



ISSN 2456-3110

Vol 4 · Issue 3

May-June 2019

Journal of
**Ayurveda and Integrated
Medical Sciences**

www.jaims.in

JAIMS



Charaka
Publications

Indexed

Shilajatu Shodhana - A brief review

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ABSTRACT

Shilajatu, a mineral drug used as a therapeutic agent in the ancient system of Indian medicine - Ayurveda. Due to higher efficacy and advocated in many disorders it is quite popular among Ayurvedic physicians. Before using it as a therapeutic medicine classical texts of Ayurveda mentioned about its *Shodhana*. *Shodhana* an procedure which encompasses purification of substances and improves its therapeutic properties. Different classical texts advocated different media and different procedures for the *Shodhana* of *Shilajatu*. Along with this different texts have mentioned different therapeutic actions of *Shilajatu*. Here it was planned to review its types, *Shodhana* procedures through available literature. For this purpose, classical texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, *Chakradutta*, *Rasarnava*, *Rasaratnasammucchaya*, *Rasapadhatti*, *Rasendrachudamani*, *Rasendrachinatamni*, *Rasaprakashsudhakara* and *Rasataranagini* were screened and revived. It was found and observed that classical texts mentioned three different types of *Shilajatu Shodhana* procedures *Dhavana*, *Bhavana*, *Swedana*. Many texts described different media and different procedures for the *Shodhana*.

Key words: Mineral, *Shodhana*, *Shilajatu*.

INTRODUCTION

Metals and minerals an integral part of Indian system of medicine - Ayurveda. Indian Vedic literature mentioned metals like gold, silver, copper, Iron, lead, tin etc. and recommended some therapeutic properties.^[1] The centuries old classical texts of Ayurveda like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* extensively quoted the therapeutic use of metals and minerals.^[2] Metals like gold, silver, copper, Iron, lead, tin and minerals like *Shilajatu*, real agar, red ochre, arsenic etc. were well described in these *Samhitas*. In

the later on *Samhitas* like *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, therapeutic properties of metals and minerals has been described. Iatrochemistry i.e. Rasashastra, a science which mainly deals with medicines prepared from mercury, metals, minerals, toxic herbs, herbs, animal origin products. In this Rasashastra before preparing medicines from metals and minerals, texts strongly advocated for their purification i.e. *Shodhana* procedures.^[3] Among this minerals *Shilajatu* is one of most therapeutically prescribed mineral. In the contexts of *Shilajatu*, *Charaka* quoted that there is no any disease or disorder which cannot be cured by *Shilajatu*.^[4] Properties of *Shilajatu* like, useful in *Jwara*, *Shotha*, *Pandu*, *Prameha*, *Agnimandya*, *Stholya*, *Rajyakshma*, *Shula*, *Gulma*, *Pliha*, *Udara*, *Hrudayashula*, *Aama*, Skin diseases.^[5] *Shuddha Shilajatu* is also chief ingredient in many popular herbo-mineral compound formulations like *Arogyvardhini*, *Chandraprabha* etc.

As mentioned earlier that *Shodhana* procedure is one of the important procedures in the manufacturing of Ayurvedic herbo-mineral medicines. Regarding *Shilajatu Shodhana* different texts of Ayurveda and

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Submission Date: 18/05/2019

Accepted Date: 26/06/2019

Access this article online

Quick Response Code



Website: www.jaims.in

DOI: 10.21760/jaims.4.3.11

Rasashastra mentioned different procedures, different liquid media and different duration. Here it was decided to review differences in the *Shodhana* procedures of *Shilajatu*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the review purpose different classical texts of Ayurveda and Rasashastra were scrutinized and reviewed like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, *Chakradutta*, *Rasarnava*, *Rasaratna Sammurchaya*, *Rasapadhatti*, *Rasendra Chudamani*, *Rasendra Chinatamani* and *Rasatarangini*.

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Charaka Samhita mentioned four types of *Shilajatu*; *Swarna*, *Rajata*, *Tamra* and *Loha*. Out of these four varieties, *Loha* variety is mentioned as a best.^[5] *Sushruta Samhita* narrated six varieties of *Shilajatu* by adding *Vanga* and *Naga* to former four types mentioned in *Charaka Samhita*. Rasashastra texts cited different classification of *Shilajatu*, stated two types of *Shilajatu* which are *Gomutragandhi* and *Karpura*.^[6]

Shodhana methods

Charaka Samhita indirectly quoted about *Shodhana* procedure of *Shilajatu*. In this method *Charaka* mentioned *Bhavana* procedure and recommended seven *Bhavana* for the therapeutic use. According to therapeutic use, the decoction of herbs which pacifies *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* is endorsed for *Bhavana* purpose.^[7] *Sushruta Samhita* mentioned decoction of *Salsaradi Gana* for *Bhavana* purpose, along with this, advocated use of different media for *Bhavana* as per disease and disorders.^[8]

Ashtanga Sangraha narrated first time detail procedure of *Shodhana* of *Shilajatu* along with quantity of media and duration. He described use of water for the *Shodhana* procedure, *Shilajatu* should be dissolved in the water and then it should be filtered and sun dried. For first time according to *Dosha*, *Vagbhata* mentioned different types of decoction with specified herbs.^[9] He advocated to use

eight times of water for the preparation of decoction of specified herbs, and should be reduced upto eight parts. This decoction in equal quantity should be used for the *Shilajatu Shodhana*, it should be reduced in the sunlight and the procedures should be repeated for seven times. Same procedure is quoted in the *Ashtanga Hrudaya*.^[10]

Chakradutta described *Shodhana* procedure as like as *Ashtanga Sangraha* but in detail. Here in procedure of decoction preparation, he differs with *Ashtanga Sangraha* and mention four times of water for preparation and should be reduced up to fourth times.^[11]

Rasarnava described details of procedure of *Shodhana* in different manners. Author mentioned procedure of boiling first ever. According to text *Shilajatu* should be boiled in *Kshara*, *Amla Varga Dravya*, *Gomutra* or *Goghruata*. Another method, *Shilajatu* should be dissolved in decoction of *Triphala* or two varieties of *Ardraka* or Cow ghee in Iron pot.^[12]

Rasaratna Sammurchaya described three different methods of *Shodhana*.^[13] In first method, *Shilajatu* should be washed in *Kshara Jala* or *Amla Varga Dravya Jala* or *Gomutra* and filtered followed by sun drying. In second method, *Shilajatu* should be dissolved in the cow milk or decoction of *Triphala* or juice of *Brhingaraja* and then it should be filtered followed by sun drying. In third method, *Shilajatu* should be boiled in *Kshara Jala*, *Amla Dravya Jala* or *Kanji* and *Guggulu Jala* for three hours in *Swedaniya Yantra*, followed by filter and sun drying.

Rasapadhatti; in first method suggested that *Shilajatu* should be washed in hot cow milk or cow urine or decoction of *Triphala* or It should be boiled in *Guggulu Jala* for two to three hours.^[14] *Raendrachudamani*; *Shilajatu* should be steamed in *Swedana Yantra* with *Kshara*, *Amla Varga Dravya* and *Guggulu* for one hour.^[15]

Rasendrachintamani; in first method *Shilajatu* should be washed with hot water and filtered. In second method; *Shilajatu* should be triturated with *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kaphahara* herbs decoction for seven times.^[16] *Rasatarangini* mentioned the *Dhavana*

method for the *Shilajatu Shodhana*. In this method, *Shilajatu* is dissolved in the double quantity of hot water and half quantity of decoction of *Triphala*. In other two methods *Triphala* decoction is replaced by *Gomutra* and juice of *Bhringaraja*.^[17]

In brief different procedures mentioned for the *Shodhana* of *Shilajatu* in the texts as following.

Dhavana procedure: In this procedure substance is dissolved in the water and filtered through cotton cloth and if necessary, filtrate is sun dried to achieve solid mass. This procedure may remove the physical and water insoluble impurities from the substance like stones, wooden material.

Bhavana Procedure: The substance is milled with the herbal juices or decoctions for definite period in the mortar and pestle. It may incorporate new therapeutic properties to the substance along with it may nullify the harmful ingredients of substance by interaction with different media.

Swedana procedure: The substance is dissolved in the liquid media and heated for specific duration. It may remove the gaseous material from the substance through evaporation.

DISCUSSION

Charaka Samhita mentioned the four types of *Shilajatu*; *Swarna*, *Rajata*, *Tamra* and *Loha*, while *Sushruta Samhita* added two more types; *Vanga* and *Naga*. This classification of *Shilajatu* found based on the origin and color of *Shilajatu*. Medieval Rasashastra texts narrated two different varieties of *Shilajatu* like *Gomutragandhi* and *Karpura*. It is based on the smell of *Shilajatu*. For these different types of *Shilajatu* classical texts mentioned the different types of *Shodhana* procedures, different types of media. Several herbal juices, decoctions, cow urine and alkaline products like *Kshara*.

Shodhana procedure mentioned in the classical texts of Ayurveda and Rasashastra are not only purification procedures but also increases the therapeutic values of the substance.^[18] Here in the context of *Shilajatu Shodhana* review shows the *Shodhana* procedure like *Bhavana*, *Swedana* and *Dhavana* with different media

like decoction of herbs, juices of herbs, animal products like cow urine and alkali media like *Kshara*. *Dhavana* procedure removes physical impurities, while *Bhavana* procedure adds some new therapeutic properties to the principal drug. *Swedana* procedure may removes the physical impurities along with some chemical impurities through evaporation. Also, heat may increase the rate of incorporation of new therapeutic properties of media in *Shilajatu*.

The ancient texts of Ayurveda like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hrudaya* emphasized on the *Dhavana* procedure along with *Bhavana* of different herbs according to use. Further more ancient texts of Ayurveda emphasized more on the therapeutic values of media. Like it was mentioned in the texts of *Charaka*, *Sushruta* and *Ashtanga Sangraha* that use media for the *Bhavana* purpose as per the *Dosha* and diseases. Here it sounds clear that ancient texts were more rational in the choice of media for the *Shodhana* procedure.

Whereas medieval texts of Rasashastra gave priority to *Shodhana* procedures like *Swedana* and *Dhavana*. *Dhavana* procedure removes the physical impurities of the *Shilajatu* and *Bhavana* of different herbs may incorporate new therapeutic properties to *Shilajatu*, and also may neutralize the other impurities through *Shilajatu*. Unlike *Bhavana* procedure, the *Swedana* procedure may nullifies some excess impurities through evaporation. As *Shilajatu* is multi-element constituting mineral, *Swedana* procedure may evaporate gaseous impurities. It may be possible that heat may acts as an enhancer in chemical procedure in between *Shilajatu* and media used for *Swedana*. To know exact role of *Shodhana* by different procedures and different media it needs a detailed physico-chemical analysis of *Shilajatu* after *Shodhana* procedure.

CONCLUSION

Three different methods of *Shodhana* like *Dhavana*, *Bhavana* and *Swedana* were found mentioned in the classical texts of Ayurveda and Rasashastra. Classical texts of Ayurveda emphasized more on the *Bhavana*

procedure and different liquid media according to diseases and *Dosha* whereas Rasashastra texts have given priority to *Dhavana* and *Swedana* procedures.

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How to cite this article: Dr. Kaveri Borkar, Dr. Balasaheb Pagire. Shilajatu Shodhana - A brief review. J Ayurveda Integr Med Sci 2019;3:59-62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21760/jaims.4.3.11>

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.

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