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# Exploring the *Agada* perspective of *Vatsanabha*

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## ABSTRACT

*Ayurved* is a comprehensive system of natural health care that originated in the ancient *Vedic* times of India. Its primary emphasis is on prevention of disease and maintenance of health. *Ayurved* is the science of life that is widely practiced in India. It used medicine prepared from plants, animals and mineral origin. All the three sources of drugs can be divided under poisonous and nonpoisonous category. *Vatsanabha* (*Aconitum ferox*) is categorized under the *Sthavara Visha*. Even a strong poison can become an excellent medicine if administered properly; on the other hand even the most useful medicine act as a poison if not handled correctly. *Vatsanabha* is highly toxic in nature even then it is used as a medicine after purification and in therapeutic dose. *Shodhana* or purification is the process which involves the purification as well as reduction in the levels of toxic principles thus removing the untoward effects the drug produce. In therapeutic doses it has capacity to treat many diseases therefore; it is used as an ingredient of various *Ayurvedic* formulations. *Ayurved* proposes a traditional technique of *Shodhana* to reduce the harmful effects associated with *Vatsanabha*. The present review article gives us opportunity to understand the therapeutic uses, toxic effects, methods of purification, antidotes and medicolegal aspect of *Vatsanabha*.

**Key words:** *Ayurved*, *Vatsanabha*, *Sthavara Visha*, *Shodhana*, *Medicolegal Aspects*.

## INTRODUCTION

*Vatsanabha* is included in *Mahavisha* having Latin name *Aconitum ferox* and family Ranunculaceae with tall and erect stem with blue, purple, white zygomorphic flowers with numerous stamens.<sup>[1]</sup>

All the parts of the plant are poisonous, the root being most potent. The root is mostly used for medicinal

purpose. Its root are useful in the treatment of various diseases such as sciatica, fever, hypertension, rheumatoid arthritis and after *Shodhana* it also act as a *Rasayana*.<sup>[2-4]</sup>

*Acharya Charaka* has categorized *Vatsanabha* under *Sthavara Visha*, *Acharya Sushruta* under *Kanda Visha* and *Acharya Kaideva Nighantu* under *Visha Varga*.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Synonyms & Vernacular Names

- Latin: *Acontium ferox* Wall ex Seringe
- Botanical Synonym: *Aconitum ferox*
- English: Indian aconite
- Hindi Name: Meetha Telia, Bachnag, *Meetha Visha*
- Sanskrit names: *Vatsnabh*, *Amrit*, *Visha*
- Punjabi name: Meetha Telia

## *Rasa Panchaka*<sup>[6]</sup>

*Guna* - *Ruksha*, *Laghu*, *Vyavayi*, *Vikashi*, *Tiksna*

*Rasa* - *Madhur*

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*Vipaka - Madhur*

*Virya - Usna*

*Karma - Kapna Vatahara*

#### Toxic constituents<sup>[7]</sup>

The tuber of *Vatsnabha* contains 0.4-0.8% diterpene alkaloids and the concentration of aconite in the fresh plant is between 0.3% and 2.0% in tubers and 0.2% and 1.2% in the leaves. The highest concentration of aconite is found in the winter. The major alkaloids are aconitine, pseudoaconitine, bikhaconitine, diacetyl pseudoaconitine, aconine, picro-aconine, veratry pseudoaconitine and chamaconitine.

#### Fatal Dose<sup>[8]</sup>

- *Vatsanabh* root - 1gm
- Extract of *Vatsnabha* - 250 mg
- Alkaloid - 4mg

**Fatal Period<sup>[9]</sup>** - Usually 1-5 hrs

#### Toxic symptoms<sup>[10-12]</sup>

##### According to *Acharya Sushruta*

- *Greeva Stambha* (neck stiffness)
- *Peeta Vinmootra Netrata* (yellowish discoloration of faeces, eyes & urine.)

##### According to *Acharya Vagbhata*

*Rasa Vagbhata* enumerated *Ashta Vegas* (eight stages) of poisoning as:

Stage 1<sup>st</sup> - *Twak Vikara* (skin changes)

Stage 2<sup>nd</sup> - *Vepathu* (tremors)

Stage 3<sup>rd</sup> - *Daaha* (burning all over the body)

Stage 4<sup>th</sup> - *Vikrtavastha* (deformities)

Stage 5<sup>th</sup> - *Phenodgama* (froth from mouth)

Stage 6<sup>th</sup> - *Skanda Bhanga* (drooping of shoulders)

Stage 7<sup>th</sup> - *Jadata* (comatose)

Stage 8<sup>th</sup> - *Marana* (death)

#### According to Modern

Aconite and relative alkaloids found *Aconitum* species causes cardio toxicity, GIT Toxic Neurotoxicity.

**GIT Manifestation** - Burning & tingling sensation in lips, throat, and mouth. - Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.

**Cardio Manifestation** - Pulse is slow, feeble irregular, Hypothermia, Hypotension and Cardiac Arrhythmia.

**Neurological Manifestation** - Vertigo, Loss in vision, hearing and speech. In *Vatsanabha* poisoning there is alternate contraction and dilation pupils which is known as hippus reaction in early stage hippus sign in seen but in later stage pupil gets dilated.

#### *Shodhana of Vatsnabha*<sup>[13-15]</sup>

*Aconitum* root is tied in a piece of cotton cloth, kept dipped in cow urine. It is exposed to sunlight for three days. Each day, urine of cow is replaced with fresh one. After third day, it is dried and preserved.

#### Mechanism of Action<sup>[16]</sup>

- Aconitine acts on nerve axons by opening sodium channels. It also inhibits complete repolarization of the membrane of myocardial tissue causing repetitive firing.
- It stimulates vagal medullary centre.

#### Therapeutic Indications

*Vatsnabha* should be used for therapeutic purpose after *Shodhana* It is indicated in following health conditions: Indigestion, Fever, Respiratory infections, Asthama, Common cold, Cough, Diabetes, Loss of Appetite.

#### Management

##### Treatment according to *Ayurved*<sup>[17-18]</sup>

- *Tankan* used as an antidote of aconite due to its *Hrudya* effect.
- *Tankan Laahi* along with *Goghrtta* should be given.
- Use of juice of *Tanduleeyak*.
- Use of *Arjun Twak*, *Churna* along with Honey & cow's clarified butter.

- Use of *Ajaadugdh* (Goat milk) - According to Ayurved Prakash, emetics should be used in the beginning then goat milk should be used until the vomiting stops. The goat milk is retained in the stomach it indicates that the toxic effect of aconite is abolished.
- Use of juice of *Tanduleeyak*.

#### Treatment according to modern<sup>[19-20]</sup>

- Gastric lavage
- Strong tea
- KMNO<sub>4</sub>
- Tannic acid
- Symptomatic treatment
- Cardiac monitoring
- For collapse give IV fluids
- For syncope give injection Digitalin in 0.25mg doses
- For cardiac arrhythmia give 50 ml of 0.1% Novacaine slow IV
- Due to vagal inhibition, can cause heart failure, in that situation give injection Atropine 1mg.

#### Post - Mortem Appearance<sup>[21]</sup>

**External** - Mucus membrane of Mouth may be pallor.

#### Internal

- (a) Inflammation and congestion of stomach
- (b) Fragments of root residue may be found in the stomach contents
- (c) Congestion and engorgement of the brain & lungs.

#### Medico legal Importance<sup>[22]</sup>

**Accidental** - Rarely found due to ingestion of *Vatsnabha* accidentally.

**Suicidal** - It found rarely by ingestion of *Vatsnabha* for suicidal intent.

**Homicidal** - It is Ideal Homicidal poison.

**Cattle Poison** - Root will be used as an Arrow poison in tribal area.

#### Important Ayurvedic formulations of Vatsnabha<sup>[23]</sup>

- *Mahashankha Vati*
- *Sanjivani Vati*
- *Tamra Parpati*
- *Kaphketu Rasa*
- *Tribhuvan Kirti Rasa*
- *Saubhagya Vati*
- *Rambana Rasa*
- *Anand Bhairava Rasa*
- *Hinguleshvara Rasa*
- *Panchamrita Rasa*
- *Vatavidhvamsani Rasa*

#### CONCLUSION

*Vatsnabha* (*Aconitum ferox*) is a *Sthavara Visha*. *Vatsnabha* is highly toxic in nature. It can be used as medicine after *Shodhana* or purification process. Pharmacologically it relieves coldness, improves digestion, Useful in treatment of sciatica, backache, night blindness, inflammation, headache, vision problem, inflammation and eyes related problems. Due to some properties like *Ashukaritwa*, *Ushna*, *Teekshna Visha Dravya* get spread rapidly in the body. So, for the quick action of medicines many Ayurvedic formulations contain these *Vishadravyas* like *Vatsnabha* as their ingredient. By utilizing these properties of *Vishadravyas* medicines can be made more effective. This review article explored the *Agad* perspective of *Vatsnabha*.

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