



## UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS (SLE) AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN AYURVEDA – A REVIEW

Dr. Priyadarshini H. P.\*<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Abdul Khader<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PG Scholar, Department of Kayachikitsa, Sri kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Center, Vijayanagar Bangalore, Karnataka. Pincode – 560104.

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Kayachikitsa, Sri kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Center, Vijayanagar Bangalore, Karnataka. Pincode – 560104.

**Corresponding Author: Dr. Priyadarshini H. P.**

PG Scholar, Department of Kayachikitsa, Sri kalabyraveshwara Swamy Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Center, Vijayanagar Bangalore, Karnataka. Pincode – 560104.

Article Received on 11/07/2022

Article Revised on 01/08/2022

Article Accepted on 21/08/2022

### ABSTRACT

Immune tolerance is a process by which the immune system recognizes and accepts the self-tissues. These occur in two mechanisms they are central and peripheral mechanism. Autoimmunity is defined as the presence of immune response against the self-tissue. This is the harmless phenomenon identified by the presence of low titer autoantibodies / auto-reactive T cells. However, if these responses causes significant organ damage, this results in autoimmune diseases which are major cause of chronic morbidity and disability. Among all the types of auto immune diseases, systemic lupus erythematosus is a rare condition which is having the prevalence rate of 6% and is more commonly occur in female of child bearing age. Systemic lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is a Systemic autoimmune disease in which organs and cells undergo damage mediated by tissue – binding autoantibodies and immune complexes. Here, in this paper SLE is correlated with *Uttana* and *Gambhira Vatarakta* based on *sthana* involved in pathogenesis and *Raktadhika Vatarakta* based on predominant *doshas* involved which presents the similar symptoms as that of SLE. *Vatarakta* is mainly caused due to *Anyonya Avarana* of *Vata* and *Rakta*. Hence, the first line of treatment should be *Mridu shodana* like *Mridu Virechana*, *Basti (Saghrta, ksheera siddha)*, *Bahirparimarjana chikitsa* like *Alepana*, *Parisheka*, *Abhyanga*, *Shamanaushadhi*, *Rasayana* and *Pathya – Apathya*. The above mentioned treatment should be planned based on the *sthana* involvement. Hence, the Ayurvedic line of management is beneficial in Systemic lupus erythematosus conditions.

**KEYWORDS:** Autoimmune disorders, SLE, *Vatarakta*, *Virechana*, *Basti chikitsa*.

### INTRODUCTION

Autoimmunity is defined as the presence of immune response against the self-tissue. This is the harmless phenomenon identified by the presence of low titer autoantibodies / auto-reactive T cells. However, if these responses causes significant organ damage, this results in autoimmune diseases which are major cause of chronic morbidity and disability.

Immune tolerance is a process by which the immune system recognizes and accepts the self-tissues. These occur in two mechanisms they are central and peripheral mechanism. The pathology mainly takes place when there is an incomplete or failed tolerance mechanism takes place. Due to this the self-reactive T – lymphocytes gets escape from the mechanism, this activated T-cells or autoantibodies produced from B –lymphocytes attacks the body's normal cells whose surface contains the self-antigen / auto antigen. Thus the autoimmune diseases produce when the body's normal tolerance decreases and

immune system fails to recognize the body's own tissue as 'self'.<sup>[1]</sup>

The autoimmune diseases are most commonly seen in female than male. The prevalence rate of autoimmune diseases are estimated approximately 10%.<sup>[2]</sup>

Autoimmune diseases are classified based on the organ involvement they are;

1. Organ specific autoimmune diseases i.e., immune response directed against localized antigens. For example: Grave's diseases, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, Type 1 Diabetes mellitus etc.,
2. Multi system autoimmune diseases i.e., immune response directed to wide spread target antigen. For example: Systemic lupus erythematosus.

Autoimmune diseases caused by Autoantibodies: Type II and Type III hypersensitivity reactions of Gell and Coombs provide a mechanism of these groups of

diseases. To elaborate 4 hypersensitivity reactions, Type I hypersensitivity reactions are exemplified by immediate or anaphylactic hypersensitivity and is mediated by bound IgE antibodies on mast cells and basophils on first exposure to antigen (allergens). Type II or Type III hypersensitivity reactions are more applicable to autoimmune diseases caused by autoantibodies. Type IV hypersensitivity is due T cells Activation.

Type III hypersensitivity reaction mediated Non Organ specific Autoimmune Disease: Type III hypersensitivity reactions forms the basis of non-organ specific autoimmune diseases such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), idiopathic inflammatory myositis, sjogrens syndrome, Rheumatoid arthritis, ANCA associated small vessel necrotic vasculitis etc., Immune complexes containing antigen antibodies to autoantigens are deposited in the capillaries and small blood vessel of skin, joints, kidneys etc causing complement activation, neutrophil activation and release of proteolytic enzymes leading to inflammation and tissue damage.<sup>[3]</sup>

Among all the types of auto immune diseases, systemic lupus erythematoses is a rare condition which is having the prevalence rate of 6% and is more commonly occur in female of child bearing age. Systemic lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is a Systemic autoimmune disease in which organs and cells undergo damage mediated by tissue – binding autoantibodies and immune complexes. There are main causative factors which can results into autoimmunity they are: genetic susceptibility, environment factors, sex and abnormal immune response due to infection.

In Ayurveda different types of autoimmune diseases can be categorized under different conditions such as, Rheumatoid arthritis under *Amavata*, Ankylosing spondylitis under *Amavata*, SLE under *Raktadhika Vatarakta*, Psoriatic arthritis under *Gambheera Vatarakta* etc., which correlates the similar signs and symptoms. There are different ayurvedic lines of treatments, such as *Bahirparimarjana chikitsa* like *Abhyanga*, *Swedana*, *Parisheka*, *lepa* etc., *Antahparimarjana chikitsa* like *Shodhana (Virechana and basti)*, *Shamana*, *Rasayana* therapies which are beneficial in case *Vatarakta*.

Here, in this paper SLE is correlated with *Uttana* and *Gambhira Vatarakta* based on *sthana* involved in pathogenesis and *Raktadhika Vatarakta* based on predominant *doshas* involved which presents the similar symptoms as that of SLE. *Vatarakta* is caused due to *anyonya avarana* of the *Vata* and *Rakta* which causes *shotha*, *Teevra shoola* etc symptoms in different parts of the body. As this is also involved different system of the body, hence it can be correlated to *Vatarakta*. And this disease is caused due to *Avarana*, and then the first line of treatment should be *Mridu shodana* like *Mridu Virechana*, *Basti (Saghrita, ksheera siddha)*, *Bahirparimarjana chikitsa* like *Alepana*, *Parisheka*,

*Abhyanga*, *Shamanaushadhi*, *Rasayana* and *Pathya – Apathya*. The above mentioned treatment should be planned based on the *sthana* involvement. Hence, the Ayurvedic line of management is beneficial in Systemic lupus erythematosus conditions.

### Understanding autoimmune disorders in Ayurveda

Autoimmune diseases occur due to the harmful response of self-immune system when immune system started attacking the body's tissue as a response against antigen / toxins or *Ama*. The inflammatory response occurs in autoimmune disorders are triggered by *Ama*. Antigen vitiated *Dosha*, altered immune response which further damages the tissues. Antigens / *Ama* modulate signaling at cellular levels leading to incompatible autoimmune response that damages the tissues. Ankylosing spondylitis, crohn's disease, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis and Lupus erythematosus etc., can be considered as autoimmune diseases arises as response against *Ama* or antigens.<sup>[4]</sup>

Systemic lupus erythematosus is a Non – organ specific autoimmune disorder, where in multi system involvement will be seen. This autoimmune condition is considered as *Vatarakta* in Ayurveda. Autoimmune diseases are mainly caused due to *Ama*. Where in, due to indulge in *Nidanas* like *mithya Ahara-vhara chesta*, *Virudha Ashana* etc., causes *Agnimandhya*, which will not digest the *Anna*. This *apakwa Anna* will attain *Amla rasa*, which convert into *Visha rupata Avastha* which further leads to *Ama Visha*. When *Ama* associated with the *Dosha*, *Dhatu* or *Mala* leads to different diseases.<sup>[5]</sup>

When this *Ama*, associated with *Rasadi Dhatus* leads to *Dhatu pradoshaja Vikaras*. In the same way, if *Ama* associated with *Rakta Dhatu* leads *Rakta Pradoshaja vikaras* like *Vatarakta* is one among them. In *Vatarakta* both *Vata* and *Rakta* get vitiated.<sup>[6]</sup>

To be more specific, on looking into the features told in *Vata Prakruti* individuals, depicting the features of *Vata* itself, it includes certain *Gunas* like the *Sheegra Guna*, by virtue there are other two *Gunas* mentioned in the literature as *Alpasmruti* (lesser remembrance – abnormality to WBCs) and *Sheegra Grahita* (early identification of tissue). The above mentioned features occur at the level of *Raktha* i.e. to be precise at the level of WBCs in the recognition of body tissues. This mechanism leads to the mistaken judgment of the body tissues as an external antigen. By this we can understand as, *Ama* at the level of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* will cause the Systemic lupus erythematosus.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Understanding Systemic lupus erythematosus in Ayurveda

Systemic lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is a Systemic autoimmune disease in which organs and cells undergo damage mediated by tissue – binding autoantibodies and immune complexes. 90% of patients are women of child bearing age with a female to male ratio of 9:1.<sup>[8]</sup> The

condition has several phenotypes, with varying clinical presentations from mild mucocutaneous manifestations to multi organ and severe central nervous system involvement.

SLE is a prototype example of type III hypersensitivity disease. Circulating antibodies to anti- nuclear antibodies which are directed against a variety of nuclear constituents (such as nucleosomes, DNA, Sm, U1RNP, Ro, SS-A, La, or SS-B) get deposited at various sites giving rise to malar rash, Photosensitivity, arthritis, glomerulonephritis, serositis and central nervous system involvement in SLE.<sup>[5]</sup>

There are main causative factors which can results into autoimmunity they are: genetic susceptibility, environment factors, sex and abnormal immune response due to infection.<sup>[9]</sup>

SLE can be considering under the purview of *Vatarakta* because of its similarity of symptoms with *Raktadhika Vatarakta*. And it can also understand under the banner of *Uttana* and *Gambhira Vatarakta*.

While explaining the *Nidana* of *Vatarakta*, Acharya have been explained that it mainly occur in *sukumaras*. In Ayurveda, *Bala* and *stree* are considered under *sukumara* in most of the context. By this we can understand that *stree* are more prone for *Vatarakta* diseases. And it also understands not only *stree* but the person who is having *sukumara shareera* irrespective of gender indulge in *Nidanas* which vitiates the *Rakta* and *Vata*. The *Gati* of *Vata* gets obstructed by vitiating *Rakta*. This *Avruta Vayu* vitiates the *Rakta* in *Sarva Shareera* and leads to manifestation of *Vatarakta*.<sup>[10]</sup>

*Nidanas* which is explained in *Vatarakta* considered as the etiological factors which flare the condition of SLE. i.e., exposure to sunlight will flare the SLE in the same way we will get the reference about that our acharyas explained that the *sukumara* person who exposed to sunlight during summer season will aggravates the *doshas*.

SLE mainly occurs in female and also who is having less immunity. Those persons we can consider under the *Sukumara*. So if these persons who indulge in *nidanas* which vitiates the *Rakta* and *Vata* will end up with the *VATARAKTA*.

The clinical features of the systemic lupus erythematosus, initially affects the skin, which causes erythematosus, raised and painful or itchy skin lesions for example malar rashes are the common skin lesions which occurs over the cheeks with sparing of the nasolabial fold. In Revised American Rheumatism Association criteria for systemic lupus erythematosus, the first 4 clinical features are related to skin i.e., Malar rash, Discoid rash, Photosensitivity and oral ulcers. Later it is explained that Arthritis, serositis, Renal disorders, neurological disorders. By this it can be understand that initially *Uttana Vatarakta* which further vitiates the *gambhira dhatu* leads to *Gambhira Vatarakta*.

In *Uttana Vatarakta*, mainly *Twak* and *Mamsa* will be affected which can be presented with symptoms of *Kandu*, *Daha*, *Ruk*, *Toda*, *Spurana*, *Tamra Vivarnata* due to vitiating *Rakta* at the level of *Twak* and *Mamsa* which leads to *Shotha* (inflammation).

In *Gambheera Vatarakta*, *Asthi*, *Sandhi*, *Majja* will be affected which presents with symptoms of *Sandhi Shoola*, *Sandhi Shotha* and *Tamra Vivarnata* at the affected joints and later it leads to *Vakrata* of *Sandhi*<sup>[11]</sup>. This can be understood as arthritis which is a common symptom seen in 90% of patients later it may present with deformity of the joints as a result of tendon damage.<sup>[12]</sup>

Acharya sushruta have explained that. As like *Kushta*, *Vatarakta* initially affects the *Twak*, *Mamsa* and later it affects the *Gambhira Dhatu*. SLE is a condition where it affects all the system of the body. Hence, it is categorized under multi system autoimmune disease. In case of mild condition, it is only restricted to Skin and in severe cases the inflammation takes place in different systems like joints, kidney, Cardiovascular, lungs, neurological, Gastrointestinal systems. So, it can be *Uttana* and *Gambhira Vatarakta* because of its multisystem involvement.<sup>[13]</sup>

Based on the *Dosha* involvement this can be considered under the *Raktaadhika Vatarakta*. Because of its close similarity of the symptoms related to *Raktadhika Vatarakta*. Clinical features of SLE and *Raktadhika Vatarakta* are as follows.<sup>[14]</sup>

SLE	<i>Raktadhika Vatarakta</i>
Pain, swelling, erythematous skin rashes over the face, and other parts of the body along with itching sensation	<i>Bhrisha</i> (severe) <i>Shoola</i> , <i>Toda</i> , <i>Shotha</i> , <i>Tamravarnata</i> anywhere in the body either over the skin or joints or any other <i>Gambheera Dhatu</i> , <i>Kandu</i>
Osteoarthritis – severe pain and swelling along with stiffness of the joints	

As the systemic lupus erythematosus, is a multi-system autoimmune disease affects different systems in chronic stage such as kidney, cardio vascular, lungs, neurological, gastrointestinal.

In the context of *Vatarakta*, while explaining the *Sadhya* – *asadhyata* of the diseases, *upadrava* of the disease has been explained. This can be correlated to the multisystem involvement of SLE as a complication.<sup>[15]</sup>

System involvement	Symptoms	Upadrava of the Vatarakta
Lung	Breathlessness	Swasa
Neurological	Fatigue, headache, Hallucinations, Poor concentration.	Shirograha, Murcha, Bhrama, moha,
Joint	Joint deformity (small joints)	Anguli vakrata
Gastro intestinal	Nausea, sometimes vomiting	Arochaka, avipaka
Cardiac involvement	Myocarditis	Marma graha
Renal Involvement	Nephritis	

### Chikitsa

Vatarakta being a systemic disease, the management of Vatarakta is aimed at controlling the vitiated vata, pitta and to normalise the Raktadusti.

General line of treatment According to Acharya Charaka “Nahi Vasti samam kinchit Vatarakta chikitsitam” i.e. in the treatment of Vatarakta, Vasti is considered as supreme. Basti treats the vitiated Vata, Pitta, Kapha as well as Rakta by its Karmukata. Especially Ksheera Basti prepared out of Tikta Dravyas is more effective in treating Vatarakta.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Raktamokshana in Vatarakta

In the disease Vatarakta, when the aggravated Vata takes sthanasamsraya in shakha, Sandhi and does the Avarana of the Rakta and the aggravated Rakta obstruct the Vata dosha. This Anyonyavarana of the Vata and Rakta causes Vatarakta vikara. This leads to severe pain Shakha and Sandhi. To relieve the Avarana, Acharya had told to do Raktamokshana in initial stage to remove the vitiated Rakta. After relieving the Avarana, Vata will get freely move all over the body and relieves the Pain.<sup>[17]</sup>

### Specific line of Treatment

Treatment based on Sthana either Uttana or Gambhira Vatarakta:

#### • Uttana Vatarakta

In Uttana Vatarakta, mainly Twak, Rakta and Mamsa will be affected which causes the pain, swelling, Reddish discoloration of the Rashes. In this condition Bahyaparimarjana chikitsa was specially indicated they are, Alepana, Abhyanga, Parisheka and Upanaha.<sup>[18]</sup>

In case of Vata, Kapha adhika Vatarakta – Ushna alepana, Abhyanga, Parisheka and Upanaha is beneficial.

In Case of Pittadhika, Raktadhika Vatarakta – Sheeta alepana, Parisheka, Abhyanga with Sheeta dravyas, Niragni Upanaha.

If we do sheet Pralepadi Chikitsa, it will cause obstruction of the Doshas and causes Shotha, Daha, Ruja and Kandu.

If we do Ushna pralepadi chikitsa, it will cause excessive Daha, Kledana, Avadarana. Hence, in Vatottara or Kaphottara Vatarakta – Ushnopachara is indicated and in Pittottara or Raktottara Vatarakta – Sheetopachara is indicated.<sup>[19]</sup>

#### • Gambheera Vatarakta

In case of Gambheera Vatarakta, where Gambheera dhatu is involved in that condition Virechana, Asthapana Basti, Anuvasana Basti and Snehapana kriya based on the Dosha involvement.<sup>[20]</sup>

As we consider SLE under the context of Raktadhika Vatarakta with its close similarity of symptoms. In this condition, the treatments which explained in the context of Raktadhika Vatarakta should be followed.

The treatment like Virechana, ghruta ksheera siddha Basti, Ghruta Pana, Dugdha pana, sheetala pralepa, sheeta parisheka and Dahashamaka upachara need to be followed.

In SLE patients, there will be excessive Fatigue will be there, and patients are Alpa Bala in such conditions Mridu Virechana should be done with either Nimbamrita Eranda Taila or Gnadhavahastadi Eranda Taila.

#### Mode of action of Virechana

In Raktadhika Vata rakta – Rakta will be Pradhana which causes Avarana of the Doshas and cause the disease. As Rakta is Ashraya for pitta and Virechana is Vishesh Chikitsa of Pitta Vikaras, which also helpful in removing the Doshas from Rakta. Hence, Virechana is beneficial based on Avastha.

In other words, Acharya Charaka has explained that, in Vatarakta condition there will be Kapha – Meda Avarana which will leads to further aggravation of Vata which vitiates the Rakta. In this condition Virechana to be adopted which helps in relieving the Avarana. Hence, Virechana helps in this condition.<sup>[21]</sup>

As these patients were Sukumara, Mridu Virechana to be adopted with Eranda Taila.

#### Basti chikitsa

Saghruta Ksheera siddha Basti is considered as the best chikitsa for Vatarakta. Guduchi is Aghrya for Vatarakta, Guduchi is having Tikta rasa, Ushnaveerya, Snigdha guna property helps to tackle the Vata and Rakta. Hence, Guduchi siddha ksheera basti is effective in this condition.

#### Mode of action of Basti in this condition

Basti is the best treatment and considered as Ardchikitsa in all types of Vata vyadhi. Basti is considered as best for Vatarakta also. The given Basti

when enters the *Pakwashaya* by its *Veerya*, draws the vitiated *Doshas* lodged in the entire body just as sun situated in the sky sucks up the moisture from the earth. The *Tikshna Guna* of the *Basti* helps to overcoming the *Sroto Dushti* resulting due to *Sanga*. Thus *Basti Dravya* after reaching to large intestine and Small intestine gets absorbed due to *Laghu, Ushna, Tikshna* and *Ruksha*

*guna* of *Dravyas*, it helps to break the obstruction and expel out the morbid *Dosha* from all over the body. As we consider SLE patients are *Sukumara, Ksheera Basti* which is explained in Charaka siddhi sthana is specially indicated in *Sukumaras* and *Abalas*. Hence, *Saghrita ksheera siddha basti* is beneficial in this condition.<sup>[22]</sup>

### Shamanaushadhi.

Sl.no	Yogas	Name of yogas
1.	Vati / Guggulu	Arogyavardhini Vati, Kaishora guggulu, Amruta guggulu
2.	Kashaya / Asava / Arishta	Vasaguduchyadi Kashaya, Amrutottara kashaya, Manjishtadi Kashaya, Amrutadi Kashaya, Sarivadhyasava, Amrutarishta
3.	Ghritha	Jeevaniya Ghritha, Guduchi Ghritha, Shatavari Ghritha
4.	Taila	Madhuparnyadi Taila, Sukumara Taila, Pinda Taila
6.	Ekamulika Prayoga	Amruta, Saariva, Guggulu, Bhallataka, Chopachini, Bala
7.	Rasayana	Chyavanaprasha Avaleha

### Pathya-apathya<sup>[23]</sup>

Pathya	Apathya
Purana Yava, godhuma, shali, shashtika	Katu, ushna, Guru, Abhishyandi ahara
Vishkira Prathuda mamsa	Lavana, Amla rasa pradhana ahara
Adaki, chanaka, mudga, masura with ghritha - yusha	Divaswapna, Ati vyayama, ati Maithuna
Who is dugdha sevi – Go dugdha, Mahisha dugdha, aja dugdha	Santapa – excess exposure to sunlight

### DISCUSSION

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is a Systemic autoimmune disease in which organs and cells undergo damage mediated by tissue – binding autoantibodies and immune complexes. 90% of patients are women of child bearing age with a female to male ratio of 9:1. The condition has several phenotypes, with varying clinical presentations from mild mucocutaneous manifestations to multi organ and severe central nervous system involvement. Even though it is more common in women of child bearing ages, it can occur in any age, in both gender. *Vatarakta* is one among the *Avarana Vyadhi*. Right from its etiopathogenesis to its complications, the illness follows the characteristic presentation of *Avarana*. Due to indulgence in *Ahara* and *Vihara* that causes the vitiation of *Vata dosha* and *Rakta dhatu*, there occurs *Marga Avarodha* of *Vata* by *Dushita Rakta*. This leads to further vitiation of *Vata dosha* which in turn vitiates *Rakta Dhatu* further more to result in manifestation of *Vatarakta*. Symptoms of SLE closely similar to *Raktadhika Vatarakta*.

As per Ayurvedic classics, *Utthana* variety of *Vatarakta* has to be treated with *Alepna* (application of medicated pastes), *Abhyanga* (massage), *Parisheka* (pouring of medicated decoction over body), and *Upanaha* (application of hot poultice). Whereas, *Gambhira* variety has to be treated with, *Virechana* (purgation), *Asthapana vasti* (decoction enema), *Snehapana* (intake of medicated oils or ghee). Here, we can incorporate the SLE under *Raktadhika Vatarakta* due to its similarity in the exhibition of clinical features. According to Acharya Charaka, *Raktadhika vatarakta* has to be treated with,

*Virechana* (purgation), *Ghritha ksheera pana* (intake of medicated ghee or milk), *Seka* (pouring of medicated decoctions over body), *Vasti* (medicated enema) and *Sheeta Nirvapana* (application of pastes for cooling). *Rasayana* also plays an important role in autoimmune diseases like SLE. If *Rasayana* is adopted after *samshodhana chikitsa* produces healthier dhatus in the presence of *Agni* and thus improves the *Vyadhikshamatva* of an individual. *Guduchi* is mentioned as the *Agryoushadhi* for *Vatarakta*. In *Vatarakta*, both *Vata* and *Rakta* possess different qualities. *Rakta* is having *Ashraya* of pitta as *snigdha, Visra, drava, Ushna gunas* while *Vata* has opposite qualities like *Ruksha, Sheeta* etc., To subside *Vatarakta*, the drug should have the qualities to relieve both the factors. *Guduchi* is having *Tikta rasa, snigdha guna* and *Ushna Veerya*, thus *Thikta* rasa helps to subside *Rakta* where as *snigdha guna* and *Ushna Veerya* helps to subside *Vata dosha*. Hence, it is beneficial in this condition. Hence, the treatment which is explained for *Raktadhika Vatarakta* is beneficial in treating the systemic lupus erythematosus.

### CONCLUSION

Systemic Lupus Erthamatosus is an autoimmune disease, which involves multi system. Hence, it is categorized under multi system involvement autoimmune disorder. In this disease, initially skin manifestation will be there. This can be understood as the *Utthana Vatarakta*. Later it will involve multiple joints, respiratory system, cardio vascular system, neurological etc., and causes inflammation. This we can understand under the context of *Gambheera vatarakta*. SLE can also be correlated to *Raktadhika Vatarakta* due to its similarity in the

exhibition of clinical features. In *Raktadhika Vatarakta Mridu virechana*, *Basti* has been explained. This will help to relieve the *Anyonya Avarana* which is caused by *Vata* as well as *Rakta*. And *Ghrita Ksheera Pana*, *Sheeta Lepa*, *Parisheka* also explained for the treatment of this condition.

In this paper it is concluded that SLE can be considered as *Uttana –gambhira Vatarakta* based on *sthana* involvement and *Raktadhika Vatarakta* based on symptoms. And it can be managed by *Shodhana*, *Shamana* and *Rasayana* therapy.

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