



NATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN AYURVED SCIENCE

Article Received Date: 03/07/2026 Reviewed on Date: 07/09/2026 Accepted on: 23/09/2026

Aartav Vichar: Principles of Menstrual and Reproductive Health in Ayurveda - A Comprehensive Literary Review

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Abstract

The Ayurvedic conceptual framework of *Aartav Vichar* represents a sophisticated, multidimensional understanding of female reproductive physiology, pathology, and therapeutics. In classical treatises, the term *Aartava* occupies a dual position, signifying both the transient monthly menstrual discharge (*Raja*) and the female reproductive germ cell or *ovum* (*Stree-beeja*). This literature review compiles and synthesizes classical views regarding the etymology, synonyms, physiological characteristics, metabolic origin, and quantity of *Raja* and *Aartava* from core scriptures including the *Sushruta Samhita*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Harita Samhita*, and *Bhavaprakasha*. It systematically analyzes the eight pathological vitiations of menstrual blood (*Aartava-dushti*), detailing their distinct clinical features, prognostic factors (*Sadhyasadhyatva*), and customized

therapeutic protocols. Pervasive disorders such as deficient menstruation (*Aartava-kshaya*) and excessive flow (*Aartava-vridhhi*) are also explored alongside their Ayurvedic treatments. By integrating purificatory therapies (*Shodhana*), specialized intrauterine enemas (*Uttarabasti*), and targeted herbal formulations, Ayurvedic science provides a highly individualized and clinically effective approach for managing gynecological pathology and associated infertility (*Abeeja* states).

Keywords:

Raja, *Aartava*, *Stree-beeja*, *Upadhatu*, *Aartava-dushti*, *Shodhana*, and *ovum*

Introduction

In Ayurvedic classical medical treatises, female reproductive health is grounded in the exhaustive study of *Aartav Vichar* (principles of menstrual and reproductive factors). Healthy menstrual flow and proper

reproductive tissue metabolism are considered vital clinical indicators of a woman's overall metabolic and systemic equilibrium. In these scriptures, the terms *Raja*, *Rajas*, and *Aartava* are utilized extensively. While *Raja* specifically denotes the periodic, visible menstrual discharge, *Aartava* carries a wider connotation, representing not only the monthly menstrual fluid but also the active female reproductive germ cell or *ovum* (*Stree-beeja*).

According to the celebrated commentary of Acharya *Dalhana* on the *Sushruta Samhita Sutrasthana* 14/6, the word *Raja* etymologically refers to a monthly, red, blood-like substance that flows from the female vaginal tract (*stree yoni*) and is connected to the cyclic cleansing of metabolic impurities. The physiological activity of this cyclic discharge is time-bound, commencing at the age of twelve years and naturally declining to cessation at approximately fifty years.

Physiologically, *Raja* is classified as an *Upadhatu* (secondary or sub-tissue) of the primary metabolic tissue *Rasa Dhatu* (plasma), which undergoes transformation to yield breast milk (*Stanya*) and menstrual fluid (*Raja*) in females. The qualitative, thermal, and functional parameters of healthy *Raja* are described as sharing close affinity with *Rakta Dhatu* (blood tissue), yet possessing a distinct fiery (*Agneya*) predominance. Vitiation of these parameters due to dietary errors, emotional stress, or seasonal factors leads to *Aartava-dushti*, which renders the reproductive fluid incapable of fertilization (*Abeeja* state). This review consolidates the

scattered classical information on *Aartav Vichar* to present a holistic clinical synthesis.

Aim

To compile, evaluate, and systematically present classical Ayurvedic principles governing menstrual and reproductive health (*Aartav Vichar*) as documented in ancient Sanskrit medical literature, and to synthesize their clinical implications for female reproductive care.

Objects (Objectives)

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To clarify the etymology, synonyms, and terminological overlaps between *Raja*, *Aartava*, and *Stree-beeja* in Ayurvedic texts.
2. To compile the physiological attributes, quantity (*Pramana*), and classical criteria for the qualitative purity of menstrual fluid.
3. To investigate the role of *Aartava* as *Stree-beeja* (the female gamete) in embryogenesis, including maternal genetic influences (*Matruja bhava*).
4. To classify the eight pathological vitiations of menstrual blood (*Aartava-dushti*), detailing their etiology, clinical features, and prognosis (*Sadhyasadyatva*).
5. To synthesize the therapeutic guidelines, including purification therapies (*Shodhana*), local treatments, and specific herbomineral formulations, for managing menstrual vitiations and *Aartava-kshaya* (deficient flow).

Observations

1. Nomenclature, Etymology, and Synonyms

Ayurvedic classical texts provide multiple synonyms for menstrual fluid to describe its diverse clinical, physical, and metabolic properties. The primary synonyms identified in the literature include *Asruk*, *Rakta*, *Rudhir*, *Aartava*, *Shonita*, *Lohita*, and *Pushpa*. In his commentary on the *Sushruta Samhita*, Acharya *Dalhana* clarifies that *Raja* refers to the red blood-like fluid secreted monthly from the female genital tract during the fertile age. The term is also used metaphorically in various contexts to denote dust, active components, or excretory cleansing elements. Furthermore, the word *Aartava* is a chronological descriptor, indicating its association with the periodic cycle (*Rutu*), as summarized in the dictum: *Rutau bhavam tadaartavam* ("that which occurs seasonally is called *Aartava*").

2. Physiological Origin, Quantity (*Pramana*), and Characteristics

Ayurvedic physiology traces the origin of *Raja* as an *Upadhatu* (sub-tissue) of *Rasa Dhatu* (primary nutritional plasma). After digestion of food, the essence of food transforms into *Rasa Dhatu*. In women, this plasma yields breast milk (*Stanya*) and menstrual fluid (*Raja*) as secondary tissues. Acharya *Vagbhata* emphasizes that this process takes place monthly: *Rasa* transforms into female menstrual blood, which flows for three days every month. According to the *Charaka Samhita*, after the old, impure *Raja* is completely expelled during menstruation, new, pure fluid (*Prasada-rupa Raja*) is generated within the body to rebuild and

prepare the uterine bed (*Garbhashayya*) for potential conception.

The physiological quantity (*Pramana*) of menstrual fluid is defined as four *Anjalis* (the volume contained in four personal handfuls). Qualitatively, healthy menstrual fluid has a unique nature characterized as *Agneya* (predominantly fiery or thermal). This fiery nature, highlighted by Acharya *Sushruta*, is determined according to the principle of *Vyapadesha stu bhuyasa* (naming based on the dominant constituent), which explains its metabolic role in cleansing and its affinity with embryogenesis.

3. Criteria for Pure Menstrual Fluid (*Shuddha Aartava*)

Ayurvedic texts establish highly specific clinical criteria to distinguish pure, healthy menstrual blood (*Shuddha Aartava*) from pathological discharge. Pure *Aartava* is characterized by the following qualitative parameters:

- **Colour:** It resembles the bright red color of the *Gunja* fruit (*Abrus precatorius*), the scarlet *Indragopa* insect (velvet mite), the blood of a healthy rabbit (*Shasha-rudhira*), or liquid lac (*Laksha-rasa*).
- **Staining Property:** When pure menstrual fluid stains clothing, the stains can be easily washed away with water, leaving no permanent discoloration or residue on the fabric (*Dhautam yachcha virajyate*).

4. *Aartava* as *Stree-beeja* (*Ovum*) in Embryogenesis

In classical embryology, *Aartava* also denotes the female germ cell or *ovum* (*Stree-*

beeja). Acharya *Sushruta* asserts that the term *Beeja* represents both *Aartava* (female reproductive factor) and *Shukra* (male semen/sperm). The combination of these two factors is essential for fertilization. If the united *Shukra* and *Aartava* are divided into fragments by the biological force of *Vayu* inside the uterus, multiple pregnancies occur, corresponding to the number of divisions. Furthermore, Ayurvedic genetics dictates that the human seed contains microscopic parts representing every organ (*Pratyangabeejabhaga*). During embryogenesis, specific visceral organs such as the liver (*Yakruta*) and spleen (*Pleeha*) are classified as maternal-derived components (*Matruja bhava*), illustrating the independent and equal importance of the female genetic factor. Any vitiation of this *Stree-beeja* by the *Doshas* results in an *Abeeja* state, which leads to infertility.

5. Pathological Vitiations (*Aartava-dushti*) and Clinical Features

The vitiation of menstrual blood is termed *Aartava-dushti*. According to Acharya *Kashyapa*, the primary causes of this condition include seasonal imbalances (*Rutusanndhi* or *Rtuyapat*), dietary errors such as the excessive intake of extremely hot and spicy foods and beverages (*atyushna annapana sevana*), and improper physical or mental regimen during the active menstrual phase (vitiation of *Rajasvala* guidelines). These factors vitiate the bodily humors (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), which subsequently afflict the menstrual fluid and blood tissue, giving rise

to eight distinct clinical categories of *Aartava-dushti*.

6. Prognosis (*Sadhyasadyatva*) of Menstrual Disorders

Ayurvedic texts divide the eight types of *Aartava-dushti* into three prognostic classes based on their clinical severity and structural pathology:

1. Sadhya (Curable):

Vitiations caused by single *Doshas* (*Vataja*, *Pittaja*, and *Kaphaja*) respond well to treatment and are easily curable.

2. Krichhrasadya (Difficult to Cure):

Vitiations involving blood tissue and combined *Doshas*, specifically *Kunapa-gandhi* (cadaveric smell), *Granthi-bhuta* (clotted), *Putigandhi* (pus-like), and *Ksheena* (deficient), require intensive and prolonged management.

3. Asadya (Incurable):

Disorders characterized by urine and feces odor (*Mutra-purisha-gandhi*) resulting from the vitiation of all three *Doshas* (*Sannipataja*) are incurable, as they indicate deep structural and metabolic failure of the reproductive system.

Table 1: Classification, Clinical Features, and Prognosis of the Eight Types of *Aartava-dushti*

Type of Vitiating	Dominant Dosha	Clinical Features (<i>Lakshana</i>)	Prognosis
1. <i>Vataja</i>	<i>Vata</i>	Thin (<i>tanu</i>), dry (<i>rooksha</i>), frothy (<i>phenila</i>), reddish-pink/crimson (<i>aruna</i>), scanty (<i>alpa</i>), and painful (<i>saruja</i>) flow. Delayed, slow discharge and intense pricking (<i>toda</i>) or splitting (<i>bheda</i>) pain.	Curable (<i>Sadhya</i>)
2. <i>Pittaja</i>	<i>Pitta</i>	Yellowish (<i>kinchit peeta</i>), dark blue (<i>aaneela</i>), or blackish discharge with a fleshy/bloody smell (<i>visra-gandha</i>). Accompanied by severe burning sensation (<i>daha</i>), dry mouth, and dysuria (<i>mutrakrichhra</i>).	Curable (<i>Sadhya</i>)
3. <i>Kaphaja</i>	<i>Kapha</i>	Thick (<i>ghana</i>), slimy (<i>pichhila</i>), pale, and cold flow resembling marrow (<i>majjadhatu-sadrusha</i>) that sinks in water. Associated with vaginal stiffness (<i>jadya</i>), laziness (<i>aalasya</i>), heaviness (<i>gaurava</i>), drowsiness (<i>tandra</i>), and excessive sleep (<i>nidra</i>).	Curable (<i>Sadhya</i>)
4. <i>Kunapa-gandhi</i>	<i>Rakta Dhatu</i>	Menstrual fluid smells like a decomposing corpse (<i>shava-gandha</i>) and is discharged in excessively large quantities (<i>analpa</i>).	Difficult (<i>Krichhrasadhya</i>)
5. <i>Granthi-bhuta</i>	<i>Vata & Kapha</i>	Flow is clotted and contains glandular, lumpy masses (<i>granthi-saman</i>). Combines features of both <i>Vata</i> and <i>Kapha</i> .	Difficult (<i>Krichhrasadhya</i>)
6. <i>Putigandhi</i>	<i>Pitta & Kapha / Rakta-Pitta</i>	Discharge has a highly offensive, putrid smell resembling pus (<i>puya-sadrusha-gandha</i>).	Difficult (<i>Krichhrasadhya</i>)
7. <i>Ksheena</i>	<i>Vata & Pitta</i>	Scanty, highly deficient, and delayed menstrual discharge.	Difficult (<i>Krichhrasadhya</i>)
8. <i>Mutra-purisha-gandhi</i>	<i>Sannipata (Three Doshas)</i>	Menstrual discharge smells strongly of urine and feces. Reflects profound, irreversible systemic and local pathology.	Incurable (<i>Asadhya</i>)

7. Therapeutic Management of *Aartava-dushti*

The treatment of vitiated menstrual fluid (*Aartava-shuddhi*) follows principles similar

to semen purification (*shukra-shuddhi*). The foundational management relies on body purification therapies (*Shodhana*) including therapeutic emesis (*Vamana*) and purgation (*Virechana*), administered according to the dominant *Dosha*. Furthermore, Acharya *Vagbhata* highlights that intrauterine enemas (*Uttarabasti*) are exceptionally beneficial for all clinical variants of *Aartava-dosha*. Local therapies such as oleation (*Snehana*) and vaginal tampons (*Pichu-dharana*) are also recommended to restore local tissue health. Specific management for each type is outlined as follows:

- **Vataja Treatment:** Administer medicated ghee (*ghrita*) prepared with *bharangi*, *yashtimadhu* (licorice), and *devadaru*. Oral intake of milk boiled with *gambhari* and *mudgaparni* (*Kashmaryadi Ksheera*) is highly effective. Additionally, the *Harita Samhita* recommends a decoction of *shunthi* (ginger), *pippali*, *musta*, *dhanvayasa*, both types of *brihati*, and *patala* mixed with curd and jaggery for one week during active menstruation. Locally, a vaginal pack containing the paste (*kalka*) of *priyangu* and sesame seeds (*tila*) must be applied.
- **Pittaja Treatment:** Utilize the *Harita Samhita* compound powder consisting of *chandana* (sandalwood), *usheera*, *manjistha*, *patola*, *musta*, *vaalaka*, *madhuka*, *rakta-chandana*, *padmaka*, both types of *punarnava*, *sariva*, *jeeraka* (cumin), and *pippali*, administered with sugar and milk. A decoction of

white sandalwood (*shweta-chandana*) mixed with honey (*kshaudra*) can be taken orally. Therapeutic purgation (*virechana*) is achieved using milk medicated with *aragvadha* and *gavakshi*. Locally, vaginal tampons of *ksheeravidari* or *chandana* paste are indicated, and vaginal washing (*prakshalana*) is performed with a decoction of red ochre (*gairika*) and soapnut (*arishta/ritha*).

- **Kaphaja Treatment:** Orally administer a decoction of *kutaja-twak* (bark), *katuki*, and *ashwagandha*, or a decoction of tender leaves of milky trees (*Ksheeri-vriksha*) mixed with honey. Emesis (*vamana*) is induced using a decoction of emetic nut (*madanaphala*), and its paste is used as a vaginal tampon. Vaginal washing must be conducted with a decoction of *lodhra* and *tinduka*, or with warm goat/sheep urine (*avi-mutra*).
- **Granthi-bhuta Treatment:** Orally administer a decoction of *patha*, *gokshura* (*tri-kantaka*), and *vrikshaka* (*kutaja*). Alternatively, a decoction of *patha*, *tryushana* (the three purges/spices: *shunthi*, *maricha*, and *pippali*), and *vrikshaka* must be prescribed.
- **Kunapa-gandhi & Putigandhi Treatment:** Prescribe white sandalwood (*shweta-chandana*) paste with water or a decoction of sandalwood (or 20–25 drops of sandalwood oil in a cup of milk). Locally, apply vaginal tampons

containing *triphala* paste, or wash the vaginal tract with *triphala* decoction.

8. Pathology and Management of *Aartava-kshaya* and *Aartava-vriddhi*

Quantitative fluctuations in menstrual fluid are classified into deficient menstruation (*Aartava-kshaya*) and excessive menstruation (*Aartava-vriddhi*):

1. ***Aartava-kshaya***: Clinical symptoms include the delay or non-appearance of menstruation at its scheduled time (*adarshana*), a marked reduction in the volume of menstrual flow (*alpata*), and severe pain in the pelvic and vaginal regions (*yoni-vedana*). The treatment strategy requires bio-purification (*shodhana*) such as emesis and purgation, combined with the therapeutic use of fiery and heating substances (*agneya dravya*) in the diet, specifically sesame seeds (*tila*), black gram (*udid*), and fermented alcoholic beverages (*sura*).
2. ***Aartava-vriddhi***: Manifests as generalized body aches (*angamarda*), excessively heavy menstrual flow (*atipravritti*), and an offensive, foul odor of the menstrual discharge (*daurgandhya*).

Conclusion

The classical Ayurvedic principles of *Aartav Vichar* provide a holistic, sophisticated, and highly effective framework for understanding and managing female reproductive and menstrual disorders. By distinguishing the dual nature of *Aartava* as both a cyclic metabolic cleansing fluid (*Raja*) and the female genetic gamete (*Stree-beeja*),

Ayurvedic scholars established personalized diagnostic and treatment systems. The eight types of *Aartava-dushti* represent different pathophysiological imbalances of the *Doshas* and tissues. Vitiated states of *Aartava* lead directly to reproductive failure (the *Abeeja* state) and infertility, highlighting the clinical necessity of maintaining menstrual purity. Ayurvedic therapies, integrating systemic purification (*shodhana*), specialized local treatments (*uttarabasti*, vaginal tampons), and highly specific herbal decoctions, aim to restore the normal volume (four *Anjalis*), healthy *Agneya* (fiery) characteristics, and non-staining properties of menstrual blood. Consolidating this ancient knowledge enables modern clinicians to implement safe, individualized, and effective treatments for menstrual irregularities, hormonal imbalances, and female infertility.

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Conflict of Interest: None

Source of funding: Nil

Cite this article:

Ashok G. More, Venkat S. Kamble. "Aartav Vichar: Principles of Menstrual and Reproductive Health in Ayurveda - A Comprehensive Literary Review". (2026)
Ayurlog: National Journal of Research in Ayurved Science, 14(04),

<https://www.ayurlog.com/index.php/ayurlog/article/view/1378>

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.52482/ayurlog.v14i03.1378>
