Artavachakra: An Ayurvedic Perspective on Menstrual Cycle

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Abstract
In womanhood, important physiological manifestation is Artavachakra, i.e. menstrual cycle, which gives her identity of motherhood. The concept of Garbhotpatti is compared with Ankarotpatti of plants. For the proper growth and development of any crop, four suitable conditions are required which are: Proper Ruta (Season), Proper Kshetra (cultivated land), Proper Ambu (Water supply), and Proper Beeja (Uncontaminated seeds). From the four essential factors for Garbha, i.e., Ruta, Kshetra, Ambu, and Beeja, the woman is responsible for the two important factors i.e. Kshetra and Beeja. In female, the period which is most favorable to conceive is called as Ruta Kala. It is also called as fertile period. Ruta (Period of conception) is of 12 days when Artava is manifested. The meaning of Artavachakra means a wheel or a cycle which works repeatedly. In Stree Sharir, it is seen in the form of bleeding through vagina or the term menstruation and it occurs in every month for the purpose of reproduction.

Keywords: Artavachakra, menstruation, menstrual cycle

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INTRODUCTION
To show the importance of the study of Rachana Shareera, Sushrutacharya has rightly quoted that no one becomes a good physician without having the knowledge of Rachana Shareera [1]. Ruta is very important for Garbhotpatti; so, for that, Rachana Sharir and Kriya Sharir concept of Artavachakra must be understood in a very fine manner. Artavachakra is cyclic process and repeats every month in reproductive age of women. Various terms are used in classic to denote menstrual blood and ovum at different places i.e. Ruta, Raja, Shonita, Lohita, Pushpa, Bija. Also, role of Doshas has mentioned on menstruation i.e. menstruation is also governed by three Doshas, viz. Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Shuddha Artava is very much essential for conception [2, 3]. The word "Artava" denotes two meanings, one of them is "Bahirpushpa" and another one is Antahpushpa. Both Bahirpushpa and Antahpushpa are interrelated. Bahirpushpa is outward manifestation of appropriate work of Antahpushpa, which is necessary for conception. Artavachakra (Menstruation Cycle) starts at the age of 12 years which is called as Rajopravatti (Menarche) and cessation of Artavachakra (Menstruation Cycle) is called as Rajonivratta (Menopause) is up to 50 years.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE
1. To review Artavachakra in different Ayurvedic classical texts.
2. To study Artavachakra in detail.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Materials
To fulfil the motto of the conceptual study, materials have been collected from the Samhitas and all the available commentaries and other text of Ayurveda. Various journals, research papers, articles and text books have been considered to collect the literary materials. Subject related information available on internet has been utilized.

Methods
All the compiled literary materials are critically analyzed and discussed in the light of aims and objectives of present study.
LITERARY REVIEW

Artava
The significant factor in Stree Sharira which is important for the purpose of reproduction is called as Artava. It is a very wide term which is used for different meanings in different texts.

Synonyms of Artava
In Ayurveda, one word is used for many meanings according to their significance. The word Artava is used for both Masika Rajasrava and Streebeeja. Artava, Raja, Shonita, Asruka, Rakta, Lohitam, Pushpam, Rudhiram etc. are the synonyms.

- Artava as a Streebeeja [3],
- Artava as an Masik Rajasrava [4, 5],
- Shonita as a Streebeeja [6, 7],
- Shonita as a Rajasrava [8],
- Raja as a Streebeeja [9],
- Raja as a Masik Rajasrava [10, 11].

Nirukti of Artava [12]
The word Artava denotes details about cyclical reproductive changes in Stree Sharir. The phenomenon which happens with regular interval is called as Artava. The word Artava itself denotes whole cyclical changes in female regarding the reproductive function.

Artava Swarupa as Rajasrava
Artava is formed from Rasa, but the nature of Artava is not Soumya like Rasa, it is of Teja Mahabhuta Pradhana, i.e., Agneya [13]. Vagbhatta says the occurrence of Artava is periodical and it is of two (Dwi), three (Tri) Bindu Pramana. While commenting on the Samyoga of Shukra and Artava, Dalhana has described the Swarup of Artava as Alpa, Styaniibhuta, Sukshma and Asanchari [14].

Characters of Shuddha Artava [15-17]
The normal Rajasrava mentioned in the text has inter-menstrual period of 1 month, duration of blood loss as 5 days and is not associated with pain or burning. Execrated blood is not unctuous, not very scanty or excessive in amount. The color resembles the red juice of lac, red lotus flower or fruit of jequity or like rabbits blood. The cloth stained with it does not retain the stain when washed, such Artava is said to be Shudha.

Varna (Colour)
- Gunjaphala: Ch. Chi. 30/226,
- Rakta Kamal: Ch. Chi. 30/226,
- Alaktaka: Ch. Chi. 30/226,
- Indragopa: Ch. Chi. 30/226,
- Sashasrika: Su. Sha. 2/19, A. S. Sha. 1/20,
- Laksha Rasa: Su. Sha. 2/19, A. S. Sha. 1/20,

Gandha (Odour)
- Madhugandhi (Ma. Ni. 61/7),
- Visrata Amagandhitva (Su. Su. 14/9),

Acharya Sushruta says that the Rakta has Visragandha due to Prithivi Mahabhoota, same can be considered for Artava [18].

Matra (Quantity)
According to Vagbhatta, it is four Anjali [19].

That is why Acharya Charaka has described about the ideal characteristic features. He says that which is neither produces less nor more amount and which is ideal for conception and does not cause any pathology during and after every cycle is the ideal amount [20].

Sparsha (Feel)
Anushnasheetam.

Samgathana (Constitution)
Composition of Artava is also Panchabhautik with the predominance of Prithvi, Jala and Teja Mahabhootas. Vayu helps in its regular generation and flows whereas Akasha Mahabhoota gives it the necessary space and Laghuta.

Artavachakra
The meaning of Chakra means a wheel or a cycle which works repeatedly. In Stree Sharira it is seen in the form of bleeding through vagina or the term menstruation, and it occurs in every month for the purpose of reproduction.

Artavachakra includes following three phases:
1. Rajasrava: 3 to 5 days: Vata Pradhana,
2. Rutu Kala: 12 to 16 days: Kapha Pradhana, and
3. Rutuvyatt Kala: 9 to 13 days after Rutu Kala: Pitta Pradhana.
Rajasrava

Duration of menstruation or inter-menstrual period of Artavachakra:
- 3 days: B. P. (Pu. Kh. Garbha 2/204),
- 3 nights: A. S. (Sha. 1/10); A. H. (Sha. 1/7),
- 5 nights: Ch. (Chi. 30/225),
- 7 days: H. S. (Sha 1/9); Bhela. S. (Sha. 5/6), and
- 3 days (excess) 5 days (medium) 16 days (scanty) Bhavaprakasha.

During this period, the stuff accumulated in the uterus during the previous period of fertility is eliminated. The Raja, which is accumulated in the uterus after Rutukala, is termed as "Purana Rajas". This accumulated Raja is eliminated from the uterus during Rajasravakala [21].

Rutu Kala

Rutukala is defined as period most suitable for achievement of conception. It is also called as fertile period and is of mostly 12-16 days from the 1st day of menses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritukala</th>
<th>Opinions of Acharyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 days (starts from 4th day of cessation of menstruation)</td>
<td>Charaka, Sushruta, Vriddha Vagbhatta, Laghu Vagbhatta, Kashyapa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 days (starts from 1st day of menstruation)</td>
<td>Bhavaprakasha, Harita, Videha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varna Paddhati</th>
<th>Kasyapa Sh. /Jatisutra/5</th>
<th>Bhavaprakasa/ Pu. 3/2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brhamana</td>
<td>12 days</td>
<td>12 nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshudra</td>
<td>11 days</td>
<td>10 nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaisya</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>08 nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Kshudra</td>
<td>09 days</td>
<td>06 nights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arundatta opines that these are the probable ages. There may be slight variation in individual cases as menarche may come at 11 years.

Rutuvyatita Kala

Rutuvyatit Kala is of 9 to 13 days after Rutu Kala. In Samhita, except the closure or constriction of Yoni and presence of Puran Raja any other physical or psychological changes are not described for this stage. As lotus flower closes after sunset, similarly after Rutu Kala, the Yoni of women gets constricted and does not accept Shukra or permits the entry of Beeja (sperm) into uterus.

DISCUSSION

Rajasrava Kala

In the uterus, blood is collected through the blood vessels of uterus within a period of 1 month and brought downward to vaginal orifice for excretion; mainly by Vata Dosha.

Role of Dosha in Rajasrava Kala

This phase is influenced by Vayu. It is actually the Vataprapok responsible to start this phase. As soon as menstruation starts, Pittaprapok starts coming to a stage of Pittashaman. Vata plays its role throughout the phase. But as Pitta decreases, Kapha comes to an action and a stage of Kaphachaya comes. The function of Vayu is the movement of any substance from one place to other, due to its Chala Guna. Vata always acts through Dhamani i.e. arteries. The spasm in the straight stem of arterioles as causative phenomenon of bleeding is similar to the action of Vata through Dhamani.

Dosha Avastha: Vata Prapok Pitta Shamhan Kapha Sanchaya

This period is prohibited for cohabitation because it is inauspicious during this period; fertilization cannot take place by the sperm. It will be thrown out just like a floating substance, which goes in the reverse direction in the water current.

Rutukala

The Rutukala in which, the seeds deposited are likely to bear fruits. This directly refers to the period of ovulation wherein the chances of conception are most.

About duration of Rutu Kala, there are different opinions:
1. It is of 12 days from the first day of menses.
2. It is of 16 days from the first day of menses.
3. It is for the whole month.
4. It is present even in the absence of menstruation.
The Yoni (external Os of uterus) closes after Rutukala like a lotus flower closes at the end of the day, so the sperm fails to enter the uterus. Therefore it is thought that the chances of conception are very rare after the period of Rutukala. With Rutukala inception previous menstrual cycle cycle and another becomes set in. The Bija Artava, which comes up and settles in the Garbhasaya during Rutukala, is termed as Suddha Shonita (i.e., Sriti Bija).

Role of Dosha in Rutu Kala

Mainly Kapha influences this phase. At the end of Rajakal level of Kapha starts increasing i.e. Chaya and during Rutu Kala Kapha level reaches of its peak i.e. Kapha Prakop. Level of Pitta starts increasing in later half of Rutu Kala, this is Pittachaya. During the whole phase Vata is at its normal level, this stage of Vata is called Vata Shaman. The function of Vata is mainly for retardation of growth and the Kapha is essential for regeneration and growth. Rutu Kala is a Period resembling proliferative phase. Thus Ayurvedic physiology of Kapha Prakop and Vata Shaman during this Kala is self explanatory for the various changes taking place during this phase and Kapha always acts through Rasa. Thus it is clear that Kapha is the predominating Dosha in Rutu Kala.

Dosha Avastha

Vata Chaya, Pitta Prakop, Kapha Shaman.

CONCLUSION

All classical texts had described almost same about menstruation. Ayurveda has given various aspects of menstruation than that of modern science which are helpful to spread awareness regarding menstruation.

As menstruation is governed by Doshas, their imbalance causes abnormality. Therefore it is necessary to have balance state of Doshas. This conceptual study has its own limits up to reviewing concept.

REFERENCES


Cite this Article