

Panca Karma

A Case Study

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Abstract: We have been personally experiencing *Panca Karma* at Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U.) Ayurvedic hospital in Varanasi (India) from the 15th to the 30th of August 1995. It included, *Pūrva Karma*, *Pradhāna Karma* and *Paścāt Karma* in a classical sequence. The overall subjective results were a deep impression of physiological purification and internal cleanliness, mental and physical stamina, purification of the mind with pacification of *Manas*, pure state of consciousness, and feeling of rejuvenation. Objective results are normalisation of weight, normalisation of appetite, increase in the flexibility of joints, normalisation of excreta including bee-glue like cerumen, pleasant body odour, improved physical endurance, improved quality of sleep. Some modifications to the classical *Panca Karma* are proposed in order to improve acceptability among patients, reduce the cost and eventually increase its efficiency.

The *Panca Karma* experienced personally was part of a training in view of a Ph.D research on drug deaddiction treatment including *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*. Classical *Panca Karma* was applied as described in *Caraka Samhitā*. It was received in the Department of *Kayacikitsa* (internal medicine), Faculty of *Ayurveda*, Institute of Medical Sciences (I.M.S.) at Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U.), under the guidance of Professor R.H. Singh, Dr. Dwivedi Bhavana, MD, Ph.D., and Dr. C.M. Tiwari, MD, Ph.D. We thank the whole medical staff and technicians for their kind collaboration.

Pūrva Karma

The preparatory phase (*Pūrva Karma*) included internal oleation (*snehana*) with medicated buffalo ghee (*Vāsā Ghṛtā*², provoking *Kapha Dosa*) with 50 ml of *Vāsā Ghṛtā* morning and evening after food until the morning of the 6th day.

Massage (*Abhyanga*) with medicated sesame oil (*Mahānārāyana Tila Taila*²) was received for 30 minutes, starting at 10 a.m.

Śirodhārā with medicated sesame oil (*Brāhmī Tila Taila*²) was then received starting with 30 minutes on the 1st day, increasing the time by 10 minutes every day to the 7th day and decreasing it thereafter by 10 minutes per day to reach 30 minutes again. On the 15th day *Śirodhārā* was experienced using luke warm water.

Finally, fomentation with steam bath in a closed wooden chamber (*Swedana*) was received for 15-20 minutes, followed by half-an-hour rest and a shower, washing with powdered lentils (*Besana*). The whole process lasted for 2-3 hours per day. The oils used for *Abhyanga* and *Śirodhārā* are found in the following table:

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Table 1 : oils for *Abhyanga* and *Śirodhārā*

No	Treatment	Oil	Composition	Quantity
1	<i>Abhyanga</i>	<i>Mahānārāyaṇa</i>	*	about 1 lit. for 15 days
2	<i>Śirodhārā</i>	<i>Brāhmi</i>	*	about 4 lit. for 15 days

* The ayurvedic formula of India, Part-I, First Edition. Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Department of Health

Pradhāna Karma

The treatment phase (*Pradhāna Karma*) with purification procedures (*Śodhānā Karma*) including emesis (*Vamana*), purgation (*Virecana*) and medicated enemas (*Vasti*) started on the 7th day.

Vamana

The following products were prepared (cf. Table 2) for *Vamana Karma*:

Table 2 : Preparations for *Vamana Karma*

No	Preparation	Ingredients	Latin Name	Preparation
1	<i>Madhuyastī Kwātha</i> Decoction of <i>Madhuyastī</i>	<i>Madhuyastī</i>	Glycyrrhiza glabra	Boil down to 1 lit. 250 gms of powder mixed with 4 lit. of water
2	<i>Saindhava Lavaṇa Jala</i> saturated salty water	<i>Saindhava Lavaṇa</i> Rock salt		dilute 750 gms of salt in 5 lit. of water
3	<i>Madanphala Cūrṇa</i> <i>Vacā Cūrṇa</i> <i>Madhu</i>	<i>Madanphala</i> <i>Vacā</i> powder Honey	Randia spinosa Acorus calamus	1.5 gms 1,5 gms mixed 10 gms
4	<i>Kantakāri</i>	whole plant	Solanum xanthocarpum	50 gms burned for fumigation
5	<i>Khadiradi Vati</i> (pills)	<i>Khadiradi</i>	Acacia catechu	2-3 times 2 pills/day
6	Ghṛtā ghee with rock salt	ghee		for massage of the chest

Emesis (*Vamana*) was performed on the 7th day after *Abhyanga*, *Śirodhārā* and *Swedana*, starting at 10 a.m. after having had milk, lentils and rice in liquid form (*peyā*), and vegetable soup for breakfast. A massage of the chest with pure ghee and then with salt was done. *Madanphala Pippalī Cūrṇa* preparation was given as an emetic drug. Then, *Madhuyasti* decoction and salty water were drunk until the stomach was completely full. Emesis then occurred. The sequence of intakes and outputs can be studied in table 3. For a total intake of 3'700 ml of *Madhuyasti* decoction and salty water, 3'940 ml were vomited, e.g. the output was 240 ml superior to the intake. After *Vamana*, a fumigation of *Kantakāri* to soothen the lungs and air passages, and *Khadirādi* pills to soothen the mouth and oesophagus were taken.

Table 3 : Vamana Karma sequence

Session #	Time a.m.	Intake Product	Intake ml	Vomit output #	Vomit output ml	Balance ml	Vomit aspect	BP mm Hg	Pulse rate
	11.05							120/80	80
	11.10	Madanphala + honey	1,5 g. 10 g.						
1	11.20	Madhuyasti Salty water	600 +600 1.200	4	600	-600	with food	150/85	85
2	11.25	Madhuyasti	300	5	900	0	frothy	140/90	85
3	11.40	Salty water	700	4	700	0	frothy	120/90	90
4	11.50	Salty water	600	6	840	240	clear	120/80	85
5	12.00	Salty water	900	6	900	0	clear	120/80	90
	12.10							130/90	90
Total			3'700	25	3'940	+240	output		

Virecana

Purgation (*Virecana Karma*) was undertaken on the evening of the 8th day. Fifty ml of Castor oil were taken at bed time, provoking 5 liquid motions 4-6 hours later in the early morning of the 9th day.

Vasti

Enemas (*Vasti Karma*) were given from the 11th day onwards. Two types of *Vastis* (*Anuvāsana* & *Nirūha Vastis*) were given on alternate days until the end of the treatment, finishing with two days of *Anuvāsana Vasti*, the composition of which is given in the following table:

Table 4 : Vasti products

No	Type	Content	%	Quantity given
1	<i>Anuvāsana Vasti</i>	<i>Mahānārāyana</i> * oil (with 59 plants)	50	50 ml
		<i>Daśmūla</i> * decoction (with 10 plants)	50	
2	<i>Nirūha Vasti</i>	<i>Mahānārāyana</i> oil	20	100 ml
		<i>Daśmūla</i> decoction	80	

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Medicated enemas were given lukewarm with a 50 ml syringe and a gastric tube, kept for about half an hour and then evacuated.

Paścāt Karma

The post-treatment phase (*Paścāt Karma*) consisted on resting, returning progressively back to normal diet and *Rasayāna* (rejuvenation medication) therapy, in our case with *Chyavanaprāśa*, a classical ayurvedic preparation.

A summary of the whole treatment is given in table 5:

Table 5 : Treatment received

Day #	Abhyanga	Śirodhārā with Brāhmi oil	Swedana	Karmas	Rest
1	30 min.	30 min.	15-20 min.	<i>Snehana</i> 2 x 50 ml	30 min.
2	30	40	15-20	2 x 50 ml	30
3	30	50	15-20	2 x 50 ml	30
4	30	60	15-20	2 x 50 ml	30
5	30	70	15-20	2 x 50 ml	30
6	30	80	15-20	1 x 50 ml	30
7	30	90	15-20	<i>Vamana</i>	30
8	30	80	15-20	REST DAY	30
9	30	70	15-20	<i>Virecana</i>	30
11	30	50	15-20	<i>Anuvāsana Vasti</i>	30
12	30	40	15-20	<i>Nirūha</i>	30
13	30	30	15-20	<i>Anuvāsana</i>	30
14	30	30	15-20	<i>Nirūha</i>	30
15	30	30	15-20	<i>Anuvāsana</i>	30
16	30	30 (with water)	15-20	<i>Anuvāsana</i>	30

Results

Medicated ghee was difficult to take from the first day. The dose was probably too high and the ghee used (buffalo ghee) was found to be more heavy than cow ghee as experienced in a previous experiment. The dislike became maximum on the 6th day when saturation occurred with steatorrhoea and the smell of ghee on the skin. The subjective feeling was that the ghee was everywhere in the body, reaching the cellular level. The rest of the treatment (viz. *Abhyanga*, *Śirodhārā* and *Swedana*) was very pleasant. From the 4th day on, cerumen had the pleasant aspect and odour of fine bee-glue.

Vamana Karma was a difficult experience to go through. It was more difficult to drink the salty water than to vomit it. Nevertheless at the end of the *vamana karma*, a clear sensation of being “freed” and purified in the upper part of the body (from head down to stomach) could be experienced. From that day on, sensibility to the quality of food increased.

Virecana Karma occurred in the early morning of the 8th day. There was no difficulty to evacuate stools which were liquid. A clear sensation of freedom in the second third of the body from stomach down to about 5 cm below navel was experienced during the rest of the day. A feeling of fullness of the lower abdomen remained.

Vasti Karma was a pleasant treatment. Progressively the lowest third of the body was pacified.

Overall effects

Objective results were a regulation of the weight (from 78 to 72,5 kg for 172 cm of height), a normalisation of appetite with a considerable decrease of food intake and a complete pacification of the whole gastro-intestinal tract. A significant increase in the flexibility of joints was observed with disappearance of chronic joint pains. A starting sciatica with hypoesthesia of the right crural area disappeared. The quality of sleep improved and although its duration was reduced, rest was deeper. The smell of the body as well as excreta (cerumen, urine, stools) became pleasant. Energy increased, to the level that there was an urge to start jogging again.

Subjective findings were a strong desire to better select foods which should be natural, light, good, reduced in quantity and not spicy. A deep feeling of rejuvenation was experienced, feeling 10-15 years younger. After 10-12 days, a total acceptance of oneself was experienced, with a clear and pacified mind and deeper experiences during meditation (increased pleasure and bliss). A feeling of lightness and cleanliness of the body and mind was noted.

This treatment was received at the same time by a cousin of mine (Mr. Toni Kuhn) who had similar results, although he did not undertake the *Vamana Karma*.

The *Panca Karma* treatment received can be rated as a very good and successful experience.

Discussion

A few changes are suggested to the classical *Panca Karma* as described in this paper.

Regarding internal *Snehana*, cow ghee is found to have a much better taste than buffalo ghee, it is

lighter and seems to act better and faster. It is important that ghee is taken on an empty stomach first thing in the morning, and we found from previous experience that increasing quantities of ghee (like 40-80-160 ml) during 3 days allows reaching saturation faster. The dislike for ghee increasing with time, becomes unbearable after 3-4 days. Also, we are not convinced that medicated ghee is absolutely necessary, and find natural ghee more pleasant with a full capacity to saturate the body.

The main effects of the *Abhyanga* received are external oleation of the body, relaxation and blood and lymph drainage. The technique of application of oil could be completed by a massage of the vital points (*Marmas*) from the 10th day onwards, or after the body has been purified of most of its *Ama* (toxins) through *Vamana* and *Virecana*. This would further balance the energies at vital points, which was not taken care of in the massage received. Also, it has not been proved that medicinal substances contained in medicated oils are absorbed through the skin, and the price of medicated oils being high, it is suggested that natural pure sesame oil could be utilised with probably the same benefit at a lower cost. Furthermore, the same oil is used for enemas, which is a much better route for the absorption of active principles contained in plants. In any case, Caraka has not mentioned medicated oils for *abhyanga* and he said that sesame oil was the best: *Tila Tailam Tailanām* (Carak Su. 13).

Śirodhārā was a beautiful experience. Increasing the time was agreeable, although time consuming for the medical team and space occupation of the ward. The effect did not increase with time and it seems that half an hour is quite enough to reach a deep experience of mental silence and relaxation. One may again question the use of a medicated oil and wonder if other fluids could be used with the same benefit. It is most probable that little or none of the chemicals contained in the medicated oil penetrate through the skin of the forehead. The same subjective experience is obtained with non- medicated oil. To answer the second point, viz. is the viscosity of oil necessary at all to produce the result, we asked to use lukewarm water for *Śirodhārā* on the last day. The result was just as good if not better than with oil, bringing about a feeling of more lightness in the experience. A deep silent mental state could also be induced that way with the benefit of avoiding the unpleasant feeling of oily and smelly hair. The cost of *Brāhmī* oil being high, this point may be of interest from a financial point of view also.

We have from the start asked that the flow of oil be absolutely regular, non moving, and centred on the *Ājñā Cakra* (a point situated between and 1-3 cm above the eyebrows). The best effect was obtained when the above conditions were present and when there was a completely silent environment.

Swedana was a good experience. Sweating was induced rapidly and profusely in a steam bath, from which our heads emerged into the “fresh” air. We suggest to test, as we have done in Switzerland, an infrared sauna. The patient sits in a small chamber where the body is heated directly by infrared rays of specific length waves. The environmental air hardly heats up higher than 40-45 °C, the tissues are heated in depth, sweating is profuse, there is a deep relaxation effect of muscles and joints, and metabolism is increased.

Vamana Karma is a stressful experience. It was actually more difficult to drink saturated salty water than vomit it, which was impressive for spectators, but fairly easy for the research scholar. We have not found that *Madanphala Pippali Cūrṇa* or *Madhuyasṭī Kwāṭha* had any significant emetic effect. Salty water had more effect. But the most important emetic effect was obtained when the full capacity, or even more, of the stomach was reached, which immediately induced emesis. Drinking saturated salty water in high quantities was not found to be risky (in case emesis is not induced) and we therefore propose to use moderately salty water (20 gms for 1 lit.) with the strict guideline to take it rapidly until vomiting occurs. As strongly hypertonic water may be of use to bring the fluids from the stomach area into the stomach for further elimination, one *Vamana* could be provoked with such a fluid. For us, an

output superior to the input was only reached once after the third *Vamana*. It may prove that Kapha Dosa was hence fully eliminated. *Vamana Karma*, in spite of its tedious application, remains a fulfilling experience with a feeling of deep purification of the upper third of the body. It can be proposed for healthy volunteers or for specific indications (i.e. asthmatic patients) with great care and taking into account the numerous contra-indications (i.e. HBP, cardiac pathology, peptic ulcer, active lung disease, etc.)

Virecana Karma did not present any problem. Castor oil seems to be the drug of choice to induce it, as it is not absorbed through the gastro-intestinal wall and acts by stimulation of the peristalsis. It induces a good purgation.

Vasti Karma remains a treatment of choice of *Panca Karma* therapy. First choice products should be used. It may be a route for the absorption of medicinal chemicals, but more than that, the Vasti will absorb the morbid factors at colonic level to eliminate them through rectal route, besides other unknown effects.

Conclusion

Panca Karma is a fulfilling experience. Its numerous effects are still to be discovered and scientifically evaluated and described.

To enhance the effects of *Panca Karma* therapy, the conditions in which it is performed are of prime importance. The environment should be appealing, silent, clean, and the atmosphere soothing and uplifting. The quality of the products used should be of first choice and controlled for their content. The medical staff should be in a positive mood. Most of these conditions were attained during the treatment received at BHU Ayurvedic hospital.

Scientific research is needed in this field in order to improve the knowledge on the importance of each step of the treatment with the goal to improve its efficiency. Some points remain to be studied (*Vamana* procedure, absorption of chemicals from medicated oils through the skin during *Abhyanga* and *Śirodhārā*, timing of *Śirodhārā*, etc.) in order to provide, if possible, a still more efficient, less costly and more enjoyable purification therapy, hopefully making it available for more people around the world.

Bibliography:

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