

COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW ON PUREESHA PAREEKSHA (AYURVEDA STOOL EXAMINATION)

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ABSTRACT

Pureesha Pareeksha, the Ayurvedic examination of stool, is an important traditional method used to understand a person's digestive health and overall internal balance. In Ayurveda, stool analysis helps assess the strength of Agni (digestive fire), the balance of the Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—and the presence of Ama (undigested toxins). As part of classical diagnostic methods such as Ashtasthana Pariksha, physicians observe different characteristics of stool, including its color, consistency, odor, quantity, and other physical features. Ancient Ayurvedic texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* describe how these features can indicate digestive disorders and various disease conditions. A unique technique called Jala Nimajjana Pariksha, in which stool is placed in water to see whether it floats or sinks, is used to understand digestive efficiency and the presence of toxins.

Traditionally, this method helped diagnose conditions such as constipation, diarrhea, parasitic infections, and Dosha imbalances. Although modern stool examinations rely on laboratory tests to detect infections, blood, or chemical changes, Pureesha Pareeksha provides a broader and more holistic understanding of digestive health. Despite some limitations like subjectivity and the need for better scientific validation, current research is exploring ways to standardize

and integrate this traditional method with modern diagnostic approaches for a more comprehensive evaluation of gastrointestinal health.

KEYWORDS: Pureesha Pareeksha, Agni, Ama, Dosha Imbalance, Digestive Health.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, health is seen as a balance between the body, mind, and spirit. Diagnosis is individualized, based on one's unique constitution (*Prakriti*) and current imbalances (*Vikriti*). A core diagnostic method is Ashtasthana Pariksha, or eight-fold examination, which includes *Nadi* (pulse), *Mootra* (urine), *Mala* (stool), *Jihva* (tongue), *Shabda* (speech), *Sparsha* (touch), *Druk* (vision), and *Aakruti* (appearance)^[1,11]

Pureesha Pareeksha, the examination of stool, is a vital part of this process. It helps assess the strength of *Agni* (digestive fire), the balance of *Doshas* (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), and the presence of *Ama* (undigested toxins).^[1] Changes in stool—such as its consistency, color, or odor—reflect digestive health and internal balance.

Stool is one of the body's key waste products (*Mala*), along with urine and sweat. Proper elimination is essential for maintaining health. Ayurveda considers digestion central to well-being, so any stool abnormality is a sign to evaluate and restore *Agni*.^[3,16]

In summary, Pureesha Pareeksha offers a simple yet powerful way to understand overall health, digestion, and metabolic function—making it a crucial tool in Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment.

In Ayurveda, *Purisha* refers to stool—the solid waste formed after digestion, where nutrients (*Sarabhaga*) are absorbed and the remaining undigested part (*Kitta Bhaga*) becomes feces. This highlights digestion as a process of separation and transformation.^[3]

Pureesha Pareeksha is the examination of stool to assess digestive health. Ancient texts guide observation of physical traits like color (*Varna*), quantity (*Matra*), odor (*Gandha*), froth (*Phenila*), and consistency (*Rupa*).^[3,6,7] These signs help identify physiological or pathological imbalances.

A special method called Jala Nimajjana Pariksha involves placing stool in water. If it floats, it may indicate the presence of *Ama* (toxins), suggesting weak digestive fire (*Agni*).^[1,6,7] This technique complements visual analysis and provides deeper insight into metabolic function.

Historical Context and Traditional Applications of Pureesha Pareeksha

Pureesha Pareeksha, or stool examination, is mentioned across classical Ayurvedic texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*.^[1] While references to stool characteristics are scattered and not detailed in one place, Charaka described normal stool quantity as *Sapta Anjali* (seven handfuls).^[3] Its inclusion in both *Ashtasthana Pariksha* and *Astavidha Pariksha* highlights its clinical significance.^[1,2] The technique *Jala Nimajjana* is widely cited for detecting *Ama* (toxins), reflecting digestive status.^[14] Over time, focus shifted more to abnormal stools in disease contexts.

Traditionally, Pureesha Pareeksha helped assess *Agni* (digestive fire), detect *Dosha* imbalances (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), diagnose conditions like *Vibandha* (constipation) and *Atisara* (diarrhea), identify *Krimi* (parasites), and even evaluate *Arista Lakshana* (signs of prognosis).^[3,9] It served as a key diagnostic tool in understanding both digestive health and disease outcomes.

1. Methodology and Different Aspects of Stool Observation and Analysis in Pureesha Pareeksha

The methodology of *Pureesha Pareeksha* in Ayurveda primarily involves two approaches: direct physical examination and the specialized *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha*. The physical examination, often referred to as *Chakshusha Pariksha* (examination by sight), entails the direct observation of the stool using the senses, with a primary emphasis on visual assessment.^[3] This visual inspection focuses on several key aspects of the stool.

Color (Varna): Observing the color of the stool is considered a crucial aspect of *Pureesha Pareeksha*, as variations in color are traditionally linked to imbalances in the *Doshas* and specific disease conditions.^[1] Ayurveda attributes the production of colors in the body to *Pitta Dosha*^[3], and vitiations in the *Doshas* can lead to characteristic color changes in the stool. For instance, black, grey, or reddish hues are often associated with imbalances in *Vata Dosha*^[8], while a white color may suggest a predominance of *Kapha Dosha*.^[8] Similarly, red, yellow, or green colors are typically linked to imbalances in *Pitta Dosha*.^[3,8,19] Table 1 summarizes some of the correlations between stool color, predominant *Doshas*, and possible associated

conditions based on the research material.

Table 1: Correlation of Stool Color with Dosha Imbalances and Diseases.^[11]

Stool Color	Predominant Dosha(s)	Possible Associated Conditions
Black	Vata	Vatika Arsha, Vatika Gulma, Kumbha Kamala, Pattika Atisara, Vata Prakopa ^[5]
Grey/Reddish	Vata	Vatika Udaroga, Vatika Arsha, Vatika Atisara, Vata Prakopa, Vata Gulma, Vata Jwara ^[5]
White	Kapha	Shleshmika Jwara, Shleshmika Udaroga, Shleshmika Arsha, Shleshmika Pandu, Shakhashrita Kamala, Shleshmika Atisara, Sahaja Arsha ^[5]
Red	Pitta	Kamala, Pittaja Atisara, Raktapitta, Sahaja Arsha, Chhidrodara ^[5]
Yellow/Green	Pitta	Pitta dominance ^[18]

Consistency (Sthanana samhanta or Rupa): The consistency of the stool is another vital aspect examined in *Pureesha Pareeksha*. Various terms are used to describe stool consistency, including *Sandra* (dense), *Baddha/Vibaddha* (solid), *Drava* (watery), *Bhinna* (loose), and *Shushka* (dry).^[1] These different consistencies are also associated with the predominance of specific *Doshas* and various diseases.^[12] For example, a *Sandra* (dense) consistency is often linked to *Kapha Dosha*, while *Baddha* (solid) or *Shushka* (dry) stool may indicate an imbalance in *Vata Dosha*. A *Drava* (watery) or *Bhinna* (loose) consistency is typically associated with the predominance of *Pitta Dosha*.^[3,19] The normal consistency of stool is often described as being well-formed, neither too hard nor too soft, similar to a ripe banana.^[1] Table 2 provides a summary of the correlation between stool consistency, predominant *Doshas*, and associated conditions.

In modern stool examination, consistency is assessed through macroscopic (gross) examination and is commonly classified using the Bristol Stool Form Scale (BSFS). Table 2.1 This scale categorizes stool into seven types based on shape and consistency, which helps in evaluating bowel habits and gastrointestinal function.

Table 2: Correlation of Stool Consistency with Dosha Imbalances and Diseases.^[11,20]

Stool Consistency	Description	Predominant Dosha(s)	Possible Associated Conditions
Sandra	Dense	Kapha	Kaphaja Atisara, Sahaja Atisara ^[3]
Baddha/Vibaddha	Solid	Vata	Asadhya Pandu, Vataja Prameha, Udararoga, Baddhodara, Purishishavrita Vata, etc. ^[3]
Drava	Watery	Pitta	Paitika Arsha, Vatika Grahani, Asadhya

			Atisara Mandagni paitika grahani ^[3]
Bhinna	Loose	Pitta	Paitika Arsha, Sleshmika Grahani, Kshayaja Kasa, etc. ^[3]
Shushka	Dry	Vata	Vataja Grahani, Sahaja Arsha ^[3]

Table 2.1: Bristol Stool Form Scale.

Type	Description of Stool	Interpretation
Type 1	Separate hard lumps, like nuts; difficult to pass	Indicates severe constipation
Type 2	Sausage-shaped but lumpy	Suggests mild constipation
Type 3	Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface	Near normal stool
Type 4	Like a smooth, soft sausage or snake	Normal and healthy stool
Type 5	Soft blobs with clear-cut edges, passed easily	Indicates lack of fiber or mild diarrhea
Type 6	Fluffy pieces with ragged edges; mushy stool	Suggests mild diarrhea
Type 7	Watery stool with no solid pieces; entirely liquid	Indicates severe diarrhea

Odor (Gandha): The odor of the stool is another important diagnostic parameter in *Pureesha Pareeksha*, and changes in odor are believed to provide insights into the state of *Agni* and the presence of certain pathological conditions.^[1] Specific odors described in Ayurvedic texts include *Amagandhi* (smell of *Ama* or undigested food), *Visragandhi* (smell of raw meat), and *Kunapagandhi* (smell of a dead body).^[3,10] A foul smell (*Durgandhita*) is also noted as potentially indicative of certain conditions.^[5] Normal stool is expected to have only a mild, non-offensive odor.^[16] Table 3 summarizes the diagnostic significance of different stool odors.

Table 3: Correlation of Stool Odor with Pathological States.^[11]

Stool Odor	Possible Interpretation	Possible Associated Conditions
Amagandhi	Presence of <i>Ama</i> (undigested food)	Amatisara ^[3]
Visragandhi	Vitiated Pitta and Kapha (smell of raw meat)	Paittika Arsha, Shleshmika Atisara ^[3]
Kunapagandhi	Vitiated Tridoshas (smell of a dead body)	Chhidrodara, Sahaja Arsha ^[3]
Durgandhita	Foul smell	Shleshmika Atisara, Paittika Pandu, Asadhya Sannipataja Chhardi, Ama Purisha, Purishavaha Srotodusti, Vid Vighata ^[5]
Mahatputigandhi	Putrefied smell	Jalodara ^[5,19]

Other Aspects: Besides these primary observations, *Pureesha Pareeksha* may also involve noting the presence of froth (*Phenila*), which is often attributed to an imbalance in *Vata Dosh*.^[3,19] The examination may also include looking for abnormal constituents such as

mucus or blood in the stool.^[5] While less common and practically challenging, some texts mention the consideration of touch (*Sparsha Pariksha*) to assess qualities like coldness, hotness, unctuousness, and roughness of the stool.^[3] Finally, obtaining information through patient interrogation (*Prashna Pariksha*) regarding the frequency and amount of stool, as well as any associated symptoms like pain during defecation, is also an integral part of the overall assessment.^[3]

The second primary method of *Pureesha Pareeksha* is the *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha*. This specialized technique involves placing a sample of the patient's stool into a container of water and observing whether it sinks or floats.^[1] According to Ayurvedic principles, if the stool sinks to the bottom of the water, it indicates the presence of *Ama* (undigested substance), which suggests impaired *Agni* (digestive fire).^[1] Conversely, if the stool floats on the surface of the water, it is interpreted as an absence of *Ama* (*Nirama*), suggesting proper digestion.^[1] Recognizing the potential for variability in this technique, efforts have been made to standardize the procedure, considering factors such as the quality and quantity of water, the type of testing container, the amount and consistency of the stool sample, and the method used to place the stool in the water.^[3] However, there are certain exceptions where the results of this test may not be reliable, such as in cases of very watery or very dry stool, or when the stool is significantly vitiated by *Kapha*.^[5] The rationale behind this test is that normally, stool with a predominance of *Agni* and *Vayu Mahabhuta* (fire and air elements) will tend to float, while the presence of *Ama* makes the stool denser and causes it to sink.^[17] The *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha* is a unique and significant method in Ayurveda for objectively assessing the presence of *Ama*, which is considered a key indicator of digestive health and a precursor to disease. The ongoing standardization efforts highlight the desire to enhance its reliability and reproducibility for contemporary application.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Despite the advancements in modern medical diagnostics, *Pureesha Pareeksha*, in its traditional forms including physical examination and *Jala Nimajjana*, continues to be practiced by many Ayurvedic practitioners today.^[13] Many studies have examined the methods and principles of *Pureesha Pareeksha*. Research on *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha* mainly looks at how it relates to Ayurvedic concepts like *Ama* and *Agni*, and how reliable the test is. Some researchers have tried to standardize the method by controlling factors such as water quality, amount of water, container type, and how the stool sample is placed in water.

These studies often show a good connection between Ayurvedic descriptions of Agni and the results of Pureesha Pareeksha.^[4] However, the technique can give variable results if these conditions are not properly controlled. Other research has tried to compare Ayurvedic stool features—like color and consistency—with modern lab findings. For example, studies may check whether an Ayurvedic stool color matches certain bile pigments or if stool consistency relates to water content or undigested food.^[15] This field is still developing, but it may help connect Ayurvedic knowledge with modern digestive science.

Pureesha Pareeksha and modern stool tests both study stool, but their approaches are very different. Pureesha Pareeksha takes a holistic view, focusing on the state of digestion, Dosha imbalance, and Agni.^[5] Modern stool tests focus on specific problems like infections, blood, inflammation, or microscopic abnormalities.^[5] Some aspects of Pureesha Pareeksha, like odor, are subjective, while modern tests are objective and laboratory-based. Pureesha Pareeksha aims to understand overall digestive strength and early imbalance. Modern tests usually aim to diagnose specific diseases or infections.^[5] Even though they differ, both methods can support each other. Ayurvedic observations like stool color and consistency offer insights into digestion that lab tests may miss. Modern tests, in turn, provide precise information on pathogens or chemical markers that Ayurveda does not measure. Using both together could give a more complete picture of digestive health. Several limitations, criticisms, and controversies surround the use and interpretation of *Pureesha Pareeksha*. One of the primary limitations is the inherent subjectivity associated with some of its aspects, particularly the assessment of stool odor, and potentially color and consistency, which can vary depending on the individual practitioner's perception and experience. Additionally, the *Jala Nimajjana* technique has been criticized for its lack of standardized procedures, which can lead to variability in results depending on the specific conditions under which the test is performed.^[3] This subjectivity and lack of standardization pose challenges for the widespread acceptance of *Pureesha Pareeksha* within a healthcare system that increasingly values objective and reproducible diagnostic methods. Another significant limitation is the limited amount of rigorous scientific research that validates the principles and diagnostic accuracy of *Pureesha Pareeksha*. While some studies have explored its correlation with modern parameters, more extensive and well-designed research is needed to establish its scientific validity according to contemporary standards. Designing studies to effectively validate traditional Ayurvedic concepts using modern scientific methods can also be challenging due to the different paradigms and frameworks of these two systems of medicine. Furthermore,

there is a potential for misinterpretation of *Pureesha Pareeksha* findings, especially if practitioners lack sufficient training and a deep understanding of Ayurvedic principles. The interpretation of stool characteristics needs to consider individual variations in diet, lifestyle, and constitution, which can significantly influence the appearance and properties of stool. Without careful consideration of these factors, there is a risk of drawing inaccurate conclusions from the examination. Finally, in many clinical situations, modern stool analysis techniques are considered the gold standard for diagnosing specific gastrointestinal conditions. These techniques often provide more detailed and specific diagnostic information, such as the identification of particular pathogens or precise of disease, which may not be attainable through traditional *Pureesha Pareeksha* alone.

CONCLUSION

Pureesha Pareeksha, the Ayurvedic method of stool examination, encompasses both direct physical observation of stool characteristics like color, consistency, odor, and form, as well as the specialized *Jala Nimajjana* technique to assess the presence of *Ama*. Historically, this method has been an integral part of Ayurvedic diagnostics, included within the *Ashtasthana Pariksha* and utilized to understand the status of *Agni*, identify *Dosha* imbalances, and even predict disease prognosis.

Despite the advancements in modern medicine, *Pureesha Pareeksha* retains its relevance in contemporary Ayurvedic practice as a tool for gaining a holistic understanding of a patient's digestive health from an Ayurvedic perspective. Ongoing research efforts are attempting to validate its principles and standardize its methodologies, particularly the *Jala Nimajjana* technique, to enhance its reliability and potential for integration with modern diagnostic approaches.

Modern stool examination is commonly used to diagnostic as well as prognostic for various gastrointestinal and parasitic diseases through microscopic and chemical analysis. In a similar way, the Ayurvedic concept of *Purisha Pariksha* may be developed as a supportive laboratory method to help assess the status of *Agni* and the presence of *Ama*.

While *Pureesha Pareeksha* offers a unique lens through which to assess digestive well-being based on traditional Ayurvedic principles, it is not without limitations. The inherent subjectivity of some aspects and the need for more robust scientific validation remain key challenges. However, the potential for *Pureesha Pareeksha* to complement modern stool

analysis techniques, providing a broader context and deeper insights into the patient's overall state, warrants further exploration. Future research should focus on rigorous scientific investigation of its diagnostic accuracy, the development of standardized protocols, and the exploration of correlations between Ayurvedic observations and modern laboratory findings. This could contribute to a more integrated and holistic approach to understanding and managing digestive health.

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