

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

By Dr B R Sharma

October 2015

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 psycho-somatic 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 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 ‘*ahara*’ 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 ahara according to Indian thought by identifying some of the fundamental questions with regard to ahara, 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 **ahara/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 [ॐ+ॐ=ॐ (ॐ=ॐ.3:2:2)].

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 *yuktaharavihara* has been recommended. Yogis like Svamimarama, Caranadasa, Vasistha etc. have included *ahara* (food) as one of the components of *Mahavrata* – in line with *Ahimsa*, *Satya* etc. Thus it can be stated that according to Indian thought the concept of *ahara* 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 (*Anandamaya Kosha*) (i.e. Sheath of Bliss). Therefore, the source and effect of food have been discussed in detail and '*Yuktahara*' or '*Mitahara*' (appropriate or balanced diet) has been recommended.

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

ॐ+ॐ=ॐ | "ॐ=ॐ"ॐ=ॐ"ॐ=ॐ 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 Chandogyopanisad (VI/5/1) and Siva Samhita (V/73-74) have given thought on this issue a little differently.

Food is of four types:-

- a) To be chewed,
- b) To be sucked,
- c) To be licked and
- d) 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:-

- i. The essence part of this *Rasa* works as nutrition to our subtle body i.e. mind, intellect, ego etc.
- ii. The Second part, which is of middle type, nourishes the ‘Seven Dhatus’ of the body.
- iii. The third part, which actually is the waste material, is thrown out of the body through various passages – such as co2 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 *Prana* which has been named differently depending on its different functions. *Prana* residing in the Heart region is responsible for every intake, so also whatever we eat through mouth travels through the *Annanalika* (Esophagus) up to the navel region which is the region of *Samana* that digests/ assimilates the food. Food after digestion is transformed into *Rasa* which is supplied to the whole body with the help of *Vyana* since *Vyana* is said to move in the whole body. Excretion of waste material is the function of *Apana*. *Udana* 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 ‘*Yuktaharavihara*’ otherwise the same *ahara* may give rise to various disorders:

∇∇□ | ©OCC♥CC●) C□ | "C□C∞CC:*᳚

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. $\forall \Delta \Phi \int c \bullet \int c \square \supset \mid \underline{c} \square c \square \mid c \bullet \int c \square \supset \mid \square c c \square c c \square \tau c \textcircled{R} Z c \square c$
 $\Phi \int c \square \mid \square c \textcircled{R} \tau c \emptyset \exists \exists$ (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- '*Shatam Vihaya 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'

“+⊥□CΥ® | %Φ⊃] □d∞C®◆C® ZC □CC®H]∞□C□CØ”

(Siva SamhitaIII/42).

4. How to eat?

In the context of *Mitahara* 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:

- d. Physical and Mental condition while eating.
- e. Chewing of the food.
- f. Avoid strenuous work soon after meals or take rest after meals.

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 *Prana* responsible for generating energy to digest the consumed food. If this energy is wasted or utilized immediately after meal for some 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 cannot 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. Vasistha, in his Samhita, has recommended the number of mouthfuls depending upon the "Asrama" one is undergoing. A person of *Brahmacarya Asrama* should eat double the quantity recommended for *Grahashta* (the householder) *Asrama* and person of *Grahashta Asrama* should consume double the quantity recommended for *Vanaprastha* or *Sannyasi*. This statement has been made taking into consideration individual's energy requirement and expenditure.

In this context Yogi Carandasa has said $\forall \forall K \subset \lambda \square \subset \subset \subseteq \square \subset \eta \textcircled{R} J \square \subset \subset \bullet J + \subset Y | " \subset + \subset \infty \subset \textcircled{R} \textcircled{R} \textcircled{R}$. 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 Bhagwadgita (B.G.) also.

$\forall \forall \square \subset \subset \tau \square \subset \clubsuit \subset | \tau \subset " \tau \subset \lambda \square \subset \subset \textcircled{R} O \subset \subset \textcircled{R} \% \nabla " \tau \subset \square \subset Z \subset (\Phi \int \subset \square \subset \clubsuit \subset | \tau$
 $\subset : \textcircled{R} \textcircled{R}$ (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; Gita has recommended 'Yuktaharavihara'. Gheranda Samhita and Hatha Pradipika have described the same under the concept of '**Mitahara**' (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 vayu.

$+ \square \subset \textcircled{R} \square \subset \square \subset \leftarrow \square | \square \subset \textcircled{R} \zeta \int \square \subset \supseteq \tau \subset \subset \textcircled{R} \square \subset \textcircled{R} \square \subset \tau \subset \lambda \tau \subset \downarrow \tau \subset$
 $\prod \square \subset \Phi \int \square \subset \emptyset *$
 $= \zeta \int \square | " \square \subset \tau \subset \lambda \square | \prod \square \subset \subset \diamond \subset \subset " \subset \subset \square | K \subset \textcircled{R} \square \int \subset \square \subset \lambda Z \subset \subset \square$
 $| \sigma \subset \textcircled{R} **$ (Gh. S. V/22)

The need for unobstructed flow of *vayu* 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 the 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 (*Gun*s i.e. *sattva-raj*s-*tamas*). These *Gun*s differ in their nature.

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

सत्त्वो रजसो तमोऽस्ति त्रैविध्यं गुणेषु
सत्त्वं शुद्धं रजसो मलिनं तमोः कृच्छ्रं च
सत्त्वं सत्त्वो रजसो तमोः त्रैविध्यं
सत्त्वं शुद्धं रजसो मलिनं तमोः कृच्छ्रं च

सत्त्वं शुद्धं रजसो मलिनं तमोः कृच्छ्रं च

© शुद्धं रजसो मलिनं तमोः कृच्छ्रं च (Sankhya Karika 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 Guna*" is the indicator of purity, creativity and bliss. *Rajoguna* 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 *Gun*s 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 *Guna* in the object. Thus, on the basis of the dominance of *Gun*as, the objects are either *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* or *Tamasika*. Similarly on the basis of three *Gun*as, the food items as well as the consumers are also classified as *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* or *Tamasika* –

+□cΛ□]-
 cD "cτ∞c"cd□cΛH]□c□cΛ□cΠ□ccZ.: | □cccξ]c□c:
 Φ]c□cccξ]c□c: □ | c̄c® □cΛHb] Φ |]c®□ccc(τc□c"cc □
 cΛτc□c∅* (Srimadbhagavata purana 11/25-9)

Those who have control over sense organs are called *Sattvika*, those who are indulged in the enjoyment of the world are *Rajasika* whereas the persons having anger, greed etc. should be identified as *Tamasika*. In *Bhagawad Gita*, the three types of food have been described in following manner :

"cc∇τ∞cΦ] +c•) c□ | - +c□cΛ: "cτ∞c□cΥ | c□ | c®O□cd " cΛΛc□c└Πcτcξ∞c∞c□c≥□cc:*
 □ | "□cc: cxcO□cc: ∇"ψc□ | c §)□c +c•) c□ | c " cc∇τ∞cΦ]c□c└□cc:** (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 *Sattvika* quality.

□ | c c̄c" cΦ] +c•) c□ | - Φ]κJ □Υ | Υ | ∞cσccτ□cΛ- σcτcΠKσc□) Kc c∞cξ]cξ•) □c:*
 +c•) c□ | c□ | c c̄" c" □c® → J c ζΛ]Λc: ◆ccc®Φ]□ c□c□c└ζ]c:** (B.G. xvii/9)

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

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 Hathapradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Yogopanishad, Vasistha Samhita – 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 *Hathapradipika* and Gheranda Samhita is being presented in brief.

i) Wholesome food:

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

Wholesome food –

○○○Ⓜ○←○◆○○○Υ | ○○∞○
○○→J Φ | ◆○○Ⓜ○○○○○ KcΠ | ○̄cΛcσv | ○○∞○○○Πτc
○"cτcc○○←○ *
◆cλσλ)Π ○cηJ cⓂΥ | Φ|○Υ | c○ζ]Φ] ○cφc◆ccΦ] ○cλ{]c○
ζ]cζ]∞○○cλζ]Φ] Zc ○c○○Π○○]○cψ○○c∅** (H.P. 1/62)

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

In *Gheranda Samhita* we find –

◆ $\text{CC} \square \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \rightarrow \text{J} \infty \text{CC} \tau \text{C} \psi \text{CC} \text{O} \text{CC} \text{R} \square \text{C} \leftarrow \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \rightarrow$
 $\text{J} \Phi \square \text{C} \emptyset^*$

$\square \text{C} \wedge \{ \text{D} \} \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{C} \text{Z} \text{C} \sigma \text{C} \Phi \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \zeta \square \text{C} \} \text{C} \wedge \square \text{C} \text{D} \text{C} \text{Z} \text{C} \tau \text{C} \wedge \text{C} \infty \text{C} \notin \bar{\text{C}} \tau \text{C} \square \text{C} \emptyset^{**}$

$\square \text{C} \eta \text{J} \text{C} \text{R} \text{Y} \text{D} \mid \text{"C} \wedge \square \mid \sigma \text{C} \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \square \text{C} \Phi \square \Gamma \square \text{C} \text{R} \text{Y} \text{D} \mid \text{Z} \text{C} \text{C} \wedge \Phi \square \text{C} \text{C} \Phi \square$
 $\square \text{C} \emptyset^*$

$\square \square \text{C} \square \theta \text{J} \Phi \square \text{C} \square \Phi \square \Phi \square \eta \text{J} \sqrt{\square} \square \square \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{D} \vee \wedge \square \square \text{C} \square \mid \vee \Phi \square \sigma \eta \text{J} \Phi \square \sigma \eta \text{J} \Phi \square \square \text{C}$
 \emptyset^{**}

$+ \text{C} \square \text{C} \square \mid \square \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{D} \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{Y} \mid \square \mid \square \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{D} \square \mid \square \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{D} \zeta \square \text{C} \sigma \text{V} \text{D} \mid \text{Z} \text{C} \square \text{C} \leftarrow \text{Y} \mid \Phi \square$
 $\square \text{C} \emptyset^*$

$\infty \text{CC} \tau \text{C} \text{C} \square \Phi \square \sqrt{\square} \square \text{C} \leftarrow \text{Y} \mid \Phi \text{D} \square \ni \epsilon \square \square \square \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{R} \text{O} \text{C} \Pi \square \text{C} \text{K} \text{C} \sigma \text{C} \square \text{C} \text{C} \text{Z} \text{C} \square \text{R}$
 $\mid \tau \text{C} \emptyset^*$

$\square \text{C} \text{C} \text{Y} \mid \text{C} \text{C} \Phi \text{D} \square \Phi \square \text{C} \text{Y} \mid \text{C} \text{C} \Phi \text{D} \square \tau \text{C} \psi \text{CC} \square \text{C} \eta \text{J} \text{C} \text{R} \text{Y} \mid \square \text{C} \omega \text{C} \Phi \square \square \text{C}$
 \emptyset^*

$\square \text{C} \phi \text{C} \text{C} \text{C} \Phi \text{D} \square \square \text{C} \text{D} \text{C} \text{C} \text{"C} \Pi \square \text{C} \text{C} \square \square \text{C} \text{"} \tau \text{C} \leftarrow \Phi \text{D} \square \square \text{C} \bullet \square \text{C} \text{Y} \text{C} \text{R} \square \text{C} \text{Z} \text{C} \Phi \square$
 $\text{C} \square \text{C} \emptyset^{**} \text{ (Gh.S. V/17-20)}$

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 *patola*, *surana*, *mana*, *kakkola*, *sukasaka*, *dradhika*, *karkati*, *ramba*, *dumbari*, *kantakantaka*, *amarambha*, *balaramba*, *rambhadanda*, *muklaka*, *vartaki* and *riddhi*. He may eat the five recommended leafy vegetables viz. *balasaka*, *kalasaka*, *patola* *patraka*, *vastuka* and *himalocika*.

+CΞζ] (i. e. etc.) in the verse of H.P. refers to fresh butter, ghee, milk, sugar cane, jaggery, banana, coconut, grapes, clove, cardamom, *dhatri*, *rasa*, nutmeg, apple, *jambala*, *harda* which are also said to be wholesome.

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

Υ | ΘCΛΠCCΦ] εΠCΠCC εXCOC τCψCC ΠCCτCΛΠCΠC
CC®CσCΠCØ*

ΠCΠCC®εΠCΥ | ε-

CTC ΠCC®OC ΠCC®OCΠ ΠCC® CΠCΠCCZC® | τCØ** (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 Hathapradipika also says –

ΠCΛ→J "CΛΠCΠCΛΠC | εXCOC OC∞C ΠCCτCΛΠCΠC®
CσCΠCØ*

ΠCΠCC®εΠCΥ | ε-

CTC ΠCC®OC ΠCC®OCΠ ΠCC® CΠCΠCCZC® | τCØ** (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 Hathapradipika –

Φ]κ] ΠΥ | τCΠKσCΥ∞CσCC®σC•] ΠτC♦CCΦ],

"CC(∞CΠΠ | τC(Υ | ετCΥ | "CCεΠCΠCΠCτ"ΠCCΠCØ*

+c ḡccḡḡ]ḡccḡ"ccḡ]ḡccḡτccΦ|]Φλ]γ | τψccΦ]cḡγ | ,

ḡccσḡccΦ]ḡ•]Ω↔ (γ | ♦ccλḡccḡḡccḡccψḡccḡcc•λ) :** (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, asafetida, garlic etc. are said to be unwholesome for a Hathayogi.

According to Gheranda Samhita –

Φ]κ] ḡγḡ | γ | ∞ccσccḡ τccHḡ] ḡcc↓→ḡ] Zc ḡ]ḡcc τccΦ|]Φ]

ḡccØ *

♦ccΦ]cḡτΦ]ηḡ] τccψcc ḡcc τccγḡ | Zc ḡccḡ"ccḡ τccψ

cc**

Φλ]γ | τψcc ḡcc"ccλḡḡ | ḡccσvλḡ | Φ←]–

ḡccσvḡ | ♦ccΦ] ḡ]σv |Φ]ḡccØ*

τccλḡḡccπ Φ]cḡγ | Φ]ḡccτψcc Zc Φ]ση] ḡccḡ∞ccḡ ḡccγ |

c♦ccΦ]ḡccØ**

Φ]ḡ]ḡḡcc ḡḡḡccπḡḡ | ḡccḡḡccḡ γ | Φλ]Zcc γ | ♦ccλḡccḡ

ḡ∞ccḡccØ*

Φ]cḡcc |Ωḡ (ḡccḡccγḡ | Zc ḡ•]Ω↔ (♦ccḡḡccḡ | Φḡ]

ḡccλΦ]ḡccØ** (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*, *pandu*, *kusmanda*, vegetable

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 Ayurveda 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 *Sattvika* type of food since Gita (XVII/8) and other Yoga texts as mentioned above "◆CΛ□D] "CΛ□C□CΛ□D |" (Sweet), "C×C O□C D" (unctuous) etc. Similarly the type of *ahara* declared by Gita as *Rajasika* and *Tamasika* have been condemned or considered non-conducive because of their *Rajasika* or *Tamasika* properties, Yoga has also considered them non-conducive in the context of *Mitahara*.

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

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

In *Gheranda Samhita* – we do find :

+□C®□C □C←□ |□C®ζ]□C≥ τCC®□C®□C τCΛ τC↓τCΠ□CΦ
 ∫□CØ*
 =ζ]□ |"□C τCΛ□ |Π□CCD◆CD "CD□ |K C®□]C□CΛZCC□ |σC®

**** (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 *vayu* – 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 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 *Mitahara* like "C◆C∞C" CD□C└Πτ□C/" (offered to Almighty) (H.P. I/58) τCψCC ∇"CΛ□ |"CD□C└Πτ□CCε (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 Shri Krishna himself has said in Gita –

"+•) ∞(↔CC□C□ |C® □C←τ∞CC □C└CC⊆σC□CCD ζ®]•) □CC⊆
 ←CTC:*" (B.G. XV/14) i.e. "I, abiding in the body of all living beings as *Vaishvanara* associated with *Prana* and *Apana* – digest the four kinds of food". One should eat by surrendering oneself to That Ultimate Controller otherwise

"+•) Φ]C□ |⊆∞C□C←θ)CT□CC Φ]υCCD%]•⊆□CC⊆τC □C□□CTC®"

(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

"∞C"CA□C(∞C Φ∧]η∧] □□CΦ]□CØ"

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

- a. Observance of long list of Wholesome and Unwholesome food.
- b. One fourth of the stomach to be kept free.
- c. Purity and Cleanliness
- d. Sweet and unctuous foodstuffs
- e. Easy digestible
- f. 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 *Ahara* is necessary be followed before stepping into the practice of *Pranayama* since it is useful till *Prana* flows through *ida* and *pingala*. Once the Yogi successfully attains the purpose of *Pranayama* i.e. his *Prana* starts flowing through *Susumna* 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 *ahara* till the *sadhaka* attains perfection in *Pranayama*.

7. Effect of food on mind:

During the discussion on the word *ahara* 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.

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।
 अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

Chandogyopanisad 7-26-2)

i.e. on purity of food depends purity of (three) 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.

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

“अहोरात्रं च भोजनं च तृणं च चण्डालोऽपि भुञ्जते ।”

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".

- a. What is the source of food – Pure or Impure?
- b. With what mental attitude it has been cooked.
- c. With what mental attitude it is consumed
- d. Are we eating to live or living to eat?
- e. 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 *ahara* (food):

- a. ĒHĒRA (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 ĒHĒRA and therefore, food has been recommended on the basis of its source and effects.
- b. Food is at the base of our morality thus this concept has also been associated with values like *Ahimsa*, (non-injury) *satya* (a man of faith) etc. therefore, *Yuktihjra -vihjra & Mitahjra* have been recommended.
- c. Food has also been classified on the basis of Tri-gunas and has been identified as *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* or *Tamasika*. Out of these *Sattvika* food has been recommended whereas *Rajasika* and *Tamasika* have been prohibited.
- d. Method of eating - e.g. when to eat, how to eat, quality, quantity, attitude of mind during meal have been given sufficient thought.
- e. Food is not merely a physical substance rather it has been accepted as one of the important contributors towards shaping personality as a whole.
- f. One fourth of each meal should contain **living food** - fruits, green vegetables, sprouts, etc

When written Author was Head, Philosophico-Literary Research Department, Kaivalyadhama S.M.Y.M. Samiti, Lonavala, Maharashtra, INDIA.

Bibliography:

1. Sarvananda, Swami (1982) *Taitriyopanishad*, Shriramkrishna Math, Malapore, Madras.
2. Svahananda, Swami (1984, 6th Edition), *Chandopanishad*, Shriramkrishna Math, Malapore, Madras.
3. Digambarji, Swami & Kokaje Ragunatha Shastri (1998, second Edition) *Hatha Pradipika*, Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla – 410 403
4. Digambarji, Swami; Dr. Gharote, M.L. (1999, 2nd Edition), *Gheranda Samhita*, Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla – 410 403
5. Maheshananda, Swami; Dr. Sharma, B.R.; Sahay, G.S.; Bodhe, R.K. (2005, Revised Edition), *Vasistha Samhita*, Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla – 410 403

6. Sant Charandasa, *Ashtanga Yoga*, Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla – 410 403
7. Chidbhavananda, Swami (1984) *Shrimad Bhagvat Gita*, Shriramkrishna Tapovanam, Tirupparaitturai, Tiruchirappalli
8. Suryanarayana Shastri, S.S. (1984) *Samkhyakarika*, University of Madras, Madras
9. Chidananda Sarasvati Swami, (1984, 2nd Edition), *Shrimadbhagvatpurana*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Powai Park Krive, Mumbai.
10. Shastri Mahadev A. (1968, Revised Edition), *Yogopanishad*, Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras-20