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Prophylactic Approach of *Abhyanga* in *Akalaja Jara* – Literary Documentations from Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *Jara* is generally venerable to all of us. In today's era most of the people are suffering from premature aging because of changing life style, unbalanced diet, physical and mental stress etc. *Rasa Vagbhata* has also mentioned *Pantha* (excessive walking) and *Manas Pratikulata* (unfavorable condition to mind) as specific causes of *Akalaja Jara* in each decade of life. Old age is a stage of *Dhatu Kshaya* (due to *Kala Prabhava*) where the destructive (*Hrasa*) phenomenon occurs due to *Rukshadi Gunas* of *Vata Dosha*. The factors mentioned in *Svastha Chatuska* of *Charakasamhita* helps to achieve and maintain *Arogya* and *Tarunya*, ruling out the principle of '*Shiryate Iti Shariram*'. Ayurveda advocates an excellent approach *Abhyanga*, which is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay *Akalaja Jara* and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. **Results & Conclusion:** Ayurveda reckons *Abhyanga* as a daily regimen owing to its univocal properties like *Jaraapaha*, *Pushtirit* (nourishing), *Shramahara*, *Drishtrikara*, *Prasadkara*, *Ayupushtikara* (prolonging age), *Swapnakara*, *Vata shamaka*. It is mentioned that *Abhyanga* should at least be done to the head, ears and feet regularly. Old age people experiencing physical, mental and emotional stress that can contribute to feeling of emotionally disconnected with each other, and from the world. *Abhyanga* encompasses basic relaxation, stress relief and is also a beneficial tool in fighting many of the symptoms of aging. The chief aim of *Jara* is to "Add life to years" rather than "years to life."

KEYWORDS

Abhyanga, Ayurveda, Akalaja Jara



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INTRODUCTION

As the incidence of premature aging is increasing globally, it has become a burning issue to take major steps for its prevention. The elderly population of India is increasing and by the year 2050 population will cross 340 million¹. The government recently stated in Parliament that India will have 34 crore people above 60 years of age by 2050 that would be more than the total population of the US². Ayurveda, has explained many potential to slower down the aging process as well as to lead a comfortable life in the old age. *Abhyanga* is one among the *Dinacharya* and it is a kind of *Bahyasneha*. It gives strength to the body, nourishes the sense organs, increases longevity etc. It is the most natural and powerful method of relaxing and at the same time rejuvenating the body. *Abhyanga* preserves the body energy and saves the individual from degeneration. It also works as a cleanser and helps the individual in expelling the toxins out of the body through sweat, urine and mucus, thus rejuvenating the body. It is done to whole body or to a particular part of the body (*Shira, Karna, Pada* etc). *Abhyanga* has been highlighted with its wide spectrum of usage both for preventive and curative purpose.

AIM

To review the literature regarding prophylactic

-tic effect of *Abhyanga* in *Akalaja Jara*.

MATERIALS & METHODS:

Information was extracted and documented from relevant Ayurvedic literatures & online published research articles.

LITERARY REVIEW

Jara

Jara is a term which indicates the declining phase, especially old age or aging process³. In other words, it is a catabolic procedure. Old age is generally venerable to all of us. But, it has more than its due share of undesirable aspects. It is also considered to be a stage of mental and physical degeneration. In old age there is progressive diminution of *Dhatu*, strength of sense organs, vigor, masculinity, and bravery, power of understanding, retaining and memorizing, speech and analyzing facts. There is gradual diminution in the qualities of *Dhatu* also⁴.

Hence it would be a great boon to humanity at large, if there was a device for the prevention of degeneration,

Type of *Jara*⁵

Sushrut has described that *Jara* is natural phenomenon of human body. It is divided in two types i.e. *Kalaja Jara* and *Akalaja Jara*.



1. Kalaja Jara - The manifestations of age related symptoms are reflected after certain age. The *Kalaja Jara* is *Pari-Rakshana – Krita*, which means that it occurs at the proper age even after following the daily and seasonal routine described in *Swasthavritta* and use of *Sodhana* at the proper time. However, this type of ageing may be of less intensity and slow progressing and thus may not be very troublesome.

2. Akalaja Jara - The symptoms which manifests before certain age due to various etiological factors, the ageing process is rapid. This type of *Jara* is said to be due to *Apari-Rakshana-Krita*, which means that it occurs before the mentioned age due to not taking the proper care of personal hygiene (*Swasthavritta*) and not undergoing *Sodhana* at proper time. This type of *Jara* may be of greater intensity and rapidly progressing, if no care is taken to check it through proper treatment.

Causes of Akalaja Jara⁶

- ❖ *Pantha*
- ❖ *Shitam*
- ❖ *Kadannam*
- ❖ *Vayovridha Yoshitah*
- ❖ *Manasah Pratikulta*

Table 1^{7,8}

Pathology of Jara

The three basic constituents of human body,

Vata, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, in a balanced state structurally and functionally, maintain the health and in an imbalanced state produce disease⁹.

Table 1 Effects of aging

| Decade | Vagbhatta ⁷ | Sharangadhara ⁸ |
|------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 st | <i>Balyavastha</i> | <i>Balyavastha</i> |
| 2 nd | <i>Vridhhi</i> | <i>Vridhhi</i> |
| 3 rd | <i>Chhavi</i> | <i>Chhavi</i> |
| 4 th | <i>Medha</i> | <i>Medha</i> |
| 5 th | <i>Twak</i> | <i>Twak</i> |
| 6 th | <i>Shukra</i> | <i>Drishhti</i> |
| 7 th | <i>Drishhti</i> | <i>Shukra</i> |
| 8 th | <i>Vikrama</i> | <i>Vikrama</i> |
| 9 th | <i>Buddhi</i> | <i>Buddhi</i> |
| 10 th | <i>Karmendriya</i> | <i>Karmendriya</i> |
| 11 th | - | <i>Chetasa</i> |
| 12 th | - | <i>Jivitam</i> |

Aging and Dosha

Amongst, these *Dosha*, *Vata* is predominant in *Vriddhavastha*. In the old age, many syndromes are observed which are the result of imbalance in the body constituents i.e., *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* to a lesser or greater extent. This imbalance varies in velocity and intensity depending upon many factors such as life style, habits, age etc. Thus, these variations are observed in the psychosomatic constitution of a person.

The various functions of *Vikrita Vayu* mentioned in *Caraka Cikitsasthana* such as *Shramsa*, *Bhramsa*, *Sanga*, *Bheda*, *Sada*, *Toda*, *Vyatha*, *Parusya*, *Shosha*, *Supti*, *Vishlesha*, *Samkocha* etc are observed in old age¹⁰.

Aging and Dhatu



The next component of *Sharira* is *Dhatu*s, which are responsible to maintain a state of equilibrium with the help of *Dosha* and *Mala*. "*Heyamana Dhatu*" is a feature of old age. They basically perform two functions:

- a) *Dharana*¹¹
- b) *Poshana*¹²

In old age due to *Vikrita Vata*, *Vishamagni*, *Ksheena Kapha*, the first *Dhatu Rasa* is not formed properly and its function of *Preenana* to the rest of the *Dhatu* is not performed, resulting in sequential weakening of all the *Dhatu* i.e., *Dhatukshaya*. Hence, due to this malformed *Rasa*, it sets off a chain of malformed *Upadhatu* and *Dhatumala*. The *Kshaya* of *Saptadhatu* naturally leads to *Ojokshaya* also.

Aging and Agni

Charaka in *Chikitsasthana* states that *Agni* is responsible for *Ayu*, *Varna*, *Bala*, *Svasthya*, *Utsaha*, *Upachaya*, *Prabha*, *Ojas*, *Prana* etc¹³. In old age, due to the predominance of *Vata Dosha*, *Vishamagni* prevails leading to *Visamagnijanya Rogas*. Due to *Vishamagni*, defective metabolism occurs within the body leading to involuntary changes such as *Kshaya* and '*Shosha*'.

Aging and Mala

Malas are equally important as that of *Dosha* and *Dhatu*s. They arise out of

*Kittapaka*¹⁴ at the *Pachakagni* and *Dhatwagni* levels. These play a vital role in the body dynamics, as elimination of *Mala* is an index of life activities. Hampered *Agni* in old age leads to *Malakshaya*.

So the concept of *Jara* has been dealt with, keeping in view of the *Tridosha*, *Saptadhatu*, *Mala*, *Agni* and *Oja*. When all of these are in homeostasis the body functions well. But due to old age, increase of *Vata*, vitiation of *Pitta* and decrease in *Kapha* causes an impact on the various other components of body, thus allowing the aging to take over.

Preventive aspects of Jara

- It means programming of lifestyle in such a way that *Akalaj Jara* can be avoided and *Kalaj Jara* can be delayed.
- The factors mentioned in *Svastha Catuska* Of *Charakasamhita* helps to achieve and maintain *Arogya* and *Tarunya*, ruling out the principle of '*Shiryate Iti Shariram*'¹⁵.

These includes

- *Ritucharya*
- *Dinacharya*
- *Abhyanga* is one of the important aspect of *Dinacharya* and it is a kind of *Bahyasneha*.

Abhyanga

Abhyanga is derived from "*Abhi+Anja Ghanj Krutvam*"¹⁶ which means-



Movements which perform by hands on bodily part to absorb the *Snehadrayva*.

Needs of *Abhyanga* in graceful aging

- For health & protection
- For emotional well being
- For beauty purposes

Types of *Abhyanga*

According to *Vatsayana Kamasutra*¹⁷

- *Samvahana*- whole body massage
- *Keshamardana*- head massage
- *Utsadana*- massage with *Kalka* /*Sneha*

According to *Tiruka* (author of *Angamardana*)¹⁷

- *Shushkangamardana*
- *Tailangamardana*
- *Ksheerangamardana*
- *Swayam Angamardana*
- *Yamalangamardana*

According to *Charaka Samhita*¹⁸

- *Shiroabhyanga*
- *padabhyanga*

➤ *karnapoorana*

According to *Ashtanga Hrudaya*¹⁹

- *Shiroabhyanga*
- *padabhyanga*
- *karnapoorana*

Table 2²⁰, **Table 3**²⁰ and **Table 4**²¹

Characters of Oil²²

Luke warm Sesame oil is the best of oils for strength and unction according to *Charaka*.

Abhyanga Technique²³

The technique of *Abhyanga* is not elaborated in the major classics of *Ayurveda*. First indication about the technique of *Abhyanga* is found in *Rigveda* in which *Abhyanga* is told to be done by hands and digits and the stroke or touch should be gentle. Here, gentle touch should not be taken as the non-application of pressure and rubbing but it implies that these processes should be limited to a point that is easily tolerated by the individual.

Table 2 Types of oil according to *Prakriti*²⁰

| Si.No | <i>Prakriti</i> | <i>Taila</i> |
|-------|--------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Vatapittaj</i> | <i>Himasagara Taila,</i> |
| 2 | <i>Pittakaphaj</i> | <i>Chandanaadi Taila, Ksheerabala Taila</i> |
| 3 | <i>Kaphavataj</i> | <i>Tila Taila, Bruhatsaindhavadi Taila</i> |

Table 3 Oil according to *Ritu*²⁰

| SI.No | <i>Ritu</i> | <i>Taila</i> |
|-------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>Shishira & Hemantha</i> | <i>Laksjhaadi Taila, Karpooraadi Taila, Tila Taila</i> |
| 2 | <i>Vasanta</i> | <i>Triphala Taila, Bruhat Saindahvadi Taila</i> |
| 3 | <i>Greeshma & Varsha</i> | <i>Ashvagandha Bala Lakshadi Taila</i> |
| 4 | <i>Sharat ritu</i> | <i>Chandanadi Taila</i> |

Table 4 Oil according to *Dosha Shamaka* properties²¹

| Si.No | <i>Dosha</i> | <i>Taila</i> |
|-------|--------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Vata</i> | <i>Tila Taila, Mahanarayan Taila</i> |
| 2 | <i>Pitta</i> | <i>Bhringraj Taila, Brahmi Taila, Narikela Taila, Nimba Taila</i> |
| 3 | <i>Kapha</i> | <i>Sarshapa Taila</i> |



Direction of *Abhyanga* ²³

Abhyanga should be performed in *Anulomagati* for the proper absorption of the oil by follicles. *Tiruk* has also talked about the direction of *Abhyanga* according to the *Dosha*.

Penetration of *Sneha* to different *Dhatu*

²⁴

➤ It is mentioned that it takes 300 *Matrakala* (approximately 1.5 mts) for *Sneha* to penetrate *Romakupa*, 400 *Matrakala* (2.1 mts) to penetrate *Twak*, 500 *Matrakala* (2.6 mts) to penetrate *Rakta*, 600 *Matrakala* (3.1 mts) for *Mamsa*, 700 *Matrkala* (3.6 mts) for *Meda*, 800 *Matrakala* (4.2 mts) for *Asthi* and 900 *Matrakala* (4.7 mts) for *Majja*. So for the complete benefits of *Abhyanga* one should perform it at least for 5 mts.

➤ **Mode of action of *Abhyanga***

During *Abhyanga*, *Romakupa* opens up due to the heat produce by the procedure and warm *Sneha*. Then *Sneha* penetrates through *Romakupa*. Arunadutta the Commentator of Ashtanga Hridaya has described the *Bhrajaka Pitta* and its functions like *Deepana* and *Pachana*²⁵. The substances applied on the skin by *Abhyanga* are being digested by the *Bhrajaka Pitta*. After that the digested *Sneha* reaches to each *Dhatu* with the help of *Vayu*. *Dashadhamani* which starts from *Hrudaya* makes many networks and finally opens

into *Romakoopa*. So oil is absorbed in skin and circulates through *Dhamani*. The *Taila* used for *Abhyanga* nourishes the tissues, gives strength and increases the *Agni*.

Charaka explained that, *Vayu* is predominant in *Sparshanendriya* which resided in *Twacha*²⁶. He also described the important link between *Mana*, *Sparsha* touch, and all the *Indriya*. The *Sparshanendriya* alone pervades all the *Indriya* and is also associated inherently with *Mana*²⁷. Therefore, *Abhyanga* is the most beneficial therapy for skin and balancing mind.

Benefits of *Abhyanga*

Shirobhyanga ^{28,29}

- *Kapala* and *Indriya Tarpana*
- prevents *Shirashoolahara*, *Khalitya*, *Palithya*, *Keshapatana*
- Increases the *Bala* of *Shira* and *Kapalaa*
- Hairs will be strong black and long
- *Indriyaprasada*
- Good for skin and renders sound sleep.

Karna Abhyanga / Poorana ^{30, 31}

- *Hanu*, *Manya*, *Shira*, and *Karna Shoolaghna*
- The person will not suffer from *Vataja Karnaroga*
- Person will not suffers from *Uchashruti* or *Badhirya*

Padabhyanga ^{32, 33}

- *Kharatwa*, *Rooksata*, *Shrama* and *Suptata* of *Pada* will be relived.



➤ Increases the *Sukumarata*, *Bala* and *Sthairya* of *Pada*.

➤ Improves the vision, mitigates *Vata*.

➤ Person will not suffer from *Gridhrasi*, *Padasputana*, *Sira* and *Snayu Sankocha*

When not to do an *Abhyanga*?³⁴

➤ *Abhyanga* should not be done in the following conditions -

➤ Fever

➤ Indigestion

➤ *Kapha* aggravation

➤ In '*Ama*' conditions

➤ In any acute illness

➤ In extreme emotional states

➤ Dehydration

DISCUSSION

The concept of *Abhyanga* is very much antiquated. It is one of the earliest forms of healing developed over years of constant observations and experiences. In modern era, the word *Abhyanga* is taken for massage but massage is a broad term. The idea of massage is concentrated on techniques of proper way of rubbing and manipulation of body while *Abhyanga* precisely stands for massage with oil or some unctuous substance.

The basis of *Abhyanga* is the touch and there are increasing medical evidences showing the great value of touch. Prime evidence of healing through *Abhyanga* is

found in *Veda* which has been shown to have effect through touch therapy.

In old age the status of *Agni* is *Vishmagni* which mainly causes -

1. Deterioration of *Bhootagni* and *Dhatwagni*.

2. Qualitative impairment of the *Adya Dhatu* "*Rasa*" which lost its function of *Preenana* leads to *Dhatukshaya*.

Dhatukshyaya is a feature of old age.

Dosha, *Dhatu*, *Malakshaya* entities leads to *Balakshyaya*. Due to *Vikruta Vata* and

depletion of *Kapha* the *Satwa* declines with age leading to decrease in its normal power of *Grahana*, *Dharana*, *Vachana*, *Smarana*.

Abhyanga, very delicate and sophisticated protocol for *Vruddhavastha*.

Astangsamgraha has been quoted "*Abhyangamacharetnityam*"³⁵ as daily

practice of the therapy evident to delay ageing, cures tiredness and *Vata* disorders, improves vision, complexion, nourishes,

lead to healthy life, sound sleep, lustrous skin etc. All these benefits can be achieved due to the proper *Dhatu Poshana* by

Abhyanga.

CONCLUSION

Once signs of *Akalaja Jara* creeps into the body, it is difficult to reverse the aging process, because it takes a lot of time to restore the human body back to its top shape



even with the general treatment. Therefore, best way to stay healthy to prevent the signs of premature aging is following the proper daily regimens. So an ideal preventive health package should include *Abhyanga* as a daily regimen owing to its properties like *Jaraapaha*, *Prasadkara*, *Ayu-Pushtikara* (prolonging age), *Vata Shamaka*. This ancient regimen include the “Art of Self Love” that can heal and manage human physiological disconnections.



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