

Review Article

A Conceptual Review of *Abhyanga* and its Cosmetic Benefits

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2394.6547.201906>

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How to cite this article:

Jhawar S. A Conceptual Review of *Abhyanga* and its Cosmetic Benefits. *J Adv Res Ayur Yoga Unani Sidd Homeo* 2019; 6(3&4): 1-3.

Date of Submission: 2019-12-10

Date of Acceptance: 2020-01-25

A B S T R A C T

Ayurveda is a science of life that from time immemorial has served the purpose of health and beauty to humanity. It has abundance of practices and procedures that when practiced regularly, not only benefit the human health but are holistic to the environment and community. A few of these measures are grouped under *Dinacharya*, one among which is *Abhyanga*. *Abhyanga*, when followed regularly renders various benefits to the body. The mode of action of the same has been clearly explained by *Acharya Sushruta*, in chapters of *Dhamanee Shareera* and *Twak Shareera*. The *Tiryak-Gata Dhamanee* helps to transfer, metabolize and utilize the *Abhyanga Dravya* with the help of other components of the *Twak*, which are then projected by *Avabhasini* layer of *Twak*, along with the other benefits of *Abhyanga*. This regular use of *Abhyanga* is being advocated here in order to re-establish the importance of *Dinacharya*, as well as reduce the burden of cosmetics in a person's life.

Keywords: *Abhyanga, Twak, Dhamanee, Cosmetics*

Introduction

Rome wasn't built in a day. Similarly health and beauty cannot be expected to be achieved with one day's effort. To a person looking at us, the index of our health is expressed by our skin. It is the reflection of our body's internal health. If the health of our body is maintained, it programs the skin to be beautiful. But today, the idea of cosmetics has twisted the definition of beauty by introducing products which, mask the person into looking beautiful. Cosmetic industry today is one of the highest grossing industry, expected to garner more than 429.8 billion by the year 2022.¹ The advent of newer products, by the second, makes it the need of the hour to embrace our roots further more. One such technique is that of *Abhyanga* told as a part of *Dinacharya*. It is a procedure when followed as routine, would not only make the skin better but improve the overall

health indeed. It could be the answer to major health and cosmetic needs today.

***Abhyanga* as a Cosmetic**

In order to understand the effects of *Abhyanga*, it is important to understand the following factors first. It includes:

1. *Twak Shareera*

The *Ayurvedic* assessment of *Twak* includes factors like:

- ***Dosha***:² *Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja* or having mixed features.
- ***Desha***:³ *Akashiya, Vayaviya* and the like (i.e., having *Bhautika* features).
- ***Garbhavakranti***:⁴ *Twak*, is the *Ksheerasantaanika*, creamy layer after a process of *Paaka*, formed from the *Shukra-shonita Samayoga* during *Garbhaavakranti*.¹

This forms the criteria of assessment to us when we examine a patient in the OPD. *Twak* of the patient is not only affected by his environment and habits today but also influenced by the *Shukra*, *Shonita*, *Garbhaashaya*, *Matru-Ahaara* and *Vihaara*. Thus, when all these factors are catered to, resultant *Twak* can be expected to be healthy.

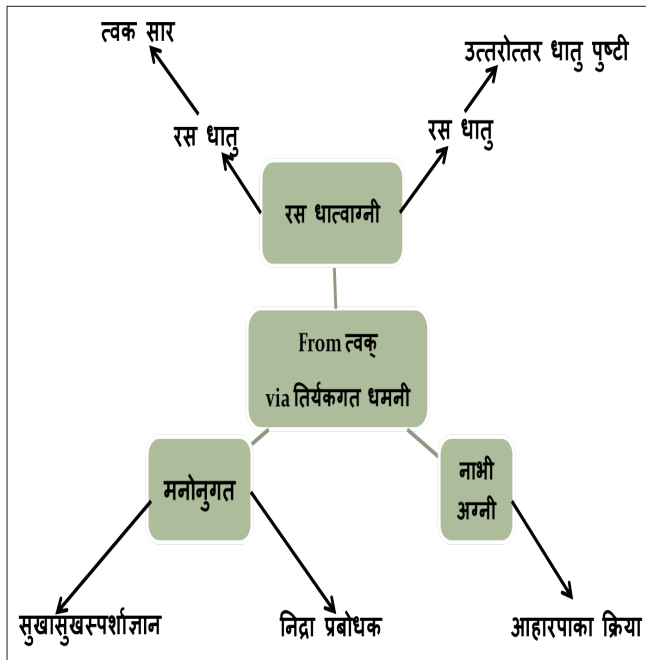
Twak is formed as 7 layers, of which *Avabhaasini* is the first.⁵ The layer that reflects what lies beneath it is called *Avabhaasini*. This layer acts like a mirror projecting the *Pancha-Chhaya*⁶ and *sarva-varnas*⁷ attributed to it, which are *Praakrutik* to the person.

2. Dhamanee Shareera

How does *Abhyanga*, the topical application of oil, aid 'Swaasthya'? The answer to this lies in *Twak Shaareera*⁸ and *Dhamanee Shaareera*⁹ as explained by *Sushruta Acharya*.

Abhyanga Dravya applied over the skin enters the deeper layers of *Twak* with the help of *Twak Bhraajaka Pitta*, *Dehaagni* and *Veerya* of the *Abhyanga dravya*.¹⁰ Once in the *Twak*, their action is not limited to that of the *Twak* only. The *Abhyanga Dravya* reaches the deepest *Dhatu* with the help of *Dhamanees*, that is, *Tiryakgata-Dhamanees* which begin from the *Nabhi*. They re-divide into numerous smaller *Dhamanees* till they reach the *Romakupas* in the *Twak*. Here they act as a channel of transportation of the *Abhyanga Dravyas* from the *Twak* to various places in the body.¹¹

The extent of reach of the *Abhyanga Dravya* can be appreciated as follows:



- Via the *Tiryakgata-Dhamanees*, the *Dravya* travels to the *Nabhi* (*Udbhavasthana* of the *Dhamanees*). *NABHI*

being the *Sthaana* for *agni*,¹² the *Abhyanga Dravya* has its effect on *agni* too. It enhances the *Agni* hence helping in *Aaharapaka Kriya*. This results in the benefits like-*Tushti Prasad*, *Pushti*, *Dardhya-Krut*.

- From the *Nabhi*, these *Dravyas* can travel to the *Hridya* via the *Urdhwagata-Dhamanees*.¹³ Here they have effect on the *Rasa Dhatu*, *Hridaya* being a *Sthana* for it.¹⁴ This has dual benefits of making the person *Rasa Sara* or *Twaksara*¹⁵ and also helping in *Uttarottara Dhatupushti*.¹⁶ This results in benefits of *Sutvak*, *Jara-Shrama Hara*, *Ayu Pradana*.
- Also, as *Twak* is a *Sparshanendriya*,¹⁷ *Abhyanga* over *Twak* stimulates *Manas*. This, in turn, causes *Sukhaasukha Sparshagnyan* and *Nidra Prabodhana*.¹⁸
- Hence, it can be understood that the process of *Abhyanga* with the help of the *Tiryak-Gata Dhamanee* nourishes the skin externally and also the entire body from within.

Discussion

The benefits of *Abhyanga*, as stated by various *Acharya*, are: *Sutvak* (good skin), *Susparsha* (soft or healthy on touch), *Priya darshana* (pleasing in appearance), *alpa Jara and so on* (anti-ageing), and the like. The cosmetic industry flourishes by using the principles of procedures like *Abhyanga*, *Udwartana*, *Utsadana*, *Anjana*¹⁹ and the like to produce products like creams, moisturizers, sunscreens, day creams, night creams, face packs and so on. The modern science also accepts the benefits of massage in overall systemic and cosmetic benefits, but lacks the principles and medications of *Ayurveda*. It is hence needed that we elaborate the benefits of *Dinacharya*, and especially *Abhyanga* to the world.

Conclusion

All these factors put together make a person overall *Swastha*. Therefore, even if *Abhyanga* is done over the *Twak* locally, it manifests into the extensive nourishment of the body. The verse from *Ashtanga Hridaya* regarding the benefits of *Abhyanga* denotes that they are never limited to the *Twak* alone. It has the potency to make the person *Swastha* when practiced regularly and suitably.²⁰ Then, we need not resort to the option of makeup to conceal our shortcomings.

Conflict of Interest: None

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