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Challenges faced in lifestyle modification - An Ayurvedic perspective

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ABSTRACT

Life style is a way of life established by a society, culture, group or individual. This includes patterns of behavior, interaction, consumption, work activity and interests that describe how a person spends his/her time. It is very interesting to note that there is a particular pattern or rhythm observed in nature as well as in the body. The concepts mentioned in Ayurveda aims at understanding a major chunk of these rhythms as well as emphasize the importance of maintaining these rhythms. Ayurvedic perspective of an ideal lifestyle includes: *Dinacharya, Ratricharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Ahara Vidhi Vidhana, Swapna, Brahmacharya/ Abhramacharya, Varshika Shodhana, Ritumatcharya, Dharniya/Adharaniya Vegas* etc. and is just not restricted to daily or seasonal regime. Therefore it frames a systematic routine that can be classified as aspects pertaining to physical, mental, social, medical, societal, cultural, dietetics etc in order to maintain an ideal life style. Having said so, it is not an easy task to implement them suddenly or just as it is in ways mentioned in texts. The basic principle has to be understood and has to be applied in an appropriate manner keeping in mind the present scenario. For example: understanding *Ritu* is a big challenge owing to the global warming. Thus, few of such challenges are being mentioned here along with suggestive implications.

Key words: *Ideal lifestyle, Hita Aayu, Sukha Aayu, life style modification, challenges, Sadvritta, code of conduct.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is blooming in present era and strengthening its root requires ambiguous augmentation. People are so engrossed earning their livelihood that they forget the language of their body and they land up possessing all the materialistic

comforts together with an ailing body. They are ignorant that simple steps taken by them at certain time can help them promote health and prolong life thus having a *Sukha* and *Hita Aayu*. The major approach of the underlying principles of Ayurveda should be made at the level of population as a whole. Not only the change that is needed to modify lifestyle should be analyzed but the challenges that come while making that change should also be considered. It is not an easy task to implement the changes suddenly or just as it is in ways mentioned in texts. The basic principle has to be understood and has to be applied in an appropriate manner keeping in mind the present scenario. Hence an effort has been made in this paper to analyze such challenges.

For instance, quoting two incidents here: A) where a person working in his office is hungry but it's not yet time for his lunch, instead he munches on a packet of chips; B) another person in same office knows he is

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hungry but he waits till the lunch time. Case A: Attitude - Ignorant; Awareness - nil; Case B: Attitude - Sensible; Awareness - nil. Such is the attitude of people who usually go by the clock hanging on the wall and often dismiss the ticking clock within oneself. Majority of the individuals are not aware of this biological clock and this is how most of us miss minute steps which are otherwise cumulating in a harmful way silently somewhere inside the body. Awareness is what most of us are lacking. All individuals should have the capability to listen to their body and to understand its language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this paper, a detailed literary study was performed. The contents and references were analyzed and used for review. The principal Ayurvedic texts referred under this study are the *Brhatrayees*. Other Ayurvedic texts, journals, relevant websites were also studied for relevant references. The practical application and utility of such references in modern era was analyzed.

Sadvritta - Code of conduct that reflects life style

The root meaning of *Sad* can be understood as *Gati* or going^[1] and *Vritta* as rhythm or circle.^[2] Combining the above words, *Sadvritta* means going in rhythm. Therefore, in a wider aspect *Sadvritta* is not restricted to code of behavioral conduct but lifestyle as a whole. Life style is a way of life established by a society, culture, group or individual.^[3] This includes patterns of behavior, interaction, consumption, work activity and interests that describe how a person spends his/her time. Universe follows a particular rhythm and

so does human body. As the three eminent factors of the universe : water, sun and air serve and control the world, in the same manner *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Vaata* control and govern the body of all living beings.^[4] *Vaata* is predominant in old age, in afternoon, late night and at the end of digestion of food. *Pitta* is predominant in the middle age, midday, mid night and during middle period of digestion. *Kapha* is predominant in early age, in forenoon, in the early part of the night and the early period of digestion.^[5] Thus, there is a rhythmic cycle going on. Based on this cyclic pattern, Ayurveda lays down guidelines for how a person should live.

Sadvritta has to be repeatedly followed like a rhythm. One, who follows the code of conduct for the healthy, lives a life of hundred years without any abnormality. Such people are praised by the noble ones; they earn fame, acquire virtue and wealth, earn friendship of all living beings and at the end, one with holy acts, get across this world.^[6] The entire framework of *Sadvritta* is scattered in the classical literature while for the diseased one it's compiled under *Nidana* or *Chikitsa Sthana*. The aim of this paper would be to collect, compile and explore the applied aspect of such scattered references for *Swastha Purusha* and an attempt to put them under one heading. It will enable better understanding and better implementation. Our *shastra* advocates *Ayu Rakshana* both for *Swastha* and *Aatura*.^[7] This paper intends to reflect only *Swastha Purusha* related *Sadvritta* and the challenges faced in adapting such modifications. Given below are the suggestive different dimensions of code of conduct that define or reflect life style.

Sadvritta (7 fold dimensions of code of conduct that defines life style)

Dimension	Physical aspects	Mental aspects	Social/ Behavioral aspects	Dietetics	Cultural aspects	Societal aspects	Medical aspects
Description	Bodily code of conduct	Code of conduct for the self, that is	Ethical code of conduct with other members	Code of conduct related to dietary	That part of life style that reflects	Code of conduct in a society	Routine medical procedures

		related to emotions, mind and sense organs (of an individual)		rules and regulations	the cultural code or major life events		
Includes	<i>Dina charya</i> <i>Ratri charya</i> <i>Ritu charya</i> <i>Adharaniya vegas</i> <i>Nidra</i>	<i>Dharaniya vegas</i>	Social/ ethical/ professional /moral/ guidelines that is described in various chapters	<i>Aahara vidhi vidhana</i> <i>Virudha ahara</i> <i>Nitya sevaniya dravya</i>	<i>Navajaata samskara</i> <i>Garbhini samakara</i> Marriages	<i>Bhramacharya/ Abhramacharya</i> <i>Ritumati evam rajaswala charya</i> <i>Daiva vyapashaya chikitsa</i> (folklore practices)	<i>Varshika shodhana</i> <i>Rasayana</i> <i>Vajikarana</i> <i>Garbhini charya</i>

The above table can also be classified as:

	Rhythmic activities	Non rhythmic activities
Daily	<i>Dina Charya</i> , ^[8] <i>Ratri Charya</i> ^[9]	<i>Ahara Vidhi</i> , <i>Indriya Swathaya</i>
Fortnightly	<i>Nakha</i> , <i>Kesha Kartana</i>	<i>Shishu Avam Matri Swasthaya</i>
Monthly	<i>Ritu Charya</i> , ^[10] <i>Ritu Mati Charya</i>	-
Yearly	<i>Varshika Shodhana</i>	-

Challenges Faced

There is a profound description found in each of the above given aspects in our classical literature. Often it is easier preached than practiced. Few of the descriptions mentioned cannot be applied as it is in modern scenario. Hence it becomes essential to

understand the underlying principle in such descriptions. For example:

Category	Sub category	Challenges faced
Physical aspects of life style- <i>Dina charya</i>	<i>Prati marsha nasya</i>	This is one such <i>karma</i> that is not popularly practiced amongst people. It is difficult to initiate it in one go. The practical problem faced is eg. in <i>kapha pradhana desha</i> especially where winters are prolonged, it becomes a challenge to introduce it as the warm days are limited and cold cloudy days are extensive. Although few drops of <i>anu tailam</i> should not cause concern but it is better to introduce it in days

		when it is not over cast. Hence, the window to initiate a person for the first time to <i>prati marsha nasya</i> is reduced.
	Vyayama	In present day scenario, it is seen that people are indulging into various forms of exercises irrespective of the consideration of their strength, season etc. A chain of gyms/ yoga centers have been seen to be cropped up in cities both big and small. How many of them advertise that the body needs to be lightly pressed or massaged after any kind of exercise ^[11] ?
Ritu charya	Ritu sandhi	Climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of health - clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter. ^[12] Many people think of global warming and climate change as synonyms, but scientists prefer to use “climate change” when describing the complex shifts now affecting our planet’s weather and climate systems. Climate change encompasses not only rising average temperatures but also extreme weather events, shifting wildlife populations and habitats, rising seas, and a range of other impacts. ^[13] This has made it difficult to demarcate precisely which season will actually fall on

		which month. Our classical literature has beautifully given description of each <i>Ritu</i> giving a picturesque idea not just limiting it to months. For a common man to understand <i>Ritu</i> becomes challenging owing to the above reasons. Hence, guidelines have to be laid down for drastic change in <i>ritu</i> eg. : if it starts raining in winters how to understand that one should continue the winter regime as it is or make slight changes and those changes to be followed till what duration.
Mental and social aspects		Malnutrition, unhealthy diet, smoking, alcohol consuming, drug abuse, stress and so on, are the presentations of unhealthy life style that they are used as dominant form of lifestyle. Besides, the lives of citizens face with new challenges. For instance, emerging new technologies within IT such as the internet and virtual communication networks, lead our world to a major challenge that threatens the physical and mental health of individuals. The challenge is the overuse and misuse of the technology. ^[14] With the advent of digital era, socialization has reduced. People are spending lesser time with friends, family, loved ones not finding

		<p>time to do what they love thus encasing themselves in walls of a confined room. This gives them less space to be emotionally involved and when they do, there is an emotional outburst. The unwholesome action performed by one whose intellect, restraint and memory are deranged, is known as intellectual error. It vitiates all the doshas.^[15]</p> <p>How to ensure that a person is encouraged to follow ethical conduct? Just by telling them to? That would not be an easy task. Asking people to undergo counseling? Still difficult to convince. On top of that the person who is willing to seek counseling falls into the grip of so called anti-stress medicines.</p> <p>It is the need of the hour to have community support groups. A major part of this responsibility lies on the work place of a person where he should be constantly encouraged to take up physical forms of leisure activity or sports or some art form. Such activities help channelize negative emotions, ensure that a person will have at least some form of physical exercise, a bit of socialization and dose of self worth of confidence.</p>
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Dietetics	Ahara vidhi vidhana	<p>It has to be clearly understood that just like mathematics there are constant and variables in <i>Ayurveda</i>. Certain principles can be blindly applied to any individual at any given time but often there are various factors which come into play which requires specification. For instance <i>Aahaar Vidhi Vidhana</i> applies to all individuals: “<i>ushnam snigdam maatratvat jeerne veerayavrudham iste deshe itsarvopkarnam naatidrutam naativilambitam ajalpan ahasan tanmanabhunjita aatmanamabhisamekhsya samyak</i>” ;^[16] but the kind of <i>Aahara</i> may differ for people. If person ‘A’ is <i>Saatmya</i> to idli and ‘B’ to roti the general rule is that either should be warm unctuous etc. Therefore <i>Saatmyata</i> holds specific to specific individual and it cannot be generalized.</p>
	Nitya sevaniya	<p>Unlike the very popular contemporary belief that curd is good every day, <i>Ayurveda</i> has put curd in that food category which one should not take constantly.^[17] The advertisement of the contemporary belief is so much so that it masks the actual classical facts. Why wait for an evidence based research to prove the ill effects of curd consumption every day? The need of the hour is to make large scale</p>

		<p>awareness of such myths.</p> <p>Similarly when it comes to balanced diet, it is quite easy to figure out the macro/micro nutrients/calories. Where is the classical analysis?</p> <p>To begin simple, the general consumable kitchen items should be calibrated on the basis of at least three markers namely: percentage of <i>Rasas</i>, <i>Virya</i> and whether it falls in <i>Nitya Sevaniya</i> or not. Thus, when a person will have a couple of items on his plate, he will at least know that he is not consuming only one <i>rasa</i> predominantly.</p>			<p>on.^[19] The principle behind them is that extensive measures have been taken to avoid <i>Vata</i> vitiation which is the main culprit of common menstrual complaints like cramps, PMS, <i>Kheena Artava</i>, <i>Nashta Artava</i>^[20] etc. Therefore our <i>Aacharyas</i> ensured that women in cycles be protected, given proper rest and care.</p> <p>In recent medical research, <i>Darbha</i> or <i>Kusha</i> grass have been observed to block X-Ray radiation.^[21] Now it cannot be even said that the age old practice is practically impossible to follow today after all!</p>
Societal aspects	Rajaswala charya	<p>It is a very common advertisement in television where a girl would jump the fence, run for social causes, become abnormally bright and breezy, why? Because she is wearing a sanitary pad? These pads will protect them, save them and boost their confidence. At the same time, however, these ads depict menstruation as a debilitating evil. One that affects their sleep, their school grades, and their career prospects.^[18]</p> <p>On the other hand, classically a specific regime has been mentioned which may sound impractical to follow as it is in today's scenario for instance sleeping on <i>darbha</i> mat, no bath, no loud talking and so</p>		Ritumati charya	<p>The concepts of <i>Pathya</i> and preconception care go hand in hand. Majority of the couple are unaware about the necessity of preconception care in present era. In present day scenario late marriages and postponement of first conception owing to busy schedule of life and workaholic attitude^[22] has an adverse impact on fertility.</p> <p>Therefore, the dos and don'ts for a woman in ovulating phase should be comprehensively popularized to promote reproductive health standards for women who are either planning or trying to conceive.</p>
			Cultural		<i>Ayurvedic</i> classics beautifully

<p>aspect of life style</p>		<p>explain the <i>Garbhadhana Samskara</i> starting with the <i>vivaha yogya praya, vivaha yogya</i> and <i>maithuna yogya purusha- stree. Acaryas</i> emphasizes on age of marriage and conception for both male and female for a better progeny.^[22]</p> <p>Awareness can be made as to what would be the effects of late/ early marriage or how age difference would reflect the reproductive health of the couple. Better awareness will lead to people making better choice for themselves.</p> <p>For instance, Consanguinity in some ethnicity is a dominant form of life style that it leads to the genetic disorders. Reformation of this life style is a preventing factor for decreasing the rate of genetic diseases.^[23] On the same topic, our <i>Acharyas</i> have mentioned <i>Atulya Gotra</i> - a healthy man desirous of progeny should indulge with woman who belongs to dissimilar clan.^[24]</p>
<p>Medical aspects</p>	<p>Varshika shodhana</p>	<p>It is seen that various insurance companies provide yearly checkups and it is still controversial if too much regular checkups are boon or bane for mankind. Instead, the face of preventive health department would marvelously change if the same companies provide privilege for yearly <i>Shodhana</i> procedures and encourage</p>

		<p>people to inculcate such procedures for prevention of diseases. It would positively reflect in the social sector of healthcare.</p>
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DISCUSSION

As it is clear from above examples, life style is not merely the daily or seasonal regime but it comprises a variety of other dimensions of animate existence. It is very elementary to say that life style modification should be done but it is high time to be observant of the challenges that come along. If following an ideal life style would have been so easy, many medical adversities would have come to an end. But this is not the case. The obstacles that come along have to be first investigated and then accordingly addressed.

Nowadays there is lot of perplexed approach as to what should be followed and what not. It is apparent to fall prey to unauthentic guidelines available at the tip of finger through conspicuous videos, blogs, website etc. It is not uncommon for a research paper to prove a fact correct and then another research to prove the same fact wrong in some span of time. Thus research has to have a strong base.

The historical glimpses are enough to prove the efficacy and utility of Ayurveda for ages, but the present era is the period when physical sciences and techniques have made a revolutionary change in the lifestyle of a man. Ayurveda came into existence to fulfill the thirst of longevity and disease free body. This thirst is eternal and so is Ayurveda.^[25] The necessity and utility of Ayurvedic principles was, is and will remain unchanged as long as the idea of a disease free life remains. Hence, it is ideal to stick around these principles and research for better implementation of these principles should be carried on.

Overcoming Challenges

Acknowledging the above challenges, it would be apt to discuss few following suggestive solutions that may be adopted to resolve them:

1. **Placing Trayo Upastambha over and above Nidana Parivarjana:** *Nidana Parivarjana* is the first line of treatment. This is applicable in a *Rogi*. Correcting *Trayopstambha* is applicable both to *Rogi* and *Swastha Purusha*. Maintaining *Trayoupstambha* should be encouraged.
2. **Prakriti mapping:** Just like how disease prevalence demographic census is taken, it would be a great contribution if similar statistics can be obtained on the region, people, climate with respect to *Prakriti*. For instance if a region A is *Kapha Pradhana Desha*, how to mould the guidelines as per the *Desha*.
3. **Developing new biomarkers:** Research scholars should be encouraged to develop new scales or biomarkers related to *Agni*, *Prakriti*, *Vikriti*, *Vyayama* or simple self assessment tools for a lay man who would know his present stand on his health condition and degree of improvement after adopting life style changes.
4. **Government/ institutional support:** Just like having a NDD - National De-worming Day, there could be a NND - national *Nasya* Day where mass population can be targeted for preventive health aspect. Moreover, simple *Dinacharya/Ritucharya* be adopted in *Ayurvedic* curriculum to boost confidence of studying scholars especially those residing in hostel.
5. **Media support:** People switch on news channels early morning to watch what's trending or what's happening worldwide or even watch horoscope. How about introducing few dedicated minutes of *Sadvritta* related to the particular month or a specific topic be dealt every day?
6. **Making guidelines public friendly:** When life style modification in a diseased person is considered, the management is case specific. Whereas while considering life style modification in a healthy person, there can be a variety of variations in this case too. Starting from not liking to perform a particular karma to difficulties faced in doing so, inculcating it at a very younger age, guideline modification with respect to male, female, child,

old age, profession, working, non working etc. to be laid.

7. **Ensuring regularity:** Changes in lifestyle of an individual will not happen overnight. Forming support groups, help centers, online services, 24/7 query help line, government/ institutional schemes may help accelerate the process.

CONCLUSION

Not only the authentic principles of Ayurveda be propagated but a *Vaidya* should be prepared for the challenges that come along. The guidelines should be simple and easy to follow by people. There should be multiple suggestions which should be pocket friendly as well as apt in modern day scenario. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to propagate authentic principles of an ideal life style. It may be challenging considering targeting herculean population at large or removing pre existing misnomers. It is better to take one step at a time and start working on it instead of contemplating the amount of time it will actually take for the authentic practices to come in full swing in present era. It must not be forgotten that what we do today will affect generations to come and it is high time we start concentrating more on the preventive measures that directly improve our health rather than those measure that indirectly indicate what can go wrong in our bodies. It has been rightly said by Rabindranath Tagore: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence"

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