



# Ayurvedic Perspective on *Virecana karma* in the Management of Poisoning

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**ABSTRACT: Introduction:** *Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of medicine, emphasizes holistic health encompassing physical, mental and social well-being. Ayurvedic treatment considers the balance of *dosha*, *dhaatu* and *mala*, emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmony for overall health. This paper explores the role of ayurvedic therapy, specifically *virecana-karma*, in addressing poisoning cases, as outlined in the *agada-tantra*, one of the eight clinical branches forming the foundation of *ayurveda*. **Materials and methods:** Poison (*visha*) is classified into natural (*akrtrima*) and unnatural or chemically prepared (*krtrima*) categories. The treatment approach differs based on the origin and characteristics of the poison. Ayurvedic classics elaborate on the various types of poison, their symptoms and the appropriate treatments. **Result and Discussion:** *Virecana*, a purgative therapy, holds significance in ayurvedic management of poisoning. The paper delves into references from classical texts, discussing specific indications and formulations for *virecana* in different types of poisonings and the importance of *virecana* in expelling toxins and restoring balance in *doshas* and *dhaatus*. It also draws parallels between ayurvedic principles and modern toxicology, particularly in emergency treatments like gastric lavage and emphasizes the unique medicinal effects of classical *virecana-karma*, noting the distinctions in approach and outcomes. **Conclusion:** In cases of poisoning, the swift removal of toxins from the body is crucial for preventing adverse health effects. Ayurvedic *virecana-karma* offers a traditional, yet effective approach; aligned with the principles of eliminating toxins to restore balance in the body. The integration of ayurvedic insights with modern toxicology principles contributes to a comprehensive understanding of poisoning management, advocating for a holistic and personalized approach to healthcare.

**Key Words:** Virecana, Agada tantra, Poisoning

## INTRODUCTION

The prime aim of *ayurveda* is to establish health in all aspects of life. According to WHO, health is the physical, mental and social well being not merely the absence of diseases. *Ayurveda* also believes as health is the balance of *dosha*, *dhaatu* and *mala* with *saatmyata* of *prasanna aatma*, *manas* and *indriyas*. Here physicians deal with every disease from their roots.

The foundation of *ayurveda* is based on eight clinical branches called *ashtaanga-ayurveda*. Among these branches, *agada-tantra* deals with

the bites of snakes, insects, spiders, scorpions, rats and other animate poisons, their characteristic poisonous symptoms and treatment of diseases caused by different types of natural, artificial and combined poisons. <sup>[1]</sup>

*Visha* causes *vishannatva* (distress) and *vishaada* (sadness) in the body. Thus *visha* has been defined as a substance that is destructive to life and possesses properties like *teekshna*, *ushna*, *rooksha*, *visada*, *vyavaayi*, *aasukaari*, *laghu*, *vikaashi*, *sookshma*, *avyakta-rasa* and *apaaki*. <sup>[2]</sup>

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Based on its origin, *visha* has been classified into two, *akr̥trima-visha* (natural poison) and *kr̥trima-visha* or *gara visha* (unnatural or chemically prepared poison). *Akr̥trima-visha* is again subdivided into two i.e. *jangama-visha* (animal poison) and *sthaavara-visha* (plant and mineral poisons). The *adhistaana* (sources) of *sthaavara-visha* and *jangama-visha* are narrated as ten and sixteen respectively.<sup>[3,4]</sup>

According to *Acaarya* Charaka, a poison formed by the combination of different poisons (*samyogaja visha*) or concocted poison is included under *gara-visha* (other than the basic classification of *visha* as *sthaavara* and *jangama visha*). Due to absence of all the ten *gunas* in combination of this *visha*, these are not considered as fatal (intensity of diseases depends on the number of *gunas*, characters like *aaṣu*, *ciraat*, *ciraataaraat*).<sup>[5]</sup> *Acaaryas* Sushruta and Vagbhata opine that the poison which is formed from the waste materials from the animals (excreta) or a combination of medicines or *bhasmas* which are having opposite properties or the poisons having less potency can be considered as *gara- visha*.<sup>[6]</sup>

The ayurvedic management of diseases in general can be broadly grouped into *śodhana* and *samana cikitsa*. The former is intended to eliminate excessively vitiated *doshas* from the body and thereby eradicate the disease as a whole, while the latter is directed towards the palliation of vitiated *doshas*. However, ayurvedic classics unequally give paramount importance to the *śodhana* therapy, owing to its credential of providing a complete cure. *Acaarya* Charaka says that *doshas* subdued by *langhana* and *paacana* therapies may provoke, but in the case of *śodhana*, there is seldom possibility of such recurrence.<sup>[7]</sup>

*Śodhana* has got no parlance in modern medicine, but we can say that the toxins and metabolic toxic products responsible for the disease are eliminated

from the body. *Śodhana-cikitsa* is performed mainly by employing *pancakarma*, which includes- *vamana*, *virecana*, *aasthaapana vasti*, *anuvasaana vasti* and *nasya-karma*.<sup>[7]</sup>

In Charaka Samhita *Cikitsaa-sthaana adhyaaya* 23, it has been stated *cikitsa upakramas* for *visha*. In these *upakramas* major *pancakarma* procedures *vamana*, *virecana*, *nasya* and *rakta-mokshana* are included in these and other allied procedures included are *agnikarma*, *parisheka*, *avagaaha*, *dhoomapaana*, *lepa*, *abhyanga*, *udvaratana* and *arishta-bandhana*, etc.<sup>[8]</sup>

Here discussing the indications and medicines along with the combinations of *virecana* in the various areas of *agada tantra*.

## Objectives

To collect references of *virecana-karma* explained in the context of *agada tantra* in *ayurveda samhitas* and to establish the importance of *virecana* in *visha-cikitsa*

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Virecana

Etymological consideration

The word *virecana* has three components. (Vachaspatyam 4847)

*Vi* - *Upasarga* (prefix)

*Richir* - *Rich dhaatu* (root)

*Lut* - *pratyaya* (suffix) (*Malaadi- nissaranam*)

Here '*Richir*' – evacuation

*Rich* - *Viyojana* (separation)

*Samparcana* (combination)

The words '*praskandana*' and '*rechana*' are also used for *virecana- karma* in classics.

### Definition

The act of expelling *doshas* through *adhobhaaga* (downward pathway) is known as *virecana*.<sup>[9]</sup>

**Site of action of virecana**

**Dosha**

*Pitta, pitta-sthaana gata alpa- kapha, Kapha-sthaana gata bahu-pitta, Pittaavrta vaata, sannipaatika* condition. (Bhela)

**Dooshya**

*Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Asthi, Majja* and *Sukra*.

**Strotas**

*Rasa-vaha, Rakta-vaha, Mamsa-vaha, Asthi-vaha* and *Majja-vaha*.

**Virecana in Visha cikitsa**

**Susrutha samhitha**

Among *Brhatrayee*, *Susrutaacaarya* has dedicated one entire *sthaana* for *agada tantra*. This it self depicts the keen observation, *Aacaarya* has given for *visha cikitsa*.

While discussing different modes of treatment principles in different aspects of *visha*, *Aacaarya* mentions that *virecana* is considered as an important treatment method.

**Table 1**  
Indications of *Virecana*

Sl. No	Chapter	Indications	Poisonous signs and symptoms	Treatment suggested
1	First chapter, <i>Annapaana rakshaa kalpa</i> . <sup>[10]</sup>	<i>Pakvaasaya visha</i>	<i>Daaha, Moorcha, Ateesaara, Trshnaa, Indriya-vaikrtam, Aatopa, Paandutaa</i> and <i>Kaarayam</i> .	<i>Virecana</i> should be done using <i>Neelini-phala</i> with ghee or <i>Dooshivishari</i> agada with curd and honey. According to <i>Dalhana</i> <i>Neelini-phala</i> is taken as <i>triphala</i> . <sup>[10]</sup>
2	Second chapter <i>Sthaavara-visha vijnaneeya</i>	Second <i>visha vega</i> <sup>[11]</sup>	Shivering, Debility, <i>Daaha</i> and pain in <i>Kantha</i>	Do <i>vamana</i> first and then <i>virecana</i> . <i>Dalhana</i> explains as to do <i>virecana</i> with ghee, honey, cold potency medicine and <i>vishaghna</i> medicines. <sup>[11]</sup>
3		<i>Dooshi-visha cikitsa</i> <sup>[12]</sup>		A person with <i>dooshivisha</i> should do <i>swedana</i> and do upward and downward <i>godhana</i> . ie, <i>vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> . <sup>[12]</sup>
4	5 <sup>th</sup> chapter <i>Sarpa dasha visha cikitsaa kalpa</i>	<i>Darveekaravisha cikitsa</i> in 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> <i>visha vega cikitsa</i> <sup>[13]</sup>	<i>Parvabheda, hikkaa, daaha, gaatraanaam gouravam, ateesaaram, hrt-peedaa, moorcha</i>	Cold treatment should be done first and followed by administering strong purificatory methods either <i>vamana</i> or <i>virecana</i> . <sup>[13]</sup>
		<i>Mandalee visha</i> in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> <i>visha-vega</i>	<i>Trshnaa, Damsa-kleda, sweda</i>	Both <i>vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> should be done using strong recepies and then thick gruel given. In the fifth <i>vega</i> the treatment is same as <i>darveekara visha</i> that is <i>teekshna godhana</i> . <sup>[13]</sup>
		<i>Raajila vega cikitsa</i>		<i>Teekshna godhana</i> is mentioned as in 5 <sup>th</sup> <i>vega cikitsa</i> of <i>darveekara</i> <sup>[13]</sup>
	<i>Mooshika visha</i> <sup>[14]</sup>			<i>Virecana</i> is indicated and do with <i>trivrt, dantee, and triphala</i> . According to <i>Dalhana</i> use <i>neeli</i> instead of <i>dantee</i> . <sup>[14]</sup>
	<i>Alarka visha</i>			<i>Visodhana</i> with <i>arka-ksheera</i> is mentioned. here <i>visodhana</i> is explained as if <i>kapha</i> is more do <i>vamana</i> and if <i>pitta</i> is more then do <i>virecana</i> and in both condition medicine is given along with <i>arka-ksheera</i> <sup>[15]</sup>

Table 2 Ashtanga sangraha				
Sl. No	Chapter	Indications	Poisonous signs and symptoms	Treatment suggested
1	<i>Visha pratishedha</i> chapter	<i>Sthaavara-visha vega</i>	<i>Lakshanas</i> in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> <i>visha vega</i> are <i>vepadhu, sweda, daaha, kantha vedana</i> <sup>[16]</sup>	<i>Vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> then <i>agada paana</i> <sup>[17]</sup>
2		<i>Visha is aama<sub>s</sub>ayapraapta</i>	Pain	
3		<i>Dooshee-visha lakshana</i>		First do <i>swedana kriyaa</i> and then <i>oordhwa</i> and <i>adho sodhana</i> ( <i>vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> then give <i>Dooshevishari gutika</i> with <i>madhu</i> and <i>ghṛta</i> <sup>[18]</sup>
4		<i>Doshaanusaara cikitsa</i>	<i>Pitta lakshana</i>	<i>Sramsana</i> as a treatment method in <i>paittika visha</i> , long with <i>bhr̥sa seetala seka</i> and <i>pradeha</i> <sup>[19]</sup>
5	<i>Sarpa visha pratishedha</i>	In <i>Paittika purusha</i> and <i>paittika damshta</i>		<i>Virecana</i>
6		<i>Adho-naabhi dashṭa</i> and <i>pitta<sub>s</sub>aya-gata visha</i> .		<i>Virecana</i> with <i>Neelini-phala</i> along with <i>dantee, paayasa</i> with <i>ksheera</i> or <i>mastu</i> . Or use <i>dravantee-coorna</i> with <i>triphala kwatha</i> . or <i>trivṛt gyaama, surasa, neelini rajah</i> , with <i>ksheera</i> . <sup>[20]</sup>
7		<i>Kapha-praaya pitta</i> ( <i>pitta</i> associated with more <i>kapha</i> )		<i>Virecana</i> with <i>pindeetaka-phala</i> ( <i>madana-phala</i> ), <i>vyosham, trivṛt, elaa, hareetaki</i> , along with <i>lavana</i> and <i>mootra</i> <sup>[20]</sup>
8		<i>Vaata-praaya pitta</i>		<i>Virecana</i> with <i>neelini-phala, ghṛta</i> and <i>lavana</i> . <sup>[20]</sup>
9	<i>Keeta visha cikitsa</i>	General line of treatment		All <i>vishahara cikitsa</i> should use and <i>samsodhana</i> . Here <i>Indu</i> commented as all anti toxic treatment along with <i>vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> . <sup>[21]</sup>
10	<i>Lootaa visha</i>	Increased( <i>mahati vishe</i> ) poison		<i>Vamana</i> and <i>virecana</i> with <i>triphala</i> and <i>trivṛt</i> or <i>dantee, pooga, mrdweeka</i> and <i>vidanga</i> <sup>[22]</sup>
11	<i>Mooshika visha cikitsa</i>		After <i>virecana</i> if one feel abdominal pain constipation, pain in anal region	For <i>virecana</i> use <i>trivṛt, neeli</i> and <i>triphala</i> <sup>[23]</sup>
12				Then give gruel prepared with <i>pippali, cavya, saariva, katuka, bala, samanga</i> and <i>sunṭhi</i> added with sugar and honey. In the commentary the <i>samanga</i> is said as <i>manjishṭha</i> . <sup>[24]</sup>
13	<i>Alarka visha</i>			<i>Virecana</i> medicine along with <i>arka-ksheera</i> or <i>sveta punarnava</i> with <i>dhattura-phala</i> . <sup>[25]</sup>
14			If patient feels burning pain in heart ( <i>hr̥ddaaha</i> ) excess salivation ( <i>praseka</i> )	<i>Virecana</i> and <i>vamana</i> with antiposnous drugs. After <i>sodhana</i> do <i>peyaadi- krama</i> also

- Mentioning about special type of bed for *visha peedita* they are indicated for *virecana*. A bed with hole in *guda pradesa* is used for *virecana* in *visha peedita*. Because when *visha peedita* gets up and walks for passing bowel it will vitiate *vaata* and lead in to spreading of *visha* in the body.<sup>[20]</sup>
- We should administer strong purificatory measures (both *virecana* and *vamana*) for *visha-naasana*. If *sodhana* is not proper, then there are chances that the *visha* situated in the wound or bite site become again activated and start act like *dooshi visha*.<sup>[26]</sup>

### Charaka samhitha

Charaka samhitha deals *visha cikitsa* in the *Cikitsaa sthaana* 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter. In this chapter *Aacaarya* explains the 24 treatment methods for *visha*. Among these one is *virecana*.<sup>[9]</sup>

### Prayogasamuchaya

Prayogasamuchaya is the most important text book on *keraleeya visha cikitsa* written by Sri Kochunni Thamburan. It deals with many treatment techniques and medicinal combinations that are commonly used in *visha cikitsa*.

In this book there is no reference of *virecana* as a treatment option in any *sarpa visha cikitsa*. In *mooshika visha cikitsa* there is the first reference about *virecana* and that is said in the 6<sup>th</sup> *paricheda*, ie *.mooshika saamaanya cikitsa*.<sup>[27]</sup>

After that, in the 11<sup>th</sup> *paricheda*, *sthaavara visha saamaanya cikitsa* advised that, if consumed without knowledge of the *sthaavara visha*, *jala-dhaara* should be performed right away in extremely cold water. And should promptly perform purgation and consume ghee with honey.<sup>[28]</sup>

In the 11<sup>th</sup> *paricheda* itself description of the symptoms of *visha* that entered in *aamaṣaya* and *pakvaṣaya* is available.. There the treatment protocol is *vamana* and *virecana*. Then said about *hrdayaavarana* and before *hrdayaavarana* do

both *oordhva* and *adho bhaaga sodhana* ie *vamana* and *virecana*.<sup>[31]</sup>

### Vishavaidya jyotsnika

Vishavaidya jyotsnika is another important text book in *keraleeya visha cikitsa* edited by K Mahadeva Sastri. Same as *Prayogasamuchaya* there doesn't have any explanation about *virecana* in *sarpa visha cikitsa*. There in 11<sup>th</sup> *adhikaara* ie., *mooshika visha*, one can find an incantation of *virecana* with some drugs.<sup>[30]</sup>

- Caster oil with milk
- Pakunna along with luke warm water
- Decoction of *amṛta, pooga, pathya* along with *sunthi*
- Decoction made with root bark of *snuhi*, *hareetaki*, *amṛta* and *sunthi*.

These are the medicines that are indicated for *virecana*. Then bathing, drinking of water with *candana*, and intake of rice with curd are the remedy for stopping the purgation due to these medicines.

### DISCUSSION

*Panchakarma* procedures are used in many cases of poisoning; among them, *virecana* plays an important role. *Aacaarya* Susrutha and Vagbhata give an important place for *virecana* in the *visha cikitsa*. Both of them use *virecana*, one of the main treatments in the second *vega* of the *sthaavara-visha*. In this, the *visha* is entered into the *aamaṣaya* and has contact with the *koshṭha* so that treatments like *vamana* and *virecana* are explained. For this, in Susrutha, if *annavisha* gets into the *pakvaṣaya*, the treatment method is *virecana*. *Prayogasamuchaya* also gives these references.

The *virecana* in *visha-cikitsa* has some differences from the usual *pancakarma*. Here, *virecana* is used as an emergency treatment to expel *visha*. Thus, here there is no explicit mention of any *poorva-karma*, such as *abhyanga*, *ooshmasveda*, etc. But only in the

case of *doosheevisha Aacaaryas* indicate *svedana* before *virecana*. Susruta in *sthaavara-visha* indicates the *pascaat-karma* to take *vishaghna oushadhas*, especially Dooshivishari gutika after *virecana*. In *mandalee visha-cikitsa* Surutha said to administer rice porridge after *virecana*, and in *mooshika visha-cikitsa* Vagbhata said to give gruel prepared with *pippali*, *cavya*, *saariva*, *katuka*, *bala*, *samanga* and *sunthi*, added with sugar and honey.

Gastric lavage is recommended mainly for patients who have ingested a life-threatening dose or who exhibit significant morbidity within one to two hours of ingestion. Lavage may be appropriate beyond this period, only in the presence of gastric concretions, delayed gastric emptying or sustained release preparations. Some authorities still recommend lavage up to six to twelve hours post-ingestion in the case of salicylates, tricyclics, carbamazepine and barbiturates.

Because the word “catharsis” refers to cleansing, it is highly appropriate when used in relation to poisoning. It is accomplished by eliminating all toxic material from the gastrointestinal system, especially the colon.

In modern toxicology, gastric lavage and catharsis are essential treatment principles for managing cases of poisoning or toxic ingestion. Gastric lavage involves the irrigation of the stomach to remove toxic substances, while catharsis promotes the rapid elimination of toxins from the body through induced bowel movements. These procedures aim to mitigate the absorption and distribution of harmful substances, thus preventing further damage to bodily systems.

In classical ayurvedic medicine, *virecana-karma* is a therapeutic procedure aimed at detoxifying the body through the expulsion of excess *pitta* (metabolic fire) and toxins accumulated in the gastrointestinal tract and liver. This cleansing

process involves the administration of purgative substances to induce controlled bowel movements, thus eliminating toxins and restoring balance to the body's *doshas* (energetic forces).

While there may not be a direct parallel between modern toxicology treatments and classical *virecana-karma*, there are underlying similarities in their objectives and mechanisms of action. Both approaches focus on eliminating harmful substances from the body to promote healing and restore physiological equilibrium.

Moreover, classical *virecana-karma* is not merely a mechanical cleansing process but also entails medicinal effects. The purgative substances used in *virecana-karma* are carefully selected based on their therapeutic properties, including their ability to pacify aggravated *doshas*, improve digestive function and enhance overall well-being. These medicinal effects complement the detoxification process, facilitating not only the removal of toxins but also the restoration of optimal health and vitality

## CONCLUSION

Though *pancakarma* procedures are used in many cases of poisoning, different *pancakarma* procedures are mentioned in the *vega* states of *visha*. The main aim of the treatment of poisoning is to remove these poisons or toxins from the body as soon as possible because, after absorbing them into the body via blood, they disturb the harmony of *dosha*, *dhaatu* and *mala* and cause many diseases or even the death. For the elimination of absorbed poison, purgation, forced dieresis and whole-bowel irrigation are used, which is similar to *virecana* in *panca-karma*.

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