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# Phases of Menstrual Cycle : The Ayurveda Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The menstrual cycle is the cyclical events that occur in the endometrium of uterus to form visible flow of menstrual blood every month. The *Artava Pravritti* is the menstrual flow which is said to be three to five days as per Ayurveda. The *Ritukala* is the fertile period of woman's endometrial cycle. The different phases of menstrual cycle in the contemporary science need to be studied in Ayurveda for similarities if any. The present paper emphasises on the study of day, duration and events of phases of menstrual cycle in Ayurveda with that of contemporary science.

**Key words:** *Artavapravritti, Ritukala, Drishtaartavakala, Yoni Sankochana, Menstrual cycle.*

## INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is the visible manifestation of cyclical physiologic uterine bleeding due to shedding of the endometrium as a result of invisible interplay of hormones mainly through hypothalamo-pituitary-ovarian axis. The first menstruation (menarche) occurs between 11-15 years with a mean of 13 years. Ultimately, it ceases between the ages 45-50 when menopause sets in. The duration of menstruation is about 4-5 days.<sup>[1]</sup>

In Ayurveda, the concept of menstruation or menstrual cycle is detailed in the context of *Artava Pravritti, Ritukala, Drishtaartava Kala, Ritumati Lakshana* etc. The words like *Artava, Shonita, Rakta, Pushpa, Raja, Beeja* are used synonymously with the ovum or menstrual blood or both as the meaning of

which is considered as per the context referred. The *Artava Pravritti* occurs at the age of 12 years and ceases at 50 years as per Ayurveda.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

*Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita* and other relevant Ayurveda text books. Journals like NCBI etc.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The menstrual cycle may be divided into two phases; the follicular or proliferative phase and the luteal or secretory phase. The length of a menstrual cycle is the number of days between the first day of menstrual bleeding of one cycle to the onset of menses of the next cycle.

The median duration of a menstrual cycle is 28 days with most cycle lengths between 25 to 30 days. The luteal phase of the cycle is relatively constant in all women, with duration of 14 days. The variability of cycle length is usually derived from varying lengths of the follicular phase of the cycle, which can range from 10 to 16 days.<sup>[2]</sup>

The *Artava Pravritti* is given due importance in Ayurveda. *Sushruta* opines the *Upachaya* (accumulation) of *Artava* occurs in *Dhamani* (arteries) of *Garbhashaya* (uterus) for a month and flows out as menstrual blood for three days. The menstrual blood is little of dark coloured, having little odour and flow

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inducted by function of *Apanavata* through *Yoni Mukha* (vagina).<sup>[3]</sup> *Charaka* says the *Artava Pravritti* occurs every month for duration of five days and that which is neither too less nor too more in quantity is said to be normal.<sup>[4]</sup>

दृष्टमार्तवं यस्मिन्काले सदृष्टमार्तवःकालः ऋतुः, सच द्वादश रात्रं भवति।

द्वादशरात्रमिति षोडशदिनेषु मध्येआद्यं दिनत्रयमन्तिमं चषोडशं योनिःसङ्कोचं दिनंनगणनीयम् || (Dalhana.Su.Sha.3/6)

The time of menstrual cycle where there is manifestation (*Drishta*) of *Artava* is called *Ritukala* or *Drishta Artavakala*. This *Ritukala* is composed of total 12 days. *Dalhana* further comments on the same that 'Among the sixteen days, except the first three days and the 16<sup>th</sup> day, the remaining 12 days are the *Drishta Artavakala* or *Ritu Kala*.<sup>[5]</sup> The *Yoni Sankochakala* (period of constriction of uterus) occurs after *Ritukala* and is similar to the contraction of a bloomed lotus after particular time period.<sup>[6]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The *Ritu* literally means the season. *Artava* is the other word synonymous to season. The season is never constant but undergoes a variety of changes to form a cycle of events in a year. The menstrual blood in Ayurveda is given name *Artava* as the ovum or uterine environment also undergoes changes to form a cycle of events that are constant in a month.

The duration of menstrual cycle as per Ayurveda is mentioned as three days in a month. In the description of process of *Garbha Abhinivrutti* (formation of zygote), *Charaka* says *Ritumati* is the time in woman where there is *Nava Raja* (formation of new ovarian cycle) and absence of *Purana Raja* (by shedding off the endometrial thickness in the form of menstrual flow).<sup>[7]</sup> Only *Ritumati* should involve in sexual act for the successful conception. This implies that the *Garbhashaya* (uterus) will undergo continuous changes in a month with *Purana* and *Gata Rajah* (old and newly formed blood).

Thus the following implications are obtained.

- *Garbhashaya* (uterus) undergoes cyclical events inside
- These events are same in every month
- They follow the events in a particular order
- The changes that occur at particular time period inside the uterus are important for the study of menstrual cycle.

The word *Artava* can be ovum or menstrual blood or both while referred as per the context. There are different contexts where in the words infer the meaning as ovum. For example in the context of *Garbhotpatti* by *Charaka* in *Sharirasthana*, it is said that the *Shukra* enters the *Garbhashaya* and combines with *Artava*.<sup>[8]</sup> The *Artava* here can be interpreted as ovum only. Another context where the *Artava* is referred for ovulatory phase is the *Uttarabastidanakala* in *Stree* is during her *Artavakala* since there will not be menstrual flow hindering the entry of administered *Uttara Basti*.<sup>[9]</sup>

The *Drishta Artava* means the *Artava* that is manifested or formed or occurred. Manifestation or occurrence of events in ovary and in endometrium contributive to fertilization is *Drishta Artava*. Some authors opine that there exists *Adrishta* (unmanifested or unseen) *Artava* too. But this view rejected by *Sushruta* himself stating the *Adrushtaartava* does not exist.<sup>[10]</sup> Hence by the explanation it is understood that *Drishtaartavakala* is the time period of changes in ovum till occurrence of ovulation.

The *Drishtaartavakala* or *Ritukala* are one and the same. The *Drishtaartavakala* is important time period in menstrual cycle as fertilization is successful only during this period. Hence it is the most fertile period of menstrual cycle.

The *Drushtaartavakala* is of 12 days. The twelve days are counted by keeping the first 16 days of menstrual cycle leaving aside the first three days of menstrual flow and 16<sup>th</sup> day of beginning of *Yoni Sankochanakala*. By inference the *Yoni Sankochankala* is understood as 14 days (subtracting 16 days from 30 days of cycle).<sup>[11]</sup>

**Table 1: Days, duration and events of menstrual cycle as per Ayurveda**

Days of menstrual cycle	Duration	Event name as per Ayurveda
Day 1 to day 3	Three days	<i>Artavasravakala</i>
Day 4 to day 15	Twelve days	<i>Ritukala</i> (also called <i>Drushtaartavakala</i> )
Day 16 <sup>th</sup> till next menses	Fourteen days	<i>Yoni Sanckochakala</i>

The description of 12 day duration of *Ritukala* and its composition is in accordance with the recent study done on the determination on 'fertile window' in reproductive woman which finds that the women with regular 28 day cycles are mostly likely to be potentially fertile on days 8-15 of their menstrual cycle.<sup>[12]</sup>

The two phases of menstrual cycle (follicular and luteal phase) consists of menstrual, regenerative, proliferative and secretory changes in endometrium.

The Regeneration of the endometrium starts even before the menstruation ceases and is completed 2-3 days after the end of menstruation. The stage of proliferation extends from 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> day to 14<sup>th</sup> day (till ovulation). Secretory phase begins on day 15 and ceases 5-6 days prior to menstruation. Menstrual phase is essentially degeneration and casting off an endometrium prepared for a pregnancy.<sup>[13]</sup>

The two phases of menstrual cycle as per contemporary science are strikingly correlated keeping the above description as follows.

**Table 2: Phases of menstrual cycle with Ayurveda correlation**

Two phases	Sub-phases	Days and duration	Ayurveda correlation
Follicular/ proliferative	Regenerative phase	Starts before menses  Completed after 2 to 3 days	<i>Yoni Sankochana</i> to <i>Artavasrava</i>

		of menstruation	
	Proliferative	5 <sup>th</sup> or 6 <sup>th</sup> day till ovulation	<i>Drishartaartavakala</i> ( <i>Ritukala</i> )
Secretary/ menstrual	Secretary	From 15 <sup>th</sup> to 5 to 6 days before menses	<i>Yoni Sankochanakala</i>
	Menstrual	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> day	<i>Artavasrava</i>

## CONCLUSION

The phases of menstrual cycle with their day and duration correlates to Ayurveda description of *Artavapravrittikala*. The menstrual, regenerative, proliferative and secretory phases of endometrium and ovulation corresponds to *Artavasrava*, *Drishartaartava* (*Ritukala*) and *Yonisankochanakala* in Ayurveda with the events occurring inside uterus and ovary being similar in description to contemporary science.

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