

Book Review



Book Review on *Sirassekadi Vidhi*- A hand book on the principles and practice of *Keraliya Panchakarma*

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ABSTRACT:

Sirassekadi vidhi is a popular book on *Keraliya Panchakarma* procedures authored by Puthiyedath Raman Menon with Malayalam commentary *Bhavaprabodhini*. The recent edition is published in the year 2009 by Vaidyabhooshanam K. Raghavan Thirumalpad, Foundation for Ayurvedic Studies, Raj Vihar, Chalakudy, Thrissur, Kerala, India, with English annotation by editor, Dr. M. Prasad. This 80-page work serves as a handbook of Kerala's specialty procedures like *Sirasseka vidhi*, *Kaya seka vidhi*, *Pinda sweda vidhi*, *Anna lepana vidhi*, *Shirolepana vidhi*, *Kala vidhi* and *Snehapana vidhi* with detailing on requirements, method of procedure, indications, contraindications and do's and don'ts. In this review, authors have tried to explore the above procedural details in English to provide wider reachability. For this purpose, the original text was studied in depth along with some of the previous review on the work.

KEYWORDS: *Anna lepana*, *Ayurveda*, *Keraliya Panchakarma*, *Pinda sweda*, *Pizhichil*, *Sirasseka vidhi*, *Snehapana*, *Thalapothichil*.

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1. INTRODUCTION: About the book [1]

The book 'Sirassekadi vidhi'- a hand book on principles and practice of *Keraliya Panchakarma*, deals with some of the very popular ayurvedic treatment procedures extensively practiced in Kerala under the caption of *Keraliya Panchakarma*. These treatment procedures are not described with their standard operative guidelines neither in the classical textbooks of Ayurveda nor by the later authors. Five procedures explained in this book include *Takra dhara*, *Pizhichil* (*Kayaseka*), *Njavara kizhi* (*Shashtika Shali Pinda Sweda*), *Njavara Anna Lepa* and *Thalapothichil* (*Shirolepa*). In this context *Sirassekadi vidhi* authored by Puthiyedath Raman Menon is considered as an authoritative book for the practice of these *Keraliya Panchakarma* procedures. Even though the original *Shloka* were in Sanskrit language, the first edition of the book, in the year 1929, came out with the entire text in Malayalam transcript along with a rational explanation (commentary) in Malayalam language. Initially five hundred copies of the first edition were printed. In his preface to this first edition, the author has mentioned the intention behind this publication specifically. "Due to the lack of authentic standard operative guidelines to perform these special *Keraliya Panchakarma* procedures, practitioners often make mistakes their practice". Though there are some guidelines given in widely followed traditional book namely *Dhara kalpa*, the author had a feeling that they lacked rationale and authenticity. He also states that he has written this book following discussions with his teachers, senior practitioners and the *ashtavaidya* lineage. Thus, the intention and the effort of writing this

book are noble and logical. However, this work did not gain much attention among *Vaidya*. Language barrier and lack of proper publicity could be the reasons behind this. This book was out of print for many decades and destined for oblivion.

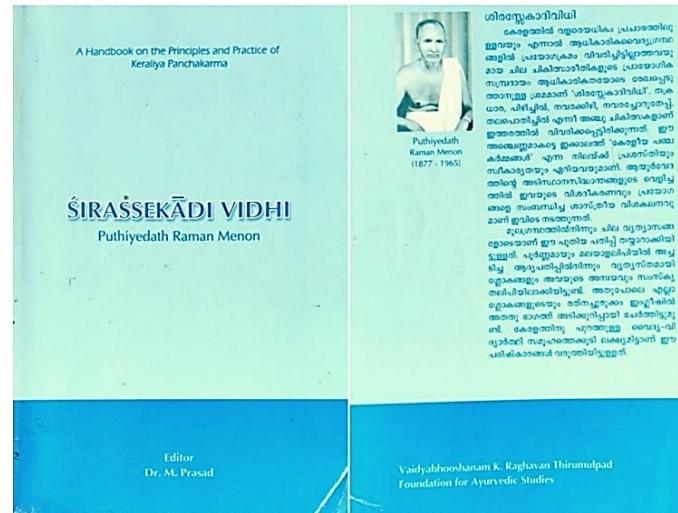


Figure 1 – Cover page of the book – *Sirassekadi Vidhi*

The edition of *Sirassekadi vidhi* under this review is the new improvised version (1st VKRTF edition) edited by Dr M. Prasad, published in the year 2009 by Vaidyabhooshanam K. Raghavan Thirumalpad Foundation for Ayurvedic Studies, Raj Vihar, Chalakudy, Thrissur-680307, Kerala state, India. The book costs 50 INR and consists of eighty pages. This edition presents all the *shloka* in Sanskrit transcript with explanation in Malayalam language. Additionally, the editor gives annotations for every shloka in English as foot notes. This is done with a view to reach Ayurveda practitioners outside Kerala.

Table 1: Details of the book at a glance

Title	<i>Sirassekadi Vidhi</i> - a hand book on principles and practice of <i>Keraliya Panchakarma</i>
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Author	Puthiyedath Raman Menon
Edition and year of publication	First edition 1929 First VKRTF edition September 2009
Language	Malayalam with annotations in English (by Editor)
Editor	Dr M. Prasad
Publisher	Vaidyabhooshanam K. Raghavan Thirumalpad Foundation for Ayurvedic Studies, Raj Vihar, Chalakudy, Thrissur-680307, Kerala state, India
Total Pages	80
Price	50 INR

2. ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR:

Author:

Puthiyedathu Raman Menon (1877-1965) was born as the second son of Sri Mekkattumana Narayanan Nampoothiri and Smt. Puthiyedathu Paruvamma at Kodungalloor Taluk in Kerala (erstwhile State of Kochi), India. Including Sanskrit, his primary education was from his father. He completed 12 years of strict traditional Ayurveda Education from the legendary scholar Kochunni Thamburan of Kodungallur Kovilakam. He followed *Ashtangahrdayam Sundari Vyakhyanam* as his main text during his studies and followed all other higher textbooks of Ayurveda for reference. He got good practical knowledge in medicine preparation and *Kriyakalpa* like *Kayaseka*, *Shirodhara* etc. from senior Vaidya Echara Varier who was the court physician there in the *Gurukulam*. After completing his studies, he returned to his native and started his clinical practice and continued his academic works. His spouse was Smt.

Thazhathu Veetil Kunjikkuttyamma and they had four children.

Other works by Puthiyedath Raman Menon:

Other literary contributions by author include Sanskrit commentary to the *Sutra Sthana* of *Ashtanga Hridayam*, "Subodhini" commentary to *Sreeramodantham* and "Nakshathrappana" on stars and their positions. There are many scientific essays and papers to his credit.

Editor

Dr. M. Prasad, is currently serving as the Director and Chief Physician at Sunethri Ayurvedashram & Research Centre, Thrissur, Kerala, India. After his post-graduation in *Shalakya Tantra* (Ayurveda Ophthalmology, Ear, nose, throat and Dental disorders), he established his own Ayurvedashram named Sunethri. He has over 28 years of clinical experience. He served as the Principal and Superintendent of Ashtamgam Ayurveda Chikitsayam and Vidyapeetham for 5 years (2015-2020). Parallel to the regular classes in an Ayurveda college during late eighties, he learned the principles and practice of Ayurveda under the legendary Acharya Padmabhushan Vaidyabhushanam K. Raghavan Thirumulpad, which he continued for 21 years. Parallel to this, he got trained under Padmasree Dr. K. Rajagopalan as well. Since 2021, he is serving as Guru for the Certificate Course in Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth (CRAV program) by Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth, New Delhi. He is doing research-oriented work on the care of autistic children from 2002 onward.

Peculiarities of the book:

The book is a compactly presented hand book consisting of eighty pages. The contents of the book are divided in

to seven chapters with an introduction followed by prefaces to the first and second edition. This follows seven chapters in order named as *Sirasseka vidhi*, *Kaya seka vidhi*, *Pinda sweda vidhi*, *Anna lepana vidhi*, *Shirolepana vidhi*, *Kala vidhi* and *Snehapana vidhi*.

The introduction starts with the emphasis on a *Vaidya* gaining sufficient practical knowledge prior to starting

clinical practice. There are mentions about various books namely *Dhara kalpa*, *Vasti pradeepam*, *Shodhana vidhi* and Ayurveda treatments of Kerala. Further, in the introduction, the author quotes various sections of the famous text *Dharakalpam* and critically comments on them to highlight their weakly built rationale

Table 2: Chapters and Contents of *Sirasekadi vidhi*

Chapter	Name	Number of shloka	Contents
1.	<i>Sirasseka vidhi</i>	21	<i>Shirodhara</i> , method of preparation, procedural methods, duration, various <i>Dhara</i> and their indications
2.	<i>Kayaseka vidhi</i>	19	Types of <i>Snehana</i> , method of <i>Kayaseka</i> , indications, time limit, do and don'ts
3.	<i>Pinda sweda vidhi</i>	12	Procedure of <i>Njavara kizhi sweda</i> , duration of therapy and indications
4.	<i>Anna lepana vidhi</i>	4	<i>Njavara anna lepa</i> procedure, indications and duration
5.	<i>Thalapothichil</i> (<i>Shirolepana</i>) <i>vidhi</i>	6	Preparation of <i>Lepa</i> , method of application, duration, pre and post therapy measures and its contraindications
6.	<i>Kala vidhi</i>	4	Proper time to do <i>Keraliya Panchakarma</i> procedure and duration
7.	<i>Snehapana vidhi</i>	7	Details about <i>Snehapana</i> , do's and don'ts during <i>Snehapana</i>

3. DISCUSSION: [2, 3]

Sirassekadi vidhi

The first chapter *Sirassekadi vidhi* starts with invoking the blessings of lord *Shiva* who is worshipped with *Dhara* on his head with chanting of *Rudra Sukta* by *Brahmins*. He also seeks blessings of his parents and starts elaborating the methods of *Sirasseka vidhi* namely *Shirodhara*, *Kayaseka* (*Pizhichil*), *Pindasweda* – (*Navara kizhi*), *Annalepana* (*Choru theppu*), and *Shirolepana* (*Thala pothichil*). Twenty-one *shloka* of this deals with the indications of *Takradhara*, wooden *droni* (therapy table on which *Dhara* is done) with its dimensions, method of positioning the *droni*, ingredients, quantity and method of preparation of *Takra* (medicated

buttermilk) for *Dhara*, preoperative procedures and the main *Dhara*, procedure of *Takradhara* are given. *Yamardha* (one and half hour) is mentioned as duration of *Dhara*. Based on *Dosha*, other options for *Dhara* like with that of tender coconut, milk, *Dadhi mastu*, medicated ghee or *Taila* or water alone are also advised. It may be of interest to read the suggestion that the stream of *Dhara* should fall on the forehead in a rhythmic fashion and the movement shall be similar to writing the Malayalam alphabets 'RA' or 'KA'. Need for uninterrupted *Dhara* flow is emphasized. *Tailadhara* is said to be beneficial in *Arumshika* (inflammatory eruptions on scalp), *Shirashoola* (headaches), *Daha* (burning sensation) and *Vrana* (wound) on the scalp or

diseases of *Vata* origin. While *Dhara* with *Takra, Ksheera* and *Jala* are contra indicated here.

Kayaseka vidhi

The second chapter in the book begins with invocations to Lord *Guruvayurappan* (Vishnu), who is worshipped with oil or ghee shower by patients suffering with *Vata* disorders. Thus, it fits exactly to context of *Kayaseka* (rhythmic pouring of medicated oils on the body) done to cure diseases of *Vata* origin. The nineteen *shloka* in this chapter explained with relevant cross references and critical comments. The explanation starts with description of *Snehana* (oleation), its two types external and internal. It is considered as effective remedy for pacifying *Vata*. *Snehapana* is internal *Snehana* while *Abhyanga* (oil massage), *Dhara* (rhythmic pouring of medicated oil), *Pichu* (medicated oil-soaked cotton pad) and *Shirovasti* (retaining warm, medicated oil on the head for a specific duration using a leather cap) are four types of external *Snehana*. *Dhara* is considered as important among these four and elaborated here. Pre-operative preparations for the setting and the patient are similar to *Sirasseka*. Six postures are mentioned for *Kayaseka* namely sitting on *Droni* (refers to the therapy table) with legs extended, supine lying, left lateral lying, right lateral lying, repeat supine lying and repeat sitting posture. While, prone lying is not mentioned. Cotton cloth is dipped in the warm oil and squeezed over the body by one hand while the other hand is used to massage the body. Thus, it requires 4 therapists to do the procedure. Application of suitable medicated oil on the head is mentioned prior to and after *Kayaseka*. One and a half *Prastha* oil

(approximately 2 litres) is required for the procedure. The deficient quantity has to be added daily and on the third day the whole oil to be changed. Thus, it requires two crops of oils to change (on day one and day four). On the seventh day oils of previous two crops are mixed and the procedure is done. *Kayaseka* is to be done below the neck level only. If this procedure is done with *Takradhara* then only supine posture is to be used. Local irrigation with luke warm oil can be done on the neck, shoulders and back prior to *Dhara*. *Kuzhambu* (oil with thick consistency) is preferred for *Kayaseka*. The time duration mentioned is *Yamardha* ((1 and $\frac{1}{2}$ hour daily) or as it suits to the condition. Warm water bath can be advised after *Kayaseka*. In *Praviddha Vatavyadhi* (advanced stages of diseases due to *Vata*) like *Akshepaka* (seizure disorders), *Apatantraka*, *Bahyayama*, *Antarayama* (various neurological manifestations), *Pakshavadha* (Hemiplegia), *Ardita* (facial palsy) and *Rakta vata* (Rheumatological Disorders), bath is contraindicated instead wiping with cloth is advised. *Kayaseka* in these *Praviddha Vata vyadhi* and *Gridhrasi* (sciatica), *Khalli*, *Vishvachi* (disorders with musculoskeletal pain of neck and upper limb) etc. conditions can enhance strength, endurance and nourishment. Diet and regimen to be followed during the course of treatment is similar to *Snehana*.

Pinda sweda vidhi

It is the third chapter in the book which starts with prayers to divine physician lord Dhanvantari, who is offered with *Payasa* (pudding made with milk and rice) by deities and ailing. After *Kayaseka*, a *Snehana* procedure *Pinda sweda* (sudation with heated bolus) is

explained which is type of *Sankara sweda*. In this entire procedure of *Shahstika Shali Pinda Sweda* is explained in 12 *shlokas*. For this 12 *Pala* (approximately 600g) of coarse powder of *Bala mula* is boiled with 12 *Prastha* (approximately 12 liters) of water and reduced to 3 *Prastha* (approximately 3litres). Half of this decoction is taken added with equal quantity of milk and 2 *Kudava* (approximately 200g) of *Shashtika* rice (*Njavara* variety rice) and cooked. This cooked rice is divided into eight portions, tied into bolus in cotton cloth. These boluses are dipped with left over decoction that is mixed with equal quantity of milk. At a time four boluses are used to massage while other four are kept for heating. Massage is done in six postures as described in *Kayaseka*. Suitable oil massage is advised before *Pinda sweda*. The procedure is to be done for one *muhurta* (48 minutes). It is considered to be good in disorders due to *vata*, enhances *Agni*, nourishes body, improves strength and complexion.

Annalepana vidhi

This fourth chapter start with indications of *Annalepana* (application of medicated rice paste) especially for people with early ageing, those who are depleted of *Dhatu* (tissues), *Indriya* (sense organs) and *Ojas* (immunity) and who seek nourishment. Preparation of *Shashtika Anna* (Rice bolus) is as explained in *Pinda sweda*. *Abhyanga* is performed as pre-operative procedure. *Annalepana* is done below the neck repeatedly (to maintain the temperature) for a period of *Yamardha* (90minutes). Paste is wiped off followed by application of oil and warm water bath.

Shiro lepana vidhi

This chapter describes about method of preparation of shiro *Lepa* (medicated head packs), its application, duration, pre and post measures along with contraindications in six verse. one *Kudava* (approximately 200g of dried pulp of *Amalaki* to be boiled with two *Kudava* buttermilk till dryness so as to make nice paste by grinding. The cool paste is applied on the scalp which is pre massaged. The paste is wrapped in a plantain leaf or lotus leaf with a hole in the centre and kept for *Ardha yama* (90 minutes). Then paste is removed followed by application of oil and washed with warm water. Diet and regimen are similar to *Snehana*. This procedure is useful in *Apachi* (lymphadenopathy), *Klama* (fatigue), enhances vision and induces good sleep. It should not be done in *Vatika* disorder for the fear of aggravation of *Vata Dosha*.

Kala vidhi

This chapter deals with *kala vidhi*. All the specialty Kerala procedures are generally performed in *Ashada* (corresponding to June-July), *Ashvina* (corresponding to September-October) and *Phalguni Masa* (corresponding to February-March). In emergency, they can also be done at any time. Preferred time to do these procedures is generally morning hours but during *Sheeta kala* (cold season), it can be delayed 2 ½ hours. Generally, all procedures are done for 14 days long but depending up on the need it can be made flexible. They can be done annually to enhance strength, nourishment and to treat premature ageing.

Snehapana vidhi

This last chapter of the book deals with *Snehapana vidhi*. It starts with narration of do's and don'ts to be

followed during *Snehabana*. This remains to be standard guidelines for all the procedures. These regimens are to be followed during entire course of treatment and for equal number of days after the completion of treatment. Finally, the text is ended by invoking the Lord of happiness and prayers to the Guru of author Kavisarvabhouma Kodungalloor Cheriya Kochunni Tampuran.

Analysis

Author starts the book with invocation to Lord *Rudra*, who is worshipped by *Hindu* with *Dhara* on his head and *Rudra sukta chanting*. Second chapter is an ode to Lord Narayana (Vishnu) who symbolizes nervous system and worshipped with oil or ghee immersion. This emphasizes the importance given to *Dhara* in this work. Further, it deals with only specialty *Keraliya Panchakarma* procedures with due considerations to minute clinical aspects which are not dealt in *Samhita*, treatises of Ayurveda. Duration of therapy is very important clinical marker clearly mentioned for each procedure. There is also an attempt to address the riddles especially with regards to selection of drug with due emphasis on *Dosha* that are not dealt in books like *Dhara kalpa*. Procedure, do's and don'ts are explicitly explained. Additionally, *Dosha* based approach is given to choose *Keraliya Panchakarma* procedures. However, the language in the original write up is little poetic and difficult to understand for other than Malayalam practitioners. Nevertheless, annotations given by the editor have eased efforts to understand the book. Yet, pictorial or video graphic representation of the procedures could have made the book more appealing.

4. CONCLUSION

Sirassekadi vidhi is a clinical practice oriented handbook on specialty *Keraliya Panchakarma* therapies worth to be read by clinicians. It clears many of the procedure related queries and provides practical execution tips. Further scope to upgrade the text lies with addition of relevant photographs and video.

Abbreviations used:

VKRTF- Vaidyabhooshanam K. Raghavan Thirumalpad Foundation

INR- Indian Rupee

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Data collection and literature search: RK, AJ

Writing – original draft: RK, AJ

Reviewing & editing: RK, AJ, GKJ

Approval of final manuscript: All authors

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