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Hammam therapy: A systemic review

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Abstract

Ilaj bit tadbeer is one of the effective modes of treatment that has been described in *Unani* system of medicine, in which modification in *Asbabe Sitta Zarooriyah* is carried out for the treatment of diseases. In classical text about sixty four different types of regimens like *Hammam*, *Dalk*, *Riyazat*, *Fasd*, etc. are described. Among them, *Hammam* is one of the famous regimens practiced all over the world since antiquity. A combination of moist and dry heat is used in classical *Hammam* for the treatment of diseases. Such combination of heat causes evacuation of superfluous or morbid matter from the body, responsible for the development of diseases. In recent years *Hammam* has gain international attention due to its wide range of effectiveness in management of different types of diseases.

Keywords: Hammam, unani, Ilaj bit Tadbeer

Introduction

The word *Hammam* is derived from the *Arabic* root *Hamm* which means “spreader of warmth” or that produces heat [1, 2]. According to *Ibne Sina* the word *Hammam* is derived from *Alhamim* which means the vehemence of summer heat. The word *Hammam* is being used as bathroom or toilets in many dialects of vernacular *Arabic*. In unani system of medicine the term *Hammam* refers to hot bath, it is aimed not only to clean the body but also to obtain beneficial effects for skin and different organs and prevention from *Humoral* diseases. It evacuates the superfluous matter or waste matter from the body in the form of sweat and vapors. *Hammam* reduces repletion and increases attractive power of nutrients and thus promotes health.

Hammam like *Riyazat* and *Dalk* is the part of *Asbab -e- ghair Zaroriyah* [3] which means they are not essential for the existence of life but if they are performed they maintain the health if the health is present and they restore the health if the body is ill or diseased.

Hammam have three rooms these rooms have different temperament, the first room is *Sard - Tar (Barid Ratab)*, second is *Garm - Tar (Haar Ratab)* and the third room is *Garm -khushk (Haar Yabis)*. Instead of this, the 4th room which is not included as the room of *hammam* is used for the changing clothes and for the relaxation [4]. The bather enters the rooms successively till the third room or he can stop the *hammam* at room second according to the need.

The mechanism, procedure and benefits of *hammam* mostly resemble to today's famous procedure like spa, sauna bath, and aromatherapy even *Turkish bath* is considered synonyms to *hammam*. In recent years *Hammam* gained increasing international attention they claims that the combination of heat, steam and aromatherapy helps to relieve stress, relax muscle, ease respiratory problem, and stimulate circulation. The procedure also deeply cleanses the skin improving its tone and texture because the steam opens the pores of skin; *hammam* helps the body to rid itself of toxins. The holistic combination of *hammam* with measures like diet and exercise boost the immune system and promotes general wellbeing.

Historical Background

The use of steam bath spread first throughout Greece then later westward to Rome then became wide spread in much of the area. The Greek and Romans are considered the leaders for elaborating expensive bath houses in which they conduct the gossip with friends, eat, drink or arrange sexual liaisons. *Hammam* or bath is very private practice these days, but in prehistoric period it is a part of social life for entertainment and gossip with friends. “In the book of bath” *Francoise de Bonneville* writes that in the 6th century BC Greece “Bathing was ritualized becoming an art of cleansing sands, hot water, hot air in dark vaulted vapor bath, a cooling plunge a rubdown with aromatic oils hence our steam bath, aroma therapy, hot baths are all ancient inventions [5].

The Greek and Romans recognized that cleanness was essential to health. Homer (about 900 BC) tells us of the wide variety of baths from hot water tubs to hot air bath. The Spartans developed primitive vapor bath a forerunner of our steam shower. Hot air baths were treated by coal burning fires or by hot rock method heating rocks outside the chamber. The Greek also used essential oils for their curative essences similar to today's aromatherapy. Sweating was enhanced by massage with infused oils or by drinking a cup of hot herb peppermint or flower tea before entering the vapor bath. *Hippocrates* (360BC) recommended daily bathing and massage with fragrant oils.

Difference between Hammam and other similar therapy

Turkish bath: Turkish bath is synonymous to *Hammam*

Sauna: Sauna has low humidity and much hotter than a steam room usually the temperature in sauna bath is 70 -100 degree centigrade but it is still comfortable due to their low humidity.^[6] The third room of *Hammam* which has *Har Yabis* (hot & dry) temperament is similar to sauna bath.

Spa: A spa is a location where mineral rich spring water and sometime sea water is used to give medicinal bath.

Types

1. Day spa: It offers a variety of facilities for improving health, beauty and relaxation through personal care treatments such as massage and facials
2. Destination spa: A resort for personal care treatment. The following services are available in destination spa.
 - Aromatherapy
 - Facials
 - Fitness consultation
 - Hair spa treatment
 - Massage
 - Nail cure (Manicure)
 - Pedicure
 - Nutrition counseling
 - Skin exfoliation
 - Waxing
 - Weight loss etc.

Rooms of Hammam: *Hammam* is a type of medicated bath for which particular type of construction was done. *Hammam* has three rooms another room which is excluded from the room of *hammam* is for the changing of clothes has *Moatadil* temperament.^[4]

The temperament of rooms of *hammam* is as follows.

- 1st Room of Hammam:** *Sard Tar (Barid Ratab)* or Cold and Wet
- 2nd Room of Hammam:** *Garm Tar (Har Ratab)* or Hot and Wet
- 3rd Room of Hammam:** *Garm Khushk (Har Yabis)* or Hot and Dry

Changing Room or 4th Room: *Moatadil*

Temperature of water used in Hammam: In 1724, Gabriel Fahrenheit invented the first mercury thermometer. So because of the unavailability of the instrument measuring temperature there is nothing mention about the temperature of water used in *hammam* in old classical text book.

The temperature of water is used in *Hammam* is as follows^[7].

1. Very cold water 40-65 F⁰
2. Cold water 65-75 F⁰

3. Tepid warm or *Moatadil* 85-95 F⁰
4. Hot Water 95-100F⁰
5. Very hot water 100-110F⁰
6. Extreme hot water 110-120F⁰

Characteristics of an Ideal Hammam^[3, 4].

1. Building of *Hammam* should be old.
2. *Hammam* should be spacious
3. Water should be sweet or soft
4. There should be proper arrangement for regulating the temperature.

General rules: The bather should enter in the first room and after that in second and third room gradually, in each room he must stay for some time so that he adapt the temperament of that room.

The bather should not stay in the *Hammam* for too long particularly in the 3rd room because it sets the bilious humor in motion and provide harm to vital organs of the body. After the end of *Hammam* bather should cover himself with a towel or cloth properly because at that time the pores of skin are open and the vital organs gets easily affected with the external cold temperature, bather should stay in changing room for some times till the temperature of body becomes normal and heart rate and respiratory rate also becomes normal.

The person of dry temperament should use water more than air so that he gets *Ratoobat* from the water otherwise the hot air produces more dryness in the body, like that the person of *Ratab* temperament should use air more than water.

When *Hammam* is taken after food it helps to gain weight because the heat of *Hammam* increases the absorption of food but when *Hammam* is taken immediately after food it causes obstruction (*Sudda*) because it causes the absorption of such food (*Ghiza*) which is not completely digested^[4].

The person who takes *Hammam* at full stomach produces *sudda* in the liver or stone in the kidney^[8].

When *Hammam* is taken before food i.e. at empty stomach it helps to reduce the weight and it also produces the dryness of body.

Disadvantages of Hammam: Every person has their own body complexion and *Mizaj*. And according to this the temperature of air and the timing of *Hammam* that how much he stays in the *Hammam* are decided. If it is not done in right way it produces certain disadvantages which are as follows^[9, 10].

1. It weakens the heart
2. It produces nausea and vomiting
3. Disperse the matter towards the weaker organ
4. It weakens the nerves
5. It causes sexual debility.

Types of Hammam and their benefits^[11-14].

Hammam is of following types.

1. Hammam Barid or Cold bath: The temp of "very cold water is" 40 F⁰ - 65F⁰ and the temperature of "cold water" is 65F⁰- 75F⁰ is generally used.

Benefits or used

1. *Hammam Barid* is beneficial to the Hot (*Har*) temperament person.
2. It causes the movement of *Hararat e ghariziyah*

towards inside (*Jism e Batin*) of the body and thus increases digestive power.

3. It strengthens the nerves and heart.
4. It is also used to lower the body temperature in case of pyrexia

2. Hammam Bahri or Sea bath: In this type of *Hammam* sea water is used

Benefits or used: It provides strength to the skin.

3. Hammam Bukhari or Vapor bath or Steam bath: In this type of *Hammam* steam is passed in whole body.

Benefits or used

1. It opens the pores of skin and increases the sweating and thus helps to remove the toxins from the body.
2. It is used to relieve the pain usually of musculoskeletal origin.
3. It helps to reduce the body weight.
4. It strengthens the nerves.

4. Hammam Boriqi or Borax bath

Benefits or used

1. It has anti-inflammatory property so useful in Osteoarthritis and gout
2. It has anti-fungal property
3. Detoxifying agent

5. Hammam Turki or Turkish bath: It is almost similar to classical *Hammam*

Benefits or used

It is used in following case.

1. Osteoarthritis
2. Gout
3. Neural pain (*Waja Asab*)
4. Chronic inflammation (*Awram e muzmina*)
5. Obesity (*Simane mufrit*)
6. Ascites (*Isteska*)
7. Paralysis

8. Hammam Har or Hot bath. The water is used in this type of *Hammam* is 95 F⁰ -110 F⁰. It softens the skin and opens the pores of skin and causes sweating.

Benefits or used

1. Osteoarthritis
2. Amenorrhoea
3. Renal pain
4. Obesity

9. Hammam Hamiz or Acid bath. In this type of *Hammam* some acid or salt is mixed in water.

Benefits or used

1. Dyspepsia (*Sue Hazm*)
2. Liver disease (*Zofe Jigar*)

8. Hammam Ramli (Sand bath). In this type of bath some parts of the body is kept under the sand and sometime Sea sand is sprinkled on the body.

Benefits or used

Sea sand has strong absorptive power so it is helpful in reducing the excess fluid in ascites.

9. Hammam Saboosi (Bran bath): In this type of *Hammam* about one kilogram of wheat flour (*Atta*) is filtered, the byproduct known as roughage (*Bhoonsi or phoonk*) is mixed in about ten liter of water and boiled till the half of water is remained, then according to use the water is mixed and used as *hammam*.

Benefits or used

1. It makes skin smooth and soft
2. It relieves from itching
3. Eczema
4. Psoriasis
5. Sunburn

10. Hammam Shamshi (Sun bath): In this case body is exposed to direct sunlight.

Benefits or used

Sun light is a source of vitamin D₃ that facilitates the absorption of calcium and thus provides strength to the bone. Usually 15-30 minutes of morning direct sunlight is advised.

11. Hammam qadmi or Pashoya (Foot bath): In this type of *hammam* the foot is immersed in water, sometime plain water is used or some time herb is mixed in water and after decoction it is used.

Benefits or used

1. Meningitis
2. Epilepsy
3. High grade fever
4. For reduction of pain (*Taskeen e dard*)
5. Deep vein thrombosis
6. Leg swelling

12. Hammam e kibriyati (gandhak) or Sulphur bath: In this type of *Hammam* potassium sulphate is mixed in water

Benefits or used: Sulphar (*Gandhak*) is effective in skin disease

13. Hammam e labni or milk bath: In this type of *hammam* either only milk or milk with water is used. Mixing milk with bath water has been done for centuries as a quick and easy way to moisturize and soften the skin.

Benefits or used

It is used for cosmetic purpose. It softens and improves the skin colour. Natural lactic acid found in milk is a form of alpha hydroxyl- acid it exfoliate the dead skin cells which reveals fresh and younger looking. Vitamin E and zinc help to slow the process of aging and retain skin's natural elasticity.

14. Hammam e nisfi or Aab e zan (Sitz bath or Hip bath). In this type of *hammam* the patient sits in water mixed with some medicines up to the level of hips. Generally a bath tub is used for this purpose.

Benefits or used

In this case the water used as decoction (*Joshanda*) or *Khesanda*, and some time only cold or hot water is used.

1. Hemorrhoids
2. Anal fissure
3. Rectal surgery
4. Episiotomy care
5. Uterine cramps
6. BPH
7. Vaginal infections
8. Urinary tract infections

15. Hammam e wahli (Mud bath). In this case the body is immersed in mud or some time the mud is rubbed on the skin. Mud can absorb toxins from the human body therefore very useful in preventing many diseases. It also has healing properties.

Benefits or used

1. It relaxes muscles
2. It improve blood circulation
3. It reduces inflammation and swellings
4. It is useful in skin diseases e.g. psoriasis, rosacea
5. Osteoarthritis

Conclusion

The focal tenacity of this article is to make awareness and to update the knowledge of *Hammam* which have been used since antiquity. Its popularity is still increasing day by day because of their beneficial effect. The healing effect of increased body temperature can play a major role in prevention as well as in curative therapy.

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