



Review Article

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A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON VARIATION OF DHARA WITH RELEVANCE TO SHIR SEKA

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Abstract

Dhara is an important external therapeutic procedure described in *Ayurveda*, where a continuous stream of medicated liquid is poured over a specific body part for a definite period. Among its different forms, *Shir Seka* holds special importance in disorders related to the head, sense organs, nervous system and psychological disturbances. The present conceptual study aims to understand the variation of *Dhara* with special reference to *Shir Seka* and its clinical relevance. In classical texts, different liquids such as *Taila*, *Takra*, *Kwatha*, *Ksheera*, *Jala* and other medicated preparations are used according to the condition of *Dosha*, *Roga*, *Rogi Bala*, season and therapeutic need. The temperature, duration, height of pouring, flow rate and selection of drug also play an important role in deciding the final therapeutic effect of *Dhara*. In *Shir Seka*, the continuous mild stream over the head may help in calming aggravated *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, improving local circulation, reducing stress, promoting relaxation and supporting normal function of *Indriya* and *Manas*. Variation in *Dhara Dravya* provides different actions such as *Snigdha*, *Sheeta*, *Ushna*, *Ruksha*, *Srotoshodhana*, *Vedanasthapana* and *Manas Prasadana*. This study highlights that proper selection and variation of *Dhara* in relation to *Shir Seka* is essential for obtaining desired therapeutic outcomes. Therefore, *Shir Seka* may be considered a valuable procedure in the management of conditions like headache, insomnia, stress, burning sensation of head, hair and scalp disorders and psychosomatic complaints when applied according to classical principles.

Keywords: *Dhara, Shir Seka, Shirodhara, Dosha, Taila Dhara, Takra Dhara, Ayurveda*

Introduction

Ayurveda has mentioned many external treatments in the form of Panchakarma and Bahirparimarjna Chikitsa, which are helpful in regaining the balance of *Doshas*, pacifying the mind, increasing blood circulation, and relieving pain.¹ among these, *Dhara* is a special treatment in which a constant flow of medicated fluid is poured over a particular body part for a fixed period of time. When Dhara is done on the head area, it is known as Shiroseka / Shir Sek / Shirodhara.²

Shiroseka is a very important procedure that is commonly used in the treatment of neurological, psychological, and psychosomatic disorders.³ It has a soothing effect on the central nervous system and is also helpful in treating disorders that occur due to the aggravation of Vata, Pitta, and Raja-Tama doshas. It is also a special form of Murdhni Taila and hence holds a very prominent place in the treatment of disorders related to the head, brain, sense organs, and mind.⁴

Dhara is not restricted to the use of oil alone, and many other fluids can be used depending on the disease condition, predominance of the dosha, and the strength of the patient. Hence, the variations of Dhara, with a special emphasis to Shiroseka becomes essential for Ayurvedic practice.⁵

Conceptual Study

Dhara

The word Dhara describes the continuous flow (dhara pravaha) of a liquid poured constantly over a part of the body.

Shiroseka / Shir Sek

- When this continuous flow is poured over the head (Shiras), it is known as Shiroseka.
- It is also known as: Shirodhara
- Shir Sek
- Mastaka Dhara
- Importance of Shiroseka
- The head is the seat of: Indriyas (sense organs), Prana Vayu, Majja Dhatu, Mana (mind)
- Therefore, the treatments carried out on the head region have direct effects on mental processes, sleep patterns, hormonal balance, nervous system, and sensory processes.

- Shiroseka offers: Snehana + Swedana effect, Relaxation of mind, Pacification of Vata, Improvement of sleep, Relief in stress, anxiety, headache, General Principle Behind Variations,
- Various liquids are chosen according to: Dosha predominance, Roga (disease condition), Rogibala (patient strength), Ritu (season), Agni & Koshta

For example:

- Vata disorders → Taila Dhara
- Pitta disorders → Ksheera / Takra Dhara
- Kapha disorders → Takra / Kwatha Dhara
- Psychological disorders → Taila + Medhya dravyas

VARIATIONS OF DHARA RELEVANT TO SHIROSEKA

1) Taila Dhara (Sneha Dhara / Shirotaila Dhara)

Definition

When medicated oil is used for Dhara over head, it is called Taila Dhara.

Indications

- Best for Vata dominant conditions:
- Insomnia (Anidra)
- Anxiety (Chittodvega)
- Depression
- Migraine / headache
- Facial palsy (Ardita)
- Cervical spondylosis
- Parkinsonism / tremors
- Stress related disorders

Common Oils Used

- Brahmi Taila
- Ksheerabala Taila
- Dhanwantaram Taila
- Mahanarayana Taila
- Jatamansi Taila

- Bala Ashwagandha Taila

Action / Mode of Effect

- Pacifies Vata
- Nourishes Majja dhatu
- Improves sleep and mental stability
- Acts as Snehana + Brimhana
- Reduces dryness, tremors, irritability
- Special Point
- Taila Dhara is the most classical and most commonly practiced Shiroseka variation.

2) Ksheera Dhara (Milk Dhara / Shiroksheera Dhara)

- Definition
- When medicated milk (Ksheer) is poured continuously over head, it is called Ksheera Dhara.
- Indications
- Best for Pitta predominant disorders:
- Burning sensation in head
- Irritability, anger
- Stress with heat symptoms
- Hypertension due to stress
- Hair fall due to pitta
- Early greying
- Migraine with burning
- Pitta prakriti mental imbalance
- Drugs Used with Milk
- Milk is boiled with:
- Yashtimadhu
- Shatavari
- Bala
- Chandana
- Usheera

3) Takra Dhara (Buttermilk Dhara)

- Definition
- When Takra (buttermilk) is used for Dhara on head, it is called Takra Dhara.
- Indications

- Useful in Kapha-Pitta disorders, scalp diseases:
- Dandruff
- Seborrheic dermatitis
- Psoriasis (scalp)
- Stress induced skin issues
- Excess sweating in scalp
- Burning + itching
- Benefits
- Reduces itching and scaling
- Clears excess oiliness
- Gives lightness to head
- Improves scalp hygiene

4) Kwatha Dhara (Decoction Dhara)

- Definition
- When medicated herbal decoction (Kwatha) is used for Dhara, it is called Kwatha Dhara.
- Indications
- Useful especially in Kapha and Ama conditions:
- Heaviness in head
- Sinusitis (Pratishyaya)
- Kapha dominant headache
- Drowsiness
- Mental dullness
- Scalp infection
- Common Kwatha Drugs
- Nimba
- Vacha
- Triphala
- Guduchi
- Dashamoola
- Bhringaraj
- Mode of Action
- Lekhana (scraping)
- Kapha shamana

- Reduces ama
- Cleanses channels
- Special Combination Dhara (Your requested add-ons)

5) Taila-Kwatha Dhara (Oil + Decoction Dhara)

- Concept
- This is a modified and highly practical variation where:
- Taila provides snehana and vata shamana
- Kwatha provides kapha/ama shamana and cleansing
- When to Use
- In mixed dosha disorders:
- Vata-Kapha headache
- Chronic stress + sinus
- Cervical spondylosis with heaviness
- Chronic migraine with stiffness
- Advantages
- Better for cases where only oil feels heavy
- Works in chronic disorders where ama is present
- Helps in Srotoshodhana + Brimhana
- Example
- Ksheerabala Taila + Dashamoola Kwatha
- Brahmi Taila + Guduchi Kwatha

6) Taila-Ksheera Dhara (Oil + Milk Dhara)

- Concept
- This is a superior combination where:
- Taila pacifies Vata and nourishes nervous system
- Ksheera cools Pitta and provides soothing effect
- Indications
- Vata-Pitta disorders
- Anxiety with burning
- Migraine with irritability
- Insomnia with heat sensation
- Hair fall due to stress + pitta
- Example
- Brahmi Taila + Yashtimadhu Siddha Ksheera

- Ksheerabala Taila + Bala Siddha Ksheera
- Benefits
- Deep relaxation
- Better sleep
- Reduced headache frequency
- Nourishes brain and hair roots

7) Taila-Kwatha-Ksheera Dhara (Oil + Decoction + Milk Dhara)

- Definition
- This is a tridosha balancing Dhara, where:
- Taila → Vata pacifying
- Ksheera → Pitta pacifying
- Kwatha → Kapha/ama pacifying

Indications

- Best for:
- Chronic stress disorders
- Mixed dosha migraine
- Psychosomatic disorders
- Hypertension with anxiety
- Vata-pitta-kapha imbalance

Why it is important

- Many modern lifestyle disorders are tridoshaja due to:
- Irregular sleep
- Overthinking
- Wrong diet
- Mental stress
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Thus, this variation becomes highly relevant in the present-day clinical practice.
- Clinical Benefit
- Deep mental calmness
- Better emotional stability
- Improved sleep
- Relief from heaviness, burning, dryness together
- Procedure of Shiroseka (Common for all variations)

Poorva Karma (Pre-procedure)

- Patient should be explained procedure
- Mild head massage with suitable oil
- Patient lies supine on Dhara table
- Eyes protected with cotton pads

Pradhana Karma (Main procedure)

- Liquid is warmed/maintained at proper temperature
- Dhara vessel placed 4 angula above forehead
- Continuous stream poured in rhythmic manner
- Movement from forehead to temples and back
- Duration: 30–60 minutes depending on condition

Paschat Karma (Post-procedure)

- Head wiped gently
- Rest given in calm room
- Lukewarm water bath after some time (if advised)
- Light diet and avoidance of stress

Precautions

- Avoid cold exposure immediately after Dhara
- Not advised in fever, indigestion, acute cold
- Temperature should be monitored properly
- Liquid should flow continuously (no breaks)

Probable Mode of Action (Modern correlation)

- Shiroseka influences:
 - Hypothalamus
 - Pituitary axis
 - Autonomic nervous system
 - Stress hormone regulation (cortisol reduction)
- The rhythmic flow generates:
 - Relaxation response
 - Enhanced cerebral circulation
 - Decreased sympathetic overactivity
 - Enhanced sleep-wake cycle

Conclusion

Shiroseka (Shir Sek) is a significant Ayurvedic therapy, which has a vast application in the treatment of neurological, psychological, and psychosomatic illnesses. Dhara therapy is not restricted to oil alone; instead, various modifications such as Taila Dhara, Ksheera Dhara, Takra Dhara, Kwatha Dhara, and advanced combinations such as Taila-Kwatha Dhara, Taila-Ksheera Dhara, and Taila-Kwatha-Ksheera Dhara are more relevant in modern days, as lifestyle disorders are tridoshaja and stress-related. The choice of Dhara dravya should be made according to the predominance of doshas, the disease condition, and the number of patients. In modern days, when lifestyle disorders are tridoshaja and stress-related, these modifications are more relevant. Therefore, proper understanding and implementation of these modifications make Shiroseka a highly effective and practical therapy in Ayurvedic practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT -NONE

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