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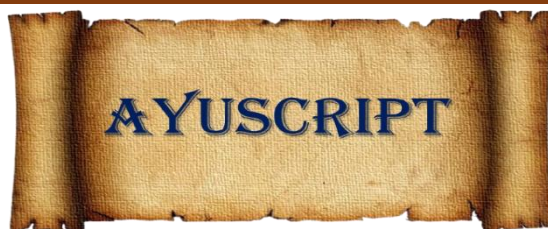
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र्मेता ॥ नवयोऽशिसाहस्रस्त्रीरुणवेचवराधिकसु ॥ ११ ॥ भवनानिमनोज्ञानि  
योमध्यकल्पयन् ॥ परिजाननरुंवेवतासंभोगायकल्पयन् ॥ १२ ॥ या  
वानोमृदास्तनद्यदपेचाशतकोटयः ॥ अन्यपिबहवोलाकावसेनिविगत  
राः ॥ १३ ॥ यन्किंवित्रियुलोकेषु सुंदरंनचदृश्यते ॥ सवाजिनप्रसेनाख्योपु  
त्रयुगस्यविद्युते ॥ १४ ॥ सुभाषितीरमासाद्यनमनस्कनयावसः ॥ सनाडि  
स्तपस्तेपेस्वर्यमुदिशपुष्टिसाचा ॥ १५ ॥ अनेनिरसनैमहास्वर्यसंवदलेव  
नेः प्रसन्नभगवान्मनोजितपुरस्थिता ॥ १६ ॥ सत्रात्रितोपिनुष्टावदृष्टादेवेदि  
करस्य ॥ निजोराशनमस्तेस्तनमस्तिसर्वलोमुखः ॥ १७ ॥ विश्वव्यापिन्नमस्तेस्त  
मस्तेनिभूरुपिया ॥ करपपेयनमस्तेस्त हरिदस्तेनमोस्तने ॥ १८ ॥ गहराजनम  
स्तेस्तनमस्तेवेदरोचिषो ॥ वेदत्रयनमस्तेस्तसर्वदेवनमोस्तने ॥ १९ ॥ प्रसीद  
तुहिदेवतासुदृष्टीमादिवाकरे ॥ ध्येसकथयमानोसादवदेवादिवाकरे ॥ २० ॥  
सिधामेभीरनधरंस्वकाजिनमवावेहः ॥ चरंरुहिप्रसनेतिमयतेमनेति





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## Superiority of *Basti* (Enema) in Comparison to *Virechana* (Purgation)

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### ABSTRACT:

*Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of medicine, employs various therapeutic procedures known as *Panchakarma* for detoxification and rejuvenation.<sup>1</sup> Among these, *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation) and *Basti* (medicinal enema) are prominent. This research article, based on classical *Ayurvedic* texts, specifically *Charaka Samhita* and its commentary, aims to critically examine and highlight the documented superiority of *Basti* over *Virechana* in specific contexts. While *Virechana* effectively eliminates morbidities, it is associated with discomforts such as disquietude, eructation, nausea, unpleasantness, and abdominal pain due to the sharp, pungent, and hot nature of the administered drugs. Furthermore, children and the elderly are deemed unfit for *Virechana* due to their inherent or diminished strength and tissue integrity. In contrast, *Basti*, particularly *Asthapana Basti* (non-unctuous enema), is presented as a universally applicable and superior therapy for these vulnerable groups. It offers profound benefits including promoting strength, enhancing complexion, inducing exhilaration, and imparting softness and unctuousness to all body parts, without causing complications. The textual analysis underscores *Basti*'s unique dual action of impurity elimination (like *Virechana* in the colon) and anabolism/nourishment, establishing its prominence in *Ayurvedic* therapeutic management.

**Keywords:** *Panchakarma*, *Basti*, *Virechana*, *Charaka Samhita*, Detoxification, Enema, Purgation

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## Introduction

*Ayurveda*, an ancient holistic medical system, emphasizes the balance of bodily humors (*Doshas: Vata, Pitta, Kapha*) for maintaining health. When these *Doshas* become imbalanced, they manifest as diseases. *Panchakarma*, a set of five therapeutic procedures, aims to purify the body and restore this balance through the elimination of accumulated toxins (*Doshas* and *Malas*). The five procedures traditionally include *Vamana* (emesis), *Virechana* (purgation), *Basti* (enema), *Nasya* (nasal administration), and *Raktamokshana* (bloodletting).<sup>1</sup>

*Virechana* involves the administration of purgative medicines to eliminate morbidities, primarily from the lower gastrointestinal tract. Due to its *Vyavayi Guna*, a *Virechana yoga* gets absorbed quickly, and its *Virya* allows it to reach the *Hridya* (heart), *Dhammani* (blood vessels), and all macro and micro channels of the body. Its *Vikasi Guna* causes softening and loosening of bonds through *Dhatu Shaithilya Karma*. The *Ushna guna* causes liquefaction of *Dosha Sanghata*. It breaks down *Mala* and *Doshas* into micro forms due to its *Tikshana Guna*. Due to *Sukshma Guna*, it reaches micro channels and disintegrates endogenous toxins, which are then excreted through these micro channels. *Virechana* occurs mainly due to its *Prabhava*, *Prithvi* and *Jala* constitution, and the presence of *Sara Guna*.<sup>2</sup> *Basti*, on the other hand, entails the administration of medicated liquids (decoctions, oils, etc.) into the rectum, acting systemically and locally. Both procedures are pivotal in *Ayurvedic* therapeutics, yet classical texts suggest a nuanced superiority of one over the other *under specific circumstances*.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to review assertions regarding the superiority of *Basti* over *Virechana*, drawing directly from the authoritative classical *Ayurvedic* text,

*Charaka Samhita*, and its commentary (*Ayurved Dipika*). The objective is to elucidate the rationale behind this declared superiority, considering factors such as patient comfort, contraindications, and therapeutic versatility, as described in the original Sanskrit texts.

## Materials and Methods

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach based on textual analysis. The primary source material for this study is the classical *Ayurvedic* treatise, *Charaka Samhita Siddhithana* 10/6-8, and its commentary by Chakrapani, which discusses the comparison between *Basti* and *Virechana*.

- **Identification of classical source:** Locating the specific verses in *Charaka* and its commentary (*Ayurved Dipika* by Chakrapani, *Siddhithana* Chapter 10, Verses 6-8) that explicitly compare *Basti* and *Virechana*, particularly concerning their merits and demerits.
- **Translation and Interpretation:** Carefully translating the Sanskrit verses and their commentaries into English, ensuring accurate interpretation of technical terms and concepts within the *Ayurvedic* framework.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Identifying key themes and arguments presented in the texts regarding the advantages of *Basti* and the disadvantages of *Virechana*.
- **Synthesize and Present Findings:** Consolidating the interpreted information to form a coherent narrative that addresses the research objective.

## Observations:

The textual analysis of *Charaka Samhita* and its commentary, *Ayurved Dipika*

(A.D.) by Chakrapani (*Siddhithana* Chapter 10, Verses 6-8), reveals clear arguments for the superiority of *Basti* over *Virechana* in certain contexts.<sup>4</sup>

### Demerits of *Virechana* (Purgation)

*Charaka* states that despite *Virechana's* capacity to eliminate morbid *Doshas* (impurities), it possesses notable demerits. These arise from the use of pungent, sharp, and hot drugs, which cause:

- a) **Discomfort (*Duhkha*) and Unpleasantness (*Ahridayatva*):** These are generalized subjective experiences that encompass the sum of the physiological side effects, reflecting the body's adverse reaction to the strong purgative action. Drugs like *Danti* (*Baliospermum montanum*) may induce extreme purging leading to prostration and weakness.
- b) ***Udgara* (Eructation or Belching):** Often associated with gastric irritation. This may occur due to altered gut motility, increased gas production, or swallowed air as a consequence of gastrointestinal distress. Drugs with

volatile oils or strong irritants may increase gas production or dyspepsia.

- c) ***Utklesa* (Nausea):** A feeling of sickness with an urge to vomit. This can be a systemic effect or arise from the intense stimulation and discomfort within the gut. *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*) or certain combinations with ghee may induce a feeling of nausea in sensitive individuals.
- d) ***Ahridayatva* (Unpleasantness):** A general disagreeable experience. Sudden evacuation of fluids and nutrients, coupled with systemic inflammatory responses or vagal stimulation, can lead to malaise. Clinical symptoms include dizziness, dehydration, hypoglycemia, and irritability.
- e) ***Kostha-ruja* (Pain or Gripping of Abdomen or Bowels):** Significant abdominal discomfort or cramps. Directly results from the forceful contractions of the intestinal muscles and visceral irritation. Use of anthraquinone-containing herbs (like *Senna*) or castor oil can cause colicky pain due to intense bowel movements.

Ayurvedic Term	Modern Perspective	Possible Cause
<i>Duhkha</i>	Discomfort, exhaustion, electrolyte imbalance	Excessive purgation, fluid/electrolyte loss
<i>Udgara</i>	Belching, reflux	Gastric irritation, increased acid production
<i>Utkleśa</i>	Nausea	GI mucosal irritation, central or vagal stimulation
<i>Ahridayatva</i>	General malaise, body ache	Dehydration, depletion, systemic stress response
<i>Koshtha-ruja</i>	Abdominal pain, colic	Overstimulation of bowel, spasm due to stimulant purgatives

The *Ayurved Dipika* (A.D.) commentary further elaborates that these discomforts manifest due to the excitation or agitation caused by the pungent, sharp, and hot tastes of the purgative drugs.<sup>5</sup>

### Unsuitability of *Virechana* for Specific Groups

A significant limitation highlighted for *Virechana* is its unsuitability for vulnerable populations:

**Children:** They have not yet achieved sufficient strength and maturity of *Dhatus* (body tissues).

**Old Persons (Aged):** Their strength and *Dhatus* have already decreased or diminished.

For these groups, the rigorous nature of purgation is deemed inappropriate, potentially leading to adverse effects due to their fragile physiological state.<sup>6</sup>

### Superiority and Benefits of *Basti* (Enema)

In *Ayurvedic* therapeutics, *Basti* is revered as the *parama chikitsa* (supreme therapy), especially for *Vata*-related disorders and

#### Enumerated Benefits of *Basti* as per *Ayurveda*<sup>7</sup>

Sanskrit Term	Meaning	Therapeutic Benefit
<i>Bala</i>	Strength, stamina, energy	<i>Basti</i> improves muscle tone, sustains <i>ojas</i> , and enhances immunity. Ideal for individuals with chronic fatigue, post-illness convalescence, or debilitating conditions.
<i>Varṇa</i>	Complexion, radiance	Detoxification and nutrient absorption via <i>Basti</i> improves blood quality, leading to a glowing skin tone and even complexion.
<i>Harsha</i>	Joy, exhilaration	By pacifying <i>Vata</i> (which governs the nervous system), <i>Basti</i> brings about mental calmness, relieves anxiety, and elevates mood.
<i>Mridu</i>	Softness	Ensures supple skin and muscle tone, preventing dryness or stiffness caused by aggravated <i>Vata</i> . Especially useful in aging-related rigidity.

systemic imbalances.<sup>16</sup> While *Virechana* is effective primarily in *Pitta*-vitiating conditions, *Basti* therapy offers a broader therapeutic range, making it particularly beneficial for vulnerable populations—such as the elderly, children, weak, emaciated, or those contraindicated for intense therapies like *Virechana* or *Vamana*. According to *Charaka*, *Asthapana Basti* (non-unctuous or decoction-based enema) is capable of achieving "*Sarvarthakrit*", i.e., accomplishing all desired therapeutic goals.

### Unique Superiority of *Basti* Over Other *Panchakarma* Therapies:

Unlike *Virechana* (which primarily acts on the *Pitta Dosha*), *Basti* addresses the root cause of 80+ diseases by pacifying *Vata*, the most influential and mobile *Dosha*. It is systemic, despite being locally administered via the colon. The active drugs are absorbed through the colonic mucosa and exert effects throughout the body. *Basti* is gentler, more customizable, and nutritionally supportive, especially in *Balavridha* (children and elderly).

<i>Snigdha</i>	Unctuousness, lubrication	<i>Basti</i> provides deep oleation from within, improving joint mobility, bowel function, and nutritional status.
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The *Ayurved Dipika* (A.D.) commentary emphasizes that these demerits present in *Virechana* are entirely absent in *Basti*. It clarifies that while the term '*Vireka*' can encompass both purgation and emesis, the comparison here is specifically with purgation because purgation also eliminates morbidities located in the *Pakvasaya* (sigmoid colon and rectum), the same primary site cleansed by *Basti*. This common area of action makes the comparison valid. The commentary further explains *Sarvarthakrta* as *Basti*'s unique ability to eliminate impurities without causing any complications, simultaneously promoting *Brahmana* (anabolism or bulk promotion), signifying its dual action of cleansing and nourishing.

### Discussion

The classical *Ayurvedic* texts, particularly *Charaka Samhita*, provide a robust argument for the superiority of *Basti* over *Virechana* in specific therapeutic contexts. This superiority is not absolute but rather conditional, predicated on factors such as patient tolerance, physiological state, and the broader therapeutic outcomes desired.

*Virechana*, while potent in expelling morbid *Doshas*, is explicitly noted for its adverse effects resulting from the sharp, pungent, and hot properties of the drugs. These effects – discomfort, nausea, abdominal pain, and general unpleasantness – indicate a more aggressive and potentially challenging experience for the patient. Such symptoms suggest a higher likelihood of discomfort and possibly complications if not administered judiciously.<sup>8</sup>

Crucially, the texts highlight that *Virechana* is contraindicated in

physiologically vulnerable groups: children and the elderly. Children, with their immature *Dhatus* and developing strength, and the aged, with diminished *Dhatus* and reduced strength, are ill-equipped to withstand the intensity of purgative therapy. This contraindication underscores a significant limitation of *Virechana*'s applicability in a substantial portion of the population.

### *Virechana* occurs due to the following three primary actions:<sup>9</sup>

- 1. Increase Propulsive Movement:** Due to its irritant property, *Virechana Dravya* stimulates the motor activity of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Some *Dravyas* increase motility by acting on the mesenteric plexus, and this heightened propulsive activity leads to less time for the absorption of colonic content.
- 2. Reduced Absorption:** By virtue of its irritative nature, *Virechana Dravya* can cause structural injury to the absorbing mucosal cells, thereby decreasing the absorbing capacity of the mucosa.
- 3. Fluid Accumulation in Gut:** *Virechana Dravya* causes inflammation in mucosal cells. Due to these inflammatory changes, vasoactive amines and polypeptides increase membrane permeability in the GI tract and cause vasodilation. Certain chemical factors also contribute by increasing permeability in response to acute inflammation. All these factors collectively initiate the *Virechana* process.

In stark contrast, *Basti* emerges as a therapy devoid of these demerits. Its gentler nature allows for its application even in those unfit for purgation. The documented benefits of *Basti* extend beyond mere elimination; it actively promotes strength, improves complexion, induces happiness, and imparts softness and unctuousness to the entire body. The commentary's explanation of *Sarvarthakrta* as *Basti*'s ability to eliminate impurities without complications while simultaneously promoting anabolism (*Brmhana*) is key. This dual action of cleansing and nourishing is a unique advantage, making *Basti* a comprehensive therapeutic modality. While *Virechana* primarily focuses on elimination (*Langhana*, or reduction therapy), *Basti* can achieve both *Langhana* and *Brmhana* depending on the formulation, thus demonstrating greater versatility. The achievement of these profound benefits is inherently tied to the successful management of *Basti*, known as *Basti Siddhi*.

The rationale for comparing *Basti* specifically with *Virechana* (and not *Vamana/emesis*) is rooted in their shared primary site of action – the *Pakvasaya* (colon and rectum). Both procedures are effective in cleansing this region. However, *Basti*'s method of administration and the nature of its medicaments allow for a less invasive and more nurturing effect, making it superior, especially when patient comfort and systemic strengthening are priorities.<sup>10</sup>

From a modern perspective, this textual insight aligns with the understanding of different pharmacological actions. Purgatives often induce significant gastrointestinal motility and irritation, leading to the reported discomforts. Enemas, particularly those with soothing or nourishing properties, can cleanse the colon while simultaneously providing

systemic benefits through absorption, without the same level of acute irritation.

The findings from this classical textual analysis have profound implications for clinical *Ayurvedic* practice. They emphasize the importance of individualized treatment based on the patient's age, strength, and constitution. *Basti*, particularly *Asthapana*, is presented not just as an alternative but as a preferred and superior therapy for vulnerable populations and when a combination of elimination and systemic nourishment is required.

### Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive textual analysis of *Charaka Samhita Siddhisthana*, *Basti* (medicinal enema) is demonstrably superior to *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation) in specific therapeutic scenarios. While *Virechana* is an effective eliminative procedure, it is associated with significant patient discomforts and is contraindicated in children and the elderly due to their physiological vulnerabilities. *Basti*, conversely, offers a gentle yet profoundly effective means of purification from the *Pakvasaya*, devoid of the harsh side effects of purgation.

*Basti* possesses a unique multifaceted therapeutic profile, contributing to strength, complexion, happiness, and systemic nourishment (anabolism), truly embodying its description as *Sarvarthakrta* (serving all purposes). This classical understanding reaffirms *Basti*'s crucial and often superior role in *Ayurvedic Panchakarma* therapy, particularly when considering patient comfort, contraindications, and comprehensive therapeutic outcomes, all of which are contingent upon the successful management of the procedure (*Basti Siddhi*).

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