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Understanding of *Guṇa* and *Karma* in *Viṣa Dravyas*: A review

Ashish Bharti Goswami and Ramakant Marde

Abstract

The word *Viṣa* (poison) is originated from the term '*Viṣannat*' means the one which causes *Viṣāda* (melancholy). According *Ācāryās Viṣa Dravyas* owns various *Guṇas* (*Laghu*, *Rukṣa* etc.) through which it performs various *Karmas* (actions) in *Śārīra*. *Ācāryās* are agreeing that a total ten number of *Guṇas* are present in *Viṣa Dravya*. Present study has been carried out to explore the Concept of *Guṇa* and *Karma* in *Viṣa Dravyas*. Our study reveals that in *Bṛhatrayī* there were addition of some other *Guṇas* such as *Āśhu*, *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī*, *Anirdeśya Rasa*, and *Apākī* apart from *Gurvādi Guṇa*. Scholars opine that the number of *Guṇas* should not be limited twenty as there may be various *Guṇas* in different contexts. In case of *Ācārya Śārṅghara's* eight *Guṇas* it can be considered as mixture of both *Guṇa* and *Karma*. *Viṣa* can act as potential antidote by understanding the concept *Gati* and *Prabhāva*. So it can be concluded that according to *Guṇa* and *Karma Viṣa dravya* can be lethal to *Śārīra* in both acute and chronic manner but it can be practiced therapeutically if used judiciously.

Keywords: *guṇa*, *karma*, *viṣa dravyas*

Introduction

The word *Viṣa* (poison) is originated from the term '*Viṣannat*' means the one which causes *Viṣāda* (melancholy) [1]. In *Āyurveda* detailed reference of *Viṣa* is found in *Agada Tantra* which is among the *Aṣṭāṅga* of *Āyurveda* [2]. In ancient literature the term *Viṣa* indicates all types of poisons such as *Jāṅgama*, *Sthavar*, and *Kratrma* (artificial) etc. According *Ācāryās Viṣa Dravyas* owns various *Guṇas* (*Laghu*, *Rukṣa* etc.) through which it performs various *Karmas* (actions) in *Śārīra*. *Viṣa Dravyas* are clinically important as they possess both toxic and antidotal effect at the same time. Understanding concept of *Guṇa* and *karma Viṣa Dravyas* will help *Vaidyas* to opt suitable *Viṣaghna Ousadha* as well as it will impart deeper understanding towards *Siddhānta* of *Viṣa Cikitsā*.

Mythological Origin of *Viṣa*

In *Samhitās* *Viṣa* is depicted in form of a human being having dreadful features such as *Caturdamśtra* (Having four fang like teeth), *Haritkeśa* (Green in colour), etc. It is believed that *Viṣa* emerged first even before *Amṛta* (Nectar) during *Samudra-Manthana*. From above said mythological origin it can be understood that *Viṣa* and *Amṛta*, though attributed with altogether antagonistic virtues, are originated from the same twig in creation [3].

Classification of *Viṣa* [4] – Based on various ancient literatures *Viṣa* is primarily classified in two group's i.e.

- Sthavar* – It includes all type of plant and mineral poisons.
- Jāṅgama* – It includes all toxins derived from animals.

Later *Ācārya* have added one more category of artificial poisons i.e. *Kritrima* or *Saṅyogaja Viṣa* to above classification [5].

Aims and Objective

Present study has been carried out to explore the Concept of *Guṇa* and *Karma* in *Viṣa Dravyas*.

Materials and Methods

It is a literary review to understand the Concept of *Guṇa* and *Karma* in *Viṣa Dravya* with the help of data collected from classical and contemporary *ayurvedic* texts and published research articles.

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Guṇa and Karma of Viṣa

In *Āyurveda* all concepts are having its practical utility. One of the concepts is Guṇa, which has divers meanings according to its use, in clinical, and literary fields [6].

Guṇa is the one which is located in *Dravya* inherently, is causative agent and devoid of property and action. It means that Guṇa itself has no action but qualifies the *Dravya* for such action [7]. *Ācāryas* are agree that a total ten number of Guṇas are present in *Viṣa dravya* but due to difference in opinion it varies from eight to eleven. Some scholar opines that Guṇas of *Viṣa Dravya* should not be depicted as only physical or pharmacological because it is both physical as well as pharmacological characteristic [8]. *Ācāryas* have mentioned total twenty *Gurvādi Guṇas* (Physico-pharmacological properties) few of them are included under Ten Guṇas of *Viṣa Dravya* i.e. *Uṣṇa*, *Tikṣṇa* etc. further

some of the terms such as *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī* etc. which does not fall under *Gurvādi Guṇa* but they are included under *Viṣa Guṇas*.

On the other hand *Karma* is the one which is capable of causing conjunction and disjunction irrespective of any other factor and is located in *Dravya*. The mode of action of *Dravya* i.e. *Karma* is based on theory of *Pañchmahābhūta*. *Dravyas* when used combined with selective *Mahābhūta* and by altering its quality and quantity produces their action by further influencing the respective *Doṣas*, *Dhātus* and *malas* accordingly. This is a sort of selective mechanism more or less like the lock and key theory based on structure function relationship.

Āyurvedācāryas have almost similar opinions regarding *Guṇa* and *Karma* of *Viṣa* apart from some exceptions [9].

Table 1: *Viṣa Guṇa* according to different *Ācāryas* [10, 11, 12, 13]

S. N.	<i>Ācārya Caraka</i>	<i>Ācārya Suśruta</i>	<i>Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa</i>	<i>Ācārya Śārṅgadharā</i>
1.	<i>Laghu</i>	<i>Laghu</i>	<i>Laghu</i>	-
2.	<i>Rukṣa</i>	<i>Rukṣa</i>	<i>Rukṣa</i>	-
3.	<i>Āśū</i>	<i>Āśū</i>	<i>Āśū</i>	-
4.	<i>Viṣada</i>	<i>Viṣada</i>	<i>Viṣada</i>	-
5.	<i>Vyavāyī</i>	<i>Vyavāyī</i>	<i>Vyavāyī</i>	<i>Vyavāyī</i>
6.	<i>Tikṣṇa</i>	<i>Tikṣṇa</i>	<i>Tikṣṇa</i>	
7.	<i>Vikāśī</i>	<i>Vikāśī</i>	<i>Vikāśī</i>	<i>Vikāśī</i>
8.	<i>Sūkṣma</i>	<i>Sūkṣma</i>	<i>Sūkṣma</i>	<i>Sūkṣma</i>
9.	<i>Uṣṇa</i>	<i>Uṣṇa</i>	<i>Uṣṇa</i>	<i>Āgneya</i>
10.	<i>Anirdeśya Rasa</i>	-	<i>Avyakta Rasa</i>	-
11.	-	<i>Apākī</i>	<i>Apākī</i>	-
12.	-	-	-	<i>Chedī</i>
13.	-	-	-	<i>Madavaha</i>
14.	-	-	-	<i>Jīvitahara</i>
15.	-	-	-	<i>Yogavāhī</i>

Table 2: *Viṣa Guṇa* and their respective *Karma* according to different *Ācāryas* [14, 15]-*Viṣa karma acc. to Ācārya Caraka*

S. N.	<i>Viṣa Guṇa</i>	<i>Caarka (Ch.Chi 23/19-23)</i>	<i>Suśruta (Su.Kal.2/19-23)</i>
1.	<i>Laghu</i>	Manageable with difficulty	Manageable with difficulty
2.	<i>Rukṣa</i>	Vitiates <i>Vāta Doṣa</i>	Vitiates <i>Vāta Doṣa</i>
3.	<i>Āśū</i>	Pervades whole body(quick acting)	Rapidly Fatal
4.	<i>Viṣada</i>	Not Adhering to <i>Doṣa</i>	Does not adhere to any spot (<i>Asthira</i>)
5.	<i>Vyavāyī</i>	Absorbed quickly in <i>Śarīra</i>	Spread through entire <i>Śarīra</i>
6.	<i>Tikṣṇa</i>	Affects Vital Parts(<i>Marma</i>)	Overwhelms the Mind (Causes unconsciousness) and tends to disintegrate <i>Śarīra Avayava</i>
7.	<i>Vikāśī</i>	lethal for life	Annihilate the <i>Doṣa</i> , <i>Dhātu</i> and <i>Malas</i>
8.	<i>Sūkṣma</i>	Vitiates <i>Rakta</i>	Penetrates quickly into <i>Śarīra Avayava</i> and derange them
9.	<i>Uṣṇa</i>	Vitiates <i>Pitta Doṣa</i>	Vitiates <i>Pitta Doṣa</i> and <i>Rakta</i>
10.	<i>Anirdeśya Rasa</i>	Vitiates <i>Kapha Doṣa</i>	
11.	<i>Apākī</i>	-	Cant not be assimilated

Table 3: *Viṣa Guṇa* and *karma acc. to Ācārya Vriddha Vāgbhaṭa* [16]

S. N.	<i>Viṣa Guṇa</i>	<i>Ācārya Vriddha Vāgbhaṭa (A.S. U.T. 40/9)</i>
1,2	<i>Tikṣṇa and Uṣṇa</i>	Vitiates <i>Pitta Doṣa</i> and <i>Rakta</i>
3	<i>Rukṣa</i>	Vitiates <i>Vāta Doṣa</i>
4	<i>Viṣada</i>	Permeate quickly due to anti- adhesion
5,6	<i>Sūkṣma and Vyavāyī</i>	Enters into <i>Doṣa</i> , <i>Dhatu</i> and <i>Avayava</i> (Limbs etc.)
7	<i>Vikāśī</i>	Affects Vital Parts(<i>Marma</i>) and causes <i>Moha</i>
8	<i>Āśukārī</i>	Pervades whole body rapidly (quick acting)
9	<i>Laghu</i>	Excrete with difficulty from <i>Śarīra</i>
10	<i>Avyakta Rasa</i>	Vitiates <i>Kapha Doṣa</i>
11	* <i>Apākī</i>	Cant not be assimilated

**Ācārya Vriddha Vāgbhaṭa* does not included *Apākī* under *Daśa Guṇa* of *Viṣa*.

Mode of Action of Viṣa

Ācārya Vgabhṭa opines that *Tikṣṇadi Guṇa* of *Viṣa* are opposite to that of *Oja* and demonstrates lethality by

vitiating *Vāta* and *Pitta Doṣas*. After entering to *Śarīra Viṣa* firstly vitiates *Rakta* further it vitiates *Tridoṣas* along with their *Āśayās* (site). At last it resides in *Hṛdaya* and which results in death^[17].

Viṣaghna (Antidotal) action of Viṣa

According to *Ācārya Caraka Viṣa* shows Antidotal action due to *Prabhāva*. (ch. sū.26/69). *Ācārya Śivdāsa Sena* in his commentary *Carakatatva pradīpikā* opined that *Viṣa* is *Viṣaghna* because *Sthavar* and *Jāngama* annihilate each other^[18].

Discussion and Conclusion

Study of *Viṣa Guṇa* is a important topic because *Ācārya Caraka* and *Śuśruta* both emphasized in detail about *Viṣa Guṇa* and their respective *Karmas*. *Ācārya P.V. Sharma* while discussing regarding nature of *Guṇa* opines that *Ayurvedic Guṇas* are not only physical properties nor pharmacological properties but they are both physical as well as pharmacological properties of a *Dravya*. These *Guṇa* reflects their action only after entering into *Śarīra*.

All *Viṣa Guṇa* are opposite to that of *Oja Guṇa*. *Ācārya Śuśruta* mentioned *Apāki* as *Guṇa* instead of *Carakoka Anirdeśya Rasa*. *Apākitava* can be co related to difficulty in digestion or metabolism of a poison. In contemporary science also it is considered that metabolism of a poison is complicated. On other hand *Ācārya Vṛddha Vāgbhaṭa* does not included *Apāki* in ten *Guṇa* of *Viṣa* this is might be because *Apākitava* is a *Lakṣaṇa* (Characteristic) rather than *Guṇa*.

Ācārya Shargdhara has mentioned only eight *Viṣa Guṇas* half of which are similar to *Brihatrayi* i.e. *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī*, *Sūkṣma*, *Āgneya* further he attempted to innovate few other *Guṇas* such as *Chedī*, *Madavaha*, *Jīvitahara* and *Yogavāhā*. *Ācārya Ādhyamalla* in his commentary named '*Dīpikā*' on *Śārṅgadhara Samhitā* explain that *Dravya* having *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī* etc. *Guṇas* is *Jīvitahara (Prāṇahara)*^[19]. It is clear that he did not consider *Jīvitahara* as a *Guṇa* rather than he consider it as a *Karma*.

The number of *Guṇa* in a *Viṣa Dravya* defines its lethality e.g. *Viṣa Dravya* having all ten *Guṇas* is considered as ideal and most lethal one while *Viṣa Dravya* with less number of *Guṇas* (i.e. 3-4 *Guṇas*) is called *Duṣīviṣa*^[20] which is also a type of poison having mild in nature. Some scholars of *Āgāda Tantra* opines all *Viṣa Dravya* have 10 *Guṇas* in it but their potency or fatality depends on prominence of *Guṇas*, as *Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa* mentioned that all *Dravyās* are *Pañcabhautika* but they are classified according to prominence of specific *Mahābhaūta* present in it, same should be considered in case of *Viṣa Dravyas*^[21].

Viṣa Dravya not only affects on *Daiḥika* (Physical) level but *Mānasika* (psychological) level also such as in definition itself it is mentioned that it caused *Viṣada* (melancholy). Each *Guṇa* of *Viṣa* results vitiating *Doṣa*, *Dhātu*, *Mala* and *Śarīra Avayava* as *Karma*.

Antidotal effect

Ācārya Chakrapāṇī while commenting on *Viṣa gati* (i.e. *Jāngama Viṣa* moves upward *Sthāvara Viṣa* Moves downwards) and *Viṣaghna Karma* (antidotal effect) of *Viṣa* opined that in case of *Sthāvara Viṣa*, *Jāngama Viṣa* acts as Antidote and vice versa. He explained that *Prabhāva* is the reason behind antidotal nature of *Viṣa*.

Conclusion

Our study reveals that in *Bṛhatrayī* there were addition of some other *Guṇas* such as *Āshū*, *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī*, *Anirdeśya Rasa*, and *Apāki* apart from *Gurvādi Guṇa*. Scholars opine that the number of *Guṇas* should not be limited twenty as there may be various *Guṇas* in different contexts. But in case of *Ācārya Śārṅgdhar's* eight *Viṣa Guṇa* he mentioned these under *Viṣa Paribhāṣā* in *Paribhāṣā Prakaraṇa*. In our opinion a *Paribhāṣā* (Definition) of *Viṣa* not only meant to explains *Guṇa* but it explained concept and action also, the Commentator *Aadhmallā* also had same view. So it can be opined that they are not only eight *Guṇas* but it can be considered as mixture of both *Guṇa* (i.e. *Vyavāyī*, *Vikāśī* etc.) and *Karma* (i.e. *Chedī*, *Madavah* etc.).

Viṣa can act as potential antidote by understanding the concept *Gati* and *Prabhāva*. So it can be concluded that according to *Guṇa* and *Karma Viṣa dravya* can be lethal to *Śarīra* in both acute and chronic manner but it can be practiced therapeutically if used judiciously.

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