

MODIFICATIONS IN SHIRODHARA EQUIPMENT: AN OVERVIEW**Dr. Subhash Sharma^{1*} and Dr. Bharti Sharma²**

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ABSTRACT

Shirodhara is a classical procedure carried out in order to alleviate *urdhava jatrugata vikaras*. Although a brief description regarding its properties and instrumentation is available in classical Ayurvedic textbooks but *Dhara kalpa* a doctrine of familial *Vaidyas* of South India explains everything ranging from its instrumentation to properties of *dhara* carried out with specific *dravyas*. The procedure with classical instrumentation remained a part of this holistic system for a long time. The need for change with time in every field has led to the evolution of instrumentation in *Shirodhara* equipment also. This paper is an attempt to overview the change in instrumentation of *Shirodhara* and to evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of the newer instrumentation.

KEYWORDS: *Shirodhara, Murdhni Tailam, Dharapatra, Spa Therapy, Droni, Shirahseka.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic classical texts consider *Shirah Pradesh* as *Uttamanga* and a *Pradhana Marma* which is where *Prana* of body resides and it controls all the senses as well as functions of the body. Its importance is not only justified by its mere functions but specific procedures have been mentioned in *Dincharya* as well as *Ritucharya* for its protection as well as prevention of disorders threatening the *Prahdana Marma* as *Chhatradhrana, Nasya, Shiroabhyanga* etc. Ascertaining the importance of this, *Aacharya Vagbhatta* has mentioned a specific group of procedures collectively known as *Murdhni Tailam*^[1] for prevention of disorders pertaining to *Shirah Pradesh*. These procedures include:

- i) *Shiroabhyanga* i.e. Massage of head with oils having specific *Dosha* pacifying oils.

- ii) *Shirahseka* i.e. pouring of liquids (unctuous and non-unctuous) on forehead and head.
- iii) *Shiropichu* i.e. placing cloth dipped in certain oils on head region.
- iv) *Shirohbasti* i.e. holding oil on head region with the help of a leather cap for a certain period.

The potency and efficacy of these procedures increases in the same sequence i.e. *Shirohbasti* is most potent procedure among all followed by *Shiropichu* and so on.^[2]

Shirahseka, popularly known as *Shirodhara* is an important procedure of this group and practiced in abundance as compared to other procedures along with *Shiroabhyanga*. Traditional practices of *Shirodhara* and its efficacy in various psychological as well as stress induced disorders has not only made it popular but also led to modernization of instrumentation in order to reduce labor and decrease the wastage of raw material required. Modern Spa therapy has inducted *Shirodhara* as its vital component and that has led various developments in the manufacturing and mode of function of its instrumentation. This induction has not only made *Shirodhara* popular among classical practitioners but also among people seeking therapies for relaxation purpose.

Classical instrumentation of *Shirodhara*: A classical *Shirodhara* instrument consists of two important components:

- a) *Dharapatra* with *Shirodhara* stand
- b) *Droni*.

***Dharapatra* with *Shirodhara* stand**

Dharakalpa, a book containing details about *Dhara karma*, describes *Dharapatra* as a vessel made of gold, silver, other metals and even clay and having capacity of two *Prastha* i.e. 1536gm. The vessel should have a perforation at its base corresponding to middle joint of little finger.^[3] This vessel is suspended from a stand with the help of cords tied around rim of the vessel. A suitable wick should be suspended from its base in order to ascertain continuous flow of the substance. *Shirodhara* stand is made of wood with a hook at its upper end for suspension of *Dharapatra*. The classical stands were the fixed ones and their height cannot be varied.

Droni

Droni is prepared from specific trees like *Plaksha*, *Udumbara*, *Gandhsara* etc. having the properties that reduce *Vata*. The measurements of *Droni* should be four *Hasta* i.e. 72 inches long, one *Hasta* i.e. 18 inches wide and a quarter *Hasta* i.e. 4.5 inches high. The *Droni* should have an outlet at the foot end to drain off the used liquids.^[4] It should have two compartments, the proximal or head end and the distal or foot end. The head end of the *Droni* should have a measurement of 18 inches. It should be firmly placed and should have level surface. The arms and legs of table should be firm.



Image I: Classical *Shirodhara* Instrument.

Modifications in *Shirodhara* Instrumentation

The instrumentation of *Shirodhara* has evolved many folds during time so as to derive maximum benefits and reduce wastage and human labor. The vary basis of innovation has been to minimize the damage to wooden aperture as well as to maintain hygienic standards. Modifications of different parts of *Shirodhara* instrument has to be reviewed first in order to understand overall change in terms of development.

a) Modification in *Dhara patra*

It starts with the classical earthen pots and various metals like copper, brass, stainless steel have been used for the same purpose of hanging it from the stand. Newer automatic instrumentation has only a nozzle connected with the motor system so as to dispense required amount of oil/decoction.



Image II: Dhara patra made of different materials.

Shirodhara stand has also got transformed from its traditional wooden frame to newer eye catching and metallic counterparts.

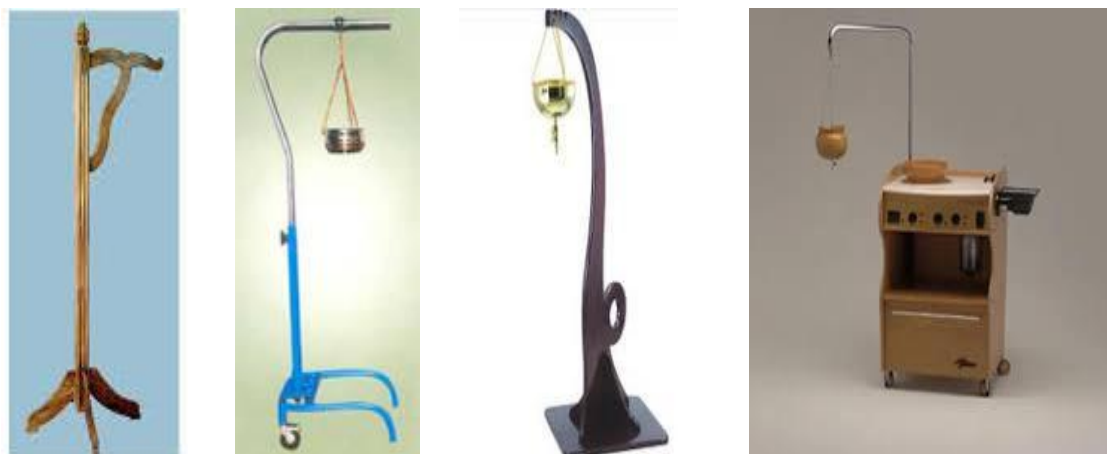


Image III: Different type of Shirodhara stands.

b) Modifications in Droni

Traditionally, *Droni* is made from wood and particularly a single piece of wood and mounted on a stand made of metal or wood. Improvisation in the material of *Droni* has taken place and instead of wood, fiber glass and metallic frame tables with cushions are used now a day as they are both comfortable as well as damage proof. The tidiness of instrumentation and its overall outlook has made these instruments the preferred ones.



Image IV: Change in architecture of *Droni*.

c) Method of performing *Shirodhara*

Shirodhara is classically a manual procedure which requires continuous warming of the fluid as well as sideways movement of *Shirodhara* vessel in order to ascertain continuous flow of fluid over the head. With advent of instruments which maintain the flow and warms the fluid continuously without manual intervention the need for physical labor has decreased. Semi-automatic and fully automatic machines have replaced the classical instrumentation. A portable version of *Shirodhara* machine has now revolutionized the way *Shirodhara* procedure is performed. Modern Spa centers have led to popularization of this procedure and hence a change in outlook in the way this procedure is carried out. A holistic approach has been completely replaced by the approach which is dominated by mechanical instrumentation and concentrated primarily on the comfort of the patient. The aesthetic approach has been replaced by one considering this procedure merely to relieve work stress or as a status symbol. Although an increase in number of patients undergoing this procedure has increased but at the same time the standards of performing this procedures has taken a toll.

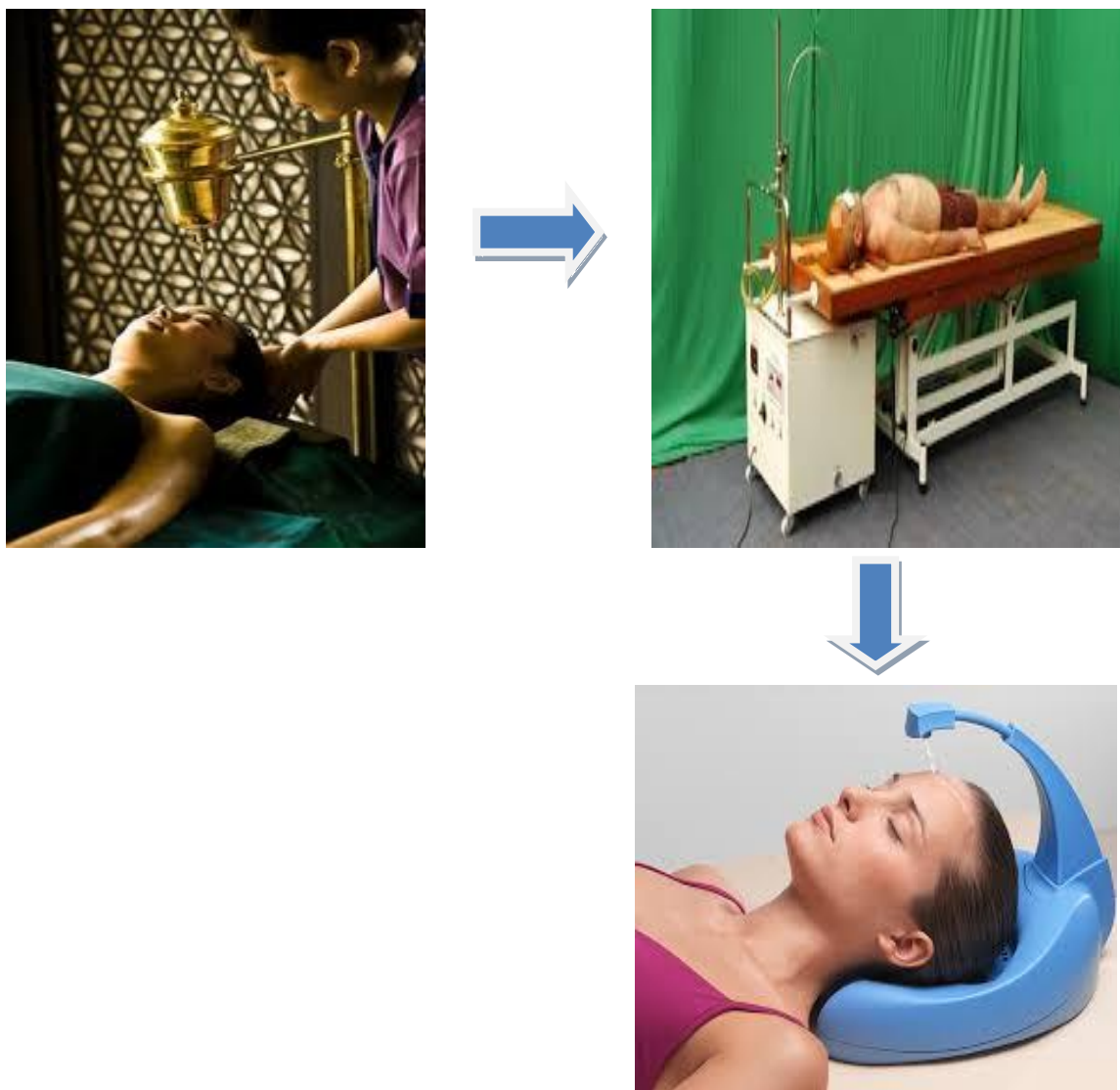


Image V: Change in methods of *Shirodhara* in photographs.

Advantages and disadvantages

- Advantages of newer instrumentation:

1. Reduction in labor of the *Panchkarma* assistants.
2. Wastage of oil is minimized.
3. Hygienic standards have improved drastically.
4. Procedure can be performed even at home (for portable device).
5. Auto warming and motorized flow has reduced the wastage of time during the procedure.

- **Disadvantages of newer instrumentation**

1. A dependency over continuous electric supply is there.
2. Self dependency has increased risks of procedure being performed incorrectly.
3. Holistic approach to treatment has been replaced by mechanical one.

4. Absence of gentle head massage during *Shirodhara* has reduced the effect of healing touch.
5. A continuous vigilance during the procedure is required to ensure the proper functioning of machine.

CONCLUSION

A newer approach to classical ways of performing procedures has opened a new era of opportunities for Ayurveda healthcare professionals. On one hand *Shirodhara* has been popularized by new ways of performing the procedures but on another its holistic ways of cure is gradually replaced by mechanical approach. Benefits on part of time and money are weighed against that obtained by classical *Pranic* healing concepts. *Shirodhara* is popularized as a stress alleviating procedure and its treatment approach has been sidelined because of sheer number of people choosing it for vary same purpose. Overall a change has gradually taken place improving the outlook this procedure and to maintain its holistic approach its original form needs to be preserved. Spa therapies although popularize this procedure but at the same time the way of conducting procedure needs a standardized so as to reap maximum benefits of this aesthetic approach to disease.

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