

Comprehensive Literary Study of Vatsanabha (Aconitum Ferox): A Toxic Dravya in Classical Ayurvedic Texts

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ABSTRACT

Vatsanabha is one of the most potent *Sthavara Visha Dravyas* (plant-based poisons) extensively described in classical Ayurvedic texts. Despite its toxicity, *Vatsanabha* has been therapeutically utilized after appropriate purification (*Shodhana*). This article presents a comparative literary study of *Vatsanabha* as described in *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Astanga Hridaya*, focusing on its nomenclature, properties, therapeutic uses, toxicological aspects, and purification methods.

Keywords: *Vatsanabha*, *Upavisha*, *Shodhana*, *Mahavisha*

INTRODUCTION

Vatsanabha (botanical name: *Aconitum ferox* Wall.), belonging to the family Ranunculaceae, is classified under *Upavisha* in Ayurveda—substances that are toxic but can be used therapeutically after *Shodhana*. It is regarded as *Mahavisha*, indicating its potent toxicity.

- *Charaka Samhita*: Classified under *Sthavara Visha* (plant poisons) [1].
- *Sushruta Samhita*: Mentioned under *Vishavarga – Kanda Visha*; advised only after purification [2].
- *Rasashastra*: Emphasized in *Rasaushadhi* preparations for its quick action post-purification [4].
- Also mentioned in *Bhavaprakash Nighantu (Dhatvadi Varga)* [4],
- *Kaiyadeva Nighantu (Visha Varga)*, and
- *Raja Nighantu (Mishraka Varga)*.

Nomenclature and Synonyms

Name	Meaning	Textual Reference
<i>Vatsanabha</i>	Resembling the navel of a calf	<i>Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa 23/41 [1]</i>
<i>Mahavisha</i>	Great poison	<i>Sushruta Samhita, Kalpa 2/3 [2]</i>
<i>Arka</i>	Potent like the sun	<i>Bhavaprakash, Purvakhanda, Visha Varga [4]</i>
<i>Halahala</i>	Deadly poison	<i>Astanga Hridaya, Uttara 40/30 [3]</i>
<i>Kshveda, Visha, Amruta</i>	Unconsciousness, Poison, Nectar if purified [4]	<i>Rasa Tarangini 24/16</i>
<i>Pranahara</i>	Life-threatening without purification	<i>Bhavaprakash, Purvakhanda, Visha Varga [4]</i>

Pharmacological Properties (*Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka, Karma*)

- **Rasa (Taste):** *Madhura*
- **Vipaka (Post-digestive taste):** *Madhura*
- **Virya (Potency):** *Ushna*
- **Guna (Qualities):** *Laghu, Tikshna, Ruksha, Vyavayi, Vikasi*
- **Dosha Karma:** *Kapha-Vata shamana*
- **Dhatu Karma:** *Alpamatrabrimhan, balya*
- **General Karma:** *Deepana, Pachana, Vedanasthapana, Srotoshodhana, Krimighna, Rasayana* (post-*Shodhana*), *Vedanahara, Jvaraghna, Shothahara, Vatanulomana*

Part Used and Dosage

- **Part Used:** Root tuber
- **Classical Dosage:** 15–125 mg after *Shodhana*
- **API Maximum Limit:** 125 mg/day post-purification [4]

Purification Methods (*Shodhana*)

Method	Procedure	Textual Reference
Cow's urine / milk boiling	Boiled for 3 hours	<i>Astanga Hrdaya</i> , Uttara 40/33 [3]
Sour gruel (<i>Kanji</i>) soaking	Overnight detoxification	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i> , Kalpa 2/8 [2]
Sesame oil (<i>Tila taila</i>) + cow urine	Enhances digestibility	<i>Charaka Samhita</i> , Siddhi 1/67 [1]

Purpose: To remove aconitine, a neurotoxic alkaloid.

Therapeutic Uses (Post-Shodhana)

Condition	Mechanism	Classical Source
<i>VishamaJvara</i>	<i>Ushna virya</i> , <i>Amapachan</i>	<i>Charaka Samhita</i> , <i>Chikitsa</i> 3/169 [1]
<i>Amavata</i>	Anti-inflammatory, <i>Vata-Kapha shaman</i>	<i>Astanga Hrdaya</i> , <i>Chikitsa</i> 22/21 [3]
<i>Shula</i>	<i>Vedanahara</i>	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i> , <i>Kalpa</i> 2/13 [2]
<i>Shwasa</i>	<i>Vatanulomana</i> , <i>Kapha shaman</i>	<i>Ashtanga Hrdaya</i> , <i>Chikitsa</i> 4/14 [3]

Classical Formulations Containing *Vatsanabha*

- *Mahavatavidhvaṃsa Rasa*
- *Ekangavira Rasa*
- *Vishatinduka Vati*
- *Yogendra Rasa*
- *Anandabhairava Rasa*
- *Tribhuvanakirti Rasa*

Used in: Paralysis, neuralgia, epilepsy, chronic fevers

Contraindications

- Pregnancy and lactation
- Children and elderly with *alpabala*
- *Grishma* and *Varsharutu*
- *Pitta-pradhanaprakrti*
- Dehydrated individuals
- With alcohol or CNS depressants

Toxicological Features (*Lakshana of Vatsanabha Visha*)

Symptoms	Reference
<i>Bhrama</i> , <i>Murccha</i> , <i>Griva-stambha</i>	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i> , <i>Kalpa</i> 2/15 [2]
<i>Gaurava</i> , <i>Daha</i>	<i>Astanga Hrdaya</i> , <i>Uttara</i> 40/34 [3]
<i>Kampa</i> , <i>Mrutyu</i>	<i>Charaka Samhita</i> , <i>Siddhi</i> 1/66 [1]

Cause: CNS toxicity due to aconitine.

Antidotes in Classical Texts

- *Ghruta* and milk – counter *Tikshna* and *Ushna gunas* [3]
- *Tila taila*, sugar, honey combinations [2]
- *Vamana* and *Virechanin* acute ingestion cases

Modern View on *Aconitum ferox*

- Contains alkaloids: Aconitine, pseudoaconitine
- Mechanism: Blocks sodium channels → arrhythmias, neurotoxicity [6]
- Fatal dose: 2–5 mg pure aconitine
- Treatment: Activated charcoal, antiarrhythmics, respiratory support

Critical Comparison

Aspect	Ayurvedic View	Modern View
Identity of toxin	<i>Tikshna, Ushna virya</i>	Aconitine alkaloid
Detoxification	<i>Shodhana</i> via milk, urine, <i>kanji</i>	No standardized detox
Post-detox usage	<i>Jvara, Vata-vyadhi, Shula, Shwasa</i>	Considered unsafe
Toxic symptoms	<i>Bhrama, Murccha, Daha, Kampa</i>	CNS & cardiovascular collapse

CONCLUSION

Vatsanabha, though extremely toxic, is acknowledged as a *Mahavisha* and a potent therapeutic agent in Ayurveda when used with due precautions. The Ayurvedic treatises—*Charaka*, *Sushruta*, and *Vagbhata*—depict its dual nature: a poison and a medicine. Accurate *Shodhana*, precise dosing, and specific indications are vital. An integrative approach combining classical detoxification with modern toxicology can open new avenues for the safe medicinal use of *Upavishas*.

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