



## Mini-review article

### A glimpse into Ayurvedic nutraceuticals and traditional snacks (*Bhaksya Varga*) according to Acharya Sushruta

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#### ABSTRACT

In modern science, food items are primarily classified based on their chemical composition, such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, and are referred to as nutraceuticals. In the classical Ayurvedic text *Sushruta Samhita*, Acharya Sushruta describes *Bhaksya Varga* (snacks) in terms of their *Rasa*, *Virya*, and *Vipaka*. These classifications are based on the biological actions of food. According to Ayurveda, a proper and balanced diet (*Ahara*) plays a crucial role in healing and prevention. A good and proper *Ahara* in illness is worth a hundred medicines, and no medication can benefit a patient who does not follow a proper dietary regimen. Ayurveda emphasizes the prevention of diseases and the promotion of health through proper diet and lifestyle (*Ahara* and *Vihara*). While the concept of nutraceuticals has gained popularity in recent times, its roots can be traced back to ancient Indian medical traditions. Ayurveda clearly states that food not only provides nutrition but also helps in maintaining overall health. The concept of *Anna Kalpana*, the formulation of food for both healthy and diseased individuals, was developed by our Acharyas, emphasizing the importance of diet in both normal and diseased states.

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#### INTRODUCTION

A healthy body and the prevention of disease are directly influenced by the intake of wholesome or unwholesome food. Similarly, the consumption of wholesome food leads to happiness, while unwholesome food is associated with misery. *Ahara* (food) sustains the life of all living beings, as life itself depends primarily on food (Payyappallimana and Venkatasubramanian, 2016).

A nutritious diet imparts strength, a healthy complexion, *ojas* (vital energy), growth and development, clarity of the senses (*Indriyas*), happiness, a clear voice, vitality, pleasure, and the enhancement of bodily tissues (*Dhatus*), intellect, and overall health. A person who follows a proper diet (*Pathya Ahara*) in accordance with their individual needs will remain free from the need for medication. *Ahara* is influenced by eight key factors, and when these rules are applied correctly in food processing, preparation, and consumption, they contribute to better health and wellness. Conversely, neglecting these principles and consuming unwholesome food may lead to various ailments and health issues.

Nutraceuticals are natural bioactive substances that provide proven physiological benefits or help reduce the risk of diseases. The growing consumer demand for an improved quality of life has sparked the nutraceutical revolution, with many seeking complementary or alternative products that offer health benefits. The

integration of nutraceuticals with traditional medicine has gained widespread consumer acceptance due to their long-standing use and proven efficacy (Nasri et al., 2014).

Although the concept of nutraceuticals is gaining increasing popularity in modern times, its roots can be traced back to ancient traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda. Ayurveda explicitly states that food, when consumed correctly, not only provides essential nutrition but also plays a vital role in maintaining health and preventing disease. It is emphasized that the right type of *Ahara*, appropriate for the individual's needs, should be consumed to maintain a healthy state and prevent illness.

Ayurvedic texts, such as the *Sushruta Samhita*, provide numerous references on the role of specific food products in managing various disease conditions (Shastri, 2005). The right diet, when consumed regularly, can improve quality of life by offering protection from external stressors. Commonly used nutraceuticals mentioned in the *Sushruta Samhita* are outlined in this document, highlighting their significance in Ayurvedic medicine and their ability to enhance overall well-being.

#### NEUTRACEUTICALS IN AYURVEDA AS PER ACHARYA SUSHRUTHA

##### Bhaksya

*Bhaksya* (snacks) made from milk are known for their

strengthening and aphrodisiac properties. They are good for the heart, have a pleasant aroma, do not cause heartburn, nourish the body, stimulate digestion, and mitigate *Pitta* (Su.su 46/392).

### Ghrtapura

*Ghrtapura* is beneficial for the *Prana* (life force), *Hridaya* (heart), and is known to balance *Vata* and *Pitta*. It is also considered *Vrishya* (aphrodisiac), *Guru* (heavy), and *Rakta-Mamsala* (supports the growth of blood and muscles) (Su.su 46/393).

Acharya Dalhana describes the preparation of *Ghrtapura* as follows: Wheat flour is made into dough, then milk, grated coconut, sugar, etc., are added. Small thin discs are shaped and deep-fried in ghee.

### Gaudika Bhakshya

*Gaudika Bhakshya* (snacks) are made from *Guda* (jaggery). These snacks are *Sthirening*, *Guru* (heavy), *Vata-nashana* (Vata-reducing), and do not cause heartburn. They mitigate *Pitta*, act as *Sukrala* (aphrodisiac), and increase *Kapha* (Su.su 46/393).

### Sattaka

*Sattaka* is a tasty snack that stimulates digestion (*Dipana*), is beneficial for the voice (*Swarya*), mitigates *Pitta* and *Vata*, and supports life (*Prana Vardana*) (Su.su 46/396).

Acharya Dalhana describes the preparation: A mixture of *Lavanga* (cloves), *Vyosa* (a type of spice), and *Khanda* (sugarcandy) is added to curd, churned well, and then filtered. The seeds of *Dadima* (pomegranate) and powder of *Karpura* (camphor) are sprinkled on top and consumed.

### Visyanda

*Visyanda* is known for its beneficial effects on the heart (*Hrudya*), has a pleasant fragrance (*Sugandhi*), is *Madhura* (sweet), *Snigdha* (unctuous), and increases *Kapha*. It is difficult to digest and balances *Vata*, acts as *Tripatikara* (restores the three doshas), and provides strength (*Balya*) (Su.su 46/397).

Acharya Dalhana mentions that *Visyanda* is made by mixing raw wheat flour with ghee, milk, and jaggery to form a liquid consistency—not too thin, not too solid.

### Phenaka

*Phenaka* is prepared from wheat flour dough and is strengthening, mitigates *Vata* and *Pitta*, and is beneficial for the heart, thus supporting overall health (Su.su 46/399).

### Palala

*Palala* is a food that increases *Kapha* and *Pitta*. It is made from oil cake or a paste of *Tila* (sesame seeds), and is hard for digestion. *Saskuli*, made from rice flour dough, is pressed through a small hole to form cylindrical or thread-like shapes and arranged in circular discs, which are then deep-fried in oil (Su.su 46/400).

### Paistika

*Paistika* is prepared from *Pishta* (a paste of corn flour) and is hot in potency (*Ushna Virya*). It aggravates *Kapha* and *Vata*, causes heartburn, and is difficult to digest, especially in large amounts (Su.su 46/401).

### Vaidala

*Vaidala* is made from pulses, which are easy to digest, have an astringent taste (*Kashaya*), and may cause gas and bloating. It does not interfere with *Pitta* but mitigates *Kapha* and acts as a purgative. Dishes made from *Masa* (black gram) are considered strengthening, aphrodisiac, and hard to digest (Su.su 46/402).

### Kurcika

*Kurcika* (cheese) is hard to digest and does not aggravate *Pitta* greatly (Su.su 46/403).

### Viruda Krta Bhaksya

*Viruda Krta Bhaksya* is prepared from sprouted grains and pulses, and is difficult to digest. It increases *Vata* and *Pitta*, causes a burning sensation, nausea, dryness, and can impair vision during digestion (Su.su 46/404).

### Kulmasa

*Kulmasa* increases *Vata*, causes dryness, is hard to digest, and produces purgation (Su.su 46/401).

Acharya Dalhana explains that *Kulmasa* is prepared by soaking barley flour in hot water, cooking it lightly, and then making thick sticks that are boiled well.

### Vatya, Dhana, and Ulumba

*Vatya* (a cake made from barley or wheat flour, fried in oil) is useful for treating *Udavarta* (upward movement of wind), cough, rhinitis, and diabetes. *Dhana* and *Ulumba* are easily digestible, reduce *Kapha* and *Medas* (fat), and promote digestion. *Dhana* refers to puffed corn (popcorn), while *Ulumba* refers to unripe corn roasted over burning coal (Su.su 46/410).

### Saktu

*Saktu* is made from cereal flour (such as barley, wheat, or rice) cooked in water. It is *Brihana* (nourishing), *Vrishya* (aphrodisiac), quenches thirst (*Trishna*), mitigates *Pitta* and *Kapha*, and is easily digestible when consumed in liquid form. When formed into hard balls, it becomes difficult to digest (Su.su 46/411).

### Laja

*Laja* (fried paddy) is beneficial for *Chardi* (vomiting), *Atisara* (diarrhea), stimulates digestion (*Dipana*), reduces *Kapha*, is *Balya* (strengthening), *Kashaya* (astringent), and is easily digestible. It also helps relieve thirst and assists in the elimination of waste (Su.su 46/413).

## Prthuka

*Prthuka* (paddy) when boiled and flattened is hard to digest, *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Brihana* (nourishing), increases *Kapha*, and provides strength when consumed with milk (*Ksheera*), mitigating *Vata* and promoting purgation (Su.su 46/414).

Fresh rice is difficult to digest, sweet in taste, and strengthening, whereas old rice aids in the healing of fractures and cures diabetes.

## CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

*Bhakshya Varga* (Snacks) is a fundamental concept in the *Annapana Vidhi Adhyaya* (the chapter on food and drink) mentioned in the *Sushruta Samhita*. This section highlights the significance of various food preparations, particularly snacks, and their role in promoting health, enhancing vitality, and aiding in the treatment of diseases. According to Ayurvedic principles, food is not merely a source of sustenance but plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of the body's doshas (energetic forces) and promoting overall well-being.

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Samskarana* refers to the process of preparing and transforming raw ingredients into nourishing, health-promoting food. The preparations described in the classical texts are simple, utilizing readily available ingredients that possess healing properties. These snacks, prepared through careful techniques, are designed not only to provide nutritional value but also to restore balance in the body, offering therapeutic benefits in the treatment of various ailments.

The *Bhakshya Varga* emphasizes that the right combination of ingredients, along with proper preparation methods, can significantly enhance the therapeutic properties of food. In Ayurveda, it is believed that food can directly impact both the body and the mind, nourishing the tissues (*Dhatus*), invigorating the digestive fire (*Agni*), and promoting overall health. The importance of food quality is underscored, where simple yet effective ingredients can serve as *nutraceuticals*, natural substances that provide physiological benefits and help prevent or treat diseases.

These preparations are designed to be easily accessible and can be made from ingredients that are commonly found in everyday life. They are not just limited to providing basic nutrition but are carefully crafted to address specific health concerns. For example, snacks like *Ghratapura*, *Sattaka*, and *Gaudika Bhakshya* are made from wholesome, nourishing ingredients that possess specific

qualities, such as strengthening, digesting, or balancing the doshas, which can help cure or alleviate diseases when consumed as part of a balanced Ayurvedic regimen.

In the modern context, Ayurvedic snacks, or *Bhakshya Varga*, can be viewed as an early form of nutraceuticals, foods that have both nutritional and medicinal value. These preparations are more than just sources of energy; they offer a holistic approach to health, promoting physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. By following the principles laid out in the *Sushruta Samhita*, these simple and accessible food items can serve as effective remedies, enhancing the body's ability to heal and thrive.

Thus, *Bhakshya Varga* in Ayurveda not only highlights the significance of food in maintaining health but also emphasizes the idea that a healthy, nutritious diet, prepared with care and precision, has the power to treat diseases and support the body's natural healing processes.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare(s) no conflicts of interest.

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