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A LITERATURE REVIEW OF ARTAVAVAHA SROTAS AS CONCEPT OF FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM IN AYURVEDA

[1]*Dr. Akshay Ashok Bachate and [2]Dr. Prashant Vinayak Gote

[1]Assistant Professor (Streerog Avum Prasutitantra) MUP_S Ayurved College Degaon Risod.

[2]Assistant Professor (Kriya - Sharir) MUP_S Ayurved College Degaon Risod.

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***Corresponding Author**
Dr. Akshay Ashok Bachate
Assistant Professor (Streerog Avum Prasutitantra) MUP_S Ayurved College Degaon Risod.

ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, a woman's health is believed to begin in the fetal stage, with guidelines provided to ensure the birth of a healthy female child. The ancient sages of Ayurveda thoroughly studied the unique anatomical and physiological characteristics of women at each stage of life. Just as a river is purified by its flow, women are cleansed through the menstrual cycle, which is one of the reasons why they are less susceptible to many diseases. Ayurveda emphasizes specific regimens to follow during the menstrual and post-menstrual periods. Ignoring these practices is a primary cause of various gynecological and systemic health issues in women. Moreover, Ayurveda identifies 20 gynecological conditions, referred to as *Yonivyapad*, all of which are considered diseases of the anatomical components of the *Artavavaha Srotas* (reproductive system). In Ayurveda, the *Artavavaha Srotas* is extensively described, covering its origin (*moolsthana*), pathophysiology, clinical conditions, and Ayurvedic treatment approaches. The concept of *Artavavaha Srotas* closely resembles the female reproductive system as understood in modern medical science. Anatomical defects within the reproductive system are considered one of the leading causes of poor obstetric outcomes. Studies show that around 12–15% of women with recurrent miscarriages have uterine malformations. Therefore, there is a growing need to expand on the physiological, anatomical, and applied Ayurveda knowledge of the female reproductive system to promote better women's health.

KEYWORDS: *Ayurveda*; Artavavaha *Srotas*; Female Reproductive System; Yonivyapad; Moolstha.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, various components of the *Artavavaha Srotas* are outlined, many of which correspond to parts of the female reproductive system. The term *Bhaga* in Ayurvedic texts refers to both the *Smaramandira* and *Yoni*, which are analogous to the vulva in modern anatomy. It is described as being 12 angular lengths, likely referring to the entire circumference of the vulva, rather than just the vaginal opening. Therefore, *Bhaga* can be understood as *Yoni*, representing the external genital organs of the female, such as the vulva and vaginal introitus. The *Smaratpatra* is located in the upper part of the vagina, similar to the clitoris, an erectile and highly sensitive structure activated during sexual activity. The term *Yoni* in Ayurvedic scriptures can refer to both the entire reproductive system and its individual organs. Depending on the context, *Yoni* may denote different parts of the female reproductive system.

The structure of the Yoni is often compared to the shape of a conch shell, being broader at the beginning, constricted in the middle, and again widening towards the end. It is described as consisting of three distinct Avartas. The **Prathamavarta** refers to the vagina and its associated structures, the **Dwitiyavarta** includes the cervix and its accompanying parts, while the **Tritiyavarta** encompasses the uterus and its appendages. The term **Garbhashaya** is a combination of two words: **Garbha**, meaning foetus, and **Ashaya**, meaning a cavity or place of holding. Thus, **Garbhashaya** refers to the organ that houses the foetus, commonly known as the uterus. It is situated between the **Pittashaya** (small intestine) and **Pakvashaya** (large intestine). The Yoni, resembling a conch shell, is made up of three Avartas, with the Garbhashaya located within the third Avarta. The shape of the Garbhashaya is compared to that of a fish called **Rohit**, triangular in form with the apex at the mouth. The mouth of this triangular cavity is narrow, while its internal space is wide.

The **Rajovahi Sira** (uterine vessels) serves as the primary blood supply to the uterus. When we consider the concept of **Artavavaha Srotas**, it can be understood in terms of its functional anatomy. The term **Moolsthan** refers to the foundational region of this system, where pathologies like injury (Viddha Lakshana) or dysfunction (Dushti Lakshana) can occur. **Artavavaha Srotas** can be seen as a physio-anatomical system located within the female pelvic cavity, consisting of the Garbhashaya and the Artavavahi Dhamani (vessels). These structures are pivotal to the functioning of the female reproductive system, and closely align with the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries in modern scientific terms.

The concept of **Artavavaha Srotas** can be explored on two levels: macroscopic and microscopic. On the macroscopic level, it refers to the reproductive tract, where processes like menstruation, conception, and fetal development occur. On the microscopic level, it focuses on the physiological aspects, as Artavavaha Srotas is fundamentally a physio-anatomical concept. The functions of the reproductive system, including ovulation, menstruation, conception, and the endometrial changes, are regulated by various hormones under the **HPO Axis** (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Ovarian Axis). These processes are also supported by proper blood and nerve supply. The capillary network in the reproductive system plays a vital role in the nourishment, development, and proper functioning of the organs.

Both Ayurvedic and modern medical perspectives agree that fertilization, implantation, nourishment, and fetal development all take place within the **Garbhashaya** (uterus). Any injury or disturbance to the **Artavavaha Srotas** or its Moolsthan can lead to symptoms such as menstrual irregularities, pain during intercourse (dyspareunia), or even infertility, which is recognized and explained by modern science as well. In conclusion, the concept of **Artavavaha Srotas** in Ayurveda shares significant similarities with the structure and function of the female reproductive system as understood in modern science, especially in terms of menstruation, conception, and fetal development.

Moolsthan of Artavavaha Srotas

When discussing the **Moolsthan** (origin) of any Srotas (physiological channels), several key aspects must be considered: **Utpattisthan** (origin), **Sangrahasthan** (storage), and **Vahanasthan** (conduction). The **Moolsthan** is understood as the fundamental location from which the origin, maintenance, and destruction of a specific bodily carrier are managed. It is also the site that controls the functional processes of that system. In the case of females, an additional Srotas, known as **Artavavaha Srotas**, is described in Ayurveda. The **Moolsthan** of Artavavaha Srotas includes the **Garbhashaya** (uterus) and **Artavavahi Dhamani** (uterine vessels or fallopian tubes). The **Garbhashaya** plays a vital role in conception, the production of Artava (ovum), and its expulsion, functioning as the primary site for these processes. This structure closely mirrors the modern understanding of the uterus and ovaries, both in terms of anatomy and function. Pathological conditions in the Garbhashaya and Artavavahi Dhamani often manifest similarly, whether in Ayurvedic or modern clinical settings.

The **Artavavahi Dhamani** can be likened to the fallopian tubes, which transport the Artava (ovum) to the uterus during the menstrual cycle. The term **Dhamana** refers to contraction, which accurately reflects the action of the fallopian tubes contracting to move the ovum. Therefore, in this context, the fallopian tubes function similarly to the **Artavavahi Dhamani**. In Ayurveda, **Garbhashaya** is defined as a cavity or space in the body that serves essential biological and physiological functions. This space is critical for the implantation and development of the **Garbha** (foetus). The term **Yoni**, used to describe the female reproductive system, encompasses the entire organ structure and functions in three distinct parts: the **Yoni** (vagina), **Garbhashayamukha** (cervical canal), and **Garbhashaya** (uterus), arranged from external to internal, respectively. The **Yoni** is often described as having a conch-like shape, consisting of three **Avartas** (circular folds), each representing different parts of the female reproductive system.

Table 1: Correlation of Ayurvedic Terms and Female Reproductive Organs.

Sr. No.	Name of the Organ in Artavavaha Srotas	Similar Organ in Female Reproductive System
1	Bhaga	Vulva or introitus
2	Smaratpatra	Clitoris
3	Yoni	Entire reproductive system
4	Garbhashaya	Uterus
5	Antarphala	Ovary

Uterine and Gynecological Health

Certain **anatomical issues** can lead to menstrual irregularities, such as uterine cancer, though this condition accounts for less than 1% of cases. Uterine cancer is rare in women under 50, and when detected early, it is highly treatable. While cancer is a potential cause of menstrual disturbances, most women in their 30s and 40s who experience heavy periods do not have cancer. Abnormalities in the uterine tissues, such as the **endometrium** (inner lining) and **myometrium** (muscle layer), may cause benign conditions like polyps or fibroids. Fibroids often lead to symptoms like abnormal uterine bleeding or infertility. Many women with fibroids do not experience symptoms and may not require treatment. However, fibroids located closer to the uterine cavity can cause heavy bleeding and contribute to infertility or miscarriages.

Ayurvedic Perspective on Gynecology

Ayurveda provides a deep understanding of gynecological issues and is open to ongoing research and exploration. The science emphasizes the importance of maintaining health and

treating diseases, particularly concerning female reproductive health. Ayurveda's holistic approach views **Aartava** as a central element in the female physiological cycle, which is not just limited to the menstrual flow but also reflects hormonal changes affecting the entire reproductive system. This cyclic activity is critical for a woman's well-being and specialization in physiological functions. **Aartava**, or menstruation, is seen as a reflection of a woman's hormonal health and is one of the first diagnostic indicators in assessing reproductive health. As such, understanding the pattern of menstrual flow is one of the primary diagnostic tools for gynecological examination.

Concept of Srotas in Ayurveda

In Ayurvedic terms, **Srotas** refers to the channels or pathways that transport bodily fluids or nutrients. These are described not only in anatomical terms but also in physiological and pathological contexts. Ayurveda views the Srotas as both **physiological anatomy** and **pathological anatomy**, emphasizing the function of these pathways rather than just their structural characteristics. While modern medicine has focused on theoretical anatomy, Ayurveda has always emphasized functional anatomy—how the body's parts work together to maintain health. This functional understanding is critical in both health and disease management.

Types of Anatomical Abnormalities in the Female Reproductive System

There are several **anatomical abnormalities** that can affect the female reproductive system, which can be classified as:

1. **Structural Deformities**: These include conditions like **Antramukhi**, **Phallini**, **Mahayoni**, **Vatiki Yoni**, **Prasransini**, along with other deformities like **Udvrtta** and **Apavrtta** of the Yoni. These deformities often result from the dislocation, displacement, or misalignment of the female reproductive organs. Modern medicine also recognizes that malposition of the uterus can lead to various reproductive issues.

2. **Embryological Deformities**: Conditions like **Suchi Mukhi**, **Shandi**, and **Bandhya Yoni Vyapadas** are related to anomalies that occur during embryological development. Ayurveda offers insights into the development of various types of vaginal openings based on embryological stages, which helps in understanding these abnormalities.

3. **Histological Deformities**: According to Ayurveda, conditions like **Karnini** and **Yoni Kanda** fall into this category, which affects the histological (microscopic) structure of the reproductive organs.

Comparing Ayurveda and Modern Science

There is no direct correlation between Ayurvedic and modern scientific terminologies due to the differing approaches to knowledge acquisition. However, there are analogies in both systems that can help in understanding female reproductive health. Ayurvedic texts provide detailed descriptions of the female reproductive system, which align with many modern concepts, offering a rich avenue for further research and exploration.

In conclusion, the Ayurvedic understanding of the female reproductive system provides a comprehensive framework for diagnosing and treating gynecological issues, both from a functional and anatomical perspective. The integration of Ayurveda with modern scientific knowledge can enhance our understanding of reproductive health and lead to more effective treatments

DISCUSSION

The female genital system develops from two **Müllerian ducts** that fuse together during embryonic development, forming a unified structure. This process supports the notion that the system operates as a cohesive whole, contrary to the idea of separate, distinct components in the **Aartava Vaha Srotas**. This concept aligns well with both **Ayurvedic** and **modern anatomical perspectives**, where the structure and function of the reproductive system are deeply interconnected. Furthermore, for any system to function optimally, every part—down to the smallest cell—must work in harmony. This reinforces the importance of a holistic, subjective approach to understanding the human body, as opposed to merely identifying the "what" and "where" of its anatomy. In **Ayurveda**, the study of anatomy is not just about locating structures but about understanding their functional significance in healing and treatment.

Given that the entire female reproductive system is considered **Aartava Vaha Srotas** in Ayurveda, the question arises: what is the Ayurvedic concept of this system? A thorough review of Ayurvedic texts reveals a comprehensive description of the **Yoni** and **Garbhashya** (uterus), which together encompass the entire female reproductive system. According to the **Sushruta Samhita**, the **Yoni** is described as having four "whorls," which are arranged in a

shape resembling a conch shell. Each of these whorls represents different anatomical components of the female reproductive system, reinforcing the integrated nature of the entire system.

Anatomical Deformities and Their Impact on Reproductive Health

Women's reproductive health is a major concern in medicine, as women play a vital role in the continuation of healthy progeny. Environmental factors, rapidly changing lifestyles, and the use of substances like drugs or steroids can significantly impact their health. Congenital or acquired anatomical defects are important factors to consider when investigating recurrent pregnancy loss. Structural abnormalities in the reproductive system should be strongly suspected when a woman experiences repeated pregnancy losses (especially in the first or second trimester), preterm deliveries, or abnormal fetal presentations. Though relatively rare, these anatomical deformities can have profound implications on fertility and pregnancy outcomes. This review serves as a reminder to healthcare providers to consider clinically relevant embryological factors and explore how such anomalies can affect a woman’s fertility.

A retrospective longitudinal study examining the incidence and reproductive impact of uterine malformations has shown that more couples are seeking reproductive assistance when the female partner has a uterine anomaly. This increase is not due to a rise in the prevalence of uterine anomalies but rather reflects improvements in diagnostic imaging techniques, such as **transvaginal ultrasound**, **hysterosalpingography (HSG)**, **magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)**, and **three-dimensional ultrasound (3D US)**. These advancements have enabled better detection of uterine abnormalities, particularly in women with infertility or recurrent miscarriages. In 1998, the **American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)** classified **Müllerian anomalies** to help clinicians better document these conditions and monitor outcomes during conception and pregnancy. Some uterine anomalies, such as the **arcuate uterus**, appear to have little impact on reproductive outcomes. However, the **uterine septum** is more definitively associated with recurrent miscarriage, and its surgical correction is generally easier and less invasive. In contrast, the **bicornuate uterus** is linked to higher rates of miscarriage, preterm delivery, and complications, requiring more extensive surgical intervention. The **didelphic uterus**, once thought to have minimal impact, has now been shown to increase the risk of preterm delivery and miscarriage. Similarly, the **unicornuate**

uterus carries the poorest outcomes, with higher rates of miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, preterm delivery, and lower live birth rates.

Ayurvedic Perspective on Gynecological Disorders

In Ayurveda, many gynecological disorders are classified under the term **Yoni Vyapad**. While "Yoni" is often translated as the vagina, in Ayurvedic literature, it refers to the entire female reproductive system. This broader understanding encompasses diseases affecting various anatomical components, including the vagina, cervix, and uterus. The term **Yoni Vyapad** thus refers to the dysfunctions or disorders of the anatomical components of the female reproductive system. Ayurvedic texts emphasize the importance of understanding the female reproductive system as a whole, and disorders related to it have been studied in great depth. However, this area of study requires further exploration through clinical surveys and research. The integration of clinical findings into Ayurvedic anatomy can lead to valuable insights, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern medical practices. As modern medicine increasingly acknowledges the importance of functional anatomy, Ayurveda's holistic approach provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of female reproductive health.

CONCLUSION

The **Artavavaha Srotas** closely resembles the female reproductive system as understood in modern medicine. This can be viewed in two ways: macroscopically, it refers to the reproductive tract, acting as the pathway for the movement of reproductive substances, and microscopically, it represents the capillary network of the uterus, which plays a crucial role in nutrient supply.The **Moolsthan** of the **Artavavaha Srotas** are the specific regions or structures in the body where **Artava** (menstrual fluid) originates, is temporarily stored, and then expelled from the body. These include the **Garbhashaya** (uterus) and the **Artavavahi Dhamani** (the blood vessels and capillaries of the uterus).Clinical conditions related to the **Rituchakra** (menstrual cycle) are influenced by various factors, including hormonal imbalances, anatomical deformities, the functioning of the central nervous system, and the overall health of the reproductive organs.In conclusion, Ayurveda provides a comprehensive understanding of the female reproductive system through the concept of **Artavavaha Srotas**, addressing its basic units, physiological anatomy, clinical conditions, and appropriate Ayurvedic management strategies.

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