

Concept of Saatmya (Habituation): An Ayurvedic Perspective on Individualized Dietetic and Lifestyle Planning

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda emphasizes health promotion and disease prevention through appropriate diet and lifestyle practices. The concept of Saatmya refers to habituation or compatibility of substances, foods, and lifestyle factors with an individual. This article explores the Ayurvedic understanding of Saatmya based on classical literature. Classical Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Kashyapa Samhita, and standard commentaries were reviewed to understand the types, determinants, and clinical significance of Saatmya. The concept encompasses both wholesome and unwholesome habitual practices and is influenced by factors such as Desha (habitat), Kala (time), Ritu (season), Prakriti (constitution), Vyayama (exercise), and disease status. Charaka and Kashyapa identify three grades: Pravara Saatmya (habituation to all six Rasas), Madhya Saatmya (habituation to two to four Rasas), and Avara Saatmya (habituation to a single Rasa). Sub-types include Desha Saatmya, Kala Saatmya, Ritu Saatmya, Jaati Saatmya, Roga Saatmya, Vyayama Saatmya, Prakriti Saatmya, and Oka Saatmya (habitual use). Understanding Saatmya is critical for individualized dietary and lifestyle planning and for prevention of Asatmyaja disorders. The concept highlights the importance of gradual transition from unwholesome habits toward wholesome practices (Padamsha Tyaga) for maintenance of health and longevity. The Ayurvedic framework of Saatmya provides a nuanced, personalized approach to dietetics that has significant relevance for contemporary preventive medicine and lifestyle counseling

Keywords: Saatmya; Oka Saatmya; Pathya; Ahara; individualized dietetics; Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION

Disease prevention and health promotion are the primary goals of Ayurvedic medical science. Ayurveda emphasizes that health is maintained through intake of Pathyahara (wholesome diet) that is conducive to Manas (mind), Indriyas (senses), and Atma (soul) [1]. The wholesomeness or otherwise of Ahara (food) and Vihara (lifestyle) depends on Matra (quantity), Kala (time), Kriya (processing), Bhumi (place), Deha (body), and Dosha (humors) [1].

The concept of Saatmya (habituation or homologation) occupies a central position in Ayurvedic dietetics and therapeutics. Regular habituation to substances that do not cause harm to the body contributes to well-being, while habitual use of unwholesome substances may eventually produce disease [1]. Understanding Saatmya is therefore essential for individualized dietary and lifestyle planning.

This article reviews the classical Ayurvedic literature pertaining to the concept of Saatmya and explores its various types, determinants, and clinical significance

2. Materials and methods

A comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts was conducted, including Charaka Samhita [1], Sushruta Samhita [2], Kashyapa Samhita [3], and relevant commentaries

including those of Chakrapani and Gangadhara. The concept of Saatmya was analyzed with respect to its definition, classification, determinants, and clinical applications.

3. Definition and conceptual framework

Charaka defines Saatmya as that which, being used continuously (Satatya), produces comfort (Upashaya) and well-being in the long term (Charaka Vimana Sthana 8/118) [1]. Gangadhara's commentary further clarifies that Saatmya refers to substances whose continuous use (Satopayoga) brings happiness (Sukha) in the subsequent period (Uttarakala) [1].

Saatmya may be associated with wholesome (Hitakara) Ahara-Vihara, but it can also be Viruddha (antagonistic) with respect to Desha (habitat), Kala (time), Jaati (family/species), Ritu (season), Roga (disease), Vyayama (exercise), Udaka (water), Divaswapna (day-sleep), Rasa (taste), and Prakriti (constitution) [2].

4. Classification of Saatmya

4.1 Grades of Saatmya (Charaka and Kashyapa)

Both Charaka and Kashyapa describe three grades of Saatmya based on Rasa intake: Pravara Saatmya (best) involves habituation to all six Rasas (Sarvarasa); Madhya Saatmya (intermediate) involves habituation to two to four Rasas; and Avara Saatmya (least) involves habituation to a single Rasa (Eka Rasa Abhyasa) [1,3].

4.2 Desha Saatmya

Desha Saatmya pertains to habitat-related habituation. Charaka explains that Desha Saatmya involves intake of substances having qualities opposite (Vipareeta Guna) to those commonly available in a given region (Charaka Vimana Sthana 1/21–25) [1]. For example, in Anupa Pradesha (marshy areas), a person should ideally consume Ushna Ruksha (hot, dry) Ahara-Vihara, but habitual intake of Sheeta Snigdha (cold, unctuous) substances becomes Desha Saatmya [2].

4.3 Kala Saatmya

Kala Saatmya relates to temporal habituation and may be classified into four types: Sthayi (permanent, extending across lives), Dirghakalina (long-term), Asthaya (variable), and Swalpakalina (short-term) [1].

4.4 Jaati Saatmya

Jaati Saatmya relates to habituation within a species or group. Charaka lists 152 Agrayaushadha (supreme substances within their respective groups) whose availability varies by region [1]. When the ideal substance is unavailable, individuals adapt to alternatives of the same group, establishing Oka Saatmya. For example, Lohita Shali (red rice) is considered superior among Shuka Dhanya, but habitual use of white rice has become Oka Saatmya in the current era.

4.5 Ritu Saatmya

Ritu Saatmya involves seasonal habituation. Ahara-Vihara should correspond with the prevailing season (Ritu) for optimal Bala (strength) and Varna (complexion) [1]. Deviation from Ritucharya guidelines, such as Divaswapna (day-sleep) in seasons other than Grishma Ritu, may become habitual and constitute Ritu-specific Oka Saatmya. Asatmyaja Rogas (unwholesome diseases) can be mitigated by following Ritusandhi protocols during the transitional seven days between seasons [1].

4.6 Roga Saatmya

In certain diseases, habituation to specific dietary practices assists in management. Classical examples include Ksheerapana (milk drinking) in Gulma Roga, Ghrita (ghee) in Udavarta, and Kshaudra (honey) in Prameha [1].

4.7 Vyayama Saatmya

Vyayama (exercise) is generally contraindicated in Grishma and Varsha Ritu, but regular practice even in these seasons becomes Vyayama Saatmya [1]. However, Charaka cautions that excessive Vyayama, Hasya (laughter), Bhashya (speech), Adhwa (walking), Gramyadhama (sexual activity), and Jagarana (night-waking), even when habitual, may ultimately lead to severe consequences (Charaka Sutra Sthana 7/34) [1].

4.8 Prakriti Saatmya

Individuals should ideally consume Ahara-Vihara having qualities opposite to their Prakriti (constitution). However, since all Doshas are present in every individual regardless of constitutional type, intake of Sarvarasa (all six tastes) helps maintain Dosha equilibrium [1].

4.9 Oka Saatmya

Oka Saatmya refers to habituation through regular use, whether the substance or practice is wholesome or unwholesome. Chakrapani identifies four types: Ritu Saatmya, Oka Saatmya, Desha Saatmya, and Roga Saatmya [1]. Knowledge of Oka Saatmya is clinically important because a substance to which a patient is habituated may

not produce the expected therapeutic effect when administered as medicine. For instance, if a patient is habitual to Ahiphena (opium), its use as Aushadha in Atisara or Grahani may not yield the desired response, necessitating an alternative treatment approach [1].

5. Contributions from Kashyapa Samhita

Kashyapa Samhita provides detailed elaboration on Saatmya, particularly regarding Garbhini (pregnant women) [3]. The Annapana consumed by the mother during pregnancy establishes Saatmya in the developing fetus. However, such Saatmya should always be evaluated in the context of Desha, Kala, and Agnimaatra (digestive capacity) [3]. Kashyapa additionally describes Rasa Saatmya and Sneha Saatmya. For example, prolonged Lavana Rasa (salt) Saatmya may lead to Raktaprapakopa, Trishna, weakened Shukra (infertility), Palitya (premature graying), and Balahaani (loss of strength). Conversely, Ghrita Saatmya enhances Ojas, Tejas, Bala, Varna, Ayu, Medha, Dhriti, and Smriti [3].

6. DISCUSSION

The concept of Saatmya represents a sophisticated framework for understanding individual variation in response to diet and lifestyle. It encompasses both the physiological adaptation to habitual substances and the potential pathological consequences of prolonged unwholesome habituation.

Sushruta provides an important therapeutic principle: even habitual Apathya (unwholesome) practices may not cause immediate harm due to Abhyasa (habituation), much like the tolerance observed with certain toxic substances. Nevertheless, it is always preferable to adopt Ahara-Vihara having opposite Guna (qualities) to Desha and Roga (Sushruta Sutra Sthana 35/39–40) [2].

The clinical relevance of Saatmya extends to treatment planning, where knowledge of a patient's habitual practices is essential for predicting therapeutic response and planning dietary interventions. The principle of Padamsha Tyaga (gradual withdrawal) recommended by Charaka (Sutra Sthana 7/36–37) [1] for transitioning from Ahita (unwholesome) to Hita (wholesome) practices is analogous to modern behavioral modification strategies used in lifestyle medicine.

Contemporary relevance of this concept is evident in the growing field of personalized nutrition and precision medicine, where individual dietary responses vary based on genetics, microbiome composition, and habitual dietary patterns. The Ayurvedic framework of Saatmya anticipated this individualized approach to dietetics by millennia.

7. CONCLUSION

Saatmya is a fundamental Ayurvedic concept with broad applications in individualized dietetic and lifestyle planning. It may be classified based on Adhishtana (basis) into Sharirika (Ritu, Desha, Oka, and Roga Saatmya, along with Kala, Jaati, Vyayama, Prakriti, and Indriyartha Saatmya) and Manasika (Prakritija and Paristhitija) categories. The principle of gradual transition from unwholesome to wholesome practices through Padamsha Tyaga remains highly relevant for contemporary health promotion. A person who desires long life and health should always practice Hita Sevana (wholesome intake) and Ahita Tyaga (avoidance of unwholesome) with the vigilance of one surrounded by adversaries [1]

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