Review Article

Momentousness of Upaskar (spices) for maintaining good health- An ancient traditional ayurvedic approach

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A B S T R A C T

Since ages Spices or condiment are perceived to be closely connected to food habit, cultural traditions, preservation and also to the medicinal use by a section of society as per their practice and experience. In so far as our country India is concerned, it is commonly pronounced as the “Spice Bowl of the World” and history of Indian spices is almost as old as the ‘human civilization of Spices. These are used as one of the main ingredient of our routine or regular food. Scattered descriptions about these are available in ancient scriptures as therapeutic / protective activity in addition to their taste enhancing activity. Sour tasting substances like Amlīkā (Tamarind), Dādima (Pomegranate), Nimbū (Lemon) and others are being described under the Hṛiddya varga (cardiac stimulant section) of Ayurveda. These substances by stimulating Bodhaka Kapha increase the taste in food. Hīṅgu (Asafoetida), Mircā (Black pepper), Sauṭhipa (Fennel) are substances which stimulate hunger and hence are called digestive substances. In the same way Rāi (Brown mustard seeds), Adaraka (Wet ginger root), etc. substances are specifically helpful in digestion and hence are called digestive substances.

1. Introduction

Complexity and subtle use of herbs & spices characterize Indian food and Indian cuisine. These spices play crucial role in Indian cooking. It is a common popular myth that if there are no spices, it’s not Indian food. We Indians have a usual practice or habit of spicing up our food to make it more hot and tasty. Some of the spices are required for the aroma, some for flavor and some for complimenting other spices Spices are defined as “a strongly flavored or aromatic substance of vegetable origin, obtained from tropical plants, commonly used as a condiment”. In Ayurveda it is called ‘Upaskara’1 and ‘Sambhāra’.2 Spices were once as precious as gold. India plays a very important role in the spice market of the world. In ancient times majority of the spices were produced in India and exported worldwide. It was then; the spices of India attracted people across the borders and forced them to come to India for Spice trade.

‘Masālā’ is a word very commonly used in Indian cooking and is simply the Hindi word for “spice.” So, whenever a combination of spices, herbs and other condiments are ground or blended together, it is called ‘masala’. In India from ancient times palatable recipes and spices are prepared with the combination of these tasteful, carminative and digestive ingredients. If we cautiously observe, it could be adequately acknowledged that there are many ayurvedic plants are either used as food as culled out as neutraceutical under schedule IV of FSSAI or used as spices since, these delicious recipes enhance digestive vigor

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and induce easy digestion. An attempt has been to segregate a list of such items ie spices and condiments in treatment of various kinds of diseases, which are detailed as follows:

Ajavāyana - Botanical name: Trachyspermum ammi (L.) Sprague; Family: Apiaceae; Sanskrit- Yavānī, Hindi- Ajwain, ajwaayan, Jayavan, Ajwan; Common English Name: The Bishop’s weed, Ajova seeds

Properties and Uses: Ajavāyana is pungent and bitter, penetrating, hot in potency, adds taste, light in attribute, carminative, digestive, cardiotonic; alleviates Kapha and Vāta; aggravates Pitta; treats analgesia, abdominal disorders, flatulence, Gulma and seminal disorders.

In case of addiction to alcohol, boil 1/2 kg of thymol seeds in 4 liters of water until reduced to 2 liters. Strain it and store. Use one cup of this drink before meals regularly. It also protects the liver and reduces the desire for alcohol.5–18

Āmalakī - Botanical name: Phyllanthus emblica L.; Family: Euphorbiaceae; Sanskrit- Āmalaki, Dhārtṛphalam, Sṛṭhālāḥ, Amṛṭapatham, Hindi- Aamla, Aavla, Aavada; English: Emblic myrobalan tree

Properties and Uses: Āmalakī is well known among rejuvenating drugs. It is an anti-diarrheal, diuretic, blood purifier and tantant. It treats diarrhea, Prameha, burning sensation, jaundice, hyperacidity, anaemia, dyspepsia, dyspnea. It is ophthalmic and longevity promoter alleviates Vāta due to the acidic taste, Pitta due to sweet and cold properties and Kapha due to dry and astringent properties.9–11,19–22

Āma- Botanical name: Mangifera indica L.; Family: Anacardiaceae; Sanskrit- Āmra; Hindi- Aam; Common English Name: Mango tree

Properties and Uses: The unripe fruit of mango is astringent-sour in taste, and pacifies Kapha. It treats vitiation of Vātāpitta, is dry, heavy in attribute, and causes common cold and anorexia. Its excessive use may be harmful.10,12,13,15–17

Ādṛakā- Botanical name: Zingiber officinale Roscoe; Family- Zingiberaceae; Sanskrit- Āḍrakāma, Śṛṅgverum; Hindi- Adrakh, Aadi; English- Wet ginger root

Properties and Uses: It is sharp, hot in potency, carminative, pungent, dry in attribute, post digestive effect is sweet and alleviates Kapāvāṭa. It is used in food preparations due to its digestive and carminative properties. Its dried form is known as Śunṭhī. It bears same properties like Ādṛaka.

It is used as a stimulant and carminative agent. Take a small quantity of ginger along with 3–4 morsels of food to enhance appetite. Ginger taken just after meals helps in easy digestion of food.8,11,13–16,20,23

Bṛhadāilā- Botanical name: Amomum subulatum Roxb. Family: Zingiberaceae; Sanskrit- Sthāilālā, Bhadrailā, Brhadelā; Hindi- Badi ilaychi; Common English Name: Greater cardamom

Properties and Uses: Its aromatic black seeds are used in spices as well as sweets. It is digestive, alleviates Pitta; hypnotic, tantant, cardiotonic, hepatostimulant. Its intake alleviates Pitta disorders.8,9,11–13,15,16,19,23

Chuhārā- Botanical name: Phoenix sylvestris (L.) Roxb.; Family: Arecaceae; Sanskrit- Kharjūra; Hindi- Pindkjhajura, Chuharaa, Choharaa; Common English Name: Date palm

Properties and Uses: It is red and yellowish-brown coloured berry. Its endocarp is fleshy and sweet. It is sweet, coolant, heavy, oily, tantant, cardiotonic, spermatogenic, carminative, strength promoting, nutritive. It treats fever, diarrhea, injury, hyperthirst, cough, dyspnea, syncope, vomiting, tuberculosis, Raktaptīta, burning sensation, alcoholism; alleviates Vātāpitta.11,15,16

Citraka- Botanical name: Plumbago zeylanica L.; Family: Plumbaginaceae; Sanskrit- Citraka, Analanāmā, Pāthī, Vyāla, Īṣaṇa; Hindi: Cheeta, Chitta, Chitrak, Chituar; Common English Name: Ceylon leadwort

Properties and Uses: It is carminative, dry and light in attribute; pungent and bitter in taste; hot in potency and adds taste. It treats sprue, Āma associated disorders, leprosy, inflammation, worm infestation and abdominal pain; alleviates Tridosha.8,10,12,13,16,17,19

Dādima- Botanical name: Punica granatum L.; Family: Lythraceae; Sanskrit- Dādima Hindi- Aanaar Common English Name: Pomegranate

Properties and Uses: Not only Dādima fruit but the whole plant part has medicinal properties. It alleviates Tridosha and hyperthirst; digestive, light, mucilaginous, brain tonic, tonic and carminative. It treats burning sensation, cardiac disorders, halitosis and throat disorders.9,10,15–17,19

Dhānycaka- Botanical name Coriandrum sativum L.; Family: Apiaceae; Sanskrit- Dhānycakam, Dhānakam, Dhānām, Dhānay, Kunaṭi, Chatrā, Vitunnakam; Hindi : Dhaniya; Common English Name: Coriander, Coriander Fruit

Properties and Uses: Astringent, bitter, sweet and pungent in taste; post digestive effect is sweet; hot in potency; light and mucilaginous in attribute; tantant, carminative, digestive and antidiarrheal. It is used in food preparations due to its specific properties. Adds taste due to its aromatic property and alleviates Pitta due to cold potency.12,13,15–17

Store dry coriander powder mixed with 4 parts of crystal sugar in a bottle. Take one teaspoon twice daily along with water in acidity. It also acts as a diuretic.5,6

Elā- Botanical name: Elettaria cardamomum (L.) Maton; Family: Zingiberaceae; Sanskrit- Elā, Sūkṣmā, Trūti, Sūkṣmāila; Hindi- Choṭi ilaychi, Safed ilaychi; Common English Name: Lesser cardamom
Properties and Uses: Green cardamom (Elä) is light and dry in attribute; pungent and sweet in taste. Post digestive effect is sweet; cold in potency and alleviates Tridosha. It alleviates Kapha. It is bitter, pungent in taste, hot in potency and light in attribute. It pacifies Vāta, Kapha, treats dyspnea, bodyache, nausea, dysuria and toxicity. It pacifies loss of taste; is aphrodisiac, cardiac and considered harmful during pregnancy. It is carminative, digestive, memory enhancer; treats wound, hemorrhoids, pruritus and cough. Application of cardamom powder along with honey inside the oral cavity cures stomatitis (mouth ulcers). 5,6

Haridrā- Botanical name:Curcuma longa L.; 3,4 Family: Zingiberaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Haridrā, Kācanī, Pītā, Niādhīyā; Hindi-Haladi, Haldi, Hardi, Hardee; Common English Name: Turmeric

Properties and Uses: Bitter and pungent in taste; dry and light in attribute; post digestive effect is pungent; hot in potency; alleviates Kaphāvata due to hot potency and alleviates Pitta due to bitter taste. Tastant and carminative; useful in anorexia, constipation, jaundice and ascites. 10-17

Jātīphala- Botanical name: Cuminum cyminum L.; 3,4 Family: Apiaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Jātīphala, Jātīkoam, Mālākīphalam; Hindi- Jayaphal, Jayaphar; Common English Name: Cumin

Properties and Uses: It is pungent in taste; hot in potency; light, sharp and mucilaginous in attribute. Acts as a digestive and carminative due to its pungent and hot properties. Acts as an analgesic and vermical due to mucilaginous and sharp properties. Useful in dyspepsia, flatulence, Gulma, abdominal pain and constipation due to carminative property. It enhance the taste due to aromatic and tastant properties. 12-14,17

Jātīphala- Botanical name: Myristica fragrans Houtt.; 3,4 Family: Myristicaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Jātīphala, Jātīkoam, Mālākīphalam; Hindi- Jayaphal, Jayaphar; Common English Name: Nutmeg

Properties and Uses: It is bitter, pungent, sharp, hot in potency, taste, cardiotonic, voice enhancer; alleviates Kaphāvata, vomiting, dyspepsia, inflammation and rhinitis. 16,17

Jāvitrī- Botanical name: Myristica fragrans Houtt.; 3,4 Family: Myristicaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Jāvitrī; Hindi-Jaavitrī, Jaavyatri; Common English Name: Mace, Nutmeg aril.

Properties and Uses: Scarlet and pale yellow aril part of Jāvaphala is known as Jāvitrī. It is well known by the name of Mālātīpatrikā, Sumanpatrikā and Jātīpatrī. Pungent and bitter in taste; light in attribute; hot in potency; tautant, complexion enhancer; aggravates Kapha. Treats emesis, dyspepsia, excessive thirst, worm infestation and poisoning. 16,17

Jiraka (Krṣṇa)- Botanical name: Cuminum cyminum L.; 3,4 Family: Apiaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Kṛṣṇajārāh, Udgrādothanaḥ, Kālājījī, Suṣāvī, Sugandhah; Hindi-Kaala jeera, Syaha jeera; Common English Name: Cumin seed

Properties and Uses: It is pungent in taste, hot in potency; alleviates Kapha and inflammation. Tastant, febrifuge, ophthalmic; anti diarrheal. It is used in different food preparations due to its specific properties 15,16,17. In urinary diseases and leucorrhoeas, boil 3-4 gm of cumin seeds in water, strain the solution and take it with crystal sugar. 5,6

Jiraka (Śveta)- Botanical name: Carum carvi L.; 3,4 Family: Apiaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Sukaljirakah, Jirakah, Jarnah, Ajājī; Hindi- Jeera, Saada jeera, Sadharan Jeera, Safed jeera; Common English Name: Cumin

Properties and Uses: It is described as coolant and tastant in Rajanighantu. It is pungent and sweet in taste, carminative, vermicidal, ophthalmic; useful in poisoning and flatulence. 12,15-17 Intake of 4-6 gm powdered roasted cumin seeds along with yogurt or diluted yogurt (lassī) gives immediate relief in diarrhea. 5,6

Kaidarya (Karīpattā)- Botanical name: Murraya koenigii (L.) Spreng.; 3,4 Family: Rutaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Kaidarya, Kaitarya, Surabhinimba; Hindi- Karipatta, Katneem, Meetha neem; Common English Name: Curry leaf tree.

Properties and Uses: From ancient times the curry leaf has been used in India. Its wet or dried leaves fried in Ghrīta (Clarified butter) or oil enhance the taste and flavor of Kadhi and Sāga. It is pungent, bitter, astringent, coolant, light; alleviates Pitta, inflammation, pruritus and poison. 8,14,17,20

Keara- Botanical name: Crocus sativus L.; 3,4 Family: Iridaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Kear; Hindi-Kesar; Family: Iridaceae Common Name: Saffron.

Medicinal use: Keara used for their emmenagogue (promoting the menstrual flow) and aphrodisiac activities. Pungent and bitter in taste; hot in potency; alleviates Vāṭakapha. Acts as complexion enhancer, tastant, aromatic, wound purifier and tonic. Useful in cephalic disorders, wound, Sidhma, worm infestation, pruritus, emesis, hiccups, skin pigmentation, poisoning, throat pain, skin disorders. 14-17

Intake of its infusion alongwith salt is useful in retention of urine. Intake of Kumkuma Madhūdaka yoga prepared from saffron paste, honey and water is useful in dysuria. 24

Kharbuja- Botanical name: Cucumis melo L.; 3,4 Family: Cucurbitaceae; 3,4 Sanskrit- Daājīgulam, Kharbujām, Madhuyākam, Madhuphalam; Hindi- Kharburj, Kharbuja, Chibud; Common English Name: Melon

Properties and Uses: Muskmelon seeds shows wound healing activity. It treats in burning sensation, delirium, and mania; alleviates Vāṭapitta. It is useful in throat
disorders, oral disorders, cardiac disorders and abdominal disorders. 13,14,16

**Lavanga-** **Botanical name:** Syzygium aromaticum (L.) Merr. & L.M. Perry; 3,4 **Family:** Myrtaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Lavangī; Hindi : Laung; Longa; Lavanga; **Common English Name:** Clove.

**Properties and Uses:** Bitter and pungent in taste; dry in attribute; cardiotonic, aphrodisiac, and tonic. It has the same properties as garlic. Sweet in taste; post digestive effect is sweet; hot in potency; alleviates Vāta; aggravates Kaphapitta. It is used as a spice due to its properties. 13,14,16,17

**Lahsun , Lasun; Family:** Liliaceae; Common English Name: Bulb Onion

**Palāṇḍu-** **Botanical name:** Allium cepa L.; 3,4 **Family:** Liliaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Palaṇḍūḥ, Yavanesṭāḥ, Mukhadūṣakāḥ; Hindi : Pyaaj, Pyaj; **Common English Name:** Bulb Onion

**Properties and Uses:** It has the same properties as garlic. Sweet in taste; post digestive effect is sweet; hot in potency; alleviates Vāta; aggravates Kaphapitta. It is used to enhance the taste. In Hārīta Sāhīhitā, 25 it is described as Vātakaphāṃaka and analgesic; useful in Gułma. According to Bhāvaprakāṣa, its post digestive effect is sweet; strength imparting, spermatogenic and alleviates Vāta. 15-17

**Properties and Uses:** Both varieties of Pippali are used for medicinal purposes. In Caraka 26 and Suruta Sāhīhitā, 24, Long pepper is described as a laxative substance. It is pungent in taste; light, sharp and mucilaginous in attribute; hot in potency; a mild laxative; useful in dyspepsia, cough, abdominal disorders, fever, leprosy and rheumatoid arthritis. From ancient times, Long pepper is used as a spice. 13-17,21

**Marica (Krśna)-** **Botanical name** Piper nigrum L.; 3,4 **Family:** Piperaceae; **Sanskrit:** Maricam, Vellajam, Krśnam, Usāṇam; Hindi : Maricha, Miracha, Gol marich; **Common English Name:** Black pepper.

**Properties and Uses:** Pungent in taste; light and sharp in attribute; hot in potency. Alleviates Vāta due to its hot potency; alleviates Kapha due to pungent, sharp and dry properties. It acts as a carminative, digestive, stomachic and astringent due to sharp and hot properties.

**Properties and Uses:** Pungent in taste; light and sharp in attribute; hot in potency; alleviates Vāta; is tastant and carminative;

Chewing 1-2 black peppercorns relieves cough and also helps in sleep, especially if coughing. Intake of 4-5 pounded black peppercorns mixed with one teaspoon of warm ghee and sugar is beneficial in ularicarian. 5,6

**Methikā-** **Botanical name:** Trigonella foenum-graecum L.; 3,4 **Family:** Fabaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Methikā, Methinī, Dīpanī, Bahupatrikā, Bodhini, Bahubijā, Jyoti, Gandhaphalā, Vallarī, Candrikā-mantā, Mirapūspa, Keravī, Bahupurī; Hindi : Methi; **Common English Name:** Fenugreek, Greek hay, Greek clover

**Properties and Uses:** Pungent in taste; hot in potency; aggravates Raktapitta; alleviates Vāta; is tastant and carminative. 10,16,20

**Properties and Uses:** Seeds of Dodā are known as Postadānā. It is sedative, nutritive, anti diarrheal and useful in oleation. It is used in sweets and pudding. It treats insomnia, general weakness, dry cough and bladder disorders along with honey or sugar. 13,16

**Putihā-** **Botanical name:** Papaver somniferum L.; 3,4 **Family:** Papaveraceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Khākhassatīlā; Hindi : Postdaana, Daana, Khas-khas ke daane, Khas-beej; **Common English Name:** Popy seeds

**Properties and Uses:** Seeds of Dodā are known as Postadānā. It is sedative, nutritive, anti diarrheal and useful in oleation. It is used in sweets and pudding. It treats insomnia, general weakness, dry cough and bladder disorders along with honey or sugar. 13,16

**Mireyā-** **Botanical name:** Foeniculum vulgare Mill.; 3,4 **Family:** Apiaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Sātapūspa, Mereyā; Hindi : Saunf, Badi saunf; **Common English Name:** Fennel fruit.

**Properties and Uses:** It is used as a mouth freshener and folk medicine from ancient times. In Madhuraskandha section of Caraka Sāhīhitā it is described by the name Chatrā and in Suruta Sāhīhitā described by the name of Mī. Pungent, bitter and sweet in taste; hot in potency; mucilaginous in attribute; alleviates Vātapitta; carminative, digestive, aphrodisiac, cardiotonic, tonic and useful in burning sensation, abdominal disorders. It is used as a spice due to its specific properties. 11,12,14-16.

**Rajikā-** **Botanical name** Brassica nigra (L.) Koch.; 3,4 **Family:** Brassicaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Rāji, Rājikā, Tikṣṇagandhā, Kṣujjanikā, Āsuri; Hindi : Rai, Lāl rai, Makda rai; **Common English Name:** Indian mustard

**Properties and Uses:** Pungent and bitter in taste; hot in potency; lastent, carminative; treats anorexia, constipation, jaundice and ascites. Alleviates Kaphavātu due to its hot property and alleviates Pitta due to bitter taste. 8,10,14,16

**Rasona-** **Botanical name:** Allium sativum L.; 3,4 **Family:** Liliaceae; 3,4 **Sanskrit:** Lahsun , Lasun; Hindi : Lahsun , Lasun; **Common English Name:** Garlic.
Properties and Uses: Sweet and pungent in taste; post digestive effect is pungent; mucilaginous, cardiotonic, tantant, tonic, union promoter, nutrient, rejuvenator and alleviates Kaphavāta.\textsuperscript{13,14,16,17}

Properties and Uses: Garlic is a strong baceriostatic agent. It is recommended in high blood pressure and atherosclerosis. It has been reported to lower blood cholesterol. Soak 1 piece of chopped garlic in water overnight.\textsuperscript{5,6}

Śāleya- Botanical name: Parmelia perlata (Huds.) Ach.;\textsuperscript{3,4} Family: Parmeliaceae;\textsuperscript{3,4} Sanskrit: Śāleyam, Śilāpūspam, Vṛdhhim; Hindi: Charaela, Bhurichareela, Pattharpool; Common English Name: Stone flowers , Yellow Lichen.

Properties and Uses: It is cold in potency; adds taste, light; alleviates Vāṭa; antidiarrheal, aromatic; useful in paediatric disorders and rheumatoid arthritis due to its Vāṭa alleviating property.\textsuperscript{8–10,12,16}

Śītalacī- Botanical name: Piper cubeba L. f.;\textsuperscript{3,4} Family: Piperaceae;\textsuperscript{3,4} Sanskrit: Kānikolāh; Hindi: Shital chini, Kabaab chini, Kankola, Sheetal marich; Common English Name: Cubebs.

Properties and Uses: Bitter in taste; light and sharp in attribute; hot in potency; cardiotonic; tantant; alleviates Kapha; treats cardiac disorders, halitosis, worm infestation and dyspepsia.\textsuperscript{9–11,15}

Ṭāḷisapta- Botanical name: Abies webbiana (Wall. ex D.Don) Lindl.;\textsuperscript{3,4} Family: Pinaceae.\textsuperscript{3,4} Sanskrit: Tāḷisam, Patrādhyanam, Dāṭrīpatram; Hindi: Taalispatra; Common English Name: Himalayan silver fir.

Properties and Uses: It is mentioned as Śīvirecaka dravya in Suruta Saṁhiṭā. According to Caraka Saṁhiṭā, it is useful in tuberculosis in the form of Tāḷisādi cūraṇa and Vatī. It is carminative, cardiotonic; alleviates Kaphapitta; useful in cough, dyspnea and oral disorders.\textsuperscript{16,17}

Tejpatra- Botanical name: Cinnamomum tamalā (Buch.-Ham.) T.Nees & Eberm.;\textsuperscript{3,4} Family: Lauraceae;\textsuperscript{3,4} Sanskrit: Patram, Tamāḷapatram, Patrakam; Hindi : Tamaalpatra, Patraj, Tejpatta, Tejpatra, Tejpaaat; Common English Name: Indian bay-leaf.

Properties and Uses: It is sweet in taste; sharp and light in attribute; hot in potency; carminative; alleviates Kaphapitta; useful in anorexia, flatulence, abdominal pain, diarrhea, Kapha disorders, digestive disorders and uterine disorders. It is useful in paediatric disorders and rheumatoid arthritis due to its Vāṭa alleviating property.\textsuperscript{13,15–17}

Twaka- Botanical name: Cinnamomum verum J.Presl.;\textsuperscript{3,4} Family: Lauraceae;\textsuperscript{3,4} Sanskrit: Dāruṣiṭā, Śvāḍvī; Hindi : Dalchini, Darchini; Common English Name: Cinnamon bark.

Properties and Uses: It is sweet and bitter in taste; hot in potency; alleviates Vāṭapitta; antidiarrheal, aromatic; useful in excessive thirst and stomatitis. It is useful in abdominal disorders due to its carminative property.\textsuperscript{12,13,15,16} It promotes digestion and relieves cold, cough and congestion when used as a decotion along with cardamom, ginger and clove.\textsuperscript{5,6}

2. Conclusion
Health is the base of four objectives of human endeavor (Purushārtha-chatusṭaya) i.e., Dharma means righteousness (moral value), Artha means prosperity (economic value), Kāma means pleasure or love (psychological value) and Mokṣa means liberation (spiritual value). For living a happy and healthy life it is very important to follow Āyurveda preachings. Use of only salutary diet promotes health of an individual and maleficent diet is the cause of all diseases. Sapidity and palatability is known to be one of the chief characters of salutary diet. While defining the properties of salutary diet in Caraka Saṁhiṭā, it is said that this type of palatable, fresh and mucilaginous food promotes health.

Palatable food prepared from the spices is beneficial only when taken in an appropriate quantity. It is a secret that a self controlled person can enjoy the actual pleasure of various delicious foods prepared from these spices only, when the earlier consumed food is completely digested because hunger enhances the palatability.

3. Conflicts of Interest
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