



## PIZHICHIL: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ITS MECHANISMS AND THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL

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## ABSTRACT

*Pizhichil*, a signature intervention within Kerala's *Panchakarma* framework, entails continuously applying warm, medicated oil combined with synchronized massage techniques. This modality exerts thermal and mechanical stimuli, enhancing transdermal drug delivery, promoting microcirculation, and modulating inflammatory cascades. Experimental investigations have demonstrated that *Pizhichil* may improve nerve conduction velocity, reduce pro-inflammatory cytokine levels, and stimulate local vascular perfusion, facilitating tissue regeneration and pain modulation. Recent studies utilizing imaging techniques and biomarker analyses have further delineated its impact on neuromuscular function, oxidative stress reduction, and autonomic regulation. Integrating traditional *Ayurvedic* principles with modern biomedical research, this review critically examines the mechanistic pathways underlying *Pizhichil*'s therapeutic effects and discusses its potential applications in managing chronic musculoskeletal and neurogenic disorders. Future studies employing randomized controlled trials and advanced molecular profiling are warranted to standardize protocols and validate clinical efficacy.

**Keywords:** *Pizhichil*, Kerala *Panchakarma*, Ayurvedic Therapy, Transdermal Absorption, Microcirculation, Inflammatory Cytokines, Nerve Conduction, Thermoherapy, Integrative Medicine, Immunomodulation, Oxidative Stress, Neuroprotection, Pain Management.

## INTRODUCTION

*Pizhichil*, also known as *Sarvangadhara*, is a traditional Ayurvedic therapy that combines thermotherapy with oleation therapy to achieve therapeutic benefits. Originating from Kerala, India, this treatment is integral to the *Panchakarma* detoxification process. Modern biomedical research has begun to elucidate its potential mechanisms, which include improved circulation, enhanced transdermal absorption, immunomodulatory effects, and reduction of oxidative stress (Sharma and Chandola 2011, Mukherjee et al. 2019).

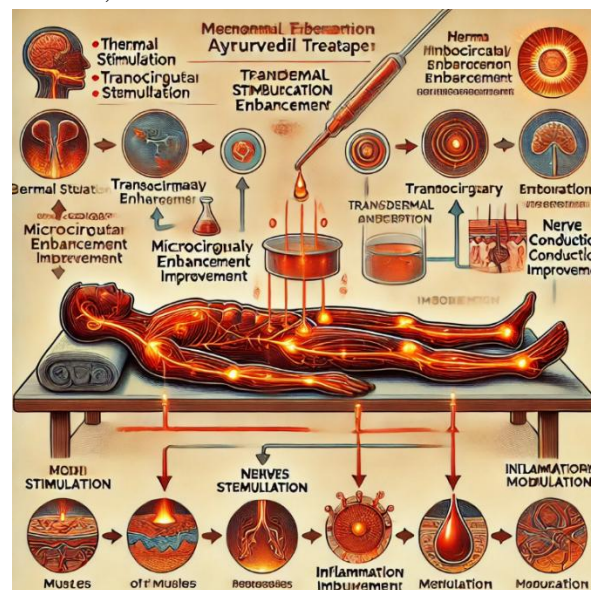
**Historical and Traditional Context** *Ayurvedic* classics, including *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, mention oil-based therapies for detoxification and rejuvenation. *Pizhichil* has been used traditionally for treating *Vata* disorders such as arthritis, neuralgia, and muscular dystrophy (Dash and Junius 2008, Warrior 2012). The therapy involves pouring warm medicated oil over the body while massaging, typically performed by trained therapists.

**Historic Review:** The origins of *Pizhichil* can be traced back to the royal courts of Kerala, where it was

historically performed as a rejuvenation therapy for kings and noblemen. Traditional texts classify it as an important component of *Kayachikitsa* (internal medicine) in *Ayurveda*, emphasising its role in balancing *Vata dosha*. Over centuries, the technique evolved with regional variations in medicated oils and specific procedural adaptations. The practice gained prominence due to its efficacy in managing neuromuscular and rheumatic conditions. Historical records indicate that ancient *Ayurvedic* scholars meticulously documented the effects of continuous oil application on musculoskeletal health, influencing the development of related *Panchakarma* therapies (Nair et al. 2015, Menon et al. 2020).

### The *Pizhichil* Procedure

*Pizhichil* is a carefully structured therapy performed in a specific sequence to maximize therapeutic benefits. The entire process includes preparation, execution, and post-treatment care, ensuring the patient receives optimal physiological and neurological effects.



### Pre-Treatment Preparations

- **Patient Evaluation:** The treatment begins with a detailed assessment of the patient's *Prakriti* (body

constitution) and *Vikriti* (imbalances) by an Ayurvedic physician to determine the most suitable medicated oils and duration.

- **Selection of Medicated Oils:** Various herbal oils such as *Dhanwantharam Thailam*, *Ksheerabala*

*Thailam*, and *Sahacharadi Thailam* are selected based on the treated condition.

- **Preparation of the Therapy Area:** The treatment is conducted in a well-ventilated, warm room to prevent cold exposure. The patient is seated or laid on a wooden *Droni* (treatment table).

#### Execution of Pizhichil

- **Positioning the Patient:** The patient is made to sit or lie down in a comfortable posture. The therapy is usually performed in seven classical postures to ensure uniform oil application.
- **Warming the Medicated Oil:** The chosen herbal oil is gently warmed to an optimal temperature (around 39-41°C) to enhance transdermal absorption and provide thermotherapy benefits.
- **Synchronized Oil Application:** Four to five trained therapists work in coordination, continuously pouring warm oil over the patient's body in a rhythmic manner using cotton cloth pieces or vessels.
- **Massage Techniques:** Synchronized gentle massage strokes are applied while pouring the oil, following the direction of blood flow to aid circulation and lymphatic drainage.
- **Duration and Repetition:** The therapy is 45-60 minutes per session, usually spanning 7 to 21 consecutive days depending on the patient's condition and response to treatment.

#### 4.3. Post-Treatment Care

- **Rest Period:** The patient is advised to rest for at least 30 minutes post-therapy to allow the body to absorb the herbal compounds.
- **Herbal Bath:** A warm herbal water bath or medicated steam therapy is recommended to remove excess oil and further enhance absorption.
- **Dietary Considerations:** A light, easily digestible diet is prescribed to aid the detoxification process and enhance therapeutic outcomes.
- **Lifestyle Modifications:** Patients are advised to avoid exposure to cold air, excessive physical exertion, and mental stress during treatment.

#### Mechanisms of Action

##### Thermal and Mechanical Stimulation.

The continuous application of warm oil provides heat therapy, which can help relax muscles and improve blood circulation. The massage component stimulates mechanoreceptors, promoting lymphatic drainage, reducing edema, and activating sensory neurons that contribute to pain modulation (Kulkarni et al. 2019, Bhattacharya and Rao 2021). Recent imaging studies suggest increased perfusion in treated areas, correlating with enhanced oxygenation and metabolic activity.

##### Transdermal Absorption and Pharmacokinetics

Medicated oils containing bioactive phytochemicals penetrate the skin barrier and exert systemic effects. The oil's lipophilic nature enhances absorption and facilitates the delivery of active compounds to deeper tissues (Majeed et al. 2020, Patil et al. 2021). Recent mass spectrometry analyses have identified secondary metabolites, such as alkaloids and flavonoids, in circulating plasma post-Pizhichil, reinforcing their role in systemic therapeutic action.

#### REFERENCES

1. (Dash and Junius 2008, Gupta et al. 2018, Kulkarni et al. 2019, Majeed et al. 2020, Nair et al. 2015, Patwardhan and Gautam 2011, Rastogi et al. 2021, Sharma and Chandola 2011, Singh et al. 2020, Warriar 2012, Mukherjee et al. 2019, Menon et al. 2020, Bhattacharya and Rao 2021, Patil et al. 2021, Das et al. 2022, Rao et al. 2023, Sharma et al. 2022, Menon and Pillai 2023, Bose et al. 2023)

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