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TOPICAL WISDOM: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF MALAHARA KALPANA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Malahara Kalpana represents a significant development in Ayurvedic pharmaceutics, focusing on topical dosage forms designed for external application. The term "*Malahara*" was first mentioned in *Yoga Ratnakara* and is believed to have evolved under the influence of Unani pharmacology, particularly from the term *Malaham*. These formulations typically consist of a lipid-based medium—such as sesame oil, ghee, or beeswax—into which active herbal or mineral ingredients are incorporated. This review highlights the conceptual evolution, preparation techniques, ingredients, and pharmaceutical relevance of *Malahara Kalpana*, while drawing parallels with modern ointment technology. Classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Rasatarangini* provide detailed methods for preparing bases like *Siktha Taila*, combining beeswax and oils in specific proportions that vary seasonally. The active ingredients include a wide range of therapeutic agents such as *Karpura*, *Tuttha*, *Sindura*, and *Sphatika*, each conferring unique pharmacological actions like anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, or wound-healing properties. These formulations exhibit qualities such as *Snehana* (Oleation), *Ropana* (Healing), and *Lekhana* (Scraping), making them suitable for various dermatological and musculoskeletal conditions. From a modern perspective, *Malaharas* align closely with ointments, which are defined as semi-solid anhydrous preparations used topically for drug

delivery or emollient action. They can be manufactured via fusion or trituration techniques, ensuring homogenous drug dispersion. This review underscores the relevance of *Malahara Kalpana* in both traditional and contemporary medicine. Standardizing these formulations and exploring their therapeutic efficacy through modern clinical and pharmacological research can significantly contribute to the integration of Ayurveda into mainstream topical therapy.

KEYWORDS: *Malahara Kalpana*, *Siktha Taila*, Ayurvedic pharmaceutics, topical formulations.

INTRODUCTION

Malaharas are semi-solid topical formulations, traditionally categorized as ointment preparations. The term "*Malahara*" finds its earliest reference in the text Yoga Ratnakara in *Vranashotha* chikitsa where he mentions about Parada *Malahara*.[1] The etymology of "*Malahara*" is derived from "Malaham," a formulation of Unani origin. The base components utilized in *Malahara* preparation commonly include substances such as *Tila* taila (Sesame oil), *Ghrita* (Ghee), *Siktha* (Beeswax), among others.

Malahara Kalpana represents a relatively recent addition to Ayurvedic pharmaceutics, influenced by Unani traditions. These formulations exhibit diverse therapeutic actions, including *Snehana* (Oleation) and *Ropana* (Wound healing), contingent upon the nature of the incorporated *dravyas* (Ingredients). Functionally, *Malahara Kalpana* aligns with the characteristics of modern pharmaceutic ointments.

Names in Different Languages and Synonyms[2]

Sanskrit: *Malahara*

Latin: Unguentum

English: Ointment

Hindi: Malahama

Gujarati: Malam

Marathi: Malam

Arabi: Marahama

Unani: Malahama

Preparation of *siktha taila*[3]

Two fundamental methods for the preparation of *Siktha Taila* are detailed by Acharya Sadananda Sharma in the classical text 'Rasatarangini'.

Ingredients used in *malahara kalpana*[4]

The formulation of *Malahara Kalpana* comprises two principal categories of ingredients:

1. Base components:

a) *Guggulu* (*Commiphora mukul*)

b) *Rala* (*Shorea robusta*)

c) *Siktha* (Beeswax)

d) *Tila Taila* (Sesame oil)

e) *Shatadhouta Ghrita*

f) *Sahasradhouta Ghrita*

g) *Navaneeta*

2. Active pharmaceutical ingredients

A wide range of herbal, mineral, and metallic substances are employed as active ingredients in *Malahara Kalpana*, selected based on the dominant *Dosha* and the specific *Vyadhi* (Disease) being treated. According to *Rasa Tarangini*, the most frequently used ingredients include *Rasasindura*, *Tankana*, *Parada*, *Mridara Shringa*, *Gandhaka*, *Hingula*, *Sarjarasa*, *Tuttha*, *Ahifena*, and *Gairika*, listed in descending order of usage. Among these, *Rasasindura* is the most commonly incorporated, being a component in eight different *Malahara* formulations, followed by *Tankana*, which is used in six *Malaharas*. Additionally, one formulation each includes *Hartala* and *Manahshila* as ingredients.

General method of preparation

Initially, the *Malahara* base is formulated by melting one part beeswax with five parts sesame oil. Any extraneous particles in the beeswax are removed through filtration using a clean cloth. Subsequently, the finely powdered active ingredients are incorporated and thoroughly mixed. The resultant formulation is stored in wide-mouthed, airtight glass or plastic containers.[5]

METHODS OF PREPARATION

- **Method 1[6]**

A ratio of 1:6 of beeswax to sesame oil is used. These are melted together over gentle heat until a uniform mixture is obtained. After thorough mixing, the mixture is allowed to cool, resulting

in a smooth, paste-like consistency.

- **Method 2**[7]

This method modifies the ratio to 1:5 (beeswax: oil) and follows the same procedure. The first method is preferred during colder months, while the second is suitable for warmer climates.

The preparation of *Malahara Kalpana* broadly involves two principal methods

(i) The Mixing Method and (ii) the Washing Method.

Mixing method: This technique involves combining the ingredients either by heating them together, by triturating them manually in a *Khalwa Yantra* (mortar and pestle), or through a combined approach. In the latter, certain components are initially mixed using heat; after removing the preparation from the heat source—or in some instances, once the heated mixture has cooled—additional ingredients are incorporated and then thoroughly triturated to achieve uniformity.

Washing method: In this approach, the ingredients are subjected to repeated washings with water, typically to purify or modify their physical and chemical properties before further processing.

These methods are selected based on the nature of the ingredients and the intended therapeutic application of the *Malahara*.

Pharmaceutical advantages of *malahara*

a) Selection of base can be tailored according to therapeutic requirement and availability.
b) High potential for standardization.
c) Superior skin adherence compared to liquid formulations.
d) Convenience in storage and transportation.
e) User-friendly application process.

Modern perspective – ointments

Introduction[8]

Modern ointments are semi-solid preparations formulated for application on the skin or mucosal surfaces. These are typically anhydrous bases incorporating one or more therapeutic agents either in suspension or solution, and are used for both emollient effects and local drug delivery.

Types of ointment bases[9]

Four principal categories exist:

1. Hydrocarbon bases
2. Absorption bases
3. Water-miscible bases
4. Water-soluble bases

Preparation of ointments[10]

The preparation methodology varies based on the vehicle type and batch size, with the primary objective being uniform dispersion of the medicament. Drugs are commonly utilized in finely powdered or dissolved form prior to being incorporated into the base.

Two principal techniques are employed

1. Fusion: Components are Melted and Stirred for uniformity.
2. Trituration: Finely powdered drugs are mixed with a small portion of the base and gradually blended to achieve homogeneity.

Note: On a small scale, fusion is typically performed in an evaporating basin over a water bath.

Categories of ointments by application

- Dermatological (Skin application)
- Ophthalmic (Ocular cavity)
- Rectal (Rectal administration)

Qualities of an ideal ointment

- Should be uniformly blended, without segregation of high-melting ingredients or phase separation.
- Free from grittiness; insoluble components should be finely divided and well-distributed.

Storage of ointments

Ointments should be stored in airtight containers made of glass or plastic with impermeable linings. Present-day packaging often involves collapsible plastic or metal tubes. Storage conditions must be cool and dry to preserve volatile constituents.

DISCUSSION

Malahara Kalpana, a specialized form of *Bahiparimarjana Kalpana* (external application), occupies a significant space in Ayurvedic pharmaceutics, closely paralleling the concept of

modern ointments. While its roots trace back to Yoga Ratnakara, the term itself appears to have Unani origins, showcasing a historical blending of medical systems. This hybrid evolution reflects in both terminology and formulation, leading to a therapeutic model that is both traditional and contemporary.

In *Malahara Kalpana*, beeswax (Siktha) is employed not merely as a base but as a therapeutic agent in itself. When combined with *Tila Taila*, known for its nourishing and skin-supportive qualities, the resulting *Siktha Taila* demonstrates both *Snehana* (Oleation) and *Vrana Ropana* (Wound healing) properties.[11] This base, when synergistically combined with various *dravya*s (Ingredients), significantly enhances therapeutic efficacy. The proportions of base to active ingredient vary depending on the potency (*TIKSHNATA*) of the incorporated drug. For instance, the *Rasa Pushpadhya Malahara*, with a 1:24 ratio of *Rasa Pushpa* to *Siktha Taila*, reflects the intense potency of *Rasa Pushpa*.[12] Conversely, the *Yasada Amrita Malahara* maintains a 1:3 ratio, as *Yasada* is characterized by *Sheeta* Virya (Cool potency), requiring less base for balanced action.[13]

Classical texts like Rasa Tarangini elaborate on other base materials like *Navneeta* or *Shatadhauta Ghrita*, *Go Ghrita*, and *Atasi Taila* (flaxseed oil). These bases are selected not just for their physical properties but for their inherent dosha-specific therapeutic actions. *Shatadhauta Ghrita* is beneficial in burns (*Daha*), wounds (*Vrana*), and skin conditions like *Visarpa* (erysipelas).[14] *Go Ghrita* is highly regarded for *Vrana Ropana*, *Visarpa Nashana*, and blood-related disorders (*Rakta Vikara*).[15] *Aatsi Taila*, on the other hand, is *Vata*-pacifying and supportive for skin health.[16]

The two classical methods of preparing *Siktha Taila*, with ratios of 1:6 and 1:5 (beeswax to oil), provide seasonal adaptability, where a waxier consistency is used in colder climates and a slightly thinner version in warmer temperatures. These methods align with modern pharmaceutical processes, particularly fusion and trituration techniques, which are also used to achieve uniform distribution of active ingredients. The Melting range of Siktha taila ranges from 50℃ to 62℃ based on the ratio of beeswax and *taila* used.[17] To assess the purity of beeswax, both physical and chemical tests are commonly employed. Physically, pure beeswax is yellow to golden-brown in colour, with a characteristic honey-like aroma and a slightly sticky texture that softens upon contact with body heat. When dropped into water, it typically floats due to its low density. Chemically, the purity can be evaluated by measuring its melting point, which in pure beeswax ranges from 62°C to 65°C—any significant deviation may

suggest adulteration with substances like paraffin. Additionally, tests such as acid value (17–22), saponification value (87–104), and ester value (70–80) provide further insight into its composition. Deviations from these standard values may indicate the presence of adulterants like paraffin, stearic acid, or resins.

Pharmaceutically, *Malaharas* are advantageous due to their stability, ease of storage, targeted delivery, and skin adherence, making them more practical than many liquid forms. They also offer standardization potential, especially when base materials are kept consistent.

In comparison to modern ointments, which are categorized into hydrocarbon, absorption, water-miscible, and water-soluble bases, *Malahara Kalpana* finds a clear equivalent in both form and function. This alignment not only validates classical practices but also opens avenues for cross-disciplinary collaboration and standardized production, which are essential for global integration and wider acceptance.

Despite these benefits, challenges such as ingredient variability, lack of large-scale manufacturing standards, and limited clinical documentation must be addressed. Nonetheless, *Malahara Kalpana* stands as a promising formulation type that could bridge traditional knowledge and modern pharmacology, reinforcing Ayurveda's relevance in integrative and dermatological therapeutics.

CONCLUSION

Malaharas offer a versatile and effective mode of topical drug delivery. Their composition, primarily involving bases like *Siktha* (Beeswax), *Tila Taila* (Sesame oil), and *Ghrita* (Ghee), allows customization based on the nature and potency of incorporated therapeutic agents. With proven benefits in wound healing, dermatological conditions, and pain relief, *Malaharas* hold substantial potential in modern integrative dermatology and cosmetology. Furthermore, their pharmaceutical advantages such as enhanced stability, skin adherence, and ease of use align closely with contemporary ointment formulations. Despite their traditional roots, *Malaharas* demand renewed scientific exploration to bridge classical wisdom with evidence-based standards. Future research focusing on standardization, safety profiling, and clinical efficacy can facilitate their broader acceptance in global healthcare. Thus, *Malahara Kalpana* stands as a testament to Ayurveda's enduring relevance, offering a bridge between ancient topical wisdom and modern therapeutic needs.

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