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Review Article

TRAYOPASTHAMBAS: THREE SUPPORTIVE PILLARS OF AYURVEDA

Bagde A. B.^{1*}, Sawant R. S.², Pawar J. J.³, Ukhalkar V. P.⁴, Qadri M. J.⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit Samhita Siddhant, Government Ayurveda College, Osmanabad, Maharashtra State, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Rasa-Shastra and Bhaishajya Kalpana, Government Ayurveda College, Nanded, Maharashtra State, India

³Assistant Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, Government Ayurveda College, Nanded, Maharashtra State, India

⁴Associate Professor, Department of Shalya Tantra, Government Ayurveda College, Nanded, Maharashtra State, India

⁵Professor, Department of Shalya Tantra, Government Ayurveda College, Nanded, Maharashtra State, India

*Correspondence

Dr. Ashvin B. Bagde,
Assistant professor, Dept. of Sanskrit
Samhita Siddhant, Government Ayurved
College, Osmanabad, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

The Ayurvedic classical text Charaka Samhita describes an analogous between the human body and a building. Any building requires pillars for its stability. The Sanskrit term for a pillar is Sthambha. Ayurveda state that for the appropriate maintenance of health one needs to have three Sthambhas (i.e. pillars) as well as three Upasthambhas (supporting pillars) functioning properly. The word Trayopastambha is derivative of two words Traya and Upasthambha. Traya means three and the word Upastambha means supporting pillars. The three Sthambha are the three Dosha (humors) Vata, Pitta and Kapha. The three Upastambha are Aahara (Food), Nidra (Sleep) and Bhramacharya (Celibacy) i.e. regulated sexual conduct. Proper food replenishes the Bhautika constituents, sleep is helpful to soothe the mind and sensory motor apparatus and observance of celibacy or moderation in sex is responsible for spiritual well being. In this article three Upastambha are outlined and explained about role of these factors in mental health.

Keywords: Rasa Aahara, Nidra, Bramhacharya, Upasthambas, Trayopasthambas, Three supportive pillars and Secondary supports of life

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the science of life deals with every aspect of life. In Ayurveda, three doshas i.e. Vata, Pitta and Kapha are described as Tristhuna¹ (Three main-pillars of body). Similarly Aahara (Balanced diet), Nidra (Complete and sound sleep) and Bramhacharya (Abstinence or regulated sex) are described as Trayopasthambas² (Three external Sub-pillars of body). Whole life of a person is depends upon Tristhuna and Trayopasthambas. In Charak Samhita, Acharya Sushruta has equated human body as a building³. For making any kind of stable and strong building, the role of pillar (base) is undisputed. Destroy any one pillar – Aahara, Nidra or Bramhacharya, the whole building will suddenly collapse into pieces. Therefore Charak Samhita, the ancient authoritative text of Ayurveda has given more importance to three of them. The health is the supreme foundation for the achievements of happy and prospers life. According to Ayurveda food is one of the important factor for health as well as source for diseases i.e. wholesome and unwholesome Aahara is responsible for happiness and unhappiness respectively. It plays an important role in establishing the phenomena of wear and tear, continues process of growth, development and gives protection to body from decay and disease etc. Therefore Aahara has been given the prime place and importance among all three Trayopasthambas.⁴ We can

say that a man can live without clothes, without shelter but cannot live without Aahara. Ayurveda mentioned complete and systemic understanding about the effect of Aahara on our physical and mental functioning of the body. For easy understanding, the three sub-pillars are described here under.

Ahara (Balanced Diet)

In Ayurveda, the term Aahara is referred as food. According to Ayurveda, the Aahara which passes through the process of “aaharan” is called as Aahara. It includes all the food items that we consume, whether it is in solids, semi - solids or liquids form. According to Acharya Charak, our body is the final and supreme product of Aahara. In Ayurvedic classics, Aahara is mentioned as one among the three Upasthambas (Sub-pillars of body) which supports the three main Sthambas (Pillars) of the body. The proper Aahar consumed in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body. On other side if taken in improper manner leads to various kinds of diseases. Aahara is considered to be vital for a human body as it provides the basic nutrients, which are very essential to carry out the basic activities of digestion and metabolism.⁵ The difference between proper health (Happiness) and un health (Unhappiness) is depends upon the quality and quantity of Ahara.⁶ Therefore for healthy living, Ayurveda emphasizes on consuming right kind of Aahara

which is healthy and nutritious.⁷ Acharyas also had given much importance and description of proper quantity as well as improper quantity and their effects on the human body. We know that every part of our human body is composed of Pancha Mahabhootas (five basic elements i.e. Prithvi (Earth), Aap (Jal), Tej (Agni), Vayu and Aakash). To follow the nature's law of equilibrium and to maintain the status of Panchabhotik components of the body, consumption of Panchabhautik Aahara is very essential. Therefore to nourish the Panchabhautik Sharir, our daily Aahara should contain of all the six rasas i.e. Madhur (Sweet), Amla (Sour), Lavana (Salty), Katu (Pungent), Tikta (Bitter) and Kashaya (Astringent) rasas. These six Rasa should be present in balanced proportions in the diet because Rasa plays a very important role in body therapeutically and also in diagnosing a certain type of disease. It has a great significance in determining the Vata, Pitta and Kapha's involvement in the actual cause of a disease. The rasas are as follows -

Madhur Rasa (Sweet Taste)

Madhur Rasa is a combination of two Mahabhootas i.e. Jal (Water) and Prithvi (Earth) Mahabhoota, which are components of Kapha Dosha. Hence they always tend to increase Kapha Dosha. Madhur rasa is described first because of its auspiciousness and property of prolonging life span. This Rasa is Guru (heavy for digestion), Snigdha (oily) and Sheet (cool) in nature. Madhur rasa is beneficial and healthy right from our birth till our death. The substance having rasa are easily absorbed in the body. As it gets easily absorbed Madhur rasa promotes the growth of all the dhatu i.e. Rasa (plasma), Rakta (blood), Maansa (muscle) Meda (fat), Asthi (bone), Majja (bone marrow), Shukra (semen) and lastly Oja (essence of tissue). Madhur Rasa is believed to increase the general body resistance against various types of diseases. Generally food is Madhur (sweet) in taste and post-digestive effect. It is liked by bees and ants.⁸

Examples of Madhur Rasa

Rice, Sugar, Sugarcane, Banana, Mango, Jackfruit, Wheat, Honey, Jaggery, Draksha (raisins) Date, Carrots, Sweet potato, Beets, Milk and Milk products (like butter, ghee and cream) etc.

Health benefits of Madhur Rasa

When Madhur Rasa used in proper quantity, it gives energy and vitality in the body. Madhur rasa is believed to increase the general body resistance against various types of diseases. It provides energy and vitality to our body. This Rasa not only nourishes but also rejuvenates the whole system of body. Madhur rasa also increases stamina and strength of the body. It increases appetite. It is excellent for building the body's seven dhatus. It promotes the growth of plasma and blood. It has beneficial effects on the skin, hairs and throat (voice). It unites broken bones. It increases fat, muscles, bones, marrow and reproductive fluids. It nourishes and maintains humors, Dhatus and Malas (wastes products) of the body.⁹

Amla Rasa (Sour Taste)

Amla Rasa is a combination of two Mahabhootas i.e. Prithvi (Earth) and Agni (Fire). The fire element naturally increases Agni, which improves taste and dispels nausea caused by Agnimandya. This rasa is Ushna (hot), Laghu (light) and

moist in nature. Amla Rasa is believed to enhance the strength of the body by providing nutrition to the various body tissues. Amla Rasa sends the ingested food item in to the stomach. This rasa decreases Vata and increases Pitta and Kapha dosha.¹⁰

Examples of Amla Rasa

It is commonly found in Amla, Grapes, Pomegranate, Lemon, Oranges, Buttermilk, Curds, Unripe Mango, Pickle, Tomatoes, Sea food, Alcohol, sour milk products like yogurt, cheese, and sour cream and fermented substances including wine, vinegar, pickles and soy sauce.

Health benefits of Amla Rasa

The sour taste is believed to enhance the strength of the body by providing nutrition to the body tissues. Sour taste stimulates digestion. It also increases the taste for food and salivation. It strengthens the heart. Amla rasa stimulates the mind and stabilize the sense organs. It relieves thirst, maintains acidity and sharpens the senses. It also increases blood circulation. This Rasa keeps the body warm, improve appetite and digestion. It also increases the taste for food and salivation. It also nourishes all dhatus except the reproductive tissues.

Lavana Rasa (Salt taste)

Lavana Rasa is composed of Agni (Fire) and Jal (Water) Mahabhootas. It is Ushna (hot), Guru (heavy) and moist by nature. This rasa is known for its Vikasi property (spreads to all -parts quickly). It increases Kapha and Pitta and decreases Vata dosha.¹¹

Examples of Lavana Rasa

All salts, sea food and various pickles.

Health benefits of Lavana Rasa

This rasa keeps the body warm, improves digestion and promotes growth in the body. Lavana rasa imparts a relish for the food and provides softness to the body parts. It stimulates the flow of saliva and gastric juices. If had in excess however, it results in sluggish lymphatic drainage, thus causing water retention and hypertension. At the same time, it causes a decrease in the body strength of an individual and increases weakness and lethargy. Abundant salt -usage negatively precipitates premature aging, hair loss, heaviness, and gastric disorders. Ayurveda considers it responsible for nurturing deep uncontrollable desires. Lavana rasa help in strengthening all tissues but when used in excess it depletes the tissues.

Katu Rasa (Pungent Taste)

Katu Rasa is composed of Agni (Fire) and Vayu (Air) Mahabhootas. It is Ushna (hot), dry and light. Due to Ushna property Katu Rasatmak dravyas influences Pitta and Vata dosha while decreases the effects of Kapha. This rasa do not offer much nutrition but stimulate digestion. It is the hottest of all the 6 Tastes.¹²

Examples of Katu Rasa

Katu Rasa is found in Chili, Garlic, Onions, Sunthi (dried ginger), Maricha (black pepper), Pippali (long pepper) etc.

Health benefits of Katu Rasa

This rasa cleanses the mouth, kindles digestive power. It activates blood circulation. In small amounts, Katu Rasa stimulates digestion, clears the sinuses, promotes sweating and detoxification, dispels gas, aids circulation, improves metabolism and relieves muscle pain. It reduces excessive Meda dhatu (fat) and swelling.

Tikta Rasa (Bitter Taste)

Tikta Rasa is composed of Vayu (Air) and Aakash Mahabhootas. This is cool, dry and good for digestion. Due to the dominance of Aakash, Tikta rasatmak dravyas are light for digestion. It increases Vata, decreases Pitta and Kapha dosha. They are useful to reduce excessive weight.¹³

Examples of Tikta Rasa

Neem, Karela, Methi, Chandan, Manjistha, Vacha, spinach, snake guard, coffee, tea etc

Health benefits of Tikta Rasa

Tikta rasa act as blood purifier and helps in build a good appetite. It also has a nature of drying the body tissue mainly mucous, fat and pus. It flushes out the toxins or "ama" from the whole body. Tikta cures itchy, eruptive skin problems. But bitterness in diet should be in proportion. Else it might lead to weight-loss, dry skin and headaches. Tikta Rasa reduces anorexia. This rasa enhances liver function and muscle tone. Tikta Rasa is useful in detoxifying the body and killing krimi (worms).

Kashaya Rasa (Astringent Taste)

This rasa increases Vata dosha and decreases Pitta and Kapha dosha. They help in providing minerals but do not build tissue. Kashaya Rasa is good for the skin Kashaya Rasa acts as a perfect cooling agent.¹⁴

Examples of Kashaya Rasa

Tea, coffee, pomegranate, asparagus, figs, Jambul (black berry), Kulath (horse gram), Un-ripened fruits (apples, bananas) Cabbage, Cauliflower, Potatoes Harda, Ashoka, Babbul (acacia tree) teak are examples of Kashaya Rasa.

Health benefits of Kashaya Rasa

This rasa has anti-inflammatory properties and helps in absorption of nutrients and is very cooling to the stomach. They cause constipation if taken in excess amount because of vitiation of Vata dosha. Kashaya rasa causes dryness of the body tissues and lessens the secretion from mucous membranes. It reduces secretions, particularly sweating. The light taste induces fantastic sleep. It subdues anxiety and stress. However one should carefully avoid excessively Kashaya rasa. It will trouble one with constipation and internal dryness.

Nidra (Sleep)

Nidra is a term used in Ayurveda to describe Sleep. A person spends one third of his life in sleep. This is the time when our body and mind goes through repair and rebuilding. Nidra is considered as second useful pillar.¹⁵ Quality sleep acts as a rejuvenator of mind and body. Sleep is one of the essential factors to lead a healthy life. While discussing about Nidra, the ancient Acharya Charak, stated that happiness and sorrow, proper and improper growth, strength and weakness,

potency and sterility, knowledge and ignorance and life and death of an individual depend on quality and quantity of proper and improper sleep.¹⁶ In Ayurveda, the Nidra has been said to be due to Ratriwabhabhava prabhava. Acharya Charak has rightly said that the Nidra caused by the nature of the night is the sleep par excellence and is called as Bhutadhatri and it nurses all the living beings. According to Acharya Kashyapa, timely implemented nidra is an indicator of good health as it brings the normalcy in body tissues and relaxes the person. Acharya Yogaratnakara says that a person who is enjoying sleep does not easily become a victim of diseases. His life will be with health, vigor and longevity.

Physiology of Nidra

According to Ayurveda, the term Nidra means the physiological state of rest of the human body, mind and the motor organs. When the mind including with Atma (soul) and body get exhausted due to day long activities, the karmaindriyas (sense organs) disassociate themselves from their objects and this makes the person to go to sleep. In short we can say that when the mind is exhausted from the regular routine work the Kapha dosha increases in the body and that brings about the natural sleep. Sleep is an important phenomenon which occurs regularly in our life as a part of normal physiology to provide rest and relaxation to the body, mind and senses which get tired and exhausted due to the wear and tear process. Therefore sound Sleep is essential for the normal functioning of all the systems of our body.¹⁷

Types of Nidra

According to Charak Samhita there are six types of Nidra¹⁸. They are as follows

Tamobhava Nidra

This Nidra is caused by the excessive predominance of the Taamasika guna in the mind which generally tends to calm the mind and also cause sleep. This Nidra causes lethargy and lack of initiative in the mind. Even after waking up the person remains in a confused state of mind and cannot differentiate between the good and the bad.

Shleshmasamudbhava

Shleshma means Kapha. This is a kind of sleep is caused by the excessive increase of Kapha dosha. Increased of Kapha results in the body induce sleep because it obstructs the sensory organs preventing their normal functions.

Manasharira shramasambhava

When body and mind gets fatigued then one falls asleep. But if there is excessive exertion, this may cause vitiation of vata leading to loss of sleep.

Agantuki Nidra

This kind of Nidra is unexpected or unnatural kind. The main reason for this nidra is organic disturbance of the body center. However, if this kind of nidra repeats then it denotes the bad state of the body condition. This type of nidra is called rishtabhuta i.e. the sleep, which indicates the death signs.

Vyadhyanuvartini Nidra

Basically this type of nidra is the result of prolonged diseases. In this type of Nidra, Kaphaja roga will have excess sleep. In

Vataja and Pittaja disorders like high fever, exhaustion, sleep is decreased.

Ratri svabhavaprabhava Nidra

It is also called as Natural sleep. It helps in maintaining the life of the human being hence called as 'Bhutadhatri'. The sleep is described in the context of Trayopasthambas is Ratri svabhavaprabhava Nidra i.e. natural sleep. The remaining types discussed above actually fall in to disorders of sleep.

Benefits of Proper Nidra

According to Sushruta Samhita, Nidra when taken properly in terms of quantity and quality gives Sukha (Pleasure), Pushti (Nourishment and growth), Bala (Strength and immunity), Vrishataa (Potency and sexual vigor), Gnaanam (Knowledge and intellect) and Jeevitam (Good life span, longevity of life). It increases the sense of well-being by freshening the body and mind and also restores the natural equilibrium among different body tissues.^{19,20}

Effect of Improper Nidra

On the other hand, improper Nidra in terms of quality and quantity (inadequate, excessive or irregular) bestows harmful effects on the body. This will result you Dukha (Grief), Karshyam (Consumption or emaciation), Abalam (Loss of strength and immunity), Kleebataa (Impotence and sterility), Agnaanam (Ignorance and idiocy) and even Death. This Nidra create a burning sensation in eyes, headache and body ache. Lack of proper sleep can affect the natural urge to eat resulting in irregular bowel movements. This type of Nidra is called as "kala ratri" which takes away both happiness and longevity of the individual.²¹

Indication of Diwaswap (Day time sleeping or Nap)

Sleeping during the day time is prescribed for those who are emaciated from excessive singing, excessive study, excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks, sexual intercourse, elimination therapy, carrying heavy weight, walking long distances, those suffering from phthisis, wasting diseases like tuberculosis, those suffering from indigestion, Trishna (thirst), Atisar (diarrhea), Udara shool (colic pain), dyspnoea, hiccup, Unmad (insanity), those who weak and emaciated, those exhausted by journey by a vehicle, grief and fear.²²

Contraindication of Diwaswap

Sleeping during the daytime in the seasons other than summer should be avoided because it causes vitiation of kapha and pitta dosha. Persons with excessive fat, those who are addicted to taking oily food, those with kapha prakruti, disease of throat, partial headache, those suffering from diseases due to the vitiation of kapha and those suffering from poisoning should never sleep during day time.²³

Symptoms of Nidravegadharana

Laxanas which appear due to suppression of urge of Nidra are Jrumbha (yawning), Angamard (body pain), drowsiness, diseases related to head and heaviness in the eyes.²⁴

Duration of Sleep

Continues sleeping for long period is not good for the health. If you sleep for longer period it will disturb the whole system of the body. The sleep requirement of different persons varies widely; it also alters with age. The following are average

figures for the hours of sleep required at different periods of life.²⁵

Table 1: showing Hours of Sleep required

Ages	Hours of Sleep required
Birth – 1 month	18 – 20 hours
1 to 6 month	15 – 18 hours
6 months – 1 years	14 – 16 hours
1 – 2 years	12 – 14 hours
2 – 5 years	10 – 12 hours
5 – 16 years	9 – 10 hours
Adults	8 hours
Old Aged Persons	4 – 6 hours

Bramhacharya (Abstaince or Regulated Sex)

The human body requires food in substantial amounts to sustain it. This food is processed at three levels

- Jatharagni (gross conversion from solid to fluid state)
- Panchamahabhutagni (the fluid is subjected to further digestion to convert it into the Panchabhautika components)
- Dhatvagni (the tissue metabolism).

The Dhatvagni finally takes the fluid and converts it into a subtle form, which can

- Replenish its own tissue
- Form the nutrient part of the next Dhaatu or Ojas
- Form the waste material and
- Form the Upadhaatus (subsidiary tissues)

This elaborate and complex procedure is spread over a period of one month, finally culminating into a substance of an unctuous, sweet, dense, heavy, cold, slimy nature of body constituent called Shukra. It differs from other body tissues it can procreate. Hence it is close to the soul. Charaka has said the transcending soul and mind use Shukra as a vehicle. Since Shukra is a very potent, structurally complex and dense tissue and is derived from the ingested food in a very condensed, concentrated form, its loss can have far reaching effects on the body. Since all the Mahabhutas are participating, it can be stimulated by any of the sense organs as well as the mind. Therefore, all ancient Indian Sciences have laid great emphasis on preservation of Shukra. This process is known as Brahmacharya (observation of celibacy). The regenerative capacity of Shukra is utilized for the formation and growth of various body constituents until the person attains maturity. On reaching maturity when the tissues have become stable enough to perform their normal functions, Shukra starts functioning as a reproductive tissue. Therefore till the attainment of physical maturity, sexual act is prohibited which in males is between 20 - 25 years and in females between 12 - 16 years. Depending on various parameters such as individual constitution, dietary habits, season of the year, the frequency of coitus has been recommended. Importance is also given to regular use of appropriate aphrodisiacs. This is helpful to replenish the ejaculated Shukra. Thus Shukra being a vehicle of Atma and mind and a major contributor of Ojas, Brahmacharya (celibacy) has been rightly described as the third of the triad.²⁶

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a complete and systemic understanding about the effect of food on our physical and mental

functioning. Ayurveda consider Aahara as not only food, but also the source of taste, smell and satisfaction. Ayurveda always recommends the best suited Aahara for each person based on his dosha prakruti. A well balanced intake of all the six rasa ensures good health. These six rasas, when taken in disproportion, result into distortion in any of the three doshas i.e. Vata, Pitta and Kapha, or body humors and this result into production of a disease. It is more important than the medicine itself. To become a proud possessor of sound health, it is also equally important that your daily diet contains all the six tastes. A balanced intake of all the six rasas ensures good health. These rasas, when taken in disproportion, result into distortion in any of the three doshas or body humors and which result into production of various diseases. Ayurveda consider Aahara as a medicinal substances and good digestion as one of the main factors to achieve optimal health. Each and every bite of food that we consume contributes to our health or ill health.

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