



Review Article

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW ON SHILAJATHU - AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Rasasastra is a branch of science deals with metals and minerals, *Shilajathu* (Bitumen) is one of the important herbo mineral drug in *Rasasastra*. It is also known as black bitumen or *Asphaltum punjabinum*, considered as mineral pitch. *Shilajathu* is widely used for treating number of diseases in various systems of medicine. It is an exudates of rocks having blackish brown colour, has been mentioned in *Samhitas* since ancient times. *Shilajathu* was described by almost all the Acharyas in their classical text books. Especially in *Rasasastra* text books, *Shilajathu* was included under *Maharasa*, *Uparasa*, *Dhatu varga*, *Suvarnadi varga*, *Paradati varga*. Description of different types of *Shilajathu* and their properties was seen in classics. Acharyas explained about the genuinity test of *Shilajathu*, various *Sodhana* procedures also mentioned for removing the impurities and make fit for consumption. *Marana* (incineration) and *Satvapata* (extraction of essence) are not necessary for *Shilajathu*, whereas *Guna* (property), *Karma* (action), *Matra* (dose) of *Shilajathu* was available in literatures. For curing various diseases *Shilajathu* administered along with different *Anupanas* (adjuvant), it is considered as panacea. It is the one of the ingredients of various Ayurveda formulations and has *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) property. In this article, an attempt has made to summarize the wide range of description of *Shilajathu* available in various Ayurveda classics.

INTRODUCTION

Rasasastra is a branch of science deals with metals and minerals, *Shilajathu* is a herbomineral substance, it included under *Maharasa*. The word *Shilajathu* comprises of two terms *Shila* and *Jathu*. Word *Shila* denotes rock, *Jathu* means blackish brown substance. It is the exudates of rocks having blackish brown colour and oozes out from steep rocks of mountains during the summer because of intense sun heat. Various Acharyas described types, *Shodana*, *Marana*, *Guna*, *Karma*, *Matra*, and *Anupana* of *Shilajathu* by difference in their opinion. So, collection of the scattered knowledge regarding *Shilajathu* is necessary. *Shilajathu* the panacea; is one of the previous review articles of *Shilajathu*.^[1]

Aim and objective of this article is comprehensively collecting the details of *Shilajathu* from various classical texts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Review of data collected from various classical Ayurvedic text books, articles and research papers from journals.

Historical background

No description of *Shilajathu* found in Vedic period. Detailed description of *Shilajathu* was seen in *Samhithas*. *Acharya Charaka* explains in *Karaprachitheeyam rasayana padam*, *Acharya Susruta* mentioned in *Madhumeha chikitsa* and *Acharya Vagbhata* in *Rasayanavidhi*. In *Rasasastra* majority of texts *Shilajathu* has been explained under either *Maharasa* or *Upadathu*.

Vernacular names

English - Mineral pitch
Hindi - *Shilajita*
Latin - *Asphaltum punjabinum*
Malayalam - Kanmadam
Sanskrit - *Shilajatu*
Unani - *Shilajith*

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Synonyms^[2]

- 1) *Dhathujam, Girijam, Adrijam, Sailodbhavam, Ashmajam, Shaileyam, Adreyam, Shaila, Gaireya, Dhatu, Shila, Shilabhyam*- Indicating origin of *Shilajathu*
- 2) *Jathu, Jathwamsakam, Silajathu, Shilaniryasa, Adrijatu, Shilasveda, Ashmajatu Ashmajatukam, Shilavyadhi, Girijatu* - Indicating state of *Shilajathu*
- 3) *Dhathuja, Shailadhathu, Shiladathu, Dhathu, shailotha*- Indicating mineral property of *Shilajathu*
- 4) *Ushnajam* - Indicating season in which occurs.

Occurrence

Ancient texts categorically state that *Shilajathu* is a product exuding out of rocks in the Himalayan and *Vindhya* area in summer months due to the heat of strong sun, also seen in Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet.

Categorization based on *Rasa Sastra* literature^[3]

Shilajathu is placed in *Maharasa* group by almost all *Rasasasthra* classics, but the *Nighantukaras* placed it in different group according to their classification.

Table 1: Placement of *Shilajathu* in various texts

S.No	Name of text	Group
1	<i>Rasa hrdaya tantra, Rasarnava, Rasendra choodamani, Rasa Prakasa Sudhakara, Rasakamadhenu, Rasa padhati, Goraksha samhitha, Rasopanisat, Rasa Kalpa, Rasaratna Samuchaya</i>	<i>Maharasa</i>
2	<i>Rasendra sara sangraha, Anandakanda, Rasa manjari, Brihat yoga Tarangini, Ayurveda Prakasa, Rasa Jala Nidhi</i>	<i>Uparasa</i>
3	<i>Bhava prakasha Nighandu, Kaiyadeva Nighantu</i>	<i>Dhatu varga</i>
4	<i>Raja Nighantu, Madanapala Nighantu</i>	<i>Suvarnadi varga</i>
5	<i>Dhanvanthari Nighantu, Shodala Nighantu</i>	<i>Chandanadi varga</i>
6	<i>Susrutha Samhitha Soothra</i>	<i>Ushakadi varga</i>
7	<i>Abhinava Nighantu</i>	<i>Dhatvadi varga</i>
8	<i>Sidha Beshaja Manimala</i>	<i>Paradhadi varga</i>
9	<i>Saligrama Nighantu</i>	<i>Dhatu upadathu varga</i>
10	<i>Ayurveda Chintamani</i>	<i>Upadathu</i>

Varieties or types

Different types of *Shilajathu* are mentioned in various contexts are far as number is concerned, but the basic concept remains same i.e., variety depends upon the rock from where it exudes.

Table 2: *Shilajathu* in *Samhithas*

Varieties	Cha.Sam	Su.Sam	A.H
<i>Swarnam</i>	+	+	+
<i>Rajatham</i>	+	+	+
<i>Tamram</i>	+	+	+
<i>Lohajam</i>	+	+	+
<i>Nagam</i>	-	+	+
<i>Vangam</i>	-	+	+

Cha. Sam – *Charaka Samhita*, *Su. Sam* – *Susruta Samhita*, *A.H* – *Astanga Hrdaya*

In *Rasa Sastra* text books different classifications of *Shilajathu* can see.

Table 3: *Shilajathu* in *Rasasasthra* texts

RRS	RSS/ RJN	Rasarnava	AP/ RPS	R.T
1. <i>Gomuthra gandhi</i> 2. <i>Karpoora Gandhi</i>	1. <i>Girija</i> 2. <i>Usharaka</i>	1. <i>Pathitha</i> 2. <i>Apathitha</i>	1. <i>Girisambhavam</i> 2. <i>Ksharabhoomija</i>	1. <i>Swarna</i> 2. <i>Rajata</i> 3. <i>Tamara</i> 4. <i>Lohaja</i>

(RRS- *Rasaratna Samuchaya*, RSS- *Rasendra sara sangraha*, RJN- *Rasa Jala Nidhi*, AP - *Ayurveda Prakasa*, RPS - *Rasa Prakasa Sudhakara*, RT- *Rasa Tarangini*)

Gomuthra Gandhi is again sub divided into two as *Sasatwa* and *Nihstawa*^[4]

In commentary of *Rasendra Sarasangraha*; *Shilajathu* was divided in to two types

a. *Girija* b. *Usharaka*

Girija is again divided into 6 types based on the presence of metal in it.

1. *Kanchana* 2. *Rajatha* 3. *Tamra* 4. *Lauha* 5. *Vanga* 6. *Yasada*

Usharaka is again divided into two types^[5]

1. *Kshara* or white coloured

2. Red coloured like fire

Shilajathu have been mentioned as of two types in *Rasarnava*

Table 4: Classification based on the main metallic content of *Shilajathu* and their pharmacological properties

Type	Colour	Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka	Dosha haratva
Swarnam	Japapushpam	Madura, Tikta	Guru	Seetha	Katu	Vatapithagna
Rajata	Panduram	Katu	Guru	Seetha	Madura	Kaphapithagna
Tamra	Neela	Tikta	Guru	Ushna	Katu	Kaphagna
Loha	Guggulu sankasa	Tikta, Lavana	Shoshana, Chedana	Seetha	Katu	Tridoshagna

Test of genuineness of *Shilajathu*

Genuinity of any drug is justified by the testing it as per the specification. In *Samhitas* and *Rasarnava* there is no specific description about the test of *Shilajathu*. RSS, RT, R. Chu, *Basavarajeeyam*, were mentioned the testing techniques which are:

- When put on fire it must burn without smoke and should became shape of *Linga*.
- When put in water it spread like a thread up to the bottom without being dissolved.
- It should look in black colour.
- Pure *Shilajathu* should have the smell of cow's urine.

Table 5: Test for the purity of *Shilajathu* in different classics

Tests for purity	RRS	AP	AK	RT	RPS	RCM	RJN
<i>Lingakara</i> when put on fire	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Assume <i>Lohakitta</i> shape on fire							+
Smokeless on burning	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Release rays in water		+		+			+
Insoluble in water	+		+				
Soluble in water					+	+	

(Ak- Anandakhanda RCM- Rasendra Chintamani)

Bad effects of Impure *Shilajathu*^[6]

Impure *Shilajathu* if taken internally may produce *Daha*, *Murcha*, *Bhramam*, *Raktapitha*, *Sosham*, *Agnimandya* and *Vidgraha*, hence it should be used after proper purification only.

Antidote for *Shilajathu*^[7]

The diseases caused by using impure *Shilajathu* can be cured by taking *Maricha* in doses of 4 *Tola* mixed with ghee for seven days.

Sodhana (purification) of *Shilajathu*

Sodhana (purification) is the word literally means purification, before administration of any drug, *Sodhana* helps to reduce impurities and potentiation the drug. Therefore, it is essential that the drug should be well purified to avoid any unwanted effect in the human being. Regarding *Shilajathu*, it is an exudate from rocks, the impurities acquired in contact with metals, soil, water should be removed to make it therapeutically eligible.

Basically 2 methods for purification of *Shilajathu* are explained in classical texts.

1. *Suryathapi*

This is the method of purification of *Shilajathu* by exposing to sunlight. *Shilajathu* is soaked either with milk or some decoction or some juice in an iron vessel for required period in the shade. After exposure to the sunlight for a period of 3 to 5 days, layer of pure *Shilajathu* will be formed at the centre of the iron vessel. It should be collected and the rest of the vessel should exposure to the sunlight again, this is the procedure of *Suryatapi* method. *Suryatapi* method of purification has also been mentioned in *Rasa Ratna Samucchaya* (RRS), *Rasa Tarangini* (RT) and *Ayurveda Prakasha* (A.P).

2. *Agnithapi*

Shilajathu is purified by boiling in liquid medium. It is placed in a cloth and tied to the mouth of the vessel. *Shilajathu* purified by *Agnithapi* method is said to have little inferior quality than *Suryathapi* method.

Table 6: Different Sodhana (purification) Drugs and Purification Technique

S.No	Texts	No of Bhavana	Sodhana drugs
1	Rasarnava ^[8]	1 Bhavana with each	Cleaning with Kshara, Amla and Gomuthra or Bhavana with Godugda, Triphala kashaya, Bhringaraja swarasa
2	Rasaratna Samuchaya ^[9]	1 Bhavana with each	Cleaning with Kshara, Amla and Gomuthra. Bhavana with Godugdha, Thriphala kashaya Bhringaraja swaras
3	Rasa Tarangini ^[10]	Ext purification 1 Bhavana	Hot water and Triphala kwatha Gomuthra or Bhringaraja swarasa
4	Ayurveda Prakasa ^[11]	1 Bhavana with each	Cleaning with water to remove external impurities Bhavana done in Godugda, Triphala, Bhringaraja swarasa Another method Bhavana in Nimba, Guduchi, Indrayava Kashaya
5	Rasa Manjari ^[12]	1 Bhavana with each	Godugdha, Triphala kwatha bhringaraja swarasa
6	BRRS ^[13]	Ext. Purification & Bhavana	Cleaning with water & Bhavana with Nimba Guduchi, Ghrita

Marana (incineration) of Shilajathu

In some texts Marana process are mentioned but it is not applicable to Shilajathu in general. In Rasaratna Samuchaya, marana of Shilajathu mentioned, it mixed with equal quantity of Gandhaka, Manasila and Harithala and then triturated with Matulunga rasa, then subjected to Gajaputa.^[14] Ayurveda Prakasha followed the same process as that of RRS.

Satvapatana (extraction of essence) of Shilajathu

Drugs are subjected to high temperature then the essence are obtained this procedure is called Satvapatana, so that the mineral content of the drug is left behind leaving other material. Shilajathu is very soft nature and hence most of the Rasasasthra texts do not prefer Satvapatana process; though Rasarnava has not mentioned about Marana it has stated about Satvapatana. According to Rasarnava, Shilajathu is

mixed with Dhanyamla, Upavisha, and Visha then Satvapatana should be performed^[15].

Authors of RRS, AP, R. Chu, are mentioned Satvapatana, by triturating Shilajathu with Dravakagana and Amlavarga and putting this mixture in to the Musha and subjecting to high temperature, the Satva obtained will be like iron. Rasa Ratna Sarmachaya and Rasendra chudamani clearly indicated that Satvapatana samskara should not be performed for Karpura Shilajathu^[16]

Properties

Rasa of Shilajathu is Tikta, Kashaya, and Kadu, Virya is Natiushna Sheeta by Charaka Samhita, Astanga Hridaya. Rasa Jala Nidhi, Astanga Sangraha, Anandakhanda and Ushna virya by Susrutha, Ayurveda Prakasa, Yogaratnakara and others. Vipaka of Shilajathu is Kadu, and exhibit the Gunas like Guru, Snigda, Mridu.

Table 7: Guna of Shilajathu

Reference	Indications
RT ^[17]	Syavathu, Pandu, Swasa, Kshaya, Pliha, Jwara, Agnimandya, Apasmara, Unmada, Udara, Arsas, Mutrakrichra, Sthaulya, Hritsula, Prameha, Prabala Soola, Udara Soola, Krimi, Asmari, Kusta, Gulma, Vata rakta.
RRS ^[18]	Jwara, Pandu, Sopha, Prameha, Agni Mandya, Medacheda Kara, Yakshma, Soola, Ama Unmulana, Gulma, Pliha, Jadara, Hrit Soolagna, Twak gatanasana
AK ^[19]	Snigda, Anamla Kashaya, Mridu, Guru, Vrishya, Chakshusya, Kshaya, Sopha, Udara, Arsas, Premeha, Mootragrahapaha, Jara mrityu nasana.
RSS ^[20]	Katu, Tikta rasa, Rasayana, Kshaya, Sotha, Udara, Arsas, Vasti roga
AP ^[21]	Kadu, Tikta, Ushna, Katu Vipaka, Rasayana, Chedi, Yogavahi, Kapha Meha Hara, Asma Sarkara Hara, Mutrakrichra, Kshaya, Swasa, Vata rakta, Arsas, Pandu, Apasmara, Unmada, Sotha, Kusta, Udara, Krimi

(RT- Rasa tarangini, RRS – Rasaratna Samuchya, AK- Anandakhanda, RSS - Rasendra sara sangraha, AP- Ayurveda prakasa)

Table 8: Special Karmas (action) of Shilajathu

Karma	References
<i>Chedana</i>	B.P, A.S, A.P, Su. Sam, A.H, R.J.N
<i>Vrishya</i>	A.K
<i>Balya</i>	RT
<i>Lekhana</i>	Sha. Sam
<i>Yogavahi</i>	BP, R.J.N
<i>Rasayana</i>	RSS, R.J.N, RT, AP
<i>Bhedi, Chakshusya</i>	AK

(B.P- Bhavaprakasa, Sha.Sam – sharangadara Samhita)

Dose

Dose is an important factor in treatment of the disease. *Charaka* also mentioned that the dose is depending upon *Roga* and *Bala* of the patient.

Table 9: Dose of Shilajathu acc. to Charaka Samhitha^[22]

Types	Quantity	Duration
<i>Uthama</i>	1 Pala	7 weeks
<i>Madyama</i>	½ Pala	3 weeks
<i>Avara</i>	1 Karsha	1 week

In *Susrutha* the dose of *Shilajathu* is 100 Pala for gaining *Pushti, Bala, Varna*, curing *Madhumeha* and longevity up to 100 years.^[23]

Dose of Shilajathu acc. to R.T^[24]

2 Gunja - 8 Gunja

Anupana

Shilajathu is given through mouth, this is soluble in the secretion of gastro intestinal tract and after absorption eliminated through urine and faeces. *Shilajathu* have *Katu Tikta kashaya rasa* and *Ushna guna*. If it is administered without any vehicle, causes irritation in the stomach. So, this is administered with milk, fruit juice etc. In *Rasa Tarangini*, Acharya describes different *Anupana* for each disease.

Table 10: Anupana in Rasa Tarangini^[25]

S.No	Anupana	Disease
1	Honey	<i>Mutrakrichrata</i>
2	<i>Dashamula kwatha</i> + sugar	<i>Asthtila, Vatabasti, Vatakundalika</i>
3	<i>Varunadi kwatha</i>	<i>Mutraghata & Ashmari</i>
4	<i>Guduchi kwatha</i>	<i>Mutraghata & Mutrakricchra</i>
5	Sugar + camphor	<i>Mutratita, Mutra jathara</i>
6	<i>Gokshuradi kwatha</i>	<i>Mutrakricchra</i>
7	<i>Kakolyadi gana</i>	<i>Klaibya</i>
8	<i>Lauha bhasma, Svarna makshika bhasma Ghrita, Haritaki, Vidanga</i>	<i>Rajyakshma</i>
9	<i>Viratataradi gana kwatha</i>	<i>Mutrakricchra</i>
10	Sugar + milk	<i>Prameha</i>
11	<i>Guggulu + Sunthi + Pippali + Gomutra</i>	<i>Urustambha</i>
12	<i>Haridra Choorna + Gomootra</i>	<i>Kumbha Kamala</i>
13	<i>Lauha+Svarna makshika bhasma</i>	<i>Rakata vridhhi</i>
14	<i>Arjuna kwatha</i> for 2 months	<i>Hrid roga</i>
15	<i>Agnimantha svarasa</i> for 2 months	<i>Sthaulya</i>

16	Bhavana with Salasaradi gana kwatha and use with same decoction for 2 months	Madhumeha, Ashmari, Mutrasharkara
17	Pippali, Pashanabheda	Premeha
18	Ela choorna + Pippali choorna	Mutraghata, Mutrakricchra
19	Karpooora (Ext. Appl.)	Wounds/bruise
20	Lauha+Swarna bhasma	Masurika jvara

Important formulations

- Chandraprabha vati
- Shiva gulika
- Arogyavardhani Vati
- Shilajathwadi vati
- Shilajathwadi loha
- Sarvamehantaka rasa
- Triphala modaka
- Tapyadi vati

DISCUSSION

Shilajathu is a blackish colour exudates from the rock, oozing during summer seasons due to the intense sun heat. It was categorized into *Maharasa*, *Uparasa* by various *Acharyas*. Different types of *Shilajathu* were mentioned in Samhitas were, *Swarnam*, *Rajatham*, *Tamram*, *Loham*, *Nagam* and *Vangam*, whereas *Shilajathu* mentioned in *Rasasatra* literature are *Gomootragandhi*, *Karpoooragandhi*^[26], *Patita*, *Apatita*^[27] and others. In a previous literature, details of *Shilajathu* in *Samhita* and *Nighandu* were described^[28]. In classics genuinely test of *Shilajathu* was well explained. In a literature, Kaveri Borker try to explain various *Sodhana* procedures of *Shilajathu* described in classics^[29]. A previous work done by Richa Pathak, *Sodhana* of *Shilajathu* was done with different media and its pharmaceutical study was carried out.^[30], concluded that *Shilajathu* extracted by *Gomootra* provides more yield than water extraction, further water extracted *Shilajathu* subjected *Sodhana* by *Triphala kashaya* and *Guduchi kashaya*. Then found that *Sodhana* done with *Triphala kashaya* provided more weight compare to *Guduchi kashaya*. Properties of *Shilajathu* mentioned in various classics are *Mootrala*, *Asmarihara*, *Balya*, *Premehahara*, *Rasayana* and others. Some properties of *Shilajathu* were proven by following works. *Shilajathu* processed with *Agnimantha*, and its clinical efficacy was proved in *sthaulya*^[31]. *Shilajathu* and *Asanadi ghana vati* in management of *Madhumeha* w.s.r to type II Diabetes mellitus was done as a comparative trial^[32]. *Shilajathu* is a one of the best *Rasayana* drug. In a previous literature, found the effect of herbo mineral formulation (*Shilajathu Rasayana*) in letrozole-induced polycystic ovarian syndrome^[33].

CONCLUSION

Shilajathu is an important drug in Ayurveda, it exhibits various properties. It has been included in different categories by different *Acharyas*. Various type of *Shilajathu* has been mentioned in classics, *Sodhana*, *Marana*, of *Shilajathu* was also described by *Acharyas*. *Shilajathu* used for treating various types of diseases, whereas it is a wonderful *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) drug. It was taken with appropriate dose and proper *Anupana* then only got desired effect.

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