

Shwitra - A Pragmatic Clinical Approach


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Shwitra is a condition characterized by whitish discoloured patches on the body. The word is derived from Sweta in Sanskrit which means white patches. It is caused due to the involve of Saptkodravya. The fourth layer of Twaka that is Tamra. It is mainly considered as a prime location of Shwitra. The disease can be equated with vitiligo and the two terms Leukoderma and vitiligo are used synonymously by most of the physician. But a little bit difference exists between their two terminology the paper reports some classical reference of Shwitra & its various pragmatic treatment.

Keywords: Shwitra, Leukoderma, Kushta, Pragmatic treatment

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Introduction

Nowadays, everyone is concerned with their appearance. Skin beauty represents both physical and psychological health. Skin is a mirror that reflects external and internal pathology, aiding in disease diagnosis. Various skin problems affect approximately 20-30% of the world's population.[1] Skin complaints affect people of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, and cause harm in a variety of ways, including discomfort, disfigurement, disability, and so on. *Kushtha* represents all types of Skin disorders in *Ayurveda*. *Kushtha* is divided into two types: *Maha Kushtha* and *Kshudra Kushtha*. *Sushruta* later mentions *Shwitra* as a different form of *Kushtha*. [2] *Shwitra* differs from *Kushtha* in terms of chronicity and hereditary history, as well as involvement of *Twak* Only, non-infectious nature of disease, *Nidana*, *Asadhya Lakshana*. *Shwitra* is similar to Vitiligo in terms of signs and symptoms. Vitiligo is a progressive disease marked by hypopigmented white patches. Because of the disease's chronicity and a lack of proper effective treatment, patients become demoralized. In modern science, PUVA (Psoralen + Ultra Violet A exposure) therapy and corticosteroids are primarily used for disease treatment, but these therapies have numerous negative side effects. Patients were treated with an Ayurvedic polyherbal powder mixture containing *Psoralea corylifolia* (*Bakuchi*) as the main ingredient supplemented with local application and phototherapy (natural). Most of the patients undergo intermittent *Sodhana* and *Shamana Chikitsa*. With these chikitsa sutra, certain local application also gives excellent results in minor skin conditions and also relieves the symptoms in severe skin pathologies and restores the disfigurement (*Varnyaprasadan Karma*) and helps in wound healing (*Varnaropan Karma*).

In classics, the chikitsa is classified into *Antahparimarjan* and *Bahiparimarjan Chikitsa*. The *Bahiparimarjan* is the local application of medicines in various forms. *Lepa* is one of them. Application of drugs in the paste form over the concerned body part is a widely acceptable form of *Lepa* preparation. In *Visarpa Chikitsa Charaka* has mentioned the method of preparation, utility, duration, thickness, operating procedure and combination of drugs. In *Kustha Chikitsa Acharya Charaka* has mentioned to use these *Lepa* after achieving proper *Sodhan* of *Rugna*.

Pathogenesis (*Samprāpti*)

Though *Samprapti* of *Shwitra* has not been explained directly in *Ayurvedic* classics, but all the general *Nidana* explained under *Kushtha Nidan Sthan* chapter 5th, here an attempt has been made to formulate and explain the pathogenesis of *Shwitra*. Due to frequent intake of one or all of the above said *Nidanas* leads in to formation of toxins (*Ama*) which further provoke or vitiates all *Doshas* and which get mixed with digestive juice (*Pitta*) and then *Rasa Dhatu* and so on it spreads from one *Dhatu* to next *Dhatu*. Thus, the vitiated *Doshas* spreads from the *Koshtha* (alimentary tract) to the *Shakha* (body tissues).

While travelling through all over the body wherever there is *Sthanavaigunya* (deformity in location) it gets lodged and shows the symptoms of the diseases. Then, these vitiated *Doshas* move in *Triyakgata Siras* and get lodged in *Tamra* layer of *Twacha* (skin) causing *Sanga* or obstruction to the local *Rasavaha Srotas* (lymph or plasma carrying channels) and *Raktavaha Srotas* (blood carrying channels). The reason behind *Dosha Dushya Sammurchana* in *Tamra* layer of *Twacha* is due to the presence of *Khavaigunya* (deformity in structural entity) in the respective areas of *Twacha*.

This leads to the *Kshaya* (decline) of local *Bhrajakapitta* and causes *Twak Shwetata*. Further the *Samprapti* continues and the deeper *Dhatus* like *Mamsa* and *Medas* are also involved. The involvement of each *Dhatu* exhibits specific discoloration on the patches. *Doshas* settled in *Rakta Dhatu* produces *Rakta Varna*, *Mamsa Dhatu* produces *Tamra varna* and *Shweta varna* when settled in *Medo Dhatu*. These altogether involved invariably in different grades and produce white macules all over external surface of the skin causing *Shwitra Kushta*.

Though all the three *Doshas* are involved, mainly vitiated *Udanavata* and *Bhrajakapitta* are held responsible because these two are responsible for maintenance of color of *Twacha*. The functioning of *Vyanavata* cannot be neglected as it is the main motivating force behind the movement of *Dushta Dosha* along with *Rasa*. According to *Sushruta* the pathogenesis of *Shwitra* is restricted up to level of skin only. It cannot reach further deeper level and also it is devoid of secretions. The elements involved in pathogenesis of disease are listed in table:

Samprapti Ghatakas of Shwitra

1. Dosha	Tridosha (Kapha Pradhana)
2. Dushya	Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa and Meda
3. Ama	Jatharagni and Dhatwagni
4. Agni	Jatharagnimandya and Dhatwagnimandya
5. Srotas	Rasavaha, Raktavaha, Mamsavaha and Medovaha
6. Srotodushti	Sanga
7. Adhishthana	Twak (Rakta, Mamsa and Meda)
8. Udbhava Sthana	Amashaya (Twak)
9. Roga Marga	Bahya
10. Vyaktasthana	Sharira (Twak)

The exact pathogenesis of vitiligo is still not fully elucidated and it remains obscure in spite of all recent findings, genetic, immune and oxidative stress factors etc., However, it is postulated that vitiligo is a multifactorial, polygenic disorder, with a complex pathogenesis. Western science explains it as a condition caused due to improper distribution of the melanin (impaired melanocyte production) beneath the skin surface.

Materials and Methods

Acharya Sushruta and Acharya Sharangadhara has mentioned the different classifications of *Lepa* in their text, on other hand Acharya Charaka has mentioned the way of its application. In *Charaka Visarpa Adhyaya* Acharya gave the following rules for *Lepa* applications.

Synonyms: *Llipta, Lepa, Lepana.*

Definition: A type of therapy, wherein paste of drug is applied topically to the affected part.

Importance of *Lepa Kalpana*: By pouring water over a burning house, the fire is extinguished immediately; in the same way the *Lepa* pacifies the provoked local *Dosha* by local application. Moreover, it also has actions like *Sodhana, Utsadana, Ropana* and *Pralahdan*. (Su. Chi.1/15)

Types of *Lepa* - According to Acharya Sushruta there are 3 types of *Lepa* as follow

1. *Pralepa*: Sita Guna, Tanu(thin), *Visoshi* or *Avisoshi*
2. *Pradeha*: Hot or Cold, thick or thin and
3. *Alepa*: It is having moderate characters of both *Pralepa* and *Pradeha*.

Asthanga Samgraha has given 10 types of *Alepa*: [3]

1. *Snaihika*: Used in *Vatika Shopha*.

2. *Nirvapana*: Used in *Pitta, Visha, Kshara* and *Agnijanya Vranas*.

3. *Prasadana*: Used to *Rakta Dushti*.

4. *Sthambhana*: Used for *Raktha Sthambhana*.

5. *Vilayana*: Used in *Kapha and Medo* vitiated

6. *Pachana*: *Lepa* of *Sheeta* and *Ruksha Dravyas* in *Pakva Shopha*.

7. *Peedana*: *Lepa* of *Ruksha* and *Pichila Dravyas*.

8. *Shodhana*: Used for the *Shodana* of

9. *Ropana*: Used in *Shuddha Vrana*.

10. *Savarnikarana*: Used to regain the normal texture of skin.

Acharya Vagbhata has given different types of *Mukha Lepa* according to seasons. He explained about three types: *Doshghna, Vishaghna* and *Varnya*. [4] Acharya Sharangadhara has classified the *Lepa Kalpana* based on their therapeutic uses: [5]

***Doshaghna Lepa*:** This variety of *Lepa* includes such drugs, which exerts their alleviatory action directly on the aggravated local *Doshas*. e.g. *Punarnavadi Lepa*. [6]

***Vishaghna Lepa*:** This kind of *Lepa* includes the drugs that nullifies poisons directly at local level after their application. The drugs used in this *Lepa* are potent than those in *Doshaghna Lepa*. e.g. *Dashanga Lepa*. [7]

***Varnya Lepa*:** This is cosmetic application over the face, which improves colour and complexion. *Chandana, Manjistha, Ushira, Shalmali, Sariva, Masoora* etc. are some of the drugs that are attributed with *Varnya* property. Most of the *Varnya* drugs are *Madhura Rasatmaka* and *Shita, Guru, Snighdha, Mrudu Gunatmaka; Shita Viryatmaka*. They alleviate *Pitta* and *Vata*. Milk, Butter, Ghee, Oil and other unctuous stuffs are used as bases to prepare *VarnyaLepa*. e.g. *Mukha KantikaraLepa*. [8]

Thickness of *Lepa*: One fourth, one third and half *Anguli* is the thickness of the *Lepa* respectively for *Doshaghna, Vishaghna* and *Varnya Lepa*. Wet *Lepa* pacifies the disease whereas dry *Lepa* causes vitiation of *Dosha*. (Sa.Utt.11/2)

Thickness of *Lepa* application should be equal to the thickness of a buffalo skin (3-5 mm approximately) (Su.Su.18/11)

Method of preparation

Kalka Peshita Aushadi Dravya (paste form) should be applied with the width of 1/3 of thumb width.

Mode of Application

Overapplication of *Lepa* one over other should be avoided before the previous one gets absorbed fully. Immediate application of second *Lepa* as soon as the previous one started to dry down (don't let the *Lepa* dry completely). For *Vaataj*, *Pittaj* and *Raktaj Visarpa* - *Aghana Lepa* (Thin) should be applied. For *Kaphaj Visarpa* - *Ghana Lepa* (Thick) should be applied. Width of *Lepa* - *Tribhaga Angushta Matra*. *Lepa* should not be *Atisnigdha* or *Atiruksha* (too oily or too dry) also should not be in very *Pinda* or *Drava* form (too much liquid or solid in consistency). Stale *Lepa* is not indicated in any conditions.

Mode of Action

According to *Ayurvedic* medicine *Lepa* or the topical formulations, should be softly massaged over the skin in an upward or reverse direction of the hairs to speed up and improve the effectiveness of application. As a result, the medicine penetrates the pores at the hair's root, where it is absorbed into the capillary network, travels to small veins, and eventually enters the systemic circulation. This finally leads to the medication's absorption and the intended outcomes. This rubbing technique raises the skin's warmth, which may hasten the drug's pilosebaceous absorption and skin penetration since heat dilates capillary ends. this rubbing technique raises the skin's warmth, which may hasten the drug's pilosebaceous absorption and skin penetration. *Twak* is the *Sthana* of *Bhrajak Pitta* that is in charge of the texture and integrity of skin, according to our classical literature. Numerous *Romkupas* originate through the *Tiryag Dhamanis*, which are dispersed throughout the skin like a mesh and act as a mediator of medication absorption in this manner. *Twaksaar* is *Rasasaar* According to *Charaka*, *Rakta* is also significant during *Varnyaprasadan*. Sweat escapes through these *Romkupa*, and *Ras Rakta Dhatu* also reaches the *Romkupa* to provide nourishment.

Pragmatic Treatment

Pragmatic treatment aims to improve outcomes in a way that is both realistic and sustainable In modern medicine, It refers to a realistic, practical approach that prioritizes real-world effectiveness, considering the patient's unique context, limitations, and preferences. The goal is to offer therapies that are not only evidence-based but also accessible, cost-effective, and adaptable to the patient's life.

Lepa Kalpana for Shwitra

In *Ayurveda*, *Lepa Kalpana* (topical applications) are often prescribed to address skin conditions like *Shwitra*. Various herbal pastes are created based on the patient's constitution and the nature of the skin condition. The goal of *Lepa* is to bring balance to the skin and help regenerate pigmentation or heal the skin.

Acc. to Charak Samhita

- *Mulakbeej* + *Avalguj* + *Gomutra* (Ch.Chi.7/169)

Acc. to Shushrut Samhita

- *Lakh*, *Kutha*, *Sarso*, *Biroja*, *Haldi*, *Sunthi*, *Maricha*, *Pippali*, *Chakramard Beej*, *Mulak Beej* grind with Butter milk and apply these *Lepa* (Chi.9/12)
- *Saindhav* *Lavan*, *Chakrmard Beej*, *Gud*, *Nagkesar*, *Rasoat* these all grind with *Kapithya Swaras* (Chi.9/13)
- *Swarna Ksheeri*, *Amaltas*, *Shirish*, *Neem*, *Raal*, *Kutaj*, *Shalvriksha Lepa* (Ch.Chi.9/15)

Acc. to Ashtang Hridayam

- *Bhallatak Lepa* (Chi.20/11) - *Bhallatak*, *Gomutra*, *Snuhiksheer*
- 1-Krishna *Sarpa Mashi*, *Bibhitaki* oil *Lepa* 2-*Sikhipitta Lepa* 3-*Netrabala* (huiber) *Bhasma* + *Bibhitaki* oil *Lepa* (Chi.20/12)
- *Sawarnkar Lepa* (Chi.20/12)- *Bakuchi Churna* (1 *Kudav*) + *Harital* (1 pal) + *Gomutra*
- *Bhallatakadi Lepa* (Chi.20/16) - *Bhallatak*, *Chita* (*dweepi*) root, *Snuhi* root, *Arka* root, *Gunja Phal* seeds, *Sunthi*, *Maricha*, *Pippali*, *Sankha Bhasma*, *Tutha*, *Kuth*, Five salt, *Yavkshar*, *Sajjikshar*, *Kalihari*

Acc. to Chakradatta

- *Amaltas Patra*, *Chakramard Beej*, *Karanj Beej*, *Vasa*, *Guduchi*, *Madanphal*, *Haldi* (*Kushtha*50/8)
- *Gandh Viroja*, *Devdaru*, *Khadir Twak*, *Dhataki Pushpa*, *Neem Twak*, *Vayvidang-Kaner Twak*(*Kushtha* Chi.50/8)
- *Bhurj Patra* nodule, *Lahsun*, *Sirish Twaka*, *Kashish*, *Guggulu*, *Sahijan Twaka*.(*Kushtha*50/9)
- *Maruva*, *Kutaj Twaka*, *Chativan Twaka*, *Pilu Phal*, *Kuth* leaves, *Jati*(*Kushtha* Chi.50/9)
- *Vacha*, *Harenuke Beej*, *Nisoth-Danti Mool*, *Bhilawa Geru* and *Rasanjan*(*Kushtha*50/10)

- *Madan Phal, Hartal, Grah Dhoom, Ela, Kashish, Lodhra, Arjun Twaka, Nagarmotha, Sarjagal (Kushtha50/10)*

Acc. to *Gadnigrah*

- *Bakuuchyadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/242) - Seeds of Bakuchi (250gm) Harital (1kg) + Gomutra*
- *Vayasyadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/243) - Makoy, Chakramard, Kuth, Pipar (each in equal amount) + Aja Mutra*
- *Marichyadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/244) - Maricha, Tambul Patra, Kuth, Madanphal, Kashish, Til Tail*
- *Patrakadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/247) - Tambula Patra, Marich, Kashish, Katu Tail, Swarnamakshik, Madanphal Tila Tail*
- *Pootikadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/248) - Pootikaranja, Madar, Snuhi, Amaltash, Jati (each leaves)*
- *Bhadrodudumvarikadi Lepa (Kushthadhikar - 36/249) - Snuhi root, Gular root, Kathgular root,*

Acc. to *Bhel Samhita*

- *Guggulu, Durva, Chitrak root, Kadli root, Tulsi root*

Acc to *Sharandhar Samhita*

- *Shwitranashak Lepa - Swarnapushpi, Kashish, Vayvidanga, Manahshila, Gorochana, Saindha Namak all content in equal quantity and grind with water. (Utt.Khand-11/40)*
- *Vayasyedgajadi Lepa - Makoy root, Chakramard root, Kutha, Pippali, all content in equal amount & grind with Aja Dugdha. (Utt.Khand-11/41)*

Discussion

The primary advantage of Lepa in managing Shwitra lies in its ability to directly address the skin condition by promoting healing, restoring pigmentation, and balancing the doshas locally. By using natural herbs with properties that support Pitta reduction, enhance Rakta Dhatu (blood tissue), and stimulate melanocyte activity, Lepa provides targeted action on the affected areas. Lepa offers a localized, non-invasive method to support and enhance the healing process, potentially leading to better results in terms of skin pigmentation and overall skin health.

Therefore, combining Lepa with holistic Ayurvedic approaches provides a comprehensive treatment strategy, making it an effective option for managing Shwitra.

Conclusion

Lepa is a highly beneficial and effective topical treatment for Shwitra in Ayurveda, offering targeted relief to those suffering from vitiligo. However, its best results are seen when used in conjunction with a holistic Ayurvedic approach, addressing both internal and external factors contributing to the condition. With consistent use and proper guidance, Lepa can be a valuable tool in managing and potentially reversing the effects of Shwitra.

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