



Review Article

IMPORTANCE OF SAMSKARA (KARANA) IN MODERN COOKING TECHNIQUES

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ABSTRACT

Ahara Vidhi Visheshya Ayatan are special rules of preparation of *Ahara* to maximize its health benefits. In which *Karana (Samskara)* does the processing of *Dravyas* lead to *Gunantaradhanam*, the transformation of their inherent attributes. This study explores how applying the knowledge of *Samskara* to correct faulty modern food preparation methods can enhance health benefits of food. **Materials & Methods:** The relevant subject matter is compiled from *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi* along with the available commentaries, scholarly articles and other sources. The materials are critically analysed, correlated, re-organized and presented in the form of research paper. **Result & Discussion:** According to Ayurveda science, *Samskara* is used to enhance the health benefits of food through their effective preparation methods like *Toya*, *Agni Sannikarsha*, *Shaucha*, *Manthana*, *Desha*, *Kala*, *Vasana*, *Bhavana* etc. Today, people tend to choose cooking methods based on taste and convenience, leading them to use incorrect methods of cooking that make food *Viruddha*, heavy to digest, thereby reducing its health benefits. By adapting the correct *Samskara (Karana)* in cooking methods adverse effects associated with improper food preparation can be eliminated. *Samskara* makes the food *Sujara*, improves its *Rasa* and *Gandha* in health aspect, removes hazardous effects of some food items, increases their *Gunas* (properties) so that one can enjoy health out of eating food. **Conclusion:** Integrating right type of *Samskara* into present-day cooking methods is crucial, as it enhances the health benefits of food by correcting the deficiencies of modern practices, ensuring transformation of *Guna*, improved digestibility, and greater overall well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya* are described as the three supporting pillars of health^[1], with *Ahara* accorded foremost importance due to its profound influence on overall wellness. Proper assimilation of food is viewed as the basis of vitality, as it sustains life, nourishes both body and mind, and promotes qualities such as healthy complexion, clear voice, sharp intellect, strength, and holistic well-being. *Maharshi Kashyapa* emphasized that diet itself is supreme medicine, highlighting its therapeutic importance^[2]. Although *Ahara* possesses inherent nutritive and beneficial properties, many food substances cannot be properly digested without

appropriate *Samskara*. The benefits of *Ahara* can be achieved only when food is prepared through proper processing. Therefore, in *Ashta Aharavidhi Visheshayatana*, *Karana* is given prime importance after *Prakriti* [3]. *Prakriti* denotes the inherent nature of a particular *Ahara* or *Aushadha*, whereas *Karana (Samskara)* refers to processes that modify the intrinsic properties of *Ahara Dravya*. Through suitable *Samskara*, *Ahitakara Dravyas* can be transformed into *Hitakara* forms. It transforms raw substances into *Samskrita Ahara* (processed food)- food that is lighter, better digestible, and better suited to support compromised *Agni*. Thus, cooking not only enhances palatability and safety but also serves as a therapeutic tool to aid digestion and maintain health.

However, in the present era, cooking is often done without a clear understanding of how different methods impact the quality of food. Adapting mismatched food combinations just for good taste, non-stick cookware, ultra-processed items, reheating

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oils or frozen food, and instant cooking methods can quietly reduce the food's health value and digestibility. Techniques such as microwaving, induction cooking, pressure cooking, and high-speed blending etc., are widely adopted without consideration of their effects on *Agni*, *Gunas*, or the *Doshic* impact of food. Safety and health impact of several modern trends through Ayurveda point of view is unknown.

Therefore, this paper explores the utility of knowledge of *Samskara* in understanding the modern-day cooking techniques in order to decide its effects on foods digestibility and health impacts.

AIM

To analyse modern cooking methodologies in accordance with Ayurvedic *Samskara* principles to determine their effects on digestibility and health outcomes.

OBJECTIVES

1. To critically analyse the *Ahara Samskaras* described in Ayurvedic literature and evaluate their functional role in food processing and health outcomes.
2. To evaluate contemporary cooking practices through the application of Ayurvedic *Samskara* principles in order to assess their potential impact on health outcomes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Classical Ayurvedic texts with commentaries, Modern literature, relevant thesis and articles, and reliable online sources related to cooking techniques in Ayurveda and modern sciences were studied and analysed. A systematic evaluation of the health effects of modern culinary techniques was conducted using Ayurvedic principles as the conceptual framework and systematically presented in this article.

OBSERVATION

As the primary focus of Ayurveda is the preservation of health rather than culinary science, detailed and direct descriptions of cooking methods are not elucidated in classical texts. However, certain references are available in Ayurvedic literature about the methods of preparation of food, as the mode of preparation plays a crucial role in determining its digestibility and health benefits.

Cooking methods are discussed under the concepts of *Karana* or *Samskara*, which refer to processes that modify the properties of food. *Acharya Charaka*, in the context of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi*

Visheshayatana, outlines principles of the preparation and consumption of food, wherein *Samskara* plays a significant role in culinary and therapeutic practices. *Samskara* is defined as the processing of *Dravya* leading to *Gunantaradhanam*, that is, alteration of inherent attributes. Such transformations are achieved through various procedures including *Toya Agni Sannikarsha* (contact with water and fire), *Shaucha* (cleansing), *Manthana* (churning), *Desha* (place of storage), *Kala* (time factor), *Vasana* (aromatization), *Bhavana* (impregnation), *Kala-Prakarsha*, and *Bhajana* (type of utensil) [4]. Among these, *Toya Sannikarsha*, *Agni Sannikarsha*, *Shaucha*, *Manthana*, and *Bhavana* are directly related to cooking methodologies.

According to *Sushruta Samhita*, food cooked on a mud frying pan (*Kapaala*) or directly over burning charcoal (*Angara*) becomes lighter to digest (*Laghu*) and helps in alleviating *Vata* [5].

Acharya Vagbhata, while explaining *Krutanna Varga* in *Sutrasthana*, states that food prepared using methods such as *Kookula*, *Karpara Bhrashta*, *Kandu*, and *Angara* becomes progressively lighter and easier to digest (*Laghu*), respectively. The renowned commentator of *Ashtanga Hridaya* has clarified the characteristics of these cooking media as follows: "*Kookula*" denotes cooking by steaming; "*Karpara*" refers to cooking in a heated earthen pan; "*Bhrashta*" refers to cooking in a perforated earthen pan, "*Kandu*" refers dome-shaped metallic vessel; and "*Angara*" denotes cooking directly over burning charcoal [6].

Tikakara Hemadri while commenting on same verse concludes that the extent of *Agni Sannikarsha* (contact with fire) is directly proportional to the *Guruta* or *Laghuta* of food, such that increased direct exposure to fire makes the food more *Laghu* (easily digestible).

Khshema-Kutuhala which is an eighteenth-century text, described *Saptavidhapaka* (seven methods of cooking) i.e.

- 1) *Bharjana* (roasting)
- 2) *Talana* (frying/deep frying)
- 3) *Svedana* (sizzling/steaming)
- 4) *Pachana* (vaporization/shallow frying)
- 5) *Kvathana* (boiling/seething)
- 6) *Tandoora*
- 7) *Pootapaka* (roasting in fire after covering/ wrapping). [7]

Cooking methods used in today's era

S.No.	Modern modes of cooking	Methods
1.	Moist-heat cooking	Boiling, steaming, simmering, poaching, blanching, pressure cooking, sous-vide cooking
2.	Dry-heat cooking	Roasting (oven, tandoor, air fryer), baking, grilling / barbequing, toasting
3.	Oil-mediated methods	Shallow frying (pan-fry, sauté, stir-fry), deep frying, roasting with

		oil/ghee, seasoning /tempering (Tadka)
4.	Mechanical methods	Churning / blending, grinding (wet or dry), mixing / emulsifying
5.	Technological methods	Induction cooking, microwave oven

Techniques used in Modern Cooking methods

1. **Mixer grinder:** A mixer grinder uses a high-speed electric motor to rotate the blades at high revolutions per minute (typically 18,000–20,000 or higher), generating forces that reduce large particles into smaller ones [8].
2. **Induction cooking:** In this, an alternating electric current passes through a copper coil beneath the cooktop surface, creating a fluctuating magnetic field. Heat is produced in copper coil due to electrical resistance and subsequently transferred to the cooking vessel through conduction. Thus, the vessel and consequently the food is heated indirectly [9].
3. **Microwave oven:** In this, an internal device called magnetron produces microwave energy that penetrates the food and induces rapid oscillation of polar molecules (water molecules), resulting in heat generation through molecular friction. So, microwave cooking involves direct internal heating of the food, with minimal primary heating of the container [10].
4. **Convection Microwave Oven:** Uses microwaves plus a heating element and fan (air) to bake, roast, and crisp, functioning more like a traditional oven.
5. **Sous-vide cooking:** In this method, food is cooked in vacuum-sealed plastic pouches that are immersed in a water bath at precisely controlled low temperatures for extended periods. Heat is transferred from the water to the pouch via convection, followed by conduction through the pouch to the food [11].

DISCUSSION

As said earlier, in Ayurveda, *Samskara* is the concept which includes cooking methods. Four types of *Samskara* described by *Maharshi Charaka* are more important to understand the effect of cooking on health. They are *Toya* and *Agni Sannikarsha*, *Manthna* and *Bhavana*." *Agni Sannikarsha* among these, is most important as *Agni* is said to be responsible for any kind of transformation in *Dravyas*.

Mode of Action: Every *Dravya* possesses a specific *Panchabhautika* composition. Exposure to *Agni Sannikarsha* (contact with fire) leads to alterations in this elemental composition. Since *Guna* are inherent attributes residing in *Dravya*, the transformation occurring after *Agni Sannikarsha* essentially represents *Dravyantaradhanam* rather than *Gunantaradhanam*. However, in practical observation, these changes in *Dravya* are perceived through alterations in *Guna* and are therefore described as *Gunantaradhanam*.

Cooking of food occurs through two primary methods:

1. Direct contact with *Agni* 2. Indirect contact with *Agni*. The method termed *Angara*, described in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and later in *Kshema-Kutuhalam*, represents cooking through direct contact with fire. Contemporary techniques like tandoor and barbecue can be categorized under this method. Traditionally, heat in a tandoor is generated by burning charcoal within the oven itself, exposing the food to live fire. In this method, food is subjected to very high temperatures, reaching up to about 480°C for extended periods, which makes the food more *Laghu* (easily digestible).

Cooking by indirect contact with *Agni* involves three components: the cooking utensil, the cooking medium, and the source of fire. *Acharya Vagbhata* describes three types of cooking utensils- *Kapala* (earthen pots), *Bhrashta* (perforated earthen vessels), and *Kandu* (metallic vessels). In these utensils, the level of heat exposure to the food increases sequentially, resulting in food becoming progressively more *Laghu* (easily digestible). In the present era, the use of earthen cooking vessels has considerably declined. Metallic utensils are now widely used because they are good conductors of heat and facilitate efficient heat transfer during cooking, resulting in food that is comparatively more *Laghu* and easier to digest.

Cooking media significantly influence the properties of food and its health effects. *Acharya Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* describes the method "*Kookula*," interpreted by renowned *Tikakara Arunadatta* as steam-based cooking (*Bashpa*), which is considered *Guru* (difficult to digest). Modern techniques like steaming, boiling and pressure cooking, correspond to this method. Foods prepared through these techniques are regarded comparatively more *Guru* than those prepared by roasting or barbecue. This is attributed to the indirect contact of fire through the medium of water. Since water itself possesses *Guru* qualities and they are opposite to *Agni*, it reduces the direct effect of *Agni* on food while also adding its own properties to the cooked food.

Similarly, when oils are used as the cooking medium, the contact of fire with food decreases due to the *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Drava* (liquid) properties of oil, which are contrary to the properties of *Agni*. In addition, oils contribute the characteristics of their source materials, such as groundnut, sesame, or mustard. Therefore, foods prepared through oil-based methods like frying acquire the properties of the oil through *Samyoga* (combination), which alters the

original attributes of the food and make it *Guru* and *Vidahi*.

Source of *Agni* and cooking technique also influence the digestibility of food and its health benefits. For example, in induction cooking the source of *Agni* is magnetic field and the heat generated, is transferred to food indirectly through copper plate. So, it makes the food comparatively more *Guru* as *Tikakara*. Hemadri commented that more is extent of contact of fire with food/vessel, more the food becomes lighter. However, in microwave oven, the source of *Agni* is itself magnetic field but the heat generated is directly transferred to the food. Moreover, the use of extra heating elements and fan in convection microwave oven makes the food *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhoot* predominant, making it more *Laghu* and easily digestible.

Experimental and clinical studies are required as the future scope of this conceptual study. The digestibility and nutritional value of rice prepared using different cooking methods- such as a pressure cooker, microwave oven, and induction heating, can be evaluated through experimental studies using albino mice.

CONCLUSION

Food contributes to health only when it is properly digested and assimilated by the body. In Ayurveda, the *Samskara* (processing) applied to food plays an important role in enhancing its digestibility. Even if a food is nutrient-rich, palatable, and easy to prepare, it does not provide health benefits if it is poorly digested; instead, it may lead to the formation of *Ama*. So, it is concluded that right amount of fire and direct or indirect contact of fire with food during preparation of food influences the *Guruta/Laghuta* of food.

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