



A Review on Medicinal uses of Sangu (Conch) with Siddha Medicine Perspectives

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Abstract

Traditional medicine has played important role in meeting the demands of primary health care in many developing countries. Siddha medicine uses natural products as raw materials. Siddha Materia medica comprises of plants, metals and minerals and animal products. Sangu (conch) is one of the animal product which was classified under 'Uparasam' by saint Bogar. It is commonly used for Gunmam (peptic ulcer), gastric disturbances etc. This review focuses on the various types of used for purification and processing.

Keywords: Sangu (conch), Uparasam, Siddha, Peptic ulcer.

Introduction

Traditional Medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illnesses. Traditional Medicine has played an important role in meeting the demands of primary health care in many developing countries and its use has expanded widely in many developed countries¹. Siddha system of medicine is one among the ancient traditional medical systems of the world, which still flourishes in South India especially in Tamil Nadu². Siddhar's mastered in alchemy and prepared medicines from plant, metal, mineral and animal kingdom and mainly them for rejuvenation of the body, which will help to maintain healthy body and strong mind and ultimately to attain eight kinds of supernatural powers. The resources of animal kingdom

include the application of leech, tortoise, feathers & egg shell of birds, bones, horns, flesh, fat, hoof, bile, dung, urine of animals, milk and milk products, earth worm, marine sources etc., Marine sources of medicinal products comprise chank, cowries, scallops, oyster shell, pearl, corals etc³.

An introduction to Molluscs:

Man has close relation with molluscs since prehistoric times. The mysterious creation of the nature from marine source fascinated man and with time the man attributed magical and mythical powers to shells and started crafting monuments. The excavation of Stone Age cultures found to contain heaps of discarded shells in kitchen. There exists evidence for the shell trade between Protohistoric Iran and Southern Asia⁴.

They also play a vital role in ecosystem by decomposition of the terrestrial ecosystem and formation of organic detritus in estuaries⁶.

Molluscs constitute an important component of marine biodiversity of India on East, West coasts and Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar islands. It is estimated that number of molluscan species varies between 80,000 and 1,00,000⁵. There are five kinds of Molluscan species found in India. They are Polyplacophora, Gastropoda, Scaphopoda, Bivalvia, Cephalopoda. Out of 586 families found in the world, 279 families were present in India⁷.

Chanks:

The history of chank can be dated back to Indus valley civilization. Chank ornaments were also found in excavations of Mohenjadaro and Harappa. According to Tamil literature, chank cutting industry existed 2000 years ago. Though it declined in Tamil Nadu, it is still a flourishing industry in West Bengal, Orissa and Bangladesh.

Chanks are of commercial importance due to their varied and unique structure, large size and glittering surfaces when polished. They are used as ornaments like bangles, rings, necklaces and a variety of shell crafts. They are also used as amulet against evil eye. With growing demand in our country, they are being exported to Italy, Spain, France and the USA. Major quantity of quality chanks were obtained from Gulf of Mannar.

Chank & Hindu religion:

Chank blowing is a usual custom to announce auspicious, religious and sacred events and also to last rites. It is blown to invoke God at the time of worship. Water poured from a chank is considered as 'holy'⁵.

Vernacular names⁸:

| | |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Tamil | : Sangu, Sankas |
| English | : Conch, Conch shell |
| Sanskrit | : Shankha |
| Ben. | : Sankh |
| Telugu | : Sankhamu |
| Kannada | : Shankha |
| Malayalam | : Sangu |
| Hindi | : Shankha |

Source: Indian Ocean coasts

Types⁵:

There are generally three kinds of chanks, namely the sacred chank of India, the Caribbean chank, the Brazilian chank belonging to a separate species under the genus *Turbinello*.

The Indian chank is distributed from Southeast coast through Sri Lanka to Southwest coast in Kerala and in the Gulf of Kutch, Gujarat. It was also reported from the St. Martin Island, of Bangladesh.

Zoological Classification

| | | |
|------------|---|-------------------|
| Kingdom | : | Animalia |
| Phylum | : | Mollusca |
| Class | : | Gastropoda |
| Family | : | Turbinellidae |
| Sub family | : | Turbinellinae |
| Genus | : | <i>Turbinella</i> |
| Species | : | <i>pyrum</i> |

Morphology of chank:

It has a large, massive, elegant shell with a fine pear-shaped spire and a wide opening or mouth which is prolonged into narrow spout. It has an external lustrous yellowish brown horny layer and beneath it a thick layer, chiefly formed by calcium carbonate⁹.

Valampuri chank

Chanks are characterised by large shells with five texture and colour and highly valued. Normally, the chank shells are formed in a dextral spiral, occasionally shells with a sinistral spiral are also formed. This peculiar type of chank is called as "Valampuri chank". These have a high value and very rarely caught, almost one in a Lakh⁹.

A sinistral chank is very rare and considered very auspicious and deeply venerated by Hindus. *Busycon contrarium* is found very common in Gulf of Mexico and West Florida is imported to India and sold as sacred chank at higher cost⁵.

Biomedical potential:

Therapeutic benefits:

- The shells were used to cure many ailments since many centuries. Molluscan shell is one

of the important raw material for calcium and calcium based industries. It contains 33 to 40% of calcium, of which 90 to 98% occur as calcium carbonate⁵.

- Shell grit is used in production of dental cream, talcum powder, carbide industry⁵.
- Chank powder is a panacea for many illnesses like jaundice, general debility, cough.
- Dried visceral mass is efficient in enlargement of spleen.
- A remedy for blotches, pimples and other skin troubles on the face and body.
- In case of rickets, chank powder mixed with water is rubbed on the breasts.
- Internally given to the acute form of dyspepsia.
- Given for asthma, cough, constipation, shooting pain and inflammatory conditions in joints.
- Used in head ache, general debility and eye diseases.
- Institutes like National Institute of Oceanography in Goa, Central Drug Research Institute in Lucknow, Bose Institute of Oceanography in Kolkata are concerned with development of marine medicinal products¹⁰.

Purification methods of conch:

Method 1¹¹:

Take 35gms (1 palam) of conch shell and 175 g of juice of *Euphorbia ligularia* (*Ilaikalli*) and dry in sun light (whole day). Repeat the process next day also and for three more days. Then it is washed to get purified.

Method 2:

The conch is buried in lime stone, slaked and taken out after washing to get it purified.

Method 3:

Take equal quantities of lime stone and fuller's earth and add eight times water. Put the conch into it and boil well to get it purified.

Method 4¹²:

Conch shell is soaked in cow's butter milk for seven days and then washed.

Method 5¹³:

Conch shell is broken into small pieces and boiled well in cow's milk.

Preparation Sangu parpam:

Method 1:

Sangu purified with limestone is made as Parpam if buried in the leaf paste of *Daemia extensa*.

Dosage: upto 260 mgs

Adjuvant: Ghee

Indications: Cough, piles, stomach diseases, enlarged tonsils, chest pain, vayu, gunmam etc.,

Method 2:

Break the conch into pieces and soak in the juice of *Phyllanthus niruri* (*Keezha nelli*) for three days and subject to puda process using clay smeared ribbons in an earthen ware and cow dung cakes.

Dosage: 244 to 488 mg, twice a day.

Adjuvant: Ghee

Indication: Acute heart diseases, burning sensation in chest, chest pain, dysuria and leucorrhoea.

Method 3:

If the paste of lotus leaf is applied on the purified conch for one day and dried in sunlight with puda process, it will be a fine Parpam.

Dosage: 244 to 488 mgs. twice a day.

Adjuvant: Ghee

Indications: Eye diseases and pitha diseases.

Siddha Medicines containing conch:

Vellai maathirai, Agnikumara maathirai¹⁴, Agnisoonu rasam¹⁴, Kalyana rasam, Sannibadha kulandhaga rasam, Kan kaasa maathirai, Thurusu maathirai¹⁵, Naga sangu parpam¹⁶, Linga chendooram¹⁶, Puzhuvettu parigaram¹⁶ etc.,

Scientific validation of conch:

Literature scanning reveals the study on standardization of Sangu parpam using infrared spectrum¹⁷ and anti inflammatory activity¹⁸ of sangu parpam in animal model.

Further, one more study to compare the anti ulcer effect of the same drug with Silasathu parpam in animal model was attempted and it proved the anti ulcer effect of the drug¹⁹.

A prospective randomized controlled clinical trial reveals the higher therapeutic potential of calcined conch prepared from lemon juice for GERD²⁰.

Conclusion

This review clearly enumerates the intimate relation between man and the conch shell. It is used for rituals to therapeutics. Marine medical products are enriched with calcium and they are used for many ailments. Though traditional Siddha medicine proclaim many medicinal uses of conch, scientific studies regarding the standardization, safety and efficacy of the drug has to be conducted to reach the global community.

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