

FOUR TYPES OF VIRECHANA (PURGATIVE THERAPY) BY SHARANGDHARA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Sharangdhara had stated four types of *virechana* i.e. *Anulomana*, *Sramsana*, *Bhedana*, *Rechana* explaining them with the help of example of one drug each. To understand their practical aspect and clinical use one need to think on certain bullets like – potency of the drug, their site of action, duration of action, effect on the consistency of the excretory product, contribution in the process of formation of feces etc. This article enlightens the practical aspect of these 4 types as above along with their mode of action, speed of action, their effect on excretory product, and their action on formation of feces and also about the nature of the drugs that should come under these four types. It also enlightens us to understand whether these four are the types of *virechana* or the grades that define *virechana*.

Keywords *Anulomana*, *Sramsana*, *Bhedana*, *Rechana*, *Sharangdhara*, *Virechana*.

INTRODUCTION: *Virechana* is the body bio purification method done for excessive *pitta dosha*, *kapha* associated *pitta*, even if *pitta* is available in large amount in *Kaphasthana*.¹ *Sharangdhara* had classified *virechana* in 4 types i.e. *Anulomana*, *Sramsana*, *Bhedana* & *Rechana*.² This classification according to *sharangdhara* is based primarily on mode of action, potency of drug, consistency of excretory product. To study *virechana* more effectively it is important to understand the practical aspect to these 4 types. Understanding the practical aspect of these 4 types can help us clarify whether these are the types or grades which define *virechana karma*.

Primary Action of *virechana*:

All the types of *virechana* primarily expel feces, provoked *pitta* and *Kapha* and other vitiated biochemical metabolites. These drugs possess *ushna*, *tikshna*, *sukshma*, *vyavayi* and *vikasi* properties. Because of these properties they reach the heart and get circulated through the vessels. They liquefy the vitiated complexes of *doshas* due to their *agneya* nature leading to the separation of adhered *doshas* located in the gross and subtle channels by their *tikshna* property.

Because of the dominance of *Prithvi*, *Jala* *Mahabhutas* and their specific action i.e. *prabhava*, these drugs take the vitiated material in downward direction and expel them through anal region.³

The concept of 'mala paka' in *virechana*

1. *Paka of mala* –

a. *Mala* is primarily *purisha*⁴. Also, *dosha*⁴, *vata* – *mutra* and *purisha* etc⁴. So, *mala* means either feces alone or the vitiated complexes of *doshas-dhatus* and all the other malas like *mutra* inside the body.

b. *Paka* is *Pachanam*^{5,6}, digestion⁷.

c. So, *Paka of mala* means the completion of the process of formation of feces after the end of digestive action or digesting the accumulated *doshas* in the intestines.

2. It is said that *virechana* medicines act after their digestion, while *vamana* drugs act before they get digested⁸. So, *Agni* plays a major role in the *virechana* process. *Agni* has its action at multiple levels from *jatharagni* to *dhatvagni*, one must understand its specific action in this regard. Apart from *sramsana*, all the other three types are said to be having *mala paka* in their action. That means they are processed by *Agni* during their action.

3. From the definition, it is seen that *Anulomana* drugs help in completing the digestion process. It finalizes the formation of feces after complete digestion. Then it propels down the feces throughout the lumen to expel it out.

4. *Anulomana karma* and *bhedana karma* are said to be having one common action, i.e. *bhedana* of *bandha*, i.e. breakage of the bonds amongst the complexes of *mala*.

5. *Bhedana* directly does not claim about *paka* procedure of *mala*. But it is said to be breaking down the bonds of accumulated complex of wastes in lumen. For breaking the bonds of hard stools, the liquefaction is necessary. So various secretions might be getting secreted into the lumen. It is not clear from the text⁹ that whether *bhedana* drugs are involved in *paka* of *mala* or not. Sometimes it might be without digestive secretions (just plain liquefying agents) and sometimes, some digestive secretions might be associated with it. But the maximum *bhedana* drugs are said to be of having *katu*, *amla* and *lavana rasa*. So, there are more chances that these drugs also carry out the process of formation of feces.

6. *Sramsana* drugs expel the unprocessed *mala* and *doshas* without waiting for the completion of their digestion from the anal route. *Koshtha* is the place where the process of digestion takes place. Some commentators consider the other hollow organs like the place of storages of *ama*, *agni*, *pakwa*, *mutra*, *rudhira* along with *hrudaya*, *unduka*,

phuphusa under the term *koshtha*. So, *malas* attached to these organs are also removed through the *sramsana* process.¹⁰

7. *Rechana* drugs with their *teekshna veerya* act strongly on the intestinal muscles. They just propel the finished and unfinished feces from the lumen. They don't participate in any type of process which involves the feces formation. They primarily work towards the propulsion of the feces from the lumen. *Virechana* medicines carry the *mala* into a downward direction due to their 'guru' property. This *guru* property should be considered with the other factors like 'prabhava' of *virechana* drugs.' Here the word 'aadi' with 'mala' indicates other vitiated *dushya* etc factors also.¹¹

8. The *paka* or the digestion of *mala* during *anulomana*, *sramsana* and *bhedana* procedures might be taking place at *jatharagni* level and the *paka* of *malas* expressed in *rechana* process might be taking place at all levels of *Agni*. But one must understand that these definitions grossly speak about the action of digestion of *mala* at *jatharagni* level.

9. These four types can be further classified into two categories.

A. *Mrudu virechana* – *anulomana* and *sramsana*

B. *Teekshna virechana* – *bhedana* and *rechana*

Method: The analysis of all the four definitions from *Sharangdhara* and searching for all the medicines having these karmas from *Bhavprakasha* give some definite conclusions as follows.

Table no. 1: - Definitions of all the four types of *Virechana* according to *Sharangdhara*

	<i>Anulomana</i> ¹²	<i>Sramsana</i> ¹³	<i>Bhedana</i> ¹⁴	<i>Rechana</i> ¹⁵
According to Sharangdhara	<i>Anulomana</i> is the procedure, in which the drug used act on <i>apakwa mala</i> (undigested or partially processed), makes it <i>pakwa</i> and expels it by bringing it in the downward direction. It breaks	It is the procedure in which the <i>pakwa</i> or <i>apakwamala</i> adhered to the <i>koshtha</i> is expelled through downward direction. These drugs do not	Forceful expulsion of <i>baddha</i> / <i>abadhha</i> / <i>pinditamala</i> . Meaning of <i>bhedana</i> is breaking, splitting, piercing,	It is the procedure by which the drug liquefies the <i>pakwa</i> or <i>apakwamala</i> and evacuates it in watery form.

	down the <i>samhanan</i> of the <i>mala</i> and expels it from downward direction without any obstruction.	convert <i>apakwamala</i> into <i>pakwa mala</i> .	dividing, separating etc.	
According to Adhamalla	<i>Anumolana</i> does not act only on <i>malapaka</i> (completing action of digestion & conversion of undigested/ partially digested material into feces i.e. final waste product) but on <i>doshapaka</i> (digestion of the vitiated complex factors or morbid elements in the body) also. ¹⁶	The partially or completely digested malas adhered to <i>koshtha</i> can be expelled out by <i>sramsana</i> . ¹⁷	<i>Bhedana</i> breaks down <i>doshas</i> as well as malas accumulated inside body and expels them through downward direction. ¹⁸	<i>Malas</i> as well as <i>doshas</i> are being expelled out through <i>rechana</i> . ¹⁹
Example	<i>Haritaki</i>	<i>Aragvadha</i>	<i>Kutaki</i>	<i>Trivrit</i>

Table no. 2: - General information of Drugs

	<i>Haritaki</i> ²⁰	<i>Aragvadha</i> ²¹	<i>Kutaki</i> ²²	<i>Trivrutta</i> ²³
Nam e	Terminalia chebula.	Cassia fistula	<i>PicrorhizaKurraoa</i>	<i>Operculinaturpethum</i>
Part used	<i>Phala, Mulaetc</i>	<i>Phalamajja</i>	<i>Mula</i> , (underground stem) <i>Mulatwaka</i>	<i>Mulatwaka</i>
Rasa	<i>Pancharasatmaka</i> except <i>Lavana rasa</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Tikta</i>	<i>Tikta, Katu</i>
Veer ya	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Ushna</i>
Vipa ka	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Madhura.</i>	<i>Katu</i>	<i>Katu</i>
.Guna	<i>Laghu, Ruksha, ushna,deepani, bruhani, anulomani etc.</i>	<i>Guru, snigdha, mrudu, sramsanautta ma, ruchya.</i>	<i>laghu, ruksha, tikshna, bhedini, deepani.</i>	<i>Laghu, ruksha, tikshna, shyamatrivruttateevravi rechani</i> ²³ , <i>shwetatrivruttarechani, swaadu, ushna Kaphapittaprashtamani, anilakopini, sarvarogahara etc.</i> ²⁴

Table no. 3: - Probable mode of action and modern aspect

Name of karma	Work done on purgative action of drugs	Modern Aspect	Conclusion
<i>Anulomana</i>	It has been proven that the oil extracted from <i>haritaki</i>	<i>Anulomana dravyas</i> can be compared with the	These drugs might be acting

	has the purgative properties. ²⁵ It increases the intestinal motility. ²⁶	carminative laxatives whose mode of action occurs due to the presence of volatile oils in it. These volatile oils stimulate the digestive system and regulate the gut contractions. A carminative, also known as carminativum, is an herb or preparation intended to either prevent formation of gas in the gastrointestinal tract or facilitate the expulsion of said gas, thereby combating flatulence. ²⁷	on smooth muscles of intestine.
<i>Sramsana</i>	The aqueous extract of the fruit pulp has purgative action due to the presence of anthraquinones in <i>Aragvadha</i> . ²⁸	<i>Sramsana</i> drugs can be compared with the Anthraquinone derivatives whose mode of action occurs on the mesenteric plexus to increase peristalsis resulting in the purgation. ²⁹	These drugs might be acting on mesenteric plexus leading to increase in peristaltic movements of intestinal muscles
<i>Bhedana</i>	<i>Kutaki</i> possesses surface tension lowering action. ³⁰	The drugs like Dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate act by surface tension lowering action. It acts on the intestinal mucosa leading to more retention of water in the lumen which softens the stool because of net water accumulation. It emulsifies the colonic contents & has purgative action due to physical property of lowering surface tension which is thought to facilitate penetration of the fecal mass by water and fats. ³¹	These drugs might be acting on intestinal mucosa for increasing the water content in intestine to facilitate penetration of the fecal mass by water and fats.
<i>Rechana</i>	The extracts of <i>Operculina turpethum</i> leaves demonstrated a potent cathartic activity through causing: discharge of watery faeces, enhanced intestinal motility and increase in intestinal fluid content. ³²	These may be compared with the stimulant purgatives which irritate intestinal mucosa, increases motility by acting on myenteric plexuses. Their more important mechanism of action is accumulation of water and electrolytes in the lumen thus enhancing the watery fecal discharge. They also cause	These drugs might be acting on intestinal smooth muscles increasing intestinal motility and increase in intestinal fluid content.

		forceful evacuation. ³³	
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Table no. 4 – Probable speed of action of the drugs: -

	<i>Anulomana</i>	<i>Sramsana</i>	<i>Bhedana</i>	<i>Rechana</i>
Speed of <i>virechana</i> action	Comparatively slower than other <i>virechaka</i> drugs.	Quicker than <i>anulomana</i> but slower than <i>bhedana</i> and <i>rechana</i> .	Quicker than <i>anulomana</i> and <i>sramsana</i> , but may be slower than <i>rechana</i> .	Fastest among all 4 types.
Reason	They may be taking time to convert <i>apakwa mala</i> into <i>pakwa</i> one & then carry on their further action.	They are not involved in <i>mala paka</i> .	<i>Bhedana</i> of already digested <i>mala</i> takes place.	They are neither involved in <i>malapaka</i> nor <i>mala bhedan</i> .

Table no. :5- Use of following Types of *Virechana*

	<i>Anulomana</i>	<i>Sramsana</i>	<i>Bhedana</i>	<i>Rechana</i>
Use according to the conditions	The condition where <i>paka</i> of <i>mala</i> is expected along with the expulsion of the same. Like <i>srotorodha</i> by undigested <i>mala</i> and <i>doshas</i> where <i>agnideepana</i> is expected and also <i>paka</i> of <i>mala&doshas</i> and the blockages of the <i>srotas</i> are to be removed.	The condition where only expulsion of <i>doshas</i> , adhered to the <i>koshtha</i> is expected without the <i>paka</i> of <i>malas</i> .	The condition where piercing/splitting/ breakage of the <i>mala</i> or <i>doshas</i> is expected.	The condition where only expulsion of <i>doshas</i> is expected with or without the <i>paka</i> of <i>malas</i> . It can also be used in the condition where excessive body fluid is expected to be expelled out.
Use in Diseased conditions	The use of <i>anulomana dravyas</i> is well explained in <i>Arshachikitsa</i> . ³⁴ <i>Udavarta</i> and <i>Adhmaan</i> . ³⁵ <i>Pandu</i> . ³⁶	Charak has already stated <i>sramsana</i> as a line of treatment in <i>Jwara</i> ³⁷ , <i>Gulma</i> ³⁸ , <i>Shwitra</i> ³⁹ & <i>Vaata vyaadh</i> ⁴⁰ .	<i>Prameha</i> , <i>Shwaas</i> , <i>Kaas</i> , <i>Asradaaha</i> , <i>Kushtha</i> , <i>Krimi</i> etc. ⁴¹	<i>Shopha</i> ⁴² , <i>Udara</i> ⁴³ , <i>Kushtha</i> ⁴⁴ , <i>Kamla</i> ⁴⁵ etc.

Table no. 6: - *Virechaka* drugs with their rasa according to *Bhavprakash*⁴⁶: -

sn	Name of varga	<i>Anulomana</i>	<i>Sramsana</i>	<i>Bhedana</i>	<i>Rechana</i>
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1	Haritakyadi	Haritaki – Pancharasa Except lavana Bidalavana	Aragvadha- Madhura	Bibhitaki - Kashaya Shunthi – Katu Aardraka- Katu Pippalimoola - Katu Katuka- Katu Katuparni - Tikta Bhallataka- Katu, Tikta Romakalavana Saamudralavana Sauvarchalalavan a	Pippali- Katu Kampillaka - Katu Katuparni - Tikta Sauvarchalalava na
2	Guduchyaadiva rga	Mahabala - Madhur(Vatan ulomani)	Meshashrung i - tikta	Gambhari- Tikta Kantakari - Tikta Eranda - Madhura Nimba - Tikta Karanja - Katu Kumari - Tikta Dronapushpi- Madhur	Alarkaarka – Katu, Tikta Snuhi - Katu Ankota - Katu Bhutruna - Katu, Tikta Trivrutta - Madhura Jayapalan- Katu Nili - Tikta Markandika (Mrudurechani)
3.	Vatadivarga	-	-	Karir – Katu, Tikta	Shami – Tikta, Katu
4.	Amraadiphala varga	-	Piilu – Madhur, Tikta	Amamrphala - Madhur, kashaya Badar – Madhur, Amla, Tikta Piilu - Madhur, Tikta Amlavetasa – Amla	
5.	Dhaatvaadivarg a	-	-	Tutha- Katu	Kankushtha – Tikta, Katu
6.	Dhanyavarga	-	Maasha- Madhur	-	-
7.	Shaakavarga	-	-	Paalakya Dronapushpidala m- Madhur Kalayashaaka - Tikta Kaaravellaka - Tikta Dindisha	Sehunda- Katu

8.	<i>Krutannavarga</i>	-	-	<i>Yavasaktu</i>	-
9.	<i>Sandhanavarga</i>	-	-	<i>Kaanjika - Katu</i> <i>Sauviir</i> <i>Shukta</i> <i>Madya - Amla</i>	-
10.	<i>Ikshuvarga</i>	-	-	<i>Paryushitaikshu -</i> <i>Rasa - Amla</i> <i>Matsyandi -</i> <i>Madhur</i>	-

The drugs explained in *Bhavprakash* in various *vargas* help us to understand the nature of drugs that might be used for these 4 types of *virechana karma*. Most of the *Anulomaka* drugs have *Madhur* and *Lavana* property with *ushna veerya* (See table no.6). *Sramsana* drugs dominantly consist of *Madhura* and *Tikta rasa* with *sheeta virya*. (See table no.6). *Bhedana* drugs mostly possess *Tikta*, *Katu*, *amla* and *lavana rasa* with *ushna virya* and *katu amla vipaka* (See table no.6). All the three *rasas* are associated generally with *teekshna* in *veerya*. Also, the *dravyas* like *Samuddra lavana*, *romaka lavana* and *sauvarchala lavana* are said to be possessing the *bhedanakarma*.⁴⁷ *Lavana* are said to be possessing *abhishyandi*, *aruksa*, *sukshma*, *ushna* and *vyavayi* properties. *Abhishyandi* property is said to be acting like ‘*dosha samghata vichhedakam*’⁴⁸ i.e. to be having the property of breaking the bonds of *dosha* complex. So, *bhedana karma* actually breaks the bonds amongst various biochemical waste metabolites and passes them out of lumen.

Maximum drugs which have the *rechanakarma* are said to be having the strong purgative action. (See table no.6) Most of them are having *Katu* and *Tikta rasa* dominance with *ushna virya*. They act primarily with their *prabhava*.

DISCUSSION: The types classified by *sharangdhara* are not actually the separate types of *virechana*. They indicate the grades of the same action from milder to severe. *Virechana karma* varies according the potency of the medicine and the site of action of the individual drug once it gets absorbed and starts its action. All these

four types might be acting on separate sites for their actions. The process of purgation is the cumulative action of the series of various events taking place once any purgative drug gets inside the digestive system.

Anulomana drugs might be just pushing the accumulated material in the intestinal lumen. It might be acting probably on short term *malabaddhata*.

Sramsana drugs are to be used for the slightly chronic constipation where the motions are passed on daily basis, but might not be getting evacuated completely. These drugs produce mild purgation.

Bhedana drugs are to be used in the cases of chronic constipation with the hard stools. When the feces become harder and have lesser content of fluids. *Bhedana* drugs break the feces, make them softer and then push them towards anal sphincter. The word ‘*bhitwa*’ indicates the vigorous intestinal movements and propel the drugs in downward direction. The word ‘*baddha*’ has the meaning like *shushka* and *grathitam*. The word *shushka* is related to *purisha* and *grathita* is related to *dosha* etc. factors.⁴⁹ ‘*Abaddhata*’ means liquefied nature. It is present at two places, one at *purisha* and the other at *mala* etc. Here the *mala* word denotes ‘*dosha*’. The word ‘*purisham bhitwa*’ indicates the fragmentation of feces. The fragmented feces then are propelled towards downward direction.⁵⁰

Trivrutta is the example of ‘*rechana’dravya*. It is the first drug mentioned in *Charaka Kalpasthana* as *virechana* drug.⁵¹ So, amongst four types of *Virechana*, the type entitled ‘*Rechana*’ might be having the properties of the

proper *virechaka* drugs i.e *ushna, teekshna, sukshma, vyavayee* and *vikasee*. That is why they are quickest in action. The mechanism for such *virechana* drugs is well documented by Charaka and said to be having the action due to *prabhava*.⁵² From the drugs mentioned by *Bhavaprakasha* as having *rechana* property practically show the quick and strong purgative action in comparison to the others(see table no 6).

The drugs from *anulomana-sramsana* and *bhedana* categories primarily might be acting on the accumulated feces inside the lumen. They act mainly on intestinal muscles and by the secretions from the lumen inside the colon only. So, the drugs of these three types might have lesser fluids excreted out through the process. But *rechana* drugs might be dragging the fluids from interstitial spaces throughout the body. So *rechanakarma* shows more fluids than the others.

CONCLUSIONS: *Paka* of *mala* is influenced by the action of *agni* and may involve the regulation of feces formation. *Anulomana, Bhedana* and *Rechana* drugs play a significant role in *paka of mala*.

Anulomana drugs might be helping in formation of feces along with their mild purgative action.

These four types may also be considered as the grades of *virechana* based on the severity of their action; *anulomana* as the mildest one up to *rechana* as strong purgative.

They can be categorized into two types according to their mode of action i.e.

A. *Mrudu virechana* – *anulomana* and *sramsana*

B. *Teekshna virechana* – *bhedana* and *rechana*

The purgative action of *anulomana, sramsana* and *bhedana* drugs may be more local whereas the purgative action of *rechana* drugs might be present throughout the body.

The drugs of all these types of medicines shall be used as per their specific

indications depending upon their action on *mala*.

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