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An empirical review of fundamental principles of Ayurveda for women's reproductive health and diseases

Mahima Patel¹, Santosh Vishnoi², A. Neelima³

^{1,2}Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stri Roga, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Dr. S. R. Rajasthan Ayurved University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

³Professor & HOD, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stri Roga, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Dr. S. R. Rajasthan Ayurved University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is known for its promotive, curative and therapeutic concepts. The main objective of Ayurvedic treatments is to promote healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, prevention of disease and specialized treatments based on the diagnosis. The fundamental principles hold a firm ground in *Ayurveda*. From creation of living beings to issues of health, disease and its diagnosis & treatment, these fundamental principles are the roots. Woman's Reproductive life is associated with drastic physiological, anatomical and psychological changes during menarche, reproductive period, pregnancy, menopause and post menopause. **Aim & Objectives:** To promote and maintain the overall well-being of Women throughout their lives using the principles of *Ayurveda*. **Methodology:** All the material and data are collected from ancient's treaties, *Ayurvedic* books, Research paper under google scholar, PubMed, research gate etc. search engines. **Result:** *Ayurveda* considers menstrual health, fertility, pregnancy, and postpartum care as essential aspects of a Woman's life. It focuses on natural and personalized methods to address Women's reproductive issues and promote overall wellness. **Discussion:** Although any individual, regardless of constitutional type, can be provoked in any and it is the *Vikriti*, the imbalanced ratio of *Doshas* which we treat in *Ayurveda*, still these cyclical imbalances operate within a specific individual constitutional background which must be taken in account in formulating individual treatment plans. **Conclusion:** *Ayurveda* dose provide principles and guidelines for diagnosis and treating the various Women's health conditions & diseases.

Key words: Women's Reproductive Health, Prasuti Tantra & Stri Roga, Clinical Aspects, Tridosha, Dhātu, Agni.

INTRODUCTION

Women's Reproductive health is a condition in which the reproductive process is accomplished in a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and is not merely the absence of disease or disorders of the reproductive process. Sexual and reproductive health

problems are responsible for one third of health issues for women between the ages of 15 and 44 years.^[1] Different life stages are associated with specific women's sexual and reproductive health issues including: Menstruation, Fertility, Cervical screening, Contraception, Pregnancy, Sexually transmissible infections, Chronic health problems (such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome), Menopause, Unplanned pregnancy and Abortion. By addressing these issues and ensuring access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, we can improve women's overall well-being and quality of life.^[2]

Ayurveda, the ancient system of traditional medicine that originated in India, has a specialized branch called "*Prasuti Tantra*" and "*Stri Roga*," which deals with women's health and promotes a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, prevention of diseases, and specialized treatments based on diagnosis. *Ayurveda* not only defines all epoch's of woman's life like *Bala*,

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Mahima Patel

Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stri Roga, Post Graduate Institute of Ayurved, Dr. S. R. Rajasthan Ayurved University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

E-mail: mahimap6060@gmail.com

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Kumari, Rajaswala, Ritumati, Garbhini, Prasava, Sutika etc., but also the health status in regards of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* variation and preventive steps in the form of diet and life style modifications to achieve health during all these epoch's where drastic changes occurs which makes her susceptible for major illnesses. These diet and lifestyle modifications are known as *Paricharya*. Understanding the basic principles of *Ayurveda* can indeed provide valuable insights into Women's reproductive health and disease. The fundamental principles hold a firm ground in *Ayurveda*. From creation of living beings to issues of health, disease and its treatment, these fundamental principles are the roots. These can be computed as *Tridosha, Dhatu-updhatu, Mala, Agni, Panchamahabhuta, Ama, Srotas, Avaran, Prakriti, Ojas, Arista* etc. They were also placed on a sound scientific footing so that all physiological and pathological phenomena were interpreted logically. The *Ayurvedic* law of uniformity of nature was established which helped in applying the physical laws to the biological field.^[3] It's important to note that while *Ayurveda* can provide valuable perspectives on Women's reproductive health.

Doshas & it's relation to Women's Health

The main components of human body are: *Dosha, Dhatu & Mala*. Principle of *Purusha Loka Sammit Nyaya* explain that *Kapha, Pitta, Vata* maintain body functions, just the same as moon, sun and wind do it in the nature.^[4]

Vata

Vata Dosha is associated with movement, including all bodily movements and functions. It is believed to control processes like respiration, circulation, and elimination. In *Ayurveda*, the pelvis is considered the seat of *Vata*, and disturbances in *Vata* can affect reproductive organs in women. Regarding menopause, *Ayurveda* believes that a predominance of *Vata* during this phase can lead to *Dhatu Kshaya*, which refers to the depletion of tissues and vitality in the body. In *Ayurveda*, *Apana Vayu* is a specific sub-type of *Vata* responsible for the downward and outward flow of energy in the body. It governs functions like the elimination of waste, menstruation, ejaculation, and childbirth.^[5] The concept of *Garbhadhan Vidhi* refers to the process of conceiving a child, and it is believed that

the position and timing during intercourse can influence the *Doshas* and thus the chances of conception.^[6]

Pitta

Raja is present in women and has characteristics of *Pitta Dosha*. *Pitta Dosha* is associated with qualities like heat, metabolism, and transformation in the body. *Aartava Shonitamvaagneyam* refers to the fact that menstrual blood (*Aartava*) is essentially a form of *Shonita* (blood) which is of an *Agneya* (fiery or *Pitta*) nature.^[7] The reproductive age, also known as the middle period, is when all the *Dhatus* (tissues) in the body, including *Bala* (strength), *Virya* (semen), *Paurush* (vitality), *Parakrama* (ability to perform physical activities), *Grahana* (sensory perception), *Dharana* (concentration), *Smarana* (memory), *Vachana* (speech), *Vijyana* (intelligence), and others are fully developed and mature. During this period, the dominance of *Pitta Dosha* is believed to be prominent.^[8] *Rutuvyatita Kala*, also known as the secretory phase, is the time around the premenstrual period. It is believed to be dominated by *Pitta Dosha*, which can lead to premenstrual symptoms like anger, excessive hunger, insomnia, and acne.^[9] *Garbhadhana Vidhi* refers to the process of conception or procreation. The text mention that coitus (sexual intercourse) performed in the left lateral position displaces *Pitta*, which burns the *Rakta* (blood) and *Shukra* (semen).^[10]

Kapha

Shukra has characteristics of *Kapha Dosha*. Childhood to Puberty: During this stage, *Kapha Dosha* tends to dominate, as the body is still developing, and the individual may exhibit characteristics of *Kapha*, such as softness, immaturity of *Dhatus* (tissues), and delayed development of physical traits like facial and axillary hair. *Rutukala* (Proliferative Phase): This phase is also considered to be dominated by *Kapha Dosha*. The individual may appear bright and healthy, have moist mouth and teeth, and experience excitement and desire for sexual relations (*Rutumati Lakshana*).^[11] *Garbhadhana Vidhi*: This refers to the ritual coitus (sexual intercourse) performed in the right lateral position, with the belief that it displaces *Kapha*, which then obstructs the *Garbhashaya* (uterus), possibly to aid in conception.^[4]

Here *Doshas* are structural and functional units of human body. To keep maintain healthy women reproductive life should maintain all three *Doshas* in balanced state, As per *Acharya Vagbhata - 'Rogastu Doshavaishmya Doshasamyā Arogata'*. An imbalanced ratio of the *Doshas* (either *Vridhhi* or *Kshaya*) leads to *Roga* (Diseases) in Women.^[12]

Dhatu & it's relation to Women's Health

Human physiology depends on balanced state of *Dosha*, *Dhatu* & *Mala*. *Doshas* are the main bio-energies which are responsible for the physiological activities. These activities take place through the media of *Dhatu-Upadhatu* & *Mala*. *Dhatu*s can be called as the stabilizing pillars of the body. *Upadhatus* are byproducts of *Dhatu*. *Malas* are excretory products formed during metabolic activity of the body.

The concept of *Dhatu*s in *Ayurveda* refers to the seven fundamental tissues in the body, which are responsible for the maintenance and nourishment of the entire body. These *Dhatu*s include *Rasa* (plasma), *Rakta* (blood), *Mamsa* (muscle), *Meda* (fat), *Asthi* (bone), *Majja* (bone marrow), and *Shukra* (reproductive tissue).^[13] The proper formation of these *Dhatu*s is vital for overall health and, specifically, for the healthy reproductive life of women. Women's health and reproductive system as more complex compared to men's due to their intricate reproductive cycle. The health of the reproductive system in women is governed by *Artava-Vaha Srotas*, which is the channel responsible for the functioning of the female reproductive system. It influences the menstrual cycle, the growth of secondary sexual characteristics, and the monthly release of *Raja* (ovum and hormones). According to *Ayurveda*, the process of *Garbhotpadhana* (conception) and the formation of the *Stri Bija* (Ovum) and *Purusha Bija* (Sperm) are influenced by the *Dhatu*s and *Upadhatus*. Proper nourishment and formation of *Dhatu*s are crucial for the regularity and health of these physiological activities.

The monthly menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and the formation of *Apara* (Placenta) and *Stanya* (Breast milk) are all considered important aspects of a woman's reproductive health. Any imbalance or malformation of the *Dhatu*s can lead to various obstetric and gynecological conditions in women.^[14]

Ayurveda emphasizes the role of *Ahara Rasa*, which consists of nutrients derived from the seven *Dhatu*s, in nourishing the body and supporting proper *Dhatu* formation. *Jatharagni* (digestive fire), *Dhatvagni* (tissue-specific metabolic fire), *Srotasas* (channels of circulation), and *Dhatu Sarata* (regularity of the *Dhatu*s) all play essential roles in ensuring the proper formation and function of *Dhatu*s.

To maintain a healthy reproductive life and prevent gynecological issues, *Ayurveda* recommends a balanced diet, lifestyle practices, and therapies that support the harmonious functioning of the *Dhatu*s and *Artava-Vaha Srotas*. *Ayurvedic* treatments, herbal remedies, and lifestyle adjustments are often utilized to address specific imbalances and promote overall well-being in women. However, it is important to consult qualified *Ayurvedic* practitioners for personalized guidance and treatment plans tailored to individual needs.

Agni & it's relation to Women's Health

In *Ayurveda*, *Pitta Dosha* is indeed responsible for digestion and is associated with the fire element. *Agni*, which translates to "fire" in *Sanskrit*, is considered the digestive fire responsible for breaking down and assimilating the food we eat. *Pitta* and *Agni* work together, as *Pitta*'s hot and sharp qualities help in the digestion process facilitated by *Agni*.

There are different types of *Agni* in the body according to *Ayurveda*. The primary *Agni* responsible for digestion is *Jatharagni*, located in the stomach. Additionally, there are seven *Dhatvagni* responsible for metabolizing and nourishing the various tissues (*Dhatu*s) of the body, and five *Bhutagni* responsible for metabolizing the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether) in the body.^[15]

In women, *Pitta* and *Agni* play important physiological roles related to the menstrual cycle (*Aartava Utpatti*), fetal circulation (*Garbhaposhana*), and complexion (*Garbhavarna Utpatti*). Imbalances in the *Doshas* and *Agni* can lead to vitiation, causing issues such as *Vishama Agni* (irregular digestion), *Tikshnagni* (hyperactive digestion), and *Vishama Agni* (variable digestion), which are believed to contribute to various diseases.

Applied Aspect

Vikriti, an imbalanced ratio of the *Doshas* relative to the individual's *Prakriti*, malnourished and malformed *Dhatu*s and *Dushtagni* are actually treated in *Ayurveda*, and it is assessed by examining the patient, including reading the *Doshas* in the pulse, and by extensively questioning the person about symptoms and past history. Examine *Dhatu Sarata* of patient, Assessed *Agni* status by questioning about food habits and *Koshtha Parikshana*.

Those changes which have more universal and predictable causes, such as the cycling of the *Doshas* through the day, the year, and the life-span are described and accounted for in Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment. The *Ayurvedic* understanding of the cycle of *Doshas* through the life-span is particularly important to issues of women's health. From the development of the fetus in utero through young adulthood, the time of normal body growth, *Kapha* dominates. *Pitta* begins its first dramatic increase at adolescence and comes to dominate the body process usually no later than the early thirties. It is highest in the middle years, when, driven by *Pitta* emotions, people typically are concerned with career advances, and risk is high for many *Pitta* disorders such as high blood pressure, non-congestive heart disease, ulcers, hyperthyroid, etc. It is also a high-risk time for many female disorders. *Vata* begins to exert considerable influence during the sixties, and by the seventies it is the dominant creating the patterns of dryness of tissues and decreased bone density associated with the aging process. Each month, with the ending of menstrual bleeding, women may experience a temporary feeling of depletion, due to the elimination of *Pitta* (through the heat and *Rakta*, or red blood cells) and *Kapha* (through the serum, or *Rasa*, part of the blood) which has just occurred in the process of menstruation. *Artava* in females is considered by some as equivalent to *Shukra Dhatu* in males as the precursor tissue for the formation of *Ojas*. This brief period of depletion is, however, followed quickly by a phase of *Kapha* increase as the endometrium is built up again. The influence of *Kapha* persists until a few days before ovulation, when *Vata*, the kinetic factor, becomes active in order to propel the egg through the fallopian tubes into the uterus. If fertilization does not occur, the dominance of *Vata* at ovulation gradually gives way to

pain in the premenstrual days and during menstruation.^[16]

Greater efforts toward rejuvenation in postmenopausal years are essential for *Vata*-dominant women, because the dry and emaciating effects of *Vata*, such as those seen in osteoporosis and loss of skin tone, can affect them more severely. Women who are dominant or provoked in *Pitta* who usually suffers the most extreme symptoms of cyclic changes, whether it be menopausal or menstrual, and who run the greatest risk of morning sickness and miscarriage during pregnancy.

Illness, whether its initial cause is internal or external (infectious organisms, change in seasons or adverse weather conditions, poor diet or inadequate living conditions, injuries or traumas), often takes root in the physical body through one of three avenues: through disorders of *Agni* (digestive capacity), through blockage of *Srotas* (the physical channels through which substances move), or through imbalance of the *Doshas*.

However, when *Ama* is present in the system, menstruation can become toxic, and the smoothness of the entire monthly cycle can be disrupted.

The *Doshas* will seek to escape the body through inappropriate channels, or will be blocked altogether and cause pain, infection, or abnormal growths. Fibroid tumors, ovarian cysts, and fibrocystic breast disease, as well as some types of infertility are examples of diseases which arise due to blockage of *Srotas*.

Table 1: Tridosha & its relations to others Principles

<i>Dosha</i>	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Kapha</i>
<i>Dhatu</i>	<i>Asthi</i>	<i>Rakta, Sweda</i>	<i>Rasa, Mamsa, Meda, Majja, Shukra</i>
<i>Pancha-mahabhut</i>	<i>Vayu, Aakasha</i>	<i>Teja</i>	<i>Jala, Prithvi</i>
<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Vata Prakopa: Katu, Tikta, Kashay</i> <i>Vata Shamak: Madhur, Amla, Lavan</i>	<i>Pitta Prakopa: Katu, Amla, Lavan</i> <i>Pitta Shamak: Madhura, Tikta, Kashay</i>	<i>Kapha Prakopa: Madhur, Amla, Lavan</i> <i>Kapha Shamak: Katu, Tikta, Kashay</i>

<i>Koshtha</i>	<i>Krura</i>	<i>Mrudu</i>	<i>Madhyam</i>
<i>Agni</i>	<i>Visham</i>	<i>Tikshna</i>	<i>Manda</i>
<i>Prakriti</i>	<i>Vataj</i>	<i>Pittaj</i>	<i>Kaphaj</i>
<i>Vaya - Avastha</i>	<i>Vridhdha</i>	<i>Madhyam</i>	<i>Bala</i>
Day-Night	Time of end of day-night	Midday & Midnight	Start of day & night
Ritu (Season)	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Sharad</i>	<i>Vasant</i>

Table 2: Tridosha & its clinical aspect in relation to Women’s Health

Dosha	Vata	Pitta	Kapha
Women’s Reproductive Health Issues in different Age periods.	Premenarcheal (5-11 years) Trauma to the genital tract, Developmental and Congenital Anomalies, Precocious puberty.	Premenarcheal (5-11 years) Vaginal bleeding.	Premenarcheal (5-11 years) Vulvovaginitis, Obesity, Delayed Puberty, Amenorrhea.
	Reproductive period (15 to 44 years) Menstrual abnormalities, Dysmenorrhea, Chronic pelvic pain, Infertility,	Reproductive Period (15 to 44 years) PMS, Abnormal Uterine Bleeding, Infertility, Abortion, Hormonal Imbalance, Skin Disorders, Urinary tract infections, Inflammatory conditions, Digestive problems, Hirsutism, Pelvic Infections, PID, RTIs and STDs.	Reproductive Period (15 to 44 years) Vaginal yeast infections, Benign tumor, Fibrocystic Breast & ovaries, Oedema, Obesity, Infertility, Menstrual irregularities, PCOS, Weakness, Depression
	Post menopausal (Above 45 yrs) Neoplasm, Postmenopausa		

	I symptoms, Vaginal dryness, Dyspareunia, Osteoporosis, Dry skin and Hair, Anxiety, Insomnia,		
Shaman Chikitsa	<i>Brahmi, Vidari, Bala, Ashwagandha, Dhashmool, Vidari, Dhashmool Arishta, Rajah Pravartini Vati, Kanya Lohadi Vati, Prataplankeshwar Rasa.</i>	<i>Shatavari, Chandan, Tagar, Guduchi, Nimba, Yashtimadhu, Amalaki, Kumari, Ela, Shankha Bhashma, Laghu Sutsekshara, Chandraprabha Vati,</i>	<i>Aarogya Vardhini, Chitraka, Trikatu, Trifala, Guggulu, Ashoka, Lodhra, Shatpushpa, Pushyanug Churna</i>
Pancha Karma	<i>Basti, Nasya, Abhyang, Shirodhara</i>	<i>Virechana</i>	<i>Vamana</i>
Sthanika Chikitsa	<i>Uttarbasti, Yoni Prakshala, Yoni Pichu</i>	<i>Yoni Pichu, Yoni Prakshalan</i>	<i>Yoni Dhupan, Yoni Puran</i>
Pathya	Diet - Wheat, Black gram, Sesame seeds, Mango, Onion, Garlic, Cinnamon, Sugar cane, Buttermilk, Butter, Almond, Hot and oily foods.	Diet - Butter, Jack fruit, Moth bean, Lotus, Sugarcane, Pointed guard (parval), Date (kharjooora), Fennel seeds, Grapes, Neem leaves, Rose, Coriander, Cucumber, Amla remedy, Carrot, Sweet potatoes, sprouts, Pumpkin, Rice, wheat, Mung dal	Diet - Beans, Green grams, Bengal grams, Horse grams, Amla, Garlic, Neem, Turmeric, Bitter gourd, Mustard, Honey, Cow urine, Long pepper, Ginger, Trifala, Barley.
	Lifestyle - Good sleep, attending hunger, thirst and natural urges as when they appear, Simple yoga & Meditation.	Lifestyle - Moderate exercise, Meditation, Morning walking, Laughing, Cold water bath.	Lifestyle - Exercise, Running, Keeping awake during night.

Apathya	Diet - Rajamasha (Cow pea), Peanut, Indian bean, Bengal grams, Peas, Green grams, Cold water, Dry & spicy namkins, junk foods, aerated drinks.	Diet - Ripe Mango, Mustard, Fenugreek, Chillies, Papper, Ajown, Tulasi, Vacha,	Diet - Dadhi, Cotton plan seed, Madhuka, Rice, Wheat, Corn, Sweets, Dairy products.
	Lifestyle - Late night sleep, Excessive exercise, Avoid fasting, stress at work, excess talking & thinking, excess sexual activities, travelling.	Lifestyle - Avoid Krodh (anger), Spicy and oily foods, Excessive sun exposure, Fasting.	Lifestyle - Restricting Sleep and Day sleep, Avoid sedentary lifestyle.

DISCUSSION

Although any individual, regardless of constitutional type, can be provoked in any and it is the *Vikriti*, the imbalanced ratio of *Doshas* which we treat in *Ayurveda*, still these cyclical imbalances operate within a specific individual constitutional background which must be taken in account in formulating individual treatment plans. *Ayurveda* indeed has a vast array of formulations and single herbs that are used to balance the *Doshas* and promote health. In case of *Agnidushti Dipan & Pachan Chikitsa* focuses on correcting imbalances in the digestive system and promoting healthy digestion through dietary modifications, herbal remedies, lifestyle changes, and other therapies. Treatment is to remove the digestive and systemic *Ama* as well as using herbs like turmeric (*Haldi*) which specifically act to cleanse the *Rakta Dhatu*. Immunity and strength of *Dhatu* can be improved by *Rasayan Chikitsa*. In such cases of *Srotosanga* (Blockage) various of the *Purva* or *Panchakarmas*, or *Ayurvedic* cleansing practices, may be indicated, as well as inclusion of various herbs which act to open blocked channels, liquefy mucous, decrease inflammation, or remove excess benign tissues, such as *Guggulu* preparations, myrrh, *Trifala*, *Amla*, castor oil, honey, turmeric, licorice root, *Mahasudarshan*, etc.^[17] *Panchmahabhautik Chikitsa* involves understanding

the elemental composition of a person's body and using various therapies and treatments to restore the balance of the elements and *Doshas*. The principle behind *Panchmahabhautik Chikitsa* is to address the root cause of the disease rather than just treating the symptoms.^[18] Moderate daily exercise and *Yoga Asanas*, as well as the avoidance of heavy or sticky foods, such as meat, yoghurt, and fried foods are also important. A combination of *Virechana* (purgation) and *Basti* (medicated enema) is usually effective in such cases.

CONCLUSION

The person is called as *Swastha* (Healthy), if he has balanced or equilibrium condition of *Dhoshas*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, *Agni*, and happy and balanced state of soul, sense organs and mind. For that *Ayurveda* gives priority to maintain the Healthy state of a normal human being and also treat the disease of patient. *Ayurveda* dose provide principles and guidelines for diagnosis and treating the various Women's health conditions & diseases. It is a well-known fact now that the diet, life style modifications with scientific approach in treatment considering *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Agni* has given encouraging results in treating disorders related to women's reproductive health.

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