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REVIEW ARTICLE

Holistic Approaches to Shirashula: A Review of Ayurvedic Strategies and Practices

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: *Vatika Sirashula* refers to headaches caused by an imbalance in the *Vata dosha*, one of the three fundamental *dosha* in *Ayurveda. Vata dosha*, characterized by qualities such as *rukshata* (dryness), *sheeta* (coldness), and *chala* (movement) especially, plays a critical role in maintaining bodily functions. When *Vata* is aggravated, it can lead to various health issues, including *Vatika Sirashula*, which manifests as *shula* (pain) and *arati* (discomfort) in *Siro pradesha*.

Aims and Objectives: Understanding the *Ayurvedic* perspective on *Vatika Sirashula* includes its causes, symptoms, and treatment strategies through *Panchakarma procedures*.

Materials and Methods: Different classical *Ayurvedic* texts, websites, journals, and research articles were referred in above context.

Results and Discussion: *Shirashula*, characterized by tension headaches and migraines in Ayurveda, is discussed in terms of its etiology, signs and symptoms, and treatment strategies. The review highlights the condition's multifaceted nature, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that combines dietary management, herbal remedies, and lifestyle modifications to address both the symptoms and underlying imbalances. This integrated methodology aims to restore *dosha* equilibrium and provide long-term relief.

Conclusion: Vatik sirahshula can be understand as a tension-type headache as per current scenario panchkarma procedure such as Nasya, shirodhara, and shirobasti. Have great potential to overcome it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tension headaches are an example of such conditions, comparable to *Vatika Shirahshula* described in *Ayurvedic* literature. According to *Charaka*,^[1] mental stress (*Manahsantapa*) is a primary factor in the development of *Shirahshula*. Both *Charaka* and *Harita* attribute *Vatika Shirahshula*^[2,3] to factors such as grief (*Shoka*) and fear (*Bhaya*). Research indicates that approximately 82% of headaches are caused by tension, underscoring the need for effective treatments.

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MD Scholar PG, Department of Panchakarma, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. Email: gaytri201297@gmail.com Modern medications for headaches typically focus on symptom relief but are associated with significant side effects, including memory loss, gastrointestinal issues, and weight gain, and may lead to dependency. Therefore, exploring safer management options is essential. *Medhya Rasayanas*, as described in classical texts, are intended to enhance cognitive functions such as intelligence (*Dhee*), comprehension (*Dhriti*), and memory (*Smriti*). Improving these functions may help address headache triggers such as stress, tension, anxiety, fear, and grief, thereby aiding in the management of *Vatika Shirahshula*.

Shirahshula is a prominent symptom of Shiroroga, classified under Urdhwajatrugata Vikara, and Nasya^[4-6] (nasal administration) is widely recommended by traditional Ayurvedic texts for its effective treatment. Nasal administration allows medicinal substances to reach

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the brain (Mastishka) and eliminate vitiated doshas. Consequently, Medhya Rasayana drugs such as Mandukparni, Shankhpushpi, and Jyotishmati were administered through the nasal route (Nasya) to evaluate their efficacy in treating this condition, compared to Medhya Ghrita administered orally (Snehapana).

1.1. Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1. To review of cause, symptoms, and pathogenesis of *Vatika Shirah Shula*
- 2. To review Ayurvedic and modern management of Shirahshula

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

 Different classical Ayurveda texts, websites, journals, and research articles were referred in above context.

2.1. Importance of Shirah (Head)

In *Ayurveda*, the head (*Shirah*) is regarded as a crucial organ, considered one of the three primary vital organs where Prana, or life force, resides. *Charaka* emphasizes the head as the most significant and central part of the body, describing it as the *Uttamanga*, or the supreme limb. He compares the head to the sun, explaining that the sensory organs and pathways conveying sensory and vital impulses from the head function like the rays of the sun^[7].

Vagbhatta further likens the human body to a tree, with the head representing the roots and the limbs as branches. He asserts that the head is the location where all sense organs and *Prana* reside, making it a critical site of consciousness and deserving of utmost protection.^[8]

Classical texts place substantial importance on the head. Shaunakya and Kumarshira Bharadwaja noted that the head of the fetus develops first, underscoring its role as the site of essential sensory organs. Vagbhatta identified 10 vital centers (Jivita Dham), including Shira (head), Rasanabandhana (ligament of the tongue), Kantha (throat), Asra (blood), Hridaya (heart), Nabhi (umbilicus), Basti (urinary bladder), Shukra (semen), Ojas (essence of tissues), and Guda (rectum and anus). [9] He also emphasized that the head is the root of the body and the seat of consciousness, thereby making it the supreme organ.

2.2. Shiroroga

Ayurvedic texts distinguish Shirahshula as both a symptom of various conditions and an independent disease entity referred to as "Shiroroga." The term Shirahshula specifically pertains to pain localized in the head. Conditions such as Khalitya (hair loss) and Palitya (premature graying) affecting the head region are not classified under Shiroroga. According to Dalhana, the commentator on the Sushruta Samhita, Shiroroga is confined to headaches, excluding other head-related disorders like Khalitya. Charaka also identifies Shiroruk (headache) as a distinct disease within the 80 types of Vata-related disorders. Madhukosha and Chakrapani Datta support Charaka's view, while Sushruta's Bhaishajya Ratnavali describes Shirahshula specifically as pain (Ruja) occurring in the head.

2.3. Historical Review

A historical review aims to trace the development of knowledge over time to understand the present state of a field. The history of medicine extends back to the dawn of human civilization, with numerous disorders documented in ancient *Vedic literature*, either explicitly or through descriptions of their characteristics. *Shirahshula*, or headache, has been recognized since ancient times. Although *Ayurvedic* and *Sanskrit* literature does not classify *Shirahshula* as a major disease, it is acknowledged as a distinct condition in various classical texts. Below, we provide an overview of references to *Shirahshula* from the *Vedic* period onward.

2.4. Vedic Kala

Among the four *Vedas*, the *Atharva Veda* is regarded as the foundational source of *Ayurveda*. It contains terms such as "*Shirsakti*," which is interpreted as referring to headache, and "*Shirshamaya*," which is understood to denote diseases affecting the head, according to many scholars.^[10]

2.5. Buddha Kala

In Buddhist literature, there are references to a physician named *Jivaka* who performed a surgical procedure on the head to extract parasitic worms. In addition, there is an account of a king who received *Nasya* treatment to alleviate his headache.

2.6. Charaka Samhita

The *Charaka Samhita* provides detailed descriptions of *Shiroroga* (head disorders) in its various sections. In the *Sutrasthana*, five types are identified: *Vataja Shiroroga, Pittaja Shiroroga, Kaphaja Shiroroga, Krimija Shiroroga, and Sannipatika Shiroroga*^[11]. The *Chikitsasthana*^[12] outlines the symptoms, prognosis, and management strategies for these disorders. In addition, the *Siddhisthana*^[13] describes four more types of *Shiroroga: Shankhaka, Ardhavabhedaka, Survavarta*, and *Anantavata*.

2.7. Sushruta Samhita

In *Uttartantra*, 11 types of *Shiroroga* ^[14] (*Su. Ut. 25/3-4*) and their management are described ^[15] (*Su. Ut. 26/3-11*) given in table 1.

2.8. Ashtanga Sarngraha

Vagbhatta also devotes two chapters of *Uttartantra* to 10 types of *Shiroroga*^[16] and their management.^[17] He further mentioned nine types of diseases of *Shirahkapala*^[18]

He used the word Shirastapa for Shiroroga as in table 2.

2.9. Ashtanga Hridaya

The Ashtanga Hridayakara details the characteristics and ten types of Shiroroga (head disorders) in its 23rd chapter and provides treatment protocols for these conditions in the 24th chapter of the *Uttartantra*. In addition, it describes nine types of Shirahkapala Roga (head and forehead disorders) in the Ashtanga Samgraha.

2.10. Madhava Nidana

Madhavakar in his literature describes 11 types of *Shiroroga* in 60th chapter. He has followed both *Sushruta* and *Charaka* in Classification-which is given in table 3 below.^[19]

2.11. Sharangdhara Samhita^[20]

In the 6th chapter of *Purvakhanda* of *Sharangdhara Samhita*, 10 types of *Shirorogas* are described as per *Ashtanga Hridayakara*.

2.12. Bhavaprakasha

Acharya Bhavamishra identifies 11 types of Shiroroga and their management in the 63rd chapter of Madhyamakhanda.^[21] The authors of Yoga Ratnakara, Gadanigraha, Vangasena, and Harita Samhita have followed the frameworks established by Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata. In Shalakya Tantra, Shiroroga is discussed in detail alongside disorders of the mouth, ears, nose, and eyes. The term Shiroroga encompasses all diseases of the head, a view also adopted by Vagbhatta and his followers.

Certain scholars have associated *Anantavata* with eye diseases. Clinical conditions such as abscesses, tumors, and *granthi* are covered in surgical texts, while minor diseases such as *Arunshika*, *Khalitya*, and *Darunaka* are classified under *Kshudrarogas*. *Sushruta* separately describes *Kshayaja* and *Raktaja Shirahshula*. *Suryavarta*, *Anantavata*, *Ardhavabhedaka*, and *Shankhaka* types of *Shirahshula* are particularly notable. *Charaka* categorizes *Raktaja Shirahshula* under *Pittaja* and *Kshayaja Shirahshula* under *Vataja Shirahshula*, reinforcing the concept that *Shiroroga* primarily refers to headaches. *Madhukosha* and *Chakrapanidatta* similarly describe *Shiroroga* as a headache.

In the 21st century, despite significant advancements in research across various fields, there has been limited investigation into *Vatika Shirahshula*, or tension headaches. This area of study warrants further attention. Notably, a specialized headache clinic has been established in New York City, indicating a growing recognition of the need for specialized care, although further specialization is still needed.

2.13. Synonyms of Shirahshula

Shiroruja, Shiroruk, Shirasantapa etc given in table 4.

2.14. Nidana

The general *Nidana* for *Shiroroga* has been described in *Charaka Samhita, Ashtanga Samgraha, Ashtanga Hridaya, Yoga Ratnakar,* and *Harita Samhia,* while the specific *Nidanas* for *Vatika Shirahshula* have been mentioned in details in *Charaka Samhita* and *Harita Samhita* only. *Sushruta* has mentioned the *Vatika Shirahshula as AnimittaShiroruja.* Here, general causes of *Shiroroga* have been tabulated number 5 as below.

2.15. Rupa of Vatikashirahshula (Symptoms)

Due to the previously mentioned etiological factors, the *Vata dominant Tridosha* gets aggravated and creates following symptoms of *VatikaShirahshula* details given in table 6.^[19,22-24]

The various types of pain resulting from the irregular activity of *Vata* can contribute to the symptoms described. *Charaka* and *vagbhatta* list several specific types of pain, such as *Shankha-nistoda* (pain in the forehead), *Ghatasambheda* (pain as if a pot is being broken), *Bhrumadhyatapanam* (pain in the center of the brows), *LalataTapanam* (pain in the forehead), *Shrotra* and *Akshinishkasanvat Pida* (pain in the ears and eyes), *Sandhimokshana Vat Pida* (pain associated with joint dislocation), *Shiroghurnanam* (pain accompanied by a sensation of the head being crushed), and *Shirajalasphurana* (pain with a sensation of water splashing in the head). These symptoms are recognized in *Charaka* and *Vagbhatta* but are not mentioned in *Sushruta*, *Madhava Nidana*, *Harita*, *Bhava Prakash* (*Uttarkhanda*), *Bangsen*, or *Yog Ratnakara*.

Most Ayurvedic texts, except Vagbhata, mention pain that worsens at night. Vagbhatta uniquely describes the specific symptom Vrishanaruja, which is not noted by other scholars. Additional

symptoms such as *Hanugraha* (pain in the jaw), *Prakashasashyata* (difficulty in light perception), *Ghranastrava* (nasal discharge), and *Achanaka Vyathashamana* (sudden relief of pain) are found exclusively in the *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hridaya. Vagbhatta* includes *Ardhavabhedaka* (pain localized to half the head) as a type of *Vataja Shiroroga*.^[25]

2.16. Samprapti

The pathogenesis of a disease begins with the aggravation of *Doshas*, which results from exposure to etiological factors. Therefore, avoiding these etiological factors is the primary principle of treatment. In this process, *Nidana* (causative factors) act as the efficient cause, *Doshas* serve as the material cause, and the interaction between *Doshas* and *Dushyas* (pathological substances) is the essential cause.

Acharya Charaka^[26] provides a detailed description of the pathogenesis of *Vatika Shiroroga*,^[27] which is not extensively covered in other *Ayurvedic* texts.

2.17. Chikitsa

In the management of *Vataja Shirahshula*, treatments involving both heat (*Ushna*) and cold (Sheet) are utilized. *Ushna Chikitsa* helps reduce *Kapha*, while *Sheet Chikitsa* addresses *Pitta*, thereby allowing *Vata* to move through its natural pathways, which alleviates headache. For *Pittaja Shirahshula*, adhering to regular meal patterns and following proper guidelines while traveling and being exposed to the sun can help reduce excess *Pitta* and thus relieve headache. The same principles apply to *Raktaja Shirahshula*. For *Kaphaja Shirahshula*, *Ushna Chikitsa* is effective in eliminating excess *Kapha* and relieving headache.

For other types of headaches, such as *Ardhavabhedaka*, *Suryavarta*, and *Anantavata*, various treatments including *Nasya*, *Shirolepa*, *Shiroparisheka*, *Shirodhara*, and *Shirobasti* are recommended. In addition to these treatments, *Shiropichu* is highly beneficial as a supportive palliative measure. *Shiropichu*, a form of *Murdhni Tailam*, involves applying oil to the head and is considered the simplest of the four procedures in this category. It falls under *Bahya Snehana Karma* (external oleation), and its efficacy improves with prolonged application, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the treatment.^[28]

2.18. Panchakarma

Brahana Nasya, Murdhni sneha, Shirodhara, Dhumapana, Kawal, Gandush, Taladharan, Netra Tarpana.

2.19. List of Oils that Can be Used for Shiropichun^[2]

- 1. ShuddhaBala Taila (VataRogaShamak)
- 2. KsheerBala Taila (VataShamak)
- 3. BalaAshwagandhadi Taila (PushtikarVataShamak)
- 4. BalaGuduchyadiTaila (RaktanugatVatarogaHar)
- 5. LakshadiTaila (TridoshaShamak)
- 6. Aarnaladi Taila (Daha-PeedaNashak)
- 7. Pinda Taila (Shoolahara)
- 8. Amrutotar Taila (Shirodahanashak)
- 9. Chandanadi Taila (Pitta shamak)
- 10. Mashadi Taila (shiropidashamak)
- 11. Triphaladi Taila (ShirorogaNashak)
- 12. AsanBilwadi Taila (Shiroroga-Karnaroga-Netraroga)
- 13. Manjishthadi Taila
- 14. BalaHathadi Taila (ShiropidaNashak)

- 15. BalaDhatryadi Taila (Shirodaha-NetradahaShamak, Vata Pitta Shaman)
- 16. Tungdrumadi Taila (Shirorog-Netrarog)
- 17. Amrutadi Taila (Shiroroga-Pitta Shaman)
- 18. NeeliNirgundyadi Taila (Kaphashaman)
- 19. NeeliNishadi Taila (Shirorog)
- 20. DurvadiTailaTiladi Taila

3. DISCUSSION

Holistic approaches to *Shirashula* (headaches) in *Ayurveda* involve a many-sided strategy that addresses not just the symptom but also the underlying imbalances in the body and mind. This perspective is rooted in the *Ayurvedic* understanding that headaches can arise from disruptions in the three *dosha-Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*-as well as from imbalances in the body's fundamental energies and natural rhythms.

3.1. Dosha Imbalances and Their Management

In Ayurveda, Shirashula (headaches) are often linked to imbalances in the dosha. For example, Vata-type headaches, often described as dry, dull, or migrainous, are typically associated with dryness and instability. Treatment focuses on grounding and moisturizing therapies. Herbs like Ashwagandha and practices such as Abhyanga (warm oil massage) are used to console Vata and promote stability and hydration. Foods that are warm, oily, and grounding, such as soups and stews, are recommended to balance Vata.

Conversely, *Pitta*-type headaches, characterized by intense, burning pain and irritability, may be attributed to excess heat and acidity in the body. Managing *Pitta* imbalances involves cooling and calming therapies. *Herbal remedies* such as *Brahmi*, which is known for its cooling and soothing properties, and *Shatavari*, which balances *Pitta* and supports overall well-being, are commonly used. In addition, incorporating foods that reduce heat, such as cucumbers, mint, and coconut, can help alleviate symptoms.

3.2. Detoxification and Cleansing

Panchakarma, a cornerstone of Ayurvedic detoxification, is integral in the treatment of chronic headaches. Procedures such as Vamana (therapeutic vomiting) and Virechana (purgation) help eliminate toxins (ama) that may contribute to headache symptoms. Shirodhara, a therapy where warm oil is poured continuously on the forehead, is particularly effective in pacifying the mind and alleviating stress-related headaches. It also enhances blood circulation to the head and provides deep relaxation.

3.3. Daily and Seasonal Routines

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of maintaining regular daily (Dinacharya) and seasonal (Ritucharya) routines to prevent headaches and maintain overall balance. Dinacharya includes practices like waking up early, eating meals at regular times, and getting adequate sleep. Ritucharya involves adjusting one's lifestyle and diet according to seasonal changes to harmonize with nature and avoid seasonal imbalances.

3.4. Stress Management and Mental Wellness

Headaches can often be aggravated by stress and emotional imbalances. *Ayurveda* addresses this through holistic practices such as meditation, *yoga*, and mindfulness. Techniques such as *Pranayama* (breathing exercises) and meditation help manage stress and promote mental

clarity, which can mitigate headache triggers. Yoga poses that enhance relaxation and circulation, such as forward bends and inversions, are also beneficial.

3.5. Personalized Care

Ayurvedic treatment is highly individualized. Practitioners assess a patient's unique constitution (Prakriti), current imbalances (Vikriti), and specific symptoms to tailor treatments accordingly. This personalized approach ensures that all aspects of the patient's health and lifestyle are considered, leading to more effective and sustainable relief from headaches.

In summary, *Ayurvedic* strategies for managing *Shirashula* involve a comprehensive approach that includes balancing *dosha*, utilizing detoxification therapies, adhering to daily and seasonal routines, managing stress, and providing personalized care. By addressing both the immediate symptoms and the root causes of headaches, Ayurveda aims to foster long-term health and equilibrium.

5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of *Panchakarma* treatment for *Sirashula* is marked by a reduction in headache symptoms and improved overall health. The integrated approach of detoxification *(panchkarma procedure)* balancing *doshas*, and stress reduction aims to provide both immediate relief and long-term benefits. A personalized treatment plan, tailored to the individual's specific needs and imbalances, ensures the best possible outcomes in managing *Sirashula*.

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 Table 1: Eleven types of Shiroroga

They are as follows						
1.	Vatika Shiroroga	7.	Krimikrita Shiroroga			
2.	Paittika Shiroroga	8.	Suryavarta			
3.	Kaphaja Shiroroga	9.	Anantavata			
4.	Sannipatika Shiroroga	10.	Ardhavabhedaka			
5.	Raktaja Shiroroga	11.	Shankhaka			
6.	Kshayaja Shiroroga					

Table 2: Ten types of *Shiroroga* are as below

1.	Vatajashirobhitapa	6.	Sarvajashirobhitapa			
2.	Ardhavabhedaka	7.	Krimijashirobhitapa			
3.	Pittaja Shiroroga	8.	Shirahkampa			
4.	Kaphaja shiroroga	9.	Shankhaka			
5.	Raktaja Shiroroga	10.	Suryavarta			
Other nine type						
1.	Upashirshaka	6.	Darunaka			
2.	Shirahpitika	7.	Indralupta			
3.	Shiroarbuda	8.	Khalitya			
4.	ShiroVidradhi	9.	Palitya			
5.	Arunshika					

Table 3: Eleven types of Shiroroga as per Madhav Nidhan

1.	Vataja shiroroga	7.	Krimija shiroroga
2.	Pittaja shiroroga	8.	Suryavarta
3.	Kaphaja shiroroga	9.	Anantavata
4.	Sannipataja shiroroga	10.	Ardhavabhedaka
5.	Raktaja shiroroga	11.	Shankhaka
6.	Kshayaja shiroroga		

 Table 4: Synonyms of shirashula

2 2	
Shiroruja	Shiropida
Shiroruk	Shirovedana
Shirastapa	Shirorti
Shirobhitapa	Shirogada
Murdhasthiruja	Shiroroga

Table 5: General etiological factors of Shiroroga

S. No.	General etiological factors	Cha. Sa.	A.H./A.S.	Y.R.	Harita
1	Vegavarodha (Suppression of natural urges)	+	+	+	+
2	Divasvapa (Day sleep)	+	+	+	-
3	Ratrijagarana (Vigil during night)	+	+	+	-
4	Madya (Alcohol)	+	+	+	-
5	UcchaBhashana (Speaking aloud)	+	+	+	+
6	Avashyaya (exposure to eastern wind)	+	+	+	-
7	Purvivata (exposure to eastern wind)	+	-	-	-
8	Atimaithuna (excess sexual indulgence)	+	+	+	-
9	AsatmyaGandha (undesirable smell)	+	+	+	-
10	Aghata (Injury)	+	-	-	-
11	Raja (exposure of dust)	+	-	-	-
12	Hima (exposure of snowfall)	+	-	-	-
13	Dhuma (exposure to smoke)	+	+	+	-
14	Atapa (exposure to sun & heat)	+	+	+	-
15	Guru Ahara (heavy food)	+	-	-	-
16	AmlaAhara (Sour food)	+	-	-	-
17	HaritaDravyaSevana (Rhizomes)	+	-	-	-
18	AtiShitambuSevana (Excess of cold water)	+	+	+	-
19	Shirobhighata (head injury)	+	-	-	-
20	DushtaAma (vitiated ama)	+	+	+	-
21	Rodana (lamentation)	+	+	+	-
22	AshruvegaNigraha (suppression of tears)	+	+	+	-
23	Meghagama (advent of cloud)	+	-	-	-
24	Manastapa (Mental stress)	+	-	-	-
25	Deshaviparyaya (regimen contrary to locality)	+	-	-	-
26	Kalaviparyaya (regimen contrary to season)	+	-	-	-
27	Utsveda (excess of sudation)	-	+	-	+
28	Krimi (worms)	-	+	+	-
29	Upadhanadvesa (avoidance of pillow)	-	+	+	-
30	Abhyangadvesa (aversion to massage)	-	+	+	+
31	Pratatekshana (constant seeing)	-	+	+	-
32	Utsedha (swelling)	-	-	+	-

Table 6: Rupa of vatika Shirah shula

Vatika Shiroroga	Cha.	Ma. Ni.	<i>A.H.</i> /	Ha.	Bangsena
Symptoms		Su. Sa.	A.S.	Sam.	Bh. Pr. Y. R.
GhataSambheda	+	-	+	-	-
BhrumadhyaTapanam	+	-	+	-	-
LalataTapanam	+	-	+	-	-
ShrotranishkasanavatPida	+	-	+	-	-
AkshinishkasanavatPida	+	-	+	-	-
Shiroghrurnanam	+	-	+	-	-
Sandhimokshana Vat Pida	+	-	+	-	-
Shirostambha	+	-	+	-	-
Shirajalasphurana	+	-	+	-	-
BhavantiTivra Nishi	-	+	-	+	+
KandharaHanugraha	-	-	+	-	-
Prakashasahyata	-	-	+	-	-
Ghranasrava	-	-	+	-	-
Vrishanaruja	-	-	-	+	-
Sudden relieved by it self	-	-	+	-	-