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A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF *SARPA VIJNANA* AS DESCRIBED IN *VISHA VAIDYA VIJNANA*

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Sarpa Vijnana* is an important aspect of *Agada Tantra*, dealing with the classification and characteristics of snakes and various features related to snakebite. The availability of classical literature exclusively for *Agada Tantra* is limited and *Visha Vaidya Vijnana*, a tulu translated book provides a comprehensive account of these aspects. Hence a conceptual review of this work was undertaken to highlight its contribution to the existing knowledge of Ayurvedic toxicology. **Aim**: To review the concepts of *Sarpa Vijnana* described in *Visha Vaidya Vijnana*. **Materials and Methods:** Relevant information regarding the classification of *Vamshastha, Naage, Kadambale and Kandhodi Sarpa*, along with their varieties, types of fang, reproductive characteristics, movement, age determination, prognosis of bite and snakebite wounds, was collected and analysed. **Conclusion:** *Visha Vaidya Vijnana* provides a valuable classical knowledge on *Sarpa Vijnana*. A review of these concepts may help to explore their relevance in relation to contemporary science.

KEYWORDS: *Sarpa Vijnana*, *Visha Vaidya Vijnana*, *Sarpa*, Snakebite, *Agada Tantra.*

INTRODUCTION

Snakes have occupied an important place in the field of toxicology since ancient times, owing to the serious consequences associated with their bites. *Agada Tantra* is one of the eight

branches of *Ayurveda*, dealing with the prevention, diagnosis, and management of poisoning from animate and inanimate sources. Among its various domains, *Sarpa Vijnana*, the science of snakes, occupies a significant place owing to the clinical importance of snakebite and deals with the identification, classification, and characteristics of snakes, along with features related to their venom and bite.

Compared with other branches of *Ayurveda*, dedicated classical literature on *Agada Tantra* is relatively limited. Therefore, regional texts preserving the traditional knowledge of toxicology serve as a valuable supplementary sources for understanding various aspects of *Sarpa Vijnana*. *Visha Vaidya Vijnana*, a Tulu-translated text, is one such work that provides detailed descriptions of snakes and snakebite.

Visha Vaidya Vijnana provides detailed descriptions of different groups of snakes, including *Vamshastha*, *Naage*, *Kadambale* and *Kandhodi*, along with their distinguishing features. It also elaborates on the types of fangs, the concept of *devatas(God)* associated with specific fangs, signs produced by bites from different fangs, oviparity, age determination, the movement (*Sanchara*) of *Darvikara* (Cobra) *Sarpa*, factors influencing the quantity and potency of venom, snakebite wounds, prognostic features (*Sadhya-Asadhyata*), and *Marana Lakshana* (Fatal signs).

An evaluation of these descriptions may help in understanding the depth of classical knowledge regarding snakes. Hence, the present review aims to analyse *Sarpa Vijnana* as described in *Visha Vaidya Vijnana*.

About the book

The book '*Visha Vaidya Vijnana*' is the Tulu translated version of the Malyalam manuscript '*Visha Vaidya*', collected by Aakaavil Kunjiraman in 1800 containing 23 contents, published by 'Times of Kudla Tulu Patrike', Beauty Plaza, 3rd floor, Balmata road, Mangalore. Among 23 contents, 4th content explains about 5th content explains about, 8th content explains about

METHODOLOGY

The contents included under methodology is given below in tabular form.

Table no. 1: Included contents.

1.Family and classification of snake
2. Classification of fangs

3.Oviparity of snake
4.Age determination of snake
5. *Sanchara of Darvikara Sarpa*
6. Factors affecting the quantity and potency of venom
7. The prognostic feature of Snake bite wound
8. Sadhya and *Asaadhya* based on fang
9. Marana Lakshana

1. Family and classification of snake

The 8th content in *Visha Vaidya Vijnana* named **"*Sarpa Vamsha Bokka Ayta Vibhago*** (Family and classification of snake)**"**[1] explains about the classification of snake, description regarding the family of snake, Oviparity of snake and snake bite wound.

Types of *Vamshastha Sarpa* (Lineage based snakes)

Vamshastha Sarpa can be referred to as lineage based snakes/ *Divya sarpa*. There are 8 *Vamshastha Sarpa* with two varieties originating from each *vamsha* (lineage) and resulting in a total of four *vamsha* (lineage). These *Vamshastha sarpa* are originated by *Kaarnika Udhbava* (Divine origin). These snakes has no death and are stated to be immortal.The features of these snakes are explained below.

Table no. 2: Types of *Vamshastha Sarpa (*Lineage based snakes).

Sl.no	Types of *Sarpa*	*Vamsha*	Features
1.	*Anantha*	*Agni*	Fiery coloured body, with **1000** hood having *chakra rekha* (wheel like), sharp eyesight.
2.	*Gulika*	*Agni*	Fiery coloured body, with **1000** hood having *chakra rekha* (wheel like), dreadful look, sharp sound is emitted during respiration.
3.	*Takshaka*	*Vaayu*	Black coloured body, with **500** hood having *chatri rekha*(umbrella shaped),fivedots in head with *Shoola rekha* (*Trishoola* / Trident) and has vision in the right side.
4.	*Mahapadma*	*Vaayu*	Black coloured body, with **500** hood having *chatri rekha* (umbrella shaped), 3 lines in it's tongue, *Bilwa (Aegle marmelos* (L). Correa ex Roxb.*)* flower like Resemblance in head which is in black colour.
5.	*Vasuki*	*Indra*	Yellow coloured body, with 100 hood having *Laangula* (tail) sign, *Swasti rekha(Swastika* sign) and has vision in the left side.
6.	*Shankapaala*	*Indra*	Yellow coloured body, with 100 hood having Laangula (tail) sign, *rekha* resembling *shankha* (Conch shell) in head.
7.	*Padma*	*Varuna*	White coloured body, with 300 hood, Padma(lotus) rekha in head, it will be mooving it's tail continuously.

8.	*Karkotaka*	*Varuna*	White coloured body, with 300 hood, having *Ardha Chandra rekha* (half moon) in its tongue.

Types of *Naage (Dharvikara sarpa/* Indian Cobra snake)

The tulu word *Naaga* can be referred to as *Dharvikara sarpa/* Indian Cobra. According to '*Visha Vaidya Vijnana*' there are 26 *Darvikara Sarpa*. The tabular representation below gives the names of Types of *Dharvikara*.

Table no. 3: Types of *Naaga (Dharvikara sarpa/* Indian Cobra snake).

sl.no	Types	sl.no	Types
1.	*Krishna*	14.	*Nitthiri*
2.	*Shwetha*	15.	*Parisarpaka*
3.	*Shankapaala*	16.	*Vichitra kusuma*
4.	*Kakodara*	17.	*Vatakarna*
5.	*Mahakarna*	18.	*Akhanda*
6.	*Mahapadma*	19.	*Chaarakarna*
7.	*Kulasthaka*	20.	*Valaahaka*
8.	*Giri karna*	21.	*Kapothadashta*
9.	*Mahavardhaka*	22.	*Dharbhapushpa*
10.	*Kundhinaasa*	23.	*Lohitha*
11.	*Kukkuta*	24.	*Bhrukutimukha*
12.	*Harvakrishna*	25.	*Veshadhu*
13.	*Trinashosha*	26.	*Mahasarpa*

Types of *Kadambale* (*Rajimantha sarpa* /Krait snake)

The tulu word *Kadambale* can be referred to as *Rajimantha sarpa/* Krait snake. According to '*Visha Vaidya Vijnana*' there are 13 types of *Rajimantha Sarpa*. The tabular representation below gives the information about the Types of Kadambale/ *Rajimantha sarpa***.**

Table no. 4: Types of *Kadambale* (*Rajimantha* sarpa / Krait snake).

Sl.no	Type	Sl.no	Type
1.	*Pundarika*	8.	*Kaala*
2.	*Ahiraja*	9.	*Shwetahatva*
3.	*Chitraka*	10.	*Lohithaksha*
4.	*Kardhama*	11.	*Chakraka*
5.	*Trinashosha*	12.	*Krithanaada*
6.	*Sarshapa*	13.	*Krishnaraja*
7.	*Lodhra pushpa*		

Types of *Kandhodi* (*Mandali sarpa* / Viper snake)

The tulu word *Kandhodi* can be referred to as *Mandali sarpa* / Viper snake. According to '*Visha Vaidya Vijnana*' there are 16 types of *Mandali Sarpa* .The tabular representation below gives the information about the Types of *Kandhodi*.

Table no. 5: Types of *Kandhodi* (*Mandali sarpa* / Viper snake).

Sl.no	Type	Sl.no	Type
1.	*Kushta*	9.	*Netther (Blood variety)*
2.	*White variety*	10.	*Theekshna*
3.	*Visarpa*	11.	*Shosha*
4.	*Peeta Netra*	12.	*Krishna*
5.	*Kutila*	13.	*Maha*
6.	*Raaga*	14.	*Pisacha*
7.	*Hema*	15.	*Bhrama*
8.	*Kumbha*	16.	*Soochi*

1. Classification of fangs

The 4th content of *Visha Vaidya Vijnana* named "***Visha Ucchuleda Koolida Vidhakulu*** **(**Types of fangs in poisonous snakes**)"**[2] explains about the type of fang, location of fang, Devata (Divine entity) residing in particular fang and signs of wound caused by particular fang. All these features are explained below in tabular representation.

Table no. 6: Classification of fangs.

Sl.no	Type of Fang	Location	Devata residing	Signs of wound
1.	*Karaali*	Left side of *mukha* (mouth)	*Bramha*	**Shape** of the wound resembles the dorsal part of cow's hoof. **Smell** of the wound resembles the eagle or buffalo
2.	*Makari*	Left side of *mukha* (mouth)	*Kaali*	**Shape** of the wound resembles the arrow. **Smell** of the wound resembles the oil.
3.	*Kaalaratri*	Right side of *mukha* (mouth)	*Yama*	**Shape** of the wound resembles the bird's feet. **Smell** of the wound resembles the sandalwood.
4.	*Yamadhoothi*	Right side of *mukha* (mouth)	*Vaayudeva*	Swelling and bluish discoloration is seen in the site of wound. **Smell** of the wound resembles the milk.

2. Oviparity of Snake

Snakes mate during *Karkaataka* (later half of July -Early half of August), *Shravana* (Mid july- late August), *Bhadrapadha (*late August - late september) month. After 120 days of fertilization it will lay 21 eggs. Eggs may be red, yellow or both mixed colour. Based on the colour of egg the gender can be decided, that is, red colour indicates female, yellow indicates male and mixed colour indicates transgender. Till 15 days after laying egg, the mother snake will protect the eggs and after 15 days snake hatch out from egg. Out of these 15 eggs only three will be survived and remaining eggs will be eaten by the mother snake. When it hatches

out it will be black in colour with five *angula* (8.815cm) length. Within seven days after birth, snake will have eye sight and after twenty days fangs will be developed.The mother snake will protect the little snake till one month. Later it travels independently. After six month, it will be 1 *mola* (45.72cm / 1.5ft) in length. Usually the life span of snake will be 120 years.[3]

3. Age determination of snake

From *Ashwini nakshatra* (1st lunar mansion) till the *nakshatra* of the day of bite should be counted. Similarly *Tithi* (lunar day) from 1st lunar day - *Prathipada*, till the *Tithi* of the day of bite should also be counted and the day from Sunday till the day of bite should also be counted. Add all these and to this add 22. This sum should be multiplied by 2. The answer will suggest the age of the snake (in terms of days) that had bitten the individual.[4]

4. *Sanchara of Darvikara Sarpa* (Indian cobra)

Darvikara sarpa (Indian cobra) will have *sanchara* mainly on Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday. It will reach back it's *Moola sthana* (original place) within 7:30pm.[5]

5. Factors affecting the quantity and potency of venom[6]

- In *Vasantha* (Spring season- from mid March to April)) and *Hemantha Ritu*(Early winter- from mid November to mid January), because of the blossom of flowers and its fragrance, the snake gets intoxicated and will have more tendency to bite any living beings.
- In *Greeshma Ritu* (Summer season - from mid May to mid july) the potency of venom will be more.
- In *Pravrt* (Beginning of rainy season) - *Ritu* because of rain and thunder, snakes won't travel more far than its *moola sthana*.
- In *Varsha Ritu* (Rainy season), the potency of venom will be medium.
- In conditions like, if snake is in water, tired after playing, in fear, lost with mangoose, under *vishaghna* trees, the venom will be in decreased amount.

6. The prognostic feature of Snake bite wound

There are four types of sanke bite namely, *Dhashta, Viddha, Khandita, Avalupta*. If there is one bite mark, it is considered as *Dhashta*, two bite marks indicates *Viddha*, more than two bite mark indicate *Khandita*, and if there is no bite mark it indicates *Avalupta*. If the wound is transverse and having saliva of snake and if it is *Khandita*, it indicates the snake which has more venom has bitten. If the wound is dry and deep, it indicates that the snake has bitten in

anger or hunger. In wound if blood mixed with saliva is seen and wound is having more width, and length that indicates the person has occupied the place of snake and living in it, hence it has bitten in order to protect it's *vamsha* or family and such wound is *Kashta Sadhya*. If the mouth of the wound is swollen, having blackish coloured blood mixed with saliva of snake, it indicates snake have bitten in fear or it got stamped by a person. If the wound is in the shape of Aame (Turtle) and swollen with blood oozing out and if it is *Kandita* variety, that indicates it is considered as '*Eeshwara Kalpitha*' (Decision of god).[7]

7. *Sadhya* and *Asaadhya* based on fang[8]

Table no. 7: *Sadhya* and *Asaadhya* based on fang.

sl.no.	Type of fang	*Sadhya - Asadhyata*
1	*Karaali*	*Sukha Sadhya*
2	*Makari*	*Sukha Sadhya*
3	*Kaalaratri*	*Kashta Sadhya*
4	*Yamadhoothi*	*Asadhya*

8. Marana Lakshana[9]

- Tiredness, pale face, breathlesness, chest pain, tremor, headache, mucous secretion from mouth, reddness of eyes, bluish discolouration of bits site, all these symptoms suggest confirm death.
- To confirm death, one should incise the forehead and see if the blood doesn't come or bluish blood is oozing out, beat him and see if the mark is not present in the skin, sprinkle the cold water to the body and see if there is no horripilation, put body to the water body and see if it is floating.

DISCUSSION

The description of *Sarpa Vijnana* in *Visha Vaidya Vijnana* presents a comprehensive traditional understanding of snakes and snake envenomation, including their identification, morphology, behaviour, reproduction, venom characteristics, bite-wound assessment and prognosis. This indicates that traditional *Agada Tantra* approached snake envenomation from multiple perspectives rather than limiting it to the effects of venom alone.

The classification of *Sarpa* into different varieties reflects the importance given to identification and differentiation of snakes. The detailed description of fang types, their location and associated wound characteristics further demonstrates an attempt to identify the nature of the bite based on local findings. Although the association of specific *Devata* with

individual fangs belongs to the traditional framework, the accompanying wound descriptions may provide scope for comparison with modern clinical observations.

The oviparity of snake includes observations regarding mating, egg laying, protection of eggs, hatching and development of young snakes. Similarly, the description of *Sanchara* of *Darvikara Sarpa* reflects traditional observations regarding snake behaviour and habitat and this might help a clinician to diagnose the snake bite. While some of these descriptions may broadly correspond with known biological features, certain observations require scientific validation.

The method of snake age determination based on *Nakshatra, Tithi* and the day of the week represents the integration of astronomical concepts into traditional toxicology. Although this method does not have an established scientific basis, its inclusion demonstrates the distinctive conceptual framework of traditional *Visha Vijnana*.

The text describes several factors influencing venom quantity and potency, including season, environmental conditions, hunger, fear and activity of the snake. Seasonal and biological variations in snake venom are also recognised in modern toxicological research.

The classification of snake-bite wounds into *Dhashta, Viddha, Khandita and Avalupta*, along with descriptions of wound shape, depth, swelling, bleeding and saliva, demonstrates an early attempt at clinical assessment and prognostication. Such observations indicate the importance given to local wound characteristics in determining the severity and circumstances of envenomation.

Sadhya-Asadhyata according to fang type further reflects the prognostic approach of Agada Tantra. The description of *Marana Lakshana* includes several systemic and local manifestations such as breathlessness, chest pain, tremor, pallor and bluish discoloration. These observations indicate an awareness of severe manifestations associated with poisoning.

A major strength of this account is its comprehensive and multidimensional approach, incorporating snake identification, behaviour, venom characteristics, wound assessment and prognosis. However, several observations, including astrological age determination, sex determination based on egg colour and certain behavioural or seasonal associations, lack scientific validation. Therefore, these descriptions should be critically interpreted and correlated with modern herpetological, toxicological and clinical evidence.

Overall, *Sarpa Vijnana* in *Visha Vaidya Vijnana* represents a valuable component of traditional *Agada Tantra* knowledge. It preserves observations concerning snakes and envenomation that may provide opportunities for interdisciplinary research, while also highlighting the need for scientific validation and contemporary correlation of traditional concepts.

CONCLUSION

Visha Vaidya Vijnana provides a detailed account of *Sarpa Vijnana*, encompassing the classification and identification of snakes, fang characteristics, reproductive patterns, behaviour, factors influencing venom potency, bite-wound features and prognosis. The text reflects a systematic traditional approach towards understanding snake envenomation and its clinical significance. Several descriptions provide scope for comparison with modern herpetological and toxicological knowledge, while certain traditional concepts require further scientific validation. Thus, *Sarpa Vijnana* represents an important component of the knowledge preserved in *Agada Tantra* and provides a valuable foundation for interdisciplinary research integrating traditional toxicology with contemporary scientific perspectives.

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