



Review Article

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MATRIJA BHAVA: AN AYURVEDIC INSIGHT INTO MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON FETAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Ayurveda provides a profound and holistic understanding of fetal development through the framework of *Shadgarbhakara Bhava*, among which *Matrija Bhava* holds a central role in determining the structural and functional integrity of the fetus. It is primarily responsible for the formation of *Mridu Avayava* (soft tissues) and ensures continuous nourishment and intrauterine support. This analytical review critically examines classical Ayurvedic descriptions of *Matrija Bhava* and correlates them with contemporary biomedical concepts such as fetal programming and epigenetics. The review highlights the influence of maternal nutrition, psychological status, lifestyle, and environmental exposures on fetal growth and development. It further elaborates on preventive and promotive measures described in Ayurveda, including *Garbhadhana Vidhi* and *Garbhini Paricharya*, for achieving *Supraja* (healthy progeny). Integrating classical Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific understanding offers valuable insights into prenatal care and long-term health outcomes.

Keywords: *Matrija Bhava*, *Garbha Sharir*, Maternal Factors, Epigenetics, Fetal Programming, Ayurveda

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, presents a comprehensive and multidimensional concept of embryogenesis (*Garbha Nirman*), wherein the development of the fetus is dependent on several fundamental factors. These include *Ritu* (appropriate timing), *Kshetra* (healthy uterine environment), *Ambu* (adequate nutrition), and *Beeja* (quality of gametes)¹. These four factors form the basic prerequisites for conception and healthy fetal development. Further elaboration of fetal development is provided through the concept of *Shadgarbhakara Bhava*, which comprises six essential contributing factors: *Matrija* (maternal), *Pitrija* (paternal), *Rasaja* (nutritional), *Satmyaja* (adaptation), *Satvaja* (psychological), and *Atmaja* (soul)². Each of these plays a distinct yet interconnected role in shaping the fetus.

Among these, *Matrija Bhava* is of paramount importance as it represents the maternal contribution that governs not only the structural formation of the fetus but also its functional development. It encompasses maternal nutrition, physiological status, psychological well-being, and environmental influences. The present review aims to critically analyze the classical descriptions of *Matrija Bhava* and explore its relevance in the light of modern scientific concepts such as epigenetics and fetal programming.

Concept of *Matrija Bhava*

The term *Matrija Bhava* refers to those components of the fetus that are derived from the mother. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe that the mother contributes predominantly to the formation of *Mridu Avayava* (soft tissues), including *Mamsa* (muscle), *Rakta* (blood), *Meda* (adipose tissue), *Hridaya* (heart), *Yakrit* (liver), and *Pleeha* (spleen)³.

These tissues are essential for sustaining life, as they are involved in metabolic processes, circulation, and organ function. The maternal contribution is not limited to the initial formation of these structures but extends throughout gestation via continuous nourishment.

The concept of *Rasa Dhatu* plays a crucial role in this context. After conception, the mother provides nourishment to the fetus through *Rasa Dhatu*, which facilitates cellular proliferation, differentiation, and organogenesis. This reflects a dynamic and ongoing maternal influence rather than a static contribution.

Thus, *Matrija Bhava* can be understood as having both:

- Structural role: Formation of soft tissues and organs
- Functional role: Continuous nourishment and regulation of fetal growth

Physiological Basis of *Matrija Bhava*

From a physiological perspective, *Matrija Bhava* can be correlated with maternal-fetal interactions occurring via the placenta. The placenta serves as the interface through which nutrients, oxygen, and metabolic products are exchanged between mother and fetus.

Ayurveda's concept of *Rasa Dhatu* parallels modern understanding of maternal blood supply and placental circulation. Any disturbance in maternal nutrition or physiology directly affects fetal growth and development.

Moreover, hormonal regulation during pregnancy, including the role of estrogen, progesterone, and placental hormones, can be interpreted as part of the functional domain of *Matrija Bhava*. These factors ensure maintenance of pregnancy and proper fetal development.

Role of Maternal Factors in Fetal Development

1. Nutritional Factors (Ahara)

Maternal nutrition is one of the most critical determinants of fetal health. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of a balanced and wholesome diet during pregnancy through the concept of *Garbhini Paricharya*⁴. This regimen provides specific dietary recommendations for each month of pregnancy to support fetal development.

Deficiency or excess of certain nutrients can lead to complications such as:

- Intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR)
- Low birth weight
- Congenital anomalies

Ayurveda also highlights the qualitative aspects of diet, emphasizing *Satmya* (suitability) and *Ahara Rasa* (nutritive essence), which influence tissue formation.

2. Psychological Factors (Manas)

The psychological state of the mother significantly influences fetal development. Ayurveda recognizes the impact of maternal emotions on the fetus and emphasizes maintaining mental stability and positivity during pregnancy⁵.

Emotional disturbances such as:

- Stress

- Fear
- Anger

may adversely affect fetal neurodevelopment, leading to behavioural and cognitive issues later in life.

Modern research supports this concept, showing that maternal stress can alter fetal brain development and stress-response mechanisms.

3. Lifestyle and Environmental Factors

Maternal lifestyle practices, including physical activity, sleep patterns, and exposure to environmental toxins, play a crucial role in fetal development.

Ayurveda describes *Garbhopaghatakara Bhava*—factors that can harm the fetus⁶. These include:

- Excessive physical exertion
- Trauma
- Exposure to toxins
- Improper dietary habits

Avoidance of such factors is essential for preventing fetal abnormalities.

***Matrija Bhava* and Congenital Disorders**

Ayurveda provides a detailed explanation of congenital anomalies through the concepts of *Beeja Dosha* and *Beejabhaga Avayava Dushti*⁷. These concepts indicate defects at the level of germ cells or their components.

When maternal factors such as *Shonita* (ovum) or *Garbhashaya* (uterus) are vitiated, it can lead to abnormalities in organs derived from maternal origin⁸.

Classical texts also describe conditions such as:

- *Prameha* (metabolic disorders)
- *Apasmara* (neurological disorders)
- *Arbuda* (tumors)

as having congenital predispositions⁹.

This demonstrates an advanced understanding of hereditary and developmental disorders in Ayurveda.

Epigenetic Perspective of *Matrija Bhava*

Epigenetics refers to changes in gene expression without alteration in the DNA sequence. Modern science has established that maternal factors such as nutrition, stress, and environmental exposures can influence fetal gene expression through epigenetic mechanisms¹⁰.

This concept closely aligns with *Matrija Bhava*, where maternal inputs determine fetal development and future health outcomes.

The theory of fetal programming suggests that adverse intrauterine conditions can predispose individuals to chronic diseases such as:

- Obesity
- Diabetes mellitus
- Cardiovascular diseases

later in life¹¹. Thus, *Matrija Bhava* can be viewed as an early conceptual framework of epigenetic regulation described in Ayurveda.

Preventive and Promotive Aspects

1. Preconception Care

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of preparing the mother before conception through *Garbhadhana Vidhi* and *Ritukala Paricharya*¹². These practices ensure optimal health of the reproductive system and improve the quality of Beeja.

2. Antenatal Care

Masanumasika Garbhini Paricharya provides a month-wise regimen that includes dietary, lifestyle, and behavioral guidelines¹³. This ensures proper nourishment and development of the fetus at each stage.

3. Behavioral and Ethical Conduct

Ayurveda advises pregnant women to maintain:

- Positive emotions
- Ethical conduct

- Calm environment

These measures help in promoting mental and physical well-being of both mother and fetus¹⁴.

Discussion

Matrija Bhava represents a comprehensive and integrative understanding of maternal influence on fetal development. It encompasses structural, functional, nutritional, and psychological aspects, making it a multidimensional concept.

The classical descriptions of *Matrija Bhava* closely align with modern scientific concepts such as epigenetics and fetal programming. While modern science explains these processes at the molecular level, Ayurveda provides a holistic framework that includes physical, मानसिक (mental), and behavioral dimensions.

One of the most significant contributions of Ayurveda is its emphasis on modifiable factors, such as diet, lifestyle, and mental health. This preventive approach is particularly relevant in the current era, where lifestyle-related disorders are increasing.

The integration of Ayurvedic principles with modern research can provide new insights into prenatal care and help in developing effective strategies for improving maternal and fetal health.

Conclusion

Matrija Bhava is a fundamental concept in Ayurvedic embryology that highlights the critical role of maternal factors in fetal development. It emphasizes the importance of maternal nutrition, psychological well-being, and lifestyle in shaping the health of the fetus.

Its correlation with modern concepts such as epigenetics and fetal programming underscores its scientific relevance. Adoption of Ayurvedic principles of maternal care can play a vital role in preventing congenital disorders and promoting long-term health.

Thus, *Matrija Bhava* serves as a bridge between classical Ayurvedic wisdom and contemporary biomedical science, offering a holistic approach to maternal and fetal health.

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