Anatomical explanation of Abhyanga (An Ayurvedic massage)

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ABSTRACT:

INTRODUCTION: Acharya Sushruta defines health it follows the Doshas must be in equilibrium, the digestive fire must be in a balanced state & the tissue (Dhatus) & Malas (waste) must work in normal state. The sensory & motar organs & mind, atma must be also in a pleasant state. Such person is called a healthy person or Sawastha. so it is clear that maintain a good health was for the longevity of life.

Maharishi Charaka has used term ‘Samhanan’ to denotes the compactness of body. A compact body is characterized by symmetrical & well divided bones, joint, muscles, bloods. An individual having a compact body is very strong otherwise he is weak. Aabhyanga is the therapeutic intervention of panchkarma in which the body is treated with simple or medicated oil on particular body part according to need.

AIM: To Study Anatomical Explanation Of Abhyanga (An Ayurvedic Massage)

OBJECTIVE:
1. Detail Study of Abhyanga
2. Study about Shatang Sharir

RESULT: Aabhyanga a procedure of panchkarma in which the body is treated with simple or medicated oil on particular body part according to need.

CONCLUSION: Thus we can conclude that Anatomical knowledge of Shadanga Sharir is quite beneficial while attempting the process of Abhyanga.

KEYWORD: AYURVEDA, PANCHKARMA, SAMHANANA, ABHYANGA, SHADANG SHARIR

INTRODUCTION
In the ancient ages Abhyanga or oil massage was the inseparable part of daily life because of the huge benefits it provides to the human body to make it strong and free of disease. It is also a subtype of Bahya Snehan (external massage), which is a part of Panchakarma therapy. In both therapeutic as well as preventive purpose is has been used with great results. But with the time changing fast, Abhyanga has got the worldwide popularity as Ayurvedic massage. In the present era life is running very fast and to cope up with its ups and downs man has to run faster than his capacity. At present we are reaching a point where we are becoming increasingly more conscious of our bodies and the need to keep them in the best possible condition. All the stress
and tension of modern people attract them towards the easily accessible massage therapy centers for a time being relief. Ayurveda has its own stand on the importance of Abhyanga. Though we find with ease in the internet or in many books various types of methods for ayurvedic massage which have been named as Abhyanga, there are rare descriptions of actual method of Abhyanga in the classical texts. It has been said that Abhyanga should be done in Anuloma direction i.e. towards the growth of hair. We have to keep the point in mind that knowledge of anatomical structures of the body is a must to give a relaxing and fruitful massage. For this purpose massaging procedures along with its anatomical explanation should be explained.

Need of study: Our Ayurveda classics have sufficient descriptions about Abhyanga and its benefits. But there are no such details about its techniques as they are described in Shloka form. For the present stressful life pattern and for the urban people who hate the ancient practice of daily oil massage, the need for getting easy relaxation through some massage therapist has been highly increasing. So for the purpose of giving view about what the Abhyanga or Ayurvedic oil massage is and how it benefits us, is to be studied. Proper knowledge of Shadanga Sharir and its components like Peshi, Asthi, Sira, Dhamani Kandara, Twacha Marma etc. are of great importance. As their knowledge is the base of any successful treatment. Although there are several kinds of massage procedures, the basic knowledge of anatomy is needed for all fruitful therapies. There is no explanation of mode of action of Abhyanga, hence it has to be explained properly that how does our body react to the therapy of oil massage.

CONCEPT OF SHADANG SHARIR

According to Ayurveda, Sharir is the human body that keeps on degenerating with time due to some digestion process going on it continuously. Sharir is the one who destroys itself due to its constant motion. The human body is composed of six main parts, namely the four Shakha (upper and lower Extremities), Madhya Sharir (Trunk or middle body) and Shira (Head and Neck). There are fifty six subsidiary members attached to these six main members of the body. Now we shall describe the Pratyangas of the body. The head, the belly, the back, the navel, the bladder and the throat (neck) occur singly. The ears, the eyes, the nostrils, the eyebrows, the armpits, the breasts, the testis, the sides, the knee joints etc. occurs in pairs. The fingers and toes which number twenty in all and the Srotas of the body to be presently described are likewise included within the Pratyanga.

The knowledge of Shadanga Sharir is very important for a physician. For this purpose the physician must have to acquire the knowledge of anatomy. In Sushrut Samhita we can find the different parts or members of the body as mentioned before including even the skin cannot be correctly described by anyone who is not versed in anatomy. For a thorough knowledge can only be acquired by comparing the accounts given in the Shastra (books on the subject) by direct personal observation. Thus we can say that the knowledge of Shadanga Sharir is very important to apply any kind of
therapy to it. *Abhyanga* is a rejuvenating procedure and to perform it properly one must have the knowledge of detailed anatomy, so that no harmful effect is offered by applying it in an improper way.

**CONCEPT OF ABHYANGA IN AYURVEDA**

*Abhyanga* means applying oil and lightly massaging the body. Often medicated and usually warm, the oil is massaged into the entire body before bathing. It can be beneficial for maintaining health and used as a medicine for certain disorders *Abhyanga*. Application of oil to the skin followed by massage in specific directions is well known by the name *Abhyanga* in *Ayurveda*. Massage in specific direction improves blood circulation, facilitates removal of the toxins from the tissues, relieves physical and mental fatigue, improves the functioning of musculoskeletal system, clears stiffness and heaviness of the body and leads to feeling of lightness. It assists development of healthy body, helps in improvement of body figure, recovers the body tissues and reduces body weight as well as fat. The Sanskrit word *Sneha* means both “oil” and “love,” and the effects of *Abhyanga* are similar to the effect of saturation with love. Both experiences can give a deep feeling of stability, warmth and comfort. All the *Ayurvedic* classics have described the various benefits of *Abhyanga* along with its contra indications.

There is no such description about the procedure of *Abhyanga* except the commentary of *Dalhana*, who mentioned that *Abhyanga* should be applied in *Anuloma* (downward) direction. Again in later period, Shri Kasture has described the specific movements of *Abhyanga* in limbs and joints. He told that in the limbs *Abhyanga* should be practiced in the direction of hair growth. This is probably because, if *Abhyanga* is applied in opposite direction of the hair growth, then it may cause breaking of the hairs as well as it will do discomfort to the receivers. In the promotion and maintenance of health in the healthy, as well as cure of illness in diseased, this procedure has gained importance in the clinical practice. This process of manipulating skin and muscles is highly recommended in *Ayurveda* for routine practice even for a healthy person who has the conscious of happy healthy life. *Acharya sushrut* similes the human body as a wooden wheel which becomes much stronger by proper application of oil and thus prevents the wear and tear, in the same manner the *Abhyanga* process prevents the wear and tear or we can say prevents the degenerative changes of the body.  

**SEQUENCE OF ABHYANGA**

The patient is undressed to minimum clothes and asked to sit in the *Dhara* table upright and oil is applied to the whole body from scalp to soles. He/she is then made to lie on his/her back and this position is ideal for applying oil to the chest and abdomen as well as anterior aspect of the limbs. Face is also best manipulated in the same position. Then the patient is asked to rest on his/her left side. Right side of the back, trunk, right shoulder, right arm and outer side of the right hip and lower limb are easily accessible in this position. Right lateral position is just opposite of left lateral position. In prone position the patient is made to rest on his/her abdomen. The back, buttocks, posterior aspect of the
limbs and sole are easily treated with oil in this position.

INDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA

1. Abhyanga in daily routine: Abhyanga is included in the daily routines to promote the health in hale and healthy. Regular practice of Abhyanga is advised to maintain the physical fitness.

2. Abhyanga in different seasons: Abhyanga is advised to protect the body from the biting cold of Hemant rutu and sharad rutu. Similarly extreme cold as well as dry weather is characteristic of Shishira ritu. Abhyanga is beneficial in this season to counteract the detrimental effect of the cold weather.

3. Abhyanga in different diseases: Sneha used for Paana, Nasya, Anuvasana and Abhyanga at the proper time, quickly brings down the aggravated Vata. Abhyanga is indicated mainly in Vata predominant states of diseases. Oleation along with sudation brings down the disfigured and painful body parts due to aggravated Vata. The analogy given by Vagbhata about Abhyanga is worth explaining here. Vagbhata says that proper Snehana and Swedana given to an inanimate dry stick will help to regain its original condition, then what to say about the living body. Some of the diseases in which Abhyanga is indicated in Ayurveda are as follows:


BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF ABHYANGA

Abhyanga is not a simple procedure of oil application; rather it maintains the excellence of body tissues, if the oil applied is suitable for the Prakriti of the patient. Hence it is recommended in normal persons for routine daily practice. Further, when the oil is selected according to the illness in the diseased, it cures the diseases also.

CONTRAINDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA

Abhyanga is an efficient therapeutic as well as health promoting procedure. In spite of these therapeutic benefits Abhyanga is not ideal to practice in the following conditions like – Kaphagrashta (suffering from Kaphaja disorders), Ajeerna (suffering from indigestion), Krita sansudha (who are just subjected to shodhana Procedure), Aama (suffering from Aama condition), Saamadosha (having vitiated dosha in Aama state), Navajwara (suffering from fever of short duration), Santarpana Samutha Roga (diseases caused by over nourishment), Agnimaandy (suffering from impaired digestive activity).

ABSORPTION OF SNEHA

The oil applied to the body surface in different procedures of Abhyanga, were absorbed and distributed to the whole body and show systemic or generalized effect. The absorption as well as distribution of the oil with the herbal ingredients
impregnated in it takes specific duration and the same is detailed in the following lines (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. NO</th>
<th>Name of the Dhatu (body part or tissue)</th>
<th>Penetrating time of oil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roma kupa</td>
<td>300 Maatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Twak</td>
<td>400 Maatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rakta</td>
<td>500 Maatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Asthi</td>
<td>800 Maatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Majja</td>
<td>900 Maatra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Shows the Abhanga Kaala (Penetrating time of oil) of different Dhatu (body part or tissue) of the body.

**ABHYANGA KAAL (PENETRATING TIME OF OIL)**

**Preparation of the patient:** Early morning hours are ideal for Abhyanga Karma. The patient should be in empty stomach and the food that is consumed in the previous day should be digested properly.

**Different postures of Abhyanga:** Commonly employed postures for Abhyanga are as follows:

1. Sitting upright with knees extended
2. Supine position
3. Left lateral position
4. Prone position
5. Right lateral position

After smearing the oil, each part of the body is massaged one after the other. Therapist moves his palms on the surface of the patient’s body in a direction similar to the orientation of hair in these parts. This is the general principle of Abhyanga technique.

**Absorption through skin:**

In man, subcutaneous absorption probably occurs mainly from the surface. Absorption through the hair follicles. Absorption through the sweat gland and sebaceous glands generally appears to be minor. When the medicament is rubbed on vigorously, the amount of the preparation that is forced into the hair follicles and glands is increased. In this way we can say that massaging the skin with some oil may help in the absorption of it through skin layers.

**ROLE OF BHRAJAKA PITTA IN ACTION OF ABHYANGA:**

Bhrajaka Pitta is located in the skin. It imparts the characteristics of color and luster, so it is termed as Bhrajaka. The variations in the colour of the skin are the functions of the Bhrajaka Pitta which is located in the skin. Arunadutta the Commentator of Ashtanga Hridaya has described the Bhrajaka Pitta and its functions like Deepana and Pachana. The substances applied on the skin by Abhyanga, Lepana and Parisheka are being digested by the Bhrajaka Pitta. So from this point of view we can say that Abhyanga helps to improve the quality of skin by getting digested by the Bhrajaka Pitta.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acharya Charaka described 107 points (Marmas) in the Sharir Sthana 6th chapter. It is said that touching these vital points can have both positive and negative results. Proper massage of these points helps dissolve stresses or remove blocks accumulated there. Sushruta described the effects of rubbing with characteristic emphasis upon the Pitta value that rubbing and friction tend to dilate the orifice of the (superficial) ducts and increase the temperature of the skin.

Thus Abhyanga also contributes to a qualitatively better life by promoting many side-benefits. Massage therapy which is popularly practiced in the western countries has been summarized to the part wise massage techniques of the body using the anatomical explanation. The anatomical landmarks are mentioned along with the structures which are directly related with massage. So it is mandatory for a clinician to know the anatomical structures related to that part, as this prevents from damaging any structures by inappropriate technique. Modern pharmacology describes that body rubbing improves the absorption through skin layers. This increase in circulation also aids the removal of toxins and waste products from the muscle. It relieves muscular tightness, fatigue, stiffness and spasms.

CONCLUSION

Anatomical knowledge of Shadanga Sharir is quite beneficial while attempting the process of Abhyanga. The various kinds of Abhyanga (massage) therapies has been practiced today following the single rule of increase the circulation of vital fluid in the applied part, as well as to stimulate the nervous system to provide a soothing and relaxing effect to the patient. Abhyanga should be done in Anuloma (to the direction of hair growth) to prevent any damage to the hair roots. All the benefits of Abhyanga are directly or indirectly related with the stimulation of autonomic nervous system and central nervous system.

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