

The Ayurvedic Perspective on *Rajahswala Paricharya*: Guidelines for Menstrual Health and Reproductive Well- being

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ABSTRACT

The modern lifestyle, characterized by heightened physical and mental stress, along with unhealthy dietary habits, has significantly contributed to an increase in menstrual disorders. Conditions such as menorrhagia, dysmenorrhea, irregular menstrual cycles, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), and endometriosis are now more prevalent. These disorders not only impair the overall health and well-being of women but also play a critical role in rising infertility rates.

Ayurveda, the ancient system of holistic medicine, emphasizes the importance of adopting specific lifestyle practices to maintain health and prevent disease. Among these practices, *Rajahswala Paricharya* is a traditional regimen tailored to address the physiological and psychological changes that occur during menstruation. This regimen provides guidelines for diet, activity, and self-care, aiming to support hormonal balance, promote menstrual health, and prevent the development of gynecological conditions.

This review examines the principles and practices of *Rajahswala Paricharya*, highlighting its scientific relevance and potential benefits in maintaining menstrual health and hygiene in the context of modern lifestyles. By integrating such evidence-based Ayurvedic practices with contemporary medical understanding, women can achieve better menstrual health and overall well-being.

Keywords: *Rajahswala Paricharya*, menstrual health, *Ahara*, *Achara*, *Ayurveda*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the oldest system of medicine and the science of life. Its purpose is to protect the health of a healthy person and correct the disease of the patient. A woman is the mother of creation. *Ayurveda* describes *stree* as “*Stree hi mulam apatyanam, stree hi rakshati rakshita*” i.e., *stree* is the root cause of progeny, and they with their splendid physical and mental performance have made an outstanding

outlook and special place in society and therefore, utmost care should be given to protect her from any ailments that affect her motherhood.

During the menstrual phase, a woman is referred to as *Rajahswala*, and the guidelines followed during this time are collectively known as *Rajahswala Paricharya*. Menstruation is a natural

biological process that reflects fertility, characterized by the cyclical shedding of the endometrial lining in the absence of fertilization. Ayurvedic texts describe the menstrual cycle as *Ritu Chakra*, which is divided into three distinct phases, i.e. *Rajah kaal* or *Rajahswala kaal* (menstruation), *Ritu Kaal* (fertile period/proliferative phase including ovulation) and *Rituvyatita Kaal* (secretory phase/post-ovulation).¹

Each phase is associated with the predominance of specific *Doshas* (bio-energies):

- ***Rajah Kaal:*** Dominated by *Vata dosha*, particularly *Apana Vayu*, which governs the downward flow of *Artava* (menstrual blood) out of the body.²
- ***Ritu Kaal:*** Dominated by *Kapha dosha*, reflecting the *Saumya* (calm and nourishing) state of *Artava* during the replenishment and proliferation of the endometrium.³
- ***Rituvyatita Kaal:*** Dominated by *Pitta dosha*, as the *Artava* remaining in the uterus post-ovulation acquires *Agneya* (fiery) properties⁴. This aligns with the thermogenic effects of progesterone, which elevates basal body temperature during the secretory phase.

For optimal reproductive health and a regular menstrual cycle, it is essential to maintain the balance of these *Doshas*. Any imbalance can lead to menstrual and reproductive disorders. Among the three primary phases of a woman's life—*Bala* (childhood), *Rajahswala* (reproductive years), and *Vriddha* (post-menopausal phase)—the *Rajahswala* period is the most significant, as it represents the fertile phase critical for reproduction. The practices outlined in *Rajahswala Paricharya* are designed to help women adapt to the physiological changes occurring during menstruation, thereby promoting overall health and preventing diseases. This holistic approach underscores the importance of balancing the body's natural rhythms to support reproductive and general well-being.

Rationale for declining adherence:

While *Rajahswala Paricharya* was historically rooted in cultural, spiritual, and perhaps health considerations, its relevance has diminished in the face of evolving societal norms, scientific understanding, and individual empowerment. Some may still choose to follow parts of it as a matter of tradition or personal belief, but for most, the focus has shifted to more balanced and evidence-based approaches to menstrual health and well-being.

- Current generation women are now working hand in hand with men of the society. Efforts toward gender equality have reduced the acceptance of practices that segregate or restrict women based solely on menstruation. Such restrictions are increasingly seen as discriminatory.⁵
- The nuclear family system has added to her woes. Due to formation of nuclear families, aversion towards ancient rules and traditions and adoption of western ways of living, this knowledge has lost its way somewhere.⁶
- Urbanization and the fast-paced nature of modern life leave little room for following the strict guidelines of *Rajahswala Paricharya*, which often include restrictions on movement, diet, and activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The literature for this review was collected from Ayurvedic texts, modern medical literature, and peer-reviewed journals to evaluate the principles and practices of *Rajahswala Paricharya* in relation to menstrual health.

CONCEPT BEHIND RAJAHSWALA PARICHARYA

Rajahswala Paricharya includes guidelines related to diet (*Ahara*) and behavior (*Achara*) during menstruation. These guidelines, described in Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Astanga Hridaya*, aim to balance *doshas* and maintain overall health. (Table 1)

Dietary practices (*Ahara*)

- **Intake of *Havisya Anna*:** *Acharya Sushruta* advised *Havisya Anna* during menstrual cycle. The term *Havisya* is used for meal prepared with *Yava* or *Shali dhanya* with milk and ghee. *Yava* is *Kashaya*, *Madhu ra*, *Katu Vipaka*, *Sheeta Virya*, *Mridu*, *Guru*, *Rukshya*, *Pichhila guna*, *Lekhana*, *Medhya*, *Agnivardhak*, *Balakar*, *Bahuvata Malakar*⁷. As *Yava* does *Karshan* (reduces excessive fats, toxins or unwanted substances) and increases *Vata*, little of ghee and milk is used to make *Havisya anna*. *Havisya* in total is easy to digest and helps in *Agnideepan*. Also during menses a woman may experience cramping pain and systemic discomforts like nausea, vomiting, diarrhea etc. which may worsen by intake of oily and spicy food. Keeping this in mind, the *Acharyas* might have advised to take *Havisya anna* during *Rajahswala* period.

Table 1: Regimen described by the *Acharyas* are mentioned below

<i>Acharya Charak</i> (Ch. Sa. 8/5)	<i>Acharya Sushruta</i> (Su. Sa. 2/26-27)	<i>Acharya Vagbhata</i> (A.S & A.H) (A.Sa. 1/44), (A.H. 1/23)
Maintain <i>Brahamacharini</i> (observance of celibacy) for 3 days starting from the first day of menses	Should be <i>Brahamacharini</i> from first day and should stay separate from husband for 3 days	<i>Brahmachari palana</i>
Should sleep on ground	Sleep on bed made of <i>Darva (Kusha)</i> grass	Should sleep on <i>Darva</i>
Eat food in an unbroken utensil with hands	Should eat <i>Havishya</i> meal (Sattvik meal) on <i>karatala</i> (palm), earthen pot or leaf	Intake of <i>yavaka</i> with milk
Should take head bath on the 4th day and wear <i>Shuklavashtra</i>	Avoid sleeping in daytime, bathing, over talking, excessive exercise etc.	Should remain <i>kalyandhyayini</i> for 3 days
With happy mood, the man and woman should perform sexual intercourse on even days with desire of son and odd days if desire for daughter.	On 4 th day after bathing, woman wear new clothes, then sees her husband first of all after chanting religious hymes	Rest regimen as <i>Acharya Sushruta</i>

Acharya Vagbhata has described to take small amount of *Yavaka* with milk during

Rajahswala time as it causes emaciation of the body and purification of *kostha*.⁸

- **Eating on earthen plate:** During the *Rajahswala* period, the body experiences a relative depletion of *Raktadhatu* (blood tissue), necessitating an increased intake of essential micro and macronutrients to support physiological balance. Eating from earthen plates, made from nutrient-rich clay, offers specific health benefits as they are a rich source of minerals which

provide an additional nutritional support to menstruating women. Also, Clay utensils have inherent alkaline properties, which help neutralize acidic components in food. This interaction contributes to maintaining a balanced pH in the digestive system, promoting better gastrointestinal health.⁹

- **Avoidance of Spicy and Oily Foods:** Such foods can exacerbate discomfort and digestive disturbances during menstruation.

Behavioral practices (*Vihara*)

- ***Brahmacharya* (Abstinence):** *palana* During

menstruation, *acharyas* have strictly indicated to follow abstinence. During menstruation, the vaginal mucosal lining is thinner making her more susceptible to infections.¹⁰ Also vaginal sexual intercourse during menses can cause contraction and relaxation of reproductive tract, such that there will be more chances of retrograde menstruation, thus contributing the development of endometriosis.¹¹ All the *acharyas* have advised to follow celibacy for first 3 days of menses.

- **Sleeping on bed made of *Darva* (Halfa grass):** In Hindu mythology, *Darva* (Halfa grass) is considered auspicious and is believed to absorb negative energies. Scientifically, *Darva* possesses properties such as *Madhura* (sweet) and *Kashaya* (astringent) *Rasa*, *Laghu* (light) and *Snigdha* (unctuous) *Guna*, *Madhura Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), *Sheeta Virya* (cooling potency), and *Tridoshaghna*—particularly *Pittahara* and *Stambhaka* (hemostatic) effects¹². It has antimicrobial and *Pittahara* properties, providing a soothing effect and aiding in temperature regulation during menstruation.¹³ The *Charaka Samhita* (Siddhisthana) recommends *Darva*

with *Aja Rakta* (goat's blood) as *Rakta Basti* (blood enema) for bleeding disorders, indicating its potential anticoagulant properties.¹⁴ Similarly, resting on a bed made of *Darbha* during menstruation may help maintain smooth blood flow by reducing clot formation.

- ***Kalyanadhyayini* (Thinking about positive things):** It is important to stay positive during *Rajahkala* as stress often creates an irregular menstrual cycle. The influence of the brain in hormonal reactions occurs through H-P-O pathway, which includes multiple effects and feedback mechanisms. Under stress the amygdala present in the limbic systems gets activated releasing the Corticotrophic releasing hormone (CRH). Increased CRH stimulate the release of ACTH in the blood leading to rise of the blood cortisol levels. These hormones cause a decrease in GnRH levels, disrupting the normal menstrual cycle.¹⁵ Being *Kalyanadhyayini* by indulging in positive thinking prevents such disruption.

Contraindicated activities

Daytime Sleep (*Divaswapna*):

- Impact: Leads to increased *Kapha* dosha, which promotes the production of *Ama* (toxins).
- Effect on Health: Causes vitiation of the *Artavavaha Srotas* (channels related to menstruation), potentially leading to menstrual and reproductive issues.

2. Bathing (*Snana*):

- Cold Water: Has *Rakta Stambhaka* (blood-constricting) effects, possibly hindering menstrual blood flow.
- Head Bath: Disrupts hormonal balance by inducing *Vata* vitiation in the head (*Shiropadesh*), affecting the HPO-axis (hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis).¹⁶
- Hot Water: Aggravates *Pitta*, potentially increasing menstrual bleeding.

3. *Abhyanga* (Oleation Therapy):

- Contraindicated during menstruation due to the weakened digestive fire (*Jatharagni*) in this phase.
- Use of oils may lead to *Abhisiyanda* (blockages) and *Srotodushti* (channel obstruction), causing

disturbances in the *Artavavaha Srotas*.

4. Excessive Physical or Emotional Activity:

- Activities like running, exercise, talking, and crying can aggravate *Vata* during menstruation.
- Stress activates the HPA axis, leading to elevated cortisol and LH levels, disrupting ovulation and luteal phase functions.¹⁷

5. *Nasya Karma* (Nasal Therapy):

- *Acharya Vagbhata* has said that '*nasa hi siraso dwaram*' i.e, nose is the gateway to the brain. When drugs instilled through *nasya karma* goes to brain, it might disrupt the normal balance of the H-P-O axis hindering the normal flow of menses. Therefore, it is advised to avoid *nasya karma* during menses.
- *Acharya Kashyap* and *Vagbhata* recommend avoiding this practice during menstruation and treating related conditions with specific herbal preparations (e.g., milk treated with *Jivaniya* herbs).

Key Ayurvedic Principles:

- Menstruation involves a delicate balance of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*,

Kapha) and physiological processes.

- Practices during this time should aim to maintain harmony without aggravating any dosha or disrupting hormonal and reproductive health.

DISCUSSION

Out of the three main epochs of female life—*Bala*, *Rajahswala* and *Vriddha*, the *Rajahswala* is the largest and most important period in the lifetime of a woman as it is the fertile period necessary for reproduction. The *Rajahswala Paricharya* helps women to adapt well to the physiological changes taking place in the body during menstruation and thus prevent occurrence of diseases.

While some aspects of *Rajahswala Paricharya* may appear outdated, its core principles of stress reduction, balanced nutrition, and dosha regulation remain relevant. Modern approaches can integrate these practices with contemporary medical knowledge to address menstrual health effectively.

CONCLUSION

The principles of *Rajahswala Paricharya*, are significant in preventing menstrual disorders and alleviating associated symptoms when followed correctly. The primary aim of *Rajahswala Paricharya* is to prevent the accumulation of *Ama* (toxic metabolic byproducts) and to maintain the

balance of *Vata dosha*, particularly *Apana Vayu*—the sub *dosha* responsible for downward bodily functions, including menstruation. By adhering to these principles, *Rajahswala Paricharya* supports the body and mind through the physiological and emotional changes that occur during the menstrual cycle. It helps regulate hormonal fluctuations, manage stress, and promote overall physical well-being. In the long term, this practice prepares individuals for optimal reproductive health, contributing to the conception and nurturing of healthy offspring. Furthermore, it ensures the maintenance of overall health by fostering balance and stability in the body's systems during menstruation. By combining these traditional Ayurvedic insights with modern scientific approaches, *Rajahswala Paricharya* offers a comprehensive and holistic strategy for menstrual health management.

Conflict of interest- Nil

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