Concept of pathya in preconceptional care: A review

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Abstract

Preconceptional care can be defined as the care or advice given to a couple planning for a pregnancy well before the time of actual conception. Modern obstetrics forwarded preconceptional care as an extension of antenatal care to provide multidimensional health to both partners and forthcoming child. The antiquity of this concept dates back to time before Christ. Ayurveda is blessed with its unique concepts of pathya and apathyaka sankalpana. Proper observance of pathya right from the time of rajaswala kala till the garbhadhana kala is the main emphasis in this review. This review will put a light on several wholesome and unwholesome diets, conducts and their mode of action on basis of ayurveda in relation with preconceptional care.

Keywords: preconception, preconceptional care, pathya, apathyaka

1. Introduction

The concept of preconceptional care require utmost importance in present era, in this context the knowledge about Pathya and Apathyaka mentioned in Ayurvedic classics gives us a great hope. Pathya in the form of ahara and vihara helps to maintain equilibrium of health in both swastha as well as vyadhi. According to modern science the early embryonic period (4-8th week) is considered as the critical period of development, because this is the most susceptible time for causing birth defects [1]. Therefore the necessity of preconceptional care is the need of the hour, since all the solutions for an unplanned pregnancy cannot be tackled antenataly. When proper preconceptional care is followed with appropriate pathya ahara and vihara there may be better maternal, paternal as well as fetal outcomes.

Pathya refers to those foods and deeds, which do not do any harm to the body and which gives happiness to body and mind. The term pathya is derived from the word patha which means srotas. Acharya Charaka defines pathya as something that which is hitha to srotas and priya to manas [2]. In sabda kalpa druma pathya is mentioned as a synonym of chikitsa [3]. Chakrapani describes pathya as one which is anupaghaithi to manus and sarira [4]. In Vaidyaka jeevanan written by Lolimbaraja describes the relevance of pathya as “pathye sathai gadarthasya kimoushadha nishevane pathye asathi gadarthasya kimoushadha nishevane” [5]. Pre requisites for a healthy pregnancy described in Ayurveda are Rithu, kshethra, Ambu and Beeja known as the garbha sambhava samagri [6]. Ayurvedic preconceptional care comprises of treatment methods associated with diet restriction, abstinence and religious rituals to ensure beeja sudhi (to improve quality of sperm and ovum), kshetra sudhi (to raise the status of endometrium) and mano sudhi (to develop the pure consciousness) [7]. Our classics have clearly explained the marital age separately for men and women. Acharya Susrutha prescribed the marital age for male as 25 years and female as 16 years [8]. But there is a difference in opinion regarding this according to Acharya Vagbhata in Astanga Sangraha were he mentioned the marriageable age for male as 21 years and female as 12 years respectively, as this age was considered as the age of full maturity or appropriate age for conception [9].

We get several references from classics regarding the rajaswala charya were the concept of pathya and apathyaka ahara viharas are specifically mentioned during rajasrava kala (menstruation) and rithu kala (ovulation). Those concepts of pathya ahara and vihara during the time of menstruation and ovulation can be adopted as a part of preconceptional care, because proper observance of these charya itself gives benefits during conception.

2. Concept of Pathya in Rajaswala Charya

2.1 According to Caraka Samhitha

Pathya vihara-From the 1st day of menstruation to the 3rd day of menstruation the lady should follow brahmacharya, should have food in hands or in unbroken plates [10]. Acharya caraka have not mentioned anything related to pathya and apathyaka ahara in rajaswala charya.
2.2 According to Susrutha Samhitha
Pathya ahara-Havishhya which is a preparation with Sali, ghritha, ksheera and yava (during first 3 days of menstruation)
Pathya vihara - From the first day of menstruation till 3rd day she should follow brahmacharya and should not see her husband for these 3 days.
Apathya vihara - divaswapna, anjanaprayoga, asrupata, snana, anulepa, abhyanga, nakshchedana, pradhavana, hasana, attikadhana, atisabda srawana, kesa prasadan, anila sevana, ayasa, svedana, alankara because such deeds during menstruation may have effect on garbha like divaswapna leads to swapa seela garbha, anjana prayoga leads to andhata of garbha etc.[11].

2.3 According to Astanga Hridaya
Pathya ahara-ksireyam yavakam in alpamatra for koshta sodhana and karshana (during the first 3 days of menstruation).
Pathya vihara-From the 1st day of menstruation to the 3rd day the lady should follow brahmacharya, she should practice subha chintha, should lie down over darbha and should have food either on parna, sarava or hastha Apathya vihara-snana and alankara.[12].

2.4 According to Astanga Sangrahya
Pathya ahara-payas sidha yavam in alpamathra as a means of karshanarth Apathya ahara-tikshna, ushna, amla, lavana ahara Pathya vihara-From the first day of menstruation to the 3rd day of menstruation the female should follow brahmacharya and should lie down over darbha and should have food either on parna, sarava or karathala.
Apathya vihara-snana and alankara.[13].

2.5 According to Kasyapa Samhitha
Pathya vihara-Brahmacharya for the first three days of menstruation[14].
Apathya Vihara-Nasya, Vamana.

2.6 According to Bhavaprakasha
Pathya ahara-havishhya during the first 3 days of menstruation Pathya vihara-Brahmacharya and ahimsa, during the artava srawa kala, she should lie over darbha and have havishhya either in hasta, sarava or parna
Apathya vihara - Asru patha, nakha chedana, abhyanga, anulepana, anjana prayoga, snanam, divaswapnam, pradhavana, atyuccha sabda srawana, hasana, bahubhashana, ayasa, bhumighana, pravata[15].

3. Concept of Pathya and Preconceptional Care
3.1 Pathya Ahara
Brihathrayees has mentioned pathya aharas separately for both males and females respectively. In male’s madhuroshadha samskrita ghritha, ksheera, salyodana asana have been mentioned. Whereas for females Taila and masa rich aharas are advised, because these increases pitha and are considered as rakhth vridhith etu[16-18]. Acharya Kasyapa also has similar explanation as that of brihathrayees with no difference[19].

Unlike the references from brihathrayees the laghathrayees does not gives much explanation about pathya aharas during preconceptional period separately for males and females, but some references from Vajeekarana adhyaya can be adopted as pathya.
In Sarangadhara samhitha certain drugs like aswagandha, musali, sarkara, satavari ksheera, masa, amalaki and bhallataka phala majja is considered as sukra janaka which can be considered as pathya in males [20].
In Bhava Prakasha Vajeekarana adhyaya description about the intake of Basta anda or kakchhap processed with pippali, lavana and ghritha is advised. Another preparation with godhuma choorna mixed with milk of cow having a living calf which is cooked with sita, madhu and ghritha. Acarya also mentioned a preparation in females for dyspareunia leading to impotency that is gokshura choorna boiled in goat’s milk added with madhu in order to consume[21].
In Bhaishajya Ratnavali Vajekarana prakarana it is mentioned that the dravyas which are having madhura rasa, guru and snigdha guna with jeevana and brhman properties are considered pathya. Acarya also explained that ghritha bhrishta masha processed with ksheera and added with sarkara if taken daily is considered as vrishya uthama. Acarya also advised to take satavari ksheerapaka with sita internally [22].
In Haritha samhitha, Sukra vridhi apaya adhyaya, intake of palanda, tila, masa, odana of visalina, ksheera, ikshu rasa, vastuka are considered pathya in sukra kshaya[23]. In vandhya roga adhyaya, acharya also advised intake of dravyas like devadali, brhathi dvaya, suryavalli, satavari which are considered pathya in vandhya[24].
According to Yoga Ratnakara, Yoni roga chikitsa adhyaya the use of tila taila, ksheera, phanihta, dudhi and ghritha taken in equal parts and mixed with pippali choorna and taken internally specially for females[25].

3.2 Apathya Ahara
According to Sarangadhara samhitha intake of drugs like jati phala and haritaki are contraindicated as they produces sukra sthambhana and sukra soshana[26].
According to Bhaishajya Ratnavali, Vajeekarana prakarana adhyaya it is mentioned that atyanta ushna, katu, tiktha, kashaya, amla, kshara pradhana leafy vegetables and excessive intake of lavana yuktha ahara padarthu is contra indicated for males[27].
According to Haritha Samhitha Surana, Sunit are considered as apathy in sukra kshaya. Intake of katu, amla, tikta, ruksha, tiktha, ushna aharas and kanji is considered as apathy in sukra vridhi[28].
In Vandhya roga adhyaya acharya describes certain apathy dravyas like kacchharam, suranam, amla kanchika and vidahi aharas[29].
According to Yoga Ratnakara in Vajeekarana chikitsa adhyaya, atimatra sevana of katu, amla and lavana dravyas are considered as apathy in sukra nasha[30].

3.3 Pathya Viharas
Among the pathya viharas mentioned by brihathrayees. Acharya Charaka and Astanga Hridaya gives a different explanation where he mentions proper sneha sweda with peyadi karma followed by vamana and virechanani sodhana kriya, thus by attaining samyag sudhi administration of asthapana and anuvasanama basti is also explained[31, 32]. In addition to this acharya Vaghbhat in Astanga Hridaya, pumsavana is also explained. Pumsavana is described as a means of putropada sthitiprada[33]. The position of maithuna for female is described by Vaghbhat as uthana sayana. In addition to this certain tips prior to maithuna like entry of male to the bed with dakshina pada first followed by female with vama pada and reciting the putershri mantra and to engage in maithuna with paraspara santhvana and priya vachana[33]. Acharya Susrutha and Astanga sangrahakara has similar opinion that is to follow brahmacarya for 1 month and to engage in maithuna[34, 35].
Acarya Kasyapa also gave a similar explanation as that of Caraka that is Sneha, Sveda, Vamana, Virechana and Asthapanas Basthi [50]. Some special procedures of putreshit yajna are only explained by Kashyapa and Caraka [57, 58]. Kashyapa gave much importance to pathya viharas rather than pathya ahara In Bhava Prakasha, Vajeekarana adhyaya, abhyanga with Maha Candanadi taila is indicated for both male and female [39].

In Haritha Samhitha, Vandhya roga adhyaya the use of malya, vastra etc of rithumathi stree or sarpsha of rithumathi stree during ritu kala and to take bath in water used by rithumathi stree is advised as a pathya vihara in Vandhyatwa [40].

3.4 Pathya in Maithuna

The 4th day of menstruation after snana was considered as the appropriate time for maithuna as a means of putralabdhyartham. Among the brihatrayees only Acarya Caraka has mentioned the appropriate position for maithuna as uthana sayana for females, because proper beejgra hrahamana occurs in this position and the dosas reside in yatha sthana. Astanga sangrahakara also have same opinion as that of Caraka regarding the position for maithuna [41, 42]. If the couple desires a male progeny they should indulge in sexual act on even days and on odd days if they desires a female progeny, which is the opinion of all the brihatrayees, Astanga sangrahakara and Kasyapa [43-47]. According to Kasyapa Samhitha, on the 4th day of menstruation after snana the woman should enter devaghrha and offer worship, also Acarya gives importance to the psychological status of woman and he also adds that she should be generous in mind [48].

3.5 Apathya in Maithuna

Acarya Caraka and Astanga Sangrahakara mentioned certain contraindicated postures for maithuna as nyuhja, parsva (dakshina parsava) and vama parsva positions. Females contraindicated for maithuna according to Caraka and Astanga sangrahakara are aitbaala, ativruddha and deergha rogi and those who suffer from kshut, pipasa and those who are bheera, shoka, vimana, krodha, atikama or alpa kama in maithuna [49, 50].

According to Kasyapa Samhitha in twilights that is morning and evening maithuna is contra indicated [51].

According to Bhava prakasha the females contraindicated for maithuna are rajaswala, vyadhimmithi, yoni rogini, vridha and garbhhini [52].

4. Discussion

The concepts of pathya and preconceptional care go hand in hand. Majority of the couple are unaware about the necessity of preconceptional care in present era. Ayurvedic classics beautifully explain the garbhadvama sanskaras starting with the vivaha yogya praya, vivaha yogya and maithuna yogya purusha and stree. Acaryaas emphasizes on age of marriage and conception for both male and female for a better progeny, in present day scenario late marriages and post ponement of first conception owing to busy schedule of life and workaholic attitude had a bad impact on fertility outcomes. Acarya Bhaishajya Ratnakara in vajeekarana adhyaya describes that roga raititha purusha after practicing vamana virechanadi shodhana kriyas after the age of 16 years up to 70 years should administer vajeekarana dravyas in order to attain dirgha jivana. He also added that maithuna is contra indicated in males before the age of 16 and after 70 years. The logic behind the relevance of pathya in rajaswala charya may be because of the diet and deeds to be performed right from the time of menarche and continuing the same till the time of rajonivritti so that this charya will cover the entire reproductive period of the female. Thus by practicing the pathyas mentioned during rajaswala kala regularly will lead to optimum health of the female, which supports the conception as well as physical and psychological wellbeing. The advice regarding the intake of havishya during the time of menstruation may be for koshta sodhana which can be understood as garbhasthayas sodhana since garbhasthaya is considered as one among the koshtangas, thereby enhancing the proper functioning of apana vata by artava nishkramana. Ghritha will help to overcome the agnimandya prevailing during this period. During the first 3 days of menstruation all the acharyas advised to practice brahmacharya, because coitus done during this time due to ph variation may lead to infections and also there may be chances of retrograde menstruation which may be a cause of endometriosis. Acharyas mentioned the use of darbha for sayana because it is proved for its disinfectant property and is easy for washing and cleaning. Certain apathya viharas like anjanaprayoga, anulepa, abhyanga, kesa prasadana, alankara because such deeds done during menstruation may cause attraction towards opposite sex. Snana is also contra indicated because sasiraskra snana with seeta jala may cause stambhana to normal menstrual flow.

Regarding the pathya ahara in preconceptional care all the brihatrayees mentioned madhuroushadsa sanskriti ghritha,ksheera and salyodana for males because madhura rasa dravyas initiate suka vridhi and taila and masa rich diet is indicated for females as these are responsible for pitha vridhi and thereby act as raktha vridhi hetu. The pathya aharas mentioned by laghuatrayees in vajeekarana adhyaya are some of the diet preparations which are practically applicable in day today life. In males the preparation with basta anda, pippali and ghritha can be advised to males preconceptionally for those who are non-vegetarians as a diet. Masa fried in ghee processed with ksheera and added with sarkara can be taken daily as a snack. The description regarding satavari ksheerapaka in males may be due to the fact that it possesses phyto estrogen content which is necessary for spermatogenesis. In Haritha samhitha Sukra vridhi upaya adhyaya, intake of palandu, tila, masa, odana of visalina, ksheera, ikshu rasa, and vastuksa are considered pathya in sukraka kshaya, which are proved scientifically. Sesame improved sperm count and motility, and can be prescribed as an effective and safe method for male infertility. Some studies have reported that garlic improves male sexual function and has beneficial effect in the recovery of testicular functions. In females with dyspareunia leading to infertility gokshura keersha paka with madhur can be advised. In Vandhya roga adhyaya, acharya Haritha advised intake of dravyas like devadali, brhtiadhyavam, suryavalli, satavari etc because drugs like devadali have visha hara property. Brhati have bhurmana, sukra rechaka and praajatapana properties. The use of tila taila, ksheera, pani, adhi, ghritha and pippali choorna is also indicated for females.

Certain apathya aharas mentioned preconceptionally are those which possess atyanta ushna, katu, tiktha and amla rasa predominant dravyas because intake of such substances may lead to sukra kshaya. Research studies have postulated that excessive intake of dravya like Haritaki can increase erection problems.

Among the pathya viharas mentioned preconceptionally, after proper sodhana by panchakarma followed with sansarjana
karma. The couple should take the pathya aharas mentioned above and engage in maithuna as per the rules. The relevance of brahmacharya for 1 month may be due to the fact that the quality of the sperm may be increased due to abstinence. The religious rituals like putreshthi yajna may be done in order to enhance the social, spiritual and cultural benefits. Acharya Haritha also explained the use of malya, vastra etc of rithumathi stree or sparsha of rithumathi stree by a vandhya, this can be justified by the studies showing that females use more cosmetics during the time of ovulation. Specific justification cannot be given regarding the description about taking bath in water used by rithumathi stree.

The 4th day of menstruation was considered by the classics as the appropriate time for maithuna. Starting from the 4th day of menstruation the couple desirous of begetting a progeny should engage in maithuna. The concept of fertility window explained by the modern science is that the proper period of ovulation for a normally menstruating female had similar references in ayurvedic classics. The reference which we can correlate is from Astanga sangraha were acharya mentions on the 4th day of menstruation after snana if the lady desires to have a progeny she should wait for three more days that is after 7 days of menstruation on the 8th day she should have maithuna. Also he mentions 8, 10, 12th day for begetting a male progeny and 5, 7, 9th day for begetting a female progeny. Even though acharya gives such an explanation he describes that if the days of maithuna is on utharothara dinas there is auyhrrasa of the garbha. In addition to this there is description about rithu kala according to anya matha in Astanga sangraha like dvadasha ratra, sodasha ratra and in case of females with sudha yoni and garbhasaya the entire month is considered as rithu kala. The relevance regarding the position of coitus for female as uthana sayana may be because of the proper deposition of semen in the vaginal pool and the swimming up of sperm to the uterus.

5. Conclusion

From ancient times itself the samskaras have been considered necessary because it implies physical representation of a symbolic change in the life of an individual. The term Samsakara means making something refining or purifying. Our classical literature has explained shodasha samskaras among which the garbhadhana sanskara, is the observation of reformatory method or fervent prayer for a worth full child in order to continue the human race, to endow future generations with good health, noble quality and high intelligence by improving the innate quality of human kind voluntarily.

The entire review gives us an idea that the couple planning for a healthy progeny should follow brahmacharya for 1 month, followed by proper shodhana therapies in the form of panchakarma and to engage in maithuna after consuming the prescribed diets.

The heat produced for long duration for professionals working with laptops results in radiation which affects the sperm production adversely. According to survey about 15 out of 100 couples from IT sector faces infertility and 40% of such cases are related to male infertility. Absence of proper sexual relationships, stress and tensions in the work place etc are the major causes of infertility in this sector. In such cases adoption of certain dinacaryas like abhyanga, vayayama, snana along with yoga and pranayama can be advised to couples as a part of pathya viharas leading to decline of physical and mental stress. In addition to this advice regarding dietary regulations is also applicable.

By practicing the pathya ahar viharas in a proper way as mentioned in the classics may lead to optimum health of both partners as well as the forthcoming child. Thus concluding with the sloka from Taittiriya Upanishad, praajanam vai pratishta loke stadhu prajaya stantu tavanah pitnamnmn bhavathi...

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