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Rajonivrutti (Menopause) - Ayurvedic point of view

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ABSTRACT

Men and women reach old age with different prospects for older age. Aging is a real challenge for women. Life span of every individual is divided into three *Avastha* (stages) as *Bala*, *Madhya* and *Vridhdha* in our classics. *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Vata Dosh* dominate *Bala*, *Madhya* and *Vridhdhawastha* respectively. This phase of life is more vulnerable for women, as along with aging, she suffers from inevitable scars of menopause. With increasing life expectancy, women spend one third of her lifetime under postmenopausal period. Menopause is a natural process in which menstruation definitively ceases, signalling the end of a woman's reproductive life and it's a natural process, not an illness, but a variety of disturbing symptoms can appear during this transition. Menopause usually occurs around the average age of 45. In women, reproductive period is controlled by *Pitta Dosh*. In *Vridhdhawastha*, where *Rajonivritti* is a major event, *Vata* is the leading *Dosha*. In modern context, estrogen governs the reproductive period and its deficiency manifests as menopause. Hence, change in level of hormones marks puberty and menopause, where as in Ayurvedic classics change in status of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* marks onset of *Raja* and *Rajonivritti*. *Rajonivritti* is a marker of aging in women.

Key words: *Rajonivrutti*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, Aging, Menopause.

INTRODUCTION

Life span of every individual is divided into three stages as *Bala*, *Madhya* and *Vridhdha* in our classics. For women, her *madhyavastha* has again sub divided in *Vrudhi*, *Youvan*, *Sampurnata*, *Hani*.^[1] These sub divisions indicate the puberty, beginning and end of reproductive period. Also, during lifetime, all the physiological and psychological changes are attributed to status of *Dhatu* and *Doshas* in the body.

Kapha, *Pitta* and *Vata Dosh* dominate *Bala*, *Madhya* and *Vridhdhawastha* respectively. *Ojas*, *Bala*, *Veerya*,

Indriya and *Dhatu Paripurnata* are important factors for sustaining vitality. *Acharya Sushruta* mention that these factors attain *Sampurnata* till 40 years of age and after that till 70 years of life span of a person, there is quality and quantity wise gradual decline in all these factors.^[2]

Dominant *Dosha* of particular stage of life governs all the functions of body, also these dominating *Dosha* are responsible for maximum number of diseases occurring in *Bala*, *Madhyam* and *Vridhdhawastha*. For eg. In *Balyavastha*, *Kaphaja Vyadhi*, in *Madhyamawastha* - *Pittaja Vikara* and in *Jarawastha* - *Vata Vyadhi* will be prevailing in majority.^[3]

Rajah - which can be taken as menstruation in present context, is considered as *Updhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu* in classics.^[4]

The onset or *Rajah* is directly related with the status of *Dhatu* and all the *Acharyas* give average age of menarche as 12 years. By this age certain physiological changes at the level of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* takes place and culminate in the manifestations of menstruation. *Dhatu Paripurnata* manifests as *Rajo Darshana* in women and marks the beginning of reproductive life.

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During this period of her life, women attain complete maturity and certain physical characteristics of woman hood are attained.

Table 1: Division of life span of women with status of Dosha and Dhatu^[5]

Male		Female	
Childhood	Upto 16 yrs.	Bala - 10yrs	K+++ , P & V+
		Kumari - 10-12yrs	K+++ , P++ , V+
		Rajomati - 12-16yrs	K&P+++ , V+
Middle Age	Vridhhi - 16yrs	Yuvati - 16-40yrs	P+++ , K++ , V+
	Yuva - 20-30 Or 34yrs	Proudha - 40-50yrs	P+++ , V++ , K+
	Dhatu maturity - 30 -40 or 60 yrs	Vruddha - 50 yrs onward	V+++ , P++ , K+
	Beginning of decline (<i>shaypal</i>) only Sushrut a.		
Old age		Vruddha 55yrs up	V+++ , P & K+

As the reproductive phase of her life is governed by *Pitta Dosha* along with *Kapha* in the beginning and *Vata Dosha* in latter stage; any imbalance in this governing *Dosha* will lead to abnormalities. This can be explained in terms of menstrual irregularities, failure to conceive and early menopause.

Rajonivritti (Menopause)

Menopause is defined as the cessation of ovarian function, resulting in permanent amenorrhoea. The diagnosis of menopause is retrospective following a period of amenorrhoea for 12 months or 6 months.

In clinical practice, the term menopause indicates the period of time during which spontaneous menstruation normally ceases. It is characterized endocrinologically by evidence of decreasing ovarian activity, biologically by decreasing fertility and

clinically by alterations in menstrual cycles and by a variety of symptoms.

World Health Organisation suggested following definitions.^[6]

Menopause - The menopause should be defined as the permanent cessation of menstruation resulting from the loss of ovarian follicular activity.

Perimenopause - The perimenopause should be used to include the period immediately prior to the menopause with endocrinological, biological and clinical features approaching menopause and at least the first year after the menopause. It is indicated by a change in the pattern of menstruation with increased or reduced menstrual intervals or both. This usually lasts for 3 -5 years or can be relatively sudden.

Postmenopause - The postmenopause should be defined as dating from the menopause, although it cannot be determined until after a period of 12 months of spontaneous amenorrhoea has been observed.

Other definitions includes,

Climacteric - Derived from greek word. Means a step of a stair. Climacteric is the physiological period during which there is regression in ovarian function which may start two to three years before menopause.

Menopausal transition - The years prior to menopause that encompass the change from normal ovulatory cycles to cessation of menses. The term climacteric and menopause are used interchangeably in practice.

In women, reproductive period is controlled by *Pitta Dosha*. In *Vridhawahastha*, where *Rajonivritti* is a major event, *Vata* is the leading *Dosha*. In modern context, estrogen governs the reproductive period and its deficiency manifests as menopause. Hence, change in level of hormones marks puberty and menopause, where as in our classics change in status of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* marks onset of *Raja* and *Rajonivritti*. *Rajonivritti* is a marker of aging in women. In Ayurveda classics, it is mentioned under normal physiology.

Etymology

The term '*Rajonivritti*' is derived from *Rajah* + *Nivritti* meaning cessation of *Artava Pravritti*. *Rajah* is taken as *Artava* i.e. menstrual blood. *Artava* along with *Stanya* is mentioned as *Upadhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu*.

Rajonivritti Kala

The age of onset of menstruation and its cessation is mentioned uniformly by all *Acharyas*. 50 years is mentioned as the age when there is *Kshaya* of *Artava* due to *Kshaya* of all *Dhatu*s in *Jara Awastha*. This age of *Rajonivritti* is classified between *Praudhawastha* and *Vridhdhawastha* in the division of life span of women.^[7] Arundutta while commenting on *Ashtanga Hridaya* opined that there might be variation in the age of onset and cessation of *Artava*. The reason behind this variation can be *Ahara*, *Vihara* and environment.

According to Modern Medical science, the mean age of menarche has been falling, and it has been proposed that the age of menopause has increased (by 5 years) over the last 100 years, but there is no strong evidence to support this. Some reports from Aristotle, Hippocrates and Roman authors indicate that 2000 years ago, women entered the menopause in their early 40s.^[8]

The average age of menopause is usually around 50 years, with limits between 45 and 55.^[9]

Nidana of Rajonivritti

Rajonivritti is not mentioned as disease in Ayurveda; hence *Nidana Panchaka* of *Rajonivritti* is not available in ayurvedic classics. Yet it can be considered under *Swabhava Bala Pravritta Vyadhi*. *Acharya Sushruta* has mentioned a group of naturally occurring diseases under the heading of *Swabhavabala Pravritta* includes *Kshudha* (Hunger); *Pipasa* (Thirst), *Nidra* (Sleep), *Jara* (Aging) and *Mrityu* (Death)^[10] which occurs during *Jarawastha*. Other factors related with this are *Kala*, *Vayu*, *Karma*, *Dhatukshaya* and *Abhighata*. *Kala* is a factor responsible for *Kshaya* and *Vridhdhi*.^[11] as well as it is a cause of *Bala*, *Taruna* and *Vridhdhawastha*. As mentioned earlier, *Jarawastha* is a span of life, which is dominant of *Vata Dosha*. *Vata Dosha* is responsible for *Kshaya* of all *Dhatu*s. This generalized *Dhatu*

Kshaya causes *Kshaya* of all *Updhatu*s, hence leading to *Artava Kshaya* i.e. *Rajonivritti*. *Karma* and *Abhighata* (Injury) specially *Artava* has *Srotorodha*^[12] can lead to *Akalaja Rajonivritti*. Certain dietary factors and life styles causing vitiation of *Vata Dosha* can lead to *Akala Jara* and in turn *Akalaja Rajonivritti*.

Types Of Rajonivritti

1. *Kalaja*
2. *Akalaja*

Rajonivritti, which occurs as per *Swabhava* and *Kala*, is timely, at probable age of 50, is *Kalaja Rajonivritti*. Cause of *Akalaja Rajonivritti* is as stated above.

Probable Samprapti of Rajonivritti

Rajonivritti occurs at *Sandhi Kala* of *Praudhawastha* and *Jarawastha*, where *Vata* starts overpowering *Pitta Dosha* and leads to *Kshaya* of all *Dhatu*s. Gradual decline of all *Dhatu*s occurring in *Jarawastha* is a natural process. *Swabhava*, *Jara*, *Vayu* and *Karma* act as *Nidana* as previously mentioned for pathogenesis of *Rajonivritti*. *Vata Dosha* is the major factor contributing in *Kshaya* of all *Dhatu*s. *Vata Dosha* manifests all the symptoms by its *Ruksha*, *Khara*, *Chala* etc. properties. During *Praudhawastha*, *Pitta Dosha* is also provoked along with *Vata*, hence symptoms of *Pitta Vridhdhi* are also present along with *Vata*.

Samprapti Ghataka

Dosha : *Vatapitta*.

Dushya : *Sapta Dhatu* Including *Udhatu Artava*.

Agni : *Jathargni Vishamta / Dhatvagni Vishamata*.

Srotas : *Rasavaha, Raktavaha, Artavavaha*.

Lakshana of Rajonivritti**Doshaja Lakshana**

Because of increased *Ruksha*, *Laghu*, *Khara* etc. *Guna* of *Vata Dosha*, it manifests certain symptoms of *Vata Vridhdhi* along with *Kapha Kshaya Lakshanas*, because of its decreased *Guru*, *Snigdha* and *Drava Guna*. *Pitta* is also increased by vitiated *Vata* in early stage of *Rajonivritti*. Few of this *Doshaja Lakshanas* as

observed in a women undergoing *Rajonivritti* and beyond *Rajonivritti* are as follows.

Vata Lakshana	Pittaja Lakshana	Kaphaja Lakshana
Balakshaya	Daha	Hrid dravatva
Sandhivedana	Trisha	Twak rukshata
Katishula	Mutradaha	Bhrama
Adhmana	Ushnaanubhuti	
Atopa	Swedahikyata	
Vibandha	Glani	
Anidra	Yonivedana	
Sirah shula		
Hasta pada supti		
Hrida spandana adhikya		

Dhatukshayaja Lakshana

Decline in quality and quantity of all *Dhatu* is a major event of aging and is mentioned by all acharyas. Individual *Dhatu Kshaya Lakshana* are as follows,^[13]

Rasa Kshaya	Rakta Kshaya	Mamsa Kshaya	Meda Kshaya	Asthi Kshaya	Majja Kshaya	Shukra Kshaya
Shabd Asahatva	Twak Rukshata	Sphik-gandadi Shushkata	Anga Rukshata	Asthi Toda	Asthi Saushirya	Yoni Veda na
Hrid Dravata	Sira Shaithilya	Toda	Shrama	Danta Nakh a Kesha Rukshata /Shat	Asthi Toda	Shrama

				ana		
Shula	Sheeta Prarthana	Glani	Krushata	Sandhi Shaithilya	Bhrama	Daur Balya
Shrama		Sandhi Vedana	Shoshana		Daurbalya	Panduta
Shoshana		Sandhi Sphutana			Tamo Darshana	
Risha		Dhamani Shaithilya				
		Rukshata				

Sadhyasadyata of Rajonivritti

As *Rajonivritti* is categorized under *Svabhavika Vyadhi*, according to Acharya Caraka, 'Svabhavo Nishpratikriyaha' i.e. by nature they are incurable. But the disease manifests again if the treatment is discontinued. Thus the *Svabhavika* diseases are *Yapya* in nature. *Chakrapani* while commenting on the word 'Nishpratikriya' says that these diseases cannot be managed with any treatment other than *Rasayana*.^[14]

Chikitsa of Rajonivritti Janya Lakshana (Menopausal Syndrome)

Rajonivritti is classified under *Swabhavika Vyadhi* occurring at the end of *Praudhawastha* and beginning of *Jarawastha*. *Chakrapani* while commenting on the word 'Nishpratikriya' says that these diseases cannot be managed with any treatment other than *Rasayana*.^[14]

Delaying *Jara* through *Rasayana* therapy is the only management making this *Kastasadhya* disease *Yapya*.

CONCLUSION

Human body is made up of dynamic energy systems that are affected by our diets, relationships, heredity and culture and the interplay of all these factors and activities. Our culture fears all natural processes: birthing, aging, healing, living, dying and since last few decades – menopause.

The age between 40-49 years in women can be termed as “midlife metamorphosis”, when there are acute physical and psychological changes. This is the age when her body begins to prepare for facing the scars of aging and menopause. The changes in women’s body at any given time are attributed to hormonal levels. Ayurveda classifies different phases of women’s lifetime according to status of *Dhatu* and *Dosha*. *Raja Pravritti* and *Raja Nivritti* are solely dependent on condition of *Dhatu* and *Dosha*. *Rajonivritti* is a biomarker of aging in women. From the division of her life span, it can be taken as *Sandhikala* of *Madhyamawastha* and *Jarawastha*. The age of menopause is agreed as around 50 years in Ayurveda as well as in modern science. In this phase the *Pitta Dosha* is responsible for most of the menopausal symptoms occurring in climacteric.

Ayurveda has been branched out by our seers into eight clinical specialties, to take care of health needs of society. Through these branches, it helps all human beings to travel through the different phases of life healthily and happily. *Rasayana* is the specialized branch of Ayurveda, which deals with the problems of aging not only to improve the healthy life but also to improve longevity. *Rasayana* is chiefly concerned with improving health status and is being practiced extensively and effectively since ages. The main aim of *Rasayana* is *Dhatu Samya*; i.e. replenishment of all *Dhatus* and to delay the aging process.^[15] To achieve this aim, *Rasayana* therapy should be implemented in *Poorvavastha* and *Madhyamawastha* of life span.^[16] Ayurveda has proved to be effective in managing and preventing chronic ailments till date. Concepts of

Ayurveda have been helpful in treating new diseases arising due to changing lifestyles and environment.

Estrogen levels declining in perimenopausal state and postmenopausal state is held responsible for various diseases women faces in her latter half of life like osteoporosis. As postmenopausal period falls under *Jarawastha*, the dominant *Vata Dosha* of this stage contributes in the occurrence of age related conditions according to Ayurvedic view. Use of *Rasayana* herbs with *Vata Pittashamaka* properties proves to be effective in managing *Rajonivritti Janya Lakshana*.

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