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Panchakarma Perception - An Overview

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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 *Samshodana* 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 *Raktamokshana* by *Acharya* Sushruta and *Paschyat Karma* like *Dhumapana*, *Ahara Sansarjana Krama* etc.

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

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* (errhines).^[1] *Raktamokshana* (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 physico-physiological measures. It may be pointed out that besides being of preparatory significance, *Samshodhana Karmas* 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

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health returns to normal, senses mind, understanding and complexion become clear and the individual acquires strength, vigor and virility.^[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.^[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) *Kriya Sharira* 2) *Karma Sharira*. *Kriya 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*, *Dhatu* and *Malas*^[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*.^[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 *Swasthavrutta* 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 physico-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 constitutions 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 *Urdhwabhaga* (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 Jatrugata Rogas* i.e. *Shirogata Rogas* or ENT disorders.^[9]

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 *Dosha* 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 *Samshodhana* 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 *Dhatu*s.
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 vitiated *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.

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