

HEALING THROUGH HAND'S-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ABHYANG AND MANUAL THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

For ages, several traditional medical systems have used manual therapy techniques to prevent and treat disease. Abhyanga, which entails applying medicated oil to the body using methodical massage techniques, is regarded in Ayurveda as a crucial therapeutic and preventive activity. Similar to this, therapeutic touch, manipulation, mobilization, and soft tissue techniques utilized in physiotherapy and rehabilitation sciences are all part of manual therapy in contemporary healthcare. Both approaches place a strong emphasis on the therapeutic benefits of touch, including increased circulation, pain relief, muscular relaxation, and general well-being. According to Ayurvedic texts, Abhyanga helps balance Doshas, nourish tissues, increase longevity, enhance sleep, and lessen weariness. Biomechanical correction, neuromuscular relaxation, pain alleviation, and functional mobility restoration are the main goals of

contemporary manual therapy. Both treatments have similar physiological effects, such as better blood circulation, lymphatic drainage, stress reduction, and improved musculoskeletal performance, although having different theoretical underpinnings. This comparison shows that while manual therapy primarily focuses on structural and functional rehabilitation, Abhyanga offers a holistic approach that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

KEYWORDS: Abhyanga, Manual Therapy, Therapeutic Massage, Panchakarma.

INTRODUCTION

Ancient healing customs have a significant influence on the constantly changing field of healthcare, providing ideas and insights that are applicable to contemporary medical practice. Before the development of modern medicine, ancient healing techniques were an essential part of human communities and played a big part in treating health and wellness.^[1] These traditional healing methods continue to have a significant impact on modern healthcare systems, influencing medical ideologies, treatment techniques, and attitudes to wellness despite the passing of millennia and the development of scientific knowledge. Ayurveda, a holistic medical approach that emphasizes the harmony of mind, body, and spirit, originated in ancient India.^[2] Ayurvedic texts, including the Charaka Samhita and the Sushruta Samhita, provide comprehensive information on diagnosis, treatment, and prevention, including food recommendations, yoga techniques, and herbal medicines.^[3] Since ancient times, touch has been acknowledged as a potent healing technique. Therapeutic massage and manual techniques have been used by many traditional medical systems worldwide to preserve health, prevent illness, and restore mental and physical equilibrium.^[4] One of the most significant daily routines (Dinacharya) and therapeutic techniques in Ayurveda that are detailed in traditional Ayurvedic scriptures is abhyanga. In order to increase physical strength, enhance circulation, nourish bodily tissues, and calm agitated Doshas, particularly Vata Dosha, it entails the methodical application of heated therapeutic oils throughout the body utilizing particular strokes and pressure techniques.^[5] The significance of Abhyanga in preserving longevity, increasing sleep, improving skin texture, lowering weariness, and preventing degenerative illnesses is emphasized in classical books like Charaka Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya. Manual therapy is a collection of practical methods used by physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, and rehabilitation professionals to treat musculoskeletal and neuromuscular conditions.^[6] The significance of Abhyanga in preserving longevity, increasing sleep, improving skin texture, lowering weariness, and preventing degenerative illnesses is emphasized in classical books like Charaka Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya. Manual therapy is a collection of practical methods used by physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, and rehabilitation professionals to treat musculoskeletal and neuromuscular conditions.^[7] Abhyanga and contemporary manual therapy have diverse philosophical and scientific roots, yet they both adhere to a number of touch-based healing concepts. Both strategies seek to promote circulation, ease tense muscles, lessen stress, and improve general wellbeing. However, manual therapy is mostly focused on anatomical,

biomechanical, and physiological notions, whereas Abhyanga takes a holistic approach including body, mind, and spirit.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya are among the major Ayurvedic classics from which references to Abhyanga were gathered for the Ayurvedic view point. The literature on manual treatment from physiotherapy textbooks, rehabilitation science publications, osteopathic and chiropractic references, and peer-reviewed scientific studies was examined for the contemporary viewpoint.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

ABHYANG

Definition

Abhyanga refers to the application of Sneha Dravya over the body along with gentle massage (Samvahana) performed in the direction of hair follicles.

Synonyms Abhyang- add reference

According to Shabda Kalpadruma, Abhyang means to anoint or to smear (*lepana*) *Snehana-Achaspadyam*, *Snehana* means to be adhesive or to be attached to.

Indications of Abhyang – Add reference

as a *Dinacharya* process to preserve health. Shiro Abhyang: Itching and dry scalp (*Arunshika*) *Taila Abhyanga: Bala, Vriddha, and Krisha individuals Hair diseases include Darunaka, Khalitya, Palitya, and others.*

Contra Indications of Abhyang^[8,9]

- *Ajirna, Nava Jwara, Taruna Jwara- it leads to Krichhra Sadhya or Asadhya Awastha due to excessive Ama-nirmiti.*
- Just after *Samshodhana Karma* like *Vamana, Virechana, Niruha Basti-* Since the person who had undergone these *Shodhana Karmas* has a *Durbal Agni* and such Abhyanga will further lead to *Agnimandya*.
- *Netra Roga, Karna Roga, Peenasa, Agnimandya, Atisara, Adhmana. - Pittaja Vyadhi, Trishna, Rakta Pitta, Prameha and AtiKshudhita.*
- *Kaphaja Vyadhi and Santarpanaja Vyadhi. - Immediately after consumption of food, Ruksha and Abhishyandi Ahara.*

- Immediately after *Tarpana and Snehapana Kriya*
- Immediately after *Snana, Vyayama, Divaswapna, Vegadharana, Prajagarana, Sheeta Vayusevana.*

Abhyanga technique^[10]

“The major Ayurvedic classics do not elaborate extensively on the procedure of Abhyanga. According to the Rigveda, Abhyanga is performed using the hands and fingers, and the strokes or touch applied should be gentle and soft. Such mild pressure is considered comfortable and easily tolerated by the individual.”

Time of Abhyanga

- To be practiced daily amongst the children.
- To be practiced once in a day or on alternate days or once in three days. It does not disturb the equilibrium of the Doshas and hence does not vitiate the Doshas.

Abhyanga Dravya

- *Sukhoshna* (lukewarm) *Sneha* (oil or ghee)
- *Vasa- prepared with Doshaghna dravyas* - Generally lukewarm oil is used for Abhyanga.

Importance of Abhyanga as a Poorvakarma^[11]

The body absorbs *Snigdhatva* from *Abhyanga*, preparing it for *Shodhana karma*. In most *Shodhanakarmas*, *abhyanga* is performed as a *Purvakarma*. The exacerbated *Dosha* is shifted from *Shakha to Koshta* by *Abhyanga's* production of *Strotovishodhana, Abhishyandanam* of the *Doshas, and Vata*, which is then readily eliminated through *Shodhanakarma*.

Mode of action of Abhyanga

- The *Sneha* used in *Abhyanga* reaches up to different *Dhatu*s when it is applied for the sufficient time.
- On reaching at the specified *Dhatu*, it subsides the diseases of that particular *Dhatu*.
- According to *Charak*, *Vayu* dominates the *Sparshanendriya* and its *Adhishthana* is *Tvacha*. The *Abhyanga* is beneficial to the skin, so one should follow it regularly.^[12]
- Since, all the *Indriyas* are in close contact with the mind, the healthy *Indriyas* ensure a healthy mind. Thus, *Abhyanga* keeps the body and mind healthy.

Mode of action of Abhyanga according to Modern view^[13]

Vatadosha and Lasika are found on the skin, where Abhyanga acts. Abhyanga thus directly affects lymphatic outflow. Tryptophan, an amino acid, is abundant in lymph. Osmotic pressure causes the skin's interior fluid to move during the massage. Therefore, the extra-cellular compartment experiences mechanical hydrostatic pressure as a result of massage. Massage facilitates the entry of fluid into tissues and viscera, diluting the accumulated poisons. The diluted toxins are introduced into the general circulation when the peripheral vessels are refilled once the treatment is finished, and they are eliminated during the process. Tryptophan and other amino acids rise in the blood after massage.

The neuron transmitter serotonin, which is produced from tryptophan at motor end plates, increases in parallel as a result. Pressure is the source of piezoelectricity. When massage is combined with a Snehadravya, the body produces electricity and a magnetic field through rhythmic movement. Nerves will become more conductive as a result of this charge. The nerve fiber receives regular discharges of electricity that travel in a circular pattern. A massage with a certain pressure can be used to alleviate the unhealthy condition caused by an interruption in momentum. When calcium ions are present, acetylcholine functions as a transmitter at the motor end and promotes synaptic action potential. The absorption rate rises when a concentrated medication is used. Because of the presence of chemicals like serotonin, percutaneous absorption is seen in inflammatory conditions. The opening of the superficial ducts tends to expand and the skin's warmth rises as a result of oil rubbing against the skin.^[14]

- The medication diffuses via the continuous lipid matrix as part of the intercellular pathway. A region of alternating organized bi-layers is known as the intercellular domain. As a result, a medication needs to partition into and diffuse through repetitive lipid and aqueous domains. Because the stratum corneum acts as a strong barrier to hydrophilic molecules, which enter more slowly, lipophilic substances—such as components of essential oils—are absorbed more easily.^[15]
- The endocrine and neurological systems, which function as linking cells, are calmed by massage. The limbic system mediates the pleasure of touching by secreting hormones that are biologically equal to happiness and health. Human Growth Hormone (HGH) release is discovered to be increased by massage or touching, which in turn speeds up the transport of digested proteins (amino acids) out of the circulation and into the cells, accelerating the cells' anabolism and promoting natural growth.

Benefits of Abhyanga^[16,17]

- *Jarahara*- enhances and strengthens the Dhatu; slows down and reverses the aging process.
- *Shramahara*- aids in overcoming the exhaustion brought on by physical activity
- *Vatahara*- corrects *Vatadosha's* vitiation. It aids in promoting and controlling Vata's appropriate function.
- *Drishtiprasadakara*- Abhyanga may be able to prevent and treat eye conditions like Timira and other age-related illnesses.
- *Pushtikara*- It nourishes all the Dhatus of the body.
- *Ayushya*- It encourages a person to live a long life. Life span is increased and the important organs and tissues perform better.
- *Swapnakara*- Overcomes sleeplessness and other mental ailments
- *Tvakdardhyakara*- Offers strength even to those of old age, offers sturdiness of the body.
- *Kleshasaha*- Due to sturdiness, body becomes capable to tolerate the stress and strains of life.
- *Varna-Balaprada*- Acts as the body complexion promoter and gives strength to the person.

MANUAL THERAPY

- Physical therapists have made significant contributions to the current range of manual therapy concepts and techniques, and manual therapy has a long history within the field of physical therapy. Orthopaedic manual physical therapy is described as "a specialized area of physiotherapy/physical therapy for the management of neuro-musculoskeletal conditions, based on clinical reasoning, using highly specific treatment approaches including manual techniques and therapeutic exercises" by the International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists (IFOMPT). Additionally, orthopaedic manual therapy incorporates and is motivated by the biopsychosocial framework of each individual patient as well as the existing scientific and clinical evidence.^[18,19]
- Orthopaedic manual physical therapy (OMPT) is described as an advanced specialty area of physical therapy practice that is based on manual examination and treatment techniques integrated with exercise, patient education, and other physical therapy modalities to address pain, loss of function, and wellness in the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT) Description of Advanced Specialty Practice (DASP) (2018).

- A key component of an OMPT therapist's work is early, reliable, and expert manual physical therapy, together with exercise and patient education. Effective and efficient care is made possible by advanced examination, communication, and decision-making abilities that are based on professional and scientific education. OMPT practitioners manage patients, discuss simple and complex neuromusculoskeletal (NMS) issues with other medical professionals, and offer suggestions and wellness-related interventions.^[20,21]

Three Paradigms for Manual Therapy Therapeutic Effects

- Physiological: It is possible to generate a favourable placebo reaction.
- Physical and biomechanical: Manual therapy helps with modelling and tissue restoration.
- Psychological: By lowering pain, manual therapy can enhance a person's mental well-being. In order to lessen pain, the pain-gate mechanism is stimulated, muscles are inhibited, nociceptive activity is decreased, and intraarticular or periarticular pressure is decreased.^[22,23]

Manual Therapy Application Framework

- Speed
- Location within range of motion (ROM)
- Force direction - anatomical and/or biomechanical
- Relative movement (anatomical or positional)
- Subject position (both limb and gross)

Manual Therapy grading guides, such as the two guides listed below (Maitland and Kaltenborn), mainly emphasize the first two factors (speed and placement within ROM).

Table no 1: Comparative Analysis of Abhyanga and Manual Therapy.

| Parameters | Abhyanga | Manual Therapy |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Origin | Originated from Ayurveda | Originated from modern physiotherapy, osteopathy, and rehabilitation sciences |
| Basic Concept | Holistic healing through oil massage and balancing of Doshas | Mechanical and functional restoration of muscles and joints |
| Philosophical Basis | Based on <i>Tridosha Siddhanta</i> , Dhatu nourishment, and mind-body balance | Based on anatomy, biomechanics, neurophysiology, and musculoskeletal science |
| Main Objective | Prevention of disease, rejuvenation, relaxation, and Dosha pacification | Pain relief, mobility improvement, rehabilitation, and functional recovery |
| Medium Used | Medicated oils, herbal oils, ghrita, | Hands-on manipulation with or |

| | | |
|------------------------|--|---|
| | or taila | without lubricants |
| Techniques | Gentle rubbing, kneading, pressure application, synchronized oil massage | Mobilization, manipulation, stretching, myofascial release, soft tissue therapy |
| Therapeutic Approach | Holistic approach involving body, mind, and spirit | Primarily physical and biomechanical approach |
| Target System | Nervous system, circulatory system, skin, muscles, and Dosha balance | Muscles, joints, fascia, ligaments, and nervous system |
| Physiological Effects | Improves circulation, promotes relaxation, nourishes tissues, reduces Vata | Reduces pain, improves range of motion, decreases muscle stiffness |
| Psychological Effects | Reduces stress, anxiety, insomnia, and mental fatigue | Provides relaxation and stress reduction mainly through neuromuscular mechanisms |
| Preventive Role | Strong preventive and rejuvenative role as part of Dinacharya | Mainly curative and rehabilitative role |
| Indications | Vata disorders, fatigue, insomnia, dryness, neurological and musculoskeletal disorders | Back pain, cervical pain, sports injuries, joint stiffness, musculoskeletal dysfunction |
| Duration and Procedure | Usually performed with warm medicated oils in a calm therapeutic setting | Depends on clinical condition and therapeutic protocol |
| Scientific Basis | Traditional Ayurvedic principles with emerging scientific evidence | Strong evidence-based biomechanical and physiological foundation |
| Outcome | Enhances overall wellbeing and longevity | Improves physical function and quality of life |

DISCUSSION

For decades, both traditional and contemporary healthcare systems have acknowledged the healing power of therapeutic touch. In order to stimulate the body's tissues, enhance circulation, ease tense muscles, and encourage relaxation, both methods make use of methodical hand movements. Their theoretical underpinnings, therapeutic objectives, and areas of application, however, are very different. Regular Abhyanga aids in balancing Vata Dosha, which is principally in charge of movement, neurological processes, and bodily deterioration, according to Ayurvedic principles. On the other hand, anatomical, biomechanical, and neurophysiological principles form the basis of modern manual treatment. Restoring joint mobility, lowering discomfort, treating musculoskeletal dysfunction, and enhancing physical performance are its main goals. According to clinical research, manual therapy may lessen pain by improving circulation, reducing inflammation, releasing endorphins, and modulating neuromuscular function. Their therapeutic viewpoints differ significantly. When choosing oils and massage techniques, Abhyanga takes into

account the person's Prakriti, Dosha imbalance, mental condition, seasonal fluctuations, and general well-being. On the other hand, manual treatment typically adheres to defined procedures based on physical examination, anatomical dysfunction, and diagnosis. Thus, manual therapy delivers evidence-based biomechanical rehabilitation, while Abhyanga offers a more comprehensive, individualized approach.

CONCLUSION

Opportunities to combine ancient Ayurvedic remedies with contemporary rehabilitation sciences have been made possible by the growing interest in integrative medicine. Sports injuries, neurological problems, arthritis, chronic pain disorders, stress-related illnesses, and lifestyle disorders may all benefit from the integration of Abhyanga with manual treatment.

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