

## PHYSIOLOGY OF ARTAVAVAHA SROTASA: A REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*Ayurvedic* classics proclaim *Srotasa* as the system of channels designed as biological transport system performing divergent functions. Indeed, it is a generic term indicating all the macro and micro channels and pathways operating in the living organism. Broadly *Srotasa* are classified in two categories: *Bahirmukha* and *Antarmukha*. *Artavavaha Srotasa* is enumerated as one of the *Antarmukha Srotasa* by *Sushruta*, playing an important role in transformation of *Artava* and *Artava Chakra*, and *Garbhhotpatti*, having *Garbhasaya* and *Artavavahi Dhamani* as its *Moolasthan*.

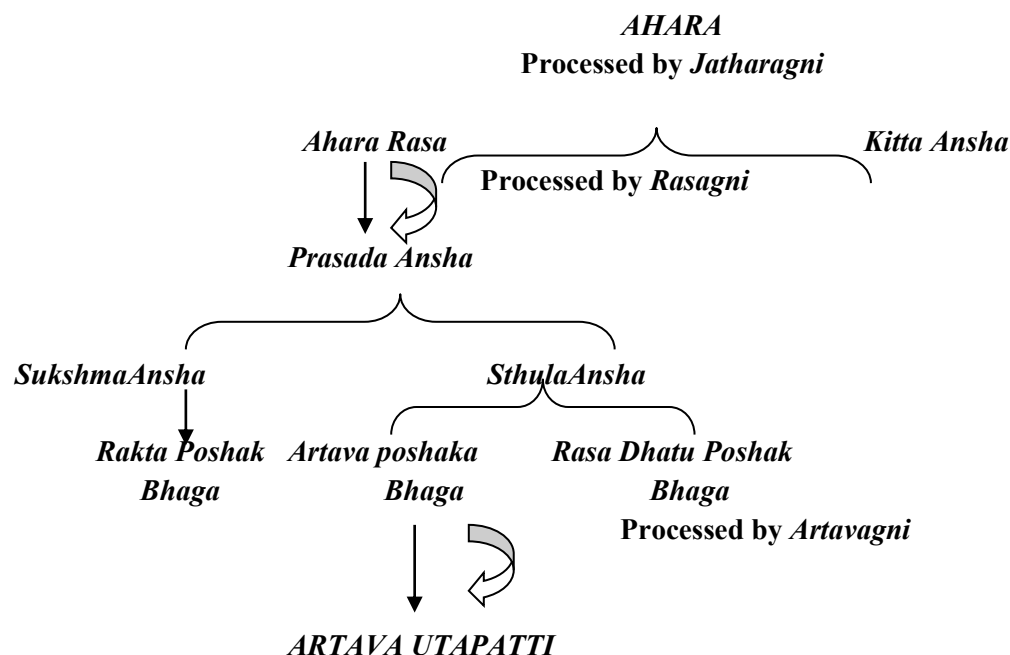
**Keywords:** *Antarmukha, Artavavaha, Garbhhotpatti, Moolasthan, Srotasa*

## INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda* almost all authors demonstrate *Artava* as one of the *Updhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu* except *Acharya Sarangdhara*, who considers *Artava* as the *Updhatu* of *Rakta Dhatu*<sup>1</sup> while *Acharya Bhava Prakash* shows *Artava* as the seventh *Dhatu* in female body.<sup>2</sup> In *Ayur-*

*veda* classics various terms are described having a similar meaning that of *Artava* viz.

*Artava; Shonita; Asrik; Raja; Rakta; Lohita; Rudhir; Pushpa; Beeja; Artava* is originated by *Rasa Dhatu*.<sup>3</sup>



Although in *Ayurveda Samhitas* female gonad / ovary are not evidently specified but some comparable terms are accessible e.g. *Phala*, *Antargata*, *Beeja Granthi*, *Dimbha* etc.

*Beeja Granthi* is described as a component of female genital organ wherein the ‘*Beeja*’ is stored, got matured and expelled out at appropriate time.

*Sushruta* quotes the term “*Phalamantrgata*” which can also be compared with ovary.<sup>4</sup>

While describing the treatment of *Ashmari* (urinary bladder stone) *Acharya Sushruta* and *Vagbhatta* as well include *Phala Srotasa* among eight vital organs which should be protected carefully from mechanical injuries.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, in *Ashtanga Hridayam Acharya Vagbhatta* mentions *Dimbha* as one of the *Koshthanga* which might be compared with *Beeja Granthi*.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Srotasa:**

**Etymological Derivation:** The word *Srotasa* is derived from the Sanskrit root “*Sru Gatau*” which means going, moving, continuing, filtering, flowing, leaking, and secreting.

**Origin:** In intrauterine life, *Srotopatti* takes place. *Vayu Mahabhuta* is responsible for generation of

*Srotasa*. When differentiation takes place, *Vayu* creates *Srotasa* with the help of appropriate *Agni*.<sup>7</sup>

**Definition:** *Srotasa* is defined as the channel or structure through which ‘*Sravanam Karma*’ i.e. flowing, moving, oozing and permeation of different constituents and nutrient of the body takes place.<sup>8</sup>

**According to Charak:** *Charak* declares *Srotasa* as the channels of circulation, carrying “*Parinamama-padyamananam*” *Dhatu* (the transforming tissues) from one place to another. Indeed, employed as communicating channels particularly for nutrient tissues/temporary tissues (*Asthayi Dhatu*) to be utilized for formation of permanent *Dhatu*s (*Sthayi Dhatu*). Also carry out the *Prana*, *Udaka* and also the three types of *Mala*.<sup>9</sup>

**According to Sushruta:** *Srotasa* are the channels of the body having originated from vacant spaces (hollow organs) spread throughout the body transporting nutrient materials to different tissues of the body, but at the same time they are different from *Sira* and *Dhamani*.<sup>10</sup>

**Synonyms of Srotasa:** *Acharya Charak* references various synonyms credited to various visible and invisible spaces inside the tissue elements of the body.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1:** Synonyms of *Srotasa* (According to *Charak*)

S. No.	Synonyms of <i>Srotasa</i>	Comparative Terms
1.	<i>Srotasa</i>	Channels
2.	<i>Sira</i>	Vein
3.	<i>Dhamani</i>	Artery
4.	<i>Rasavahini</i>	Capillary
5.	<i>Pantha</i>	Passage
6.	<i>Sarirachhidra</i>	Space inside the body
7.	<i>Rasayani</i>	Lymphatic Channel
8.	<i>Nadi</i>	Duct
9.	<i>Marga</i>	Track
10.	<i>Samvrtasamrta</i>	Duct closed at one end and open at the other
11.	<i>Sthana</i>	Residence
12.	<i>Asaya</i>	Container
13.	<i>Niketa</i>	Abode

**Classification of *Srotasa*:** *Srotasa* are classified in various ways in *Ayurvedic Samhitas*: One of these are – *Bahirmukha* and *Antarmukha Srotasa*.

***Bahirmukha Srotasa*:** While describing *Pratyanga* in *Sharira Sthana*, *Sushruta* enumerates nine *Bahirmukha Srotasa* and adds three more in female. While *Charak* described only 10 *Bahirmukha Srotasa*.

**Table 2:** *Bahirmukha Srotasa* (According to *Sushruta*)<sup>12</sup>

S. NO.	<i>Bahirmukha Srotasa</i>	Comparative Terms
1.	<i>Shravana</i>	Two ears
2.	<i>Nayan</i>	Two eyes
3.	<i>Vadana</i>	One mouth
4.	<i>Ghrana</i>	Two nostrils
5.	<i>Guda</i>	Anal opening
6.	<i>Mendra</i>	Urethral opening
7.	<i>Stana</i>	Two breasts/ nipples
8.	<i>Raktavaha</i>	One vaginal opening for the outflow of menstrual Blood

**Table 3:** *Bahirmukha Srotasa* (According to *Charak*)<sup>13</sup>

S. NO.	<i>Bahirmukha Srotasa</i>	Comparative Terms
1.	<i>Guda</i>	Anal opening
2.	<i>Mutra marga</i>	Urethral opening
3.	<i>Netra</i>	Two eyes
4.	<i>Karna</i>	Two ears
5.	<i>Nasikachhidra</i>	Two nostrils
6.	<i>Mukha Marga</i>	One mouth
7.	<i>Swedavaha Marga</i>	Sweat glands

***Antarmukha Srotasa*:** *Charak* describes thirteen gross channels (*Antarmukha Srotasa*), seven for seven *Dhatus*, three for *Malas* and three (one for each: food, water and air), While *Sushruta* pronounces eleven pairs of *Srotasa*.

**Table 4: Antarmukha Srotasa**(According to different Acharya)

S. No.	According to Charak	According to Sushruta
1.	Pranavaha Srotasa	Pranavaha Srotasa
2.	Annavaaha Srotasa	Annavaaha Srotasa
3.	Udakavaha Srotasa	Udakavaha Srotasa
4.	Rasavaha Srotasa	Rasavaha Srotasa
5.	Raktavaha Srotasa	Raktavaha Srotasa
6.	Mamsvaha Srotasa	Mamsvaha Srotasa
7.	Medavaha Srotasa	Medavaha Srotasa
8.	Asthivaha Srotasa	Shukravaha Srotasa
9.	Majjavaha Srotasa	Purishvaha Srotasa
10.	Shukravaha Srotasa	Mutravaha Srotasa
11.	Purishvaha Srotasa	Artavavaha Srotasa
12.	Mutravaha Srotasa	-
13.	Swedavaha Srotasa	-

**Artavavaha Srotasa:** Acharya Sushruta has described Artavavaha Srotasa as Antarmukha Srotasa, which plays an important role in transformation of Artava, Artava Chakra, and Garbhotpatti.

Unfortunately, a very concise description of Artavavaha Srotasa is available in different Ayurveda compendia except Sushruta Samhita.

**According to Acharya Charak:** Acharya Charak uses term Rajovaha Shira in Yonivyapada Adhyaya while describing Pradara Roga.<sup>14</sup>

**According to Ashtanga Samgraha:** Acharya Vagbhatta uses the term Rajovahi Srotasa while describing Artava Adarshan in pregnant women.<sup>15</sup>

**According to Acharya Kashyapa:** In Kashyapa Samhita, in context to Gabhashaya (uterus) author remarks about Rajovaha Sira situated in Garbhasaya (uterus), performing transportation as well as expulsion of Rajah per month, also carries Pushpa.<sup>16</sup>

**According to Acharya Sushruta:** Artavavaha Srotasa are two in number, having their roots in Garbhashaya and Artavavahi Dhamanis, when injured causes infertility, dyspareunia and amenorrhoea.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Moolsthana of Artavavaha Srotasa:**

Moolsthana of Srotasa may be considered as the structures concerned with origin, maintenance, and destruction of that corresponding carrier of body nutrient and control the entire functional dealing and processes of that specific carrier. In female Artavavaha Srotasa is described as additional one. Acharya Sushruta mentions Garbhashaya and Artavavahi Dhamani as the Moolsthana of Artavavaha Srotasa.

**Garbhashaya (Uterus):** Garbhasaya is the place where the Garbha (embryo) stays and get develops till the full term, and is originated from Rakta, Kapha, Pitta and Vayu together along with Antra, Basti, Guda and other abdominal organs.<sup>18</sup> Kukshi and Vipulasrota are the another names given to Garbhashaya. It is placed between Pittashaya (gall bladder) and Pakwashaya (intestine) being attached to the third Avarata of Yoni just behind the Basti, having the shape like mouth of 'Rohitafish'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore commentator Dalhana amplifies the hollow inner cavity of uterus resembles the mouth of Rohitafish.

Acharya Sushruta adds on 20 extra Peshi (muscles) in female body as compared to male.

**Table 5:** Number of *Peshi* In Female (According to *Sushruta*)<sup>20</sup>

S. No.	Parts	No. of <i>Peshi</i>
1.	In Breasts	5 in each breast
2.	In <i>Garbhashaya</i>	4 in <i>Apatayapatha</i>
3.	In <i>Garbhashaya</i>	3 in <i>Garbhachidra</i>
3.	In <i>Garbhashaya</i>	3 are responsible for access of <i>Shukra</i> and <i>Artava</i>

**Artavavahi Dhamani:** The *Atharva Veda* refers the ducts with thick walls as *Dhamanis*. This may be equivalent to arteries. The term *Dhamani* is derived from the root '*Dhma*', means a pipe or tubular vessel or canal in the human body originating from heart or the naval, carrying the *Rasa*. *Charak* defines *Dhamani* as the tract producing sound. While *Sushruta* illustrates *Sira* and *Dhamani* as the channels inside the

body he also proclaims *Nabhi* as the site of origin of both *Dhamani* and *Sira* (in foetus). *Charak*, *Ashtanga Samgraha* and *Ashtanga Hridayam* as well use the term *Nabhi* in reference to foetal life. In postnatal period *Dhamanis* get originated from *Hridaya*. Based on their course of circulation 24 main *Dhamanis* are divided in three categories.

**Table 6:** Number of *Dhamanias* (according to *Sushruta*)<sup>21</sup>

S. No.	<i>Dhamanias</i>	Number
1.	<i>Urdhvagami Dhamani</i>	10
2.	<i>Adhogami Dhamani</i>	10
3.	<i>Tiryaka Dhamani</i>	4

**Adhogami Dhamani:** *Dhamanis* spreading downward carry flatus, faces, semen, and menstrual blood etc. Among these two are concerned with the formation (*Pradurbhava*) and two for the excretion of *Artava*.

#### **Yoni (Vagina):**

The word *Yoni* is derived from the root '*Yuj-samshamne*' meaning to join or link.<sup>22</sup> All soft structures of the body are derived from *Matruja Bhava*. *Yoni* and *Garbhashaya* being the soft structures are referred as *Matruja Avayava* derived from *Shonita*. Several correlated terms to *Yoni* are *Bhaga*, *Varanga*, *Upastha*, *Smarmandiram* etc. as proposed in *Vaidyika Shabda Sindhu*. In *Rajanighantu* the word *Varanga* is mentioned as one of the synonyms of *Yoni* or *Bhaga*, while *Dalhana* use the term *Smarmandiram* to denote both external and internal orifices. *Bhava Prakash* also proposes a similar term *Samirana Nadi*, which is present in *Madanadapatra*.

*Yoni* resembles '*Shankha Nabhi*' (hollow portion of conch shell) in shape, having three *Avarata* (circles or envelops). Out of 20 extra *Peshi* (muscles) present in female as compared to male as described in *Bhava*

*Prakash* 4 *Peshi* are situated in the vaginal canal (*Apatayapatha*) out of which 2 are internal while other two are rounded and situated externally around the opening named *Yoni Karnika*.<sup>23</sup>

**Aim:** This article aims to review literature regarding *Artavavaha Srotasa* as described in *Ayurveda* classics and to explore its correlation with contemporary concept of female reproductive physiology

**Material and Method:** The literary material has been collected, compiled and analysed from all available *Ayurveda* classical texts, relevant literature from modern physiology & other various related information from authentic publications.

## DISCUSSION

On reviewing all the relevant references, we may conclude that *Artava* may behaves like *Dhatu* or an *Up-dhatu* at different time since reproductive physiology in female is undergoing periodical changes regularly.

**Dhatu Rupa Artava:** *Dhatu* is defined as the body tissue which supports and nourishes the body. *Artava* follows this definition since it supports the body as

well as serves as an essential factor for the formation and nourishment of some structures in the body E.g.

- During pregnancy *Artava* plays an important role in the formation of *Apara* (placenta).<sup>24</sup>
- During pregnancy *Artava* is responsible for the growth and nourishment of the breast /mammary glands.<sup>25</sup>
- At puberty accumulation of *Artava* in the uterus promotes growth and development of breasts and hair on pubic region.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of above discussion, we may include *Artava* in the category of *Dhatu*.

**Updhatu Rupa Artava:** After the onset of puberty in non-pregnant women *Artava* gets accumulated in uterus at every month and eliminated out through vaginal orifice under the influence of *Apana Vayu*. This accumulated *Artava* does not play any physiological role in nourishment and maintenance of any other *Dhatu* or bodily substances. So, in non-pregnant women it serves as a *Updhatu* providing only support to the body.

In *Ayurvedic* literature almost all authors exemplify the concept of *Srotasa* in detail and define *Srotasa* as the channels where all *Dhatu* are produced, nourished, absorbed and transported from one place to another.

Each *Srotasa* has its own *Moolasthan* associating with the transformation of the element that flows through the *Srotasa*. Interestingly it is the fact that if a *Srotasa* is vitiated (*Dusta*), it does not mean that their *Moolasthan* should also be affected, on the contrary if *Moolasthan* is malfunctioning it will definitely mess up the *Srotasa* and can cause some disease.

In modern point of view *Srotasa* can be associated with the organ system composed of different organs work together to perform a similar function. As *Acharya Charak* mentions human body (*Purush*) as an agglomeration of *Srotasa*.<sup>27</sup> Contemporary science deliberates human body composed of various organ systems.

Furthermore, *Acharya Charak* while describing *Pra-krita Karma* of *Vata* mentions two categories of *Srotasa* namely *Anusrotasa* and *Sthulasrotasa*.

<sup>28</sup>*Anusrotasa* can be analogue with the miniature structures of body like cells, cell membranes, capillar-

ies etc. On the other hand, *Sthula Srotasa* may be equivalent to the tubular body structures like blood vessels, intestine, trachea etc.

After reviewing all aspects, it may be concluded that when we state about *Srotasa* only it may be considered as channels but when we speak about *Srotasa* along with their *Moolasthan*, it may be considered as organ system, as *Srotasa* and channels / passage both have the comparable function to carry/transport the substances (*Parinama Prapta Dhatu*) or nutrients from one place to another, in the same way *Srotasa* along with their *Moolasthan* and organ systems both are associated with the biotransformation, storage, nourishment, transportation, absorption and excretion of *Dhatu*s and other bodily elements. Therefore, we can compare the *Srotasa* to the channels and *Srotasa* with their *Moolasthan* to the organ system.

*Artavavaha Srotasa* is a unique creation of the female body associated with the reproductive function. God has given this liberal gift to the women only. *Acharya Sushruta* specifically mentions *Artavavaha Srotasa* but *Charak* does not.

This *Srotasa* is concerned with the formation, storage, nourishment and excretion/elimination of *Artava*. Considering two categories of *Srotasa* reviewed earlier *Abhayantara* and *Bahya Srotas*, *Artavavaha Srotasa* might also be divided in two categories:

- *Abhayantara Artavavaha Srotasa* (*Garbhashaya* and *Artavavahi Dhamani*)
- *Bahya Artavavaha Srotasa* (*Yoni*)

Indeed, both these forms of *Artavavaha Srotasa* are equally imperative from physiological point of view, as *Abhayantara Artavavaha Srotasa* is responsible for formation, nourishment, growth and storage of *Artava*, while *Bahya Artavavaha Srotasa* is responsible for the excretion/elimination of *Artava* out of the body. *Abhayantara Artavavaha Srotasa* is two in number, having their roots in *Garbhashaya* and *Artavavahi Dhamanis*, any injury to these may cause infertility, dyspareunia and amenorrhoea.<sup>29</sup> Whereas *Yoni* is considered as *Bahya Artavavaha Srotasa* and it is single in number.<sup>30</sup>

In recent aspect we can compare *Artavavaha Srotasa* with female reproductive system E.g. *Garbhashaya*

may be compared with uterus, *Artavavahi Dhamani* with fallopian tube as well as with uterine arteries and *Yoni* can be compared with vaginal orifice since these structures are aligned with similar anatomical as well as physiological properties E.g. –

**Formation:** *Ayurveda* reveals that *Beeja Rupa Artava* (ovum) is formed in *Dimbh Granthi* connected with *Garbhashaya*, while *Raja Rupa Artava* (menstrual blood) is formed in *Garbhashaya* similarly current science reveals that ovum is formed in ovary and components of menstrual blood are formed from uterine endometrium.

**Nourishment:** According to *Ayurveda* the *Rasa Dhatu* and *Artavavahi Dhamani* afford nourishment to the *Artava* whereas contemporary science describes mucosa and secretion from the peg cells of the fallopian tube provide nourishment to the ovum and uterine arteries to the uterine endometrium.

**Storage:** According to *Ayurveda*, *Artava* is originated in *Garbhasaya* and stored there till one-month, modern science also offers the similar concept that usually only a single ovum cell forms in ovary at every month and is stored here until the ovulation takes place.

**Movement:** According to *Ayurveda*, *Artava* is carried by *Beejavahini (Artavavahi Dhamani)* while According to modern concept fallopian tube conveys the ovum from ovary to uterus.

**Excretion:** According to *Ayurveda*, *Artava* is expelled out through *Yonimukha* by the force of *Apana Vata*. And according to the modern science menstrual blood is expelled out through the vaginal orifice due to the contractile property of vaginal muscles.

Furthermore, as in tubectomy both the fallopian tubes are blocked or ligated to prevent the ovum to travel from the ovaries to the uterus, thereby eliminating the chances of conception. Similarly, *Sushruta* mentions any cut or blockage in *Artavavaha Srotasa* may lead to *Bandhyatva* or other gynaecological manifestations. So, in the light of above discussion the analogy between *Artavavaha Srotasa* and female reproductive system has been shown.

## CONCLUSION

After reviewing all aspects about the *Srotasa*, it may be concluded that when we state about *Srotasa* only it may be considered as channels but when we speak about *Srotasa* along with their *Moolasthanas*, it may be considered as organ system, as *Srotasa* and channels or passage both have the comparable function to carry or transport the substances (*Parinama Prapta Dhatu*) or nutrients from one place to another, in the same way *Srotasa* along with their *Moolasthanas* and organ systems both are associated with the biotransformation, storage, nourishment, transportation, absorption and excretion of *Dhatu*s and other bodily elements. Therefore, we can compare the *Srotasa* to the channels and *Srotasa* with their *Moolasthanas* to the organ system.

*Artavavaha Srotasa* is a unique creation of the female body associated with the reproductive function. This *Srotasa* is concerned with the formation, storage, nourishment and excretion/elimination of *Artava*. In recent aspect we can compare *Artavavaha Srotasa* with female reproductive system E.g. *Garbhasaya* may be compared with uterus, *Artavavahi Dhamani* with fallopian tube as well as with uterine arteries and *Yoni* can be compared with vaginal orifice since these structures are aligned with similar anatomical as well as physiological properties. Regarding *Artavavaha Srotasa* it can be concluded that, whole female reproductive system is considered as the *Artavavaha Srotasa*.

In *Ayurvedic* literature almost all *Acharyas* put *Artava* in the category of *Updhatu* except *Acharya Bhavaprakasha*, they state that *Artava* is a seventh *Dhatu* in females. After view all aspects we can conclude that, when a female is pregnant only on that time *Artava* behave like a *Dhatu* and play a major role in formation of placenta and responsible for the growth and development of mammary glands. In normal condition it remains in the form of *Updhatu* and only performs *Dharana Karma* in the body.

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