

Conceptual Insights into Langhana Upakrama in Ayurveda

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Abstract

Ayurveda, known as the ancient science of life, is derived from the term “Ayusho Vedaha,” which means the knowledge or wisdom of life. This comprehensive system of medicine has two main goals: maintaining the health of healthy individuals and treating disease in those who are ill. In addition to medicinal treatments, classical Ayurvedic scholars (Granthakaras) have highlighted the significance of Langhana as an important therapeutic modality. The word Langhana is derived from Laghu, meaning lightness, and refers to therapies that reduce bodily heaviness and promote a sense of lightness.

According to Ayurvedic principles, aggravation of Kapha Dosha results in heaviness and obstruction of bodily channels (Srotorodha). When Kapha combines with Pitta Dosha, Langhana therapy becomes particularly beneficial. The core principle of Langhana is to stimulate and enhance the digestive and metabolic fire (Agni), which, especially with reduced food intake, aids in the digestion (Pachana) of vitiated doshas and supports the restoration of health. Its application is individualized, taking into account factors such as Dosha, Agni, Vaya (age), Kala (season), and Bala (strength). Langhana exerts Amapachaka effects at both the gastrointestinal (Koshta) and systemic (Sarvadaihika) levels. This study focuses on Langhana Upakrama, including its definition, classifications, indications, contraindications, and therapeutic relevance.

KEYWORDS: Langhana, Upakrama, Apatarpana, Jatharagni, Laghu.

INTRODUCTION

Considering today’s fast-paced lifestyle and the increasing prevalence of lifestyle-related disorders, Langhana can be regarded as an effective remedial approach. Irregular daily routines-such as staying awake late at night, waking up late in the morning, excessive consumption of junk food, and high levels of stress-contribute significantly to the development of various health problems. Globalization has transformed working patterns worldwide, demanding a highly skilled and dedicated workforce willing to invest extra time and effort to meet professional goals.

As a result, many individuals adopt unhealthy shortcuts in their daily lives, particularly in their dietary

habits. Irregular eating patterns and poor food choices impair digestion, leading to the formation of Ama (metabolic toxins). According to Ayurveda, Aamadosha is considered the root cause of many diseases. The classical texts explain that Agnimandya (weakened digestive fire) occurs in the early stage of disease, resulting in Ama formation. At this stage, Langhana is recommended as a primary line of treatment. Therefore, Langhana holds significant importance in Ayurvedic principles and practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study has been compiled from various Ayurvedic Samhitas, their respective commentaries, as well as relevant research papers and scientific journals.

NIRUKTI

“laghi gatau, laghi shoshanea” (Amarakoṣa 1/1/64) “Langhana” word derived from ‘langha dhaatu’ and ‘lyuṭ pratyaya’. ‘Langha dhaatu’ indicates ‘Gati’ or ‘Shoṣhaṇa’ (to soak).

DEFINITION

“Yat kinchit laghavkaram dehe tat Langhana m smrutam”^[1]

“Langhana m laghavay tat”^[2]

In gross meaning, it indicates the whole procedure of producing lightness in the body.

SYNONYMS

Anashana, Apatarpaṇa, Laghubhojana and Upavaasa are the synonyms of Langhana . Langhana as upavasa found in samhita.[3]

TYPES OF THE LANGHANA

(A) Acharya Charaka

Apatarpaṇa (3 types) = Langhana , Langhana - pachana, Doṣavasechana.

Langhana (10 types)^[4] = Shodhana – 4 and Pipaasa, Maruta, Atapa, Pachana, Upavasa, Vyayama.

(B) Acharya Vagbhāṭa

Langhana (2 types)^[5] – Shodhana, Shamana

Langhana (12 types)^[6]

(a) Shamana = Pachana, Deepana, Kṣhuta, Tṛuṭ, Vyayama, Atapa, Maruta

(b) Shodhana = Niruha, Vamana, Kayavireka, Shirovireka, Asravistruti.

The whole Langhana karma can be implemented as Shodhanarooopi and Shamanarooopi Langhana .

Shodhanarooopi Langhana

1. Vamana

“tatra doshaharanam urdhvabhagam vamana sangyakam,”^[7]

Vamana is described as a procedure that expels vitiated doshas through the upper part (Urdhwabhaga) of the body. According to Chakrapani’s commentary, Urdhwabhaga specifically refers to the elimination of doshas through the mouth. Although Vamana is fundamentally a form of Shodhana (purificatory therapy) aimed at removing bodily waste products (Shareeramala), it has at times been broadly categorized under Virechana in the sense of cleansing. However, in conventional usage, Virechana specifically denotes purgation through the lower route.

Vamana therapy, being a Shodhana-roopi Langhana (purificatory form of lightening therapy), produces lightness in the body by effectively eliminating aggravated doshas.

2. Virechana

“adhobhagam virechan sangyakam,”^[8]

The procedure that expels vitiated doshas from the Adhobhaga (lower part) of the body is known as Virechana. According to Chakrapani, adhobhagahara refers specifically to the elimination of doshas through the guda (anal route). Since Kapha and Pitta are drava dhatus, they can tolerate Langhana therapies, as mentioned in Bhavaprakasha, particularly in the form of shodhana procedures such as Vamana and Virechana. During Virechana, Pitta, Kapha, and Vata doshas are expelled sequentially, resulting in lightness and clarity of the body

3. Basti

Administration of Aushadhi dravyas through the Guda (anal route) is known as Basti Chikitsa. In this therapy, Basti facilitates Dosha Nirharana (elimination of doshas) through the anus. The removal of doshas produces lightness in the body; therefore, Basti is considered a form of Langhana therapy.

While explaining “Chatusprakara Shodhana,” Chakrapani states that all elimination therapies are included under Shodhana, except Anuvasana Basti. This is because Anuvasana Basti does not expel doshas from the body; rather, it nourishes and supports the bodily tissues.

4. Shirovirechana

Shirovirechana is considered a synonym of Nasya. In the Sushruta Samhita, Nasya is defined as the procedure in which Aushadha or Aushadha-siddha Sneha is administered through the nasal route. It is classified into two types: Shirovirechana and Snehana.

In the Sharangadhara Samhita, Nasya is also divided into Rechana and Snehana, where Rechana Nasya performs karshanata (elimination and reduction) of vitiated doshas. Shirovirechana is mainly indicated in Kapha-pradhana Shirorogas such as Shirogourava, Shirashoola, and Peenasa.

From the explanations given by various authors, Shirovirechana can be understood as the elimination of morbid doshas through the nasal route by the administration of specific Shirovirechana drugs.

Shamanaroppi Langhana's

1. Pipasa

Pipasa refers to the controlled withholding of the urge to drink water. However, it should not be practiced excessively, as it may lead to adverse effects such as mukha shosha (dryness of mouth), kantha shosha (dryness of throat), rakta shosha, and hridaya vyatha. Proper regulation of water intake enhances Agni, reduces kleda and abhishyandi conditions in the body, and helps correct atyambupana (excessive water intake), which weakens Agni and produces Ama. Through Pipasa, doshas undergo shamana, resulting in lightness of the body.

2. Maruta

Maruta is considered a form of Shamana-roopi Langhana. Although Maruta is synonymous with Vata dosha within the body and plays an essential role in maintaining Agni and performing pachana karma physiologically, in this context it refers to external air or wind. Classical texts describe certain types of wind from specific directions as disease-causing, while fresh and pure air promotes health. Dushta Maruta is said to cause Janapadodhwamsa rogas, whereas clean air supports wellbeing by kindling Jatharagni, facilitating Amapachana, and producing lightness in the body. According to Chakrapani, exposure to wind induces lightness, though cold wind is comparatively less effective.

3. Atapa

Atapa (exposure to sunlight) is another type of Shamana-roopi Langhana and is included among the ten types of Niragni Sweda. During Sharad Ritu, sun-heated water (Suryataptajala) is described as

Hamsodaka, which is considered pure and nectar-like. Vagbhata explains that Atapa primarily alleviates Kapha dosha and promotes lightness in the body. References from the Atharvaveda also highlight the therapeutic use of sunlight in disorders such as Hridroga, Vrikkaroga, and Yakritroga. These descriptions indicate its usefulness in metabolic and digestive disorders associated with Ama.

4. Pachana

Acharya Sharangadhara was the first to clearly define and differentiate Pachana and Deepana. Pachana is described as the process that digests Ama without increasing Agni -“pachayati aamam na vahnī kuryad yat tadhvi pachanam”.^[9] The Deepika commentary explains that Amapachana involves rookshana karma in sama dosha, dhatu, and mala. Numerous Pachana drugs are mentioned in classical texts, with Chitraka considered the best among them. Proper administration of Pachana dravyas in Samadosha conditions produces lightness in the body. Pachana is indicated in Madhyabala disorders such as Hridroga, Visuchika, Alasaka, Jwara, Vibandha, Gourava, Udgara, Hrallasa, and Arochaka, mainly caused by vitiated Kapha and Pitta doshas.

5. Deepana

Deepana is defined as the therapeutic measure that stimulates Agni without directly digesting Ama -“pachet na aamam vahnīkruncha dipanam”^[10] Deepana drugs are indicated in conditions such as Jwara, Grahani, Rajayakshma, and Atisara. These medicines enhance Agni not only at the level of Jatharagni but also Bhutagni and Dhatvagni, thereby correcting impaired digestion, which is the primary factor responsible for Ama formation.

6. Upavasa

Upavasa refers to taking very little food or complete fasting even in the presence of hunger. Classical texts frequently recommend Upavasa as a form of Langhana in diseases such as Jwara, Visuchika, Alasaka, and Medoroga. It should be continued only until lightness and therapeutic benefits are achieved, while avoiding complications caused by suppression of the hunger urge (Kshudha Vega Dharana). Diseases like Chhardi, Atisara, Hridroga, Hrallasa, Visuchika, Alasaka, Jwara, Vibandha, Gourava, and Udgara, which arise from Kapha and Pitta vitiation and are of Alpabala nature, are effectively managed through proper regulation of Pipasa and Upavasa.

7. Vyayama

Acharya Charaka defines Vyayama as “Shareera cheshta sthairyath balavardhini”^[11] meaning physical activity that promotes bodily stability and enhances strength. Arunadatta describes Vyayama as “Shareerayasajanajam karma vyayam sadnitam”^[12] referring to actions that produce a sense of fatigue in the body. Vyayama should be performed only up to Ardha-shakti (half of one’s physical capacity).

Vyayama is considered a type of Niragni Sweda, as both exercise and sudation generate heat within the body, leading to Agnideepthi and Amapachana. Regular practice of Vyayama produces laghavata (lightness), medokshaya (reduction of fat), and stimulation of Agni. These effects oppose the qualities of Ama, thereby aiding its digestion and preventing its further formation. Therapeutically, practices such as Jalabhisarana Vyayama are recommended in Urustambha, while Vyayama and Vyavaya are advised in the management of Sthoulya (obesity).

Gunas of Langhana Dravyas^[13]

S.No.	Guṇa	Meaning / Description
1	Laghu	Light- easy to digest and reduces heaviness in the body

2	Uṣhṇa	Hot- enhances Agni and promotes digestion and metabolism
3	Tikshṇa	Sharp- penetrates deeply and helps in quick action on doshas
4	Vishada	Clear / non-slimy- removes stickiness and cleanses channels
5	Ruksha	Dry- absorbs excess moisture and reduces Kapha and Meda
6	Sukshma	Subtle- capable of entering minute channels (Srotas)
7	Khara	Rough / Coarse- scrapes accumulated doshas and Ama
8	Sara	Mobile / Flowing- facilitates movement and elimination of doshas
9	Kathina	Hard- provides firmness and counteracts excessive softness or unctuousness

Samyaka Yoga of Langhana (Proper Langhana)^[14]

The following signs indicate the proper and effective administration of Langhana therapy:

- Easy and unobstructed elimination of flatus, urine, and faeces
- Feeling of lightness in the body, especially in the chest region
- Clear and pleasant belching
- Cleanliness and freshness of the throat and oral cavity
- Disappearance of giddiness and fatigue
- Occurrence of mild sweating
- Development of Ruchi (desire or taste for food)
- Increase in thirst and appetite

These features collectively signify the successful and appropriate effect of Langhana therapy.

Indications for Langhana Therapy^[15]

- According to Vagbhata, Langhana is the primary line of treatment in conditions such as Mehadasha, Aamadasha, Snehadhikya, Jwara, Urustambha, Kustha, Visarpa, Vidradhi, Pleeharoga, Shiroroga, Kantharoga, and Netraroga.^[15]
- Yogaratnakara also states that disorders like Akshiroga, Kukshiroga, Pratishtyaya, Vrana, and Jwara can be effectively managed by Langhana therapy within five days.^[16]

Hence, Langhana has significant utility in day-to-day clinical practice.

Contraindications of Langhana Therapy

Vaidya Shodhala describes specific conditions where Langhana should be avoided (Avasthavisheṣha Langhana Nishiddha), including:^[17]

- Patients suffering from Vata disorders
- Individuals affected by excessive hunger or thirst
- Conditions such as Mukha Shosha (dryness of mouth) and Bhrama (giddiness)
- Children, elderly persons, pregnant women, and debilitated individuals
- Persons exhausted due to long travel (Margaparikramana)
- Individuals affected by intense emotions such as anger, grief, or excessive sexual activity
- Patients with Kshayaja Jwara

Proper adherence to indications and contraindications is essential during treatment. Since achieving dosha equilibrium is the main therapeutic objective, improper use of Langhana may aggravate rather than balance the doshas.

Clinical Applications of Langhana

- 1. Jwara (Fever):** In Jwara, Jatharagni becomes vitiated along with doshas and spreads from the stomach to other body parts through Rasa, impairing digestion. Therefore, restoration of Agni through Langhana and Pachana is essential. Upavasa (fasting) is considered the first line of treatment, especially in Taruna Jwara (early stage fever).
- 2. Raktapitta:** Due to Aamadoshā, Pitta vitiates the blood and causes bleeding through natural body openings. Initial management involves Langhana to promote Amapachana.
- 3. Amatisara (Dysentery with Ama):** Diarrhea should not be immediately suppressed; instead, Langhana is advised as the primary treatment.
- 4. Vrana (Wounds):** Among the Shashti Upakrama described by Sushruta, Apatarpana is the first therapeutic measure. This principle is applicable not only in wound management but also in certain surgical conditions such as Arbuda. Modern studies also suggest that fasting may help eliminate preneoplastic cells.
- 5. Margavarodhajanya Vatavyadhi:** Disorders caused by obstruction of Vata due to Kapha and Meda should be managed with Rukshana and Langhana therapies.
- 6. Vatarakta:** In this condition, obstruction of the blood pathways occurs mainly due to accumulation of Kapha and Meda (comparable to obstructive arterial disorders); hence Langhana is considered the treatment of choice.
- 7. Other Margavarana-janya and Santarpanottha Disorders:** Diseases arising from over-nourishment, such as Hridroga (IHD), Pliharoga (splenomegaly associated with hyperlipoproteinemia), Gulma, and Atisara (ischemic colitis), can also be effectively managed with Langhana therapy.

Discussion

Langhana, the primary line of treatment for Ama, provides adequate time for the existing Agni to complete the digestion of residual food and accumulated Ama within the body. This therapeutic approach works on the principle of reducing metabolic load by restricting the intake of new food, thereby preventing further burden on the digestive fire. As a result, Agni functions without obstruction and efficiently digests the remaining undigested material. In this way, Langhana acts as a process of metabolic rest or “load reduction,” allowing the body to restore its natural digestive capacity. Under the concept of Nidana Parivarjana, Langhana in the form of Upavasa eliminates exposure to causative factors, which is considered the first step in treatment. By avoiding etiological factors, the process of Sammurchana (interaction of vitiated doshas with Ama) is halted, leading to improvement in Agni and gradual removal of Ama. The Charaka Samhita emphasizes Langhana as the first line of management in Amashayottha Vyadhis and Rasapradoshaja Vyadhis. Classical texts also state that Samadosha cannot be eliminated effectively unless Ama undergoes proper Pakwavastha (maturation or digestion). Langhana facilitates this transformation, making doshas suitable for elimination therapies. Therefore, Langhana serves as a fundamental therapeutic measure for correcting impaired digestion, removing Ama, and restoring physiological balance in the body.

CONCLUSION

For the management of the Ama stage (Amavastha) of diseases, Langhana is considered the first line of treatment because it produces Laghu guna, which is opposite to the Guru guna of Ama. Owing to this opposing quality, Langhana is regarded as the most effective therapeutic approach for eliminating Ama. It helps in cleansing and opening the body channels (srotoshodhana), thereby restoring normal physiological functions.

In the present-day corporate lifestyle, improper diet, stress, and sedentary habits commonly lead to Amajanya Vyadhis. In such conditions, especially during the Ama stage of disease, Langhana remains an essential and often irreplaceable therapeutic measure. Attempting to expel accumulated Ama without first digesting or processing it through Langhana can be harmful and may further weaken the body. Properly administered Langhana produces Amapachana effects both at the Koshta (gastrointestinal level) and at the Sarvadaihika (systemic) level.

Interestingly, even animals instinctively follow the principles of Langhana during illness—they reduce food intake, consume grass to induce vomiting, and fast until recovery. This natural behavior highlights the fundamental importance of Langhana therapy. Therefore, as rational and evolved human beings, it is essential to recognize and apply the unavoidable therapeutic significance of Langhana in maintaining health and managing disease.

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