

A REVIEW ON HYDROTHERAPY PRACTICES IN ANCIENT INDIA

ABSTRACT:

Background: Water being one of the five great elements (pañcamahābhūta), is considered to be the medium of creation and maintenance of life. Hydrotherapy is the application of water in various forms, temperature on the body either internally or externally for the treatment of the diseases and maintenance of health. It has been observed that many of the practices are considered as a part of daily routine before it was developed into a separate treatment modality. Application of water was given utmost importance in Indian traditional texts like Rigveda, yajurveda, atharva veda, as well as caraka samhitā, ṣuṣrūta samhitā and añōāigasangraha of āyurveda. The practice of hydrotherapy was a part of the all performances or rituals like yāga and yajña. In this study we aim to elaborate the ancient Indian techniques for improving the body immunity through hydrotherapy as mentioned in traditional texts. The traditional references for hydrotherapy technique like bath, affusion, immersion, packs, irrigations, compresses, poultices, etc, in Indian tradition are searched and compiled. The key changes which can happen in the body due to these practices, which confirm the healthy condition is studied and the proper methodology for these procedures are listed as per the Indian texts with upgrading methods. We observed in this research that, although having a firm foundation of these behaviours listed in all classic books, they are not mandatory in our day-to-day actions. The modern life style has given more liberty to the people about these practices. Many historical methods have been seen to be unappealing or to fail to persuade others. In this regard we found many of the ready/easy practices which can reach wider range of people, as an essential method to propagate and train for better living and protection of health to entire humankind.

Key Words: Water, Hydrotherapy, Indian Tradition, Vedas, Naturopathy.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Hydrotherapy is the application of water in various forms and temperature on the body either internally or externally for the treatment of the diseases and maintenance of health. ^[1] It has been observed that many of the practices are considered as a part of daily routine before it was developed into a separate treatment modality like Hydrotherapy. The practices like washing hands, gargling (throat irrigation), Bathing, water drinking is considered to be the protective measures, then evolved and modified into different procedures. ^[2] The concept of usage of water for prevention and treatment of disease and promotion of health was well developed in philosophy and medicine of eastern civilization based on river Sindhu. ^[3] Water or “āpa” was worshipped in reality and symbolically in ancient Indian culture as nature was kept above man. ^[4] Ancient religious thought is progression from

physical to spiritual, from a purely naturalistic to an increasingly ethical and psychological view of nature. [5] Worshipping of water resources has the intention of protection and maintenance of health through water.

Water is one of the five great elements (pañcamahābhūta) namely ether (ākāśa), air (vāyu), fire (teja or agni), water (āpa), and Earth (pṛthivī). [6] In Vedas and Upanishads, the traditional text books of Indian culture, the process of evolution of five great elements (pañcamahābhūta) is explained very systematically. The Air is said to have been generated from space, fire from air, water from fire, and earth from water. Fire and water, which are claimed to pervade the whole cosmos, have a tight relationship and are said to be procreative. [7] The five elements constitute the physical universe; Water is regarded as the primordial substance from which the universe came into being as it is mentioned in Rigveda (RV), SBXIV,3,2.13. It is mentioned that water is the source of our lives, i.e, janayathā. [8] In Yajurveda (YV) hymn no-17/36 states that life in universe, by receiving the cosmic water will have the ability to partake it fully. [9] Bruhadāraeyakopanisad (BAU) in its verse,6.4.1, mentions that the element earth sustains all creatures and the earth is sustained by water. The water gets transformed into herbs and vegetations, they in turn become flowers and then fruits and fruits support the creatures. [10] The respect was shown by taking utmost care of the water sources. There was a warning in Atharva Veda (AV) about maintaining of water and its sources clean. Pollution was mentioned as poisoning and considered as responsible for spreading of diseases. One who dirties or spoils ponds, lakes, rivers, etc., or cause smell near residential areas was liable to chastisement. [11] 'Waters and herbs should have no poison' is mentioned in RV sahitā vi –39-5. 'Waters are to be freed from defilement' is according to Atharva Veda Samhita x-5-24. Taittirāya upaniṣad (TU) in the verse 5.101 prescribes certain norms for human beings to keep the environment clean. "One should not cause urine and stool in water, should not spit in water; and should not take bath. [12] Yajurveda also cautions against polluting water as well as destroying trees or plants which are the sources of medicine. It is mentioned in padmapurāḥ in the verse from 8-13 of chapter 8 of Kriya Yoga Sar that dirtying of water or surroundings of rivers as a sinful act. This is an excellent mode of preventing the disease. The God who exists in the universe, lives in air, water, in fire and also in trees and herbs, men should have reverence for them". BAU (3.9.28). [13] in the same manner the subject of water has been related spiritually, philosophically, cosmologically, medically, and poetically in the ancient Indian literature comprising the veda, upaniṣad, purāḥ and smṛti.

2. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The knowledge of medicinal property of water was inherited among ancient Indian people and texts. The use of water as a medicine was not investigated and it remained unearthed. This study referred the ancient Indian literature such as veda and upaniṣad, āyurveda and traditional treatment methods, exploring the knowledge of hydrotherapy. It has become a need, especially because hydrotherapy now occupies the majority of treatment modalities as an independent or adjuvant therapy in the present day. We have conducted a study to revive hydrotherapy of ancient India which will be a contribution towards the better understanding in diagnosis, and treatment of the disease.

2.1 Concept of Medicinal property in Water

Atharva veda (AV) mentions about beneficial effects of water irrespective of the place where it had been obtained. In verse 11/4, it is said that "In those deserts where water is present, it is available from ponds, the water we fill in pitchers/pots, water available through rains, may all this water be beneficial to us". The benefit which is mentioned here is health itself to every individual human being. [14] Caraka Samhita (CS) defines health as a condition which is the best source of virtue, wealth, gratification and emancipation while diseases are destroyers of this source of welfare and life itself (CS.Sū.1.15-17). [15] According to çuçruta samhita, a healthy person is one who has a perfect balance of all body functions in equilibrium with the mind and soul, any deviation from which results in diseases (SS.Sū.15.41). [16] Añöäìgasangraha (AS) a traditional text on Ayurveda describes that there can be no life without water and world is predominantly watery both in health or in ill health. [17] Kathopanishad refers to this custom stating 'A learned guest who visits our dwellings is gleaming similar to fire and to appease him get water [132]'; in other words, guests must be first treated with water to cleanse themselves. [17] So, providing water to wash hands, legs and giving water to sip is the first line of treatment recommended for the guests especially in Hindu culture. AV in several other hymns like 6.23; 24 & 57 specifically mention the medicinal value of waters and as a dispeller of diseases, as a curer of incurable diseases. In the verse-1.161.9., RV recognizes these qualities and

state – ‘there exists no better element other than water’. In the verse - 10.9.5. of RV, it is stated that “Water is sovereign of precious treasures, hence requested to act as a healer and remove all ill health”.^[18] The water is considered to be a preservable, precious panacea for the disease condition.

2.2 Water as Universal Remedial Agent

The medicinal property of water, uplifts it as a universal remedial agent i. e. vishwa bheSaja. Water was known to give strength and vigor as it is mentioned in RV. It is known to relieve the weakness or degeneration (kñaya). Water is abundantly filled with Medicinal Herbs; helps to protect body, so that one can live long according to RV.^[19] “Water is present in all Medicinal Herbs of the World, as TU explains the same in verse 1.7.1. Thus, water was considered to be the main ingredient of herbs and plants, also all living beings, in particular human beings. In AV water gets first place as a curative medicine, Water gives strength, it is remedial, it expels diseases.^[20] AV tells indirectly that water contains nectar, the mythological divine drink which makes Gods (Deva) unageing and immortal. AV feels that water is, as skilled as a physician, even the herbs are medicinal because they are the products of water. The early beginnings of the art of healing and of the knowledge of healing herbs are found in the “kauçika sūtra “of the AV.^[21] Yajurveda in the verse 15.20 elaborates the application of water differently. “Water is the light, the essence, the nectar and the God, the Brahman”. Yajurveda described water is good for eye problems and is energetic. Up till now in day-to-day practices most of the eye problems are removed by rinsing eye with water.^[22] Inherent properties of water both Physical and chemical are responsible for the different functions which are carried out by water in both human beings and plants. Water moves from root of the plant till the tip by capillary action. Capillary action is the ability of a liquid to flow in narrow spaces without the assistance of, and in opposition to external forces like gravity. Water is capable of capillary action due to its properties of adhesion & cohesion.^[23]

An example of capillary action in human biology is the drainage of constantly produced tear fluid from the eye. This is essential in many parts of the body, especially: (low viscosity and lubricating property) in the thoracic and abdominal cavities where internal organs (e.g., the heart and lungs, and the organs of the digestive system) are located next to each other and slide over one another as the body moves.^[24] At synovial joints, structures such as bones, ligaments, and tendons must move smoothly relative to one another without being hampered by friction between the various structures/surfaces. Lubrication is required when internal organs/cells come into contact with one another and glide over one another. Organisms Depend on Cohesion. Hydrogen bonds hold the substance together, a phenomenon called cohesion. Cohesion is responsible for the transport of the water column in plants. The existence of hydrogen bond will help water to consider a unique media to treat all the ailment.^[25] The physical properties are recognized in rain water as stated in Sūtra Stāna (SS) 45.3. It was stated that water dropping down from sky, has no taste, no odour. It is absolutely pure and beneficial like nectar. it gives and sustains life, quenches thirst, cures wounds by weapons etc. and revives the consciousness of those who faint due to fatigue, gives clear knowledge, removes drowsiness, burning sensation in the body. The concept of water in Rigveda also recognizes these properties of water as divine values. “The water which is created in the universe, the water which flows in the form of river etc, the water which comes from the digging of the wells, canals etc., the water which is self-created in the form of waterfalls etc, who enters into the ocean and who is pure and full of light, who is full of divine characteristics, help me in this world. Thus, Water is being mentioned as the great purifier and help when received.^[26] The rejuvenation therapy (rasāyana) originally based on ‘Rasa’ means water only. The rasa or sap of water is known to care like mother. Water is considered as mother who can know to care in the disease process and correct the system. Vedic texts consistently use ‘rasa’ in the sense of water. “āpam rasaù” is a frequently appearing phrase in the AV. Similarly, in the AV there was frequent praise of water and its virtues such as conferring luster, putting away old age, resisting of diseases and bringing of immortality are emphasized.^[27] Thus, in the Vedic age water was regarded as rasāyana and it is said to fulfil all the functions and dispeller of diseases.

2.3 Healing process in water

Healing process in water is categorized into three remedial properties like Absorbing and communicating property, change of state and solvent property.^[28]

2.3.1. Absorbing and communicating property:

According to the concept of Indian philosophy as explained in Vedic age, water gets divided into minute particles due to the effect of sun rays and wind. Then it ascends to the atmosphere by the capillary of air. It gets condensed there and subsequently falls as rainfall. So, absorption of water by the atmosphere was recognized here. The verse RV,83.4 Rishi Atri prays parjanya in the following words: - "When parjanya (Sun of Heaven) protects the earth with his waters i.e. irrigates the earth, then winds (for rains) are blown, lightning strikes, vegetation sprouts and grows, sky downpours the drops of water and the earth becomes capable for the welfare of the whole world". This verse mentions about absorption of water by earth helping the vegetation and energy will be gained through this vegetation.^[29] Compared with other materials water can absorb or release a relatively large amount of heat energy while only adjusting its own temperature by a relatively small amount. Therefore, the fact that water accounts for a significant proportion of body mass helps the body to cope with environmental temperature variations and maintain the body's temperature within a safe and comfortable range. The specific heat of the body and water help in the amount of heat that must be absorbed or communicated between water and body to be same. SS mentions that Aqua is a major chemical required for digestion of food taken in. It is advisable to sip little water during meals. The water is also said to give nutrition in the verse VII.49.2 of RV. Nutrition of the body is by two processes mainly, absorption of food and communication of heat produced in cellular activity. So, absorption and communication can be very effective through watery medium when it is used internally.

2.3.2. Change of state:

In Linga purana of 1.36.38 and 1.36.39 say that water is never destroyed nor lost, only its state is changed. Verses 1.36.66-67 of the Linga purana says that it changes one state to the other, water (liquid) to Vapour (gas) by sun heat. Vapour ascends to the sky with the air and gets converted into cloud. The cloud will be converted into rain fall. These verses indicate that the interchanging of solid, liquid and vapour state of water was known.^[30] The tripartite nature of agni has been connected with the three forms of water – celestial, atmospheric, and terrestrial, called by different synonyms in RV. In Verse XII362.4 of Mahabharata, it is explained that sun rays will rain for 4 months and same water will be extracted by the sunrays.^[31] The circulation of water in different forms. The change of state of water from solid to liquid and liquid to gas or vice versa provides a wide range of application each state exhibiting unique effect on the body.^[32]

2.3.3. Solvent property:

In cāndogya upaniṣad verse 6.13.1, the dissolving property of water where the son çvetaketu gets the knowledge of Brahman. Water is an excellent solvent that transports many essential molecules and other particles around the body. These include nutrients and waste products from the body's metabolic processes. Ionization, Electronegativity and osmosis in water, helps to flush out toxins and waste products from tissues and ultimately from the body.^[33] Elimination by water is mentioned in Veda both from body and mind. Water is said to wash away the wicked tendencies in a person the treacheries burning within and any falsehood of the mind.8.1. RV offers oblations to deities presiding over the flowing waters- "O Water, which we have drunk, becomes refreshing in our body. May you be pleasant to us by driving away diseases and pains – O divine immortal waters" (RV 63). Water is seen as the reservoir of all curative medicines. 'varuṇa' is a cosmic ruler as well as the deity that dwells in waters, presides over them and is, therefore, prayed to for granting strength and virility to people'. Water is considered to be a purifier, life-giver, and destroyer of evil.^[34]

2.4 Techniques of Hydrotherapy

Baths, Packs, Compresses and irrigations are the main treatment modalities of hydrotherapy which were practised in ancient India. All these treatments have different action and reaction according to the ability of response in the person, temperature, duration, area of application and mode of application used. The cold receptors will get stimulated gradually but hot receptors suddenly.^[35] The series changes can occur in three phases as action, reaction and remote effect. So, hydrotherapy prescription making should be very much subjective. The modalities like cold bath and immersions were practiced by appreciating the beneficial effects. Verse 9.1 of RV mentions about deeply entering to water which will produce shining of skin in person. In RV ponds of varying depths for bathing was mentioned in hymn no10/71/7.^[36] All major religions of India place an emphasis on ceremonial purity, and bathing is one of the primary means of attaining outward purity. Ancient Indians used elaborate practices for personal hygiene with three daily baths and washing. In Hindu households, any acts of defilement are countered by undergoing a bath and Hindus also immerse in Sarovar as part of

religious rites. These are recorded in the works called *gruhya sūtra* and are in practice today in some communities. The *gruhya sūtra* or Vedic domestic rites and rituals for the householders mentions about washing hands, taking bath, wearing wet cloth as in pack and sipping water as part of many rituals.^[37] Steam bath and Sun bath, are mentioned in *āyurveda* as *svedana*, *snehana*. They are the pre procedures for *Panchakarma*.^[38] An herbal combination is added sometimes to the steam for medicinal effect. Sea bathing and river bathing were also advised as a hygienic measure in Hinduism. Local baths like 'Foot bath' improves eyesight and pacifies the mind. This rejuvenates the circulatory system. The foot bath is recommended for curing acute headache, insomnia, disorders related to blood pressure, etc.^[39]

There is clear instruction on drinking water based on a person's nature. When water is consumed, it bestows fortunate divinity on the individual who drinks it. 4.1 of RV. Consuming water about 1.5 liters each morning on an empty stomach, as well as throughout the day is called *uña kāla cikistā*. Water therapy is considered to be a material way of taking an "internal bath".^[40] The attributes of rainwater gathered prior to the contact with land are listed by *çuçruta* in the 45th branch of SS. 'It beats the disparities caused by *vātā*, *pitta*, *kapha* offers vigor, augments the seven building materials of the body known as *saptadhātu* which enhances the brain activity'. Once it touches the land its quality changes according to the quality of the terrain. *cāēakya nēti* in the verse 41 mentions that during indigestion the right and suitable food is water only, preferably hot water.^[41] CS mentions that Water taken at dawn works like the heavenly nectar, and in the process of assimilation, it bestows strength; water works like poison when taken immediately after food and as a medicine when properly employed during disease condition. SS talks about the quantity of water to be taken. The food doesn't get digested and assimilated if water is consumed in very high quantities. The same problem occurs when water is consumed in too low quantities. It is important to drink more water on a regular basis if you want to have a decent appetite. A person suffering from loss of taste, heartburn, oedema, any of the wasting illnesses, poor digestion, abdominal dropsy, skin disorders, fever, diseases affecting the eyes, ulcer, and diabetes mellitus should drink as little water as possible. AS in the verse 5 states that water consumed in the middle, at the end and in the beginning results in a balanced structure, obese structure and a lean structure, respectively. SS warns that water taken before meals will dampen the digestive power (*jaōharāgni*) and dilute the digestive juices, and in the long run, it results in malassimilation (ineffective assimilation). Water, when taken immediately after meal, causes obesity, and hence, it is advisable to take little water in the course of meals.

SS explains about the thirteen types of fomentation as well as their indications and contra indications. At the time of fomentation, it is necessary to protect the body like eyes, heart and testicle. Because these are most delicate parts of the body. Fomentation is to be administered until there is complete recovery from cold, colic pain, stiffness and heaviness of body, or until tenderness and sweating appear there.

SS in the verse 45 explains the use of describes the therapeutic benefits of cold water. Cold water is known to be helpful in treating epilepsy, in summer, in the condition of excessive body heat, the imbalance of *pitta*, treating blood poisoning, problem associated with excessive consumption of wine, the state of unconsciousness, exhaustion, vertigo or dizziness and nausea. Although cold water is good and is recommended to be used as medicine, its use is not advised under conditions, such as pain at the sides of the chest, catarrh, rheumatism, diseases of the larynx, distention of the stomach by gas or air, cases of undigested faeces, acute stage of fever, just after the exhibition of any emetic or purgative remedy, severe cough and soon after consuming fatty or oily drinks (*snehapāna*) acute cold, *vātā* diseases, sore throat, gastritis, constipation, fever immediately after dysentery and nausea, during hiccups and on consuming more of oily food.

3. CONCLUSION:

Water is an essential component in the medical field. It is unquestionably a component of treating symptoms and eradicating the underlying cause of the sickness. The word 'jévanaà' is derived from the root verb 'jéva' meaning embracing life or 'prāēadhāraēē'. Water is given the word *jévanaà* to show its importance in life. Water is broadly found in scriptures as an utter necessity in bathing, (*snaana*), drinking (*pāna*), cleansing (*çauca*), relieving treatment (*cikitsā*), hospitality

(upacāra), farming (kruñi), and offering (tarpaëaà). Mahatma Gandhi employed water therapy to effectively heal many people's diseases. Water is consequently understood as the elixir of life. Water is used both in the preparation of medications and in their consumption. Prevention, treatment and maintenance of health through is a divine responsibility of every person. In this regard, the knowledge of ancient scholars on usage of water as medicine water is thought to bring peace, happiness wealth, long life and good health.

NOTE:

The study highlights the efficacy of "ayurveda" which is an ancient tradition, used in some parts of India. This ancient concept should be carefully evaluated in the light of modern medical science and can be utilized partially if found suitable

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ABBREVIATIONS:

RV - Rigveda

YV - Yajurveda

BAU - Bruhadäraëyakopanisad

TU - Taittaréya upaniñad

CS - Caraka Samhita

AS - Añöäìgasangraha

AV - Atherva Veda

SS - Sütra Stäna

UNDER PEER REVIEW