



Review Article

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AYURVEDA CONCEPT OF VISHA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Among the Ashtanga, *Agada tantra* (toxicology) stands separate in its concept, clinical approach, management and result. This is the only chapter that guides us in managing poison and poisoning conditions. As we all know, *visha* and *visha chikitsa* require a special mention in any medical system. The definition of *Visha* explained in Ayurveda is very close to the definition of poison in modern toxicology. Poison is a substance, which on ingestion, inhalation, absorption, application, injection or development within the body, in relatively small amounts, produces injury to the body by its chemical action. In Charaka Samhita, a study of *visha gunas* is necessary for its treatment. Since the basis of treatment is *samanya-vishesha siddhanta*, a drug or diet which is opposite in the properties of the disease should be used for its treatment.

Keywords: *Agada, visha, visha gunas*, the concept of *vega*, toxins, poisons.

INTRODUCTION

The substance immediately after entering the body causes the vitiation of the health dhatus or kills the healthy person, which is called *Visha*¹. Acharya Charaka defined *visha* as a substance having 10 specific properties, producing 8 stages, having its origin from *Jalamahabhoota*, with effects like *Agnimahabhoota*, which can be found in both animate and inanimate substances and should be treated with 24 modalities² Acharya Sharangadhara defined it as the substance which is *agnibhuta pradhana*, destroyer of life and *yogavahi* in action³. Classification – According to Ayurveda Samhitas, the *visha* classification is based on its origin (*yoni*) and its site (*adhishtana*). In *Rasashastra*, the *visha* is classified into two types based on their properties (*guna*):

Mahavisha and *Upavisha*. Acharya Charaka classified *visha* into three, *sthavara visha* (inanimate poison), *jangama* (animate poison), and *samyogaja* (artificial poison including *gara* and *krithrima*)⁴ *Sushruta Samhita* classified *visha* into *sthavara*, *jangama*, and *krithrima*⁵. Acharya *Vagbhata* says about two types of *visha*, *krithrima* (*garavisha*) and *akrithrima* (*sthavara* and *jangama*)⁶. According to *Bhavaprakasha* *akrithrima visha* and *krithrima visha*. *Krithrima visha* includes *garavisha* and *dooshivisha*⁷.

Visha gunas—Acharya *Sushruta* has mentioned 10 *gunas*, and Acharya *Vagbhata* and Acharya *Charaka* mentioned 9 *gunas*⁸. In *Sharangadhara Samhita* 8 *gunas* are mentioned⁹.

Table 1: *Visha Karma* based on *visha gunas*

Gunas	S.S.K ¹⁰	C.S.Chi ¹¹	A.S.U ¹²	B.P ¹³	Y.R ¹⁴
<i>Rooksha</i>	Vitiate <i>vata</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Ushna</i>	Vitiate <i>pitta</i> and <i>raktha</i>	Vitiate <i>vata</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Tikshna</i>	The function of the <i>marma</i> affected	<i>Marmaghna</i>	Vitiate <i>pitta</i> and <i>raktha</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Sookshma</i>	Gains entry to all organs of the body and damages their function	<i>Raktha prakopa</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Ashukari</i>	Kills fast	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Vyavayi</i>	Adversely affects the basic constitution of the individual	Spreads quickly in the body	Spreads throughout the body	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Vikashi</i>	Deranges structure and debilitates functions of the <i>dosas dhatus</i> and <i>mala</i>	<i>Pranaghna</i>	<i>Marmachedana</i> and <i>matimoham</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Vishada</i>	Easily spread all over the body	Continuous movement	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Laghu</i>	Difficult to treat	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Avipaki</i>	Elimination from the body by purgatives, emesis etc., is difficult.	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
<i>Avyaktha rasa</i>	-	It causes <i>kapha prakopa</i> and gets mixed with acquiring its form	S.A.Su	-	-

S.S.K- *Sushruta Samhita Kalpasthana*, C.S Chi-*Charaka Samhita Chikistasthana*, B.P- *Bhavaprakasha*, Y.R- *Yogratanakar*, S.A.Su- Same as *Sushruta*

Concept of vega and vegantara

It is explained as the spread of *visha* through *dhatu*s is not uniform. The seven *dhatu*s are contained in *ashayas* bordered by membranes (*kala*). Poisons, in their efforts to spread through tissues, break the membranes and enter the tissue. Traversing each membrane poison creates a *vega*. The interval during which poison leaves the preceding *kala* and attacks the succeeding one is called its *vegantara*. This period termed *vegantara*, is relatively symptoms free. *Vata* dosha facilitates the movement. Some authors specify substrates occupied by poisons during *vega*. Some give only the number and symptoms; others give only symptoms/differences in the number of *vegas*. The majority accepts seven *vegas*, but Acharya Punarvasu says they are eight.

Table 2: *Visha vega lakshanas* according to Charaka

Visha vega	Symptoms
Rasa	Trit, Moha, Dantaharsha, Pradeka, Vamathu, Klama
Raktha	Vaivarnya, Bhrama, Vepathu, Moorcha, Jrm bha and Angachimichimatmaka
Mamsa	Mandala, Kandu, Swayathu, Koda
Fourth	Daha, Chardi, Angasoola, Moorcha
Fifth	Neela tama darshanam
Sixth	Hikka
Seventh	Skandha bhanga
Eighth	Maranam

Sthavara visha

55 types of *sthavara vishas* are explained by Acharya Sushruta. Among these only

2 are of mineral origin, and the remaining 53 are of vegetable origin. Acharya Charaka has given 21 examples; out of these, some can be identified at present.

Classification of sthavara visha

According to Rasatarangini, the *Sthavara visha* is sub-classified into types, one of them *Mahavisha* having high potency and the other one is *Upavisha* having less potency

Mahavisha

These are nine *Halahala, Kalakoota, Sringaka, Pradeepana, Saurashraka, Brahmaputra, Haridraka, Saktuka* and *Vatsanabha*. The fact is *Vatsanabha* is the only *Mahavisha* that can be identified at present.

Upavisha

Ayurvedic classics and texts from the medieval period have classified all the poisons into *mahavisha* and *upavisha*. *Upavisha* is a group of drugs which are not as much of toxic. They are not poisonous but produce certain toxic symptoms on consumption or administration. The symptoms produced in the body due to *upavisha* are less toxic, less severe, and usually not life-threatening, and therapeutic measures can control their poisonousness based on certain basic criteria like source, base, properties, potency etc.

There is no direct reference regarding the category of *upavisha* in *bhrithrayi* and *lagutrayi*

Table 3: *Upavisha* mentioned in different Ayurvedic texts

Drug	R.T	A.P	B.P	R.R.S	R.km	R.R.Su
Kupeelu	√			√	√	√
Ahiphena	√	√	√			√
Rechaka	√					√
Datura	√	√	√	√	√	√
Vijaya				√		
Gunja	√	√	√			√
Bhallataka	√			√	√	
Arka	√	√	√	√	√	√
Snuhi	√	√	√	√	√	√
Langali	√	√	√	√	√	√
Karaveera	√	√	√	√	√	√

R.T- Rastargini, A.P- Ayurved Prakash, B.P- Bhavprakash, R.R.S- Rasrantnasamuchayy, R.Km- Ras Kaumudi, R.R.Su- Ras Ratnasudhakar

Arka Ksheera, Snuhi Ksheera, Langali, Karaveera, Gunja, Ahiphena, and *Dattura* are seven main *sthavara vishas* explained in traditional Malayalam texts *Prayoga samuchayam* and *Kriyakoumudi*

Asrayas of Sthavara visha – Ten *adhishtanas* of *sthavara visha* explained in Sushruta Samhita are *moola*(root), *pathra*(leaf), *phala* (fruit), *pushpa* (flower), *twak* (bark), *sara* (hardwood), *niryasa* (latex), *ksheera* (milky latex), *dhatu* (mineral), *kanda* (tuber)

Sthavara visha samanya lakshana – *sthavara visha* produces *jwara, hikka, dantaharsha, galargaham, phena, vami aruchi,*

swasa, moorcha. According to Vaidyajyothsnika, the *sthavara visha* has swelling, warmth, intense fever, *chintha, shoka*, sickness, fainting, vomiting, emaciation, and retention of bowel and urine. According to Yogratnakara, the *sthavara visha* produces *jwara, hikka, dantaharsha, galagraha, phenachardi, aruchi, swasa, murcha*

Sthavara visha vega lakshanas – First *vega* is when poison enters *rasadhattu*. Then it enters *raktha dhatu*, causing a second *vega*; likewise, when *visha* vitiates *shukra dhatu*, it will be the seventh stage of poisoning, followed by death; death is counted as the eighth *vega* by Charaka acharya.

Table 4: Sthavara visha vega lakshanas according to different texts

Vegas	Sushruta ¹⁵	A.H/A. S ¹⁶	Kriyakoumudi
First vega	<i>Jihwa shyavata moorcha Sthabda, swasa</i>	<i>Jihwa syavata, sthabda, moorcha, trasa, klama, vami</i>	<i>Jihwa syavata, sthambana, swasarodha, moorcha, bhaya, indriyasada</i>
Second vega	<i>Sweda, daha, vepathu, kandaruja, and hrdvedhana</i>	<i>Vepathu sthabdha, moorcha, trasa, khama vami</i>	S.A.Su
Third vega	<i>talusosha, amashayashoola, durbala, pakwasaya and amashaya toda, hikka, kasa, and antrakaruja</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Fourth vega	<i>Sirogaurava</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Fifth vega	<i>Kapha phaseka, vaivarnya, parvabheda, pakwadana vedana</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Sixth vega	<i>Prajna pranasha, atisara</i>	<i>Samjapranasha atisara</i>	S.A.Su
Seventh vega	<i>Skanda prishtha katibagna, sannirodha</i>	<i>Skanda prishtha katibagna, mrthyu</i>	S.A.Su

A,H- Ashtanga Hridaya Samhita, A.S- Ashtanga Samgraha, S.A.Su- Same as Sushruta

Table 5: Sthavara visha vega chikitsa according to different Acharyas¹⁷

Vega	Sushruta	Vagbhata	Kriyakoumudi
First vega	<i>Vamana sheetambu sechana, agadapanam</i>	S.A.Su	<i>Vamanam sheetambu sechanam, dooshivishari agada</i>
Second vega	<i>Vamanam, virechanam</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Third vega	<i>Agadapana, nasya, anjana</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Fourth vega	<i>Agada+sneha</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Fifth vega	<i>Madhu+madhuka kwata</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Sixth vega	<i>Atisara chikitsa</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su
Seventh vega	<i>Avapeedanam, kakapada</i>	S.A.Su	S.A.Su

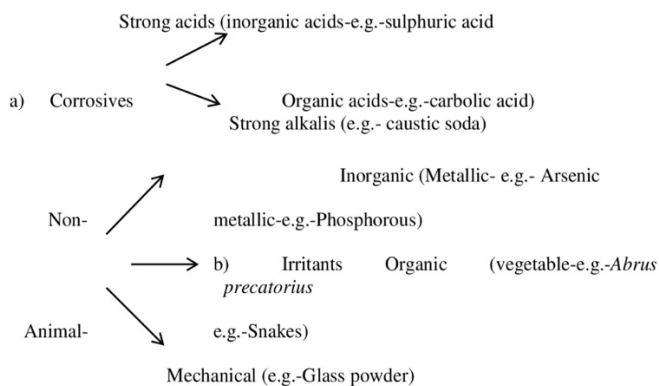
Inanimate poison (modern view)

Classification

Classification

1. According to the site and mode of action they are 2 types

A) Local action



B) Remote action

C) C.N.S. Poisons

1]Somniferous- e.g.-Opium 2] Stimulant's- e.g. -Cocaine 3] Deliriant's -e.g. -Datura

C) Spinal poison - *Strychnos nuxvomica*

D) Peripheral nerves

1]Local anaesthetics-e.g. -Cocaine 2] Relaxants-e.g.-Curare 3] Cardiac poison

4]Aconite, Nicotine

2]According to the medico-legal importance

a) Homicidal- aconite

d) Abortifacient- Calotropis

b) Suicidal- Opium

e) Stupefying agent- *Datura*

c) Accidental- *Abrus precatorius*

f) Cattle poison- *Abrus precatorius*

DISCUSSION

It is a well-known fact that traditional systems of medicine have always played an essential role in meeting global healthcare needs. Although modern medicine is well-developed in most of the world, a large section of the population in India still relies on herbal medicines for their primary care. Plants are the backbone of all life on Earth and an essential resource for human well-being. Only a few plant species have been studied for possible medicinal applications despite using herbal medicines for centuries. Safety and efficacy data are available for an even small number of plants. Since ancient times we have gotten a description of poisonous plants, many of which are used as a good remedy for several disorders after proper processing.

In Rasatarangini, a textbook from the 19th century, eleven drugs have been mentioned as *Upavishas*, along with the procedures of purifying them & utilizing them in medicine. *Visha* is mainly classified into natural poison and artificial poison in Ayurveda. Samhitas natural poison includes *Sthavara visha* and *Jangama visha*, and artificial poison has *garavisha*. *Sthavara visha* (inanimate poison) includes poisons of plant origin and toxic minerals, metals or metal ores in their natural form embedded in the earth.

CONCLUSION

The classification of poisons is based on certain basic criteria like origin, base, properties, potency etc. some of the Ayurvedic classics and texts in the medieval period have classified all the poisons into two categories: mahavisha and upavisha based on toxicity and potency. The toxic manifestation of *visha* in *dhatu* is known as the "*visha vega*" in the particular *dhatu*. During the spread process, the poison takes some time to gain entry from the former *dhatu* to the latter.

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