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Understanding *Vatarakta* w.s.r. to Gout through Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Vatarakta, a common metabolic disorder is a grievous medical condition present in the society. *Vatarakta* as the name suggest is the vitiation of *Vata Dosha* and *Rakta Dhatu* (blood). In this condition the normal flow of *Vata* is obstructed by *Rakta* leading to symptoms starting from *Paada* (foot) and *Hasta* (hands). It is a *Vatapradhana* (*Vata* predominant) *Tridoshaja Vyadhi*. *Vatarakta* is a major *Vatavyadhi* caused due to *Avarana* (occlusion) pathology. The symptomatology of Gout has striking similarities with those explained in *Vatarakta*. Gout is a common type of arthritis due to uric acid disturbance where excess uric-acid in blood stream forms crystals in the joint that causes intense pain, swelling and stiffness, it usually affects the joint in the big toe. Numerous studies have established the impact of gout on patient's morbidity and mortality. Despite major advances in treatment of gout, many patients with gout are not properly controlled and continuing with recurrent flares of gouty arthritis. Therefore, here an attempt is made, to understand *Vatarakta* (gout) from both modern and Ayurvedic concepts and to discuss the management of the condition from Ayurvedic point of view.

Key words: *Vatarakta*, *Vata Dosha*, *Rakta*, *Paada*, *Hasta*, *Vatapradhana*, *Tridoshaja Vyadhi*, *Vatavyadhi*, *Aavarana*, *Ayurvedic*.

INTRODUCTION

Description of *Vatarakta* disease is explained in almost all Ayurvedic *Samhitas* (Ayurvedic treatise). *Vatarakta* is known by different names like *Vatashonita*, *Khuddavata*, *Vatabalasaka*, *Adhyavata*, *Vataasrika* etc. In *Vatarakta* there is a vitiation of *Vata* and *Rakta* where vitiated *Vata Dosha* leads to

the vitiation of *Rakta Dhatu* and *Rasavaha Srotas* and *Raktavaha Srotas* (microvessels carrying blood) are mainly involved in this disease. Joint pain is one of the main feature of this disease. *Vatarakta* usually starts from the big toe or from hands and gradually involves other joints or tissues. Acharya Charaka explained it in a separate chapter and mentioned two types of *Vatarakta* as *Uttana* (superficial form) and *Gambheera* (joints involved). In *Gambheera Vatarakta*, the joint involvement is mainly seen therefore can be compared with Gout. Gout is a type of arthritis where disturbed metabolism leads to increase in the level of uric acid in blood, and after some time it forms urate crystals which gets accumulated in joints and leads to sudden onset of pain, inflammation, stiffness, etc. in the joint. Usually it occurs in a single joint but severe gout can sometimes affect many joints at once, this is known as polyarticular gout. If left untreated, it can cause irreversible damage in the joints, tophi formation, kidney disorders etc. The management of *Vatarakta* is

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done by *Shamana Aushadis* and *Shodhana* procedures indicated in *Ayurvedic Samhitas*.

Etiology (causative factors)

The etiology of *Vatarakta* can be broadly understood under *Aharaja Nidana* (food related causes) like excess intake of *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), *Amla* (sour) *Rasa*, *Sheeta* (cool), *Ushna* (hot), *Guru* (heavy to digest) *Ahara*, *Alpabhojana* (less amount of food), *Ajeerna Bhojana* (undigested food) etc., *Viharaja Nidana*^[1](lifestyle related causes) like anger, day time sleeping, doing more activities like swimming, trauma or injury etc., other factors like delicate, lazy, obese, more intake of *Madhura Rasa* (glucose or carbohydrates) and people who have sedentary lifestyle are more prone to get *Vatarakta*.^[2] The causative factors for *Vatarakta* can further be understood by the factors vitiating *Vata*, factors vitiating *Rakta*.

General prevalence of gout is 1-4% of the general population. In western countries, it occurs in 3-6% in men and 1-2% in women. In some countries, prevalence may increase up to 10%. Prevalence rises up to 10% in men and 6% in women more than 80 years old. Annual incidence of gout is 2.68 per 1000 persons. It occurs in men 2-6 folds more than women. Worldwide incidence of gout increases gradually due to poor dietary habits such as fast foods, lack of exercises, increased incidence of obesity and metabolic syndrome.^[3] There are a number of factors that can increase the likelihood of hyperuricemia or gout, like genetic predisposition, lifestyle, eating high protein diet, certain medications can increase levels of uric acid in body such as some diuretics and salicylate containing drugs, being overweight increases risk of gout as there is more turnover of body tissue and more production of uric acid as a metabolic waste, trauma and other health problems like renal problems can reduce the body's ability to efficiently remove waste products, leading to elevated uric acid levels.

Types of Vatarakta

Depend on site of pathogenesis *Vatrakta* is of three types, *Uttana Vata Rakta* (superficial gout) - where

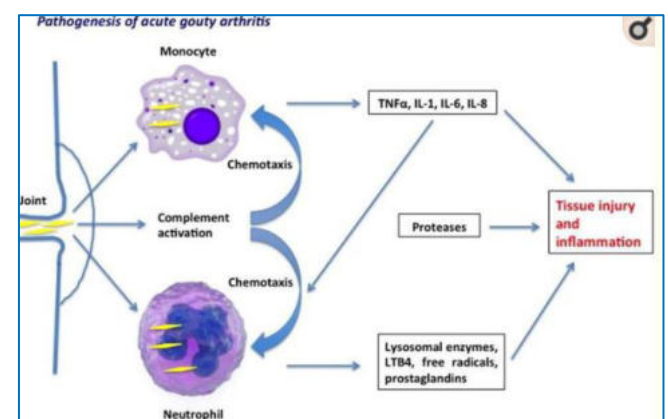
Twak and *Mamsa* are involved, *Gambira Vata Rakta* (deep gout) - all the other *Dhatu*s are involved in pathogenesis and *Ubhayashrita Vata Rakta* - Signs and symptoms of both *Uttana* and *Gambhira Vatarakta* are present. According to *Sushruta* there is only one type of *Vata Rakta*,^[4] *Uttana* and *Gambira Vata Rakta* on the basis of chronicity of the disease, *Uttana* state of *Vata Rakta* in latter course becomes *Gambhira*. On the basis of *Dosha* involved, eight types of *Vatarakta* mentioned by *Acharyas* are, *Vataja*, *Pittaja*, *Kaphaja*, *Raktaja*, *Vatapittaja*, *Vatakaphaja*, *Kaphapittaja* and *Tridoshaja*.^[5] Gout is broadly of two types or forms, Acute gouty arthritis and chronic gout.

Pathophysiology of Vatarakta

Acharya Charaka explained the pathogenesis of *Vatarakta*.^[6] Due to *Shukshma Guna* (can enter minute spaces) of *Vata* and *Drava Guna* (fluid nature) of *Rakta*, these vitiated *Dosha* and *Dhatu* circulated throughout the body in *Srotas* (capillaries), locally occlusion takes place in joints due to there bending structure and *Sthana Samshraya* (stage of localization) of vitiated *Vata* and *Rakta* takes place which leads to *Vatarakta*.

Gout is a disorder of purine metabolism^[7] and occurs when its final metabolite, uric acid, crystallizes in the form of monosodium urate, precipitating and forming deposits called tophi in joints, tendons, and in the surrounding tissues.^[8]

The pathogenesis of acute gouty arthritis can be understood as follow.^[9]



Recurrent attacks of gout when leads to chronic inflammation manifestate with bone erosion,

sinovitis, damaging the cartilage of involved joint and may lead to the formation of tophi. This can be understood by different mechanisms involved. Urate crystals in synovium stimulates chondrocytes to produce inflammatory cytokines, nitric oxide and matrix metalloproteases resulting in cartilage damage.^{[10],[11]}

Symptomatology of Vatarakta

On the basis of *Doshas* predominance the features of *Vataja Vatarakta* are *Sirayama* (fullness of vein), *Shoola, Toda* (various types of pain in joint), *Shotha* (oedema in joint), *Roukshyam Shyavata* (dark colored skin of joint), *Shotha Vriddhi/Hani* (intermittent change in oedema over joint), *Dhamani Anguli, Sandhi Sankocha* (Spasm in the arteries, fingers and joint), stiffness and pain in joints, tendency to avoid cold substance. Symptoms in *Pittaja Vatarakta* are, *Vidaha* (burning sensation in affected site), *Vedana* (pain), fainting, sweating, excess thirst, *Mada* (confusion), *Raga, Paka, Bheda* (redness, suppuration, cutting type of pain) and *Shosha* (emaciation). Features of *Kaphaja Vatarakta* are, *Staimitya* (feeling of covered with a wet cloth), heaviness of body, *Snigdha* (unctuousness in skin), *Supta* (numbness) and mild pain are seen. The symptoms of *Raktaja Vatarakta* are *Shotha*, pain, itching, *Kleda* (secretion) and no effect of use of *Snigdha* and *Ruksha* medicine.^[12]

Uttana Vatarakta

Here involvement is upto *Twaka* and *Mamsa* (skin and muscle tissue) and symptoms like itching, burning sensation, *Twak Ruka* (superficial pain), deformity in organ, tingling sensation and spasm, *Shavata* (skin darkness) is seen.

Gambheera Vatarakta

The involvement upto *Dhatu* is seen in *Uttana Vatarakta*. Stiffness, hardness in oedema, severe pain in internal part of oedema, *Shavata* (skin darkness), burning, tingling and pricking sensation in joint is present.

Complication of Vatarakta

Vatarakta may produce, Sleeplessness, anorexia, shortness of breath, *Shirograha* (heaviness in head),

Mamsakotha (gangrene of muscle), *Murcha* (fainting) etc.^[12]

Gout usually becomes symptomatic suddenly. The main symptoms are intense joint pain that subsides to discomfort, inflammation and redness. Gout frequently affects the large joint of the big toe, but can also affect the forefoot, ankles, knees, elbows, wrists and fingers. The pain can be excruciating. It can complicate and in some cases may develop some serious conditions such as kidney stone, and sometimes patient may have flare up or regular recurrence causing gradual damage to the joint as well as the surrounding tissues.

Treatment of Vatarakta

The treatment principle of *Vatarakta* comprises of externally *Abhyanga* (massage), *Parisheka* (pouring of medicine), *Aalepa* (application on skin) etc., where as internally purgative, *Sneha* (oil based preparation), *Basti* (medicated enema) and *Raktavisravana* (therapeutic blood letting). In *Vataja Vatarakta*, *Ghrita*, medicated oil, can be used for external procedures of massage or as enema, In *Pittaja Vatarakta*, *Viraechana*, *Ghritapana*, milk and *Anuvasana Basti* is indicated and in *Kaphaja Vatarakta*, *Mridu* (mild) *Virechana*, *Snehana*, lukewarm *Lepa* has been indicated by *Acharya Charaka*. *Acharya Charaka* mentioned that before *Raktavisravana*, *Snehana* procedure and then *Virechana* should be done.^[13]

Shamana Chikitsa

Guduchi is the drug of choice in *Vatarakta*. *Nimbaadi Churna*, *Nishotha Churna*, decoction such as *Patolaadi Quatha*, *Amrutaadi Quatha* and *Arishtas* like *Khadirarishta* are indicated in *Vatarakta*. *Ghrita* like *Guduchi Ghrita*, *Bala Ghrita*, *Jeevaniya Ghrita* and *Khuddangapadmaka Taila*, *Pinda Taila*, *Sukumara Taila* are used in *Vatarakta*. *Guggulu* like *Kaishora*, *Punarnava* and *Amrita Guggulu* are given in the condition of *Vatarakta*. For external application, *Tagaraadi Pralepa*, *Shatadhauta Ghrita* and *Balaadi Lepa* etc. are effective.

In Avarana condition

In *Kapha-Meda Avarana* condition, *Vyayama* (exercise), *Shodhana*, *Arishta*, *Gomutrapana*, *Virechana*, *Takra Prayoga* and *Haritaki* is beneficial. In *Raktapittadhivridha Vatarakta*, *Bhedana* (incision), *Shodhana* (cleaning) and *Ropana* (healing) are adopted.

Pathya (wholesome diet and lifestyle)

Role of healthy diet and lifestyle is an important factor in *Vatarakta*. For the patients of *Vatarakta*, *Purana Yava*, *Godhuma*, *Shali*, Soup of *Adhaki*, *Chanaka*, *Mudga*, leafy vegetables like *Sunishannaka*, *Kakamachi*, *Shatavari*, *Sauvarchala* sizzled with *Ghrit* is useful.

Apathya (unwholesome diet and lifestyle)

Divaswapa (day time sleeping), *Santapa* (over heat), *Katu*, *Ushna* (hot), heavy to digest food and *Dadhi* (curd) should be avoided in *Vatarakta*.

The diagnosis of Gout is made on the basis of clinical manifestation of disease along with investigations like, blood leukocyte count, Serum Uric acid and creatinine levels. Majority of gout cases are treated with medication to treat the symptoms of gout attacks, prevent future flares and reduce the risk of gout complications such as kidney stones and the development of tophi. Nonsteroidal anti inflammatory as a drug of choice. Salicylates and diuretics are avoided and Colchicine were seen effective in the treatment of gouty arthritis.

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of lifestyle disorders is increasing rapidly and *Vatarakta* is one among them. Preventing the causative factors of disease is the foremost measure that can be taken. Healthy diet and lifestyle can be followed by adopting the regime and practices mentioned in Ayurvedic classics like *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya* the proper method of eating food etc. With improvements in patient of gout as both an acutely debilitating and chronic disease, further developments in medicines and in research is going

on into the disease biology which help in producing adequate control and prevention of acute gout flares.

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