

 <p>ISSN NO. 2320-5407</p>	<p>Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com</p> <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</p> <p>Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/12141 DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/12141</p>	 <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407</p> <p>Available homepage: http://www.journalijar.com Journal DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01</p>
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A LITERARY REVIEW ON RATRICHARYA- A PATH TOWARDS HEALTHY LIFE

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 05 October 2020

Final Accepted: 10 November 2020

Published: December 2020

Key words:-

Ahara, Nidra, Brahmacharya,
Ratricharya, Health

Abstract

The paramount aim of Ayurveda is SwasthasyaSwaasthyaRakshanam; AathurasyaVikaraPrasamanam Cha. For the gratification of this goal, there are different concepts in Ayurveda and Ratricharya is one among them. Ratricharya is not so much explained as a separate heading like that of Dinacharya in all pioneer textbooks. But the latter century authors has explained about it. Ratricharya is not merely Nidra or sleep, but it is included in the three sub pillars of life ie, Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya. Ignorance of night regimen is very common in the current scenario; especially in today's younster's life style. So to attain a state of perfect well-being, one has to practice healthy regimens like Dinacharya(daily regimen), Ritucharya(seasonal regimen), Ratricharya, Sadvritta(codes of conduct) etc. which are clearly described in Ayurveda. Ayurvedic lifestyle promotes physical, mental as well as social health and ultimately leads to symptomatic improvement as well as the improvement in the quality of life and thus helps in the prevention and management of diseases. The present article aims to elaborate the concept of Ratricharya in Ayurvedic classics.

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Introduction:-

Night covers almost 50% of the whole life span. In comparison to the day, it is usually an inactive phase of life when a man return back to home for physical and mental rest. Night (Ratri) starts after sunset when twilight is over and continues till dawn of the day.

A major portion of the night is mostly passed by sleeping. It is only the early evening (8pm) ,late evening (10pm) and later phase of night (after 4am) which demands care in respect of dietetics, sexual acts and other regimen of life mainly to keep the body full of strength and vigor for the next coming days activities.

The body as a whole mostly passes through an anabolic phase during night. Physiologically, the following changes will take place during night:-

1. Nervous system takes complete rest in night during sleep (sound sleep)
2. Circulatory system slower down
3. A minimal oxidation and combustion at the cellular level leads to the maximum recoup of energy in the body.
4. Other systems of the body also pass to a resting phase.

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In view of the above facts it is advisable to have a little care of diet, drinks and other activities in certain parts of the night besides sleeping hours.

*“Naktham dinaani me yaanthi kadhambhutasya samprathi
Dukhabhagam na bhavatyevam nityam sannihithasmrithi”*

A.H. Su. 2/47

Vagbhata says that one who is always cautious in analyzing their Dinacharya and Ratricharya they never get afflicted with sufferings¹.

Ratricharya mainly includes Ahara, Maithuna and Nidra. It has been mentioned in AshtangaHridaya, AshtangaSangraha, BhavaPrakasha and other allied literature like Manusmriti, Dakshasmriti etc.

*“Pradosha paschimou yamou vedabhyasena thou nayeth
Yaamadwayam shayanasthu brahmabhooyasya kalpathe”*

Dakshasmriti 2/59

According to Dakshasmriti treatise, one who passes the early and late parts of the night (first 2 praharas ie, 6 hours) in studying vedas and sleeps in the remaining 6 hours, he attains Brahmatva- the Supreme state of peace and tranquility, detached from the bindings, endowed with good physical and mental health.

Sandhyacharya – Regimen during evening ie, 5-6pm

Indications during Sandhyakala:-

- Mukha , Netra and Paadaprakshalana
- Vishranti
- Upasana / Worship

Contraindications during Sandhyakala:-

As per BhavaPrakasha, the following five things are to be avoided²

*“Ethani panchakarmani sandhyayam varjayethbudha:
Aharam maithunam nidram sampatam gathimadhwani
Bhojanajjayathe vyadhi maithunath garbhavaikruti:
Nidraya ni:swatha padhath ayurhani gathe: bhayam”*

B.P. Pu.5/261-262

Ahara – intake of food should be avoided during this time as it will not get digested fully and eventually leads to the manifestation of many diseases.

Maithuna – indulgence in sexual acts during this time leads to fetal abnormalities.

Nidra – sleep during sandhyakala leads to poverty. The word ni:swatha here means poverty in all terms ie, loss of health, wealth, wisdom and intelligence.

Sampatam – studying during sandhya will lead to ayuhani ie, loss of life. In olden days the artificial lighting facility was not available. So reading in dim light gives strain to sense organs which lead to the damage and functioning of vital organs and eventually leads to ayuhani.

Gathi – journey should be avoided as it will lead to fear and insecurity.

Ratri BhojanaVidhi

*“Ratrou tu bhojanam kuryath prathama praharaanthare
Kinchitoonam samasneeyath durjaram tatra varjayeth”*

B.P.Pu.5/265

One should take dinner during the first part (prathamaprahara- 3 hours) of night and it should be lesser in quantity in comparison to day time but it should not be heavy and troublesome in digestion³.

Further Vagbhata says-

*“Saayam bhuktvā laghuhitham samahithamāna: suchi:
Saasthaaram anusamsritya swacharyaam cha atha samvisheth”*

A. S. Su 3/118

One should sleep after taking light and wholesome food with peaceful, fair minded and having accounted entire activities of the day and after offering prayers to the God in his own bed⁴.

Light, nutritious and wholesome food particularly in early part of night will facilitate easy digestion and keep gastro intestinal tract unloaded.

*“Yukthopadhaanam swaastheernam vistheerna avishamam sukham
Jaanuthulyam mridu shubham sevetha shayanaasanam
Praak dakshinashiraa: paadaavakurvaano guroonprati”*

A. S. Su 3/120-121

The sleeping place should be spacious in length and breadth, furnished with suitable pillows which is soft, even and comfortable. The cot which is to be for lying down should possess the height up to the knee and well covered with soft mattresses. The head should face towards east or south direction and legs should not be stretched towards teachers or elders⁵.

Bhojanottara Karma- Post prandial activities

*“Tatha :paanigatham annam anyena apaneeya dantatharastham
Cha Sanai:Sanai:shodhanena vishodhya lepagandha
Snehaapanodamachantho angulya agragalithambu parishiktha
Netra :tambooladikrita vadanavaishadhyo dhoomapaanaadi
hrito:urldhwakaphavega:paadasathamaatram gatwa vaamaparswena samviseth
Dravotharabhojana: thu shayyam na athisevetha:”*

A.S.Su 10/13

Paniprakshalana- one should thoroughly wash his hands until the food particles are completely washed off the hands.

Dantashodhana- the teeth should be cleansed by brushing; the food particles residing in between the teeth should be removed with tooth picks; if any sticking is there, gargle then mouth to remove the coating, smell and greasiness.

Netrasparshana- one should touch the eyes with the moist finger tips after hand washing.

Tamboolasevana- one should make the mouth clean and pleasant by chewing betel leaves.

Dhoomapana – one should inhale medicated smoke to remove upward accumulation of kapha.

Gamana – before going to bed one should walk for paadashata matra(100 steps)

Samveshana – after gamana one should sleep on left lateral position.

Those who have consumed excessive liquid food, they should sleep for less duration.

*“Bhuktvā raajavath aaseetha yaavadannam klamogatha:
Tatha: paadasatham gatva vaamaparswena samvisheth”*

Su. Su.46/ 487

According to Susruta, after meals one should sit comfortably like a king until the heaviness and discomfort of food is relieved; then walk for 100 steps and should lie down on bed by left side⁷.

According to BhavaPrakasha, after having food one should do achamana , remove the remnants of food particles residing between the teeth with tooth pick.

*“Bhuktvā paanitalam ghrishtva chakshusho: yadi deeyathe
Achirenaiva tat vaari timirani vyapohathi”*

B.P.Pu 5/157

After food, hands should be washed well with water and the eyes should be touched with moist hands, this will cure blindness quickly⁸.

Jyotsna, Avashyaya, Tama

Effect of jyotsna (moonlight), avashyaya (mist) and tama (darkness) on health:-

*“Jyotsna seethe smaraanandaprada trut pithadaharit
Tato heenaguna: kuryath avasyayo anilam kapham
Tamo bhayavaham moha dikmohajanakam bhaveth
Pithahrith kaphahrith kaamavardhanam klamakrit cha tat”*

B.P.Pu 5/263-264

Jyotsna - is having cooling and soothing effect, enhances sexual desire, pacifies thirst, pitha and daaha (burning sensation). Avashyaya - is inferior in quality than moonlight, but it aggravates vatha and kapha.

Tamas - gives rise to fear, creates delusion, confusion in recognizing directions, it mitigates pitha, kapha, enhances sexual desire and leads to klama (tiredness)⁹.

Triphala for Eye Health

*“Triphalaam madhu sarpibhyaam nisi netrabalaaya cha
Swasthyaanuvrittikrith yath cha rogochedakaram cha yath”*

A.S.Su.10/20

According to VridhaVagbhata, one should take Triphalachurna mixed with honey and ghee daily at night before going to bed to strengthen the eyes and to improve the vision¹⁰.

All foods which are good to maintain health and all those which cure diseases also should be used daily.

Anjana– Collyrium

*“Souviram anjanam nityam hitam akshnoprayojayeth
Pancharatre ashtaratre va sraavanarthe rasanjanam”*

Ch. Su 5/ 15

*“Diva that na prayokthavyam netrayo: theekshaanjanam
Vireka durbaladrishti: aadityam prapya seedathi
Tasmath sraavyam nishaayam thu dhruvam anjanamishyathe”*

Ch . Su 5/17

Anjana practice has been mentioned under Dinacharya. It is beneficial for eye diseases and also enhance eye health. Collyriums can also be applied during night time for the purpose of cleansing (sraavana). Souviranjanam is the best one and can be applied on daily basis. Rasanjanam is having rukshaguna and shall be applied once in 5th / 8th night to expel the aggravated doshas from the eyes and also to purify the eyes.¹¹

A strong collyrium must not be applied to the eyes during the day time as the eyes are weakened by the drainage of kapha and will be adversely affected by the sun's rays. Thus the anjana which is meant for sraavana should only be applied during night time¹².

Maithuna - Intercourse

Sex is one of the natural instinct. People get indulged in sex at various parts of the day, but sex during night is good and wholesome for health.

*“Sharire jaayathe nityam dehina: surathaspruha
Avyavaayaan meha medovridhi: shithilatha tano:”*

B. P. Pu 5/266

Man will have sexual desire every day. If he suppresses the urge for sex, he will suffer from meha (urinary disorders, diabetes), medovridhi (obesity) and tanu shithilatha (looseness/laxity /weakness of the body)¹³.

Strigamanaguna- benefits of copulation

*“Aayushmantho mandajara vapu: varnabalanvitha:
Sthira upachita mamsascha bhavanthi strishusamyatha:”*

B. P. Pu 5/274

Those who does maithuna in a proper manner will obtain long life, decreased development of old age, body endowed with good complexion and strength and also with well-formed musculature¹⁴.

Time for copulation

*“Sevetha kaamatha: kaamam balath vajeekritho hime
Prakamam thu nishavetha maithunam shishiragame”
B.P.Pu 5/275*

Man can engage himself in copulation as much as his desire during hemantartu (winter season), strengthened by the use of aphrodisiacs and in shishirartu even without using aphrodisiacs¹⁵.

*“Trayahath vasantha sarado :pakshath vrishti nidaaghayo:”
B.P.Pu 5/276*

During vasantha and saradrtu, copulation should be done once in three days and during varsha, grishmartu, once in a fortnight¹⁶.

*“Seethe ratrou diva grishme vasanthe thu diva nishi
Varshasu vaaridatdhvane saratsu sarasa: smara:”
B.P.Pu 5/278*

Copulation should be done –

At night time during cold seasons
At day time during summer
At day and night during spring
At the time of thunderbolt during rainy season and
As and when desired during autumn¹⁷

Contraindicated time for copulation

*“Upeyath purusho narim sandhyayo:na cha parvasu
Goosarge cha ardharatre cha tatha madhyamdine api cha”
B.P.Pu 5/279*

Man should not indulge in sex during evenings, during full moon day, new moon day, eclipse etc, at the time when cows are let out for grazing and also during midnight and mid day¹⁸.

Beneficial practices after sexual intercourse

*“Snanam sa sarkaram ksheeram bhakshyam ikshavasamskritam
Vaatho mamsarasa: swapna: surathanthe hitha ami”
B.P.Pu 5/298*

After copulation one should take bath, drink milk with sugar, intake of foods processed with sugarcane products, meat soup, resort to cool breeze and sleep¹⁹.

Nidra- Sleep

*“Nidra hi naama praaninaam prathamam idam sareeradharananimitham”
Chandra koushika*

Sleep is one of the trayaupasthambhas. Sleep in terms of quality and quantity is essential to maintain an optimum health. Serious sleep disturbances may lead to many diseases and also to death. Sleeping at night is conducive to health and thus a sound sleep can prevents many diseases.

*“Ardharogahari nidra
Ye swapathi sukham ratrou tesham kaayagni: ichyathe
Aaharam pratigruhaathi thatha: pushtikaram param”
Skandhapurana*

Sleep is capable of destroying half of our diseases.

In a person who is getting good and sound sleep at night has the capacity to digest the food properly, this will enhances the kaayagni and in turn nourishes the body properly.

Physiology of sleep:

“Yada tu manasi klaanthe karmaatmaana: klamaanvithaa:

Vishayebhyo nivarthanthe tada swapithi maanava:"

Ch.Su 21/25

When the mind including the sensory and motor organs gets exhausted or become inactive, they will dissociate themselves from their own objects. Thus the individual gets sleep²⁰.

"Nidrayatham sukham dukham pushti: kaarsyam balaabalam

Vrishata kleeabatha jnanam ajnanam jeevitham na cha

Akaale athiprasangaascha na cha nidra nishevitha

Sukhayushi paraakuryath kaalaratri :ivaaparaa"

Ch. Su 21/26-27

The above mentioned verse explains about good and bad effects of proper and improper sleep. Untimely and excessive sleep takes away happiness and longevity similar to kaalaratri²¹.

"Pushtim varnam bala utsaaham vahnideepthim karothe hi

Yo leedhe sayanasamaye madhumisram beejapooradalachoornam

Sa thu lajjakara vathaprasara nirodhath sukham swapithi"

B.P.Pu 5/301-302

Sleeping at the proper time leads to pushti (nourishment), varna(good complexion), bala(strength), utsaaha(enthusiasm) and good digestive power.

One who licks the powder of tender leaves of bijapura mixed with honey during bed time, enjoys comfortable sleep due to the easy movement of flatus²².

Discussion:-

Ayurveda the science of life gives importance for both curative and preventive aspects. The majority of Ayurveda literatures in early chapters explained about the maintenance of healthy life style. Such techniques are numerous and one among them is Ratricharya.

The instructions given for night regimen and contraindications if analyzed in the light of Ayurveda and today's modern life, it elicits many truthful facts for the betterment of health both at the physical and mental levels.

It has been advised to take light, nutritious and wholesome food especially in the early parts of night will facilitate easy digestion and will keep gastro intestinal tract unloaded.

Bhavamisra opines about the contraindicated acts during late evening hours. A wise man who need to be healthy always should not resort to such activities which is harmful to the body.

Post dinner activities are mentioned by almost all treatises and that should be followed viz. sit like a king after food to relieve the stress, walk for hundred steps and lie down on the left side to promote easy digestion.

The concept of Anjana ,Dhumapana which has described are having their own role in preventing Kaphajavyadhi as there will be predominance of kapha during sandhyakala and ratrikala. So by the practice of anjana and dhumapana , one can prevent urdhwajatrugataroagas.

Importance of taking Triphalachurna with honey and ghee regularly at night for the betterment of eye health is also being mentioned.

The importance of copulation, its need, benefits, indicated and contraindicated timings and the beneficial practices after copulation has been clearly mentioned.

Further Acharyas have given details regarding Nidra, its importance in present day's life, measures to induce good sleep, sleeping postures etc. Spacious and comfortable bed is advised for the sake of free and undisturbed sleep. There is also mentioning of keeping head towards east or south direction which is having great significance in view of earth's magnetic force. Thus the person will get mild and soothing effect on the body to have a sound sleep.

Conclusion:-

Night is an important part of our life, meant for taking a break from our activities, a time for mental and physical rest, to reactivate, rejuvenate and refresh ourselves for the next day's activities.

Ratricharya, a concept explained in Ayurveda explains the activities which are to be done and avoided during night time.

Each and every procedure in Ratricharya like sandhyakalavarjya karma, importance of moonlight, ratrihojana, importance of anjana, dhoomapana, sexual desire and shayanavidhi etc are having its own importance in preventing diseases and promoting health.

After referring all available classical texts where ratricharya is mentioned, it can be concluded that by following the principles of Ayurveda especially Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Ratricharya, Sadvritta etc, a person can stay healthy by physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

So by following the concept of Ratricharya in daily life, an individual can attain highest state of well-being.

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