

CHAPTER-08

SIGNIFICANCE OF AHARA SAMSKARA – FOOD PROCESSING

Dr. PREETPAL SINGH

Assistant Professor,
Glocal College of Ayurvedic Medical Sciences and
Research Centre, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U P, India

Dr. GURUSEWAK SINGH

Associate Professor,
Department of Rachana Sharir
Glocal College of Ayurvedic Medical Sciences and
Research Centre, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U P, India

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ABSTRACT

Ahara (food) is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating. Ayurveda specified the characteristics of food in terms of quality, quantity and time which vary from person to person considering their Prakriti (constitution), Vaya (age), Agni (capacity of digestion), Ritu (season) etc. Samskara is the process of modifying properties of any food article or medication. Samskara can be done by Toya (water), Agni (fire), Shaucha (purification), Manthana (Churning or shaking), Desha (habitat), Vasana (using specific utensils) etc. By processing, food articles which are difficult to digest/take more time for digestion become easy to digest/take less time for digestion and vice versa. So, with the help of proper Samskara (processing), bad qualities of the Ahara Dravya (food article) can be removed and good qualities can be added which are responsible for making food article wholesome for a person or for specific condition.

Keywords: Ahara, Ahara-Samskara, food processing

1. INTRODUCTION

The word “Ahara” (food) is very much familiar since time immemorial. Various classics/dictionaries describe Ahara in their own unique way. *Shabdakalpadruma* explains that Ahara (food) is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eatingⁱ. Modern definition of food is also pointing towards the process of ingestion but simultaneously it mentions the aim by adding words metabolism, nutrition, growth etc. Collins dictionary defines the word food as “any substance that can be ingested by a living organism and metabolized into energy and body tissue is known as food.”

Prevention from diseases and promotion of health is the aim of Ayurveda. This can be achieved only by *Vishuddha Ahara* and *Achara* (pure diet and good behaviour/acts) according to *Acharya Chakrapani*ⁱⁱ. Thus, Ahara or diet is an important tool for physician for both the purposes i.e. prevention and cure. Considering this importance, Ayurveda included Ahara (food) on prime position among three *Upastambha*ⁱⁱⁱ (sub pillars).

Ayurveda specified the characteristics of food in terms of quality, quantity and time which vary from person to person considering their *Prakriti* (constitution), *Vaya* (age), *Agni* (capacity of digestion), *Ritu* (season) etc. It is advised to select the food considering all these factors and the *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (properties), *Hitakara* or *Ahitakara Prabhava* (wholesome and unwholesome effect), *Samskara* (processing) etc. factors also should be kept in mind while selection of food.

Samskara is the process of modifying properties of any food article or medication. So by *Samskara* one can modify properties of *Ahara Dravya* (food article) or medication according to their personal or individual need.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Ayurvedic texts mainly Brihatrayee comprising Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Samgraha and Ashtanga Hridaya were analyzed for the present review. Various Ayurvedic lexicons were also reviewed which provided the definite base for the study. All the analyzed data was scrutinized and re-arranged in making the framework of the narrative review of the present topic.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Ahara Samskara:

संस्कारःकरणंमतम् | (Ch. Su. 26/34)

करणंपुनःस्वाभाविकानांद्रव्याणामभिसंस्कारः |

संस्कारोद्दिगुणान्तराधानमुच्यते || (Ch. Vi. 1/21)

संस्कारस्तुतोयाग्निसन्निकर्षशौचमन्थनदेशकालभावनाभाजनादिभिरुपजन्यते || (A.S.Su.10/6)

Samskara (processing) is also known as Karana. In simple words it can be understood as preparation method of food. Acharya Charaka declared “Gunantaradhana as the result of Samskara. The word Gunantaradhana is made up of 3 words:

- **Guna** - Property
- **Antara** - Other
- **Adhana** - the word *Adhana* also has various meanings like exchanging or placing or putting upon or infusing or putting in or imparting.

Thus, the collective meaning of word ‘*Gunantaradhan*’ is exchanging/placing/putting upon/imparting other properties in *Dravya*.

In classical texts of Ayurveda various processes useful for making *Gunantaradhana* (alteration in properties) is given. They are as below^{iv}:

- *Toya Sannikarsha* (processing with water)
- *Agni Sannikarsha* (processing with fire)
- *Shaucha* (purification)

- Manthana (Churning or shaking)
- Desha (habitat)
- Vasana (using specific utensils)
- Bhavanadi (Paka, Dhavana, Avapa, Nirvapa, Sinchana, Sthapana, Mardana)
- Kala Prakarsa (alteration in properties due to time)
- Bhajanadi (Peshana, Abhimantrana etc)

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF SAMSKARA

Not a single *Ahara Dravya* (food article) can fulfill all the nutritional requirements needed according to the condition. So, for developing special properties in any *Ahara Dravya* (food article) despite of their natural properties *Acharya* explain *Samskara* (processing) in classical texts of Ayurveda.

This *Gunantaradhana* (change in *Guna*) by *Samskara* (processing) is possible only in case of *Naimittika Guna* (casual/specific properties), not in the case of *Samsiddhika Guna* (constitutional/ inherent properties). e.g. *Ushna Guna* (hot) of *Agni* (fire), *Chala Guna* (movement) of *Vayu* (air), *Snigdha Guna* (unctuousness) of *Tail* (oil) etc. cannot be changed by *Samskara* (processing), because these are *Samsiddhika Guna* (inherent properties) called as '*Yavat Dravya Bhavina*' by Chakrapani which means these kinds of properties always sustain with particular substance up to existence of substance^v.

There are different methods of *Samskara* (processing) are explained in the classical texts i.e. *Toya* (water), *Agni* (fire), *Shaucha* (cleaning/purification), *Kala* (time) etc. With the help of *Samskara* (processing), bad qualities of the *Ahara Dravya* (food article) can be removed and good qualities can be added like new grains are not advised to consume because these are *Guru* (heavy to digest) and *Abhishyandhi* (produces blockage in channels). These are advised to consume after one year because due to *Kala-Samskara* (processing or effect of time), grains become *Laghu* (easily digestible) and *Anabhishyandhi* (unable to produce blockage in channels) and their nutritional value also remain same.

By processing, the heavy (difficult to digest/take more time for digestion) ones become light (easy to digest/take less time for digestion) and vice versa. e.g. Rice: one can use rice in various ways by adopting various types of *Samskara* (processing) i.e. *Samskara* with water (boiling) it will be *Peya* (thin gruel of rice), *Vilepi* (thick gruel of rice) etc., *Samskara* (processing) with milk, it will be *Payasa*, *Samskara* (processing) with *Jirak*

(*Cuminum cyminum*), *Ela* (*Elettaria cardamomum*), etc. (fried) it will be *Jira* rice and *Samskara* (processing) with fire i.e. roasting it will be *Lajja* (puffed rice), Though these all are the preparations of rice, but according to various types of *Samskara* (processing) they all are having different types of qualities and nutritive values.

Samskara (processing) also depends on the quantity of substances which are used during the process in the preparation of *Peya* (thin gruel of rice), *Vilepi* (thick gruel of rice) etc. The quantity of water is different. Likewise, one can prepare *Roti*, *Bhakhari*, *Parotha*, *Puri* - they all are made up of wheat flour, but as the different proportion of oil, water and wheat flour are used in their preparations, they all are having different qualities.

Among all *Samskaras*, *Agni Samskara* is most used one at present era. Almost all the food we consume is prepared with *Agni Samskara*. *Agni* has been said as medium of transformation from *Ama* (immature things) to *Pakva* (mature) ones. It brings *Laghuta* (more digestibility) in the raw food articles. According to the opinion of the Acharya Vagbhata in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, properties will be different for the same preparation made from same ingredient if the style of cooking is changed. eg. *Apupa* (cake of flour/ a sort of bread) prepared by using same flour but by different methods like by water steam, on pan (*Tawa*), in Oven (*Tandoor*) or by direct contact with embers (*Angaar*). *Apupa* prepared on embers is progressively more easily digestible as compare to *Apupa* prepared in oven, on pan or by water steam^{vi}. i.e. processing (*Samskara*) by direct contact with fire makes food preparation more easily digestible as compare to processing done by using any medium or material.

On the other hand, by *Mardana Samskara* (milling), a food article can be reduced from *Sthoola* (large particle size) to *Sukshma* (minute/smaller particle size) form which made food easily digestible and easily/rapidly absorbable. As latest studies also proved that small particle size is directly proportional to absorption rate of the substance i.e. smaller the particle size of a food material or drug faster the absorption^{vii}.

As *Mamsa* (meats) are generally *Guru*, *Snigdha*, *Brimhana* and *Sthoola* but by applying proper *Samskara*, its properties can be modified according to need. When meat is dried up (*Parishushka Mamsa*) and converted into powdered (*Pishta*) form (known as *Ullupta Mamsa*). This *Ullupta Mamsa* when again processed with *Agni* it become more *Laghu*^{viii}. This *Laghu* and *Sukshma* properties are very important as these are responsible for fast digestion and absorption, so that the consumer get nutrition quickly.

5. CONCLUSION

Food is on prime position amongst the things responsible for sustaining life as it provides nutrition and energy for the routine or specific activities. These can be achieved only if food consumed by a person is *Hitakara* (wholesome). One food article is not wholesome for all persons or in every condition as every person have their specific body constitution. Due to specific body constitution and specific condition some modifications are require in the properties of food article to make it wholesome. Here *Samskara* plays an important role for making food article wholesome. So, we can conclude that *Ahara Samskara* by specific method or with specific material plays an important role for making food wholesome which maintain healthy state of body or also helps in recovery from diseases.

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