

**MONTH: JAN: FEB -2016**

**VOLUME: 4, ISSUE: 1**

**ISSN: 2348-1846**



# **Punarna V**

**TITLE**

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**AN INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED AYURVED JOURNAL  
ON LINE BI-MONTHLY AYURVED JOURNAL**

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## LEECH THERAPY IN VICHARCHIKA (ECZEMA): OWN EXPERIENCE

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**ABSTRACT:**

*Every clinician has its own way of treatment while treating various challengeable diseases. The most popular but have variance skin lesion is eczema. It is correlated clinically in Ayurveda by vicharchika, a type of kshudra kustha and kshudra roga. Eczema has endogenous and exogenous in origin and is not considered fairly as an autoimmune disease but its endogenous origin and atopic dermatitis may shows its validity towards autoimmunity. In Ayurveda the dietetic incompatibility etc causes vitiation of raktadhatu. It leads to many skin diseases (kustha) and for which bloodletting is indicated. Bloodletting through Leeches is practiced frequently with bitter & sweetie experiences. With the help of this article an attempt is taken to share own experience while treating the eczema by Leech application and Ayurvedic drugs. It may be believed as a treatment preference in future.*

**KEYWORDS:** Eczema, Leech, Raktamokshana, Vicharchika.

## INTRODUCTION

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Ayurveda has description of skin diseases in form of *mahakustha* (major skin diseases), *kshudrakustha* (minor skin diseases), *kshudraroga* (minor diseases) etc. The basic causes behind this are mandagni (digestive insufficiency), viruddhahar (dietetic incompatibilities), irregular lifestyle, occupation etc which produces *ama* (improperly digested food that exacerbates all the *doshas*). Various other factors like suppression of natural urges (e.g. *chardi-vomiting*), inherited and autoimmune factors also causes skin diseases like eczema. The skin disease *Vicharchika* (eczema) is grouped in *kshudrakustha* and caused by *kaphaj doshas*<sup>1</sup>. It is not easy to correlate *vicharchika* by eczema exactly because both Ayurveda and modern system has its peculiar view. In Ayurveda the disease are named according to principle of *tridosha* with their direct clinical presentation while in modern science mainly based on underlying pathology.<sup>2</sup> The number of cases of eczematous dermatitis is increases in society in accordance to modernization. Most of the cases have eczematous history in childhood and few respiratory problems like asthma. Patient suffering from eczema generally seeks medical advice and treatment from various hospitals and

lastly when they get exhausted then consult Ayurveda treatment. For such patients Ayurveda give a hope for successful management. At Leech unit of department of shalya tantra of institute the Leech therapy adjuvant with oral medication & suggestion are practiced in same. The bloodletting is a parasurgical procedure and is the main method to take care of skin diseases (Sushruta sutrasthan chapter 14/34)<sup>3</sup> The leech are applied in deep places for bloodletting (*avgadhe-jalauka-shyat*, Sushruta shareer ch.8/25-26)<sup>4</sup>. The common preferred Ayurvedic drugs for eczema are blood purifier (*raktasodhak*), anti-inflammatory, anti-pruritic, vermifuge etc. This drug with suitable diet and avoidance of causative factors amplifies the results.

**RAKTAMOKSHANA & JALAUKAVACHARANA (LEECH THERAPY)** – Before discussing the case of eczema it is requisite to have glimpse on *raktamokshana* (a bloodletting procedure) and *jalaukavacharana* (Leech therapy). *Raktamoksana* in present scenario is an accepted, safe and effective procedure for the treatment of *raktajaroga* (disease caused by impure raktadosha). Sushruta includes *raktamokshana* as one of the procedure of *Panchakarma Chikitsa*. Although in *panchakarma*, the events are designed to eliminate vitiated *doshas* but *Raktamokshana* aims to eliminate vitiated rakta in therapeutic quantity. During *raktamokshana* procedure especially aggravated *pitta dosa* is eliminated because *rakta* and *pitta* are integrally associated with each other. Bloodletting can be performed with the help of Leeches and is termed as Leech therapy. The Leeches are invertebrate animals & belonging from phylum Annelida (segmental organism), class hirudinea, order gnathobdellida<sup>5</sup>. *Hirudinaria*

*medicinalis* and *H. granulose* are common species of Leeches used in clinical practice. Leeches are sanguivorous animals and suck the impure stagnant blood from application site and discharge their saliva in blood which has various useful constituent with multiple beneficial effects. Leech therapy is well known unique treatment procedure for *raktaj* and *pittaja roga* in Ayurveda and practiced in various skin diseases like eczema, psoriasis, herpes etc.

**VICHARCHIKA (ECZEMA) AND ITS AUTOIMMUNE ASPECT:** *Vicharchika* on the basis of clinical features like dark brown macular eruptions, itching, discharge etc (Charak samhita chikitsa 07)<sup>6</sup> it can be correlated with eczema. Eczema is general term for any itchy red rash that initially weeps or oozes serum and may become crusted; thickened or scaly.<sup>7</sup> Eczema is group of skin diseases including atopic dermatitis, seborrhoeic dermatitis, allergic dermatitis etc. Its endogenous origin and atopic type focus it towards autoimmunity, but fairly it cannot considered as auto immune diseases. Autoimmune diseases are variety of immune dysregulation associated with person own immunity in which body fail to identify self and non self and the

immune reaction is directed against normal cells, tissues or organs in which it resides (termed as auto-antigens). Skin conditions due to autoimmunity or immune deregulations are not unique to people with primary immunodeficiency diseases. Common skin conditions like eczema or psoriasis are seen in people with normal immune systems as well<sup>8</sup> but few experimental study proves that eczema is an autoimmune disease.<sup>9</sup>


**VARIOUS TREATMENT MODALITIES FOR VICHARCHIKA (ECZEMA) AND LEECH APPLICATION-** Various treatments are practiced by clinician depending on stages of disease listed in table 01. Many of the patients attending shalya OPD of institute and referred cases of other OPD are put on Ayurvedic drugs and Leech therapy. The therapy started after clinical diagnosis, normal routine blood investigation, taking consent and full explanations about procedure and prognosis. The patients on leech therapy are reviewed at weekly interval for application of Leeches up to seven or eight sittings. The recurrence of eczema may happen, so after a break of one or two month the therapy again repeated. The result shows that after few sitting condition start to improve.

**Table 01 -Various treatment modalities for *Vicharchika* (Eczema)**

Contemporary Treatment <sup>10</sup>	Ayurvedic Treatment <sup>11,12</sup>
<b>Removal of triggers</b> – Contact allergens/irritants in contact dermatitis. Aggravating factors in atopic dermatitis	1. The healing formula of kushtha diseases is <i>ghritpaan, vaman, virechan</i> and <i>raktamokshana</i> . For <i>raktamokshana</i> use <i>prachhan</i> in minor cases & <i>siravedha</i> in severe cases. These cleansing processes can be continual but preserve the strength of patient (Charak chikitsasthan chapter 07/39-41).
<b>Hydration</b> – Basic principle of treatment of eczema is by hydration of skin followed by application of emollients.	2. The raktaja illness are treated with <i>raktapittashamak</i> drugs, <i>virechan, upwash</i> and <i>raktamokshana</i> (Charak samhita sutrasthan chapter 24/18). 3. <b><i>Nidana parivarjana</i></b> – Avoidance of causative factors like <i>viruddhara-vihar</i> (dietetic incompatibilities) that

<p><b>Acute localised lesion</b> – Soaks followed by topical application of corticosteroids.</p>	<p>4. produces <i>Ama</i> etc. <b>Samsodhan chikitsa</b> – Biopurificatory methods viz <i>Vaman, Virechana, Basti, Raktamokshan</i> can be applied according to extent of <i>dosha</i> involved and strength of patient.</p>
<p><b>Acute extensive lesion</b> – short course of systemic steroids.</p>	<p>5. <b>Samshaman chikitsa</b> – with the help of <i>aushdi-anna-vihar</i>, by <i>Antahaparimarjana</i> (internal intake of medicine) and <i>Vahiparimarjana</i>(external application of medicine).</p>
<p><b>Infected lesions</b> – Topical or systemic antibiotics and topical corticosteroids</p>	<p>6. Various medicines are available for treatment of eczema.</p>
<p><b>Chronic</b> – Topical corticosteroids, often with keratolytic agents like urea and salicylic acid.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Common medication suggested in practice are</b><sup>13</sup> –<i>Virechana</i> drugs (purgative or laxative, e.g. <i>aragvadhadi kashaya</i>), <i>kanduhara</i>(antipruritic) application, <i>karanja</i> oil, <i>chakramarda</i> oil, <i>mahamarichyadi</i> oil, <i>gandhak rasayana</i>(if burning sensation), <i>kutajghanvati</i>, <i>mahanjithadi kwath</i>(<i>varnyakara</i>- create skin colour), immunomodulator (<i>Haridra, Guduchi, Chitrak, Saariva</i>) etc.</li> <li>• Other drugs are <i>saarivadyashava, kaishore guggulu, panchatiktaghrita guggulu, arogyavardhini vati, krimimudgar rasa, triphala churna, amalki churna, rasamanikya, sameerpannaga rasa, giloya satva, chopchinyadi churna</i> etc.</li> <li>• <i>Pathya</i> – light diet, wheat, barley, moong pulse, non-unctuousness diet, <i>tikta rasa</i> diet(pointed gourd, bitter gourd, garlic), light exercise, massage, cleanliness etc.</li> <li>• <i>Apathya</i> - Patient is advice to avoid heavy diet, curd, fish, jaggery, til (sesamum), brinjal, kidney bean, cabbage etc. Avoid constipation causing factor, dietetic incompatibilities, spicy food, oily food etc.</li> </ul>	

Table 02 A glimpses of patient taking Leech application

No. of attempts of Leech application in eczema cases at Leech unit of department of shalya tantra CBPACS, New Delhi (from January- 2014 to October 2015)				
January 2014	0	January 2015	01	
February 2014	02	February 2015	04	
March 2014	01	March 2015	14	
April 2014	03	April 2015	09	
May 2014	02	May 2015	08	
June 2014	05	June 2015	11	
July 2014	01	July 2015	06	
August 2014	01	August 2015	06	



September 2014	04	September 2015	07	
October 2014	06	October 2015	03	
November 2014	04			
December 2014	02			

### CLINICAL OBSERVATION & DISCUSSION

Along with skin disease the eczema are very common illness with psychological, social, financial trouble to the patient and their relatives. The management of eczematous dermatitis in modern medicine are done with antibiotics, antihistamines, steroids etc but even after their uses relapses, recurrences and other complications are very frequent. In practice the cases attending OPD at different stages of diseases having various additional features like in simple chronic phase, in acute, in inflammatory phase, dry, wet etc. So plan of treatment should be as per condition. Ayurveda says that *kustha* (skin diseases) are mainly caused by *viruddhahara* and *raktadushti* and the vitiated blood is responsible for such condition. So removal of vitiated blood is better treatment for this and also the frequent *shodhan*(purification) like *raktamokshana* is indicated in *kustha* due to involvement of *bahudoshas*. Leeches have blood suckers which suck the blood from affected area and inoculate many bioactive alkaloid in circulation which

together responsible for therapeutic effect with anti inflammatory actions. When the drugs take orally or applied locally, its act well with assurance that enhancement of local blood circulation with removal of stasis impure blood. Leech therapy is best for removing toxins, allergens & immobile impure blood at local site and thereby improving blood circulation. This also insert anti-inflammatory and antihistaminic constituent of Leech saliva. During treatment period it is tried to identified the cause like allergens etc and its avoidance, with make use of healthy life style, diet, exercise etc. Since most autoimmune diseases and chronic conditions, including eczema, are caused by delayed autoimmune responses to foods in the digestive tract, the logical step, then, is to test for and identify the foods that cause these reaction<sup>14</sup>. Leech application gives significant relief for the symptoms of eczema. The life quality of the patient also improved significantly after leech therapy. No adverse reactions were reported during the entire course of study<sup>15</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

Inspite of practice of various treatment methods but results still require added satisfaction. So the patients move towards Ayurvedic clinician. Proper leech application may cure the disease with help of oral medication and diet. There is disappearance of maculo-papular eruptions, swelling, roughness,

discolouration along with diminishing of itching after last sitting of Leech therapy. On the basis of result seen in clinical practice it is not a hyperbole that it is promising and having untapped potential for the successful management of eczema. As per observation in clinical care the diminution of recurrence rate, relief in

disease, safety from adverse effect, cost in fact and day care applicability encourages its application. It is also recommended that

it should be justified with evidence base research on scientific platform through accurate set of rules.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The credit goes to those entire patients who accept the proposal of Leech therapy and help to publicize and support of Ayurvedic therapy. We also offer gratitude to our Director-Principal and staff of

department of shalya tantra whose supports are valuable. An excuse is appealed if any error found with your appreciation.

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