



A REVIEW ON AHARA (FOOD) IN PRAYOGA SAMUCHCHAYA

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ABSTRACT

Ahara (food), one among the trayopastambha (Three pillars) is that which sustains life. It is inevitable for the existence for any life form. As the samhitas (classical texts) mentions, that when food is taken with logic it nourishes whereas when taken carelessly can act as visha (poison) which is capable of even taking away the life. 'Prayoga Samuchchaya' is an agada tantra (toxicology) literature which is still widely used in Kerala. Though the text primarily deals with visha chikitsa (treatment for poison), it also elaborates on the concept of ahara (food). This article is a review on the atiahara (over eating), viruddha ahara (incompatible food) and vishaja ahara (poisoned food).

KEYWORDS: Ahara (food), ahara visha (food poisoning), viruddha ahara (incompatible food), vishaja ahara (poisoned food), Prayoga Samuchchaya.

INTRODUCTION

Food is a basic need of any living being. Food can both nourish and even kill a person if taken without proper considerations. Hence it is given utmost importance in all health sciences. In Ayurveda, diet plays a pivotal role in occurrence of diseases as well as its cure. Therefore it gives clear cut instructions regarding the proper and improper way of consuming food.

In Ashtanga Hridaya it is said that consuming suitable and unsuitable food mixed together is known as samashana. Consuming large quantity of good, food even before the previous meal is digested constitutes adhyashana. Consuming less or more quantity at improper time is known as vishamashana. All these three either cause death or give rise to dreaded diseases.^[1]

Apart from the above said causes there are others which can lead to diseases and they are food which is disliked, which cause flatulence, which are over cooked or uncooked, which are not easily digestible, which are dry, very cold, contaminated, which cause burning sensation during digestion, which are dried up or soaked in more water or food that is taken by a person afflicted with anger, grief hunger etc.

About The Book

Kerala is the home for many toxicological texts and prayoga sammuchchaya is one among them. The title of the book *prayoga samuchchaya* means "a collection of practical knowledge". As the title represents, it is a compendium of the author's practical knowledge in vishachikitsa (toxicology) as well as that which he gained from his teacher. It was written in native language, Malayalam around 1934 AD by Kochunni Thampuram. He was a member of the royal Cochin dynasty. He was a generous king with a vivid knowledge in sarpavisha chikitsa (treatment for snake venom).

The book contains 11 chapters, which are called parichedhas. A major part of this book explains about various types of visha like jangama (animal), sthavara (static) and kaiyyu visha along with its treatment. Towards the end of the text we find explanations on aharajanya vikaras (diseases from food) and its management. The 11th chapter gives detailed information about food poisoning; they are atibhakshana chikitsa (over eating), viruddha bhakshana chikitsa (incompatible food), lakshana (symptoms) of poisoned food and drinks.

Atibhakshana Chikitsa (over eating)

According to the author when consumed in excess even ones staple diet can lead to various digestive disorders. Henceforth he explains treatment for the same. The

author has given 35 food items which causes disease on over eating. The table below explains some of the food items that are overeaten and its treatment.

Table 1: Treatment for overeating.

Sl. No	Food item	Treatment
1	Curd and buttermilk	Water boiled with dried ginger
2	Tobacco	Coconut milk
3	Oil	Salt water
4	Jackfruit	Dried ginger
5	Sugarcane	Decoction prepared with dried ginger and black pepper
6	Sugar	Honey mixed with jaggery
7	Milk	Sugar or water boiled with dried ginger
8	Mango	Water boiled with cumin seeds and dried ginger along with black salt
9	Horse gram	Decoction prepared with Indian gooseberry or <i>Terminilia chebula</i>
10	Bengal gram	Water boiled with dried ginger along with rock salt and cumin seed powder
11	Banana	Salt
12	Garlic	Decoction prepared with <i>Vetiveria zizanioides</i> and <i>Santalum album</i>
13	Wild yam	Decoction prepared with dry ginger along with asafoetida
14	Fish	Buttermilk with salt
15	Mutton	Luke warm water along with cardamom seeds
16	Rice flakes	Tender coconut water
17	Rice	Powdered curry leaves, dry ginger, rock salt in hot water

Table 2: Excessive consumption of shadrasas (Six tastes).

Sl. No	Rasa (Taste)	Treatment
1	Sweet	Buffalo's milk
2	Sour	Decoction of cardamom seeds along with sugar
3	Salt	Consuming ghee, sugar and curd alone or in combination
4	Bitter	Sweets
5	Pungent	Fresh water, ghee and jaggery
6	Astringent	Food with sour taste

Virudha Bhakshana Chikitsa (incompatible food)

The author directly begins by enumerating the different variety of incompatible food saying that when consumed

ignorantly it can lead to death. The author gives 75 such fatal combinations out of which a few are listed below.

Table 3: List of incompatible food.

Sl. No	Incompatible food
1	Milk with black gram, jaggery, ghee, honey, curd, dates, pomegranate, gooseberry, sour substances, jackfruit, mango, all fishes especially prawns and horse gram
2	Drinking after having vegetables
3	Curd with chicken, hot food
4	Tender coconut flesh with milk
5	Liquor with grapes, sugar, dates, any hot substance
6	Camphor with coconut water
7	Mutton or beef with honey, sesame seeds, jaggery, milk, raddish, green gram, sprouts
8	Ghee kept in brass vessel
9	Pork cooked in mustard oil
10	Fish or any aquatic animal meat with sprouts
11	Internal or external use of oil used for frying fish
12	Meat cooked with milk
13	Sugarcane and honey
14	Banana with milk, curd or buttermilk
15	Meat of animals from marshy land with four snehana dravyas
16	Any food article which does not help in elimination of dosha

Treatment

Elimination therapy, especially vama (vomiting) is mentioned as the prime treatment for disease arising due to intake of incompatible food. Purgation is also said to be useful. Consuming food or drinks which is antagonistic to the viruddhahara (incompatible food) can pacify the disease.

Null effects of viruddhahara (incompatible food)

A person who is young with a strong digestive capacity, intakes unctuous diet, indulge in exercises will not be affected with the ill effects of viruddhahara (incompatible food) if he is accustomed to viruddhahara (incompatible food). At the same time the author says that, even if he is used to taking viruddhahara (incompatible food) right from birth or even in a small quantity will suffer severe consequences for sure if he does not follow a proper diet and regimen.

Savisha Anapanadi Lakshana (Signs of poisoned Food and Drinks)

In this context the author explains the changes one must observe when poison is added to different food materials.

When rice is poisoned, on cooking the rice thickens, takes longer time to get cooked, once cooked it gets spoiled immediately and the fumes on cooking will have the color of peacock's neck. On consumption, the person will have moha (confusion), murcha (fainting), excessive salivation, loss of perception, froth, hallucinations, excessive lacrimation, etc.

If leafy vegetables and meat are poisoned it will have a different color, smell and taste. In milk appearance of red streaks can be seen on poisoning. When curd is poisoned it attains streaks having the color of Patali flower's colour (*Sterospermum suaveolens*). Buttermilk will attain yellow and black color streaks. In ghee- milky white streaks, in honey- green, in alcohol and water- black and in oil- white streaks will be seen on poisoning.

On poisoning, unripe banana ripens quickly and ripened ones rotten faster. Moist food items get dried up and dry ones undergoes color changes. Soft items becomes harder and vice versa.

DISCUSSION

Food, the basic need of any living being is the prime factor for survival. From time immemorial the acharyas had emphasized the importance of taking food with appropriate caution and care. The food which is consumed irresponsibly has the potential to act as poison. Hence, Prayoga Samuchchaya though a vishavaidya (toxicology) text, discusses the importance of inappropriate intake of food, its ill effects and management.

Apart from the immediate effects that it produces, viruddhahara (incompatible food) acts as a slow poison. The toxins get accumulated in the body without being

eliminated. Thus it acts as dushivisha (cumulative toxicity). At the same time, the inconsiderate combinations of food articles may lead to the formation of harmful chemical constituents in the body. Hence, the author compares viruddhahara (incompatible food) with gara visha (compound poison) and explains the concept of ahara (food) soon after explaining the concept of gara visha (compound poison).

CONCLUSION

Classics have given appropriate importance to visha chikitsa (treatment for poison) as it deals with emergency situations. This text being written towards the later century, one may find it more feasible compared to the samhitas. Prayoga samuchchaya contains the cream of many toxicological books. By reading this the physician attains the confidence to face critical situations arising while treating the visha (poison). As already discussed as food can act as poison in some conditions, the author has explained in detail the excessive consumption of food, incompatible food, its ill effects and treatment.

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