

VISHAMRUTAM-AN APPRAISAL ON VISHAS AND UPAVISHAS

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ABSTRACT

Rasa Shastra, a discipline of Ayurveda, deals with huge number of poisonous drugs utilized in various processes as well as for the internal administration. These poisonous drugs can be classified as herbal, metal and minerals, and animal poisons based on their origin. 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. Hence, in addition to the knowledge of metals and minerals, it is necessary to have the equal knowledge of herbal poisons mentioned in our classics. Poisonous drugs used judiciously after processing, act as ambrosia (amruta) and can treat many ailments. This paper is an appraisal on various poisons drugs, their origin, utility and their role in Rasa Shastra.

KEYWORDS: Visha, upavisha, rasa shastra, amruta, rasayana and vishopavishas.

INTRODUCTION

Vishas are the most poisonous drugs, hence called Mahavishas. The description of vishas is more available in Rasa Shastra compared to any other discipline of Ayurveda. Various Rasa Shastra texts like Rasarnava (Rnv), Rasaratnasamucchaya (RRS), Rasa tarangini (RT), etc. had emphasized more on vishas. There are totally about 29 Mahavishas mentioned in various Rasa classics. The number varies from five to eighteen. Among them Vatsanabha (*Aconitum ferox*) is the only drug that can be used as a medicine, and all other drugs enumerated are more toxic and have no medicinal use. Upavishas are the visha category that is less virulent than the mahavishas, hence named upavisha. The description and utility of upavishas is available only in the Rasa classics. The number of upavishas varies from text to text ranging from the number five to eleven. In addition to their therapeutic uses upavishas are also used in Rasakarmas like parada agnisthayi (thermo stable), bubhukshana (with increased amalgamation power), bandana (binding) and marana (incineration). 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).

Visha Nirukti (Derivation of Word Visha)

The word visha is derived from the root 'vish' which means to pervade completely. Thus visha is the one which pervades the whole body immediately after ingestion.^[1]

Paribhasha (Definition of Visha)

Charaka and Susrutha opine that "visha is a substance that which causes sadness". Visha is a substance that which vitiates the dhatus and takes off the life of an individual immediately after entering into the body.^[2]

Classification of Visha

The classification of the poison differs from text to text. The general classification of visha is Sthavara (obtained from static source like plants and mines in earth) and Jangama (obtained from movable source like snakes and other animals). Sthavara vishas consists of vishas and upavishas, and khanija i.e metals and minerals.^[2,3]

Table 1: Number of vishas and upavishas.

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

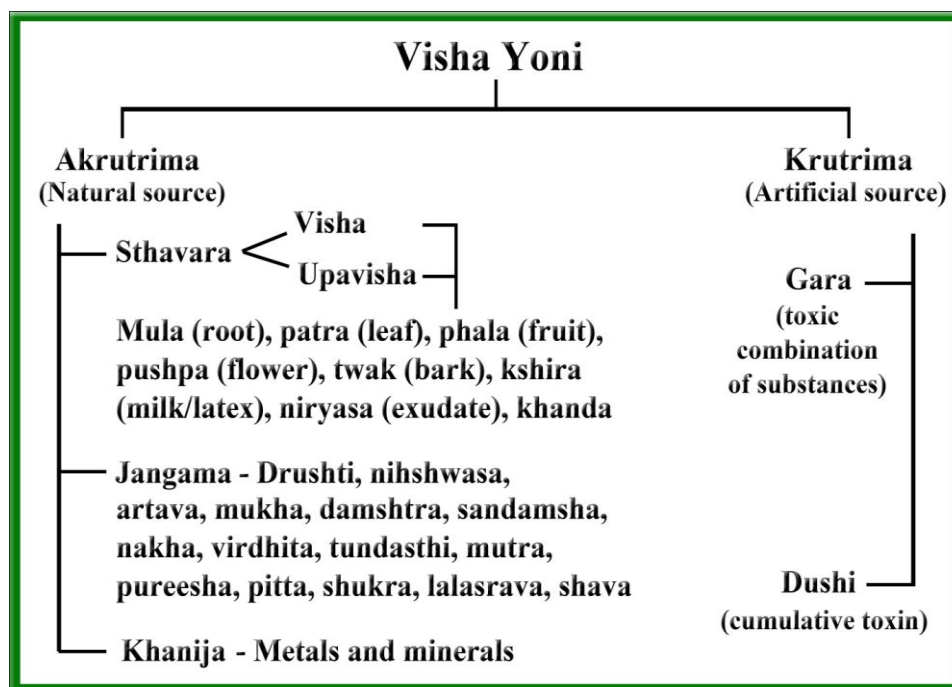


Fig. 1: Classification of vishas based on origin.

Vishagati (movement of toxins in body): Jangamavisha acts in the lower part (adhah bhaga) of the body where as Sthavaravisha acts in the upper part (urdhwa bhaga). Hence they counteract each other.

Visha gunas (qualities of toxin/poison): Laghu (light), ruksha (dry), ashu, visada, vikasi and vyavayi (enhanced bioavailability), tikshna (intense), sukshma (subtle), ushna (hot), anirdeshya rasa/apaki/avyakta rasa. All these 10 qualities are opposite to that of Ojas (essential energy for the body and mind) that keeps body healthy.^[3]

Visha Shodhana (purification process)

The vishas and upavishas mentioned in classics should be subjected to various process of purification to nullify the evil/undesired adverse effects and to enhance the therapeutic properties. As the vishas possess vyavayi and vikasi gunas; once the toxins are removed, they act as medicine/ambrosia (amruta).

Shodhana Vishishtata (significance of purification process)

The vishadravyas should be processed for purification (sodhana) before their administration to nullify toxicity and enhance the rasayana (rejuvenation) property.

Samanya Sodhana (general purification method)

The drug is to be soaked in Gomutra and kept in sunlight for 3 days. Gomutra has to be changed daily and finally the drug has to be washed with hot water.

Vishagna gana (group of antidote herbs): Haridra (*Curcuma longa*), Manjistha (*Rubia cordifolia*), Suvaha, Sushmela, Palindi, Chandana (*Santalum album*), Kanaka (*Datura metel*), Shirisha (*Albizia lebbek*), Tinduvara, Sleshmantaka (*Cordia dichotoma*).^[4]

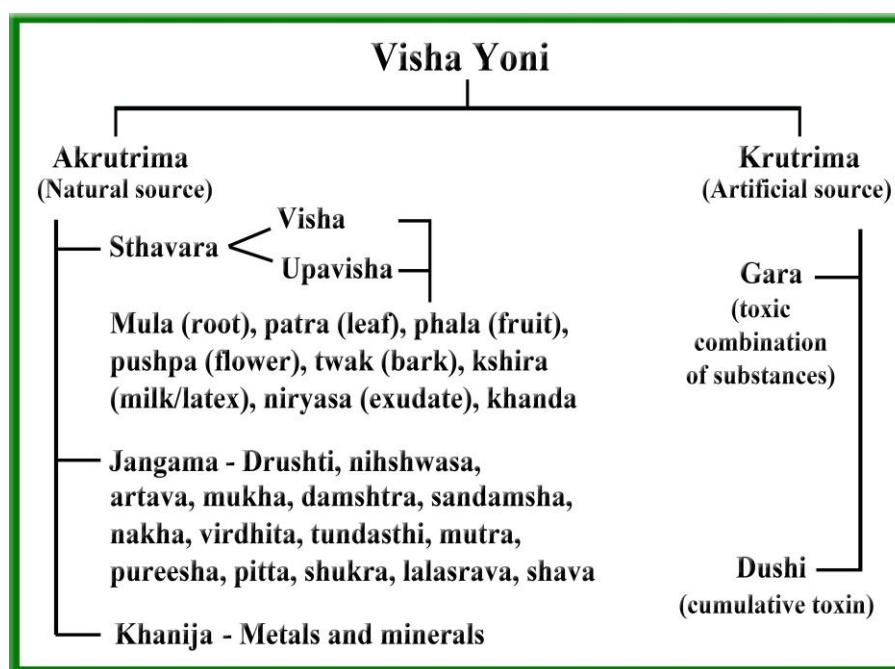
Table 2: Enumeration of visha.

S.No	Visha	Rnav	R.R.S, R.Pu	RR	Sa.Sa, Y.R, R.T R.Sam, R.Bhas	R.M	R.A
1.	Vatsanabha	-	+	-	+	+	+
2.	Kalakuta	+	+	+	+	+	+
3.	Meshasringi	-	-	-	-	-	+
4.	Halahala	-	-	-	+	+	+
5.	Dardura	-	-	-	-	-	+
6.	Karkata	-	-	-	-	-	+
7.	Mulaka	-	-	-	-	-	+
8.	Granthi	-	-	-	-	-	+
9.	Haridra	-	-	+	+	+	+
10.	Raktasringi	-	-	+	-	-	+
11.	Pradeepana	-	-	-	+	-	+
12.	Mayura	-	-	-	-	+	-
13.	Binduka	-	-	-	-	+	-

14.	Saktuka	+	+	+	+	+	-
15.	Baluka	-	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Sakhanabha	-	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Sumangala	-	-	-	-	-	-
18.	Sringika	+	+	-	+	+	-
19.	Markata	-	-	-	-	-	-
20.	Mustaka	+	-	+	-	+	-
21.	Kardama	-	-	-	-	-	-
22.	Pushkara	-	-	-	-	-	-
23.	Shikhi	-	-	-	-	-	-
24.	Harita	-	-	-	-	-	-
25.	Chakra visha	-	-	-	-	-	-
26.	Sourashtrika	-	-	-	+	-	-
27.	Brahmaputra	-	-	-	+	-	-
28.	Pitta	-	+	-	-	-	-
29.	Krishna visha	+	-	-	-	-	-
Total number-29		5	5	5	9	18	11

Table 3: Enumeration of upavishas.

S.No	Upavisha	Botanical name	Rnav	RRS	RSS, AP,YR	R.Chi	RSK	RT, R.Sam	RPu RBh	Su. Pr
1.	Snuhi	<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i>	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-
2.	Arka	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
3.	Dattura	<i>Datura metal</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
4.	Karavira	<i>Nerium Oleander</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5.	Langali	<i>Gloriosa superba</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
6.	Vishatinduka	<i>Nux vomica</i>	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
7.	Nilaka/ Bhallataka	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i>	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+
8.	Gunja	<i>Abrus precatorius</i>	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-
9.	Ahiphena	<i>Opium poppy</i>	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-
10.	Jayapala	<i>Croton tiglium</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
11.	Neelini	<i>Indigofera tinctoria</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12.	Ativisha	<i>Aconitum heterophyllum</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Number-12			5	5	7	8	6	11	9	6



DISCUSSION

In Rasa shastra, 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 sthavara/khanija visha 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, rasa dravyas which are also poisonous are indicated only after processing. The qualities of Ojas and visha antagonize each other, but still visha dravyas can act as Rasayana dravyas 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 parada, ex: chitraka in swedana (vapouring procedure); in moorchana (swooning procedure) they are used for the removal of vishadosha; langali and chitraka in adhadhapanasamskara (condensation). They also help to increase kramanatva of parada. Use in preparation of Ranjana taila, Sarana taila. References of visha and upavishas in veda samskara of parada are enumerated, ex: vishatruna, vishodaka, raktasnuhi, chitraka, etc. They have role in doshanivarana of parada (elimination of blemishes of mercury); ex: chitraka to remove vahni dosha; krishna dattura to remove chapalya dosha.^[6]

References of classification of visha based on varna and rasa karma are observed. In the preparation of 'vida'; helps in mukhikarana and pakshakartana of parada. Vishopavishas (vishas and upavishas) helps in parada marana and bandhana. Chapala bandha yoga contains chitraka, karaveera, langali. Krishna sarpavisha is used for Vajra druti bandha. Rasa bandhaka dravyas include raktasnuhi, raktachitraka. These groups of drugs are used in nirgandha murchana (murchana process without gandhaka/sulphur) of parada; they are also included in 'niyamaka gana oushadhas'. Nirjeevakaraka oushadhas like langali, rakta srungi, rakta chitraka, vajri, etc. Dwandwa melapana yoga includes vishas like vatsanabha, gunja, langali, etc. They also help in identification of loha through Avarta pareeksha. Prakasha musha is to be applied with kalka of visha, tankana and gunja.

Utility in deha veda includes its action as ambrosia, if it is administered in apt dose after processing as described in classics. These drugs are used as rasayana (for rejuvenation). Few commonly used rasayana are Amruta rasayana and Bhallata rasayana. It enhances Vajeekarana (aphrodisiac) activity where in a combination of dugdha, kapikacchu (*Mucuna pruriens*), vatsanabha, karjura, yashtimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) along with honey and ghee enhances the Shukra dhatu (seminal fluid - sperm

and ovum). Vishopavishas utility in chikitsa (treatment) sthavara visha acts as an antidote for jangama visha and vice versa. Textbook Rasaratna samucchaya describes vishas in a separate chapter called Vishakalpa, their utility and various kalpas used in many of the diseases are described in detail.

Utility of vishopavishas in other areas-Gunja is one among the 'mitra panchaka', 'dravaka gana' and used in apunarbhava bhasma pareeksha. Arka and snuhi kshira are the common bhavanartha dravyas in the process of marana (incineration) of most of the rasa dravyas. All the vishopavishas are used in the sattvapata (extraction method) of chapala (bismuth) drug. To quote safety profile of Visha oushadhi's, "A drug is safe if it destroys the disease but not the diseased. 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-agrahya dravya lakshanas described in classics. The drug has to be collected accordingly as said in classics and according to the grahya lakshanas. Such collected drug has to be preserved properly and processed.

Acharyas have mentioned various methods of sodhana 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. Pathya-apathya plays a major role in drug administration. Regimen like Swasthavrutta, Brahmacharya and Pathya-apathya ahara, are to be strictly followed while administering Vishas.^[7]

CONCLUSION

In Rasa shastra, like any other Rasa dravyas, visha and upavishas also play a significant role. It is reviewed in various classics that, visha may 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 plays an important role both in lohavedha 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. Hence to conclude, Rasoushadhis prepared from vishas according to the classics and administered accordingly act like amruta (ambrosia).

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