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AYURVEDIC RITU CLASSIFICATION AND CLIMATIC VARIABILITY: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SEASONAL PATTERNS

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ABSTRACT

Seasonal changes have a strong influence on human health and day-to-day functioning. In Ayurveda, these changes are understood through the concept of Ritu, and guidelines for adapting diet and lifestyle are given under Ritucharya. However, in real-world conditions, climate does not behave uniformly across regions. Temperature, rainfall, and seasonal patterns vary widely, both within India and globally. This review looks at how Ayurvedic seasonal classification compares with actual climatic conditions. It also considers how different cultures across the world understand and divide seasons based on local environmental changes. These observations suggest that the classical six-season model does not always align perfectly with regional realities. Because of this mismatch, applying the same seasonal regimen everywhere may not be practical. A more flexible and region-specific approach, based on the actual characteristics of seasons in a given area, may be more effective in maintaining health.

KEYWORDS: Ritu, Season, Climate, World, India.

INTRODUCTION

Seasonal variation is a fundamental environmental determinant influencing human physiology, disease patterns, and overall health outcomes.[1] Across different geographical regions, climatic conditions such as temperature, humidity, and photoperiod exhibit significant variability, leading to region-specific seasonal characteristics. Ayurveda conceptualizes these cyclical changes through the framework of *Ritu Chakra*, wherein six distinct seasons are described along with their specific effects on the equilibrium of Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—and corresponding health implications.[2] However, the classical description of Ritu is primarily based on a generalized climatic pattern and may not accurately correspond to the diverse environmental conditions observed across various regions of India and the world.[3] This discrepancy raises important questions regarding the universal applicability of Ritucharya and highlights the need for a critical evaluation of Ayurvedic seasonal classification in the context of regional and global climatic variability.

The Earth revolves around the Sun and rotates on its own axis, resulting in the formation of seasons as well as the cycle of day and night. Seasonal variations such as the summer and winter solstices arise due to the axial tilt of the Earth and its revolution around the Sun. These variations lead to significant differences in climatic conditions across regions.[4] This climatic diversity results in considerable regional variation in seasonal patterns, which may not always correspond with the classical Ayurvedic classification of Ritu.

The present review aims to compare Ayurvedic Ritu classification with regional and global climatic patterns, and to assess the necessity for contextual modification of Ritucharya for effective seasonal health management.

Concept of Ritu

The concept of *Ritu* (season) in Ayurveda is closely linked with the broader understanding of *Kala* (time). Time is considered a fundamental factor influencing natural processes, including seasonal changes, variations in taste, Dosha fluctuations, and bodily strength. Classical texts describe that the interaction of the Sun, Moon, and Wind, governed by time and their natural movements, plays a key role in the formation of seasons and their effects on the human body.[5]

A year is traditionally divided into six seasons (*Shad Ritu*), with each season comprising two months. These seasons are further grouped based on the movement of the Sun into two

phases—*Uttarayana* (northward movement) and *Dakshinayana* (southward movement). The northward movement of the Sun is associated with increased dryness and includes late winter to summer, whereas the southward movement is associated with increased moisture and includes the rainy to early winter seasons.[6] Acharya mentioned Pravrut ritu (Ashadha-Shravana) in text before varsha ritu.[7] In south portion of Vindhya more rainfall so pravprit ritu comes before varsha and because of less Sheeta there will be no Shishira Ritu. In north portion of Vindhya more sheeta so shishira ritu comes before Hemanta ritu.[8]

Table No. 1: Relationship in between Ritu's and Lunar Months.

Ritu	**Lunar Months**	**(Classical Synonyms)[9]**
Shishira	Magha – Phalguna	Tapa – Tapasya
Vasanta	Chaitra – Vaishakha	Madhu – Madhava
Grishma	Jyeshtha – Ashadha	Shuchi – Shukra
Varsha	Shravana – Bhadrapada	Nabha – Nabhasya
Sharad	Ashwin – Kartika	Isha – Urja
Hemanta	Margashirsha – Pausha	Saha – Sahasya

Each Ritu has a specific impact on the balance of Doshas. Seasonal transitions lead to stages of accumulation (*Sanchaya*), aggravation (*Prakopa*), and pacification (*Prashama*) of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. These cyclic changes are responsible for predictable variations in health and disease patterns across seasons.[10]

Table No. 2: *Ritu - Dosha Avastha.*

Dosha Avastha	***Vata***	***Pitta***	***Kapha***
Sanchaya	*Grishma*	*Varsha*	*Hemant*
Prakopa	*Varsha*	*Sharad*	*Vasanta*
Prashama	*Sharad*	*Hemant*	*Grishma*

Fig. No. 1: Relationship in between Seasons and Ritu's.

Fig. No. 2: Relationship in between Ritu's and Months.

Climatic Regions of India[11]

India exhibits considerable climatic diversity, which can broadly be categorized into four major groups: tropical rainy, dry, humid subtropical, and mountain climates. These classifications are based on variations in temperature, rainfall patterns, and geographical features, and they play an important role in determining regional seasonal characteristics.

1. Tropical Rainy Climate

This group is characterized by consistently high temperatures, which generally do not fall below 18°C even during the coldest month.

a. Tropical Monsoon Rainforest Climate

This type is observed in coastal lowlands, the Western Ghats, and parts of southern Assam. It is marked by high temperatures throughout the year and heavy, seasonal rainfall. The rainy season typically extends from May to November, followed by a relatively dry period from December to March.

b. Tropical Wet and Dry Climate

Found across much of peninsular India (excluding semi-arid regions), this climate features long dry periods during winter and early summer, along with very high temperatures in peak summer. Rainfall mainly occurs from June to September due to the southwest monsoon. An exception is Tamil Nadu, which receives significant rainfall during the winter months (October to December).

2. Dry Climate Group

This group is characterized by low precipitation and high evaporation rates.

a. Tropical Semi-Arid Steppe Climate

This climate occurs in regions such as Karnataka, interior Tamil Nadu, western Andhra Pradesh, and central Maharashtra. Annual rainfall ranges between 40–75 cm. Northern parts receive rainfall during the summer monsoon, while southern regions receive rainfall later in the year. Summers are hot and dry, with temperatures reaching around 35°C.

b. Tropical and Subtropical Desert Climate

This type is mainly found in western Rajasthan, including the Thar Desert. It is characterized by extremely low and irregular rainfall, very high summer temperatures (often exceeding 45°C), and cold winters, sometimes approaching freezing conditions.

c. Tropical and Subtropical Steppe Climate

Observed in regions like Punjab and Haryana, this climate represents a transitional zone between desert and humid subtropical conditions. Rainfall is moderate but unreliable and occurs mainly during the monsoon season. Temperature extremes are less severe compared to desert regions.

3. Humid Subtropical Climate

a. Humid Subtropical Climate with Dry Winters

This climate is found in the foothills of the Himalayas, including parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, northern West Bengal, and Assam. It is characterized by hot summers, with temperatures often exceeding 45°C, and predominantly dry winters. Rainfall is mainly concentrated in the summer months, varying from moderate levels in western regions to heavy rainfall near the Himalayas.

4. Mountain Climate

Mountain climates are observed in regions such as Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. Temperature decreases with increasing altitude, typically at a rate of about 0.6°C per 100 meters. The trans-Himalayan region remains cold, dry, and windy throughout the year. Snowfall is common, especially during late winter and early spring, with peak snowfall occurring between December and February.

Global Divisions[12]

Across the world, different cultures have developed their own ways of understanding seasons—often far more detailed than the simple four-season model we commonly use today.

These systems are closely tied to real environmental changes, not just calendar dates.

In East Asia, for example, the year is divided into 24 solar terms based on the Sun's position. Each term lasts about two weeks and reflects subtle shifts in weather or nature. Some of the names are quite descriptive—like "Awakening of Insects" or "White Dew"—which show how closely people observed seasonal transitions. In Japan, this idea is taken even further, breaking the year into 72 micro-seasons, each lasting just a few days.

In Australia, the Noongar people have followed a six-season cycle for thousands of years. Instead of fixed dates, their seasons are identified by changes in the environment—like flowering plants, animal behavior, and rainfall patterns. Each season flows into the next based on what's happening in nature.

Similarly, in Arctic regions, Inuit communities describe the year in stages rather than strict seasons. These stages are based on things like sea ice formation, melting patterns, and wildlife activity. So instead of thinking in terms of "winter" or "summer," the focus is on what the land and environment are actually doing.

In tropical regions like the Amazon and parts of Africa, seasons are often defined by water rather than temperature. People pay close attention to wet and dry cycles, especially the transition periods between them. For instance, some African communities structure the year around lunar months and natural events like plant blooming, rather than fixed seasonal labels.

When you look at how different cultures describe seasons, it becomes obvious that they're not universal—they're shaped by local climate and ecological conditions. Ayurveda, however, presents a fixed six-season framework. While this is conceptually clear, it doesn't always align neatly with the wide variability seen across different regions. Because of this, it's worth examining whether the traditional classification of Ritu should remain uniform or be adapted to suit regional climatic realities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A narrative literature review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary scientific literature. Relevant literature was searched through databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus using appropriate keywords. Relevant Ayurvedic Samhitas, textbooks, research articles, and review articles were included based on their relevance to the topic. Duplicate, irrelevant, and inaccessible literature was excluded. The collected

information was critically analyzed and synthesized according to the objectives of the review.

RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

Impact of Climatic Variation on Ritu Expression Seasonal patterns don't really play out the same way everywhere. They shift depending on where you are—latitude, altitude, rainfall, all of it matters. Ayurveda, on the other hand, lays out a fixed six-season cycle. It's structured and systematic, but when you look at real-world conditions, things don't always line up so neatly.

Take India itself. In the northern parts, winters are clearly defined—cold, distinct, easy to identify. But move toward the south or coastal regions, and that sharp winter phase almost fades out. Seasons blend into each other more, and the variation feels much less pronounced. In tropical regions, you might not even see all six seasons clearly, while in colder areas, winter tends to stretch on longer than expected. If you look globally, it's a similar story—many cultures define seasons based on what's actually happening in their environment, not by a fixed calendar structure.

Because of this, the classical idea of how Doshas change with each Ritu may not show up in the same way everywhere. The patterns described in texts assume a certain kind of climate, and when that shifts, the physiological responses might shift too. So applying Ritucharya in a uniform way across all regions doesn't always make practical sense.

This brings up an important point—maybe the traditional seasonal framework shouldn't be treated as rigid. It needs to be looked at in context, keeping regional climate in mind, rather than assuming it works the same everywhere.

Implications for Ritucharya

If seasonal patterns themselves are changing from place to place, then it doesn't make sense to follow the same diet and lifestyle everywhere. What works in one region may not suit another at all. Instead of applying Ritucharya in a fixed way, it makes more sense to observe the local climate—what kind of seasonal features are actually present, and how the Doshas are behaving in that context.

Based on that, a more personalized or region-specific approach can be followed. Rather than strictly sticking to calendar-based seasons, the focus should shift toward understanding the current environmental conditions and adapting diet and lifestyle accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Seasonal changes have a significant impact on overall health and physiological balance. However, climatic conditions vary widely across different regions, leading to differences in the expression of seasons. Because of this variability, it becomes difficult to apply a uniform diet and lifestyle approach based solely on a fixed seasonal framework. Therefore, it is more practical to observe the actual characteristics of Ritu in a given region and adopt a flexible, region-specific approach to seasonal regimens. Such an approach can enhance the effectiveness and relevance of Ritucharya in diverse environmental conditions.

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