Critical review of Snan (bathing), its effects on health – Ayurvedic & modern view

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Abstract: The ayurvedic science emphasizes on lifestyle for longevity and disease free health status of individual. The ideal lifestyle is described by many ways in the Ayurveda among which Dincharya (daily regimen) is important one. The Dincharya explained ideal behavior right from early awakening upto sleep which is to be followed daily to remain healthy. The snan (bathing) is part of dincharya which is practiced daily. Nowadays, many types of bath in this modern world are heard but knowing the health benefits of it is lacking in the society. The health benefits of snan have not been focused deeply though it is described very clearly and deeply in Ayurveda. Moreover, many studies revealed its benefits on physical, mental, psychological level. Hence this article aims to review the topic of snan, its details from ayurvedic and modern point of view along with its health benefits.

Keywords: - Snan, Dincharya, Shaucha, immersion bathing,

Introduction

The most important goal of Ayurveda is to promote & maintain health. According to ayurvedic knowledge, we can achieve this by aligning our daily lives with the cycles of nature & use the natural rhythm of time. A daily routine is absolutely necessary to bring radical changes in body, mind & consciousness. Routine helps to establish balance in one’s physical & mental constitution. It also regularizes persons biological clock, aids digestion, absorption, assimilation & generates confidence, self control, peace, happiness & longevity. A wise person who wish to have healthy life, should follow all the regime mentioned in the dincharya. Dincharya (daily regimen) starts from bramamuhurta utith (means awakening one & half hour before sunrise) followed by Mala-mutra visarjana (excreation of urine & excreta), Dantadhavana (brushing of teeth), Jhvanirlekhana (tongue cleaning), Mukhrakshalana (washing of face); Anjana (collyrium), Nasya (nasal drops), Kaval Gandush (washing of oral cavity with medicated liquids in various forms), Dhumpaana (inhalation of medicated fumes), Tambula sevana, Abhyang (external oleation), Vyayama (exercise), Udvarthana (dry massage by medicines), Snana (bathing) etc. In Ayurveda & puraana, the importance of cleanliness for prevention of disease is mentioned. In patanjali yoga sutra; Shauch (cleanliness) is one type of Niyam (part of ashtang yog). The Shauch is classified in external & internal types. The Snan (bathing) comes under external Shauch, In Mahabharat, five types of shaucha are mentioned – Man (mental), Karma (behavioural), Kaal (time), Sharir (physical), Vak (speech) shaucha.

The details like method, types, benefits, indications, qualities of snana are mentioned in different ayurvedic classical literature like bruhatatrayee, Bhavprakash, Yogratnakar, yagnvalkya smriti etc.

This articles will review the ayurvedic views on Snan (bathing) along with its details, various aspects and health benefits.

Review of Literature :-

1. Definition -
Snan is one of regimen of dincharya which has to be done daily. It removes sweat, dirt, fatigue from body and stimulant of libido1.

2. Matra of Snana
According to Swasthavrutta Sudha, it should be performed like an elephant which means more quantity of water should be used to take bath in order to clean the whole body. According to modern science 140-150 liters of water per person is required for daily purposes which include bathing.2

3. Time of Snana
According to Yogratnakara, one should take bath early in the morning. Among the daily regimen (dincharya), the bathing (Snana) is described after Vyayama. There will be Ayasa (tiredness) after doing Vyayama. Hence snana should be practiced after Vyayama to relieve the Ayasa.3

4. 7 Types of Snan (According to Yagnavalka)
a) Mantrasan – Bathing by uttering Mantra given in upnishad
b) Bhouoma - Bathing by smearing the whole body with mud
c) Agneya - Application of Bhasma (Ash)
d) Vyayavya - Bathing with dust arising while cow is walking
e) Divya - Snana in sun rays combined with rain.
f) Varuna - Bathing in river water.
g) Manasa - Thinking about the sacred soul.

3 types of Snan –
   a) Nitya Snan – Daily bathing
   b) Naimmittik Snan – bath on special occasion like death of relative, after hair cut etc.
   c) Kamya Snan – bath after special vows undertaken like temple tank

According to Mahabhrata, “Varuna Snana” is considered as best among the types of snana. Varun snan is performed in river water.²

Suitable place for Snana :-

According to Manusmruti, one should perform Snana daily in river, near temples, scared places (Tirthsthana), ponds, sarahas (flow of water like river), Garta (dugged well), Prastravana (water fall).³

Health Benefits of Snana :-

(A) Ayurvedic view –

1. According to charak samhita⁶
   - purifying, aphrodisiac,
   - promoter of life & Ojus
   - destroys fatigue, sweat & dirt, resuscitative
   - brings strength in the body.

2. According to Sushrut samhita⁷
   - removes the feeling of sleep, burning sensation, fatigue, sweating, itching, excessive thirst
   - the best cleansing medium.
   - beneficial to the heart, stimulates all the senses.
   - removes drowsiness & evil thoughts, affords contentment, increases the sexual virility in male,
   - stimulates the digestive power & causes purification of blood.

3. According to Ashtang hridya samhita⁸
   - improves appetite, sexual vigour, span of life,
   - also enhances valour (enthusiasm), strength
   - improves itching, dirt, exhaustion, sweat, stupor, thirst, burning sensation & sin.

4. According to Yogaratnakara⁹
   - Paap Nashaka (relieves all sins),
   - Dukha swapna vidiwamsana (destroys the doshas of bad dreams),
   - Pavithram (auspicious),
   - Deha mala Nashakam (removes all morbid matters of body),
   - Tejo Vardhanam (improves luster),
   - Rupadhyokaram (helps in beautification of body),
   - Shareera Sukha Dayakam (brings pleasing or happiness to the body),
   - Kayagnideepanam (increases digestive fire),
   - Shramaharam (relieves stress of work).

5. According to Bhavaprakash¹⁰
   - improves color & complexion of the skin,
   - removes itching & disorders of skin.

6. According to Kalyanarka
   - Enhancement of satisfaction, strength, luster, health,
   - long life, the normalcy of the humors & smoothness & also increases digestion and appetite.

7. According to Yadnyavalka smriti, Snan provides ¹⁶
   - Bala (strength),
   - Roopa (beauty),
   - Tej (glow of skin)
   - Shaucha (cleaness of body),
   - Aayushya (Life)
   - Aagrogya (Disease free life)
   - Alolupa (non greediness)
   - duswapna nasha (Destroys bad dreams)
   - Yash (Success)
   - Medha (Intelligence)

Effects of cold water & hot water bath -¹¹,¹²,¹³-

Bathing with cold water relieves rakta-pitta (bleeding disorders) whereas hot water bathing increases strength & even relieves vata & kapha doshas. Taking Hot water bath to body parts below shoulder (Adhay kaya) increases strength of the body but taking the hot water over head during bath decreases the strength of hairs & eyes.
Contraindication of Snana according to Ayurveda - 14,15:-

- Arditha (facial palsy)
- Atisara (diarrhea)
- Aadhmaan (distension of abdomen)
- Pinasa (rhinitis)
- Ajeerna (indigestion)
- Bhuktavat (immediately after taking food)
- Jwara (fever)
- Karna shool (earache)
- Anila (vata)
- Arochaka (Anorexia)
- Netra (eye), Aasya (oral), karna (ear) diseases.

Modern View –

Taking bath has great physical and mental health benefits. Several forms of bathing include conventional shower stem shower, sauna, bathtub (immersion).

i) Anti microbial effect-
   The bacterial, fungal load from contact of environment can accumulate increasing the risk of infection. The bathing is a natural way to clean the skin and helps to avoid irritation, inflammation & sores caused by dead skin cell accumulation.

ii) Action on mental health and stress –
   The snana helps to sleep well. Some researchers showed 30 min bath at 104 Fahrenheit degree improves the problem of depression. Warm baths are also linked to decrease in stress hormones and more balanced serotonin level helping to regulate the mood. Two cross sectional studies showed the people who had a habit of bathing in hot water have good subjective health status, sufficient sleep and rest, low levels of stress, high subjective happiness 17,18.

iii) Action on Cardiovascular system –
   A study on bathing in patients with cardiovascular diseases showed hemodynamic improvement. 17,18

iv) Action on Metabolism –
   The method of immersion bathing in hot water causes vasodilatation by hyperthermic action resulting in elevation of supply of oxygen and nutrients to the peripheral circulation as well as increased elimination of carbon dioxide & metabolic waste products. 17,18

v) Action on musculoskeletal system –
   The hyperthermic action of hot water relaxes the muscles, softens collagen in ligaments and articular capsules, improves musculoskeletal function. 19

vi) Action on skin health –
   It improves Roop (complexion), tej (lusture, glow) of skin due to vasodilation. It removes itching and skin disorders. Siddarthak Snan is one of the medicated bathing described in Ayurveda to treat skin diseases.

vii) Action on digestive power –
    It improves the appetite and digestive power.

viii) Action on sexual health –
    It improves the libido, sexual vigor. It increases the Oja (essence of all body elements).

Discussion –

The snan (bathing) is one of the important daily regimen as described by Ayurveda. Its various types are described in Ayurveda and modern science also. The Ayurveda mentioned Gajavat snan i.e. using plenty of water & till the satisfaction of body & mind whereas according to modern science the immersion method of bathing is more beneficial than having the shower bath as it increases the supply of oxygen & nutrients to the peripheral circulation, elimination of carbon dioxide and metabolic waste materials. Further, Ayurveda mentioned the positive effects of snan on skin tone, strength of body, mental status, dreams, success, intelligence, disease free life which reflects the deep thinking of ayurvedic science. Ayurvedic science also mentioned contra indications of snan which are lacking in the modern science.

“Rules of taking bath”
1. A bath should be taken in the morning & should be before the morning meal.
2. Bathing should be done with lukewarm water except of head, rubbing the entire body with cloth early after bathing helps improves luster, removes itching & disorders of the skin.
3. Always changed the dress after bath, sleep, while going out of house & for worshipping gods.
4. Bathing entering into reservoirs of water & sleeping should not to be naked.

Conclusion –

1. The snan is described on broad level in ayurvedic science along with its contra indications.
2. It has multiple positive health benefits on Physical, mental, psychological levels along with multiple systems of the body.
3. The hot water immersion method of bathing is considered as best for positive health effects. In Ayurveda Varun snan is considered as best but season wise use of water in bathing is also mentioned to maintain dosh saamya.
4. Snan is purifying act of body, mind & soul. It has to be practised by everyone everyday & whenever needed.

Conflict of Interest –

Author does not claim any conflict of interest.

Citation –


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