



Karna Purana and Varti in the Management of Tinnitus (Karnanada)

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Abstract

Tinnitus, referred to as *Karnanada* in Ayurveda, is characterized by the perception of sound in the ears without an external auditory stimulus. Conventional medical approaches often provide symptomatic relief but lack curative measures. Ayurveda offers a holistic understanding of *Karnanada* as a manifestation of *Vata dosha* imbalance in the *Urdhva Jatru Pradesha*. Classical treatments such as *Karna Purana* (instillation of medicated oil into the ear) and *Karna Varti* (application of medicated wick) are described in Ayurvedic literature for various ear disorders including *Karnanada*. This review explores the Ayurvedic concepts, formulations, mechanisms of action, and contemporary clinical correlations of *Karna Purana* and *Varti* in the management of tinnitus. The aim is to assess their therapeutic potential and relevance in modern clinical practice through the analysis of classical references, pharmacological properties of ingredients, and recent studies.

Keywords: *Karnanada*, tinnitus, *Karna Purana*, *Karna Varti*, *Vata Vyadhi*, Ayurveda, *Shalaky Tantra*, ear disorders

Introduction

Tinnitus affects up to 15% of the global population, with a higher prevalence in older adults and those with noise exposure or sensorineural hearing loss. It can range from mild disturbances to severe psychological distress, impairing sleep and quality of life (1,2). While modern medicine classifies it as either objective or subjective, with various underlying aetiologies, treatment options often remain limited to sound therapy, pharmacological agents (e.g., GABA analogs), and counselling.

Ayurveda describes tinnitus under the term *Karnanada*, categorized as a *Vataja Karna Roga* in *Urdhwajatrugata* diseases. *Vata dosha* governs sensory functions, and its aggravation in the *karna marma* (vital point in the ear) disrupts the normal transmission of *nada* (sound), leading to abnormal perceptions (3,4). Classical therapies like *Karna Purana* and *Varti* aim to pacify *Vata*, nourish the auditory pathways, and restore the equilibrium of *doshas*.

Pathophysiology of *Karnanada* in Ayurveda

Classical View

- *Karnanada* is listed among 28 types of *Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhis* (5).
- The *vitiated Vata* in *Shringataka marma*, connected to *karna*, creates spurious sounds.
- The symptoms include perception of various sounds (buzzing, humming, ringing), discomfort, and emotional disturbance.

Srotas Involved

- *Pranavaha srotas*, *Nadivaha srotas*, and *Majjavaha srotas* are involved in the manifestation of *Karnanada*.
- *Vata dushti* causes blockage or irregular flow in these *srotas*, disturbing auditory processing.

Modern Understanding of Tinnitus

Modern medicine defines tinnitus as the perception of sound without external stimuli. It may be:

- Subjective tinnitus: perceived only by the patient.
- Objective tinnitus: rare, caused by actual sound sources within the body.

Etiologies include:

- Sensorineural hearing loss
- Otologic infections
- Acoustic trauma
- Neurological conditions
- Ototoxic drugs (6)

Therapies include:

- Masking devices
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Benzodiazepines or antiepileptics
- Sound retraining

However, most treatments focus on symptom management rather than addressing the root cause.

Review of *Karna Purana*

Karna Purana is a classical procedure in which medicated oil is instilled into the ear canal. Described in detail by Acharya Sushruta, it is indicated for ear pain, tinnitus, deafness, and stiffness of the jaw (7).

Common Oils Used

Taila	Properties and Indications
<i>Kshirabala taila</i>	<i>Vatahara</i> , nervine tonic, used in <i>Karnanada</i> and <i>Badhirya</i>
<i>Bilva taila</i>	Antimicrobial, <i>Kaphahara</i> , reduces discharge and pain
<i>Nirgundi taila</i>	Anti-inflammatory, analgesic
<i>Dashamoola taila</i>	Balancing <i>tridosha</i> , indicated in neuralgia

Mechanism of Action (Pharmacodynamics)

- Lubricates and nourishes *srotas*
- Pacifies localized *Vata*
- Reduces nerve hypersensitivity
- Improves blood flow in the tympanic membrane area
- Has mild analgesic and anti-inflammatory effects (8,9)

Karna Varti

Karna Varti refers to the insertion of a medicated wick into the ear. It is used in conditions like discharge, tinnitus, and itching (10).

Types of *Varti* and Ingredients

- *Panchaguna Varti*: includes *Haridra*, *Triphala*, *Nimba*, *Daruharidra*, *Guggulu*
- *Yashtimadhu Varti*: soothing, anti-inflammatory
- *Varti* can be prepared with *kwatha* or *kalka* of herbs and inserted after drying.

Actions

- Provides sustained drug release in the ear canal
- Acts as *lekhana*, *shothahara*, and *vatahara*
- Removes blockages and maintains patency of *srotas*
- Aids in drying excess *kleda* and *srotoshuddhi* (11)

Pharmacological Correlation of Key Herbs

Herb	Action	Modern Findings
<i>Bala</i>	<i>Balya, Vatahara, Rasayana</i>	Neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory (12)
<i>Dashamoola</i>	<i>Tridoshaghna, Vata-nashaka</i>	Antioxidant, antineuralgic, immunomodulator (13)
<i>Yashtimadhu</i>	<i>Shothahara, Sandhaniya, Ropana</i>	Corticosteroid-like action, soothing
<i>Nimba</i>	<i>Kledahara, Kusthaghna</i>	Antibacterial, antifungal
<i>Guggulu</i>	<i>Lekhana, Shothahara, Rasayana</i>	Anti-inflammatory, lipid-lowering

Clinical and Experimental Evidence

While large-scale RCTs on *Karna Purana* and *Varti* for tinnitus are lacking, some published studies support their utility:

1. Singh et al. (2021) observed that *Kshirabala taila Karna Purana* in 30 tinnitus patients showed 60% reduction in VAS score (14).
2. Gopalakrishna et al. (2020) documented improvement in hearing discomfort and sleep quality with *Dashamoola taila Karna Purana* (15).
3. Patanjali Ayurved Hospital (case series, 2022): Combined therapy of *Purana* and *Varti* improved THI scores in 75% of patients.

These results indicate a promising scope for integrating these therapies with modern otological practices.

Discussion

Karna Purana and *Varti* work on the core Ayurvedic principle of addressing *Vata vitiation*. Unlike modern masking devices or temporary pharmacologic sedatives, Ayurvedic treatment aims to reverse the pathogenesis.

Their benefits include:

- Non-invasive, safe approach
- Holistic relief in both tinnitus and associated conditions like anxiety or insomnia
- Sustainable results with fewer relapses
- Cost-effectiveness, especially important in rural and low-resource settings

Challenges include standardization of procedures, oil quality, and absence of large-scale evidence.

Conclusion

The management of *Karnanada* through *Karna Purana* and *Karna Varti* offers a time-tested, holistic approach that aligns with the understanding of tinnitus in Ayurveda. Current evidence, though preliminary, supports their safety and efficacy. Further clinical trials, pharmacological validation, and cross-disciplinary studies will help establish their role as integrative tools in auditory medicine.

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