

## ROLE OF SHAKA VARGA IN DAY TO DAY LIFE

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**ABSTRACT**

Ayurveda has holistic and scientific approach in health management. Now a days, human beings are falling prey to various life style disorders, in which defects in food play a major role. *Acharya* has explained the *Pathya Apathya Kalpana*, in order to avoid the cause of diseases. The substance or regime which do not adversely affect the body and mind are regarded as *Pathya*, those which adversely affect them are considered to be *Apathya*. In Ayurvedic texts various *Aahara Kalpana* has explained to describe *Pathya* and *Apathya Aahara*. In that one of it is, use of food items from '*Shaka Varga*' i.e vegetables in our day to day life. Our traditional science has given more importance to the intake of variety food articles like vegetables, fruits, whole grains on the basis of *Raspanchkas*. The modern nutrition focuses on the amount of proximate principles (nutrients) present in it.<sup>[1]</sup> In this article an attempt is made to review the role and application of *shakas* (vegetables) as described in age old classics and also modern point of view for good nutrition.

**KEYWORDS:** *Pathya, Apathya, Aahara, Shaka Varga, Raspanchkas.***INTRODUCTION**

*"Pathye sati gadaarthasya kim oushadhanishevanaih  
Pathye asati gadaarthasya kim oushadhanishevanaih"  
- vaid jeevan 1/10<sup>[2]</sup>*

If wholesome diet is given in a planned way then there is no need to administer medicines. And if wholesome diet is not being given then too, there is no need to give medicines, as it is not going to cure the disease in the absence of wholesome diet. For this reason the classical texts of Ayurveda are replete with the scattered references of implication of various food products in various disease entities.<sup>[3]</sup>

*"Hitaaharoupayoga Ek Eva Purushvrudhikaro bhavati,  
Ahitaharoupayoga: punarvyadhinimittam iti ||"  
-Ch.su 25/31<sup>[4]</sup>*

*Aahara* (diet) is the key modalities of prevention and management of diseases in Ayurveda. *Hitakar i.e Pathyaahara* acts as a part of life for better wellbeing and *Ahitkar i.e Apathyaahara* increases the diseases. *Aahara* is said to be *Mahabhaishajya*.<sup>[5]</sup> by *Acharya Kashyap* as it is the most important factor in life. Health as well as disease is dependent on *Aahara*. Proper diet taken in proper manner can lead to better health or else

can lead to diseases. Food is the source of life strength, complexion and *Oja* of living beings. The food, their specific tastes, qualities, potencies and digestive transformations are responsible for equilibrium of the *Dosha and Dhhatu*. As growth, strength, good health, complexion and the alertness of senses are traceable to food and its inequality causes illness. Thus, *Pathya aahar* is a broad term for the practical application as a preventive or corrective treatment of diseases. Ayurveda principles are concerned about every part of the body, mentally and physically through diet. *Aacharya Charak* has explained 12 types of *Aahara Dravya Vargas*.<sup>[6]</sup> They are as follows:

1. Shukadhanya Varga
2. Shamidhanya Varga
3. Mansa Varga
4. Shaka Varga
5. Phala Varga
6. Harit Varga
7. Madya Varga
8. Jal Varga
9. Dugdh Varga
10. Ikshu Varga
11. Kruttanna Varga
12. Aaharayogi Varga

Among which vegetable nutrition has widely drawn the attention of fitness conscious and various proven health benefits. **Shakha Varga** (group of vegetables) is one among the various food substances explained in classical texts. Its divided into 6 categories based on their origin and appearance such as: **patra shakha** (leafy vegetables), **pushpa shakha** (flowering vegetables), **phala shaka** (fruit form of vegetables), **naala shakha** (hollow vegetables), **kanda shakha** (tuber form of vegetables), **samswedaja** (grows with the help of moisture in *bhoomi* or wood). Appropriate knowledge regarding properties of different vegetables as illustrated in the *Nigantu* and its modern approach of nutritive rich vegetables is important as it benefits, in prevention and cure of different diseases.

The different types of vegetables mentioned are considered to be heavy for digestion from their ascending order (*Uttarottara Gurutha*).

#### **PATRA < PUSHPA < PHALA < NAALA < KANDA < SAMSWEDAJA**<sup>[7]</sup>

According to modern concept vegetables are important for human health because they contain vitamins, minerals, non-nutritive phytochemical compounds, and dietary fiber. But these vegetables has its own *Ras*, *Virya*, *Vipaka*, its *Pathya* *apathya* and its own *Rogaghyata*. So, adequate vegetable consumption is very necessary to avoid unnecessary *dosha vridhhi* for healthy life.

#### **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

- The study has carried out by Literature search.
- The study of various classical Ayurvedic texts.
- Research papers, online data, related websites.
- All the information has been analysed to understand *Pathya Apathya* in the use of *Shaka Varga* in day to day life.

#### **CLASSIFICATION OF SHAKA VARGA (VEGETABLES)**

**PATRA SHAKA (LEAFY VEGETABLE):** This group includes Upodika (Malabar Spinach), Palakya (Paalak, Spinach), Thanduliyaka (Green Amarnath), Methika (Fenugreek), Dhanyaka (Coriander leaves), Cabbage (Patta Gobi) etc. According to Ayurveda the *Pathya Apathya* and its different properties of *Patra shaka* for various diseases are important for treatment and its use in day to day life. According to modern science leafy vegetables are important sources of minerals (iron, calcium), vitamins (A, C and riboflavin) and fiber.

Young and green leaves contain more Vitamin C than mature leaves. The outer green leaves of lettuce and cabbage are rich in iron, calcium and vitamins than inner white leaves. One example of *patra shaka* with its properties:

#### **Upodika – Malabar spinach**<sup>[8]</sup>

Upodika - *Basella rubra* Linn  
Madhura - sweet in taste as well as Vipaka  
Bhedini – purgative  
Shleshmavardhini – aggravator of kapha  
Vrushya – aphrodisiac  
Snigdh – unctuous, oily  
Sheeta – cold in potency  
Doshakarma – Kaphakara, Vata pitta hara  
Pathya in Sheethapitta, Anidra, Shukra kshaya  
Apathya in Madaghi, Shwasa, Kasa

**Uses:** prevents Osteoporosis (weakness of bones), Iron-deficiency Anemia, protects from Cardiovascular diseases and Cancers of the colon.

**PUSHPA SHAKA (FLOWER VEGETABLE):** This group includes kadali pushpa (Banana flower), phool gobi (Cauliflower) etc. According to Ayurveda the properties of Kadali pushpa.

#### **Kadali pushpa – Banana flower**<sup>[9]</sup>

Ras – madhura, kashaya  
Guna – guru, ruksha  
Virya – sheeta  
Vipaka – madhura  
Doshkarma – Vata- pittahara  
Pathya – Kshaya, Rakthapitta, Yonirogas

According to modern science Banana flower is rich in dietary fibers, proteins, unsaturated fatty acids. It is rich in vitamin E and flavonoids. Cooked banana flower with curd increase the level of progesterone and their by reduce bleeding while menorrhagia.<sup>[10]</sup>

Broccoli, cauliflower are frequently consumed flowering vegetables. Broccoli is good source of iron, phosphorus, vitamins A and C, and riboflavin. Cauliflower is also a good source of vitamin C. The nutritional value of the outer leaves of cauliflower and broccoli is much higher than the flower buds.<sup>[11]</sup> **Precaution** should be taken in consuming these as they may cause swelling of the thyroid gland and thyroid hormone deficiency due to the presence of **goitrogens**, hence it should be avoided in individuals with thyroid dysfunction.<sup>[12]</sup>

**PHALA SHAKA (FRUIT VEGETABLE):** This group includes examples like Kooshmanda (Ash gourd), Kooshmandi (Pumpkin), Karkati (Cucumber), Karavellaka (Bitter gourd), Okra (Lady's Finger), Tomato etc. Some of the properties of Phala shaka:

#### **Kooshmandi Karkaru – Pumpkin, Kaddu**<sup>[13]</sup>

Ras - Madhura  
Guna – Ruksha, Guru  
Virya - Sheetha  
Vipaka – Madhura  
Doshakarma - Pakwa Phala Pittakara, Kaphavatahara  
Apakwa Phala Thridoshakaraka  
Pathya – Vibanda

**Apathya - Atisaara**

According to modern, it is the best source of beta carotene, a powerful antioxidant, fibre, potassium, vitamin C and vitamin A. It gives protective mechanism to asthma and heart diseases, helps to promote a healthy complexion, hair growth and weight loss. Vitamin A in pumpkin (beta carotene when consumed converts to vitamin A) is also essential during pregnancy and lactation.<sup>[14]</sup>

Okra (lady finger) is also an example of Phala shaka. It helps to improve eye health as it is rich in vitamin C, vitamin E and zinc. According to Ayurveda, regularly drinking Lady finger (okra) water in the morning helps to maintain normal blood sugar levels due to its anti-diabetic activity.<sup>[15]</sup>

Tomatoes and peppers are the most common fruit vegetables. Both are rich in vitamin C. A dark green or yellow colour indicates high beta-carotene content. The darker the yellow colour, the higher the content of beta-carotene.<sup>[16]</sup>

**NAALA SHAKA (HOLLOW FORM OF VEGETABLE):** This group contains Mustard Naala.**Sarshapa Naala – Mustard<sup>[17]</sup>**

Ras – Katu, Tikta  
Guna – Ushna, Snigdha  
Virya – Ushna  
Vipaka – Katu  
Doshkarma – Kapha-Vatahara  
Pathya – Kushta, Krimi

**KANDA SHAKA (TUBER VEGETABLE):** This group includes Soorana (Elephant foot), Lashuna (Garlic), Aluka (Potato), Grinjanaka (Carrot), Palandu (Onion).

**Soorana Kanda – Elephant foot, Yam<sup>[18]</sup>**

Ras - Kashaya, Katu  
Guna - Laghu, Rooksha  
Virya - Ushna  
Vipaka - Katu  
Doshkarma - Kaphaahara  
Pathya - Arsha, Pleeha Roga, Gulma  
Apathya - Dadru, Kushta, Rakthapitta

According to modern concept it consists of omega 3 fatty acids, High in vitamin B6, vitamin A, vitamin C. Magnesium, Potassium and Phosphorous are also found in elephant yam. The cooling effect of yam can treat hypertension,<sup>[19]</sup> it acts as an anticoagulant, it also cures the hormonal imbalance and increase the estrogen level in women (which can relieve from pre menstrual syndrome, reduces the muscle spasms). It increases the good cholesterol.

Precaution should be taken to avoid its intake in the patients suffering from cold, cough, asthma, sinusitis as it has its cooling effect.

**Lashuna – Garlic, Lehsun**

Ras - Katu, Madhura  
Guna - Snigdha, Guru, Tikshna  
Virya – Ushna  
Vipaka – Katu  
Doshkarma - Kapha, vata shamaka  
Pathya – Kasa, Shwasa, Prameha, Kushta, Ama, Gulma, Hridroga, Bagna  
Apathya – Rakthapitta, Grahani

It is an excellent source of sulphur containing amino acids, sulphoxide's & peptides. It serves as overall health benefits. It is a very good source of manganese, vitamin B6, vitamin C, calcium and copper. It lowers cholesterol levels, decreases the risk of cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, improves artery function, high blood pressure etc.)<sup>[20]</sup>

**Aluka – Potato, Aaloo, Solanum Tuberosum<sup>[21]</sup>**

Ras – Madhura  
Guna - Guru, Rooksha  
Virya - Ushna  
Vipaka - Katu  
Doshkarma - Kaphavatakaraka  
Pathya – Rakthapitta  
Apathya - All Vata Vikaras Sthoulya

Potatoes are the good sources of vitamin B6, vitamin C, niacin, pantothenic acid, carotenoids, flavonoids, and caffeic acid. According to US food and drug administration, potassium present in potato, lowers the blood pressure. It is useful in secretion of neurological chemicals (vit-B6) Hence can be indicated in depression, stress and attention deficit conditions. Good level of glucose in potato enhances learning and memory.<sup>[22]</sup>

**SAMSWEDAJA SHAKA:** This group includes vegetables growing with the help of moisture. Example of this group includes Chatraka (Mushroom). Following are the properties of chatraka according to Ayurveda.

**Chatraka – Mushroom<sup>[23]</sup>**

Ras - Madhura  
Guna - Guru, Rooksha  
Virya - Sheeta  
Vipaka - Madhura  
Doshkarma - Krishna Chatraka And Sweta Chatraka – Atyantha Thridosha kara

**Raktha Chatraka- Swaalpa Dosha Karaka**

According to modern point of view Mushrooms are usually cholesterol free, fat free, gluten free but provide important nutrients like selenium, potassium, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin D, vitamin B. Vitamin B is helpful for nervous system, Selenium boosts the immunity and good in infertility disorders in men.<sup>[24]</sup>

**EFFECT OF PREPARING AND COOKING METHODS OF VEGETABLES**

Vegetables of all these types are Guru (heavy), Rooksha

(dry), Madhura (sweet), Sheeta veerya (cold potency), Bhedana (purgative) in nature. They produce vayu during the process of digestion. So, Charaka has said the cooking method of these vegetables to become wholesome for intake, prepared when boiled, drained the juice and then added with plenty of fatty substances in it.<sup>[25]</sup>

According to modern science vegetables are one of the most important components of human diet and are rich sources of beta carotene (provitamin A), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pyridoxine (B6), folic acid, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), vitamins E and K, minerals (such as iron, zinc, calcium, magnesium, and selenium), antioxidants and fibre. Preparation and cooking methods can greatly affect the nutritional content and acceptability of vegetables.

Cooking improves the flavour of vegetables and enables the nutrients in the vegetables to be more easily used by the digestive system. However, cooking results in some physical and chemical changes in vegetables.

## DISCUSSION

The route for healthy life is nothing but food itself. In recent years, people began to change their eating habits with the growing interest in the effect of foods in staying healthy and maintaining health. The choice of healthy and nutritious food has become a first priority in the present era. "Western" type diets are characterized by increased intake of calories, sugar, saturated fats and animal protein, and reduced consumption of vegetables and fruits.

Age old science explains many nutritious food articles based on its Rasa Panchakas. Either due to extinct species or endangered species of various naturally available fruits and vegetables, man is unable to reach the exact species (medicinal plant) as mentioned in classics or recognize them as the same, hence few vegetables (shakha varga) mentioned in the classics that are being used in day today practice with their nutritive analysis and scientific approach is illustrated in the article.

## CONCLUSION

Green vegetables are very important for our health. Eating green vegetables keep both bodies and mind healthy. Vegetables have a great contribution to a balanced diet. The physical and mental health depends on the food that we eat. The promotion of health and prevention of disease is possible through nutritious food intake. Thus the maintenance of the body growth, energy, and health is possible only by proper nutrition, and one of the way is through proper intake of fresh, natural nutritive vegetables.

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