

Original Research Article

Role of Aharaupayogi Varga in Health Promotion

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, is based on well-established Siddhanta (principles) that aim to promote health, prevent disease, and achieve longevity. Among these, the concept of Trayoupastambha (three pillars of health)—Ahara (diet), Nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya (regulated lifestyle)—is considered fundamental for maintaining physiological balance and overall well-being. Ahara which is the term for a balanced diet is the first pillar of Ayurveda. In fact, Ahara is very primary and basic which it serves as a main source of nutrition and energy and also in the growth, maintenance and repair of body tissues (Dhatu). What we put in our body not only affects our physical health but also our mental performance also plays a role in shaping our nature and habits. Also, improper Ahara may in fact have negative impact on our health. Acharya Charaka reported a classification of twelve Ahara Vargas among them Aharayogi Varga which is the systematized grouping of food items (Ahara Dravya) according to their health benefits, promotion of long life and disease prevention. The term “Ahara” means food, while “Upayogi” means suitable for use, and “Varga” denotes a category or group. Thus, Aharaupayogi Varga encompasses different groups of food items classified according to their properties (Guna), taste (Rasa), potency (Virya), post-digestive effect (Vipaka) and action (Prabhava). Hence, the present article deals with over view of Aharaupayogi Vargas in Ayurveda and Contemporary science.

Keywords: Ahara, Ayurveda, Trayaupastambha, Varga, Aharaupayogi.

INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda the science of life is a heritage of knowledge passed on to us by our great ancestors. It is the only medical system which puts forth the way of living in harmony with nature. It is a science which grew out of many a discussion and research. It puts equal emphasis on preventive and curative aspects of health. It presented the unique concepts of Tridosha, Dhatu and Mala for body homeostasis. Good health is the base of achieving Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.¹ It presents 3 main aspects Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya which support the body². Ahara, has been enumerated first, which shows its importance. Food is what which is put forth as the base for stability of all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living beings. Ahara is described as Mahabhaiṣajya by Kashyapa, indicating that no other medicament is equal to diet in maintaining and restoring health.³

Flavors play an important role in the consumption of food; thus, they indirectly help in the supply of nutrients by enhancing appetite, digestion, absorption and metabolism. Acharya Charaka has mentioned twelve Ahara Vargas. The Ahara Vargas include all the components of balanced diet. Among them Aharaupayogi Varga contains different type of oils, condiments, spices and different types of salts.

Aim and Objectives:

- To Study the Aharayogi Varga according to Charak Samhita.
- To know the role of Aharaupayogi Varga in health promotion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Collection, compilation, rearrangement and analysis of data from various Ayurveda literatures and articles.

Table 1: Shows the Aharayogi Varga according to Charaka Samhita⁴

Dravya	English name	Rasa	Guna /Virya	Indication
1.Tila Taila	Sesame Oil	Madhura Rasa Kashaya Anurasa	Sukshma,Ushna,Vyavayi,Pittala,Vat a-Kaphanashaka	-
2.Eranda Taila	Castrol Oil	Madhura Rasa	Guru,Shleshma-Abhivardhana, Vataghna.	Vatarakata,Gulma , Ajirna, Hrudroga and Jwara
3.Sarshapa Taila	Mustard Oil	Katu Rasa	UshnaVirya, Rakta-Pittakara Kaphashukravatahara	Kandu And Kotha
4.Priyala Taila	Chironji Oil	Madhura Rasa	Guru,Shleshma-Vardhaka	Vata-Pitta Conditions
5.Atasi Taila	Flaxseed Oil	Madhura- Amla Rasa	Usha Virya, Rakta Pitta Prakopa	Vata Conditions
6.Kusumbha Taila	Safflower Oil	Guru	UshaVirya, Daha,Sarvadosha Prakopaka	-
7.Majja and Vasa	-	Madhura	Brmhana, Vrushya, Balya	-
8.Vishwa Bhesaja	Ginger	-	Snigdha, Vrushya, Dipaniya, Vata Kaphaghna, Hrudyta, Rochana	-
9.Pippali	Long Pepper	Madhura(wet) Katu (dry)	Snigdha, Guru, Shelshmala (Wet) Vatakaphaghna, Vrushya (Dry)	-
10.Maricha	Black Pepper		Na Ati Ushna, Avrushya,Laghu, Rochana,Deepana,Kaphavataghni	-
11.Hingu	Asafetida	Katu Rasa	Ushna, Laghu, Vata-Kaphaghna, Vibandhaghna, Shula-Prashamana, Pachana, Rochana.	-
12.Saidhava Lavana	Rock salt /pink salt	Lavana, Samadhura	Vrishya, Rochana,Dipana, Avidahi, Chakshushya,Tridoshghna	-
13.Souvarchal a Lavana	Black salt		Suksma, Laghu Guna, Usna Virya Sugandha,Vibandhghna, hrudyta Ruchiprada,Udgarashodhi	-
14.Vida Lavana	Ammoniu m chloride		Ushna, Tikshana, Vyavahi,Shula Prashamana, Deepana,vataanulomaa	-
15.Audbhida Lavana	Earth salt	Tikta And KatuRasa	Kshara,Tiksna and kleda Guna	-
16.Samudra Lavana	Sea salt	Samadhura, Satikta katu	Rochana,paki, samsri,Anilapaha	-
17.Karavi, Kunchika, Ajaji, Yavani, Dhanya and Tumburu	Caraway, Fenugreek seeds, Cumin, Ajawain, Coriander, Toothache tree		Kaphahara And Dourgandhahara	-

supports health of your blood vessels and respiratory system.⁹

Aharayogi Varga (Condiments and Adjuncts):

Aharayogi Varga one among the 12 Vargas which is explained by Acharya Charaka. Aharayogi Dravya's aid in digestion, enhance the palatability of food and help maintain Dosha equilibrium; they include various oils and fats, followed by spices, salts, Kshara and other dietary adjuncts used along with meals. Aharayogi Varga is essential because it helps the individuals to choose a balanced diet for optimal health. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating various nutrients and food groups to support the bodily functions and over all wellbeing.⁴ While the other Vargas described in Charaka Samhita mainly deal with Ahara Dravya's intended for nourishment, the Aharayogi Varga includes Aushadhi Dravya's that are used along with food to enhance digestion and therapeutic action.

Modern Aspects of Aharayogi Varga: Oils:

Oils have been used in food preparation for many centuries. Oils are concentrated sources of energy, provide essential fatty acids (EFAs), facilitate the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) and contribute to cellular structure and metabolic regulation. The quality and type of oil consumed are crucial determinants of their health impact⁵. Vegetable oils are indispensable components of the daily human diet, valued not only for their sensory attributes and use as cooking media, but also for their role as concentrated sources of energy that help maintain normal body functions and body temperature.⁶

TILA TAILA (SESAME OIL): According to studies, sesame seeds are high in nutrients like calcium and iron and include 21.9% protein and 61.7% fat.⁷

- Sesamine, a crystalline material, and sesamolin are also present in sesame oil; as a result, the oil's oxidative stability has been enhanced.⁸
- Sesame oil is good for skin. Because it is a fast-absorbing oil which also contains vitamin E it is an antioxidant.
- We find in this oil large amounts of copper, calcium, zinc and iron. Calcium and zinc are good for bones. Also, copper is known to help with gout and arthritis. Magnesium

Eranda Taila (Castor Oil):

Castor oil contains 90% ricinoleic acid. There are also stearic, linoleic, oleic, and dihydroxy stearic acids present.¹⁰

- One of the most popular traditional treatments for constipation is castor oil, which is made from the seeds. It stimulates bowel movements and has a potent laxative effect.
- Traditional medicine frequently uses castor oil to treat hair loss and encourage healthy hair growth. It is thought to prevent dandruff, strengthen hair follicles, and nourish the scalp.¹¹
- Traditional Ayurvedic property of Krimighna Karma of Eranda is supported by the strong antibacterial activity of *Ricinus communis* oil and extracts against both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria as well as fungal infections.¹²

Sarshapa Taila (Mustard Oil):

- Glucosinolate, a phytonutrient found in mustard oil, has fungicidal, antimicrobial, and anticarcinogenic qualities that lessen the impact of chronic illnesses.¹³
- It stimulates digestive juices to provide a sense of hunger, which aids in digesting.¹⁴
- While seeds are frequently used for tempering and culinary dishes in South India, mustard oil is frequently utilized as a spice in North India.

Priyala Taila (Chironji Oil):

- Chironji's kernel oil has strong medicinal properties and is used as an ointment for a variety of skin conditions. Its paste works well as a skin conditioner to get rid of blemishes and stains on the face.
- Phenolics and flavonoids found in *Buchanania lanzan* seed oil and kernel extracts exhibit potent free-radical scavenging activity, shielding cells from oxidative stress and age-related illnesses.¹⁵
- Antioxidant-rich chironji oil helps anti-aging skincare products by protecting the skin from oxidative stress caused by environmental factors including pollution and UV rays.¹⁶

Atasi Taila (Flaxseed Oil):

- The α -Linolenic acid from flaxseed oil is well reported for its hypocholesterolemia effect and anti-inflammatory effects due to decreasing the production of inflammatory cytokines.¹⁷
- Flaxseed oil is known to decrease cholesterol levels and may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancer.¹⁸

Kusumbha Taila (Safflower Oil):

- Studies have shown that safflower oil may help in reducing abdominal obesity, blood pressure, and insulin resistance even without dietary modification.¹⁹
- Research suggests that safflower oil may lower LDL cholesterol levels and may also possess blood-thinning, clot-preventing, vasodilatory, and blood pressure-lowering properties²⁰.

In addition to the oils described by Charaka, a wide range of edible oils such as olive oil, soybean oil, palm oil and groundnut (peanut) oil are widely used today, each exhibiting distinct nutritional composition with studies highlighting their varied fatty acid profiles and differential roles in health and disease.

Spices:

According to The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the term spice refers to 'aromatic vegetable substance in the whole, broken or ground form, the significant function of which in food is seasoning rather than nutrition' and from which 'no portion of any volatile oil or other flavoring principle has been removed'²¹. Spices are plant products used in flavoring foods and beverage. Spice is actually culinary term and not a specific botanical category.²²

Spices are generally, though not always, stored and utilized in dried form. They serve as aromatic and flavoring agents obtained from various parts of plants, including seeds, arils, bark, flower buds, stigmas, roots, and resins. Since ancient times, aromatic plant materials have been extensively used in food preparation, preservation, and embalming practices, particularly in regions where these plants are native, such as Hindustan and the Spice Islands. In the present day, the use of spices has become ubiquitous, although their significance varies among different cuisines. Here enlisting the health promoting properties of spices which are explained in Charaka Samhita.

Vishwa Bhesaja (Ginger)²³:

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), a member of the Zingiberaceae family, is a popular spice used globally especially in most of the Asian countries. It contains zingiberene and bisabolene as an aromatic constituent and gingerols and shogaols as pungent constituent. It has been used as a spice as well as medicine in India and China since ancient times.

Health promotion properties:

It is widely used as a traditional home remedy, especially for relieving nausea during pregnancy. It is also believed to reduce different types of pain, including arthritis-related discomfort, muscle soreness, chest pain, lower back pain, abdominal pain, and menstrual cramps. In addition, it is commonly used to support relief from upper respiratory tract infections, cough, and bronchitis. Due to its anti-inflammatory properties, it is often recommended for managing joint problems. Fresh juice of the plant is also applied to soothe minor skin burns. Its natural warming effect is considered beneficial in providing comfort during colds and flu.

PIPALI (LONG PEPPER):

Piper longum, commonly referred to as Pippali or long pepper, medicinal plant that is described in ayurveda traditionally employed for its carminative, rejuvenate and respiratory benefits. It contains piperine and piperlongumine contributes to anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and hepatoprotective effects.²⁴

Health promotion properties:

- It has shown antimicrobial activity against several pathogens, including *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Salmonella typhi*. Its anthelmintic properties have also been noted, which suggests it might help in treating intestinal parasitic infections.²⁵
- Studies have found that extracts of it can boost the production of white blood cells and increase the activity of immune cells. This indicates its possible role as an immune system regulator.²⁴

Maricha (Black Pepper)²⁶:

Piper nigrum is the most widely used spice in the world and is known as "King of spices". It belongs to piperaceae family. It constitutes an important component of culinary seasoning and an essential ingredient of numerous food stuffs.

Health promoting properties:

- It holds the properties such as carminative, aromatic stimulant and antibacterial.
- It stimulates the taste buds causing reflex stimulation of gastric secretion, improving digestion and treating gastrointestinal upsets and flatulence.

Hingu (Asafoetida)²⁷:

It is extensively used in Indian medicine and cookery for ages.

Health-promoting properties:

- In cookery for flavoring curries, sauces, and pickles in conjunction with onion and garlic, it has been analyzed to have antibiotic and sedative properties.
- Effective remedies for many diseases and disorders such as spasmodic disorders, respiratory disorders like whooping cough, asthma, and bronchitis, flatulence, and distension of the stomach.

Salts:

Salt is known as table salt or sodium chloride, is an iconic compound with the chemical formula NaCl, representing 1:1 ratio of sodium and chloride ions. Salt is one of the most widely used food additives as a preservative, enhancing the flavors. Table salt is commonly used as a condiment and food preservative.

Health-promoting properties:

- Reducing dietary salt intake significantly lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure and reduce urinary sodium levels, supporting salt-reduction efforts in health promotion.²⁸
- salt is involved in the development or inhibition of some enzymatic reactions in foods, which allow the generation of reactions responsible for the development of texture, color, taste and aroma, characteristics of many food products.²⁹

Acharya Charaka as explained 5 types of salts which are having different health promoting properties which are enlisted below:

Saidhava lavana (Pink salt/Rock salt):³⁰

Rock salt contains 85% of NaCl and 15% of trace minerals (84 elements) whereas common salt contains 97% NaCl and 2.5% additives. 15% of trace minerals of 84 elements give extra energy to the homeostatic system in the body system to give a healthy condition.

It can be used to cure many disorders and ailments at home. It helps to reduce

inflammation and irritation caused by insect bites. It can serve as a very simple remedy for Halitosis (Bad breath), teeth whitener or mouth freshener. It stimulates digestive fire and balances the natural secretion of HCl. It's recommended as a cure for laxative and digestive disorders. It also improves appetite and gets rid of intestinal and abdominal gases, cramps and also calms heartburn.

Souvarchala Lavana (Black salt):

Black salt is prized in culinary circles for its distinctive flavor profile and versatility in cooking and various health benefits. Research supports traditional claims that black salt can aid in digestion. The presence of sulfur compounds, which have carminative properties, helps reduce bloating and flatulence by promoting the expulsion of gas from the intestines.³¹

Its mineral makeup, especially its potassium level, can aid in preserving electrolyte balance, which is essential for both general hydration and muscle performance.³²

Vida Lavana (Ammonium chloride) and Audbhida Lavana (Earth salt)³³:

There are few researches on both Vida Lavana and Audbhida Lavana by considering the properties explained by Charaka we can consider,

Vida Lavana helps in digestion, acid base balance, electrolyte balance and acts as laxative. Audbhida Lavana helps in acid base balance because of its alkali properties.

Samudra lavana (sea salt):

Sea salt is frequently used in cooking, and when ingested in moderation, it may have beneficial effects on health in addition to its function as a flavour enhancer. It supports digestive functions, maintains electrolyte balance, and supports cardiovascular function, among other elements of health.³⁴

Kshara (Alkali):

In Ayurveda, Kshara has properties of Ushana, Tikshna, Ruksha, Chedana, Keldi, Paki, Deepana and Pachana properties, in modern we consider as alkali i.e. the food items that produce an alkaline residue after metabolism in the body. Mainly Alkali foods include plant-based products such as fruits, vegetables and mineral rich foods.

Kshara i.e. sodium bicarbonate, referred as baking soda/ baking powder, is fairly used in baking of pancakes, cakes, quick breads, soda bread, and other baked food products. Food

preparation like papad, pickles, cold drinks and Eno etc. which are commonly consumed has chief ingredient as sodium bicarbonate.³⁵

Alkali preparations (Kshara) in general are sharp, hot, light, unctuous, softening, carminative, corrosive, and caustic, digestive stimulant and depletive. The condiments which are explained by Charaka like Karavi, Ajaji, Yavani and Dhanya, can be considered as Kshara

Condiments:

Condiments are an integral part of our culinary experiences, elevating the flavors and textures of our meals. The term "condiment" comes from the Latin word "condire," meaning "to season." Condiments are an integral part of our culinary experiences, elevating the flavors and textures of our meals.³⁶

The condiments described in the Charaka Samhita are Karavi, Kunchika, Ajaji, Yavani, Dhanya, and Tumburu. The various health-promoting properties of these condiments are enlisted below:

Karavi (Caraway):

- Caraway is used in digestive unrest including gas, loss of appetite, bloating, heartburn, as well as mild spasms of the stomach and intestines.
- Traditionally, its oil has been used to help people to avoid phlegm, relieve constipation, and provide urination control.³⁷
- Nursing mothers use it to increase the flow of breast milk.³⁸
- It shows the properties such as anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, anti-spasmodic.³⁹

Kunchika (Fenugreek Seeds):

- Fenugreek has been shown to have hypoglycemic, hypercholesterolemic, antioxidant properties, and immunomodulatory characteristics.⁴⁰
- Dietary fiber and galactomannan in fenugreek help reduce blood glucose and cholesterol levels, supporting cardiovascular health.⁴¹

Ajaji (Cumin):

- Cumin supplementation has shown beneficial effects on fasting blood sugar, triglycerides, HDL cholesterol, and waist circumference in adults with metabolic

disorders, suggesting its role in metabolic health promotion.

- Its extracts demonstrate antibacterial and antimicrobial activity, helping protect against pathogens and contributing to immune health.⁴²
- It has been suggested as an effective aid to weight control in overweight and obese women.⁴³

Yavani (Ajwain):

- The seed of ajwain is bitter, pungent and it acts as anthelmintic, carminative, laxative, and stomachic. It also cures abdominal tumors, abdominal pains and piles.⁴⁴
- Seeds contain an essential oil containing about 50% thymol which is a strong germicide, anti-spasmodic and fungicide. Thymol present in the ajwain is also used in toothpaste and perfumery.⁴⁵

Dhanya (Coriander):

- Fresh coriander leaves are used as a garnish for curries and other foods, and they are also used as a condiment.⁴⁶
- Phytochemicals present in *Coriandrum sativum*, such as flavonoids, phenolic acids, phytosterols, and terpenes, have significant potential in cardiovascular health and have demonstrated an angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE)-inhibiting potency, cardioprotective, antihyperlipidemic, and cardiometabolic disorder-inhibiting properties.⁴⁷

Tumburu (Toothache Tree)⁴⁸:

- *Zanthoxylum armatum* known as the Toothache tree, Indian Prickly Ash and Nepal Pepper, is a small tree or spiny shrub.
- It is used as a spice in the culinary practices of China, India, Nepal, Tibet and Sichuan.
- It showed work against antioxidants, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, hepatoprotective, pesticides, anthelmintic, antiproliferative properties.

DISCUSSION

In Classics Ahara Varga is categorized on the basis of Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka and Prabhava. Out of them Aharayogi Varga comprises of oils, spices, condiments and various type of salts. Some of the general characters of Aharayogi Varga are Ahara Samskarartha (Which changes quality of food),

Rochana (Taste Enhancer), Deepana (Digestive fire increaser), Dourgandha Nashana (Removes foul smell), Vatakaphahara (Subdues Vata and Kapha). These Aharayogi Varga are mostly used to improve digestion, taste and quality of food.

Acharya Charaka explained various types of oils and their properties, recognizing that different oils produce different effects depending on their active compounds. Modern research largely supports this view. The fatty acid profile of an oil determines its impact on blood lipids. Saturated fats like palmitic acid tend to raise cholesterol levels, while others such as lauric acid and stearic acid have a more neutral effect. Polyunsaturated fats, on the other hand, help lower total cholesterol. The human body's response to dietary fats is so consistent that predictive equations have been developed based on an oil's fatty acid composition.

From a health perspective, the main takeaway is this: it's not about finding the "best" oil. The evidence points to the idea that people should focus on unsaturated vegetable-based oils instead of saturated fats. This choice promotes heart health due to a better fatty acid profile, along with added benefits from vitamins and bioactive compounds found in different oils. However, it's important to be careful.

Excessive intake, especially of oils that are repeatedly heated, leads to oxidative degradation products that have been linked to diabetes, coronary heart disease, hypertension, and cancer. Moderation and proper use are essential.

Studies in association between health and choice of culinary oil are small scale interventions, therefore need to be interpreted with caution. Lack of evidence to support the health benefits of culinary oils makes it inappropriate to conclude at present that any one oil has greater health benefits over any other.

Spices add flavor to food and improve their sensory qualities. They contain antioxidants, which are a large group of bioactive compounds. This group includes flavonoids, phenolic compounds, sulfur-containing compounds, tannins, alkaloids, phenolic diterpenes, and vitamins. Spices can have various positive effects on human health. These effects include reducing the risk of sclerosis, preventing blood clots, fighting cancer, lowering inflammation, controlling heart rhythms, easing arthritis, protecting the

stomach, and lowering lipid levels. Additionally, spices can protect against radiation, reduce allergic reactions, and combat malaria. They also slow down the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein and prevent protein glycation.

Salt has been essential to civilization through its use as a flavor enhancer and as a preservative in food products. Sodium is an element found in salt and is deemed necessary for certain human physiological functions including the regulation of extracellular fluid volume, nerve conduction, and muscle function. Salts are essential for normal physiological functioning in all individuals. However, both regular and excessive intake of salt can increase the risk of various diseases, especially non-communicable conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and stroke.

It has been observed that people worldwide consume significantly higher amounts of sodium than the levels recommended by the World Health Organization for adults, exceeding what is necessary for normal body functions. There are 5 types of salts are explained by Acharya Charaka. Each salt has its own properties and health benefits.

Condiments such as fenugreek seeds (Kunchika), cumin (Ajaji), caraway (Karavi), ajwain (Yavani), coriander (Dhanya), and Tumburu (*Zanthoxylum armatum*) are described by Charaka as flavoring agents. Research now confirms that these condiments contain polyphenols, flavonoids, and essential oils that act as antioxidants, digestive stimulants, metabolism enhancers, and anti-inflammatory agents. In health promotion, condiments offer a simple way to add both flavor and function to meals. They can be used fresh or lightly roasted to preserve their volatile oils, and their regular inclusion supports digestive health and metabolic balance.

Integrating Aharayogi Varga into Daily Life

Integrating Aharayogi Varga into Daily Life Putting this knowledge into practice doesn't have to be complicated. A practical approach includes using a variety of cold-pressed oils, a mix of spices, moderate amounts of salt (preferably traditional types like rock salt), and fresh condiments in daily cooking. Avoid overheating oils and relying on processed condiments. Ayurveda also highlights the importance of personalization: choices should

reflect one's constitution (Prakriti) and digestive capacity (Agni). When used thoughtfully, the elements of Aharayogi Varga work together to improve digestion, boost nutrient absorption, and lower the risk of chronic disease. They are not just kitchen additions; they form a key strategy for promoting health that combines traditional wisdom with modern nutrition.

CONCLUSION:

Aharayogi Varga, the only Varga which is explained by Acharya Charaka. Collective evidences from above suggests that Aharayogi Varga is not only a source of nutrition but also having health promoting properties due to the chemical constituents present in them. Aharayogi Dravya's are innumerable and vary according to individual preference. The use of spices varies from region to region due to differences in culture, geography, and traditional food practices.

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