

## A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS AND ITS MANAGEMENT WITH RESPECT TO VATARAKTA

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### ABSTRACT

Rheumatoid Arthritis is a chronic, auto-immune inflammatory multisystem disorder that primarily affects the synovial joints along with extra-articular manifestations. RA makes life crippling and miserable by severe pain, swelling, redness, stiffness, and limitation of the functions of joints. Modern medical science doesn't have effective management for RA and the presently available treatments target providing symptomatic relief by the administration of NSAIDs, DMARDs, etc. This may lead to several side effects also. Ayurveda mentions a disease called *vatarakta* which resembles RA in every aspect including *nidana*, *samprapti*, *Poorvarupa*, and *rupa*. There resides the most relevance of applying an *Ayurvedic* approach in the management of RA. This study is a humble attempt at conceptual analysis of Rheumatoid Arthritis concerning *vatarakta* and the available effective methods of *ayurvedic* management to improve the quality of life of the affected individuals.

**Keywords:** Rheumatoid Arthritis, *Vatarakta*.

## INTRODUCTION

Rheumatoid Arthritis is a chronic autoimmune disease primarily involving the joints in which its main feature is symmetrical peripheral polyarthritis. RA occurs all over the world.<sup>1</sup>The cause of RA remains unknown. The factors such as genetic, autoimmunity, infectious agents, environmental, nutritional, hormonal, etc play an important role in the causation of RA.<sup>2</sup> The synovial tissues are the primary target in RA. Once RA is initiated, the synovial tissues throughout the body become the site of a complex interaction of T cells, B cells, and macrophages. The resultant synovitis causes the production of excessive amounts of synovial fluid and the infiltration of pannus into adjacent bone and cartilage. Synovitis results in the destruction of cartilage, and marginal bone and in the stretching or rupture of the joint capsule or tendons and ligaments. These effects are manifested in individuals by deformities and disabilities that make up the clinical picture of RA. It may also exhibit systemic features like fatigue, weight loss, and low-grade fever. Also, extra-articular manifestations including skin, cardiovascular, pulmonary, ophthalmologic, and neurologic will be present.<sup>3</sup>In acute cases there will be laboratory findings such as raised ESR level, CRP level, and low Haemoglobin level.80% of cases are associated with positive RF titre and most of them shows positive ACCP.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Ayurvedic concept, *Vatarakta* is a disease in which there is vitiation of *vata* and *rakta* by their own causative factor. The *vata* and *rakta* get lodged in *sandhis* due to *Vatarakta* of *sandhi sthana* and together with *pitta* and *kapha* lead to the manifestation of symptoms like *sopha*, *ruja*, etc. RA shows great similarity to *Vatarakta* with polyarthritis and course of disease with prolonged exacerbation and remission as the main features. Based on the different stages of the disease and dosa predominance the different treatment modalities explained by *Acharyas* can be adopted here.

## Rationale and Background

An epidemiological survey done by WHO, COPCORD shows a prevalence of 0.45% in urban and 0.7% in rural populations in India.<sup>2</sup> RA increases between 25 to 55 years of age.<sup>4</sup>Women are affected more than men with a female to male ratio of 3:1.<sup>5</sup> RA can be a severe condition and a great burden to the health care system, if timely intervention is not done; as it occurs during the most productive years of adulthood. Also, there is not much effective management available in modern medicine and it only focuses on the reduction of pain and swelling which is mainly treated with Corticosteroids, NSAIDs, DMARDs, etc hurting bone mass. So, it will be so beneficial for the patients to adopt *ayurvedic* management by considering it in the aspect of *vatarakta*, and thereby the symptoms can be reduced and can improve the quality of life to a great extent.

## Aim

To analyze the concept of Rheumatoid Arthritis concerning *Vatarakta* and the application of *Vatarakta chikitsa* in the particular disease condition to overcome the limitations faced by the individuals while adopting modern medical management.

## Materials and Method

References from Modern Medicine Textbooks and *Ayurveda samhitas* about Rheumatoid arthritis and *Vatarakta* respectively were adopted for literary collection.

## RA v/s Vatarakta

The application of treatment modalities of *vatarakta* in RA gets reliable only after analysing the similarities of RA towards *vatarakta*. The table below shows an attempt to compare RA with *vatarakta* in different aspects including the etiology, pathogenesis, clinical features, and prognosis of *Nidana*, *Samprapti*, *Poorvaroopa*, *Roopa*, and *Sadhya Asadhyata* of *vatarakta*.

**Table 1: RA v/s Vatarakta**

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS	VATARAKTA
Having acute onset and chronic in nature <sup>4</sup>	<i>Chirakari<sup>6</sup> and kalantharena gambheeramachareth<sup>7</sup></i>
Genetic predisposition with female to male ratio 3:1 <sup>2</sup>	<i>Prayena sukumaranam<sup>7</sup></i>
Exacerbation and remission are commonly seen <sup>4</sup>	<i>Bhutva pranasaki muhuravir bhavanti<sup>7</sup></i>
Etiology includes malnutrition, incompatible food, spicy food, lack of exercise, sleep disturbances, etc. <sup>5</sup>	<i>Nidana-Virudha anna, vidahi anna, achankramana seela, nisa jagaranam, diwaswapnam etc<sup>6,7</sup></i>
Articular manifestations are the most common	<i>Parvaswabhihitam Kshubdam vakratvat avathishtate.<sup>6</sup></i>
Smaller joints are commonly involved <sup>4</sup>	<i>Krutvaadoudhastapadetumoolamdehe vidhavati<sup>6</sup></i>
Fever is a clinical feature <sup>4</sup>	<i>Jwara<sup>6</sup></i>
Anorexia seen <sup>4</sup>	<i>Aruchi<sup>6</sup></i>
Faigue <sup>4</sup>	<i>Alasya, sadana<sup>6</sup></i>
Reddish discoloration of the skin <sup>4</sup>	<i>Raga, Mandalotpatti<sup>6</sup></i>
Subcutaneous nodules are commonly seen in extensor surfaces and even in the lungs. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Pidaka, Arbuda, Mamsakodha mentioned as upadravas<sup>6</sup></i>
Pain in the joints – is the commonest clinical feature. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Soola, bhrusharuk, vedan, ruk, toda, bheda, aritman, atiruk etc.<sup>6</sup></i>
Tenderness in the affected joints <sup>4</sup>	<i>Sparshaasahishnutha<sup>3</sup></i>
Swelling in the joints <sup>4</sup>	<i>Gambheeraswayadhu<sup>6</sup></i>
Redness in the affected joints <sup>4</sup>	<i>Raga Pakasoshaschoktani paittikai<sup>6</sup></i>
Warmth in the affected joints <sup>4</sup>	<i>Osha, Bhrososhmata, daha in pattika vatarakta.<sup>6</sup></i>
Stiffness of affected joints. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Stabdata<sup>6</sup></i>
Deformities lead to loss of functions of the joints. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Sandhisaitihilyam Chindannivacharatyantarakreekurvashcha vegavan. Karotikhanjam panguvasarvatascharan.<sup>6</sup></i>
Formation of contractures over time which causes joint deformities like swan neck deformity, Boutonniere deformity. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Dhamaniangulisansdeenam sankocha.<sup>6</sup></i>
Usually, the patients with systemic involvement have a poor prognosis, and sustained disease activity of more than one-year duration is associated with poor outcome. <sup>4</sup>	<i>Vatarakta along with all upadravas like Aruchi, Mamsakodha, etc and having deformities like Angulivakrata are considered as Asadhya.<sup>6</sup></i>

Thus, RA is very much similar to *Vatarakta*. So, the treatment protocol for *vatarakta* can be adopted here to reduce the symptoms as well as to prevent the progression of the disease.

**Management:**<sup>(6,7)</sup>

*Vatarakta chikitsa* can be adopted based on the predominance of *dosa* and the stages of the disease.

According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, in *Uthana vatarakta* since *twak* and *mamsa dhatus* are affected; the treatment should be *raktaprasadana* and *vatanulomana* in nature. So *pralepa*, *abhyanga*, *Pariseka*, and *Avagaha* can be done. According to *Charaka*, instead of *Avagaha*, *upanaha* can be done. In the case of *gambheera vatarakta*, the *dosas* are deep-seated and so

*sodhana chikitsa* like *virechana*, *asthapana vasthy*, *snehapana*, etc can be adopted.

The main treatment principles include *Samana* and *Sodhana*.

**Samana Chikitsa-** helps to mitigate the vitiated *dosas* and also to prevent the

reoccurrence of the symptoms after *sodhana chikitsa*.

**Sodhana Chikitsa-** It includes treatments like *Rakthamokshana*, *virechana*, and *vasthi*.

**Rakthamokshana-**

According to *Acharya vagbhata*, *Rakthamokshana* should be given after *snehana*. It can be done by using can be done using *sringa*, *jalouka suchi*, *alabu*, and *prachana* or *siravedha*, based on the strength of the disease and degree of *dosa kopa*.

**Virechana-** Either *Snehayukta virechana* or *ruksha virechana* can be done after proper *snehana* and it is useful since it is *raktadushti*.

**Vasthi:** *Anuvasana* and *asthapana vasthy* can be administered frequently since there is severe *vata kopa* along with *dhatugata avastha*.

“*Nirharedva malam tasya saghrutai ksheera vasthibhi*”. Vata occluded by mala can be removed by *saghritha ksheera vasti* and it pacifies *vata kopa* as well as *rakta dushti*.

“*Na hi vasthi samam kinchit vatarakta chikitsitam*. No other treatment comparable to *vasthi* is there for *vatarakta*.”

**Table 2:** Types of *vatarakta* & it's *chikitsa*

Type of <i>vatarakta</i>	<i>chikitsa</i>
<i>Vatadhika vatarakta</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sneha pana</i> and <i>abhyanga</i> using <i>ghrita</i>, <i>taila</i>, <i>vasa</i> and <i>majja</i> can be administered</li> <li>• <i>Vasti</i> can be done with the same</li> <li>• Lukewarm fomentation is also applicable</li> </ul>
<i>Rakthadhika</i> and <i>pittadhika vatarakta</i> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ghrita pana</i>, <i>dugdha pana</i>, and <i>mridu virechana</i> can be administered</li> <li>• <i>pariseka</i> with a decoction of <i>pitta</i> and <i>rakta samana dravya</i></li> <li>• <i>anuvasana vasti</i></li> <li>• <i>seeta pralepa</i> (according to <i>Acharya charaka</i>)</li> </ul>
<i>Kaphadhika vatarakta</i> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mridu vamana</i> can be adopted here</li> <li>• The application of <i>snehana</i>, <i>svedana</i>, and <i>langhana</i> is useful.</li> <li>• Lukewarm <i>pralepa</i> which is not too cold or too hot.</li> </ul>

**Rasayana chikitsa-** In *vatarakta* rasayanas like *chyavanprasa*, *vardhamanapippali rasayana* and *Ayahpatra pippali rasayana* can be given.

## DISCUSSION

Nowadays, the incidence of RA is increasing at an alarming rate. It creates a lot of concern all over the world due to the huge curse and disabilities caused by it to the human. While considering the different aspects of this disease and comparing it with that of *vatarakta* mentioned in *Ayurveda* classics, it is evident that both of them are similar in various aspects. Even though modern medicine has flourished a lot, there are only limited measures available for the treatment of RA, which only deals with symptomatic relief and which may further lead to the occurrence of different complications in the affected individuals. There stands the relevance of *Ayurvedic* treatment modalities which can be ensured based on the stages of disease and *dosa* predominance.

The *samprapti* of *vatarakta* goes based on vitiation of *dosas* and how it reacts with *dushyas* to produce different types of symptoms and further leading to de-

formities of the joints. Here *vata* and *rakta* get vitiated by their own causative factor. Vitiated *rakta* obstructs the *marga* of *vata*. These get circulated throughout the body through *siras* due to the *sukshmatwa* and *saratva* of *vata* and *dravatva* and *saratva properties* of *pitta*. These get lodged in the *sandhis* and along with the *sthanika pitta* and *kapha dosa*, produce different symptoms like *sopha*, *ruja*, etc. *Agnimandhya* is a major cause of producing different types of diseases. *Jadaragnimandya* leading to *mandhya* of all other *agni* like *bhutagni* and *dhatwagni* can lead to the formation of *ama*. The *dosas* and *dushyas* get mixed with *ama* and evolve the *sama avastha*. This *ama* circulates through the *srothas* to different body parts and leads to the manifestation of diseases. In *vatarakta*, *dhatugatha ama* plays an important role. So, the treatment should start from *Nidana parivajana*. Advise the individuals to avoid all the diet and regimens that provoke the dis-

ease condition. *Uthana vatarakta* can be considered the acute phase of RA, where pain, swelling, warmth, and tenderness of the joints are *predominant*. Here the pathology remains in the *twak* and *mamdsa dhatu* level. Later it becomes *gambheera avastha* by penetrating the deeper *dhatu*s. Thus, the pannus formation, destruction of articular cartilage, bone, etc occurs and further leads to deformities. While considering the treatment first of all *kapha vata hara* treatment can be adopted since it helps to pacify the *dhatugata ama* and helps in relieving stiffness and swelling of the joints. *Abhyanga* can increase the oxygenated blood supply to the body parts including the joints thereby nourishing the joints in the acute phase, as the inflammation is predominant, the involvement of *pitta dosa* seems evident. So, *bahya chikitsa* like *abhyanga*, *seka*, etc can be done, and then *sodhana karmas* like *virechana*, *vasthi*, *raktamokshana* can be adopted. As pain is the major symptom, it is due to *vata dosa*, *vasti* can give much relief since it is the particular treatment for pacifying *vata dosa*. *Virechana* has its effect on *pitta dosa* thereby reducing swelling, redness, and warmth. Internal medications having *vata rakta hara* and *amahara* properties can be given along with this. Also, the effect of *rasayana* is so relevant in a palliative manner in order to reduce the symptoms and prevent the reoccurrence of the disease.

## CONCLUSION

By analyzing the particular context from different angles, the resemblance between RA and *vatarakta* are easily noticeable. So, the different treatment modalities of *vatarakta* explained by *Acharyas* can be adopted in the management of RA, which is safe, beneficial, and cost-effective for the affected individuals. Thereby a great relief can be provided to the humans who are threatened with the miserable conditions of RA.

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