Panchakarma Perception - An Overview

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the science of life, its main objective being to relieve human suffering and to impart health and longevity. Thus Ayurveda envisages the means of preventive and treatment of various ailments and preservation of health.

The term Panchakarma consists of two words Panch and Karma. Pancha means five and Karma means method of treatment i.e. fivefold specialised techniques of therapy viz. Vamana (therapeutic emesis), Virechana (therapeutic purgation), Anuvasana and Niruha Basti (enemata) and Nasya Karma and Rakamokshana by Acharya Sushruta and Paschyt Karma like Dhumapani, Ahara Sansarjana Krama etc.

Key words: Ayurveda, Panchakarma Therapy, Samshodhana, Shodhana.

ABSTRACT

Panchakarma therapy is a potent system of medicine. These five specialised techniques, collectively termed as Panchakarma, attack the very root causes of diseases, cleanse all body microcirculatory channels, remove the vitiated Doshas from the body and produce long lasting beneficial effects. Panchakarma therapy is effective against the treatment of majority of diseases. On the other hand this therapy improves the body resistance (Immunity) and thereby checks the pathogenesis of the disease confirming its preventive effects also. It is to be noted that Panchakarma therapy is not a classification of specialised techniques but is a compressive Samshodhana regimen under which all other similar procedures may be included. The classical Panchakarma therapy consists of Purvakarma i.e. Snehana and Swedana Karma, Pradhana Karma i.e. Vamana, Virechana, Anuvasana and Niruha Basti and Nasya Karma and Rakamokshana by Acharya Sushruta and Paschyt Karma like Dhumapani, Ahara Sansarjana Krama etc.

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INTRODUCTION

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The term Panchakarma consists of two words Panch and Karma. Pancha means five and Karma means method of treatment i.e. fivefold specialised techniques of therapy viz. Vamana (therapeutic emesis), Virechana (therapeutic purgation), Anuvasana and Niruha Basti (enemata) and Nasya Karma (errhines). Rakamokshana (bloodletting).

This is achieved through systemic Samshodhana of the body. Panchakarma therapy has been conceived to be the prime pre-requisite for all kinds of preventive and curative procedures. These purificatory procedures consist of variety of physio-physiological measures. It may be pointed out that besides being of preparatory significance, Samshodhana Karmanas forms a full therapy in them for a variety of ailments. Panchakarma therapy is designed to eradicate the vitiated Doshas and to maintain a state of normalcy and equilibrium which is the fundamental basis of health.

Panchakarma therapy primarily aims at cleansing the body of its accumulated impurities, toxins or stagnant Malas and nourishing the body tissues Dhatus. Once this is achieved, it becomes very easy to rejuvenate all body Dhatus and prevent the process of the premature ageing. Thus life span of an individual is prolonged and he leads a disease free old age. Highlighting the effect of Samshodhana therapy, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that in person, who has undergone the purificatory regimen, the digestive power increases, his disorders disappear and his
health returns to normal, senses mind, understanding and complexion become clear and the individual acquires strength, vigor and virility.\textsuperscript{[2]} Shodhana therapy or Panchakarma therapy had been recognised as a therapeutic procedure of great importance in Ayurveda. The description about Panchakarma therapy described elaborately in Charaka and Sushruta Samhita. Acharya Charaka has used the term Panchakarma in his text i.e. Charaka Samhita in Sutra Sthana, Vimansthana and Chikitsasthana. Siddhisthana of Charaka Samhita has dealt in details about Panchakarma. Acharya Sushruta has described Panchakarma therapy in Chikitsasthana and also described an independent procedure termed as Raktamokshana, a special technique of blood letting in Raktagat Vyadhi. Separate chapters on Snehana and Swedana are described by Sushruta.

Panchakarma plays a vital role in Ayurvedic therapeutics. The importance of Panchakarma in Ayurveda is testified by the fact that it is essentially applicable to all cases, covering a wide range of preventive, curative and promotive condition. Shamana therapy does not work well if Shodhana Chikitsa is not done priorly and thus the ground is not prepared well. Even in Rasayana and Vajikarana evacuation of Doshas is a pre-condition for their effective application.\textsuperscript{[3]} Panchakarma carries the unique idea of total disease cure. No other Medical system has any such therapy even at hypothetical level. Charaka has discussed Panchakarma therapy in brief in Sutrasthana, Vimansthana and Chikitsasthana. The grater details of the techniques are available in Siddhisthana.

It conceived that systemic Samshodhana of the complete body is a prime pre-requisite for all kinds of preventive and curative procedures. Besides being of preparatory significant; Panchakarma therapy (Samshodhana Karma) forms a full therapy in themselves for various diseases. Panchakarma therapy is designed to eradicate the vitiated Doshas and to maintain a state of normalcy and equilibrium which is the fundamental basis of health. Panchakarma therapy has a direct relevance to both the health and ill persons. These can be categorised broadly in two groups, viz. 1) Shodhan therapy i.e. Purificatory therapy. 2) Shamana therapy i.e. Palliative therapy.

Panchakarma Sharira: (therapeutic physiology)

Sharira is the science of study of the structure and function of the body. Practically Sharira has two fold viz. 1) Kiya Sharira 2) Karma Sharira. Kiya Sharira refers to the normal physiology of the body while Karma Sharira refers to the study of the structure and function of the body as especially relevant to a particular Karma or therapy. Thus in implication Karma Sharira is the therapeutic physiology. The study of physiology is especially important in the context of Panchakarma therapy where a number of much specialised external and internal purificatory procedures are applied as a therapy such as massage, fomentation, emesis, purgation, enemata, snuffing, blood letting etc.

Shodhana is concerned with Malas. Panchakarma is meant for elimination of Malas and as such to understand the role of Panchakarma it is necessary to know the nature and functions of Malas. The body composed of three biological units Doshas, Dhatus and Malas\textsuperscript{[4]} which maintain the body, if they are in the state of equilibrium. The body is made of innumerable channels - Strotomayam hi Shariram. These channels, if blocked the flow of nutrients, energies and metabolise is obstructed and the total body physiology is distorted. Thus according to Ayurveda, Strotodusti or channels defect is the basic abnormality which is considered as the cause of all diseases and disorders. The concept of Samshodhana or bio purification through Panchakarma therapy is the essential component of the therapeutic modalities. Ayurveda believes that measures administered per oral route eliminate Amashayagata Vyadhis while those administered per rectum may influence the Pakwashayagata Rogas. Similarly the drugs induced by nasal route relieve Urdhwa Jatrugata Rogas.\textsuperscript{[5]}

Panchakarma have specific influence on different Doshas in the body and accordingly they have specific indications - Kaphas - Vamana, Pitta - Virechana, Vata - Basti. There may be variety of causative factors of a disease but the actual intrinsic factors which get vitiated and imbalanced to precipitate the disease are the three Doshas viz. Vata, Pitta, Kapha. Although these three Doshas are essential constituents of the body but these Tridoshas tend to get vitiated and
imbalanced leading to vitiation of other constituents of body resulting in the precipitation of disease. In the state of equilibrium support the body as like Dhatus. Similarly Malas also maintain and support the body.

Biopurification, Rasayana and Kayakalpa
The full Panchakarma therapy followed by appropriate Rasayana Karma undertaken for the purpose of Vaya-Sthapana or rejuvenation is called Kayakalpa.

Panchakarma therapy is preceded by Purvakarmas viz. Pachana, Deepana, Snehana, Swedana. Pachana and Deepana are advocated for improving the states of Kosthagni.\(^6\) Snehana means oleation therapy. It makes the vitiated Doshas easily extractable from the body and is indicated specially in Vata Vyadhi. Swedana Karma means induction of Sweda in the body. It consists of fomentation inducing sweating. Sweda is always performed after adequate Snehana Karma. Swedana Karmas help in melting the vitiated Doshas which in term are expelled out of the body through lubricated micro-circulatory channels. Swedana is indicated specially in Kaphaja and Vataja Vyadhi.

Panchakarma therapy is an integral part of Ayurvedic treatment and as such has its role in every therapeutic situation. In principles, Samshodhana is a prerequisite for all Shamana treatments. However the major contemporary specific areas of application of Panchakarma therapy are - 1) Promotive and Preventative health care as a component of Swasthavruta regime. 2) As an integral pre requisite of Rasayana therapy and Kayakalpa. 3) Curative treatment of chronic diseases.

With the administration of the Shodhana therapy attempts are made to purify or cleanse all the body tissues. (Stoto Shodhana) and to bring about the harmony of Tridoshas i.e. Vata, Pitta, Kapha and Manasa Doshas i.e. Satwa, Raja, Tama in such a way that vitiated Doshas are removed from the body and long lasting beneficial effects of long duration are produced in the body. Shodhana therapy is not merely a therapeutic regime but a management of the individual for a pretty long time. The Samshodhana treatment consist of a number of physic-physiological measures advocated in the treatment of a disease.

The Panchakarma therapy is a similar Samshodhana regimen.

The Panchakarma therapy is based upon the fundamental principles on which Ayurvedic system of medicine stands. Each one of these procedures constitutes the particular type of Doshik disturbances and indications and contra indications of their uses. Thus entire therapy is based on Ayurvedic theories of physiology and pathogenesis.

This therapy is usually carried out with a two fold goal i.e.

1) Samshodhana or biopurification.
2) Samshamana or rehabilitation.

The most essential physiological structure of the human body which act as a medium of the effect of different Panchakarma procedures are, the Kala i.e. the mucosa and Twak i.e. the skin, because in the application of Snehana. Abhyanga or massage and Swedana Karmas are administered through the skin and its layers. These all pervading structures of the body serve as medium of transport of excretable which are to be eliminated from the body during Samshodhana Karma i.e. bio purification. The therapies like oleation, massage and fomentation help in purifying the body through skin by way of sweating or mobilisation and permeation of the Malas from Shakhas (peripheral circulation) to Kostha (viscera and hollow organs) for subsequent expulsion.\(^7\)

Purvakarma

Panchakarma therapy is preceded by Purvakarmas viz. Pachana, Deepana, Snehana, Swedana. Pachana and Deepana are advocated for improving the states of Kosthagni.\(^7\) The preparatory part of Samshodhana consists of Snehana (oleation) followed by Swedana heat generation or heat application. Snehana means oleation therapy. Snehana is indicated specially in Vata Vyadhi. Snehana is the external or internal application of oily substance by means of massage or ingestion. Snehana is said to cause smoothening, displacement, softening and liquefaction of vitiated Doshas and so causes the elimination of vitiated Doshas. Sticky and non-separable vitiated Doshas are made non sticky and separate by Snehana.
Swedana Karma means induction of Sweda in the body. It consists of fomentation inducing Sweda or sweating. Swedana karmas help in melting the vitiated Doshas which in term are expelled out of the body through lubricated micro-circulatory channels. Swedana is indicated specially in Kaphaja and Vataja Vyadhi.

These preparatory measures are important component of the Samshodhana regimen and are essential before the commencement of the Pradhana karmas namely, Vamana (emesis), Virechana (purgation), Basti (enemata), Shirovirechana (nasal application) and Raktamokshana (blood letting).

**Samshodhana Karma:**
Any alteration in the function of these passage or obstruction will lead to the mal-transportation of metabolites to different parts when required for nutrition or excretion. This disturbance thus ultimately leads to the genesis of disease. Samshodhana therapy helps to clean the channels and to rejuvenate them for ensuring a proper transportation of the metabolites. Samshodhana aims at recouping the harmony of diseased passage and retaining the harmony in normal states instead of cleaning the body alone, as per the popular belief, Samshodhana works at maintaining the normalcy of the body and its components also. Here it is worth while to refer to the root meaning of Samshodhana. Samshodhana stands for rectification and is more vital and complicated than Shodhana (merely a physical or chemical purification) which is less complicated.

**Vamana Karma**
Vamana karma means to induce therapeutic vomiting. It is indicated for the purification of Urdhwa Bhaga (Thoracic region) of the body. In this karma vitiated Doshas are eliminated from the oral route by administration of Vamaka Dravyas. Vamana Karma is specifically indicated in Kaphaja Disorders.

**Virechana Karma**
Virechana Karma means the process by which the vitiated Doshas are removed from the Adho Bhaga (Abdominal region) of the body through anal route by administration of Virechaka Dravyas. Virechana Karma is specifically indicated in Pittaja Disorders.

**Basti Karma**
Basti Karma is another purificatory technique in which Basti Drayas are administered through various route i.e. rectum, vagina or urethra. Basti Karma is the specific therapy for Vatik disorders.

**Nasya Karma**
Nasya Karma is the term given to a specific purificatory measure when the required medication are instilled through nasal passage in liquid or powder or vapour forms. Nasya Karma is specifically indicated in Urdhwa Jatragata Rogas i.e. Shirogata Rogas or ENT disorders. 

**Raktamokshana**
Raktamokshana is the procedure of blood letting for therapeutic purpose for removing morbid Doshas present in the blood. It is specifically indicated in blood born, Pitta dominant or surgical diseases.

After administration of Pradhana Karma the individual in subjected to the Paschat Karma including Dhumapana, Kavalagraha, Gandusha and Sansarjana Krama according to needs of the individual. The process of restoration of digestive functions Agni by means of advocating specific dietetic regimen is known as Sansarjana Krama.

The Panchakarma therapy is used mainly with following objectives;

Preventive - Panchakarma is recommended in healthy individuals for preservation and maintenance of the positive health as a preventive therapy.

Rejuvenation - Panchakarma is indicated as a pre-requisite in individuals where Rasayana therapy is recommended for revival, regeneration and revitalisation of all body Dhatus.

Curative - is another very important indication of Panchakarma therapy for various diseases. It is important to remember that Panchakarmas have specific influence on different Doshas in the body. Specific karma is indicated in specific vitiated Dosh dominant diseases. Vata - Basti Karma, Pitta - Virechana Karma and Kapha - Vamana Karma.

**The Molecular Basis of Samshodhana Effect**
Ayurveda propounds a fundamental approach to therapeutics by introducing the unique concept of
Samshodhana. The body is comprised of innumerable channels both gross and subtle to facilitate the flow of nutrients and excretion of metabolites. Unless these channels i.e. Srotas are clean and dynamic, it will not be possible to maintain the normal homeostasis i.e. the Dhatu Samyata. Thus Ayurveda introduces the concept of Samshodhana which forms the foundation of Ayurvedic therapeutics. Samshodhana is claimed to be a radical therapy and supposed to eliminate the vitiated Doshas causing unrest in the body. It is also said that the diseases treated by Sanshodhana therapy never replace again. Beside its application in therapeutics Samshodhana is also essential for the induction of Rasayana therapy which is done for the rehabilitation and rejuvenation of the body. Furthermore during outbreaks of epidemics and pandemics Samshodhana of the body is done by Panchakarma both for the prevention as well as for the treatment of diseases. Panchakarma is also done in relation to the circadian and circannual variations of the Doshas.

**Beneficial effects of Panchakarma therapy:**[10]

1. The significance of Panchakarma is testified by the fact that they are essentially applicable to all cases covering a wide range of preventive, curative and promotive conditions.
2. Conservative management or Shamana Chikitsa does not work adequately if Shodhana therapy is not preceded.
3. Panchakarma if carried out which due respect to the season and body constitution renders biopurification, immune potentiation and disease prevention.
4. It renders immediate multiple therapeutic benefits such as, effect on specific disease, desired benefit, rehabilitation, physiotherapy effect.
5. Effect of general Immunity as a long term benefit.
6. Panchakarma is important preparatory procedure before Rasayana therapy (Rejuvenative procedure)
7. Biological systems of the whole body return to normalcy.

8. There are rejuvenation and revitalisation of all body tissues and Dhatus.
9. Waste products, unwanted materials, various toxins and Malas are removed from the body at various levels (cellular/tissue level) leading to cleansing effect or purification of the body i.e. Stroto Shodhana is achieved.
10. Normal physiological functions of all the body systems are potentiated eg. absorptions and metabolism is improved.
11. The prognosis of various critical diseases significantly improved after Panchakarma therapy.
12. The vitiated Doshas are eliminated from the body mainly through the elementary canal.
13. The beneficial results produced after Panchakarma therapy is of long duration and long lasting.
14. The individual will not be affected by premature ageing and lives long with a sound health.

**DISCUSSION**

To precisely delineate the role of Snehana and Swedana, it is essential to have a look at the dynamics of cells and their components. The Samshodhana effect of Panchakarma is a complex phenomenon and the present discussion processes certain hypothesis about the possible mechanisms involved. There may be many more ways and factors contributing to its complexity which are still waiting to be deciphered. Let us hope for a better understanding of Panchakarmas in the near future, so that this age old but still worthy therapeutic measure can be fully utilized for the well-being of suffering humanity. Shodhana strikes at the root of Malas and eradicates them and as such the disorder treated with Samshodhana.[11]

As stated earlier that Panchakarma presents the unique approach of Ayurvedic system of medicine. The basic contribution of Panchakarma is that it removes the vitiating Doshas from the body and provides purification of body at two levels,

1. **Gross level** - Various organs and systems of the body are thoroughly cleansed eg. Cardio vascular
system, Gastro intestinal tract, Respiratory system etc.

2. **Cellular level** - Purification/cleansing of the body is produced at the level of cells, cell membranes and molecules.

Theory of purification depicts a unique idea of permanent cure. No other medical system in the world propounds any theory or therapy similar to the *Panchakarma* therapy of *Ayurveda*. The *Panchakarma* plays a vital role in *Ayurvedic* therapeutics and has been widely recognized as a valuable means for health care and cure.

**CONCLUSION**

The *Panchakarma* therapy is entirely based upon the fundamental principal of *Ayurveda* and each of its steps, which constitute certain specific measures, are applied after due consideration to the type of *Doshas* disturbances, indications and contraindications. Therapy while considering the indications and contra indications of different therapeutic procedures special attention is paid to *Balyavastha, Jaravastha, Durbala*, and the *Garbhini*. Many major *Samshodhana Karmas* are contra indicated in children and pregnant women.

**REFERENCES**


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