



ARTAVA THE PRIME ELEMENT IN MAINTAINING HEALTH OF A WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic science has defined artava in various forms where it maintains the physiological balance of the artava chakra as well as it maintains the reproductive health of a women. The term Artava is used in Ayurvedic classics in various contexts where it is referred to as menstrual blood shed every month through the yoni marga, or sometimes it is also interpreted as hormones, some references point towards beeja (ovum) as artava. The same artava when becomes dushta can become the prime cause of diseases in women. Hence artava is considered a prime element in maintaining the health of a women.

INTRODUCTION

Artava is the functional unit of artavavaha srotas and the moola of artava vaha srotas is garbhashaya and artavavahani dhamanis. Artava is the upadhatu of rasa dhatu, where dhatu help in nourishing the body whereas upadathus support the body in various ways. Artava is agneya, has characteristics of raktha, responsible for formation of garbha. it has the lakshana of raktha, hence acharya dalhana says that- artava has karma- "jeevanam" which is similar to raktha and has predominance of tejo mahabhutha.^[1]

As the normal function of artava can maintain the balance in female reproductive system, the same balance can get disturbed when there is dosha prakopa. And manifest conditions like artava dushti. Thus, detailed analysis to understand the nidanas, diagnosis and pathogenesis of artava dushti is required in order to plan proper Ayurvedic treatment and get successful results in treating them.

Artava in Various Stages of Womens Life

The various conditions related to artava can be based on the different stages of life of a woman. Acharya Chakrapani states that during the initial formation of artava it is Sowmya in nature; as it is formed from rasa and is influenced by it, but with the passage of time during excretion it changes to agneya. This change is brought by the action of doshas, in the same way as tejas converts parthiva dravya into dhuma, ikshu rasa is kaphakara which after fermentation becomes tridoshakara.

The functioning of artava during various stages of womens life varies, Artava can be seen from garbhakala itself-

आर्तवं च यद्यपि द्वादशवर्षादूर्ध्वं व्यज्यते, तथाऽपि आर्तवोत्पत्तिर्गर्भकाल एव भवति। (cha.sa.sha. 4/30 chakra.tika)

यथा च बालस्य जीर्णस्य वा तरोः पुष्पफलं पुष्पफलस्य वा तद्विधस्य गन्धो नोपलभ्यते तथैव नो नषोडशातीतसप्ततिवर्षस्य पुंसः शुक्रसेकादयः । योषितश्चो नद्वादशातीतपञ्चाशद्वर्षाया रजस्तन्यादय इति ॥(अ० सं० शा० 1/21)

In chakrapani tika, it clearly mentions that artava utpatti occurs during fetal life. Development of primitive germ cells by about 3rd to 4th week of gestational age starts and these undergo rapid mitotic divisions and differentiate into oogonia and reaches up to 7 million at 20th week. This shows the evidence of presence of artava during fetal life. At birth all the oogonia are replaced by primary oocytes which have completed the prophase of the first meiotic division and remain in resting phase (dictyotene stage) between prophase and metaphase. The primary oocytes do not finish the first meiotic division until puberty is reached. Thus, based on Acharya vagbhatas explanation, gandha is not explicit in a bud till it matures to become pushpa similarly before puberty the oocytes remain in quiescent stage. However, out of some 2 million oogonias remaining at puberty, 400 would ovulate during the entire reproductive period due to the influence of FSH, LH, Estrogen and

Progesterone. This whole process of formation, development and its functioning after puberty can be correlated to the fact -as said by acharya sushruta where appearance of 'asrug punaha' at around the age of 12 years gives a suitable explanation.^[2]

Menarche and Menopause

तद्वर्षाद्द्वादशादूर्ध्वं याति पञ्चाशतः क्षयम् ||(su.s.su 14/6)

The first menstruation in life is called menarche which is one of the signs of puberty. This has been called as Prathama rajodarshankaala. On the other hand, menopause means permanent cessation of menstruation - the end of reproductive life due to loss of ovarian follicular activity. It has been termed as rajonivrittikaala. Acharya sushruta have also mentioned regarding the development of secondary sexual characters around the age of menarche.^[3]

ACHARYA	MENARCHE (Prathama rajo darshana)	MENOPAUSE (Rajonivrutti ayu)
SUSHRUTHA and VAGBATHA	12 YEARS	50 YEARS
KASHYAPA	16 YEARS (age of initiation of menses (menarche) gets influenced by specific ahara (dietetics) and arogya (health)	
ARUNADUTTA	Can occur before 12 YEARS	Can occur after 50 YEARS

Rutuchakra- The Phases of Menstruation

Once the girl attains menarche, she starts having a regular menstrual cycle which is termed as rutuchakra. The word 'chakra' signifies its cyclical and rhythmic pattern which appears at regular intervals. A single rituchakra covers a period of one chandramasa (28 days) and it has been divided into three phases-

1. The Rajahsraavakaala: the menstrual phase, 3 to 4 days of duration.
2. The Ritukaala : the proliferative phase and ovulatory phase, upto 12 to 16 days
3. The Rituvyatitakaala: the secretory phase, from post ovulatory till next menstruation, 14 days

Utpatti and Pravrutti Of Artava

रसादेव स्त्रिया रक्तं रजःसञ्जं प्रवर्तते |

तद्वर्षाद्द्वादशादूर्ध्वं याति पञ्चाशतः क्षयम् || (su.s.su 14/6)

Arthava is the product of rasa dathu which comes out from the female genitalia every month. Usually, the girl attains puberty with the visible bleeding per vagina that is termed as raja.

सूक्ष्मकेशप्रतीकाशा बीजरक्तवहाः सिराः। गर्भाशयं तर्पयन्ति
मासाद्बीजाय कल्पते || (vishvamitra, Su.sa.su 14/14
chakra.teeka)

During the ritu chakra period, there will be appearance raktavaha siras resembling sukshma kasha (the strand of hair) which will formed in garbhashaya in the period of whole month, to receive the beeja and preparing it for conception.

मासेनोपचितं काले धमनीभ्यां तदार्तवम् |

ईषत्कृष्णं विवर्णं च वायुर्योनिमुखं नयेत् ||१०|| (su.s.su 3/10)

The blood collected for the whole month by both dhamanis (uterine vessels and endometrial capillaries) having blackish colour and specific odour is brought downwards by vayu for excretion. During the menstrual cycle the women is called RAJASWALA.

Shuddha Artava Lakshana

मासान्निष्पिच्छदाहार्ति पञ्चरात्रानुबन्धि च |

नैवातिबहु नात्यल्पमार्तवं शुद्धमादिशेत् ||

गुञ्जाफलसवर्णं च पद्मालक्तकसन्निभम् |

इन्द्रगोपकसङ्काशमार्तवं शुद्धमादिशेत् || (C.S.CHI.30/225-226)

Acharya Charak has explained the characters of menstrual blood in normal menstruation which explains the physiology of female reproductive tract appropriately. A normal menstruation has an interval of one month, duration of five days, is not associated with pain or burning sensation. The menstrual blood is neither very scanty nor excess in amount, and resembles the colors of gunjaphala, red lotus flower (padmalaktaka sannibham), or of Indragopa.

आर्तवस्य वर्णद्वयाभिधानम् वातादिप्रकृतिभेदेन वर्णभेदात् |
(bha.pra.purva. 3/106)

निष्पिच्छदाहार्ति अपिच्छिलमदाहमशूलम्, एतेन
विकृतवातादिलक्षणरहितमित्यर्थः || (bha.pra.chi. 68/10
teeka)

There are also references regarding, menstrual blood not being bright red in colour, but is slightly blackish in nature. Acharya bhavamishra has explained that this difference in colour is due to the prakruthi of the individual and the vitiated doshas are responsible for the

symptoms like burning sensation, pain, picchilata etc that are seen during the bleeding phase.

Artava and Its Role As Hormone

ऋतुस्तु द्वादशरात्रं भवति दृष्टार्तवः; अदृष्टार्तवास्यस्तीत्येके भाषन्ते || (su.sa.sha 3/6)

There are two phases of menstruation where the secretions are expelled – one is the menstrual phase and the other one is the ovulatory phase. The menstrual blood which is secreted through vagina every month for 3 to 4 days of duration is called as drushta arthava. The ovum-the stree beeja which is secreted on or around 12th to 14th day of the menstrual cycle is secreted internally and is not visible with naked eye, hence is called as the adrushta arthava. Hormones play a very important role during the menstrual period; these also can be considered as adrushta arthava.

Arthava in The Context Of Prasuthi Tantra-

गृहीतगर्भाणामार्तवहानां स्रोतसां वर्त्मान्यवरुध्यन्ते गर्भेण, तस्माद्गृहीतगर्भाणामार्तवं न दृश्यते; ततस्तदधः प्रतिहतमूर्ध्वमागतमपरं चोपचीयमानमपरेत्यभिधीयते; शेषं चोर्ध्वतरमागतं पयोधरावभिप्रतिपद्यते, तस्माद्गर्भिण्यः पीनोन्नतपयोधरा भवन्ति ||(su.sa.sha 4/24)

1. Acharya sushruta while describing the formation of placenta say that due to obstruction to orifices of artava vaha srotas by the fetus, the artava goes upwards, gets accumulated and forms placenta. Remaining artava moves further upwards and helps in the development of the breast leading to dark pigmentation of areola and lips.
2. In suthika this raktha in the breast gets influenced by kapha and forms sthanya.
3. Acharya sushruta while explaining garbhavrata, garbhapata and mooda garbha, uses the term raktha for bleeding during pregnancy.^[4]

Arthava Explained As A Cause for Congenital Anomalies

यदा स्त्रिया दोषप्रकोपणोक्तान्यासेवमानाया दोषाः प्रकुपिताः शरीरमुपसर्पन्तः शोणितगर्भाशयावुपपद्यन्ते (cha.sa.sha 4/30)

acharya charaka while explaining the cause for congenital anomalies (beeja, beeja bhaga, beeja bhaga awayava dushti), he says that when the stree consumes various dosha prakopakara aahara vihara it leads to vitiation of rasa dhatu (which in turn does dooshana of artava) reaches raktha and circulates throughout the body and reaches garbhashaya and affect the formation of garbha leading to congenital anomalies.

मिथ्याचारेण ताः स्त्रीणां प्रदुष्टेनार्तवेन च

जायन्ते बीजदोषाच्च दैवाच्च शृणु ताः पृथक् || (cha.sa.chi. 30/8)

Artava dosha and beeja dosha are considered to be the main causative factors for all yoni vyapads. There are some of the yonivyapad which have been considered as arising out of congenital anomalies for example shandi, suchimukhi, antarmukhi, vandhya, and varta.

Pathological Variation of Artava

Artava in its physiological form maintains the reproductive health of women, any deviation causing imbalance in various doshas and datus leads to several ailments such as Artava vridhhi, Artava kshaya, asrigdara, nashta artava, kshina artava, ashta artava dushti, and some yonivyapads. Hence understanding of these are necessary to identify the cause of the variation and treat them accordingly. There are various causative factors enumerated in kashyapa Samhita such as-

- Administration of nasya during menstruation
- Excessive intake of food and drinks which are hot in quality and potency during menstruation
- Use of excessive shodhana aushadhis for cleansing by woman having mridu koshta

Artava Vridhhi

आर्तवमङ्गमर्दमतिप्रवृत्तिर्दौर्गन्ध्यं च...||१६|| (su.s.su 15/16)

Menstrual bleeding starts early. There will be excessive bleeding. The women will be lethargic and weak. There will be restlessness.

Asrigdhara

रजः प्रदीर्यते यस्मात् प्रदरस्तेन स स्मृतः | (C.S.CHI 30/209)

Menstrual cycle occurring at intervals of 21–35 days with a mean of 28 days regularly with a duration of about 4–5 days with 20 to 80 mL blood loss (average of 35 mL) in a woman shows that she has healthy physiological cycle. Any deviation from this is pathological. Asrigdhara is one of the conditions with excessive and prolonged bleeding. Asrigdhara can be manifested in a woman without any underlying cause, but it can also be seen in some cases with certain specific pathological changes in reproductive organs.

Artava Kshaya

आर्तवक्षये यथोचितकालादर्शनमल्पता वा योनिवेदना च (su.s.su 15/12)

In arthava kshaya the women will have irregular menstrual cycles, bleeding in less quantity and pain in vagina. Scanty menstrual flow with or without pain is the main clinical feature seen in arthava kshaya (oligomenorrhea).

Ashta Artava Dushti

The rutuchakra gets disturbed owing to various ahara and vihara which influence manifestation of diseases such as Arthava dushti. This is of eight types which are Vataja, pittaja, kaphaja, rakthaja/ kunapagandhi, granthibutha, putipuya, kshina and mutrapurishatulya which can be correlated to-

- Vataja- oligomenorrhea/ hypomenorrhea with dysmenorrhea

- Pittaja- inflammatory condition of reproductive organs due to infection, chronic pelvic cellulitis along with oligomenorrhea
- Kaphaja- Chronic endometritis or cervicitis associated with oligomenorrhea.
- Rakthaja/ kunapagandhi- early stage of endometrial carcinoma
- Granthi butha- Malignant disorders of reproductive system (cervical CA)
- Puti puya- Acute infection of reproductive organs such as acute endometritis, pyometra, pelvic abscess.
- Kshina- Hypoestrogenic oligomenorrhea caused by dhatu kshaya.
- Mutra purisha Gandhi- cervical CA (3rd 4th stage), vesicovaginal fistula, rectovaginal fistula.

Treatment of Various Artava Doshas

sneha, sweda, vamanadi karmas, bastis and uttarabasti are beneficial.

Various sthanika procedures like yoni prakshalana, yoni pichu, and yoni purana, yoni lepana with dravyas capable of suppressing affected dosha locally give excellent results.

Sukra doshahara treatment can also be adopted in woman affected with artava dushti to get effective results.

Our Acharyas have also mentioned the use of rasayana and vajikarana aushadies after shodana and shamana for restoring back the reproductive health of a woman.

There are some ayurvedic formulations which could be commonly used in all varieties of arthava dushti irrespective of the dosha vitiation, such as Chandraprabhavati, Chandrakala rasa, Ashoka arishta, pushyanuga churna, yogaraja guggulu, pugapaka, shatapushpa taila, shatavari gritha, and jeevantyadi gritha have shown commendable results.

Basti's like jeevantyadi anuvasana yamaka basthi, mustadi yapan basthi, sahacharadi yapana basthi are adopted.

Pathyas like shali anna, yava, Madhya, mamsa are beneficial in ashta arthava dushti.

DISCUSSION

As we extend our understanding about various aspects of artava; in one of the books "Menstruation across cultures" by Nithin Sridhar the author has given a different perspective about understanding the term "raja" he says, it may be referred to as the "Rajas Guna". Rajas is one among the three Gunas. It denotes flow, movement, passion, energy etc. and imparts a dynamic nature to the Individual, but at the same time it also increases person's bondage to the worldly cycle. In the physical body, 'Rajasraava represents the flow of

menstrual blood, which contains blood, cervical mucus, vaginal secretions, and endometrial tissue that are being thrown out of the physical body. In the vital body, Rajasraava represents the flow of excess Rajasic energy, i.e., Prana Shakti (especially the Apana Vayu). Blood is the carrier of Prana Shakti within the physical body. Thus, through the excretion of the blood, excess PranaShakti, which is Rajasic in nature, is being thrown out of the body during menstruation. In the mental sheath, Rajas represents thoughts and emotions such as anger, frustration, uneasiness, irritation, mood-swings, etc. to which menstruating women are more prone to. Therefore, menstruation is a complicated physio-psychological process that exposes a woman to the excess Rajasic condition of the physical, vital, and mental levels.

Concept of artava based on the references of Ayurvedic texts can be interpreted in various ways as explained, which gives the basic biology of menstrual cycle. This concept could be well understood as a coordinated response to HPO axis and hormones with the cyclic changes in the ovaries and endometrium. With inappropriate thickening or decidualization of endometrium- clinical problems such as excessive bleeding, metrorrhagia or even sometimes cancer. Also, there are certain issues like endometriosis or adenomyosis where the endometrial tissue is located outside the uterine cavity.

The complete physiology of menstruation, age of onset, age of withdrawal, duration and amount of bleeding, color, smell, unctuousness of the menstrual blood in a normal condition is known, which Today with the development of modern tools and techniques, we are able to explain in terms of hormones and other physiological processes.

The age of onset (menarche)and the age of cessation (menopause)of the rituchakra, regularity and periodicity of the rituchakra, the amount of the rajahsrava(blood discharged), the density of rajahsrava, the unctuousness of the rajahsrava, the colour of the rajahsrava and any foul smell if present, plus its association with pain, etc. are the points which should be considered while making the diagnosis.

There are so many diseases in women which are associated with abnormal menstruation. Most of them are curable if diagnosed early. Problems related with menstrual disturbances are one of the most common problems amongst females. The women's menstrual cycle impact not only on her physical and mental health but also on her quality of life, work and community is substantial.

Inappropriate aahara and vihara, especially in women who have dual nature of work- that is taking care of household activities and working outside, are facing a lot of problems related to menstruation. It has been a proven

fact that the food habits these days which include refined carbohydrates, fried and fast food, sugary beverages, processed meat etc causing increase in weight and improper nutritional benefits causes obesity, menstrual disorders, and even leading to infertility.

Some menstrual disorders like shandi yonivyapat are because of some genetic or chromosomal abnormalities and cannot be cured. Chromosomal abnormalities have long been recognized as a cause of menstrual cycle disorder, premature ovarian insufficiency, and recurrent pregnancy loss which can be contributed by x chromosome abnormalities in women which are explained in our classics as beeja, beeja bhaga and beeja bhaga avayava dushti. Not only genetic, studies show that many environmental factors may affect the characteristics of menstrual cycle including workplace, caffeine consumption, smoking, occupation, physical activity, diet, age, weight, medical conditions and lifestyle factors.

Treatment related to such menstrual abnormalities have been advised by acharyas and should be adopted based on dosha vitiation, bala of the patient and severity of the disease.

CONCLUSION

Characteristics of artava in terms of its cyclical flow by its length, duration, amount and regularity have been analyzed. The term artava not only points toward the physiological aspect of female reproductive system but also the psychological variations, which a female undergoes in her various menstrual phases as well as various stages of her life. The pathological conditions related to artava have been discussed in detail and the treatment aspect based on Ayurvedic classics are mentioned. A woman should have nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle to maintain the balance of ritu cakra.

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