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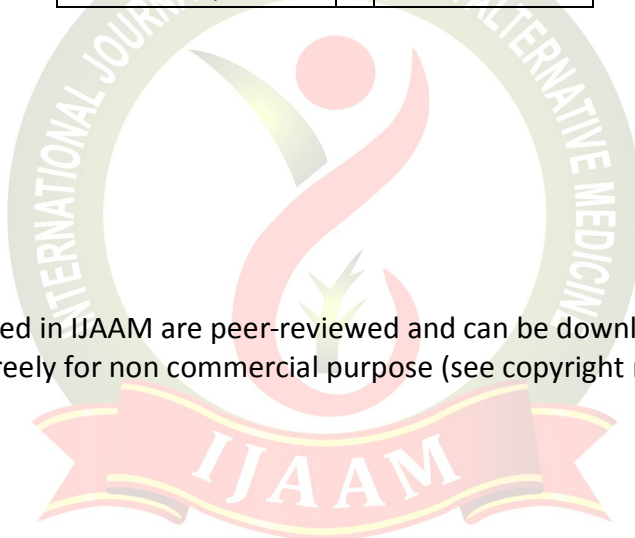
## **CONCEPT OF 'VISHA'- AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE**

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**CONCEPT OF 'VISHA' - AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE****\*Corresponding Author****Kalpana R. Chavhan**Assistant Professor,  
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drkalpanachavhan@gmail.com**QR Code IJAAM****ABSTRACT:**

*Agadtantra* is one of the eight branches of Ayurveda, which deals with the study of poison and its treating measures. The term *visha* is derived for causing *vishada* i.e. depression of spirits, even for *devatas*. When *visha* is administered, it disturbs all the functions of body, makes them abnormal, which degrades the health of human being resulting death. While using any drug it is important that the physician should be aware of its properties and it should be administered with the treating intentions. The real difference between a medicine and a poison is the intent with which it is given. An acute poison can become an excellent drug if it is properly administered, and similarly even a drug, if not properly administered, becomes an acute poison. Action of a drug on the body is depend upon various factors like its properties, dose, mode of administration etc. But it is important to know that what properties of a substance decides either it act like a medicine or like a poison on the body. As properties of a *dravya* is important to know its mode of action, it is useful to decide the line of treatment for specific poisoning. This review article includes discussion about the *Ayurvedic* concepts of properties of poisonous substances, their origins and factors responsible for their mode of action.

**Key Words:** Toxicology, *Agadtantra*, *Visha*, *Visha-guna*, Poison**INTRODUCTION**

Toxicology is one of the branch of medical science which deals with poisons with reference to their sources, properties, toxic symptoms produced by them, the lethal dose, treatment to combat the toxic effects, methods for detections of poisons [1]. It is included under *Agadtantra*, one of the eight branches of Ayurveda. [2] On account of filling with depressed spirits or *Vishada*, it is termed to be *visha* i.e. poison. [3] It is a substance on administration disturbs all the functions of body i.e. *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala* and makes them abnormal, which degrades the health of human being resulting death. Medico-legal experts expresses that the real difference between a medicine and a poison is the intent with which it is given. Ayurveda is a science which is having preventive and treating principles towards the diseases. There are many causes of different diseases mentioned in the ancient texts. Poisons are one of them. By any means poisons get entered in the body and disturb the normal functions of the body. For treating it, various medicinal formulations are mentioned in Ayurveda. They are termed as *Agada* i.e. Antidotes. These are the substances which prevents the action of poison and neutralize its effects. Medico-legal experts expresses that the real difference between a medicine and a poison is the intent with which it is given. According to *Charaka* even an acute poison can become an excellent drug if it is properly administered, and similarly even a drug,

if not properly administered, becomes an acute poison. [4] The action of poison is depend upon its properties and is called as *guna* of that substance. The substance having 10 *gunas* is considered as most toxic in action. [5] There are differences of opinions about the numbers of *gunas* among all the *Aacharyas*. These properties of *Vishadravya* will decide that what kind of toxic effect it will create in the body and how it will get treated. Due to the properties like *Ashukaritwa*, *Ushna*, *Tikshna* *vishadravya* get rapidly spread in the body so it is a main content of many *ayurvedic* medicinal formulations.

So for understanding the poison, its mode of action and treatment it is important to understand the concept of its *gunas* and some other factors which are responsible for its mechanism of action.

**Aim and Objective-**

- To study the concept of *Visha* according to Ayurveda.
- Recollect and arrange all the scattered references in different ancient texts related to *Visha*.

**Materials and Method-**

- The whole study is based on literary review collected from classical *Ayurveda* texts and modern books.
- This study is carried out under following heads-
  1. Definition of *Visha*

2. *Vishotptti*-(Mythological Origin of Poison)
3. Classification of *Visha*-
4. *Visha Gunas*-Ten attributes of poison
5. *Panchabautik* investigations
6. *Visha prabhava*-(Effect of poison on the body)
7. Discussion
8. Conclusion

### Definition of *Visha*

The word '*Visha*' is made with the two words i.e. *Vish+ka*, which means to occupy or to get spread rapidly. A substance which rapidly gets spread in to *Rasadi dhatus* and occupies the body is called as *Visha*.<sup>[6]</sup>

On account of filling with depressed spirits or *Vishada*, it is termed to be *visha* i.e. poison. As the world became despaired at the sight of it, (or became *vishanna*) it was called *Visha* by *Charaka*.<sup>[7]</sup> *Chakrapani* described it as *Visha* gives *vishada*.<sup>[8]</sup> *Sharangadhara* defines that the *Visha* is a substance which is *Agnibhutapradhana*, destroyer of life and *yogawahi* i.e. prime synergetic in action.<sup>[9]</sup> According to modern medical science poison is defined as a substance which after being absorbed in to the living organism or by its chemical action on the tissues, produces an injurious effect on the body.

### *Vishotptti*-(Mythological Origin of Poison)

1. ***Shrimadbhagwat***<sup>[10]</sup>-In days of yore, while the ocean was being churned by the Gods and the demons for obtaining *Amruta*. Before the appearance of *Amruta*, *Visha* appeared from the ocean. All the Gods and demons got irritate with its presence, then they requested to lord Shiva to have the *Visha* for the well being of the universe. So Lord Shiva drunk the poison. While drinking, some drops of it fall on earth, which got deposit in plants and animals and thus the plant and animal poisons generated.
2. ***Charaka***<sup>[11]</sup>-While the ocean was being churned by the Gods and the Demons for obtaining *Amruta*, a ferocious person who was resplendent with aura, and who had four fangs, tawny hair and fiery eyes emerged. The world became despaired (*Vishanna*) at this site because of which he was called the poison or *visha*. Lord *Bramha* deposited this poison in *jangam* and *sthavara* substances. Therefore, the poison originated from water (*Ambusmbhavam*) is of two types and it resembles fire (*pavakopam*)<sup>[12]</sup>
3. ***Shushruta***<sup>[13]</sup>-It is stated that there was a

devil named *Kaitabha*, who out of vanity, obstructed in various ways the work of Lord *Bramha*, when he was engaged in the creation of nature. For acts of *Kaitabha* God *Bramha* grew very angry. His wrath then became manifest and came down in a violent form from his mouth. It burnt the mighty devil to ashes. Even after the destruction of the demon, that wonderful and terrific glow went on surprisingly at the sight of which all the Gods were deeply depressed in sprits (*vishada*). The term *Visha* is so called on account of its filling the Gods with *vishada*. There upon, *Bramha* after having created all living beings cast the remaining wrath both into inanimate and animate creations.

### Classification of *Visha*-

On the basis of origin *Visha* has been classified mainly into two categories namely *Sthavar visha* i.e. plant and mineral poisons, and *Jangam visha* i.e. animal poisons where the sites of *Sthavar*<sup>[14]</sup> and *jangama visha*<sup>[15]</sup> has described ten and sixteen respectively.<sup>[16]</sup> *Sushruta*, while describing the instantaneously fatal poison, described *sthavara*, *Jangama* and *Krittrima vishas* i.e. artificial poison.<sup>[17]</sup> *Charaka* included another type the *gara visha* along with the above three types.<sup>[18]</sup> *Chakrapani* opines that, the combination of two-non poisonous materials is called *gara* and which produced by the combination of two poisonous materials, is called *krittrima* or artificial.<sup>[19]</sup> *Vagbhata* described two main types i.e. natural poison which are *Sthavar* and *Jangam visha* and artificial poison i.e. *Garavisha*.<sup>[20]</sup> Certain texts also classifies *vishdravyas* in *Mahavisha*<sup>[21]</sup> and *Upavisha*<sup>[22]</sup>. *Dravya* with high toxic potency called *Mahavisha* and the *visha* with less potency called *Upavisha*.

### *Visha Gunas*-Ten attributes of poison

There are many factors responsible for the specific action of a *dravya*. Some *dravya* act according to its *rasa*, some according to *virya*, some according to *guna* and some of them act according to its *prabhava*.<sup>[23]</sup> Based on these *rasadi gunas*, classification of *vishas* or tests of *vishas* are not described in the classical texts of Ayurveda. *Visha* contains 10 *gunas*.<sup>[24]</sup> *Visha gunas* according to *Ayurvedic* texts are described in Table no 1. These ten *gunas* vitiates the *doshas* and destroys the *Ojas*. The then properties of *visha* can be explained in following way:

- ***Laghu*** (Lightness)- is opposite to *Guru guna* (heaviness). It is also responsible for *Lekhankarma*.<sup>[25]</sup> *Dravya* having this *guna* are



easily digestible and causes lightness in the body.<sup>[26]</sup>

- **Ruksha** (rough)-is apposite to the *snigdha* and causes the *stambhana* (withholding), *kharatva* (harsh), *kathinatva* (hardness) <sup>[27]</sup>, and responsible for the *shoshantva* (emaciation) of the body.<sup>[28]</sup>
- **Ashu**(quick acting) <sup>[29]</sup>-Due to its quickness it get spreads all over the body like the oil which spreads immediately on water.
- **Vishada**(non-slimmy) <sup>[30]</sup>-is opposite to *picchila* and removes moistness and helps healing of ulcers
- **Vyavaye** (Quickly absorbed)<sup>[31]</sup>-It first spreads all over the body and then get digested.
- **Tikshna** (Sharpness) <sup>[32]</sup>-Gives rise to burning sensation encourages suppuration and increases secretions.
- **Vikashi** (Depressant) -While spreading all over the body produce looseness of the ligaments.
- **Sukshma** (minuteness) <sup>[33]</sup>-Property due to its minuteness enters into the minutest of channels.
- **Ushna** (Hotness) <sup>[34]</sup>-Is opposite to the *sheeta*.
- **Anirdeshya Rasa** (Tasteless) <sup>[35]</sup>-Which does not have any specific rasa or taste
- **Apaki/Avipaki** (indigestible) <sup>[36]</sup>-Which is not digestible.

Sharangadhar *samhita* described the *visha guna* as, the drugs possessing properties like *vyavaye*, *vikasi*, *sukshma*, *chedi*, *madavaha*, *agneya*, *jivithara* and *yogavahi* is called as *visha*.<sup>[37]</sup> Effect on the body and responsible *visha Guna* is described in Table no.3<sup>[38]</sup>. While describing about the origin of the *visha*, *Sushruta* described another property of the *visha*; just as the atmospheric water which has imperceptible and undeveloped taste, of ground or soil on which it fall upon, so it is the nature of the tasteless *visha* that it partakes up the specific taste (*rasa*) of thing or animal in which it exists.<sup>[39]</sup> The nature of *visha* is considered exactly opposite to that of the *Ojas*.<sup>[40]</sup> so when *visha* is administered or enters the body; causes destruction of *ojas* which leads to death. Difference between *visha*, *Madya*, *Ghrta*, *Dugdha* and *Ojas* are described in table no.2. *Ojas* is a substance through which all living beings gets nourished and thus helps to sustain the life of an individual. It is only the foremost substance responsible for the union of *Shukra* and *shonita* thus leads to the formation of fetus. This is the essence of all the seven *dhatu*s. <sup>[41]</sup> *Madya* (Alcohol) is having similar properties as that of *Visha* contains but potency of *guna* is more seen in *visha* than *Madya*. <sup>[42]</sup> Instead of *Anirdeshya Rasa* *Madhya* is having its *amla rasa*. <sup>[43]</sup> Again like *Visha* alcohol destroys all the attributes of *Ojas*

which is the abode of *Satva* by virtue of its ten attributes and result of this affliction, the mind gets agitated and so causes intoxication. <sup>[44]</sup>

### Panchabautik Investigations

All matter is constituted of five *mahabhutas*. <sup>[45]</sup> Thus all the *dravyas* in the world are formed of *panchbhutas* only. According to *siddhanta*, though the *mahabhutas* differ in their ratio in different *dravyas*, they are named by the predominant *mahabhuta* such as *parthiva*, *aapya*, *tejasa*, *vayavya* and *nabhasa dravyas* respectively. <sup>[46]</sup> Details of *visha guna*, *Mahabuta* combination, *Dosha prabhava* and Action on the body is described in Table no.4 <sup>[47]</sup> In the same way, *visha dravyas* are also constituted by these *panchamahabhutas* only. Specific *panchamahabhutic* dominance of *visha dravyas* was not described in the *samhitas*. *Dalhana* while commenting on *Sushruta's* explanation of detection of poisoning by use on animals, *Vishanna pariksha* is explained in the following way by him <sup>[48]</sup> -

*Shabda Pariksha*-when poisoned food burns making loud cracking sound.

*Rupa Pariksha*-when cast into the fire it acquires the colour of peacock's neck

*Gandha Pariksha*-when it burns it emits irritating fumes and it cannot be speedily extinguished

*Rasa Pariksha*-Flies dies after flying over the poisonous food.

*Sparsha Pariksha*-Features are explained in the context touch of poisonous food

### Visha prabhava-(Effect of poison on the body)

After getting entered into the body the poison immediately vitiates the blood then simultaneously it vitiates all the *tridoshas* and its respective sites and at least proves to be fatal for an individual after getting entered into the *hridaya* (heart) <sup>[49]</sup>. The blood after getting vitiated by poison leads to tingling or pricking sensation all over the body, leads to red colour patches on the skin, sweating, horripilation, feeling of ants moving over the body, sever aches and pains all over the body, yawning, desire for the food stuffs having cold potency. The dominant or the potency of *tridosha* also gets debilitate and loses their potency by mixing up with the blood which gets vitiated by the poison, thus leading to the death or hampering of the health.<sup>[50]</sup> The poison first vitiates that specific *dosha* by which it is predominant, where the poison gets localized produces the diseases first to that organ. <sup>[51]</sup> If the poison is present in *Vatashaya*, produces diseases of *Vata* as well as diseases of *Kapha*. If poison is present in *Pittashaya*, it produces diseases of *Pitta* and *Kapha*, similarly if it is present in *Kaphashaya*, it produces diseases of *Kapha* as well as *Pitta*. <sup>[52]</sup>

**DISCUSSION**

*Visha* is a substance which disturbs all the functions of the body, which results into fetal conditions. Ayurvedic concept of poison is slightly different as that of modern medicine. Medico-legal experts promote the thought that difference between a medicine and a poison is the intent with which it is given as that of Ayurveda expresses the concept that an acute poison becomes an excellent drug if it is properly administered, and similarly even a drug if not administered properly can become an acute poison. According to Ayurveda every *dravya* (substance) can create a specific action on the body and this action depends upon the *guna* (properties) of that *dravya*. Particular *guna* decides the particular action of that *dravya* on the body. There is a difference of opinions about the number of *vishaguna* present in the *vishadravyas*. But the action of *vishadravyas* in the body knew to all *acharyas*. It is mentioned in the texts that the *vishadravya* having ten *gunas* is considered as more toxic in action e.g. *Vastanabha*, and it's called as *Mahavisha* by *acharyas*. Due to

some properties like *Ashukaritwa*, *Ushana*, *Tikshana vishadravya* get spread rapidly in the body. So for the quick action of medicines many *ayurvedic* formulations contain these *vishadravyas* as their ingredient. By utilizing these properties of *vishadravyas* medicines can be made more effective. All the substances in the world are formed of *Panchamahabhutas*. In the same way, *vishadravyas* are also constituted by these *Panchamahabhutas* only. Each *vishaguna* contains a specific *Mahabhuta* combination and so as having a *dosha prabhava* which is responsible for particular action in the body e.g. *Laghu guna* contains *mahabhuta* like *Teja*, *Vayu* and *Aakash*, so it act like *Vataprakopak* and *Kaphashamak* and generates a effect of *Langhana* in the body. So *guna* is responsible for specific action of a *vishadravya* in to the body. Hence it is important to know that which *vishadravya* containing which *gunas* so it will be better for understanding it's action in the body and will also useful to minimize it's hazardous action and helpful for treating toxicity.

**Table No.1: Classification of Gunas**

Sr.no.	Charaka	Sushruta	Vagbhata	Sharangadhar
1.	Laghu	-	Laghu	-
2.	Ruksha	Ruksha	Ruksha	-
3.	Aashu	Aashu	Aashukarita	-
4.	Vishad	Vishad	Vishad	-
5.	Vyavaye	Vyavavaye	Vyavaye	Vyavaye
6.	Tikshna	Tikshna	Tikshna	-
7.	Vikasi	vikasi	Vikasi	Vikasi
8.	Sukshma	Sukshma	Sukshma	-
9.	Ushna	Ushna	Ushna	Aganeya
10.	Anirdeshyarasa	-	Avyaktarasa	-
11.	-	Laghupaki	Vishampaki	-
12.	-	-	-	Chedi
13.	-	-	Medawaham	Medawaham
14.	-	-	-	Yogwahi
15.	-	-	-	Jivithara

**Table no.2: Comparison of Gunas-Visha, Madya, Ojas, Ghrita, Dugdha**

Visha	Madya	Ooja	Go-dugdha <sup>[53]</sup>	Go-ghrita <sup>[54]</sup>
Laghu	Laghu	Guru	Guru	Laghu
Ruksha	Ruksha	Snigdha	Snigdha	Snigdha
Tikshna	Tikshna	Mrudu	Mrudu	Mrudu
Ushna	Ushna	Sheet	Sheet	Sheet
Sukshma	Sukshma	Bahal	Sandra	Yogwahi
Ashukari	Ashukari	Prasanna	Prasanna	Prasanna
Vyavaye	Vyavaye	Sthirra	Manda	Saumya
Vikashi	Vikashi	Slakshna	Slakshna	Slakshna
Vishada	Vishada	Pischil	Pischil	Alpabhishyyandi
Anirdeshyarasa	Amla	Madhur	Madhur	Madhur
Apaki	-	-	-	-
Yogawahi	-	-	-	-
Madawaha	-	-	-	-
Chedi	-	-	-	-
Jivithara	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	Rasayana
-	-	-	-	Kaphakar

Table No.3: Effect on Body and Responsible Gunas [41]

Sr.No.	Effect In the body	Responsible Guna
1.	Enters in all body parts	<i>Sukshma, Ashu, Vyavaye</i>
2.	Disturbances in <i>Marmasthana</i>	<i>Tikshna, Vikasi, Chedi</i>
3.	Reflecting <i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Tikshana, Vikashi, Madawaha, Chedi</i>
4.	<i>Raktadushti</i>	<i>Sukshma, Tikshana</i>
5.	<i>Vaatdushti</i>	<i>Ruksha</i>
6.	<i>Pittadushti</i>	<i>Ushna, Agneya</i>
7.	<i>Kaphadushti</i>	<i>Anirdeshyarasa</i>
8.	Increasing <i>Aahar-rasa</i>	<i>Anerdeshyarasa and Yogwahi</i>
9.	Spreading rapidly	<i>Ashu, Vyavaye</i>
10.	No any change	<i>Vyavaye</i>
11.	Not get digested	<i>Apaki</i>
12.	Minimizing the treatment measures	<i>Laghu</i>
13.	Difficult to treat	<i>Laghu, Apaki</i>
14.	Loosing Body and Mind	<i>Vishad, chedi</i>
15.	Sudden Death	<i>Ashu, vyavaye, Vikashi</i>
16.	Destroying <i>Ooja</i>	<i>All gunas</i>

Table no.4: Panchabautik Investigations

Sr.No.	Vishaguna	Mahabuta combination	Dosha Prabhava	Main Function in the Body
1.	<i>Laghu</i>	<i>Teja+Vayu+Akaash</i>	<i>Vaat↑, Kapha↓</i>	<i>Langhana</i>
2.	<i>Ruksha</i>	<i>Teja+Vayu+Prithvi</i>	<i>Vaat↑, Kapha↓</i>	<i>Shoshan</i>
3.	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Teeja</i>	<i>Pitta↑, Vaat↓, Kapha↓</i>	<i>Swedana</i>
4.	<i>Tikshna</i>	<i>Teeja</i>	<i>Pitta↑, Kapha↓</i>	<i>Shodhana</i>
5.	<i>Sukshma</i>	<i>Teja+Vayu+Akaash</i>	<i>Vaat↑</i>	<i>Vivarnata</i>
6.	<i>Vishada</i>	<i>Teja+Vayu+Akaash, Prithvi</i>	<i>Vaat↑</i>	<i>Prakshalan</i>

**CONCLUSION**

Properties of a substance decides either it act like a medicine or like a poison in the body. An acute poison can become an excellent drug if it is properly administered, and similarly even a drug, if not properly administered, becomes an acute poison. So it is important to know that what properties of a substance decides either it act like a medicine or like a poison in the body. All actions of *Visha* are depends upon the *Gunas* that it having. Particular *guna* is responsible for particular effect on the body. Once we come to know the *guna pradhanya* in a poisonous substance it will be easy to treat the condition by using *dravyas* which are having opposite *gunas*. So for proper treatment of poisoning it is important to know about the *guna-pradhanya* that the substance is having. For knowing the *sadhya-sadhyatwa* and fatality, *gunas* are also important. The substance containing 10 numbers of *vishaguna* is more fatal and difficult to treat

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