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Review Article

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON 'SAHASRAVEDHI': AN UNEXPLORED MINERAL DRUG

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ABSTRACT

The drug 'Sahasravedhi' is one of the ingredients in several formulations such as Rasnadi churna, and Karuthavattu. Though traditional practitioners of Kerala consider this as a mineral origin- drug, it is not mentioned in major Rasashastra texts like Rasaratna samucchaya or Rasatarangini. Conventional applications of Sahasravedhi were compiled through an extensive review of classical Ayurveda and Siddha textbooks in Sanskrit, Malayalam, and Tamil. Information on clinical experience with the drug was gathered through telephone interviews with traditional practitioners. Sahasravedhi samples were procured from local markets and practitioners. Drug authentication was done in Department of Rasashastra and Bhaishajya Kalpana, SDMCAH, Hassan. Efforts were made to hypothesize its pharmaceutical activity and address existing controversies. On literature review, more than 40 formulations and applications of Sahasravedhi were found in various texts- Prayoga Samucchaya, Arogyakalpadrumam, Chikitsa Manjari, Yogamrutam, Agastya vaidya Chandrika, and, Siddha materia medica. Reference of shodhana and marana of Sahasravedhi was also found. Drug samples of Sahasravedhi procured is a brownish-red stone resembling Pashana gairika. Sahasravedhi in formulations like Rasnadi churna, Karuthavattu can be concluded to be unequivocally a mineral drug identified as limonite, commonly called brown hematite. This can be understood as a type of Gairika. Dominant properties and actions of this drug would be pittarakta shamana, vata anulomana, stambhana with special action in vatavaha, pittavaha, raktavaha, mutravaha, artava vaha srotas. References indicate that limonite is used in Chinese medicine also. Further research is essential to completely study its pharmacological activity and applications, thereby enhancing our understanding of this rare and valuable drug.

Keywords: Sahasravedhi, limonite, mineral drug, Rasnadi churna, Karuthavattu, Iron oxide

INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic pharmaceutics utilizes a wide range of raw materials for medicine preparation. Rasashastra is the branch of Ayurveda that focuses on the study of herbal, mineral and animal origin drugs, with a particular emphasis on Rasa or mercury. A drug's appearance, properties, dosage, and availability are crucial for its therapeutic application, whether as a single drug or in formulations. This is why major Rasashastra texts like Rasaratna Samucchayam, Rasatarangini or Rasendra chintamani dedicate much significance to drug classification and detailed explanations of individual drugs.

Sahasravedhi (SV) is a brownish- red mineral drug utilised in Ayurvedic therapeutics as both a single drug and an ingredient in commonly prescribed formulations such as Rasnadi churnam[1] Kachuradi churnam, Sirasthodadi gulika and Karuthavattu. Notably, references of the mineral drug Sahasravedhi are found only in regional Ayurvedic and Siddha treatises from South India, in Malayalam and Tamil languages. These include Chikitsa Manjari[2], Yogamrutam[3], Agastya Vaidya Chandrika[4], etc. Due to the limited availability of accurate English translations of these regional texts and potential misunderstandings, literature studies have indicated confusion regarding the drug Sahasravedhi. Literature search showed that different articles in the same journal interprets the drug 'Sahasravedhi' in Rasnadi churnam and Karuthavattu as limonite and Hingu respectively which poses confusion[5,6].

Drugs can be named based on various factors including their origin, properties or appearance. Same name for multiple drugs can lead to confusion in drug selection, necessitating careful interpretation with specific contexts. Hingu (*Ferula asafoetida*) has a synonym Sahasravedhi quoted in Amarakosha[7], Nighantushesha[8] and Bhavaprakasha nighantu[9]. However, it is evident that 'Sahasravedhi' refers to distinct drugs in different contexts. The mineral drug Sahasravedhi is known for its pithahara action due to sita and stambhana qualities. Whereas Hingu is pithakara and ushna in nature. Therefore, careful drug selection is important whenever the name 'Sahasravedhi' is mentioned.

References of mineral drug Sahasravedhi were compiled and documented through an extensive manual review of classical Ayurveda and Siddha textbooks in Sanskrit, Malayalam, and Tamil. Subsequent studies and papers on the drug were also reviewed. Information on clinical experience with the drug was gathered through telephone interviews with traditional practitioners. Sahasravedhi samples were procured from local markets and practitioners. Drug authentication was done in Department of Rasashastra and Bhaishajya Kalpana, SDMCAH, Hassan. Efforts were made to hypothesize its pharmaceutical activity and address existing controversies.

Synonyms- Sahasrabhedi, Shatavedhi, Bhedi, Vedhi, Vedhini
Vernacular name- Sahasravedhi
Sanskrit name- Sahasravedhi

English name- Limonite associated with weathering
Malayalam name- Sahasravedhikkallu
Tamil name- Satharabedi, Senjilai, Malai naatam, Kalluyir[10]

Classical categorization
It is mentioned as one among 120 Uparasa and one among 5 Vayu pradhana Uparasa in the Siddha text Siddha Materia Medica[11]. Uparasa refers to secondary minerals other than metallic ores found mostly in natural state, and some in combination, and those derived from the animals[12].

Historical background
Sahasravedhi is not mentioned in the Rasashastra classics like Rasaratnasamuchayam, Rasatarangini, Rasaratnakaram etc. From this it is clear that it was either not used or was not common in that period. This mineral is not mentioned even in the Nighantu but there is mentioning of Sahasravedhi as a synonym for Hingu (*Ferula asafoetida*) and Amlavetasa (*Garcinia pedunculata*).

Sahasravedhi is first mentioned in the text Chikitsamanjari by an anonymous author[2]. Following this there are other books like Vaidyamanorama, written by Uppottukannan in 19th century, Vaidyamrta pradipika, Sahasrayogam, Cikitsa chintamani-vaidyasamgraham (Author- Pandarattu Narayana Pillai Ashan), Yogasaram (Author- Dr.M.K Vaidyar, former Professor, College of Indigenous medicine, Madras), Agastya vaidya chandrika (Vadayattukotta K. Parameswaran Pillai), Siddha system of home remedies (Chidambara nath.)[13] that mention this mineral drug.

Shodhana (purification procedure)[14]
- Bhavana (levigation) in Nimbu swarasa (Lemon juice) for 1 day.
- Sahasravedhi is powdered well and immersed in nimbu swarasa (lemon juice) for one day, washed with water and shade- dried.
- Sahasravedhi is powdered well, immersed in Nimbu swarasa (lemon juice) for seven and a half nazhika, then washed with water and dried.
- Powdered Sahasravedhi is immersed in cow's milk for one day, then shade- dried.

Marana (incineration)[14]
Shodhita Sahasravedhi is triturated in Nimbu swarasa (lemon juice) till the attainment of Subhavita lakshana. Chakrika (pellets) of uniform size is prepared and dried. Then properly sealed in Sharava (earthen plates), and subjected to Gajaputa. Procedure is repeated till the attainment of Bhasma siddhi lakshana.

Formulations and therapeutic applications

Table 1: References of Sahasravedhi in Prayoga Samuchayam

Chapter	Formulation	Indication	Mode of use
Mandali visa chikitsa	Single drug	Chardi in mandali visha	SV + koshna jala for internal administration
Mandali visa chikitsa	Single drug	Rakta chardi in mandali visa	SV + navaneeta

Table 2: References of Sahasravedhi in Arogyakalpadrumam[15]

Chapter	Formulation	Indication	Mode of use
Jwara chikitsa	Kuzhambu for shiropichu	Sannipata jwara	Rasna, musta, yashti etc (24 drugs) with sigru patra swarasa or eranda taila
Raktapitta chikitsa	Single drug	Rakta chardi	SV + navaneeta
Raktapitta chikitsa	Jeerakadi churna	Shwasa, kasa	Jeeraka, trikatu, ela, etc (28 drugs) with sita, madhu
Arshas chikitsa	Prakshepa in Ushiradi kwatha	Paramaushadha in raktarshas	Ushira, darvi, nimba, musta, patha, vasa
Arshas chikitsa	Dronapushpadi Gulika	Arshas, agnimandya, atisara, grahani	24 drugs With dadhi
Mutraghata chikitsa	Gokshuradi gulika	Sarva Mutraghata	With dharoshna ksheera/ amalaki swarasa/ madhu/ ikshu rasa/ narikela jala
Shakharoga chikitsa	Shiro pratisara churna	Idhmaka	18 drugs- mashi prepared and used for shiro pratisarana
Vrana chikitsa	Mahalodhradi churna	Sadyovrana	Avachurnana
Linga- yoniroga parakarana	Siddhamruta ghruta	Raktayoni	SV as kalka. For internal administration
Shiroroga prakarana	Bhagottaram gulika	Vata, Pitha, Kapha Shirashula	lalata lepa or shiropichu. With stanya or ghruta or narikela ksheera

Table 3: References of Sahasravedhi in Chikitsamanjari[2]

Chapter	Formulation	Indication	Mode of use
Raktapitta chikitsa	Single drug	Raktapitta	SV + navaneeta
Rajayakshma chikitsa	Single drug	Kshaya	SV + Vasa swarasa
Rajayakshma chikitsa	Single drug	Kshaya, swarasada	SV with yasti churna, sita, navaneeta
Atisara chikitsa	Jatyadi gulika	Sarvatisara, Raktasrava	(9 drugs) With takra/ madhu
Atisara chikitsa	Gulika yoga	Atisara	(15 drugs) With madhu/ kutaja phanita
Atisara chikitsa	Churna yoga	Atisara, arshas	SV + Hingula + guda
Atyagni chikitsa	Vedhiyashtyadi churna	Atyagni	With ksheera, sita or koshna jala
Mutrakruchchra chikitsa	Gokshuradi ghruta	Mutrakruchchra, Shuklasrava, Astisrava, Raktasrava	SV as patrapaka dravya
Prameha Pidaka chikitsa	Single drug	Siroruja, Daha	SV + yashti + navaneeta for shiropichu
Somaroga chikitsa	Churna yoga	Somaroga	Sahasravedhi, shilajatu, Kausheyashma + Sita + koshna jala
Kamala chikitsa	Kozhuppakarukadi ghruta	Shiroroga, Shirodaha	SV as patrapaka

Telephone interviews with various Ayurvedic and Siddha practitioners revealed the following use of Sahasravedhi in clinical practice-
120mg of Sahasravedhi Bhasma administered with ½ teaspoon butter in conditions of Asrugdara, Raktaarshas, and Gudamargaga raktapitta.

Figure 1: Sahasravedhi

Mineralogy
Occurrence: Limonite is formed by oxidation & hydration of iron minerals like pyrite, magnetite, glauconite, siderite, laterites etc. Limonite itself is understood as mixture of goethite & lepidocrocite.

Physical properties
There is a wide range of physical properties for this mineral drug, as it is a combination of number of minerals. Pyrite, haematite, siderite and magnetite are closely associated with limonite and hence their properties also influence the physical and chemical nature of Sahasravedhi.

- Form and habit- Found in mamillated/ stalactitic/ botryoidal/ pisolitic forms. Crystals are having radiating structure.
- Colour- Brown to red to yellow.
- Streak- Yellow to brown (depending on association)
- Lustre- mostly dull, sometimes submetallic to silky.
- Cleavage and fracture- Good, Uneven
- Hardness- 5-5.5
- Specific gravity- 3.3- 4.3 (varies with iron content)

Chemical properties

- Composition- Primarily composed of hydrated iron oxide.
- Chemical formula varies depending on the exact composition- $FeO(OH).nH_2O$
- Reactivity- Limonite is stable mineral under normal conditions. It reacts with strong acids and oxidizing agents such as chlorine, Hydrogen peroxide etc.

DISCUSSION

As direct references of Grahya lakshana of Sahasravedhi are not available, they may be inferred from the synonyms particularly mentioned in Bhogar Nighatu- 'Senjilai' which means Red stone; 'Malai naatam' meaning rooted in mountain; 'Kalluyir' meaning stone with life; 'Pothigaimalai vintu'means the one in pothigai hills[16], all substantiating that it is a drug of mineral origin. 39 formulations containing Sahasravedhi were compiled from texts Prayoga samucchayam, Arogya kalpadrumam, Yogamrutam, and Chikitsa Manjari. Therapeutic applications of Sahasravedhi as single drug is mentioned in asrugdara, raktapitta, atisara, swetapradara, and dushta vrana chikitsa. Among these, 30 formulations were meant for internal use and 9 for external use. In asrugdara, raktapitta, atisara, atyagni, mutrakruchra, somaroga, chardi, bala atisara, grahani, atimutrata, shwasa, hidhma, and shwetapradara. Sahasravedhi is advised for internal administration. Whereas in shirashula, shirodaha, pramehapitaka, dushta vrana, daha, vatavyadhi, pinasa, karnaroga, netraroga, and sannipatha, it is mentioned for external use.

7 formulations with Sahasravedhi were found in Rakthapitha adhikara, 5 in Rakthaatisara, 3 each in Asrugdara, Sadyovrana, and Siroroga. As references of Sahasravedhi are not found in classical Sanskrit texts of Rasashastra but only in Malayalam and Tamil books of Ayurveda and Siddha, it might be dominantly available and used in Southern India. Though Nighantu mention Sahasravedhi as one of the synonyms of Hingu, misunderstanding it as Hingu in the formulations Rasnadi churna, Kachuradi churna, Karuthavattu etc is irrational as the mineral drug Sahasravedhi and Hingu have contrasting properties. From the indications and therapeutic applications mentioned in classical texts, the mineral Sahasravedhi should be Pithahara, Vataanulomana, Sita, Stambhana, Raktapithahara, Kasa shwasahara, and properties similar to Gairika. Hingu on the other hand is Pitta vardhaka, Kaphavata hara, Ushna, Katu rasa, Chedana, Teekshna, Deepana, and Pachana. Hence wrong placement of Hingu in place of the mineral drug Sahasravedhi could completely alter and mislead the therapeutic action of that particular formulation.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, when dealing with formulations mentioned in texts of vernacular languages like Malayalam or Tamil, drug identification should be strictly based on native language texts to prevent confusion, misidentifications and incorrect drug usage. Based on the same reasons, Sahasravedhi in the formulations like Rasnadi churna, Kachuradi churna, Karuthavattu is unequivocally a mineral drug. Therefore, this particular study highlights the importance of identifying, understanding and exploration of such rare and unexplored drugs from various regional language books which is not included in regular academics. Further studies and standardization of such drugs should be promoted to make it accessible to a broader readership. Other Malayalam and Tamil textbooks should be further reviewed to identify additional applications of the drug.

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