



# CONCEPT OF *PURISHA* IN AYURVEDA — A PHYSIOLOGICAL APPROACH WITH REFERENCE TO FAECES

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## ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* is fundamental to understanding the physiological and functional organization of the human body. *Malas* are the metabolic end products that are meant to be excreted, ensuring the maintenance of internal balance. They are broadly classified into *Sharirika Malas* and *Dhatu Malas*. The *Sharirika Malas* comprise three main components—*Mutra* (urine), *Purisha* (faeces), and *Sweda* (sweat). Among these, *Purisha* and *Mutra* are considered *Aharamalas*, derived as by-products of digestion. During digestion, the *Sara Bhaga* or nutritive part of food is absorbed, while the undigested portion solidifies to form *Pureesha*. The *Jala Nimajjana Pariksha* is an important diagnostic method described in Ayurveda to identify the presence of *Ama* (undigested toxins) in the body. Ayurveda places special emphasis on *Mala*, considering it one of the *Traya Upasthambha* (three supporting pillars of life). Since *Sharira* (the body) serves as the foundation for achieving the *Purusharthas*—the goals of life—it becomes essential to understand its composition. The classical Ayurvedic statement “*Dosha Dhatu Mala Mulam hi Shariram*” highlights that the body is sustained by these three entities. Detailed descriptions of *Purisha* (faeces) are found in Ayurvedic texts, explaining dietary habits, excretory processes, and characteristics such as timing and consistency in relation to health and disease. As *Dhatu* formation is invariably accompanied by *Mala* production, regular elimination is vital to prevent accumulation and disease. Thus, proper understanding and management of *Mala* play a crucial role in maintaining health and homeostasis as per Ayurvedic principles.

## KEYWORDS:

*Malas, Shareerika Malas, Dhatu Malas, Mutra, Purisha, Sweda, Aharamalas, Traya Upasthambha .*

## INTRODUCTION:

'Mala' is an essential entity that is nourished by *Kitta* through the action of *Agni*. *Purisha Mala* is formed in the *Purishavaha Srotas* from this *Kitta*. In the large intestine, approximately one litre of semi-solid slurry is received, where reabsorption of water, sodium, chloride, glucose, and amino acids occurs. Potassium is secreted in this region, and goblet cells release mucus to lubricate the faecal matter. Intestinal bacteria further act upon this slurry, producing vitamins such as *Vitamin K* and *Vitamin B12*. Thus, in its initial phase, *Purisha Mala* serves as a functional entity, providing strength and support to *Vata*, *Agni*, and *Pitta* <sup>[1,2]</sup>

Depending on the individual's age and bodily status, *Mala* is regularly replenished until it attains its physiological equilibrium in both quantity and quality. This equilibrium helps maintain homeostasis within the body. However, when *Mala* accumulates beyond its normal limit, it becomes detrimental to physiological functions and must be excreted; otherwise, it results in various pathological conditions. <sup>[1]</sup>

When *Purisha Mala* becomes vitiated, it manifests symptoms in the *Purishavaha Srotas* in the form of *Purisha Vriddhi* (increase), *Purisha Kshaya* (decrease), or *Sama Purisha Lakshana* (abnormal stool characteristics). Such derangements are responsible for *Mala Pradoshaja Vikara*. The examination of these features, along with *Purisha Pariksha*, can play a valuable role in the diagnosis of diseases from an Ayurvedic perspective.

In Ayurveda, the *Dosha–Dhatu–Mala* concept is fundamental for understanding body functions. *Malas* are the metabolic end products that need to be excreted for maintaining physiological balance. They are broadly classified into two categories: *Sharirika Mala* (bodily wastes) and *Dhatu Mala* (metabolic wastes). *Sharirika Mala* includes *Mutra* (urine), *Purisha* (stool), and *Sweda* (sweat), whereas *Dhatu Malas* are of seven types. *Purisha*, being a *Sharirika Mala*, is formed from the digested food. During digestion, the *Sara Bhaga* (nutritive portion) is absorbed, while the undigested residue solidifies to form *Purisha*.

If *Malas* are not properly excreted, metabolic activities are impaired, leading to the formation of abnormal *Dhatus* and disease manifestation <sup>[3,4]</sup> *Purisha* represents the digested food in the form of waste, retained in the *Pakwashaya* and formed by the *Purishadharakala* of the *Purishavaha Srotas*. When excessive *Purisha Mala* is produced due to any etiological factor, other *Dhatu Malas* are also disturbed. <sup>[1]</sup> Increased *Purisha Mala* can cause symptoms such as heaviness (*Guruta*) and increased excretion from other channels like the nose and eyes (*Nasa* and *Netra Mala*).

In certain pathological conditions, faeces may contain substances not seen in healthy individuals, such as undigested food particles, mucus, parasites, intestinal calculi, pus, or blood. Ayurveda attributes such abnormalities to *Agni Vikriti*, as *Agni* is responsible for the formation of *Kitta*; hence, any disturbance in *Agni* leads to deranged formation of *Purisha Mala* and subsequent disease <sup>[1]</sup>

## DERIVATION:

Derived from पृ & र्शान् means Crumbling /excremental dirt /rubbish /solid mass which fills up the intestine <sup>[5]</sup>

## PANCHABHOUTHIKATA OF PUREESHA:

In *Purisha Mala*, *Agni* and *Vayu* are predominantly present along with *Prithvi Mahabhuta*. *Prithvi Mahabhuta* imparts form and solidity to the *Purisha*, while *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhutas* contribute mild warmth, yellowish coloration, slight *Katu Rasa*, and the characteristic faecal odour. Its consistency depends on the presence of *Jala mahabhootha*. Due to the predominance of *Agni* and *Vayu*, normal *Purisha* tends to float on water. However, when *Purisha Mala* becomes *Sama Purisha* as a result of *Jataragni Vikruti* and *Ama Nirmiti*, its *Panchabhautika Sanghatana* undergoes alteration. <sup>[6]</sup>

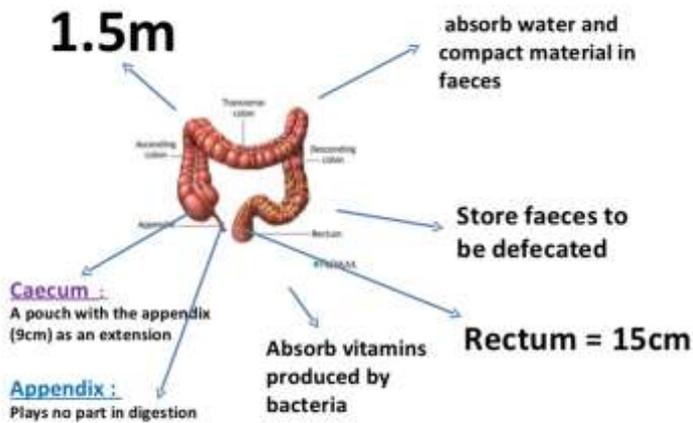
## COMPOSITION OF FAECES:

Consists of 75% water (main bulk of faeces) & 25% solids like Ca, phosphate etc. inorganic material, Undigested plant fibers, Epithelial cells, dead bacteria, Constituents of intestinal secretions like bile pigments, fats, proteins

## FORMATION OF PUREESHA:

The digested food is divided into two components — *Kitta* (waste) and *Sāra* (*Prasāda*, the essence). The clear or liquid portion of the waste forms *Mūtra* (urine), while the solid portion constitutes *Sakṛit* (faeces). <sup>[7]</sup> When the *pakva anna* (digested food residue in waste form) reaches the *Pakwāśaya* (large intestine), it is dried and solidified by the

action of *Vahni* (digestive fire). In this region, due to its inherent *Kaṭubhāva* (pungent nature), *Vāyu* (gaseous elements) are also generated. [8]



physiology of stool formation:

**QUANTITY OF PUREESHA: 7 Anjali** [9]

**FUNCTION OF PUREESHA:** [10]

*Puriṣa* (faeces) acts as an *Upastambha* (supporting pillar) of the body, aiding in the proper functioning and stability of both *Vāyu* and *Agni*.

**PUREESHA VAHA SROTAS:**

**Root of origin:** Pakvasaya(colon) & sthula guda (rectum) [11]

**PUREESHA VAHA SROTHO DUSTI KARANAM:** [12]

The *Puriṣavaha Srotas* becomes vitiated due to suppression of the *Puriṣa Vega* (urge for defecation), *Atyāśana* (overeating), *Ajīrṇa* (indigestion), and *Adhyaśana* (consuming food before the previous meal is digested), particularly in individuals who are emaciated and possess weak digestive fire (*Mandāgni*).

**PUREESHA VAHA SROTHO DUSTI LAKSHANAM:** [13]

The characteristic manifestations of vitiation of the *Puriṣavaha Srotas* include difficulty in defecation with straining (*tenesmus*), passage of scanty stools accompanied by abdominal gurgling (*borborygmi*) and pain, or alternating episodes of diarrhoea and constipation. In some cases, excessive stool evacuation may also occur. Such presentations indicate that the *Puriṣavaha Srotas* is afflicted.

**PUREESHA VAHA SROTHO DUSTI CHIKITSA:**

Same as that of athisara chikitsa

**PUREESHA VAHA SROTHO VIDHA LAKSHANAM:** [14]

In a person whose *Puriṣavaha Srotas* (faecal channel) is injured (*Viddha*), there occurs *Ānāha* (abdominal distension), *Durgandhatā* (foul smell), and *Grathitāntratā* (obstruction of the intestines).

**PUREESHA STHANAM:**

*Suśruta* identifies *Guda* (anus and rectal region) as one of the Marma points (vital areas of the body). It plays an essential physiological role in the elimination of faeces and gases. [15] According to *Chakrapāṇi's* commentary, the *Guda* (anal region) is divided into two parts —

- *Uttara Guda*: the upper rectal segment where faecal matter is held before defecation, and
- *Adhara Guda*: the lower anal canal through which faeces are eliminated. [16]

**PUREESHA DHARA KALA:** <sup>[17]</sup>

The *Purishadhara Kala* is the fifth *Kala* and is located in the *Antakoshta*, between the terminal part of the *Laghu Antra* and the initial part of the *Brhadantra*, known as *Unduka*. In this region, the separation of *Rasa*, *Mutra*, and *Purisha* occurs. This process of separation is governed by the actions of *Vata* and *Agni*.

**PUREESHA KSHAYA:**

Reduction of *purisha* (faecal matter) leads to noisy movement of flatus within the intestines (*borborygmus*), accompanied by colicky, constricting pain. The accumulated gas then moves upward, causing marked discomfort in the *hṛdaya* (cardiac region of the stomach) and *pārśva* (lateral regions of the thorax). <sup>[18]</sup> In the condition of *Puriṣa-kṣaya* (depletion or deficiency of faecal matter), one should consume preparations made from **Kulmāṣa** (boiled pulses), **Māṣa** (black gram), **Kuṣkuṇḍa** (horse gram), **Ajamamsa** (goat's meat), **Yava** (barley), **Śāka** (green leafy vegetables), **Dhānyamla**

**PUREESHA VRIDHI:** <sup>[19]</sup>

Increased *sakrit* (faeces) causes *ātōpa* (*borborygmus*), *ādhmāna* (abdominal distention), *gaurava* (heaviness of abdomen) and *vēdana* (colicky pain). Treatment is the same as that of *athisara chikitsa*.

**assessment of dosha predominance from the characteristic features of stool:** <sup>[20]</sup>

| Dosha predominance | Characteristics of stool*                                     |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Vata</b>        | Hard, dry, broken, frothy, dry and smoky color                |
| <b>Pitta</b>       | Yellowish in color  |
| <b>Kapha</b>       | Whitish in color  |
| Vata-kapha         | Brownish in color   |
| Pitta-vata         | Binding or broken type, yellowish or yellowish black in color |
| Kapha-pitta        | Yellowish, white, sticky/slimy                                |
| Tridosha           | Blackish, broken, compact and whitish                         |

**PANCHABHOUTHIKA EXAMINATION OF PURISHA:**

With human 5 senses *purisha* can be examined

Sabda - (भूर्युच्चारः).

Sparśa - *Purisa* is little warm to touch.

Rūpa - normal color is yellowish brown.

Rasa - *katurasa*.

Gandha - typical fecal odor

**VISUAL EXAMINATION** <sup>[23]</sup>

COLOUR- of feces is brown, which is due to presence of urobilin, derivative of bilirubin.

Pathology- acholic stools in obstructive jaundice

CONSISTENCY-Bristol stool scale is a diagnostic medical tool designed to classify the form of human faeces.

It is used in both clinical as well as experimental fields

## 7 categories in Bristol stool chart

| Bristol Stool Chart |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Type 1              |  | Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)  |
| Type 2              |  | Sausage-shaped but lumpy                       |
| Type 3              |  | Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface  |
| Type 4              |  | Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft       |
| Type 5              |  | Soft blobs with clear-cut edges                |
| Type 6              |  | Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool |
| Type 7              |  | Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid       |

**STOOL EXAMINATION:****MACROSCOPICAL EXAMINATION**

- ✓ Amount
- ✓ Blood/mucous
- ✓ Helminths
- ✓ Undigested food materials
- ✓ Consistency

- ✓ Colour
- ✓ Odour

**MICROSCOPICAL EXAMINATION**

- ✓ Motile parasites e.g. *E.histolytica*
- ✓ Presence of RBC and pus cells – dysentery
- ✓ Charcot leydon crystals- chronic dysenteries and ulcerative colitis
- ✓ Chronic diarrhea - AIDS
- ✓ Presence of *mycobacterium tuberculosis* - intestinal tuberculosis

**CHEMICAL EXAMINATION**

- ✓ **Ph of stool is slightly acidic 5-7**
- ✓ **Test for faecal fat-**
- ✓ diagnostic test to detect the excess fat in the feces (steatorrhea) indicating fat malabsorption conditions
- ✓ Steatorrhea: chronic pancreatitis, cystic fibrosis and Shwachman–Diamond syndrome (these are characterized by deficiency of pancreatic digestive enzymes)
- ✓ **Test for nitrogen** - excess loss is found in mal absorption
- ✓ **Test for fecal occult blood**

**BAD PROGNOSTIC FEATURES OF STOOL: [20]**

- Excessively blackish/whitish/yellowish/ reddish coloration of feces
- Excessively hot nature (causing burning sensation in anus)
- Excessively foul-smelling

- With a mixture of different colors
- Indicative of bad prognosis of a disease or imminent death of the person.
- These features are indicative of grave underlying pathologies like gastrointestinal bleeding.

### CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS: [23]

a) Diarrhea mixed with mucous and red blood cells is associated with: -

Typhoid  
Cholera  
Amoebiasis

b) Diarrhea mixed with mucus and white blood cells is associated with: -

Ulcerative  
Shigellosis  
Salmonellosis  
Intestinal tuberculosis

colitis

c) Pasty” stool is associated with a high fat content in the stool: -

1. A significant increase of fat is usually detected on gross examination.
2. Common bile duct obstruction-- the fat gives the stool a putty-like appearance
3. In cystic fibrosis -butter stool appearance

### ODOUR

1. A foul odour -- degradation of undigested protein.  
Excessive carbohydrate ingestion.
2. A sickly sweet odour --volatile fatty acids & undigested lactose.

### STOOL PH

1. Increased PH (alkaline) in: -  
A protein break down adenomac colitis.  
Antibiotic
2. Decreased PH (acid): -  
Carbohydrate malabsorption  
Fat malabsorption  
Disaccharide deficiency

### STOOL COLOUR

1. Yellow to Yellow-green - severe diarrhoea
2. Green - severe diarrhea bile
3. Tan or clay colored -blockage of the common bile duct
4. Maroon-to-red-to-pink -bleeding from the lower G.I.T
5. Blood streak - on the outer surface of usually indicates hemorrhoids or anal abnormalities.

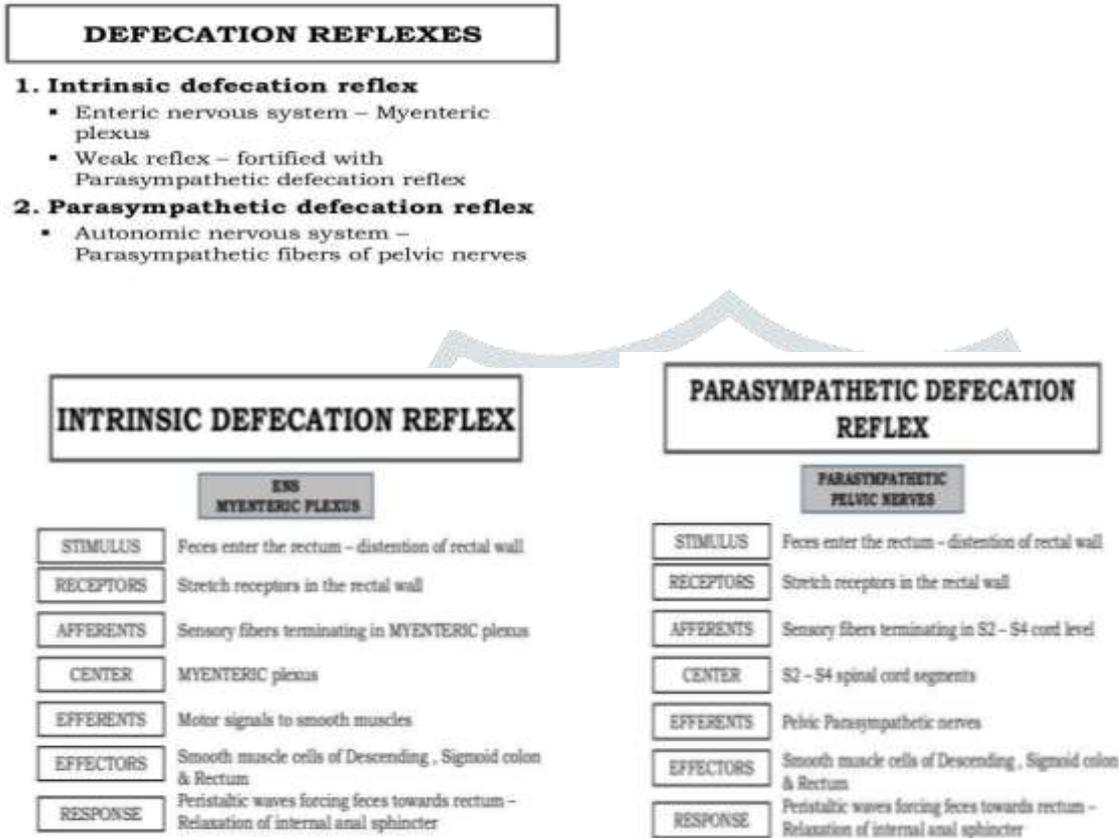
### FAECES AS AN ASSESSMENT PARAMETER IN THERAPEUTIC PROCEDURES [21]

IN OLEATION: The character of stool is considered as an important parameter in assessment of the therapeutic oleation before therapeutic emesis (vamana) and purgation (virechana).

### PUREESHA VISARJANA: [22]

Apāna Vāyu, located in the *śroni* (pelvic region) and *basti* (urinary bladder area), governs and controls the expulsion or elimination of śukra (semen), ārtava (menstrual blood), śakṛit (faeces), mūtra (urine), and garbha (fetus).

DEFAECATION: The process of excretion of faecal material. It involves both voluntary and reflex activities [24]



act of defaecation:

## DISCUSSION:

In Ayurveda, the concept of **Doṣa–Dhātu–Mala** forms the foundation of body physiology. *Mala* refers to the metabolic waste products that must be eliminated to maintain health. They are broadly classified into **Śārīrika Mala** (bodily wastes) and **Dhātu Mala** (metabolic wastes). Śārīrika Malas include **Mūtra** (urine), **Puriṣa** (faeces), and **Sveda** (sweat), while Dhātu Malas are seven in number, arising as by-products of tissue metabolism.

*Puriṣa*, being a Śārīrika Mala, is derived from food. After digestion, the *Sāra bhāga* (nutritive portion) is absorbed, and the remaining solid residue becomes *Puriṣa*. Proper excretion of Mala is essential for maintaining metabolic balance; its retention leads to deranged metabolism, formation of defective tissues, and various diseases.

Physiologically, normal Mala functions support both nourishment and elimination. Their characteristics are assessed through parameters such as **Varṇa** (colour), **Gandha** (odour), **Sparśa** (consistency), **Mātrā** (quantity), and associated symptoms like pain or frequency changes.

In modern terms, **faeces** are the solid waste excreted through the anus, normally 100–250 g per day in adults, composed of approximately 75 % water and 25 % solids — including bacteria, indigestible food fibres, fats, inorganic salts, and proteins. The brown colour results from bacterial action on bile pigments, and the odour arises from compounds like indole, skatole, and hydrogen sulfide. Alterations in faecal characteristics indicate bowel dysfunctions such as constipation, diarrhoea, malabsorption, or gastrointestinal bleeding.

## CONCLUSION:

Stool is a significant by-product of metabolism that reflects various physiological and pathological changes occurring within the body. The *Purīṣadhāra Kalā*, counted as the fifth *Kalā*, is situated in the *Antaḥkoṣṭha*, between the terminal part of the *Laghu Antra* (small intestine) and the initial portion of the *Brhat Antra* (large intestine), known as *Unduka*. It is at this site that the separation of *Rasa*, *Mūtra*, and *Purīṣa* takes place, with the major segregation of waste (*Mala-vibhajana*) occurring in the *Pakvāśaya* (large intestine).

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