



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Cosmetic Significance of LEPA in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient system of holistic healing that emphasizes overall health through internal and external therapies. Skin care is particularly important, as our skin, the largest organ, not only protects the body but also mirrors internal health and affects how we see ourselves. The face, which faces the most environmental stress, often becomes a key focus in personal care. In recent years, Ayurvedic cosmetology has gained global recognition for its natural, safe, affordable, and sustainable methods. One highly effective external therapy is *Lepa Kalpana*, which involves applying herbal pastes directly to the skin. A specific type, *Mukhalepa* (facial lepa), has been traditionally used to improve skin tone, purify blood, and reduce acne, pigmentation, blemishes, and fine lines. It also helps improve elasticity and slows down signs of aging. These benefits come from Ayurvedic principles such as detoxification (*Shodhana*), healing (*Ropana*), anti-inflammatory action (*Pitta-Shamana*), rejuvenation (*Rasayana*), and balancing oil secretion (*Kapha-Hara*). *Lepa Kalpana* effectively manages skin issues like acne (*Mukhadushika*), hyperpigmentation (*Vyanga*), eczema (*Charmadala*), and discoloration (*Tvak Vaivarnya*). This effectiveness is due to bioactive plant compounds influenced by concepts such as taste (*Rasa*), quality (*Guna*), potency (*Virya*), post-digestive effect (*Vipaka*), and unique action (*Prabhava*).

This article looks at *Lepa Kalpana* relevance today, detailing its preparation, application, types, and best usage. It connects ancient wisdom with modern needs, offering a valuable Ayurvedic approach to skin health and overall well-being.

INTRODUCTION -

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes a holistic approach to health and disease management through two main methods internal medication (*Antar Parimarjana Chikitsa*) and external therapies (*Bahya Kalpana* or *Bahirparimarjana Chikitsa*). In modern medical language, these external therapies are similar to topical applications, where medicinal substances are applied directly to the skin for therapeutic effects. Among the various types of *Bahya Kalpana*, the most commonly used are *Lepa* (herbal pastes), *Upanaha* (poultices), and *Malahara* (ointments). Each of these preparations is important in localized treatment, providing relief by working directly on the affected area.¹

Lepa Kalpana is particularly significant as the most practiced external therapy in Ayurveda. It involves preparing and applying herbal pastes to specific areas of the body, mainly to soothe the locally aggravated doshas *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. By addressing doshic imbalance where it occurs, *Lepa* helps reduce symptoms such as inflammation, swelling, pain, and various skin issues.

The therapeutic effects of *Lepa* can be explained using classical Ayurvedic principles such as *Shoshana* (removal of toxins and excess doshas), *Stambhana/Ushna* (cooling or heating effects based on the formula), *Poshana* (nourishing tissues), and *Ropana* (healing wounds and minimizing scars). These diverse effects are further enhanced by its anti-inflammatory, rejuvenating, and cosmetic benefits, showcasing its broad therapeutic reach.²

MATERIAL-

All the available in different classics regarding like, Acharya Charak does not provide a specific classification of *Lepa* in his texts, unlike Acharya Sushruta and Acharya Sharangadhara, who have elaborated on its types and usage. Instead, Charak focuses on the contextual application of *Lepa* across various disease conditions, detailing its method of use according to the therapeutic requirement.

In the *Visarpa Chikitsa Adhyaya* of the *Charaka Samhita*, Acharya Charaka outlines specific guidelines and principles for the application of *Lepa*.

METHODS-

Classification and Types –

In the *Sharangadhara Samhita*, Acharya Sharangadhara categorizes *Lepa Kalpa* (medicated pastes) into three types³

- A) *Doshaghna* (for pacifying doshas)
- B) *Vishaghna* (anti-toxic)
- C) *Varnya* (complexion-enhancing).

He describes 91 *Lepas* in a dedicated chapter, including unique formulations like *Kitaghna*, *Suryavartahara*, *Ardhavabhedakaghna*, *Kurandhara*, and those affecting reproductive and sexual health such as *Yoni Sankochaka*, *Yonidravaka*, *Lingavridhdhikara*, *Stanavridhdhikara*, and *Vashikarana* *Lepas*. The nomenclature of these *Lepas* is based on key ingredients (*Langalyadi Lepa*), the number of components (*Dashanga Lepa*), or the disease targeted (*Shvitrahara Lepa*). Ingredients are drawn from diverse sources, including plant, mineral, marine, and animal origins examples include *Dhattura*, *Postadana*, *Shankha*, *Hingula*, *Swarnamakshika*, and *Parada*.

B. According to Acharya Vagbhatta⁴

- *Snaiihika*
- *Stambhan*
- *Nirvapana*
- *Vilayana*
- *Prasadana*
- *Pidana*
- *Shodhan*
- *Savarnikaran*
- *Pachana*
- *Shoshan*

C. Classification by Acharya Sushruta⁵

- A. *Pralepa* - These are thin pastes applied superficially, usually for cooling and soothing effects.
- B. *Pradeha* - *Pradeha* *Lepas* are thicker and more viscous, often used for deeper penetration and sustained release of active ingredients.
- C. *Alepa* - This category includes pastes that exhibit properties of both *Pralepa* and *Pradeha*, offering a balanced therapeutic effect.

D. According to Charaka Samhita - *Pramana* (Thickness) of *Mukhalepa*⁶

One fourth, one third & half *Angul Praman* is the thickness of the *Lepa* respectively for *Doshaghna*, *Vishaghna* & *Varnya Lepa*.

The thickness of *Lepa* should ideally be about the width of a wheat grain (*Godhuma Pindi*) or the thickness of the palm (*Hastapadatala*). Charaka emphasizes that the application should neither be too thin nor too thick, as both extremes may reduce its therapeutic efficacy.

Time for *Lepa* application:

Lepa should not be applied at nights nor should it be allowed to stay on after it dries up, whereas *Pradeha* can be allowed to stay on even after drying, in order to cause constriction or pressure over the part of the body.⁷

Methodology for *Lepa* application

Acharya Charaka has been described first about thickness of the *Lepa*

(Cha. Chi 21/100) According to acharya Charaka *Pralepa* should be applied 1/3 part of the *Angushta*)

1. In the *Sushruta Samhita*, it provides clear instructions on how to apply the treatment. It suggests spreading the medication evenly over the affected area with a thickness similar to the back of a knife's edge or slightly more. This guideline stresses the need for uniform application to ensure proper contact with the skin, which helps improve the treatment's effectiveness. These detailed directions show the surgical precision and practical focus of *Sushruta's* teachings, highlighting the importance of dosage and technique in external treatment methods.⁸

2. In *Ashtanga Hridaya*, although no specific measurement is provided, the text emphasizes the need for a smooth, even, and moderately thick application to ensure effective action.⁹

3. *Kashyapa Samhita* recommends a thickness that matches the width of a barley grain (*Yava Pindi*) or is slightly thicker. The consistency should be thick enough to stay on the skin without dripping.¹⁰

4. *Bhavaprakasha*, a later text, suggests that the thickness should be about a finger's breadth, or *Angula*. It highlights the importance of even application, taking into account the type of *Lepa*, such as *Sneha Lepa* or *Upanaha Lepa*, as well as the individual's *dosha* constitution. Interestingly, different therapeutic categories recommend varying thicknesses.¹¹

- *Doshaghna* *Lepa* should be around ¼ *Angula*,
- *Vishaghna* *Lepa* about ½ *Angula*, and

- Varnya Lepa approximately ½ Angula.

Pashchat karma of Mukhalepa:-

Lepa should be removed before it dry. After that *Mridu Abhyanga* should be done for better its efficacy¹².

Contraindication of Mukha lepa- It should not be used by people who have *Pinasa* (rhinorrhoea), *Ajirna* (indigestion), right after *Nasya Karma* (nasal drops), *Hanugraha* (lock jaw), *Arochaka* (anorexia), or after staying awake the night before. Benefits of *Mukhalepa*, When applied correctly, it treats premature greying of hair, *Vyanga* (wrinkles), *Timira* (blurry vision), and *Nilika* (bluish discoloration)¹³.

Importance of mukha lepa kalpana -

Mukha Lepa prevent from the diseases like *Akala Valit-Palit*, *Vyang*, *Timir* and *Nilika*.

Lepa Kalpana, the external application of herbal pastes, is important in *Ayurveda* for treating localized skin conditions and inflammatory disorders. It also has cosmetic benefits, such as removing bad odor, reducing excessive sweating, addressing discoloration, and improving complexion. *Acharya Sushruta* highlights its effectiveness by comparing it to water putting out a fire in a burning house. Just as water cools and soothes, *Lepa* calms aggravated local *Doshas* when applied externally.

When *Lepa* is used with a suitable medium like oil, ghee, or water, the active plant compounds are released into the medium and absorbed through hair follicles, sweat channels, and capillary openings. How well it is absorbed depends on skin type, application site, and the medium used. After absorption, the formulation undergoes metabolic transformation through the localized action of *Brajaka Pitta*. This process calms the imbalanced *Kapha* and *Pitta Doshas*, reducing inflammation, pus formation, and discoloration while preventing further progression of the condition.

Probable Mode of Action-

The mode of action of *Lepa* (herbal cream) can be understood through both *Ayurvedic* principles and modern anatomy.

A) According to *Ayurveda*, *Lepa* should be applied gently in an upward direction on the skin, where *Bhrajak Pitta* controls complexion, texture, and absorption. The medicament enters through *Romkupas* (pores and hair follicles). *Tiryak Dhamanis* (horizontal capillary channels) spread like a network throughout the skin, with *Romkupas* acting as gateways for drug absorption. These allow the medicament to reach the *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatus*, promoting *Varnya Prasadan* (improved complexion and skin health). The rubbing action raises local temperature, widens capillaries, and boosts circulation. This enhances both systemic and localized effects of the medicament.

B) From a modern perspective -Topical applications such as *Lepa* act primarily on the skin layers—epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous tissue where absorption occurs through hair follicles, sebaceous glands, sweat glands, and the intercellular lipid matrix of the skin. Although facial arteries and veins do not directly absorb *Lepa*, its benefits include improved superficial circulation via vessels like the facial artery and vein, stimulation of skin metabolism, and detoxification through sweat and sebaceous glands. It's easier for skincare ingredients to penetrate areas with thinner skin. For example, facial skin is thinner than the skin on the palms and soles of the feet.

This promotes the widening of superficial capillaries and improves blood circulation, oxygen flow, nutrient supply, and lymphatic drainage. Herbal phytochemicals stimulate fibroblasts and keratinocytes, which support collagen synthesis, skin elasticity, and cell renewal while also providing antioxidant and antimicrobial protection. Additionally, *Lepa* helps detoxify the skin by cleansing pores, absorbing excess oil, and removing metabolic waste through sweat and sebaceous glands. It forms a protective barrier against pollutants and free radicals. *Lepa* also influences neurovascular responses through cutaneous nerves and *marma* points. It rejuvenates the skin, maintains its elasticity, and restores balance to the facial tissue. The arterial supply of the facial skin mainly comes from the facial and superficial temporal arteries. It also receives blood from branches of the maxillary and ophthalmic arteries, which run alongside the cutaneous branches of the trigeminal nerve.

DISCUSSION

The concept of *Pralepa* or *Lepam* reflects *Ayurveda*'s focus on personalized, site-specific therapy. The choice of ingredients, method of preparation, and mode of application are determined based on the involved *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, and disease presentation. *Ayurveda* therapy suggests that *Lepa*, that is, the topical formulations, should be gently rubbed in an upward or reverse direction of the hairs over the skin to make the action of application more quick and effective.

Acharyas in *Ayurvedic* classics define the importance of *Lepa*, which plays a beneficiary role in the management of skin disorders and for improving skin complexion by reducing the vitiated *Doshas* and bringing them into a state of equilibrium, which is responsible for the normalization function of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, etc.

Sushruta Samhita (*Chikitsa Sthana*) categorizes *Lepa* based on therapeutic intent—*Shita Lepa* (cooling), *Ushna Lepa* (heating), *Ropana Lepa* (healing), and *Varnya Lepa* (complexion-enhancing)—each designed to correct specific *Dosha* imbalances and tissue disruptions.

Lepas play a dual role in both curative and preventive dermatology. Their application in *Twak Roga Chikitsa* is widely documented for conditions like *Pama*, *Kushtha*, and *Charmadala*, while in cosmetology, *Lepas* such as *Varnya Lepa* and *Mukhalepa* are used to promote *Varna Prasadana* (enhanced complexion), reduce blemishes, and nourish the skin. Modern pharmacological investigations validate the presence of bioactive compounds such as flavonoids, alkaloids, and phenolic acids in commonly used *Lepa* herbs like *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa*), and *Chandana* (*Santalum album*).

Additionally, the physicochemical properties of *Lepas* like particle size, moisture content, and base medium affect dermal absorption, thereby influencing therapeutic efficacy. Contemporary interest in clean, green, and natural skincare aligns with *Ayurvedic* principles, underscoring the global relevance of *Lepam* in modern cosmetology and integrative dermatological practice.

CONCLUSION

Lepa in the *Ayurvedic* system of medicine plays a very good role in the management of skin disorders as well as in the field of cosmetology, providing external application of *Lepa* with less time required and more beneficial results.

Lepa is a type of external *Ayurvedic* therapy. It connects traditional medicine with modern skincare by providing natural, targeted, and overall treatment options. Its proven effectiveness in treating skin issues and improving beauty makes it an essential part of *Ayurvedic* cosmetology. The use of *Mukha Lepa* increases beauty and imparts freshness. It is better to avoid synthetic chemical-based cosmetic products and use natural substances and products. It will make the skin healthy, prevent skin diseases, and improve complexion. Herbal face packs increase the fairness and smoothness of the skin and can also cure wrinkles, dark circles, and pimples. One can derive the maximum benefits of herbal face packs by using them according to their skin type. Face packs are helpful for both preventive and curative purposes in any skin problem

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