

PRE SUNSET INTAKE OF FOOD

The Jaina system of food habits is considered to be the healthiest of all, by experts. Food plays a major role in the upkeep of physical and psychic balance in a person's behaviour.

The following are the important aspects of Jaina system of food habits:

1. Vegetarian diet
2. Pre sunset intake of food
3. Consumption of filtered and boiled water
4. Avoidance of root and bulbous vegetables
5. Avoidance of honey
6. Avoidance of liquor and narcotics
7. Avoiding of 'Udumbar' fruits such as fig, banyan and the like
8. Regular observance of 'Upavās'

All these restrictions on food are mainly based on the principle of subsistence of life through minimum violence.

Though vegetarian diet is the major aspect of Jaina food habits, Pre sunset food intake is also given equal importance in this system. According to this, one is expected to take one's food 48 minutes before sunset. It is because after sunset, the ephemeral microorganisms start spreading in the atmosphere and they are sure to be killed unaware during the process of cooking and consuming the food at night. This does not only add to violence but also amounts to contamination of food which may result in health issues.

Highlight on non-intake of food at night:

Jains are noted for their observance of this as a rule. Recently a 'Tirthankara' statue was unearthed by the efforts of 'Ahimsa walk' group, a voluntary association of Jaina enthusiasts, in a hamlet by name 'Rāvutta Nallur' near Utthira Merur, situated between Chennai and Kancheepuram. Though the name looks as if that it may be a place connected with Muslims with a surname of 'Rāvutthar'. To everyone's surprise, it is a place connected with Jains.

The most elderly man in the village was asked to give his opinion on the unearthing of the Jaina Tirthankara statue. He opined that the hamlet was once

a place inhabited by those who followed ‘non intake of food at night’. The present name ‘Rāvutta Nallur’ should have been originally ‘Rābhutta Nallur’.

‘Ra’ refers to night and ‘bhukta.’ refers to intake of food and ‘abhuktam’ refers to non-intake of food in Sanskrit.

Rā + Abhukta + Nallur

‘Abhutta’ is the Prakrit equivalent of the Sanskrit ‘abhukta’, which refers to the negation of the word ‘bhukta’ which in turn refers to non-intake of food. The Sanskrit word ‘Bhuktam’ is pronounced ‘bhuttam’ in Prakrit, and ‘abhuktam’ is pronounced ‘abhuttam’.

In Prakrit, ‘Bhukta’ becomes ‘Bhutta’ where the conjunct letter fades away as ‘Bhakti’ becomes ‘Bhatti’ and ‘Shakti’ becomes ‘Shatti’.

Rā + Abhutta + Nallur

Rāvutta Nallur

References from Jaina texts:

‘Arungala cheppu’, the Tamil version of the Sanskrit original, ‘Ratna Karandaka Shrāvakāchāram, which elaborates on the householders’ Dharma, explains the 11 stages of householders.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Dharisan | - having faith alone |
| 2 | Vratikan | - following vows |
| 3 | Sāmāyikan | - following the rules of sāmāyika thrice a day |
| 4 | Pōshadha Upavāsan | - observing ‘upavāsa’ on the four days of the month |
| 5 | Acchitthan | - refraining from having green vegetables, fruits etc. |
| 6 | Rātri Abhuktan | - refraining from food intake at night |
| 7 | Brahmacharyan | - conquering over the physical lust |
| 8 | Anāramban | - refraining from all deeds of violence |
| 9 | Aparigrahan | - refraining the internal and external attachments |
| 10 | Anānumatan | - free from worldly connections |
| 11 | Utthittan | - renouncing the home and surrendering to the ascetics |

The first 6 stages belong to the last order, the stages from 7 to 9 belong to the middle order and the stages 10 and 11 belong to the primary order of the householders. Thus the refraining from intake of food at night is the primary rule followed by the last stage of the last order of the householders.

“இருளின் கண் நால்வகை ஊனும் துறந்தான்
இராத்திரி அபுக்தன் எனல்”

- அருங்கல செப்பு

The text says that the person in the sixth stage is one who avoids four kinds of food intake at night.

The four types of food are those that are taken in by:

1. Eating
2. Chewing
3. Drinking
4. Licking

“ Annam pānam khādhyam lehiyam naśrati yo vibhāvaryām |

Sa ca **rātribhukti virāt:** sakhe dhwanu kampa mana mana: ||”

-Ratna karaṇḍaka shrāvakāchāram

“ He who, being mercifully inclined towards all living beings, does not take any of the four kinds of food, namely, grains or things made of grains, liquids, sweetmeats and semi liquids after sunset is called a ‘**Rātribhuktivirata shravaka**’

-Ratna karaṇḍaka shrāvakāchāram

The Jain version of Ramayana, by title ‘Padma purāṇam’ says as under:

“Madhyamāmsāśnam **rātrau bhojanam** kanda bhakṣaṇam |

Ye kurvanti vṛthā teṣām tīrtha yātrā japastapa: ||”

-Padma purāṇam

“All the pilgrimages, mantra chanting and spiritual practices are in vain for those who consume liquor and meat, take food at night and consume root vegetables.”

கொல்லாமை, பொய்யாமை, கள்ளாமை, காமத்தை

ஒல்லாமை, ஒண்பொருளை வரைதலோடு இவை பிறவும்

பொல்லாத புலைசு தேன் கள் இருள் உண்ணா நிலைமையொடு

நல்லாரைப் பணிவதும் நாமுறையே பயன் உரைப்பாம்!

- பழம் பாடல்

“Non-violence, truth, non-stealing, chastity, limiting possessions with avoidance of meat, honey, liquor and intake of food after sunset along with reverence to the wise are the virtues that yield good results.”

-An old Tamil verse

விரையார் மலர்மிசை வருவார் திருவறம்
விழைவார், கொலையினை விழையார்; பொய்
உரையார்; களவினை ஒழுகார்; பிறர்மனை
உவவார்; மிகுபொருள் உவவார்; வெம்
சுரையால் உணர்வினை அழியார்; அழிதசை
துவ்வார்; விடமென வெவ்வாறும்
புரையார்; நறவினை நுகரார்; இரவுணல்
புகழார்; குரவரை இகழாரே!

- திருக்கலம்பகம்

“Those who follow the householders’ Dharma propounded by the Jina would refrain from killing, untruth, stealing, lust towards other’s wife and avarice towards accumulation of wealth, consumption of liquor, meat and honey, intake of food after sunset, and irreverence to elders.”

-Tirukkalamambakam

செய்யும் வினையும் இருள் உண்பதுவும்
தேனும் நறவும் ஊனும் உயிரும்
பொய்யும் கொலையும் களவும் தவிரப்
பொய்தீர் அறநூல் செய்தார் தமது ஊர்
கையும் முகமும் இதழும் விழியும்
காலும் நிறமும் போலும் கமலம்
கொய்யும் மடவார் கண் வாய் அதரம்
கோபம் கடியும் தீபங்குடியே!

-தீபங்குடி பதிகம்

Jayamkondar, a popular Tamil poet who authored ‘Kalingatthupparani’, had composed a collection of poems under the title of ‘Deepankudi pathikam’, in

praise of his native place, Deepankudi in Tanjore district. In this above verse, he enlists the virtues followed by the residents of his native place; they are engaged in composing texts on Dharma and refrained from taking food at night, honey, liquor, meat, untruth, killing, stealing and lust for women.

கொலை பொய் களவு காமம் தேன் கொடியதென்றுத்தாய்

இரவுணல் இல்லையென்று உறுதி மொழியுரைத்தாய்

இயலாம் அடியார் தமக்கு மெய்நூல் மலைவில்லாத

ஆறேழும் வகுத்தாய் செகத்தாய் மகத்தான

நிலையா அருகாவென நினைத்தார் பிறவி தொலைத்தாரே!

-துதிப் பாடல்

A song in praise of the Arhat, narrates that He sermonized that killing, untruth, stealing, physical lust and intake of honey amounts to violence, stressed upon the non-intake of food in nights and preached upon the six dravyas and seven tattvas. Those who contemplate on Him escape from the cycle of births and deaths.

References from Hindu texts:

‘Narakatvārāṇi catwāri pratamam **rātri bhōjanam**

Parastrī gamanam caiva santāṇānanta kāyike

Ye rāthrou sarvatāhāram varjayati samekasa:

Teṣām bhakṣōpavāsasya phalam māsenā jayate

Nōdakamapi pātapyam rātravatra Yudhiṣṭir

Tapasivinām viśeṣeṇa ṛṣiṇāmca vivekinām ||’

- Mahābhārata

“Yushishtir! Intake of food at night, enjoyment with the ladies other than one’s wife, intake of sweet candied, preserved and pickled vegetables and consumption of root vegetables are considered to be the four entrances to hell. The first among them is the intake of food at night. Whoever refraining from consuming all types of food intake at night are blessed with the benefit of a fortnight’s ‘upavāsa’. Even water should not be drunk during nights. More

important is that ascetics and wise householders should not even drink water at night.”

“Astaṅgate divānāte āpō ṛitir mucyate |

Annam māmsam ca samam prōktam mārkaṇḍeya mahariṣiṇā ||

-Garuda purāṇam

“Markaṇḍeya Maharishi had said that after sunset, water is equivalent to blood and rice is equivalent to meat; therefore one has to refrain from intake of food at night.”

Scientific significance:

Almost all texts on Indian medicine insist on the non-intake of food at night. All branches of medicine, from ayurveda to allopathy recommend the intake of meal at least two to three hours before retiring to bed.

Dr. B. M. Hegde supports this view on Jain practice of pre sunset food intake. His speech under the title “Shubha Sukshmangal”, elaborates on the benefits enjoyed by this practice.

Apart from avoiding violence towards microorganisms it is healthy to have our food before sunset.

When a person has a late meal and goes to sleep, all the parts of his body would be put to rest except those of the digestive system. The digestive organs would be working overtime without proper coordinated rest with other systems in the body. This leads to most of the digestive disorders. This slows down the metabolic rate. The easy and common solution to all these health issues is to have food before sunset.

So when a person has timely meals before sunset and goes to bed, his digestive organs are not loaded with the burden of secreting digestive enzymes to digest the food. The cells of the digestive system are rejuvenated by the long hours of rest. Digestive disorders are kept at bay. Once the digestive disorders are done away with, general health will definitely improve.

Obesity is kept under check. Fat constituents are under control. Body is felt lighter during the whole day. Over eating is controlled and gluttonous craving for food subsides gradually.

Since physical imbalances are set right by this practice, the mental attitude towards general approach to various things in life takes a new turn. Body and mind coordination would be at its optimum level.

Limitations:

The present life style demands compliance with frequent official trips, irregular shifts and extended hours of work schedule for both men and women. Apart from the tight work schedules, commutation to work place and back in urban areas also poses a problem to this. Due to the heavy traffic congestion, people cannot reach their destination in time. By the time they reach home, they are both physically and mentally exhausted. With a rise in the purchasing power and general standard of living, people find it easy to skip their cooking chores and buy their food from the fast food centres. All these factors contribute to taking meals at late night.

Suggestions:

Though it is really very difficult to follow this healthy practice in the current scenario, considering the health benefits it is still worth trying. People who are religious and health conscious always make it a point to stick to this tradition of pre sunset meal. For those who could not prepare a pre sunset meal, the minimum stack of few fruits comes handy. This practice is not as difficult as it seems to be. It needs only a strong conviction and unshakable will power. Whenever one tends to make a compromise on this, it is to be borne in mind that it is all for one's own physical and mental wellbeing.

Conclusion:

Only a healthy physique and mindset would be able to assist a person in facing the challenges of stressful life in this modern world. Food plays a major role in connection with this need of the hour. Traditional system of food habits recommended by our elders should be viewed with much seriousness and put to practice effectively.

Where there is purity of food, there would be purity of thought process. Where there is purity of thought process, there is purity of mind. Where there is purity of mind, there is purity in the delivery of thoughts through speech and actions. There would be total alertness in what we think, speak and act.