



A REVIEW ON VISHAVAIDYA JYOTSNIKA

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ABSTRACT

Agada Tantra is one among the eight branches of Ayurveda. Apart from samhitas (classical texts), there are many text books dealing with agada tantra (toxicology) written in various regional Indian languages. Some of them have been translated to English, but many are yet to see light. Kerala which is rich in its Ayurveda legacy has made much contribution to the subject. Vishavaidya Jyotsnika is one such textbook which gives immense knowledge about the practice of vishachikitsa. Dhootha lakshanas in cases of visha (poison) and the concept of amritakala and vishakala has been explained only in this book. Pashu chikitsa in cases of poisoning has also been explained here. This text contributes largely to the practice as well research in agada tantra. This article is based on the text Vishavaidya Jyotsnika an English Translation published by Department of Agada Tantra, Vaidyaratnam P.S Varier Ayurveda College, Kottakkal, Kerala.

KEYWORDS: Agada tantra, vishavaidya jyotsnika, vishachikitsa, dhootha lakshana, amritakala, vishakala.

INTRODUCTION

Agada tantra(toxicology) is one among the ashtangas of Ayurveda. It deals with study of different poisonous bites and its management. Agada tantra (toxicology) has been in practice in the state of Kerala since time immemorial. Kerala being a land rich in flora and fauna, always offered a fertile ground for the snakes to thrive. Several folklores and stories revolve around them and hence they are given a divine position in the ecosystem of the state. With the surge in human population, it lead to a situation where snakes were forced to share its habitat with humans. Thus the incidence of snake bites increased which marked the beginning of a Visha Vaidya Parampara (legacy) of Kerala. A unified code of practice of Visha Vaidya (physician) was established only after the arrival of texts like Vishavaidya Jyotsnika, Vishanarayaneeyam, Lakshanamrutham, Haramekhala, Prayoga Samucchayam, etc. Among these, the Vishavaidya Jyotsnika is the most popular and widely practiced. In earlier days ayurveda was taught only through Gurukula Sampradaya. Therefore only few books were available during that time. Vishavaidya Jyotsnika reflects the ancient tradition of vishavaidya sampradaya (tradition). This was written in the native language of Kerala which is Malayalam. This

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The term *vishavaidya Jyotsnika* is a combination of “*vishavaidya (physician)*” and “*jyotsnika*”- meaning this text is the one which shines like a moon amidst the vishachikitsa literature. In Kerala, in old mansions of vishavaidya (physician), different versions of the text are preserved in the form of thaliyolas (palm leaves manuscripts). In one such manuscript, towards the end it states that the book has been written by a vaidya (physician) named Govindan.

The book had been detailed under 21 adhikaras (chapters). They describe about signs and symptoms, treatment of sarpas (snakes), treatment of mooshika (rats), vrschika (scorpion), lootha (spider), nakula (mangoose), marjara (cat), alarka (dog), aswa (horse), vanara (monkey), nara (man), etc. Two chapters have been exclusively used for describing the treatment of poison using mantras (hymns).

Table 1: Content of the book

Chapter	Name of the chapter	Highlights
1	Mangalacharanam	Characteristics of Visha vaidya (physician) Classification of poison – sthava (static) and jangama (animal)
2	Vishapratikriyavidhi	Vishaghatika Mrutyu yoga Dagdhayoga Dootha lakshana
3	Savisha- Nirvisha dams lakshana	Leenajeevana Gathajeevana lakshana
4	Visha chikitsa vidhi (samanyam)	Oothu chikitsa
5	Darveekara visha chikitsa	Description of cobra bite signs and symptoms and treatment
6	Mandalee visha chikitsa	Description of viper bite signs and symptoms and treatment
7	Rajila visha chikitsa	Description of krait bite signs and symptoms and treatment
8	Chikitsa kramam (samanyam)	General line of treatment in poison Aushadha matra (posology)
9	Vishahara yogangal	Various formulations used in poisoning
10	Sudhakaaladi vivaranam	Sudhakala/amritakala and vishakala, Aushadha grahana krama (collections of drugs)
11	Mooshika visha chikitsa	Description of rat bite signs and symptoms and treatment
12	Vrischikadi visha chikitsa	Description of scorpion sting signs and symptoms and treatment Description of spider bite signs and symptoms and treatment
13	Sthavara visha vijnana prathishedam	Description of types, signs and symptoms and treatment of sthavara visha (static poison), Pratyoushadha (antidotes)
14	Pashu chikitsa	Cattle poisoning signs and symptoms and treatment
15	Sarvavisha chikitsa	Treatment for unknown poisons, Important vishahara yogas (anti-poisonous drugs)
16	Sarva mahavisha chikitsa	Sarpa grahanadi prayoga (handling of snakes)
17	Sarjopathi prakaram	Description of origin of snakes, Sarpakula (family)
18	Sarpa lakshanam	Characteristics of different snakes

The book begins with salutation to the gods like Lord Ganapathy, Lord Vishnu, Subrahmanian and Garuda. The first chapter enumerates about qualities that should be seen in a visha vaidya (physician) as well as the patients who should be treated and rejected.

Prognosis of poison

The book gives the prognosis of snake bites based on various aspects such as inauspicious nakshatras (stars), days, kaala (time), desa (place) and doota lakshanas.

Doota Lakshanas: In olden days the messenger or an informant comes to the vaidya (physician) bringing the news about a snake bite. Based on the characteristics shown by the messenger the vaidya (physician) draws prognosis of the snake bite. The book describes both auspicious and inauspicious characteristics of the messenger.

Vishaghatika, mrityuyoga, dagdhayoga, triyoga- these are various combinations of nakshatras (stars), days, time and position of the sun. If snake bite occurs during any of the described combinations, it shows bad prognosis or even death.

Sarpa chikitsa (snake bite treatment)

The fatality is very high in snake bites and hence among the 21 chapters, 11 chapters are devoted exclusively for snake bites in this book. The origin of sarpa kula (family), identification of snakes, specific habitats of snakes, etc. is dealt towards the end of the book. Here the four major types of snakes have been explained in detail. Their damsha lakshanas (signs of bite), properties of their venom as well as the treatment has been elaborated. The four types of poisonous fangs which are karali, makari, kalarathi and yamaduthika is mentioned along with the symptoms that each of

them produces. Dhathugata vishalakshana starting from charma (skin) and then moving to rakta (blood), mamsa (muscle), meda (fat), asthi (bone), majja (bone marrow) and sukra (semen) is found in the text.

The book classifies treatment into two major types- mantra prabhava (use of hymns) and aushadha prayojana (use of medicines). The use of hymns has been described in the 19th and 20th chapters of the book. The use of medicines has been told for each of the three snakes in three separate chapters. The use of medicines can be concluded mainly under four main categories – paana (oral), lepa (ointments), nasya (nasal instillations) and anjana (collyrium). One of the most important treatments discussed in this book is the “Oothu Chikitsa”. In Oothu Chikitsa: the drugs used are:- Vishwa (*Zingiber officinale*), Dusparsha (*Tragia involucrata*), Maricha (*Piper nigrum*). These drugs are taken in equal quantity and chewed by three people and blown into both ears and the scalp simultaneously until a count of 150. This is said to destroy the action of poison in the first three dhatus. In viper bite, in order to reduce the oedema and burning sensation thookkudhaara (irrigation with medicated water) has been mentioned.

Leenajeevan: If within an hour of poisoning, the patient becomes unconscious and the confirmatory tests for death are negative, then the person is said to be in leenajeevan that is there is still a little bit of life left in him.

Gatajeevana is when the patient is unconscious and the tests for death are positive. Here the various signs to confirm death have been mentioned.

Other than snakes, the book explains about the signs and symptoms along with the treatment of mooshika (rat), vrischika (scorpion) and lootha (spider) visha. Other Visha Chikitsas

mentioned includes Nakula visha (mangoose), Marjara visha (cat), Shvana visha (dog), Kroshtuka visha (jackal), Ashwa visha (horse), Vaanara visha (monkey), Marthya visha (human), Mandooka visha (frog), Garden lizard poison, Chameleon poison, Lizard poison, Wasp, Millipede poison, Jalouka visha (leech), Matsya visha (fish) and Bringa visha (beetle).

In samanya chikitsa krama, the general lines of treatment in any poisonous cases have been told. Treatment modalities like raktamokshana (bloodletting), jaladhaara (water therapy), swedana (sudation), snana vidhi (bath), etc. have been elaborated. The ill effects due to the chikitsa dosha (adverse drug reaction) and its remedies are another highlight in this context. Pathya ahara (diet) with respect to each types of food is explained.

Aushadha matra (posology) for different formulations like kalka (paste), kwatha (decoction), swarasa (plant extract), dhaara (irrigation), etc. is explained.

Sthavara visha chikitsa(plant and mineral poison)

In this context we find explanations about types, signs, symptoms and treatment of sthavara visha. The book gives more emphasis on bhallataka (*Semicarpus anacardium*) and nagadanti (*Croton oblongifolius*) visha. Here we also find one of the important aspects of poison management using pratyoushadha (antidote). The book gives pratyoushadha for a wide range of sthavara visha and even ahara visha (poisoned food).

Pashu chikitsa (cattle poisoning)

Symptoms and treatment for a cow which is affected by poison has been described in detail in this book. Both internal as well as external treatment has been told here.

Amrithakala/Sudhakala and Vishakala

Two kalas are present in a human body, which are, sudhakala and vishakala. There are 15 sthanas (points) told in detail for sudhakala and visha stays in the 7th sthana (point). In case venomous bite, when a massage is done on sudhakala the venom will disappear and if it is done on vishakala, the venom increases.

CONCLUSION

The contents of the book can be divided under two main headings namely Mantra chikitsa (use of hymns) and Oushadha chikitsa (use of medicines). The author explains in detail, all aspects of snake bite and its treatment, both in general as well as specific. The author gives very simple formulations containing easily available drugs. Most of the procedures told are very practical and are still widely practiced in Kerala. The author directly begins with the treatment aspects and later explains other aspects of snakes towards the end of the book. This might be a deliberate attempt to show the importance of treatment to save a life over the knowledge of other aspects of snakes. The book is written completely in Malayalam, which makes it inaccessible for those who do not understand the language.

Vishavaidya Jyotsnika is a treasure house of knowledge with respect to the treatment of various poisons. The knowledge imparted from this book has been utilized by the visha vaidyas (physician) of Kerala since long time. Even now the physician who practices visha chikitsa in Kerala follows the treatment modalities told in the text. It is unfortunate that this book is not getting the adequate attention it deserves in national level. This book is indeed a treasure which needs to be utilized completely and shows a wide scope for research works. Agada tantra is comparatively unexplored and through thorough research of texts like these, a more practical side of this subject can be reviewed.

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