ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF PARISHEKA: AN AYURVEDIC EXTERNAL THERAPEUTIC PROCEDURE

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ABSTRACT

The term Swedana *(Fomentation Therapy) is derived from the root* 'Swid' *with the suffix* 'Nich'. *It is defined as the procedure that alleviates* Stambhata *(stiffness),* Gauravata *(heaviness), and* Sheetata *(coldness), and induces perspiration in the individual. Sagni sweda (thermal) and Niragni sweda (non-thermal) are the two primary varieties of swedana. Parisheka is the process of seka where warm and unctuous liquids like medicated milk, oils, decoctions, mutra, kshara, ghrita or amlakanjika are continuously poured in a stream over a specific body part (ekanga) or the whole body (sarvanga) for therapeutic purposes. It is a type of saagni sweda (thermal) is considered under drava sweda by Acharya Sushruta where it is told to be useful in Pittotkrushta Avastha thus considered useful in inflammatory conditions. Just as the fire is extinguished by sprinkling water, similarly the aggravated* doshagni *can be pacified through the therapeutic application of Parisheka. Its efficacy lies in the intelligent selection of medicated liquids, tailored to the specific condition and* dosha *involved. The therapeutic process, when executed following classical* vidhi *(procedure), facilitates localized sudation, alleviates pain, reduces inflammation, and improves circulation, all while offering a gentle yet effective approach compared to other fomentation methods. As modern interest grows in non-invasive and natural therapies, Parisheka presents a promising integrative treatment option.*

KEY WORDS*: Swedana, Parisheka, Saagni sweda, Drava sweda*

INTRODUCTION

The term *Swedana* (Fomentation Therapy) is derived from the root *'Swid'* with the suffix *'Nich'*. It is defined as the procedure that alleviates *Stambhata* (stiffness), *Gauravata* (heaviness), and *Sheetata* (coldness), and induces perspiration in the individual. [1]

Swedana (Fomentation Therapy) is regarded as one of the significant therapeutic modalities in *Ayurveda* and is classified under *Bahirparimarjana Chikitsa* (external treatments). Although *Swedana* is generally considered as a *Purvakarma* (preparatory procedure) in *Shodhana* therapies, it also holds independent significance as a *Pradhana Karma* (primary treatment) in certain disease conditions.

Swedana is divided into many types by the *Acharyas. Sagni sweda* (thermal) and *Niragni sweda* (non-thermal) are the two primary varieties, according to *Acharaya Charaka. Vyayama* (exercise), *Ushna sadana* (warm rooms), *Guru pravarana* (thick blankets), *Kshudha* (hunger), *Bahupana* (excessive drinking), *Bhaya* (fear), *Krodha* (anger), *Upanaha* (poultice), *Ahava* (war), and *Atapa* (war) are the 10 forms of *Niragni sweda*.[2] *Sankara* (mixed), *Prastara* (hotbed), *Nadi* (steam kettle), *Parisheka* (affusion), *Avagaha* (bath), *Jentaka* (sudatorium), *Asmaghana* (stone bed), *Karshu* (trench), *Kuti* (cabin), *Bhu* (ground bed), *Kumbhi* (pitcher bed), *Kupa* (pit sudation), and *Holaka* (pit sudation) are the 13 varieties of *Sagni sweda*. [3]

Acharya Vagbhata has described four types of *sweda* as *Tapa sweda* (direct heat), *Ushma sweda* (steam), *Upanah Asweda* (poultice), and *Drava sweda* (warm liquid). [4]

The term *Parisheka* is derived from the root *'sich'* (to sprinkle or pour) with the prefix *'pari'* (all over, thoroughly) and suffix *'seka'* (sprinkling, pouring).

Parisheka is the process of *seka* where warm and unctuous liquids like medicated milk, oils, decoctions, *mutra, kshara, ghrita* or *amlakanjika* are continuously poured in a stream over a specific body part (*ekanga*) or the whole body (*sarvanga*) for therapeutic purposes. [5]

Synonyms of *Parisheka* include *Dhara*, *Seka*, *Avasheka*, *Snana, Praseka, Ksharana*, and *Sechana*—all referring to various forms of sprinkling or therapeutic pouring in *Ayurvedic* practice.

It is a type of *saagni sweda* (thermal) is considered under *drava sweda* by *Acharya Sushruta* where it is told to be useful in *Pittsamsrishta Avastha* thus considered useful in inflammatory conditions. [6]

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
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Acharya Charaka describes *Parisheka* in the context of external treatment under *Chikitsa Sthana*, especially in the management of *Vrana* (wounds) and *Pitta-predominant* disorders. [7]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this review is to provide a comprehensive critical evaluation of *Parisheka*, an external therapeutic procedure in *Ayurveda*, traditionally used as part of *Bahirparimarjana Chikitsa* (external treatments) and *Swedana Karma* (sudation therapies).

The objectives of this review are as follows:

1. To explore the classical references of *Parisheka* from *Ayurvedic* texts, including its indications, procedural variations, and theoretical foundations in relation to Tridosha Siddhanta.
2. To classify and describe different types of *Parisheka* procedures, such as *Sarvanga Parisheka*, *Sthanika Parisheka*, *Sheeta Parisheka*, and *Ushna Parisheka*, along with their methods of administration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review study conducted an in-depth analysis of both classical literature and modern electronic sources to gain a holistic understanding of *Parisheka*. Key classical texts, including the *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi*, were examined alongside contemporary databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and esteemed journals. These resources were carefully reviewed to identify related diseases and to develop a comprehensive perspective on the therapeutic principles and applications of *Parisheka.*

Classification: *Parisheka* is mainly classified into two categories:

1. ***Ekanga Parisheka****: Ekanga Parisheka* is a localised process involving continuous target pouring of warm and unctuous liquids like medicated milk, oils, decoctions, *mutra, kshara, ghrita* or *amlakanjika* over a specific part of body (knee, shoulder or legs) to reduce pain, stiffness or inflammation. It is mainly indicated in *Gulma, Anaha, Bhagandara, Vrana, Tuni, Shoola, Abhighata, Toda, Udavarata, Kotha, Mudhvata, Ashteela, Visarpa, Pleeha, Vidradhi* etc.
2. ***Sarvanga Parisheka****: Sarvanaga Parisheka* is the continuous pouring of warm medicated liquids over the entire body in a rhythmic and synchronized manner. It is mainly indicated in *Vatarakta, Raktapitta, Vatavyadhi, Kushtha, Prameha, Shotha, Klaibya, Daha, Rajayakshma, Unmada, Visarpa, Madatyaya, Visha, Kasa, Bridhna, Bhagandara, Vruddhi* and in *updarava* of *Vamana, Virechana* and *nabhinadikartana.*

Roganusara Parisheka Dravya

Vyadhi	***Parisheka Dravya***
Vataja shotha	*Sarpi/ Taila/ Dhanyamla/ Mamsa rasa/ Vatahara kashaya* [8]
Pittaja shotha	*Ksheera/ Ghrita/ Madhu/ Sharkarodaka/ Ikshurasa/ Madhura gana siddha kashaya/ Ksheerivruksha kashaya* [9]
Kaphaja shotha	*Taila/ Mutra/ Ksharodaka/ Sura/ Shukti/ Kulatha+shunthijala+gomutra* [10]
Kikkisa	*Malatimadhuka siddha kashaya* [11]
Vatarakta	*Dashamoola ksheerapaka* [12]
Visha	*Chandana sheet dhara* [13]
Jwara	*Chandanadi kashaya, Agurvadi kashaya* [14]
Raktapitta	*Mrudu, Madhura, tikta, sheetala Dravya* [15]
Kushtha	*Khadirakalpa, Dhavadi gomutra* [16]
Rajayakshama	*Madhukambu* [17]
Unmada	*Siddharthakaagada snana* [18]
Madatyaya	*Amlakanji* [19]
Bhagna	*Chakra taila* [20]
Upadamsha	*Prapoundarika+madhuka+rasna+punarnava, Aragvadhadi kashaya* [21]
Vatavyadhi	*Ksheera, Ikshurasa, Madhuka, Sharkara, Tandulodka, Draksha, Ikshukashaya, Mastu, Dhanyamala* [22]
Visarpa	*Ksheera, Ikshurasa* [23]
Masurika	*Tandulambu* [24]
Vruddhiand Bradhna	*Ruksha parisheka* [25]
Prameha	*Asanadi gana kashaya* [26]
Arsha	*Eranda+Gokantaka+Ushavi+Punarnava+Surabhi with sasneha ksheera taila* [27]
Gudakila	*Bilvamula+Agnika+Kshara+Kushtha* [28]
Vatacharmadala	*Puga+Palasha+Patali+Rasna kashaya, ksheera, sukhoshna parisheka* [29]

Sambhara sangraha* for *Parisheka

1. ***Sechana Patra****- Sechana Patra* refers to the vessels used for sprinkling/pouring liquids during *Parisheka*. [30]
   a. *Kumbhi*: A small pot (made of clay or metals such as copper or brass), with a tapered opening or a small orifice at the bottom designed for a uniform continuous flow of medicated liquid.

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b. *Varshulika (Sahsradhara/ Alpaghati):* Similar vessel but with numerous small perforations, creating a gentle shower or sprinkling effect.





c. *Pranadi (Pranadika/ Venunalnadi):* A tubular instrument made up of bamboo pipe, acting as another form of pouring vessel.



2. ***Drava Dravya:*** Medicated oils, decoctions like *Dashamoola kashaya, Chandanadi kashaya* etc, *Dhanyamla*, Milk, *Ghrita* etc based on the disease.
3. *Droni*
4. Vessels
5. Earplugs
6. Soft towels
7. Masseurs
8. *Abhyanga* oil
9. Cloth

Parisheka Viddhi

1. Patient lies comfortably (supine, prone, or side-lying depending on site).
2. *Abhyanga* with suitable oil is done. In case of *ruksha parisheka*, avoid *abhyanga.*
3. Body is covered with cloth.
4. Lukewarm medicated liquids are to be filled in the *kumbhi/ varshanika* or *pranadi* and poured in a continuous, gentle stream over the target area at a height of 4 angula for the head and for rest of the body 12 *angula* from skin surface in symmetrical manner.
5. Maintain constant temperature, replace or reheat liquid as needed.
6. Gentle massage (*mardana*) may be performed simultaneously for better penetration.
7. Continue for 20–45 minutes depending on indication.

***Paschat Karma* (Post-procedure)**

1. Wipe the body with a clean, soft cloth.
2. Allow the patient to rest for 15–30 minutes in a warm, draft-free room.
3. Advise warm water bath after a suitable interval.
4. Application of *rasnadi churna* over scalp.
5. *Hit ahara*: Light, warm food (*yusha*, *manda*).

Precautions

1. Temperature should be maintained at the same level throughout the procedure, and should be checked beforehand to avoid any burns.
2. Stream should be uniform and continuous.

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Parisheka Kala

- In *Atirooksha* persons and *Pitta* associated *Vata* conditions: 2.5 *muhurta* (Approx 2 hours).
- In *Snigdha* and *kaphamishrita:* 1.25 *muhurta* (Approx 1 hour).
- The procedure should be continued till sweat is produced.
- The oil will penetrate to the base of hair follicles in 300 matra kalas. In 700 matra kalas it enters the skin. In 1300 matra kalas it penetrates into the deeper tissues. It will penetrate to the base of the deeper tissues in 987 matra kalas exactly. [31]

Interval for renewal of *Parisheka Dravya:* [32]

Dravya	Days
Milk	One day (Fresh milk should be used every day)
Dhanyamla	Three days (On 4th day fresh *dhanyamla* is to be used)
Sneha	Three days (Fresh *Sneha* on each day- Superior Same *Sneha* for 3 days- *Madhyama* Beyond 3 days or mixing used and fresh *Sneha*- Least grade)

Therapeutic Value of *Parisheka*

Just as the fire is extinguished by sprinkling water, similarly the aggravated *doshagni* can be pacified through the therapeutic application of *Parisheka.* [33]

Thermal Effect: *Ushna* (warm) property of the medicated liquid facilitates vasodilation**,** improving local circulation and metabolic activity. Heat softens tissues, reduces stiffness, and helps in *srotoshodhana* (channel cleansing). Maintains optimal skin temperature, supporting *Bhrajaka Pitta* function for better absorption of applied substances.

Mechanical Effect: Continuous, gentle stream provides mild mechanical stimulation, which enhances lymphatic drainage, relieves muscle tension and promotes relaxation and pain reduction through cutaneous mechanoreceptor activation.

Pharmacological Effect: Medicated liquids (*Taila, Kashaya, Ksheera, Takra*) deliver active phytoconstituents directly to the skin. *Bhrajaka Pitta* assists in the transdermal processing of these substances, enabling local and systemic therapeutic action. Specific drug properties (*Rasa*, *Guna*, *Veerya*, *Vipaka*, *Prabhava*) determine the targeted effect on *Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha* imbalance.

Dosha Shamana

- *Vata***:** Warmth and unctuousness relieve dryness, stiffness, and pain.
- *Pitta*: Cooling medicated liquids (in certain variations) calm aggravated *Pitta* in inflammatory skin or joint conditions.
- *Kapha***:** Heat and herbal properties help liquefy and mobilize stagnant *Kapha.*

Psychological Effect: Gentle, rhythmic pouring induces parasympathetic activation, reducing stress, anxiety, and muscle guarding factors that indirectly support healing.

CONCLUSION

Parisheka, an *Ayurvedic* external therapy, holds a significant place within the broader framework of *Swedana* (sudation) procedures. Through a systematic review of classical texts and contemporary interpretations, it becomes evident that *Parisheka* is a versatile and targeted modality employed for a variety of *vyadhis* (diseases). Its efficacy lies in the intelligent selection of medicated liquids, tailored to the specific condition and *dosha* involved. The therapeutic process, when executed following classical *vidhi* (procedure), facilitates localized sudation, alleviates pain, reduces inflammation, and improves circulation, all while offering a gentle yet effective approach compared to other fomentation methods. As modern interest grows in non-invasive and natural therapies, *Parisheka* presents a promising integrative treatment option. Future clinical research and standardization of its techniques could further validate and expand its utility in contemporary healthcare.

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ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

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