



PHYSIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF AHARA IN PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The oldest science of life, *Ayurveda*, has been practised for thousands of years in India and is founded on its own distinctive core concepts, such as disease prevention, health maintenance, and health promotion. *Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacarya* (good conducts) make up *Trayopasthamba*. Each *Upasthamba* has a specific role to play in disease prevention. *Ahara* has been regarded as the first, demonstrating its paramount importance. The cornerstone of *Ayurveda*, known as *Ahara*, is a balanced diet.

Acharya Charaka made it very apparent that a daily diet should be of the kind that not only contributes to maintaining current health but also acts as a preventative measure against future illness. As stated in the classics of *Ayurveda*, this is a crucial component of preventive medicine. The main causes of diseases are an improper diet, poor eating habits, a lack of exercise, and a lack of awareness. *Triguna* is a symbol for the fundamental mental energies. The *Triguna* Theory holds that while it is difficult to alter one's physical makeup, one's mental attitude can be shaped by the foods they consume. Based on how food affected the *Triguna* of the mind, ancient yogic science divided food into three main categories termed the *Satvik Ahara*, *Rajasic Ahara*, and *Tamasic Ahara*. This essay will explore the impact of *Trigunas* on mental health and examine some of the classics. An attempt has been made to describe them in terms of scientific terminology and their link with *Ahara*.

KEYWORDS - *Ahara*, *Triguna*, *Trayopasthamba*, *Satvik Ahara*, *Rajasic Ahara* and *Tamasic*

Ahara, Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the most ancient systems of medicine in the world. It is essentially a science of life, health & cure based on the eternal laws of nature. *Ayurveda* defines health as a state of equilibrium of *Tridosha*, *Trimala*, *Sapatadhatu* & Homeostasis of mind as well as sense organs. Mental wellbeing is a cardinal integrant of Ayurvedic definition of 'Swasthya' along with the Physical and Spiritual wellbeing. *Ayurveda* has always laid special emphasis on prevention and promotive aspects. It deals with physical, psychological & spiritual wellbeing of an individual & represents total health of human being in a holistic way. WHO defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his

community. Mental health is a foundation for effective communication, learning, emotions, thinking and self-esteem in an individual. Mental illness is often used as an umbrella term for all diagnosable mental disorders involving significant changes in thinking, emotion and behaviour. And functional problems in family, society and work place. Mental disorder is a significant contributor to the global burden of disease & affects people in all communities across the world.

“Chittam Cheetah Hrdayam Svantam Hrunamasam Manah Iti” (Amarakosha 1/4/3).¹

Mana is the entity through which the knowledge is obtained, which is closely related with *Atma*, through which one can perceive and the seat of *Mana* is *Hridaya*.¹

Mana, also known as the seat of the soul or *Atma*, is a superior analytical capacity that governs the entire body by integrating the higher senses. *Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Chitta*, and *Ahamkara* together are referred to as four *Antahkarana* in *Vedanta Darshana*. *Manas*, also known as "*Ubhayatmaka*," is described as a dual faculty with both sensory and motor capabilities. Because it regulates and coordinates all other faculties, linking them to the soul, it is regarded as a superior faculty. No particular description of mental illness is provided in the classical texts of *Ayurveda*; nonetheless, *Unmada Chikitsa* classifies all types of mental problems.

According to *Ayurveda*, the vitiation of *Raja* and *Tama* causes *Manasika Vikara*. *Aahara*, *Vihara*, *Achara*, and *Vichara* are the four characteristics of living that *Ayurveda* believes will guarantee good health. A healthy and happy life is ensured by following certain rules. It is important to develop environments and living conditions that support mental health and enable people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles in order to improve mental health and prevent sickness. The key elements that play a crucial part in achieving good mental health are following to the guidelines for eating healthy *Aahara* and *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Sadvritta*, and *Achara Rasayana*.

Ayurvedic system of medicine, *Chikitsa* has been categorized under 3 dimensions as follow:²

- 1) **Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa-** (use of *Mantra*, *Aushadhi*, *Mani*, *Bali*, *Ahara*, *Homa*, *Niyama*, *Prayashchitta*, *Upavasa*, *Svastyayana*, *Pranipatagamana* etc. are aimed at boosting the self-confidence and mental strength to the individual)
- 2) **Satvavajaya Chikitsa-** (Controlling the mind, in such a way that it is not acted upon the various stressors making it prone to *Prajnaparadha*. *Acharya Charaka*, defines *Satvavajaya* as withdrawal of mind from unwholesome objects.)
- 3) **Yuktiyapashraya Chikitsa -** (This includes treatment through logical use of medicines and modification of *Aahara* and *Vihara* to suit the needs of the person.)

Diet is supposed to be the foundation of everything, including life, strength, complexion, *Ojas*, growth and development, happiness, clarity of voice, lustre, and pleasure. It is also said to be the source of intellect, health, and other factors. *Mana* is the subtle and abstract aspect of *Anna*, and according to the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the food inside the body is separated into three parts: *Sthoola*, *Madhyama*, and *Anu Bhaga*, which nourish *Purisha*, *Mamsa*, and *Mana*, respectively.

“Annamayam Hi Soumya Manah” is a popular quote from *Chhandogya Upanishad*, which means the mind is the essence of food we take. So, all the aspects are important to prevent the mental illness and to promote the mental health, because healthy mind lives in a healthy body. If the mind is unsullied and pure, it will greatly help in maintaining physical well-being and health.

(WHO) - Mental Health

WHO Conceptualizes mental health as a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

CONCEPT OF AHARA

- *Shabda Kalpa druma* explains that *Ahara* is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating.
- *Acharya Dalhana* said that the substance which is swallowed through *Anna-nalika* is called *Aahara*.
- *Acharya Cakrapani* said that *Ahara* means anything which is ingested and thus it includes both diet and drugs.

आहार शुद्धौ सत्तत्त्व शुद्धिं सत्तत्त्व शुद्धौ स्मृतं ध्रुवा स्मृतं लम्भेसववग्रन्थीनां द्विप्र मोक्षः³

(Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2)

Purity of diet leads to mental purity, which leads to constant remembrance of God. From this constant remembering of God, one is set free from all restraints and is emancipated.

Yogic Classification of food:

1) *Satvik food* ⁴

- ❖ Persons in the mode of goodness prefer foods that promote the life span, Increase virtue, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent with natural fats, wholesome and nourishing, conducive to the heart health and naturally tasteful.

Preventive aspect of *Satvik Ahara*

- The cooking and processing of *Satvik Aahara* is to be done in a *Satvik* atmosphere and with *Satvik* mood, affection and love.
- *Satvik Aahara* is not considered in terms of its physical composition but is also viewed from the point of view of its cooking and eating. It is considered pure and ideal for promoting Sattva Guna in the system.

A diet like this centre the mind and increases empathy and compassion. The majority of fruits are regarded as *Satvik*. They are regarded as pure, natural, and eco-friendly because they are consumed freshly in accordance with the cycles of time and season. Fruits increase mental acuity and calm the lower organs.

2) *Rajasik food* ⁵

- ❖ Too bitter food items, too sour food items, very hot, Pungent, Dry and Spicy, are dear to person in the mode of passion. Such foods produce pain, grief and diseases

Preventive aspect of *Rajasik Aahara*

- *Rajasik Aahara* augments activity and agility.
- It increases the attributes of *Pitta* and *Agni* in the biological system and increases basal metabolic rate.
- Consumption of *Rajasika* food besides, augmenting *Rajo Guna* in system, cause hyperacidity, irritability, restlessness, Hypertension, peptic ulcer, anxiety and insomnia, So, it should be avoided by the person suffering from such ailments.
- For those who are lazy and dull, it may be appropriate to advice consuming a larger quantity of *Rajasik* food items.

3) *Tamasic food* ⁶

Stale food, Tasteless, Putrid, Polluted & Impure are dear to person in the mode of ignorance.

Facet of *Tamasik Aahar*

- *Tamasika Aahara* is hard to digest, increases *Kapha*, and promotes lethargy and inertia.
- *Tamasika Ahara* should be avoided since it dulls the mind, fuels rage and criminal tendencies, and prevents society from improving.
- It may include fried food, overcooked food items, burnt food, fermented food, meat, fish, eggs, alcohol and tobacco, cigarettes, preservative-filled food, etc.

DISCUSSION

Dietary practises play a part in supporting mental health and preventing mental diseases. If it is *Pathya Ahara* or *Apathya Ahara*, then *Ahara* is the best of all cures and one of the main causes of the illness. *Pathya Ahara* & *Vihara* are the focal points of the preventive & therapeutic aspects. While *Viruddhahara* (*Rajasika* and *Tamasika Ahara*) degrades mental health and vitiates *Doshas*. According to a well-known *Chandogya Upanishad* quotation, "Mind is the essence of food we ingest." In contrast to *Rajasika* and *Tamasika Ahara*, *Satvik Ahara* lengthens life, nourishes *Satva*, is healthful, rich in nutrients, and beneficial to the soul. A proper adoption of *Satvik Ahara* should be done in a 1:3 ratio.

REFERENCES

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- 3) Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2.
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- 5) Bhagavad Gita Shloka/Verse 9 of Chapter 17
- 6) Bhagavad Gita Shloka/Verse 10 of Chapter 17.