

BRIDGING TRADITION AND CULINARY SCIENCE: FOOD TYPOLOGIES AND COOKING IN INDIAN HERITAGE

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Abstract

This research explores the systematic classifications of food and traditional cooking techniques outlined in ancient Indian texts such as the Bhagavad Geeta, Charaka Samhita, and Kshema Kutuhalam. The categorization is based on texture and intake methods while cooking techniques range from frying to specialized methods like roasting in a pit. The study also delves into the Ayurvedic ontology of food, highlighting the hierarchical classification of plant and animal origins. This framework bridges traditional practices with a modern understanding of culinary science.

Keywords: Food classification, Ayurveda, Cooking methods, Ontology, Indian culinary traditions.

Introduction

Food is not just a necessity but a cultural phenomenon reflecting traditional knowledge and practices. Indian classical texts provide an intricate classification system of food items, categorizing them based on properties, origin, and consumption methods. This paper seeks to examine these classifications and explore the traditional cooking methods outlined in ancient scriptures. The research also aims to elucidate the ontological structure of food items as conceptualized in Ayurveda, bridging historical context with contemporary culinary science.

Classifications of Food and different cooking methods

Classifications of Food

Generally, in mundane meals, we have various dishes, and we have our nomenclature (like rice, dal, fry, rasa, pickle, powder, etc.) to name them. But traditionally, there is a certain classification of food by which all kinds of recipes can be segregated.

According to Bhagavdgeeta, the food is classified into four kinds¹ such as *Bhojyam* (eatable), *Bhakshyam* (chewable), *Lehyam* (lickable) and *Chusyam* (drinkable). The Smilar classification can be seen in Ramayana, Manusmriti and Kshema kutuhalam also.

Acharya Charaka has classified the *Ahara Dravya* (food articles) in different ways. Diet is one, from the viewpoint of intake, of two types according to source, animal origin, and plant origin, *Hitahara* (wholesome) and *Ahitahara* (unwholesome)² depending upon its effect on a biological system. These are

¹ अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।

पापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥

अहम् एव वैश्वानर उदरस्थः अग्निः भूत्वा 'अयम् अग्निर्वैश्वानरो योऽयमन्तः पुरुषे येनेदमन्नं पच्यते' [1] इत्यादिश्रुतेः वैश्वानरः सन् प्राणिनां प्राणवतां देहम् आश्रितः प्रविष्टः प्राणापानसमायुक्तः प्राणापानाभ्यां समायुक्तः संयुक्तः पचामि पंक्तिं करोमि चतुर्विधं चतुष्प्रकारम् अन्नम् अशनं भोज्यं भक्ष्यं चोष्यं लेह्यं च। श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता, शांकर-भाष्यम्, अध्याय 15, श्लोक 14 p551

² तमुवाच भागवानात्रेयः- हिताहारोपयोग एक एव पुरुषस्याभिवृद्धिकरो भवति। अहिताहारोपयोगः पुनर्व्यधीनां निमित्तमिति।

further classified into four categories depending upon the way of intake which are *Pana* (drinkables), *Asana* (eatables), *Bhakshya* (chewable), and *Lehya* (lickable).³ *Acharya Kashyapa* classified food articles into five categories based on the *Panchamahabhutas* which are *Akasheeya*, *Vayavya*, *Agneya*, *Apya* and *Parthiva*. *Acharya Sharangadhara* and *Bhavaprakasha* further classified food articles into six types such as *Bhojya*, *Bhakshya Charvya*, *Lehya*, *Chusya*, *Peya*.⁴ The same list is appeared in *Shivatattva Ratnakara* and *bhajana kutuhalam*.

Consolidated list of food classifications depicted from various sources

Food type	BG	SR	CS	BK	KK
<i>Bhojya (palatable)</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Bhakshya (chewable)</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Charvya (crushable with teeth)</i>	-	+	-	+	-
<i>Lehya (lickable)</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Chusya (swallowable)</i>	+	+		+	-
<i>Peya (drinkable)</i>	-	+	+	+	+

Note: BG – Bhagavad Geeta, SR- Sivattvaratnakara, CS- Charaka Samhita, BK- Bhojana kutuhalam, KK- Kshema kutuhalam

Indian culinary traditions highlight seven primary methods of cooking:

1. Bharjan (Frying) – e.g., potato fry.
2. Talan (Deep-frying) – e.g., puri and baji.
3. Sweda (Steaming) – e.g., idlis and other steamed foods.
4. Pachan (Cooking to ripen) – e.g., rice and curries.
5. Kwathan (Boiling) – e.g., rasam and sambar.
6. Tandoor (Roasting) – Popularized by tandoori roti and similar dishes.
7. Putapak (Cooking in a pit) – A unique method practiced in regions like Maharashtra.

Each method reflects the culinary diversity and the influence of local ingredients, climate, and culture.

Classification of *Dravya* in *Ayurveda* and *Ontological frame-work of recipes*

All kinds of recipes are prepared of plant-origin and animal-origin material. According to *Ayurveda*, there are certain sub-classifications under plant origin and animal origin in the context of the *dravya* concept. Before structuring the ontological framework of recipes, one should know the hierarchical linkages of source material.

In *Ayurveda*, the *dravya* was classified into three types such as *Jāṅgama*, *Audbhid*, *pārthiva*⁵ Respectively. As per the present context, the sub-classifications of *Jāṅgama* and *Audbhid* will explained. The discussion on these categories is as follows.

Charaka Samhita, Adhyaya 25, vkyam 30, p197

³ Charaka Samhita, Adhyaya 25, vakyam, 35, p197

⁴ Triveni Raina, Brij Kishor, Swapnil Saini, Dalip Sharma. Role of Ahara as a Prime Etiological Factor in the Manifestation of Disease. International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research. 2018;6(6):60-65.

⁵ तत् पुनस्त्रिविधं प्रोक्तं जाङ्गमौद्भिदपार्थिवम् | Charaka Samhita.1.1.68, p.9

Jāṅgama category

As discussed earlier, a living being that motiles is called *Jāṅgama*. *Suśrta* has classified *Jāṅgama* category into four groups – 1.*Jarāyuja* 2. *Aṇḍaja* 3.*Svedaaja* and 4.*Udbhijja*. This is a popular classification in *Samhitās* and *Kośas*. Special characteristics of each group are described in what follows.

- i. **Jarāyuja :-** पशु-मनुष्य-व्यालादयो जरायुजाः।⁶ Living beings that have reproductive organs with placenta are *Jarāyujas*. *Suśrta* includes man, lion, tiger, and other animals in this category.
- ii. **Aṇḍaja :-** खग-सर्प-सरीसृप-प्रभृतयोऽण्डजाः।⁷ *Aṇḍajas* are those which originate from eggs. Aves (birds), reptiles. Crows, snakes, lizards, fish, etc.
- iii. **Svedaaja :-** कृमि-कीट-पिपीलिकाप्रभृतयः स्वेदजाः।⁸ *Svedaajas* are living creatures that are born out of sweat. Ants, mosquitoes, insects, etc., are considered in this category.
- iv. **Udbhijja :-** इन्द्रगोप-मण्डूकप्रभृतयः उद्भिज्जाः।⁹ The cochineal insect of various kinds is called *mandragora*. A firefly is also an *indragopa*. Also, frogs and similar animals come under *Udbhijja* category.

Audbhid category

The *Audbhid* category was classified into four groups *Vanaspati*, *Vānaspatya*, *Vīrudh*, and *Oṣadhis*. This classification is similar in allied Ayurvedic texts. In these texts, their features were also mentioned namely

- i. **Vanaspati:-** 'Plants do not possess visible flowers'¹⁰ are vanspatīs. Hence, they are *apuṣpas* (flowerless). For Instance, *aśvattha*, *agaru*, *devadāru*, *arjuna* etc.
- ii. **Vānaspatya :-** 'plants bear both flowers and fruits'¹¹ are vanspatyas. For Instance, *āmra*, *harītaki* etc.
- iii. **Vīrudh :-** Those plants which twine crawl or climb up are known as *Vīrudhs*. Also, '*Pratāna*'¹² are called virudhs. *Pratāna* or virudh was further sub-categorized as- 'a) *Latā* and b) *Gulma*'¹³
- iv. **Latā:-** Climbers are called '*Latā*' and also they are otherwise called *Vallī*'¹⁴ *vidārī*, *kapikaccu* etc.,

⁶ Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

⁷ Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

⁸ Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

⁹ Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

¹⁰ i) फलैर्वनस्पतिः। Charaka Samhita.1.72, p.9

ii) अपुष्पाः फलवन्तो वनस्पतयः। Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

iii) तत्र फलिनो वनस्पतिः। Astanga Sangraha.1.12, Pp.137

iv) तैरपुष्पाद्वनस्पतिः। Amarakosha.2.4.6, Pp.129

v) वनस्पतिः फलतिः यः पुष्पैर्विना। Raja Nighantu.1.29, Pp.13

¹¹ i) पुष्पैवानस्पत्यः फलैरपि। Charaka Samhita.1.72, Pp.9

ii) फलपुष्पवान्वानस्पत्यः। Astanga Sangraha.1.12, Pp.137

iii) पुष्पफलवन्तो वृक्षाः। Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8

iv) वानस्पत्यः फलैः पुष्पात्। Amarakosha.2.4.6, p.129

v) तैः फलं वानस्पत्यः। Raja Nighantu.1.29, p.13

¹² प्रताने वीरुधः स्मृताः। Charaka Samhita.1.72, p.9

¹³ प्रतान शब्देन लता गुल्माश्च गृह्यन्ते। Charaka Samhita.1.72, Cakrapani, p.9

¹⁴ वल्ली तु व्रततिर्लता। Amarakosha.2.4.6, p.130

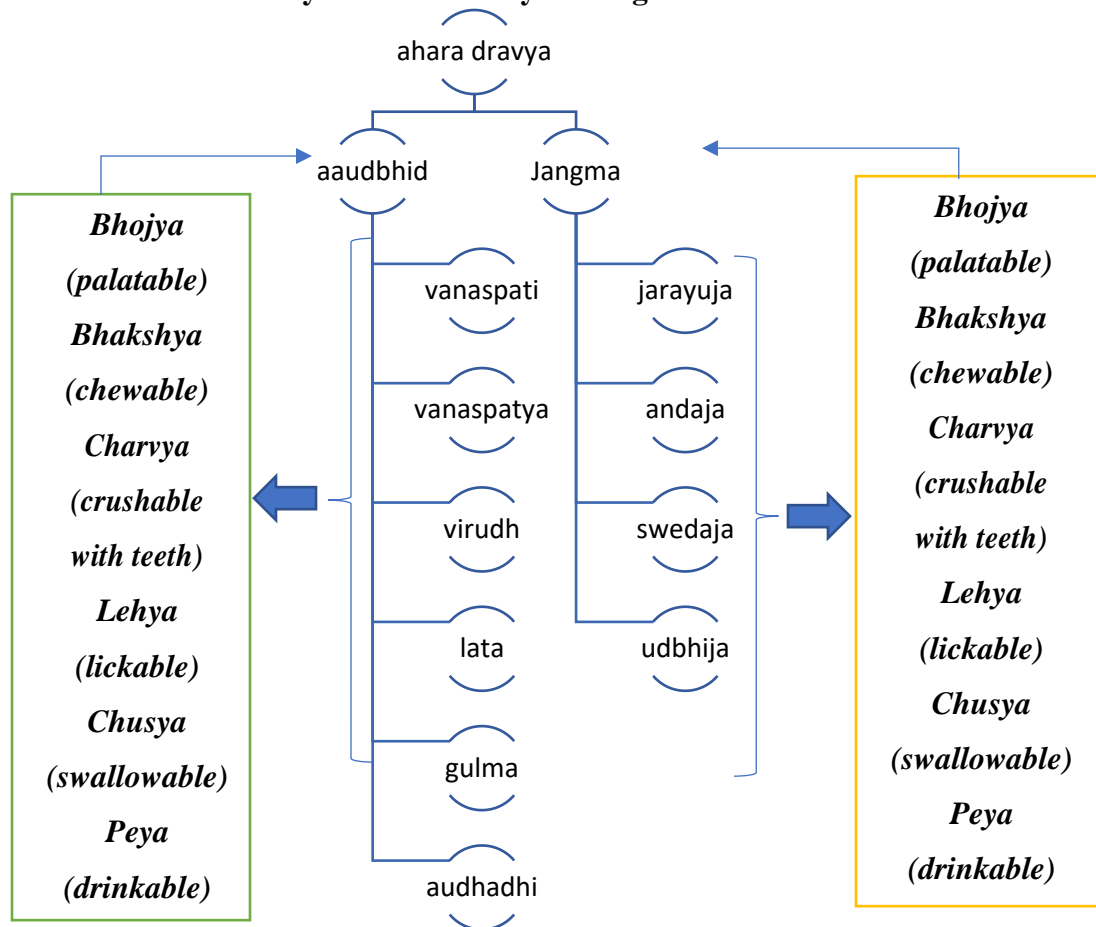
are climbers.

- v. **Gulma:-** Shrubs are *gulmas*. These are also climbers. But, can not crawl/or go up as long as the *Latās*. 'Atibala', 'Śālīparṇī' etc., are *gulmas*. The *gulma* category consists of a cluster of trees.
- vi. **Oṣadhi :-** In Ayurveda, the word *Oṣadhi* comes under *Audbhid* category. Those plants which 'whither away after yielding the fruits or after harvest'¹⁵ are known as *Oṣadhis*. Perennial crops like paddy, pulses, wheat, maize etc., are *Oṣadhis*.

Ontological framework of recipes

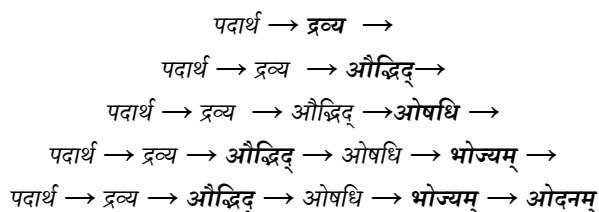
The term 'ontology' is originated from the Greek. It means 'study of being or existence or reality.' The study of the existence of entities, their classification based on similarities or differences, and the hierarchy involved in it come closer to the philosophical studies.

Hierarchy of Ahara dravyas along with food classifications



¹⁵ i) ओषध्यः फलपाकान्ताः। Charaka Samhita.1.72, p.9
 ii) फलपाकान्ता त्वौषधिरिति। Asthanga Sangraha.1.12, p.137
 iii) फलपाकनिष्ठा ओषधय इति। Sushruta Samhita.1.1, Pp.7-8
 iv) ओषधिः फलपाकान्ता। Amarakosha.2.4.6 p.129
 v) फलपरीपाकावसानान्विता। Raja Nighantu.1.29, p.13

Ontology also plays an important role in showing the heirachical linkage of certain food article. The basic build block will be पदार्थ. Based on the ontological linkage, one can aware of root source and food type of certain food item. For instance, the ontological linkage of 'ओदनम् (cooked-rice)' is shown bellow



Conclusion

The classifications of food and cooking methods documented in ancient Indian texts reveal a profound understanding of dietary science. These frameworks emphasize the holistic integration of nutrition, health, and cultural values. Revisiting such traditional knowledge provides a pathway to innovating modern culinary practices while preserving cultural heritage. By understanding the ontological framework, we can appreciate the interconnectedness of food sources, preparation methods, and their effects on human physiology and well-being.

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