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REVIEW ARTICLE

An Appraisal of Vatsanābha (Aconitum Ferox Wall.) with special reference to classical texts of Ayurveda: Samhitā, Cikitsā Grantha, Nighaṅṭus and Rasagrantha

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Vatsanābha, (*Aconitum ferox* Wall., Ranunculaceae), has been well documented in Ayurvedic texts such as Samhitā (treatise), Nighaṅṭu (lexicons), Rasagranthas (compendia related to alchemy) and Cikitsā granthas (compendia of Ayurveda). **Methods:** This paper provides a collective information regarding Vatsanābha, its morphological characters, properties and actions mentioned in Nighantu, Samhita and Rasagrantha. **Result and discussion:** The study reveals that *Vatsanābha*, a medicinal plant has about forty-one synonyms (paryaya); and highlights its morphological characters and pharmacological properties. It is attributed with properties like Vyavāyī (CNS stimulation followed by depression), Balya (tonic), Rasāyana (Rejuvenation), Kaṅṭharukhara (reliever of throat pain), etc. As a single drug, Vatsanābha is indicated in about twenty-seven clinical conditions like Agnimāndhya (digestive impairment), Kāsa (cough), Madāvaha (alcoholism), Gulma (abdominal lump), etc. Vatsanābha is used for Śodhana (purification procedure), krāmaṇa (transformation of base metals into gold) and Vedhana (alchemy); 3 saṅskāra among the aṣṭasaṅskāra of pāra. **Conclusion:** This review may enrich to documentary research and may provide collective and detailed information regarding Vatsanābha as it is presented in ayurvedic classical texts.

Keywords: Ayurveda, *Aconitum ferox*, Amṛta, Garala, Vatsanābha, Viṣa, Classical texts

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical system being practiced in many countries, for prevention and management of various disorders. Description of drugs used in Ayurveda can be well traced in various classical texts known as .Samhitā (treatise), Nighaṅṭu (lexicons), Rasagranthas (compendia related to alchemy) and Cikitsā granthas (compendia of Ayurveda). etc. These literatures were written at different time period in the past¹. Drugs of herbal

origin are predominantly prescribed in these texts to combat various diseases. Among these drugs some are having highly poisonous effects but are very strongly prescribed for their therapeutic effect due to their quick and effective actions. Vatsanābha, also known as Viṣa (poison) and Amṛta (nectar), botanically identified as *Aconitum ferox* Wall. belongs to family Ranunculaceae. It is a perennial erect herb growing up to 2 m in height; roots look like the navel of children. Leaves are alternate, deeply lobed; lobes are oval in shape,

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Submitted: 27.04.2020

Revised: 12.06.2020

Received: 29.04.2020

Accepted: 26.06.2020

toothed, soft and hairy. Inflorescence is raceme, terminal spike. Flower purple to greenish white. Fruits are follicle, wrinkled and pubescent. Seeds are black with pitted test². The plant is commonly found at site of lower alpine region during July-August. In the Sikkim Himalaya, it is found at the North-eastern Sikkim, Nathula region, Singalela ridges and the Dzongri area³. It is well known drug available throughout India with various vernacular names like Bish, Mahoor (Hindi); Mithavisha (Assam, Odia); Kathvish (Bengali); Vatsanabhi (Kannad), etc⁴. Root contains an active principle Indaconitine ($C_{34}H_{47}NO_{10}$), chasmanitine ($C_{34}H_{47}NO_9$), chasmanthinine, one unidentified alkaloid-base A ($C_{26}H_{43}O_6N$), Chasmanine etc.⁵

Vatsanābha have been attributed with many Paryāya (synonyms), Guṇa-karmas (properties and actions), Prayoga (indications) etc., in different classical Ayurvedic texts of Ayurveda. In this article an attempt has been made to compile and prepare a comprehensive information on various aspects of *Vatsanābha* from available Samhitā, Nighaṇṭu, Rasagranthas and Cikitsā grantha.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Information regarding the drug Vatsanābha is being compiled from printed form of Samhitā, Nighaṇṭu, Rasagranthas and Cikitsā granthas available in the library of the institute and online source of E-Nighaṇṭu. Information were extracted from available 30 Nighaṇṭu (Table 1), 21 Rasagranthas & Cikitsā grantha (Table-2) and 09 Samhitā (Table-3).

INCLUSION CRITERIA

This review concealment the available Samhitā, Nighaṇṭu, Rasagranthas and Cikitsā granthas. The available data are presented in precise tabular format in a systematic manner with regards to its synonyms, classification, properties, actions and indications on various disease conditions. Standard dictionaries were referred for the interpretation of classical Ayurvedic terminologies for their probable English equivalent terms. Standard dictionaries and NAMASTE PORTAL^[64] were referred for the interpretation of classical Ayurvedic terminologies and their nearest English equivalents.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Nighaṇṭu and Rasagranthas, available in manuscript form were excluded from the present review.

DATA ANALYSIS

The repetition of a single formulations noted in more than one text was considered as one.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Paryāya (synonyms): Various names have been attributed to a single plant to describe its morphological as well as pharmacological characters are known as Paryāya(synonyms) (citation), which can be traced in

various classical literatures known as Samhitas, Nighaṇṭus (lexicon) and Kośa(dictionary)⁶⁵. It is observed that about 41 synonyms have been depicted to describe the properties of Vatsanābha; which is based upon pharmacological action, pharmacognostical characters, mythology and habitat (Table 4). On critical analysis of synonyms attributed to Vatsanābha, it can be concluded that the plant poison (sthāvarādhyā) whose root appears like umbilical cord of calf and causes death to the calf due to accidental ingestion (Vatsanābha, Vatsanābhī); invades all over the body quickly due to virtue of 'Vikāsi' Guṇa (Viṣa); donates poison and may end life (Gara, Garalam); causes addiction due to its addictiveness nature (Kśveḍa); A deadly poison (Kālakuṭa; Hālāhala), and also acts as nectar (Amṛta), a reputed drug applicable in numerous disorders (Mahausadham). It is known as Vatsanābha and botanically identified as *Aconitum ferox* Wall. of the family Ranunculaceae.

CLASSIFICATION

For proper understanding drugs have been classified into various groups/sections according to their morphological and pharmacological properties, and therapeutic indication/uses. Out of the referred 30 Nighaṇṭus, 17 Nighaṇṭus, Arka Prakāśa, Aṣṭāṅga hṛdaya, Aṣṭāṅga saṅgraha, Ayurveda prakāśa, Caraka samhitā, Rasajalanidhi, Rasatarṅgiṇī and Rasendra Cūḍāmaṇī had described the drug under a group or class (Vargas).

Abhidhāna ratnamālā had classified drug according to Rasa and quoted under Kaṣāya skandha. It was also found that it was included under Candanādi varga, Pippalayādi varga and Śatapuspādi varga etc., where the groups were named after the first drug of the group. Based on its habit, it has also been included under Sthāvara Viṣa and Kanda Viṣa. In Rasagrantha, it has been mentioned in Dhātu Varga and Dhātuupdhātu Rasauparasa Ratnauparatna Viṣaupviṣādi Varga. Rest have been mentioned in Bhūmyādi varga and Mishra prakraṇa, etc. The details of classifications have been enumerated in Table 5.

Rasādipaṅcaka (Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics properties) and Doṣāghnatā

Most of the Nighaṇṭus reported Madhura Rasa of Vatsanābha. On the other hand, many Rasagrantha reported kaṭu, Tikta and Kaṣāya Rasa, Laghu, Tikṣṇa, vyāvāyi Guṇa of Vatsanābha. The details of Rasapaṅcaka attributed to Vatsanābha are presented in Table 6. A drug performs certain local and general actions either by its Rasa, Guṇa and certain systemic or specific therapeutic actions by its Vipāka and Vīrya. Ācārya Caraka states that some substances act in accordance with their Rasa (taste), others in accordance with their properties or biotransformation (Vipāka), others in accordance with their Vīrya (potency), and yet other or specific action (Prabhāva)^[54].

Karma (Actions) and roghatnā (indications):

Various properties attributed to Vatsanābha by various authors have been presented in Table 7. Vatsanābha has been indicated in the management of 16 *Karmas* such as Vyāvāyī (CNS stimulation followed by depression) [26, 33, 43, 51, 52, 58, 65], Balya (tonic) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Rasāyana (Rejuvenation) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Kaṅṭharukhara (reliever of thought pain) [15, 27, 31, 35], Bṛmhaṇa (nourishing) [43, 57, 58], Grāhi (pursue) [51, 52, 58], Svedajanana (perception) [33, 35, 54], Vedanāhara (pain reliever) [33, 35, 54], Yogavāhī (conveyer) [26, 33, 57], Mūtrala (diuretic) [35, 54], Santāpakāraka [31, 35], Abhigāta (trauma) [54], Abhiṣyanda (ophthalmia) [57], Dīpana (appetizer) [57] and Śamana (supress) [57]. It is also used in 27 different disease condition such as Agnimāndhya (digestive impairment) [33, 43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Kāsa (cough) [33, 43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Madāvaha (alcoholism) [26, 33, 43, 51, 52, 58, 65], Gulma (abdominal lump) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Pāṇḍu (anaemia) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Plihodara (disease of spleen) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Vātaroga (neuro-muscular anomalies) [43, 51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Arśa (piles) [43, 51, 52, 58, 65], Bhagandara (fistula) [43, 51, 52, 58, 65], Kuṣṭha (disease of skin) [51, 52, 57, 58, 65], Śvāsa (asthama) [43, 51, 52, 57, 65], Vraṇa (wound) [43, 51, 52, 58, 65], Jvara (fever) [33, 54, 57], Āmavāta (rheumatoid arthritis) [54, 57], Hṛdaroga (heart disorders) [26, 54], Kaṭīśūla (back pain) [43, 57], Śūla (pain) [35, 54], Timira (blindness) [57, 58], Grahaṇī (sprue/ibs) [57], Gr̥dhrasī (sciatica) [57], Gudaroga (disease of anal region) [57], Karnāśoṭha (disease of ear) [57], Karṇaśūla (disease of ear) [57], Netraśoṭha (disease of eye) [57], Śirahśūla (headache) [57], Śoṭha (oedema) [33] and Visarapa (ersipelas) [54]. Among them Ayurveda Prakāśa, Rasendra sambhava, Bṛhat rasarāja sundara and Rasatarāṅgiṇī indicated Vatsanābha in maximum diseases condition.

Vatsanābha in Rasaśāstra:

Vatsanābha is used in most of the Rasaśāstra granthas for Śodhana (purification procedure) and krāmaṇa (transformation of base metals into gold) of Rasauśadhī. Śodhana process is used to remove Viṣa (toxic compounds), the constituents or convert them to chemically modified compounds which is less toxic and/ may be potent. Vatsanābha is used in 3 saṅskāra among the aṣṭasaṅskāra of pārada i.e. Śodhana (purification procedure), krāmaṇa (transformation of base metals into gold) and Vedhana (alchemy). Vatsanābha is also used for pāradabandhaka surā, Rasa bubhukṣitakaraṇam, Rasasyagrāsavidhi, Rasarañjana, abhṛka bhasma, Tāmra bhasma, nāga bhasma and many more conditions which are mentioned in Table-8

CONCLUSION

Vatsanābha is one of the potent and useful drug in Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia, known for its quick action. Though known for its most poisonous effect, this drug has been attributed with fifteen cikitsā upayogī (useful in treatment) including its anabolic (Balya, Bṛmhaṇa, Rasāyana) action. This drug is being indicated in 27 clinical conditions covering seven srotas. Vatsanābha is also used for pharmaceutical

processing like Śodhana (purification procedure), krāmaṇa (transformation of base metals into gold) and Vedhana (alchemy) of Pārada, Mahārasa/Uparasa, Dhātu and Ratna/Uparatna. This review may steer as a direction to further scientific research to explore all the pharmacological properties of Vatsanābha delineated in various Nighaṅṭus (lexicons) and may be referred as a document based research for further researches.

ABBREVIATIONS: Not Applicable

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Not Applicable

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: None

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How to cite this article:

Buha M, Sojeetra N, Acharya RN, An Appraisal of Vatsanābha (*Aconitum Ferox* Wall.) with Special Reference to Classical Texts Of Ayurveda: Samhitā, Cikitsā Grantha, Nighaṅṭus And Rasagrantha, The Healer Journal, 2020;1(1): 20-27

Table 1: list of referred 30 Nighaṅṭu from where information pertaining to Vatsanābha has been collected.

1.	Abhidhāna manjirī (A.M.) ⁶	16.	Nighaṅṭuśeṣa (N.S.) ²¹
2.	Abhidhāna ratnamālā (A.R.) ⁷	17.	Paryāyamuktāvalī (PM) ²²
3.	Amarakośa (A.K.) ⁸	18.	Paryāyaratnamālā(P.R.) ²³
4.	Aṣṭāṅga nighaṅṭu (A.N.) ⁹	19.	Priya nighaṅṭu (P.N.) ²⁴
5.	Bhāvaprakāśa nighaṅṭu (B.N.) ¹⁰	20.	Rāja nighaṅṭu (R.N.) ²⁵
6.	Dhanavanatarī nighaṅṭu (DH.N.) ¹¹	21.	Rājavallabha nighaṅṭu (R.V.N.) ²⁶
7.	Harīṭakyādi nighaṅṭu (HAN) ¹²	22.	Śabdacandrikā (S.C.) ²⁷
8.	Hṛdayadipaka nighaṅṭu (H.D.N.) ¹³	23.	Śāligrāma nighaṅṭu (S.L.N.) ²⁸
9.	Kaiyadeva nighaṅṭu (K.D.) ¹⁴	24.	Śāṅkara nighaṅṭu (SRN) ²⁹
10.	Laghu nighaṅṭu (L.N.) ¹⁵	25.	Sarasavatī nighaṅṭu (S.V.N.) ³⁰
11.	Madanādi nighaṅṭu (M.D.N.) ¹⁶	26.	Sauśruta nighaṅṭu (S.N.) ³¹
12.	Madanapāla nighaṅṭu (M.N.) ¹⁷	27.	Siddhamāntra nighaṅṭu (S.M.N.) ³²
13.	Mādhava dravyaguṇa (M.D.) ¹⁸	28.	Siddhasāra nighaṅṭu (S.S.N.) ³³
14.	Mahauśadha nighaṅṭu (MOA) ¹⁹	29.	Śivakośa nighaṅṭu (S.K.) ³⁴
15.	Nighaṅṭu ādarśa (N.A.) ²⁰	30.	Soḍhala nighaṅṭu (SO.N.) ³⁵

Table 2: List of referred 21 Rasagranthas and Cikitsā grantha from where information pertaining to Vatsanābha has been collected.

1.	Ānanda kanda ³⁶	12.	Rasatarāṅgiṇī ⁴⁷
2.	Arka prakāśa ³⁷	13.	Rasāyana sara ⁴⁸
3.	Āyurveda prakāśa ³⁸	14.	Rasendra chuḍāmaṇī ⁴⁹
4.	Bhārata bhaiśyajya ratnākara ³⁹	15.	Rasendra cintāmaṇī ⁵⁰
5.	Bṛhat rasarāja sundara ⁴⁰	16.	Rasendra maṅgala ⁵¹
6.	Rasa jala nidhī ⁴¹	17.	Rasendra saṁbhava ⁵²
7.	Rasa prakāśa sudhākara ⁴²	18.	Rasendrapurāṇa ⁵³
8.	Rasa saṅketa kalikā ⁴³	19.	Rasopaniṣata ⁵⁴
9.	Rasakaumudī ⁴⁴	20.	Sahasrayogam ⁵⁵
10.	Rasāmṛtama ⁴⁵	21.	Yogatarāṅgiṇī ⁵⁶
11.	Rasaratnasamuccaya ⁴⁶		

Table 3: List of referred 09 Saṁhitā from where information pertaining to Vatsanābha has been collected.

1.	Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya ⁵⁷	5.	Suśruta saṁhitā ⁶¹
2.	Aṣṭāṅga saṁgraha ⁵⁸	6.	Vaṅgasena saṁhitā ⁶²
3.	Caraka saṁhitā ⁵⁹	7.	Yogaratanākara ⁶³
4.	Śārṅgadhara saṁhitā ⁶⁰		

Search words: Vatsanābha, Viṣa, Amṛta, Garala

Table 4: Synonyms attributed to Vatsanābha.

SN	Paryāya(synonyms)	References
Based on Guna (characters) and Karma (Actions)		
1.	Amṛta [15, 27, 54], Gara [12, 19], Garalam [12, 15, 19, 25, 27, 31, 51, 52, 57], Kṣveḍa [12, 31, 51, 52, 57], Mahauśadha [15, 27], Maraṅgam [15, 27], Miṣṭaviṣa [33], Pradīpana [12, 31], Prāṇahāraḱam [15, 27], Viṣa [9, 12, 15, 17, 19, 25, 27, 31, 51, 52, 54, 57]	The food of the gods, Nectar. It donates poison and This may end life. It is reputed drug applicable in numerous disorders. This causes addiction due to its addictiveness nature. It invades all over the body quickly due to virtue of ‘Vikāsi’ Guṇa.
2.	Amṛta (The food of gods, Nectar)	[15, 27, 54]
Pharmacognostical characters		
3.	Piṅḍa [17], Śṛṅga [54], Śṛṅgī [19, 40], Tailakanda [33], Vatsanābha [9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 25, 33], Vatsanābhī [27]	It appears like umbilical cord of calf or like horns

SN	Paryāya(synonyms)	References
Based upon Mythology		
4.	Hālāhala [9, 14, 17], Kālakūṭa [9, 14, 25, 40, 51, 52, 57], Kālinda [16], Saktuka [40], Śāmbhavo [16]	A poison churing of the ocean, swallowed by śiva and causing the blueness of neck.
Based upon Habitat		
5.	Barbara [14, 17], Darada [25], Dārada [25, 31], Naipāla [54], Saurāṣṭrīka [31], Sthāvarādya [15, 27]	A partic vegetable poison
Other		
6.	Bālabhadra [16], Bola [9, 14, 17], Brmhaputra [12, 31], Gandharasa [17], Jātīrasa [14], Kākola [12, 31], Kośa [17], Nāgam [15, 27], Nirloha [17], Rasa [9, 14, 17], Saptagandhaka [14], Śauklikeya [12, 31], Stokam [14, 15, 17, 27], Ugra [15, 27]	

Table 5: Classification of Vatsanābha in referred Nighaṇṭu, samhita and Chikitsa grantha.

Basis of the classification	Gana, Varga and Skandha
Based on first drug of the group	Viṣanāmārka gaṇā [50], Viṣopayoga [62], Viṣa Varga [51, 54, 40, 31], Kuśmāṇḍādi Gaṇa [57], Candanādi varga [17, 25], Elādi Varga [9, 32], Madanādi gaṇa varga [32], Pippalayādi varga [27, 34], Śatapuspādi varga [33], Svarṇādi Varga [35], Vatsanābhādi Varga [34]
Based on properties	Kaṣāya skandha [19]
Based on habit	Sthāvara Viṣa [63, 60], Kanda Viṣa [61]
In <i>Rasagrantha</i>	Dhātu Varga [36], Dhātuupadhatu Rasauparasa Ratnauparatna Viṣaupviṣādi Varga [33, 36]
Miscellaneous (according to contexts of literatures)	Bhūmyādi varga [16], Miśrakādi varga [15, 27, 24], Miśra prakraṇa [26]

Table 6: Rasapañcaka (Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics properties) and Doṣaghnatā of Vatsanābha as reported in various Nighaṇṭus (lexicons).

References	Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka	Karma
B.P.	Madhura	Rukṣa, Laghu, Tikṣṇa, Vyavāyī, Vikāśī, Yogavāhī	Uṣṇa	Madhura	Vātakaphahara, Sannipātahara
Mah. Ni.	Madhura	-	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara Sannipātahara
R.N.	Madhura	-	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara
Sā. Ni.	Madhura	-	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara, sannipātahara
A.P.	Kaṭu, tikta, Kaṣaya	Uṣṇa, Vyavāyī, Grāhi	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara
R.J.N	Kaṭu, tikta,	-	-	-	-
R.Sb	Kaṭu, tikta, Kaṣaya	Vyavāyī	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara
B.R.S.	Kaṭu, tikta, Kaṣaya	Vyavāyī	Uṣṇa	-	Vātakaphahara
R.T.	Kaṭu, tikta, Kaṣaya	Yogavāhī	Uṣṇa	Katu	Vātakaphahara, Sannipātahara
R.S.K.	Kaṭu, tikta, Kaṣaya	Vyavāyī	-	-	-

Table 8: Use of Vatsanābha in processing of Pārada and other metals

Rasa/Parada
Haratāla satva pātana [44], Krāmaṇa saṅskāra [56], Pārada Bandhaka Surā [56], Pārada bubhuksāvidhi [53, 58], Parada Mukhakarāṇa vidhi [66], Pārada Śodhana [49, 56], Pātanopayogī niyāmaka gaṇa [56], Rasarañjana karma [45, 54], Rasasyagrāsa vidhi [54], Sāraṇopayogī Taila [56], Vedhana saṅskāra [56]
Mahārāsa
Abhraka Bhasma [56], Abhraka vedha vidhi [54], Capala Bhasma [58], Capala satvapātana [54], Capala Śodhana [58], Gandhaka Śodhana [54]
Dhātu
Dhātu druti [56], Nāga Bhasma [56], Rajata Nirmāṇa [56], Raupya karaṇa [54], Suvarṇa druti [56], Tāmra Bhasma [56], Tāmra vedha saṅskāra [56]