

VATSANABH VISHA AS MEDICINE: AN OVERVIEW

^{*1}Dr. Kalyani Arjun Bondre, ²Dr. Abhilash Dineshrao Pardhekar,
³Dr. Prashant S. Dakhole

^{*1}Assistant Professor (Department of Agadtantra).

²Shivpriya Ayurved College Hospital and Research Centre Ketapar.

³Principal, Professor n HOD Shalya Tantra.

Vilasrao Deshmukh Ayurvedic Medical College n Research Centre Mouda, Nagpur.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Kalyani Arjun Bondre

Assistant Professor (Department of
agadtantra) Vilasrao Deshmukh
Ayurvedic Medical College n
Research Centre Mouda, Nagpur.



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ABSTRACT

Background: *Agadtantra* is one of the branches of *Ashtanga* Ayurveda which deals with Poison, their manifestation and treatment. In *Charak samhita* it is mentioned that any drug which is used injudiciously is a poison and any poison which is used judiciously is a Medicine. *Vatsanabh* is included in *Visha* Category by *Rasatarangini* while it is included in Cardiac poison by modern toxicology. If it is used judiciously, it can act as excellent medicine. All *Visha* and *Upavisha* are used internally as a medicine only after their *shodhana sanskara*. *Vatsanabh* formulations are used in various diseases for therapeutic purpose. **Objective:** To review *Vatsanabh Visha* as a medicine through classical textbooks and Research articles. **Methodology:** *Vatsanabh* is reviewed through various *Ayurvedic Samhitas* and Research articles. After reviewing it, its therapeutic use is emphasized in this review. Basic principle

of Ayurveda, injudicious use of drug convert it into harmful poison and judicious use of poison will convert it in to excellent medicine is focused in this review. *Vatsanabh* is mainly used in *Vata Kapha* disorders and is contraindicated in conditions with aggravated *Pitta*. Several pharmacological studies have shown that *Vatsanabh* possesses anaesthetic, anti-arthritic, diuretic, sedative, nerve stimulating, analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antidote, and cardiac stimulant characteristics. **Conclusion:** If *Vatsanabh* is used injudiciously, it is a

poison. But by *Shodhana Sanskara* mentioned in Ayurveda, it is used in various formulations for various therapeutic use like *jwara*, *kasa* etc. and it works as *Amrit* for the patient.

KEYWORDS: *Vatsanabh*, Medicine, *Visha*, *Agadtantra*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda believes that every plant available on earth have quality of becoming a medicine. In other words, there is no plant material on the planet that cannot be used as potential therapeutic agent. In Ayurveda, *vishadravya* are classified into two types depending on their source. *Sthavara Visha* includes the poisonous drugs from mineral and plant origin. *Jangama Visha* includes toxic effects of animal and insect bites.^[1] There are ten *adhithana* of *sthavar Visha*, in which *Vatsanabha* falls under the category of *kanda visha*.^[2] In *Rastrangini*, out of nine *Mahavisha*, *vatsanabha* is the only one, which is widely used and is considered best for *rasa kriya* and *rasayana*.^[3]

Aconitum ferox, also known as Indian aconite or *Vatsanabha* in Ayurveda, is a fascinating plant which possesses a duality of being incredibly poisonous yet also used medicinally for centuries. *Vatsanabha*, the *Ayurvedic* synonym to Aconite has derived its name from sanskrit for the resemblance of its tuber to the umbilicus of a calf.^[4] It is a species of monk's hood in the family of Ranunculaceae. These are found abundant at Sandakphu which is the highest point of the Darjeeling Hills in the Indian State of West Bengal.^[5]

All parts of aconite plant are poisonous and the root tubers are the most potent. Dry root is conical or tapering 5-10 cm long, 1.5-2cm thick at the upper end and dark brown in color.^[6] It contains large quantities of alkaloid pseudoaconitine, which is deadly poison.^[7]

Use of *Visha dravyas* as Medicines has been narrated by *Acharya Charaka* as "Even an acute poison can become an excellent drug if it is properly administered on the other hand even a drug, if not properly administered, becomes an acute poison."^[8] The poisonous plants reported in ancient scriptures of Ayurveda are still being used widely in a number of diseases after processing with proper *Shodhana*. *Ayurvedic* physicians successfully employed these drugs after proper *Shodhana*. The concept of *Shodhana* was mentioned for the first time in *Charaka Samhita* in the context of *Danti Dravanti Kalpadhyaya*. To reduce the '*Vikasi*' property of *Danti* root, *Charaka* mentioned it as '*Sanskara*'.^[9] It is reported that Aconite (*Vatsanabha*)

purified by cow urine is converted to cardiac stimulant, whereas raw Aconite is cardiac depressant.

It is clearly mentioned in '*Bhava Prakasha*' that the bad/toxic effects attributed to '*Ashodhita Vishas*' are minimized when these are used after being subjected to *Shodhana*. Hence '*Vishas*' should be essentially subjected for *Shodhana* before being used in therapeutics.^[10,11]

Types of Vatsanabh

White and black are the two types of Vatsanabh. Pure Vatsanabh is actually white in color, it becomes black after conditioning. This conditioning is required to protect it from insects.

According to Rasatarangini 3 types of Vatsanabha are: 1. Krushnabh 2. Kapish 3. Pandur. These varieties became subsequently more superior than other. (R.T.24/15pg650)

Ayurvedic properties

Table 1: Ayurvedic properties of Vatsanabha.

Rasa	Madhura
Guna	Laghu, Ruksha, Tikshna, Vyavayi, Vikashi
Virya	Ushna
Vipaka	Katu
Karma	Vata-kaphahara, Jwarahara, Jangama Vishahara, Madakari, Kushthaghna

Chemical Constituents: The tuber of *Vatsanabha* contains Major alkaloids which are aconitine, pseudoaconitine, diacetyl pseudoaconitine, aconine, piroaconine.

Shodhana

Since it is categorized under *Mahavisha* because of its highly poisonous properties, purification is needed before administration it in human body as medicine. Three traditional methods for purification of Aconite are described in Ayurveda.

First Method: Small pieces of *Vatsanabha* immersed in a pot with *Gomutra* (cow's urine), placed under bright sunlight for 3 days, everyday replacing with fresh *Gomutra*. Dry it on 4th day after removing the outer layer and store it. This is the best textual way to purify Aconite.

Second Method: Small pieces of Aconite are to be kept in a cloth bag and this bag is to be boiled through a vessel called *Dola Yantra* & containing cow milk. A 3-6 hour boiling through this way can purify Aconite.

Third Method: As it is done in second method, Goat milk is used instead of cow milk. Through this way also, Aconite can be purified.

Therapeutic Dose: The appropriate therapeutic dose of *Vatsanabh* varies from person to person depending on their age, body condition, effects on *dosha* and severity of the health condition.

According to Rasatarangini - 1/16 ratti to 1/8 ratti (6 to 12 mg)

Therapeutic potential

From the classical books of *Ayurveda* which includes *Nighantu*, *Samhita*; it is evident that due to the fast acting properties of *Vatsanabha* it has been used for the treatment of the following disease conditions as mentioned below.

- Vata vyadhi (neuromuscular anomalies)
- Agnimandya (digestive impairment)
- Jvara (fever)
- Kasa (cough)
- Rajyakshma (tuberculosis)
- Kustha (disease of skin)
- Shotha (inflammation)
- Ajirna (indigestion)
- Prameha (diabetes)
- Udararoga (disease of abdomen)

Aconite is particularly efficient for the treatment of many febrile diseases and inflammation resulting due to tonsillitis, pharyngitis etc. The roots (ethanolic extract) possess anti arthritic properties which is due to the presence of compounds like tannins, alkaloids and phenolic compounds.

Aconite root is incorporated as an important Chinese medicine. Nervous and rheumatic pains can be relieved when applied as an ointment externally when mixed with lard. The pain of scorpion bite can also be relieved when used externally.

Table 2: Ayurvedic formulations containing Aconite (Vatsanabha).

Name of the compound	Reference Book	Indication
Agnikumara rasa	Bhaisajya Ratnavali	Indigestion
Agnisandipana rasa	Bhaisajya Ratnavali	Indigestion
Agnitundi Bati	Bhaisajya Ratnavali	Indigestion
Ananda Bhairava rasa	Rasa Raj Sunder	Fever, cough, diarrhea
Hinguleshvara Rasa	Bhaishajya Ratnavali	Joint pain, Viral fever,
Laxmi narayana rasa	Rasa Yoga Samgriha	Chronic fever
Mritunjaya Rasa	Rasa Tarangini	Chronic fever
Pratap lankeshwara Rasa	Yoga Ratnakara	Puerparial fever
Sanjeevani Bati	Sharangdhara Samhita	Common cold with fever, indigestion
Tribhuvan Kirti Rasa	Yoga Ratnakara	Influenza, viral fever
Vata gajankusha rasa	Rasendra Sar Samgriha	Sciatica, obesity, Vata disease

METHODOLOGY

Description related to *Vatsanabha* has been found in *Vrihad-Trayi* like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*. The *Nighantus* of Ayurveda i.e., *Dhanwantari Nighantu*, *Sodhala Nighantu*, *Kaiyadev Nighantu*, *Bhava Prakash Nighantu* etc. have elaborated *Vatsanabha* in their respective texts. References from these texts were reviewed for this article.

DISCUSSION

Vatsanabha is well known ingredient of Ayurvedic formulation and is prescribed as an antipyretic, analgesic, anti-rheumatic, appetizer and digestion. There are chances that use of larger than recommended dose of Ayurvedic medicines containing aconite can produce drug reactions. Formulations having aconitum roots as an ingredient are highly effective in various diseases.

Practitioners while prescribing such medicines should be aware of the quantity of *Vatsanabha* in a formulation and prescribe such drugs only in recommended dose and follow-up the patient for any toxic symptoms. If any toxic symptom appears, the formulation containing *Vatsanabha* should be immediately stopped and medicine to counteract the toxic symptoms should be started immediately without any delay. The patient should also be aware and not to purchase Ayurvedic medicine over the counter (OTC) and avoid selfmedication.

CONCLUSION

From the above review, it can be concluded that *Suddha Vatsanabha* has great medicinal value, by the virtue of its properties like *Ushna*, *Ashukaritwa*, *laghu*, *tikshna* *vishadravyas*. It gets spread rapidly in the body by these properties, in a similar way other Ayurvedic

formulations can be made more effective. It can also cause toxicity if used without purification, self-medication or its over dosing.

Further detailed study can be carried out to study the effect of Tankan bhasma as specific antidote in reducing the toxic effects of Vatsanabha, which is alkaline in nature by this action we can study the more combination of tankan bhasma and elevates its effects on individual toxic components of Aconite. Further clinical assessment of medicinal properties and its safety profile are required for its clinical applications in future.

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