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CONCEPT OF ĀHĀRA (Food) IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE - AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

SHARMA, B. R. *

ABSTRACT

On the name of modern culture we are striving to follow unnatural life style and unknowingly acquiring highly disastrous habits. One of such habits is related to āhāra (food) that we consume. Food plays an important role in developing/shaping the whole personality of an individual. It is said as we eat so we develop our mind. In this article an effort has been made to understand/analyse and simplify the concept of āhāra according to Indian thought by identifying following a few questions so that even a common man can understand this important concept.

1. What we understand by the term āhāra?
2. Whether food is at the base of our existence, how?
3. When to eat?
4. How to eat?
5. How much to eat?
6. 'What' and 'what not' to eat?
7. Effect of food on our mind and thought process
8. Conclusion.

Key words : Āhāra, mitāhāra, yuktāhāravihāra

INTRODUCTION

Food, sleep etc. are the natural needs of all beings and if these are satisfied without over-ruling the law of nature, then seldom they generate any health hazard. If we minutely observe the daily life of all other beings-excepting of course the human being - we will find that they never violate the law of nature and this perhaps is the secret of their health and contrary to this human being always requires health upkeep. Man, being the best creation because of his thinking faculty, misuses this faculty rather than using it properly, violates the law of nature and thereby becomes victim of several psychosomatic disorders and therefore, human being often requires medical assistance for overcoming health problems. Modern society is the worst example in this regard - which has really misguided itself on

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the name of modern culture. All human values have lost their meaning and every person is striving to follow the unnatural modern lifestyle blindly and is unknowingly acquiring highly disastrous habits. One of such damaging habits is related to 'āhāra' or 'Food'. It is said that the personality of a man is created also out of the food he consumes-besides, many other factors. As we eat, so we develop our mind.

In this article an effort has been made to understand, analyze and simplify the concept of āhāra according to Indian thought by identifying some of the fundamental questions with regard to āhāra, so that even a common man could grasp this important concept easily. These questions are as under:-

1. What we understand by the term ahara?
2. Whether food is at the base of our existence, how?
3. When to eat?
4. How to eat?
5. How much to eat?
6. 'What' and 'what not' to eat?
7. Effect of food on our mind and thought process
8. Conclusion

Let us analyze above-mentioned questions one by one.

1. What we understand by the word ahara?

At the outset let us make it clear that there is difference in the eastern and western concepts of āhāra/food, since there is great difference in Eastern and Western life style, values, habits and thinking etc. Westerners are concerned with the nutritive value of the food that we consume and the food items are analyzed on the basis of Protein, Carbohydrate, Fat, Vitamin etc. and balanced diet is decided on the basis of the quantity of these values and their intake can be increased or decreased depending on the requirements and needs of an individual. Unfortunately no thought has been given on sources of the food, since no food item is prohibited to them. Prohibition is based only on requirement or non-requirement of certain food item. Therefore, it can be safely stated that Western dieticians have focused their attention mainly on physical health. Effect of food on mind and behaviour of an individual has not given much importance. But according to Indian thinkers food is considered as Brahma ['अन्नं वै ब्रह्म' (तै.उप.३:२:२)]. All living beings are born out of food and are sustained by food and they have not only considered the food value in terms of nutrition but also tried to analyze the food value from the viewpoint of its source, season, geographical consideration, so also individual's psychophysical constitution and taste as the food is not only responsible for maintaining the physical health but also for our good or bad thoughts. That is the reason why, everywhere in Indian scripture *yuktāhāravihāra* has been recommended. Yogis like Svātmārāma, Caranādāsa, Vasiṣṭha etc. have included āhāra

(food) as one of the components of *Mahāvratā* - in line with *Ahiṃsā*, *Satya* etc. Thus it can be stated that according to Indian thought the concept of *āhāra* is not limited to the physical aspect which we satisfy and fulfill through eating and drinking but it includes all types of intake in the form of thoughts through our sense organs as a result of interaction in the society. Indian journey of life starts with (*Annamaya Kosha*) (i.e. sheath of Food) but transcends it in order to reach (*Ānandamaya Kosha*) (i.e. Sheath of Bliss). Therefore, the source and effect of food have been discussed in detail and '*Yuktāhāra*' or '*Mitāhāra*' (appropriate or balanced diet) has been recommended.

2. Whether food is at the base of our existence? If so How?

'आहार संभवं वस्तु' Food is at the base of our existence. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how food is responsible for our existence? If we ask this question to Modern dietician he may say that energy is necessary for the physical body and air, water and food supply us that energy. Thus, consumed food and water transform itself into energy in order to maintain the temperature of the body to its optimum level so that mechanism inside the body could work properly.

In *Chāndogyaopaniṣat* (VI/5/1) and *Śiva Saṃhitā* (V/73-74) have given thought on this issue a little differently

Food is of four types:-

- To be chewed,
- To be sucked,
- To be licked and
- To be drunk.

When these four types of food are consumed by the person - it is transformed into '*Rasa*' and that is divided into three parts:-

- The essence part of this *Rasa* works as nutrition to our subtle body i.e. mind, intellect, ego etc.
- The Second part, which is of middle type, nourishes the 'Seven Dhatus' of the body.
- The third part, which actually is the waste material, is thrown out of the body through various passages - such as CO_2 is thrown out of the Lungs, Sweat from Skin, Urine and Stool from their respective organs.

According to Indian thinkers, the mechanism of the transformation of food in to *Rasa* and its assimilation in the body is regulated by *Prāṇa* which has been named differently depending on its different functions. *Prāṇa* residing in the Heart region is responsible for every intake; so also whatever we eat through mouth travels through the *Annanalīkā* (Esophagus) up to the navel region, which is the region of *Samāna* that digests/assimilates the food. Food after digestion is transformed into *Rasa*, which is supplied to the whole body with the help of *Vyāna* since *Vyāna* is said to move in the whole

body. Excretion of waste material is the function of *Apāna*. *Udāna* residing in the throat to head region is supposed to regulate our thought, emotions or capability of learning and speaking. In this way we can understand how the food is the basis of our existence of life. The existence includes not only the physical aspect but encompasses all aspects - mental and spiritual etc.. The body mind complex functions properly only when we follow '*Yuktāhāravihāra*' otherwise the same *āhāra* may give rise to various disorders: "रोगाश्चाहार संभवाः।"

3. When to eat?

We must understand that every individual is unique and his food requirements are also unique depending on his Physical and Mental constitution, as well as time and space. Therefore, it is necessary that every individual should recognize his or her Mental and Physical requirements, which is possible through introspection and experience. No one else can do it.

- a. "एकाहारं निराहारं यामान्ते च न कारयेत्" (Gh.S. V/31).

Generally it is said that one should not eat within three hours after one full meal. However, even this cannot be taken as very hard and fast rule since it mainly depends on individual's energy expenditure and functioning of the digestive system. For example - old person may have less appetite in comparison to the young and a child will have more appetite in comparison to the young person. Therefore, a child may require food even before three hours gap. Thus, a person is required to understand one's need for food. Generally one should follow the rule of '**Eat when you are really hungry and drink when you are thirsty**' whenever a person violates this, he is subjected for adverse effects.

- b. One should not eat during physical tiredness or mental restlessness. Since, in such situation person may not be able to decide the quantity and he may eat more or less than required. If we eat while viewing T.V. or during business discussions, usually we may eat more or less than the required quantity of food. This happens because our attention is not towards food but it is diverted to T.V. programs or business deals. Therefore, one should eat with total attention towards eating and with enjoying the taste of the food. It is said - '*Śataṃ vihāya bhoktavyam*', which actually means leave your hundred types of jobs while eating.
- c. Indian Yogis have given a good scientific base for deciding when to eat? And even a common man can easily follow that. Whenever the body requires energy or also during the expenditure of energy, we can experience the dominance of our right nostril e.g., when we are angry, the right nostril becomes dominant and contrary to this, when we are calm and quiet, the left nostril becomes dominant. This works an indicator as to the requirement of energy. Thus, when our body really requires energy, automatically our right nostril becomes dominant.

Therefore, it is said that 'eat while right nostril is dominant' 'अनिलेऽर्कं प्रवेशे च भोक्तव्यम्' ('Siva Samhitā' III/42).

4. How to eat?

In the context of *Mitāhāra* in Yogic Literature, the mental condition during meals has also been taken care of in detail. However, one should take care of following factors while eating:

- a. Physical and Mental condition while eating
- b. Chewing of the food
- c. Avoid strenuous work soon after meals or take rest after meal.

a) Physical and Mental condition while eating :

We should very clearly understand that when we are physically or mentally tired or restless, we become unable to determine the right quantity, quality and purity of the food conducive for ourselves. Thus, physical and mental rest is prerequisite for taking meals.

b) Chewing of the food :

Chewing of the food should be proper. Nature has given us 32 teeth suggesting that every mouthful should be chewed at least for 32 times. This method promotes better secretion of digestive juices starting from the saliva which is sufficiently secreted and mixed with the food serves as important agent responsible for digestion. This also is conducive for the function of different systems in the body. Similarly whatever knowledge we receive from the external world, that also should be properly screened and then accepted. We should focus our attention only to those factors which are conducive for our health in its totality.

c) Avoid strenuous work soon after meal :

It is said that one should lie straight on one's back at least up to eight breathing, sleep on the right side for sixteen breathing and after that change the position to the left and continue the position for at least thirty two breathing. We must know that it is *Prāṇa* responsible for generating energy to digest the consumed food. If this energy is utilized immediately after meal for any strenuous work, it will have its consequences on our digestion. Therefore, resting a while immediately after meal is necessary.

5. How much to eat ?

The criterion for determining the quantity of food should be as per the need of an individual. It can not be determined by others since every individual's digestive capacity and need for energy depends upon his Physical and Mental energy requirement and expenditure. Indian thinkers have recognized this fact and therefore, they have given some guidelines in this direction, which can help in determining

the quantity of food for oneself. Vasiṣṭha, in his Saṃhitā, has recommended the number of mouthfuls depending upon the 'Āśrama' one is undergoing. A person of *Brahmacarya āśrama* should eat double the quantity recommended for *Grahasṭha* (the householder) *āśrama* and person of *Gṛhasṭhāśrama* should consume double the quantity recommended for *Vānaprastha* or *Sannyāsa*. This statement has been made taking into consideration individual's energy requirement and expenditure.

In this context Yogi Carandāsa has said "क्षुधा मिटे नहि आलस आवे". Thus indicating that one should consume to the extent that appetite is satisfied and it should not induce physical lethargy. In this way, he has emphasized on the point that quantity of food should not be less or more, rather it should be completely balanced according to one's need. Similar concept is available in Bhagwadgītā (B.G.) also. "नात्यश्रतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकानश्रतः" (B.G. VI/17) i.e. neither overeating nor under eating is conducive for a Yogi therefore, balance in quantity should be maintained. That is why; Gītā has recommended 'Yuktāhāravihāra'. Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā and Haṭha Pradīpikā have described the same under the concept of 'Mitāhāra' (balanced diet) i.e. a person should divide his intake capacity in four parts and maximum half part should be filled by solid food, one fourth should be filled with water and rest one part should be left empty for free movement of vāyu.

अत्रेन पूरयेदर्थं तोयेन तु तृतीयकम्।

उदरस्य तुरीयांशं संरक्षेद्वायुचारणे।। (Gh. S. V/22)

The need for unobstructed flow of vāyu has been discussed in detail in the context of digestion of food. This can be followed only if we have grasped that how and when to eat.

6. 'What' and 'what not' to eat ?

Selection of appropriate food item is very difficult but equally important. It must be according to one's nature and purpose. Ancient Indian thinking available in this context can be classified into following heads for a better understanding :

A. Philosophical basis for the selection of food items.

B. Ayurvedic basis for the selection of food items.

C. Yogic basis for the selection of food items.

A. Philosophical basis:

According to the Indian Philosophical thought every object of the visible world is the transformation of three-fold energy (*Guṇas* i.e. *sattva-rajās-tamas*). These *Guṇas* differ in their nature.

“प्रीत्यप्रीतिविषादात्मकं”

सत्त्वं लघु प्रकाशकमिष्टमुपष्टम्भकं चलञ्च रजः।

गुरु वरणकमेव तमः प्रदीपवद्भार्यतो वृत्तिः।। (Sāṅkhya Kārikā 12-13)

Sattva is said to be light in weight and illuminating. Its lightness helps in making the object non-physical and its illuminating power is capable of giving extension to the consciousness. Therefore, '*Sattva Guṇa*' is the indicator of purity, creativity and bliss. *Rajoguṇa* by nature is stimulant, hyperactive and fickle and therefore, said to be the indicator of stimulation, impatience and pain. *Tamas* is said to be heavy in weight and works as covering for the consciousness and it is indicated by ignorance, darkness and immobility. All three *Guṇas* have been compared with the Flame, Wick and Oil of a lamp and their colours are white, red and black respectively.

The quality of every object of the world has been determined on the basis of dominance of a particular *Guṇa* in the object. Thus, on the basis of the dominance of *Guṇas*, the objects either are *Sāttvika*, *Rājasika*, or *Tāmasika*. Similarly on the basis of three *Guṇas*, the food items as well as the consumers are also classified as *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* or *Tamasika* -

अपुरुषं सत्त्वसंयुक्तमनुमीयाच्छमादिभिः ।

कामादिभिः रजो युक्तं क्रोधाद्यैः तमसा युतम् ॥ (Śrīmadbhāgavata purāṇa 11/25-9)

Those who have control over sense organs are called *Sāttvika*; those who are indulged in the enjoyment of the world are *Rājasika* whereas the persons having anger, greed etc. should be identified as *Tāmasika*. In Bhagawadgītā, the three types of food have been described in following manner :

सात्त्विक आहार - आयुः सत्त्वबलारोग्यं सुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहारा सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥ (B.G. XVII/8)

i.e. the food that increase vitality, energy, vigor, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are savoury and oleaginous, Substantial and Agreeable are liked by the persons of *Sāttvika* quality.

राजसिक आहार - कट्वम्ल लवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्ष विदाहिनः ।

आहाराराजसस्येष्टा दुःखःशोकभयप्रदाः ॥ (B.G. XVII/9)

i.e. the food that is bitter, sour, saline, over hot, pungent, dry and burning are liked by the *Rājasika* and are productive of pain, grief and disease.

तामसिक आहार - यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ (B.G. XVII/10)

i.e. the food that is stale, tasteless, stinking, cooked overnight, refused and impure are liked by *Tāmasika* ones.

It is evident that out of three types of food quoted above, *Sāttvika* food has been recommended since Indian Philosophy considers realization of self as the sole aim of life. *Sāttvika* food works as initial step in the process of actualizing this aim.

B. Ayurvedic Basis:

The purpose of Ayurveda is to maintain the health of the healthy person and treatment of a sick person from this point of view Ayurveda has classified all the food items on the basis of 'TRIDOṢA theory' and therefore, food items are:

- i) either subsiding *Vāta* or aggravating *Vāta*
- ii) either subsiding *Pitta* or aggravating *Pitta*
- iii) either subsiding *Kapha* or aggravating *Kapha*

The quality of food items are further being classified on the basis of *Rasa* (i.e. Taste of six types), *Vīrya* (i.e. effect hot or cold) and *Vipāka* (i.e. digestion - heavy or light). It has been recommended that one should eat according to one's constitution and temperament. Along with that one should change the foodstuff depending on appropriate food items in particular season, change in food items and behavior according to season and observance of natural laws is the key to the healthy life. When a person violates such rules and consumes food against his own constitution and temperament can be called *prajñāparādha* (प्रज्ञापराध). This is considered to be the starting point of all kinds of disorders.

C. Yogic Basis:

Meaning of yoga is 'to join' which means joining with natural law (i.e. living in tune with nature). The more we get ourselves associated with natural laws, the more we lead a natural life and start recognizing/ identifying those factors which give rise to unnatural life style. Thereafter, by adopting various methods of rooting out such factors, start realizing oneness (*ekatva*) in and out, which is the highest goal of Yoga.

To actualize this highest goal, the role of food (as conducive or non-conductive) has also been discussed e.g. *Atyāhāra* (overeating) has been considered as non-conductive whereas, *Mitāhāra* (balanced diet) has been recommended as conducive. In order to emphasize on observance of *Mitāhāra* it has been said that he who begins the practice of Yoga, without controlling his food habits, suffers from many diseases and does not make any progress in Yoga.

Yogic literature defines *Mitāhāra* as follows -

- i) सुस्निग्धं मधुरहारश्चतुर्याशविवर्जितः।
भुज्यते शिवसंप्रीत्यै मिताहारः स उच्यते॥ (H.P. I/58)
- ii) शुद्धं सुमधुरं स्निग्धमुदरार्थविवर्जितम्।
भुज्यते सुरसंप्रीत्या मिताहारमिमं विदुः॥ (Gh.S. V/21)
- i) Eating sweet, unctuous food offered first to the Almighty (i.e. not eaten for one's own

satisfaction) leaving one quarter (of the stomach) empty - this is known as 'Mitāhāra'.

- ii) They call it Mitāhāra (balanced diet) which is pure, sweet, lubricated and fills only half the stomach and which is palatable and is eaten to please the God (in oneself).

Above-mentioned definitions of *Mitāhāra* not only indicate the quality of food but also recommend a complete code with regard to food, which can be easily understood as follows.

A) Quality of food.

- i) Wholesome
- ii) Unwholesome

B) Quantity of food to be consumed by a Yoga Practitioner and

C) Mental condition during meals

A) Quality of Food :

Yogic literature such as *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā*, *Yogopaniṣad*, *Vasiṣṭha Saṃhitā* have given ample information regarding wholesome and un-wholesome food on the basis of the quality of the food stuff. Here, the information available in *Haṭhapradīpikā* and *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* is being presented in brief.

i) Wholesome food:

Swātmārāma in *Haṭhapradīpikā* (H.P.) has presented following list of food items recognized them as wholesome for a Yoga practitioner.

Wholesome food -

गोधूमशालियवषष्टिकशोभनान्नं क्षीराज्यखण्डनवनीतसितामधूनि ।

शुण्ठीपटोलकफलादिकपञ्चशाकं मुद्गादिदिव्यमुदकं च यमीन्द्रपथ्यम् ॥ (H.P. I/62)

i.e. wheat, rice, barley and *ṣaṣṭika* (a special variety of rice), milk, ghee, sugar, butter, sugar candy, honey, dry ginger, the patolaka fruit (*Paravala* - a kind of cucumber), the five leafy vegetables, green gram and rain water collected when the sun is in *maghā* - (the 10th lunar mansion) etc. are considered to be wholesome food for advanced Yogis.

In *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* we find -

शाल्यन्नं यवपिष्टं वा तथा गोधूमपिष्टकम् ।

मुद्गं माषचणकादि शुभ्रं च तुषवर्जितम् ॥

पटोलं सुरणं मानं कक्कोलं च शुकाशकम् ।

द्राढिकां कर्कटीं रम्भा डुम्बरीं कण्टकण्टकम् ॥

आमरम्भां बालरम्भां रम्भादण्डं च मूलकम् ।

वार्ताकीं मूलकं ऋद्धिं योगी भक्षणमाचरेत् ।

बालशाकं कालशाकं तथा पटोलपत्रकम् ।

पञ्चशाकं प्रशंसीयाद्वास्तूकं हिमल्लेचिकाम् ॥ (Gh.S. V/17-20)

i.e. a yogi should eat food prepared from rice, flour or barley and wheat, green gram, horse gram etc. which should be pure and free from husk. A Yogi should eat paṭola, suraṇa, māna, kakkola, śukāśaka, drāḍhikā, karkaṭī, rambhā, ḍumbarī, kaṇṭakaṇṭaka, āmarambhā, bālarambhā, rambhādaṇḍa, mūlaka, vārtāki and riddhi. He may eat the five recommended leafy vegetables viz. bālaśāka, kālaśāka, paṭola patra, vāstūka and himalocikā.

आदि (i. e. etc.) in H.P. fresh butter, ghee, milk, sugar cane, jaggery, banana, coconut, grapes, clove, cardamom, dhātri, rasa, nutmeg, apple, jambala, hardā which are also said to be wholesome.

Even among the wholesome food, the Yogi should select the food on the basis of

लघुपाकं प्रियं स्निग्धं तथा धातुप्रपोषणम् ।

मनोभिलषितं योग्यं योगी भोजनमाचरेत् ॥ (Gh. S. V/29)

i.e. easily digestible, agreeable, soft and sticky, which nourishes the elementary substances of the body and which is desirable and proper. Similarly Haṭhapradīpikā also says -

पुष्टं सुमधुरं स्निग्धं गव्यं धातुप्रपोषणम् ।

मनोभिलषितं योग्यं योगी भोजनमाचरेत् ॥ (H. P. I/63)

i.e. Yogis should eat food i.e. nutritious, sweet and unctuous, products of cow's milk, nourishing, of their own choice and suitable for the practice of Yoga.

ii) Un-wholesome food -

According to Haṭhapradīpikā -

कट्वम्लतीक्ष्णत्वणोष्णहरीतशाक -

सौवीरतैलतिलसर्षपमद्यमत्स्यान् ।

आजादिमांसदधितक्रकुलत्थकोल -

पिण्याकहिङ्गुलशुनाद्यमपथ्यमाहुः ॥ (H. P. I/59)

i.e. eating food which is bitter, sour, pungent, salty or hot, green vegetables, sour gruel, oil, mustard, sesame and (consuming) alcohol, fish, meat, curd, buttermilk, kulattha, berries, oil cakes, asafoetida, garlic etc. are said to be unwholesome for a Haṭhayogī.

According to Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā -

कदम्बं लवणं तिक्तं भृष्टं च दधितक्रकम् ।
 शाकोत्कटं तथा मद्य तालं च पनसं तथा ॥
 कुलत्थं मसुरं पाण्डुं कूष्माण्डं शाकदण्डकम् ।
 तुम्बीकोलकपित्थं च कण्टबिल्वं पलाशकम् ॥
 कदम्बं जम्बीरं बिम्बं लकुचं लशुनं विषम् ।
 कामरङ्गं पियालं च हिङ्गुशाल्मलिकेमुकम् ॥ (Gh. S. V/23-26)

i.e. In the beginning of Yogic practices one should avoid bitter, sour, salt, pungent, scorched food, curds, buttermilk, heavy vegetables, liquor, palm nuts, jackfruits, *kulattha*, *masura*, *pāṇḍu*, *kūṣmāṇḍa*, vegetable stems, gourds, berries, *kapittha*, *kaṇṭabilva*, *palāśaka*, *kadamba*, *jambīra*, *bimba*, *lukuca*, *laśuna*, lotus stalk fibers, *kāmarāṅga*, *piyāla*, *hiṅgu*, *śālmali* and *kemuka*. These are unwholesome for a Yoga practitioner.

Moreover, such food items which are -

कठिनं दुरितं पूतिमुष्णं पर्युषितं तथा ।
 अतिशीतं चाति चोष्णं भक्ष्यं योगी विवर्जयेत् ॥ (Gh. S. V/30)

i.e. hard, polluted, putrid, producing heat inside the body, stale, extremely cold or extremely hot.

Thus, from the list of wholesome and unwholesome food, it can be deduced that the yoga authors accept the methods of classification of food items according to Āyurveda. And if we analyze the food items enumerated under wholesome and unwholesome food according to Āyurveda following points can be safely stated :

Wholesome

1. From the view point of Rasa -Sweet (Madhura) has been recommended.
2. From the view point of Effect -cooling food stuffs have been recommended.
3. From the view point of digestion- light food has been considered wholesome.
4. Wholesome food items are either subsiding Pitta or Vāta or Kapha.

Un-Wholesome

- From the view point of Rasa- bitter, pungent, sour, salty have not been recommended
- From the view point of effect- heat producing food stuffs have been considered unwholesome.
- From the view point of digestion- heavy food stuffs have been considered unwholesome.
- Unwholesome food items are either aggravating Vāta or Pitta or Kapha.

5. Food items which are fresh, pure and agreeable only can be called Wholesome.

Food which are heated over again, stale, impure and non-agreeable can be called Unwholesome.

In the light of the above discussion, Yoga practitioners of present age must keep in mind that Yoga literature has evaluated the quality of food on the basis of Āyurveda and not on Western Parameters - since no foodstuff can be said to be prohibited according to them. It is also worth noting that Yoga recommends *Sāttvika* type of food since *Gītā* (XVII/8) and other Yoga texts as mentioned above 'शुद्धं सुमधुरं' (Sweet), 'स्निग्धं' (unctuous) etc. Similarly the type of *āhāra* declared by *Gītā* as *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* have been condemned or considered non-conducive because of their *Rājasika* or *Tāmasika* properties, Yoga has also considered them non-conducive in the context of *Mitāhāra*.

b. Quantity of food to be consumed by a Yogasādhaka:

In the definition of *Mitāhāra* the statements like - "leaving one fourth of the space" also refer an indication of quantity.

In *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā* - we do find :

अन्नेन पूरयेदधं तोयेन तु तृतीयकम् ।

उदरस्य तुरीयांशं संरक्षेद्वायुचारणे ॥ (Gh.S. 5/22)

i.e. one should fill half the stomach with food, one quarter with water and the fourth quarter should be reserved for the free movement of *vāyu* - this is called balanced diet. Thus every individual should decide himself with regard to the quantity of food to be consumed depending on one's need. For this, it is necessary to know one's own intensity of appetite and further this knowledge can be applied only if we know as to 'When to eat? and How to eat?'

Many diseases of modern times are mainly because of non-observance of the rule of quantity to be consumed. Therefore, it is necessary that we identify our need and eat accordingly then only we can be benefited from the food we consume.

c. Mental condition while eating:

The statements in the context of *Mitāhāra* like 'शिवसंप्रीत्यै' (offered to Almighty) (H.P. I/58) and 'सुरसंप्रीत्या' (to please the God) (Gh.S.V/21) indicate above the mental attitude while eating. In order to understand this, if we take into consideration the theory of 'as in Macrocosm so in Microcosm', we will also understand that the creator of Macrocosm is also the creator of Microcosm. Lord Śrīkrṣṇa himself has said in *Gītā* - 'अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।' (B.G. XV/14) i.e. 'I, abiding in the body of all living beings as *Vaiśvānara* associated with *Prāṇa* and *Apāna* - digest the four kinds of food'. One should eat by surrendering oneself to That Ultimate Controller otherwise 'अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्त्ताऽहमिति

मन्यते' (B.G. III/27) one may develop the attitude of 'I am the doer' because of Ego. One should cautiously avoid such attitude and this has been indicated by the statements like 'offered to Almighty' or 'to please the God'. This attitude is gradually expanded and further transforms into 'वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्'.

Thus, in Yogic literature following points have been taken into consideration in the context of discussion on *Mitāhāra*:

- Observance of long list of Wholesome and Unwholesome food.
- One fourth of the stomach to be kept free.
- Purity and Cleanliness
- Sweet and unctuous foodstuffs
- Easy digestible
- Mental attitude should be of 'offering to Almighty'

If one follows the above-mentioned instructions with regards to the food, the person will remain physically fit and mentally aware and also he will be able to attain Yogic Goal. This code of āhāra is necessary be followed before stepping into the practice of Prāṇāyāma since it is useful till Prāṇa flows through Idā and Piṅgalā. Once the Yogi successfully attains the purpose of Prāṇāyāma i.e. his Prāṇa starts flowing through Suṣūmṇā and rises upward, the Yogi transcends gross hunger and thirst and subtle mental conflicts like pleasure or pain. Therefore, it is necessary to follow the code of āhāra till the sādhaṅka attains perfection in Prāṇāyāma.

7. Effect of food on mind

During the discussion on the word āhāra it has already been stated that food nourishes not only the gross body but it is also responsible for our moral or immoral behaviour. Food determines our mental attitude, which is further responsible for various human values. Therefore, in Indian thought, the purity of food has been very well appreciated -

आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धिः सत्त्वशुद्धौ ध्रुवा स्मृतिः।

स्मृतिलाभे सर्वग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः। (Chāndogyopaniṣad 7-26-2)

i.e. purity of food depends on purity of internal organs, purity of internal organs leads to stability of memory and if memory is stable, the person remains free from all sorts of mental conflicts. This concept has been amply supported in our Indian Literature.

“अन्नशुद्धौ सत्त्वस्य विवृद्धिः”, आहारशुद्धौ चित्तस्य विशुद्धिर्भवति स्वता' (Pāśu. Br. Up. 3.36 [41])

and

‘निष्कल्मषो भवेद् भक्तो राजन् शुद्धान्नभोजनात् ।
प्रसीदन्तीन्द्रियाण्याशु सत्त्वं च परिवर्धते ॥’ (Bh. Va. Up. 4-15)

Such statements confirm that pure food makes citta pure leading to arousal of pure thoughts resulting into blissful condition of internal and external organs.

Although in the earlier paragraphs it has already been discussed in detail about various aspects of food, here some special points are given to highlight the concept of 'Purity of Food'

- What is the source of food - Pure or Impure?
- With what mental attitude it has been cooked.
- With what mental attitude it is consumed
- Are we eating to live or living to eat?
- Whether food has been shared or consumed alone.

All the above points contribute toward purity of food. Thus, it can be said that food is not only the physical substance but it has been understood by associating it with many aspects of human existence which goes to contribute towards the development of individual's personality as a whole.

8. CONCLUSION

Following concluding points can be made on the basis of above discussion with regards to āhāra (food) :

- ĀHĀRA (food) has a broad connotation in Indian thought which not only nourishes the gross body but also the subtle body as the sensory inputs are also considered as ĀHĀRA and therefore, food has been recommended on the basis of its source and effects.
- Food is at the base of our morality thus this concept has also been associated with values like *Ahiṃsā*, (non-injury), *satya* (a man of faith) etc. therefore, *Yuktāhāravihāra* & *Mītāhāra* have been recommended.
- Food has also been classified on the basis of Tri-guṇas and has been identified as *Sāttvika*, *Rājasika* or *Tāmasika*. Out of these, *Sāttvika* food has been recommended whereas *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* have been prohibited.
- Method of eating - e.g. when to eat, how to eat, quality, quantity, attitude of mind during meal have been given sufficient thought.
- Food is not merely a physical substance rather it has been accepted as one of the important contributors towards shaping our personality as a whole.
- One fourth of each meal should contain living food - fruits, green vegetables, sprouts etc.

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