



Ayurveda (Science of Life): A Foundation t Food and Nutrition

Subhose V^{1*}, Medha V² and Cherishna V³

Regional Ayurveda Research Institute for Drug Development, India

*Corresponding author: Varanasi Subhose, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute for Drug Development, Gwalior, 474009, Madhya Pradesh, India, Email: dr_vsubhose@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Ayurveda is the oldest science and tradition of Indian system of medicine which dates back to 6000 years. Ayurveda is not only a medical science but also a complete science of life, which has the three Sub pillar i.e. *Ahara* (food/diet) *Nidra* (sleep) and *Brahmacarya* (abstinence) among which *Ahara* (food) is considered as the most important. Food (*Ahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*) plays significant role on one's overall health and diseases. Concept of *Rasa* has been used to guide the nutrition of the body hence, Ayurveda concept of nutrition includes six *rasas* which helps in leading a healthy life by individual. A Balanced diet comprises of all the six *rasas*. There is an order to be followed at the time of consuming food. The concept of *Rasa* which has been explained in Ayurveda is primary guidance for common man to take care of nutrition and to sustain health. Hence it's very essential to validate many Ayurvedic concepts to establish their importance in day to day life.

Keywords: Food, Rasa, Nutrition, Health, Diet, Tridoshas

Introduction

Concept of food (*Ahara*)

Ayurveda is a science of life (Ayur=life, Veda=science or knowledge). This is more than a mere traditional Indian system of medicine, because it not only treats the suffering but also emphasizes on living healthy life. Ayurveda is not only a medical science but also a complete science of life, which deals with health promotion, prevention and management of the disease. According to ayurveda, body is the product of Food, hence "Food is cause for Health and disease" [1]. Showing the importance of food Acharya Charaka says that food sustains the life of all living beings through nourishment which includes increased complexion and clarity of skin, good voice, longevity, strength of body and mind [2]. Food (*Ahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*) plays significant role on one's overall health and diseases.

➤ In Ayurveda all the *Dravyas*(substances) are classified

based on usage as two types:

- ***Ahara*** (Food): *Aharam Rasa pradanam*- The substances predominate by nutrients (*rasa*) are considered as *Ahara*. Which are consumed for nutritional support by living beings, some of the examples are grains, pulses, spices etc.
- ***Oushada*** (Medicine): *Oushadamvirya pradaman*-The substances predominate by *Viraya* (potency) are considered as *Oushadha*. Which are consumed by living beings for alleviating diseases, all the substances having medicinal importance.

Concept of Nutrition (*Rasa*)

Rasa is defined as a "knowledge perceived through the taste receptors"-*Rasane Indriya* located on *Jihvā* (tongue) [3]. *Rasa* is experienced the moment a substance come's into contact with the tongue [4]. *Rasa* corresponds to "taste" in English. But it represents beyond the taste. The concept of *rasa* explores the chemistry of the substances, which is

different from the concept of taste. But taste is the first tool to understand the concept of “Nutrition” in Ayurveda. *Rasa* has been used to guide the nutrition of the body hence, Ayurveda concept of nutrition includes all the six *rasas* which helps in leading a healthy life by individual.

Types of Rasas and their Properties

There are six types of *rasas* i.e., *madhura* (sweet), *amla* (sour), *Lavana* (Salty), *Katu* (hot), *tikta* (bitter) and *kasaya* (astringent) [5]. Each *rasa* contributes to the nourishment of the body when consumed in appropriate quantity according individual requirement. The properties of Rasas are as follows:

- **Madhura Rasa** (sweet) promotes life as a whole, provides overall strength, lustre to the skin and is beneficial for the throat. However, excessive intake aggravates *kapha* and contributes to obesity, congestion and other diseases. Some of the examples are rice, wheat, milk etc.
- **Amla Rasa** (sour) stimulates “*agni*” (digestive enzymes), provides energy, awakens the mind and stimulates salivation. However, excessive intake causes heartburn, indigestion, and water retention (swelling). Some of the examples are tamarind, lemon, unripe mango etc.
- **Lavana Rasa** (salty) is heavy and oily and when consumed in moderation is antispasmodic, promotes energy and helps maintain water and electrolyte balance. However, when used in excess it induces water retention (swelling), elevates blood pressure and induces vomit. For example, rock salt, black salt, Sea salt etc.
- Ayurveda recommends the use of rock salt (*Saidhavalavana*) in diet due to its mineral contents and other salts mentioned in Ayurveda in diet due to its mineral content. But should reduce the use of sea salt due to its sodium content.
- **Katu Rasa** (pungent): This *rasa* in moderate use improves digestion, absorption, allows cleansing of sinuses, Aids in circulation, and helps in elimination of waste from body. It acts as a blood thinner and contributes to the vitality and vigour of the body. But excessive intake may cause sterility, fatigue and excessive thirst. Some of the examples are pepper, dry ginger, long-pepper etc.
- Ayurveda recommends *trikattu* (three pungents) which are dry ginger (*Shunti*), pepper (*Maricha*) and long-pepper (*Pipli*) as dietary supplement for pungent taste but discourage the use of chillies (dry or fresh).
- **Tikta Rasa** (bitter): *Tikta rasa* stimulate all other tastes. They act as antipyretic, tone the pancreas and reduce fat. Over consumption may cause dizziness. For example turmeric, fenugreek, bitter guard etc.
- **Kashaya Rasa** (astringent): *Kashaya rasa* aid in absorption and in binding stool. Excess use will induce griping, constipation and blood coagulation [6]. Few examples are unripe bananas, Pomegranate, and Chickpea etc.

Balanced Diet

“*Sarva Rasabyasam Arogyakaranam Srestam*” it means habit of consuming the foods having all *rasas* leads to good health and is considered as best. According to Ayurveda balanced diet comprises of all the six *rasas*, hence those who consume the foods of all six tastes regularly achieve good health. And who consume single *rasa* foods leads to various metabolic disorders and health problems.

Way of Consuming Food

➤ Order of Rasa at the time of Consuming Food

If we follow the order of *rasa* in food we can prevent the disease and not only the disease but also it keeps our body as well as mind in healthy condition scientifically according to Ayurveda.

While taking food we have to follow the following rules:

1. *Madhararasatmakahar* (Sweet food items) at starting of meal or dinner.
2. *Amla and Lavanarasatmakahar* (Sour and Salty food items) at the middle of meal or dinner.
3. *Katu, Tikata and Kashayarasatmakahar* (Pungent, bitter and astringent food items) at the end of meal or dinner.
4. Finally *Madhararasatmakahar* intake ends the meal [7].
- *Adrak* (Ginger) and salt at first/before of meal or dinner or on both time.

Cooking of Food

Processing of food results in the transformation of attributes of the *dravya*. Methods of preparing different type of food items like *manda* (rice water which is the clear supernatant watery portion (without rice) in which rice is boiled), *Peya* (rice soup), *Yavaagu* (semi solid meal thicker than *Peya*), *Vilepi* (thick rice soup which is thicker than *Yavaagu*), *Yusha* (Lentil soup), are mentioned in the *samhitas*. The different *aharakalapanas* of the same *dravya* differ in their properties and digestability. The four forms of cooked foods i.e., *Ashita* (eatables), *Peeta* (liquid food), *Khadita* (linctus) and *Leedha* (mastic able foods) [8].

Ayurveda emphasizes on consuming food which is hot and unctuous, because it taste good, stimulates digestive fire, digests without delay, nourish body, provides firmness to sense organs, increases strength, produces complexion. The foods taken in proper quantities promote life span without disturbing the equilibrium of tridoshas (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*), stimulate peristaltic movements, don't disturb the digestive fire and get digested with comfort [9]. One should eat only when the previous meal is digested, otherwise the indigested food vitiates all the *doshas* quickly. One should eat food consisting of the items which are non-antagonistic in potency in favourable place and with favourable accessories.

One should not consume food too fast or too slow. One should take food without talking and laughing and with full concentration [10-15].

Conclusion and Discussion

All these suggest that *rasa* may be a scientific concept of Ayurveda to assess or provisionally determine potential chemistry of any substance. But its chemistry is not only nutritional but also of pharmacological importance. Mainly in any substances the primary metabolites and secondary metabolites which are of nutritional and pharmacological potential. The concept of Rasa which has been explained in Ayurveda is primary guidance for common man to take care of nutrition and to sustain health. It also helps in prevention as well as management of one's nutritional deficiency, malnutrition and diseases. Hence it's very essential to validate many Ayurvedic concepts to establish their importance in day to day life.

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