



Review Article

RITU SHODHANA - WAY TO STAY HEALTHY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VIRECHANA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a unique and ancient science of life which considers the *Tridoshas vata, Pitta* and *Kapha* as *Tristhunas* (pillars) of human body. The aim of Ayurveda is to maintain health of a healthy person and treating ailments of the diseased. Timely elimination of increased *Doshas* by purificatory measures during specified season is known as *Ritu shodhana*. *Sharadiya Virechana* i.e., purification therapy in autumn season is best for elimination of *Prakupita* (aggravated) *Pitta dosha*. The present review aims to summarize the benefits of *Ritu shodhana* with special reference to *Virechana* on health of a person. **Materials and Methods:** Literature search was carried out through search engines like PubMed, Web of Science and Google Scholar using keywords like '*Ritu shodhana*', '*Virechana*', 'seasonal regimens', 'seasonal variations in India', 'lifestyle disorders'. Classics such as *Bruhatrayis*, *Laghutrayis* were also reviewed. The relevant studies were identified and the findings summarized. Result and discussion- *Ritu shodhana* plays a key role in prevention of diseases. Among *Panchakarmas virechana* (purgation therapy) is one of the prime purificatory procedures for elimination of *Pitta dosha*. As the expulsion of *Dosha* occurs in normal route it is not complicated. Hence it has great promise and requires research in this area.

INTRODUCTION

The world is growing fast technologically but the health status of developing countries need attention. The world health statistics report 2023 states that though the overall population health has improved over 7 decades, issues like management of non-communicable diseases, impact of COVID-19, climate change and health are fetching concerns of mankind^[1]. In the present era lifestyle disorders are very common which is mainly because of not following the seasonal regimen.

In Ayurveda a person with normal activity of *Dosha, Dhatu, Mala* and *Agni* along with *Prasanna aatma, Prasanna indriya* and *Prasanna manas* is considered *swastha* (healthy)^[2]. To remain healthy *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), *Sadvrutta* (code of conduct) have been

explained in Ayurveda among which *Ritu shodhana* is unique. The purificatory therapeutic measure in which accumulated morbid *Doshas* are expelled from body through nearest route is *Shodhana*. *Vamana, Virechana, Niruha basti, Shirovirechana* and *Rakta mokshana* are the five procedures^[3]. For the elimination of *Kapha, Pitta* and *Vata vamana, Virechana* and *Basti* are specially indicated^[4]. *Virechana karma* is specifically indicated in *Sharath ritu*. It helps in improving the intellectual activity, strengthens all sense organs, provide stability to *Dhatu*, increases *Bala* (strength), *Agni deepti* (increases digestive power), delays ageing process^[5].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literary search related to *Ritu shodhana, Virechana*, seasonal regimens, seasonal variations in India, lifestyle disorders was done in the published Ayurvedic database on the online platform such as PubMed, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The information about *Ritu shodhana, Virechana* was also searched in *Brihatrayis* and *Laghutrayis*. Data was collected. Appropriate summary of the findings of the publications relevant to this study were made. Final literature was reviewed and results were drawn.

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Importance of *Ritushodhana*

The basic aim of Ayurveda is *Swasthasya swasthya rakshanam* which means to maintain health of the healthy^[6]. Environment has an influence on human being. The changes in environment depict the season. Human being and environment have a unique relationship. When the body is unable to adapt to the changes in seasons there occurs *Dosha vaishamya*. The body becomes vulnerable to diseases^[7]. *Ritu shodhana* is important as adaptation to changes in environment is important for survival. *Ritucharya* is explained in detail in almost all *Samhitas* of Ayurveda. In *Tasyashitiya* chapter of Charaka Samhita it is mentioned that by following the suitable regimen for every season, the strength and complexion of the person are enhanced^[8].

Classification of Seasons in Ayurveda

Depending on direction of movement of sun the year is divided in to two periods *Ayana* (solstice). They are *Uttarayana* (northern solstice) and *Dakshinayana* (southern solstice). Three *Ritus* or seasons make one *Ayana*. The word *Ritu* means "to go". It is the way in which the nature expresses itself in a sequence in particular and specific in present forms in short, the seasons^[9].

Effect of *Uttarayana*

It is called *Adana kala*. Sun and wind are very powerful in this time. It indicates the ascent of the sun or northward movement of the sun. The cooling quality of the earth and the strength of the people are reduced. There is increase in *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent) and *Katu* (pungent) taste. It brings dryness in the body and reduces the strength of the person.

In this period there is northward journey of the Sun from Tropic of Capricorn to Tropic of cancer. The rays of the sun fall perpendicular at 30-degree meridian of the North Pole on June 21st every year. It is called summer solstice.

Effect of *Dakshinayana*

It is called *Visarga kala*. In this period wind is not very dry, moon is more powerful than sun. It indicates descent of sun or southern movement of the sun. Due to clouds, rain and cold winds earth becomes cool. Unctuousness of atmosphere sets in. There is predominance of *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty) taste. The strength of person increases during this period.

In this period rays of sun fall over 30-degree meridian of the South Pole perpendicularly on December 21st every year. It is called winter solstice. There is southward movement of sun from Tropic of Cancer to Tropic of Capricorn.

Table 1: Solstice, Seasons and their Properties

Kaala	Ritu (season)	Maasa (Month)	Properties of the season
Aadan (Northern solstice)	<i>Sishira</i>	Mid-January to mid-March	Winter season
	<i>Vasanta</i>	Mid-March to mid-May	Spring season
	<i>Grishma</i>	Mid-May to mid-July	Summer season
Visarga (Southern solstice)	<i>Varsha</i>	Mid July to mid-September	Rainy season
	<i>Sharath</i>	Mid-September to mid November	Autumn season
	<i>Hemant</i>	Mid November to mid January	Late autumn

State of Strength

In *Varsha* and *Grishma* that is in the beginning of *Visarga kala* and ending of *Adana kala*, weakness occurs. In the middle of the solstices during *Sharath* and *Vasanta*, strength is in moderate grade. In the end of *Visarga kala* and in the beginning of *Adana kala* that is during *Hemanta* and *Shishira* maximum strength is seen^[10].

Table 2: Seasonal variation of *Dosha*

Dosha	Sanchay (accumulation)	Prakop (aggravation)	Prashaman (pacification)
<i>Vata</i>	<i>Grishma</i>	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Sharath</i>
<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Sharath</i>	<i>Hemant</i>
<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Shishir</i>	<i>Vasanth</i>	<i>Grishma</i>

In Ayurveda the diet and regimen to be followed in specific season has been explained in detail. Along with *Ahara* and *Vihara*, *Desha* and *Kala* also has an important role in maintenance of equilibrium of *Doshas* in human body^[11]. The attributes of season cause *Doshas* to undergo *Sanchaya* (accumulation), *Prakopa* (aggravation) and *Prashama* (pacification). The unwholesome diet and lifestyles followed in a particular season leads to *Sanchaya* of *Doshas* in the body. They get aggravated in the next following season. *Ritu shodhana* is the elimination of the aggravated *Doshas* from the body.

Table 3: Unique preventive measure of Ayurveda - Ritu shodhana

Ritu	Dosha Prakopa	Shodhana
Vasanth	Kapha	Vamana, Nasya
Sharath	Pitta	Virechana, Raktamokshana
Varsha	Vata	Basti

Benefits of Shodhana^[12]

- Improves digestive power
- Maintains homeostasis of the body
- Pacifies diseases
- Improves functions of sense organs, mind and intellect.
- Improves complexion, strength and nourishment
- Improves quality of progeny
- Delays aging
- Provides long life without affliction of diseases

Regimen in Sharath ritu

Sharath ritu is observed from mid-September to mid-November in India. *Pitta* accumulation occurs due to the reduced digestive fire, *Amlapaka*, polluted water and cold nature of rainy season. The *Sanchita pitta* becomes *Prakupita* in autumn season because of hot nature of the season. There is absence of clouds and the sun's rays reach earth with greater intensity. *Tiktasarpipana*, *Virechana* and *Raktamokshana* are indicated in *Sharath*.^[13]

Pitta and Virechana

Vata, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are considered the three *Sthunas* of the body in Ayurveda. Their equilibrium state is health. There are 5 types of *Pitta* namely *Pachaka*, *Sadhaka*, *Alochaka*, *Ranjaka*, *Bhrajaka*. The functions attributed to *Pitta* are similar to the role of enzymes, endocrine system in the body. *Virechanam Pittaharanam shreshta*. *Virechana* is the procedure in which orally administered drug acts on internally situated *Doshas* of the body specifically on *Pitta dosha* and expels them out of the body through anal route^[14]. *Virechana* is the choice of treatment for *Kevala pitta*, *Pitta* associated with *Kapha* and in *Pittasthana gata kapha*^[15]. Just as how fire gets cooled by subsiding the fire of the building similarly by subsiding *Amashayagata pitta* all other *Pittas* get subsided^[16].

Formulations administered in Sharath ritu

Trivrit, *Duralabha*, *Musta*, *Sarkara*, *Udeechya*, *Chandana*, *Yastyahwa*, *Satala* along with *Drakshambu* is advised for *Virechana*^[19]. *Tiktha ghrita pana* is mentioned in *Sharath ritu*. The *Madhura rasa* and *Madhura vipaka* of *Ghrita* pacifies *Pitta dosha*. *Ghrita* is good for all persons in all seasons according to *Kashyapa*.

Table 4: Classification of Virechana dravya

Based on mode of action - <i>Virechana Dravya</i> are classified by <i>Sharangadhara</i> as ^[17]	<i>Virechana agrya dravya</i> according to <i>Sushruta</i> ^[18]
<i>Anulomana</i> – <i>Haritaki</i> (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>) <i>Sramsana</i> – <i>Aragwadha</i> (<i>Cassia fistula</i>) <i>Bhedana</i> – <i>Katuki</i> (<i>Picrorhiza kurroa</i>) <i>Rechana</i> – <i>Trivrit</i> (<i>Operculina turpethum</i>)	<i>Mula virechana</i> - <i>Shyama Trivrit</i> (<i>Operculina turpethum</i>) <i>Phala virechana</i> - <i>Haritaki</i> (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>) <i>Twak virechana</i> - <i>Tilvaka</i> (<i>Symplocos racemosa</i>) <i>Swarasa virechana</i> - <i>Karavellaka</i> (<i>Momordica charantia</i>) <i>Dugdha virechana</i> - <i>Snuhi</i> (<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i>)

Indications of Virechana karma

Various disorders suitable for *Virechana* are explained in *Charaka Siddhithana*, *Sushruta Chikitsasthana*, *Ashtanga Hridaya sutrasthana*. Some of the conditions are skin diseases, obstinate urinary disorders, diabetes, fistula-in-ano, obstinate abdominal diseases including ascites, piles, inguinal swelling, splenic disorders, phantom tumour, thyroid enlargement, lymphadenitis, parasitic infestation, erysipelas, anemia, headache, burning sensation of eyes, heart diseases, freckles, bluish black moles, excessive discharge from eyes, jaundice, asthma, cough, cervical adenitis, epilepsy, insanity, gout, gynaec disorders, seminal morbidities, cataract, anorexia, indigestion, vomiting, oedema, pustular eruptions.

The drugs used for *Virechana* are mild irritant to stomach and intestinal mucosa, hence cause inflammation. This increases the permeability of the

capillaries, which in turn allow the absorption and excretion of such substances which are not allowed in normal condition.

Benefits of Virechana

Among the *Panchakarma*, *Virechana* is the ideal and best treatment for the elimination of *Pitta dosha* and to some extent other two *Doshas* also. It is less tedious and hence complications are less. It has specific action on various conditions of all three *Doshas*. It is a procedure of choice for healthy as well as diseased. The simile given by *Sushruta* is by removal of water just as how all dependents of water get destroyed, similarly by removal of vitiated *Pitta* all the diseases caused due to *Pitta* get pacified.

DISCUSSION

Many other systems of medicine have also observed the influence of seasonal variations on the physical and mental health of the human being. Hippocrates has quoted "Whoever wishes to investigate medicine properly should proceed thus in the first place to consider the seasons of the year and what effect each of them produces"^[20].

Wind, rain clouds, nature of land, water and various atmospheric phenomena including temperature, humidity, and atmospheric pressure are the environmental factors that undergo a continuous change. Diurnal as well as seasonal variations for a particular time are seen in these factors and are known as season^[21]. Human clinical study to assess the biophysical and biochemical changes occurring due to *Ritusandhi* was carried out by Mallika et al. Provocation of *Tridoshas* with the dominance of *Vata* and *Kapha* was observed by the study. The variations in biochemical values were not remarkable. *Jwara*, *Pratishyaya* and *Alasya lakshanas* were frequently seen in *Ritusandhi*^[22].

A study on concept of *Ritus* and their effect on *Bala* was conducted by Jangid et al. *Hemanta* is the *Ritu* of *Pravara bala*, *Vasanta* is the *Ritu* of *Madhyama bala* and *Varsha* is the *Ritu* of *Avara bala* were the results drawn from study^[23]. An animal study was conducted with respect to seasonal changes. Effects of photoperiod on immune function and hormone synthesis influence the development of certain disease was the conclusion drawn from the study^[24].

An increased occurrence of dry skin in winter, flu, heat stroke in summer, pollen allergy in spring, high incidence of air and water borne diseases in rainy season and skin diseases in autumn is observed. It clearly shows that physiology justifies the concept of *Ritucharya*^[25]. There is explanation of seasonal affective disorder in modern science^[26]. In Ayurveda, stages of development of disease are explained by *Kriyakala* concept. *Ritu* is the *Vyanjaka* or *Nimittakarana* in the aggravation of *Doshas* and manifestation of disease. By regular *Ritu shodhana* one can prevent the occurrence of disease by maintaining the equilibrium of *Doshas*.

Lifestyle disorders result because of unsuitable way of living and inappropriate relationship of people with environment. The diet of people has changed. It determines the rate of cancer and other life style disorders such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases etc^[27]. Onset of these lifestyle diseases is insidious, slow progression and is difficult to cure^[28].

India is identified as a nation with most lifestyle disorders in near future with the younger population more affected by the World health

organization. India now is considered as the diabetes capital of the world, will soon be entitled capital of lifestyle disease also. Study shows that in young urban population incidence of hypertension, obesity and heart disease is increasing especially^[29]. By following the *Ritucharya*, we can surely avoid lifestyle diseases by practicing regimen in accordance with the *Ritu* to maintain the equilibrium of the *Tridoshas* and to stay healthy^[30].

Ritu shodhana is one method of preventing lifestyle disorders. The original research - 'lipophil-mediated reduction of toxicants in humans: an evaluation of an Ayurvedic detoxification procedure' by Robert E. Herronet et al. substantial concludes that - Ingestion of lipophilic materials in substantial amounts can be effective in stimulating intestinal excretion of lipophilic environmental contaminants deposited in adipose tissues. Ayurvedic detoxification procedures are helpful in reducing environmental and occupational toxicants from body. The prospective, longitudinal study demonstrated that use of the lipophil-mediated detoxification procedure resulted in significant reductions in serum levels of dichloro diphenyl dichloroethylene (DDE), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and beta-hexachlorocyclohexane (HCH). Hence it indicates that *Ritushodhana* may be beneficial in reduction of toxicants accumulated due to environmental factors and bioaccumulation^[31].

Yadav *et al* concluded undergoing *Ritu Shodhana* prevents the occurrence of viral infection like COVID -19 but also avoids the spread and mortality. It can certainly add years to the life along with improving the quality of life^[32]. In a conceptual review role of *ritushodhana* in prevention of cancer, *Shodhana* in appropriate seasons helps to expel *Sanchita malas* by not allowing carcinogens to impeach in the body which may prevent the occurrence of cancer. *Virechana* is very beneficial in liver and stomach cancers^[33].

A. MacIntosh et al. conducted a pilot patient outcome focused non-controlled clinical intervention, with 25 disease free participants. A 7 day detoxification program was done and 23% increase in liver detoxification capacity was observed. There was an increase in urinary sulfate to creatinine ratio after treatment. Improved liver detoxification capacity may contribute to wellbeing^[34]. A study was done on *croton tiglium* seeds purification with cow's milk which is used in Ayurveda. It has severe purgative action^[35].

An observational case series study was done and concluded that *Virechana* has a positive and important role in getting rid of complaints like urticaria, gastritis, indigestion, psoriasis, allergic dermatitis, acne which are aggravated in autumn

season and other *Pitta prakopa lakshanas* in *Sharath ritu* as mentioned in classics^[36]. A randomized comparative clinical trial to evaluate the effect of *Trivrttashtaka Churna* and *Trivrt Churna* as a *Virechaka Yoga* in healthy individuals during *Sharad Ritu* was done and concluded that *Trivrttashtaka Churna* was better than *Trivrt Churna* because of its better palatability and acceptability, comparatively better in latency period for onset of first *Virechana vega*, in total number of *Virechana vega* and in reduction of body weight^[37].

There is constant change in state of *Doshas*. Human physiology is designed such that major chunk of metabolic waste comes and settles in *Koshtha* as it is *Mahanimna* (big depression/pit)^[38]. Majority of this accumulation is removed as urine and faeces on a daily basis. *Vruddha Vagbhata* gives a simile that even though a gem stays in clean water there will be gradual deposition of sediment over it after some time. In the same way seasonal deposition of *Doshas* occur in body which may lead to seasonal diseases like bronchial asthma, urticaria etc. To prevent these diseases and lifestyle disorders which are rampant in today's world, it is very important to undergo *Ritu shodhana*. *Ritu shodhana* will help stop the rapid increase in the incidence of such diseases. Normal state of *Agni* is very vital for healthy state of body. By *Virechana* the aggravated *Doshas* in *Koshtha* gets expelled from nearest normal route. *Jathragni* (digestive fire) gets kindled by *Virechana* along with attaining *Srotoshuddhi* (clearing of channels) and *Laghuta* (lightness). *Virechana* is less tedious procedure and possibility of complications is less. It can be done easily and is the widely practiced *Shodhana* therapy in clinical practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Ritu shodhana plays an important role in prevention of disease and hence serving the motto of Ayurveda '*Swasthasya swaasthya rakshanam*'. *Virechana* in *Sharath ritu* is ideal for elimination of aggravated *Pitta*. Every wise person should be vigilant about his duty towards his own body as an officer in charge of city preserves the city and a charioteer in maintenance of his chariot. It is the duty of an Ayurvedic physician to educate people and develop public awareness to undergo *Ritu shodhana* regularly to prevent lifestyle disorders which is prevalent in today's age.

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