

Visha Chikitsa acc to Charaka Samhita w.s.r. to poisoning- a review article

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Abstract

Visha Chikitsa, or the treatment of poisoning, is a crucial aspect of **Ayurveda**, as detailed in the classical text **Charaka Samhita**. This article explores the Ayurvedic understanding of poisons (**Visha**), their types, clinical manifestations, prognosis, and therapeutic approaches as outlined by **Acharya Charaka**. By correlating these ancient principles with modern toxicology, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview that bridges traditional wisdom with contemporary medical science. The integration of Ayurvedic concepts with modern perspectives can enhance the understanding and management of poisoning, emphasizing a holistic approach to patient care.

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Introduction

Poisoning remains a significant global health concern, contributing to morbidity and mortality worldwide. The sources of poisons are diverse, ranging from natural toxins found in plants and animals to synthetic chemicals and drugs. In modern medicine, toxicology is the branch that deals with the study of poisons, their effects, and management.

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, has a rich tradition in the management of poisoning, referred to as **Visha Chikitsa**. The **Charaka Samhita**, one of the foundational texts of Ayurveda, dedicates an entire chapter to this topic, outlining the etiology, classification, clinical features, and treatment of various poisons.

This article delves into the Ayurvedic perspective on Visha Chikitsa as presented by Acharya Charaka, correlating it with modern toxicology. By examining the principles and practices described in the classical text alongside contemporary medical understanding, we aim to enhance the knowledge base for managing poisoning effectively.

Understanding Visha (Poison) in Ayurveda

Definition

In Ayurveda, **Visha** refers to any substance that, when introduced into the body, disrupts the normal physiological functions and can lead to disease or death. Poisons are characterized by their **Virulence (Teekshnata)**, **Quick action (Ashukari)**, and **Ability to spread throughout the body (Vyavayi)**.

Origin and Classification

Acharya Charaka describes the origin of poisons in mythological terms, indicating their profound impact and significance. Poisons are broadly classified into two main categories:

- 1. Sthavara Visha (Plant and Mineral Poisons):**
 - Derived from immobile sources such as plants, minerals, and soils.
 - Examples include toxic herbs and heavy metals.
- 2. Jangama Visha (Animal Poisons):**
 - Derived from mobile sources, primarily animals.
 - Examples include snake venom, scorpion stings, and insect bites.

Sanskrit Reference:

- *“Jaṅgamasthāvarāyām tadyoniṁ brahmā nyayojayat; Tadambusambhavaṁ tasmāddvidhaṁ pāvakopamam.”*
(Verses 6)

Properties of Poison

According to Ayurveda, poisons possess the following ten properties:

- 1. Laghu (Lightness)**
- 2. Ruksha (Dryness)**
- 3. Ashu (Quick action)**
- 4. Vishada (Non-slimy)**
- 5. Vyavayi (Pervasiveness)**
- 6. Teekshna (Sharpness)**

7. **Vikashi (Destabilizing)**
8. **Sukshma (Subtlety)**
9. **Ushna (Heat)**
10. **Anirdeshya Rasa (Indescribable taste)**

Sanskrit Reference:

- “Laghu rūkṣamāśu viśadam vyavāyi tikṣṇam vikāsi sūkṣmam ca; Uṣṇamanirdeśyarasam daśaguṇamuktam viṣam tajjñaiḥ.” (Verse 24)

Modern Correlation

In modern toxicology, poisons are substances that cause harm to organisms through chemical reactions or molecular activity. Poisons can be classified based on their origin, chemical nature, mechanism of action, and target organs.

1. Classification Based on Origin:

- **Biological Poisons (Toxins):** Derived from living organisms (e.g., snake venom, bacterial toxins).
- **Chemical Poisons:** Synthetic or naturally occurring chemicals (e.g., pesticides, heavy metals).

2. Properties of Poisons:

- **Absorption and Distribution:** How quickly and extensively a poison spreads in the body.
- **Mechanism of Action:** How the poison disrupts normal physiological functions.
- **Toxicokinetics:** The movement of poisons within the body, including absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion.

Clinical Features (Lakshana) of Poisoning

Ayurvedic Perspective

The clinical manifestations of poisoning vary depending on the type of poison and the individual's constitution (Prakriti). Acharya Charaka outlines the symptoms based on the type of poison and the stage of poisoning.

General Symptoms

1. Jangama Visha (Animal Poisons):

- **Nidra (Sleepiness)**
- **Tandra (Drowsiness)**
- **Klama (Fatigue)**
- **Daha (Burning sensation)**
- **Lomaharsha (Goosebumps)**
- **Shoṭha (Swelling)**
- **Atisara (Diarrhea)**

2. Sthavara Visha (Plant Poisons):

- **Jvara (Fever)**
- **Hikka (Hiccups)**
- **Dantaharsha (Tooth sensitivity)**
- **Galagraha (Throat constriction)**
- **Phena (Frothing)**

- **Aruchi (Anorexia)**
- **Shwasa (Dyspnea)**
- **Murcha (Fainting)**

Sanskrit References:

- “Nidrām tandrām klamarṁ dāharṁ sapākam lōmaharṣaṇam; Shōpham caivātisāram ca janayej jaṅgamarṁ viṣam.” (Verse 15)
- “Sthāvaram tu jvaram hikkam dantaharṣam galagraham; Phēnavam aruci śvāsam mūrccchās ca janayed viṣam.” (Verse 16)

Stages of Poisoning (Vega)

Poisoning progresses through eight stages, each with specific symptoms:

1. First Vega:

- **Tandra (Drowsiness)**
- **Moha (Delirium)**
- **Dantaharsha (Tooth sensitivity)**
- **Praseka (Salivation)**
- **Vomiting sensations**

2. Second Vega:

- **Vaivarnya (Discoloration)**
- **Bhrama (Giddiness)**
- **Vepathu (Tremors)**
- **Murcha (Fainting)**
- **Angacimicima (Tingling sensations)**

3. Third Vega:

- **Mandala (Circular skin lesions)**
- **Kandu (Itching)**
- **Shotha (Swelling)**
- **Kotha (Urticaria)**

4. Fourth Vega:

- **Symptoms related to aggravated Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha)**

5. Fifth Vega:

- **Visual disturbances**
- **Seeing dark colors or darkness**

6. Sixth Vega:

- **Hikka (Hiccups)**
- **Bhangah (Body collapse)**

7. Seventh Vega:

- **Complete loss of consciousness**

8. Eighth Vega:

- **Death**

Sanskrit References:

- “Tṛṇmoha-dantaharṣa-praseka-vamatha-klāmā bhavanti ādyē; Vega rasapradoṣād aṣṭkpradoṣād dviṭīye tu...” (Verses 18-20)

Modern Correlation

Clinical features of poisoning depend on the nature of the poison, dose, route of exposure, and individual susceptibility.

General Symptoms

1. Neurological Symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Coma

2. Gastrointestinal Symptoms:

- Nausea and Vomiting
- Abdominal Pain
- Diarrhea

3. Cardiovascular Symptoms:

- Tachycardia
- Hypotension
- Arrhythmias

4. Respiratory Symptoms:

- Dyspnea
- Bronchospasm

5. Dermatological Symptoms:

- Rashes
- Itching
- Blistering

Stages of Poisoning

• Acute Phase:

- Rapid onset of symptoms due to high levels of poison in the body.

• Subacute Phase:

- Progressive worsening of symptoms as poison affects organ systems.

• Chronic Phase:

- Long-term effects due to cumulative exposure or delayed toxicity.
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Prognosis (Sadhya-Asadhya) of Poisoning

Ayurvedic Perspective

The prognosis depends on several factors, including the type of poison, amount, site of entry, time elapsed, and the patient's strength.

• Sadhya (Curable):

- Early-stage poisoning with mild symptoms.
- When the poison is of lesser potency.
- In strong and young individuals.

• Kricchra Sadhya (Difficult to Cure):

- Poisoning with moderate symptoms.
- When the poison is potent or in larger quantities.

• **Asadhya (Incurable):**

- Advanced stages with severe symptoms.
- Poisoning with highly potent poisons.
- In weak, elderly, or very young patients.

Factors Influencing Prognosis:

- **Type of Poison:** Animal poisons are generally more virulent.
- **Route of Entry:** Oral ingestion, injection, inhalation.
- **Time Delay:** Delayed treatment worsens prognosis.
- **Patient Factors:** Age, strength, pre-existing conditions.

Modern Correlation

• **Good Prognosis:**

- Prompt recognition and treatment.
- Low-dose exposure.
- Non-lethal poisons.

• **Poor Prognosis:**

- Delayed treatment.
- High-dose or highly toxic substances.
- Vulnerable populations (children, elderly, immunocompromised).

Treatment (Chikitsa) of Poisoning

Ayurvedic Principles

Acharya Charaka outlines 24 therapeutic measures for managing poisoning:

1. **Mantra (Incantations)**
2. **Arishta (Protective charms)**
3. **Utkartana (Excision)**
4. **Nispidana (Pressing out poison)**
5. **Aachushana (Suction)**
6. **Agni (Cauterization)**
7. **Parisheka (Irrigation)**
8. **Avagaha (Immersion)**
9. **Raktamokshana (Bloodletting)**
10. **Vamana (Emesis)**
11. **Virechana (Purgation)**
12. **Upadhana (Application of poultices)**
13. **Hridayavarana (Protecting the heart)**
14. **Anjana (Collyrium)**
15. **Nasya (Nasal therapy)**
16. **Dhuma (Medicated smoke)**
17. **Leha (Licking medicines)**

18. **Prashamana (Pacification)**
19. **Pratisarana (Rubbing with medicated pastes)**
20. **Prativisha (Administration of antidotes)**
21. **Sanjnasthapana (Restoration of consciousness)**
22. **Panana (Oral medications)**
23. **Lepa (External applications)**
24. **Mritasanjivana (Revival of the dead)**

Sanskrit Reference:

- “Mantrāriṣṭōtkartananiṣpīdanacūṣaṇāgnipariṣēkāḥ; Avagāha-raktamokṣaṇa-vamana-vireka-upadhānāni...” (Verses 35-36)

General Treatment Approach

1. First Aid Measures:

○ Removal of Poison:

- **Excision (Utkartana):** Cutting out the bitten area if necessary.
- **Suction (Aachushana):** Using the mouth or devices to extract poison.
- **Pressing (Nispidana):** Squeezing the area to expel poison.
- **Tourniquet Application:** To prevent the spread of poison.

2. Detoxification Therapies:

- **Vamana (Emesis):** Inducing vomiting to expel ingested poison.
- **Virechana (Purgation):** Inducing purgation to cleanse the bowels.
- **Raktamokshana (Bloodletting):** Removing contaminated blood.

3. Specific Antidotes (Prativisha):

○ Administration of Antidotal Herbs:

- **Mrita Sanjeevana Agada:** A renowned antidote formulation.
- **Vishaghna Dravyas:** Herbs like Shirisha (Albizia lebeck), Nimba (Azadirachta indica).

4. Supportive Therapies:

○ Protecting Vital Organs:

- **Hridayavarana:** Protecting the heart with specific medications.

○ Restoration of Consciousness:

- **Sanjnasthapana:** Using herbal formulations to revive consciousness.

○ Symptomatic Management:

- **Anjana (Eye treatments):** For ocular symptoms.
- **Nasya (Nasal medications):** For head and neck symptoms.

5. External Applications:

○ Lepa (Medicated Pastes):

- Applying antidotal pastes to the affected area.

○ Parisheka (Irrigation):

- Washing the area with medicated decoctions.

○ Agni (Cauterization):

- Using heat to neutralize poison locally.

Specific Treatments According to Poison Type

Snake Bite (Sarpa Damsa)

1. First Aid:

- **Tourniquet Application:** Above the bite site.
- **Excision and Suction:** Removing and extracting poison.

2. Detoxification:

- **Bloodletting:** From the area around the bite.
- **Emesis and Purgation:** If poison is ingested.

3. Antidotes:

- **Herbal Formulations:**
 - **Mrita Sanjeevana Agada**
 - **Mahagandhahasti Agada**

4. Symptomatic Treatment:

- **Cold Compresses:** To reduce swelling and burning.
- **Heart Protection:** Using cardioprotective herbs.

Scorpion Sting (Vrischika Damsa)

1. Local Applications:

- **Hot Fomentation:** With medicated oils.
- **Abhyanga (Massage):** With warm oils.

2. Oral Medications:

- **Herbal Decoctions:** Using anti-toxic herbs.

3. Symptomatic Relief:

- **Pain Management:** Using analgesic herbs.

Insect Bites (Kita Damsa)

1. Local Treatments:

- **Application of Pastes:** Made from cooling herbs.

2. Systemic Therapies:

- **Antihistaminic Herbs:** To reduce allergic reactions.

Dietary and Lifestyle Management

1. Dietary Recommendations:

- **Light and Easily Digestible Foods:**
 - Rice gruel, barley water.
- **Avoidance of Aggravating Foods:**
 - Heavy, oily, spicy foods.

2. Lifestyle Modifications:

- **Rest:** Minimizing physical activity.
 - **Avoidance of Exposure:**
 - Staying away from heat, sunlight.
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Modern Medical Management

1. First Aid Measures:

- **Assessment and Stabilization:**
 - Airway, breathing, circulation.
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- **Removal of Poison:**
 - Decontamination of skin, gastric lavage if appropriate.
 - 2. **Administration of Antidotes:**
 - **Specific Antidotes:**
 - Antivenom for snake bites.
 - Atropine for organophosphate poisoning.
 - 3. **Supportive Care:**
 - **Symptomatic Treatment:**
 - Pain management, antiemetics.
 - **Monitoring Vital Signs:**
 - Continuous observation.
 - 4. **Elimination Enhancement:**
 - **Activated Charcoal:**
 - To bind ingested poisons.
 - **Diuresis and Dialysis:**
 - For poisons eliminated via kidneys.
 - 5. **Advanced Therapies:**
 - **Mechanical Ventilation:**
 - If respiratory failure occurs.
 - **Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO):**
 - In severe cases.
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Discussion

The Ayurvedic approach to poisoning emphasizes prompt recognition, removal of poison, and holistic management, including detoxification, symptomatic relief, and restoration of normal physiological functions.

Correlation with Modern Toxicology:

- **Removal of Poison:**
 - Ayurveda's emphasis on excision, suction, and emesis aligns with modern decontamination practices.
- **Detoxification Therapies:**
 - Bloodletting can be correlated with modern methods to remove toxins from the bloodstream, such as dialysis.
- **Use of Antidotes:**
 - Ayurvedic antidotes are herbal formulations with known detoxifying properties.
- **Symptomatic Treatment:**
 - Managing symptoms like pain, swelling, and organ protection is common to both systems.

Herbal Antidotes and Pharmacological Actions:

- **Shirisha (*Albizia lebbek*):**
 - Known for anti-histaminic and anti-anaphylactic properties.
- **Nimba (*Azadirachta indica*):**
 - Exhibits anti-inflammatory and detoxifying effects.

Integrative Potential:

- **Complementary Use of Herbs:**
 - Some Ayurvedic herbs can be integrated into supportive care for poisoning.
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- **Holistic Patient Care:**

- Ayurveda's focus on diet and lifestyle can aid in recovery.

Challenges and Considerations:

- **Standardization of Herbal Formulations:**

- Ensuring consistency and efficacy.

- **Scientific Validation:**

- Need for clinical trials to establish evidence.
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Conclusion

Visha Chikitsa, as detailed by Acharya Charaka, provides a comprehensive framework for the management of poisoning. The Ayurvedic approach encompasses immediate removal of the poison, detoxification, use of specific antidotes, and supportive care, reflecting a holistic treatment strategy.

By correlating these ancient principles with modern toxicology, we can appreciate the depth of Ayurvedic knowledge and its potential applications today. Integrating Ayurvedic concepts with contemporary medical practices may enhance patient outcomes, offering a more holistic approach to the management of poisoning.

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