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Use of poisons in Ayurveda medicines; a contemporary review

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Abstract:

Since the dawn of human civilization, the use of various herbs and inorganic drugs in the form of medicine was practiced. In this context Ayurveda stands out in the health care system as it mentions the use of various herbs and other drugs in number of diseased conditions. The use of poisonous plants as well as some mineral ores which are poisonous are been made as Ayurveda medicines and are in use till date. Here a brief review is done to enlist various plant origin poisons and mineral origin poisons used as medicines. Drugs used under Visha Varga for making various formulations have been discussed. Also their contemporary Ayurveda drugs which are in practice for treating various ailments are been discussed.

Keywords: Visha Varga, Ayurveda, poisonous plants.

Introduction:

Use of herbal drugs has its roots to the primitive age. Ayurveda as one of the oldest science of life known to mankind states the use of various herbs and minerals as part of medicines. Abiding to the principles of Ayurveda, it states that all available materials can be used as medicines. In this view Ayurveda classics had mentioned the use of number of herbs, metals, ores and other procedural techniques as medicines. These drugs are subjected to specific procedures to make them absorbable and exhibit its medicinal benefits. We find a very systematic and detailed classification of all drugs. These drugs are studied on the basis of *Rasa Panchakai*. i.e. its *Rasa*, *Virya*, *Vipaka*, *Guna* and *Karma*. Furthermore some drugs exhibit peculiar properties which are studied under its *Prabhava*.

Classification of drugs –

There are many types of classification mentioned in Ayurveda texts.

Classification on basis of activity – *Antachetana, Bahichetana Dravya*

Classification on basis of *Utpatti* – *Panchamahabhutatmak Dravya*

Classification on basis of origin – *Yoni Bheda* – *Sthavara Dravya* (Plant and mineral origin), *Jangama Dravya* (Animal origin)

Classification according to *Rasashastra* and *Bhaishajya Kalpana* – *Maharasa, Uparasa, Sadharana rasa, Ratna Varga, Dhatu Varga, Visha Varga* etc.

As we go through the classification of Ayurveda drugs, we come across a specific type which is *Visha Varga*. Apart from it there are other groups of drugs which has some drugs which are poisonous in nature.

Visha Varga as part of medicine -

From *Samhita* period to the medieval period of *Rasashastra*, we come across more and more use of *Visha Varga* drugs in medicines. The theory for using it is stated by *Rasa Vagbhata* in *Rasaratnasammuchaya*.

द्रव्यंविषयुतंयत्तद्द्रव्यधिकगुणंभवेत्।
सुधाहालाहलैर्युक्तासुधाधिकगुणातथा।।

- *Rasaratnasamuuchya* 2/127

It states, if the Drugs are added with specified *Visha* in medicines, it amplifies the properties of former medicines. Same way as nectar added with some *Halahala* – poison, it improves its potency.

Classification of *Visha Varga* in *Rasashastra* texts,

1. *Sthavara* – of plant and mineral origin.
2. *Jangama*– of animal origin.
3. *Krutrim / GaraVisha/ Samyojag Visha* – artificially prepared or processed.

Some of the commonly used *Visha* drugs are as follows;

Drug name	Latin name
<i>Vatsanabha</i>	<i>Aconitum ferox</i>
<i>Arkakshira</i> (Latex of plant)	<i>Calotropisgigantia</i>
<i>Snuhikshira</i> (Latex of plant)	<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i>
<i>Langali</i>	<i>Gloriosasuperba</i>
<i>Karviraka</i>	<i>Nerium indicium</i>
<i>Gunja</i>	<i>Abrusprecatorious</i>
<i>Ahiphena</i>	<i>Papaversomniferum</i>

<i>Dhattura</i>	Dhaturametel
<i>Vishtinduka</i>	Strychnosnuxvomica
<i>Jayapala</i>	Croton tiglium
<i>Bhanga</i>	Cannbisindica
<i>Bhallataka</i>	Semicarpusanacardium

Along with this herbs or plant origin drugs, there are many mineral origin drugs used in medicine which are poisonous in nature. This are as follows,

All *Rasashastra* drugs from *Parada* to *Sudha Varga* are said to cause poisonous effects if ingested without through *Shodhana* and *Marana* procedures. Hence they can be considered as poisonous drugs which are meant to use in minute quantity. Apart from this inclusive part of *Rasashastra* drugs, there are some mineral poisons mentioned in texts which are;

Name of mineral drug	English names
<i>Sasyaka</i>	Blue vitriol
<i>Gandhaka</i>	Sulphur
<i>Hartala</i>	Orpiment
<i>Manashila</i>	Realgar
<i>Gauripashana</i>	Arsenic
<i>Girisindura</i>	Red oxide of mercury
<i>Nagasindura</i>	Red oxide of lead

The properties along with its utility as medicines along with their formulations mentioned in various Ayurveda classics are as follows;

Name of drug	Properties	Formulations
<i>Vatsanabha</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa, Yoghahi, Rasayana, Vaat – Kapha Nashana, Deepana, Jwara – Kushta – Pandu – Vaatajshool – Gulma Nashana</i>	<i>Sanjivani Vati, Anandbhairava Ras, Hinguleshwar Ras</i>
<i>Langali</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta Rasa, Lahu, Tikshna, Ushna, Kaphavata Shamaka</i>	<i>Kalakuta Rasa, Brihat Marichadi Taila, Chitrakadi Taila</i>

<i>Karviraka</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta Rasa, Lahu, Ushna, VaatKphaghna</i>	<i>Manikyā Rasa, Brihat Marichadi Taila</i>
<i>Gunja</i>	<i>Tikta, Kashaya Rasa, Lagu, Ruksha, Ushna, Vaat Kaphaghna</i>	<i>Gunja Taila, Sarivadi Vati, Neelibhrungadi Taila</i>
<i>Ahiphena</i>	<i>Tikta, Kashaya Rasa, laghu, Ruksha, Ushana, Kaphaghna</i>	<i>Nidrodāy Ras, Ahiphenasava, Ashtakshari Giluka</i>
<i>Dhattura</i>	<i>Tikta, Katu Rasa, Ushna, Kapha Vataghna</i>	<i>Kanakasava, Dhaturpatradi Taila, Vishgarbha tail</i>
<i>Vishtinduka</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta Rasa, Laghu, Ushna, Vata Kaphaghna</i>	<i>Agnitundi Vati, Ekangveer Rasa, Vishatinduka Vati</i>
<i>Jayapala</i>	<i>Katu Rasa, Guru, Ruksha, Tikshna, Kaphapitta Shamaka</i>	<i>Jalodharai Rasa, Krimishodhini Vati</i>
<i>Bhanga</i>	<i>Tikta Rasa, Tekshna, Ushana, Vata Kaphaghna</i>	<i>Pushpadhanwa Ras, Nidrodāy Rasa, Jatiphaladi Churna</i>
<i>Bhallataka</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa, Laghu, Tekshna, Ushna, Snigdha, Kapha Vataghna</i>	<i>Sanjivani Vati, Bhallataka Rasayana, Amrit Bhallataka Ghrit</i>
<i>Sasyaka</i>	<i>Kashaya, Lekhana, Bhedi, Krimighna, Kapha Pittaghna</i>	<i>Kanaksundar Rasa, Tuttha Malhara, Jatyadi Taila</i>
<i>Gandhaka</i>	<i>Madhura, Katu, Ushna, Deepana, Pachana</i>	<i>Gandhaka Druti, Gandhaka Malhara, Gandhaka Rasayana</i>
<i>Hartala</i>	<i>Katu, Snigdha, Ushana, Deepana, Kushthahar</i>	<i>Rasamanikya, Talasinsur, Samirpannag Rasa</i>
<i>Manashila</i>	<i>Katu, Tikta, Snigdha, Ushana, Guru, Lekhana, Rasayana, Kandughna</i>	<i>Shwaskuthar Rasa, Rajmriganka Rasa, Trailokyachintamani Rasa, Shilasindur Rasa</i>

<i>Gauripashana</i>	<i>Snigdha, Kaphavatahar</i>	<i>Mallasindura, Samirpannag Rasa</i>
<i>Girisindura</i>	<i>Ushna, Tekshna</i>	<i>Sinduradi Lepam</i>

Inference:

Ayurveda had stated the above mentioned drugs which are poisonous in nature and are still medicinally very useful. In the view of modern medical science, all Ayurveda drugs contain heavy metals and poisons which are harmful for body. But which when subjected to proper technical procedures of *Shodhana*– purification and *Marana* – incineration, these drugs can be used in various medicinal formulations. The proper dose and drug delivery vehicle i.e. *Anupana* and *Sahapana* are also mentioned according to the diseases for these formulations. In today's Ayurveda practice the major part of prescription are of these formulations and which gives prompt effective outcome in given diseases. Thus considering present context of the study, we can give emphasis on the use of such drugs which are beneficial for humans.

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