WORLD JOURNAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH
SJIF Impact Factor 8.453
Volume 14, Issue 7, 1851-1858. Research Article ISSN 2277–7105

SHODHANA (PURIFICATION) OF TOXIC DRAVYAS IN SAMHITAS CLASSICAL METHODS AND THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION

[1*]Dr. Meenakshi Chauhan, [2]Dr. Shruti Singh Arjariya and [3]Dr. Preeti Tiwari

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhant, Mansarovar Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre Bhopal.

[2]Associate Professor, Department of Dravyaguna, Mansarovar Ayurvedic Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre Bhopal.

[3]Associate Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhant, Sri Sai Institute of Ayurvedic Research and Medicine Bhopal, M. P.

Article Received on
19 February 2024,

Revised on 07 March 2025,
Accepted on 27 March 2025

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20257-36190

***Corresponding Author**
Dr. Meenakshi Chauhan
Assistant Professor, Department of Samhita Siddhant, Mansarovar Ayurvedic Medical college, Hospital & Research Centre Bhopal.

ABSTRACT

Shodhana (purification) is a crucial process in Ayurveda for detoxifying toxic substances while enhancing their therapeutic efficacy. Classical texts like Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Rasa Ratna Samuchaya, and Rasa Tarangini describe specific purification methods for metals, minerals, and poisonous plants. Techniques such as Swedana (boiling), Nirvapa (quenching), Bhavana (impregnation with herbal decoctions), and Mardana (grinding) are employed to remove harmful properties. These methods not only detoxify substances but also improve bioavailability and ensure safety in medicinal formulations. Modern studies validate these purification techniques by confirming the chemical transformation of toxic elements into bioavailable, non-toxic forms. Shodhana remains highly relevant in contemporary Ayurvedic practice, bridging traditional wisdom with modern pharmacological validation. Further research and clinical studies will enhance its credibility and application in integrative medicine.

KEYWORDS: Shodhana, Ayurveda, Toxic Dravyas, Rasashastra, Purification Techniques.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes the use of herbal, mineral, and metallic substances for therapeutic purposes. However, several of these substances are toxic in their natural state and require purification (Shodhana) before medicinal use. The process of Shodhana is detailed extensively in classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Rasashastra texts.

The concept of Shodhana is rooted in the principle that every substance in nature possesses medicinal value when used appropriately. If toxic substances are purified correctly, they can become potent medicines. This aligns with the verse.

"विषं विषस्य भेषजम्"

(Poison itself can be a medicine when used correctly.)

In Ayurveda, the process of Shodhana aims to remove or neutralize the toxic effects of substances while enhancing their therapeutic potential. The methods used include various techniques such as Swedana (boiling), Nirvapa (quenching), and Bhavana (impregnation with herbal decoctions). These purification techniques ensure that the toxic elements are either removed or transformed into a non-toxic and bioavailable form.

Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita mention several toxic substances, including metals, minerals, and poisonous plants, which require specific Shodhana procedures before their use in formulations. Rasashastra texts, particularly Rasa Ratna Samuchaya and Rasa Tarangini, provide elaborate descriptions of these purification methods.

The importance of Shodhana is not limited to Ayurveda alone; it has gained recognition in modern pharmacology as well. Many Ayurvedic formulations containing purified metals and minerals have been studied scientifically, and their safety and efficacy have been validated.

Need for Study

Shodhana is essential for ensuring the safe use of toxic substances in Ayurveda. A systematic study of classical purification methods helps bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern pharmacological approaches, ensuring the efficacy and safety of Ayurvedic formulations.

Definitions

Shodhana is defined in Ayurvedic texts as the process of removing impurities and toxic effects from substances while enhancing their therapeutic properties.

"शोधनं दोषहरणं, गुणवृद्धिकरं तथा"

(Shodhana removes impurities and enhances the beneficial properties of a substance.)

This purification is categorized into different methods based on the type of toxic material, ensuring that the substance is fit for medicinal use.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials required for Shodhana vary depending on the substance being purified. Common materials include

- **Herbal decoctions** (e.g., Triphala Kashaya, Gomutra)
- **Cow urine (Gomutra)** and cow milk
- **Lime water and buttermilk**
- **Sulfur, mercury, and other metals** (for Rasashastra preparations)
- **Heating and quenching mediums** (e.g., oil, herbal juices)

The methods employed for Shodhana include

1. **Swedana (Boiling with herbal decoctions)** – Used for plant-based toxins.
2. **Nirvapa (Quenching in liquids like milk, cow urine)** – Applied for metals and minerals.
3. **Mardana (Grinding with herbal juices)** – Used for minerals like Hingula (Cinnabar).
4. **Bhavana (Trituration with herbal liquids)** – Enhances bioavailability.
5. **Gandhaka Shodhana (Sulfur purification)** – Involves boiling sulfur in cow's milk or Triphala decoction.

Toxic Dravyas in Samhitas: Classical Methods and Their Practical Application

The Ayurvedic texts classify toxic substances into different categories, each requiring specific purification methods.

1. Metals and Minerals (Dhatus and Upadhatus)

Metals such as mercury (Parada), gold (Suvarna), lead (Naga), tin (Vanga), and iron (Lauha) require Shodhana before use. Methods include

Parada Shodhana

"सप्तकृत्वोऽम्लदुग्धाद्यैः शोधनं परदस्य तु।"

(Mercury should be purified seven times using acidic substances, milk, etc.)

Mercury is purified using processes like Mardana (grinding with lime juice) and Swedana (boiling with Triphala decoction).

Gandhaka Shodhana

"दुग्धे सर्पिषि वा सिद्धे गन्धकं शुद्धिमाप्नुयात्।"

(Sulfur is purified by processing with milk or ghee.)

Sulfur is melted and poured into milk or herbal decoctions.

- **Tamra (Copper) Shodhana**

Copper is heated and quenched in herbal decoctions multiple times.

2. Poisonous Plants (Vishadravyas)

Several plants contain toxic principles that require detoxification:

Aconitum (Vatsanabha)

"गोमूत्रे वात्सनाभस्य शोधनं परिकीर्तितम्।"

(Aconitum should be purified using cow's urine.)

Purified by boiling in cow's urine.

- **Datura**

Soaked in cow's milk and boiled before medicinal use.

Jayapala (Croton seed)

"तप्ते जले शुद्धिमेति जयपालः प्रशस्यते।"

(Croton seed is purified by immersing in hot water.)

The seed is roasted to reduce its toxic effects.

3. Animal-Derived Substances

Certain animal-derived substances require purification

Guggulu (Resin of Commiphora mukul)

"त्रिफलाकषायेन शुद्धिर्गुग्गुलु संभवा।"

(Guggulu is purified using Triphala decoction.)

Purified by washing with Triphala decoction.

- **Shankha Bhasma (Conch shell ash)**

Treated with lime juice and heated to remove impurities.

Practical Applications of Shodhana

Shodhana plays a crucial role in Ayurvedic medicine, especially in ensuring the safety and efficacy of substances that are inherently toxic or difficult to digest in their natural state. Below are the key practical applications of Shodhana.

1. Enhances the Safety of Ayurvedic Formulations

Many metals, minerals, and plant-based toxins are used in Ayurveda after undergoing purification to eliminate harmful components. For example:

- **Mercury (Parada)** is highly toxic in its raw form but, after Shodhana, it becomes a powerful therapeutic agent used in Rasashastra formulations like Rasa Sindura.
- **Aconitum (Vatsanabha)**, a highly poisonous herb, is purified using cow's urine and other detoxification methods, making it safe for medicinal use.
- **Guggulu (Commiphora mukul)**, a resin with impurities, is purified using Triphala decoction to remove unwanted substances.

By removing toxic elements, these substances can be safely incorporated into Ayurvedic formulations without causing harm to the patient.

2. Improves Bioavailability and Therapeutic Efficacy

Shodhana not only detoxifies substances but also enhances their medicinal properties by making them more absorbable in the human body. This process helps:

- **Increase solubility:** Purified minerals like Tamra (copper) and Loha (iron) undergo Bhasmikarana (calcination), which converts them into fine, bioavailable particles.
- **Improve potency:** Bhavana (impregnation with herbal liquids) enhances the therapeutic potential of substances by adding medicinal qualities from herbal extracts.
- **Facilitate digestion:** Heavy metals and minerals, once purified, are easier to metabolize and do not cause gastric irritation.

3. Reduces Toxicity Without Compromising Medicinal Properties

Unlike chemical detoxification, which often reduces the medicinal properties of a substance, Ayurvedic Shodhana selectively removes toxic elements while preserving or even enhancing its therapeutic effects. Examples include

- **Shankha Bhasma (conch shell ash)** is treated with herbal extracts, reducing its toxicity while maintaining its antacid and digestive benefits.
- **Gandhaka (sulfur)** is purified using cow's milk and Triphala decoction, making it safe for use in skin disorders while retaining its antibacterial properties.
- **Datura seeds** undergo a purification process that removes their toxic alkaloids while preserving their bronchodilatory and analgesic properties.

4. Scientific Studies Validate the Detoxification Potential of Shodhana Processes

Modern scientific research has confirmed that the Shodhana process alters the chemical structure of substances, leading to

- **Reduction of heavy metal toxicity**: Studies on purified Mercury (Parada) and Lead (Naga) show that toxic effects are significantly reduced when subjected to classical purification methods.
- **Transformation of minerals**: Analysis of purified iron (Lauha Bhasma) reveals that it contains nano-sized particles, making it easier for the body to absorb.
- **Enhanced pharmacological activity**: Research on detoxified Vatsanabha (Aconitum) shows that its toxicity is reduced while its analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties remain intact.

These studies bridge the gap between traditional Ayurvedic knowledge and modern pharmacological principles, validating the safety and efficacy of Shodhana.

OBSERVATIONS

- **Shodhana significantly reduces toxic effects while enhancing medicinal properties.** Experimental studies have shown that raw substances contain harmful elements, which are removed or neutralized through purification. For instance, raw sulfur contains impurities that may cause allergic reactions, but after purification, it becomes safe for therapeutic use.

- **Ayurvedic texts emphasize plant-based detoxifying agents like cow urine, herbal juices, and milk**
- Classical methods rely on naturally occurring substances for detoxification, such as:
  - **Gomutra (cow urine)** – Used to detoxify metals and minerals.
  - **Triphala decoction** – Used in purifying Guggulu and other herbal substances.
  - **Cow's milk** – Used to remove toxicity from poisonous plant extracts.

- **Modern studies indicate that Ayurvedic purification methods alter the chemical composition of substances, making them safer**

  Analytical studies show that the structural and compositional changes in substances after purification result in reduced toxicity and improved bioavailability.

- **Rasashastra-based purification ensures that metals and minerals become bioavailable without harmful side effects**

Research on Bhasmas (calcined metal preparations) suggests that they exist in nano or micro-particle form, which allows them to be easily absorbed and used by the body without causing toxicity.

CONCLUSION

Shodhana is an essential process in Ayurveda that ensures the safe and effective use of naturally occurring toxic substances. The classical methods of purification described in Samhitas and Rasashastra texts remain highly relevant today. Scientific validation of these methods confirms that Shodhana enhances the bioavailability of substances while neutralizing their harmful effects.

By integrating ancient purification techniques with modern research, Ayurveda can continue to offer safe and effective therapeutic solutions. Further studies and clinical trials will help establish Ayurvedic purification processes as a scientifically validated practice, ensuring their continued application in both traditional and contemporary medicine.

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