

**AHARA RASA UNVEILED – TRANSFORMATION TO THE FINEST**Varghese Jibi Thankachan¹, Vaishali Deshpande², Manna Mathew³, Sreelakshmi S⁴

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**ABSTRACT**

Ahara (food) is considered to be *Mahabhaishajya* or *Sarvabhaishajya* (best medicine) in Ayurveda and is also considered to be one among *Trayopasthamba* (3 pillars of life). A *Sampoornaahara* (balanced diet) should contain all the essential nutrients for the proper growth of the body and mind. *Ahara* (food) does the *Poshana* (nourishment) of the *Dhatus* (body tissues) and food is constantly required after birth for the repair of impaired *dhatu*s (body tissues) and build up new *Dhatus* (tissues) of excellent quality for good sustainability of quality life. Inappropriate food or faulty food habits can lead to many diseases ranging from a simple skin disease which reflects the improper *Rasa dhatu* (rasa tissue) to incurable disease of that of Infertility reflecting *Shukradhatu*. (Defective sperm)

Keywords: *Ahara Rasa; Shukra; Dhatuposhana; Infertility; Taste; Pathya;*

INTRODUCTION

Ahara rasa (food essence) production begins with digestion after the process of *Jatharagni* (digestive fire). This *Rasa Dhatu* (tissue) further nourishes the *Uttarotardhatu* (consecutive dhatus) till *Shukradhatu* (sperm tissue), which later reflects as *Garbha* (foetus) being the nutrient fraction of *Shukra* (sperm). This *Dhatuposhana* (nourishment of dhatus) starts from *Garbhavastha* (stage of the foetus) where the *Ahara* (food) consumed by the mother produces *Ahara rasa* (food essence) which nourishes the *Garbha* (foetus) and gets a proper formation of organs with all the *Saptadhatu* (seven tissues). The theories of *Dhatuposhana* (nourishment of dhatus) are mentioned in the classics as *Ksheeradadhinyaya* (Law of Transformation), *Kedarikulyanyaya* (Law of Transmission), *KhaleKapotnyaya* (Law of Selection).

Rasadraktamtatomamsammamsammedatatoasthi ca

Asthanomajjatatashukramshukratgarbhaprasaada-ja || (1)..... Ch. Chi 15/16

A *sampoornaahara* (balanced diet) should have all the essential nutrients for proper growth. No single food or single *Ahara rasa* (food essence) will provide all essential nutrients for sustaining life. It may result in poor physical and mental health. Overeating of a single food or *Ahara Rasa* (Taste) may lead to different disease conditions also.

Aim & Objective

1. To emphasize and discuss the concept of *Ahararasa* in Ayurvedic classical literature.
2. To emphasize the importance of *Ahararasa* in the process of digestion.

Materials And Methods

This is a review article wherein references of *Ahara rasa*, *Dhatu Utpatti* (Nourishment of dhatus) have been compiled, analysed and discussed for an in-depth understanding of *Ahara Rasa* and its importance in sustaining a healthy life.

The Six tastes in Ayurveda

Ahara Rasa is the essence of life and affects every aspect of our existence- from structure to physiology, straight through our overall state of mind and con-

sciousness. It can be considered a powerful therapeutic tool that ultimately determines the overall flavour of our existence. In the ayurvedic tradition, there is an immense significance of *Rasa* (taste). Ayurveda recognizes six tastes and is termed as *Shadrasa*, viz *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), and *Kashaya* (astringent). Each of these has a role to play in our health and wellbeing.

Properties of Shadrasa:

Madhura (Sweet) - It builds all *Saptadhatu* (seven tissues) in the body. Apart from giving strength and immunity to the body, it improves complexion, soothes the sense organs and mind and thus increases life expectancy.

Amla (Sour)- This rasa induces appetite and acts as a heart tonic by regulating the function of the heart. It is also good for the digestive system as it increases the digestive *Agni* (digestive fire) through its *Deepana* (kindling fire), *Pachana* (digestive fire) qualities.

Lavana (Salty) - With the intake of this *Rasa* (taste), it increases appetite and digestion. It imparts moisture and removes blockages in the channels.

Katu (Pungent) - It increases digestion, sharpens and clears all the senses. It has *Lekhana* (scraping) *Shoshana* (drying) effect on the body channels.

Tikta (Bitter) - Though untasteful, but it cleanses the oral cavity and causes dryness. It has *Lekhana* property and detoxifying effects.

Kashaya (Astringent) -

This rasa purifies the blood and cleans out toxins from the skin. Apart from that, it also aids digestion, does *Shoshana* (drying) and helps in the healing of wounds. In Ayurveda, the basic concept of drug action is dependent on *Rasa Panchaka* (properties starting with rasa) that is *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (properties), *Virya* (potency), *Vipak* (a metabolite of drug) and *Prabhav* (specific action). One of the fundamental teachings in ayurvedic tradition is that everything in the universe is a combination of five elements- earth, water, fire, air and space. Even the same applies with *Rasa*, it contains all five elements with predominantly two elements. Accordingly, these *Rasa* also causes

Dosha Vriddhi (increasing of doshas) and *Dosha Shamana* (decrease meant of doshas) as per their qualities in it.

“*Rasa swaduamlalavanatiktoshanakashayaka / Shad dravyamashritatetuyathapurvambalavaha// Tatradyamaruthamghnanti, trayasthiktadayahakapham/ Kashayatiktamadhurahapittamanyetukurvate*”² (A.H.Su 1/15) “*Tatrabhumi-*

bugunabahulyanmadhura, bhumhyaagnigunabahulyatamlal/ Toyaagnigunabahulyatlavana, vayavyaagnigunabahulyatkatukaa, vayavyaakashgunabahulyattikta, prithvyaanilgunabahulyat-kashayaiti // tatra, madhuramlalavanavataghna, madhuratiktakashayapittaghna, katutiktakashayashleshmaghna”³ (Su.Su. 42/3-4)

Table 1: *Rasa - Panchabhoutikatva, DoshaVriddhi & Shamana* (properties of taste)

<i>Rasa</i> (taste)	<i>Panchabhoutik major elements</i>	<i>Constitution-five</i>	<i>Dosha Vriddhi</i> (Increased humors)	<i>Dosha Shamana</i> (Decreased humors)
<i>Madhura</i> (sweet)	<i>Prithvi & Jal</i> (Earth & Water)		<i>Kapha</i> (phlegm)	<i>Vata Pitta</i> (air, bile)
<i>Amla</i> (sour)	<i>Pritvi & Tejas</i> (Earth & Fire)		<i>Kapha Pitta</i> (phlegm, bile)	<i>Vata</i> (air)
<i>Lavana</i> (salty)	<i>Tejas & Jal</i> (Fire & Water)		<i>Kapha Pitta</i> (phlegm, bile)	<i>Vata</i> (air)
<i>Katu</i> (pungent)	<i>Tejas & Vayu</i> (Fire & Air)		<i>Vata Pitta</i> (air, bile)	<i>Kapha</i> (phlegm)
<i>Tikta</i> (bitter)	<i>Akasha & Vayu</i> (Space & Air)		<i>Vata</i> (air)	<i>Pitta Kapha</i> (bile phlegm)
<i>Kashaya</i> (astringent)	<i>Prithvi & Vayu</i> (Earth & Air)		<i>Vata</i> (air)	<i>Kapha Pitta</i> (phlegm bile)

Table 2: Showing *Rasa* causing *Vriddhi Shamana* of *Dosha* (properties of taste)

<i>Dosha</i>	<i>Vriddhi</i>	<i>Shamana</i>
<i>Vata</i> (air)	<i>Katu, Tikta, Kashaya</i>	<i>Madhur, Amla, Lavana</i>
<i>Pitta</i> (bile)	<i>Amla, Lavan, Katu</i>	<i>Tikta, Kashay, Madhur</i>
<i>Kapha</i> (phlegm)	<i>Madhur, Amla, Lavana</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta, Kashaya</i>

The sequence of intake of *Rasa* in healthy condition

According to Ayurveda, there is a sequence of *Rasa* (taste) in food to be followed to maintain a healthy mind and body.

“*Purvammadhuramashniyatmadhyeamlalanouraso /*

Paschataeshaanrasaanvaidyobhojaneshuavacarayet”⁴ Su.Su 46/460

“*Manojnamshuchinaatushnampratyagrasamanamhitam*

Purvammadhuramashneeyanmadhyeamlalanavaourasau

Paschansheshanrasaanvaidhyoubhojaneshvavacharayeth.”

“*Ashneeyattanmanabhutvapurvamtumadhuramrasam*

Madhyeamlalanavaupaschatkatutiktakashayakam”.....⁵ Yogrtnakar

During *Aharasevana* (food intake) the following rule has to be followed:

1. *Madhurarasatmakahara* (food items predominantly with *Madhura Rasa*) - at starting of the meal
2. *Amla Lavanarasatmakahara* (food items predominantly with salty and sour taste)–at the middle of the meal
3. *Katu-Tikta and Kashaya Rasa* (food items predominantly with pungent, bitter, astringent tastes.)–at the end of the meal.

The logical reason behind this is:

- Before intake of food, our stomach is empty and due to this *Laghu* (light), *Ruksha* (dry) qualities of *Vata* (air) and *Ushna Guna* of *Pitta* aggravates. So, to maintain *Vata* (air)and *Pitta* (bile) *Dosha* (humour) *Madhur Rasa* (sweet taste) is taken first as it is having the *Panchabhoutik* (five major elements) constitution of *Prithvi* and *Jala*

and opposite qualities that of *Guru* (heavy), *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Sheeta* (cold).

- In middle, both *Amla* (sour) and *Lavana* (salty) *Rasa* is consumed because these *Rasa* (taste) increases the taste of food and these *Rasa* (taste) possess *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Ushna Guna* (hot property) which makes the food moist and digestible by maintaining acid level normal in stomach and duodenum. It also pacifies *Vata Dosha* (air humour). The *Panchabhautik* (five major elements) constitution of *Amla Rasa* is *Prithvi* and *Teja* and that of *Lavana Rasa* is *Jala* and *Teja* and thus it maintains the digestive fire.
- At last, *Katu Tikta Kashaya Rasa* is to be consumed. After intake of food, there is a necessity for proper digestion and absorption from the gut. These three *Rasa* helps its functioning like *Ushna Guna* of *Katu Rasa* for digestion purpose. *Sheeta Vishada* (clear) *Guna* of *Tikta Rasa* (bitter taste) to avoid excessive *Snigdha Guna* (unctuous property) in the intestines and maintains *Pitta* (bile) at normal condition. *Laghu* (light) *Ruksha* (dry) *Guna* (property) of *Kashaya Rasa* (astringent taste) to absorb the digested material from the gut wall. The *Panchabhautik* (five major elements) constitution of *Katu Rasa* is *Agni* and *Vayu*, *Tikta Rasa* is *Akash* and *Vayu* and of *Kashaya Rasa* is *Prithvi* and *Vayu*.

In the *Samprapti* (pathogenesis) of disease, due to improper food ingestion, it causes vitiation of *Doshas* ie *Kapha Dosha* in *Amashaya*, *Pitta Dosha* in *Pachyamanashaya* (gastro intestine) *Vata Dosha* in *Pakvashaya*. The *Dosha* vitiation takes place after ingestion of *Apathyaahara* (incompatible foods).

This order of *Rasa* changes as per pathology or diseased condition. In *Kaphaja Vyadhis* (diseases caused by vitiation of phlegm, *Katu* (pungent) *Tikta* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent) *Rasatmak Ahara* (food predominantly of the tastes mentioned here) is advised.

In *Pittaja Vyadhis* (diseases caused by vitiation of bile) *Tikta*, *Madhura* and *Kashaya Rasa* and in *Vataja* diseases (diseases caused by vitiation of bile) *Lavana*, *Amla*, *Madhura Rasa* respectively. Therefore,

the *Guna* of *Rasa* (properties of taste) is having important in manifestation as well as curing the disease.

Treating Diseases with the knowledge of Rasa-

When the *Shareera* (body) is observed as a whole we can logically prove the treatment of any disease pertaining as per the *Sthanavishesha* (specific location). The upper body indicates the *Kaphasthana* (location of phlegm), the middle as *Pitta Sthana* (location of bile) and the lower as the *Vatasthana* (location of air) respectively. If we plan a treatment considering the *Sthanavishesha* (specific location), *Vatasthana* (location of air) and the disorders related to *Vatasthana* (location of air) should be treated with *Madhura Rasa* (sweet taste). The *Pittasthana* (location of bile) and the disorders related to *Pittasthana* (location of bile) should be treated with *Amla Rasa* (sour taste) and *Lavana rasa* (salty taste), and lastly considering the *Kapha Stana* (location of phlegm) and the disorders related to the *Kaphasthana* (location of phlegm) should be treated with *Katutikta* (pungent, bitter taste) and *Kashaya rasapradhandravayas*.

Similarly, *Rasa* (food essence), *Rakta* (blood), *Mamsa* (muscle), *Meda* (fat), *Asthi* (bone), *Majji* (marrow), *Shukra* (sperm) are the *Saptadhatu* (seven tissues) and these tissues are regularly formed getting their nutrition from the food we take, destroyed in due course of time and once again replaced. The quality and quantity of food, discipline in the timing of food, the strength of the digestive fire within, digestion, absorption, conveyance, and transformation of nutrition in the cells, all contribute to tissue health.

“*Tathaapyapampradhanatvat rasa soumyo-abhidhiyate |*

atiriktagunaraktevanhemamsetuparthiva||

medasyaambubhuvoasthiprithivyaanilatejasaam | majjishukre ca soumasya ||”⁶.....

The *Panchabhoutika* (five major elements) constitution of *Saptadhatu* (seven tissues) as per the above *shloka* (verse) is that *Rasa Dhatu* (the essence of food) is *Jala Mahabhutapradhan* (predominantly of water), *Rakta* (blood) is *Teja*, *Mamsadhatu* (muscle tissue) is *Prithvi* (earth), *Asthidhatu* (bone tissue) is *Prithvi* (earth), *Vayu* (air) and *Teja* (*Agni*) and that

of *Majja* (marrow) and *Shukra* (sperm) is *jalamahabhutapradhan* (predominantly of Jala mahabhuta). Thus we can say that *Rasa* (food essence) has similar properties as that of *Kapha* (phlegm), *Rakta* (blood) has similar properties as that with *Pitta* (bile), *Asthi* (bone) with that of *Vata* (air), and rest with that of *Kapha* (phlegm). So as a hypothesis we can say that while we treat diseases about *Rasa Dhatu*, (food essence) its *Moola* (root) being *Hridaya* (heart) we can administer *Dravyas* (substances) like *Amalaki* (*Emblica Officinalis*), which are *Amla Rasa* (sour taste) and work as *Hrdya* (cardiotonic). *Twak* (skin) is the *Adhithana* (base) of *Rasa Dhatu* (food essence), skin diseases or *Vrana* (wound) can be easily treated with *Kashaya Rasa Dravyas* (astringent substances) And similarly while treating *Shukradhatu* (sperm tissue) disorders like azoospermia, we can use *Kaphavardhaka Madhurarasatmaka Dravyas* (substances predominantly with a sweet taste which increases phlegm) like *Gokshura* (*Tribulus Terrestris*), *Shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*) etc. to nourish the *Shukradhatu* (sperm tissue). The same treatment protocol can be accepted with *Rakta* (blood) and *pitta* (bile) because they have *Ashrayaashrayee Sambandha* (property of dependency). So, *Kashaya*, *Tikta* and *Madhurarasatmaka Dravyas* (substances containing sweet taste, astringent taste and bitter taste) like *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *Manjishta* (*Rubia cordifolia*) etc. can be given in *Rakta -Pittaja* diseases (caused by blood and bile). *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Majja* are also dependent on *Kapha* (phlegm), so any disease about them can be treated with *Tikta*, *Katu Kasaya dravyas*. (Substances containing bitter, pungent, astringent)

DISCUSSION

Among *Rasa Panchak* (properties of rasa starting with rasa), *Rasa* is the main factor that comes in contact with the *Doshas* (humour) present in the gastrointestinal tract after its administration. So, at first changes occur in the quality of *Doshas* (humour) and due to its vitiation, *Dhatu* and *Mala* (waste) get vitiated and due to its change, it manifests as a disease. In various classics, it has been mentioned that

if *Pathya* (proper food) is taken, then there is no need for medicine, and if proper food is not taken, then any medicine taken won't be effective.

“Pathye sati gadartasyakimoushadhanishevanaihi. Pathyeasatigadartasyakimoushadhanishevanaihi”||
(*vaidyajeivanam 1/10*)

“Na tupalpathyavihinasyabhesajanamshatairapi”||
(*Yogratnakar*)

Only *Pathyaahar* (combatible food) and *Vihar* (regimen) can cure diseases, but one who does not follow *Pathya* (combatible food) cannot be cured by the use of hundreds of medicines.

Thus, we can say no medicine is equivalent to food, and it's possible to make a person disease-free with just a proper diet.

CONCLUSION

The human body is the product of food. One should regularly consume food that is conducive for the maintenance of good health and is capable of preventing diseases. Most of the incurable diseases are produced due to improper food. *Ahara*, *Nidra*, *Brahmacharya* are (food, sleep, abstinence) recognized as the three *Upastambhas* (3 pillars of life) essential for the smooth running of life. Among these three, *Ahara* is the best sustainer of life. Every substance is possessing one or two tastes predominantly of six tastes. Thus, we can say Ayurveda teaches us to fully acknowledge, appreciate and even relish the variety of flavours we encounter throughout the day.

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