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Scientific Review on Mode of Action of Virechana Karma with Reference to Various Skin Disorders

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ABSTRACT:

Virechana Karma (therapeutic purgation) is a cornerstone of Panchakarma, the bio-purification modality in Ayurveda. It is specifically indicated for disorders stemming from the vitiation of Pitta and Rakta (blood), which are fundamental to the pathogenesis of many skin diseases. This review aims to synthesize the classical Ayurvedic understanding and contemporary clinical evidence regarding the mode of action of Virechana Karma in managing skin disorders like psoriasis (Ek Kushtha), eczema (Vicharchika), acne vulgaris (Yauvan Pidika), and vitiligo (Shwitra). The procedure works through a multi-faceted mechanism involving the purification of microchannels (Srotas), correction of Agni (digestive and metabolic fire), elimination of morbid Doshas (bio-humors) from the deepest tissues, and restoration of homeostasis. Clinical case studies have demonstrated significant efficacy, with reports of 50-80% improvement in symptoms. This article concludes that Virechana Karma offers a comprehensive, systemic detoxification approach that addresses the root cause of stubborn skin diseases, making it a highly effective therapeutic intervention.

KEYWORDS: Virechana Karma, Panchakarma, Skin Diseases, Psoriasis, Ek Kushtha, Mode of Action.

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INTRODUCTION:

Skin disorders represent a significant health burden worldwide, not only because of their high prevalence but also due to their chronic and recurrent nature, which often impairs the quality of life of affected individuals. Many dermatological conditions, such as eczema, psoriasis, and chronic urticaria, are long-lasting and resistant to complete cure, frequently leading to physical discomfort, psychological stress, and social stigma. Conventional therapeutic modalities in modern medicine, although effective in providing temporary symptomatic relief, are often associated with limitations such as drug resistance, relapse after discontinuation, and adverse effects arising from long-term use of corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, or biologics [1]. Moreover, these therapies predominantly aim at controlling visible symptoms rather than addressing the underlying systemic imbalances that contribute to the pathology. In contrast, Ayurveda offers a holistic and root-cause-oriented perspective in the management of skin disorders. The classical texts classify most skin diseases under the broad entity of *Kushtha*, which encompasses a wide spectrum of dermatological conditions. The fundamental cause of *Kushtha* is described as the vitiation of *Tridoshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) in association with the vitiation of various bodily tissues (*Dushyas*), primarily *Twak* (skin), *Rakta* (blood), *Mamsa* (muscle), and *Lasika* (lymph) [2,3]. This multidimensional pathology highlights the systemic origin of skin diseases, underscoring the importance of internal purification and correction of dosha-dushya imbalance rather than relying only on external or symptomatic measures. Ayurveda emphasizes *Shodhana Chikitsa* (bio-purification therapies) as a fundamental approach to expel accumulated morbid doshas from the body and thereby

prevent recurrence of the disease. Within the Panchakarma procedures, *Virechana Karma* (therapeutic purgation) is considered the prime therapy for conditions dominated by *Pitta* and *Rakta* dosha vitiation, which are commonly involved in inflammatory and bleeding skin disorders [4,5]. *Virechana* is defined as the controlled elimination of morbid doshas through the *Adhobhaga Marga* (lower route, i.e., anal passage) [6]. By facilitating the expulsion of vitiated *Pitta* and *Rakta* from their primary sites, *Virechana* not only provides symptomatic relief in skin disorders but also corrects the systemic imbalance, thereby addressing the root pathology. This review systematically explores both the classical foundations and modern scientific perspectives regarding the mode of action of *Virechana Karma*. It highlights how this procedure, through its detoxifying, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory effects, contributes to the effective management of various dermatological conditions. Furthermore, an evidence-based understanding of *Virechana Karma* in the context of skin disorders may offer valuable insights for developing integrative therapeutic strategies that combine the strengths of Ayurveda and modern medicine.

Virechana and its Rationale in Skin Disorders

Ayurvedic Physiology of Skin (*Twacha*)
According to *Sushruta*, the skin (*Twacha*) is composed of seven layers, each serving as a site for the manifestation of specific diseases [7, 8]. The health of the skin is intrinsically linked to the balance of *Bhrajaka Pitta*, a subtype of *Pitta Dosha* responsible for skin complexion, temperature regulation, and metabolic processes at the dermal level [4, 9]. Any imbalance in *Doshas*, particularly *Pitta* and *Rakta*, directly manifests on the skin.

Classification and Procedure of Virechana

Virechana is not a monolithic procedure but is classified based on the mechanism of the drug used:

Anulomana: Mild laxatives that promote normal downward movement of Vata (e.g., Haritaki).

Sramsana: Evacuates sticky, half-digested waste without prior digestion (e.g., Aragvadha).

Bhedana: Breaks down hard, consolidated stools (e.g., Katuki).

Rechana: Induces purgation by liquefying digested and undigested waste (e.g., Trivrit) [6, 10].

The therapy is systematically conducted in three stages:

1. Purva Karma (Pre-operative procedures)

Purva Karma refers to the preparatory measures undertaken prior to the main Virechana procedure. Its objective is to prepare the patient's body in such a way that the vitiated Doshas can be effectively mobilized and expelled. This stage generally involves three key steps:

Deepana–Pachana (Appetizing and Digestive Therapy): Special herbal formulations are administered to correct the impaired digestive fire (Agni) and eliminate Ama (undigested or improperly metabolized toxic material), which otherwise obstructs the channels (Srotas) and hampers the purification process. By ensuring proper digestion and metabolism, this step lays the foundation for successful Shodhana.

Snehapana (Internal Oleation): The patient is administered medicated ghee or oil, most commonly Panchatikta Ghrita or other suitable preparations, depending on the disease condition and doshic predominance. The Sneha, being unctuous in nature, penetrates deeply into the tissues, loosens the pathological adhesion between Doshas and Dushyas, and facilitates their movement

from the peripheral tissues (Shakha) towards the gastrointestinal tract (Koshtha), where they can be expelled during Virechana.

Swedana (Sudation Therapy): In many classical protocols, fomentation or sweating therapy is given after oleation to further liquefy and mobilize the Doshas. This enhances their flow towards the Koshtha, preparing the body for the purgative action to follow.

Thus, Purva Karma plays a crucial role in channelizing the morbid Doshas into the gut, ensuring that the forthcoming purgation is both effective and safe [1, 11].

2. Pradhana Karma (Operative procedure)

Pradhana Karma is the main phase of Virechana, where the actual therapeutic purgation is induced. After proper assessment of the patient's readiness and on an empty stomach, a suitable purgative drug (Virechana Dravya) is administered.

Choice of Drug: Depending on the disease condition and doshic predominance, drugs such as Trivrit Avaleha, Eranda Taila (castor oil), or classical formulations like Avipattikara Churna may be prescribed. These medicines act primarily on the Pitta and Rakta doshas, dislodging and eliminating them through the anal passage.

Monitoring of Vegas (Purgative Bouts): The number of bowel movements (Vegas), their consistency, and the nature of the expelled contents are carefully observed. Classical texts describe parameters such as Samyak Shuddhi Lakshanas (signs of proper purification), Heena Shuddhi (inadequate purification), and Ati Shuddhi (excessive purification). These observations guide the physician in evaluating the adequacy and success of the procedure.

Patient Supervision: During this process, the patient is kept under close medical observation to monitor hydration, strength, and overall response. The purgation is

controlled and therapeutic, distinct from pathological diarrhea, and aims to eliminate only the vitiated doshas without disturbing the normal physiology [12].

Thus, Pradhana Karma ensures the systematic expulsion of accumulated doshas, directly addressing the root pathology of the disease.

3. Paschat Karma (Post-operative procedures)

Paschat Karma comprises the post-therapeutic care and convalescence measures that are essential for consolidating the benefits of Virechana and restoring normal digestive and metabolic functions.

Samsarjana Krama (Graduated Dietetic Regimen): After Virechana, the digestive power (Agni) becomes temporarily weakened. To restore it gradually, a structured dietary plan beginning with easily digestible preparations like Manda (rice water), Peya (thin gruel), and Vilepi (thicker gruel) is advised. The diet is slowly advanced to more substantial food items as digestion improves.

Rest and Lifestyle Regulation: The patient is advised to avoid physical exertion, mental stress, and exposure to factors that could aggravate the doshas, such as excessive heat or incompatible foods. Proper rest and adherence to wholesome dietary rules help in the stabilization of the body and mind.

Prevention of Relapse: By gradually re-establishing digestive strength and ensuring proper metabolic activity, Paschat Karma prevents recurrence of doshic accumulation, thereby maintaining the long-term therapeutic effects of Virechana [6].

So, Paschat Karma is not merely convalescence but a carefully structured program that ensures the restoration of normalcy, prevents complications, and maximizes the benefits of the purification process.

DISCUSSION:

Mode of Action of Virechana in Skin Diseases

The therapeutic efficacy of Virechana Karma in dermatological conditions can be understood through a multi-dimensional mechanism that integrates classical Ayurvedic concepts with plausible modern physiological interpretations. Its action operates at systemic, metabolic, and immunological levels, thereby addressing both the symptoms and underlying pathology of skin diseases.

1. Purification of Microchannels (Srotoshodhana)

In Ayurveda, obstruction of microchannels (Srotas) is considered a key factor in the pathogenesis of skin disorders. Virechana drugs possess properties such as Ushna (hot), Tikshna (sharp), Sukshma (subtle), Vyavayi (permeating), and Vikasi (disintegrating), which enable them to penetrate deep tissues and clear obstructed pathways [6,13]. The Tikshna quality facilitates the breakdown of aggregated morbid material, while the Sukshma property allows the drugs to reach minute channels. Collectively, these actions mobilize the toxins and accumulated Doshas towards the gastrointestinal tract (*Koshtha*), from where they are subsequently eliminated. From a modern standpoint, this cleansing effect may correlate with improved microcirculation, detoxification, and enhanced tissue perfusion.

2. Correction of Agni (Metabolic Regulation)

Disturbance of Agni (digestive and metabolic fire) is central to the formation of Ama (toxic metabolites), which is implicated in the genesis of chronic skin disorders. During *Purva Karma*, administration of Deepana-Pachana drugs strengthens digestive function, ensures complete metabolism of ingested food, and prevents further

production of Ama [1,11]. Restoration of balanced Agni promotes effective Dhatu Poshana (tissue nutrition), thereby supporting the structural and functional integrity of skin. From a scientific perspective, this can be equated with improved gastrointestinal metabolism, better nutrient assimilation, and reduction of pro-inflammatory metabolites.

3. Mobilization and Elimination of Morbid Doshas

Oleation therapies (*Snehapana* and *Abhyanga*) and sudation (*Swedana*) help to loosen, liquefy, and mobilize morbid Doshas seated in peripheral tissues (*Shakha*), particularly the skin. The Vyavayi and Vikasi properties of Virechana medicines facilitate the transportation of these morbid elements back into the gastrointestinal tract [6,14]. Finally, the purgative action, mediated by the dominance of Prithvi (earth) and Jala (water) Mahabhutas in Virechana drugs, ensures their systemic expulsion through the anal route [4,13]. This process mirrors modern detoxification concepts, where accumulated waste metabolites and inflammatory mediators are systematically cleared from the body.

4. Restoration of Homeostasis and Immunomodulation

The elimination of vitiated Doshas results in the restoration of Dhatu Samya (tissue homeostasis). Beyond purification, Virechana is also reported to exhibit immunomodulatory effects. Classical texts highlight its role in rejuvenating body tissues, while modern clinical and experimental evidence suggests reduction in inflammatory markers, improvement in antioxidant status, and enhancement of immune regulation following therapy [4,15]. This dual action supports long-term remission and reduces the likelihood of relapse in chronic skin diseases.

5. Clinical Evidence

Clinical outcomes provide further validation of the therapeutic role of Virechana in skin disorders. In psoriasis (*Ekakushtha*), Singh et al. documented 60% improvement following Shodhana therapy, with outcomes improving to 80% after adjunct Shamana measures [1]. Similarly, Ghimire and Neupane observed 50% symptomatic relief after Virechana and nearly 70% improvement after two months of follow-up medication [11]. Comparable positive results have been reported in conditions such as eczema (*Vicharchika*) and acne vulgaris, reinforcing the broad clinical applicability and effectiveness of Virechana in dermatology [4,16].

CONCLUSION:

Virechana Karma is far more than a simple laxative procedure. It is a sophisticated, systemic detoxification therapy that addresses the fundamental pathogenesis of skin diseases. Its mode of action involves a sequential process of preparatory procedures to mobilize toxins, followed by their targeted elimination from the body via the physiological route of purgation. By purifying the microchannels, correcting metabolism, eliminating morbid Doshas, and restoring systemic homeostasis, Virechana offers a holistic and radical treatment for various obstinate skin disorders. The compelling clinical evidence underscores its value as a primary line of management in Ayurvedic dermatology. Further robust clinical trials are warranted to validate these mechanisms with modern scientific parameters.

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