



PROCEEDING OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

on 19 & 20 November 2021

**Theme- Geriatric Diseases-Care and Cure
to Celebrate**



jointly organized by

**Gujrat Board of Ayurvedic &
Unani System of Medicine &
Parul University**

JAITRA-2021

Organized by : Department of PG & Phd Studies in Rasashastra &
Bhaishajya Kalpana, Parul Institute of Ayurved, Parul University.

SHILAJIT FOR LONGEVITY – A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

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Abstract

Ayurveda is considered to be one of the oldest medical system in the world. The nature of human is to aspire for longevity. Practically, this desire is found in all peoples of the world. So, if longevity is desired, then there must be a system of rejuvenation for one who keeps on remaining young. 'Rasayana tantra' is one among the eight branches in Ayurveda where systematic, scientific and fruitful results are claimed.

Shilajit is one of herbo-mineral drug which is widely practised in Ayurveda system of Medicines. It is a multi component natural occurring mineral, which is pale-brown to blackish-brown exudation of variable consistency exuding from layers of rocks in some mountain ranges of the world, especially the Himalayan and Hindukush range of India and Nepal. A complex mixture of plant, microbial metabolites, organic humic substances are found in it that occurs in the rock rhizospheres of its natural habitat. This mineral pitch is used as rejuvenator. Most oftenly used as kidney tonic and to increase the core energy of the body which is responsible for sexual and spiritual power. It has four rasa out of six i.e. pungent, bitter, salty, and astringent with hot potency.

This review article explores the use of Shilajit in the management of ageing and age related disorders. Hence, Shilajit has been reviewed in the various headings for longevity - with its uses, definition, types and formulations etc as this paper aims to explore the hidden treasure for healthy ageing.

Keywords – Ayurveda; Longevity; Shilajit

Introduction

Shilajit is one of herbo-mineral drug which is widely used in Indian system of medicines. It is a multi component natural occurring mineral, which is pale-brown to blackish-brown exudation of variable consistency exuding from layers of rocks in some mountain ranges of the world, especially the Himalayan range of India, Tibet and Nepal altitudes between 2500 and 5000 m.¹ A complex mixture of plant, microbial metabolites, organic humic substances are found in it that occurs in the rock rhizospheres of its natural habitat. There are some other terms used for Shilajit like Dhaturasa, Dhatusara, Shiladhatu etc, has been used in different classics. The word Shilajit is composed of two parts "Shila" means rock/mountain and "jit" means "having won". So, the literary

meaning is "Conqueror of mountains and destroyer of weakness"²⁻⁶ The ancient Ayurvedic text, Charaka Samhita describe Shilajit as a cure for all diseases as well as a Rasayana (rejuvenator) that promises to increase longevity. Charaka Samhita describes it as "Stones of metal like gold" while Sushruta Samhita describes it as "A gelatinous substance."^{7,8}

Shilajit is brown to blackish organic matter exuded from steep rocks from mountainous regions of India, Russia, China, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Tibet. It is a natural herbo-mineral substance with various bioactive constituents such as DBPs, DCPs, and fulvic acid. The humus consists of 60-80% organic matter and is bitter in taste with an odour like cow's urine.^{9,10,11}

Synonyms of Shilajit:

Shilajit is also known by Shilajeet, Shilajatu, Silaras, Adrija, Girijatu, Kanmada, Shaileya etc (Dash 1991), The english name of shilajit is Mineral Pitch / vegetable asphalt while its botanical name is Black bitumen, Latin name is Asphaltum punjabianum. Shilajit is known by following vernacular names - Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi called as Silajita, in Persian it is known as Momiai Faqurual Yahud while in Arabic as hajar-ul-musa. In Odia and Bengali called as Silajatu and in Tamil is known as Uerangyum. In Nepali, shilajit is called as Kalo Shilajita and in Russian known as Mummio, Mumie.

Design: Literature Review

Methods:

The materials were searched with the term 'Shilajit' in Ayurvedic texts, Indian Materia Medica and other classics in relation to longevity. Various published research articles were also searched for this study and treatment aspect of all the relevant content is considered and analyzed to get a comprehensive concept on use of Shilajit as rasayana.

Composition

Shilajit is a highly viscous tar-like substance; chemically composed of 60-80% of humic substances like humic acids, humins, and fulvic acid. Several studies conclude that it comprises various bioactive components like hippuric acid, resin and waxy materials, fatty acids, and vegetable matter. Additionally, it contains phenolic lipids, iron, silica, lithium, copper, zinc, and many other metals. Its physical composition comprises 60-80% organic matter, 20-40% of mineral matter, and about 5% of trace elements. Trace elements are those elements that are present only for a limited period, especially in a particular environment or sample. Most probably, it is available in dark blackish-brown powder. But as we go deeper, many other types of Shilajit are present in reddish, whitish, and bluish.¹²

Traditional use of Shilajit

Traditionally, Shilajit is consumed by people from the north of India and Nepal and children usually take it with milk in their breakfast. The Sherpa claim to have Shilajit as a part of their diet, they constitute a population of strong men with very high level of healthy longevity. The traditional uses include its action in genitourinary disorders, enlarged spleen, epilepsy and haemorrhoids.^{13,14} Shilajit is also used externally for sprain, bruises, stops the itching and oozing of skin diseases and for inflammatory swelling arthritis.¹⁵

Dosage

There is not much scientific evidence to determine appropriate or standard dose of Shilajit. But the recommended dose is 300 to 500 milligrams per day. The availability of Shilajit as medicinal form includes capsules, powder, semisolid and liquid.^{16,17,18}

Indications:

- Shilajit has number of health benefits^{19,20}
- Strengthens and rejuvenates the immune system
- Strengthens and cleanses the lungs
- Purifies blood
- Helps in removing the toxins from the body
- Helps maintain kidney function
- Maintains blood sugar levels
- Helps to maintain body weight
- Strengthens the reproductive system, toning both the male and female reproductive organs
- Useful in loss of libido
- Makes strong and healthy bones
- Improves vitality and stamina
- Healthy aging
- Removes excess fat and kapha

Contraindications: Shilajit is considered to be natural and safe, but it is contraindicated / should not be used in Hemochromatosis (high iron levels in the blood), Hypoglycaemia, High Uric acid levels²¹ and best to avoid in pregnant and breastfeeding.

DISCUSSION

Shilajit is a maharasa (super-vitalizer) in Ayurveda. It contains fulvic acids as the main components along with free and conjugated dibenzo- α -pyrones (DBPs; Urolithins) and more than 40 minerals and is included as an ingredient in a number of currently available nutritional supplements.²² As it is rich in fulvic acid that makes it a strong

antioxidant and anti-inflammatory substance. This safeguards the body from cellular damages. Not only does this have, but it also assists in repairing and regenerating tissues. The high presence of fulvic acid acts as a shield against free radical damage. Also, it maintains the balance of calcium in the bones. Ultimately, better health and longevity are achieved, resulting in slow aging. This systematic review found moderate to strong evidence for the reduction of pain, weakness, functional impairment, and joint stiffness through Shilajit. Whereas the contemporary medical science is more materialistic and having high dependence on the pharmacological interventions. This review finds that Shilajit is used in twenty Shastriya formulations and twenty-four proprietary drugs for extraneous indications. Major degenerative ailments are Diabetes, Cancer, heart diseases, osteoporosis, joint pains, Alzheimer's Parkinson's and other form of dementia. The extent to which aging process and degeneration has set in these days can be seen from the medical statistics. Shilajit contains 84 types of minerals in natural ionic form which are very vital for maintaining the equilibrium of energy metabolism in our body. The minerals in Shilajit are not similar to the mineral supplements available in market. These minerals are in ionic form and have previously been absorbed by rich plant life and returned back to earth. So they are easily absorbed by the body cells. Thus effectively arrests and reverses the aging process.

Medicinal Uses

Shilajit is used for Diabetes, regulating the blood sugar level, improving pancreas function, purifying the blood, improving spleen function, strengthening digestion. It is also used for treatment of genito-urinary diseases, sexual weakness, gonorrhoea, diabetes, chronic bronchitis, phthisis, asthma, gallstone, Leprosy, Epilepsy, Mental disorders, renal stone, anuria, jaundice, enlarged spleen and liver, and nervous diseases, improving metabolism, reducing fat, Filariasis, Cachexia, Fever, dissolving tumors, tuberculosis reducing tiredness, counteracting thirst, as a powerful rejuvenator, as a sexual enhancer. Chronic fatigue syndrome, Alzheimer's disease, sperm count, and high cholesterol.²³

CONCLUSION

This review study demonstrates the importance of Shilajit as a safe and effective treatment option in ageing and geriatric disorders. From the above discussion it is clear that Shilajit has health benefits in promotion of longevity, rejuvenation, increase in physical strength, and antiaging activity (Pande et al., 2017). Further studies can establish the antioxidant property of Shilajit which may prove the immunomodulator action to establish its potential effect as rasayana. It can be concluded that Shilajit can be nectar for all human ailments.

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Proceeding of International Conference JAITRA - 2021

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Published by : Book Rivers (www.bookrivers.com)

(www.brpressindia.com)

HN:22 Kanchan Nagar Maickale Lucknow

Mobile: 9695375469

ISBN: 978-93-5515-117-9

MRP: 1050/ INR