



PRINCIPLES OF YOGIC DIET FOR YOG PRACTITIONERS

Ayurveda

Dr. Roma Suresh Gangawane MD (Swasthavritta and Yog) Ph.D. (Swasthavritta, TMV, Pune), Asst. Prof. Dept. of Swasthavritta and Yog, SSAM, Hadapsar, Pune,

Dr. Yogesh Dhondiram Yelmar MD (Rog Nidan Evam Vikruti Vidyaan), Ph.D. Scholar (Rog Nidan, TMV, Pune).

ABSTRACT

Practicing *Yog* is one of the most beneficial daily regimen, and if this regimen is associated with healthy diet it can bring out astonishing results. Eating appropriate and balanced diet is essential for a *Yog* practitioner. The consumed food influences physical as well as spiritual wellbeing. *Yogic Diet* is a *Satvik Aahar* (diet), a kind of food rich in *Prana* (vitality); which endorses virtue, strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. *Yog* is described as '*Chittavrittinirodha*', the pacification of the mind. *Yog* promotes the use of the *Satvik* diet to support these subtle goals. Valuable guidelines regarding various food components and its intake along with its maximum benefits are quoted as references in classical texts of *Yog* like – *Hathayog Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. The present article is focused to review the principles of *Yogic Diet* mentioned in classical texts and recent researches available on it. The properties of the food articles mentioned like – *Godhuma*, *Yava*, *Shashtik*, *Dugdha*, *Ghruta*, etc and its possible physiological actions on the body of the *Yog* practitioner will be determined. Also the concept of *Hitaahar* (contributive/conductive) and *Mitaahar* (right quantity) will be evaluated in detail.

KEYWORDS

Yogic Diet, Satvik diet, Yog practitioner, Mitaahar

INTRODUCTION:

The foundation for *Yog Abhyas* is a healthy body for a *Yog* Practitioner by which various *Yog kriyas* can be performed. Spiritual development can be achieved with it. In *Yog*, psycho-physiological considerations weigh more in the formulation of a basis for prescription of diet, than mere moral or socio-religious ones. Diet depends on availability of food ingredients and their preparations; as also on climate, age and personal habits. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* it is rightly quoted, 'By the purity of food, one becomes purified in his inner nature.' *Yog* and *Aahar* (appropriate diet) are the two pillars of successful *Yog* practice. Amongst the classification of food into three types i.e. *Satvik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik*, a diet conducive to *Yog* practice and spiritual progress is *Yogic/Satvik* diet.

So the current study is an attempt to put forward the principles of *Yogic* diets the properties of food articles mentioned in *Hathayog Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*, along with concept of *Hitaahar* and *Mitaahar*.

Concept of Pathya for Yog Practitioner:

Dharma, *Karma* and *Aatma* are inseparable entities and express itself most where faith (*Vishvasa*), practice suggestion (*Vyanjana*), experience (*Anubhava*) and intuition (*Pratibha*) converge our general analytic triangle – *Mana-Anna-Prana* (Mind-Food-Breath). The food thus becomes basis for breath and mind, underscoring an interplay between gross (*Sthula*) and subtle (*Sukshma*) constitutive elements. Similarly applicable to food is the triangle of three basic qualities or constituents of nature (*Satva, Raja* and *Tama*)

In life such triangular qualities (*Trigunas*) swirl within oneself and outside attracting an interaction of food with innate strands (*Gunas*), flaws (*Doshas*), moods (*Bhavas*), aesthetes (*Rasas*) and attachments (*Ragas*).

Food-Breath-Mind triangle can be further deciphered to emphasize the point that cosmological constituents that stand squarely behind food. Breath (*Prana*) via food yields the intellect (*Buddhi*), which in turn works on five sensory organs (*Pancha Dyanendriya*), five organs of action (*Pancha Karmendriya*), five subtle elements (*Pancha Tatva*) and five gross elements (*Pancha Mahabhoot*). All these conceptual and semantic complexities translate into a simple, direct and forceful principle: one should practice self-control via austerities to control the swirl of proceeding triangular constituents of the world (*Trigunatmak Samsara*). For attainment of the ultimate goal, Food becomes the crucial link between finite (body) and infinite (soul). Food and body become souls sheath (*Koshas*) and not other way round. *Yog* practitioners realize this truth, and remind themselves that only their body is perishable, they are not. Since *Atman* alone is real, it is considered capable of creating bodies and the food that it needs.

The notion of diet to be followed by *Yog* practitioner is elaborated by the *Taittiriya Upanishad* as one of soul five sheaths (*Panchakoshas* – *Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vidgyaanomaya* and *Anandamaya* viz. food, breath, mind, intellect and bliss respectively). Though constituting the outermost sheath, food successively transforms itself into the innermost and the subtlest experience-spiritual bliss (*Atmananda*). Each succeeding subtler sheath represents to the *Yog* practitioner a transformation and transcendence of the one before. He experiences how the moral food substance (*Anna*) changes into the rarefied breath, the breath into mind, the mind into still rarer (*Sukshma*) intellect, and the last into bliss (*Ananda*). Precedes, accompanies, closes and envelopes into the universe.

Pathya Aahar in Yog Practitioner:

As per reference from *Hathayog Pradipika* verses 58, 62-63 *Gheranda Samhita Panchamopadesh* verses 16-21; A *Yog* practitioner should eat food prepared from rice, flour of barley and wheat, green gram, black gram, horse gram etc. which should be clean and free from husk. Should consume *Patola, Surana, Mana, Kakkola, Sukasaka, Dradhika, Karkati, Rambha, Dumbari, Kantakantaka, Amarambha, Balarambha, Rambhadanda, Mulaka, Vartaki* and *Riddhi* as well as the five recommended leafy vegetables- *Balasaka, Kalasaka, Patola-Patraka, Vastuka* and *Himalocika*.

The diet should be controlled and adequate (*Mitaahar*) which is pure, (*Shudha*), sweet (*sumadhur*) and unctuous (*Snigdha*) – quantity enough to fill only half the stomach and which is palatable and is eaten to please the soul. One should fill half the stomach with food; one quarter should be reserved for the movement of the air.

A *Yog* practitioner should consume fresh butter, ghee, milk, sugar, sugar-cane, jaggery, ripe plantain, coconut fruit, pomegranate, aniseed, grapes, *Lavali, Dhatri* (myrobalan), cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, *Paurusa*, rose apple, *Jambala, Haritaki* and dates. Similarly should eat food which is easily digestible, agreeable, well lubricated with ghee and which nourishes the elementary substances of the body and which will be pleasing for mind. In the beginning for the practice of *Pranayam* one should take milk and ghee daily and food twice a day, once at noon once in the evening.

Eating sweet and soft food first offered to the universe, leaving one quarter of stomach empty is known as *Mitaahar*. Wheat, rice, barley and *Shashtika* (a special variety of rice), milk, ghee, sugar, butter, sugar candy, honey, dry ginger, *Paravara* (cucumber), the five leafy vegetables and green-gram are considered to be wholesome food for *Yog* practitioner. Also the food to be consumed should be nutritious, sweet and unctuous (soft), products of cow's milk and nourishing food of their own choice suitable for the practice of *Yog*.

The diet should be Conducive (*Hitaahar*) which can be considered as food pleasant to body and mind. Easily digestible, should contain all the six tastes, nutritious and according to season (*Rutu*).

A bland diet comprising of simple vegetable proteins, low in salt content and moderately rich in cereals; lacto-vegetables and fruits that are adequate in minerals and vitamins have been prescribed in a *Yog* practitioner.

Apathya Aahar in Yog Practitioner:

As quoted in *Hathyog Pradipika* verses 59-61 and *Gheranda Samhita Panchamopadesh* verses 22-31 the diet and food articles to be avoided by a *Yog* practitioner in the beginning of *Yogic* practices - bitter, sour, salt, pungent, scorched food-such as curds, buttermilk, heavy vegetables, liquor, palmnuts, jack fruit, *Kulatha*, *Masura*, *Kusmanda*, vegetable stems, gourds, berries, *Kapitha*, *Kanta-Bilva*, *Palaska*, *Kadamba*, *Jambira*, *Bimba*, *Lakucha*, *Lasuna*, lotus – stalk fibres, *Kamarangapiyala*, *Hingu*, *Solmali* and *Kemuka*. Should avoid food that are hard, polluted, putrid, producing heat inside the body, stale, extremely cold and extremely hot. Eating in excess the food which bitter, sour, pungent, salty or hot, oil (mustard and sesame) and consuming alcohol, fish, meat, curds, buttermilk, *Kulatha*, berries, oil-cakes, asafetida, garlic (even in small quantities) are said to be unwholesome. Likewise, foods that are reheated dry and excessively salty, sour are unhealthy, and should be avoided.

Properties of Aaharj Pathya in Yog Practitioner:

1. *Shadrasatmak* food ingredients are mentioned as *Pathya* in the classical texts. Every food item has impact on the awareness thinking and feeling aspect of a person. Food intake due to its calorific value and tissue building nature it becomes important for body functioning. Some dietary contents cause feeling of heaviness in the body while some cause unnecessary stimulation of various desires and urges. In terms of *Yog*, *Satvik Aahar* help a *Yog* Practitioner to develop awareness without excessive stimulation of desires urges, or heaviness in the body.

2. Entire energy requirement of a *Yog* Practitioner is fulfilled with cereals, tubers and fruits. Heavy muscular exertion is avoided by these people, as *Yog* practices are non-strenuous on physical plane. Vegetable proteins look out at repair, wear and tear of body tissues and provide the required minerals and vitamins to the body.

3. Cow's milk (Proteins), butter and ghee (fatty acids) assist in working of the nervous system and sets up it to withstand the heightened activity whenever it takes place.

4. Infections cause intestinal disturbance, hence food items with astringent taste are included which are well-known for their coagulating effects. Aniseed like food items and others having aromatic substances and volatile oils are mild digestants facilitates digestive process without irritating membrane of gastro-intestinal tract.

5. Bulky food stretching intestines or colon due to flatulence giving rise to colic pains, should be avoided, as throughout meditation and suspended breathing it is felt that the nervous system loses its contact with the periphery in respect to food in gastrointestinal tract.

6. Diet inclusive of irritating factors in the form of salt, condiments, and wines, smoking and eating very hot and cold food items should be avoided, as internal stimulation of nervous system is affected. Rock salt, rich in potassium can be incorporated as it has tranquillizing effect on the nervous system.

7. Meat, eggs and fish *Dravyas* from *Mamsa varga* should be forbidden, due to its high sodium content can stimulate and irritate the nervous system. It influences *Yog* Practitioner who is sensitive, hyper-reactive and delicate at certain stages of practices. It influences the overall feeling, thinking, individual in a subtler way and becomes unsuited with the strength of *Yog*.

DISCUSSION:

Yoga deals with the realization of oneself through the '*Niras*' or '*Nirodh*' of *Chitta* i.e. complete cessation of various disturbances and turbulences of mind and consciousness. It is, therefore, a subject type of an experimental science, at and philosophy. ⁸Sensory inputs from numerous objects through the five sense of organs and systems of the

body disturb us in many ways in the form of stimulation irritations etc. in terminology of *Yog* disturbed awareness of this type is called '*Vyutthita Chitta*' and through proper diet, physical activities, attitude of life and thinking one is expected to reduce this state of disturbed awareness and experiences a state of equilibrium or undisturbed awareness termed as '*Samhitha Chitta*'.

Food ingredients can be classified into three types:

1. *Satvik* food purifies the body, calms the mind, and makes one feel energetic and enthusiastic.
2. *Rajasik* food stimulates body and mind, excites passions, can cause hyperactivity, restless, anger, irritability and sleeplessness.
3. *Tamasik* food makes dull, lethargic, drowsy, brings confusion and disorientation.

So the food consumed if is *Satvik* in nature can help in gaining stability to mind and body, while doing *Asana*, *Pranayam* or meditation. Unlike *Rajasik* or *Tamasik* food *Satvik* diet enhances the stability which ultimately helps in attainment of the goal of the *Yog* Practitioner.

Discussion on Physiological aspect :

The smooth muscles of the digestive organs are not working under our will. Major autonomic nerves of the gastrointestinal tract (GIT) is the Vagus nerve which sends branches to the stomach, small intestine and upper portion of the large intestine. The nerve is composed of efferent parasympathetic fibers from the receptors and nerve plexuses in the GIT wall. Sympathetic nerve fibers are also supplied to the GIT. In short, the smooth muscles and exocrine (digestive) glands are directly influenced by autonomic nerves, the internal nerve plexus and the hormones secreted by GIT itself. Gastrointestinal receptors initiate reflexes and the information is thus conveyed to the central nervous system (CNS). Short reflexes convey self-regulation in the tract. Strong reflexes however bring CNS into action. For example, sight of food initiates reflex which involves CNS. Complex behavioral changes like emotions influence upon GIT through CNS.

Visceroreceptors are stimulated due to sensations. When they are stimulated, they send sensory impulses to the CNS. Hunger and appetite are such sensations which come from the stomach. The appetite centre lies in the lateral hypothalamus which can increase the food intake. The medial hypothalamus contains satiety centre. When this centre is stimulated, food intake is inhibited. *Satvik* diet which when consumed in form of *Hitaahar* and *Mitaahar* not only controls these centers but also helps the *Yog* Practitioner in blissful attainment.

Emotional status of individual while having food also influences health. Food should be fresh, having pleasant smell and good taste. Balanced diet with proper quantity of food at right time is important. Overeating leads to lethargy while under eating does not provide sufficient nourishment. Therefore it is important to eat right food at regular intervals. Also the state of mind of person cooking and eating also affects food. Hence, for maximum benefit *Yog* practitioner should combine *Satvik* diet with *Asana*, *Pranayam* and meditation to create positive energy as *Aahar* contains *Prana* in it.

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