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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 *apathya 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, apathya

1. Introduction

The concept of preconceptional care require utmost importance in present era, in this context the knowledge about *Pathya* and *Apathya* 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 *vyadhitha*. 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 antenatally. 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 does 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 *anupaghathi to manas* and *sarira* [4] In Vaidyaka jeevanam written by Lolimbaraja describes the relevance of pathya as “*pathye sathi 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 Susruta 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 *apathya 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 preconception.

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 *apathya ahara* in *rajaswala charya*.

2.2 According to Susruta Samhitha

Pathya ahara-Havishya 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, nakhachedana, pradhavana, hasana, atikadhana, atisabda sravana, kesa prasadana, 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 Sangraha

Pathya ahara-payas sidha yavanna in *alpamathra* as a means of *karshanartha* *Apathya ahara-tikshna, ushna, amla, lavana ahara* *Pathya vihara*-From the first day of menstruation to the third day of menstruation the female should follow *brahmacharya* and should lie down over *darbha* and should have food either in *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-havishya during the first 3 days of menstruation *Pathya viharas-Brahmacharya* and *ahimsa*, during the *artava srava kala*, she should lie over *darbha* and have *havishya* either in *hastha, sarava* or *parna*

Apathya viharas - *Asru patha, nakha chedana, abhyanga, anulepana, anjana prayoga, snanam, divaswapnam, pradhavana, atyuccha sabda sravana, hasana, bahubhashana, ayasa, bhumighanana, pravata* [15].

3. Concept of Pathya and Preconceptional Care

3.1 Pathya Ahara

Brihatrayees has mentioned *pathya aharas* separately for both males and females respectively. In male's *madhuroushadha 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 *raktha vriddhi hethu* [16-18]. *Acharya Kasyapa* also has similar explanation as that of *brihatrayees* with no difference [19].

Unlike the references from *brihatrayees* the *laghutrayees* does not give 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 *kacchapa* 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 Vajikarana prakarana* it is mentioned that the *dravyas* which are having *madhura rasa, guru* and *snigdha guna* with *jeevana* and *brhmana* properties are considered *pathya*. *Acarya* also explained that *gritha bhrishtha masha* processed with *ksheera* and added with *sarkara* if taken daily is considered as *vrishya uthama*. *Acarya* also advised to take *satavari ksheerapaka* with *sitha* internally [22].

In *Haritha samhitha, Sukra vridhi upaya adhyaya*, intake of *palandu, 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, phanitha, dadhi* 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 produce *sukra sthambhana* and *sukra soshana* [26].

According to *Baishajya 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 padartha* is contra indicated for males [27].

According to *Haritha Samhitha Surana, Sunti* are considered as *apathya* in *sukra kshaya*. Intake of *katu, amla, tikta, ruksha, tikshna, ushna aharas* and *kanji* is considered as *apathya* in *sukra vridhi* [28]. In *Vandhya roga adhyaya acharya* describes certain *apathya dravyas* like *kaccharam, 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 *apathya* in *sukra nasha* [30].

3.3 Pathya Viharas

Among the *pathya viharas* mentioned by *brihatrayees*. *Acharya Charaka* and *Astanga Hridaya* gives a different explanation where he mentions proper *sneha sweda* with *peyadi karma* followed by *vamana* and *virechanadi sodhana kriya*, thus by attaining *samyag sudhi* administration of *asthapana* and *anuvassana basti* is also explained [31, 32]. In addition to this *acharya Vagbhata* in *Astanga Hridaya, pumsavana* is also explained. *Pumsavana* is described as a means of *putrotpada sthithiprada* [33]. The position of *maithuna* for female is described by *Vagbhata* 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 *putershti mantra* and to engage in *maithuna* with *paraspara santhvana* and *priya vachana* [33]. *Acharya Susruta* and *Astanga sangraha* has similar opinion that is to follow *brahmacharya* 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 Asthapana basthi* [36]. Some special procedures of *putreshti yajna* are only explained by Kashyapa and Caraka [37, 38]. 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 *sparsha* of *rithumathi stree* during *rithu 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 *putralabdyartham*. Among the *brihatrayees* only Acarya Caraka has mentioned the appropriate position for *maithuna* as *uthana sayana* for females, because proper *beeja grahana* occurs in this position and the *dosas* reside in *yatha sthana*. Astanga sangraha-kara 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 desire a female progeny, which is the opinion of all the *brihatrayees*, *Astanga sangraha-kara* and Kasyapa [43-47].

According to Kasyapa Samhitha, on the 4th day of menstruation after snana the woman should enter *devagrha* 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 Sangraha-kara mentioned certain contraindicated postures for *maithuna* as *nyubja, parsva (dakshina parsva)* and *vama parsva* positions. Females contraindicated for *maithuna* according to Caraka and Astanga sangraha-kara are *atibaala, ativruddha* and *deergha rogi* and those who suffer from *kshut, pipasa* and those who are *bheeru, 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, vyadhimathi, yoni roginini, vridha* and *garbhini* [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 *garbhadhana samskara* starting with the *vivaha yogya praya, vivaha yogya* and *maithuna yogya purusha* and *stree*. Acaryas emphasize 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 rahitha 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 *rajonivriti* 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 *garbhashaya sodhana* since *garbhasaya* is considered as one among the *koshtanga*, 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 *sasiraska snana* with *seeta jala* may cause *stambhana* to normal menstrual flow.

Regarding the *pathya ahara* in preconceptional care all the *brihatrayees* mentioned *madhuroushadha samskritha ghritha, ksheera* and *salyodana* for males because *madhura rasa dravyas* initiate *sukra 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 *laghutrayees* 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 vastuka* are considered *pathya* in *sukra 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 ksheera paka* with *madhu* can be advised. In *vandhya roga adhyaya, acharya* Haritha advised intake of *dravyas* like *devadali, brihatidvayam, suryavalli, satavari* etc because drugs like *devadali* have *visha hara* property, *Brhati* have *brhmana, sukra rechaka* and *prajasthapana* properties. The use of *tila taila, ksheera, phanitha, dadhi, 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 *samsarjana*

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 *putreshti 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 that is 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 where *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 *uharothara dinas* there is *ayuharsa* 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 samskara*, 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, vyayama, 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 ahara 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, *prajananam vai pratishtha loke stadhu prajaya stantu tanvanah pitrmamrno bhavathi...*

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