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Book Review on *Sirassekadi Vidhi*

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INTRODUCTION

The book *sirassekadi vidhi* is one of the ancient books on treatment procedures of Ayurveda written by Puthiyedath Raman Menon, who was born in 1877 and passed away in 1965. The book attempts to authentically document the practicality of certain therapies that are very popular in Kerala but not described in any of *Samhita*. The reputed and mostly accepted five types of *Keraliya kriyakrama* viz *Takradhara*, *Pizhichil (Kayaseka)*, *Pindasweda*, *Annalepa* and *Thalapothishil(Sirolepa)* have been explained here. In light of the basic theories of Ayurveda, their explanation and scientific analysis of their applications are carried out here from the author's personal observation and experiences. The author has also written a Sanskrit

commentary on *Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrastana* and also many scientific articles. He was a disciple of famous Malayalam as well as Sanskrit poet, astrologer and Ayurvedic physician 'Kavisarvabhoma' Cheriya Kochunni Thampuran of *kodungallore kovilakam*. *Kodungallore kovilakam* is a palace of the royal family of the medieval kingdom of *kodungallore* in Kerala, which was a combat Arena of a group of poets whose actions were instrumental in bringing about a lot of positive changes in the world of Malayalam poetry.

The book has two editions, the first one was published by the author himself in 1929. The currently available one is the second edition which is published by



Vaidyabhooshanam K.Raghavan Thirumulpad Foundation for Ayurvedic studies in 2009 and edited by Dr M Prasad. It costs about Rupees fifty and consists of eighty pages. The current edition has been prepared with some modifications from the original. Unlike the first edition, which was printed entirely in Malayalam, the verses and their application have been translated into Sanskrit. Similarly, the synopsis of all the verses has been added as a footnote in English. These reforms are aimed at the medical student community outside Kerala as well.

The motivation behind writing the book has been revealed in the preface as there was no authentic textbook for the practical applications of Kerala special procedures and the books like *Dhara Kalpa*, which is followed by most of the traditional Vaidya, discuss a few points which seem to be irrational and unscientific. Even though the attempt put by the author is appreciable, unfortunately, they were not given enough attention at that time or he was not able to spread it properly.

BODY

It can be considered as a handbook on the principles and practice of *Keraliya Panchakarma* which is presented in *sloka* with Malayalam commentary '*Bhavaprabodhini*' by the author and English annotations by the editor. It consists of seven chapters. As the name suggests the first chapter is *sirasseka vidhi* followed by *kayaseka vidhi*, *pindasweda vidhi*, *annalepana vidhi*, *sirolepana vidhi*, *kala vidhi* and *snehapana vidhi*. In the introductory part, the editor has given the reason behind the inspiration to write the book and a brief account of the author's life history. A statement of the author about the book is also given next to the introduction.

The first chapter *sirasseka vidhi* describes *takradhara* with its indication, peculiarities of *droni*, *dhara* pot, method of preparing medicine for procedure and duration. Though other varieties of *sirasseka* like *tailadhara* hasn't been described in detail, as it has been already mentioned in classical texts like *Ashtangahridaya*, different medicines according to *dosha* predominance and their indications are also mentioned by the author.

In the context of *kayaseka*, the author starts with the primary classification of *snehana* procedure i.e *bahya* and *abhyanthara*. The *bahya snehana* is again classified as *abhynga*, *dhara*, *pichu* and *vasti*. A detailed description of each procedure has been given by the author. Along with it, the quantity of *taila*, duration of the procedure, indication of *kayaseka* are also mentioned. After *snehana*, *shashtika pinda swedana* was explained in the chapter

named *Pindasweda*. The preparation of bolus, procedure and benefits of *shashtika pinda sweda* are specified. A modified form of *shashtika pinda sweda* i.e *annalepana* is mentioned in the next chapter which starts with its indication and then the procedure is described in a concise manner.

Sirolepana, application of medicinal paste over the scalp in a uniform thickness, is described next with its indications and operative procedure. The author also justifies its contra-indications. The chapter ends by describing the role of *gandharvahastadi kashaya* in the *sirassekadi* procedures and the general duration of *pathya krama*. In the chapter named '*Kalavidhi*', the author mentions the appropriate time for the procedures like *Dhara* etc. According to him, these are performed generally in the months of *Ashata*, *Aswina* and *Phalguna*. As the regimen of *snehapana* is taken as the standard routine for all therapies, a narration of dos and don'ts during *snehapana* is given in the last chapter, *snehapana vidhi adhyaya*.

ANALYSIS

The book can be considered as a handy guide for physicians as it details very minute aspects of treatments widely practiced in Kerala. The author hasn't explained procedures that have already been mentioned in texts like *Ashtanga hridaya* but have included the *Keraliya kriya krama* which is mostly practiced unsystematically in the absence of prescriptive science. Though the procedures like *dhara* has already mentioned in books like *Dharakalpa*, the author found some points discussed as unhealthy, unconventional and irrational.

While describing *takradhara*, the author has indicated it only in *kapha-pitta* predominant conditions and contraindicated in *vata* predominant conditions as use of *sheeta* and *ruksha* can aggravate *vata* where as *ruksha guna* will help in pacifying *Kapha* and *Pitta dosha*, *sheeta guna* pacify *pitta dosha*. This is quite different from what explained in *Dharakalpa*, where it is mentioned in conditions like *kara-charana paristhoda* and *hrid ruja* which seems to be *vata* predominant. Similarly, the author has attempted to analyze each and every points practically and rationally throughout the book. Even the rationale behind using *droni* made out of *vatahara* drugs during *takradahra* (which is *kapha pitta hara*) is also explained by the author.

It is also noteworthy that it is specifically stated that *dhara* should be used as "*anamla*" which is in stark contrast to the reference of usage of *amla takra* as explained in *Dhara*

kalpa. This idea needs to be further discussed and observed in view of possibilities of *Vidaha*, and *abhishyanda*. The author adds to mention about disease like *kapha* predominant conditions (*Apachi*, etc) where *amla takra* can be used. The use of drugs in *takradhara* according to *dosha* predominance can also be seen- for example, in diseases with predominant *kapha dosha*, *musta* is used to medicate the *takra*. Similarly, in *pitta* use of *yashtimadhu*, in *kapha-pitta* roga use of *vilwa moola* and in *pitta vata roga*-use of *balamoola* or *satavari* is advised. According to the author, the *dhara* should be fall on the forehead in a rhythmic fashion of writing the Malayalam alphabets ‘*Ra*’ or ‘*Ka*’. Also, the use of tender coconut water or fresh cold water for *shirodhara* in specific conditions are discussed. Similar use of *jaladhara* can also be seen in books like *Chikitsa sangraha* and *Aryvaidya chikitsa marga*. The length of wick used in *dhara* pot and height of *shirodhara* are also mentioned which is different from other books like *dhara kalpa*, *chikitsa sangraha* etc. Rest of the procedures mentioned and specifications of *droni* and *dhara* pot are similar to other classics. In the context of *kayaseka*, the author specifically states that prone position should be avoided to reduce the pressure on the heart and the conditions where oil can be used without heating are also mentioned which cannot be seen in any of the other books. Generally bathing may be done after *kayaseka* in hot water

but author insists that in certain conditions like *Apathanaka Bahyayama* etc bathing should be avoided. Usually the end point of *shashtika pinda sweda* is mentioned as till the medicine used for *sweda* get exhausted, while describing *shashtika pinda sweda* the author shares his observation that if seven rounds of massages are done in each of six positions, the decoction used for dipping will be finished. The procedures like *Annalepana* and *Shirolepa* are explained similar to other texts. The book ends by explaining *Pathya-Apathya* of *Snehapana* as it is applicable for all procedures.

CONCLUSION

The book *sirassekadividhi* is truly beneficial for practitioners as it gives a concise account of *keraliya panchakarma* procedures along with its practicality and rationale. The author has explained all the procedures in detail while explaining the logic behind each step also. So it is a must-have book for practitioners which will add valuable points to one’s practical knowledge.

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Fig 1 Front and Back Cover Of Book

