

Concept of Poison in Ayurveda

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Editorial

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A poison is a substance that, when introduced into a living body by any route or comes in contact with the body, produces ill health, disease or death. There are some substances that are harmful by their nature. On the other hand some substances behave like a poison being influenced by some conditions. Mixing with some other substance, ratio, method of use etc. are some such conditions.

Existence of the harmful substances in the nature was detected by the human beings before time immemorial. But probably the concepts on these substances were first documented in Charaka Samhita before about 3000 years B.C. It was followed by the scholars like Susruta (1000 B.C), Bagbhata etc.

The Ayurvedic scholars define poison (Visha) as the substance that produces fear/unhappiness in the minds of the people on visualization, touch or internal use. Their definition is seemed to be more justified even than the modern definition of poison. The poisons are described to have 10 properties. Describing the mode of action of the poisons it is said that, they basically affect on the "OJA" (the ultimate and minute humor of the body that protects from the external harmful aetiology).

Some substances available in the nature are found to be harmful due to their natural properties. Their source may be either animates or inanimates. Under certain situations some potent poisons are prepared by combining two or more non poisonous or poisonous substances. Keeping all these situations the poisons are classified in very interesting way.

Describing the routes of contact of the poisons, starting from food and drink, almost all are mentioned which indicate the depth of knowledge of our ancestors on poison. A very interesting description on identification of a poisoned substance, signs and symptoms of contact and treatment module is also nicely mentioned.

Among the animate poisons snakes (sarpa) have got prior importance. All the snakes are classified and described elaborately with special reference to their morphological character, behavior, affect of the specific poison and treatment. Even the mythological faiths on snakes are not neglected. The concept of the Drishti and Nihswasavisha (poison that can affect even on look and expiration of the snake) is an interesting concept that can give ampoule of scope for study and research.

Twenty four procedures of treatment for the poison victims are another interesting topic of the Ayurvedic classics. Concept of the procedures for emergency management in Vishavidya (Toxicology) like Nasya (application of medicines through the nostrils), Dhooma (application of medicated smokes through mouth or nostrils), Anjana (collyrium), Hridayavarana (protection of the heart), Mritasanjivana (procedures to recover the patient from a state of deep coma), Upadhana (Kakapada)(extraction of poison with the help of fresh meat through an incision given on the vertex) etc. are some examples of the interesting fields of research.

The "Sadyomaranalingani (signs of recent death)", "Asadyavishapitalakshanani (signs of incurable patient of poisoning)" have practical value and utility even in the present time.

The classical Agada (Antidotes) are to be evaluated scientifically with special reference to their effect, safety, dosage and applicability.

The descriptions on the poisons of spiders, mosquitoes, frogs, insects, scorpions etc. along with the signs and

symptoms, treatment, prognosis etc. are also the potent fields for study and research.

It Can Be Expected that, "THE UNTIRED EFFORT OF THE SCIENTISTS MAY HELP TO UNDERSTAND AND EVALUATE THE ANCIENT CONCEPTS OF POISON".