

International Journal of Research in Indian Medicine

Significance of *Swasthavritta* in females with regards to various life stages.

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Abstract-

The classics of Ayurveda provide us with a crisp account of its excellence in all walks of life. The objective of Ayurveda is ‘Sustenance of Health & Curing of Diseases’. All these aspects are specially described under the branch of ‘*Swasthavritta*’. Female-specific physiology includes three major phases, viz., menstruation (*Rajahkala*), pregnancy (*Sagarbhavastha*) and the puerperium (*Sootika Avastha*). Although these are physiological milestones, they contain a great danger of contracting various diseases. Ayurveda, especially the philosophy of ‘*Swasthavritta*’ requires following a specific code of conduct pertaining to diet and lifestyle even in these phases. It is denoted as ‘*Paricharya*’. Thus, we decided to carry out a present review in order to provide a compiled information of female-specific *Swasthavritta* regimes, viz., *Rajaswala Paricharya* (Code of conduct for menstruating women), *Garbhini Paricharya* (Code of conduct for pregnant women) and *Sootika Paricharya* (Code of

conduct for puerperal women). In such places where the healthcare approach is limited, educating the masses regarding these female-specific *Swasthavritta* protocols can be helpful.

Keywords- *Paricharya, Garbhini, Sootika, Rajaswala, Menstruation, Female Health*

Introduction-

The word ‘Ayurveda’ literally means ‘Science of Life’. In this way, Ayurveda is much more than just a medicine system. In fact, it has been a part of Indian lifestyle consciously and otherwise. With its own philosophy and principles, Ayurveda can totally guide us in living a healthy and happy life. The classics of Ayurveda provide us a crisp account of its excellence in all walks of life.

The objective of Ayurveda is ‘Sustenance of Health & Curing of Diseases’.¹ Thus, tenets of Ayurveda need to be inculcated in lifestyle of not only diseased but, healthy persons too!

Basically, it teaches us how to take care of oneself, as a preventive healthcare system. All these aspects are especially described under the branch of 'Swasthavritta'. Various guidelines in *Swasthavritta* such as *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya* and *Sadvritta* are commonly applicable to all the people irrespective of their sex.

According to Ayurveda, women are most precious owing of their crucial role in continuing the progeny line. It has been described that; the female genital system acts like a fertile field (*Kshetra*) for nurturing the *Garbha* (foetus).² Thus, it is necessary to keep it healthy and disease free. Female specific physiology includes three major phases, viz., menstruation (*Rajahkala*), pregnancy (*Sagarbhavastha*) and puerperium (*Sootika Avastha*). Although these are physiological milestones, they contain great danger of contracting various diseases. The ailments occurring during these phases are able to hamper reproduction as well as whole body health. Today's demanding and busy lifestyle compels women to ignore special requirements of these phases and facing serious consequences for it.

Ayurveda, especially philosophy of 'Swasthavritta' requires to follow specific code of conduct pertaining to diet and lifestyle even in these phases. It is denoted as 'Paricharya'. Traditionally, these dictates were passed on from generation to generation. However, emergence of nuclear families has caused a hindrance in this knowledge flow.

Table no. 1- *Rajaswala Paricharya*^{3,4,5}

Thus, we decided to carry out present review in order to provide a compiled information of female specific *Swasthavritta* regimes, viz., *Rajaswala Paricharya* (Code of conduct for menstruating women), *Garbhini Paricharya* (Code of conduct for pregnant women) and *Sootika Paricharya* (Code of conduct for puerperal women).

Materials & Methods-

The study was carried out by careful searching through the references in major Ayurveda texts, such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, Ashtanga Sangraha, Kashyapa Samhita and Bhava Prakash. For correlation, modern science references were searched in textbooks and published articles, wherever necessary.

Observations & Results-

Ayurveda advocates regular performance of certain wholesome deeds or customs under the headings of 'Charya', such as *Dinacharya* and *Rutucharya*. However, there are also references for female specific codes owing their unique life phases. These codes are called as 'Paricharya'. Here, there are dos and don'ts that are to be followed not just by the concerned woman, but those accompanying her too. In the present review *Paricharya* to be followed by and for 'Rajaswala', 'Garbhini' and 'Sootika' are described in tabular form.

A. *Rajaswala Paricharya-*

This regimen should be followed for first four days of menstruation. (Table no. 1)

Conduct	Dos	Don'ts
Diet (<i>Ahara</i>)	<i>Havishya</i> (meal made up of ghee, <i>Shali</i> rice and milk) and <i>Yavaka</i> (meal made up of barley and milk) in utensils made from clay and leaves	<i>Teekshna</i> , <i>Katu</i> and salty diet, excessive eating
Lifestyle (<i>Vihara</i>)	Thinking about good and auspicious things, sleeping on a ' <i>Darbha</i> ' bedding, Observing <i>Brahmacharya</i>	Day-sleep, Coitus, Applying <i>Anjana</i> , Crying, <i>Abhyanga</i> , Excessive talking, Exercise
Miscellaneous	Wearing clean, white clothes	Ornaments, adornments,

B. *Garbhini Paricharya*-

This regimen should be followed right from conception till childbirth. (Table no. 2)

Table no. 2- *Garbhini Paricharya*^{6,7,8,9}

Conduct	Dos	Don'ts
Diet (<i>Ahara</i>)	Cooked <i>Shali</i> rice, Ghee, milk, Specific month-wise diet (<i>Masanumasika Pathya</i>)	Spicy, <i>Katu-Teekshna</i> diet, <i>Vishtambhi</i> diet
Lifestyle (<i>Vihara</i>)	Proper rest, hygiene, Active lifestyle, Positive and happy attitude, comfortable surroundings	<i>Garbopaghatakara Bhava</i> (Activities harmful to foetus), such as, heavy exercises, coitus, harsh or violent activities, sleeping in day and awakening in night, sitting in uneven places visiting lonely places, fasting, grief, anger etc.
Miscellaneous	Usage of <i>Garbhashthapak Dravya</i> such as, <i>Brahmi</i> , <i>Shatavari</i> etc.	Riding on vehicles on uneven path

C. *Sootika Paricharya*-

The puerperal period (*Sootika Avastha*) is considered to commence just after the expulsion of the placenta till onset of the next menstruation.¹⁰ This period is

3- *Sootika Paricharya*^{13,14,15}

generally of six weeks up to 4-6 months.^{11,12} The regimen to be followed in this time period is described as '*Sootika Paricharya*. (Table 3)

Table

Conduct	Dos	Don'ts
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Diet (<i>Ahara</i>)	Sneha tempered with <i>Panchakola</i> , <i>Manda</i> of <i>Shali</i> rice, <i>Laghu Panchamoola Kwatha</i>	<i>Laghu</i> , <i>Sheeta</i> diet
Lifestyle (<i>Vihara</i>)	Proper rest, <i>Abhyanga</i> , <i>Parisheka</i> , <i>Yoni Dhoopana</i>	Exercise, Anger, Mental & Physical stress
Miscellaneous	<i>Udarabandhana</i> (Abdominal belt)	<i>Niruha</i> , <i>Nasya</i> , <i>Virechana</i> etc.

Discussion

The *Paricharya* mentioned for *Rajaswala*, *Garbhini* and *Sootika* denote some common aspects and some condition-specific guidelines. For instance, consideration of delicateness (*Sukumara*) of women is a common entity. Also, much importance is given to maintaining equilibrium of *Vata Dosha*, especially *Apana Vayu*. It is due to female reproductive system being under influence of *Vata Dosha*. Thus, most of these measures can be related to management of *Vata Dosha*.

Rajaswala Avastha is first major milestone in female-specific physiology. However, there is natural *Bala Hani* due to blood loss. The main diet and lifestyle mentioned here of *Balya*, *Bruhmaneeya*, *Rasayana* properties. At the same time, care is to be taken to avoid vitiated of already diminished *Agni* by avoiding heavy diet. The *Paricharya* aims in formation of good quality *Rasa Dhatu*, as *Raja/Artava* are derived from it.

Garbhini Avastha is crucial not only for the mother but for her foetus too! A pregnant woman shall be treated with special care just like a pot filled with oil. The slightest swaying of such a pot will cause spilling of the oil. Similarly, the slightest aversions by the pregnant

woman can cause adverse pregnancy outcomes.¹⁶ The diet of a pregnant woman helps in her own nourishment and nourishment of foetus. The requirements also change as per monthly growth of the foetus. At the same time, her *Agni* needs to be protected. The diet regimes are planned considering all of these aspects. Her psychological condition can also affect growth and nourishment of foetus. Thus, many regulations regarding lifestyle are also noted.

Once the childbirth occurs, the woman's body is totally weak due to stress and blood loss. Also, she is more prone to vitiation of *Vata* due to sudden emptying of uterus. There is also responsibility to provide good quality nourishment to new born baby in form of '*Stanya*'. The *Sootika Paricharya* is designed considering all these aspects. Most Acharya advice its duration till body regains its pre-pregnancy physiology, i.e., onset of menstruation. Till then, following this *Paricharya* helps in maintaining and nourishing the body and prevents many dreaded complications.

Currently, preservation of mother and child life is main concern for many developing countries. Although advent of antibiotics, aseptic precautions, surgical

advances etc. have considerably reduced this issue, it still persists.

In such places where healthcare approach is limited, educating masses regarding these female specific *Swasthavritta* protocols can be helpful. As already mentioned, many aspects mentioned here are culturally and socially acceptable in India. Thus, there are good chances of people's acceptance towards it. This can be a great contribution towards, 'Healthy Woman-Healthy Generation' concept.

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Conflict of Interest: Non

Source of funding: Nil

Cite this article:

"Significance of Swasthavritta in females with regards to various life stages."

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Ayurline: International Journal of Research In Indian Medicine 2022; 6(2):01-06