

ROLE OF RAKTAMOKSHANA KARMA IN SHIROROGA: EMPHASIS ON
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ABSTRACT

Headache (*Shiropoga*) is one of the most common health concerns today, frequently arising due to poor dietary habits, excessive consumption of alcohol and tobacco, irregular sleep, mental stress, and prolonged use of medications such as analgesics and steroids. While modern medicine often provides symptomatic relief, *Ayurveda* offers a holistic understanding of its etiology, emphasizing the role of *Dosha–Dushya* imbalance, particularly the association of *Rakta* and *Pitta*. To explore the therapeutic potential of *Raktamokshana*, specifically *Siravyadha* (venesection), in the management of *Shiropoga*. A conceptual review was carried out based on classical *Ayurvedic* texts including *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with supportive modern interpretations. Descriptions regarding etiology, classification, indications, contraindications, and procedural aspects of *Siravyadha* were systematically analyzed. *Siravyadha* is regarded as one of the foremost methods of *Raktamokshana*, described by *Acharya Sushruta* as *Ardha Chikitsa* (half of the entire treatment). It effectively eliminates vitiated *Rakta*, improves local circulation, alleviates pain, and corrects the pathology at its root. The procedure is indicated in *Pittaja Shiropoga*, *Raktaja Shiropoga*, *Suryavarta*, *Ardhavadhedaka*, and *Anantavata*. Its mechanism of action involves removal of *Avarana* (obstruction), restoration of *Dosha* balance, enhancement of local metabolism, and stimulation of healthy blood cell production. *Siravyadha* provides both immediate and long-term relief in *Shiropoga*. By addressing the underlying pathology rather than offering symptomatic control alone, it represents a safe, effective, and holistic therapeutic intervention highly relevant in the context of modern lifestyle disorders.

KEYWORDS: *Ayurveda*, *Shiropoga*, *Raktamokshana*, *Siravyadha*, Headache, Venesection.

INTRODUCTION

In today's lifestyle, irregular food habits, excessive consumption of alcohol and tobacco, disturbed sleep patterns, mental stress, and frequent use of painkillers, antibiotics, or steroids often contribute to the development of various types of headaches. Modern management mainly relies on analgesics, which may provide short-term relief but, when used regularly, can paradoxically trigger headaches themselves. *Ayurvedic* classics also describe several causes of headaches. *Acharya Vagbhata* has mentioned that exposure to smoke, intense sunlight, cold winds or snow, habitual day-sleep, night awakening, suppression of emotions like tears, excessive crying, overconsumption of water or alcoholic drinks, worm infestation, suppression of natural urges, sleeping without a pillow, poor hygiene, prolonged downward gazing, inhalation of foul smells, chronic nasal or paranasal infections, indigestion, and excessive talking—all disturb the *Doshas*, which then localize in the head and lead to *Shiropogas* (head disorders).^[1]

Sushruta categorizes *Shiropoga* into eleven distinct types. These include *Vataja*, *Pittaja*, *Kaphaja*, *Sannipataja*, *Raktaja*, and *Krimija Shiropoga*, along with four special types described as *Suryavarta*, *Anantavata*, *Ardhavadhedaka*, and *Shankhaka*.^[2]

Shodhana Karma represents a distinctive therapeutic approach in *Ayurveda*, comprising five specialized procedures aimed at internal purification of the body through the most appropriate routes.^[3]

These detoxification therapies directly target the root sites of the vitiated *Doshas*, expel them from the system, and thereby help the body to restore its natural balance (homeostasis). This process not only enhances rapid rejuvenation but also improves the efficacy of medicines administered subsequently. Among these therapies, *Raktamokshana* is considered a unique para-surgical technique, particularly effective in disorders arising from *Pitta* and *Rakta* vitiation. *Siravedha*, classified under *Raktamokshana*, is indicated in the management of systemic disorders associated with blood vitiation. Just

Shrunga (horn application), and *Alabu* (gourd application). *Raktamokshana* performed through *Shastra* (surgical methods) includes *Pracchana* (scarification) and *Siravyadha* (venesection). *Siravedha* (venesection) can be performed in two ways.

- Viddha* – through incision or puncture
- Suchi* – using a needle.

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graph TD; A[Hetu sevan] --> B[Sharirika]; A --> C[Mansika]; B --> D[Vatapradhan Tridosha Dushti]; C --> E[Rakta Dushti]; D --> F[Khavaigunya in Shira]; E --> F; F --> G[Sthan Samshraya in Shira]; G --> H[Dosha Dushya Sammurchana]; H --> I[Shiroroga];
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The diagram illustrates the pathogenesis of Shiroroga (Liver Disease) according to Ayurveda. It begins with **Hetu sevan** (Cause/Intake), which leads to **Sharirika** (Physical) and **Mansika** (Mental) factors. These factors lead to **Vatapradhan Tridosha Dushti** (Vata-dominant Tridosha imbalance) and **Rakta Dushti** (Blood imbalance). Both of these lead to **Khavaigunya in Shira** (Impaired function in the Liver). This is followed by **Sthan Samshraya in Shira** (Accumulation in the Liver), then **Dosha Dushya Sammurchana** (Exacerbation of Doshas), and finally results in **Shiroroga** (Liver Disease).

Among the different techniques of *Raktamokshana* mentioned in the *Sushruta Samhita*, *Siravyadha* is considered one of the most frequently employed and significant therapeutic procedures. It involves the removal of vitiated blood with the help of sharp instruments and is especially indicated in conditions of *Sarvangagata Raktadushti* (systemic vitiation of blood).^[7] This procedure provides immediate relief from pain and redness, and is considered as *Ardha Chikitsa* (half of the entire therapy) in *Shalya Tantra*. However, certain veins are unsuitable for venesection and are termed *Avedhya Siras*. Performing *Siravyadha* on these veins is contraindicated, as it may lead to severe complications, disability, or even death.^[8]

- *Pittaja Shiororoga*^[9,10]
- *Raktaj Shiororoga*^[11]
- *Suryavarta*^[12]
- *Ardhavybedak*^[13]
- *Anantvata*^[14]

Raktamokshana is contraindicated in *Kshayaja* and *Krimija Shirorogas*. *Siravyadha* should also be avoided on days that are extremely cold, excessively hot, marked by strong winds, or heavily overcast. This procedure must not be performed on healthy individuals (except during *Sharad Ritu*).

Furthermore, *Siravyadha* is contraindicated in patients with generalized swelling, severe emaciation due to prolonged intake of sour food, or those suffering from conditions such as anaemia, haemorrhoids, ascites (abdominal enlargement), chronic fatigue, oedema, as well as in pregnant women.

Dosha: Predominantly *Tridosha* involvement
Dushya: *Rakta* (vitiated blood as the affected tissue)
Srotodusti: *Sanga* (obstruction) and *Vimargagamana* (aberrant movement) of channels
Adhithana: *Shira Pradesh* (cranial region as the primary site)
Agni: *Jatharagni Mandya* (diminished digestive fire)
Rogmarga: *Madhyama Rogamarga* (the central route of disease manifestation)

METHOD AND MATERIALS^[17]

Siravyadha is considered one of the *Shashtra Karmas* among the eight major surgical procedures and also classified as one of the *Upakramas* out of the sixty measures described in *Ayurveda*. For its successful execution and for the effective management of possible complications, the following materials should be arranged in advance.

- Well-prepared and appropriate place for the procedure
- *Kutharika Shastra*, *Vrihimukha Shastra* (or scalp vein set no. 20)
- Medicated oil for *Snehana* and *Swedana Yantra* for fomentation

- *Bandhana* materials (tourniquet, etc.), cotton, gauze pieces, bandages, kidney tray
- Decoctions (*Kashaya*) for wound cleansing, hot and cold water
- Instruments and accessories for *Raktaskandana* (haemostasis)

Vedhya Sira: At the region of *Lalata* (forehead), *Apanga Sira*, or the nearest suitable vein.

Vyadhana Pramana: The puncture should be of the size equivalent to half a grain of barley ($\frac{1}{2}$ *Yava*).

Procedure (*Siravyadha Vidhi*):^[18] The patient should first be made to sit in the proper posture (*Asana*). After performing *Abhyanga* (oleation), *Swedana* (sudation), and *Yantrana Vidhi* (appropriate preparation), venesection is carried out as per the classical method. The procedure should be performed only after the patient has been given *Yavagu* (gruel) mixed with ghee or oil, ensuring proper nourishment and stability.

Signs of Proper Venesection (*Samyak Siravyadha Lakshana*): When the procedure is correctly performed, blood flows in a steady stream for about one *Muhurta* and then ceases spontaneously. Just as the yellow fluid first exudes when the flowers of *Kusumbha* are crushed, similarly, the vitiated blood initially flows out when the vein is punctured.

Quantity of Bloodletting (*Srava Pramana*):^[19] Classical texts recommend the volume of blood to be let out as one *Prastha*, which is nearly 768 ml. After the bleeding, a tight dressing should be applied to the wound.

Pathya and Apathya (Post-procedure Regimen): The patient should be advised to take food that is light, unctuous, nourishing, and conducive to blood formation, preferably slightly sour or without sourness. After venesection, the following should be strictly avoided until complete recovery of strength.

- Excessive physical exercise
- Sexual activity
- Exposure to cold breeze
- Fasting with only one meal a day
- Daytime sleep
- Use of alkalis and pungent food substances
- Mental stress such as grief
- Excessive talking
- Indigestion

Mode of Action of *Siravedha*

While describing the six stages of *Kriyakala*, *Sushruta* highlights the significant role of *Rakta* in the third and most crucial stage, known as *Prasara*. During this phase, the *Doshas* begin to disseminate throughout different regions of the body, and *Rakta* serves as the medium for their spread. By performing *Siravedha*, the penetration of

morbid *Doshas* into subsequent tissues (*Uttarottara Dhatus*) is effectively restricted.^[20]

According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Rakta* is one among the *Dasha Pranayatana* (ten vital seats of life) and is essential for sustaining *Jivana* (life). Elimination of vitiated blood (*Dushita Rakta*) by *Siravedha* promotes the replenishment and proper functioning of purified blood (*Shuddha Rakta*), thereby restoring systemic equilibrium.

From a physiological perspective, *Raktamokshana* improves venous circulation and reduces *Raktavṛta Vata* (*Vata* obstructed by vitiated blood). As a result, immediate relief from pain and associated symptoms is observed.

DISCUSSION

Therapeutic Significance of *Raktamokshana* in *Shiroroga*

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Raktaja Roga* once treated with *Raktamokshana* attains *Apurnabhava* (non-recurrence). *Siravyadha* is considered highly beneficial in various types of *Shiroroga*, particularly *Pittaja Shiroroga*, *Raktaja Shiroroga*, *Suryavarta*, *Ardhavadhedaka*, and *Anantavata*.

Avarana Chikitsa

Raktamokshana is primarily indicated in disorders involving *Pitta*, *Rakta*, and *Kapha*, particularly when *Pitta* or *Kapha* serve as *Anubandha* (associating factors) to *Vata Dosha*. In such conditions, where *Vata* is aggravated due to obstruction (*Avarana*) by *Kapha* and *Pitta*, bloodletting helps to remove the obstruction, thereby facilitating the *Anuloma Gati* (normal course) of vitiated *Vata*. This indirectly alleviates the *Vatika* symptoms.^[21]

Samsrita Dosha

In conditions of *Samsrita Dosha*, *Pitta Dosha* should be treated first due to its close association with *Rakta* (*Ashraya–Ashrayi Bhava*). In such cases, *Raktamokshana* plays a key role in pacifying the aggravated *Pitta Dosha*.^[22]

Probable Mechanisms

In general, several physiological changes are observed following bloodletting. This procedure enhances local blood circulation and metabolic activity, while also stimulating the production of fresh, functionally more active red blood cells.^[23] Owing to these effects, *Raktamokshana* proves highly beneficial in managing various disorders, particularly *Raktaja Vikaras*.

CONCLUSION

Headache (*Shiroroga*) is one of the most common disorders encountered in today's era due to irregular diet, lifestyle disturbances, stress, and overuse of modern medications. While conventional management primarily focuses on symptomatic relief through analgesics,

Ayurveda offers a deeper understanding of the pathology and provides effective, long-lasting solutions. Acharyas like Sushruta and Vaghbata have explained Shiroroga in detail, emphasizing the role of vitiated Doshas, particularly Rakta and Pitta, in its manifestation.

Among the therapeutic modalities, Raktamokshana—especially Siravyadha—occupies a significant place as a Shodhana procedure. By expelling vitiated blood, it not only halts the progression of disease but also provides immediate relief from pain, redness, and associated symptoms. The therapy restores balance by improving circulation, enhancing local metabolism, and stimulating the production of healthy blood cells. Furthermore, classical references highlight that disorders such as Pittaja Shiroroga, Raktaja Shiroroga, Suryavarta, Ardhavabhedaka, and Anantavata respond particularly well to Siravyadha.

Thus, Siravyadha can be considered both preventive and curative, offering a holistic approach that addresses the root cause rather than merely controlling symptoms. Integrating this ancient para-surgical method with modern practices could provide a safe, effective, and sustainable management strategy for headache and related disorders.

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