

RITUCHARYA: SAFEGUARD FOR SEASONAL DISORDERS

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda has always aim to maintain the health and prevent the diseases by following proper diet and lifestyle regimen rather than treatment and cure of the diseases. The objectives of Ayurveda are *Swasthyashya Swasthya Rakshanam*, which means to maintain the health of the healthy, and *Aturashya Vikara Prashamanancha*, means to cure the diseases of the diseased.^[1] For this purpose there is a big portion described in ayurveda named as a *svasthavritta* and *annapan. Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) have been mentioned in *svasthavritta* of Ayurveda.^[2]

With the change in ritu (season), the change is very prominent in the atmosphere around us. We see various changes in bio-life around us, such as flowering in spring and leaf-shedding in autumn in the plants, hibernation of many animals with the coming of winter, and so on. As human being is also part of the same ecology, the body is greatly influenced by external environment.

As adaptations according to the changes, is the key for survival, the knowledge of *Ritucharya* (regimen for various seasons) is very important. Failing to follow this leads to derangement of homeostasis and causes various diseases, such as viral flue. seasonal diseases

are a result of an inappropriate adaptation of people with their environment. In our country the situation is quite alarming due to rapid changing of disease profile.

Ritucharya is prominently discussed in most of the *Samhitas* of Ayurveda. Prevention of disease to maintain health is being the first and foremost aim of the holistic science of Ayurveda. In *Tasyashitya* chapter of Charaka Samhita, it is said “*Tasya Shitadiya Ahaarbalam Varnascha Vardhate. Tasyartusatmayam Vaditam Chestaharvyapasrayam,*” which means ‘the strength and complexion of the person knowing the suitable diet and regimen for every season and practicing accordingly are enhanced.’^[3] Main theme of this chapter is to make people aware concerning the methods to live in accordance with the environment.

Classification of season

The year according to *Ayurveda* is divided into two periods *Ayana* (solstice) depending on the direction of movement of sun that is *Uttarayana* (northern solstice) and *Dakshinayana* (southern solstice). Each is formed of three *Ritus* (seasons). The word *Ritu* means “to go.” It is the form in which the nature expresses itself in a sequence in particular and specific in present forms in short, the seasons.^[4]

A year consists of six seasons, namely, Shishira (winter), Vasanta (spring), and Grishma (summer) in Uttarayan and Varsha (monsoon), Sharata (autumn), and Hemanta (late autumn) in Dakshinayana. As Ayurveda has its origin in India, the above seasonal changes are observed predominantly in Indian subcontinent.

Uttarayana and its effect

Uttarayana indicates northward movement of the sun. In this period the sun and the wind are powerful. The sun takes away the strength of the people and the cooling quality of the earth. It brings increase in the *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent), and *Katu* (pungent) *Rasa* (taste), respectively, which brings about dryness in the body and reduces the *Bala* (strength). It is also called *Adana Kala*.

According to modern science, this can be compared with the gradual movement of earth around the sun to the position, in which the rays of the sun falls perpendicularly at 30 degree meridian of the North Pole on June 21st every year, called as summer solstice. The northward journey of the Sun from Tropic of Capricorn to Tropic of Cancer happens.

During *Uttarayana* the seasonal changes in Indian subcontinent is from *Shishira* (winter) to *Vasanta*(spring) and to *Grishma* (summer). The period can be compared to mid-January to mid-July, when warmness and dryness in weather increases. It has an overall debilitating effect on environment, to which human being is also a part.

Dakshinayana and its effect

Dakshinayana indicates of the sun in southern direction. In this period, the wind is not very dry; the moon is more powerful than sun. The earth becomes cool due to the clouds, rain, and cold winds. Unctuousness sets in the atmosphere and *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), and *Madhura*(sweet) *Rasa* are predominant, so the strength of person enhances during this period. It is also called *Visarga Kala*.

According to modern science, this can be compared with the gradual movement of the earth around the sun to the position, in which the rays of the sun fall over 30 degree meridian of the South Pole perpendicularly on December 21st every year, is called as winter solstice. The southward movement of the Sun occurs from Tropic of Cancer to Tropic of Capricorn.

During *Dakshinayana*, the seasonal changes occur in the Indian subcontinent from *Varsha* (monsoon) to *Sarata* (autumn) and to *Hemanta* (late autumn). This period can be compared to mid-July to mid-January, when cool sets, and due to which anabolic activity dominates over the catabolic activity in the environment.

State of strength

In the beginning of *Visarga Kala* and ending of *Adana kala*, that is, during *Varsha* and *Grishma*, weakness occurs. In the middle of the solstices, that is, during *Sharata* and *Vasanta*, strength remains in moderate grade and in the end of *Visarga Kala* and in the beginning of *Adana Kala*, that is, during *Hemanta* and *Shishira*, maximum strength is seen.^[5]

DISCUSSION

The environmental factors include the nature of the land, water, and various atmospheric phenomena, including temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric pressure. All these environmental factors undergo a continuous change and at a time, no two moments are exactly alike in a given place. Thus with the rising Sun the temperature keeps on rising and gradually drops at night. The maximum and minimum temperature fluctuates daily but it

is highest in summer and lowest in winter. Similarly, all these factors show diurnal as well as seasonal variations and these variations for a particular time are known as season.^[6]

during *Ritusandhi* frequently, *Jwara*, *Pratishyaya*, *Angamarda*, and *Alasya* etc. *Lakshnas* were met with. In *Agnibala* also although remarkable changes are seen. the overall effect of *Hemanta Ritu* on *Bala* of healthy is maximum, effect of *Vasanta Ritu* is moderate and the effect of *Varsha Ritu* is minimum, and concluded that *Hemanta* is the *Ritu* of *Pravara Bala*, *Vasanta* is the *Ritu* of *Madhyama Bala* and *Varsha* is the *Ritu* of *Avara Bala*.

Many other systems of medical science have observed the influence of seasonal rhythm in physical and mental health. To quote Hippocrates, “Whoever wishes to investigate medicine properly should proceed thus in the first place to consider the seasons of the year and what affect each of them produces.”^[7] Even in Tibetan system of medicine, seasons are regarded as one of the fundamental factors in etiology and pathology, and a powerful instrument in the prevention of diseases.

In *Ayurveda*, the knowledge of *Ritucharya* is a first step guide to the concept of *Kriya-Kala*, which describes the modes and stages of the development of diseases, with regard to the state of different *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* in accordance with the changes of time. A good understanding of it is very much essential for early diagnosis and prognosis for adopting preventive and curative measures.

It is to be known that abnormalities in the *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* results in *Roga* (disease). With changes in food pattern, sleep and lifestyle, there are changes in the status of *Tridosha* and *Agni*, which is bound to affect us, resulting disharmony, causing seasonal diseases. *Ritu* acts as *Nimittakarana* in the aggravation and manifestation of disease.

It has been observed that there is an increased occurrence of flu, dry skin in winter, heat stroke in summer, pollen allergy in spring, high incidence of air and water borne diseases in rainy season, and skin diseases in autumn. Thus it can be said that physiology indicates the concept of *Ritucharya*.

With global warming and variation in the advent of season, it can surely be a query, of the importance of *Ritucharya* in the present scenario. It is to be understood that the background on which *Ritucharya* is based, that is, *Dosha* and *Panchamahabhuta* theory. Although today *Ritus* do not follow uniformity, the level of *Dosha* and *Panchamahabhuta* can be

analyzed accordingly, to decide the regimen, to which this knowledge of *Ayurveda* holds as a pathfinder.

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