



# Futuristic Considerations of Raktamoksha, a paradoxically placed Sodhana Karma or a Principal Sastra Karma Type: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

*Raktamokshana*, it is an important part of the clinical therapeutic use of *Panchakarma* in the management of several important disease conditions. It is safe and essential part of the treatment protocol for patients with vitiated *pitta dosa* or *rakta dushya sammurchana*, which is chronic or doesn't respond to gentler interventions. *Raktamoksha* by *siravedha* is considered to be the supreme therapy as it drains out the vitiated *rakta* and cures diseases. Those who undergo *raktamokshana* regularly at proper time will not be afflicted with *twak dosa*, *granthi*, *sopha* and other *raktaja rogas*. Among *sodhana karmas*, ancient scholars have frequently quoted that, for the treatment of skin diseases, *raktamokshana* is considered as the supreme method. In Ayurveda there are two types of *raktamoksha*: *Sastra visravana* and *Anusastra visravana*. *Sharat rtu*, which belongs to *visargakala* is characterised by *prasama* of *vata dosa* and *prakopa* of *pitta dosa*. In *Sharat rtu charya*, among *raktamoksha*, *siravedha* is the apt procedure as it does *dosa sodhana* from the whole body. By these procedures, the normalcy of *rakta* is maintained. *Raktamoksha* is one among the important treatment modalities in *Visha chikitsa*, *Manasa rogas*, and *Urdhwanga rogas*. *Raktamokshana* is the safe and effective therapeutic tool of *Panchakarma* in various types of *rakta pradoshaja vyadhis* if judiciously administered. *Raktamokshana* is also one procedure in *rtu charya*, so as to eliminate the vitiated *dosas* in *rtu sandhi*, which strongly establish the procedure as a principal *sodhana* therapy.

**Keywords:** *Raktamoksha*, Blood letting, *Sodhana*, *Panchakarma*

## INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda* emphasises preventive and healing therapies along with various methods of purification and rejuvenation. *Ayurveda* is more than a mere healing system, it is a science and an art of appropriate living that helps to achieve longevity. It can guide every individual in the proper choice of diet, living habits and exercise to restore balance in the body, mind and consciousness, thus preventing disease from gaining a foothold in the system. Every individual constitution has its own unique balance of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* according to its own nature. When this *doshic* balance is disturbed, it creates imbalance, which is disorder. The internal environment is governed by *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, which are constantly reacting to the external environment. The wrong diet, habits, life style, incompatible food combinations, seasonal changes, repressed emotions and stress factors can all act either together or separately to change the balance of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. According to the nature of cause, *vata*, *pitta* or *kapha* undergo aggravation or derangement, which affects the *agni* and produces *ama*. To stop the further production of *ama*, *Ayurveda* suggests putting the person on a proper diet with appropriate lifestyle, habits and exercise, and administering a proper cleansing programme called *Panchasodhana/Panchakarma*. *Panchakarma* presents a unique approach of *Ayurveda* with specially designed five procedures of internal purification of the body through the nearest possible route. Such purification allows the biological system to return to homeostasis and to rejuvenate rapidly and also facilitates the desired pharmacotherapeutic effects of medicines administered thereafter. *Panchakarma* has a full therapy role as promotive, preventive and curative procedure. *Panchakarma* is not merely a *sodhana* therapy as it is understood, but also has wider range of therapeutics such as *brimhana*, *lekhana*, *stambhana*, *rasayana*, *vrishya*, etc. *Panchakarma* not only eliminate the disease causing toxins but also revitalizes the tissues. *Panchakarma* is not only good for alleviating the disease but is also a useful modality of treatment in preserving and promoting the perfect health.<sup>1</sup>

## DIFFERENCE OF OPINION REGARDING THE INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION OF PROCEDURES IN PANCHAKARMA

According to *Maharshi Atreya* school of thought, *Panchakarma* refers to *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Niruha vasti*, *Anuvasana vasti* and *Nasya*. The *Bhagavan Dhanvanthari* school of thought considers *rakta* also as a *dosa*, the vitiation of which can cause diseases, so *raktamokshana* is included as the fifth therapy in the *panchakarma* (*panchasodhana*) and the *niruha* and *anuvasana vasti* is clubbed into *vasti*. So the five therapies are *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Vasti*, *Nasya* and *Raktamokshana*. Reasons for *raktamokshana* exclusion are *raktamokshana* is a surgical therapy, elimination of *dosas* from the nearest route is not possible and no specific *dosa sodhana* occurs. Reasons for *raktamokshana* inclusion are *rakta* is considered as the *chathurtha dosa*, also a *sodhana pradhana karma* and *dosa vyavastha* is there.<sup>1</sup>

## DEFINITION OF RAKTAMOKSHA

*Raktamokshana* is among the most important but poorly understood *panchakarma* treatments. In fact, detractors of *ayurvedic* medicine have always found it a convenient target to use to ridicule it as some sort of primitive and barbarian system which has no place in modern healthcare. Also, although it is one of the

*pradhanakarmas* of *panchakarma* and commonly performed in medical facilities throughout India, it is rarely administered. *Raktamokshana*, it is an important part of the clinical therapeutic use of *panchakarma* in the management of several important disease conditions. It is safe and essential part of the treatment protocol for patients with vitiated *pitta dosa* or *rakta dushya sammurchana*, which is chronic or doesn't respond to gentler interventions. It is also useful for specific *vata* and *kapha* related conditions.<sup>2</sup>

## IMPORTANCE OF RAKTAMOKSHA

*Rakta* takes important role in spreading the disease from one part to the other part of the body by carrying the vitiated *dosas*. Because of the vitiation of *rakta*, the *sodhana* of *rakta* is essential. *Raktamoksha* by *siravedha* is considered to be the supreme therapy as it drains out the vitiated *rakta* and cures diseases. Those who undergo *raktamokshana* regularly at proper time will not be afflicted with *twak dosa*, *granthi*, *sopha* and other *raktaja rogas*. Among *sodhana* karmas, ancient scholars have frequently quoted that, for the treatment of skin diseases, *raktamokshana* is considered as the supreme method. By *siravedha* alone all the diseases will be cured from their roots, just like rice and other crops in the field dry out completely by removing the bunds of field. The diseases which are not cured by *sneha*, *lepa*, etc. are cured instantaneously with *raktamoksha*. The *siravedha* is considered as the half treatment or even some scholars as complete treatment in *Salyatantra*, as the *Vasti* is considered in *Kayachikitsa*.<sup>3</sup>

## TYPES OF RAKTAMOKSHA

In *Ayurveda* there are two types of *raktamoksha*:

1) *Shastra visravana* – The use of metallic instruments, which is divided into two categories:

- *Sira vyadhana* – Venipuncture, using a syringe to remove blood from vein.
- *Prachana* – Letting the blood exude out through several superficial incisions made in the skin with a metallic blade or scalpel.

A sub-type of the latter is *Alabu prachana*. This is the use of a bottle gourd, or other conical-shaped vegetables, to create a vacuum over the incisions. It is similar to and the forerunner of Chinese and European wet cupping which appeared later.

2) *Anushastra visravana* – Methods which do not use metallic instruments. This is divided into two categories:

- *Jalukavacharana* – Applying leeches to a particular area.
- *Sringavacharana* – Using a cow's horn, used for treating *pitta/rakta* conditions accompanied by a high degree of *vata* vitiation.<sup>4</sup>

## INDICATIONS OF DIFFERENT RAKTAMOKSHAS

The condition of *rakta* should be considered before selecting the right method of *raktamokshana*. *Prachana* should be done, if the *dusta rakta* is accumulated in one place or clotted. If the *rakta* is accumulated in clotted manner or if *rakta* is vitiated in deeper areas, then *jalu* should be used. If the *dusta rakta* is

situated in the *twak*, *alabu*, *ghati* and *sringa* can be used. If the vitiated *rakta* has occupied the body as a whole, *siravedha* has to be done. *Dalhana* commenting on *Susruta Samhita Sutrasthana*, clears that *sringa* and *alabu* are to be practiced in delicate people (*sukumara*). *Jaluka* can be used in most delicate persons (*parama sukumara*). The *jaluka* should be used when burning and pricking sensation symptoms are present. The *sringa* and *alabu* should be used to remove the *rakta*, when there is loss of sensation, itching and tingling sensation. When there is vitiation of *rakta*, in the whole body and shifts from one place to another, *siravedha* should be done.<sup>5</sup>

## RAKTAMOKSHA IN RTUCHARYA

*Sharat rtu*, which belongs to *visargakala* is characterised by *prasama* of *vata dosa* and *prakopa* of *pitta dosa*. So the *rtucharya* of *Sharath rtu* contains *charyas* which pacify *pitta dosa* in general. In other word, we can say *Sharath rtu charya* is *pitta dosa upakrama*. *Virechana*, which is the *sodhana* therapy of pacifying *pitta dosa* is done in this *rtu*. As we know, *rakta* and *pitta* are related by *asraya-asrayi bhava*, *prakopa* of *pitta* will also result in *prakopa* of *rakta* also. So it is also to be maintained to normalcy. *Raktamoksha* is included in *Sharat rtu charya* considering the above facts. The people who are following this procedure in *Sharat rtu charya*, hardly gets *raktapradosha janya vyadhis*. Also, in *mukharoga*, it is mentioned that that *akala raktamokshana* is a cause for the disease. In *Sharat rtu charya*, among *raktamoksha*, *siravedha* is the apt procedure as it does *dosa sodhana* from the whole body. By these procedures, the normalcy of *rakta* is maintained.<sup>6</sup>

## RAKTAMOKSHA IN VISHA CHIKITSA

*Raktamoksha* is one among the *chaturvimsati upakramas* in *vishachikitsa*. *Raktamokshana* prevents *visha* to spread into body through blood. According to *Vishajyotsnika*, *vega* is the ability of the poison to invade the *dhatus* quickly and consecutively. In other words, it is the stages of subsequent invasion of the *dhatus* by poison. In *Susruta Samhita*, instead of *dhatus*, the word *kala* is used. So, *vega* is the ability of *visha* supported by *vayu*, to spread into the *kalas* one by one and manifestation of the particular signs and symptoms. There is a time interval usually taken by the *visha* to conquer each *kala* fully and is termed as *vegantara*. The importance of *visha vegantara* is that the medication and treatment procedures should be carried out during this interval. There the blood should be eliminated through scraping, application of horn or leech or venesection because blood being affected by poison, the constitution is deranged and thus the patient expires. Among the *chaturvimshati upakramas*, *raktamoksha* is at the ninth place. That is, bloodletting eliminates the poison from the blood as the blood is the major media which blow up the poison. *Pitta* and *rakta* has *asrya-asrayi sambandha*. Hence with the help of bloodletting, not only impure blood is removed from the body, but also *dusitha pitta* is removed from the body. It is very effective in skin disorders such as psoriasis, eczema, acne, scabies, urticaria, leucoderma, etc. Most of the skin diseases are the products of *dushivisha*. The careful modulation of the bloodletting using modern technique can treat many diseases where all other means fall. It removes poison or vitiated *dosas* from blood through skin route. Blood is great media for spreading poison in the body. Due to blood as media poison is absorbed and

circulated throughout the body speedily, which can lead to death. When the blood is removed by *raktamokshana* procedure, then poison or toxin will also get remove with blood from body. Hence *raktamoksha* is the topmost treatment in poisoning. It can be done by *prachana*, *sringa*, *jaluka*, *alabu* or *siravedha*. *Siravedha* is now commonly done. Bloodletting from veins at extremities is effective in removing toxins from blood. This therapy in *Ayurveda* is a partial or a complete treatment depending on the situation. Further researches are required to investigate whether *raktamoksha* really prevents another impulses of *visha* spreading from one *kala* to the next one that is aggravation of poison from one *dhatu* to another one. Its best possible application in cases of poisoning to be ruled out. As poison's *laghu guna* is more fatal than *ushna tikshna guna* of *rakta* so whether use of *shringa* is more beneficial or *jaluka* is yet to be decided only by practical experiments on animals. Such grey areas of research need to be explored in the clinical field of *Agadatantra*.<sup>7</sup>

### RAKTAMOKSHA IN MANASA ROGAS

*Ayurveda* describes three *gunas* of mind – *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Ayurveda* describes that a possibility of disease is due to imbalance of *tamas* or *rajas* in the mind which are the reactive tendencies which vitiate the mind and leading to emotional imbalance, also results in psychological disturbances hence *rajas* and *tamas* are termed as *dosas* of mind. *Tridosas* are *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. The reason for any unhealthy condition is the toxins create by the accumulated *dosas*. These negative feelings are emotional toxins accumulate in the mind. If they are not driven out of the body in a stipulated period of time, they give rise to or may lead into various chronic mental disorders like anxiety, neurosis, depression, insomnia, etc. If this is further ignored, it turns into permanent disorders like *unmada*, *apasmara*, *atatwabhinivesha*. In the classical references of *manasaroga chikitsa*, along with *sodhana karmas*, *raktamokshana*, mainly *siravedha* is also mentioned. But these are not practiced in the current era. New researches are to be done in this field to establish the efficacy of *raktamokshana* in *manasa rogas*.<sup>8</sup>

### RAKTAMOKSHA IN URDHWANGA ROGAS

*Jalukavacharana* is type of *raktamokshana* which is practiced globally in India since ancient times to treat *netra rogas*, in which vitiated *pitta* and *rakta dosas* get let from the body. *Jalukavacharana* is an effective blood purification therapy which has property to subside pain, swelling, redness and burning sensation immediately and in which small quantity of blood removed to neutralize accumulated vitiated *pitta* and *rakta dosas* of many blood borne diseases. Also it is much safer and less complicated process. For example, open angle glaucoma is an eye disease in which there is an unstable or sustained increase in intraocular pressure resulting damaging of eye structures and impairment of its function. In open angle glaucoma, *jalukavacharana* facilitates drainage of aqueous humour through the trabecular meshwork by creating negative pressure in the vein present locally. *Jalukavacharana* is one of the very effective treatment modality for treating various *netra rogas*. When leech is applied to biologically active areas of the human body, the bite itself gives a positive effect. According to modern science, leech's saliva contains hirudin, hyaluronidase enzyme which acts as anticoagulant, local anaesthetic, anti-inflammatory vasodilator,

antithrombotic, hypotensive and analgesic effect. Hence, more efforts should be undertaken to optimize this utilization. More clinical trials are required to assess leech efficacy and safety in the treatment of *netra rogas*. Even though, *raktamokshana* is indicated in various *karna- nasa- mukha rogas*, it is rarely administered. In *shirokapala rogas* like *indralupta, khalita*, etc. *raktamokshana karmas*, especially, *prachana karma* is practiced clinically. It helps to removes the localised *dosa kopa*.<sup>9</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Raktamokshana* is considered one among *sodhana* procedure. *Raktamoksha* means letting of blood which is mainly indicated in certain disease state specifically when there is *raktadushti* and also during physiologic function. *Raktamokshana* is one among the principal *sodhana* therapies. If the disease does not respond to the *shamana chikitsa*, it is considered to be due to vitiation of *rakta*, thus it is indicated as a therapy in various *pitta* and *rakta* related diseases. *Raktamoksha* is one of the purification therapies where the disease causing factors are expelled out from the body in addition to relief from the disease symptomology as well as no recurrence. Hence it is said to be a complete *sodhana* treatment. In *panchakarma chikitsa*, the vitiated *dosas* are purified and in *siravedha* vitiated *dushya* to be let out with *rakta dhatu* along with along with vitiated *dosa* where *rakta dhatu* is predominant. The susceptibility of *rakta* towards impurity is so versatile that the classics were compelled to agree upon *rakta* as the fourth *dosa*. Therefore, *dushitha rakta* from the related *siras* should be let out to protect the health or to remove the disease. Since *pitta* is depend on *rakta*, therefore *raktamokshana* decreases the quantum of enhancement of *pitta*, henceforth *dosa* and *pittaja vyadhis* are too relieved or cured by the therapy.

*Acharyas* has described different modalities for *raktamoksha* according to the patient, state of *rakta* and state of *dosa*. For *sukumara* patients, *sastrakrita raktamokshana* should not be used as they may get apprehensive with its invasive nature and due to that, vasoconstriction occurs and the blood cannot be evacuate in proper amount and chances of *appravrti* or *alpapravrti* occurs. If it is necessary to do the *sastrakrita raktamokshana* to that type of patient, the physician has to first explain the procedure to the patient. For use of *asastrakrita raktamokshana*, *Vagbhata* has specially indicated particular modalities for particular *dosa* and also explains the reasons behind that. In the different methods of *raktamokshana*, different magnitude of negative pressure is produced. The instrument which creates more negative pressure can remove more deeply seated *dosa*, so here *Acharya* has explained the use of different modalities according to extent. As in *samyak sudhi lakshana*, *Acharya* has stated that the blood stops by minimal efforts. It means that to evacuate small amount of blood if we choose a big vein for *raktamoksha*, it will lead to *atiyoga* and if we have to evacuate more blood and small vein is selected so it will lead to *ayoga*. That means the selection of a superficial site also depends upon the amount of blood to be letted.

In human body every cell is a basic unit having its own metabolic activity. For this purpose it needs energy, nutrition and excretion which is performed by circulatory and digestive system. In this way, homeostasis is maintained. If there is any pathology at tissue level to a great extent there is a need of more fresh blood to metabolise its waste products, but the local circulatory system is not able to fulfil this requirement. As a

result interstitial pressure gets increased and healing mechanism gets slow due to less blood supply. If we observe the *siravedha* sites, most probably they are near to the site of pathogenesis. By performing *siravedha* locally on the vein which drains the vicious pathological elements of that tissue so the blood supply of that particular part get increase and the healing process of that part can be stimulated.

The *Ayurvedic* principles of *sodhana karma* also indicate that *dosas* should be removed out of the body from the nearest possible pathway. As the *rakta* is the *moola* of the body, its vitiation should be evacuated out of the body from the nearest part of its vitiation. *Acharya Vagbhata* in *Astanga Sangraha* mention probable mode of action of *raktamoksha*. *Purvakarma* is indicated for liquefaction of *dosas* and mobile them into blood circulation. *Siravedha* remove the *dosas* from circulation and thus it acts on removal of disease.

## CONCLUSION

*Raktamokshana* is one of the important para-surgical procedure denoting letting of impure blood outside the body. Different modalities of *raktamokshana* can be adopted, but *siravedha* is one of the *sastravacharana*. Of course, it appears to be surprising that different sites have been advocated in different diseases. To analyse this context, different hypothesis and patho-physiological mechanisms are applicable as the basic unit of the body is cell. Each cell is especially adopting different mechanism to perform functions. The function of circulation is to serve the needs of the tissues such as nutrients, oxygen, hormones and also transport waste products away. When the tissues are active they need more blood flow. Heart normally cannot increase its cardiac out more than four to seven times. Therefore, it is not possible to increase the blood flow everywhere in the body. When a particular demands increased flow, instead micro-vessel of each tissue are monitoring the tissue needs, such as availability of oxygen and nutrients and the accumulation of waste products, these intern controls local blood flow to the level of tissue need. The microcirculation of each type tissue of body is specially organized to serve special needs. Every cell has got their own microcirculation to maintain its constant internal environment. *Raktamokshana* is the safe and effective therapeutic tool of *panchakarma* in various types of *rakta pradoshaja vyahis* if judiciously administered. *Raktamokshana* is also one procedure in *rtu charya*, so as to eliminate the vitiated *dosas* in *rtu sandhi*, which strongly establish the procedure as a principal *sodhana* therapy. Finally, we can conclude that *Raktamokshana* is truly a *Sarvanga sodhana karma*.

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