

Ritucharya: Ayurvedic Perspectives on Seasonal Regimens for Health Maintenance – A Review

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Abstract—Ritucharya represents a distinctive Ayurvedic principle that explains seasonal adaptation. The annual cycle (samvatsara) is systematically divided into six ritus. When the Sun moves in the northward direction relative to the Earth, the period is termed Adana kala, comprising Shishira, Vasanta and Grishma. Conversely, when the Sun shifts southwards, the phase is known as Visarga kala, which includes Varsha, Sharad and Hemanta. Seasonal expression results from periodic variations in environmental factors such as temperature, photoperiod, and circadian rhythms. As humans function as an inseparable component of the natural ecosystem, these cyclical changes exert a significant influence on bodily functions and physiological processes. To sustain internal equilibrium in response to these external fluctuations, adherence to a season-specific regimen becomes essential. For this reason, the ancient Acharyas prescribed Ritucharya, formulated on the basis of seasonal patterns of dosha, bala (strength) and agni (digestive capacity). Hence, following Ritucharya is crucial for preventing season-related disorders and maintaining optimal health.

Index Terms—Adana kala; Ritu (season); Bala; Visargkala; Agni; Dosha.

I. INTRODUCTION

The classical literature of Ayurveda contains extensive and valuable guidance on Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), which is elaborated in nearly all major texts. The term Ritucharya is formed from *Ritu* (season) and *Charya* (conduct), collectively referring to the diet and lifestyle practices suitable for each season. The annual cycle is divided into six ritus based on the position of the Sun relative to the Earth. These six seasons- Shishira (winter), Vasanta (spring), Greeshma (summer), Varsha (monsoon), Sharad (autumn) and Hemanta (late autumn/pre-

winter)—are classified according to their corresponding months, *rashi*, and characteristic features.[1] It is essential to recognize each season by its inherent properties.

Ritucharya outlines the appropriate Ahara and Vihara (dietary habits and lifestyle activities) that should be adopted in harmony with seasonal transitions. Observing such regulations becomes crucial for preventing the onset of season-related disorders. As the body moves through these six seasons, it naturally experiences cyclical variations in dosha, bala, and agni (digestive strength). Hence, following an identical routine throughout the year can disturb physiological balance.

The fundamental purpose of Ritucharya, rooted in the principles of samanya and vishesha (similarity and dissimilarity), is to maintain doshic equilibrium and support health preservation. While Acharyas have described Ritucharya primarily for healthy individuals, appropriate modifications are required for those with existing health conditions.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To present the key characteristics of the six Ritu (seasons) and outline the corresponding dietary and lifestyle regimens described in the classical Ayurvedic texts.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

All available references related to Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) in the Ayurvedic classical texts will be systematically reviewed for this study. In addition, relevant websites and scholarly journals

offering information on various Ritus and their corresponding Ritucharya will also be consulted.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

For proper adaptation of Ritucharya, it is essential to understand the months associated with each Ritu

along with their specific seasonal characteristics.[2] The seasonal profile of each Ritu is summarised below (Table 1).

TABLE-1

Ritu	Corresponding Months	Seasonal Characteristics	Predominant Rasa	Bala (Strength)
Shishira	Magha – Falgun	During this phase, the Sun and wind exhibit intense dryness and strength, drawing away the cooling and moist qualities of the earth.	Tikta	Maximum
Vasanta	Chaitra – Vaishakh	Marks the onset of warmth with gradual melting of accumulated Kapha.	Katu	Medium
Greeshma	Jyeshtha – Ashadha	Extremely hot period leading to dryness and depletion of moisture.	Kashaya	Lower
Varsha	Shravan – Bhadrapad	Dominance of clouds, rainfall and cool winds, making the earth moist and the Moon relatively stronger.	Amla	Lower
Sharad	Ashwin – Kartik	Clear sky and rising heat following monsoon; pitta-prakopa season.	Lavan	Medium
Hemanta	Margashirsha – Pausa	Cold climate with invigorating effect, leading to enhanced digestive fire and bodily strength.	Madhur	Maximum

HEMANT RITUCHARYA

Seasonal Impact on the Body

During sheeta kala (Hemanta), exposure to cold air leads to constriction of body channels, which results in the stimulation of Agni (digestive power). Despite external cold creating some obstruction, the internal Agni becomes so potent that it can efficiently digest heavy and large-quantity foods. If adequate nourishment is not provided, this heightened Agni begins to consume the rasa and subsequent dhatus, resulting in tissue depletion and eventual Vaat Dosha vitiation.[3]

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

Considering the strong digestive capacity, food in Hemanta should include items that are unctuous, sweet, sour and salty. Ayurveda recommends:

- Meat of fatty, aquatic, marshy and burrowing animals
- Roasted meat of prey-snatching animals
- Madira, sidhu, honey
- Milk and milk products, sugarcane preparations, fats and oils
- Newly harvested rice

- Warm water[4]

Daily diet may include items like laddu, sheera, soup, bhajiya, sukhadi, fried foods, kheer, cake, and alcoholic preparations, as these support the increased digestive capacity.

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

For maintaining bodily warmth and preventing Vata aggravation, the following activities are beneficial:

- Abhyanga (oil massage)
- Utsadana (anointing)
- Murdhnitaila application
- Jentaka type of fomentation (sudation)
- Taking sunlight exposure
- Staying in warm underground rooms or heated inner spaces
- Applying aguru (Aquilaria agallochaRoxb.) paste over the body
- Wearing warm, thick clothing
- Engaging in sexual intercourse up to full satisfaction, as described in the classics
- Regular use of footwear[5]

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To prevent Vata aggravation and maintain tissue integrity during Hemanta, one should avoid:

- Foods and drinks that are light-to-digest or Vata-provoking
- Inadequate meal quantities
- Diluted gruels
- Exposure to strong, cold winds These factors may counteract the enhanced digestive strength and promote Vata vitiation, leading to seasonal morbidities.[6]

SHISHIRA RITUCHARYA

Seasonal Impact on the Body

Shishira Ritu shares many physiological features with Hemanta, but due to the beginning of Adana Kala, there is a gradual reduction in bala (strength). Increased dryness and the presence of clouds, cold winds and occasional rainfall further intensify the cold environment. This combination enhances Vata predominance and necessitates additional warmth and protection.

Since the overall effect of cold remains comparable to Hemanta, the metabolism and digestive activity continue to stay elevated, though the body's endurance begins to decline.[7]

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

As the characteristics of Shishira closely mimic Hemanta, the entire dietary regimen recommended for Hemanta remains applicable here as well. Foods that are unctuous, nourishing, sweet, sour, and salty support the strong Agni (digestive fire) and help counteract Vata and dryness. Thus, heavy and warm preparations, adequate fats, milk products, meat soups, sugarcane derivatives, and fermented products continue to be beneficial.

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

Lifestyle practices in Shishira also follow those of Hemanta; however, protection from cold winds becomes especially important. Practices such as:

- Abhyanga, utsadana, and murdhnaitaila
 - Light forms of fomentation
 - Staying in well-heated, less windy shelters
 - Using warm clothing and keeping the body lubricated
- are particularly emphasized to counteract the dryness and cold of this season. Among all seasonal measures, seeking warm and less breezy environments is specifically highlighted for Shishira.[7]

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To maintain physiological balance and prevent Vata aggravation, individuals should avoid food and drinks that are:

- Pungent (katu)
- Bitter (tikta)
- Astringent (kashaya)
- Vata-vitiating
- Light-to-digest
- Cold in potency

These substances further enhance dryness and cold, thereby aggravating Vata and increasing susceptibility to seasonal disorders.[8]

VASANTA RITUCHARYA

Seasonal Impact on the Body

During Vasanta Ritu (spring), the Shleshma (Kapha) that accumulated and solidified throughout Hemanta undergoes liquefaction due to the increasing warmth of the sun's rays. This process leads to a diminished Agni (digestive power), creating a physiological environment prone to Kapha-associated disorders such as congestion, sluggish digestion, and allergies.[9]

Therefore, the seasonal regimen in Vasanta aims to reduce Kapha, stimulate Agni, and prevent metabolic disturbances.

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

To support the weakened Agni and counteract Kapha aggravation, diet during Vasanta should emphasize:

- Light, easily digestible foods
- Preparations of old barley (yava) and old wheat
- Meat of sharabha (wapiti), shasha (rabbit), ena (antelope), lava (common quail), and kapinjala (grey partridge)[9]

Digestive stimulants and Kapha-pacifying substances are encouraged:

- Clean alcoholic beverages like sidhu and madhvika[10]
- Honey, which is considered the most effective agent for balancing Kapha
- Water infused with ginger, nagarmotha (Cyperus rotundus Linn.), honey, and similar ingredients that enhance Agni and reduce Kapha accumulation[11]

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

As Kapha Dosha is naturally aggravated in Vasanta, detoxifying and stimulating measures are essential:

- Vamana (therapeutic emesis) and other shodhana (purification) procedures

- Vyayama (physical exercise) on a regular basis
- Ruksha udvartana (dry massage)
- Dhumapana (medicated smoking)
- Gandusha (gargling) and use of collyrium (anjana) to pacify Kapha
- Use of lukewarm water for bathing and cleansing activities
- Application of fragrant pastes such as chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.) and agaru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb.) to keep the body fresh and light
- Enjoying outdoor environments and youthful activities, as described in classical texts[12]

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To prevent further Kapha aggravation and ensure proper digestion, one should avoid:

- Foods that are heavy, cold, unctuous, sour, and sweet
- Items like newly harvested rice, new wheat, and excess milk products
- Daytime sleeping, which increases Kapha and promotes sluggishness[13]

GRISHMA RITUCHARYA

Seasonal Impact on the Body

Grishma Ritu (summer season) is characterized by intense Sun heat, which causes marked dryness in the environment. Continuous exposure to strong sunlight leads to progressive depletion of body fluids, reduction of bala (strength), and a noticeable decline in Agni (digestive capacity). The combined effect of dehydration, heat, and dryness makes the body more prone to fatigue, faintness, digestive disturbances, and Vata aggravation if proper seasonal measures are not followed.[14]

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

To counter the excessive heat and dryness of summer, diet should emphasize sweet, cold, liquid, and unctuous qualities:

- Cold and sweet mantha (a light liquid preparation)
- Easily digestible foods due to reduced Agni
- Meat soups of wild animals and birds
- Ghee, milk, and shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn.)[14]

Hydration and cooling beverages are essential:

- Corn flour mixed with cold water and sugar
- White boiled rice accompanied with meat of desert animals

- Water cooled in mud pots, sometimes flavored with karpura (camphor)
- Fruit juices and naturally juicy fruits
- Buffalo milk mixed with sugar and cooled naturally by moonlight and starlight for nighttime consumption[15]

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

Lifestyle during Grishma should focus on cooling, rest, and conservation of energy:

- Daytime sleep in a cool, shaded area
- Application of chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.) paste at night
- Sleeping on open terraces or airy roofs cooled by moon rays
- Enjoying gardens, cool water, flowers, thin and light garments, and refreshing surroundings[16]
- Sexual activity should be minimized, with classical texts advising a gap of 15 days between acts, to prevent further depletion of energy.[17]

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To prevent overheating and digestive disturbances, the following should be avoided:

- Alcoholic drinks; if necessary, consume only in small amounts, well diluted
- Foods that are salty, sour, pungent, or hot
- Physical exertion, which worsens dehydration and exhausts the already weakened system[18]

VARSHA RITUCHARYA

Varsha Ritu (rainy season) is marked by continuous rainfall, cloudiness, heavy winds, and increased atmospheric moisture. As the environment becomes damp and heavy, the Agni (digestive fire)—already weakened during Grishma—declines further due to adankala (low-strength period), exposure to impure water, and acidic transformation caused by rain. This leads to aggravation of Vata, accompanied by instability of Pitta and Kapha, making all three Doshas vulnerable.

Clinically, this manifests as:

- Poor digestion and decreased metabolic efficiency
- Bloating, indigestion, and reduced appetite
- Joint pain, stiffness, and Vata-dominant disorders
- Increased susceptibility to infections, edema, skin diseases
- General heaviness and lethargy

Thus, Varsha Ritu requires measures that stabilize Agni, prevent moisture-related disorders, and pacify vitiated Doshas.

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

Diet in Varsha Ritu should focus on enhancing digestion, reducing excess moisture (*kleda*), and pacifying aggravated Vata:

- Agni-supportive foods prepared from old barley, wheat, and Shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn.)
- Warm, freshly prepared meals that are sour, salty, and unctuous, especially to alleviate Vata
- Meat soups of wild animals, prepared light and digestible
- Soups and foods processed with carminative herbs such as:
 - Panchakola (Pippali, Pippalimula, Chavya, Chitraka, Nagara)
 - Ginger and other Agni-stimulating spices

Hydration should be safe and digestion-friendly:

- Always drink boiled and slightly warm water
- Fermented drinks (like *madhvik*) and water should be mixed with a small amount of honey
- Food and beverages may include honey in small quantity to counter the excessive moisture of the season

Overall, the diet must remain light, warm, and easily digestible.

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

Lifestyle during Varsha Ritu should counter heaviness, stabilize Vata, and reduce humidity exposure:

- Pragnarsha (friction massage) and Udavartana (dry massage) to reduce moisture and improve circulation
- Regular snana (bath) and use of mild fragrances and garlands
- Wearing light, clean, and dry clothes, preferably fumigated
- Residing in places that are free from humidity, well-ventilated, and kept dry
- Undergo cleansing therapy, especially Asthapana Basti (non-unctuous enema) to normalize aggravated Vata

These practices help prevent Vata disorders, skin infections, and moisture-related discomforts.

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To maintain Agni and prevent Dosha vitiation, the following should be avoided:

- Diluted mantha or excessive liquid diet, which further weakens digestion
- Daytime sleeping, causing Kapha accumulation and digestive impairment
- Exposure to dew, river water, and heavy moisture
- Strenuous physical exercise and exposure to sunlight, both of which destabilize Doshas
- Sexual intercourse, which further depletes energy in an already weakened season

Avoiding these factors is essential to prevent gastrointestinal disturbances, Vata disorders, and seasonal illnesses.

SHARAD RITUCHARYA

Seasonal Impact on the Body

Sharad Ritu (autumn) follows Varsha Ritu, where the body becomes accustomed to cold, damp, and heavy environmental conditions. When Sharad begins, the sudden increase in sunlight and atmospheric heat triggers aggravation of accumulated Pitta Dosha.

This Pitta excitation reflects as:

- Burning sensations, acidity, gastritis
- Skin disorders (rashes, boils, urticaria)
- Headaches and irritability
- Increased susceptibility to inflammatory conditions
- Aggravation of bleeding disorders

The shift from moisture-laden weather to dry heat requires dietary and lifestyle measures that cool, cleanse, and stabilize Pitta.

Dietary Measures (Ahara)

Food should be predominantly sweet, light, cold, and slightly bitter, all of which pacify aggravated Pitta:

- Preparations made from old barley, wheat, and green gram
- Meat of active, land-dwelling animals like rabbit, antelope, and sheep
- Intake of food only with proper appetite to prevent Pitta overload

Specific classical recommendations include:

- Use of TiktaGhrita (ghee processed with bitter herbs) when the sky is clear, to pacify excessive Pitta
- Administration of mild purgation and bloodletting in indicated individuals to eliminate aggravated Pitta[25]
- Consumption of Hamsodaka-water naturally heated by sunlight during the day, cooled by

moon rays at night, detoxified by exposure to Agastya (Canopus).

- This water is considered extremely pure and acts like nectar for drinking and bathing[26]

Overall, dietary measures must soothe Pitta without weakening Agni.

Lifestyle Measures (Vihara)

Sharad season encourages cooling and gentle rejuvenation:

- Wearing light, clean clothes and garlands of fragrant flowers[27]
- Regular exposure to moonlight in the early night, which naturally pacifies Pitta
- Staying in well-ventilated areas with mild cooling environment

These measures help counter internal heat, reduce stress, and balance Pitta.

Avoidable Factors and Preventive Considerations

To prevent Pitta aggravation and seasonal disorders, avoid:

- Exposure to direct sunlight and dew, both of which intensify Pitta
- Consumption of muscle fats, oils, and the meat of aquatic or marshy animals
- Alkaline preparations and curd, known to aggravate Pitta
- Daytime sleeping, which promotes Kapha accumulation and digestion issues
- Exposure to easterly winds, which destabilize Pitta and produce discomfort[28]

Avoidance of these factors protects against inflammatory disorders and maintains seasonal homeostasis.

CONCEPT OF RITUSANDHI

The last seven days of the preceding Ritu and the first seven days of the following Ritu together are referred to as Ritusandhi. During this transition period, the regimen of the previous season should be gradually discontinued, while the practices of the succeeding season should be adopted sequentially (Padanshika Krama). This means that foods or activities that were previously habitual but unsuitable should be phased out step by step, and new, healthy seasonal practices should be introduced gradually with intervals of one, two, or three days. If these changes are made abruptly, it may lead to diseases due to unaccustomed foods and activities. This guidance is significant because

although the external environment changes rapidly, the endogenous system of the body requires time to adjust smoothly to the new season.[30]

IV. DISCUSSION

Ayurveda is the science of life, emphasizing preventive healthcare, and Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) represents one of its key preventive measures. In each season, Vata, Pitta, and Kapha Doshas exhibit different states because environmental changes directly influence the physiology of the body.

Ritucharya is designed according to seasonal variations in Dosha, Bala (strength), and Agni (digestive power). During Shishira and Hemant Ritus, Agni is strong, allowing the consumption of heavier foods without compromising health. In Vasanta Ritu, Kapha Dosha is aggravated and Agni is weaker; hence, Kapha-pacifying diets and therapies are recommended by our ancient Acharyas. In Grishma Ritu, Agni is reduced and Bala is minimal, making Madhur (sweet) and liquid diets most suitable. Varsha Ritu is more susceptible to disease since all three Doshas are vitiated. Sharad Ritu is predominated by Pitta Dosha, so Pitta-reducing diet and therapies are advised.

Thus, Ritucharya has a significant impact on individual health. Acharya Charak stated that following the seasonal regimen promotes good health, strength, complexion, and longevity. Ritucharya is primarily recommended for healthy individuals, but modifications are required in disease conditions. It should also be followed according to Prakruti (body constitution based on Dosha).

These six Ritus are specific to India; for other regions, seasonal adaptations should be made based on the characteristics of the local atmosphere. Overall, this discussion highlights that Ritucharya (seasonal regimen) is an essential concept for maintaining health and preventing diseases.

V. CONCLUSION

In the present era, the effects of global warming have altered the conventional patterns of seasons. Therefore, a particular Ritu (season) should be identified based on its characteristic features rather than relying solely on calendar months. In disease

conditions, the application of Ritucharya should be adjusted according to the patient's individual condition. Following the season-specific diet and lifestyle helps maintain health, improve immunity, and support overall physiological balance. The adoption of Ritucharya remains a crucial practice for achieving the primary aim of Ayurveda, namely the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases.

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