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“CONCEPT OF AHARA AND NIDRA AS PER CHARAKA SAMHITA: A CRITICAL REVIEW”

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ABSTRACT:

Every person in the universe wants to be healthy. So everyone has to have the knowledge of concept of health. We have different definitions for the health. According to W.H.O. health is defined as the Physical, Mental and the Social well being. In Ayurveda, as per *Susruta*, health is defined as a state of equilibrium of the bio-energies that are responsible for all the physiological functions of the body, good appetite, proper functioning of all the body tissues, proper excretion of body wastes along with “*Prasannata*” (serenity) of soul, sense organs & mind is said as *Swasthya* or health. *Acharya Charaka* described *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya* are the three *Upastambha* (pillars) of the body. These three pillars of the health when adopted with their equated states, man enjoys a state of complete comfort, ease and happiness with peace said as *Swasthya*.

The presented study deals with the literature review of the concept of *Ahara* and *Nidra* proposed by *Acharya Charaka*.

Key words: *Swasthya*, Ayurveda, *Upastambha*, *Ahara*, *Nidra*, *Charaka*.

INTRODUCTION:

Being healthy (*Arogya*) is considered as the real *Sukha* (happiness) which is the root cause for attaining *Chaturvidha Purushartha* i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama & Moksha*. *Acharya Charaka* proposed the three pillars, *Trayopastambha*, which play an important role in keeping us healthy are

1. *Ahara* (Diet),
2. *Nidra* (Sleep)
3. *Brahmacharya* (Abstinence)

Any imbalance in these three is the cause for many diseases. When we think of diet only one thing strikes immediately in everyone's mind i.e., do not eat the junk food and "eat healthy food to be healthy", but simply by eating healthy food will keep you healthy....." NO" absolutely not. There are few more points that have to be kept in mind while consuming the food to keep our self healthy as mentioned in the *ayurvedic* science. *Ahara* is nothing but the daily food taking process of every human being.

Sleep is one of the important pillars in maintaining our health. It is a wave of thought about nothingness. Sleep plays an important role in maintaining physical and mental health. For example, sleep is involved in healing and repair of your heart and blood vessels. Ongoing sleep deficiency is linked to an increase risk of

heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke. Mental health issues such as depression, stress, mood fluctuation etc. It has been estimated that 90% of patients with depression complain about sleep quality. Poor sleep is even associated with increased risk of death by suicide. *Nidra* is the required sleep, with its quality and quantity aspects.

The *Brahmacharya* described by *Acharya Charaka* is one of the *Trayopastambha*, which guides about the coital principles applied to the human beings. The importance of the *Ahara* and *Nidra* is remarkable as far as the requirement is concerned. Both the concepts are to be understood thoroughly to achieve *Chaturvidha Purushartha*. Moreover, *Brahmacharya* is personal regulation principle based component, so the personalization is needed to achieve one's *Brahmacharya*.

The presented study is about the review of literature of concept of *Ahara* and *Nidra* as per *Acharya Charaka*.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

1. To review the literature of concept of *Ahara* as per *Acharya Charaka*.
2. To review the literature of concept of *Nidra* as per *Acharya Charaka*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Materials –

1. **Data collection tools:** *Samhitas*, textbooks, articles, indexed journals, Google scholar, Pub med; internet etc. is reviewed for the concept of *Ahara* as per *Acharya Charaka*, concept of *Nidra* as per *Acharya Charaka*.

Methods –

A thorough review of literature is carried out and the opinions of the *Acharya Charaka* about the concepts of *Ahara*, *Nidra* are understood.

CONCEPT OF AHARA AS PER ACHARYA CHARAKA:

While describing the importance and benefits of *Ahara*, *Acharya Charaka* described the *Ahara* as *Prana* of human being¹. It means that the human beings are not having survival without *Ahara*. Every organism ingests food for its energy requirement. If properly taken, *Ahara* yields growth and development of body parts and organs. The *Ahara* provides comfort to the *Mana*, and smoothens its functions. It makes the color of the body, provides liveliness, skillfulness and happiness. *Ahara* gives the body satiety, growth and muscular and mental stability.

Food is the one which the human beings and animals eat & is said to be of four types i.e. eatables, chewable, lickables & drinkables which helps in giving the nourishment to our body and keeps us healthy and fit. But along with the intake of healthy food and avoiding the junk food there are some rules and regulations that has to be followed during the consumption of food. *Acharya Charaka* described the rules of ingesting *Ahara* as *ashta Ahara Visheshayatana*². As per the *ashta Ahara Visheshayatana* the following 8 components of *Ahara* can be considered while having the diet:

1. *Prakriti*³: every substance has its own quality make up. The original qualities of the substances are described as *prakriti*. They are naturally occurring characters which exhibit certain functions on body after having them. The *prakriti* of *Moong* is *Laghu*, so they are easily digested. But in case of mutton, the *prakriti* is *guru*. So they are not so easily digested.
2. *Karana*⁴: these are the transformation methods to alter the *Prakriti* of the substance. The processes included in *Karana* are cooking, boiling, frying, grinding, chopping etc. these are the daily used methods in the kitchens. They

are also important as they transform the *Guna* (qualities) of the substances.

3. *Kala*: time to eat should also be given an importance as some foods

are not to be consumed in specific time. As per *Acharya Charaka*, *bala* of a man differs as per *kala*⁵. E.g. In *Greeshma Ritu* spicy, oily and *pittaprakopaka Ahara* should be avoided as there is natural *pitta Prakopa* in *Greeshma Ritu*.

4. *Desha*⁶: the geographical habitat of a particular edible food substance is considered here. The *Desha* are of 3 types as per Ayurveda, *Anupa*, *Jangala* and *Sadharana*. *Anupa Desha* has dominance of *Kapha Dosha* and shows the characters like plenty water, diseases due to vitiated *Kapha Dosha*, greenery in the environment due to plenty of plants etc. The *Jangala Desha* shows the characters like scarcity of water, diseases due to vitiated *Vata Dosha*, desert environment due to scarcity of plants etc due to dominance of *Vata Dosha*.

Sadharana Desha shows a mixed variety of characters of *Vata*, *pitta* and *Kapha Dosha*. This environment influences the properties of foods which affects

the health of a man residing or new to the particular *Desha*.

5. *Samyoga*⁷: it literally means union or making together. Two or more foods if conjugated with each other, the properties and their functions differ. The mixture of the single substances act differently than the single substances. This additive or synergistic effect or sometimes subtractive effect is provided by making *Samyoga* of the foods. E.g. as per Ayurveda, the union of honey and ghee in their equal proportions is said to be *Nishiddha*.

6. *Rashi*⁸: it is a certain amount. The quantity of the food also should be taken into account for its useful actions on the body. E.g. as per Ayurveda, Food should never be consumed stomach full. It is clearly mentioned in Ayurveda that 1 part of the stomach should be filled with solids, 2nd part with liquids & the last 3rd part should be left empty for the proper digestion of the food.

7. *Upayoga Sanstha*⁹: these are more supportive things while *Ahara* is taken e.g. surrounding environment, behavior of the person taking *Ahara*. The detailed

guidelines are issued in the *ayurvedic* treatises.

8. *Upayokta*¹⁰: the person taking *Ahara* is called *Upayokta*. The habits of the *Upayokta* are considered here. Habits make a particular food *Pathya* or *Apathya* for the person having it.

As per *Acharya Charaka*, some more rules¹¹ regarding process of taking *Ahara* are as follows:

- Food should be hot as it increases the process of digestion.
- We should not eat food either very fast or very slow as it may lead to indigestion.
- We should not talk or laugh while eating the food in order to avoid choking.
- Always one should take the food in a good & healthy environment.
- One should consume the food only when the previously taken food is completely digested.
- We should take the food only when we feel hungry.
- Don't take the heavy food items like flour, corn etc., and water after meals.
- Food should be unctuous.
- We should always eat food with interest.
- The diet especially hard food substances should be properly chewed.
- Avoid taking water at least 15 minutes before having food. The quantity of water taken after eating food should be little.
- Heavy food should be taken in a limited quantity.
- Heavy food should not be taken at night. The proper time for taking your dinner is approximately is 2 to 3 hours before going to bed.
- Do not sleep immediately after taking the meal.
- Ayurveda insists that iced water should not be drunk during or after the meal as it slows digestion.
- After meals heavy physical work should be avoided.
- In order to stimulate appetite, one can chew and eat half teaspoonful of freshly grated ginger with a pinch of rock salt 10 to 15 minutes before each meal.
- Incompatible food combinations [*Virudhha Ahara*] like banana with milk/ curd, fish with curd/milk, sweet substances with salt/sour substances ,honey and ghee in equal quantity etc. should be avoided as it leads to the production of toxins in the system.

By following the above conditions one can easily digest the food that has been taken in proper quantity and in proper time leading to the increase in strength, complexion, health and the lifespan. Food not only nourishes our body but it also nourishes our mind. Along with maintaining the health it should have the quality of not causing the diseases. Food like dry vegetables, dry meat, and tubers should not be consumed at all, cheese, fish, curd, black gram, barley, Paneer, heated butter milk, pig, cow, meat should not be consumed continuously & food like green gram, Amlaki, wheat, Shali Dhanya (type of rice), milk, honey, ghee etc., are supposed to be consumed daily. The intake of food also depends upon the seasons like taking the cold, liquid and sweet food in summer and avoiding it in winter, etc.

CONCEPT OF NIDRA AS PER ACHARYA CHARAKA:

Nidra or natural sleep is due to excess *Kapha Dosha* and *Tama Guna*. *Acharya Charaka* described the mechanism of *Nidra* as: when both *Mana* and *Sharira* are getting tired, *Indriya* gets relaxed and stops doing their functions, *Nidra* is achieved. When there is coordination between *Indriya* and *Mana*. Man enjoys an uninterrupted state of being knowledgeable. When this coordination breaks, *Nidra*

comes. *Acharya Charaka* described seven types of *Nidra*¹².

Seven types of *Nidra* are described by *Acharya Charaka*:

1. *Tamobhava*,
2. *Shleshmabhava*,
3. *Manshramabhava*,
4. *Sharirashramabhava*,
5. *Agantuki*,
6. *Vyadhijanya*,
7. *Ratriprabhava*.

Acharya Charaka described the benefits of sleep¹³:

Sukha, *Pushti*, *Bala*, *Vrushata*, *Dnyana* etc. are the benefits of good sleep. The irregular or inadequate sleep gives *Dukkha*, *Abala*, *Kleebata*, *Adnyana* etc. Proper sleep is the cause for happiness, nourishment, strength, fertility, knowledge and long life and lack sleep is the cause for sadness, leanness, weakness, infertility, dullness and even death. Hence by following the rules and regulations of sleep one can keep themselves healthy both physically and mentally. In routine it has been observed that, persons who sleep more will be prone to diseases like obesity, NIDDM, laziness, obesity etc. some common rules for the sleep is as follows:

1. Early to bed and early to rise with 6 to 8 hours duration of sleep keeps an adult healthy.

2. One should not sleep during the day time except in summer season.
3. Children, old age, pregnant ladies and diseased persons can have a day sleep.
4. Persons who sleep more will be prone to disorders like obesity, NIDDM, laziness etc.,
5. In Ayurveda it is said that the person who also sleeps in the day time will become obese and the one who doesn't even sleep in the night will become lean.
6. Half an hour meditation before going to bed will relax your mind and thereby induces a sound sleep.
7. A cup of milk before going to bed will also induce the sleep.
8. Sleep immediately after the meal is not indicated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The literature review of the concept of *Ahara* and *Nidra* with the help of *Charaka Samhita* leads to the following conclusion:

1. *Acharya Charaka* described *Ahara* in all respects i.e. its meaning, benefits, rules to have it in the form of *Ashta Ahara visheshayatana*. The unique concept of *ashta Ahara visheshayatana* is the specialty of

Charaka Samhita for the concept of *Ahara*.

2. The simplest ways of putting forward the rules of the *Ahara* is also outstanding literature in *Charaka Samhita*.
3. The *Ahara* is further explained in details with respect to *Pachana* and the production of end product i.e. *Ahara rasa*. The further explanation is also important but beyond the scope of the study.
4. Concept of *Nidra* is also accounted in details by *Acharya Charaka*. *Nidra* is explained with respect to its genesis, advantages-disadvantages and its types. The concept is thoroughly emphasized by *Acharya Charaka*.
5. The concept of *Ahara* and *Nidra* are to be studied in details from *Charaka Samhita* to understand the importance and the details of the concepts, which are main components of *Trayopastambha*.

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