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SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON SHIRODHARA AND THE MODE OF ACTION OF *TAKRADHARA*

KEY WORDS: Takradhara, Shirodhara, Buttermilk, Amalaki kwatha

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ABSTRACT

Takradhara is a classical Ayurvedic therapeutic procedure in which medicated buttermilk is poured continuously over the forehead and scalp. It is considered a specialised form of Shirodhara used in Panchakarma therapy for the management of various psychosomatic and neurological disorders. The term "Takra" refers to buttermilk, while "Dhara" means a continuous stream. In this procedure, medicated Takra prepared with herbal drugs such as Amalaki and Musta is poured rhythmically from a specific height over the forehead for a fixed duration. Takra possesses Pancharasa, except Lavana Rasa, and is characterised by Amla Vipaka and Ushna Virya, with Vata-Kapha shamaka properties. The therapy is particularly beneficial in conditions associated with Kapha and Pitta predominance, such as insomnia (Anidra), headache, stress, premature greying of hair, hypertension, and certain skin disorders. From a physiological perspective, Takradhara may enhance cerebral circulation, reduce stress hormones, and induce a calming effect on the nervous system. Due to its soothing and therapeutic actions, Takradhara serves as an effective and safe Ayurvedic treatment modality for improving mental health and overall well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In Takradhara procedure, " Medicated Takra" is continuously poured over the forehead and scalp. Takra possesses Pancha-Rasa with the exception of Lavana Rasa. Takra has the Amla Vipaka, Ushna Virya, and Vata Kaphaghna properties. [1] Takradhara is effective in treating illnesses like Klama, Apachi, Sirodaha, Siroruk, Unmada, Prameha and those predominance of Kapha and Pitta.[2] In Takradhara, buttermilk processed with medicated herbs is used as an external procedure. The medicated Takra is poured in a continuous stream over the forehead from a height of 4 angulas.

Takradhara can be practised in different ways, like Ekanga Takradhara where Dhara is done over a part of body e.g.in the case of psoriasis of limbs.

Sarvanga Takradhara where Dhara is done on the whole body which is useful in stress and fatigue. I has been found useful in Pakshaghat (hemiplegia)[3]

Third type is shirodhara where dhara is done over the forehead and scalp which is beneficial in hypertension, headache and migraine. Contents of Takradhara- Amalaki Churna-200gms, Milk- 1.5 ltr , Musta Churna-100gms, Oil(for Talam) -10 ml

Purva Karma

To prepare Takra, take 1.5 litres of milk, dilute it 4 times with water, add 100 g of crushed Mustha, and boil until it is reduced to 1/4 of its original volume. Once it has cooled, Mustha is next sieved out; the ready milk needs to soured for the night. The following morning, the curd is churned with Amalaki kwatha to make the takra for Dhara.

To prepare Amalaki kwatha the dried Amalaki fruit should be boiled with 16 times water and then reduced to 1/8th of its original volume. After the procedure some of that is used to wash the head. Amalaki, is a fruit that has been dried for atleast an year in sunlight and air. Amalaki should be taken in the form of a coarse powder, and quality fruits that are free of contamination should be chosen with care.[4] In advance, seeds ought to be thrown away. Depending on the condition, milk used to make Takra can be medicated with Argwadhadi Churna, Useera, Hreebera, Chandana, Yashti, or Panchagandha Churna

Pradhana Karma

Balathaila, Khseer Balathaila, or any other specialised oil according to disease state may be applied over the head as a practice. Abhyanga over the body was recommended by some practitioners. The patient's ear should be filled with cotton, and the eyes should be covered with cotton gauze. Every aspect of the operation, as well as the benefits and restrictions of the therapy, should be explained to the patient and their family members. The tip of the dharavarti should be 6-7 cms (four angula) above the patient's forehead. The overall length of the varti should be three times 18–21 cm.[5] The takra needs to be collected and poured back into the container. The attendant keeps swinging the vessel across the patient's head to ensure that the entire forehead will receive the takra. For better results, the head and body are gently rubbed simultaneously. Dhara should never be poured from a lower height or higher height than recommended since this could make the condition worse.[6] In short, all the steps are the same as for Shirodhara, however the Takra should not be heated or used more than once.

Buttermilk used in Dhara should be freshly prepared daily. Takradhara is prescribed for seven to fourteen days, and the recommended duration for the procedure is 60 to 120 minutes.[7]

Paschat Karma

It is recommended for the patient to rest for the same amount of time after the treatment, then take a bath. After Dhara, the head is cleansed with Amalaki kwath. Following towel drying of the wet head, Tala Dharana may be performed. Rasnadi Choorna is very common in practice for tala dharana. It is to be rubbed on the scalp's crown for a few seconds. By doing so, it will combat the cold induced by the treatment. The patient should consume Pathya aahara and should not directly exposed to wind, dust, sunlight and rain. Hot and Fresh food should be taken. Hot water should be used for drinking and bathing purposes.[8] A proper diet plan and lifestyle should be prescribed to the patient and patient should adhere to this strictly during and after treatment.

Complications and management -

If the dhara is poured from a height greater than the prescribed height, it may cause shivering in some patients due to excessive cold. Here, the procedure is stopped immediately, and the patient is managed with a hot water bath i.e. ushnopachara, hot liquid for internal use or the patient should be kept in a warm room for a few hours.[9]

MODE OF ACTION –

In Psychosomatic disorders, Takradhara is the unique procedure for all types of Manasa doshas. When Takra is poured in a continuous stream over the forehead, it might stimulate the Marmas; Marmas are the Pranas, and it may be correlated with the vital energy of the body. Marmas located in the head are the Apanga, Avarta, Shanka, Utkshepa, Seemanta and Sthapani.[10] Takradhara improves circulation, which in turn improves the blood circulation to the brain. This improves the intellectual function also. So improvement in the psychic symptoms is achieved.

It induces relaxation and natural sleep by increasing the intensity of alpha brain waves and decreasing the brain's cortisol and adrenaline levels.

It also causes a significant decrease in heart rate, which is useful for stress management. [11] During the procedure, prolonged Dhara of the drugs mixed with Takra over the forehead generates a conduction that not only acts as a tranquillizer but also induces sleep. This procedure not only normalises serotonin and noradrenaline but also maintains normal hypothalamic function. On Emotional and Behavioural Patterns - Chittanasha (psychological abnormality) and Bhaya is said to cause due to injury of seemantamarma. Thus, dhara can heal the marma and it may reverse the chittanasha and bhaya also. The therapy also influences the body's energy centers (Chakras), particularly those governing mental equilibrium and emotional stability. By modulating these areas, Takradhara helps restore mental balance and mitigates stress-induced hypertension.[12]

The combination of Amalaki, Musta, and Takra has a cooling impact on the brain and the entire nervous system, thereby releasing stress and anxiety that have built up in the main control centre of our bodies. Drugs called Sitha Virya may stimulate the hypothalamus. Cold nature had a calming impact on the hypothalamus, which controls numerous bodily and mental processes, and the pituitary gland. The body functions including the heart functions take place in a relaxed manner. Blood and nutrients are properly circulated throughout the body. Reduced are the peripheral resistance The body's passageways open. As the cells begin to eliminate the toxins, the body's metabolism as a whole improves. Buttermilk contains large amount of lactic acid. It is scientifically proved that lactic acid is used to moisten & lessen the appearance of thickened Psoriatic scales.[13]

DISCUSSION

Takradhara may be able to interact with the deepest recesses of the brain by soothing the Marmas. Takradhara is highly effective in reducing stress. It induces a state of physical and mental calmness. It is a unique procedure for all types of Manasdoshas Takradhara is a Shaman karma, in which Dosha kopa and Dhatu shaithilya is pacified. Sharir shodhana should be done before the procedure of takradhara. At least Mridu shodhana is given for the patients who is planning to undergo Takradhara. Generally, Takradhara is considered under Shirodhara, which is one of the Murdhni tailas.[14] The term Murdhnitaila means procedures used for Murdha or Shiras. Thus, Takaradhara is for Shiras. But it is also done as Ekangadhara or Sarvangadhara. Indications for Shirodhara are Daha, Paka, and Vrana of the Kapala. But practically it is also used in psychological problems like Strain, Psychosomatic Disorders, Anxiety Neurosis and Tension Headache.

While assessing the Dosha-wise classification of Rogas, it is seen that Takradhara is administered in Kapha Pittaja dosha rogas, whereas in Vatajaroga, it is contraindicated. It might be because of SheetaRukshaguna of medicated Takra. Still based on Dosha kopa of rogas, particular Dosha shamana drugs can be added while preparing Takra. For example, in the Vataprakopa condition, Varanadigana drugs can be adopted. In Pitta prakopa conditions, Yashtimadhu, Chandana, Padmaka, etc. can be used. Similarly, involvement of Vata dosha is less, and the other remaining doshas are more. Bilwa moola, Satavari, etc., are used. Sourness is also taken into account. In Sahasra yoga, we can find that Amla Rahita Takra has to be taken. But in conditions like Apachi or Kaphaja rogas, Amla Takra is advised.

The procedure is done at a height of four Angulas above the forehead.[15] Duration of Takradhara is one and a half hours. But it is always better to start with a minimum time for the first sitting and slowly increase on a daily basis. While doing Takradhara Pathya Apathya should be followed, like keep the mind in a happy state, abstaining from all actions that give pain and distress to the body, and limiting speech.

In practical experience, the patient feels calm, stress-free, and improves the quality of sleep, increases concentration power of patient, lightness of body and mind, Agni vridhi, thus Takradhara helps to attain a healthy peaceful life.

CONCLUSION

Takradhara is an important therapeutic procedure in Ayurvedic Panchakarma that provides significant benefits in the management of various psychosomatic and neurological disorders. As a specialised form of Shirodhara, it utilises medicated buttermilk poured in a continuous stream over the forehead to produce calming and therapeutic effects on both the body and mind. The therapy works primarily through the pacification of aggravated Doshas, particularly Kapha and Pitta, while promoting mental relaxation and physiological balance.

The ingredients commonly used in Takradhara, such as Amalaki, Musta, and medicated Takra, possess cooling and soothing properties that help reduce stress, improve sleep quality, and enhance mental clarity. The continuous rhythmic flow of Takra over the forehead is believed to stimulate vital Marma points in the head region, which are closely associated with neurological and psychological functions. This stimulation may help regulate the nervous system and promote mental stability.

From a modern perspective, Takradhara may influence neurophysiological mechanisms by enhancing cerebral circulation, modulating neuroendocrine functions, and reducing stress-related hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. The procedure also induces a state of deep relaxation, increases alpha brain wave activity, and helps in the regulation of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and norepinephrine. These physiological effects may explain its usefulness in conditions like insomnia, anxiety, hypertension, migraine, and other stress-related disorders.

Clinical experience suggests that patients undergoing Takradhara often report improved sleep, reduced mental stress, better concentration, and an overall sense of well-being. However, proper patient selection, adherence to classical procedural guidelines, and appropriate dietary and lifestyle modifications are essential to achieve optimal results.

In conclusion, Takradhara is a safe, effective, and holistic therapeutic modality that addresses both physical and psychological aspects of health. Its integration into clinical practice can contribute significantly to the management of stress-related conditions and the promotion of overall health and well-being.

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