

Review Article

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CONCEPT OF *RITUMATI LAKSHANA*, *RITUMATICHARYA* AND *RITUKALA*; THEIR PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN FEMALE LIFE

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Abstract

The Ayurvedic terms of *Ritumati Lakshana*, *Ritumaticharya* and *Ritukala* define the time frame of a woman's fertility cycle, along with the distinguishing characteristics of this time, as well as what measures to take to preserve reproductive wellness during the fertility cycle. Ayurveda outlined various *Lakshanas* that describe the characteristics of a *Ritumati Stree*. These include a delicate, soft and attractive form (*Sukumara Anga*); healthy hair growth; moist, lubricated lips; pleasant, melodious voice; sweet-smelling, moist skin; and regular, painless flow of menstrual blood (*Raja Kshaya*) during the menstrual cycle. The characteristics of *Ritumati Lakshana* are the signs and symptoms women show throughout their menstrual cycle. *Ritumati Lakshana* creates the foundation for understanding the physiology of menstruation in Ayurveda. When combined with an understanding of *Deha Prakriti*, *Ritumati Lakshana* tells us a great deal about the characteristics of *Sharira* and *Swasthya*, including sexual behaviour, pregnancy, menstrual health and menarche. The *Ritu* (fertile period) is also viewed as one of the most important markers of a woman's overall health. Similarly the concept of *Ritumaticharya* describes the dietary and lifestyle regimen that should be followed during the menses to maintain reproductive health and restore balance within the body.

Key-Words: *Ritumati*, *Ritumaticharya*, *Ritukala*, *Streerog*, *Prasutitantra*

Introduction

The Ayurveda described various terms related to the reproductive health and life of female; *Ritumati Lakshana*, *Ritumaticharya* and *Ritukala* are amongst them. *Ritumati Lakshana* refers to the physiologic and psychologic changes occurring in a woman during her *Ritukala* (fertile phase). The features of *Ritumati Lakshana* signify healthy and normal function of the reproductive system. The physical characteristics of a *Ritumati Stree* include; *Sukumara anga*, soft, oily appearance of the body; shiny hair, moist lips and mouth; softness in trunk and body; slightly prominent breasts, thighs and buttocks, etc [1-3].

The idea of *Ritumaticharya* outlines the food and lifestyle practices that should be adhered to during menstruation in order to preserve reproductive health and reestablish bodily equilibrium. The goals of the *Ritumaticharya*, also known as *Garbhasambhava Vimana* to control the monthly menstrual cycle, preserve the body's hormonal equilibrium and reduce the prevalence of gynecological problems.

The term '*Ritukala*' describes the period of greatest fertility in the menstrual cycle. This period corresponds broadly with the physiological phases of follicular phase and ovulation described in conventional western medicine. *Ritukala* phase occurs approximately from the 4th day after menstruation through the 12th-16th day in healthy women, although it can vary depending upon the individual's *Prakriti* [2-5].

Considering the physiological importance of *Ritumati Lakshana*, *Ritumaticharya* and *Ritukala* in female life this article describes importance of these terms and related conditions associated with female reproductive system.

Ritumati Stree Lakshana

The ancient Ayurvedic physician provides an extensive description of *Ritumati Stree Lakshana* that the menstrual cycle causes women to experience predictable physiological and psychological changes, which are observable by medical professionals and used to assist in diagnosing and treating *Manyata*. Examples of the physiological manifestations include changes in body temperature, appetite and skin characteristics; as well as the psychological manifestations of changes in mood and irritability. These physical and psychological changes occur in women during the menstrual cycle to assist their fertility status and diagnosing disorders.

These physical changes include increased hunger, alterations in skin appearance, altered thermal states, emotional changes; mood swings and impatience. Ayurveda emphasized that one must understand the cyclical nature of women's reproductive health when managing their reproductive system and therefore recommends dietary adjustments and lifestyle changes for managing gynecological disorders. In terms of function, the *Ritumati Lakshanas* are similar in many ways to the physiological effects that estrogens have on the body and are the equivalent to the ovarian follicular or estrous phases documented in modern reproductive physiology [4-6].

During this period the features that indicate *Shuddha Artava Lakshana* are includes bleeding which occur on a clear monthly cycle around five days long each month without pain or burning sensation. The blood colour is described to be similar to *Gunjaphala*, *Padma* and *Laksharasa*. Normal menstrual blood is characterized as neither abundant nor excessively light, is not oily and does not stain clothing. Woman possesses a healthy *Yoni*, *Garbhashaya* and *Shonita*, has expelled out the old "*Purana Rajas*" and has new *Artava* that has formed and is in a state of pleasant radiance and healthiness.

Rutukala

Ayurveda divides the menstrual cycle (*Rituchakra*) into three primary stages as mentioned in **Figure 1**. As mentioned in figure, *Rutuvyatita Kala*, *Ritukala* and *Rajasrava Kala* correspond to the contemporary understanding of the follicular, ovulatory, and luteal phases, each associated with particular *Doshas* for either causing abnormalities or maintaining health. Amongst them *Ritukala* is very important for maintaining reproductive health of women.

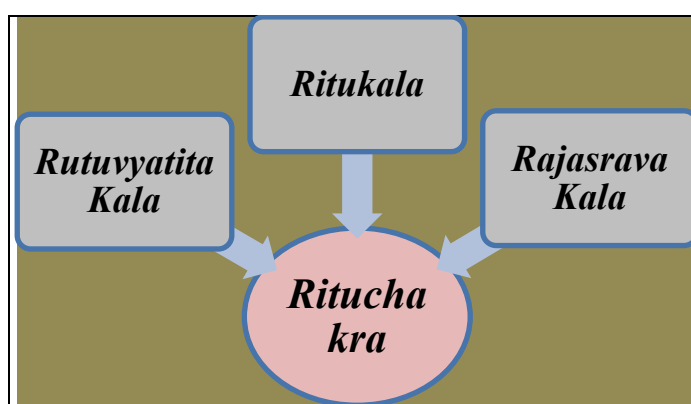


Figure 1: Various stages of *Rituchakra*

Ritu, in Ayurveda refers to the phase in the woman's menstrual cycle in which the woman is most likely to become pregnant. This phase occurs at ovulation when the female reproductive system is prepared for conception with optimum levels of egg release. *Ritukala* is specifically defined as the fertile phase in a woman's menstrual cycle. According to the Ayurvedic texts, the duration of *Ritukala* is 12 or 16 days; however, the day of menstruation is excluded from this definition, whereas the last day of the *Ritukala* is excluded due to complications arising from *Yoni Sankocha*. Therefore, the effective *Ritukala* is determined to be the 12 days when a woman can get pregnant, as it is believed that a woman may only conceive during this effective period of time during her menstrual cycle [5-7].

Rutukala is considered the best time to conceive and is when the deposition of the *Beeja* (sperm) is believed to provide sufficient conditions to enable conception, as it coincides with the time of ovulation. The specific duration of the *Rutukala* may vary depending on a woman's particular "*Varna*". *Rutukala* is analogous to a lotus flower in that after *Rutukala* ends the *Yoni* becomes narrow or constricted and, as a result, the *Shukra* may be unable to enter the uterus, thereby greatly decreasing the chances of conceiving. *Rutuvyatitakala* is the period of time between the conclusions of one *Rutukala* until the commencement of the next *Rajasrava Kala* [6-8].

Ritumaticharya

The general principles of *Ritumaticharya* include rest, avoidance of intense physical activity and mental stressors, abstinence from procedures including *Abhyanga*, napping and sexual intercourse for at least 3 days of menstruation. Furthermore, the attainment of emotional stability and maintaining a regular routine are vital to prevent the aggravation of *Vata Dosha*.

Health guidelines (*Pathya*) as *Ritumaticharya* for the *Rajaswala* are as follows:

- ✓ To respect the *Brahmacharya* vows.
- ✓ To eat food with hands alone (never with metals).
- ✓ To sleep on a mat made from *Darbha* grass.
- ✓ To eat light nourishing foods such as ghee, rice, barley and milk.

Apathya (harmful practices) includes limiting *Vata*, bathing during the day, falling asleep at noon or daytime naps, application of anointing oils to the body, masses as well as cutting nails, talking too much or hearing too much, exposure to wind, over-exertion, eating spicy, salty or irritating foods and excessive emotional aggression, etc.

According to *Ritumati Charya* guidelines woman should eat nourishing, light and *Satvika* foods. She should not eat anything that is extremely sour, dry or heavy, and she should have a lifestyle that allows her to, among other things, rest enough, be mentally relaxed, avoid stress, avoid too much physical work, and not awaken at night. Personal hygiene and being positive with thinking will help to maintain *Vata dosha* balance and hold ideal conditions for *Garbha Dharana* or conception [8-10].

Conclusion

Ritumaticharya offer a complete Ayurvedic system for understanding women's cyclical physiology in regard to reproduction and reproduction related health. The classical texts describe the menstrual cycle as a unique experience, with physical and psychological characteristics that differ from other phases of a woman's cycle and indicative of optimal hormone and systemic balance during the menstrual phase. The practice of *Ritumaticharya* necessitates the disciplined observance of dietary, lifestyle, and physical practices around the time of menstruation to preserve *Dosha* balance, and therefore reduce the risk of developing gynecological disorders. *Ritukala* indicates the best time for conception, when the deposition of the *Beeja* is believed to provide sufficient conditions to enable conception, as it coincides with the time of ovulation. Consideration of these Ayurvedic terms and understanding of these concepts definitely helps one to remain healthy and avoiding gynecological disorders.

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