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A critical review on Dysmenorrhea with reference to *Kashtartava* and its Ayurvedic management

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ABSTRACT

Due to today's sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise, dysmenorrhoea is becoming today's burning problem. In present-day life, women are effectively facing challenges encountered by stressful life resulting in *Mithyaahara* and *Vihara*, over exertion and malnutrition, this may direct to *Vikruti* in "*Rituchakra*" leading to various *Vyadhi* allied to menstruation. *Ayurveda* recommends *Ritucharya* and *Dinacharya*, diet modulation and *Yoga* in the form of *Asanas*, *Pranayam* and meditation on a regular basis so as to alleviate dysmenorrhoea effectively. Similarly, *Uttarbasti*, *Garbhashaya Balya Aushadhi*, *Anuvasana* or *Matrabasti* can also be administered if necessary. Today stress is becoming an inescapable part of modern life. In the incessant quest for material comforts, a woman has been losing her health. The basic reason why women are reeling under myriad problems is because she has not been following the codes of healthy living. She has disregarded the codes for the bodily health as well as healthy mind also. Menstruation is a natural event as a part of the normal process of reproductive life in females. This causes discomfort for women's daily ensuing day to day activities and may result in missing work or school, inability to participate in sports or other activities. In the treatment of dysmenorrhea, no addictive, analgesic, antispasmodics are prescribed which are not good for health for longer use. In *Ayurvedic* classics *Kashtartava* (dysmenorrhoea) is not described as a separate disease because women were not suffering much from this problem in that era because of pin pointed *Ritucharya* and *Rajasvalacharya*. According to *Ayurvedic* text, there are many other diseases in which *Kashtartava* is considered and is described as a symptom. Hence, this study is particular about the description regarding *Kashtartava* on the basis of scattered classical references.

Key words: *Apatyamarga*, *Artava*, *Baddhartava*, *Kashtartava*, *Dysmenorrhoea*.

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurvedic* classics *Kashtartava* (dysmenorrhoea) is not described as a separate disease. The term dysmenorrhea refers to painful menstruation.

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Dysmenorrhea is a cramp labour-like pain in the lower abdomen. According to *Ayurvedic* text, there are many other diseases in which *Kashtartava* is considered and is described as a symptom. Menstruation is a natural event as a part of the normal process of reproductive life in females. Due to today's sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise, dysmenorrhoea is becoming today's burning problem throughout the world which causes discomfort for women's daily ensuing day to day activities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Artava: A substance of the body which flows out at the specific period of time is called as *Artava*. A substance which flows out from *Apatyamarga* without pain, burning and sliminess is known as *Artava*. *Apana Vayu* and *Vyana Vayu* are mainly responsible for *Artava Utpatti*.

Kashtartava: Kashtartava (dysmenorrhea) is not separately described as a disease. But there are many diseases in which Kashtartava is considered and described as a symptom.

Nirukti: The term Kashtartava is made of two words - Kashta and Artava.

Kashta: Painful, difficult, troublesome, ill, forced, wrong, unnatural, a bad state of thing.

Artava: Belonging to reasons, period of time, menstruation.

Thus, the word Kashtartava can be expressed as- "Kashthana Muchyati Iti Kashtartava" i.e., the condition where Artava is shaded with great difficulty and pain is termed as "Kashtartava".

Samprapti Ghataka

- Dosha - Vata Pradhana Tridosha
- Vata - Vyana, Apana
- Pitta - Ranjaka, Pachaka
- Kapha as Anubandhita Dosha
- Dhatu - Rasa, Rakta, Artava
- Upadhatu - Artava
- Agni - Jatharagni, Rasagni, Raktagni
- Srotasa - Rasa, Rakta and Artavavaha Srotasa
- Srotodushti - Sanga and Vimargagamana
- Rogamarga - Abyantara
- Sthana Samshraya - Garbhashaya
- Vyakti Sthana - Garbhashaya

Ayurvedic concept of pain related to Kashtartava

Acharya Charaka has mentioned none of the gynaecological disease can be arise without affliction of aggravated Vata. Vata is the main responsible factor, though other Doshas only be present as Anubandhi to it. So, pain is produced due to vitiation of only Vata Dosha or in combination with other Doshas.

MODERN REVIEW

Definition of Menstruation

Menstruation is a function peculiar to women and the higher apes. It may be defined as a "periodic and cyclic shedding of pregestational endometrium accompanied by loss of blood". It takes place at approximately 28 days interval between the menarche and menopause. Menstruation is the visible manifestation of cyclic physiologic uterine bleeding due to shedding of the endometrium following invisible interplay of hormones mainly through hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian endometrial axis.

Definition of Dysmenorrhoea

The term dysmenorrhoea refers to painful menstruation. Dysmenorrhoea is a cramp labour-like pain in the lower abdomen that radiates to upper abdomen, waist and thighs and is sometimes accompanied by systemic symptoms like nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache and dizziness.

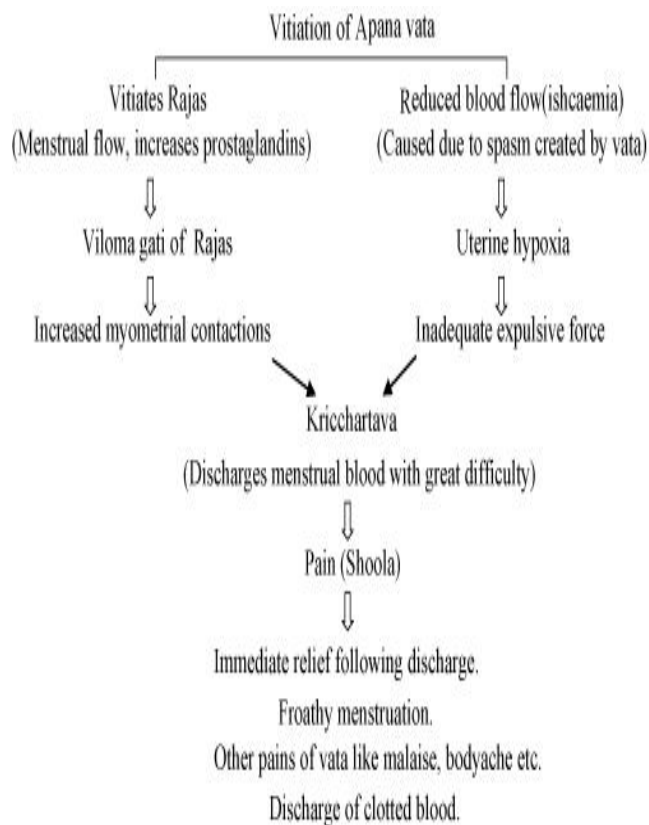
Mechanism of pain production

1. The Obstructive theory: This theory is that there is obstruction to the outflow of blood by the acute bend in the uterus at the internal os, by stenosis of the internal os, aggravated by premenstrual congestion, and that the retained blood then sets up irregular, spasmodic and painful contractions occurs. As per Ayurveda this obstruction is caused due to Vata.
2. The Hypoplasia theory: The uterus as remained in the prepubertal state, with a small corpus, relatively long cervix and under developed muscles which is unable to expel the menstrual blood. The retained blood sets up painful contractions (due to Alpa Mamsa Dathu).
3. Disturbed Polarity of uterus: If the uterine polarity is disturbed menstrual blood is retained in the uterus and sets up painful contractions (due to Apana Vata which causes Vilomagati of Rajah).
4. Clotting of the menstrual blood: According to this view dysmenorrhoea may be caused by clotting

the menstrual blood (*Baddha Artava*), the clots being then difficult to expel (due to *Kapha*).

5. Degenerative changes in the nerves supplying the uterus (due to *Vyana Vata*).
6. The muscle ischemia theory: It is suggested that the pain is due to ischemia of the uterine muscle during exaggerated uterine contractions (due to *Vata*).
7. Increased prostaglandins, endoperoxides and metabolite.
8. Excessive decidual formation (due to *Kapha*).
9. Uterine mal-formation (*Beeja Dosha*).
10. Corpus luteum - if there is no corpus luteum no dysmenorrhoea, as is illustrated by the painless bleeding of anovular menstruation.
11. Low pain threshold, General ill health (*Alpa Sara*).
12. Psychological factors (*Manasika Karanas*).
13. Environmental factors causing nervous tension (*Viharaja*).

Aetiopathogenesis



Types of Dysmenorrhea

A) Primary Dysmenorrhea

Primary dysmenorrhoea is the pain associated to ovulation cycles, without demonstrable lesions that affect the reproductive organs. Primary dysmenorrhea is related to myometrial contractions induced by prostaglandins originating in secretory endometrium, which result in uterine ischemia and pain. In addition to the physiologic perspective, various psychologic theories have also been proposed, emphasizing the role of personality factors and attitudes about menstruation.

B) Secondary Dysmenorrhea

Secondary dysmenorrhoea is the pain associated with ovulatory cycles caused by a demonstrable pathology.

Differential diagnosis

The most important differential diagnosis of primary dysmenorrhoea is secondary dysmenorrhoea.

Secondary Dysmenorrhea

1. Endometriosis
2. Adenomyosis
3. Uterine myoma
4. Endometrial polyps
5. Obstructive malformations of the genital tract

Other causes of pain

- Chronic pelvic inflammatory disease
- Pelvic adhesions
- Irritable bowel syndrome inflammatory bowel disease
- Interstitial cystitis

Sudden onset of Dysmenorrhea

- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Unrecognized ectopic pregnancy
- Spontaneous abortion

Treatment concept according to Ayurvedic principles

These disorders (gynaecological disorders) do not occur without vitiation of *Vata*, thus first of all *Vata* should be normalized, and only then treatment for other *Doshas* should be done. In all these gynaecological disorders, after proper oleation and sudation, emesis etc. all five purifying measures should be used. Only after proper cleansing of *Doshas* through upper and lower passages with *Vamana* and *Virechan Karma*, other medicines should be given. Cleansing measures cure gynaecologic disorders in the same way as they cure the diseases of other systems. In menstrual disorders caused by *Vata Dosh*, the specific treatment prescribed for suppressing that particular *Dosha* should be used. Recipes prescribed for *Yoni Rogas* and *Uttarbasti* etc. should also be used after giving due consideration to the vitiated *Dosha*. The drug should have properties like unctuous, hot, sour and salty should be used for the relief from menstrual disorders due to *Vata*. Sweet, cold and astringent substances for the purification of *Pitta* and hot, dry and astringent for *Kapha* could be the choice. For *Avrita Apana Vayu*, treatment should be *Agnideepana*, *Grahi*, *Vata*, *Anulomana* and *Pakvashaya Shuddhikara*.

Life-style modification

- Exercise regularly-minimum thrice a week for minimum 30-45 minutes.
- Ensure sound sleep of at least 6-8 hours daily.
- Avoid smoking and alcohol Reduce caffeine

Diet

- Eat healthy, warm and fresh foods
- Eat 5-6 small meals
- Have fresh fruits like plums, dark grapes, apples, pomegranates.
- Eat more leafy vegetables
- Regularly use ginger in food preparations
- Avoid high fat and sugar
- Take supplements like calcium, magnesium, vitamin E, B6, B12.

Yoga

Yoga activities can help to reduce and prevent the severity of many ailments that specifically women's health and give strength, stability, and suppleness. *Yoga Asanas* are considered as the most convenient, drugless, and inexpensive method. *Yoga* is also found to have encouraging effect on increasing the pain threshold capacity in individuals. In *Yoga*, various types of *Asanas* have been mentioned. Among them *Ushtrasana*, *Bhadrasana*, *Gomukhasana*, and *Vajrasana* have a pain relieving effect.

Ayurvedic Treatment

According to *Ayurveda*, menstruation is guarded by *Vata Dosh*. Derangement or aggravation of *Vata Dosh* gives rise to this symptom. The treatment, which alleviates *Vata*, gives excellent results in this disease. *Panchakarma* treatments like *Uttarbasti*, *Anuvasana* or *Matrabasti* are the treatments which will specifically target derangement of *Vata* in menstrual problems. *Garbhashaya Balya Aushadhi* will also reduce associated symptoms.

Specific treatment

- *Snehana Karma* (oleation) with *Trivrita Sneha*.
- *Swedana Karma* (hot fomentation).
- Oral use of *Dashmoola Ksheera*.
- *Vasti* (enema) with *Dashmoola Ksheera*.
- *Anuvasana Vasti* (oil enema), *Uttaravasti* (intra uterine oil instillation) with *Traivritasneha*.
- Poultice made of pasted Barley, wheat, *Kinva*, *Kusta*, *Shatapushpa*, *Priyangu*, and *Bala*.
- Intake of *Sneha* in oral form.
- *Swedana* with milk.
- *Snehana* in the form of *Anuvasana Vasti* and *Uttaravasti*.
- Other measures which are capable of suppressing the *Vata*. *Rajah Pravartini Vati*, *Kaseesadi Vati*, *Dashmoola Taila*, *Trivrit Taila* for *Uttaravasti*.

DISCUSSION

Culturally, the abbreviation Primary Dysmenorrhea is widely understood in the world to refer to difficulties associated with menses, and the abbreviation is used frequently even in casual and conversational settings, without regard to medical rigor. In these contexts, the syndrome is rarely referred to without abbreviation, and the intensions of the reference are frequently broader than the clinical definition. *Vata* is responsible for all *Yoni Rogas* especially of *Udaavartini*. In *Ayurveda* various treatment modalities are mentioned for the treatment of *Vata Rogas*. Among them *Vasti* is the better treatment modality for *Vata*. *Vasti* is of two types based on the drug taken. *Niruha* or *Kashaya Vasti* in which decoction is taken, *Anuvasana* or *Sneha Vasti* in which oil is taken as main drug. *Matra Vasti* is a sub-type of *Anuvasana Vasti*.

Probable mode of action of *Matravasti*

Vasti is the best treatment for Dysmenorrhoea. *Matravasti* has both local and systemic effects. It causes *Vatanulomana* thereby normalizing *Apana Vata*. Gut is a sensory organ consisting of neural, immune and sensory detectors and cells, and provides direct input to local (intra mural) regulatory systems and information that passes to CNS or other organs. *Vasti* may stimulate the enteric nervous system and thus it can influence CNS and all bodily organs. *Vasti* may act on the neurohumoral system of body by stimulating CNS through ENS. It thereby restores the physiology at molecular level. It can also act on the inflammatory substances like prostaglandins and vasopressin etc. *Vasti* may also help to excrete increased prostaglandins. Visceral afferent stimulation may result in activation of the Hypothalamo-pituitary adrenal axis and Autonomous nervous system, involving the release of neurotransmitters like serotonin and hormones. Thus, it normalizes the neurotransmitters, hormonal and neural pathways and relieves all the symptom complex emerged as a result of neurohormonal imbalances in the patients of dysmenorrhoea. Spasm caused by vitiated *Apanavayu* causing obstruction to the flow of menstrual blood is

the general underlying pathology. *Taila* enters into the *Srotas* and removes the *Sankocha* (spasm) by virtue of its *Sookshma*, *Vyavayi* and *Vikasi* i.e., fast spreading nature.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda views in Primary Dysmenorrhea as a *Doshic* imbalance that can potentially be impacted through balanced living and appropriate diet, herbal supplements, exercise, routine, *Yoga*, meditation, as well as nourishing inputs through all five senses. Ayurveda being a holistic medicine offers potential remedies which are proved beyond doubt in solving the problem in gynaecological disorders successfully.

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