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Review Article

Guru Cha Atarpana: A Classical Ayurvedic Paradigm for Sthoulya (Obesity) Management

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Abstract

Sthoulya (obesity) is one of the major lifestyle disorders of the present era and is primarily considered a *Santarpanajanya Vyadhi* in Ayurveda. Excessive accumulation of *Meda* and *Kapha* not only affects physical appearance but also predisposes an individual to several metabolic disorders. Although *Atarpana Chikitsa* is advocated in the management of *Sthoulya*, the use of conventional *Laghu Atarpana* may not be appropriate in all patients, especially those possessing *Tikshnagni*. In such situations, the concept of *Guru cha Atarpana* offers a unique therapeutic approach.Objective of the study is to review the concept of *Guru cha Atarpana* and to understand its role in the prevention and management of *Sthoulya* and other *Kapha-Meda* predominant disorders.Relevant references pertaining to *Guru Guna*, *Atarpana*, and *Sthoulya* were collected from classical Ayurvedic texts and analyzed critically. The available literary evidence was reviewed to understand the therapeutic basis and clinical applicability of *Guru cha Atarpana*. *Guru cha Atarpana* employs substances that are heavy in nature but capable of reducing excess *Kapha* and *Meda*. The use of naturally *Guru* substances such as *Yava*, as well as appropriate *Samskar*a of *dravyas*, helps in achieving depletion without causing excessive tissue nourishment. This approach prolongs gastric emptying, delays the onset of hunger, promotes early satiety, and supports dietary discipline. Simultaneously, it helps maintain *Agni,* prevents *Vata* aggravation, and effectively interrupts the *Kapha-Medo Avarana Samprapti* involved in *Sthoulya*. The principles of this treatment can also be extended to conditions such as *Prameha, Urustambha,* and *Vatarakta*. *Guru cha Atarpana* represents a distinctive and practical Ayurvedic treatment strategy for *Sthoulya*, particularly in individuals with strong digestive power. By providing satiety while restricting excessive nourishment, it addresses the fundamental pathology of *Kapha-Meda* disorders and offers a sustainable approach for their long-term management and prevention.

Keywords: Ayurveda*, Guru cha Atarpana, Sthoulya,* Obesity, *Atarpana, Guru Guna, Agni.*

Introduction

Guru cha atarpana is a distinctive treatment policy explained in Ayurveda to deal with *sthoulya* (obesity). This approach integrates specific dietary, lifestyle, and behavioral patterns like laziness, lethargy etc. The concept of *atarpana* (lack of nourishment) can be achieved through two methods: *Laghu Atarpana* and *Guru Atarpana*. To fully grasp the selection of *Guru Atarpana ahara vihara* in specific conditions involving *kapha-medo avarana samprapti* (pathog - enesis involving obstruction by *Kapha* and fat), it's crucial to understand the individual and combined effects of *guru* (heavy) and *apatarpana* (depletion) on the body and *agni* (digestive fire).

Understanding the Concept of "Guru"

The term *guru* can be interpreted in two ways:
a.It can denote a high dose or increased quantity (*matra*).
b.It can refer to *guru guna* (heavy quality) as one of the twenty fundamental qualities (*Vimshati guna*).
In the present context, *guru* primarily refers to *guru*

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guna, encompassing substances that are inherently heavy (*dravyas* which possess *guru guna* by their nature) and those that acquire this quality through various food preparations (*aharakalpana*) and processing methods (*samskara*). More precisely, *guru* means an article that is heavy for digestion.

Definition of *Gurutva*: Heaviness *(Gurutva)* is the non-inherent *(asamaavaayi)* cause of primary downfall or fall due to gravity.[1]

yasya dravyasya brumhane shakti sa guru

whichever substance has a capacity to nourish the body is called *guru*

Elemental Composition (*Pancha Bhoutikatwa*): The Earth element *(Prithvi Mahabhoota)* signifies stability, heaviness, and structure in a substance. According to some other *Acharyas*, heaviness (*gauravam*) is due to the Earth (*paarthivam*) and Water (*aapyama*) elements[2].

Prescribed *Matra* for *Guru Guna Dravyas*:

Half satiety (*ardha sauhityam*) for *guru* substances[8].Depending on the substance (*dravyaa - pekshaayaa*), one-third (*tribhaaga sauhityam*) or half satiety (*ardha sauhityam*) is advised for *guru* substances[9]. Here, *sauhitya* refers to *trupti* (conten - tment), defined as the cessation of desire for eating (*bhakshanaadeenaam aakaankshaa nivruttih*)[10]. This means a feeling of contentment, which is produced out of *bojana* (eating). So *guru guna* can achieve this target of *thrupti* /satiety very easily compared to *laghu dravyas*. As a result, the person will be reluctant to take food again, the return of hunger will be delayed, and the frequency of consumption is minimized.

By the consumption of *guru dravyas*, since it takes longer time for digestion and assimilation, they(*Guru dravyas*) are going to make a direct influence on *kala* (time), which is one among the *ahara parinam akarabavas* (factors influencing food transformation). Time contributes to the complete transformation and distribution of food throughout the body[11].

Arunadata, in the context dealing with *guru ca atarpana* in *sthoulya*, says: Due to its heaviness (*Gauravaaccha*), it does not get digested quickly[12]. This indicates that the period required for the outcome of food consumption to manifest in the body is going to get delayed by *guru dravyas*.

In short, by administration of *guru guna dravyas*:

1.Helps to attain satiety early with minimum quantity.

2.Takes longer time for digestion.

Understanding "*Atarpana*"

Tarpana by its word meaning refers to *thrupti* (satiety) or *preenana* (nourishment). Here, the meaning of *thrupti* has to be interpreted as *preenana*, which denotes nourishing or strengthening effect in the body. So *atarpana* can be defined as absence or lack of *tarpana*. Gangadhara states: *Atarpana* is that by which there is no satiety[13]. It means the absence of *tarpana* or satiety[10].

The term *atarpana* as such is quoted seldom in literature and even in such contexts commentators like Arunadatta, Indu, Gangadhara have considered *atarpana* as *apatarpana* itself and have not tried to give a comprehensible description. But from the available description it may be considered as: In this context, the term *apatarpana* when used in relation to *Ahara* refers to absence of food consumption (*Bhojana*)[10]. And *atarpana* denotes lack of *Poshana* (nourishment)[10].

Apatarpana means Includes fasting (*langhanam*), absence of food (*bhojanaabhaavah*)[16]. *Atarpana* means that which lacks satiety (*truptyaabhaavo yasya tat*)[10].

Again, in different occasions the meaning conveyed by the term *apatarpana* varies:

a. Apatarpana as one among the *Dvividhopakrama* (two types of therapeutic measures), which includes *Langana* (fasting), *Swedana* (sudation) and *Rookshana* (drying therapy).

b. Apatarpana referring to the *dashavidha langana* (ten types of fasting), such as *Chatushprakara samshudhi* (four types of purificatory measures).

c. In the context of *Ama* (undigested food material), *apatarpana* refers to *Langana*, *Pacana* (digestive therapy) and *Doshavasecana* (elimination of vitiated *doshas*).

d. In case of diseases like *jwara* (fever), *Apatarpana* means only *Upavasa* (fasting), not the other methods of *Langana*.

In the present context, *Atarpana* has got only one meaning, i.e., *Aharajanya atarpana* (atarpana caused by diet).Otherwise,in a more clear way it is the adminis -tration of *Aahara* which possesses comparatively less nourishing effect on the body (*sharera*) and *agni*.

Why *Laghu Atarpana* is Contraindicated in *Sthoulya*

In general, most of the *atarpana dravyas* possess *laghu guna* (light quality). So they can attain the expected effect of *apatarpana* very easily. But in *kaphamedo avarana* condition, *atarpana* produced out of *laghu guna dravyas* won't give the desired results. Because *agni* is already in a state of *Sandhukshita avastha* (excessively sharp state). This will get further intensified by *laghu ahara* due to its *agni-vayu mahabuta* predominance and *agni sandooshana* property (property to vitiate *agni*) leading to *kapha-medo vrudhi* (increase in *Kapha* and *meda*. *Laghu guna* even fails to attain the goal of *vata shamana* (alleviation of *Vata*).So,*upavasa* (complete fasting) and *laghu atarpana* are totally contra-indicated in *Sthoulya*.

Therapeutic Goals of *Guru Atarpana*

When *guru atarpana* is applied, it is supposed to produce following effects on body:

a. *Agni yaapanam* (maintenance of *agni*).

b. *Vaataghnataa* (alleviation of *Vata*).

c. *Shleshma medo haratvam* (reduction of *Kapha* and fat).

According to Shivadasa Sen, the particle "*cha*" in *Guru cha atarpana* has got a very specific meaning. It shows nothing but the importance of lifestyle and behavioral changes needed to put into practice along with dietetic management in *sthoulya*, such as staying awake (*jaagaravyaayaama*), exercise (*vyaayaama*), and mental activity (*chintaadi grahanam*)[15].

Sthoulya Samprapti and the Role of *Guru Cha Atarpana*

The concept of *guru atarpana* can be well explained with the help of *sthoulya samprapti* (pathogenesis of obesity), as it is the summarized treatment of entire *sthoulya chikitsa* (treatment of obesity)

In persons who do not exercise (*avyayaama*), sleep during the day (*divasvapna*), and consume *Kapha*-aggravating foods (*shleshmaahaara sevinah*), In that person the sweet essence of food (*madhuro'nnarasah*)

Table 1: Actions and Effects of *Guru Guna* (Heaviness Quality)

Effect & Influence	Action
Promotes nourishment (*Bruhmana*)	Substances with the potency to increase body mass and nourish tissues are considered *Guru*.[3]
Enhances strength (*Bala*) and nourishment (*Tarpana*)	*Guru* causes *saada* (heaviness/debility), *lepa* (coating), supports *bala* (strength), and promotes *tarpana* and *bruhmana*.[4]
Alleviates *Vata,* promotes *Kapha* and *Pushti*	Balances *Vata*, promotes *Kapha* and nourishment (*pushti)*, but is slow to digest (*chirapaki)*.[5]
Increases *Mala* (Waste products)	Causes satiety (*trupti janaka*), suppresses digestive fire (*agnimandata)*, leads to coating of channels (*srotalepana*), and is chirapaki (Protracted digestion/ Prolonged digestion).[6]
Influence on *Agni*	Guruuni *dravyani* (heavy substances) are not conducive to digestion (*agni*).[7]
Dosage consideration due to heaviness	Because of difficult digestibility (durjaratvaat), proper *matra* (dose) must be considered in use of *guru* substances.

Table 2: Methods of Guru Cha Atarpana Implementation

Method	Description	Example
Use of Naturally *Guru* but *Atarpana Dravyas*	Use substances that inherently possess *guru guna* (heaviness) but exhibit *atarpana* (depleting) or *karshana* (slimming) properties.	*Samskruta Yava* (Barley) – Though heavy, it depletes body tissues[14].
Samskara (Processing) of *Laghu Dravyas*	Convert *laghu atarpana dravyas* (light depleting substances) into *guru atarpana dravyas* through specific *samskras (*like *peshana* etc).	Processing *prashatika* (rice) to make it heavier before administration[14].
Samskara of *Guru Santarpana Dravyas*	Modify *guru santarpana dravyas* (heavy nourishing substances) to behave like *guru atarpana* through suitable *samskara*[14].	

predominantly increases fat (*medau vivarddhate*) due to its unctuousness *guna* (*snehaat*) [16].

In individuals with *atisthoulya* (excessive obesity), due to excessive indulgence in *gurvadi santarpana ahara vihara* (heavy, nourishing diet and lifestyle), an increase in *shleshma* (*Kapha*) occurs. This *shleshma*, when mixed with *apakwa annarasa* (undigested food essence), forms *ama* (toxins), i.e., *dhatugata ama* (toxins located in tissues). Due to the specificity of *nidana* (causative) factors, only *mala roopa medo dhatu vrudhi* (increase in fat tissue in the form of waste products) occurs. The remaining *rasa* (plasma/nutrient fluid) will be very less in quantity, such that it won't be in a position to nourish other *dhatus* (tissues). Since *srotas* (channels) are in a state of *medo rudha avastha* (obstructed by fat), *vayu* (*Vata*) gets sheltered in the *koshta* (alimentary tract) itself, resulting in *sandhukshita agni* (stimulated digestive fire).

In such a situation, the method of management should be that all measures which destroy fat (meda), *Anila* (*Vata*), and *Shleshma* (*Kapha*) are desired[17]. This can be best attained by the implementation of *guru atarpana*. Because, as stated by Gangadhara, for an excessively obese person, the depletion (*karshanam*) mentioned is desired. In obesity (*sthoulye*), due to stimulated agni (*sandhukshitagni*) and increased *koshta vayu* (*bhootakoshtavaayutvaabhyaam*), *guru dravya* which is atarpana is desired because it causes depletion (*karshanam syaat*) due to its non-nourishing quality (*apoushakatvaat*)[18]. Arunadatta states: This indeed reduces fat (*medah kshapayati*) due to its dryness (*raukshyaat*), and due to its heaviness (*gauravaaccha*), it does not get digested quickly (*shiighram jaraam na gachchati*)[12].

Broader Applicability of *Guru Cha Atarpana*

While *Sthoulya* is just an example quoted in the literature, the applicability of *guru ca atarpana* is not only limited to this,but can also be applied in so many other conditions where *Kapha-meda avarana* (obstruction by *Kapha* and fat) can be observed, like that of *Prameha* (diabetes), *Urusthamba* (thigh stiffness), and *Vatarakta* (gout).

Examples of *Dravyas* Used in *Guru Cha Atarpana*:

1. *Yava* (Barley): *Guru* (heavy), *rooksha* (drying), *lekhana* (scraping), *anabishyandi* (non-channel blocking).
2. *Mudga* (Green gram): *Laghu* (light) and *rooksha* (drying).
3. *Madhu (purana*) (Old Honey): R*ooksha* (drying), *laghu* (light), *meda sthoulyapaha* (removes fat and obesity), *atilekhana* (strong scraping action).
4. *Shyamaka* (Barnyard Millet): *Soshana* (drying) and *rooksha* (drying).
5. *Gavedhuka* (Coix lacryma-jobi): *Karshyakrut* (causes emaciation), *kaphanashini* (destroys *Kapha*).

Discussion

The concept of *Guru Cha Atarpana* repre - sents a nuanced and context-specific therapeutic approach within the Ayurvedic framework, parti - cularly valuable in managing *Sthoulya* (obesity) and associated *Kapha–Meda* pathologies. This approach stands in contrast to conventional methods that emphasize *Langhana* (fasting) or *Laghu Atarpana*, offering a more sustainable and constitutionally

appropriate management plan for individuals with *Sandhukshitagni* and *Kapha-Medo Avarana*.

One of the unique aspects of *Guru Cha Atarpana* lies in its seemingly counter-intuitive principle—the use of *guru* (heavy) but non-nourishing (atarpana) substances to reduce excess body fat and regulate appetite. Guru dravyas, though comparatively slow to digest, promote sustained satiety, delay the return of hunger, and reduce the frequency of food intake. This concept finds parallels in modern nutritional science through the Satiety Index (SI), which measures the ability of foods to induce fullness and reduce subsequent food consumption. Foods possessing a higher satiety index are associated with better appetite regulation and improved weight management outcomes.

Similarly, the concept can also be understood in relation to the Glycaemic Index (GI). Many *Guru Cha Atarpana dravyas* such as *Yava* (barley), *Mudga*, *Shyamaka*, and *Gavedhuka* are known to produce a slower and more sustained release of glucose, thereby avoiding rapid glycaemic fluctuations and excessive hunger. Foods with lower GI values contribute to prolonged satiety, improved metabolic regulation, and reduced caloric intake, which are desirable outcomes in the management of *Sthoulya*. Thus, the Ayurvedic rationale of selecting *guru* yet *atarpana* substances appears to correspond with modern concepts of low-GI and high-SI dietary interventions.

Moreover, the slow digestion of these substances allows better regulation of *Agni* without causing its suppression, thereby avoiding excessive *Vata* aggrav - ation, which is a common drawback associated with abrupt or prolonged fasting. This highlights the therapeutic superiority of *Guru Cha Atarpana* in selected patients where maintaining *Agni* while reducing *Meda* is essential.

The contraindication of *Laghu Atarpana* in *Sthoulya* is particularly critical. In individuals with sharp *Agni* and obstructed *Srotas* due to *Kapha* and *Meda* accumulation, administration of *laghu dravyas* may further stimulate *Agni*, increase food craving and hunger frequency, aggravate *Vata,* and potentially worsen the pathological process. This underscores the importance of tailoring treatment not merely based on disease but also according to *agnibala*, *srotas* condition, and *dosha* predominance, reflecting the individualized therapeutic approach advocated by Ayurveda.

Further, the behavioral and lifestyle components emphasized through the particle "*cha*" in *Guru Cha Atarpana* reflect Ayurveda's holistic approach to disease management. Along with appropriate dietary measures, interventions such as *Jaagara* (controlled wakefulness), *Vyaayama* (exercise), and *Chintaadi Grahana* (mental discipline and behavioral regulation) contribute to correcting the etiological factors responsible for obesity. These measures support energy expenditure, regulate food-seeking behaviour, and facilitate long-term weight management.

Classical references substantiate the pharmacological and functional characteristics of *guru dravyas*, particularly their *Bruhmana, Vata-shamana*, and *Kapha-Meda hara* properties. *Yava* (barley) serves as a classical example of a substance that is *guru* in *guna* yet *Karshana* in *karma*. Similarly, *Mudga*, *Shyamaka*, *Gavedhuka*, and *Purana Madhu* demonstrate how appropriate selection and processing (*Samskara*) can enhance therapeutic effectiveness without compro - mising *Agni* or causing nutritional deficiency.

The broader applicability of *Guru Cha Atarpana* beyond obesity, particularly in conditions such as *Prameha*,*Vatarakta*, and *Urustambha*, suggests its potential utility in a range of metabolic disorders characterized by *Kapha-Meda* predominance. This enhances its contemporary relevance in an era marked by increasing prevalence of obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and sedentary lifestyles.

From a clinical and research perspective, *Guru Cha Atarpana* encourages a rational dietary strategy centered on satiety enhancement, digestive regulation, and *Srotas* management. The parallels observed with modern concepts such as Glycaemic Index and Satiety Index offer opportunities for interdisciplinary research and may facilitate a better scientific understanding of classical Ayurvedic dietary principles in metabolic disorders.

Conclusion

Guru Cha Atarpana forms the anchor of treatment in the management of *Sthoulya*. It acts in a number of ways to achieve the goal of weight decline by increasing the time of digestion, decreasing return of hunger, early attainment of satiety, appetite control, and also by executing proper lifestyle and behavioural codes.

Guru Cha Atarpana constitutes an important therapeutic principle in the management of *Sthoulya*, particularly in individuals with *Sandhukshita Agni* and *Kapha–Meda* predominance. By employing *Guru* yet *Atarpana* substances, it promotes sustained satiety, delays the recurrence of hunger, regulates food intake, and supports gradual reduction of excess *Meda* without causing *Agni* suppression or *Vata* aggravation. The incorporation of complementary lifestyle measures further enhances its effectiveness by addressing behavioural and metabolic contributors to obesity. The concept demonstrates remarkable alignment with modern understanding of low glycaemic index and high satiety index foods, highlighting its continued relevance in the dietary management of obesity and related metabolic disorders.

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