

Review



A critical appraisal on dynamic interrelationship of *Ahara* and *Agni*

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: In *Taittiriya Upanishad* it is written that *purush* (living beings) are evolved from *anna*. *Anna* (food) acts as *prana* in living being. *Ahara* (food) is the prime cause for the formation of the body as well as for manifestation of disease. *Ahara* is transformed to body entities by action of *agni*. Proper function of *agni* – *jarana shakti* of an individual primarily depends on quality and quantity of ingested food – *abhyavaharan shakti*. So it clears that between *ahara* and *agni* there is a relation. **Materials and Methods:** The references related to *ahara* and *agni* has been searched and collected from Ayurvedic texts, different indexed journals, research articles etc. The references mainly related with correlations between *ahara*, *agni* have been studied, critically analyzed. **Description:** Properly ingested *ahara* get transformed *ahara rasa* and subsequently different bio entities like *bala* (strength), *varna* (complexion), *ojas*, *sausvarya* (prominent voice) etc. by proper action of *agni*. The intake capacity of *ahara* of an individual is termed as *abhyvahanana shakti* which also follows different dietetic rules and regulations. *Agni* of an individual – *jaran shakti* should be proportionate to *abhyavaharana shakti* of an individual. **Discussion:** *Agni* acts at three level- *jatharagni*, *dhvatagni* and *bhutagni*. Among these *jathagni* is the prime one and controls others. If *abhyvahanana shakti* is greater than *jarana shakti*, this condition leads to various *ama pradoshaja* diseases and the reverse situation leads to various *dhatu kshayaja* (due to depleted state of *dhatu*s) diseases. Balanced proportion between *abhyvahanana shakti* and *jarana shakti* helps in maintaining health otherwise lead to diseases. *Ahara* acts as fuel for *agni*. Without *agni*, *ahara* should not be transformed to its subsequent products and without *ahara*, *agni* cannot be sustained. **Conclusion:** *Ahara* and *agni* are interrelated. Balanced condition between these two should be maintained.

KEYWORDS: *Ahara*, *agni*, *abhyavaharanashakti*, *jaran shakti*, *disease*, *health*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The body and disease both are resultant of *ahara*. The happiness and sorrow result from the wholesome and unwholesome diet. [1] Comprehending the significance of *ahara*, *Acharya Kashyapa* regarded *ahara* as first line of treatment. [2] *Ahara* should be consumed as per *agnibala*. [3] *Ahara* is the main source of *bala* (strength). The maintenance of body function and replenishment of worn out *dhatu*s (tissue) depends on *ahara*. By improving the declined *dhatu*s and by pacifying the *dosha prakopa* (vitiation of *doshas*) status, *ahara* improves the status of *bala*. *Ahara* constitutes one *upasthambha* (pillar) of the tripod of health. [4] *Ahara* or *anna-rasa* has basic relation with *purusha* (living being).

In *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Brahmananda Valli*, *Anuvaka 1*; the evolution of *purusha* had been described from philosophical point of view. [5]

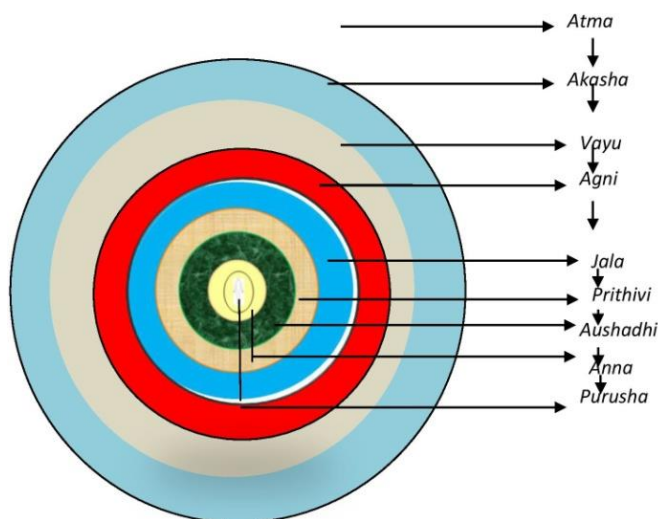


Fig no.1. The evolution of *purusha* as per *taittiriya upanishad*.

Here the transformation of the unmanifest *atma* (soul/ consciousness) into the manifest *purusha* is described in a very systemic and sequential order. In this sequence from the *atma*, *akasha* (space) is unfolded first, then from *akasha*, *vayu* (air) is evolved; then from *vayu*, *agni* (fire/transforming agent) is originated; and then from *agni*, *apa* (water) is emerged, subsequently from *apa*, *prithivi* (earth) is proceeded.

Following that *aushadhi* (herbs) is emerged from *prithivi*, then from *prithivi*, *anna* (food) is proceeded, and finally in this systematic descent of creation *purusha* is manifested.

In such way *purusha* is regarded as to be formed from *anna* and more precisely it is said that *purusha* is composed of *annarasa* (essence of food). This establishes the direct relationship of *ahara* and human being. *Acharya Charaka* described that *bala* and *ayu* (life) depends on *ahara*. [6] *Acharya Sushruta* emphasized that *ahara* is responsible for *pinana* (nourishment) of body. It produces *sadya balakrit* [instant strength], *dharaka* (support body), *ayu vardhaka* (increases life span), *tejah vardhaka* (increases lusture), *agni vardhaka* (increase status of *agni*), as well as *smriti vardhaka* (mental activities like memory power) etc. [7] In *ShrimadaBhagavata Gita*, it is mentioned that *satvika ahara* (pure food) promotes *pushti* (nourishment), *bala* (strength) *arogya* (absence of diseases), *sukha* (happiness) and *priti* (affection) etc. [8] *Ahara* is the factor, which sustains and supports the *deha dhatu*s, *ojas* (excellent part of tissue), *bala*, and complexion. [9]

Acharya Charaka had mentioned that human body and disease both are produced from *ahara*. [10] If *ahara* is *hitahara* (wholesome diet) then it will lead to *arogya* (disease free state) and vice versa. [11] *Hita* (wholesomeness) and *ahita* (unwholesomeness) of *ahara* mainly depends on its application as per *matra* (dose), *kala* (time of administration), *kriya* (function), *bhumi* (place), *deha* (body constitution), *dosha* (different vitiating state of body elements) and *purush* (the uniqueness of the individual). [12]

Many references are available in classics showing the dignity of *ahara*. Many research works had been published on *ahara* and *agni*. Among these, one article entitled 'Concept of *Ahara Parinaman in View of Agni – A Physiological and Anatomical Review*' was found closer to the present study. [13] However, the emphasis in that article was primarily focused *Agni Sthana* (location of *agni*) and *Ahara Paka* (different stages of digestion and metabolism) from a different analytical approach.

Aharamatra (capacity of diet intake) is depends on *agnibala* as well as quality of *ahara*. [14] *Agni* acts as a transforming agent. All *dravyas* (things) are made up of *pancha mahabhuta*. [15] *Ahara* is *panchabhautika* as well as *purusha* (human beings) is comprised of *pancha mahabhuta*. The basic differences among different types of *panchabhautika dravyas* are difference among ratio and configuration of these *pancha mahabhuta*. The non-homogenous substances transformed to homogenous one through proper action of *agni*. *Agni* acts at three levels in human being – *jatharagni*, *dhatvagni* and *bhutagni*. *Jatharagni* acts on

panchabhautic ahara and as a result *ahara rasa* is produced then this *ahara rasa* is subjected for further subsequent transformations by *dhatvagnis* and consequently *sapta dhatus* and their by-products are produced in an orderly manner. *Bhutagni* acts at very minute level. So, the intake of *ahara* should be proportionate to the individual's *agni* status to ensure its proper transformation and utilization. Otherwise this will lead to abnormalities or diseases. Intake capacity of *ahara* of an individual is called *abhyavaharana shakti* and proper transformation (digestion and metabolism) of ingested food is termed as *jarana shakti* in *Ayurveda*. In context to *dashavidha aturapariksha* (tenfold examination of patient), *Acharya Charaka* said that *ahara shakti* should be examined in respect of *abhyavaharanashakti* and *jaranashakti*. [16]

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The points related to *ahara* and *agni* in have been primarily searched from *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Ashtanga Samgrha*, *Kashyapa Samhita* and other classical texts.

In addition, modern medical books, different indexed journals, research articles, medical manuals and magazines were searched and analyzed. Various e-books and electronic literature also thoroughly searched.

In this present study special emphasis has been given to find out the inter-relationship between *agni* and *ahara*. The data mainly related with interdependence of *ahara* and *agni* have been critically analyzed. Then the scrutinized outcome, logically rearranged to find the factual co-relation between *ahara* and *agni*.

3. DESCRIPTION

In *Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmananda Valli, Anuvaka 1* ; it is said that living creatures are originated from *anna*. *Acharya Charaka* said that *anna* acts as *prana* for all living creatures. [17] So, it is clear that human being depends on *anna* for their existence, sustenance and maintenance. Apart from this, *varna* (complexion), *prasada* (cheerfulness), *sausvarya* (good voice), *jivita* (continuity of life), *pratibha* (thoughts), *sukha* (happiness), *tushti* (contentment), *pushti* (corpulence), *bala* (strength), *medha* (intellect) etc.-all these depend on *anna*. *Acharaya Charaka* had accentuated the value of *anna* from *laukika karma* (worldly activities done for livelihood,) up to the *apavarga* (ultimate liberation. [18] He gave importance to rational and irrational intake of *anna* for continuation and cessation of life. [19] *Agni* is key factor for transformation of these *panchabhautika ahara*. *Ahara* acts as fuel for functioning of *agni*. [20] So, intake of *ahara* and *agni* of an individual should be proportionate and balance to each other. Any mismatch between these two leads to disease. *Acharya Charaka* had mentioned the right technique for assessment of (i) intake capacity of *ahara* of an individual – *abhyavaharana shakti* and (ii) status of *agni* of an individual - *Jarana shakti* under the section of *ahara shaktitah pariksha*, which is an important component of *dashavidha atura pariksha*.

Abhyavaharana shakti:

Abhyavaharana shakti mainly denotes the quality and quantity of diet, which is to be ingested. Intake of *ahara* must always be sufficient to supply the metabolic needs of the body and yet not so much as to cause abnormality in *dhatu*s. Different *ahara* contains

different proportion of *rasas, gunas*, etc. Appropriate balance must be maintained among these qualities. So that all segments of body can be supplied with the requisite material, which rebuilds that worn out systems and nourishes the *dhatu*s, maintains the equilibrium of the body constituents. Proper and wholesome *ahara* maintains of health, on the other hand improper or unwholesome *ahara* causes disease. An ideal *ahara* not only nourishes the body but also nourishes mind. Hence qualities of mind are also influenced by type of consumed *ahara*. *Acharya Sushruta* stated that one who consumes *ahara* having antagonistic property with no self-control is liable for bodily ailments, mental weakness or even premature death. [21]

According to Ayurvedic science intake of *ahara* is regulated by *ahara* properties as well as by status of *agni* and mind of the individual.

Ahara properties i.e. wholesomeness, quality and quantity of *ahara* etc. are mainly related to *ashta vidha ahara vidhi visheshayatana* (eight rules for dietary intake) and *ahara vidhi vidhana* (rules of diet intake). For example *prakriti* (nature), *karana* (modification) etc. are the important factors of *ashta vidha ahara vidhi vesheshayatana* to regulate *abhyavaharana shakti*.

Prakriti : *Prakriti* of diet that is *guruta, laghuta, murtata, dravata* have great role in modifying *abhyavaharana matra*. [22, 23]

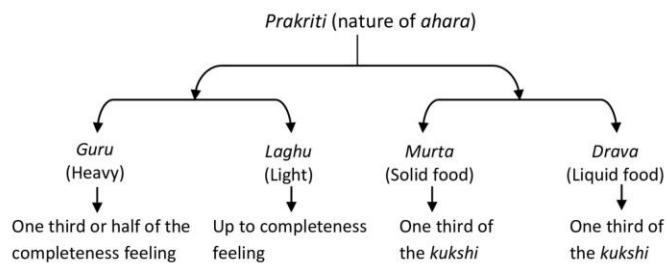


Fig 2: Flow chart on *ahara prakriti* and *abhyavaharana matra*

Karana (processing of diet): By means of *samskara* (processing) one may introduce several additional useful properties in the *ahara*. That will be helpful to increase nutritional value without increasing its quantity.

Samyoga (combination), *rashi* (amount), *desha* (place), *kala* (time) etc. also to some extent regulate *abhyavaharana shakti*.

According to modern physiology, intake of food is mainly regulated by hunger, appetite and satiety.

Hunger:

The term hunger means a craving for food and it is associated with a number of objective sensations. It is a physiological need for food, triggered by signals such as low blood glucose levels, empty stomach, and hormonal signals (e.g., ghrelin). For instance, a person who has not had food for many hours, the stomach undergoes intense rhythmic contraction. These cause tight or gnawing feeling in the pit of stomach and sometime actually cause pain called hunger pain. However, even after the stomach is completely removed, the feeling of hunger still happens. The desire for food continues to drive a person to look for an adequate food supply.

Appetite:

The appetite is often used in the same sense as hunger except that it usually implies desire for specific types of food instead of food in general. Therefore appetite helps

a person choose the quality of food to eat. Appetite is more related with psychological desire.

Satiety:

Satiety of food is opposite of hunger. Satiety usually results from feeling of fullness and the suppression of further eating after a meal. It happens through a complex neuro hormonal pathway.

Nutritional status of the body also controls the *abhyavaharana shakti*.

Jarana shakti:

Jarana shakti means proper digestion and assimilation of *ahara* material. The non-homologous substances transformed to homologues one through proper action of *agni*.

According to its mode of function it can be differentiated as *jatharagni*, *dhatvagni* and *bhutagni*.

Acarya Charaka has mentioned 13 types of *agni*. These are five types of *jatharagni* (digestive enzyme), five types of types of *bhutagni* (enzyme at cellular level), and seven types of *dhatvagni* (enzyme at tissue level). Among these, *jatharagni* is the prime one which regulates other *agnis* of body. Thus it takes part in maintenance of *svasthya* of the individual. Apart from this *dehabala* depend on the *jatharagni bala* and vice versa. In clinical practices assessment of *jatharagni bala* is done usually. Status of *agni* is also inferred through *jarana shakti*. [24]

Acharya Vagbhata mentioned the signs & symptoms of *jirna ahara*. [25] These are

1. *Udagara shuddhi* (normal eructation)
2. *Utsaha* (sense of activeness)

3. *Vegotsargayothocita* (proper evacuation of call of nature)
4. *Laghuta* (feeling of lightness)
5. *Kshut* (proper appetite)
6. *Pipasa* (normal thirst)

Relation between Jatharagni and dosha

There are four states of *agni*. These are as follows [26]

Table 1: Four states of *agni*

<i>Samagni</i>	It is due to equilibrium state of all the <i>doshas</i> and it digests and assimilates the <i>ahara</i> taken in proper amount and time.
<i>Vishamagni</i>	The feature of <i>vishamagni</i> is the inconsistent nature of digestion and assimilation. This inconsistency mainly arises from the predominant <i>vata dosha</i> .
<i>Mandagni</i>	<i>Mandagni</i> is due to predominance of <i>kapha dosha</i> and it fails to digest even <i>ahara</i> taken in proper amount and time.
<i>Tikshnagni</i>	It is due to predominance of <i>pitta dosha</i> and it can digest even the incompatible <i>ahara</i> taken in even in short duration.

Acharya Sushruta had mentioned that *adhmana* (flatulence), *shula* (pain), *udavarta* (upward movement of intestinal air), *atisara* (diarrhoea), *jathara gaurava* (heaviness of abdomen), *antra kujana* (gargling sound of abdomen), *pravahana* (straining at stool passing) are due to *vishamagni*. *Gala*, *talv*, *oshthashosha* and *daha* (drying and burning sensation at throat, palate and lip

area), *santapa* (exhaustion by body heat) are usually seen due to *tikshnagni*; *Udaragaurav* (heaviness of abdomen), *shirah gaurava* (heaviness of head), *kasa* (cough), *shvasa* (dyspnoea), *praseka* (salivation), *chardi* (vomiting), *angasada* (malaise of body) are due to *mandagni*. [27]

In *Ashtanga Hridaya* it is written that *mandagni* is the cause of all diseases in general. [28]

Abhyavaharana shakti and jarana shakti:

Abhyavaharana shakti and *jarana shakti* should be proportionate. So that body will be able to utilize the ingested *ahara* material properly, otherwise it will lead to abnormalities.

If *abhyavaharana shakti* is greater than *jarana shakti* than it will cause improper *ahara paka*, as a result default *ahara rasa (ama)* or less quantity of *ahara rasa* will be produce. Both of this condition will bring imbalance in *dhatu*s as an ultimatum. *Ama anna rasa* (undigested food material) or *apakva ahara* (relatively greater quantity of undigested food) through negative feedback mechanism further diminishes the strength of *jatharagni*. All the other *agnis* i.e. *panchabhautikagni* and *saptadhatvagnis* are sustained by *jathragni* in their performance. Dullness of *jatharagni* subsequently brings imbalance in *bhutagni* and *dhatvagni* level, ultimately leads to total metabolic derangement of body.

If *abhyavaharana shakti* is less than *jarana shakti* then after digesting the *ahara* material *jathragni* starts to digest the *dhatu*s. Progressively, the *dhatu*s get depleted and *doshas* mainly *vayu* become aggravated, ultimately results *dhatu kshayajanya* (diminished state

of tissue) diseases. The reason behind these phenomena is the energy required for maintenance of body is not optimum, results wasting of *dhatu*s. Progressive emaciation of *dhatu*s followed by disease or death.

Apart from these *usnata* (hotness), *snigdhatva* (unctuousness), *varna* (complexion), *gandha*, seasonal variation also exercise their role in *abhyavaharana shakti* and *jarana shakti*. Nutritional status of body mainly depends on *ahara shakti* i.e. *abhyavaharana shakti* and *jarana shakti* both. If both are proportionate then it leads to health and any disproportion in this ratio causes various types of diseases.

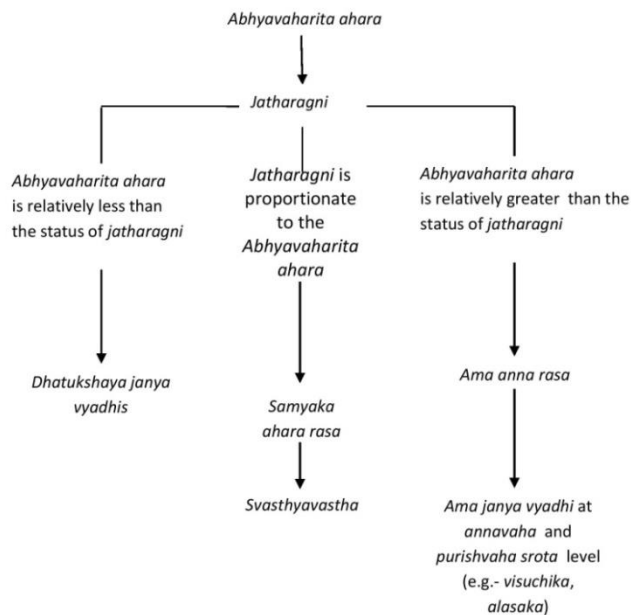


Fig 3: Relation between *abhyavaharana shakti* and *jarana shakti*

Fig.3. *Abhyavaharana shakti* , *jarana shakti* and their relation with health and diseases.

Capacity of ingestion i.e. *abhyavaharana shakti* mainly depends on power of digestion and quality of *ahara*. When *abhyavaharana shakti* is greater than *jarana shakti* it leads various *amaja* disorder at *annavaha* and

purishvaha srota level such as *alasaka*, *visuchika*. Contrarily to these when *jarana shakti* is greater than *abhyavaharana shakti* leads various *dhatu kshaya* disorders. Considering all other situations to maintain proper health *abhyavaharana shakti* will be according to *jarana shakti* of the individual.

Dhatvagni and *bhutagni* are governed by *jatharagni*. Generally if *jatharagni* is functioning in proper way, *dhatvagni* and *bhutagni* do the same and if *jatharagni* is impaired it shows the same reflection at *dhatvagni* and *bhutagni* level.

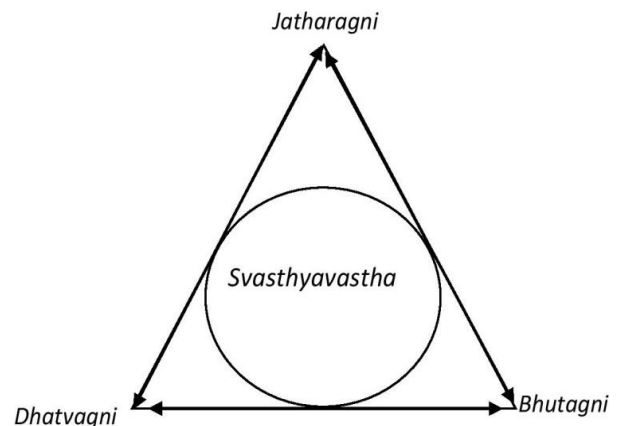


Fig 4: Proper co-ordination among these three *agnis* results *svस्थ्य*

Improper action of *agni* at *jatharagni* level primarily causes *annavaha* and *purishvaha srotaja* disorders. Improper action of *agni* at *dhatvagni* level for example if it is diminished it causes *madhumeha*, *amavata* etc diseases; at if at *bhutagni* level it causes the diseases affecting whole body metabolism.

***Ahara shakti* and *bala* :**

On the basis of *ahara shakti*, individuals can be classified under three categories i.e. *pravara* (excellent), *madhyama* (middle) and *avara* (minimum) *ahara shakti* denoting three different degree of strength.

Pravara ahara shakti: Good qualities of *abhyavaharana* and *jarana shakti* produce maximum strength of the individual.

Madhyama ahara shakti: Moderate strength of *abhyavaharana* and *jarana shakti* or any one of these is relatively deteriorated is classified as moderate strength.

Avara ahara shakti: Minimum strength of *abhyavaharana* and *jarana shakti* or any one of these in relatively deranged to some extent is regarded as minimum strength.

So *ahara shakti* has a great contribution in determining *atura bala*.

Ahara plays an important role in maintaining health and also has a part in preventing and treating diseases. All *Acharyas* dedicated a significant portion of their texts to *ahara*. For example, *Acharya Charaka* emphasized the importance of *ahara matra* in the *Matrashitiya adhyaya* of *Sutra sthana*. He devoted one section to *Annapana vidhi*. The *Rasa vimana adhyaya* discusses *ashtavidha ahara visheshayatana* in detail. In the *Trividha kukshiyaya vimana adhyaya*, the emphasis is on the importance of *ahara matra* and the examination of *ahara shakti* is detailed in the *Rogabhishagajitiya adhyaya*. These sections explore the value of *ahara*, *hitahara*, and *ahitahara*, as well as *pathya* and *apathya* and their outcomes. In the treatment of *roga*, each *roga* has specific *hitahara/pathya* and *ahitahara/apathya* outlined. The same applies to various types of therapeutic applications. For instance, before *vamana karma*, it is advisable to consume *kapha vardhaka ahara*. After

vamana karma, the individual must follow a specialized diet plan.

4. DISCUSSION

In *Taittiriya Upanishad* it is written that from *anna*, *purusha* is evolved. *Acharya Charaka* had mentioned that *anna* acts like *prana* for living beings. The *anna* which nourishes the *deha dhatu*, *ojas*, *bala*, *varna* etc, here *agni* plays important role because nourishment does not produce from *apakva ahara* (undigested food).[29] *Ahara* and *agni* both are mutually co-dependent for continuation of life. Any type of irregularities in *ahara* reflects in status of *agni* and vice versa. To regulate the irregularities of *ahara* *Acharyas* had prescribed different types of dietetic rules. These rules reflect in two dimensions– 1) based on *ahara dravya* – for example, on the nature of *ahara dravya* - determine the intake quantity of that *ahara*; 2) based on different features of the individuals who is consuming *ahara* such as *prakriti*, *agni*, *koshtha*, *kala* etc. *Agni* is the golden key which transforms the non-homogenous substances (*ahara*) to homogenous body substances. Among all types of *agni*, *jatharagni* is the prime one which governs other *agnis*. *Acharya Charaka* had mentioned the assessment intake capacity of food of an individual and status of *agni* of that individual under one broad heading *Ahara shaktitah pariksha*. These are *abhyavaharana shaktitah pariksha* and *jarana shaktitah pariksha*. If *abhyavaharana shakti* is greater than status of *jarana shakti* it will lead to *amaja* disorders and reverse condition will lead to *dhatukshayaja* disorders. *Acharya Charaka* had mentioned that excessive intake of food is the

predominant cause for causing *amadosh*. [30] One should consider *ashtavidha ahara vidhi visheshayatana* - *prakriti* (nature); *karana* (processing of substances); *samayoga* (combinations); *rashi* (quantity); *desha* (habitat); *kala* (time); *upyoga samstha* (dietetic rules); *upayokta* (the individual). The properties of these factors, whether beneficial or harmful, are interdependent. [31] Other than *ashta vidha ahara vidhivisheshayatana*, intake of *ahara* also depends on psychological status, place, time, habit of food intake etc. Nutritional status of body mainly depends on *ahara shakti* i.e. *abhyavaharana shakti* as well as *jarana shakti* both. *Acharya Sushruta* had mentioned *samagni* (equilibrium state of *agni* which transform the ingested food properly) is one of the important factor of *svasthavastha* (healthy state). [32] Dietary plan of an individual should be according to *deha prakriti* of the individual with due consideration to the nature of diet as well as its proper timing, place and presentation. *Ahara* should be change with the seasons; this practice is called *ritusatmya ahara*. *Ahara* should include all six *rasas*. Eating too much of any one *rasa* can lead to health issues. Therefore, it is important to include all six *rasa* in the diet, rather than focusing on just one. Individuals who consume all the *rasas* along with *ghrita kshir* and other beneficial foods will be always *balavan* (strong) and *dirghayushi* (long life). And those who mainly eat *ruksha ahara* and stick to only one *rasa* will tend to be *alpa bala* and *alpayush* (short life). [33]

When wholesome and unwholesome ingredients are eaten together, this mixed food is called *samashana*. If the quantity is too much or too little, or if it is consumed

too early or too late for the appropriate meal time, it is referred to as *vishamashana*. If food is consumed again before the previous meal is digested, it is called *adhyashana*. All three of these types of meals can lead to death or severe diseases. [34]

All diseases are results from abnormality of *agnis*. In any type of therapeutic procedures, before application of *aushadhas*, status of *agni* is assessed for proper function of *aushadhas*.

Considering all other situations to continue proper health, equilibrium status of *agni* should be maintained. For maintenance of *agni* proper *ahara* is essential because it acts as fuel for proper activities of *agni*.

5. CONCLUSION

Taittiriya Upanishad reveals that *purusha* i.e. human body is an outcome of *anna*. *Anna* acts as *prana*. *Agni* is responsible for transforming *ahara* to bodily attributes like *bala*, *ojas*, *varna* etc. Proper functioning of *agni* depends on *ahara* which acts as fuel. Amount of ingested *ahara* should be proportionate of with power of *agni*. *Abhyavaharana shakti* (quality and quantity of ingested diet) as well as *jarana shakti*. (digestive and metabolic capacity of various tissues, organs) should be proportionate. It helps in continuation of healthy state of body. If there is any disproportion between *abhyavaharana shakti* and *jarana shakti* it causes various diseases. *Ahara*, the external substances are transformed to bodily entities by action of *agni*. So, *ahara* and *agni* are mutually dependent.

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