

FORBIDDEN FRUIT AND VEGETABLES IN ORIYA ALMANAC: AN ETHNOBOTANICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The present communication aims to study, analyse and report about the dietary restriction of certain fruit and vegetables on specific lunar days as prescribed in ancient Oriya astronomical text 'Panjika' or Almanac, not reported earlier. The study also evaluates its role in Hindu astronomy and culture. Fourteen different types of plant products are found to be the restricted items which are meticulously followed in rural Odisha with the notion that there will be disorder in body physiology by violating this norm. The possible scientific validity of this belief is analysed with recommendation of further elaborate investigation basing on clinical trial.

KEYWORDS: Almanac, lunar day, solar day, astronomical text.

INTRODUCTION

Fruits and vegetables are essential constituents of a balance-diet for normal growth and development of the human body. Body physiology may be disrupted unless they are consumed in a regulated manner. Ancient Indian scholars were aware of this phenomenon and have prescribed dietary restrictions taking into considerations the age, time, season and condition of human health. The earliest written record of such use of plants is in the 'Rig-Veda', the holy scripture of Hindus (4500-1600 BC). In 'Athurva-Veda' which was a latter work, the use of plants as medicine are more varied. This was followed by the monumental contributions like 'Charak Samhita' (1000-800 BC), 'Sushrut Samhita' (800-700 BC) and Vagbhata's 'Astanga Hridaya'. A number of books on Ayurveda and Hindu Botany were then written by many learned ancient scholars concerning the medicinal utility of plants and vegetation [1]. There are also description of plants in many other religious texts like 'Upanishads', 'Puranas' and 'Samhitas' highlighting their utility [2-8]. 'Panjika' or Almanac is one such text followed by people from ancient time. Panjika or Almanac also called 'Panchanga' is a significant behavioural text of Hindu astronomy. It has five main sections namely 'Bara' (day), 'Tithi' (lunar or solar day), 'Nakshyatra' (star position), 'Yoga' (timing) and 'Karana' (guidelines). This almanac is prepared on the basis of observation and calculation of the position of Sun and movement of planets, moon and earth. Based on this study the auspicious time for marriage ceremony, thread ceremony, good time for journey, naming of the new baby, preparation and use of medicine, house construction, starting of education and above all restrictions on consumption of fruits and vegetables on specific lunar days have been prescribed every year.

There are thirty varieties of almanac prepared in different languages in India from very ancient times. Moreover, there is a national almanac called Rastriya 'Panchanga' published by Government of India annually since 1957. Although it is difficult to determine precisely the date of commencement of this tradition of preparing the almanac, the practice seems to have been continued among the Hindu astronomers for more than 2500 years. The Oriya almanac under study, was written on the palm leaves (the practice is still continuing in some parts of the state), but from 1967 it is available in the form of a printed book and published annually. At present there are three different Panjikas prepared and published by different schools of Oriya astronomers. Of these the Orissa Kohinoor Press Panjika [9] is widely used among the Oriya's and is acclaimed for its accuracy in calculation and observation. This project was undertaken to survey, explore and analyse the guidelines and dictums prescribed in the Oriya astronomical text 'Panjika', and also evaluates its role in Hindu astronomy and culture, not reported earlier.

THE LAND AND CULTURE

The Odisha state is situated in eastern coast of India. It is famous for large number of temples and other religious places where many functions and rituals are performed throughout the year [10]. The science of astronomy has also been developed from ancient times to find out the particular auspicious days and time to perform those rituals.

A sect of astrologers who are colloquially called 'Yotisha' have been assigned the work to study the relative position of Sun, moon and planets and their possible effects on all earthly bodies. Astronomical events such as solar and lunar eclipse have also been correctly predicted in advance. By continuous observation, study and calculations, this study has been systematized and codified in the form of Almanac or Panjika.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was conducted from 2009-2011, covering all the regions of Odisha (total 30 districts) where a definite almanac is followed. The 'Kohinoor Press Panjika' and 'Radharaman Panjika' are followed by majority of Oriyas while the 'Biraja Panjika' is only prevalent in 'Biraja Mandal' i.e. the area covering the Jajpur, Kendrapara and Bhadrak districts of Odisha. Survey was conducted following a standard prescribed procedure i.e. through personal interview and participant observation method [11]. The respondents were selected basing on their age and experience. The guidelines and restrictions as prescribed in Almanac and its possible adverse effect on violation of the dictum was ascertained from its followers in course of investigation. Moreover, restriction of fruits and vegetables on each lunar day, mentioned in the Orissa Kohinoor Press Panjika was scrutinized for a whole year and recorded. The correct botanical names of items ascertained either in ancient Oriya or Sanskrit have been catalogued with its vernacular and common English name as well as family. The almanacs for the past ten years were verified to ascertain possible variations in the nature of restricted fruits and vegetables on the same lunar day.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fourteen types of fruits, vegetables or plant product are restricted for consumption on specific lunar days of each fortnight irrespective of bright or dark of a lunar month (Table 1). Restriction of a particular type starts from the second half of a lunar day till the first half of the next day. There is also instruction to avoid oil and non-vegetarian food on full moon, new moon and first day (called as Sankranti) of every month. It is evident from the almanac that, the time period for different religious functions and rituals are related to the relative position of the Sun, moon and other celestial bodies. Although, the historical record of the use of this almanac is not enough to substantiate still it is believed that the temple rituals of Lord Jagannath temple at Puri (Odisha) are being conducted according to the calculation of this almanac. The specific effect of different celestial bodies on human health on a particular lunar and solar day is not clearly known to modern science but some typical changes in animals and plants on particular days and time have been observed from ancient period (400 BC), termed as biological rhythm or periodicity. Leaf movement, cell division, opening of flowers, discharge of perfumes and pollen grains from the flowers, concentration of pigments and metabolic activity like respiration in plants are some of the interesting examples of diurnal rhythms relating to Sun and moon. Similarly, the madness in human beings (Lunacy) show periodic fluctuation. The intensity of pain and swelling of filarial patients become pronounced on full moon and new moon days [12]. On consultation with some knowledgeable older persons those who believe and follow the text, it was reported that there will be disorder in body physiology by violation of this norm. The reason for restriction of these fruits and vegetables on specific lunar days and their possible effect on human body and health warrants elaborate scientific investigation based on clinical trial.

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Table 1. Forbidden fruit and vegetables from Oriya almanac

Lunar day*	Vernacular name	English name	Botanical name and family
1 st	Kusmanda	White gourd	<i>Benincasa hispida</i> Cogn. (Cucurbitaceae)
2 nd	Bruhathi	Solanum	<i>Solanum violaceum</i> Ortega. (Solanaceae)
3 rd	Potala	Parbal	<i>Trichosanthes dioica</i> Roxb. (Cucurbitaceae)
4 th	Mulaka	Radish	<i>Raphanus sativus</i> L. (Brassicaceae)
5 th	Sriphala	Coconut	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. (Arecaceae)
6 th	Nimba	Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A.Juss (Meliaceae)
7 th	Tala	Palmyra palm	<i>Borassus flabellifer</i> L. (Arecaceae)
8 th	Sriphala	Coconut	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. (Arecaceae)
9 th	Alabu	Bottle gourd	<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i> (Molina) Standl. (Cucurbitaceae)
10 th	Kalambi	Ipomoea	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> Forsk. (Convolvulaceae)
11 th	Simbica	Carpet legume	<i>Dolichos lablab</i> L. (Fabaceae)
12 th	Putika	Basella	<i>Basella rubra</i> L. (Basellaceae)
13 th	Bartaki	Brinjal	<i>Solanum melongena</i> L. (Solanaceae)
14 th	Masha	Black gram	<i>Vinga mungo</i> (L.)Hepper. (Fabaceae)
15 th Full moon and new moon day	Taila	Oil	<i>Sesamum indicum</i> L. (Pedaliaceae)

*Both fortnights

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to evolve ways and means to authenticate, codify and preserve such traditional knowledge for the benefit of posterity.

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