

Controversy in Genesis of Shilajitu

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Abstract— Shilajitu is one of the Maharasa [1]. It is named as it comes out of the stones heated by the sun in summer in the form of thick exudation having many shades. It is found in Himalayan regions, Kashmir, Bhutan and Tibet. It also occurs in the vicinity of petroleum and coal mines. Ayurvedic texts had mentioned that Loha, Tamra, Swarna and Roupya varieties of Shilajitu are found in the vicinity of the mines of these metals and Shilajitu is formed as exudates from these rocks. But Shilajitu is not found either in Rajasthan where there are copper mines or in Bihar, where there are iron mines. All these regions are well-known as hot-places, still no Shilajitu was found there. Further, there are many similarities between the plant Snuhi and Shilajitu. A controversy is there among the practitioners of Ayurveda regarding the origin of Shilajitu whether it is mineral or vegetable origin. Considering the above facts, this review gives a comprehensive approach on Shilajitu highlighting the significance, definition, source, synonyms, varieties, origin, physical properties, and chemical constituents including controversy in genesis of Shilajitu.

Keywords— Ayurveda, Controversy, Shilajitu, Snuhi.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the traditional Indian pharmacopoeia, out of the 220 mineral and metal substances used in traditional Indian medical systems, Shilajitu is a natural mineral, a gift of nature's resource. Shilajitu is widely used in oriental medicine to arrest ageing and to accelerate the process of rejuvenation—the two major attributes of an Ayurvedic medicine. It is a potent and very safe dietary supplement, restoring the energetic balance and potentially able to prevent several diseases.

Definition

Shilajitu is described by Brihatrayi. According to Susrutha Samhita, Shilajitu exudates similar to 'Laksha' and comes out from the mountains due to intense sun heat. It is claimed to destroy all the diseases. Out of its varieties that which is

blackish, heavy, smooth, free from sand and soil; having a smell similar to cow's urine is considered to be the best.

Types

Charaka classified it into four varieties, on the basis of the metal contents such as Gold, Silver, Copper and Iron. Susrutha mentioned 6 varieties of Shilajitu adding Trapusa and Vanga varieties to the above four varieties. In Rasaratna Samuchaya, Shilajitu is classified into two types, Gomutra Shilajitu and Karpura Shilajitu. Gomutra Shilajitu possesses the odours of cow's urine. Karpura Shilajitu possesses the odours of camphor [2]. In Ayurveda Prakasha, two types of Shilajitu are mentioned as Giri Sambhava and Ksharabhumi Janya [3]. In these first one can be considered as Gomutra Shilajitu and the second one as Karpura Shilajitu.

TABLE 1. Special properties of different kinds of Shilajitu [4]

S.No	Type of Shilajitu	Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka	Appearance
1.	Swarna	Madhura, Tikta	Snigdha, Guru	Sita	Katu	Reddish in colour like hibiscus flower.
2.	Rajata	Kshara, Katu, Amla	Guru, Vidahi	Sita	Madhura	Whitish in colour similar to moon or conch shell.
3.	Tamra	Tikta, Katu	Tikshna	Ushna	Katu	Peacock neck like colour.
4.	Loha	Tikta, Lavana	----	Sita	Katu	Its colour resembles like Guggulu.
5.	Trapu	Tikta, Katu	---	---	---	It looks like Tin.
6.	Naga	Tikta	Mridu	Katu	---	Black colour.

Physical Properties

Hemagarbha Shilajitu- It is red just like Japapushpa, Guru and Gomutra Gandhi.

Taragarbha Shilajitu- It is Pandu, Guru and Gomutra Gandhi

Tamrarbha Shilajitu- It is Barhi kanthabha, Ghana, Guru and Gomutra Gandhi

Lohagarbha Shilajitu- It is just like Guggulu, Jatapakshabha, Guru, Mridhu and Krishna.

Shilajitu is black in colour and shiny. It is heavy and burns on fire without fumes or smoke. It slowly dissolves in water

and render yellowish colour. Shilajitu is insoluble in alcohol, ether and chloroform. As it is moist and sticky, it is used for tableting. It has a pungent smell like cow's urine due to hippuric acid [5].

Chemical Composition

The Chemical composition of it varies in wide range; hence its chemical formula cannot be derived. The organic substances mainly urea, causes its pungent odour.

English Name: Black bitumen or Mineral pitch

TABLE 2. Chemical composition of Shilajitu

Minerals	38.65%
Organic substances	36.2%
Water	9.5%
Nitrogenous substances	1.3%
Lime	7.8%
Mica	1.35%

Controversy Studies

More than 150 years ago, European scientists Stiffenson and Compbell [1813] had done on elaborate research on the chemical composition of Black bitumen called Shilajitu. They had found that it contains impure form of mineral as Bitumen (or) mineral resin. They had also correlated black bitumen with coal and related minerals.

A geological survey of various samples of Shilajitu from western Himalayas was done by Indian scientists Rajnath and Prasad [1942]. They found that inflammable mineral substance bitumen or the rocks from which Shilajitu exudates are not related with the genesis of Shilajitu. They observed that a plant resembling Snuhi grows in the vicinity of rocks which exude Shilajitu.

Indian scientist Chopra [1958] showed by chemical analysis that Shilajitu contains albuminoids, gums, resins, benzoic acid, fatty acid, and hippuric acid. He also solicited that Shilajitu is a plant originated substance and moreover, the hippuric acid albuminoids (which are found in animal urine) has an animal origin also. The scientists Singh and Sharma (1970) endorsed the postulate of Chopra. The plant resembling common milk hedge (Snuhi) which is known as ‘Euphorbia royalina’, that exudes ample amount of latex is the origin of Shilajitu was postulated by the scientist Pande (1973).

Scientists Joshi and Lal (1976) analysed the rocks which exude Shilajitu and showed that both are totally unrelated chemically. The rocks contained very insignificant amount of Iron. From these observations it is clear that the inter relation between the rocks and their exudation, Shilajitu is a very fable.

Moreover, the scientists enlightened that the variation in colours of Shilajitu are due to changes in the colour of latex in colours of Snuhi, due to atmosphere. First it is golden yellow, than turns into red- brownish and finally black [6].

II. DISCUSSION

There are several hypotheses regarding the origin of Shilajitu

- European scientists Stiffenson and Compbell [1813] had done on elaborate research on the chemical composition of Black bitumen i.e Shilajitu
- Indian scientists Rajnath and Prasad observed that a plant resembling Snuhi grows in the vicinity of rocks which exude Shilajitu.
- Indian scientist Chopra also solicited that Shilajitu is a plant originated substance and moreover, the hippuric acid albuminoids (which are found in animal urine) has an animal origin also.
- The scientists Singh and Sharma observed the plant resembling common milk hedge (Snuhi) which is known as ‘Euphorbia royalina’.

III. CONCLUSION

The chemical analysis of Shilajitu and latex of Snuhi they proved similarity and stated the possibility Shilajitu to be of plant originated. All research studies established a definite relationship between Euphorbia royalina (Snuhi) latex and the formation Shilajitu. But still controversy remains as there are Ayurvedic scholars who believe only in ancient texts of Ayurveda. From these views it seems that Shilajitu is to be considered as a plant originated substance.

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