



GASTRONOMICAL CONCEPTS IN AYURVEDA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Gastronomy, an intelligent knowledge of whatever concerns with man's nourishment, is a broad and fertile field that is increasingly explored during recent decades. But, far from the ancient period Ayurveda explains the concepts of Matrasana, Aharavidhi, Anupana, Aharaka etc. A compiled knowledge of both concepts will be fruitful for the mankind in different ways. The main objective is to correlate the ancient Ayurvedic concepts and modern gastronomy to establish a food habit for proper nourishment and prevention of diseases. An extensive analysis and compilation of salient information regarding the concepts of food and nutrients were done by reviewing Ayurveda literature, Pubmed and other scientific databases. Ayurveda has its own universally accepted principles, methods and practices revolving around the concept of food. According to that food is one among the factors used to determine the health of an individual. Several examples given in Ayurveda literature in terms of wholesome food supplement (Pathya) are practically indicated in disease management. Understanding of incompatibilities of food materials and processing i.e. Virudhaahara, Prakriti as a key determinant of effect of food on body system, rules and regulations while intake and preparation of food were other gastronomical concepts in Ayurveda. Since the incidences of lifestyle disorders are increasingly demanding a proper food habit, both Ayurvedic and gastronomic concepts can be utilized for a better life.

Key words -Aharavidhi, Gastronomy, lifestyle disorders, Nourishment, Pathya Virudhaahara.

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy is a knowledge of whatever concerned with man's nourishment. It's a broad and fertile field that is increasingly explored during the recent decades. Most of the dictionaries explain the concept of Gastronomy as "the art or science of good or delicate eating"¹. But still it remains difficult to define it and still elusive. The word Gastronomy comes from the two Greek words gastro- meaning stomach and nomos -meaning rules and regulations related to stomach i.e laws regarding eating and drinking. Gastronomy can also be related to the historical, cultural, social, scientific and technical aspects of eating and drinking. It can be different according to the gastronomic characters of the country, the religion, geography and vegetation.

Ayurveda, the science or knowledge of life has its historical roots in the Indian subcontinent. It uses a combination of diet, lifestyle modification and medicinal treatments for the proper balance of doshas. From the ancient period itself Ayurveda has its own universally accepted principles, methods and practices revolving around the concept of food. Basic principles of Ayurveda treatments always depend on the food habits that the patient.

In the quest for new flavors sometimes the health concerns are forgotten. This will result in serious health issues either in a short or a long period. So, a combined knowledge of Ayurveda and gastronomic concept would help us to build a better and healthy food habits.

GASTRONOMY²

Food is a basic requirement of life. Thus, the journey for the new tastes and cooking techniques roots back to the time immemorial. Food is an idea symbol of culture and gives the meaning of social behaviour and human development. The early man who was primarily a vegetarian then hunted for animals and later learned the art of making fire which led to the beginning of cookery. The ability of man to manipulate the environment in enabled him to expand with skills. The early civilizations were based on highly fertile areas. With the development of civilization man acquired the knowledge of cultivation and domestication of animals. This benefited them for growing and storing grains, fruits etc for larger population. Thus, the settlement at different region and cultivation available lead to the beginning of gastronomy culture for that particular area. So historically gastronomy can be related to the preparation of food and advises and guidance on eating and drinking. It gives a social and cultural learning of what to be eaten, when and where, and with whom, in what manners and combinations. Such eating practices were defined by the environment and ingredients available there.

The main factors that make rich gastronomic culture includes

- Stable climates
- Abundance of vegetation
- Efficient agricultural practices
- Economic prosperity
- Proper governing

Even though the taste of a bygone age was determined by these factors, as the years passed on the taste, the concepts and the view regarding the gastronomy got altered with its time and space.

MODERN GASTRONOMY

According to Gillespie Gastronomy as a subject can be broken down in to four main areas³.

Practical Gastronomy: -The field of production and services of food and the beverages, the techniques animated to convert raw ingredients to specific dishes, Important area for the food professionals like shift and service personnel

Theoretical Gastronomy: -The procedures and planning to help the practical gastronomy in an ordered way includes the required documents so the events like menu etc. Documenting the procedures and methods can be included in this.

Technical Gastronomy: - To arrange the type and quantity of equipment needed the machinery used the arrangements for the serving area and the service personnel etc, Menu Engineering Improving the old techniques and introducing new ones are included under this.

Food Gastronomy: -The field that explains the origin of food and drinks, maybe complex or simple depending on various factors.

Indian Gastronomy

Indian gastronomy is one of the oldest in the world and is an amalgam of history and confluence of culture. It is strongly linked to the religion with many rules for preparation, serving and eating food and drinks. The diversity of religious belief and practices given birth to a melange of flavors across the country.

History of Indian agricultural practices days back to the Indus valley civilization era and even before that in some parts of southern India. Depending on geographical nature, the prime cultivation differs and thus the staple food varies from a region to other. The influence of different traditions within the religion leads to varieties of method for cooking. Many ancient and medieval Hindu textbook strongly prohibits eating meat, but the coastal region depends on the sea for their life and the fish and other sea foods becomes a part of their Cousins. Lacto-vegetarian lifestyle which includes vegetables as well as dairy products is also accepted.

Indian cuisine is influenced by centuries of Islamic rules particularly the Mughal rule. The merging of middle eastern cuisine with Indian spices and ingredients gave the most beautiful Mughlai cuisine. These were considered to be the most richest, popular and lavish cuisines in the country. These were mainly adapted in Delhi and Lucknow in the north and Hyderabad in the south. Biryani, kurmas, pilau, kababs are some of the examples of such cuisines. This still remains as one of the most important part of Indian Culinary style. Apart from this other religion followed in India like Buddhism, Christianity Jainism etc also have their particular culinary styles. All these historical journeys have witnessed different cooking techniques and eating preferences satisfying the generations. But sometimes it disturbs the healthy lifestyle.

GASTRONOMY IN AYURVEDA

Food, being an integral part of our life, we prefer to explore more in this field. Ayurveda consider ahara as the main reason for

building up of body as well as disease⁴. It is said that wholesome and unwholesome ahara responsible for happiness and miseries in life⁵. It is also considered to be one of the three factors that supports life that is ahara (food), nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya⁶. If these factors were well maintained body would be endowed with bala varna upachaya (strength and complexion) and can continue to full span of life if he does not indulge in any unwanted deeds of life and one who follows such a wholesome diet can leave 100 years free from diseases⁷. That means only an individual following healthy diet can have Healthy body by which he can perform the activities of life leading to happiness, satisfaction nourishment and intellect etc.

Tridosha theory in one of the basic principles of Ayurveda⁸. Depending on the characteristics dosha individual are categorized in to different prakriti (temperament and personality)⁹. In the description of prakriti the food substances with particular characteristics are mentioned for each. This includes the amount of fat to be taken, whether hot or cold food, different rasas or tastes. So, it implies that one should follow certain parameters regarding food with respect to their body temperament and personality. So that the balance of the three doshas will give them a healthy life. So, example those who are free predominantly vata prakriti should take food with plenty of fat, warm, sweet and salty. So that they won't have a vata kopa thus their tridosha balance will be maintained. But present-day lifestyle never allows such demand of body and people turns directly into instant food materials.

The other important concept in Ayurveda is ritucharya where the lifestyle to be adopted during the changing seasons are mentioned¹⁰. It has a key role to play in the gastronomic concept for each season. For example, during greeshma ritu or summer season food items which are sweet, light, unctuous and cool with plenty of liquid are advised to take¹¹. But today people are not at all ready to compromise the spicy foods even during the fiery days.

Ayurveda describes the eight factors that determine the utility of various types of foods¹². This is an indispensable area of gastronomic concepts in Ayurveda. These eight factors have to be considered thoroughly during preparation as well as intake of food.

Prakriti: - defines the nature of the substance, it is an inherent character. Some substance will be heavy some will be light Even before their processing. So their amount and usage should be according to the required calorie.

Karanam: - The processing which results in the transformation of the attributes, influenced by the amount and kind of heat applied, dilutions, cleansing, churning, storing, flavouring, preservation, containers etc. Sometimes Direct application or excess application of heat to the food may lead to loss of certain attributes of the food materials. The packaged food which are store for long duration are enormously used but we be sure about their nutritious value.

Samyogam: - Combination of two or more substances. Sometimes foods which are good for health when used individually may become poisonous by improper combination. Concept of virudhahara also comes in this. Combination of milk and any fruits are common in these days in the form of milk shakes are said to be virudha or incompatible.

Rashi: - Quantity of each ingredient and the total quantity of food to be taken. This knowledge helps to determine the proper

amount to be taken for example in terms of the amount of macro nutrients like carbohydrates, protein, and fat as required for the individual.

Desha: - The habitat. This knowledge should be considered while collecting the raw ingredients.

Depending on the origin and occurrence the attributes may change both in the case of plants as well as animals. Food grown in desert will be light, those in Himalayan regions are efficacious.

Kalam: -The time, seasonal variations as well as the age of the subject who eats the food. Seasonal requirement as per Ritu charya should be followed. Different age groups require different nutritional status.

Upayoga samstha:- Aharavidhi the Dietetic rules to be followed during food intake. Regulates the digestive parameters.

Upayoktha: - The one who consumes the food. Depending on day-to-day lifestyle one will become adapted to certain things. Mental as well as physical factors may include under this.

CONCEPT OF VIRUDHA AHARA

It is the knowledge regarding the combination and processing of food substances. It describes some hazardous combination and methods of preparation of food items. Such food preparations will lead to imbalance in doshas and provoke them but never expels them. There are 18 types of virudha explained in Ayurveda textbook¹³

Desha virudha: -Taking dry, penetrating, and extra spicy foods at desert regions

Kala virudha: - Taking foods contradictory to that mentioned in ritu charya.

Agni virudha: - Taking heavy food when one is not hungry, or taking light food when one's power of digestion is high, like taking snacks for lunch etc.

Matra virudha: - Combination of certain foods ingredients in equal quantity are said to be hazardous. Studies have revealed about the physicochemical changes occurring in such conditions. Use of ghee and honey in equal quantity.

Satmya virudha: - Suddenly changing one's food habits (from which one was accustomed for long time to a new one).

Aniladi virudha: - Taking food which makes imbalance in one's tridosha and opposes one's prakriti .

Samskara virudha: -Preparing foods in such utensils which makes poisonous effects on the food prepared. Use of combination of substances which results in a poisonous product.

Virya virudha: -Taking foods having opposite virudha together like hot food with a cold food.for example hot noodles with cold coffee

Koshta virudha: - Taking food without considering one's internal environment. Taking dry foods by one who having costive bowel.

Avastha virudha: - Taking food without considering the situations. Intake of cold substances after strenuous activities. Intake of fatty foods just after sleeping or a drowsiness.

Karma virudha:- Taking foods which has been kept in wrong environment .Intake of ghee kept in Tamra parts for 10days makes it poisonous.

Parihara and upachara virudha:- Taking extremely cold foods after intake of a fatty food like eating ice cream after taking Biriyani. Taking extremely hot items after taking meat.

Paka virudha: - Taking food which is not prepared by applying proper heat. Taking over cooked, under cooked, half cooked items.

Samyoga virudha: - Taking Unwholesome combinations of foods. Fruits with milk, fish with milk etc.

Hrtvirudha: - Taking foods without considering mental satisfaction

Sampat virudha: -Taking foods without considering their quality. Using them when they are not rich in their quality.

Vidhi virudha: - Taking foods without following ahara vidhi.

AHARA VIDHI¹⁴: -Ahara vidhi includes some rules and manners to be followed while eating foods (Table 1).

Table 1: Ahara vidhi in Ayurveda

Do's	Don'ts
1. take the food warm	Should not keep the food for a long time before eating after preparing it
2. take food with adequate amount of liquid in it	Eating foods in extremely dry condition will make it difficult to digest it
3. consider the quantity	Should not eat full stomach. Leave some space so that digestion will be easier
4. take the food only after digestion of previous food taken	Taking food before the digestion of previous meal may lead to indigestion as well as other ailments
5. do not take extremely hot and extremely cold foods together	Take foods in warm conditions and avoid refrigerated items to come into normal temperature before eating
6. take food from a place you are mentally satisfied	The place chosen to eat food should satisfy mental factors so that we can concentrate on each aspects of eating
7. take the food with every required utensil.	Proper utensils, tables, crockeries and cutleries
8. take the food in an adequate speed	Taking food very slowly as well as very quickly will affect proper digestion.
9. take the food with concentration	It will help to know the various flavours, the perfect amount and thus a satisfaction
10. take food only if you need it that too wholeheartedly	Should be mentally prepared to have the food

In addition to this Ashtanga Hridaya also explains some manners to be followed while taking food¹⁵.

1. To take the food having different Rasa, predominantly Madhura Rasa.
2. Take food after proper cleansing of your body, including one's hands, legs, face etc
3. Should give priority to the children and aged people
4. Should consider about the pets also
5. Take food with a good company

It's also said to avoid food which are contaminated, those which are heated again and again, which are extremely hot, and those prepare with extra salt. Daily usage of preparation with paneer, curd, alkaline preparation, food containing vinegar (like pickles etc) and some uncooked foods etc are said to be unhealthy. In

non-vegetarian foods those which are prepared from emaciated animals, the dried meat or fish, that which are preserved with excess salt etc are not considered good for health¹⁶.

Other concepts regarding unhealthy food habits include the following¹⁷

1. Eating the food as an admixture of desirable undesirable food (samāsana)
2. Taking food before proper digestion of previous one (adhyāsana)
3. Untimely intake of food and that too in improper quantity (vishāmāshana)

All these habits are said to be unhealthy but unfortunately these are the commonest habit of people nowadays days.

Anupana or postprandial drinks are explained for many food preparations so that it may help in its easy digestion and balance the doshas¹⁸.

- a) Taking cold water when taking food with barely, wheat, curd, honey etc
- b) Whey, buttermilk, or seasonal rice water in case of preparation of leafy vegetables

All these concepts will help to determine a healthy food habits and lifestyle.

DISCUSSION

“Health” as defined by world health organization (WHO) is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity. As quoted by Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin in ‘The physiology of taste or meditations on transcendental gastronomy¹⁹’ i.e. “Tell me what kind of food you eat and I will tell you what kind of man you are” it is quite clear that the food we eat defines us both physically and psychologically. The food we eat and the life we follow are the prime factors that decide whether we are healthy or not. Concepts of fast foods, canned foods, smoking of foods etc had created unexpected changes in food habits leading to detrimental effects on health. The increased prevalence of lifestyle disorders takes a partnership with this and leads to the major diseases with high mortality rate.

The unconstrained use of chemicals in the form of preservatives, food colors, taste makers, etc has contributed a lot for these, this can occur with both cooked as well as uncooked foods either vegetables, fruits or meats. The other main contributing factors is some new unhealthy cooking techniques. Concept of virudha ahara has to be considered deeply to resolve this. Those mention in pakavirudha (like preparing food in excess heat, grilled, deep fried, or uncooked), samskara virudha, samyoga virudha (unwholesome combinations) etc reveals the hazards of such methods. Daily use of certain foods is all said to be avoided. Because daily use of diets with high fat contents, low fibre, excess salt, pickles, dried meats etc will not make a proper balanced diet.

Along with all these, mental factors also play a prominent role in digestion of food we eat. Thus, eating food in a peaceful environment with good company, being kind and providing food to those around us etc are mentioned for a better mental satisfaction. We can also get information regarding personal hygiene too. And the eating habits like adhyāsana, vishāmāshana, samāshana etc has to be avoided for leading a proper lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

After considering certain gastronomical concepts regarding cooking techniques and eating habits etc, there is a need for readdressing of those techniques for making a healthy diet pattern. Ayurveda concepts of cooking techniques and serving as well as dietetic considerations will help in this matter. Thus, a combined knowledge of the manners and processes that has to be followed while cooking as well as eating from both Ayurveda and gastronomical concepts should be made in to use. Since the incidence of lifestyle disorders are increasingly demanding a proper food habits and healthy lifestyle, Ayurveda and gastronomical ideas can be utilized for providing a better life.

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