

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Applied Physiology of *Rakta Dhatu* with special reference to *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara*

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## ABSTRACT

The body is maintained, developed, and nourished by structures known as *Dhatu* (body tissues), which serve as the functional instruments of the *Doshas* (body humours). *Rakta Dhatu* is the second among the seven *Dhatu*s. It is formed from the *Prasada Bhaga* (nutritive essence) of *Rasa Dhatu* through the action of *Rasa Dhatwagni* and *Bhutagni*. The Sanskrit word *Rakta* originates from the root "*Raj Ranjane*," meaning "to colour" or "to stain." This tissue is called *Rakta* because of its ability to impart a red colour, such as staining a white cloth crimson. As one of the seven essential body tissues, *Rakta* is distributed throughout the body. However, it is found in greater concentration in certain organs, where it performs more specialized physiological functions.

**Key Words** *Rakta Dhatu*, *Raktavaha Srotas*, *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Dosha*, *Dhatu* & *Malas* are fundamentals of body<sup>1</sup>. Among the seven *Dhatu*s, *Rakta Dhatu* is the second *Dhatu* and performs *Jeevana Karma* (sustaining or maintaining function). It is produced from the *Prasada Bhaga* (pure part) of *Rasa Dhatu*. *Rakta Dhatu* possesses properties (*Gunas*) similar to those of *Pitta Dosha*, such as *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Ushna* (hot), *Tikshna* (sharp), and *Drava* (liquid).

*Rakta Dhatu* is primarily associated with the *Apa* and *Teja Mahabhutas*. It circulates throughout the body through the *Dhamanis* (blood vessels) originating from the heart and performs vital

functions such as *Jeevana* (maintenance of life) and *Mamsa Pushti* (nourishment of muscle tissue). The *Raktavaha Srotas* is regarded as the principle channel responsible for the transportation and maintenance of *Rakta Dhatu*. According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Yakruta* (liver) and *Pliha* (spleen) are considered the chief sites of this *Srotas*. *Acharya Sushruta*, in addition, has mentioned the *Raktavahi Dhamanis* as important structures associated with *Rakta*

*Rakta* has a fundamental role in maintaining life, and its severe depletion can adversely affect vital functions and may even become life-threatening. Recognizing its importance, *Acharya Sushruta* has accorded *Rakta* a special status and described

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it as the fourth *Dosha*<sup>2</sup>. Various etiological factors (*Hetus*) can cause vitiation of the *Doshas*. When these vitiated *Doshas* adversely affect *Rakta Dhatu*, they result in disorders collectively known as *Rakta Pradoshaja Vyadhis*<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, a proper understanding of the physiological significance of *Rakta Dhatu* and the pathogenesis of *Rakta Pradoshaja vyadhis* is essential for comprehending their clinical importance.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To study the role of *Rakta dhatu* in *Rakta Pradoshaja vikara*.
- To study the concept, formation, nourishment, functions, and physiological characteristics of *Rakta Dhatu*.
- To study *Rakta Dhatu Vriddhi* and *Kshaya*.
- To understand the causes, pathogenesis, and manifestations of *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara*.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

- Ayurvedic literature
- Research papers,
- Works and articles
- Internet

### Metabolism of *Raktadhatu*

*Rakta Dhatu* is formed and maintained through *Raktavaha Srotas*, which are responsible for its transportation and nourishment. *Yakrita* (liver) and *Pleeha* (spleen) are regarded as important sites associated with the formation and processing of *Rakta Dhatu*. Following the digestion of food, the nutritive portion, known as

*Ahararasa*, is separated from the waste portion, or *Kittansha*. The *Ahararasa* subsequently undergoes further transformation under the influence of *Ranjaka Pitta*, which imparts its characteristic reddish colour and contributes to the formation of *Rakta Dhatu*.

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Rasa* is derived from the nutritive portion of digested food. After reaching the *Yakrita* and *Pleeha* through the *Kostha*, it undergoes further transformation. The action of *Tejas* imparts a reddish colour and a fluid consistency to the developing *Rakta Dhatu*. When this process occurs appropriately with respect to both quality and quantity, the resultant tissue is identified as *Rakta Dhatu*. During the metabolic transformation of *Rakta Dhatu*, *Pitta* is described as its *Mala* (metabolic waste product). The *Upadhatus* associated with *Rakta Dhatu* are *Kandara* (tendons) and *Sira* (blood vessels). Although all *Dhatus* are composed of the *Panchamahabhutas*, *Rakta Dhatu* is considered to have a predominance of *Teja (Agni)* and *Jala (Apa)* *Mahabhutas*.

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**Nirukti** - "*Raj Ranjane*"<sup>4</sup>

Means to stain.

**Synonyms** = *Rudhiram*, *Asrija*, *Shonitam*, *Asram*, *Lohitam*, *Lohitam*.

### Quantity of *Rakta Dhatu*

Physiological measures of the *Raktadhatu* is 8 *Anjali*<sup>5</sup>.

### *Dhatu Poshana*

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*Rakta Dhatu* has a higher viscosity than *Rasa Dhatu*. It is liquid in nature and is heavier than *Rasa Dhatu*. Ideal *Rakta Dhatu* is described as *Asamhatam*, meaning it should neither be excessively viscous nor excessively liquid<sup>6</sup>. *Dhatu Poshana* is also known as *Sukshma Pachana*. The *Ahara Rasa*, after reaching the *Adho-Amashaya*, is transported to the *Hridaya* and, with the help of *Samana Vayu*, is further distributed to the *Dhatus* by *Vyana Vayu*. According to *Acharya Charaka*<sup>7</sup> and *Acharya Vagbhata*<sup>8</sup>, the nourishment of the *Dhatus* takes place sequentially. Various theories regarding *Dhatu Poshana* have been proposed by the commentators (*Tikakaras*).

- 1) *Kshira Dadhi Nyaya*
- 2) *Kedar Kulya Nyaya*
- 3) *Khale Kapot Nyaya*

When *Ahara Rasa* is distributed throughout the body, it first nourishes *Rasa Dhatu*, followed sequentially by *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, and finally *Shukra Dhatu*, which is considered the most refined essence of all the *Dhatus*.

*Dalhana*, the commentator on *Sushruta Samhita*, has elaborated the process of *Dhatu Poshana Karma*<sup>9</sup>. According to him, when *Ahara Rasa* undergoes digestion by *Rasagni*, it is divided into three parts which are *stula sarabhaga*, *Sukshma sarabhaga* and *mala bhaga*. The *Sthula sarabhaga* nourishes *Rasa Dhatu*, while the *Sukshma sarabhaga* nourishes *Rakta Dhatu*, and the remaining portion forms *Mala*, mainly *Kapha*. Since *Shukra Dhatu* is considered the most

refined essence of all the *Dhatus*, it does not produce any *Mala*.

### ***Rakta Dhatu Utpatti sthana***

In Ayurvedic literature, *Rasa Dhatu* is considered to originate from the nutritive portion of ingested food. During its further transformation, *Rasa* reaches the *Yakrita* (liver) and *Pleeha* (spleen), where it undergoes a change in colour and develops into *Rakta Dhatu*. The classical texts also mention *Sarakta Medas*, a particular form of *Meda Dhatu* that may be correlated with red bone marrow in contemporary anatomy. However, the Ayurvedic texts do not clearly designate *Sarakta Medas* as the definite site of *Rakta Dhatu* formation.

### **Physiological functions of *Rakta Dhatu***

#### ***Shuddha Rakta Lakshana***

- Pure blood look like a bright *Indragopa*.
- Like pure gold
- Looks like *Padma* and *Alaktaka*.
- Brightly reddish like *Gunja Phala*<sup>10</sup>

*Rakta* which is identical to the colour of *Indragopa*, not too thick and free from discolouration should be taken as normal.

#### ***Shuddha Rakta Purusha Lakshana***<sup>11</sup>

A person is considered to possess the purest quality of blood based on certain characteristics, such as an excellent complexion, properly functioning sense organs, an unimpaired digestive system, well-nourished tissues, pleasant physical features, and good stamina.

#### ***Rakta Dhatu Sara Purusha Lakshana***

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*Rakta Dhatu Sara Purusha* refers to an individual in whom *Rakta Dhatu* is present in a well-nourished, pure, and optimal state. According to Ayurvedic descriptions, such individuals exhibit a natural lustre, softness, and healthy reddish coloration in various parts of the body. The ears, face, tongue, nose, lips, palms, soles, nails, forehead, and genital region are described as smooth, unctuous, and radiant. Their overall appearance is attractive and full of vitality.

*Rakta Sara* individuals are generally described as pleasant, intelligent, calm, and gentle in temperament. They may have a comparatively lower tolerance to excessive heat and may experience greater sensitivity to stressful conditions. Characteristic features include smooth and reddish nails, oral cavity, palate, tongue, lips, palms, and soles, reflecting the excellence of *Rakta Dhatu*<sup>12</sup>.

### **Shuddha Rakta Karya**

When flowing through *siras* all over body-

- strengthens other *dhatu*s.
- Improves complexion.
- Nourishment of tissues (poshan)
- Enhances the quality of *Ojas*.
- Pranadharana<sup>13</sup>
- Blood is one of the *dasha pranayatanas*. Circulating *rakta* is medium of transport of *Ojas* (factor responsible for resistance to disease).

### **Rakta Kshaya lakshana-**

- Skin roughness.
- Sour craving.
- Desire cold environment.

- Looseness of blood vessels.
- Cracks of skin<sup>14</sup>.
- Sensation of touch, gets hampered Dullness. Difficulty in understanding new information.

### **Rakta Vridhi lakshana:-**

- An increase in *Rakta Dhatu* may lead to disorders such as *Kuṣṭha*, *Visarpa*, *Plīhā*, *vidradhi*, *Gulma*, *Upakuśa*, *Kamala*, and *Vyanga*.
- It may also cause an imbalance in *Agni* (digestive/metabolic power).
- In such individuals, the skin, eyes, nails, and urine may appear reddish in colour<sup>15</sup>.

### **According to Acharya Charaka**

While classifying the tissues of the body based on the *mahabhutas*, *Rakta* is categorised under the *Jala Mahabhuta Pradhana Dravya*<sup>16</sup>. While explaining the treatment for *Raktakshaya*, *Rakta* is considered to have *Agni* and *Soma Guna*.

### **Etiological factors of Rakta pradoshaj vyadhi**

According to acharya charaka -

– *Aharaja*, *Viharaja*, *manasika*.

- **Aharaja** - *Katu*, *Amla*, *Lavana Rasa Sevana*, *Kshara*, *Kulatha*, *Mamsa*, *Tilataila*, *Pindalu*, *Mulaka*, *Dadhi*, *Jalaj- Anupa masa*, *Virudhaahara*
- **Viharaja** - *Divasvapa*, *Atyadana*, *Atapa Sevana*, *Anila Sevana*, *Vega Avarodha (Chardi)*, *Srama*, *Abhighata*, *Adhyasana*, *Ajeernasana*.

- **Manasika** - *Krodha*

*Acharya Charaka* has described *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara* at two different places,

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namely, the *Vyadhashonitiya Adhyaya* of *Sutra Sthana* and the *Vividhashitapitiya Adhyaya*. *Acharya Sushruta* has also discussed these disorders in the *Vyadhisamuddeshiya Adhyaya*. Some manifestations that may be indirectly associated with *Rakta Dushti* include *Agnimandya*, *Angagaurava*, *Aruchi*, *Tandra*, and other similar symptoms.

In certain pathological conditions, the vitiated *Rakta* may be expelled or escape from the body, as observed in conditions such as *Raktameha*,

*Raktapitta*, and *Asrigdara*. Among the *Doshas*, *Pitta Dosha* has a particularly close association with *Rakta Dhatu* because of their *Ashraya-Ashrayee* relationship. Hence, in disorders involving *Rakta Dushti*, simultaneous vitiation of *Pitta Dosha* and *Rakta Dhatu* is considered significant<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, the *Nanatmaja Vikara* described by *Acharya Charaka* (cha. Su. 20) exhibit similarities with several manifestations of *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara*.

**Table 1** *Rakta Pradhoshaja Vikara* by different Acharya

| <b>Vyadhi</b>                  | <b>Charaka<br/>(Cha.Su. 28 )</b> | <b>Sushruta<br/>(Su.Su.24)</b> | <b>Bhela<br/>(B.S.11/5-14)</b> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Kushta</i>                  | +                                | +                              | +                              |
| <i>Visarpa</i>                 | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Pidaka</i>                  | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Raktapitta</i>              | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Asrugdara</i>               | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Guda, Medhra, Asya paka</i> | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Pleeharoga</i>              | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Gulma</i>                   | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Vidradhi</i>                | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Nilika</i>                  | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Kamla</i>                   | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Vyanga</i>                  | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Piplava</i>                 | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Tilakalaka</i>              | +                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Dadru</i>                   | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Charmadala</i>              | +                                | -                              | +                              |
| <i>Pama</i>                    | +                                | -                              | +                              |
| <i>Kotha</i>                   | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Asramandala</i>             | +                                | -                              | -                              |
| <i>Mashaka</i>                 | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Nyachha</i>                 | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Indralupta</i>              | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Vatashonita</i>             | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Arsha</i>                   | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Arbuda</i>                  | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Angamarda</i>               | -                                | +                              | -                              |
| <i>Kachhu</i>                  | -                                | -                              | +                              |
| <i>Vicharchika</i>             | -                                | -                              | +                              |

### Principle of management for *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikaras*<sup>18</sup>

“*Kuryat shonitarogashu raktapittaharikriyam I Virekam upavasam cha sravanam shonitasya cha II*”

Before applying a *Sutra* in clinical practice, a thorough literary and critical analysis of the relevant textual passage is essential. The following points should be considered:

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1. Variation in the textual reading: There is a difference in the textual reading of the verse. Commentator *Gangadhara* has accepted the reading “*Anuvasana*” instead of “*Upavasa*”, whereas the other commentators have generally accepted “*Upavasa*” as the appropriate reading.

2. Interpretation of the Sutra: The quotation can be interpreted in more than one way. One interpretation is based on the principle of *Uddesa–Nirdesa Tantrayukti*, in which the first line provides the general statement that *Raktapittahari Kriya* should be adopted, while the subsequent line specifies the therapeutic measures, namely *Virechana*, *Upavasa*, and *Raktamokshana*, as the principal approaches for managing *Rakta-Pitta*.

3. Another interpretation is that *Raktapittahari Kriya* may be considered an independent therapeutic approach in addition to *Upavasa*, *Virechana*, and *Raktamokshana*. In this context, *Raktapittahari Kriya* can be understood primarily as *Shamana* therapy aimed at alleviating *Pitta Dosha*, while *Upavasa* represents *Pachana* therapy, and *Virechana* and *Raktamokshana* represent *Shodhana* therapies.

These therapeutic measures should be selected according to the stage, severity, and clinical condition of the disease. Thus, the *Sutra* can be understood as describing a combination of *Shamana*, *Pachana*, and *Shodhana* approaches in the management of *Rakta-Pitta*. *Acharya Gangadhara* has also provided a specific sequence of these therapeutic measures in his commentary.

For treatment for *Raktapradoshaja Vikaras* is *Raktamokshana* → *Virechana* → *Anuvasana*  
Followed by *shanshamani kriya*

## DISCUSSION

*Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* are considered the fundamental components of the human body. Among the *Dhatus*, *Rasa* and *Rakta* are both fluid in nature. *Rasa Dhatu* is formed first and continuously circulates throughout the body, primarily performing the function of *Preenana* (nourishment). *Rakta Dhatu* is considered vital for life and is described as *Pranayatana*, as it plays an essential role in maintaining the vitality of the body.

*Rakta Dhatu* also contributes to the nourishment and maintenance of other *Dhatus* by supplying essential nutrients to the tissues. Therefore, the nutritional status and proper functioning of the tissues are closely associated with the condition of *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu*. Considering the vital importance of *Rakta Dhatu*, *Acharya Sushruta* has accorded it a special status and described *Rakta* as the fourth *Dosha*. Various disorders resulting from the vitiation of *Rakta Dhatu* have also been described in *Ayurvedic* texts.

• **Kushta** -

It is one of the important *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara* described in *Ayurveda*. The pathogenesis of *Kushta* involves the vitiation of all three *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—along with *Rakta*, *Lasika*, *Twak*, and *Mamsa Dhatu*, which act as the principal *Dushyas*. According to the

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*Samhitas*, the involvement of these seven factors is essential for the manifestation of *Kushta*; hence, they are collectively referred to as *Sapta Dravya*. *Kushta* is broadly classified into seven *Mahakushtas* and eleven *Kshudra Kushtas*.

### • *Visarpa*-

*Kushta* and *Visarpa* both involve the *Sapta Dravya*; however, they differ in their clinical presentation and progression. *Kushta* generally follows a chronic course, whereas *Visarpa* is characterized by an acute and rapidly progressive nature. *Paapa Karma* is mentioned as an etiological factor specifically for *Kushta* and is not described as a causative factor for *Visarpa*. The term *Visarpa* indicates a tendency to spread or propagate rapidly in a serpiginous manner, which is a characteristic feature of the condition.

### • *Raktapitta*-

*Raktapitta* is a bleeding disorder caused by the combined aggravation of *Rakta* and *Pitta*. When *Rakta* and *Pitta* become excessively vitiated and exceed a certain threshold, the affected blood may flow or ooze through various *strotasas* like *mukha*, *nasa*, *netra*, *purish*, *mutra*, *swedavaha* etc.

### • *Asrukgdara*-

It has closely resemblance with Menorrhagia. Excessive bleeding during monthly periods in women. In *Asrukdar* mainly *vata dosha* and *rakta dhatu* is vitiated.

### • *Gudapaka*-

Suppuration & inflammation of anus, rectum, lower colon. *Paka* is mainly due to *vikrutapittadosha* & *raktadhatu*.

### • *Medhrapaka* -

Suppuration of penis. It is mainly associated a vitiation of *rakta dhatu* & *pitta dosha*.

### • *Asya paka*-

Mouth ulcers, stomatitis can be mostly correlated with *Asyapaka*. *Asyapaka* is due to vitiated *rakta dhatu* and *pitta dosha*.

### • *Pleeharoga*-

It is enlargement of spleen. It is one of sign of *rakta dhatu vridhhi*.

### • *Gulma*-

*Gulma* is tumor like structure formed in abdomen. *Gulma* is result of vitiated *raktadhatu* and *Kapha dosha*.

### • *Vidradhi*-

Due to vitiation of *rakta & pitta dosha* *vidradhi* can be formed. *Vidradhi* can be correlate as Abscess.

### • *Neelika*:-

Blue coloured eruptions on skin. *Neela* colour means blue shade colour. These eruptions may be on skin of face or any other parts of body. It can be correlate with blue moles, cyanosis. eg. face cyanosis. *Rakta dhatu* & *Pitta dosha* is vitiated.

### • *Kamala* -

It can be correlate with jaundice, where yellow discoloration of eyes, mucus membrane. *Rakta dhatu* along a *pitta* and *kapha dosha* vitiation lead to *kamala vyadhi*.

### • *Yyanga* -

*Yyanga* is nothing but freckles. It is *rakta* and *piittavikruti*.

### • *Piploo* -

It is port wine marks. It is *Rakta* & *pitta vikruti*.

### • *Tilakalaka* -

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Black moles are closely resemble with *tilakalaka*. It is *raktavikruti* along with *vata*, *pitta* *dosha*.

### • **Mashaka-**

Painless, blackish eruptions on skin, mainly at arms, neck (mainly of thoracic regions) It is *Rakta* & *pitta* *vikruti*.

### • **Dadru-**

Dadru is *tinea*, worm intestations. It is result of vitiation of *raktadhatu* along & *pitta* & *Kapha* predominance.

### • **Shwitra-**

Vitiligo or Leucoderma has closely association and shows features like *Shwitra*. It is *rakta dhutu* & *kapha dosha* *vikar*.

### • **Arsha-**

*Arsha* can be correlate with *Piles*. It is mainly the result of vitiation of *raktadhatu* *vikrutia* along with *pitta* & *kapha dosha*.

### • **Vatashonita-**

As name suggest, it is *vata dosha* along with *shonita* means *raktadhatu* *vikruti*. It can be correlate with *Gout*, *Arthritis*.

### • **Asrukmandala-**

These are the red coloured patches over skin. It is mainly due to vitiation of *raktadhatu* and *pitta dosha*.

### • **Indralupta-**

It is a circular patchy balding. Also known as *Alopecia*. It is *vikruti* of *raktadhatu* and *kapha dosha*.

### • **Angamarda-**

Body pain of particular area suggest that there is vitiation of local *raktadhatu* along with *vata*

*dosha*.

### Conclusion:

Based on the concepts described in *Ayurveda*, *Raktadhatu* may be correlated with blood owing to its fluid nature and its continuous circulation through the vascular system. According to *Ayurvedic* principles, *Vyana Vayu* is responsible for the distribution of *Raktadhatu* throughout the body. It facilitates the transport of essential nutrients and *Ojas*, thereby supporting the nourishment and maintenance of various body tissues. The formation and quality of *Shuddha Raktadhatu* are influenced by several factors, including dietary habits, daily regimen, *Desha-satmya*, *Kala-satmya*, and *Oka-satmya*. Any disturbance in these factors may affect *Raktadhatu* and contribute to the development of various blood-related disorders, collectively described as *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikaras*. These descriptions indicate that *Ayurvedic* scholars provided a comprehensive understanding of the physiology and pathological aspects of *Rakta Dhatu*. Correlating these classical concepts with contemporary scientific knowledge may provide a better understanding of their physiological and clinical significance.

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