

# Artavachakra: An Ayurvedic Perspective on Menstrual Cycle

**Kabi Prasad Mohanty<sup>1,\*</sup>, Sanghamitra Dash<sup>1</sup>, Madhumita panigrahi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of *Rachana Shareera*, Major S.D. Singh P.G. Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Bewar Road, Fatehgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup>Scholar of Basic Principles Department, Institute of Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar, Gujarat, India

## 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 Ankurotpatti of plants. For the proper growth and development of any crop, four suitable conditions are required which are: Proper Rutu (Season), Proper Kshetra (cultivated land), Proper Ambu (Water supply), and Proper Beeja (Uncontaminated seeds). From the four essential factors for Garbha, i.e., Rutu, 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 Rutu Kala. It is also called as fertile period. Rutu (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

\*Author for Correspondence E-mail: drkabiprasad.mohanty@gmail.com

## 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]. *Rutu* 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. *Rutu*, *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 *Rajonivritta* (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],
- *Shonit* as a *Rajasrava* [8],
- *Raja* as a *Streebeeja* [9], and
- *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 Pradhan*, i.e., *Agneya* [13].

*Vagbhata* 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*, *Sryanibhuta*, *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 jequirity 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,
- *Ishat Krishna*: Su. Su. 3/7, A. S. Sha. 1/43, Ha. Sha. 1/23-24.

### 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 *Vagbhata*, 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. *Rutuvyatit 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.

Ritukala	Opinions of Acharyas
12 days (starts from 4th day of cessation of menstruation)	Charaka, Sushruta, Vriddha Vagbhata, Laghu Vagbhata, Kashyapa.
16 days (starts from 1st day of menstruation)	Bhavaprakasha, Harita, Videha.

Further division of *Ritukala* is illustrated in B.P. and Ka. Sa. On the basis of *Varna Paddhati*.

Varna Paddhati	Kasyapa Sh. /Jatisutriya/5	Bhavaprakasa/ Pu. 3/2
Brahmana	12 days	12 nights
Kshyatriya	11 days	10 nights
Vaisya	10 days	08 nights
Other/Kshudra	09 days	06 nights

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

#### Rajahsrava 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 *Vataprakop* responsible to start this phase. As soon as menstruation starts, *Pittaprakop* 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 *Dhamanis* 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 Prakop Pitta Shaman 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.
4. It is for the whole month.
5. 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., *Stri 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 Shaman Pitta Chaya Kapha Prakop*

### Rutuvyatita kala

#### Role of Dosha in Rutuvyatitkal

This phase is influenced mainly by *Pitta*. The level of *Pitta* which starts increasing at the end of *Rutu Kala* reaches the level called *Pitta Prakop*. As the level of *Pitta* increases, level of *Kapha* goes on decreasing till it comes to the level of *Kaphashaman*. During the later period of this stage, *Vata* comes into action. *Vata* and *Pitta* because of their certain properties increase further i.e., *Vata Chaya* and *Pittaprakop*. After the peak stage of *Vata*, i.e. *Prakop Rajakal* starts. *Pitta* always acts through medium of *Rakta*. Thus the phase which resembles the secretary phase is influenced by *Pitta* and *Rakta*. According to *Ayurveda*, *Pitta* is essential for various types of secretions of body. *Rakta* is nothing but blood; hence the influence of *Pitta* and *Rakta* on this phase is of *Rutuvyatit Kala* is self-explanatory regarding the glandular and

vesicular changes in the endometrium during this phase. Thus *Pitta* is predominant in this phase called *Rutuvyatit 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.

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