



# THE RELAXATION THERAPY “SHIRODHARA W.S.R. TO TAKRADHARA”.

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## ABSTRACT

Panchakarma is a traditional Ayurvedic system of detoxification and rejuvenation for the body and mind. Among its most profound relaxation therapies is **Shirodhara**, a procedure where medicated liquids are poured in a continuous, steady stream onto the forehead and the *Agya Chakra*. When processed buttermilk (*Takra*) is utilized as the medium, the procedure is specifically termed **Takradhara**.

This therapy induces a deep state of relaxed awareness, resulting in a dynamic psychosomatic balance. In Ayurvedic physiology, the head is the seat of *Prana*, *Udana*, and *Vyana Vayu*, as well as *Sadhaka Pitta* and *Tarpaka Kapha*. Takradhara re-establishes the functional integrity between these critical sub-types of *Doshas*.

The forehead and scalp are home to several vital energy points (*Marmas*). Takradhara allows the patient to focus on these areas, bringing stability to mental functions and stimulating the *Agya Chakra* (located between the eyebrows) to produce a state of profound relaxation. As a variant of Shirodhara, Takradhara is highly effective and remains an accessible, cost-effective therapeutic option, ensuring that the benefits of this traditional science can be reached by all levels of society.

**Keywords:** Shirodhara, Takradhara, Natural Relaxation, Psychosomatic Balance, Agya Chakra, Ayurveda.

## INTRODUCTION

Shirodhara is a specialized *Keraliya Panchakarma* therapy. While extensive descriptions of this procedure are limited in the primary Brihatrayi texts, the celebrated South Indian classical text, **Sahasrayogam**, provides a comprehensive explanation of its methodology. The term Shirodhara is derived from two Sanskrit words: *Shiro* (Head) and *Dhara* (Flow).

The procedure involves a continuous, rhythmic pouring of liquid onto the patient's forehead. Various liquid media are selected based on the specific clinical requirements of the individual. When processed buttermilk is used, the procedure is known as **Takradhara**.

These therapies are primarily indicated to relieve stress and prevent mental illness. Specifically, *Takra* (buttermilk) exerts a profound soothing effect on the physiology by pacifying both *Vata* and *Pitta Doshas*. By restoring mental calm and stabilizing emotions, these "Dhara" therapies serve as a powerful tool for maintaining psychological equilibrium and overall well-being.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 1. Materials Required

The following materials are required for the preparation and administration of Takradhara:

**Table 1: Composition and Quantity of Materials**

Sr. No.	Contents	Quantity
1.	<i>Amalaki Churna</i>	200 gm
2.	Milk	1.5 L
3.	<i>Musta Churna</i>	100 gm
4.	Taila	10 ml
5.	<i>Rasnadi Churna</i>	5 gm

### 2. Preparation of Medicine

The preparation is divided into two distinct pharmaceutical processes:

#### A) Medicated Takra (Buttermilk):

- **Step 1:** 1.5 liters of milk is diluted with four parts water.
- **Step 2:** This mixture is boiled with 100 g of crushed *Musta* and reduced to one-fourth of the original volume.
- **Step 3:** Once cooled, the *Musta* is sieved out, and the medicated milk is set to sour overnight to form curd.
- **Step 4:** The following morning, the curd is churned. This resulting buttermilk (*Takra*) is then mixed with *Amalaki Kwatha* to prepare the final medium for the *Dhara*.

#### B) Amalaki Kwatha (Decoction):

- Dried *Amalaki* fruit (seeds removed) is boiled with 16 parts water and reduced to **1/8th** of its original quantity.
- **Quality Control:** Only high-quality, sun-dried *Amalaki* (aged at least one year) should be used in coarse powder form.
- **Usage:** A portion of this decoction is used for the *Dhara* mixture, while the remainder is reserved for washing the head post-procedure.

#### ❖ *Purva Karma* (Pre-operative Measures)

- **Shiro Abhyanga:** Depending on the clinical condition, *Bala Taila*, *Ksheerabala Taila*, or a disease-specific oil is applied to the head.
- **Talam:** A small amount of medicated paste/oil is applied to the crown (*Adhipati Marma*).
- **Protection:** The eyes are covered with cotton gauze, and the ears are plugged with cotton to prevent the entry of the liquid.
- **Counseling:** The patient and their relatives are briefed on the procedure, expected benefits, and clinical limitations to ensure cooperation and mental relaxation.

## ❖ Pradhana karma (main procedure)

### 1. Positioning the Patient

The patient is advised to lie in a supine position (*Uttana Shayana*) on the *Dhara Droni* (massage table). A small pillow or rolled cloth is placed under the neck to ensure the head is slightly tilted back, allowing the liquid to flow backward into the drainage system of the table.

### 2. Height and Placement of the Dhara Patra

The *Dhara Patra* (specialized vessel with a hole at the bottom) is suspended exactly above the forehead. The distance between the wick (*Varti*) of the vessel and the patient's forehead should be **4 Angula** (approximately 8–10 cm). This height is critical; if it is too high, it may cause discomfort, and if too low, the pressure will be insufficient to stimulate the *Marmas*.

### 3. The Flow (Dhara)

- **Oscillation:** The vessel is moved in a slow, continuous, and rhythmic pendulum-like motion across the forehead, from one temple to the other.
- **Stream Quality:** The flow of the medicated *Takra* should be as thick as the little finger and must remain unbroken (*Avicchinna Dhara*).
- **Focus Areas:** Special attention is given to the **Agya Chakra** (the space between the eyebrows) and the various *Sthapani* and *Utkshepa Marmas* on the forehead.
- **Manual Assistance:** The practitioner may simultaneously perform a very light massage on the forehead with the other hand to enhance the soothing effect.

### 4. Duration

The procedure is typically carried out for **45 to 60 minutes**, preferably during the early morning hours (*Brahmamuhurta* or before noon) to align with the natural cooling qualities of *Takra*.

## ❖ Pashchata Karma (Post-operative Measures)

1. **Cleaning:** After the stipulated time, the flow is stopped. The head is wiped clean, and the remaining *Amalaki Kwatha* (prepared earlier) is used to wash the scalp to remove any residue of buttermilk.
2. **Talam Removal:** The *Talam* (medicated paste) is removed, and a fresh application of **Rasnadi Churna** is rubbed onto the crown (*Adhipati Marma*) to prevent *Kaphaja* complications like cold or sinusitis.
3. **Rest:** The patient is advised to rest for 30 minutes in a draft-free environment and avoid direct sunlight or heavy physical activity.
4. **Dietary Advice:** A light, warm, and easily digestible meal (*Laghu Ahara*) is recommended following the treatment.

## Possible Mode of Action of Takradhara

### A. Psychosomatic Impact and Marma Stimulation

In Ayurveda, the head is considered the *Uttamanga* (the superior organ), housing several vital points of energy convergence known as **Marmas**. During Takradhara, the continuous, rhythmic pressure of the medicated buttermilk specifically stimulates the following:

- **Sthapani Marma:** Located between the eyebrows, directly correlating to the *Agya Chakra*.
- **Apanga & Avarta Marmas:** Situated around the orbits of the eyes.
- **Utkshepa & Shankha Marmas:** Located at the temples.

- **Seemantha Marmas:** The vital points corresponding to the cranial sutures.

Stimulating these points is believed to communicate with the deepest recesses of the brain. From a modern perspective, this constant tactile and thermal stimulation at the forehead triggers the **Trigeminal Nerve** endings, which sends inhibitory signals to the brain's reticular activating system, inducing a sedative-like effect.

## B. The Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis

The forehead is a highly vascularized area with a direct relationship to the **Hypothalamus**—the control center for the Autonomic Nervous System.

1. **ANS Regulation:** Stress triggers the Sympathetic Nervous System ("fight or flight"). The cooling and rhythmic nature of Takradhara stimulates the **Parasympathetic Nervous System**, reducing heart rate, lowering cortisol levels, and restoring homeostasis.
2. **Cerebral Circulation:** The procedure improves local peripheral circulation, which by reflex mechanism, is thought to enhance cerebral blood flow. Improved perfusion to the prefrontal cortex and hypothalamus enhances higher intellectual functions (Medha) and emotional stability.
3. **Alpha Wave Induction:** Clinical studies often show that the "Dhara" effect shifts brain activity from high-frequency Beta waves (anxiety/alertness) to low-frequency **Alpha waves** (deep relaxation and creativity).

## C. Immunomodulatory Effect

By soothing the *Prana* located at these *Marmas*, Takradhara helps in the "Prana-Vritti" (flow of life energy). Modern correlation suggests that by reducing chronic stress and balancing the ANS, the body's **immune system** (specifically T-cell activity and cytokine balance) is strengthened, as chronic cortisol elevation is known to be immunosuppressive.

## ADVANTAGES OF TAKRADHARA

The therapeutic application of Takradhara offers several distinct advantages, making it a versatile choice in Ayurvedic clinical practice:

### 1. Potent Pitta-Shamaka (Cooling) Effect

Unlike oil-based Shirodhara, which can sometimes be too heavy or heating, Takradhara has a natural cooling (*Sheeta*) property. It is the gold standard for treating **Pitta-dominant** disorders such as:

- Chronic headaches and migraines.
- Burning sensations in the eyes or scalp.
- Inflammatory skin conditions like Psoriasis (*Eka-kushtha*).

### 2. Superior Psychosomatic Stabilization

Takradhara is specifically noted for its ability to pacify **Sadhaka Pitta** (the sub-dosha governing emotions) and **Tarpaka Kapha** (governing the nourishment of sense organs). This makes it highly effective for:

- **Insomnia (Anidra):** Inducing deep, natural sleep without the "hangover" effect of sedative drugs.
- **Anxiety and Depression:** Stabilizing the mind by cooling the "heated" emotions of anger and irritability.
- **Stress Management:** Reducing cortisol levels through continuous rhythmic stimulation.

### 3. Metabolic and Scalp Benefits

- **Dandruff and Hair Loss:** The lactic acid and probiotics in medicated buttermilk, combined with *Amalaki*, act as a natural cleanser and nourisher for the scalp, treating premature graying and hair fall.
- **Non-Greasy:** Unlike oil, Takradhara is easy to wash off and does not leave the patient feeling heavy or oily, making it more convenient for daily-basis treatments.

#### 4. Socioeconomic Accessibility (Economical Dhara)

As highlighted in your abstract, one of the greatest advantages is its **cost-effectiveness**:

- **Resource Availability:** Milk and *Amalaki* are widely available and significantly cheaper than large quantities of medicated oils (like *Mahanarayana* or *Chandanadi* oil).
- **Affordability:** This allows patients from all economic backgrounds to undergo a full 7 to 14-day course of Panchakarma without a heavy financial burden.

#### 5. Safety and Versatility

Takradhara is generally safer for patients who might find oil treatments too "heavy" (*Abhishyandi*). It can be safely administered to:

- Diabetic patients (where oil absorption might be a concern).
- Patients with mild hypertension.
- Elderly patients who require a gentle, soothing therapy.

### CONCLUSION

The ancient Ayurvedic procedure of **Takradhara** represents a profound synergy between biological cooling and neurological stabilization. While traditionally rooted in the *Keraliya Panchakarma* lineage and documented in the *Sahasrayogam*, its relevance in the 21st century is more significant than ever.

As a specialized form of *Shirodhara*, Takradhara excels in the management of **Psychosomatic Disorders** by pacifying the *Sadhaka Pitta* and *Vata Dosha*. By systematically stimulating vital *Marmas*—specifically the *Agya Chakra* and *Sthapani Marma*—the therapy transitions the body from a state of sympathetic "fight-or-flight" to a parasympathetic state of "rest and digest."

From a modern clinical perspective, the efficacy of Takradhara can be attributed to its ability to regulate the **Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis**, thereby lowering cortisol levels and enhancing cerebral blood flow. Furthermore, its unique use of medicated buttermilk (*Takra*) and *Amalaki* provides a cooling, non-invasive, and highly **economical** alternative to oil-based treatments, making it accessible to a broader demographic of patients.

In summary, Takradhara is not merely a relaxation technique but a sophisticated therapeutic intervention. It offers a holistic, safe, and cost-effective solution for stress, insomnia, and inflammatory conditions, proving that traditional wisdom remains a cornerstone for modern mental and physical well-being.

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