A Conceptual Study of Ritu Mukha Lepa in Saundarya Ayurveda

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Abstract: Lepa Kalpana, an integral part of Ayurvedic external therapies, involves the application of herbal pastes for maintaining skin health and addressing imbalances in the doshas. With roots in ancient texts like the Sushruta Samhita , Ashtanga Hrdaya and Sharangadhara Samhita, this practice has been historically valued for its therapeutic and cosmetic benefits. Its preparation requires precision in consistency, thickness, and duration to achieve benefits like exfoliation, hydration, detoxification, and improved complexion. The seasonal adaptability of ritu(seasonal) lepa highlights its enduring importance, offering a natural and effective means of promoting skin health while respecting individual constitution and environmental factors. In Saundarya Ayurveda, the idea of 'Ritu' based mukha lepa provides a comprehensive approach to skincare by harmonizing with seasonal shifts to preserve and enhance skin health.

Keywords: Lepa, Mukha lepa, Ritu Mukha Lepa, Saundarya Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Lepa kalpana* is primarily detailed in the *Sharangadhara Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hrdaya*. The root word for *lepa* originates from "*lip upadehe*," which means to anoint or coat [1]. According *to Acharya Sharangadhara*, the synonyms for *alepa* are "*lipta, lepa* and *lepan*"[2] It refers to a substance meant for external application. In *Bhaisajya Kalpana*, *lepa* is categorized as a '*Bahirparimarjana Chikitsa'*[3], which falls under the domain of *Bahya kalpana*. One of the advantages of *Kalka kalpana* is its use as *lepana* (anointing).

Acharya Yadavji Trikamji[4], defines *lepa* as the process of grinding wet ingredients on a stone or mixing dry ingredients with water for application on the body. In South Kerala, this application is called 'Pooch Iduka', while in North Kerala, it is referred to as 'Pattiduka', implying the act of covering and adhering respectively.

Types of *Lepa*

Table 1. Types of *lepa* according to different *Acharya's*.

Acharya	Types of lepa
Susrutha	Pradeha, Pralepa, Alepa [5]
Sharangdhara	Doshagna, Vishagna, Varnya [6]
Vagbhata	Snaihika, Nirvapana, Prasada, Stambhana, Vilayana, Pachana, Pidana, Shodhana, Shoshana, Savarnikaram [7]

- *Pralepa lepa*: It is used in *vishoshi* (drying) and *avishoshi* (non-drying) wounds. This type is cold and thin in nature, prepared from *Sita Virya* (cooling) substances. Indicated in *pitta pradhana twak vikaras*.[8]
- *Pradeha lepa*: It is used in *avishoshi* (non-drying) wound. It can be either cold or hot , thick, and is primarily used for treating *Vata-Kaphaja* conditions.[9]
- *Alepa lepa*: This type falls between the above two; it is neither too thin nor too thick when applied.[10]

Mukha Lepa

1. *Doshahara lepa: These* lepas *are prepared by grinding and applied to swollen areas to alleviate related conditions. Examples include* Dasanga lepa, Jadamayadi lepa, Nagaradi lepa, Gruhadoomadi lepa, *and* Arshohara lepa.[11]
2. *Vishahara lepa: These lepas counteract toxins from* Bhallataka *seeds, insects, or spiders. Remedies include sesame seeds with goat's milk and ghee for* Bhallataka *irritation, as well as anti-toxic options like neem leaves, turmeric, tulsi, and* Vilwadi gulika.[12]
3. *Varnakara lepa: These* lepa's *treat conditions like* Vyanga *and* Neelika, *enhance complexion, and*

address acne. Rakta chandana, Haridra, Manjishta, *and* bud of *Ficus religiosa* serves these purposes.[13]

Application, Time & Precaution

I. Lepa should be applied warm for Vata and Kapha , and for the remaining, it should be very cold.[14]
II. Lepana oushadha should be applied while moist. i. Wash the face before the lepa gets dry. ii. If the lepa dries on the skin, it vitiates the complexion.[15]

III. Separate thickness are prescribed for the three types of lepa: [16]

Table 2. Thickness specifications for various types of *lepa*

Lepa	Thickness
Doshagna Lepa	1/4th Angula
Vishagna Lepa	1/3rd Angula
Varnya Lepa	1/2nd Angula

This is also the dosage of *Dosha anusarena Vata, Pitta,* or *Kapha dosha's*.[17]

IV. *Lepa* should be applied retrogradely. It helps to penetrate the hair follicles and spread the potency to the sweat glands. This method is also beneficial for proper adhesion of the drug.[18]

V. Avoid applying *lepa* at night during the cold season, as it suppresses *sveda* (sweat)and may cause blockages, worsening the condition. By avoiding nighttime application, the hair follicles remain open, allowing natural expulsion of *sveda*, making it an unsuitable time for application.[19]

VI. Avoid reapplying the *lepa* more than once, as it can lead to excessive thickness, heat, pain, and burning sensation.[20]

VII. Do not reuse a *lepana* medicine that has lost its effectiveness after the initial application, as it will not provide any benefit if applied again.[21]

VIII. Dry *lepa* should not be pulled off. It should be changed only after it has absorbed or softened and when removed , the face should be anointed with oil.[22]

IX. Dry medicine should be changed immediately. Medicine that cannot be applied comfortably will increase the harm.[23]

X. Proper care is essential in preparing and applying *lepa's*. The thickness and particle size are crucial for effectiveness. Finer particles block hair follicles, increasing *sveda* production, while a thinner consistency may dry out too quickly and cause pain. Excessive thickness can cause *sveda avaroda*(obstruction of sweat flow). The *lepa* should be prepared and applied according to the specific condition of the disease.[24]

XI. The *lepa* should not be left on face more than 15-20 minutes. Keeping for very long time may result in formulation of wrinkles, sagging of skin and enlargement of open pores.[25]

XII. Do not scrub face vigorously; this may result in eruption of pimples and dark spots.[26]

XIII. Avoid applying *lepa* near 'eye zone'(the skin around eye is very delicate). The process of removing face pack may damage the sensitive skin around eyes.[27]

XIV. The person should avoid day sleep, excessive talk, exposure to fire and sunlight, sorrow and anger during the course of the therapy.[28]

XV. It should not be applied to persons suffering from *pinasa* (rhinorrhoea), *ajirna* (indigestion), immediately after errhines, *hanugraha* (lock jaw), *arōcaka* (anorexia) and after keeping awake the previous night. If properly done, it cures premature greying of hair, *vyanga* (blackish hyper pigmentation of the face), wrinkles, *timira* (blurring of vision) and *nilika* (bluish hyper pigmentation of the face).[29]

Shelf life of *lepa*: [30]

Herbal *lepa churna* retains its potency for up to 2 months when stored in an airtight container. However, if the *lepa* contains mineral and metallic substances, these ingredients have no expiration date. The shelf life primarily depends on the base used to prepare the *lepa*, as all Ayurvedic bases, except *siktha*, *ghrita*, and *taila*, tend to spoil within 24 hours.

Benefits of using face packs[31] [32]

1. Face packs help exfoliate dead skin cells.
2. They provide a soothing and relaxing effect on the skin.

3. They quickly restore the skin's natural glow and radiance.
4. Regular use can effectively counteract the damaging effects of pollution and harsh weather conditions.

In Ayurvedic cosmetology, *Mukha lepa* has been a celebrated practice for enhancing beauty and promoting skin health. This age-old tradition is deeply rooted in the holistic philosophy of Ayurveda, which emphasizes balance and harmony between body, mind, and environment.

Ritu Lepa

Ritu lepa refers to a type of herbal paste or facial application prepared and applied according to the changing seasons . In Ayurveda, the principles of *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) are used to adapt skincare practices to maintain the balance of *Dosha's* (*Vata, Pitta,* and *Kapha)* affected by seasonal variations. The purpose of *Ritu lepa* is to address specific skin concerns that arise due to climatic changes, ensuring optimal skin health and radiance throughout the year. Each season calls for a unique combination of herbs and ingredients that counteract the dominant *dosha* and environmental effects of that period. In persons habituated to *Mukhālēpa* , the vision becomes perfect, the face will never be gloomy and will become smooth, resembling a lotus flower.

Acharya Vagbhata emphasizes *Ritu lepa* applications in *Gandhushavidhi Adhyaya* [33] ,to balance *dosha's* and protect the skin from environmental effects.

Table 3. List of drugs in different *ritu* according to *Acharya Vagbhata* [34]

Ritu	Drugs
Hemanta (Early Winter)	Cotyledon of Kola, Root of Vrsa, Bark of Sabara, Gaura sarsapa.
Sisira (Extreme Winter)	Root of Simhi, Tila, Krsna, Bark of Darvi, Dehusked Yava.
Vasanta (Spring)	Root of Darbha, Hima, Usira, Sirisa, Misi, Tandula.
Grisma (Summer)	Kumuda, Utpala, Kalhara, Durva, Madhuka, Candana.
Varsa (Rainy)	Kaliyaka, Tila, Usira, Mamsi, Tagara, Padmaka.
Sarad (Autumn)	Talisa, Gundra, Paundrahva, Yasti, Kasa, Nata, Aguru.

Table 4. *Hemanta ritu lepa oushadha's* [35] [36]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka		
Kola	Ziziphus mauritiana	Madhura, Amla	Guru, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura/ Amla	Vata -pitta hara	Cotyledon
Vrsa	Adathoda vasica	Tikta, Kasaya	Laghu, Ruksa	Sita	Katu	Kapha-pitta hara	Root
Sabara	Symplocos racemosa	Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Ruksa	Sita	Katu	Kapha-pitta hara	Bark
Gaura sarsapa	Brassica alba	Katu, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha	Usna	Katu	Kapha- vata hara	Seed

Table 5. Sisira ritu lepa oushadha's [37] [38]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guan	Virya	Vipaka		
Simhi	Solanum anguivi	Katu, Tikta	Laghu, Ruksa	Usna	Katu	Kapha- vata hara	Root

Tila	Sesamum indicum	Madhura, Kasaya, Tikta	Guru, Snigdha	Usna	Madhura	Vata hara	Seed
Krsna	Piper longum	Katu	Laghu, Snigdha	Usna	Madhura	Vata- kapha hara	Fruit
Darvi	Coscinium fenestratum	Tikta, Kasaya	Laghu, Ruksa	Usna	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Bark
Yava	Hordeum vulgare	Kasaya, Madhura	Guru, Ruksa	Sita	Katu	Pitta- kapha hara	Grains

Table 6. *Vasanta ritu lepa oushadha's* [39 40]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka		
Darbha	Desmostachya bipinnata	Madhura, Kasaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Root
Hima	Santalum album	Tikta, Madhura	Laghu, Ruksa	Sita	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Heart wood
Usira	Vetiveria zizanioides	Tikta, Madhura	Ruksa, Laghu.	Sita	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Root
Sirisa	Albizia lebbek	Kasaya, Tikta, Madhura	Laghu, Ruksa, Tiksna	Usna	Katu	Tridosa hara	Stem bark
Misi	Anethum graveolens	Katu, Tikta	Laghu, Tiksna	Usna	Katu	Vata-kapha hara	Fruits/ leaves
Tandula	Rice powder	Madhura	Snigdha, Laghu	Sita	Madhura	Vata -pitta hara	Grains

Table 7. *Grisma ritu lepa oushadha's* [41 42]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka		
Kumuda	Nymphaea nouchali	Madhura, Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha, Picchila	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Flower
Utpala	Nymphaea stellata	Madhura, Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha, Picchila	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Flower
Kalhara	Nelumbo nucifera	Madhura, Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha, Picchila	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Flower
Durva	Cynodon dactylon	Kasaya, Madhura	Laghu	Sita	Madhura	Kapha- pitta hara	Whole plant/ root
Madhuka	Glycyrrhiza glabra	Madhura	Guru, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Root

Candana	Santalum album	Tikta, Madhura	Laghu, Ruksa	Sita	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Heart wood

Table 8. *Varsa ritu lepa oushadha's* [43 44]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka		
Kaliyaka	Aquilaria agallocha	Katu, Tikta	Laghu, Tiksna	Usna	Katu	Vata- kapha hara	Resinous wood
Tila	Sesamum indicum	Madhura, Kasaya, Tikta	Guru, Snigdha	Usna	Madhura	Vata hara	Seed
Usira	Vetiveria zizanioides	Tikta, Madhura	Ruksa, Laghu	Sita	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Root
Mamsi	Nardostchys jatamansi	Tikta, Kasaya, Madhura	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Katu	Tridosa hara	Rhizome
Tagara	Valeriana wallichii	Tikta, Katu, Kasaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Usna	Katu	Kapha- vata hara	Root
Padmaka	Prunus cerasoides	Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Katu	Kapha- pitta hara	Stem bark

Table 9. Sarad ritu lepa oushadha's [45 46]

Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Properties				Karma	Part Used
		Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka		
Talisa	Abies webbiana	Tikta, Madhura	Laghu, Tiksna	Usna	Katu	Kapha-vata hara	Leaves
Gundra	Saccharum arundinaceum	Madhura, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Root
Paundrahva	Saccharum officinarum	Madhura	Guru, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Vata-pitta hara	Stem
Yasti	Glycyrrhiza glabra	Madhura	Guru, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Tridosa hara	Root
Kasa	Saccharum spontaneum	Madhura, Kasaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Madhura	Vata-pitta hara	Root
Nata	Valeriana wallichi	Kasaya, Tikta	Laghu, Snigdha	Sita	Katu	Kapha-pitta hara	Stem bark
Aguru	Aquilaria agallocha	Tikta, Katu, Kasaya	Laghu, Snigdha	Usna	Katu	Kapha-vata hara	Root

Ritu lepa is significant for aligning skincare practices with seasonal transitions, as outlined in the *Samhita's*. As a key aspect of Saundarya Ayurveda , it emphasizes maintaining harmony between the skin, body, and environment. Since each *ritu* influences the *dosha's* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, & *Kapha*) differently, *ritu lepa* addresses these seasonal imbalances to keep the skin healthy and resilient. The *oushadha's* used in *ritu lepa* provide nourishment, detoxification, and hydration, promoting long-term skin health. By balancing the *dosha's* before they are aggravated, *ritu lepa* prevents seasonal skin concerns such as dryness, acne, dullness, and infections.

DISCUSSION

Hemanta ritu is marked by cold, dry, and heavy attributes that can aggravate *vata dosha* while enhancing *sarira bala* and *agni*. The herbs used during this season help balance *vata* and *kapha doshas*, nourish the body (*kola*), detoxify (*sabara, vrsa*), and safeguard against seasonal ailments. Warming herbs like *gaura sarsapa* combat cold-related conditions, while cooling herbs such as *vrsa* reduce inflammation. The cold and dry qualities of *Sisira ritu* aggravate *vata* and *kapha doshas*. Herbs like *simhi* and *tila* help balance these *dosha's* effectively. *Darvi* and *yava* detoxify the body by calming *kapha* and *pitta*, while *tila* nourishes and alleviates dryness caused by *vata*. Herbs with hot potency, such as *krsna* and *darvi*,

generate warmth, supporting digestion and preventing cold-related issues. *Tila* is particularly helpful in hydrating the skin and hair, which become dry during this season. These herbs enhance the body's ability to resist seasonal ailments as the transition to spring occurs. During *Vasant ritu, kapha* tends to accumulate, and the body undergoes seasonal changes. These herbs help balance *tridosa*, especially *kapha* and *pitta*. *Darbha* and *Misi* detoxify the body, removing winter toxins, while *Darbha* and *Uśīra* cool and soothe inflammation caused by *kapha* or *pitta*. *Tandula* and *hima* nourish and strengthen the body's vitality for spring rejuvenation. *Sirisa* promotes healthy skin, while *usira* and *darbha* refresh both the skin and body. *Misi* and *usira* aid digestion and enhance appetite, supporting the transition to warmer months.

Grisma ritu brings heat and dryness that can aggravate *pitta* and *kapha doshas*. Herbs like *kumuda*, *utpala*, and *kalhara* cool and calm the body, offering relief from the summer heat. *Durva* and *madhuka* detoxify, hydrate, and soothe heat-related discomfort. *Candana* and *madhuka* promote healthy skin by cooling and preventing dryness. These herbs also support digestive health as the digestive fire fluctuates during the summer. *Varsa ritu* causes excess moisture, aggravating *kapha dosha*. These herbs help balance *vata* and *kapha*, with some like *mamsi* addressing all *dosha's*. *Usira* and *padmaka* cool and soothe the body, relieving inflammation. *Tila* and *mamsi* nourish and strengthen the body during the energy-depleting monsoon. *Kālīyaka* and *tagara* alleviate *vata* and *kapha* imbalances, support respiratory health, and reduce discomfort from dampness. Additionally, these herbs aid digestion and prevent *ama* during the *varsa ritu*. *Sarad ritu*, with its temperature and humidity changes, aggravates *kapha dosha*. These herbs help balance *vata* and *kapha*, with some like *gundrā* addressing all *dosha's*. *Talisa* and *yasti* provide cooling effects, detoxifying and balancing residual heat from summer. *Paundrahva* and *gundra* nourish and strengthen, supporting vitality in the cooler weather. *Aguru* and *nata* aid respiratory health, while *talisa* improves skin by balancing *kapha* and *vata*. Additionally, *yasti* and *kasa* regulate digestion and prevent toxin buildup.

CONCLUSION

Lepa kalpana is a cornerstone of Ayurvedic external therapies, offering profound benefits for both therapeutic and cosmetic applications. Rooted in classical texts such as the *Sharangadhara Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hrdaya, lepa's* demonstrate a versatile approach to balancing *doshas* and addressing various skin and systemic conditions. This ancient practice aligns skincare with environmental and individual needs, as illustrated in seasonal applications like *ritu lepa's*, which harmonize *dosha* imbalances caused by climatic variations. The meticulous preparation, dosage, and application techniques underscore the importance of adhering to Ayurvedic principles to maximize the efficacy of *lepas*. Their capacity to exfoliate, detoxify, nourish, and rejuvenate the skin highlights their relevance in modern Ayurvedic cosmetology.

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