

A Review on Visha and Upavisha Dravyas of Rasa Shastra

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Abstract: Ayurveda is science of long and healthy live which focus on treatment of diseases. Ayurveda works on management of physical and mental health using various medicines involving herbs, poisonous drugs, metals and minerals. Ayurveda embraces different streams including Rasa Shastra which utilizes Rasa aushadhi (Herbo - mineral preparations) for therapeutic purposes. This article discusses about Visha - upvishadravyas commonly used to improve health and their role in the preparation of making Rasa aushadhi to treat illness as herbs in single or in a compound formulations.

Keywords: Rasa aushadhi, Visha - upvishadravyas, shodhan, therapeutic use.

1. Introduction

In Ayurvedic classical text the use of poisonous plants are since ancient time. Plants are the major source of medicine in Ayurveda. Though most of the plant drugs are safe, but few are toxic in nature. These poisonous / toxic plants are categorized as *visha* and *upavisha* in Ayurvedic texts. Ayurvedic classics have various methods of *shodhana* to overcome toxicity of poisonous plants. After *shodhana* process *visha* and *upavishadravyas* are considered of highly therapeutic value and very effective in small doses after proper purification, even sharpest poison can be a good life saving medicine. To purify any *vishadravyas* help not only to eradicate the toxicity of the drug but also imbibes additional therapeutic properties and makes the drug more users attentive. *Dukha* that is called *Visha* or which cause *mrityu* by internal administration termed as *Visha*. *Vishadravyas* plays an important role in *Paradabandhana* and it will give more benefits to human being by using proper quantity with proper process. The drugs of *visha* group should be collected when they are *Nava* (fresh), *Guru* (heavy), *Snigdha* (smooth), *Ghana* (solid) and when they abide fruits.

Vishadravyas

Brief History: - The history of *visha* and its treatment ways back to centuries. The mythological concept regarding origin of *visha* states that it was created at time of creation of universe by lord Bramha and other opinion that it was obtained during Samudramanthana. References regarding *Vista* or poison and poising can also be traced in *Vedas*. It was believed that *moksha* (*Salvation*) is the ultimate aim of life and it was also believed that this can be attained to *Rasa karma* with the proper use of *Visha* – *upvishadravyas* which will fulfil this desire. It is said in the texts that *visha* and *upvishadravyas* which used properly, would prove highly beneficial to the body or even as life saving drug like *amrita*.

(nectar) otherwise they are considered to be fatal to mankind.

Visha - Etymology: - The word *vista* is derived from the root 'Visha' means to suffuse completely. The *sthavar* or *jangamadravyas*, which induce toxic symptoms in the body when inhaled, consumed in un - purified form are called as 'Vista dravyas'.

Synonyms of Visha: - , *Garala*, *Kalakuta*, *Kswedva*.

Classification of visha: The classification of poison is based on certain basic criteria like origin, base properties, potency etc. The classification of the poison differs from Ayurvedic text to text. Ayurvedic classics and texts in medieval period have classified into *mahavisha* and *upavisha*. *Visha* basing upon its origin has been classified into two categories *jangamavisha* (animal poison) and (plant and mineral poison) *sthavaravisha*. The sites of *sthavaravisha* and *jangamavisha* are narrated as ten and sixteen respectively. Further it also is also classified as *Akritisima visha* (natural poison) and *kritisimavisha* (Chemically prepared *Visha*) where *akritisimavisha* is again sub divided into *Sthvara* and *Jangama*.

According to *Rasa Tarangini* *Vishadravyas* can be classified in to two types depending on their sources.

1. Sthavaravisha	<i>Sthavaravisha</i> includes the poisonous drugs from mineral and plant origin.
2. Jangamavisha	The <i>jangamavisha</i> includes the toxic effects of animal and insect bites. (rats, snake, etc)

Sthavaravisha again of two types: - 1) *Visha* 2) *Upavisha*

Number of *Vishas* and *Upavishas* according to Ayurvedic classics

Types of vishas	Rasaratnasamucchaya	Sharangadharasamhita	Rasa tarangini
Visha	5	9	9
Upavisha	7	7	11

VishaGuna; - Acharya Charaka and Sushruta have enumerated ten similar gunas of visha with an exception of apaaki (Sushruta) being replaced by anirdeshyarasa (Charaka). Acharya Vaghbata has attributed eleven gunasto a vishadravyaby including apaaki and Avyaktarasa. Sharangdhara has stated certain extra gunas of vishadravya like chhedi, madavaha, jivitahara and yogavahi. Laghu (light), ruksha (dry), aashu, vishada, vikasi and vyavayi (enhanced bioavailability), tikshna (intense), sukhsha (subtle), ushna (hot), anirdeshya rasa / apaaki / avyakta rasa. All these 10 qualities are opposite to that of Ojasa (essential energy for the body and mind) that keep body healthy. The first available reference of upavishas is from the text Rasarnava. Among the recent authors Rasa tarangini emphasized on upavishas. Apart from Rasa Tarangini, abundant references are found in Rasendrapurana (Rpu), Rasendrasambhava (R. Sam) and Rasendrabhaskara (R. bh)

Vishadravya - collection: - The poisonous herbal drugs (upavisha) are to be collected when these plants are at their peak potency level. The plants should be newly grown, it should possess snigdh (smooth) ghana, and guru guna. These plants should be collected from the place where anti-poisonous drugs are not grown. They should be free from climatic effects and should be ripped completely.

Vishadravyas - Samskara: - The purified 'vishadravyas' should be carefully covered with a cloth soaked in 'raktasarsapataila' and placed in suitable container. By doing so the 'Vishadravyas' retains its potency for a longer period.

VishadravyaPrayoga: - when the disease remains incurable even after administration of different rasa aushadhis the use shudhavishadravya as medicine will be beneficial. These "Vishadravya" are more beneficial in VataKaphajaroga.

VishadravyaSevana - Unfit Person: - The persons who are short tempered (pitta prakriti), who are impotent, who are suffering from rajayakshmaroga, who are hungry, thirsty, tired after prolonged work and pregnant women, children, aged persons and sukulmars all these people are considered unfit for administration of vishadravya.

Vishadravyas seven - pathaya: -

Aharajapatheya: - Ghee, milk, sugar, honey wheat and its preparation, cooked rice Maricha, saindhava

Viharajapatheya: Brahmacharya staying in cool areas, cold seasons and use of cold water. All these are considered good for the persons during consumption of Vishadravyas.

Vishagati (Movement of toxins in body): - Jangamavisha acts in the lower part (adhahbhaga) of the body whereas Sthavaravisha acts in the upper part (urdhwabhaga). Hence they counteract each other.

2. Aim

The aim of this review is to provide detailed knowledge on *poisonous medicinal plants* used for various therapeutic purposes after different pharmaceutical process of *shodhana*. After *shodhanavisha* are having the *karmas* like *Rasayana*, *Yogavahi*, *Tridoshaghana*, *Brumhana* and *Veeryavardhaka*. *Poisonous plants (Visha, Upavishadravyaas)* are commonly used to improve health and their role in making medicines to treat illness as herbs in single or in compound formulations.

In *Rasashastra*, almost all drugs used are *visha* in nature including *parada* (without *Samskara*). For example eight *doshas* or toxic effects of *Tamra* (copper) if consumed unprocessed were described in detail. Hence all metals and minerals may be included under *sthvara / khanijavisha* group. The property of *vishatva* may be the reason for the quick action in minimum dose. Hence forth *Rasa shastra* stands superior and most appreciated for its attributes, *Rasa chikitsa* stands exceptional. There are contraindications mentioned for the usage of *visha*, but still, *rasha dravyas* which are also poisonous are indicated only after processing. The qualities of *Ojasa* and *visha* antagonize each other, but still *vishadravyas* can act as *Rasayanadravyas* after proper processing and appropriate dose.

The utility of *vishas* and *upavishas* can be classified as - Utility in *Lohaveda*, *Dehaveda*, *Chikitsa* and in other areas.

Utility in *Lohaveda* of *vishas* and *upavishas* includes various *Samskaras* (special procedures) of *parade*. Ex: *Chitraka* in *swedana* (vapouring procedure); in *moorchana* (swooning procedure) they are used for the removal of *vishadosha*; *langali* and *chitrakain* *adhahpatanasamskara* (condensation). They also help to increase *kramanatva* of *parada*. Use in preparation of *Ranjanataila*, *Saranataila*.

References of *visha* and *upavishas* in *vedasamskara* of *parada* are enumerated. Ex: *Vishatrunga*, *vishodaka*, *raktasnuhi*, *chitraka*, etc. They have role in *doshanivarana* of *parada* (elimination of blemishes of mercury). Ex: *Chitraka* to remove *vahnidosha*, *Krishna dattura* to remove *chapalayadosha*.

Utility of *vishopavishas* in other areas - *Gunja* is one among the "mitra panchaka" *dravakagana* and used in *apunarbhavabhasmapareeksha*. *Arka* and *snuhiksheera* are the common *bhavanarthadravyasin* in the process of *marana* (incineration) of most of the *rasha dravyas*. All the *vishopavishas* are used in the *sattvapatana* (extraction method) of *chapala* (bismuth) drug. To quote safety profile of *Visha aushadhis*, "A drug is safe if it destroys the disease but not the diseased".

Some *Rasa aushadhis* containing *Visha/Upvisha* as ingredients and their Therapeutic uses as mentioned in *Rasa RatanSamuchchaya*.

A safety profile starts with the identification of a genuine drug, processing, etc and till the drug proven clinically safe. The selection of the drug for processing should be done carefully based on *grahya - agrahyadravyalakshanas* described in *classics*. The drug has to be collected accordingly as said in *classics* and according to the *grahyalakshanas*. Such collected drug has to be preserved properly and processed.

3. Materials and Methods

Visha (Poison) are classified into two categories on basis of their toxicity and potency - (1) *Visha* (2) *Upavisha*. In this section by various process of *shodhana* poisons have capacity for therapeutic and single as well as compound formulation prepared. *Acharyas* have mentioned various methods of *shodhana* to nullify all the evil effects and to enhance the therapeutic properties of a drug. *Vatsanabha* is one of the common drugs used in drug compounding / formulation along with *Tankana* which acts as an antidote; *Haritaki* is also used. The drug administered in appropriate dose and according to the conditions, acts as *amruta*; else can cause ill effects. *Vishopavishas* should not be administered to children below 8 years and adults above 80 years of age. These drugs as adjuvant help in antagonizing

the toxic effects and enhance the therapeutic benefits. *Pathyaapathy* play a major role in drug administration. Regimen like *Swasthavrutta*, *Brahmacharya* and *Pathyaapathyaaahara*, are to be strictly followed.

On review of *Ayurvedic literature* it is observed that various *shodhan* process are mentioned for *visha* and *upavisha*.

Following procedures are common for different '*Vishopavisha*' drugs:

Gomutra Nimajjan: - Soaking in cow urine for prescribed period.

Swedana: - Boiling in different liquids such as cow milk, goat milk cow urine vegetable extracts and kanjika etc.

Bharjana: - Frying with or without ghee.

Bhavana: - Maceration and / or trituration with vegetable juices.

Nihsnehana: - Reduction of oily content.

Kshalana: - Washing with hot water.

Nistvachikarana: - It is the process of decortications (Removal of covering).

Synonyms, Shodhana, Dose, Uses, Formulations and Fatal Dose for Various Types of *Visha* and *Upavisha*: -

S. N	Name	Synonyms	Shodhana	Dose	Uses	Formulations	Fatal Dose
1	<i>Vatsanabha</i> (<i>Visha</i>) (<i>Aconitum Ferox</i>)	<i>Amruta</i>	<i>Soaked in Gomutra for three days</i>	$\frac{1}{16}$ th to $\frac{1}{8}$ Ratis	<i>Tridoshahara, Jwara, swasa, kasa</i>	<i>Hinguleswararasa, Sanjeevanivati</i>	4 mg of the alkaloid
2	<i>StrychnosNuxvomica</i> (<i>Upvisha</i>)	<i>Kupeelu</i>	<i>Swedana in Godugdha for one yama</i>	$\frac{1}{4}$ th to 1 Ratis	<i>Rakthavikara, Kandu</i>	<i>Navajeevana rasa, Agnitundivati</i>	2 gm powdered
3	<i>Jayapala</i> (<i>Croton Tigliam</i>)	<i>Jaipala</i>	<i>Swedana in Godugdha for two yama</i>	$\frac{1}{8}$ th to $\frac{1}{4}$ Ratis	<i>Kustha, Vrana</i>	<i>Dantiharitaki, Jalodrari rasa</i>	1 - 2 ml of oil or 4 - 5 crushed seeds
4	<i>Dhattura</i> (<i>Dattura Stramonium</i>)	<i>Kanaka</i>	<i>Swedana in Godugdha for one yama</i>	$\frac{1}{4}$ th to $\frac{1}{2}$ Ratis	<i>Bronchial Asthama</i>	<i>Kanakasava, Unmadagajankush rasa</i>	50 to 100 seeds
5	<i>Bhang</i> (<i>Cannabis Indica</i>)	<i>Vijaya</i>	<i>Wash with water and dry</i>	2 to 4 Ratis	<i>Grahani, Antrasula, Pralapa</i>	<i>Sukravallaba rasa Vijayavati</i>	10 mg per kg body weight
6	<i>Bhallataka</i> (<i>Semicarpus Anacardium</i>)	<i>Vatari</i>	<i>Swedan for one yam with coconut water</i>	1 to 3 Ratis	<i>Arsyas, Kustha, Switra</i>	<i>Sanjeevanivati, Bhallatakarasayana</i>	About 10 gm
7	<i>Gunja</i> (<i>Abrus Precatorious</i>)	<i>Sikhandi</i>	<i>Swedana in Godugdha</i>	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 Ratis	<i>Conjunctivitis</i>	<i>Gunjabadra rasa, Gunjaditaila</i>	90 - 120 mg (1 to 2 seeds)
8	<i>ArkaKsheera</i>	<i>Ravidugdha</i>	Not needed		<i>Gulma, Krumi, Udararoga</i>	<i>Lokeshwar rasa, Vajaratalila</i>	Uncertain
9	<i>SnuhiKsheera</i>	<i>Snuhidugdha</i>	<i>Imaliswarasa</i>	Mulachurna - $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 gm	<i>Kustha</i>	<i>Arshkuthar rasa, Kameshwara rasa</i>	Uncertain
10	<i>Langali</i> (<i>Gloriosa Superba</i>)	<i>Dipta</i>	<i>Soaked in gomutra for one day</i>	Churna 250 to 500 mg	<i>Sotha, Vrana</i>	<i>Sulantak rasa, Vaishvanara rasa</i>	Not definite
11	<i>Karaveera</i> (<i>NeriumIndicum</i>)	<i>Hayamara</i>	<i>Swedana in godugdha for</i>	Churna – 30 to 125 mg	<i>Pama, Ashmari, kustha</i>	<i>Sparshvataditaila, Karviradhitaila</i>	Leaves 5 to 15

			<i>one yama</i>				
12	<i>Ahiphena</i> (Opium)	<i>Nipheña</i>	<i>Bhavana in</i> <i>Srungaveraswarasa for 21 times</i>	1/4 th to 1 Ratis	<i>Karnasula,</i> <i>Atisara</i>	<i>Ahiphenasava,</i> <i>Vedanantakarasa</i>	2 gm
13	<i>Chitrakmool</i> (<i>Plumbago Zeylenica</i>)	<i>Pathi, Vyala</i>	<i>Cut in small pieces, dipped in lime water, wash and dried.</i>	<i>Root powder</i> - 1 to 2 gm	<i>Grahni, Arsyas,</i> <i>Increase appetite.</i>	<i>Chitrakadivati,</i> <i>Agnitudivati</i>	Not mentioned

4. Result

It is effective in small dose so *Vishas* described in *Rasa Shastra* as *rashaushadhi*. *Vishas* should be essentially subjected for *Shodhana* before being used in therapeutics. Larger doses of purified *vishamay* induce toxicity and may be fatal. *Herbal poisons* (*vishas* and *upavishas*) have a wide range of pharmaceutical and therapeutic utility in *Rasa Shastra*, hence also named as “*Visha Shastra*”. In many of the processes and formulations herbal poisons are equally used. They are used as *Rasayana* (rejuvenation and longevity drugs) to give strength and vitality to the body and the wisdom of detachment to the mind. Though they are highly poisonous, various purification processes help in nullifying the evil effects of the drug as well as attributing various other therapeutic benefits, allowing the drug to be used internally.

5. Discussion

Present review divulge that the *vishas* and *upvishas* are very useful as a part of use in the herbo - mineral preparations though needs to detoxified and purified. In ayurvedic classic purification and detoxification classical method methods make it suitable to use for human beings for the treatment of various health conditions. By ancient time various ayurvedic classics toxic substances into *visha* and *upavisha* categories on the basis of their intensity of the *vishadrvyas*. By different shodhan procedure these *vishadrvya* detoxify. *Pathaya*, *apathaya* and *Vishasevan* unfit persons described by different Acharyas in Ayurvedic classics are described here. Aftershodhan *Visha* and *Upavisha* have very beneficial in little amount and medicinal properties utilised in various diseases.

6. Conclusion

Proper *Shodhana* methods as mentioned in our *RasaShastra* and other different *Ayurvedic Classics* *Visha* and *Upavisha* have potential role and these drug used in therapeutic *matra* can be safely used in various diseases. In *Rasashastra*, like any other *Rasa dravyas*, *visha* and *upavishas* also play a significant role. It is reviewed in various *classics* that, *vishamay* act as *amruta*, if administered in proper dose and vice versa. Also in modern, it is said that, toxins are molecules that are harmful to living organisms. It is a fact that virtually any substance can be harmful at high enough concentrations - as Paracelsus (1493 - 1541) said in the sixteenth century, “the dose makes the poison”. *Vishas* play an important role both in *loahavedha* and *dehavedha*. It is found that if toxicity of these substances is reduced they may become more beneficial and quick - acting due to their

vyavayi and *vikasigunas*. *Vishas* processed and administered appropriately are considered *rasayana*, *vajeekarana*, *sarvarogahara* and even *vishaghna*. If a manufacturer is not taking care in procuring a genuine raw material from authentic resources and deviate from the manufacturing process as prescribed in the *classics*, definitely the product will be spurious and this may happen with any system of medicine.

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