

IMPORTANCE OF RAKTAMOKSHANA IN BLOOD-PURIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Raktamokshana, the bloodletting procedure is a kind of para surgery used especially for the treatment of *Raktadusti* (blood-borne disorders). It is one among the five-purification therapies described by *Acharya Sushruta*. It is derived from two words, 'Rakta' which means blood and 'Mokshana' which means to leave. *Raktamokshana* can be done by two ways i.e., 1) *Shastra visravana* (using sharp instruments). It is of two types a) *Pracchana* (Scarification) which is done for *ekadositharakta & pinditarakta* and b) *Siravyadhana* (Venepuncture) which is done for *sarvanga dosha & angavyapaka rakta* and 2) *Anushastra vidhi* (without using sharp instruments). It is of three types i.e., a) *Sringa* for *Vata* disorders & *tvachasthita rakta* b) *Jalauka* (Leech therapy) for *pitta* disorders & in *avagaada rakta* and c) *Alabu* for *kapha* disorders & *tvachasthita rakta*. *Rakta* is responsible for strength, complexion, happiness and longevity of life. The present paper highlights the importance of *raktamokshana*, as it can prevent skin diseases, blood borne disorders, oedema, lymph node enlargement etc., and it cures the diseases like *kustha, raktapitta, visarpa, gulma, kaamala, dadru, charmadala, swithra, jwara* etc., which are caused due to vitiation of *rakta*.

Keywords: *Raktamokshana, Shastra visravana, Anu shastra vidhi, Sira vyadhana and Jalauka.*

INTRODUCTION

According to Ayurveda there are two types of treatment procedures. 1) *Santarpana* or *brimhana* (nourishing therapy) and 2) *Apatarpana* or *langhana* (depleting therapy)¹. *Langhana* is of two types, *sodhanachikitsa* (purificatory therapy) and *samanachikitsa* (palliative therapy)². *Pancha karma* is a type of *Sodhana chikitsa* which forcibly expels the *dosha* out of the body. *Pancha karma* includes five types of therapeutic procedures which are *Vamana karma* (emetic therapy), *Virechanakarma* (purgation

therapy), *Vastikarma* (medicated enema), *Raktamokshana* (bloodletting) and *Shirovirechana* (nasal medication)^{3,4}. *Charaka* has not included *Raktamokshana* under *panchakarma*, instead he has mentioned *Asthapana vasti* and *Anuvasana vasti* as separate procedures⁵. Reason behind this, may be *Sushruta* being related to the *Dhanwantari school*, emphasized *Raktamokshana* as one of the major para-surgical procedure while *Charaka* who was from the school of

Atreya has given more importance to *Vasti* and considered it as half of the entire therapeutic measures⁶.

Review of Literature:

The importance of *Rakta* is highlighted by the *Acharya Sushruta*. There are separate chapters for the description of *rakta*, procedure of *Raktamokshana*, types of *Raktamokshana*, indications, contra-indications etc., in detail. *Astanga Samgraha* and *Astanga Hridaya* also highlighted the procedure of *Raktamokshana*, mainly regarding the *Sira vyadhana*. But in *Charaka Samhita* there is limited information regarding the *Raktamokshana* is available.

Raktamokshana:

Raktamokshana, the bloodletting procedure is a kind of para surgery used especially for the treatment of *Raktadusti* (blood-borne disorders). The synonyms of *Raktamokshana* are *asravisruti*, *sonitamokshana*, *raktanirharana*, *raktasravana*, *raktaharana*. It is one among the five-purification therapies described by *Acharya Sushruta*. It is derived from the two words, 'Rakta' which means blood and 'Mokshana' which means to leave. Thus, *Raktamokshana* means to let the blood out⁷. The vitiated blood should be expelled out from the body to reduce the quantity of toxic substances or else it leads to several blood borne disorders. *Jalauka* (leech) should be used in *avagaada rakta*, *Pracchanna* (scarification) should be done in *pin-dita rakta*, *Sira vyadhana* should be done in *an-gavyapaka rakta* and *Sringa* (horn) & *Alabu* (gourd) should be used in *tvachasthita rakta*⁸. By undergoing *Raktamokshana*, several diseases like skin diseases, blood borne disorders, oedema, lymph node enlargement etc., can be prevented⁹.

Types of Raktamokshana:

Raktamokshana can be classified in to 2 groups

1) Shastra visravana: The process of bloodletting which is done by using the sharp instruments. It is of two types¹⁰.

a) *Pracchana*- This procedure is done for the disorders of *ekadositha rakta* and *pindita rakta*.

b) *Sira vyadhana*- This procedure is done for *sarvanga dosha*.

2) Anu Shastra Vidhi: In this procedure the sharp metallic instruments are not used for removal of the blood. It is further classified into three categories¹¹.

a. *Sringa*- The cow horn is *usna*(warm), *madhura* (sweet) and *snigdha*(oily). Hence this procedure is done for treating the *Vata* disorders¹².

b. *Jalauka*- Leech is born in water, live in cold place and it is soothing. Hence this procedure is done for the patients with *Pitta dosha* disorders, king, rich, children, old people, ladies, physically and mentally weak patients.

c. *Alabu*- Gourd is *katu*(pungent), *ruksha*(rough) and *tikshna* (sharp). Hence this procedure is done for treating the *Kapha* disorders.

Rakta:

Rakta is considered as one among the *Dasha pranaayatana* by *Charaka*^{13,14}. According to *Astanga Hridaya* it is one among the *Dasha Jeevitadhama*¹⁵. According to *Astanga Samgraha* it is one among the *Dasha pranaayatana*¹⁶. *Rakta* is considered as the fourth *dosha* according to *Acharya Sushruta*¹⁷. *Rakta* is one among the *sapta dhatu* in the human body. It is formed from the *rasa* which traverses through the *Yakrut & Pleeha* and gets coloured by the *Tejo Mahabhuta*¹⁸. *Rakta* is the *Bahya rogaayana*(external pathway) for the diseases like *masha* (moles), *vyanga* (discolored patches), *gandalaji* (glandular ulcer on the face), *arbuda* (malignant tumour), *durnaama*(haemorrhoids), *gulma*(abdominal tumour), *sopha*(swelling)etc.,¹⁹ The *rakta* which possess characters like *indragopaka prateekaasam* (colour of cochineal), neither too thick nor discolored is considered as *Suddharakta lakshana*²⁰. It is responsible for strength, complexion, happiness, longevity and maintain the life. *Rakta dhatu ksaya* leads to *twak parusyam*(dryness of skin) and vitiation of *rakta* by *pitta* and *kapha* leads to several diseases like *kustha* (leprosy), *raktapitta* (bleeding from different parts of body), *visarpa* (herpes), *vidradhi* (abscess), *pleeharoha* (disease of spleen), *gulma* (abdominal tumour), *kaamala* (jaundice), *dadru* (ring worm), *charamadala* (dermatitis), *swithra* (leucoderma), *agnisadhana* (dyspepsia), *vaatasra* (gout), *bhrama* (giddiness), fever, *mukha*, *nethra* and *shiroroga*²¹. These diseases can be cured

by means of proper *raktamokshana*. Blood is one of the major components of the body. It plays an important role to regulate the functions of various systems of the body.

Functions of blood:²²

Blood is a liquid connective tissue that has three general functions:

➤ **Transportation-**

- Blood transports oxygen from lungs to the cells of the body and carbon dioxide from the cells to the lungs.
- It carries nutrients from the gastrointestinal tract to body cells.
- It carries heat and waste products away from the cells. Thus, it maintains Homeostasis.
- It carries hormones from endocrine glands to the target organs.

➤ **Regulation-**

- It regulates pH and core body temperature.

➤ **Protection-**

- The clotting mechanism protects against the blood loss.
- Phagocytic white blood cells and plasma proteins like antibodies protect against the foreign microbes and toxins.

Procedure of Raktamokshana:

The whole procedure of the *Raktamokshana* can be done in three phases:

Purva Karma:²³

- The patient should be screened primarily before starting the procedure on the guidelines who are mentioned as contra-indicated for the procedure. The selected patient should be given oleation (*snehana*) and sudation (*swedana*). The patient should be advised to take diet consisting mainly of liquid or gruel but counteracting the *dosha* causing the diseases.
- Suitable time should be selected for the process and patient should be made to sit or stand in a position which does not interfere with vital life functions.
- The part should be positioned and tied with cloth, leather, inner bark of trees or creeper without endangering his life, neither too tightly nor too

loosely. Then search and confirm the site on the body of patient for *pradhana karma*.

Pradhana Karma:

The various aspects which should be considered during *pradhana karma* are as follows: -

➤ **Pracchana-**²⁴

- In this process the bloodletting is done by means of Scarification. The scratch should be straight, fine and even. It should not be very near to each other; it should not be very deep nor very superficial.
- The scratch should be away from the vulnerable areas, vessels, nerves and joints.

➤ **Sira vyadhana-**²⁵

- This is a Para-surgical procedure which is known as Venepuncture where the removal of blood is done by using scalp vein or needle.
- **Size of puncture**

The size of *Sira vyadhana* in the *mamsa pradesha* is *yavamatra* by *Vrihimukha sastra*. Other than *mamsa pradesha*, it should be $\frac{1}{2}$ *yava* or *vrihimatra* by *Vrihimukha sastra*, where as in *asthipradesha* it should be $\frac{1}{2}$ *yavamatra* by *Kutharika*.

- **Suitable time for Sira vyadhana karma**

In rainy season on uncloudy day, in summer season on cool day and in autumn season on mid-day *Sira vyadhana* should be done.

The maximum limit of bloodletting to be done is about one *prastha*²⁶.

➤ **Sringa-**

- This procedure is done by applying the cow's horn on the selected part of the body. The air gets sucked out, which creates a vacuum. Then the vitiated blood oozes out.

➤ **Jalauka-**^{27,28}

- This procedure is called as Leech therapy, as treatment is done by applying leech on the region of the body. Minute pricks are applied near the affected region. The leech should be applied over that region after the blood oozes out. Then the leech starts to suck the blood and its mouth becomes like the horse hooves. Its neck is then covered by the wet cotton. When enough blood is sucked that is upto pricking pain or itching sensa-

tion is produced, the leech leaves the area and moves down. In case, if it does not leave on its own, turmeric powder is sprinkled on the leech. Then the leech should be made to vomit out the blood or else it develops the incurable disease called as *Indramada*.

➤ **Alabu-**

- This procedure is done by means of creating vacuum and extracting the blood through it by using a vegetable i.e., bottle gourd.

Paschat Karma:²⁹

- After the completion of *pradhana karma*, dressing is done with a gentle massage surrounding the wound by using the medicated oil.
- After successful *Raktamokshana* bleeding should be stop by itself. If the bleeding does not stop by itself, then gentle pressure should be applied with cotton for few minutes. If the bleeding continuous, then the patient should be done either of these *Sandhana* (process of adhesion), *Skandana* (cooling measures to congeal the blood), *Pachana* (process of suppuration), *Dahana* (cauterization).
- The process of bloodletting leads to emaciation, decrease in the digestive power and aggravation of *vata*. Hence to prevent these, the patient should be prescribed with the diet, which is not too cold, should be easy to digest, demulcent, hematinic and non-acidic food.
- The patient should avoid the following till he regains strength or for one month- anger, sexual intercourse, day sleep, excessive talking, physical exercise, riding, exposure to too cold or too hot, contradictory diet, unsuitable diet and heavy food.

Samyak srava lakshana:

After the *pradhana karma*, the bleeding should be stopped by itself after certain time, which indicates that the bloodletting is done properly. The vitiated blood flows out from the punctured vein like the yellow juice oozes out from the flower of *Kusumbha*. Then the person can observe some *lakshana* like feeling of lightness, happiness, subsidence of pain as well as intensity of disease, which are considered as *Samyak srava lakshana*.

Asamyak srava lakshana:

- Headache, blurring of vision, emaciation, convulsion, burning sensation, hemiplegia, monoplegia, hiccough, dyspnoea, cough, anaemia and death. They may be result due to *raktamokshana* done by quacks, done in excessive hot weather, done after excessive *swedana* and deep puncturing of the vein.
- If inadequate blood flow happens, leads to complications like oedema, burning sensation, inflammation & pain.

Contraindications:³⁰

- *Sarvanga sopha* (general anasarca)
- *Ksheena* (emaciated person)
- *Paandu* (anaemia)
- *Arshas* (haemorrhoids)
- *Udara* (abdominal distension)
- *Sosha* (consumption)
- *Garbhini* (pregnant women)
- Children or too old people.
- Wounded, timid, tired, emaciated, weak persons.
- Those who underwent emesis, purgation, medicated enema recently.
- Those who suffer with cough, asthma, consumption, hyperpyrexia, convulsions, paralysis.
- Fasting and excessive thirst.
- Unconscious person.

Indications:^{31,32,33}

- *Kustha*(leprosy)
- Blood vitiated by toxic substances
- *Arbuda*(tumours)
- *Visarpa*(spreading cellulitis)
- *Paaka*(acute inflammation)
- *Sopha*(oedema)
- *Vrana*(ulcer caused by poison)
- *Sonitha avaseka sadhyaroga*(blood borne disorders)
- *Apakva roga*(prodromal stage of disease)
- *Vishopasarga*(cases of poisoning)
- *Athyayika*(emergency conditions)
- *Madha*(intoxication) and *Murcha*(fainting)

DISCUSSION

Raktamokshana is one of the types of *Panchakarma* that comes under the *Sodhana chikitsa*. It is the process of bloodletting either by using the sharp instrument or without using the sharp instrument for the therapeutic purpose of removing the morbid *dosha* from the body. *Acharya Sushruta* had given much importance to *Rakta* and considered it as the fourth *dosha*. Even though *Raktamokshana* is an important procedure, *Acharya Sushruta* stressed on the appropriate quantity of removal of blood from the body. Because the excessive removal of blood causes severe complications and may cause death also. As in present society, people are much prone to lifestyle disorders due to the increase of intake of junk food, irregular dietary habit, late night sleep, lack of physical activity, un-hygienic maintenance etc., causes the accumulation of the impurities in the blood. This leads to the cause of several blood borne diseases, skin diseases, lifestyle disorders etc., In order to remove the toxic substances from the blood, one should undergo *Raktamokshana* procedure periodically or else it may lead to life threatening condition. So proper *raktamokshana* not only cure the ailments, it also prevents several diseases and helps to maintain the health of the people. *Raktamokshana* is considered as one of the important procedures in *Panchakarma*. As the diseases which cannot be relieved by procedures like *snehana*, *swedana*, *nasya*, *kriya kalpa* etc., can be cured by proper *raktamokshana*. In *Shalya tantra*, *Sira vyadhana* which comes under *raktamokshana* is considered as half of the treatment just like *Basti* is considered as half of the treatment in *Kaya chikitsa*. *Raktamokshana* is a popular para surgical procedure of *Ayurveda* since ancient time. Several diseases can be cured by proper *raktamokshana* procedure. It also prevents number of skin disorders, blood borne diseases, oedema, lymph node enlargement etc., as *raktamokshana* can be done in emergency condition also, one should be very precautious about the patient if not it leads to severe complications or even death of the patient.

CONCLUSION

Raktamokshana can be practiced as preventive therapy as well as curative therapy. This is a para-surgical procedure by which half of the surgical interventions can be prevented. *Ayurveda* highlighted the importance of *raktamokshana* and mentioned its role in several diseases. *Ayurveda* mainly aims both preventive as well as curative aspect of the disease. *Raktamokshana* is one among such procedures which is done to cure as well as prevent several diseases.

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