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A conceptual study on *Rajonivritti* with special reference to menopausal syndrome in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Menopausal syndrome refers to final cessation of menstruation with group of symptoms, at which the woman gradually changes from the reproductive life into one of senescence. This is due to changing dietary & behavioural habits, physical as well as mental & intellectual capacities of females. Such kinds of adversity may lead to drastic change in her lifestyle. Woman is the center point of the family, society, nation & the world. So the health of nation depends upon the health of a woman. So to maintain her health, utmost care & effective treatment should be needed. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is one and only alternative for this health hazard by which one can get spectacular achievement in combating the disease, but it has a wider range of secondary health complications like vaginal bleeding, breast cancer, endometrical cancer, gallbladder diseases etc. So. to find out safe, potent, cost effective remedy from Ayurveda for the management of afore said lacuna is the need of the hour.

Key words: Menopausal syndrome, Rajonivritti, Rasayana, Psychological changes

INTRODUCTION

The entire scenario has changed in today's era of information and technology. Women have a multifaceted perspective and have a unique role in society by achieving incredible physical and mental feats in practically every sector. As a result of hormonal changes, every woman experiences a variety of physiological and psychological changes throughout this "stage of life." Such abnormalities can sometimes progress to the stage of disease or condition known as "Menopausal Syndrome," which is characterized by a variety of vasomotor, psychiatric,

genital, locomotor, and GIT symptoms.

In Ayurveda, this phenomenon taken in a different way and not as a serious health problem. As Sushruta mentioned that menopause deals with *Jarapakva Avastha* of the body.^[1]

The *Ancient Acharyas* termed it as a normal physiology occurring at the age near about 50 years due to *Vata* predominance and *Dhatukshaya*.

Though menopause is a natural event as a part of the normal process of aging, it is turning into a major health problem in recent years in developed as well as developing countries like India.

India has a large population, which has already crossed the 1 billion mark with 71 million people over 60 years of age and the number of menopausal women about 43 million. Projected figures in 2026 have estimated the population in India will be 1.4 billion, people over 60 years 173 million, and the menopausal population 103 million. Average age of menopause is 47.5 years in Indian women with an average life expectancy of 71 years.^[2]

So, there is a grow in the number of older women who will be facing "triple jeopardy" of being aged,

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being menopausal (change of life) and being dependable in the world. The studies of last two decades shows that older women report more psychological distress and they are less satisfied with life than men.^[3]

Therefore, there is a wide scope of research to find out safe, potent, cost effective remedy from Ayurveda for the management of Menopausal Syndromes.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the etiopathogenesis of *Rajonivritti* w.s.r. to menopausal syndrome.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the present study both the Ayurvedic and Modern literatures related with the subject were searched, compiled and criticized systematically.

RAJONIVRITTI

Rajonivritti is not described separately as a pathological condition or severe health problem in Ayurvedic classics. The ancient acharyas termed it as a normal physiology.

The term '*Rajonivritti*' is made up of two different words viz. "Rajah" and "Nivritti".

Rajah - Artava

Nivritti - end or ceasing.

Menopause (*Rajonivritti*) is defined as the permanent cessation of menstruation at the end of reproductive life resulting from the loss of Ovarian follicular activity.

Age of Menopause

According to Sushruta and various other references too, (A.S. Sha. 1/11; A.H.Sha. 1/7; B.P. Pu. 3/1, 204), 50 years is mentioned as the age of *Rajonivritti*, when the body is fully in grip of senility.

Acharya Arundatta opines that the age mentioned above is a probable age and not a fixed one. There may be some variations in this regard. (Arundatta on A.H. Sha. 1/7).

The clinical diagnosis is confirmed following stoppage of menstruation for six (or twelve) consecutive months, for which, there is no other obvious pathological or a physiological cause. As such, a woman is declared to have attained Menopause only retrospectively. It is an event rather than a period of time.

Factors influencing on the age of Menopause

The age of natural Menopause appears to be determined genetically and does not seem to be related to age of menarche or age at last pregnancy. It is also not related to number of pregnancy, lactation or ovulations; use of contraceptives; or failure to ovulate spontaneously. It is also unrelated to race, height, weight, socio-economic conditions, education heavy physical work etc.

Clinical impression has suggested that mothers and daughters tend to experience Menopause at the same age, and there are two studies indicating that daughters of mothers with an early Menopause (before age 46) also have an early Menopause.^[4-6]

Signs and Symptoms of Menopause?

Though Menopause is a natural biological process and neither an illness nor a disease, various physical and psychological changes take place in her body due to waning ovarian function and process of ageing.

A) Physical Changes

Although in 50% of women, the effect of Menopause is temporarily delayed by a trickle of estrogen from the adrenal gland, the female body including genitalia reacts to waning ovarian function by atrophy, inactivity and retrogression.

In Ovary : The ovaries shrink in size.

In Fallopian tubes : The fallopian tubes show feature of atrophy.

In Uterus : The uterus gradually gets smaller in size.

In Cervix : The cervix becomes smaller in size.

In Vagina : The vagina becomes narrower and smaller due to gradual loss of elasticity.

In Fornices : The fornices gradually disappear as the cervix regresses.

In Vulva : The Vulva atrophies and the vaginal orifice becomes smaller which leads to dyspareunia.

The vestibule and the skin of the Labia minora become pale, dry, thin atrophic and more prone to infections.

Labia majora and Mons become flattern due to gradual reduction of fat contained by them.

- The pubic hair is reduced in amount of becomes gray.
- The skin around the vaginal orifice and urethra loses some of its resistance to infections as the epithelium because thin.
- The Pelvic cellular tissues become scanty and lax, and the ligaments and the tissues, which support the uterus and vagina, lose their tone due to reduction in muscular strength as a part of aging.

In Bladder and Urethra : Bladder and Urethra undergo similar changes to those of the vagina. The epithelium becomes thin as is more prone to damage and for infections. Periurethral tissue atrophies. Thinning of urethra and periurethral tissue diminish the functional urethral length.

Prolapse of Urethro-vesicular junction occur due to decreased pelvic support.

In Breasts : The mammary glandular tissue atrophies and the deposition of fat frequently make the breasts more pendulous. The breasts lose their fullness and become soft and flat and ultimately, they shrivel. The nipples get smaller in size and are non erectile. These changes occur very gradually and may not be noticeable for some years after Menopause.

General Changes :

In addition to the local atrophy of the generative organs, certain general disturbances develop which are almost certainly caused by alterations in the endocrine balance and as a part of ageing which was maintained during the childbearing period of life as enlisted below.

- Woman becomes coarser in build and appearance.
- She develops features suggestive of a mild degree of acromegaly. The shoulders become flat and the waistline is lost.
- The skin becomes wrinkled, thin, more prone to damage and infection as skin collagen context is reduced in Menopause.
- A slight growth of hair can be seen on the face especially round the lips and chin.
- Body hair become spares later in life and this is a part of senile changes affecting all organs. Axillaries and pubic hair are not much shed because these depend on the adrenal rather than the ovary.
- Fat is deposited around the breasts (in fatty women), hips and abdomen.
- In most cases the blood pressure rises and cardiac irregularities and tachycardia some times occur.
- Arthritic changes often develop in the joints and in some women a well-marked osteoporosis may be seen, particularly in the spine and pelvic girdle, which renders these bones liable to fracture.^[7]

B) Psychological changes

Psychological changes in Menopausal stage vary considerably and depend largely on the make-up of an individual and on her previous outlook on the Menopause and its significance.

A Menopausal woman may experience varied types of emotions ranging from mild concern to frank denial due to following factors.

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Tension
- Headache
- Irritability
- Nervousness
- Feeling unhappy

- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Excitability
- Crying
- Palpitations
- Loss of interest in most things
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Attacks of panic^[8]

Management of Menopausal Syndrome

The Rajonivrittijanya avastha is one of the phases of Ageing in woman, which is a naturally occurring condition, under the influence of *Kala* and *Swabhava*. Menopause and Ageing are seen with the advancement of the age and both of these conditions mainly represent *Kshayavastha* (Declining condition of *Dhatu*). *Rajonivritti* can be considered as one of the initial symptoms of aging manifestation, and the end of female reproductive life.

As *Rajonivritti* too, is a naturally occurring condition and having good number of similarities with the process of aging, it should be managed with the principles of Ageing, giving much emphasis on the Rasayana Therapy.

As in *Rajonivritti*, as the Vata Dosha is dominant, majority of symptoms occur due to *Vatavridhi* resulting in degeneration of bone or *Asthi Dhatu* (osteoporosis). Aggravation of Pitta *Dosha* cause increase in hotness, spreading and *Katu Rasata* (pungency qualities of blood) of *Rakta Dhatu* (hot flushes).

In addition to the physical symptoms, psychological impact of menopausal syndrome shows importance of head, hence treatment procedures for head like *Nasya Karma*, *Takra Dhara*, *Medya Rasayanas* are helpful.

Treatment is decided by physician after assessing the body constitution and deep investigation of presenting complaints (imbalances of *Doshas*) of the patient.

Diet and lifestyle advice for menopause

Ayurveda advocates that “prevention is better than cure”. Eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and reducing stress provides the foundation of wellbeing for everyone. Ayurvedic recommendations for menopause include:

- Introduce a Vata-Pitta pacifying diet, that is warm, light, cooked, fresh and unctuous (containing good oils) food.
- Avoid dry, cold, fermented, left-over foods, refined sugar and red meats.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Regular, mild-moderate exercise is good to combat the symptoms. Exercises that relax the nervous system, such as walking, Yoga and meditation are excellent.
- To calm *Vata*, it is very important to create regular routines around your sleep, food, work, exercise and family time.
- Daily self-massage with warm oil (*Abhyanga*) and nasal medication (*Nasya*) where you place some drops of oil in each nostril can assist with hormonal balancing.

DISCUSSION

Menopause is the point in a woman’s life when menstruation stops permanently – signifying the end of her ability to have children. Menopause is the last stage of gradual biological process in which the ovaries reduce their production of female sex hormones – a process which begins at 3 to 5 years prior to the final cessation of menstrual period. This transitional phase is called the climacteric.

According to Ayurveda *Rajonivritti* is a *Svabhavika Prakriya* like *Ksudha* (hunger), *Pipasa* (thirst) and *Nidra* (sleep) etc. occurring in female body in later stage of life due to *Jaravastha* indicating the changes in her life style.

Though *Rajonivritti* is physiological phenomenon but due to the fast life, rapid migration, stress, strain, tension, hurry-worry, repeatedly leads to

Dhatukshyavstha which stimulates the aging process. Due to this aging process and incapability to bear the condition and it becomes a state of pathology.^[9]

Rajonivritti is a representative syndrome of *Praudhavastha*. This *Avastha* lies in a *Sandhikala*. It means a mid-period between *Yuvavastha* and *Vridhdhavastha*. During this period there is a peak level of *Pitta*. Further due to influence of coming *Jarakala*, *Vata* also remain in aggravated condition. This vitiated *Vata* expels out the *Pitta* from its original place i.e., *Ashaya Apakarsh* of *Pitta* by *Vata*. This aggravated *Vata* along with vitiated *Pitta* creates hot flushes, excessive sweating, sleep disturbance, irritability, dryness of vagina, etc. which are similar to *Vataja-Pittaja* symptoms. These are nothing but *Rajonivritti Avastha Janya Lakshana* or menopausal syndrome. Reduction of *Bala* or immunity occurs in different *Dhatu*s due to debility. So, the *Rasayana* therapy can give relief to the patients.

'*Rajonivritti*' too; are manifested due to progressive reduction in the functional ability of *Agnis*, (cell and tissue metabolic activity), which resulted into an inadequate tissue nutrition. This nutritional imbalance triggers the irreversible degenerative changes in "*Saptadhatu*", (seven tissue elements) mainly in *Rasadhatu*. So, considering the Ayurvedic concepts of physiology, *Rasayana* therapy promotes the nutrition through one of the following three modes.^[10]

1. By direct enrichment of the nutritional quality of *Rasa* (*Poshaka Rasa*) i.e., the nutrient plasma. Such *Rasayana* agents contain in their bulk, high quality of nutrients and as such when administered, they are directly added to the pool of nutrition and in turn help in improved tissue nourishment leading to subsequent *Rasayana* effects. e.g., *Ghrita*, *Dugdha*, *Satavari* etc.
2. By promoting nutrition through improving the *Agnivyapara*. i.e., digestion and Metabolism. Such *Rasayana* drugs promote digestion of food and vitalize the metabolic activity resulting in turn to improved nutritional status at the level of *Dhatu*s. e.g. *Haritaki*, *Bhallataka* etc.

3. By promoting the competence of *Srotas* i.e., microcirculation and tissue perfusion. Due to such *Rasayana* drugs, the micro-circulatory channels in the body leading to better bio-availability of nutrients to the tissues and improved tissue perfusion resulting into improved nutritional status. e.g. *Guggulu*.

Rasayana is also known for its curative effect on aging as a *Vayahstapana*. Thus, *Rasayana* helps to break the *Samprapti* of *Rajonivritti*.

CONCLUSION

Rajonivritti is a physiological process but when it causes discomfort either to mind or body it attains *Vyadhisvarupa* and becomes a disease status which requires medical interference. *Rajonivritti* occurs due to aging process suggesting aggravation of *Vatadosha* and diminution of *Kaphadosha*. The symptoms occurring in menopausal syndrome like; sleep disturbance, irritability, hot flushes, etc. can be co-relate with *Vata Pittaja Lakshana*. As *Rajonivritti* deals with *Jaravastha*, *Rasayana* therapy is the line of treatment and for prevention of longer-term effects of depletion of *Dhatu*s.

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