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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DHAM (TRADITIONAL FEAST OF MANDI IN HIMACHAL PRADESH) A COMPLETE FOOD WITH AYURVEDA PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

In Ayurveda, Ahara (food) is considered as one of a major tripod of life. As per Ayurveda a good diet consist of all six *rasa* and are taken in proper sequence of *Madhura* followed by *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, *Tikta* and *Kashaya*. *Dham* is a popular traditional feast of Himachal Pradesh (H.P.), which is a good example of complete food as per Ayurveda having all six *rasa* and is served in proper sequence. The dish composed of a sweet (*boondikameetha*) followed by *Sepu Badi*, *kaddukakhatta*, *kolkakhatta*, *mahkidaal* and in the end of diet *jhol*. Served in *pattal* (plates made of leaves of *Taur -bauhinia vahli*) which have good antioxidant properties. The preservation method used in the region of ingredients of *dham* is also traditional as no chemical is used. All these make up *dhama* complete diet in terms of Ayurveda and also in terms of nutrition. Present study deals with various Ayurveda and scientific aspects of *dham* and its importance.

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Introduction:-

Food (*Ahara*) is one of the tripods of life as per Ayurvedic classicsⁱ. Among the three *Upastambha*, *Ahara* is considered as the best sustainer of life (*Vrittikaranam Sreshtam*)ⁱⁱ. Region wise food habits changes, which is important as per the climate and conditions prevailing in the region. But in present era with fast changing food habits and more and more use of canned food, chemical preservatives and junk foods, health is getting compromised. In order to preserve the health, food serves an important factor which must be given due importance. Ayurveda has incorporated various explanations regarding this vital pillar of life. This includes the classification of foods according to the geographical area and also with respect to the bodily *Tri-Dosha* and *Satvikadiguna*, different processing methods of food, importance and role of food on the body and mind, wholesome and unwholesome diets and the pattern of metabolism.

Himachal is a culture in terms of various nutritious traditional food, playing a role in everyday life as well as in festivals. In many families, everyday meals are sit-down affairs consisting of two to three main course dishes, carbohydrate staples such as Rice, varied protein and micronutrient rich accompaniments such as pulses and vegetables, as well as sweets. The people of H.P. have developed traditional food processing technologies for preparing the foods from locally available substrates largely governed by the ethnic preference, agro climatic

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conditions, sociocultural ethos and religion. However, there may be local variation from region to region. A number of traditional foods are prepared and consumed by people in Himachal Pradesh for centuries, and these form a part of sociocultural life of the hill people^{iii-iv}.

Aim of study:-

This review aims at scanning the scattered literature on proper diet in accordance with Ayurveda with special reference to a traditional food called as *Dham* of Mandi, H.P.

Method:-

Classical texts of Ayurveda as well as PUBMED, MEDLINE database and relevant journals were used for the search of relevant literature and research papers. Papers published between Jan 1960 to Jan 2017 were only considered. The key words used for the search was 'Ayurveda', '*Shad Rasa*' '*Ahara*' 'Traditional food' and '*Dham*' etc. information from conversation from local inhabitant of Mandi were also included in the review to search out and understand proper tradition of preparing, preserving and serving of *Dham*. Only research articles published in English language were considered.

***Dham* (Traditional feast of H.P.):**

In H. P. during functions and marriages, traditional community meal is prepared which is called *Dham*. *Dham* is a traditional festive meal, cooked only by *botis* (a particular caste of Brahmins who are hereditary chefs). Preparations for this elaborate mid-day meal begin a night before. Food is cooked in big brass utensils or mud pots and everyone sits on the ground in rows to have food^v. In the present study *Dham* specifically of Mandi is being discussed.

As Sushrut explain the proper sequence of having meals and have mention that a proper diet should include all six *rasa*. In the beginning of food Sweet – *Madhura* dominant food should be taken then in the middle Sour – *Amla* and Salty – *Lavana* dominant food and toward the end of food Pungent – *Katu*, Bitter – *Tikta*, and Astringent – *Kashaya rasa* dominant diet should be taken^{vi}.

Dham prepared in the traditional way is an example of *shadrasa ahara* (food with all six *rasa*) which is considered as a complete food as per Ayurveda and also served in the proper sequence of *rasa*.

The starters begins with *madhur rasa* (sweet dish), *Boondika Meetha* (prepared from chickpea flour) dipped in sweet syrup along with dry fruits).

The next item comes *Sepu Badi*, It is prepared from fresh spinach leaves and *badi*. *Badi* constitute of *Masha* (black lentil) and *Chana* (Bengal gram) deeply fried with the gravy of coriander and spinach leaves giving it a *Madhura-Amla rasa* (Sweet- Sour).

Then comes *Amla- lavana Rasa* (Sour- Salty) *Kadukakhata* Prepared from pumpkins and giving the dish a blend of sweet and sour taste.

Then comes *kolkakhata* (*makushtabheda* - *Vigna aconitifolia*). Prepared from the pulse commonly known *askol*. It is sour and brings a grimace on face. Added with *Rai powder* it is *Katurasa* (pungent taste) dominant.

Then comes *Mahkidaal* that is *masha* (black lentils) the pulse is prepared with Fennel seeds, two three bay leaves, Green Cardamoms, Black Cardamoms, small stick of Cinnamon, Cloves, Coriander seeds, Bay leaves, Curd, Spinach, pinch of Asafetida, red chili powder, coriander powder and turmeric powder making it a *tiktapradran* (Bitter dominant) dish.

At last *Jhol* which is *iskashay rasa* (Astringent) dominant is regular prepared item in house of every *Mandyali* (native people of Mandi), prepared from curd and water in mud pot. In the local terms it is said "the food wouldn't digest until a glass of *Jhol* is not drunk" goes in accordance with Ayurveda. Its *rukhsaguna* which may help in cleansing of esophagus and gut from *Ghrita* rich food. Moreover as it is made up *takra* (butter milk) as its main ingredient hence it serves as a great *Pachana* (Digestive)^{vii} especially of ghee & oil^{viii}.

Eating and Serving Styles:-

Eating with your hands is considered important in Indian etiquette because a person eating with his hands knows the exact temperature of food before the morsel hits his mouth thus preventing blisters in mouth due to consumption of hot food^{ix}. In H.P. specifically in Mandi region, a cleaned *Taur – bauhinia vahlileaves* are most commonly used^x as a hygienic and visually interesting alternative to plates. The leaves have health benefits too in terms of antimicrobial effect and antioxidant properties^{xi}. In addition the plant leaves are completely biodegradable. It also provide job and income to less privileged rural people thus forming one of the important part of rural economy in H.P.^{xii}

Nutritional and medicinal value:-

Black gram (*Masha - Vigna mungo*) content of *sepubadi* and *mahki dal* is *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Balya* (increases strength), increases *Kapha* and *Pitta*, *Malakara* (increases bulk of faeces), *Sara* (laxative), *Guru* (not easily digestible), *Ushna* (hot in potency), *Vatahara* (mitigate Vata), *Madhura* (sweet in taste), and *ShukraVridhdhikara* (aphrodisiac properties)^{xiii}. Black gram is very nutritious as it contains high levels of protein (25g/100g), potassium (983 mg/100g), calcium (138 mg/100g), iron (7.57 mg/100g), niacin (1.447 mg/100g), Thiamine (0.273 mg/100g), and riboflavin (0.254 mg/100g).^{xiv} Black gram complements the essential amino acids provided in most cereals and plays an important role in the diets of the people of Nepal and north India.^{xv} Black gram has been shown to be useful in mitigating elevated cholesterol levels^{xvi-xvii}.

Bengal gram also called as chickpea (*chana dal- Cicer arietinum*) content of sweet and *sepubadi* is useful in throat problems, blood disorders, bronchitis, skin diseases and liver or gall bladder related problems [biliousness]^{xviii}. In addition to these applications, the chickpea seeds are also used for blood enrichment, treating skin ailments, ear infections, and liver and spleen disorders^{xix}. It is rich in nutritionally important unsaturated fatty acids like linoleic and oleic acid. β -sitosterol, campesterol and stigmasterol are important sterols present in chickpea oil. Calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and especially potassium are also present in chickpea seeds. It is a good source of important vitamins such as riboflavin, niacin, thiamine, folate and the vitamin A precursor, β -carotene^{xx}.

Kolki dal (Vigna aconitifolia): It is quite different from *Mothki dal* described in Ayurved as it is bigger than original *moth*, and both are available in this region though as per botanical classification the latin name of both these pulses are same but as per locals both type of pulses are available in Mandi region the one commonly known as *moth dal* and the other which is used in *Dham* called as *kolki dal*. *Vigna aconitifolia* is rich in (values per 100 gm) calcium 150mg, iron 10.8 mg, magnesium 381 mg, manganese 1.8 mg, phosphorus 489 mg, potassium 1191 mg, sodium 30 mg and zinc 1.9 mg along with thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, panthothenic acid, folate and Vitamin C. Among macronutrients it contains 343 calories, 23 g of protein, 62 g of carbohydrate and 1.6 g of fat^{xxi}.

Jhol (spiced butter milk): buttermilk is a rich source of Vitamin B12, calcium, Riboflavin and probiotics which help strengthen the digestive system and the immunity of the body. *Takra* (Buttermilk) is very useful in the diseases associated with the *Agni Vikriti*. By means of its Properties it acts as *Tridoshaghana* (Vitiates all three *doshas* of body)^{xxii}.

The utensils used for cooking sweet is iron vessels which gives extra benefit of iron, moreover loss of nutrients in iron vessels, brass vessels and mud pot cooking (used for making other dishes of *dham* other than the sweet) are also very less as compared to aluminum and cooker cooking of food.

Seasonal consideration:-

During winter season due to the contact with cold wind, the digestive power of healthy people get increased and capable of digesting any heavy food.^{xxiii} In cold season *snigdha* and *ushna* food is indicated, hence *masha* (black gram) and *Ghrta* dominant diet is a good and nutritious food in this region^{xxiv}. Hence *Dham* is a good food especially for cold hill region of Himachal. Moreover cooking it with plenty of spices and use of *jholat* the end of food also helps in proper digestion of the dish.

Influence of Mana (Mental Factors) on Digestion:-

Acharya Charaka mentioned the influence of negative emotions on the digestion of food^{xxv}. Healthy and wholesome food if taken even in proper quantity do not get properly digested when the individual is afflicted with grief, fear, anger, sorrow, excessive sleep and excessive vigil. This is also considered in having *Dhamas* it is served in festive mood, where all people gather and have this dish together sitting on ground with the feeling of equality and happiness.

Natural Preservation:-

Rice being the main food is generally preserved by drying in sun^{xxvi} and instead of using sodium benzoate (preservative), they use more *rai* which acts as a natural preservative owing to its good antimicrobial activity^{xxvii}. And they also have unique way for preserving raw pulses for longer periods, in which they rub the pulses with mustard oil which protects it from pests and fungus. And they also treat the utensils in which these are kept, with smoke of red '*mirchi*' (chili). It helps in longer preservation^{xxviii}.

Conclusion:-

India is a rich culture. Many of the Traditional practices, food habits have a scientific basis, though with course of time many wrong practice may have prevailed, but some practices like the food habits of different region have been studies from time to time and have been found to have better nutritional value and found in accordance with Ayurveda. One such dish popular in Mandi H.P. known as *dham* have been reviewed and found to follow the definition of proper diet as described in Ayurveda. Hence it can be concluded from the present study that such traditional food should be conserved and be made popular so the people may understand the importance of traditional food, and the method of traditional preservation and sequence of serving should be conserved which is getting changed with time as it may prove detrimental to the benefits which traditionally made and served *dham* may provide. As popularly said in Ayurveda: If one eats *pathya* (Proper food) then there is no need of medicine and if one don't eat *pathya* (takes improper diet) still there will be no need of medicine^{xxix}.

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