

CONCEPT OF VISHA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Right from the beginning poison is a subject that has fascinated human beings. Poison has been a challenge and threat to well being, even existence of life. Poison which may be natural or artificial, animate or inanimate have different actions on the body ranging from simple uneasiness to death. Persons who have no direct contact with poisons, sometimes doubt that poison has somehow entered into the body and this feeling itself is capable of producing symptoms at time similar with poisoning because of its dreadful nature. Ayurveda also gives due importance to poisons and poisoning, their source, effects, prognosis, management and complications. Poisons of defective potency such as artificial poison (*Garavisha*), Latent poison (*Dooshivisha*) and effects of polluted air; atmosphere, water etc are being dealt with in detail in

one among the eight branches of Ayurveda i.e. toxicology (*Agadatantra*). Ayurvedic *Vishatantra* deals with some unique concepts like *vega*, *vegantara*, *visha adhusthana* etc. Knowledge about these concepts will be helpful in research and enrichment of science. This article is an attempt to disseminate the concept of poison (*Visha*) in ayurveda to other fraternity of science.

KEYWORDS: *Visha*, Poison.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the most ancient systems of life, health and cure which dates back to pre-Vedic era and has withstood umpteen challenges through its way to the present era of modernization and allied medical sciences. Through these ages, its highly codified system of life and health science based on its own unique and original concepts and fundamental

principles have never changed. Its applicability and practicability have survived through its *Ashtangas*.

Among the *Ashtangas*, *Agadatantra* stands separate in its concept, clinical approach, management and result right from the days of its inception. It is *Visha Gara vairodhika prashamana* in its concept, clinically approached as an *Agantuja vyadhi*, patient with *visha* is to be managed as a house on fire, earlier its extinguished, lesser the damage, and the result for the effort of *Vaidya* is immediate when compared to the other disorders. Ayurvedic toxicology (*Agadatantra*) had developed various concepts regarding acute poisoning, environmental pollution, incompatibilities of food and regimen and even notions of immunity and allergy. It studies both extrinsic and intrinsic poisons. It also deals with the effects of poisonous substances, both animate and inanimate and their treatment.

Agadatantra is classified into two i.e. rational toxicology (*vishavaidya*) and psychological toxicology (*visha vidya*). *Visha vaidya* is the method of treating poisoning by using antidotes whereas *Visha vidya* is the methodology adopted to eliminate the effect of toxins from the body by using *mantars*. Excerpts of *Agadathantra* is found in various scriptures and *Puranas*. *Atharva Veda* has described poisons and detoxification methods in several hymns.

The fame of *Agadathantra* was not confining to the boundaries of India only, but it was propagated miles away even to Greece and Arabia. History states that Alexander the Great took with him the toxicologists (*Visha vaidyas*) of India to take advantage of this system to the benefit of his people.

Poison is defined as any substance taken into or formed in the body that destroys life or impairs health. Knowledge on the origin, development and toxicity manifestations of accumulated poisons (endogenous or exogenous) and suitable remedial measures are an integral part of health.

Derivation

The term *Visha* is originated from the Sanskrit *dhatu* “*vish*^[1]” which denotes the spreading nature of *visha*. Another derivation is “*Visha vipryoge*” which shows the capacity of *visha* to derange the body and mind.

Definition

According to acharya Sushruta the substance that causes sadness (*vishada*) is termed as *visha*.^[2]

The substance that enters the body (systemically or locally) creates disturbance among the smooth functioning of the *rasadi dhathus* and culminates either ill health or death is called *visha*.^[3]

Acharya Charaka has defined *visha* as 'that which has its origin from *Ambu*, having ten *gunas* and twenty four *upakramas*.^[4]

In Sushruta Samhita another myth is given as *visha* originated from the wrath of Lord *Brahma*.^[5]

Visha can be defined as a substance, by virtue of its eleven *gunas*, can act against the *Ojus* and takes away the life of a person immediately with predominance of *vata* and *pitta dosha*.^[6]

Mythological origin of Poison

There are three different stories regarding origin of *visha*.

1. As per Charak samhita & Astanga hridaya-Once upon a time, Gods and demons (*Devas* and *Asuras*) churned the ocean of milk to bring up ambrosia (*amrita*), the divine potion for eternal life. A horrible creature, resembling a man arose from the sea. It had four large curved canine teeth (*damshtra*), green hairs and the body emitting fierce fire. The mere appearance of poison cast a deep shadow of gloom to the universe. The sorrow created by the creature gave it the name *Visha*.^[7] Lord Brahma dispersed and dispatched this creature to inanimate (*sthavara*) and animate (*jangama*.) substrata by uttering 'Hum' sound. According to Chakrapani sorrow is generated by it and hence the name *Visha*.

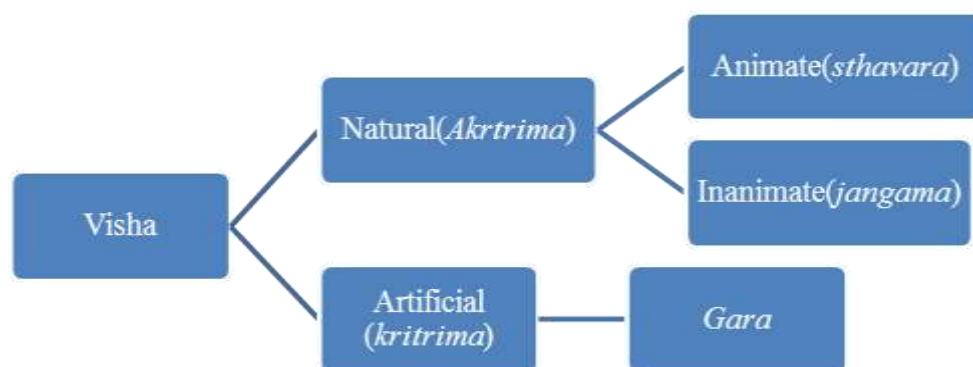
2. As per Sushruta samhita-While Lord Brahma was engaged in the process of creation, the task was hindered and obstructed by a demon (*asura*) known as Kaitabha, Brahma was angered and his wrath, personified fought, defeated and killed Kaitabha. Dissatisfied even by death of its enemy, wrath grew fast and engulfed the universe causing oppression to creations. To relieve them Brahma dispersed the wrath to animate and inanimate poisons.^[8]

3. As per Rasa ratna samuchaya- Gods, devils, *gandharva*, *yaksha*, *kinraragana* etc. decided to churn the ocean of milk by using Snake as a rope, during churning due to over tiredness of Snake (*Nagaraja*) and as well as wound occurs to *Mandarachala* hill, a fiery flame occurs, from this *Kalakoota* originates, by looking this the whole world become distress and approaches Lord Shiva and requested to do something. Lord Shiva drank the whole

Kalakoota visha; the residue of this (*visha*) got settled in few roots, leaves, soil, water, rhizomes, minerals etc.^[9]

Classification of visha

1. Based on Astanga hridaya the primary classification of poison is *Krithrima* (artificial) and *Akrithrima* (natural). *Krithrima visha* is *Garavisha*. *Akrithrima* is again divided into *Sthavara* (inanimate) and *Jangama* (animate). *Sthavara visha* are vegetable and mineral toxins. *Jangama visha* includes snakes, spiders, and rats etc.^[10]



2. Mahrshi Sushruta endorsed the view that primary classification of poison is as Inanimate (*sthavara*) & Animate (*jangama*)^[11]

3. Acharya Charak classified the poison to three main head as Inanimate (*sthavara*), Animate (*jangama*) & artificial (*gara/samjagoja*)^[12]

4. *Visha* and *Upavisha*.^[13]

Site of Inanimate (*sthavara*) poison^[14]

Sthavara (vegetable and mineral) has ten abodes such as root (*moola*), leaf (*patra*), flower (*pushpa*), fruit (*phala*), bark (*tvak*), hard wood or pith (*sara*) exudates or gum (*niryasa*), sap (*ksheera*), mineral ores (*dhatu*) rhizomes tubers (*kandha*).

Site of Animate (*Jangama*) poison^[15]

Sites of *Jangama visha* are sixteen such as sight (*drushti*), breathing (*nisvasa*), touch (*sparsa*), tusk, canine teeth (*damshttra*), mouth or teeth (*mukha*), nails, claws (*nakha*), bone (*asthi*), urine (*mootra*), excreta (*pureesha*), semen (*sukra*), menstrual blood (*arthava*), saliva (*lala*), hair (*roma*) bristle, stings (*sooka*) bile (*pitha*) and dead body (*sava*).

Properties of *Visha* (Poison)^[16]

All poisons are having ten qualities, eight *vegās*, and their ill effects can be treated by twenty-four types of modalities.

Guna (properties) is defined as “*Samavayi to nischesta karnam gunah*”. *Guna* by itself is inactive. It becomes active when it is associated with *dravyas* for the purpose of producing action.

Table No I. Properties of *Visha*

Properties	C.Ch. ^[17]	S.K. ^[18]	A.S. ^[19]	A.H. ^[20]	Sh. S ^[21]
<i>Rooksha</i> – Dry	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Ushna</i> – Hot	+	+	+	+	<i>Agneya</i>
<i>Teekshna</i> – Sharp	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Sukshma</i> – Minute	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Aashukaree</i> – Quick action	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Vyavayee</i> – Spreading without digestion	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Vikasee</i> – Muscle relaxant	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Vishada</i> – Clear	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Laghu</i> – Light	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Apakee</i> – Indigestible	-	+	+	+	-
<i>Avaktarasa</i> – Undifferentiated taste	-	-	+	+	-
<i>Anirdeshya rasa</i> – Undetectable taste	+	-	-	-	-
<i>Chedi</i>	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Madavaha</i>	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Yogavahi</i>	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Jivithahara</i>	-	-	-	-	+

Mechanism of action of poison^[22, 23]

Poison whether natural or artificial possesses ten properties, and performs different functions because of its ten properties.

Rooksha → Vitiates *Vata*

Ushna → Vitiates *Pitta* and Blood

Teekshna → Affects the functions of brain and deranges vital points

Sookshma → Gains entry to all organs of the body and damages their functions

Ashukaree → Kills fast

Vyavayee → Adversely affects the basic constitution without digestion

Vikasee → Deranges structure and debilitates functions of *Doshas*, *Dhatus* and *Malas*

Vishada → Easy spread all over the body

Laghu → Difficult to treat as it can spread without digestion

Apakee → Since it indigestible, elimination from the body by purgation, emesis etc, is not possible

Anirdeshya rasa → Capable of vitiating the *Kapha* and it aids the spread of poison through the essence of food (*annarasa*)

Pathogenesis (*Samprapthi*)

Poison which enters into the body either by oral route or by parenteral route primarily affects *rakta dhatu*, vitiating *kapha*, *pitta*, *vata doshas* along with their *ashayas*, then finally reaches heart^[24] (*hridaya*). However, course of spreading takes a very short duration because of *ashukari* and *vyavayi* properties. Blood is an important medium for rapid spread of poison.^[25]

In Sushruta Kalpasthana it is mentioned that in poison all the properties are in *tiksna* form and hence it vitiates all the *doshas*. These *doshas* after vitiation leaves their natural property and hence cannot digest the *visha*. And, because of vital centers regulating respiration etc. gets enveloped due to the deranged *kapha*, the patient becomes comatose. Life remains hidden in his body, but his sensory and motor functions are apparently absent.^[26]

Visha v/s *Ojus*

The properties of *vishas* are opposite to that of *ojus*.^[27] Since the *ojus* is the vital force for the existence of life in the body, its destruction causes termination of life from the body.^[28]

Table No.II. *Visha* v/s *Ojus*

<i>Visha</i>	<i>Ojus</i>
<i>Laghu</i> (Light)	<i>Guru</i> (Heavy)
<i>Rooksha</i> (Rough)	<i>Snigdha</i> (Unctous)
<i>Ushna</i> (Hot)	<i>Sheeta</i> (cool)
<i>Tiksna</i> (Sharpness)	<i>Mrudu</i> (Soft)
<i>Sookshma</i> (Minuteness)	<i>Bahala</i> (Viscous)
<i>Ashukari</i> (Quick acting)	<i>Prasada</i> (Clear)
<i>Vyavayi</i> (Quick absorbed)	<i>Stihira</i> (Stabla)
<i>Avyakta rasa</i> (Tasteless)	<i>Madhura</i> (Sweet)
<i>Vikasi</i> (Muscle relaxant)	<i>Slakshna</i> (Smooth)
<i>Vishada</i> (Non slimy)	<i>Picchila</i> (Slimy)

Vegas and *Vegantaras*

There are seven *dhatu*s in the human body. Each of the seven *dhatu*s (tissues) are separated by a membrane (*Kalaa*). While traversing each membrane *visha* creates a phase known as *Vega*. In other way we can say the saptadhatu are contained in cisterns bordered by (*Kalaa*) membrane. *Visha*, in its effort to spread through tissues pass through the membrane and

enters the *saptadhatu*s produces seven *Vega*. Situated in a *dhatu*, *visha* precipitates certain specific symptoms.^[29]

Poison takes some time to enter from the former *dhatu* to the latter. This time period is termed as *Vegantaras*. *Vata* is the *dosha* facilitating this movement. Not only in human beings, *Visha vega* are also found in Birds and Animals. In animals the phases of poison are four and in the birds the phases of poison are three in number. Seven *vegas* are accepted by majority of the Acharyas, but Acharya Punarvasu says that they are eight in numbers.^[30]

General treatment of Poisoning^[31]

General treatment of poisoning is based on the *dosha* involved. Acharya Charaka has described twenty-four therapeutic measures. Treatment is also done based on stages and symptoms.

The twenty-four methods of therapy are

1. *Mantra* - Chanting of Hymns
2. *Aristabandhana* - Ligation / Bandage
3. *Utakartana* - Incision
4. *Nishpeedana* - Pressing or compression
5. *Choosana* - Suction
6. *Agni* - Cauterization
7. *Parisheka* - Irrigation
8. *Avagaha* - Immersion bath
9. *Raktamokshana* - Blood letting
10. *Vamana* - Therapeutic Emesis
11. *Vireka* - Therapeutic Purgation
12. *Upadhaana* - Application of medicine/fresh flesh on head after incision
13. *Hridayavarana* - Protecting and stimulating the heart
14. *Anjana* - Collyrium
15. *Nasya* - Nasal medication
16. *Dhoopana* - Medicated fumigation
17. *Leha* - Consumption of lick able preparations
18. *Oushadha* - Medicines
19. *Prasamana* - Removal of residual poison
20. *Pratisarana* - Dusting of medicated powder

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 21. <i>Prativisha</i> | - | Administration of poison / antidotes |
| 22. <i>Samjnasansthapana</i> | - | Revival of consciousness |
| 23. <i>Lepa</i> | - | Coating |
| 24. <i>Mritasanjeevana</i> | - | Revival of the apparently dead |

Use of *Prativisha* (counter poison) is based on the opposing action of animate and inanimate poison. In animate poison, inanimate poison is used as *prativisha* and vice versa.^[32] When the effect of poison does not subside by curative hymns and administration of drugs, *prativisha* should be given after the lapse of 5th phase and before the lapse of 7th phase.^[33]

As per Acharya Vagabhat, the wise physician should determine the appropriate treatment only after considering the nature, accustomisation, season, location, stage, strength and weakness of the poison and the patient. Poison of *kapha* nature should be mitigated by emesis and application of paste of drugs possessing hot, dry and penetrating properties and by foods of astringent, pungent and bitter taste. Poison of *pitta* nature should be mitigated by mild purgation, application of paste with cold qualities, with foods of astringent, pungent and bitter tastes. Poison of *vata* nature should be pacified by foods which are sweet, unctuous, sour, salty and added with ghee, application of paste of similar qualities on skin and eating meat as food.^[34]

Poisoning complication^[35] (*Visha Upadrava*)

There are sixteen poisoning complications or secondary diseases of persons affected by poison are described as fever, cough, vomiting, dyspnoea, hiccup, severe thirst, fainting, diarrhea, hard faeces, flatulence, pain in the bladder and head, swelling, bad smell, bleeding and aggravation of *vata* by poison.

Prognosis of Poisoning^[36]

Poison which has got localized in the seat of *kapha* is curable even without much treatment but that localized in the seat of *pitta* is curable with great effort and that localized in the seat of *vata* is either very difficult to cure even with great effort or not curable at all.

Features of recovery from the poisoning^[37]

- Balance of *Doshas* & *Dhaatus*
- Restoration of appetite, luster and skin color
- Normal evacuation of urine & faeces

- Clarity of mind
- Proper functioning of sense organs

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