

RITU CHARYA – SEASONAL REGIMENS ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA – A REVIEW

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Abstract

Ritucharya is a unique concept of Ayurveda. A year (samvatsara) is divided into six parts by seasons. Among them, when the Sun is in northward position to the Earth, that part of the year is called Adana kala and includes three ritu starting from shishira, vasanta and grishma. When the Sun is in a position of southwards of the Earth, the period is called visarga kala and includes three ritu starting from varsha, sharad and hemanta. Seasons are manifested due to the changes in environmental conditions, temperature, day-night cycle and circadian rhythm. Being an integral unit of the nature, these seasonal changes in nature affect human physiology too. Therefore, one must follow the specific regimen for maintaining the homeostasis of body against the changes of nature. So our ancient Acharyas have designed the seasonal regimen according to changes in the dosha, bala (strength), and agni (digestive power). Therefore, Ritucharya is most important for prevention from seasonal diseases.

Keywords: Adana kala; Ritu (season); Bala; Visargkala; Agni; Dosha.

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INTRODUCTION

The treasure of Ayurveda has precious knowledge of Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) which is explained in almost all the classic text of Ayurveda. Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is a combination of two words i.e. Ritu (season) and Charya (lifestyle). Ritu means seasons and Charya means what to do. In general Ritucharya means diet and lifestyle prescribed according to different seasons. Year is divided into 6 seasons on the basis of the position of sun with respect to earth. These 6 seasons are Shishira (winter), Vasanta (spring), Greeshma (summer), Varsha (monsoon), Sharad (autumn) and Hemanta (late autumn / pre-winter).^[1] The seasons are differentiated according to month, rashi and characteristics. One should identify the seasons to as per its characteristics. The Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) involves, following the genuine rules regarding Ahara and Vihara (food and activities) according to the changing season. There is a strong need to follow some rules regarding diet and habits in order to combat the upcoming diseases. Our body is bound to face different variations of Dosha, Strength and Agni (digestive power) while passing through six seasons. So our body is likely to get affected if the same regimen is followed in all seasons.

Concept of Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is to preserve the equilibrium of dosha through the concept of samanya and vishesha (similarity and peculiarity). Knowledge and regular observance of suitable Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is mainly for the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. Acharyas described ritucharya for healthy person so modifications are necessary for diseased person.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To highlight the features of Six Ritu (season) along with dietary and habitual regimen explained in various classical texts of Ayurveda.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

All the available references of ritucharya (seasonal regimen) in Ayurvedic classics will be reviewed for this study. The relevant websites and journals providing information regarding the Ritus and Ritucharya will also be reviewed.

Conceptual study

For adaption of Ritucharya one has to knowledge about month and characteristic features of respective seasons.^[2] (Table 1)

Hemant Ritucharya

Diet

During sheeta kala (hemanta) cold wind stimulates the Agni (digestive power) of healthy individuals and Agni (digestive power) is also obstructed in body by the atmospheric cold. So Agni (digestive power) becomes strong or powerful enough to digest food that is heavy in digestion and in excess quantity. If person cannot get adequate food, then this increased Agni (digestive power) consumes / absorbs the rasa etc. Dhatus of body and leads towards emaciation this condition further creates the vitiation of Vaat Dosha.^[3]

As Agni (digestive power) is stimulated, Unctuous, Sweet, sour and salty food items should be consumed predominantly. Meat of fatty, aquatic, marshy and burrowing animals should be taken. Also consume roasted meat of animals that eat by snatching the prey. After that one should consume madira and sidhu (type of wines and honey).

Milk products, sugar cane products, fats and oils, new rice and warm water should be taken during Hemant Ritu.^[4]

Table 1: Characteristic features of Ritu

Season	Month	Characteristic features	Rasa	Strength
Shishira	Magha - Falgun	The Sun and wind become very strong, powerful and dry during this half of the year.	Tikta	Maximum
Vasanta	Chaitra- Vaishakh		Katu	Medium
Greeshma	Jetha- Ashadha	It takes away all the cooling qualities of the earth.	Kashaya	Lower
Varsha	Shravan- Badrapad		Amla	Lower
Sharad	Aso- Kartak	Moon is more powerful, earth is cooled down due to clouds, rain and cold wind.	Lavan	Medium
Hemanta	Magshar- Posha		Madhur	Maximum

For example - laddu, cake, sheera, bhajiya, sukhadi, kheer, soup, fried items, alcoholic preparation etc. should be taken regularly.

Lifestyle

In Hemanta Ritu, abhyanga (oil application), utsadana (anointing), murdhni taila (applying oil on the head), fomentation by jentaka (a type of fomentation / sudation) method, sunbath, spending time in hot underground houses and warmer, inner rooms of the house is indicated.

One should always wear thick and warm clothes and the body should be anointed with thick paste of aguru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb.) (eagle-wood). A man should sleep in the bed at night embracing a healthy woman having well developed, plump breasts and anointed with the paste of aguru and indulge in sexual intercourse up to full satisfaction. Always wear footwear.^[5]

Avoid factors

One should avoid the intake of food and drinks that cause vata vitiation and inherently light to digest in property. Avoid to exposure of strong winds, inadequate quantities of food and diluted gruel.^[6]

Shishira Ritucharya

Hemanta and Shishira seasons are almost similar in characteristics. Due to the onset of adankala (low strength period), dryness increases and due to clouds, winds and rain, cold prevails in Shishira Ritu. Therefore, the whole regimen advised for hemanta should also be followed in shishira ritu. In addition to that, one should specially stay in less windy and warm shelters.^[7]

Avoid factors

Food and drinks that are predominantly pungent, bitter and astringent in taste, vata vitiating and inherently light to digest and cold in properties should be avoided.^[8]

Vasanta Ritucharya

Diet

Shleshma accumulated in Hemanta ritu gets liquefied by hot rays of the Sun in Vasanta Ritu, which in turn disturbs / decreases the digestive power and ultimately causes many diseases. As agni is weak one should take food which is easily digestible preparation of old barley and wheat, meat of sharabha (wapiti), shasha (rabbit), ena (ante lope), lava (common quail) and Kapinjal (grey partridge).^[9]

One should drink clean alcoholic drinks like sidhu and madhvik (types of wine preparations) in Vasanta. Honey should be taken predominantly to normalize the vitiation of Kapha.^[10]

Drink water processed with ginger, Nagarmotha, honey etc. ingredients which stimulate the Agni and pacify the excess Kapha Dosha.^[11]

Lifestyle

As Kapha Dosha is aggravated in vasanta ritu, vaman (therapeutic emesis), nasya etc. purification procedures should be done.

At the advent of spring, when flowers blossom one should regularly resort to physical exercise, dry massage, medicated smoking, gargling, and collyrium which pacify the aggravated Kapha Dosha. Always use lukewarm water for Bathing and cleaning of excretory orifices.

A person should apply the paste of Chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.) and Agaru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb.) (Eagle-wood) on the body and enjoy the youthfulness of women and of gardens.^[12]

Avoid factors

One should avoid heavy to digest, cold, sour, unctuous and sweet food items like newly harvested rice, wheat, milk products. One should not sleep during the daytime.^[13]

Grishma ritucharya

Effect of excess Sun-heat in summer

In Grishma ritu (summer season), the Sun, by its rays, excessively dries up the environment.

Diet

Sweet, cold, liquid and unctuous qualities food and drinks are considered as wholesome. One should take cold and sweet mantha (a type of liquid diet), meat of wild animals and birds, ghee and milk with shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn.). In this season agni (digestive power) is hampered so foods which are easily digestible should be taken regularly. Take corn flour mixed with cold water and sugar.^[14]

Boiled rice, which is white in colour, should be eaten along with meat of desert animals. One should use cool water kept in mud pot along with karpura (camphor) for drinking. One should take plenty of fruit juices and juicy fruits. Buffalo milk mixed with sugar and cooled by moonlight and stars should be used for drinking.^[15]

Lifestyle

One should sleep in a cool shelter during daytime. During night one should apply the paste of Chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.) on the body and then sleep in the airy roof / terrace of the house which is cooled by the Moon-rays.

In summer, one should enjoy the coolness of gardens, cold water and flowers, wearing garlands, wearing of very light and thin dress.^[16]

One should indulge in sexual intercourse on gap of 15 days.^[17]

Avoid factors

One should consume alcoholic beverages in little quantities or should not be consumed at all. If taken, should be diluted with plenty of water. One should not consume salty, sour, pungent and hot food. Physical exercise should be avoided.^[18]

Varsha Ritucharya

Diet

Due to adankala, Agni (digestive power) is also weak and due to evaporating vapors from the Earth, rainfall and acidic transformation of water, the Agni (digestive power) is weakened, thus leading to the further vitiation of vata and other Dosha in Varsha ritu. So In rainy season, diet and lifestyle which balance all three doshas should be adopted as all three doshas are vitiated.^[19]

When the days are cooler due to wind and rain, one should take mainly sour, salty and unctuous food to alleviate vata.

A person should consume easily digestible food which is prepared from old barley, wheat and Shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn.) along with meat of wild animals and processed soup as per digestive capacity. All the food preparations should be processed with carminative drugs like cumin seeds, panchakola (Five drugs Pippali, Pippali mula, Chavya, Chitraka and Nagara and ginger etc.

Whenever madhvik or other fermented liquors and water are consumed, they should be mixed with a little amount of honey. Always use boiled water for drinking.

One should use food and drinks mostly added with honey in small quantity to pacify the kleda (moisture) of rainy season.^[20]

Lifestyle

In the rainy season, one should practice pragharsa (friction massage), udavartana (dry massage), snana (bath), use of fragrance, garlands, wearing light and clean clothes and should reside in the place which is free from humidity. Always wear fumigated clothes.^[21]

One should do purification procedures mainly asthapana basti (dry enema) to normalize Vata Dosha.^[22]

Avoid factors

One should avoid diluted mantha (excess liquid diet), sleeping during the day, and exposure to dew, river water, physical exercise, sun rays and sexual intercourse in this season.^[23]

Sharad Ritucharya

Diet

Body is habituated to cold and rain in Varsha Ritu. Suddenly the heat of sun-rays in the Sharad (autumn) season, the accumulated pitta dosha in the body often gets aggravated.

So in this season food and drinks predominantly of sweet, light, cold and slightly bitter qualities and having Pitta alleviating properties should be taken in proper quantity. One should eat only when there is good appetite. One should eat meat of active animals like rabbit, antelope, sheep etc. and preparation of old barley, wheat, green gram.^[24]

In Sharad, whenever the rain clouds disappear, the intake of tikta ghee (ghee medicated with bitter items), use of purgatives and blood-letting are indicated.^[25]

In sharad ritu water naturally heated with sunrays during daytime and cooled with moon rays during night and well purified and detoxified by the course of time and effects of Agastya (the star Canopus) is called Hansodak. It is clean and clear. This water is beneficial as nectar when used for the purpose of bathing and drinking.^[26]

Lifestyle during autumn season

In Sharad Ritu, garlands of seasonal flowers, clean clothes (apparels), and exposure to moon-rays in early nights are very beneficial.^[27]

Avoid factors

Exposure to Sun and dew, intake of muscle fats and oils, meat of aquatic and marshy animals, alkaline preparations and curd are contraindicated in Sharad Ritu. One should not sleep during daytime and restrict exposure to easterly wind.^[28]

Concept of Ritusandhi

The last seven days of preceding Ritu and first seven days of following Ritu are together known as Ritusandhi. During this period the regimen of the previous season should be discontinued gradually and those of the succeeding season adopted slowly.^[29] Particular padanshika krama (sequential regimen) has to be adopted i.e. Unhealthy things which one has become accustomed should be discontinued gradually and healthy things should be adopted gradually with intervals of one, two or three days. On the other hand, if they are discontinued or adopted suddenly, diseases due to unaccustomed foods and activities develop.^[30] It is a significant advice, as the changeover of external environment from one season to other is very rapid, but our endogenous system needs some time for smooth change over.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda is a science of life it emphasis on preventive aspects. Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is a preventive aspect. In every season vata, pitta and kapha dosha are in different state because changes in nature also affect the body. Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is designed as per the changes in dosha, bala and agni (digestive power) of body as per

season. In shishira and hemant season agni (digestive power) is strong so heavy food can not hamper the health. Kapha dosha is provoked during Vasanta ritu and agni (digestive power) is weak so in this season kapha reducing diet and therapy are advised by our ancient rishis. In grishma ritu agni (digestive power) is weak and strength is minimum so madhur and liquid diet is suitable. Varsha ritu is more prone for disease origin because all 3 doshas are vitiated during this season. Sharad ritu is predominated by pitta dosha so in this period pitta reducing diet and therapy are advised. So there is a great impact of ritucharya in individual health. Acharya Charak also said that by adopting seasonal regimen one can get good health, strength, complexion and long life. Ritucharya is advisable for healthy person. Modification in ritucharya is required in disease condition. One should follow the ritucharya as per its Prakruti (constitution of body according to Dosha).

These 6 ritus find only in India so for other places as per characteristic features of atmosphere one can decide about particular season.

So by this discussion we know that ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is very important concept for maintaining the healthy status.

CONCLUSION

In today's era we saw the effects of global warming on seasons also. One can identify the particular season by its characteristics not depends on months. In disease condition application of ritucharya depends on patient's condition. Diet and lifestyle which are followed according to season maintain healthy status and also improve immunity of individual. Adoption of ritucharya is most important for fulfilling the aim of Ayurveda i.e. maintenance of health and prevention from diseases.

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