

REVIEW ARTICLE

Concept of Diet in Traditional Yoga Texts: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The concept of yogic diet is one of the fundamental principles provided by yoga texts for the attainment of well-being. Therefore, the goal of this review was to examine the specificities of yogic diet based on specific verses and how it is classified in several important ancient yogic texts, including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (HYP), *Gheranda Samhita* (GS) and *Bhagavad Gita* (BG).

Methods: All the originally collected verses on diet from the Sanskrit language were translated into English, examined and interpreted; and translated verses was grouped under the three points: (1) dietary verses from the yogic texts; (2) classification of diet in yogic texts; and (3) the specifics of each classification within each text.

Results: In the current analysis of the classic texts, HYP, GS, and BG shows that diet is discussed in eight, seventeen, and six verses of these classical yogic texts, respectively. The HYP and GS mentioned three different food categories: (1) *Mitahara*, (2) *Pathya Ahara*, and (3) *Apathya Ahara*. The BG divided the food into three categories: (1) *Swattik Ahara*, (2) *Rajaswik Ahara*, and (3) *Tamasik Ahara*.

Discussion: The overall findings revealed the diverse and distinct perspective on diet in each yoga texts. Future researchers will be able to look at and compare yogic diet with modern dietary classifications and their nutritional properties. By pointing out shortcomings in the current evaluation, researchers can also use resources to conduct more thorough research on compound diets for the next study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a life science that originated thousands of years ago in ancient India.^[1] To promote general health and well-being, yoga is a comprehensive practice that includes many different physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines.^[2] The word “yoga” is derived from the Sanskrit word “*Yuj*”, meaning “to unite” or “to join” and refers to the union of mind, body, and spirit.^[3] Attaining *Moksha*, or liberation, is the primary goal of yoga, and it can be achieved only by those who have good physical and mental health.^[4]

Yoga texts provide several basic principles to promote well-being and reach *Moksha* (liberation). Among these, the concept of diet is important.^[5] Much of the existing literature in this area is either limited to a few classic texts for examination or provides a cursory summary

of the concept of diet in yoga.^[6-12] Thus, the objective of this present review was to examine the details of yogic diet based on certain verses and how it is classified in various important ancient texts including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (HYP), *Gheranda Samhita* (GS) and *Bhagavad Gita* (BG).^[13-15]

2. METHODS

HYP, GS, and BG serve as the primary sources from which the yogic diet and classification system were derived. Initially, all the originally collected verses on diet from the Sanskrit language were translated into English.^[16] Second, these translated verses were examined and interpreted; and finally, each translated verses was systematically grouped under the three points: (1) dietary verses from the yogic texts; (2) classification of diet in yogic texts; and (3) the specifics of each classification within each text. PubMed and Google Scholar were also searched to find scientific literature on yoga diet.^[17,18] Using relevant keywords, related research articles were found from these two databases. This databases search resulted in some relevant studies on yogic diet.

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3. RESULTS

3.1. Dietary verses from the yoga texts

The traditional yoga texts HYP, GS, and BG contain eight, seventeen, and six verses, respectively, related to diet. The lists of relevant verses related to diet from each of the traditional yoga text are presented in Table 1.

3.2. Classification of diet in yoga texts

The HYP and GS include three different categories for diet: (1) *Mitahara*, (2) *Pathya Ahara*, and (3) *Apathya Ahara*. There were three categories in the BG: (1) *Swattik Ahara*, (2) *Rajaswik Ahara*, and (3) *Tamasik Ahara*. The classifications of diet that are mentioned in traditional yoga texts are presented in Figure 1.

3.3. Diet according to HYP

There are eight verses in the HYP that discuss diet (verses 15, 57–60, 62–63 of chapter 1, and verse 14 of chapter 2). The HYP states that overeating is considered an obstacle to the accomplishment of yoga, and to be successful in yoga practice one must be *Mitahari*. In the HYP, three different types of diet are mentioned: (1) *Mitahara*, (2) *Pathya Ahara*, and (3) *Apathya Ahara*. The complete descriptions of each of the three dietary categories are mentioned below in details:

3.3.1. *Mitahara (the habit of moderate food)*

The food which is well-greased and pleasing that has been offered to God should be consumed keeping one-fourth of the stomach empty (i.e., one should consume only three-fourths of total stomach). This kind of eating habit is called *Mitahara* (HYP 1/58).

3.3.2. *Pathya Ahara (wholesome diet)*

The practitioner of yoga should take wheat, rice, barley, *shastika* rice, milk, clarified butter, muscovado, butter, sugar-candy, honey, dry ginger, pointed gourd, five types of leafy vegetables (i.e., *jiwanti*, *bathua*, *cholai*, *megnadh*, and *punarnava*), green gram, and rain water. The food should be well-fed to body, very pleasing, well-greased, milk products, nourishing *dhatu*s, suitable for mind and worthy. In the beginning stages of practice, food consisting of milk and ghee is recommended (HYP 1/62-63, 2/14).

3.3.3. *Apathya Ahara (unwholesome diet)*

The practitioner of yoga should avoid those foods which are bitter, sour, spicy, salty, hot, green leafy vegetables, jujubes, oil, sesame, mustard, alcohol, fish, goat meat, curd, buttermilk, piper longum, saffron, asafoetida, garlic, reheated, dry, excessive salty, sour, and forbidden leafy vegetables (HYP 1/59-60).

3.4. Diet according to GS

There are 17 verses in the GS that discuss diet in chapter 5 (verses 2, 16-31). GS states that to succeed in yoga, a practitioner must adhere to *Mitahara* at the outset of their practice (chapter 5, verse 2). A practitioner will suffer from various ailments and not succeed in yoga if they begin without adhering to *Mitahara* (chapter 5, verse 16). The GS mentions three different kinds of diet: (1) *Mitahara*, (2) *Pathya Ahara*, and (3) *Apathya Ahara*. The complete descriptions of each of the three dietary categories are mentioned below in details:

3.4.1. *Mitahara (the habit of moderate food)*

The food which is pure, very pleasing and well-greased that should be consumed with contentedly keeping half of the stomach empty

(i.e., one should consume only half of total stomach). This kind of eating habit is called *Mitahara*. Half of the stomach should be filled with food, the third part with water, and the fourth part should be kept empty for ventilation (GS 5/21-22).

3.4.2. *Pathya Ahara (wholesome diet)*

A yogi should eat rice, barley *sattu*, wheat flour, *mungo dal*, *urid dal*, and bengal gram/chickpea, which should be clean and free from chaff. A yogi may also eat pointed gourd, jack fruit, *manakachu*, *kakkola*, jujube, bonduc nut, cucumber, plantain fig, unripe plantain, the small plantain, the plantain stem, roots, egg plant, and other medicinal roots and fruits (e.g., *riddhi*, etc). He may eat green, fresh vegetables, black vegetable, leaves of *patola*, the *vastuku shaka*, and *hima-lochika shaka*. These five vegetable leaves praised as fit for yogis. A yogi may also eat the following while practicing yoga is cardamon, *jaiphal*, cloves, aphrodisiacs or stimulants, the rose-apple, *haritaki*, and palm dates. A yogi may eat his diet according to his desire, which are easily digestible, agreeable, and cooling foods which nourish the humors of the body (GS 5/17-20, 5/28-29).

3.4.3. *Apathya Ahara (unwholesome diet)*

In the beginning of yoga-practice, one should discard bitter, acid, salt, pungent and roasted things, curd, whey, heavy vegetables, wine, palmnuts, over-ripe jack-fruit, *kulattha*, *masur* beans, *pandu* fruit, pumpkins, vegetable stems, gourds, berries, *katha-bel* (*feronia elephantum*), *kantabilva*, *palasa* (*butea frondosa*), *kadamba* (*nauclea cadamba*), *jambira* (*citron*), *bimba*, *lukucha* (a kind of bread fruit tree), onions, lotus, *kamaranga*, *piyala* (*buchanama latifolia*), *hinga* (*assefoetida*), *salmali*, *kemuka*, fresh butter, ghee, thickened milk, sugar, and date-sugar, ripe plantain, cocoa-nut, pomegranate, dates, *lavani* fruit, *amalaki* (*myrobalans*), and everything containing acid juices. Yogi should avoid hard (not easily digestible), sinful food, or putrid food, or very hot, or very stale food, as well as very cooling or very much exciting food. He should avoid early (morning before sunrise) baths, fasting, or anything giving pain to the body. He should also prohibit eating only once a day, or not eating at all. However, he may remain without food for three hours. In the beginning before commencing it, he should take a little milk and ghee, and take his food twice daily, once at noon, and once in the evening (GS 5/23-27, 5/29-31).

3.5. Diet according to BG

There are six verses in the BG that discuss diet (verses 16-17 of chapter 6 and verses 7-10 of chapter 17). According to BG, yoga is not for one who eats too much or who does not eat at all (verse 16 of chapter 6). To get success in yoga, one must moderate in food (verse 17 of chapter 6). The food that people prefer is according to their dispositions (verse 7 of chapter 17). In the BG, three different types of diet are mentioned: (1) *Swattik Ahara*, (2) *Rajaswik Ahara*, and (3) *Tamasik Ahara*. The complete descriptions of each of the three dietary categories are mentioned below in details:

3.5.1. *Swattik Ahara (Swattik diet)*

The food which rich in water, well-greased, pleasing to the heart and increase longevity, intellect, strength, health, happiness, affection are those foods which are favorite to *Swattik* people (BG 17/8).

3.5.2. *Rajaswik Ahara (Rajaswik diet)*

The food which are bitter, sour, salty, very hot, spicy, dry, combustible and such foods produce pain, grief, and disease are those foods which are favorite to *Rajaswik* people (BG 17/9).

3.5.3. *Tamasik Ahara (Tamasik diet)*

The food which are undercooked, juiceless, foul smelling, stale, spoiled, and impure are those foods which are favorite to *Tamasik* people (BG 17/10).

4. DISCUSSION

In the current analysis of the classic texts, HYP, GS and BG, there are eight, seventeen and six verses respectively that discuss diet. The HYP and GS include three different dietary categories: (1) *Mitahara*, (2) *Pathya Ahara*, and (3) *Apathya Ahara*. There are three categories of BG which are somewhat different: (1) *Swattik Ahara*, (2) *Rajaswik Ahara*, and (3) *Tamasik Ahara*.

The topic is made more fascinating by the abundance of names of both healthy and unhealthy foods listed in these classical books.^[19] The classification of food in yoga literature, a systematic arrangement of dietary verses from those sources, and a thorough explanation of each classification within those texts were all included in this review. According to traditional yoga texts, consumption of excessive and low-quality food is considered a hindrance to yoga practice, which is also the primary cause of obesity.^[20,21] In contrast, following *Mitahara*, *Pathya Ahara*, and *Swattik Ahara* make it easier to achieve yogic objectives.^[22,23] The findings also revealed that the food products that are placed in front of us are influenced by our words, emotions, and thoughts – both good and negative – which in turn influence the recipients.^[24,25] As a result, everything from the process of preparing food to the attitude of those serving it and receiving it is affected. Feelings of satisfaction, gratitude etc. elevate food to the level of its sacraments, as the ingredients and preparation techniques of food enhance its taste and nutritional value.^[26] Due to this, food under *Mitahara* is included in practically all yoga books along with some mandatory practices to promote a pure mental state.

5. CONCLUSION

The collective results revealed that each yoga text's perception of food is highly unique and diverse. If someone want to excel in yoga, it is recommended that he should practice *Mitahara*. It will be possible for future scholars to examine and compare yogic diets with contemporary dietary classifications and their nutritional properties. Researchers can also use the materials to conduct more in-depth research on yogic diet for the future study by identifying flaws in the current evaluation. Yogic diet is specifically designed for yoga so that the practitioner does not fall ill and can remain healthy during the practice. Yogic diet mostly includes vegetarianism and individuals who lead a sedentary life can greatly benefit from adopting a yogic diet in addition to their regular yoga practice. According to yoga texts, one must keep specific dietary measures in mind before engaging in any particular yoga practice. Yogic diet is based on the idea of *Mitahara*, *Pathya*, and *Satvik Ahara*. Hence, quality of food (*Swattik*), the quantity (half the stomach should be filled with food, one-fourth with water and one fourth for air), and mental state at the time of eating (calm and stable) are important factors for each yoga practitioner. This current review found yogic diet have positive effects on people's physical, mental, and social health, which is based on traditional yoga texts. Furthermore, it seems that following a yogic diet is more beneficial for practicing yoga successfully.

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7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors contributed equally in design and execution of the article.

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9. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study is not required ethical clearance as it is a review study.

10. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

11. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

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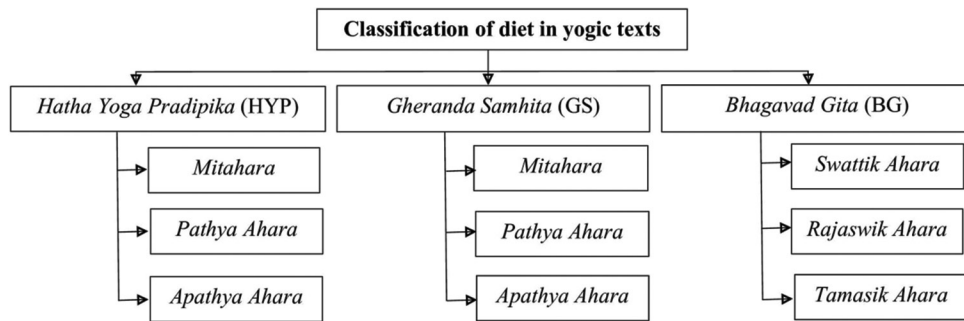


Figure 1: The classifications of diet that are mentioned in traditional yoga texts

Table 1: Lists of relevant verses related to diet from each of the traditional yoga text

Traditional yoga texts	Relevant verses related to diet
<i>Hatha Yoga Pradipika</i>	Chapter 1 (verses 15, 57–60, 62–63); Chapter 2 (verse 14)
<i>Gheranda Samhita</i>	Chapter 5 (verses 2, 16–31)
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Chapter 6 (verses 16–17); Chapter 17 (verses 7–10)