



REVISITING THE VIDDHA KARMA IN AYURVEDIC TRADITION: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Vidha Karma is a unique parasurgical (Anushastra karam) procedure described in Ayurveda by Acharya Sushruta, among the 8 shastra karma, that involves therapeutic puncturing of specific anatomical sites to relieve pain (Shoolghana Chikitsa) and manage various diseases. Rooted in the principles of classical Ayurvedic medicine, it is primarily indicated for conditions associated with vitiated Doshas, particularly disorders involving pain, inflammation, and impaired circulation. It helps by releasing obstructed Vata, draining impure blood, clearing the body's channels, and ultimately reducing pain. Despite its long history and continued practice in traditional medicine, Viddha Karma remains relatively underexplored in contemporary scientific literature. This review aims to present a comprehensive overview of Viddha Karma by examining its historical background, classical references, theoretical principles, indications, contraindications, procedural aspects, therapeutic applications, and available scientific evidence. Information has been compiled from classical Ayurvedic texts and published research, including that in Scopus and PubMed, to provide an integrated understanding of this traditional intervention for the present study. The reviewed literature suggests that Viddha Karma may offer therapeutic benefits in the management of musculoskeletal, neurological, and certain vascular disorders; however, the available evidence is limited. This review highlights the relevance of Viddha Karma as a valuable Ayurvedic therapeutic modality. It emphasises the need for continued research to support its integration into evidence-based and integrative healthcare practices.

KEYWORDS: Viddha karam, Ayurveda, tradition, culture.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, pain is primarily attributed to the aggravation or obstruction of Vata Dosha, particularly when its normal movement is disturbed by the accumulation of Doshas, Dhatus, or Mala. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe various therapeutic procedures to restore the normal flow of Vata and relieve pain. Among these, Viddha Karma (therapeutic puncturing), one of the Ashtavidha Shastra Karma (eight fundamental surgical procedures) described by Acharya Sushruta in the Sutar Sthana, chapter 25, and by Acharya Charak in the Sutar Sthana, chapter 26, holds an important place in Shalya Tantra. Viddha Karma involves puncturing specific structures or pathological collections using appropriate surgical instruments to facilitate the drainage

of accumulated blood, pus, or other morbid contents. According to Ayurvedic principles, this procedure helps release obstructed Vata, eliminate impure blood, and clear the body's channels (Srotas), thereby reducing pain and restoring normal physiological function.

Siravedha in connection with viddhakarma

Siravyadha is one of the principal procedures of Raktamokshana (bloodletting) described in the Siravyadha Vidhi Adhyaya (Sharira Sthana 8) of the *Sushruta Samhita*. It is primarily indicated for the evacuation of vitiated blood (Dushta Rakta) in diseases where Rakta plays a major role in the pathogenesis. The procedure involves puncturing a selected vein (Sira) using a Vrihimukha Shastra or a similar sharp instrument

to allow controlled bloodletting. The depth of puncture is sufficient to access the vein and facilitate the desired quantity of blood removal. Siravyadha is considered a systemic purification therapy that helps reduce inflammation, congestion, pain, swelling, and other disorders associated with Rakta Dushti.

In contrast, Viddha Karma is a minimally invasive para-surgical procedure in which a fine needle or sharp instrument is used to puncture specific therapeutic points, tender spots, or anatomical landmarks. Unlike Siravyadha, its primary objective is not bloodletting, although a few drops of blood may occasionally appear. Instead, the procedure aims to relieve localised pain, reduce muscle spasm and stiffness, improve microcirculation, remove obstruction in the channels (*Srotoshodhana*), and restore normal physiological function. The therapeutic effect of Viddha Karma is believed to result from stimulation of local neurovascular structures, making it conceptually comparable to modern dry needling or acupuncture, while remaining firmly rooted in Ayurvedic principles.

Although both procedures involve puncturing body tissues, they differ significantly in their indications, target structures, and therapeutic goals. Siravyadha specifically targets veins (*Sira*) for the purpose of bloodletting and systemic detoxification, whereas Viddha Karma targets painful points involving muscles (*Mamsa*), tendons (*Snayu*), ligaments, fascia, or other soft tissues to achieve local pain relief and functional improvement. Siravyadha requires a deeper puncture to access the vein, while Viddha Karma generally employs a superficial to moderate depth depending on the anatomical site and therapeutic indication.

Another important distinction lies in the quantity of blood released. In Siravyadha, the controlled evacuation of blood is an essential part of the treatment, whereas in Viddha Karma any bleeding is incidental and minimal. Consequently, Siravyadha is mainly indicated in disorders associated with Rakta Dushti, such as inflammatory and vascular conditions, while Viddha Karma is commonly employed in musculoskeletal disorders, including Sandhigata Vata (osteoarthritis), Gridhrasi (sciatica), Manyastambha (cervical spondylosis), and Katigraha (low back pain), where localised pain and restricted movement are the predominant symptoms.

Thus, despite sharing the common principle of therapeutic puncturing, Siravyadha and Viddha Karma represent two distinct Ayurvedic interventions. Siravyadha is primarily a bloodletting procedure intended for systemic purification through the removal of vitiated blood, whereas Viddha Karma is a targeted pain-management technique that provides analgesic, anti-inflammatory, neuromodulatory, and functional benefits without the primary intention of blood evacuation.

Procedure of viddha karam

Viddha Karma is a minimally invasive para-surgical procedure performed under strict aseptic precautions. Before the procedure, the patient is positioned comfortably to ensure easy access to the affected area. The treatment site is identified based on the location of maximum tenderness, pain, or the classical anatomical point described in Ayurvedic texts. The skin is then cleaned with an appropriate antiseptic solution.

A sterile disposable needle or a fine Vrihimukha Shashtra, depending on the clinical indication and institutional practice, is gently inserted into the selected point. The depth of insertion is determined by the anatomical location, the patient's body habitus, and the underlying tissue involved. The puncture is performed carefully to stimulate the target tissue without causing significant injury. In some cases, a minimal amount of blood may ooze from the puncture site; however, bloodletting is not the primary objective of the procedure.

After needle insertion, the instrument is withdrawn smoothly, and gentle pressure is applied with sterile gauze until any minor bleeding stops. The puncture site is cleaned and, if required, covered with a sterile dressing. The patient is advised to keep the area clean, avoid physical activity for the remaining day, and report immediately if excessive pain, swelling, or signs of infection develop.

Suggested mode of action

The exact mechanism of action of Viddha Karma has not been mentioned in classical Ayurveda; however, its therapeutic effects can be understood through both Ayurvedic principles and modern concepts.

According to Ayurveda, pain (*Shoola*) and restricted movement are primarily caused by the vitiation of Vata Dosha, often associated with Srotorodha (obstruction of body channels) due to the accumulation of Kapha, Ama, or localised tissue pathology. Viddha karam helps to remove this obstruction, facilitating the normal movement of Vata and restoring physiological balance. The stimulation produced by Viddha Karma improves local circulation, promotes Srotoshodhana (channel cleansing), reduces tissue stiffness, and alleviates pain. It also enhances the flow of Rakta and nourishes the affected tissues, thereby supporting the healing process.

From a modern perspective, Viddha Karma acts through multiple physiological mechanisms. Mechanical stimulation of the skin, fascia, muscles, and connective tissues activates peripheral sensory nerve endings, which modulate pain transmission through the gate control mechanism at the spinal cord level. Needle stimulation also triggers the release of endogenous analgesic substances such as endorphins, enkephalins, and serotonin, leading to a reduction in pain perception. Additionally, local vasodilation and improved microcirculation increase oxygen and nutrient delivery

while facilitating the removal of inflammatory mediators and metabolic waste products from the affected tissues.

The procedure also helps reduce muscle spasm, release myofascial trigger points, and improve tissue flexibility, resulting in enhanced joint mobility and functional recovery. Repeated stimulation may influence the autonomic nervous system, producing anti-inflammatory effects and promoting tissue repair through neurovascular modulation.

Depth of needle insertion

Classical Ayurvedic texts do not specify a fixed or uniform depth for Viddha Karma. Instead, the depth of needle insertion is selected based on the anatomical site, the targeted tissue, and the intended therapeutic outcome. In current clinical practice, Viddha Karma is generally performed with a superficial-to-moderate depth of insertion, typically ranging from 2 to 10 mm for most musculoskeletal disorders. In regions with thicker soft tissues, a greater depth may be used when clinically indicated, provided the procedure is performed by a trained practitioner with adequate knowledge of regional anatomy and appropriate aseptic precautions.

Indication and contraindication

Viddha Karma is primarily indicated in **Vata-dominant disorders** characterised by localised pain (*Shoola*), stiffness (*Stambha*), restricted movement, and neuromuscular dysfunction. Classical Ayurvedic literature recommends its use in conditions such as Gridhrasi, Manyastambha, Apabahuka, Katigraha, Snayugata Vata, Kandaragata Vata, Janu Sandhigata Vata, and other painful musculoskeletal disorders. From a contemporary perspective, Viddha Karma may be considered in chronic musculoskeletal pain, myofascial pain syndromes, tendinopathies, ligament injuries, and selected neuropathic pain conditions where localised stimulation is intended to relieve pain and improve functional mobility. The selection of the puncture site and depth should be individualised according to the anatomical location and therapeutic objective.

Viddha Karma is contraindicated in patients with **bleeding disorders**, severe anaemia (*Pandu*), marked debility (*Daurbalya*), uncontrolled systemic illness, active local infection, cellulitis, ulcers, or malignancy at the intended puncture site. The procedure should also be avoided in pregnant women, very young children, and frail elderly individuals unless specifically indicated and performed under expert supervision. Patients receiving anticoagulant therapy or those with impaired wound healing require careful assessment before the procedure. Strict aseptic precautions and appropriate patient selection are essential to minimise procedural complications and ensure optimal therapeutic outcomes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Viddha Karma is an important para-surgical procedure in Ayurveda that has been traditionally used to manage pain

and movement-related disorders, particularly those caused by aggravated Vata Dosha. By stimulating specific anatomical points, it is believed to reduce pain, relieve stiffness, and improve joint and muscle function. In recent years, Viddha Karma has gained attention because of its similarities to modern needling techniques such as dry needling and acupuncture. However, its therapeutic approach is based on the unique Ayurvedic principles of Dosha, Srotas, and Marma. Although the available clinical evidence suggests that Viddha Karma is a safe, simple, and cost-effective treatment option for musculoskeletal disorders, further well-designed clinical studies are needed to establish standardised treatment protocols and strengthen its scientific evidence.

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