ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A review on the concept of Vishaghna Dravya (anti-toxic drugs) in Ayurveda.

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Poisons (*Visha*) may be of plant, animal and mineral origin which produce deleterious effects on the body. Agada Tantra is the branch of Ayurveda which deals with the toxicological aspects. There is a requirement of antidotes and antitoxic drugs to arrest the effect of visha. There are such drugs called *Vishaghna* (anti poisonous / anti-toxic) mentioned in Ayurveda samhitas and textbooks. **Materials and Methods:** Major Ayurvedic samhitas viz. Charak samhita, Sushruta samhita, Astanga Hridayam were looked into for references regarding *Vishaghna* drugs. **Observation and results:** There are a huge number of plants, animal products and minerals mentioned under various categories and groups. These drugs with similar properties and actions are grouped together, e.g. *Vishaghna gana* in Charak samhita, *Aragvadhadi gana*, *Patoladi gana*, *Anjanadi gana*, *Trapuadi gana* etc. in Sushruta samhita. Similarly Astanga hridayam also contains similar groups. **Conclusion:** There is abundance of poison in the environment in various forms manifested as pollution, epidemics etc. There are huge resources of anti-toxic drugs naturally occurring that can be utilized to address the biggest issues of the planet today. These drugs need to be considered for experimental studies.

Keywords: Poison, *Visha*, *Vishaghna*, Anti-toxic, *Agada*.

INTRODUCTION

Poison (*visha*) is a substance (solid, liquid or gaseous) which if introduced in the living body or brought into contact with any part thereof will produce ill-health or death by its constitutional or local effects or both. ¹Toxin is a naturally

(plant, animal and microorganism) produced chemical that alters the normal function of another organism. However in alternative medicine and by lifestyle journalists, the term “toxin” is used to refer to any substance alleged to cause ill health. This could include the *Sthavara Visha* (poison of plant

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origin), Jangama *Visha* (poison of animal origin), *Dhatu Visha* (poisonous metals and minerals), dooshivisha (cumulative poison), gara visha (artificial poison) etc. mentioned in Ayurveda treatises.² The *dravya* (matter) which causes *vishada* (sorrow) is known as *visha*.³ The one which causes abnormality in senses and organs is called *gada*, since it causes *vishada*, it is called *visha* and the one which acts as antidote to *gada* is called *agada*.⁴ Those which act against toxic substance are called as *vishaghna*. *Agada Tantra* is one of the eight original clinical branches of Ayurveda which basically deals with the toxicological aspects.⁵ *Agada Tantra* deals with poisoning by bites of venomous creatures and various types poisons. *Vishaghna* drugs are those which act on the deleterious effects of various poisons on the senses organs of the body. Different drugs act against poison by exerting their action on *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, *Srotas*, *Ashaya* etc. which are vitiated by *visha*.⁶ This article is based on the textual review of the major Ayurveda compendias (Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtangahrudayam) and the available commentaries on these literatures. Relevant Scientific literatures and publications were referred to understand the concept of *vishaghna* drugs and substantiate the Ayurveda approach for the same.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The references regarding the *vishaghna* drugs were searched in Ayurveda compendias viz. Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtangahrudayam. The properties of the drugs were verified from the text book of *Dravyaguna Vigyan* (Ayurveda pharmacy). The Ayurveda claims were substantiated with modern research works.

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Major references of *vishaghna* drugs in Ayurveda:

1. Shatvirechanashataasritya adhyaya, Charaka sutrasthana 4th chapter.
2. Dravya sangrhaniya adhyaya, Sushruta sutrasthana 38th chapter.
3. Shodhanadigana sangraha, Ashtangahrudayasutrasthana 15th chapter.

Categories of *vishaghna* drugs:

1. *Vishaghna gana*- *Haridra* (*Curcuma longa*), *Manjistha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Suvaha* (*Pluchea lanceolata*), *Sukshma ela* (*Elettaria cardamom*), *Palindi* (*Operculina turpethum*), *Chandan* (*Santalum album*), *Katak* (*Strychnos potatorum*), *shirish* (*Albizia lebbek*), *Sindhuvara* (*Vitex negundo*),

Shlesmataka (*Cordia dichotoma*).⁷ These drugs have hepatoprotective and antioxidant activity. These twelve *dravya* are *Vishaghna*, *Shothaghna*, *Raktashodhaka* and *Tridosha Shamak*.⁸

2. *Aragvadhadi gana*- *Aragvadha* (*Cassia fistula*), *Madanphal* (*Randia spinosa*), *Kutaja* (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*), *Patha* (*Cissampelos pareira*), *Saireyaka* (*Barleria prionitis*), *Moorva* (*Sansevieria zeylanica*), *Indrayava* (seeds of *kutaja*), *Saptaparni* (*Alstonia scholaris*), *Nimba* (*Azadirachta indica*), *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *Chitraka* (*Plumbago zeylanica*), *Karanja* (*Pongamia pinnata*), *Putikaranja* (*Caesalpinia bonducella*), *Patola* (*Trichosanthes dioica*), *Chirayata* (*Swerti Chirayata*), *karela* (bitter gourd). These drugs alleviate *kapha dosha* and *visha*. These are also useful for *Prameha* (diabetes), *Kustha* (skin disorders), *Jvara* (fever), *Vaman* (vomiting), and *Kandu* (itching).⁹
3. *Lodhradi gana*- *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa*), *Palash* (*Butea monosperma*), *Ashoka* (*Saraca Asoka*), *Shyonaka* (*Oroxylum indicum*), *Katphala* (*Myrica Esculenta*), *Kadamba* (*Anthocephalus indicus*), *Bharangi* (*Clerodendrum serrate*), *Shallaki* (*Boswellia serrata*). These drugs are useful for destroying *kapha dosha*, *meda* (fat), genital disorders, wound healing and anti poisonous.¹⁰
4. *Eladi gana*-*Ela* (*Elettaria cardamomum*), *Tagara* (*Vetiveria wallichii*), *Kustha* (*Saussurea lappa*), *Tvaka* (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*), *Dalchini* (*Cinnamomum tamala*), *Jatamansi* (*Nardostichs jatmansi*), *Nagakesara* (*Mesua Ferrea*), *padmakesara* (*Nelumbo nucifera*), *Kesara* (*Crocus sativus*), *Usira* (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), *Devdaru* (*Cedrus deodara*), *Harenu* (*Pisum sativum*), *Priyangu* (*Callicarpa macrophylla*), *Guggulu* (*Commiphora wightii*), *Sarjarasa* (*Vateria indica*). These drugs are useful in *vata* and *kapha* disorders, provide good complexion, useful in itching, boils, eczema apart from being anti poisonous.¹¹
5. *Patoladi gana*- *Patola* (*Trichosanthes dioica*), *Chandan* (*Santalum album*), *Raktachandan* (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), *Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *moorva* (*Marsdenia tenacissima*), *Katurohini* (*Picrorhiza kurroa*), *Patha* (*Cissampelos pareira*). These drugs are helpful in *pitta* and *kapha* conditions, itching, vomiting and increased appetite, heal wounds apart from being anti-toxic.¹²

6. Shyamadi gana- *Nisoth* and *Trivrit*(*Oerculina turpethum*), *Danti* (*Baliospermum montanum*), *Kalmegha* (*Andrographis paniculata*), *Tilvaka* (*Viburnum coriaceum*), *Kampillaka* (*Mallotus philippensis*), *Karanja*, *Priyangu*, *Guduchi*, *Saptla* (*Euphorbia dracunculoides*), *Sehunda* (*Euphorbia neriifolia*), *Svarnakshiri* (*Argemone Mexicana*). These drugs are helpful in poisonous conditions and abdominal disorders like *gulma*, *adhmana*, *malabheda* etc.¹³

7. Anjanadi gana- *Sauviranjana* (lead sulphide), *Rasanjan* (antimony sulphide), *Nagakasesara*, *Priyangu*, *Usira*, *Kamakshesara*, *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*). These are useful in raktapitta disease, burning sensation and poisonous conditions.¹⁴

8. Trapuadi gana - *Vanga* (tin), *Sheesha* (lead), *Tamra* (copper), *Rajat* (silver), *Swarna* (Gold), *Krishna loha* (iron). These are useful in *garavisha* (artificial poison), worm infestation, poison, thirst, heart disease and *pandu* (anemia).¹⁵

9. Utpaladi gana- These contain various varieties of lotus and *Yastimadhu*. Useful in conditions like thirst, raktapitta, burning sensations, fainting, vomiting and poison.¹⁶

10. Eksara gana yoga- *Bakuchi* (*Psoralea corylifolia*), *Katabhi* (*Cardiospermum halicacabum*), *Sindhuvara*, *Choraka* (*Angelica glauca*), *Varuna* (*Crataeva nurvala*), *Kustha* (*Saussurea lappa*), *Sarpagandha* (*Rauwolfia serpentina*), *Saptala*, *punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *Shrisha* (*Albizia lebbek*), *Aragvadha*, *Arka* (*Calotropis procera*), *Shyama*, *Patha*, *Vidanga* (*Embelia ribes*), *Ashmantaka* (*Ficus rumphii*), *Mango*, black earth etc.¹⁷

11. Sarivadi gana- *Sariva* (*Hemidesmus indicus*), *Usira*, *Kasmarya* (*Gmelina arborea*), *madhuka* (*Madhuca longifolia*), *Parushaka* (*Grewia asiatica*), *Yashtimadhu*. Useful in burning sensation, bleeding disorders, thirst and fever conditions.¹⁸ Similarly, there is also mention of *Anjanadi gana*, *Patoladi gana*, *Aragvadhadi gana*, *Arkadi gana*, *Lodhradi gana* and *Eladi gana*.

12. Bhavaprakash nighantu- Out of 676 drugs mentioned in *Bhavaprakash Nighantu* there are 136 single drugs identified which exhibit vishaghna karma including herbs, minerals and of animal

origin. Among them 13 drugs belong to *Haritakyadi varga*, 22 drugs belong to *Karpooradi varga*, 33 drugs belong to *Guduchyadi varga*, 15 drugs belong to *Pushpa varga*, 13 drugs belong to *Vatadi varga*, 3 drugs belong to *Amradiphalala varga* and 17 drugs belong to *Dhatvadi varga*, 3 drugs from *Dhanyaka varga*, 6 drugs belong to *Shaka varga*, 1 drug belongs to *Maansa varga*, 1 drug from *Vari varga*, 1 drug from *Takra varga*, 4 drugs belongs to *Ghrit varga*, 1 from *mutra varga*, 1 drug was from *Taila varga* and other one was from *Madhu varga*, 1 from *Ikshu varga* and remaining varga were devoid of vishaghna dravya.¹⁹

13. Dravya guna by PV Sharma- *Shirisha*, *Nirvisha* (*Delphinium denudatum*), *Chilhint* (*Cocculus hirsutus*) and *Ankola* (*Alangium salvifolium*) are the four drugs in vishaghna category.²⁰

DISCUSSION

Qualities (Guna) of Vishaghna drugs.²¹

Guru (heavy), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Prasanna* (not too quick), *Pichhila* (slimy), *Sheeta* (cold), *Madhura* (sweet), *Mridu* (soft), *Sthira* (immobile), *Shlakshna* (smooth), *Bahala/ Sandra* (dense). These ten properties of vishaghna are just opposite of the ten visha properties viz. *Laghu* (light), *Ruksha* (rough), *Ashukari* (fast acting), *Yavayi* (quickly absorbable), *Teekshna* (sharp), *Vikasi* (depressant), *Sukshma* (subtle), *Ushna* (hot), *Vishada* (non-slimy), *Anirdesh rasa* (undefined taste).²² The properties of visha are just opposite of ojas. Ojas in Ayurveda is considered as quintessence of all the seven Dhatus and represent the Bala or biological strength which include immune strength. Ojas is considered as resistance to decay and degeneration of the body and immunity against the disease. Infact, visha has its action on ojas (ultimate essence of the body). These vishaghna drugs are *ojo vardhak* (increasing ojas), *jeevaniya* (strengthening), and hence counteracts the visha by virtue of their qualities. These drugs increase ojas, strengthen heart, protect *dhatu*s, alleviate vata and pitta, arrest the *Visha Vegas* and detoxify the blood.^{23,24}

Vishaghna drug on the basis of Rasa (taste):

1. *Madhura rasa*- increases ojas, strengthens heart and alleviates vata- pitta. Eg. *Yashtimadhu*

2. *Tikta rasa*- alleviates pitta dosha. Eg. *Patola*

3. *Kashaya rasa* - arrest the spread of poison. Eg. *Arjuna* (*Terminalia arjuna*)

On the basis of Vipaka:

1. *Madhura vipaka*(final taste after metabolism)-
alleviate pitta dosha, strengthen dhatus and ojas. Eg.
Guduchi, yashtimadhu

On the basis of veerya (potency):

1. *Sheeta veerya*- increases oja and dhatu, alleviates
vata and pitta dosha and arrests the spread of poison.

On the basis of *Prabhava* (specific action): anti-toxic effect.
Eg. shiresha, cow ghee

CONCLUSION

While there is enough appeal against the use of poisonous Ayurveda drugs (visha, upvisha, metals and minerals and animal products), credential to the vishagna drugs is not given. For every poison available on the earth, there is an antidote. It is just the ignorance that we are not able to capitalize. The mode of action of vishaghna drugs on the basis of Ayurveda principle is discussed. There is an abundance of poison in the environment in various forms manifested as pollution, epidemics etc. We have such huge resources of anti-toxic drugs naturally occurring that can be utilized to address the biggest issues of the planet today. These Vishaghna drugs form the major part of the agada formulations which are indicated for poisonous cases. On modern parameters, most of these drugs are found to be hepatoprotective, nephroprotective, few being diuretics, cardioprotective, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Although research has been carried out on some of the drugs discussed above, each of these drugs needs experimental and clinical trials.

ABBREVIATIONS: not applicable

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST: author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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