A critical review on Snana: An Ayurvedic way of bathing

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Snana is a technique that emphasizes the connection between the body, mind, and spirit. It has its roots in Ayurvedic medicine. According to Ayurveda, the choice of water, temperature, and the manner in which one bathes can have profound effects on the Doshas that direct an individual's composition. Aim: This study aims to present a comprehensive and critical review of "Snana," the Ayurvedic practice of bathing, along with its therapeutic, ritualistic, and holistic aspects. Methodology: A comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of Snana (bathing) was done in major Ayurvedic textbooks and their available commentaries. Conclusion: Snana is important for preserving health and preventing lifestyle diseases. Therefore, to take full advantage of its benefits and preserve health, it needs to be performed as a daily regimen following its proper rules as mentioned in Ayurvedic textbooks.

Key words: Ayurveda, Bath, Dinacharya, Snana.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Snana" in Ayurveda refers to bathing, a ritualistic and therapeutic practice that is essential to preserving one's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Ayurveda sees Snana as a holistic practice that goes beyond simple body cleansing. It includes several ideas that are consistent with harmony and balance. Snana is a technique that emphasizes the connection between the body, mind, and spirit. It has its roots in Ayurvedic medicine. According to Ayurveda, the choice of water, temperature, and the manner in which one bathes can have profound effects on the Doshas that direct an individual's composition. In addition to physical cleansing, the traditional practice of Snana includes the application of therapeutic ingredients such as oils, powder scrubs, and herbal infusions that are designed to balance Doshas and improve general well-being.

In Ayurveda, Dinacharya (daily routine) is the ideal sequence of steps to follow daily in order to lead a long and healthy life. Preservation of the health of the healthy individual is the first aim of Ayurveda. Dinacharya is one such practice to maintain the health of individuals. Snana is described as a part of Dinacharya by various authors in Ayurveda. A normal equilibrium of three Doshas is maintained by these daily regimens, which have a positive physiological effect on the proper functioning of the body system. Snana plays a major role in maintaining health, but its significance and usefulness are still largely ignored. Thus, an attempt is made to provide a detailed explanation of Snana.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: This study aims to present a comprehensive and critical review of "Snana," the Ayurvedic practice of
bathing, along with its therapeutic, ritualistic, and holistic aspects.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To collect and review all the references related to Snana from Ayurvedic texts and contemporary literature.
2. To explore the underlying idea and method of Snana as per Ayurveda.

**METHODOLOGY**

A comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of Snana (bathing) was done. Major Ayurvedic textbooks like Charaka Samhita, Sushrutha Samhita, Ashtanga Hridayam, Ashtanga Sangraha, Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, Sharangdhar Samhita, and Yogaratnakara and their available commentaries were searched. In addition, online research databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were searched for the relevant published materials.

**DISCUSSION**

Snana or bathing involves more than just washing your body with soap and buckets of water. It has a proper method. This method is described briefly as a part of Dinacharya in various Ayurvedic textbooks. Usually, people take a bath to maintain personal hygiene. Some take baths in holy rivers to pacify their Papa Karma (bad deeds). Some take a bath to relax. In essence, it purifies our body, mind, and soul.

In Ayurvedic textbooks, the types, methods, quantity, timing, frequency, benefits, indications, and contraindications of Snana have all been thoroughly explained.

**Classification of Snana**

There are different types of Snana described in the Vedic literature and Hindu scriptures like Bramha Snana, Muni Snana, Deva Snana, Manava Snana, Rakhsasa Snana, Varuna Snana, Mantra Snana, Divya Snana, Kriya Snana, Agneya Snanam, Vayaveya Snana, Prokshana Snana, Gowna Snana, Kapila Snana, Nitya Snana, Naimitta Snana, Malaharsha Snana, Kriyaanga Snana, Kamya Snana, and Mahendra Snana, etc.

There are three types of Snana according to Daksha Smriti.[1]

1. **Nitya Snana**: That which is performed daily. Nitya Snana is further classified into three types. The first one is the bath which dissolves the dirt of the entire body, it is named Malapaharan Snana. Second is the bath which is taken in water with a resolution and chanting Mantras. And bathing in the evening in both ways is the third type of bathing.

2. **Naimittika Snana**: This is performed during solar eclipse or lunar eclipse etc.

3. **Kamya Snana**: That which is done with the desire of heaven.

There are five types of Snana according to Parashara Smriti.[2]

1. Agneya Snana
2. Varuna Snana
3. Bramha Snana
4. Vayavya Snana
5. Divya Snana

There are six types of Snana according to Bhagavan Srikantha Deva (Dakshinamurty) as described in the Kamika Agama - Purvapada.[3]

1. Varuna Snana
2. Agneya Snana
3. Mantra Snana
4. Manasa Snana
5. Vayavya Snana
6. Mahendra Snana

There are six types of Snana according to Shankha Smriti.[4]

1. Nitya Snana
2. Naimittika Snana
3. **Kaamya Snana**
4. **Kriyaanga Snana**
5. **Malakarshana Snana**
6. **Kriya Snana**

There are seven different kinds ofSnana, according to Yagnavalkya Smrti.[5]

1. **Mantra Snana**: Snana performed by chanting the mantras of Vedas and Upanishads is denoted as Mantra Snana.
2. **Bhouma Snana**: The method of Snana performed by applying and massaging mud all over the body is known as Bhouma Snana.
3. **Agneya Snana**: This Snana is performed by applying Bhasma (ash from the burnt cow dung powder) is called Agneya Snana.
4. **Vayavya Snana**: Vayavya Snana is the name given to the Snana with dust that shows up when the cow walks.
5. **Divya Snana**: The type of Snana performed in the sun's rays or the sun's glare when it's raining is called Divya Snana.
6. **Varuna Snana**: Snana done in river water is termed as Varuna Snana.
7. **Manasa Snana**: To simply think about the divine soul is referred to as Manasa Snana.

**Materials to be used for Snana**

Water is, in fact, very important in many ancient Indian traditions, including Vedic literature, Ayurveda, and Yoga. The importance of water is deeply rooted in cultural, spiritual, and practical aspects.

**Vedic Literature**: In the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, hymns dedicated to water are prevalent. Water is often personified and regarded with reverence as a purifying element. The sacred rivers, such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, and others, are considered divine and are associated with spiritual purification. The Satapathabrahmana, an ancient Indian text associated with the Yajurveda, emphasizes the role of water as a purifying agent. Rituals and ceremonies often involve the use of water for purification purposes.

**Ayurveda**: Ayurveda nowhere mentions using soap. It recommends using cleansing powder referred to as "Snana Choorna". They recommend using the following items for Snana, for example, Rakta Chandana, Manjishtha, Yashtimadhu, Haridra, Panchvalkala kvatha choorna, etc. The only reason behind using these Choorna is that they are in coarse powdery form which helps to clean the dirt, remove the dead skin, and also open the skin pores to create a healthy environment in that area.

**Yoga**: In yogic practices, the concept of internal purification, known as Shuddhi or Shatkarma, involves the use of water for practices like Neti (nasal cleansing), Dhauti (internal cleansing), and Kunjal (stomach wash). The purification of the body and mind is often symbolized by the cleansing properties of water in yogic philosophy.

**Quantity of Water for Snana**[6]

The exact amount of water for Snana is not stated anywhere, but according to a classical source, it should be performed like Gajavat Snana, or "bath like an elephant," which implies that the bath should contain enough water to thoroughly clean the entire body. According to contemporary science’s parameters, it can be estimated that an individual needs approximately 150 liters of water per day for bathing.

**Number of Snana per day**

Everyday bathing is traditionally advised, which has been standard practice for centuries. According to Vedic literature, a Brahmacharini (female householder) is supposed to take a bath once, while a Brahmana (male householder) is expected to bath twice, the first one before sunrise and the second at noon. Sanyasis (hermits/monks) should take three baths, one before sunrise, the second at noon, and the third one right before dusk. Vedic Mantras of Rigveda, Taittiriyam Samhita, etc. should always be chanted while taking a bath.

While describing Sadvritta, Acharya Charaka mentions the frequency of baths as ‘dvau kalavupasprishet’ for the maintenance of positive health and control over sense organs.[7]
Ideal time for Snana

The exact time for taking a bath is not mentioned in Ayurveda directly as such. However, it advises one to get up from bed early in the morning at Brahmamuhurta (48 minutes before sunrise, between 4:30 am to 6:00 am) and attend to certain acts called as Dinacharya. When the time required for all the regimens mentioned in Dinacharya is taken into account, and then the time for taking a bath comes to not less than around two hours after sunrise.

Ancient Idea of Snana Area[8]

According to the instructions in the Manu Smriti, one should perform Snana every day in Nadi (rivers), Devakhaata Tadaaga (natural pond or reservoirs at the premises of temples), Sara (lakes), and Garta (waterholes), and Prasravana (well or spring).

Sequence of Act of Snana in Dinacharya

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anjana Dantadhawan</td>
<td>Waking up at Brahmamuhurta</td>
<td>Waking up at Brahmamuhurta</td>
<td>Waking up at Brahmamuhurta</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dhoomapana Jivha Nirlekhana Shaucha Vidhi Shaucha Karma</td>
<td>Mala Darshana-Sparshana</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Nasya Mukha Prakshalana Dantadhawana Achamana</td>
<td>Mala Tyaga</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Dantadhawan Anjana Anjana Dantadhawana Dantadhawana</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Jivha Nirlekhana Tambula Sevana Nasya Jivha Nirlekhana Jivha Nirlekhana</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Tambula Sevana Sirodbhyanaga Tambula Sevana Anjana Gandusha</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Kavala Abhyanga Abhyanga Nasya Mukha Prakshalana</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Shirodbhyanaga Pariseka Vyayama Gandusa Nasya</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Padabhyanaga Vyayama Mardana Dhumapan a Anjana</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Sharira Parimarjan a Udvartha Udvartha Prasadana Nakha-Kesha Kartana</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Snana Udgharsana Snana Tambula Kesha Prasadana</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Utsadana Abhyanga Adarsha Lokana</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Snana Vyayama Vyayama</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Udvartha Abhyanga</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Snana Shirodbhyanaga Karnapuran a</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Padabhyanaga</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Udvartha</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Mukhodwaram</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Snana</td>
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Order of pouring water during Snana – Head to Feet Or Feet to Head

There is slight confusion among people and two-way thoughts regarding the sequence of bathing. The guidelines provided here are general recommendations based on commonly accepted principles in various traditional textbooks and Vedic literature. However, specific references to these exact steps are not found in classical Ayurvedic texts. We all agree with the fact that cold temperature causes constriction and hot temperature causes dilatation of blood vessels. According to the principles of Ayurveda, it says to apply cold water to the head and hot water to the part below the neck. Here we need to understand the reason why Acharyas have mentioned this way. It is because applying hot water to the head will damage the sense organs, especially the eyes. Hot water and fluid inside the eyes are both great enemies. Due to the heat, Kledata (moisture) in the eyes melts and causes several eye diseases. And if cold water is applied to the part below the neck, due to the action of...
Sheeta Guna it tightens the muscles, constricts the blood vessels, and produces stiffness in the whole body. While in the case of a diseased person, the sequence does vary according to the condition. In Sushrutha Samhita it is mentioned that if a person is suffering from Vata and Kapha Dosha Prakopa then he should take a bath with Ushna Jala (warm water) to his head. However, in the case of a healthy individual it doesn't matter much if he takes a bath first from head or feet, it is just that one should follow the proper rules of bathing.

Specific temperature of water used for Snana

It is always advised to take a cold-water bath for the head and a hot water bath for the body part below the neck to protect and maintain the health of our sense organs. However, it differs based on the individual's body type known as Prakriti. It can be summarized as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prakriti</th>
<th>Temperature of Water</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kapha</td>
<td>Low Temperature or Warm Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitta</td>
<td>Medium Temperature or Lukewarm water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vata</td>
<td>High Temperature or Hot Water</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The human body is divided into three parts in Ayurveda as per the Dosha predominance; hence one should use water with different temperatures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portion of the Body</th>
<th>Predominant Dosha</th>
<th>Temperature of Water</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head to Chest</td>
<td>Kapha Dosha</td>
<td>Low Temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest to Naval</td>
<td>Pitta Dosha</td>
<td>Medium Temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval to Feet</td>
<td>Vata Dosha</td>
<td>High Temperature</td>
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Benefits of Snana

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Removes Dauragandhya (Foul smell), Gaurava</td>
<td>Removes Nidra (sleep), Daha</td>
<td>Agni Deepana (Enhances Digestive Power)</td>
<td>Agni Deepana (Enhances Digestive Power)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pratih Snana (early morning bath) removes Mala (diet), Papa (sins), Duhswapna (bad dreams), Shrama (fatigue)

Tejo Vardhana (increases vital power), Roopa Dyotakara (enhances beauty), Sharira Sukhada (pleasure to the body), Kama Deepana (stimulates sexual urges), Agni Deepana (enhances digestive power), Streemam Manmathagahana

[14] Charaka Samhita
[13] Sushrutha Samhita
[14] Ashtanga Hridaya
[23] Yogaratnakara
Bathing in Sheeta Jala (cold water) enhances vision and, when taken at the right time, stimulates Jatharagni which promotes digestion. Raktapitta (bleeding disorders) are cured by taking a cold water bath. Taking a cold water bath, especially in winter, aggravates Vata and Kapha Doshas. Applying cold water to the head while bathing revitalizes the sight of the person.

Benefit of using hot water for Snana\(^{[18-20]}\)

An individual’s strength increases and their increased Vata and Kapha Doshas decreases when they take a bath in Ushna Jala (warm water). The body gains strength from Ushna Jala Snana, except for the head. It suggests that taking a head bath in hot water is not a good idea. If it is done, it weakens the body and has negative effects on the heart, eyes, and hair. The only part of the body that should be bathed in Ushna Jala is below the neck or clavicle level. Acharya Sushruta recommends a warm water bath for the head as a remedy for Kapha and Vata Dosha aggravation. Baths in warm water should be avoided in the summer as they aggravate Pitta Dosha.

Contraindications of Snana

Probable mode of action of Snana\(^{[27]}\)

Snana helps to remove impurities, sweat, and accumulated toxins from the skin, thus it is responsible for physical cleanliness. The body experiences a hyperthermic response when exposed to Snana, raising body temperature. In the hypothalamus, a rise in temperature excites heat-sensitive neurons and inhibits cold-sensitive neurons. This results in sweating, which lowers body temperature, and stimulates parasympathetic nerves. The peripheral partial pressure of oxygen will naturally rise, which will boost metabolism, induce the elimination of toxins and waste material, and refresh the body. These actions and characteristics of the human body’s nervous system resemble the actions of Vata Dosha. Warm water baths relax the muscles and the nervous system, and due to its Ushna Guna, it checks the proper functioning of Vata Dosha, thus bringing a sense of calm and stress-free feeling. This is the reason why Ayurveda suggests taking baths with warm water. If cold water is applied first to the head, there will be vasoconstriction of superficial veins which in turn increases blood pressure in those veins. As a result, there is a risk of cardiovascular disorders, stroke, etc. That’s why a person with cardiac disease should be careful and may be advised to take a bath first from the feet, while a normal person can start from head to feet direction.

The action of bathing stimulates the skin, which is considered the largest organ in the human body. In Ayurveda Tvak (skin) is the seat of Vata Dosha. Skin is the only part that comes in physical contact with the water while bathing. Different types of Doshas residing on the skin areVyana Vata, Bhrajaka Pitta, and Shleshaka Kapha. It is believed that stimulation enhances blood circulation and supports the elimination of toxins through the skin which promotes the Prabha (luster) of the skin. When it is discussed at the subtle level of Panchamahabhoota, Vayu (air),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ashtanga Hridaya (^{[14]})</th>
<th>Sushruta Samhita (^{[15]})</th>
<th>Yogaratnakara (^{[26]})</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The person who is suffering from</strong> Ardita (facial paralysis), Netra (Eye Diseases), Karna (Ear diseases), Atisara (diarrhoea), Adhmana (distension of the abdomen), Pinasa (rhinitis), Ajirna (indigestion), and Bhuktavat (immediately after)</td>
<td><strong>A person suffering from</strong> Atisara (diarrhoea), Jvare (fever), Karnashoola (otalgia), Anila (Vataja diseases), Adhmana (distension of the abdomen), Arochaka (loss of taste), Ajirna (indigestion), and Bhuktavat (immediately after)</td>
<td><strong>The person who is suffering from</strong> Jvare (fever), Atisara (diarrhoea), Netra Raga (Eye Diseases), Karna Raga (Ear diseases), Anila Arta (Vataja diseases), Adhmana (distension of the abdomen), Pinasa (rhinitis), Ajirna (indigestion), and Bhuktavat (immediately after)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Akasha (space), Teja (fire), and Ap (water) Mahabhootas are responsible for the luster and glow of the skin as they act according to their respective qualities.

CONCLUSION

All the regimens described in Dinacharya are equally significant in maintaining the health of an individual. Snana is important for preserving health and preventing lifestyle diseases. Therefore, to take full advantage of its benefits and preserve health, it needs to be performed as a daily regimen following its proper rules as mentioned in Ayurvedic textbooks.

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