



SHIRODHARA IN THE MANAGEMENT OF VATIKA SHIRASHOOLA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHRONIC DAILY HEADACHE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT :

In Uttartantra, Acharya Sushruta has devoted separate chapters to *Shiroroga* and their management. This fact itself shows that *Shirashoola* has been a major problem to the physicians since long back. In modern medical science the drugs used in alleviating headache have been found to give temporary relief only and that too with some serious side effects like gastrointestinal problems, dementia, weight gain, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting etc. Also some drugs are found to be addictive to patients. Therefore there arises a need to discover a non pharmacological therapy to alleviate *shirashoola*. *Shirodhara* is one such therapy in which medicated decoction or oil etc is poured onto forehead from a specific height for a stipulated duration of time. Present review paper highlights the importance and mode of action of *shirodhara* in the management of *shirashoola*.

Keywords : uttartantra, *shirodhara*, *shirashoola*, decoction

INTRODUCTION: The great economist Adam Smith has told that the needs of human being are infinite but the availability is less to fulfill. Our life style has become drastically changed and our growing needs have no end. Speed and accuracy are the prime demands of modern era. To cope with this situation everybody has to face hectic, competitive and stressful life. Irregular food habits, suppression of natural urges, lack of proper sleep and less time for relaxation being part of our life, enhances incidences of many diseases. Diseases mainly having psychosomatic origin are increasing due to urbanization, high industrial growth and deforestation at a drastic speed. Chronic daily headache (CDH) is one amongst such disorders which can be compared with *Vatika Shirashula* described in *Ayurvedic* texts.

CDH is a recently emerged clinical entity. It is a primary headache recurring daily or al-

most daily for at least fifteen days a month (4 days/week). Majority of the patients present mixed features of tension type and migraine type headache which are almost non-separable. Though patho-physiology of CDH is currently unknown but researchers have hypothesized that the chronic intake of analgesics may transform the intermittent headache into CDH due to impairment or suppression of pain inhibitory system of the body. Thus one of the important features of CDH is analgesic overuse¹.

Its increasing global incidence is a cause of concern for all which has forced to initiate the research work to discover an effective medicine for the better management of this challenging ailment. Majority of the drugs employed in modern medicine for this disease are almost limited to suppress the symptoms and also found addictive. All the experiences in the past in headache man-

agement have gradually revealed that the drug approach of management probably is not the right approach. Therefore there is a wide scope of research to find out the safest remedy or non-pharmacological approach from *Ayurveda* for the management of this disease. *Shirodhara* is an amazing effective allied *Panchakarma* procedure for balancing the *Vata dosha* and improves the function of the brain.

Acharya Vagbhatta has described the *Gandusha*, *Mukhalepa* and *Murdha Tailam*. The four types of *Murdha Tailam*² described there include *Abhyanga*, *Seka*, *Pichhu* and *Basti*. *Seka* here means *Shiro-Parisheka*, which is also known as *shirodhara*. *Shirodhara* is a procedure in which a liquid (oil, milk, butter milk, water, and decoctions) is poured in a continuous stretch on the forehead. It is mentioned under *Keraliya Panchakarma*, which is a simplified form of classical *Ayurvedic Panchakarma* therapy.

In this procedure medicated liquids are allowed to trickle slowly on the forehead through a fine stream from an appropriate height. The vessel used is known as *Dharapatra* made up of clay or metal with probable capacity of 64 ounce (approx. 1.81 litre). In the basement of *Dharapatra* there should be a tiny hole for the passing of a wick (length = 6 *Angul*) which should hang 4 fingers (*Angul*) above the forehead of the patient. The special table on which patient lies is called *Droni* having suitable drainage system for the poured liquid³.

Indications: *Shirashoola*⁴, *Shankhaka*⁵, *Suryavarta*⁶, *Ardhavabhedaka*, *Suryavarta*, *Ardita*, *Pakshaghata*, *Hanugraha*, *Akshishula*, *Nidranasha*, *Shirogata Vata*, *Shirah Kampa*

Nowadays main indications^{7,8} of *Shirodhara* are-

- Headaches (chronic in nature).
- Neurological disorders (associated headaches, facial palsy, memory loss etc.)
- Psychiatric disorders (psychosis, neurosis, insomnia).
- Skin conditions (psoriasis, eczema).
- For management of pain and stress associated with disorders of eyes, ears, nose, throat and head
- Psychosomatic disorders (Irritable bowel syndrome).
- Lowering of excessive body temperature (high grade fevers, hyperthermia)
- Hypertension

Procedure of *Shirodhara*⁹: The procedure of *Dhara* is carried out in three stages-

1. *Purva karma* (Pre operative Procedure)
2. *Pradhana karma* (Main Procedure)
3. *Pashchat karma* (Post operative Procedure)

***Purva karma*:** In *Purvakarma* preparation of the patient and equipment (*droni*, *dhara patra*, other equipments like cloth piece, cotton etc.) along with *sanskara* of *taila* is done (i.e. heating of *taila* just above the room temp.)

***Pradhana karma*:** The patient is asked to become free from his natural calls before lying on *Dhara* table. The patients are allowed only to take tea, if they are addicted to it. The patient is asked to lie down on *Dhara* table on his back with his head resting on slightly elevated wooden platform made in the table. Then both the eyes are covered with cotton piece so that the *taila* may not enter in eyes.

Then lukewarm *taila* is poured in *Dharapatra* and is allowed to trickle contin-

uously in a fine-stream with neither very fast nor very slow rate on the forehead of the patient. The entire forehead is covered with the flow by maneuvering the *Dharapatra* in the pendulum manner. The *taila* is collected in another vessel and is used to refill the *Dharapatra* before it is empty.

Dharakala¹⁰: Dhara process is done for at least half an hour in the morning upto 21 days. It is believed that through this irrigation method of head the effect of medications can be achieved upto the limbs and entire body by 21 days. In the patients having dryness and *Pittayukta Vata*, the period of *Shirodhara* should be 2½ *prahara* or 2 *prahara* and in *Snigdha Kaphayukta Vata* it is one *prahara* or it should be upto perspiration initiation.

Changing the Liquid: When milk is used for *shirodhara*, it should be changed daily. *Dhanyamla* can be used upto 3 days. Oil also should be changed at 3 days interval. In the first 3 days, half of the oil is used, for next 3 days later half of it is used and on the 7th day all the first and second half both are mixed together, after that it should be discarded.

Temperature of the Liquid: It should be *Sukhoshana* near about to body temperature.

Pashchat Karma: After completing *Shirodhara*, head and hairs of the patient are wiped with a cloth piece. Eyes may be washed with lukewarm water if needed. This is followed by a short duration of rest and massage of the body including head with oil and then a lukewarm bath. The patients are advised to have a light diet and as per indications they can continue their daily routine.

Pariharaniya: The patient should avoid physical exertions, mental excitement such

as anger, grief etc., sexual desire and exposure to cold, sun, dew, wind, smoke or dust. Riding on elephant or horses, walking, speaking too long or too loud and such other actions that may give any strain to the system must be avoided. Sleeping during daytime and standing continuously for long period must also be avoided. It is also advisable to use a pillow which is neither very high nor very low, during sleep at night.

Pariharakala: The patient should take *pathya* and remain as *jitendriya* up to the period which is taken for the completion of *Dharakarma*.

Contra-indications¹¹

- Space occupying lesion in the brain
- Glaucoma
- Fever
- Conjunctivitis
- Inflammatory conditions of head
- *Kaphaj Vikaras- Shirodhara* further increases *kapha*, which makes the diseases difficult to cure.

DISCUSSION:

Probable Mode of Action of Shirodhara Percutaneous absorption of the drug – Dhara acts by percutaneous absorption¹² of the medicine through the skin into the microcirculation. The therapeutic effect may be due to diffusion of the drug *dravyas* through the fine pores present over forehead in similar way as seen by the procedure like *Abhyanga, Snana, Udvartana, Parisheka* etc.

Application of heat to the forehead skin- Luke warm oil and water act as a vehicle to transfer heat to the skin. This local application of heat causes vasodilatation of arterioles¹³ and the increased circulation to the

concerned part further facilitates more nutrients and oxygen to the part.

Acupressure (Reflexology)– When a receptor is continuously stimulated with the same strength of stimulus after sometime the receptor stops sending impulses through the afferent nerve. This principle¹⁴ can be used to block the afferent impulses of pain. In *Dhara* the duration of the therapy is thirty minutes, hence there is prolonged and continuous pressure on the forehead due to trickling of *dhara drava*. This continuous pressure coupled with heat of oil is thought to release body's natural pain killers; the Endorphins. The endorphins produce analgesia by action on the brain stem.

Vibration (Psychological Effect)- The continuous trickling of *drava* on the forehead sets in vibration in the cranial vault same as is done by pronunciation of the word "Om" in *Hindu mythology*. These vibrations have a positive stimulating effect on the CNS and create a state of relaxation¹⁵. This induces changes in the emotional states of the patients and hence normalizing the neurotransmitters serotonin, adrenaline and nor-adrenaline.

Effect on Marma- *Sushruta* has mentioned 'Sthapani Marma' between the two eyebrows. It is *Vishlyaghana* type of the *sira marma*. Its *pramana*¹⁶ has been mentioned half finger. *Amarakosha* has named it as *Kurcha Marma*. The *shirashulshamak* effect of *shirodhara* proved by this study seems to be mediated through this *sthapani* or *kurcha marma*. Taila poured on this *marma* affects vasodilatation of arterioles leading to relief in pain.

The posture in the procedure of Shirodhara- Posture while doing the thera-

py also adds on to the benefits of *shirodhara*. While doing *shirodhara* patient is kept lied on *shirodhara* table in supine position which itself is a relaxing posture as seen in *shavasana*¹⁷.

Somatoautonomic Reflex set up by pouring of drug on forehead- The physiologic effect of sesame oil dripped on the forehead induced by somatoautonomic reflex through pressure sensors in the skin or hair follicles via the trigeminal cranial nerve¹⁸.

Drug effect- The *vatashamka* drugs used in the procedure, by virtue of its *rasa, guna, veerya, vipaka* and *prabhav* act in alleviating *shirashoola* by cutaneous absorption.

CONCLUSION: On the basis of the discussion done in the present study it can be safely predicted that there is a substantial scope of using this *Ayurvedic* treatment modality as a safe and effective remedy for the management of *vatika shirashoola*.

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