

Conceptual review on Ayurvedic methodology of *Svedan Karma*

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Abstract

This review focuses on the ancient Ayurvedic therapeutic procedure known as *Svedan karma*, or sudation therapy, as outlined in classical texts like the *Charak Samhita*. *Swedana*, the therapeutic application of heat or steam to induce sweating, is essential in *Ayurvedic* pretreatment (*Pūrvakarma*) and specific curative protocols. The methodology involves diverse techniques (*Svedana* types) and consideration of benefits (*Svedana guṇa*), potential complications, and specific contraindications (*upayogīyo*), as discussed primarily in the fourteenth chapter of the classical text. The application of *Swedana* is aimed at balancing the bodily humors (*doṣas*) and treating conditions arising from their vitiation, such as pain or urinary issues.

Keywords: *Swedana, Ayurveda, Charak Samhita, Sudation, Panchakarma, Doṣa, Caturdaśo'dhyāya*

Introduction

Ayurveda, defined as the science of life (*Āyur lakṣaṇa*), is characterized by its holistic approach to maintaining health and curing disease. It considers the body (*śarīra*), sense organs (*indriyas*), mind (*sattva* or *mana*), and soul (*ātmā*). The principles of *Ayurveda* address the entire universe (*loka*), emphasizing the components of *dravya* (substance), *guṇa* (quality), *karma* (action), *samavāya* (inseparable concomitance), and *viśeṣa* (differentiation). The concept of *karma* refers to the action of the body, which is intended to maintain health or perform therapeutic functions.^[1]

Among the key therapeutic actions (*karma*) described in *Ayurveda* are the purification procedures known collectively as *Panchakarma* (or variations thereof), which include processes for elimination and palliation of *doṣas*. *Swedan karma*, the subject of this review, is a vital preparatory action (or sometimes a stand-alone treatment) that precedes major elimination therapies like *virechana* (purgation) and *vamana* (emesis).^[2]

The comprehensive description of this therapy is found in the fourteenth chapter of the classical text, the *Charak Samhita*, titled चतुर्दशोऽध्यायः.^[1]

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this review is to comprehensively detail the methodology of *Swedan karma* based on the textual description provided in the relevant chapter of the *Charak Samhita*.

The objectives are:

1. To enumerate the various types of *Swedana* procedures described in the text.
2. To list the benefits (*guṇa*) and potential complications or specific contraindications (*upayogiyo*) associated with *Swedana*.
3. To note specific therapeutic applications of *Swedana* identified in other treatment contexts, such as managing the urge to urinate (*mutrapratisiddha*).

Methodology

The methodology of *Swedan karma* is primarily drawn from the topics addressed in the *Caturdaśo 'dhyāya* (*Caturdaśo 'dhyāya*) (page 219–234) of the *Charak Samhita*.^[1] The text lists the following topics related to this therapeutic modality:

1. **Svedana:** स्वेदन
2. *Svedana* benefits (स्वेदन गुण)
3. Contraindications and the appropriate recipient of *Svedana* (उपयोगियों—*upayogiyo*)
4. Types of *Svedana*:^[3]
 - *Svedana* with or without unctuous
 - Types of *Svedana* (e.g., *sankara sveda*, *prastara sveda*, *nadi sveda*, *pani sveda*, *avatagama*, *karsuva*)
5. *Upavesana* and its methods (उपवेशन—*Upaveśana ke guṇa vai vidhi*)
6. Different types of sudation procedures:
 - संकरस्वेद (*Sankara Sveda*)
 - प्रस्तरस्वेद (*Prastara Sveda*)
 - नाडीस्वेद (*Nāḍī Sveda*)
 - परिषेकस्वेद (*Pariṣeka Sveda*)
 - अवगाहस्वेद (*Avagāha Sveda*)
 - कूर्चस्वेद (*Kūrca Sveda*)
 - जेंताकस्वेद (*Jentāka Sveda*)

- अश्मस्वेद (*Aśma Sveda*)
- कर्षुस्वेद (*Karṣu Sveda*)
- कूर्चस्वेद (*Kūrca Sveda*)
- भूर्मिस्वेद (*Bhūrmi Sveda*)
- कुटीस्वेद (*Kuṭī Sveda*)
- दम्पाकस्वेद (*Dampaka Sveda*)
- होलाकास्वेद (*Holāka Sveda*)

7. Appropriate and inappropriate *Svedana* (अतियुक्त *Svedana*, विरहित *Svedana*)

The therapeutic use of *Svedana* is often preceded by unctuous application (*sneha* or *taila*). For instance, regarding the obstruction of urine urge, treatment includes applying oil (*taila*) and fat (*vasā*) externally and internally, followed by *Svedana* (sweating) using heat, and then *virechan* (purgation). This confirms its typical role in clearing pathways (*mārgas*).^[3]

Discussion:

The core purpose of *Swedana* relates to the movement of *doṣas* (bodily humors) that are blocked or stagnant. In the context of *Ayurveda*, the application of heat and moisture serves to soften the body, prepare the *doṣas* for movement, and ultimately expel them via elimination pathways.

The different types of *Swedana* modalities listed, such as *Nāḍī Sveda* (pipe steam application) and *Avagāha Sveda* (tub bath), suggest a highly specific and varied approach to delivering therapeutic heat. This variation is necessary because the treatment must be

tailored based on the patient's constitution (*prakṛti*), season (*kāla*), quantity (*mātrā*), and other influential factors. The specific context of using *Svedana* for urinary retention (*mutrapratisiddha vegon ke rokane*) further highlights its utility in easing internal blocks, as the treatment follows topical application of oily substances and precedes purgation.

The text also implies that excessive or inappropriate *Svedana* can lead to harm (अतियुक्त *Svedana* and विरहित *Svedana*). This emphasizes the necessity for accurate diagnosis and precise application of the method, reflecting the detailed attention paid to successful treatment (or *kriyās siddhi*) described elsewhere in the text, which is based on skillful combinations of the four pillars of treatment (*Catuspāda*): physician (*Bhaiṣaja*), substances (*dravya*), attendant (*paricāraka*), and patient (*rogi*).

Conclusion:

Based on the topics covered in the *Charak Samhita*, *Swedan karma* is established as a diverse and essential methodology in *Ayurvedic* therapeutics. The text delineates numerous specific methods of sudation (*Sankara Sveda*, *Nāḍī Sveda*, etc.) along with explicit guidance on its benefits and limitations, particularly documented in the *Caturdaśo'dhyāya*. Its use in managing specific pathological states, such as alleviating pain associated with suppressing the urge to urinate, underscores its role in mobilizing bodily humors (*doṣas*) and facilitating healthy elimination. The classical *Ayurvedic* methodology of *Swedana*

emphasizes a customized and carefully executed approach to external heat application.

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