

Different life phases of a woman seen from Ayurvedic perspective

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We generally understand a 'system of health' as 'system of medicine' and medicine to be a substance either to be ingested through mouth, applied to the skin or breathed or sniffed in through the nostrils or by other modalities. Medicine which is absorbed by being touched and passed by transcendental feminine energy would all be considered most unconventional ways of treatment. Ayurveda has built in a variety of such

unconventional treatments since Ayurveda has a totalistic and holistic approach to the total lifestyle and the total person.

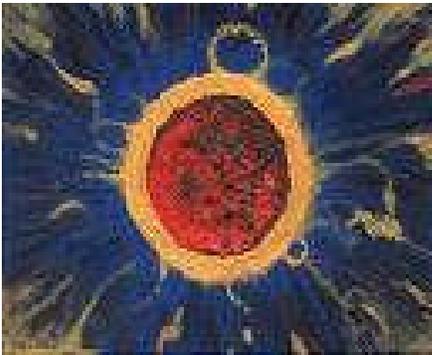
Ayurveda has been widely recognized as a system of natural health care congenial to the health needs of women. A woman in Ayurvedic teachings has been glorified as a mother of religion, culture, health and wealth of desire of the whole world. The wondrous process of seeing life from the very beginning brought to the universe by feminine energy can be seen in the authentic texts.

A female has always embodied her highest esteem when she fulfils the simple, traditional role of "mother." This is because the feminine energy is the origin of all creations; she is the primeval force, *Prakriti* and *Shakti*; all that is divine and abundant. Ayurveda considers a woman to be the most important valuable jewel as the four fold objectives of life, progeny, happiness, all can be attained only through her.

The mother has been venerated precisely because of her capability of giving life, her war-like fertility. Central to the idea of the mother is the idea of womanhood, of the feminine, of selflessness, of calling and sacrifice. Central to the idea of myth is power; the power to propagate, the power to defend, the power to alienate.

Ayurveda way of life encourages woman to know her womanhood & express her feminine energy and power and giving her enough knowledge to use them on a day by day basis. While knowing & caring for herself in times of vulnerability she can maintain her individuality, energy, respect, power & health applying the Ayurvedic principles to her own individual situation.

Embryogenesis and *Prakriti*



The very much openness of attraction and acceptance of ovum to spermatozoon decides our openness to the whole new phenomenon and experience and thereby explains the dominance of feminine energy in us. The field is ready to accept the seeds for a very special happening at the time of our conception in our mother's womb.

The very entrance of spermatozoon into the ovum by breaking its wall creates ignition and as a result heat is generated and energy is produced. The quantity and quality of energy produced thereupon decides our '*Prakriti*', our nature. Without any doubt we accept the fact that the nature, '*Prakriti*' is feminine. At that time, we are endowed with a blueprint of the way we are meant to be. This "blueprint" depends on many factors, chief among them are:

1. The characteristics and traits of our parents, the paternal and maternal genes and also the state of their physical, mental and spiritual balance at our conception.

2. The state of mother's womb and her overall nutrition from physical, mental and spiritual levels.
3. The season of the year and the place with its energy where conception has taken place, also the planetary positions at the time of conception.

Acharya Sushruta, an ancient and one of the three most eminent authors on Ayurveda, tried to establish the similarity between crop cultivation and human conception and embryogenesis. For crop cultivation we require only four factors, like the right season, right field, nourishing water and seeds. In human reproduction also four definite factors are required.

The season is the fertile period of cycle of menstruation, the field is the uterus, and where the embryo gets its bed, nourishing blood plasma is the water and seeds are the male and female gametes, the ovum and sperm.

The transcendental energies



All sex, in fact all life everywhere, is about the meeting of feminine and masculine energy, the meeting of consciousness and light. This does not mean that men always represent the masculine, or that women always hold feminine energy. It means that sexual union is always about a more conscious presence penetrating a more yielding, loving surrender.

The transcendental energies, as viewed by us, in our current state, appear to us as "female" or "male". It is not that the transcendental energies take embodiment, or form. It is our perception of them that

creates the genders as we know them. The forms we perceive are illusory. The genders in themselves are illusory in the way we see them. Illusory means, "not what it seems".

If we look at the spiritual 'qualities' or 'energies', it can be seen as "God" having two different energies, or polarities, we call them "male" and "female", just to be easier to be understood.

Those two energies unite and the offspring of that union creates the material existence. The material existence is also patterned on those male and female energies. Sexual union in the material world is a kind of mirroring of the union of the two transcendental energies when the material existence came into creation.

Classification by age factor

It is a common observation that the physiological state of a body does not remain one and the same throughout the life span. At certain periods, some physiological changes take place in the body. Taking into consideration, these physiological changes, a woman's life is spread into different stages, which are called as epochs the rough criterion for grouping is the age, but the main aim of grouping is to point out the physiological state of the body during that epoch.

The distinctive anatomical and physiological features of women in each age group were well studied by the ancient sages of Ayurveda. And lucidly explained by examples from Mother Nature; "just as the river is cleansed by its flow the women are purified by the menstrual flow". That is the reason for the non-susceptibility of women to many diseases. The regimens to be followed during menstrual and post-menstrual periods are well advocated in Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is founded on the principle of keeping the mind and body in tune with nature and women are far more sensitive to the rhythms and cycles of nature. Women respond very differently in different stages of their lives. They are aware of what is happening to their

condition of mind and body every part of the day and night, every month, every season, throughout the year and throughout their lives.

The distinctive anatomical and physiological features of women in each age group were well studied by the ancient sages of Ayurveda. The women are classified into seven according to their age:

- New born to 12 years: Baby (*Kanya*)
- 10 years to 12 years: Girl (*Baala*)
- 12 years to 14 years: Age of menarche (*Artava darshani*)
- 14 years to 16 years: Adolescent (*Shodashi rajaswala*)
- 16 years to 40 years: Adult (*Yuvati*)
- 40 years to 50 years: Pre-menopause (*Saubhagya*)
- Above 50 years: Post-menopause (*Prauddha* or *Rajo-nivratta*)

As mentioned above at the age of twelve the menstruation begins. The woman at first menstruation is called as the age of menarche. Woman continues to menstruate cyclically till about the age of forty to fifty years. Thereafter the menstruation ceases. The cessation of menstruation is called menopause. Adolescence is a period when a carefree child steps to become a responsible adult. Age range of adolescence is about fourteen to sixteen years. The physical and psychological changes begin before fourteen years continue till the age of sixteen years.

Acharya Sushruta mentions sixteen years of age as puberty in females as compared to the age of male mentioned as twenty four. As girls mature into young woman, along with the very apparent physical changes, a subtle change in her attitude and worldview also takes place. During this period a very specific caring and lessons of code of conduct known as *Achaar Rasayana* in Ayurveda classics should be followed with the old and experienced members of the family and community.

Preparation and Needs for 'Mother-to-be'

Ayurveda recognizes the need for the mental, spiritual and physical preparation of the 'Mother-to-be' for the momentous event of childbirth conceptualized as three months preparation for couple planning pregnancy prior to conception.

The author draws his inspiration from Charaka Samhita, an authentic Ayurvedic compendium mentioning about types of intelligence as, the power of reasoning (*Dhee*), the power of firmness (*Dhriti*) and the power of recollection (*Smriti*).

Ayurveda advocates that pregnancy should be by choice, and not by chance. "When in the process of copulation, the couple need to think good thoughts as these are passing thoughts into the sperm and the ova, and they are taken, like memory (*Smriti*), deep into the embryo, so too it becomes charged with negativity in case of negative thoughts, thus these thoughts are to be avoided so that the seeds of negativity are not sown."

The beginning is by the purification of the gametes (sperm and ovum). If the couple is not in a state of mental stability and calmness with prominence of *Sattva* state of Mind, they cannot give birth to a healthy child. This mental calmness and stability of *Sattvic* mind is closely related to one's food habits and many other factors. Therefore a specific Ayurvedic nutrition and life style is advised with *Sattvic* food. Total abstinence from spicy foods and addictive substances is advised.

It is now universally proven that the fetus is not just a mindless mass of flesh, but a highly responsive and evolving human being, capable of receiving, understanding and responding to external stimuli. It, therefore, follows that the fetus has a right to receive positive and enriching feedback which is done by *Garbha-adhana sanskara*.

Ayurveda prescribes a particular daily practice for the pregnant woman. Along with the prescription for diet, yoga and routine daily care, instructions are also given for reading material, subjects of discussion, and music and mantras to be listened to have positive

impact on fetal life and expectant mother. The *Gayatri Mantra* is advised in pre-pregnancy planning period and during the pregnancy.

***Garbhadhana* - to enter the womb**

Ayurvedic tradition of initiating a new life is into 16 *sanskara*. The first *sanskara* is given when life enters the womb and conception takes place. It is known as *Garbha-adhana*.

'*Garbha* means 'Womb'. It expounds the details of what human consciousness goes through, while it still resides in the womb, in the form of a fetus. When the brain of the fetus forms, its active mind is more active than that of children and/or adults. The reason is that while in the womb, the fetus is not distracted by the senses, and its connection with the attractions and distractions of the outside world. So now the soul, being placed within the mother, goes through physical and emotional turmoil.

The Pregnancy (*Garbha*) and care of pregnancy

From time immemorial a pregnant woman deserves attention of all. Ayurveda has a vast knowledge about formation and development of pregnancy and its pathology. The same way Ayurvedic classics well described about Obstetrics and Gynecology (*Matra Shakti, jata karma* and *Stri Roga*).

Motherhood is the crowing act of a woman's feminine role of life. It provides evidence that she is biologically adequate. It leads to the fulfillment of her maternal instinct. It gives her an opportunity to

project herself into the next generation. It provides the closest bond that can exist between two human beings "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh".

As a lot of changes taking place in the physiology in the creation of a new life, extra care and proper rest are needed to cater to this. Moderate exercises should be regular but without strain. Walking and swimming are ideal and are best done in the morning. Yoga is also beneficial and a good preparation for giving birth. It is important to remember the uniqueness of this situation and to adapt accordingly. Trying to maintain the same level of activity and habitually eating food without recourse to cravings and desires is not conducive to the health of the mother and/ or of the child.

According to *Acharya* Charaka, a baby's anatomy, physiology and mind are comprised of four parts: one from the mother, one from the father, one from the mother's intake during pregnancy (food, emotions, perceptions, and environment) and one from nature or consciousness. The health, happiness and harmony of the parents are of great importance spiritually, mentally and physically. Rituals, religious practices and Meditation are of great benefit to the expectant mother and can help to overcome feelings of fatigue.

Keeping the scope of this article limited only the maternal origin is emphasized. The soft tissues, like flesh, fat tissue, skin etc. and organs like heart, liver, spleen, pancreas, umbilicus, kidneys, urinary bladder, stomach, small and large intestine, mesentery and omentum etc. are of maternal origin.

By adopting the Ayurvedic principles during pregnancy the growth of the new life within and be best prepared for your new life as a parent can really be enjoyed. Vital warmth springs up in the womb and the belly. In the seat of the warm bile, *Prana* flows – at the proper season ordained by the creator.

The embryo lying (in the womb) for (a day) and night is a confused mass; after seven days it becomes a bubble; after a fortnight, a mass and in a month, it hardens. In two months develops the region of the head; in three months, the feet; in the fourth, belly and hip; in the

fifth, the backbone; in the sixth, nose, eyes and ears; in the seventh the embryo quickens with life and in the eighth month, it becomes complete.

By the dominance of the father's semen, the child becomes male; the mother's – female. If at the time of impregnation, the parents are agitated; the child will be born with congenital anomalies likely to be blind, crippled, and hunch-backed or stunted in growth. If the couple has vital air-trouble, the semen enters in two parts resulting in twins.

Care of the pregnant mother - *Garbhini Paricharya*

Ayurveda has suggested a very good protocol for the care of the pregnant mother (*Garbhini Paricharya*). It has given a detailed description of Ayurvedic Nutrition, activities of daily living i.e., life style and thought process of the mother to be followed during pregnancy as these directly affect the mother as well as the child. Vedic rituals, *Ayurvedic Sutra, Mantra*, Prayers and Meditation are of great benefit to the expectant parents.

In the Vedic tradition, as each sense develops a baby shower is given to honor it. In the third month of pregnancy the sense of sight is celebrated by beautiful things to look at. The fourth month honors the sense of taste with delicious food. The sense of hearing is celebrated in the fifth month with melodious and soothing music. The shower celebrating the developing sense of smell includes delightful aromas while at the final shower clothing and gold are given to honor the sense of touch.

Ayurvedic medicated clarified butter (*aushadh-sadhita ghrita*) preparations can be taken from the first month of pregnancy which improves the growth of the fetus, also the mental growth. These *Ghrita* preparations can be included as an integral part of the diet, during pregnancy. It is for this reason that *Ayurveda* suggests *Sattvic*

food, which means pure, easily digested foods that nourish the tissues (*dhatu*) of mother and the unborn child.

These include foods such as milk and milk products according to season, rice, wheat, and clarified butter (*ghrita*), fresh vegetables, fruits and grains, soups of fresh green leafy vegetables cooked with cumin seeds and ginger and later served with a table spoon of *ghee* in warm soups, fresh seasonal fruits, etc.

Sattvic foods do not cause constipation or indigestion, and they create a more settled state of mind. These foods help the mother enjoy ideal health and vitality, and also help with the growth of the baby. This type of diet is useful for fetal growth, for maternal health and for further healthy lactation.

Ayurveda also says that pregnancy is the time to consume nutritional food substances like lentils of ***Urad*** (*Phaseolus radiatus*), ***Amalaki*** (*Embelica officinalis*) and some minerals of zinc etc. By the sixth or the seventh month, fetal organs are well formed, well organized, and they also acquire strength. Sub-tissues described in *Ayurveda* like skin, hair and nails also being formed and shaping up. Hence, this is the month when medicated *Ayurvedic ghrita* is recommended.

According to *Ayurveda Dietetics*, a pregnant woman should avoid the state of constipation and should take mild laxatives like three *myrobalans* (***Triphala***) if constipation is a problem, an *Ayurvedic* oil enema for hard stools.

In addition to this, it recommends that a pregnant woman should eat only home made food cooked on low fire and avoid fast food, food with preservatives and artificially added colors and whenever possible food and vegetables and fruits of biological origin.

She should sleep in a secured place in the house to avoid trouble from notorious supernatural powers and should use loose clothing to be comfortable. A few other activities like going out of the house without a justifiable reason, talking to unknown people, looking at things which

create fear in the mind and strenuous physical activities are to be avoided.

Ayurvedic massage (*Abhyanga*) with Ayurvedic oil is recommended for the pregnant woman once a day as first morning ritual after bowel evacuation and some cleansing. With Ayurvedic oil massage a feeling of more evenness, more balance, and more energy throughout the day is experienced.

The massage and other techniques balance *Vata* bio-energy principle, the mind-body operator that governs movement and many mental functions), so the mother feels steadier, more even, less anxious. There is more happiness, even in the body itself, and more balance in the entire nervous system. Feelings of agitation, depression, or sorrow dissolve a feeling of relaxation and wholeness takes over. After even a week of Ayurvedic massage therapy, the mother to be feels remarkably revitalized. The general aches, pains, and imbalances start to subside.

The classical Ayurvedic herbs known for rejuvenation which support nutrition of tissues (*dhatu-poshana*), calm the nerves and also a good sustainer of pregnancy are: **Ashwagandha** (*Withania somnifera*), **Bala** (*Sida cordifolia*) and **Kapikachchu** (*Mucuna pruriens*), **Shatavari** (*Asparagus racemosus*), **Madhuyashti** (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and **Brahmi** (*Celestrus paniculatus*). Today we get Ayurvedic tonic formulas such as **Shatavari Kalpa** compound and **Chyavanprasha Avleha** which are good for pregnant women (*Garbhini*). Application of sandalwood powder paste on forehead and neck are recommended to keep the mind fresh and happy.

In general, the *Ayurveda* does not recommend medicines until and unless there is maternal and/or fetal distress. *Ayurveda* also advises avoiding alcohol consumption, smoking, etc., to avoid fetal abnormalities. It further suggests avoiding sexual activity after the fifth or the sixth month as sexual act can induce fetal distress.

Ayurvedic Dietetics for lactating mother

For the lactating mother regular intake of all the hot, pungent, and spicy food recipes should be avoided, as these decrease milk secretion. Also, Ghee and oils should be taken in adequate amount to improve digestion, facilitate the easy evacuation of bowels, nourish the tissues, and subdue the vitiated *Vata Dosha*, which gets aggravated during the process of childbirth.

Exposure to pollute and infectious climatic conditions should be avoided, since any infection to the mother during lactation period can be easily transferred to the child. Care should be taken while taking drugs during lactation, since many drugs are excreted through milk and might exert an adverse effect on the baby.

Breast-feeding should be stopped and the child should be given solid food from the age of one year. This is known as weaning and is described in the Ayurvedic classics as *Anna-prashana Sanskara*. The first food item given to the child should be semi solid paste of well-cooked brown rice with sugar or molasses and seeds of green cardamom.

If milk production and secretion is more than what is required by the baby, extra milk should be squeezed and discarded; otherwise it can cause congestion and result in the formation of the breast abscess. During lactation period Ayurveda advises use of **Yashtimadhu** (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), **Haldi** (*Curcuma longa*) and **Shatavari** (*Asparagus racemosus*) and **Ghrita** (clarified butter).

Other generic preparations such as **Shatavari Ghrita**, **Ashwagandha Ghrita**, etc., should be taken for maintaining the quality as well as quantity of milk. For the cases of cracked nipple or breast abscess, local application of medicated Ghrita on the affected nipple is very useful.

Menopause (*Rajo-nivratti*)

Menopause is a natural phase in a woman's life, indicating a cessation of reproductive ability and signaled visibly by the stoppage of the menstrual periods. The ovaries cease to respond to *Dosha* changes due to *Pitta Dosha* thus bringing ovulation to a halt. There is a concomitant reduction in the levels of the reproductive sex hormones. The reasons for this event are complex and genetically pre-determined that tend to be highly variable in timings, pattern and behavior. The age at which menopause occurs is variable from 45 to 55 years.

In some women there may be a very early menopause and conversely, in some, it may be quite delayed. In some woman it can be easy and silent and in some it can be problematic and may be associated with mood changes, hot flushes, physical conditioning, migraine, depression, night sweats, fatigue, emotional changes, sleep disturbances, dry skin and hair, aches and pains in the joints, headaches, palpitations, vaginal dryness, urinary symptoms etc. The intensity of these symptoms tends to vary.

The pattern of menopause tends to be highly variable. The age at which menopause occurs, may also have a familial pattern There may be a gradual lightening in the flow of blood and a lengthening of the menstrual cycle. In some, the occasional cycle may be missed, while some kind of irregularity may be termed normal. It must be understood that frequent periods, heavy bleeding are not due to menopause, these is referred as dysfunctional uterine bleeding (D.U.B.) categorized under gynecocological disorders (*Yoni Vyapada*) in Ayurveda .

The changes in menstrual pattern may occur over the course of a few years and a woman is said to be through her menopause if she has had no bleeding for a year. Bleeding occurring after this is termed post menopausal bleeding and may signify disease. Post menopausal bleeding requires evaluation. In many women, menopause is a silent event and this is particularly true in women from traditional cultures. A

woman who perceives the menopause as a natural event is likely to have little by way of symptoms. Some have minor symptoms that can be easily ignored while others may have crippling symptoms interfering with lifestyle.

These require evaluation by an Ayurveda Vaidya or a therapist and are often treated by non hormonal options like dietary and health herbal supplements like, **Arjuna** (*Terminalia arjuna*) for hypertension and **Ashoka** (*Saraca indica*).

The concept that the menopause requires medication is a fallacy. Women with minor symptoms usually require little else other than reassurance. Lifestyle changes to enhance calcium and vitamin D consumption by sun bath, along with an active lifestyle with morning walk by Ayurvedic way focusing on **Marma** points' stimulation are very helpful at this stage of life. Increasing the consumption of foods rich in phytoestrogens i.e., plant based estrogens such as: Soya beans, beetroot, parsley, fennel root, brussel sprouts, mint (*pudina*) and coriander (*dhanyaka*), etc.

Women with severe symptoms particularly for relief from hot flushes, night sweats, vaginal dryness etc. may use Ayurvedic preparations instead of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) as HRT may have side-effects such as: tender breasts, heavier periods, enlarging fibroids, weight gain, depression and irritability, an increased risk of developing blood clots which can be life-threatening.

Ayurvedic approaches include the use of herbal remedies such as **Shatavari** (*Asparagus racemosus*) and **Ashwagandha** (*Withania somnifera*) along with receiving Ayurvedic massages with body and mind constitution based oils primarily with **Bala** (*Sida cordifolia*) as main ingredient, breathing exercises such as Pranayama and relaxation techniques such as *Yoga Nidra* and Meditation.

There is reference of number of studies in Ayurvedic Clinics and Institutions in India conducted under the guidance and supervision of the author of this article written for the healing community of the

Netherlands and rest of Europe and world about the efficacy of some of the complex formulations which author has formulated which are free from side-effects. The author avoids naming these complex formulations to resist any commercial references.

Depression in menopause manifests in headaches, sleepless nights, constant tension, detachment, irritability, and loss of appetite, dryness of mouth, fear, self-blame, lack of concentration, and lack of interest in any kind of activity. Although chronic headaches may not be psychosomatic, they can be caused by depression or anxiety. Thus, counseling (*Satvavajaya Chikitsa*) can help to identify and address emotional concerns and should be considered as part of the treatment."

There are two types of stress leading to mental disorder. Biochemical stressors are hormonal fluctuations at the onset of puberty, pre-menstrual phase, post partum phase and menopause. Estrogens have an effect on brain chemicals like serotonin and/or epinephrine that are involved in headaches. An imbalance in serotonin levels has, in fact, been implicated in disorders like migraine and depression."

In India women are traditionally fed with Ayurvedic food supplements right from the onset of puberty throughout the reproductive years. Ayurveda has best natural health supplements and products to manage the changes in the body from puberty to menopause. The herbal nourishment of Ayurveda makes the changes less painful and builds immunity and resistance to handle change naturally. Combined with Yoga, Ayurveda can work miracles. Ayurvedic health care enhances the results of Yoga. Ayurvedic healthcare is the best bet for women to stop the aging process. Periodic rejuvenation therapy will keep health, beauty and zest for life intact throughout the years.

Note for information for the practitioners of Natural sciences and Ayurvedic community

In order to prevent grant of patents based on Indian Traditional Knowledge, Government of India has undertaken an ambitious project

of creating a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library. This is a joint venture of the Council of Scientific Research and Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha.

This project is intended to cover about 35,000 formulations available in 14 classical texts of Ayurveda to convert the information on patent compatible format. The work has been initiated with a co-operative set up of 30 Ayurveda experts, 5 Information Technology experts and 2 Patent examiners. The digital library will include all details in digital format about international patent classification, traditional research classification, Ayurveda terminology, concepts, definitions, classical formulations, doses, disease conditions and references to abstract of classical texts.

After the completion of the project the author, in the capacity of advisor of International committee of All India Ayurvedic Congress, the prime body of Vaidya -Ayurvedic Doctors will be able to share these documents with the healing community and members of different healing associations and the participants of this seminar.

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