance and

thereby its effects

3. **Samyoga**: Combination of items, which may give rise to new properties which are not seen in individual items
4. **Rashi** (Quantity of food): The quantity of diet considered in its entirety is *Sarvagraha*, while the quantity of individual dietary articles is *Parigraha*.
5. **Desha** (Habitat of the dietary articles as well as the consumer): denotes the geographic region relating that the substance(s) are local or endemic to, and thus, are suitable to.
6. **Kala** (Time- age, diurnal & seasonal variations, stage of disease): It can be taken to be the ever moving time, as in seasons (e.g., suitable to seasons), or as duration from the standpoint of a condition (e.g., a condition that does not get treated within a specific duration becomes incurable).
7. **Upayokta** (Consumer): *Upayokta* is the one who consumes the food. *Okasatmya* (habituation towards certain practices) plays an important role in prescription of diet.
8. **Upayoga Samstha** (Guidelines for diet consumption): These guidelines need to be followed for proper digestion. If they are not observed, consequences like indigestion leading to *Aama* (undigested incompatible food toxins) formation, are possible further resulting in diseases.

The characteristics of the eight factors mentioned in the above verses are *Paraspara Upakaraka* (inter-dependent). Any regimen prescribed should be done after gaining a thorough understanding of the food articles from these eight aspects for them to be wholesome. Food or any other *Dravya* that is *Priya* (liked) but is *Ahita* (unwholesome) and *Asukhodarka*

(likely to result in unpleasant consequences) should not be used by *Moha* (ignorance) or *Pramada* (carelessness).¹²

Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (Healthy eating habits): These are healthy eating guidelines (*Upayog Samstha*) in detail, which should be followed while eating food, to remain healthy and enhance the span of life. These guidelines are described in different texts under different headings like *Bhojana Vidhi* and *Anna Vidhi*. These are applicable to healthy as well as diseased ones.¹³

The prescribed method of eating for the healthy and the sick (in certain cases) who take wholesome food timely and habitually is that one should eat warm, unctuous food in proper quantity, after the previously consumed food is digested. The food eaten should be non-antagonistic (i.e., not unsuitable to one's constitution or habit) and should be consumed in a favourable place, with all the favourable accessories, not too fast, not too slow, not while talking or laughing, and with full concentration.

The *Ashana - Vichara* mentioned in *Charaka Samhita Chikitsa Sthana - Grahani Chikitsa Adhyaya*.¹⁴ Taking of wholesome and unwholesome foods together in diet is known as *Samashana*. *Vishamashana* is defined as taking food either in excess quantity or very little quantity and also if taken before or after appropriate time. *Adhyashana* is having food even though previously eaten food is not yet digested.

Viruddhashana: The entire diet that causes *Dosha - Astravana* (excites the *Dosha*) but *Na Nirharati Kayatah* (does not eliminate it out of the body) is harmful and considered as *Viruddhashana*. The substances which are contrary to *Deha-*

Dhatu behave with *Virodha* (antagonism) to them. This *Viruddha* (antagonism) may be in terms of *Guna* (properties), *Samyoga* (combination), *Sanskara* (processing), *Desha* (place), *Kala* (time), *Matra* (dose) etc. or *Swabhava* (natural composition).^{15, 16}

Conclusion:

Ahara is considered as *Mahabhaishajya* or the superior medicine in Ayurveda. Numerous lifestyle disorders occur due to faulty dietary habits which may be prevented by proper *Ahara* and eating habits. According to Acharya Charaka, A person with discipline and self-control should always feed his *Agni* with the fuel of wholesome food and drink and stay mindful of the consideration of *Matra* (measure) and *Kala* (time). The disciplined man who practices *Hita-Bhojana* (wholesome diet) lives for a period of 36000 nights i.e. hundred years, is blessed by good people and is *Anatura* (free from disease).

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