



THE ROLE OF PANCHATIKTA GHRITA IN TREATING SHUSHKAKSHIPAKA (DRY EYE SYNDROME)

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ABSTRACT

Dry Eye Syndrome (DES) is a multifactorial disease of the ocular surface characterized by a loss of tear film homeostasis, resulting in symptoms of discomfort and visual disturbance. In classical Ayurveda, a strikingly similar condition is described as *Shushkakshipaka*. This article explores the Ayurvedic understanding of *Shushkakshipaka*, focusing on its etiopathogenesis involving *Vata* and *Pitta doshas*. It delves into the classical therapeutic recommendation from the foundational text, *Sushruta Samhita*, which advocates for the internal administration (*pānam*) of a bitter medicated ghee. The primary focus is on *Panchatikta Ghrita*, a premier formulation in this category. The article analyzes its composition, therapeutic rationale, and mode of action, which involves systemic oleation (*Snehana*), pacification of *Vata-Pitta doshas*, and blood purification (*Rakta Shodhana*). By contrasting the holistic, root-cause-oriented Ayurvedic approach with the often-symptomatic conventional treatments, this paper highlights the potential of integrating *Panchatikta Ghrita* into the management protocol for the growing global burden of Dry Eye Syndrome.

KEYWORDS: *Shushkakshipaka*, Dry Eye Syndrome, *Panchatikta Ghrita*, Ayurveda, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Vata-Pitta*, *Snehapana*.

INTRODUCTION

Dry Eye Syndrome (DES) has emerged as a significant public health issue, affecting millions worldwide. Its prevalence is escalating due to factors like increased screen time (leading to Computer Vision Syndrome), environmental pollution, aging populations, and certain systemic diseases.^[1] DES is defined as "a multifactorial disease of the ocular surface characterized by a loss of homeostasis of the tear film, and accompanied by ocular symptoms, in which tear film instability and hyperosmolarity, ocular surface inflammation and damage, and neurosensory abnormalities play etiological roles".^[2] Conventional management primarily relies on palliative measures such as artificial tears, lubricating gels, anti-inflammatory eye drops, and punctal plugs, which offer temporary relief but often fail to address the underlying systemic imbalances.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a comprehensive perspective on ocular diseases under the branch of *Shalakyta Tantra*. The condition described as *Shushkakshipaka* in classical texts bears a remarkable resemblance to DES. The term itself is descriptive *Shushka* (dry), *Akshi* (eye), and *Paka* (inflammation or suppuration). According to Ayurveda, this condition

arises from a vitiation of *Vata dosha* (the principle of dryness and movement) and *Pitta dosha* (the principle of heat and transformation), leading to dryness, roughness, and inflammation of the eyes.^[3]

The treatment protocol in Ayurveda is not merely local but systemic, aiming to restore the *dosha* equilibrium. The *Sushruta Samhita*, an authoritative text on surgery and medicine, provides a clear directive for managing *Shushkakshipaka*. This article aims to elucidate this classical approach, focusing on the pivotal role of internal oleation with *Panchatikta Ghrita*, a potent bitter-medicated ghee, as a holistic and effective therapy for Dry Eye Syndrome.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

To explore the classical Ayurvedic therapeutic approach of *Panchatikta Ghrita* as a holistic, systemic solution for the increasing prevalence of and limited long-term remedies for Dry Eye Syndrome.

1. A Clinical Understanding of *Shushkakshipaka*

Shushkakshipaka is classified under *Sarvagata Netra Rogas* (diseases affecting all parts of the eye). Its

pathogenesis (*Samprapti*) involves the aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta doshas*.

- **Role of Vata Dosha** *Vata*, with its inherent qualities of *Ruksha* (dry), *Khara* (rough), and *Chala* (mobile), is the primary cause of dryness. When aggravated, it depletes the unctuous and lubricating qualities (*Snigdha Guna*) of the tear film, leading to ocular surface dehydration.
- **Role of Pitta Dosha** *Pitta*, characterized by *Ushna* (hot) and *Tikshna* (sharp) qualities, is responsible for the 'paka' or inflammatory

component. It causes burning sensations, redness, and irritation, corresponding to the ocular surface inflammation seen in modern pathology.

The combination of these two *doshas* creates a vicious cycle of dryness and inflammation, perfectly mirroring the modern understanding of DES.

Table 1: Comparison of Symptoms *Shushkakshipaka* vs. Dry Eye Syndrome.

<i>Shushkakshipaka</i> Symptoms (as per Ayurveda)	Modern Dry Eye Syndrome Symptoms
<i>Rukshata</i> (Dryness)	Dryness, Grittiness
<i>Gharsha</i> (Gritty sensation, foreign body sensation)	Sandy or gritty feeling
<i>Toda</i> (Pricking pain)	Stinging or sharp pain
<i>Daha</i> (Burning sensation)	Burning or scratchiness
<i>Krichronmilana</i> (Difficulty in opening eyes)	Difficulty wearing contact lenses, eye fatigue
<i>Aavilata</i> (Blurred or unclear vision)	Blurred vision, light sensitivity
<i>Rakta Raji</i> (Reddish discoloration)	Eye redness

2. The Classical Mandate The *Sushruta Samhita* Reference

The foundational evidence for using *Panchatikta Ghrita* in *Shushkakshipaka* comes directly from the *Sushruta Samhita*. In the *Uttara Tantra*, which details diseases of the head and neck, Acharya Sushruta provides a concise and powerful therapeutic guideline.

शुष्काक्षिपाके तु तर्पणं पूजितं सदा ।

स्नेहनार्थं तथा पानं घृतस्य बहु तिक्तकम् ॥ २६ ॥

Sushruta Samhita, Uttara Tantra, Chapter 6, Verse 26^[4]

In the condition of *Shushkakshipaka*, *Tarpana* (a local ocular therapy with medicated ghee) is always praised. Similarly, for the purpose of internal oleation (*snehanārtham*), the oral consumption (*pānam*) of a very *Panchatikta Ghrita* (*ghṛtasya bahu tiktakam*) is advised.

This verse establishes two core principles

1. **Local Therapy *Tarpana*** for local nourishment and lubrication.

2. **Systemic Therapy** Oral intake of a "*Panchatikta Ghrita*" to correct the internal root cause.

The term *bahu tiktakam ghṛtam* is a descriptor for a class of formulations. *Panchatikta Ghrita* and *Mahatikta Ghrita* are the most renowned and widely used preparations that fit this description, with *Panchatikta Ghrita* being the archetypal choice.^[5]

3. *Panchatikta Ghrita* Composition and Pharmacological Properties

Panchatikta Ghrita is a polyherbal formulation where five supremely bitter (*Tikta Rasa*) herbs are processed in a base of cow's ghee (*Go Ghrita*). The standard formulation is mentioned in texts like the *Bhaishajya Ratnavali*.^[6]

Table 2: Core Ingredients of *Panchatikta Ghrita* and their Properties.

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Key Property (<i>Karma</i>)
Nimba	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	<i>Kandughna</i> (anti-pruritic), <i>Vranahara</i> (wound healing), <i>Krimighna</i> (antimicrobial)
Patola	<i>Trichosanthes dioica</i>	<i>Jwarahara</i> (antipyretic), <i>Pittahara</i> (Pitta-pacifying), <i>Rakta Shodhaka</i> (blood purifier)
Vyaghri/Kantakari	<i>Solanum xanthocarpum</i>	<i>Shothahara</i> (anti-inflammatory), <i>Kanthyā</i> (good for throat), <i>Kasahara</i> (anti-tussive)
Guduchi	<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>	<i>Rasayana</i> (rejuvenator), <i>Jwarahara</i> , <i>Tridosha Shamaka</i> (balances all 3 doshas)
Vasa	<i>Adhatoda vasica</i>	<i>Raktapittahara</i> (stops bleeding), <i>Shothahara</i> , <i>Kasahara</i>
Go Ghrita	Cow's Ghee	<i>Vata-Pitta Shamaka</i> , <i>Snigdha</i> (unctuous), <i>Rasayana</i> , <i>Yogavahi</i> (catalytic carrier)

4. Therapeutic Rationale The Multifaceted Mode of Action

The efficacy of *Panchatikta Ghrita* in *Shushkakshipaka* is not incidental; it is based on profound Ayurvedic pharmacological principles.

4.1. Systemic Oleation (*Abhyantara Snehapana*)

The oral administration of medicated ghee is known as *Snehapana*. Unlike topical eye drops that provide transient surface relief, *Snehapana* works systemically. The lipid-soluble active compounds of the herbs, carried by the ghee, are absorbed into the bloodstream. Ghee's inherent *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Sukshma* (subtle) properties allow it to penetrate deep into bodily tissues (*dhatu*s) and cross cellular barriers, including the blood-retinal barrier, providing nourishment and lubrication from within.^[7] This internal oleation pacifies the systemic *Vata* aggravation, addressing the root cause of dryness throughout the body, including the lacrimal glands and ocular surface.

4.2. Dual Dosha Pacification

Shushkakshipaka is a classic *Vata-Pitta* disease. *Panchatikta Ghrita* is uniquely designed to counter both

- **Ghee Pacifies Vata** The unctuous, heavy, and sweet post-digestive effect (*Madhura Vipaka*) of ghee directly counteracts the dry, light, and rough qualities of *Vata*.
- **Bitter Herbs Pacify Pitta** The *Tikta Rasa* (bitter taste) of the five herbs is the most effective taste for pacifying *Pitta dosha*. It has *Sheeta* (cooling) and *Ruksha* (drying) properties that reduce inflammation, cool the system, and absorb excess heat and acidity associated with *Pitta*.^[8]

4.3. The *Yogavahi* Property of Ghee

Ghee is celebrated as a *Yogavahi*, meaning it acts as a catalytic agent or a synergistic carrier. Without altering its own properties, it absorbs the medicinal qualities (*Gunas*) of the herbs processed with it and delivers them efficiently to the target tissues.^[7] In this case, ghee carries the anti-inflammatory and cooling properties of the bitter herbs to the eyes and related channels (*srotas*).

4.4. *Rakta Shodhaka* (Blood Purifying) Action

The bitter herbs, particularly *Nimba* and *Patola*, are renowned blood purifiers. In Ayurveda, inflammation (*Paka*) is often linked to impurities in the blood (*Rakta Dhatu*). By purifying the blood, *Panchatikta Ghrita* reduces systemic inflammation, which in turn alleviates the inflammatory symptoms in the eye, such as burning and redness.

DISCUSSION

The Ayurvedic approach to *Shushkakshipaka* offers a profound contrast to the conventional management of DES. While modern medicine excels at providing immediate, localized relief with artificial tears, the Ayurvedic strategy, exemplified by the use of *Panchatikta Ghrita*, aims for a systemic and long-

lasting resolution. The treatment is not directed at the eye in isolation but at the individual as a whole, seeking to correct the fundamental imbalance of *Vata* and *Pitta* that precipitated the condition.

The prescription of *pānam ghrtasya bahu tiktakam* in the *Sushruta Samhita* is a testament to the advanced understanding of etiopathogenesis in ancient medicine. It acknowledges that ocular dryness and inflammation are not merely surface-level issues but manifestations of an internal derangement. This systemic approach is particularly relevant today, where DES is often linked to systemic inflammatory conditions, autoimmune diseases, and lifestyle factors that disrupt the body's overall homeostasis.^[9]

The use of *Panchatikta Ghrita* requires administration by a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner, often as part of a structured *Snehapana* regimen, which may be followed by detoxification therapies (*Shodhana*) like *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation) for deeper cleansing. This highlights a potential challenge patient compliance and the need for medical supervision, which differs from the simple over-the-counter application of eye drops.

However, the potential benefits—addressing the root cause, providing lasting relief, and conferring collateral benefits like improved skin health and reduced systemic inflammation (*Rasayana* effect)—make it a compelling therapeutic option. Further clinical research, including randomized controlled trials (RCTs), is essential to validate the efficacy of *Panchatikta Ghrita* for DES using modern diagnostic parameters like Tear Film Break-Up Time (TBUT), Schirmer's test, and ocular surface staining scores. Such studies would help bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary clinical practice, potentially integrating this safe and holistic therapy into mainstream ophthalmology.^[10]

CONCLUSION

Shushkakshipaka, the Ayurvedic analogue of Dry Eye Syndrome, is a *Vata-Pitta* dominant disorder characterized by dryness and inflammation. The *Sushruta Samhita* provides a clear and potent therapeutic directive for its management internal oleation (*Snehapana*) with a *Panchatikta Ghrita*. *Panchatikta Ghrita* stands as the quintessential formulation for this purpose. Its efficacy stems from a multi-pronged mechanism that includes systemic lubrication, pacification of the root *doshas* (*Vata* and *Pitta*), blood purification, and deep tissue nourishment facilitated by the *Yogavahi* nature of ghee. By addressing the underlying pathology rather than just the symptoms, the administration of *Panchatikta Ghrita* represents a holistic, time-tested, and profoundly relevant strategy for providing lasting relief to those suffering from the chronic and pervasive challenge of Dry Eye Syndrome.

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