



Review Article

## A CRITICAL REVIEW STUDY ON ROLE OF SHIRODHARA IN TWAKVIKAR

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### ABSTRACT

*Shirodhara*, a traditional Ayurvedic therapy, involves the rhythmic pouring of medicated liquids over the forehead, primarily aimed at stress management and relaxation. Its potential in addressing *Twakvikar* (skin disorders) like eczema, psoriasis, and acne, linked to *Pitta* and *Vata dosha* imbalances, is noteworthy. By alleviating stress, pacifying *Doshas*, and enhancing systemic balance, *Shirodhara* contributes to managing these conditions holistically, emphasizing the mind-body connection. Clinical studies suggest its role in enhancing natural detoxification processes and regulating the hypothalamus and limbic system, reducing psychological stress and hormonal imbalances underlying many skin disorders. *Shirodhara's* dual impact on mental and physical health, combined with its ability to improve blood circulation and promote relaxation, supports skin rejuvenation. Medicated oils like *Ksheeradhara* and *Tailadhara* nourish and heal inflamed skin, making *Shirodhara* a valuable adjunct in managing chronic or stress-induced *Twakvikar*.

### INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, emphasizes the balance of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) as essential for maintaining health and preventing disease. Among the many therapeutic techniques described in Ayurvedic texts, *Shirodhara* stands out as a unique procedure for harmonizing the mind and body.<sup>[1]</sup> Derived from the words *Shiro* (head) and *Dhara* (flow), this therapy involves the continuous pouring of medicated liquids, such as herbal oils, decoctions, or buttermilk, over the forehead in a controlled manner.<sup>[2]</sup> While it is traditionally used to alleviate stress and promote relaxation, its application in the management of *Twakvikar* (skin disorders) is gaining recognition.<sup>[3]</sup>


*Twakvikar* encompasses a wide range of skin conditions, including eczema, psoriasis, acne, and dermatitis, which are often associated with imbalances in *Pitta* and *Vata doshas*. These imbalances may manifest as inflammation, dryness, discoloration, or irritation of the skin.<sup>[4]</sup> Additionally, modern lifestyles

characterized by high stress levels, irregular eating habits, and environmental pollution exacerbate skin disorders, making effective treatment approaches critical. *Shirodhara*, with its calming and detoxifying effects, addresses both the physical and psychological factors contributing to *Twakvikar*.<sup>[5]</sup>

The procedure of *Shirodhara* works through its impact on the central nervous system, inducing a state of deep relaxation and reducing the production of stress hormones such as cortisol. Stress is a known aggravator of *Twakvikar*, as it disrupts the immune response and hormonal balance, leading to worsening of symptoms. By calming the mind and reducing stress, *Shirodhara* indirectly mitigates the triggers that exacerbate skin conditions. Furthermore, the medicated liquids used in the therapy possess therapeutic properties that help nourish the skin and soothe inflammation.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Epidemiology of Skin Diseases: Global and Indian Perspective

Skin diseases represent a significant burden on public health globally, affecting individuals of all age groups and socioeconomic statuses. According to the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study, skin conditions are among the top 15 groups of diseases contributing to the overall global disease burden.<sup>[7]</sup> Common skin disorders such as eczema, acne, psoriasis, and dermatitis impact nearly 900 million people

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worldwide, with dermatological conditions ranking as the fourth leading cause of nonfatal disability. Environmental factors, lifestyle changes, and rising urbanization have exacerbated the prevalence of these conditions, making skin diseases a pressing global health challenge.<sup>[8]</sup>

In India, the burden of skin disorders is also substantial, with millions of people affected by a diverse range of dermatological conditions. A study conducted by the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists (IADVL) highlighted that eczema, fungal infections, psoriasis, and acne are among the most common skin ailments in the country.<sup>[9]</sup> Climatic factors such as extreme heat and humidity, combined with pollution and poor hygiene practices in certain areas, contribute significantly to the prevalence of these conditions. Additionally, rapid urbanization and industrialization have led to increased exposure to irritants and allergens, further escalating the incidence of skin disorders.<sup>[10]</sup>

This article explores the multifaceted role of *Shirodhara* in the management of *Twakvikar*. It examines the physiological, psychological, and dermatological benefits of this therapy, supported by classical Ayurvedic principles and modern research. By addressing the root causes of skin disorders and offering a holistic approach to healing, *Shirodhara* emerges as a valuable intervention for individuals seeking sustainable solutions for *Twakvikar*. Through a better understanding of its mechanisms and applications, the potential of *Shirodhara* in integrative dermatology can be further realized.<sup>[11]</sup>

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Literature Review:** Classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Charaka Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, were reviewed to understand the theoretical basis of *Shirodhara* and its application in *Twakvikar*. Modern clinical studies and research papers on *Shirodhara* and its effects on skin health were analyzed.

**Study Design:** A Review analysis of the role of *Shirodhara* in managing *Twakvikar*. Focus on the therapeutic outcomes in patients with conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, and acne.

**Materials Used:** Medicated oils (*Taila*), herbal decoctions (*Kwatha*), and buttermilk (*Takra*) were prepared following Ayurvedic guidelines. The choice of materials was tailored to the individual patient's *Prakriti* and *Dosha* imbalances.

**Procedure:** Continuous and rhythmic pouring of the selected liquid over the forehead for 30–60 minutes. The therapy was conducted in a calm, controlled environment to enhance relaxation and therapeutic benefits.

**Data Collection:** Observations on symptom reduction, improvement in skin texture, and psychological well-being were recorded.

## Concept of *Twak-vikar*

In Ayurveda, *Twakvikar* refers to skin disorders that result from imbalances in the *Tridoshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*), which govern the physiological and pathological functions of the body. The skin (*Twak*) is considered the outermost layer of the body and serves as a reflection of internal health, directly influenced by the balance of the *Doshas*. The Ayurvedic perspective on skin diseases emphasizes not only the symptoms but also the root causes, focusing on systemic imbalances and lifestyle factors.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Classification of Skin Diseases in Ayurveda

Ayurveda categorizes skin diseases primarily under the umbrella of *Kushtha*, which includes a variety of skin conditions ranging from minor infections to chronic and severe disorders. Skin diseases are further classified into:

- **Mahakushtha:** Major skin disorders, typically chronic and difficult to treat (e.g., psoriasis, vitiligo).
- **Kshudrakushtha:** Minor skin conditions, often localized and less severe (e.g., eczema, acne).

Skin disorders are also described in terms of *Vataja*, *Pittaja*, *Kaphaja*, or mixed *Dosha* imbalances, with each type displaying characteristic symptoms:

- **Vataja Twakvikar:** Dryness, roughness, scaling, and fissures.
- **Pittaja Twakvikar:** Redness, inflammation, burning sensation, and oozing.
- **Kaphaja Twakvikar:** Oily, sticky lesions, itching, and heaviness.

## Factors Contributing to *Twakvikar*<sup>[13]</sup>

### Internal Causes

- **Dosha imbalances:** Irregularities in *Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha* lead to impaired metabolic processes and toxin accumulation (*Ama*).
- **Digestive issues (*Agni Mandya*):** Poor digestion and improper elimination lead to toxin build-up, which manifests as skin disorders.
- **Stress:** Psychological imbalances aggravate *Vata* and *Pitta*, worsening inflammatory and stress-induced skin conditions.

### External Causes

- **Environmental factors:** Pollution, allergens, and excessive exposure to sunlight or harsh climates.
- **Lifestyle factors:** Poor diet, sedentary habits, and lack of sleep disrupt *Dosha* equilibrium.

## Samprapti (Pathogenesis) of Twakvikar

In Ayurveda, the pathogenesis (*Samprapti*) of *Twakvikar* (skin disorders) is described in detail, highlighting the sequential progression of the disease from its initial causative factors (*Nidana*) to its clinical manifestation. Understanding *Samprapti* is crucial for diagnosing the condition and tailoring appropriate treatment.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Samprapti Stages of Twakvikar

The development of *Twakvikar* follows the classical six stages of disease progression (*Shat Kriyakala*) in Ayurveda:

#### a) Sanchaya (Accumulation)

- Imbalance in *Doshas* begins due to causative factors such as poor diet, improper lifestyle, and environmental triggers.
- Example: Increased *Pitta dosha* accumulates in the skin tissues due to excessive heat, spicy foods, or stress.

#### b) Prakopa (Aggravation)

- The vitiated *Doshas* are aggravated and become mobile within the body.
- Example: Aggravated *Pitta* causes inflammation and redness, while *Vata* exacerbates dryness and itching.

#### c) Prasara (Spread)

- The aggravated *Doshas* spread through the body via *Rasa dhatu* (plasma) and *Rakta dhatu* (blood).
- Example: The toxins (*ama*) created by imbalanced digestion enter the bloodstream and affect skin tissues.

#### d) Sthana Samshraya (Localization)

- The vitiated *Doshas* settle in the skin (*Twak*), where there is *Khavaigunya* (susceptibility).
- Example: Localized lesions, discoloration, or inflammation develop in specific areas of the skin.

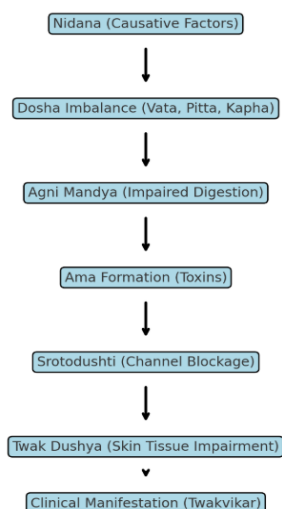
#### e) Vyakti (Manifestation)

- Clinical symptoms of *Twakvikar* become apparent.
- Example: Conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, or acne present with specific characteristics like itching, scaling, or oozing.

#### f) Bheda (Complications)

- If untreated, the disease progresses to chronicity or develops complications, such as deep scarring, infections, or systemic effects.

Flowchart of Samprapti in Twakvikar (Arrow-wise)



### Ayurvedic Approach to Diagnosis

- *Nidana Parivarjana* (identifying and eliminating causative factors) plays a vital role.
- Diagnostic tools such as *Prakriti pariksha* (constitution analysis) and *Dosha* assessment guide personalized treatment.

### Management of Twakvikar in Ayurveda

- **Internal Therapies:** Use of herbal formulations such as *Mahamanjishthadi Kwatha* for blood purification and *Tikta ghrita* for detoxification.
- **External Therapies:** *Abhyanga* (oil massage), *Lepa* (herbal pastes), and *Shirodhara* are integral to skin health.
- **Lifestyle Modifications:** Incorporation of *Dinacharya* (daily routine) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) to restore *Dosha* balance.

### Concept of Shirodhara

*Shirodhara* is particularly emphasized in managing *Twakvikar* associated with stress and *Dosha* imbalances, as it helps reduce systemic inflammation, detoxifies the body, and restores equilibrium, showcasing the holistic nature of Ayurvedic dermatology.<sup>[15]</sup>

*Shirodhara*, derived from the Sanskrit words *Shiro* (head) and *Dhara* (flow), is an ancient Ayurvedic therapy where a continuous stream of medicated liquid is poured on the forehead. This therapy is renowned for its profound effects on the nervous system and its ability to harmonize mind, body, and spirit. Traditionally, *Shirodhara* is prescribed for a variety of conditions, including stress, anxiety, insomnia, and *Twakvikar* (skin disorders).<sup>[16]</sup>

#### 1. Procedure of Shirodhara

The *Shirodhara* process is performed in a controlled and calm environment to maximize its

therapeutic effects. The procedure involves the following steps:

### Preparation

- The patient lies in a supine position on a specially designed *Droni* (wooden table).
- The forehead is cleaned, and the eyes are covered to prevent irritation from the liquid.
- The medicated liquid is warmed to a temperature of around 38–40°C and maintained consistently throughout the procedure.<sup>[17]</sup>

### Execution

- A *Dhara yantra* (a vessel with a hole at the bottom) is positioned approximately 4–6 inches above the forehead.
- The liquid is poured in a continuous, rhythmic stream over the center of the forehead (the *Ajna chakra* or third eye region), moving gently from side to side.
- The pouring lasts for 30–60 minutes, depending on the condition being treated.<sup>[18]</sup>

### Post-Therapy Care

- After the therapy, the patient rests for 15–20 minutes to assimilate the effects.
- The liquid is wiped off, and the head is gently massaged.
- The patient is advised to avoid exposure to cold, wind, or stress immediately after the therapy.<sup>[19]</sup>

### Medicated Liquids Used in Shirodhara

The type of liquid used in *Shirodhara* is chosen based on the patient's *Prakriti* (constitution) and the *Dosha* imbalance. Commonly used liquids include:

#### Medicated Oils (*Taila*)

- Examples: *Kshirabala Taila*, *Brahmi Taila*.
- Indicated for *Vata* and *Pitta* imbalances, promoting relaxation and nourishment.<sup>[20]</sup>

#### Buttermilk (*Takra*)

Indicated for conditions caused by *Pitta* imbalance, such as inflammation and burning sensations.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### Herbal Decoctions (*Kwatha*)

Custom-made formulations targeting specific disorders like psoriasis or eczema.

#### Milk (*Dugdha*)

Useful in reducing dryness and heat associated with *Vata* and *Pitta* disorders.

#### • Mechanism of Action<sup>[22]</sup>

The therapeutic effects of *Shirodhara* are achieved through a combination of physiological, psychological, and neurological mechanisms:

### Calming the Nervous System

The rhythmic pouring of liquid stimulates the hypothalamus, promoting relaxation and reducing stress hormone levels such as cortisol.

### Balancing *Doshas*

The therapy pacifies *Vata* and *Pitta doshas*, which are often implicated in *Twakvikar*.

### Improving Circulation

The gentle pressure and warmth enhance blood flow, nourishing the skin and underlying tissues.

### Detoxification

The medicated liquids aid in the removal of toxins (*Ama*) and improve the function of *Srotas* (body channels).

### Benefits of *Shirodhara* in *Twakvikar*<sup>[23]</sup>

- **Stress Reduction:** Stress is a known aggravator of *Twakvikar*. By reducing stress, *Shirodhara* indirectly alleviates symptoms such as inflammation and itching.
- **Improved Skin Health:** The medicated oils used in the therapy provide nourishment to the skin and aid in healing inflamed or irritated areas.
- **Detoxification:** The therapy facilitates the elimination of toxins, a common cause of chronic skin disorders.
- **Holistic Healing:** By addressing both the mind and body, *Shirodhara* provides a comprehensive approach to treating *Twakvikar*.

### Indications for *Shirodhara*<sup>[24]</sup>

- Chronic skin conditions like eczema, psoriasis, and dermatitis.
- Stress-related disorders contributing to *Twakvikar*.
- Anxiety, insomnia, and mental fatigue that exacerbate skin conditions.
- Conditions involving dryness, redness, and itching caused by *Pitta* and *Vata* imbalances.

### Precautions and Contraindications<sup>[25]</sup>

- Avoid *Shirodhara* in acute infections, fever, or severe sinusitis.
- Ensure the liquid's temperature is consistent to avoid discomfort or burns.
- Contraindicated in cases of severe hypotension or during pregnancy.

*Shirodhara* remains a cornerstone of Ayurvedic therapy, offering a holistic solution for *Twakvikar* by integrating physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Its therapeutic effects underscore the importance of Ayurveda in addressing modern dermatological and lifestyle-related challenges.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Shirodhara

This SOP outlines the standardized procedure for performing *Shirodhara* to ensure safety, consistency, and effectiveness. The steps include preparation, execution, and post-therapy care.<sup>[27]</sup>

### Pre-Therapy Preparation

#### Patient Preparation

- Inform the patient about the procedure and its benefits. Obtain consent.
- Assess the patient's *Prakriti* (constitution) and *Dosha* imbalances to select the appropriate medicated liquid.
- Advise the patient to wear loose, comfortable clothing. Remove any accessories from the head and face.
- Ensure the patient has avoided heavy meals for at least 2 hours before the therapy.

#### Therapist Preparation

- Wash hands thoroughly and wear clean, appropriate attire.
- Ensure the therapist is knowledgeable about the patient's condition and therapy protocol.

#### Equipment and Material Preparation

- Use a clean, comfortable *Droni* (wooden table) with appropriate head support.
- Prepare the selected medicated liquid (*Taila*, *Takra*, *Kwatha*, or *Dugdha*).
- Heat the liquid to a consistent temperature of 38–40°C using a double boiler to avoid overheating.
- Set up the *Dhara yantra* (vessel) 4–6 inches above the patient's forehead.
- Ensure all equipment is sterilized and ready for use.

#### Environment Preparation

- Create a calm and quiet environment with dim lighting and soothing music if desired.
- Maintain an ambient room temperature of 25–28°C to keep the patient comfortable.

#### Execution of *Shirodhara*

##### Positioning the Patient

- Ask the patient to lie on their back in a supine position on the *Droni*.
- Ensure the head is positioned comfortably with the forehead exposed.
- Cover the eyes with a soft cloth or cotton pad to avoid irritation.

##### Procedure

- Fill the *Dhara yantra* with the warmed medicated liquid.

- Begin pouring the liquid in a continuous, rhythmic stream over the forehead, focusing on the *Ajna chakra* (third eye region).
- Move the stream gently from one temple to the other in a systematic manner.
- Monitor the liquid temperature throughout the procedure and replenish the vessel as needed.
- Continue the therapy for 30–60 minutes, based on the patient's condition and practitioner's recommendation.

#### Safety Measures

- Regularly check the patient's comfort level and ensure the liquid temperature remains consistent.
- Address any discomfort or interruptions promptly.

#### Post-Therapy Care

##### Cleaning

- Wipe the patient's forehead and hair gently to remove residual liquid.
- If oils are used, provide a warm towel or herbal shampoo for cleansing.

##### Rest

- Allow the patient to rest for 15–20 minutes in a calm environment before leaving.
- Offer a warm herbal tea or light snack if needed.

#### Post-Therapy Advice

- Avoid exposure to cold air, wind, or stress for the rest of the day.
- Recommend mild activities and a light diet to complement the therapy.
- Suggest follow-up sessions based on the patient's progress and needs.

#### Precautions and Contraindications

- Ensure the patient does not have acute fever, infections, or open wounds on the head.
- Avoid in cases of severe hypotension, head injuries, or during pregnancy.
- Discontinue the procedure immediately if the patient experiences discomfort or adverse reactions.

#### DISCUSSION

*Shirodhara*, a cornerstone therapy in Ayurveda, has emerged as a significant intervention for managing *Twakvikar* (skin disorders) due to its holistic approach that integrates physiological, psychological, and dermatological benefits. The therapy's ability to address the root causes of skin diseases- *Dosha* imbalances, toxin accumulation (*Ama*), and stress- highlights its multidimensional efficacy.<sup>[28]</sup>

The role of *Shirodhara* in pacifying *Vata* and *Pitta doshas* is particularly relevant to *Twakvikar*, as these imbalances often manifest as dryness, itching,

inflammation, and redness in skin disorders. By using medicated liquids such as *Taila* (oil) and *Takra* (buttermilk), *Shirodhara* not only nourishes the skin but also restores systemic harmony. This aligns with Ayurvedic principles that emphasize addressing the root cause rather than merely treating symptoms.<sup>[29]</sup>

Stress is a well-documented aggravator of many skin conditions, including eczema, psoriasis, and acne. Modern research corroborates that elevated cortisol levels disrupt immune and inflammatory responses, exacerbating skin symptoms. *Shirodhara* induces a state of deep relaxation, modulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and reducing cortisol levels. This stress-reduction mechanism not only alleviates skin symptoms but also improves overall mental well-being, which is integral to holistic healing in Ayurveda.<sup>[30]</sup>

The continuous rhythmic pouring of medicated liquids during *Shirodhara* stimulates blood circulation and improves nutrient delivery to the skin tissues (*Twak dhatu*). Additionally, the therapy aids in detoxifying the skin by facilitating the removal of toxins (*Ama*) through the lymphatic system. This dual action contributes to healthier and rejuvenated skin, making *Shirodhara* an effective adjunct therapy for chronic and stubborn skin disorders.<sup>[31]</sup>

While modern dermatology relies heavily on topical applications, systemic medications, and phototherapy for skin disorders, these approaches often address only the symptoms or localized aspects of the condition. *Shirodhara*, on the other hand, offers a holistic approach that integrates physical and psychological dimensions. The therapy's focus on mental relaxation and systemic detoxification provides long-term benefits, making it a complementary option alongside conventional treatments.<sup>[32]</sup>

### Challenges and Limitations

Despite its benefits, *Shirodhara* is not without limitations. Its effectiveness largely depends on the expertise of the practitioner, the quality of materials used, and the patient's adherence to post-therapy advice. Moreover, the therapy may not be suitable for acute skin infections or conditions requiring immediate medical intervention. Further, while there is growing interest in Ayurvedic therapies, scientific validation and large-scale clinical trials are needed to establish standardized protocols and efficacy.<sup>[33]</sup>

### Future Perspectives

To bridge the gap between traditional and modern medicine, integrative approaches incorporating *Shirodhara* with evidence-based dermatological practices can be explored. Collaborative studies evaluating its effects on stress markers, inflammatory cytokines, and skin

regeneration can enhance its credibility and application. Additionally, adapting the therapy for urban settings and busy lifestyles can increase its accessibility and acceptance.<sup>[34]</sup>

### CONCLUSION

*Shirodhara*, as a traditional Ayurvedic therapy, offers a holistic and effective approach to managing *Twakvikar* (skin disorders). By addressing the root causes of skin diseases- *Dosha* imbalances, toxin accumulation (*Ama*), and stress- it provides not only symptomatic relief but also long-term improvements in skin health. The therapy's ability to harmonize the mind and body through stress reduction and systemic detoxification sets it apart as a unique intervention in dermatological care. The application of *Shirodhara* in *Twakvikar* highlights the profound interconnectedness between mental and physical health, an aspect often overlooked in conventional treatments. Its integration into patient care can complement modern dermatological practices, offering a multidimensional approach to skin health. While challenges such as standardization and accessibility remain, the growing recognition of *Shirodhara* underscores its relevance in both traditional and contemporary healthcare systems. Incorporating *Shirodhara* into treatment protocols for chronic and stress-induced skin conditions can significantly enhance therapeutic outcomes. With further scientific validation and global awareness, *Shirodhara* has the potential to become a cornerstone of integrative dermatology, bridging the gap between ancient Ayurvedic wisdom and modern medical science.

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