CRITICAL STUDY OF RAKTAMOKSHANA W.S.R. TO CHARAKA SAMHITA
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ABSTRACT

Lord Dhanvantari, an incarnation of Vishnu, the promulgator of Ayurveda holds leech in his hand indicating the importance of leech therapy in the field of medical practice. The practice of Raktamokshana can be traced back from Vedic period and the references related to bloodletting by means of leech application are available in the Kousika sutra of Adharvana Veda. The extraction of blood for the cure of many disorders was in practice since antiquity until the late 19th century. Hippocrates was also reported that bloodletting was in practice in Greece during the fifth century B.C. It was used to "treat" a wide range of diseases, becoming a standard treatment for almost every ailment, and was practiced prophylactically as well as therapeutically. A British medical text recommended bloodletting for acne, asthma, cancer, cholera, coma, convulsions, diabetes, epilepsy, gangrene, gout, herpes, indigestion, insanity, jaundice, leprosy, ophthalmic conditions, stroke and the other one hundred diseases also infers the importance of Hirudotherapy in the medical practice. Though Charaka has not incorporated Raktamokshana (bloodletting) in the group of Panchakarma, mentioning of more than 30 references of Raktamokshana for the management of Jwara (fever), Gulma (abdominal tumor), Kushta (skin disorders), Arshas (piles), Visarpa (herpes) and Vatarakta (gout) etc. suggests the comprehensive knowledge about bloodletting therapy. The details of the historical perspective as well as the references related to Raktamokshana in Charaka Samhita are discussed in this article.

Key Words: Raktamokshana, Bloodletting, Charaka Samhita

INTRODUCTION: The word ‘Pancha’ refers to the number five and the ‘Karma’ refers to the therapy. The term ‘Panchakarma’ means five therapeutic procedures that brings about homeostasis. According to Charaka school of thought Vamana (emesis),Virechana (purgation), Asthapanavasti (enema therapy with decoctions),Anuvasanavasti(enema therapy with oils) and Nasya (nasal administration) come under the category of Panchakarma treatment modalities[1]. Though Charaka has not incorporated Raktamokshana (bloodletting) in the group of Panchakarma, mentioning of more than 30 references of Raktamokshana for the management of various disease conditions related to different branches of Ayurveda suggests that he is having a comprehensive knowledge about bloodletting therapy also.

Historical Aspects of Raktamokshana:
Lord Dhanvantari, an incarnation of Vishnu, the promulgator of Ayurveda holds leech in his hand indicating the importance of leech therapy in the field of medical practice. The practice of Raktamokshana can be traced back from Vedic period and the references related to bloodletting by means of leech application are available in Kousika sutra of Adharvana Veda\textsuperscript{[2]}. 

History reveals that around five thousands of years ago, one will find mention of the principles of Panchakarma therapeutic procedures. By gone through the historical works, it is observed that physicians of Greek, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia and South America, due to different reasons, were using various methods of Panchakarma therapies\textsuperscript{[3]}.

The extraction of blood for the cure of many disorders was the most common medical practice performed by physicians from antiquity until the late 19th century. In the good olden days, the physicians believed that for treating hypertension, bloodletting could sometimes have had a beneficial effect by reducing blood volume. Bloodletting is having been practiced among ancient peoples including the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks. Hippocrates also reported that bloodletting was in practice in Greece during the fifth century B.C. \textsuperscript{[4]}.

Cupping and bleeding instruments noticed on the votive tablet from the temple of Asclepius at Athens reveals the practice of phlebotomy since antiquity.

votivetablenet, representing cupping and bleeding instruments from temple of asclepius at athens in centre is represented a folding case containing scalpels of various forms on either side are cupping vessels.\textsuperscript{5}

Greeks might have been passed the phlebotomy techniques to the Islamic medical professionals and they advised, particularly for fevers\textsuperscript{[6]}.

Bloodletting was used to "treat" a wide range of diseases, becoming a standard treatment for almost every ailment, and was practiced prophylactically as well as therapeutically.

A British medical text recommended bloodletting for acne, asthma, cancer, cholera, coma, convulsions, diabetes, epilepsy, gangrene, gout, herpes, indigestion, insanity, jaundice, leprosy, ophthalmic conditions, plague, pneumonia, scurvy, smallpox, stroke, tetanus,
tuberculosis, and for some one hundred other diseases[7].

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:
• To reveal the historical aspects of Raktamokshana since antiquity.
• To do analytical study and document the details of Raktamokshana mentioned in Charaka Samhita.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:
After a thorough consultation of Charaka Samhita, Ancient Historical works along with e-journals; the subject matter related to Raktamokshana was compiled and critically analyzed to achieve the aims and objectives of the study.

OBSERVATIONS:
On critical study of Charaka Samhita, a number of references related to Raktamokshana are noticed as under.

Jwara (Fever):
1. Karnamooola Sodha (inflammation near the root of the ear) as a consequence of Sannipatajwara ……… Raktavasechana by incising the vein nearer to the ear (Ch. S. Chi. 3/288)
2. SakhanusariJwara…..Raktavasechana by incising the vein in the arm (Ch. S. Chi. 3/289)
3. AbhighatajaJwara…Raktavasechana (Ch. S. Chi. 3/319)

Gulma (Abdominal tumor):
4. If Gulma doesn’t cure by medicines, it is inferred that the vitiation of the blood is the cause and should be managed by means of Raktavasechana with the help of Sringa (horn) etc. Bloodletting can also be done by Bahu Siravedhana i.e.incising the vein in the arm (Ch. S. Chi. 5/32).
5. If Gulma is associated with the complications like Trishna (thirst), Jwara(fever), Paridaha(excessive burning sensation), Soola(colic), Sweda(sweating), Agnimardava (decreased digestive power) and Aruchi(anorexia); it should be managed by means of Raktavasechana (Ch. S. Chi. 5/36).
6. In case of Kaphaja Gulma, Raktamokshana is suggested by means of Ghatiyantra. In this context, the author had also explained the method of application of Ghatiyantra in a lucid manner (Ch. S. Chi. 5/137 - 141).

Kushta:
7. For the management of Pittaja Kushta… Raktamokshana is advised. It is further quoted that in case of Alpa Dosha (less acute stage), bloodletting should be done by means of Pracchana (rubbing with a coarse device) and in case of Bahu Dosha (more acute stage) by means of Siravedhana (Venesection) - (Ch. S. Chi. 7/40).
8. The equipment and instruments useful for bloodletting therapy in the context of Kushta Chikitsa is suggested by Charaka as…. Kurcha Sastra, Sringa, Alabu, Jalouka (Ch. S. Chi. 7/50 - 52).
9. Raktamokshana is also indicated for the management of Switra (leucoderma) - (Ch. S. Chi. 7/172).

Rajayakshma (Wasting condition):
10. For the management of the symptoms of Rajayakshma such as Sirahsoola (headache) and Parswasoola (pain in the flanks) bloodletting therapy by means of Sringa, Alabu, Jalouka or Siravedhana is suggested by Acharya Charaka(Ch. S. Chi. 8/82).

Unmada (Insanity):
11. For the management of Unmada, Vishamajwara and Apasmara (epilepsy) bloodletting is to be conducted at Sankha-kesanta Sandhi (joint of hairline and temporal region) - (Ch. S. Chi. 9/77).

Swayadhu (Oedema):
12. For the management of Galaganda (goiter) and Gandamala (cervical adenitis) Siravedhana is advised (Ch. S. Chi. 12/80).

13. Bloodletting therapy by means of Venesection is suggested for the management of Alaji, Charmanakhantara Sodha (whitlow) and Vidarika (inguinal and axillary lymphadenitis) (Ch. S. Chi. 12/89).

14. Jalagardabha is to be treated by means of Raktamokshana (Ch. S. Chi. 12/100).

Udara (Abdominal disorder):
15. Vama-Bahu Siravedhana (Venesection in the left arm) is indicated in Yakritodara and Pleehodara (enlargement of liver & spleen) - (Ch. S. Chi. 13/77).

Arshas (Hemorrhoids):
16. In case of Raktarshas (bleeding piles), Raktamokshana is to be conducted by means of Jalouka Prayoga (leech application), Sastra (sharp instruments), Suchi (needles) etc. (Ch. S. Chi. 14/61).

Grahani (Dysentery):
17. Siravedhana is indicated in Atyagni (increased digestive power) - (Ch. S. Chi. 15/226).

Visarpa (Erysipelas):
18. In case of Visarpa, if the vitiated Doshas in the state of Ama are lodged in Pittasthana, it is advised to conduct bloodletting. (Ch. S. Chi. 21/45).

19. If the blood is vitiating in the periphery and causes Visarpa - Raktamokshana is indicated.

In case of vitiating blood is associated either with Vata, Pitta or Kapha; it should be extracted by means of Vishana (horn), Jalouka (leech) or Alabu (gourd) respectively. (Ch. S. Chi. 21/68-69).

20. If Grandhi Visarpa is dominated by Rakta and Pitta, it should be treated by bloodletting therapy. (Ch. S. Chi. 21/119).

Visha (Poisoning):
21. When poison is spreading from the place of bite, after sucking the poison – bloodletting should be conducted by means of Pracchana, Sringa, Jalouka and Siravedhana. (Ch. S. Chi. 23/39).

Dwivraniya (2 Types of Ulcers):
22. Raktavasechana (Ch. S. Chi. 25/38).

23. In the premonitory state of Vrana, to arrest the further progress of the disease, Raktavasechana is indicated (Ch. S. Chi. 25/44).

Trimarmiya (3 Vital Organs):
24. In the case of the remaining types of headaches, bloodletting is indicated (Ch. S. Chi. 26/81).

25. Siravedhana is also indicated in Mukhapaka (stomatitis) (Ch. S. Chi. 26/204).

26. For the management of Pittaja Swarabheda (hoarseness of voice), Siravedhana is indicated (Ch. S. Chi. 26/289).

Vatavyadhi (neurological disorders):
27. When Raktagata Vata vitiates, Raktamokshana is advised (Ch. S. Chi. 28/92).

Vatarakta (Gout):
28. If the aggravated Vata is located in the periphery bloodletting should be done by means of Sringa, Jalouka, Alabu and Suchi (Ch. S. Chi. 29/36-38).

29. Siravedhana is indicated in Vatarakta when it is associated with Raga (redness), Ruja (pain) and Daha (burning sensation) - (Ch. S. Chi. 29/131)

Yonivyapath Chikitsa (Treatment of Gyneac disorders):
30. If the impotency is caused by Dhvajabhanga (morbidity of the phallus), Raktamokshana is advised (Ch. S. Chi. 30/200).

Trimarmiya Siddhi:
31. For the management of Anantavata – Siravedhana is indicated (Ch. S. Si. 9/85)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION:
- Whatever is mentioned in this work is available elsewhere and things not mentioned here are not to be found anywhere else.” This statement of Agnivesa is very much true.
- It is evident that Acharya Charaka has a definite idea about the stages and the management of different disease conditions and thus mentioned Raktamokshana at more than 30 places in his work and also quoted that the diseases which may not be cured by drugs should be treated by surgical or para-surgical measures.
- On critical study of Charaka Samhita, it is recognized that the author has incorporated various aspects of bloodletting therapy as under.
  - Types of Raktamokshana - Sringa, Jalouka, Alabu, Suchi, Siravedhana, Pracchana
    - Method of application of Ghatiyantra (Ch. S. Chi. 5/137-141)
    - Instruments useful for Raktamokshana-Kurcha Sastra, (Ch. S. Chi. 7/50-52).
    - Places of Venesection to be done –
      - Karnamoola Siravedhana (nearer the ear) - (Ch. S. Chi. 3/288),
      - Bahu Siravedhana (arm) - (Ch. S. Chi. 3/289; 5/32)
- Sankha-kesanta Sandhi (joint of hairline & temporal region) - (Ch. S. Chi. 9/77)
- Vama-Bahu (in the left arm) - (Ch. S. Chi. 13/77)
- The author has clearly stated that one must be cautious about his limitations while treating a patient other than his specialization and such cases should be referred to the concerned specialist.
- Further in the context of Gulma Chikitsa, it is mentioned that the administration of alkalis’ and cauterization is the specialty of Dhanvantari School i.e. school of surgeons. Hence for the administration of alkali therapy, services of physicians who are Ksharatantra Vid (proficient in the administration of alkalis’) should be better utilized.
- Though Charaka Samhita is considered to be primarily a work on Kayachikitsa, matter related to other branches has also been dealt in a comprehensive manner. However the author is very much clear about the views and ideas while dealing a patient other than his specialization. Hence, Acharya Charaka has never crossed his jurisdiction at any point of time, while documenting the medical knowledge in his compendium.

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