

A Review on Sociocultural Importance of Menstrual Health According to Ayurveda Medicine and Its Relevance to the Public Health Outcomes

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Abstract

Menstruation is an exceptional phenomenon that the nature has planned for women that undergoes certain reproductive changes from the menarche till menopause. This is a psychological process in females influenced not only by race, nutrition, and heredity but also by the socio-cultural background. The cultural practices related with menstruation across globe are different. Ayurveda is a world's oldest holistic medical system which interpret the science of life. *Prasuti Tantra* and *Stri Roga* is a branch of Ayurvedic medicine that deals with pregnancy and Woman's health. The *Paricharyas* or code of conduct mentioned for a menstrual female is termed as *Rajaswala Paricharya* in Ayurveda. This study was aimed to review on menstrual health in Ayurveda and its relevance to public health outcomes. The data were collected by referring six ancient Ayurveda texts books: Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Astanga Hridaya, Astanga Sangraha, Kasyapa Samhitha and Bhavaprakasha. The study showed that the classical texts of Ayurveda have deep understanding of the menstrual cycle in relation to the doshas (body constitution) and the concept of *Rajaswala Paricharya* (regimen for the menstrual female) which having the *Pathya* (indicate) and *Apathya* (not to indicate) of *Ahara* (food) and *Viharana* (behaviors) specifically mentioned in the menstruation period interpreted more sociocultural benefits to maintain menstrual health with healthy period of preconception. In the present era, menstrual hygiene is very essential and gynecological disorders can reduce through the proper menstrual health management. Thus, by practicing the *Pathya* mentioned in Ayurveda during menstrual period regularly will lead to optimum health of the female.

Index Terms: Ayurveda, *Rajaswala Paricharya*, Menstrual Health, Public Health

I. Introduction

Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to the menstrual cycle (Bobel, 2021). Menstruation is an exceptional phenomenon that the nature has planned for women that undergoes certain reproductive changes from the menarche till menopause. The physiological, pathological, and psychological aspects of the menstruation are associate with health of women. Hygiene during menstruation is an important part of woman's life. Adolescence in girls has been recognized with special period in their life cycle as the onset of menarche that requires specific and special attention ((National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, 2014). The cultural practices related with menstruation across globe are different. The improvement of reproductive health can be achieved if the myths, values, customs associated with intercourse, fertility, pregnancy are considered (Castaneda, 1996).

Ayurveda is a world's oldest holistic medical system which interpret the science of life. *Prasuti Tantra* and *Stri Roga* is a branch of Ayurvedic medicine that deals with pregnancy and Woman's health. It broadly discusses about the physical, mental and emotional aspects of woman's health. Women passes through three stages in life as *Bala* (childhood), *Rajaswala* (Menstrual period), and *Vridha* (Old age). Among them, *Rajaswala* period is the most important period with a menstruation. Ayurveda has described the mechanism of *Rajo Pravritti* (menarche) precisely and *Ritu chakra* (menstrual cycle) which undergoes with the control of three *doshas*. *Ritu chakra* covers a period of one *Chandramasa* (28 days) and it has been divided into 3 phases as the *Rajah srava kala*,

Ritu kala and *Rituvyayita kaala*. *Rajah srava kala* (menstrual phase) is of 3 to 5 or 7 days and *Ritu kala* (proliferative phase including ovulation) is of 12 or 16 days. In women, *Rajas* or *Artava* flows 3-5 days every month from the age of 12 until menopause, around the age of 50 ((Trikamji and Ram, 2007).

In Ayurveda, Acharyas mentioned different food and behavioral patterns for maintaining the health like *Garbhini Paricharya* (regimen for the pregnant mother), *Soothika Paricharya* (postnatal care), *Rajaswala Paricharya* (regimen for the menstrual female) etc. The *Paricharyas* or code of conduct mentioned for a menstrual female is termed as *Rajaswala Paricharya* and this is the most neglected part in the society. Acharya has mentioned that *Rajaswala Paricharya* need to follow from the moment of appearance of menstrual flow for a period of three days. They mentioned food and behavioral patterns which are indicate and not to indicate for maintaining the good menstrual health.

II. Objective

- To review the concepts of menstrual health according to Ayurveda medicine.
- To identify the sociocultural importance of menstrual health according to Ayurveda medicine and its relevance to public health outcomes.

III. Methodology

A literature review was done on the sociocultural aspects of menstrual health according to Ayurveda medicine. Six ancient Ayurveda texts were selected and searched for the authentic data in literature. The literature review was carried out in Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Astanga Hridaya, Astanga Sangraha, Kasyapa Samhitha and Bhavaprakasha. Further research was carried out that based on the data collected from these books with using journal articles in scientific databases.

IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Data collected from extensive literature review of *Rajaswala Paricharya* (regimen for the menstrual female) from Ayurveda texts.

Ayurveda texts	Food (<i>Ahara</i>)		Behaviors (<i>Viharana</i>)	
	Indicate (<i>Pathya</i>)	Not to indicate (<i>Apathya</i>)	Indicated (<i>Pathya</i>)	Not to indicate (<i>Apathya</i>)
Caraka Samhitha			Should follow <i>Brahmacharya</i> . Should have food in hands or in unbroken plates.	
Susrutha Samhitha	' <i>Havishya</i> ' which is a preparation with rice, ghee, milk with <i>Yava</i> (during first 3 days of menstruation)		Should follow <i>Brahmacharya</i> .	Should avoid from <i>Divaswapna</i> , <i>Anjan aprayoga</i> , <i>Asrupata</i> , <i>Snana</i> , <i>Anulepa</i> , <i>Abhyanga</i> , <i>Nakhachedana</i> , <i>Pradhavana</i> ,

				<i>Haasana, Atikadhana, Atisabda Sravana, Kesa Prasadana, Anila Sevana, Ayasa, Swedana and Alankara.</i>
Astanga Hridaya	Milk with <i>Yava</i> in small quantities. (During the first 3 days of menstruation).		From the 1st day of menstruation to the 3rd day the lady should follow <i>Brahmacharya</i> . Should practice <i>Subha Chintha</i> . Should lie down over <i>Darbha</i> .	Should avoid from <i>Snana</i> and <i>Alankara</i> .
Astanga Sangraha	<i>Payasa</i> mix with <i>Yavanna</i> in small quantities.	Should avoid from <i>Tikshna, Ushna, Amla, Lavana Ahara</i>	From the 1st day of menstruation to the 3 rd day of menstruation the female should follow <i>Brahmacharya</i> . Should lie down over <i>Darbha</i> .	Should avoid from <i>Snana</i> and <i>Alankara</i> .
Kasyapa Samhitha			<i>Brahmacharya</i> for the first three days of menstruation.	Should avoid from <i>Nasya</i> and <i>Vamana</i> .
Bhavaprakasha	<i>Havishya</i> during the first 3 days of menstruation.		<i>Brahmacharya</i> and <i>Ahimsa</i> . Should lie down over <i>Darbha</i> .	<i>Asru patha, Nakha Chedana, Abhyanga, Anulepana, Anjana Prayoga, Snanam, Divaswapnam, Pradhavana, Atyuccha Sabda Sravana, Haasana, Bahubhashana</i> and <i>Ayasa</i> .

Rajaswala Paricharya will helps women to become healthy in both physical and mental aspects during the menstrual cycle and it acts as an important tool to enhance fertility. The logic behind the relevance of *Pathya* in *Rajaswala Paricharya* indicate the diet and behaviors to be performed from the time of menarche and continuing till the time of *Rajo Nivritti* (menopause). So, this *Paricharya* will cover the entire reproductive period of the female with leading to optimum health of the female.

The menstrual cycle can cause some changes in the appetite and physical symptoms like nausea, bloating, diarrhea, or constipation with less feel of eating. Also, at the time of menstruation the body pressure is increased, and bile secretion is reduced. It is important to increase the *Agni* (digestive fire) by using proper diet during the menstruation period. So, eating easily digested diet with getting plenty of liquids helps to increase appetite and removal of bloating and constipation. Acharyas mentioned that *Havisya* or *Yavaka* are a good as *Agnivardhaka Ahara* (increase appetite). The utensils made of clay has alkaline properties. It neutralizes the pH balance of the food by interacting with acids in food. This also enhances the digestion along with the diet. Some Acharyas mentioned to use the utensils made of clay which has alkaline properties. It neutralizes the pH balance of the food by interacting with acids in food which can enhances the digestion along with the diet. Women should avoid *Tikshna* (pungent), *Katu* (spicy) and *Lavana* (salty) foods which cause to increase the menstrual flow.

Acharyas mentioned that during the menstruation period, she should sleep on the bed made from *Darbha* spread over the ground. But it is difficult to practice in now a day. These grasses have disinfectant property and protects the body from the toxic radiations with negative energies during this period. Acharyas mentioned *Pathya* and *Apathya* behavioral patterns that women should follow during the menstruation period. She should avoid from sleeping in the daytime which leads to formation of *Ama* (indigestion) by increase of *Kapha Dosha*. She should avoid the application of *Anjana* (*Anjan Aprayoga*). She needs to avoid shedding of tears during the menstruation (*Ashrupata*). Bathing (*Snana*) will cause the *Stambhana* and it may decrease menstrual bleeding with hormone imbalance of the body. Also, Acharyas mentioned that she should avoid from oil massaging and smearing in the body (*Anulepa* and *Abhyanga*), too much laughing and talking (*Hasana* and *Atiadhana*) and plucking of nails (*Nakhachedana*). Running and too much of exercise (*Pradhavana* and *Vyayama*) should be avoided due to weakness of the body during menstruation with blood flow. If it is occurred, it will lead to *Vata Prakopa*. Use of *Sweda*, *Vamana* and *Nasya karma* can cause to *Dosha Prakopa* (vitiation of *Thridosha*). Coitus is contraindicated during the menstruation, and it affect for health of a women by worsen the condition that causing infections and chances of retrograde menstruation which may leads to endometriosis. *Subha chintna* (good mental state) and *Ahimsa* (calm mind) mentioned by Acharyas are very important to reduce irritability, depression and anxiety which are not uncommon during the menstruation. *Rajaswala Paricharya* helps to prevent gynecological diseases and infertility by enhancing reproductive health during this period of menstruation.

V. Conclusion

Menstrual health and hygiene are essential to the wellbeing and empowerment of women and adolescent girls. The study showed that the classical texts of Ayurveda have deep understanding of the menstrual cycle in relation to the *doshas* and the concept of *Rajaswala Paricharya* which having the *Pathya* and *Apathya* of *Ahara* and *Viharana* specifically mentioned in the menstruation period interpreted more public health benefits to maintain menstrual health with healthy period of preconception. In the present era, menstrual hygiene is very essential and gynecological disorders can reduce through the proper menstrual health management. Thus, by practicing the *Pathya* mentioned in Ayurveda during menstrual period regularly will lead to optimum health of the female and it supports the conception as well as physical and psychological wellbeing.

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