



Leech Therapy- A Unique Concept Of Ayurveda - A review Bali Yogitha*.

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Ayurveda speaks about many modes of healing art, even surgery and para-surgical techniques. Among the para-surgical measures, Raktamokshana or blood letting enjoys a pride of place from the dawn of medical history. Earliest references of blood letting are found in the basic works of all systems of medicine. The oldest civilization of the world too used this method to bestow health on its subjects from time immemorial. Raktamokshana is a technical term employed to denote a para-surgical procedure to expel out the vitiated blood from selected areas of the body, by specific methods. Sushruta Samhita, the oldest available manual on surgery has devoted an entire chapter for the description of Jalaukas, and a chapter on Jalaukavacharaniya for the purpose of blood letting. Jalaukavacharana is claimed to be the supreme therapy because of its safety and high efficacy in the disorders involving the vitiation of blood. It is safely indicated even for the king, rich, old, fearful, weak, women and the people of tender nature.

Etymology Of Jalauka (Leech)

The word *Jalauka* is a compound word with two components *Jala* + *Ayu*; i.e. the animals having water as the life. The term *Jalauka* can be split into *Jala* + *Oka*; i.e. water dwelling animals.

Definition

Shabdakalpadruma has considered *Jalauka* in feminine gender and defined it as an aquatic creature employed to expel out the vitiated blood.

Synonyms

Jalauka is called by different names, which are as below – *Jalayuka, Jalaua, Jaluka, Jalaluka, Jaalalauka, Jalita, Jaloka, Jalauga, Jalatani, Jalaukas, Jalsuchi, Jalaukasu, Jalsarpini, Raktapata, Ruktapa, Raktapayini, Vanini, Vedhini, Venika.*

Types Of Jalauka

In Ayurvedic literature, *Jalauka* have been classified into two main groups:

1. *Savisha* (Venomous)
2. *Nirvisha* (Non-venomous) Each group containing six in number.

1. Savisha Jalauka

The *Savisha Jalauka* originates in the decomposed urine and fecal matter of toads and poisonous fishes in ponds of stagnant and turbid water.

General characters of Savisha Jalauka:

Such types of *Jalauka* are having the following characters according to the Ayurvedic texts:

- Thick
- Slow locomotion
- Fatigues
- Middle part elongated
- Delay in sucking
- Not commandable type

- Sucks little quantity of blood.

Individual features of Savisha Jalauka:

The poisonous (leeches) are:1.krsna 2.karbura 3.alagarda 4.indrayudha 5.samudrika 6.gocandana

Out of them (1).krsna leeches are black like collyrium powder and have broad heads.(2) the karbura leeches are elongated like varmi fish having cleft end elevated ventral surface.(3)the alagarda leeches are hairy, have prominent sides and black mouth.(4) the indrayudha leeches raised linear marks and thus appear of variegated colours like those of a rain bow.(5) the samudrika leeches are slightly black and yellow in colour,are spotted and posses the features of an attractive flower.(6) the gocanda leeches appear to be divided in their hind part like scrotum of a bull and have a pinpointed mouth.

Features Of Savisha Jalauka Bite

If *Savisha Jalauka* is applied then a person suffers from following clinical symptoms:

- Burning
- Itching
- Swelling
- Drowsiness
- Fever
- Delirium
- Unconsciousness
- Irresistible inclination to scratch the seat of bite.

2. NIRVISHA JALAUKA

Nirvisha Jalauka originates in decomposed vegetable matter, as the purified stems of the several aquatic plants known as *Padma*, *Utpala*, *Nalina*, *Kumuda*, *Pundarika* and common zoophytes, which live in clear water.

General characters of Nirvisha Jalauka

Such types of *Jalaukas* are characterized by following points:

1. Strong and large bodied.
2. Ready suckers
3. Greedy

Individual features of Nirvisha Jalauka

The nonpoisonous(leeches) are:(1)kapila,(2) pingala,(3) sankumukhi,(4)musika,(5) pundarika-mukhi,(6) savarika.

(1)kapila(leeches) have their sides coloured like manahsila(real gar) and their dorsal surfaces are slimy and coloured likemudga pulse.(2) pingala (leeches) are slightly red or brown in colour, have rounded bodies and move fast.(3)sankumukhi(leeches) are coloured like liver,are fast sucker and have long tapering mouth.(4)musika (leeches) have their colour and shape similar to those of a mouse and posses a disagreeable odour.(5)pundarika-mukhi(leeches) are coloured like mudga pulse and have their mouth like a white lotus.(6)savarika(leeches) are slimy, coloured like lotus leaves and are eighteen finger-breadths in length. They are used in veterinary practice.

Geographical Distribution

According to Sushruta, the leeches are found in *Yavana (Turkesthana, Pandya, Sahya, Pautana etc.)*

Habitat

Such leeches swim about in sweet scented water, live on, nonpoisonous weeds, lie on the leaves of flowering water plants inspite of on the dark and oozy beds of pools and suck blood from the affected part of a human being without causing any discomfort.

Collection Of Leech

Collection of leeches is very simple. Acharya Sushruta has told that the leeches can be caught with a piece of wet leather, in tanks streams and where there are lotuses. There is another method to collect the leeches i.e. the fresh meat of dead animals, fish or milk must be applied on the thigh of an animal or the human being himself, may apply on his thigh (*Jangha*) and keep the *Jangha* in the water for some time. Due to attraction of these diets, *Jalauka* will come and start biting. hen they are made to leave the skin of the person with the application of *Saindhava lavana* (rock salt) and collected.

Time Of Collection

Acharya Dalhana has told that the best time for collecting leeches is *Sharad Ritu* (Autumn).

Preservation Of Leeches

After collecting the leeches like above, they should be kept in a wide and new pot. The pure water of tank with lotus is put into the pot. Feed it with *Shaivala*, the meat of pig and other animals, which are living in watery and marshy areas, and powder of stem of small plants; in order to make the leech to move and the grass and leaves of plants must be kept inside water in the pot. On every third day the water should be changed and feeding should be dropped inside the pot. After seven days the pot should be changed. Poisonous leeches must be thrown out.

Mode Of Action

K. M. Nadakarni in his work 'Indian Materia Medica' has dealt the action and uses of leeches in great details. According to him leeches are antiphlogistic, used for the local abstraction of blood and are also anticoagulants. Depletion by leeches is analogous to the abstraction of blood by venesection, by lancing or by moist cupping. The quantity of blood drawn off by each Indian leech is bout 1 to 1½ drachms. The anti-phlogistic action is slow. They make a limited or gradual local impression. They are used in acute inflammation of the glands, as mammae, parotid etc; also in incipient abscesses boils, in bruises, sprains and blows, in inflammations of the serous membranes and in inflammation affecting the skin or bones. This is generally followed by hot fomentations to relieve the pain and the inflammation.

Indications Of Leech Application

Only Vagbhata has mentioned diseases where leech application is indicated, they are given here Gulma, Arsha, Vidradhi, Kushtha, Vatarakta, Galaroga, Netra Roga, Visha Dvashta and Visarpa.

The blood vitiated by vata, pitta and kapha should be let out by horn, leech or gourd respectively; (all though) in all (types of vitiated blood) any one of the three methods may be used.

- The cow's horn is said to be warm, soothing and oily; therefore it is indicated for letting out the blood vitiated by vata.
- Leeches are born in water, live in cold places and are soothing; hence they are indicated for letting out the blood vitiated by pitta.
- Gourd is said to be pungent, rough and sharp; therefore it is indicated for letting out the blood vitiated by kapha.

Method Of Jalaukavacharana

Purva karma: The patient who is curable by blood letting treatment through the leeches should be made to sit or lie down, and if the site of the lesion is painless, it should be dried by rubbing with earth and powdered cow dung.

Pradhana karma: The leeches should then be grasped and a mixture of mustard and turmeric paste in water should be applied upon them and then for a muhurta they should be kept in a vessel of water till they get rid of their exhaustion and there after they may be made to stick at the site of the lesion. They should be fully covered with a fine wet white cloth except for their mouth which should be left exposed. if they do not stick, a drop of milk or blood may be applied(at the site of application) or scratching may be done there .If they do not stick even then, another one may be tried. When its mouth gets suck (to the site) and middle portion gets elevated assuming the shape of a horse shoe it should be known it is sucking well. The sucking leeches should be held covered by wet cloth. withdrawal of leeches. When pricking pain or itching is produced at the site of application it should be inferred that the leech is now sucking pure blood (after having sucked the vitiated blood). (the leech)when sucking pure blood should be removed . if it does not withdraw due to the smell of blood common salt powder should be sprinkled upon its mouth.

Paschat karma: When it has fallen away its away its body should be massaged by ricepowder and its mouth by oil and common salt;its hind portion should then be held by the left hand in the between the thumb and fingers and its should be slowly and gently squeezed (Beginning from the tail end to) as far upwards as the mouth by the thumb and fingers of the right hand and it should made to vomit till it shows the symptoms of complete emptying . when the (leech) completely emptied (of blood), is left in a vessel of water it moves to and fro in search of food. the leech which sinks down and does not move after left in water should be known to have vomited incompletely , it should again be made to vomit properly. After proper vomiting it should be replaced (In water)as described previously. After assessing the amount of bleeding ,whether appropriate or incorrect ,it (the wound) should simply be anointed by ghtra washed one hundred times(satadhaughrta) or else should be compressed by gauze (soaked)in the same .the wound caused by the leech should further be rubbed with honey and cold water should be sprinkled over it ,or else it should be bandaged ;or astringent ,sweet ,greasy and cold paste may be applied over the wound.

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