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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW OF UTERINE FIBROIDS

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Abstract

Uterine fibroids are the most common solid benign tumours in women of reproductive age. Histologically this tumour is composed of smooth muscle and fibrous connective tissue, called as uterine leiomyoma, myoma, fibromyoma. Uterine fibroid related symptoms negatively impact physical and social activities, women's health related quality of life and work productivity. The postmenopausal incidence, although postmenopausal leiomyomas are smaller and fewer. Though uterine fibroids are non-cancerous in character; they exhibit a wide range of symptoms like dysmenorrhea, menorrhagia, metrorrhagia, lower backache. Ayurveda classics mention various pathological conditions that have features similar to fibroids. Owing to its muscular origin, with slow growth may be better compared to *Granthi/Arbud* in *Garbhashaya*. In the modern era of busy lifestyle, intake of junk food, lack of exercise etc had led to *Agnivaishamy* and *Aama* formation. This in turn vitiates *Doshas* like *Kapha* and *Vata* and *Dushyas* like *Rasa*, *Raktha*, *Mamsa*, *Medas* and *Arthava* resulting in *Dhatwagnimandya* leading to formation of *GarbhashayaGranthi*.

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Introduction:-

Fibroid occurs in 20-40% of women during reproductive age and 11-19% in perimenopausal age.^[1] The changing dietary pattern in modern era has led to the emerging trend of Fast-food culture. Swinging through the drive-thru for energy dense food consisting of high fat and high sugar accompanied by sedentary lifestyle is a major cause of increased incidence of lifestyle induced gynaecological diseases in young women. It is estimated that fibroid uterus has a prevalence of 20 to 40% among women over the age of 35 years.^[2] Women experience distress and impaired work productivity due to fibroid. There are many women undiagnosed with significant symptoms emphasizing the need for improved awareness and management of fibroids.^[3]

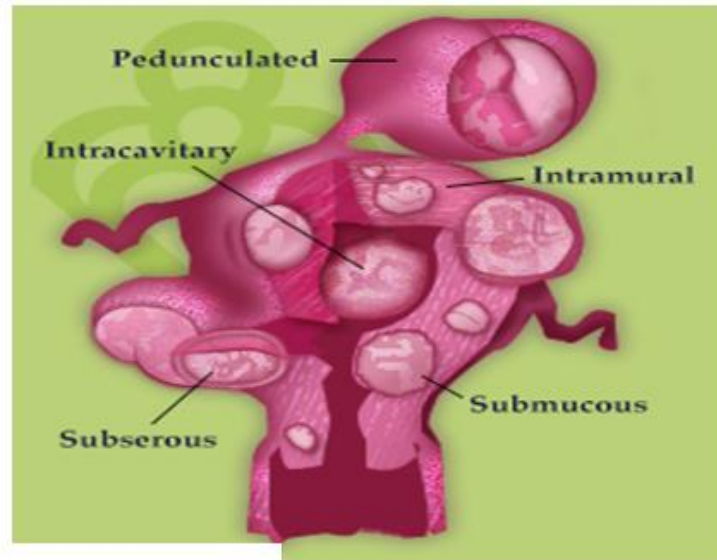
Contemporary treatment protocols include hormonal therapy, hysterectomy, myomectomy and uterine artery embolization. Reluctance of patients to undergo prolonged hormone therapy, the fear of surgery and usual mentality of patient in preserving the anatomical and functional integrity of the body, bring them to Ayurveda or any other alternative treatment of their choice. About 20% to 80% of women develop fibroids by the age of 50. In 2013, it was estimated that 171 million women were affected worldwide. After menopause, they usually decrease in size.

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However, the management of fibroids is undergoing an important evolution, with the focus on patient's quality of life.

The treatment approach is directed towards reducing size of fibroids using *Ushna, Tiskhna, Lekhana Dravyas* along with management of symptoms. The inevitable roles of *Vata* in *Yoni Roga* is also taken into account in its management. Combining different treatment aspects of *Granthi* and *Yoni Roga Chikitsa*, a unique approach towards the management of its varied presentations added on with lifestyle modification can contribute to healthy social life.



Materials And Methods:-

Methodology primarily includes literature review of Ayurvedic classics and relevant texts of contemporary science which are critically analysed.

Causes of Uterine Fibroid^[4] –

1. Age - Rare before 20 years and most commonly found after 35 years.
2. Parity- Common in nulliparous and relatively infertile women.
3. Racial- African, American ethnicity associated with 3-9 times more prone than Asian.
4. Genetic - plays very important role in fibroid development.
5. Changes in Oestrogen and Progesterone level.
6. Late pregnancy and multiple pregnancies.
7. Lifestyle related causes - stress, obesity, diet.

Types of Uterine Fibroid-

Uterine Fibroids are classified by their location.

- 1) Sub-serosal Fibroids- Located at outer wall of the uterine cavity and in serosal covering of the uterus and expand outward through the wall. The sub-serosal fibroid that can form a stalk on which the mass is attached termed pedunculated fibroids.
- 2) Intramural Fibroids- The word "mural" means "wall". An intramural fibroid is one that arises within and remains in the wall of uterus. These fibroids are the most common type of fibroid. Located in the thick wall of the uterus (myometrium). These develop within the lining of the uterus and expand inward.
- 3) Submucosal Fibroids- They are located inside the cavity of the uterus. These are located in muscle beneath the lining of uterine wall (endometrium). These are the least common fibroids, but they tend to cause the most problems. They can cause heavy bleeding, long period and irregular bleeding between the cycles.

Differential Diagnosis-

1. Endometrial Polyp, Endometrial Cancer
2. Endometrial Hyperplasia

3. Endometrial cyst/endometrioma
4. Ectopic pregnancy
5. Adenomyosis
6. Pregnancy
7. Haematometra
8. Ovarian tumour

Ayurvedic View on Fibroids:

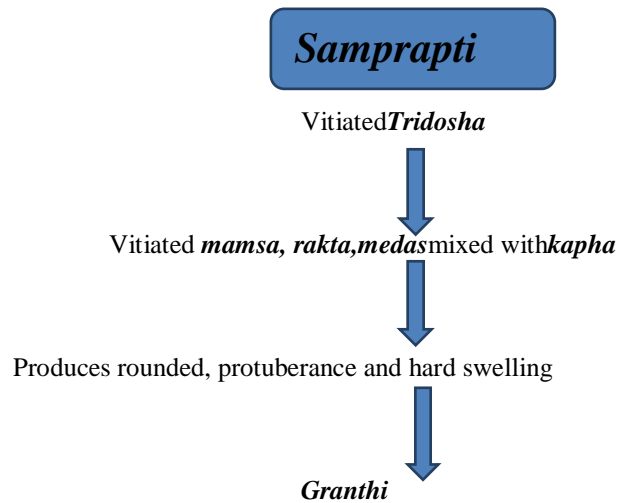
Various terminologies like *Granthi*, *Arbuda*, *Shopha*, *Gulma*, *Vidradhi*, *Arshas* etc described in ancient Ayurveda classics, seems to be similar to tumours or cystic swellings. There is no direct reference of uterine fibroid in Ayurveda. According to *Aacharya Charaka*, the clinical features of *Granthi* are different and they are described in *Shotha Adhyaya*^[5]. *Sushruta Acharya* mentions that main clinical feature of *Granthi*, *Vidradhi* and *Alaji* is *Shopha* or swelling.^[6] When *Granthi* becomes large, it is called *Arbuda*.^[7]

In fibroids usually suppuration does not occur, so it may not be correlated to *Vidradhi*. *Arshas* are fleshy outgrowths sprouts of muscles, skin and fat tissue growing in rectum, nose, ears, skin due to vitiation of *Tridoshas* in *Twak*, *Mamsa* and *Medas*.^[8] Fibroids being mainly muscular in origin, with slow growth may be better compared to *Mamsa Granthi* occurring in *Garbhashaya*. The description of *Mamsa Granthi* told by *Acharya Vagbhata* are *Snigdham* (smooth), *Mahantam* (big), *Kathinam* (hard) and studded with arteries and veins caused due to ingestion of *Mamsa Ahara*.^[9] The attributes of myoma like *Kathinya* (hardness), *Ghanatwa* (solidification) and *Gaurava* (heaviness) are *Kaphaja* in nature. On the other hand, *Kharatwa* (rigid), *Parusatwa* (roughness) are attributes of *Vata*.

Etiopathogenesis:

Pathogenesis of *Granthi* is propounded as when morbid *Tridoshas*, vitiate *Rakta* (blood), *Mamsa* (fleshy/muscles) and *Meda* (fat/adipose tissue) that are admixed with *Kapha* produce rounded protuberant, knotty or glandular and hard swelling called *Granthi*. *Acharaya Susruta* says the *Nidana* of *Shopha* like intake of *Gramya Mamsa*, *Ajeerna Ahara*, *Diwaswapna* etc are also causative factors for formation of *Granthi*. *Acharya Vagbhata* says that disease pertaining to female genitalia is not possible without the involvement of *Vata* and further describes *Dushta Bhojana*, *Dushta Arthava*, *Beeja Dosha* and *Daivta* as causative factors. Abnormalities in functions of *Agni* lead to *Kha-Vaigunya* and further formation of *Aama*. The *Samarasap* produce *Dhatwagnimandya* which results in further vitiation of *Dushyas* like *Raktha* and *Mamsa* in susceptible individuals. *Granthi* is mentioned among *Vridhhi* and *Dusthi Lakshanas* of *Mamsa Dhatu*. When *Kha Vaigunya* occur in *Garbhashaya*, it leads to vitiation and accumulation of *Mamsa Dhatu* leading to *Granthi* formation in *Garbhashaya*. There is involvement of *Rasa*, *Raktha*, *Mamsa*, *Medo* and *Arthava* *Srothas* that leads to manifestation of *Garbhashaya Vikriti*. When symptoms are present in *Garbhashaya* (uterus), it causes increase in the surface area resulting in pressure symptoms upon adjacent organs. They present as lower backache and pelvic symptoms due to pressure exerted on spine and adjacent areas, when they exert pressure on adjacent organs like urinary bladder and rectum, they cause incontinence or retention of urine and faeces. This also causes distortion in shape of uterus causing *Apana Vaigunya*. With *Apanavayu Dushti Nidana* like *Rooksha -Guru Anna*, *Vegadarana* and *Chakramana* lead to increased uterine contraction resulting in *Arthava Ruja* (congestive dysmenorrhea). The increased surface area extends into uterine cavity exhibit as disturbance in menstrual cycle like menorrhagia, metrorrhagia.

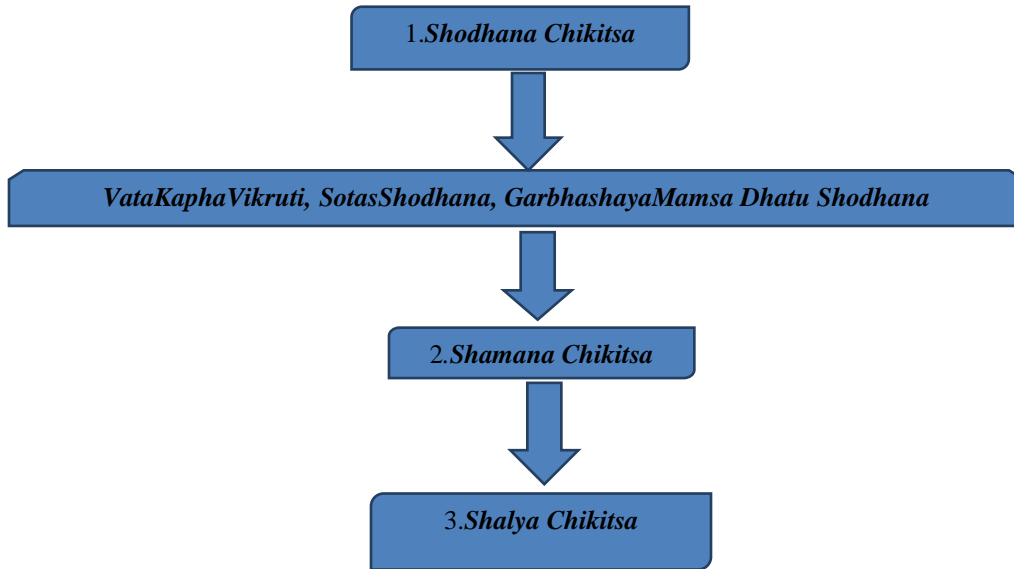
Category	Samprapti
1. <i>Dosha</i>	<i>Vata Kapha</i> predominant <i>Tridoshika Vyadhi</i>
2. <i>Dushya</i>	<i>Mamsa</i> is the principle <i>Dushya</i>
3. <i>Agni</i>	<i>Agni</i>
4. <i>Srotas</i>	<i>Rasavaha</i> , <i>Raktavaha</i> , <i>Mamsavaha</i> , <i>Medovaha</i> <i>Srotasa</i> and <i>artavavaha</i> along with the involvement of others <i>srotasa</i>
5. <i>Sroto Dushti</i>	<i>Sroto Sanga</i> is initial defect in <i>Srotasa</i> followed by <i>Atipravritti</i>
6. <i>Udbhavasthana</i>	<i>Garbhashaya</i> , <i>Pakwashayottha Vyadhi</i>
7. <i>Roga Marga</i>	<i>Abhyantara Roga Marga</i>
8. <i>Swabhava</i>	<i>Chirkari</i>
9. <i>Sadhyasadyata</i>	<i>Asadhya (Yapya) Vyadhi</i>



Management:

The treatment of fibroids starts with *Shodhana Chikitsa*. *Vata, Kapha* dominating *Tridoshas* eradicating tumours by attacking are involved in the pathogenesis of the *Arbuda*. *Mulika Chikitsa* totally focuses on their pathogenesis. Hence, *VataKaphahara* medications are required to overcome disease evacuation. *Dushya* are *Mamsa* and *Meda*; hence, the medications should possess *Lekhana* properties. Along with *Amapachana, Agni Deepana* drugs are needed for breaking the *Sanga, Atipravritta* type of *Srotodushti*. While describing the features of *Yapya Vyadhi Charaka*, it is said, “*Patya Sevaye Alpa Sukham*” (survive by wholesome regimen).^[13] When considering the treatment just cited, it is clear that the line of treatment was developed on the basis of *Shodhana* (purification) and *Shaman Chikitsa* (palliative treatment). When one’s disease cannot be controlled by these measures, surgical procedures are introduced. *VataKaphaShodhana* should plan as they are the main two *Dodhas* involved in *Dhatu* vitiation in this condition. Further *Srothasa* purification is essential for *Rasavaha, Raktavaha, Mansavaha, Medovaha Srothasa* (channels) *Artavavaha Srotas* as there are *Sanga* (obstructions) or *Atipravrutthi* (excessive action) occurs in pathogenesis.^[14] *Mamsa Dhatu Shodhana Kriya* are also essential at this level. Once the *Shodhana* process is successfully completed, *Shamana* treatments are initiated. As uterine fibroids are *Pakvashayagata* disease, *Apanavatha Shamana* is essential. At the same time *Agni Deepana* treatments are essential to prevent *Aama* formation. *Lekhana* drugs act by scraping, scratching or by removal of excess *Dosha*. Therefore, *Lekhana* is said to be effective for obesity and abnormal growths (benign and malignant) of the body.^[15]

Along with this *Mulika Chikitsa* or general measures *Avasthanochita Chikitsa* or symptomatic treatments should be also continued for the purpose of controlling signs and symptoms. Though Ayurveda is not clearly described for uterine fibroids, its various clinical presentations are almost addressed. Menorrhagia and intermenstrual bleeding should be treated by following *Raktapradara Chikitsa*.^[16] Astringent herbs can be used as *Rakta Stambhana* drugs (haemostats). Hormones could be balanced by using *Ambu Shamaka* measures, which are also important in menorrhagia. Further, *Rakta Vardaka* treatment is needed to correct depletion of haemoglobin level. *Apanavata Anulomana, Vedana Nashana* (Analgesic) treatments are needed for the cases with *Kashta Rajas* (dysmenorrhea). The same *Apana Vata Anulomana* treatments can be adapted for *Maithuna Asahishnuthva* (dyspareunia) and *Kati Shula* (noncyclic pelvic pain). *Muthra Dosha* (increased urinary frequency) associated with fibroids can be managed with the help of *Muthra Shodhaka* (urine purification), *Muthra Vaha Srothas Avarodha Hara* measures.



Conclusion:-

In today's era uterine fibroid is very big issue and is very common, which may result in various menstrual problems such as dysmenorrhea, menorrhagia and irregular periods, by disturbing anatomical as well as physiological integrity. Young couples must be counselled about greater risk of developing fibroids and other gynaecological diseases by postponing first pregnancy. **KaphaMedoVardhakaAharas** like **MamsaBhojana**, junk foods, pizzas etc should be avoided. In allopathy there are few treatments mentioned to treat the fibroid. Surgical intervention need not be the only management for uterine fibroids. The Acharyas gives emphasis to **NidanaParivarjana** and also elaborates the importance of **Dinacharya, Rithucharya, Rajaswalacharya** and their role in upbringing healthy womanhood. Thus, with Ayurvedic medications and life style modification, we can assure women to reach higher potentials of personal and professional life.

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