



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Vatsanabha in Rasashastra: Transformation of a Deadly Poison into a Therapeutic Agent A Review of Classical Detoxification, Pharmacology, and Toxicology

Dr Shatrunjay Markam ^{1*}, Dr Deepak Jansevaki Jaiswal ², Dr Varsha Prashant Wanjari ³

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Agad Tantra Evam Vidhi Vaidhyak, Government Autonomous Ayurved College Jabalpur M.P., India

² Professor, Rasashastra Evan Bhaishajya Kalpana Department, Ram Krishna college of Ayurveda and medical sciences, Gandhinagar, Bhopal, RKDF University, India

³ Vice Principal & Professor, Rasashastra Evan Bhaishajya Kalpana Department, L N Ayurved college and hospital, Madhya Pradesh, India

* Corresponding Author: Dr Shatrunjay Markam

Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 02

March-April 2026

Received: 20-01-2026

Accepted: 21-02-2026

Published: 19-03-2026

Page No: 356-361

Abstract

Vatsanabha is considered one of the most potent plant poisons described in Ayurveda and is classified under *Upavisha*. Despite its inherent toxicity, classical Ayurvedic pharmacology describes methods by which this poisonous drug is transformed into a safe and therapeutically valuable medicine. The disciplines of *Rasashastra* and *Agad Tantra* collectively provide detailed insights into the detoxification, safe therapeutic use, and management of poisoning related to such substances. Classical Ayurvedic texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Rasa Tarangini, describe the properties, toxicity, and purification procedures of *Vatsanabha*. **Objective:** To review the classical and contemporary evidence regarding the transformation of *Vatsanabha* from a highly toxic substance into a therapeutically useful drug through Ayurvedic detoxification processes.

Methods: Information regarding the pharmacological properties, toxicological profile, *Shodhana* procedures, and therapeutic applications of *Vatsanabha* was compiled from authoritative sources and relevant research studies.

Outcome: *Vatsanabha* (*Aconitum ferox*) contains potent alkaloids, such as aconitine, which are responsible for its toxic effects on the nervous and cardiovascular systems. Classical Ayurvedic pharmacology describes specific *Shodhana* procedures, including processing with *Gomutra*, *Godugdha*, and herbal media, which significantly reduce toxicity while retaining therapeutic properties. After proper detoxification, *Vatsanabha* is widely used in several classical formulations, such as Tribhuvana Kirti Rasa, Mahavata Vidhwamsana Rasa, and Sanjeevani Vati, primarily for conditions including fever, pain, and neurological disorders. Modern pharmacological studies also indicate analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and antipyretic activities of detoxified preparations.

Conclusion: *Vatsanabha* exemplifies the Ayurvedic principle of transforming toxic substances into potent therapeutic agents through appropriate pharmaceutical processing.

Keywords: Vatsanabha, Rasashastra, Agad Tantra, Shodhana, Toxicology, Detoxification

1. Introduction

In Ayurveda, *Visha Dravya* refers to substances with inherent toxic properties that can cause harmful or life-threatening effects when consumed in their natural state. Ayurvedic scholars recognised that certain natural substances exhibit both intense pharmacological potency and toxicity.^[1] Therefore, these substances were systematically studied, classified, and cautiously utilised in therapeutics through appropriate pharmaceutical processing and dosage regulation.

A unique principle of Ayurvedic pharmacology is the transformation of toxic substances into safe and effective medicines through purification and processing procedures known as *Shodhana*.^[2] Properly processed toxic substances are believed to

¹ Sharma PV. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Surabharati Academy; 2008. Dravyaguna Vijnana. Golden Jubilee Edition; p. 128.

² Acharya JT. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Vidya Bhawan; 2011. Agnivesa: Charaka Samhita; p. 23.

acquire desirable medicinal properties and can be safely used in minimal therapeutic doses. Thus, the controlled use of detoxified poisonous substances represents an advanced pharmacological and toxicological approach within Ayurveda.

Among the various poisonous drugs described in Ayurvedic literature, *Vatsanabha* is considered one of the most potent plant-derived poisons and is traditionally classified under *Upavisha*. Botanically identified as *Aconitum ferox*, it contains highly toxic alkaloids such as aconitine, which exert significant effects on the nervous and cardiovascular systems.^[3] In its crude form, *Vatsanabha* is extremely dangerous; however, after proper detoxification, it becomes an important ingredient in several formulations used for conditions such as fever, pain, inflammatory disorders, and neurological ailments.^[4]

Detailed descriptions of *Vatsanabha*, its toxic manifestations, and therapeutic management are found in classical Ayurvedic texts, including Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, where various types of poisons and their clinical features are discussed. Later texts of *Rasashastra*, particularly *Rasa Tarangini*, provide elaborate descriptions of *Shodhana* procedures and pharmaceutical processing techniques that enable the safe medicinal use of *Vatsanabha*.^[5]

Understanding the classical concept of transforming a deadly poison into a therapeutic agent provides valuable insights into the sophisticated pharmacological and toxicological knowledge embedded within Ayurveda. This review aims to analyse the classical and contemporary evidence related to *Vatsanabha*, focusing on its transformation from a toxic substance into a potent medicine through the principles of *Rasashastra* and *Agadtantra*.

2. Botanical and Pharmacognostic Profile

Botanical Identity

Vatsanabha is botanically identified as *Aconitum ferox* Wall. ex Ser., belonging to the family Ranunculaceae, which is traditionally referred to in Ayurveda as *Vatsanabha Kula*.^[6] In classical Ayurvedic classification, it is included in the *Visha Varga*, the group of toxic substances with strong pharmacological potency. Despite being a highly poisonous plant in its crude form, *Vatsanabha* becomes therapeutically useful after undergoing appropriate purification (*Shodhana*) procedures described in *Rasashastra*.

2.1. Vernacular Names and Sanskrit Synonyms^[7]

Different vernacular names across India widely know Vatsanabha. In English, it is commonly called Monk's Hood or Aconite. In Hindi and several North Indian languages, it is referred to as *Bachnag* or *Meetha Vish*. At the same time, regional names include *Basnag* in Gujarati, *Mohari* in

Punjabi, *Vish* in Assamese, and *Nabhi* in Telugu. In Sanskrit literature, numerous synonyms describe its properties and effects. Important synonyms include *Vatsanabha*, *Vatsanaga*, *Kshveda*, *Visha*, *Garala*, and *Amruta*. These names reflect both its toxic and therapeutic nature. Classical texts describe that although it is inherently poisonous (*Visha*), when properly processed, it may act as a potent medicine and even as *Amruta* (nectar-like) in suitable doses.

2.2. Classical Categorization

Ayurvedic texts classify *Vatsanabha* among poisonous plant drugs. According to Charaka Samhita, it falls under *Sthavara Visha*, which includes poisons derived from plant and mineral sources.^[8] In Sushruta Samhita, it is categorised as *Kanda Visha*, indicating poisons originating from tuberous roots.^[9] Bhavaprakasha Nighantu describes it under the *Dhatvadi Varga*, emphasising its toxic nature and medicinal applications after purification.^[10]

2.3. Habitat and Distribution^[11]

Vatsanabha is predominantly found in the alpine and subalpine regions of the Himalayan range. It grows at elevations above 5000 feet, particularly in Sikkim, Nepal, and adjoining Himalayan regions. The plant thrives in cool climatic conditions and is generally collected during the *Vasanta Rutu* (spring season), when the tuberous roots are considered most potent for medicinal use.

Morphological Characteristics

Vatsanabha is a perennial herb characterised by tuberous roots that constitute the principal medicinal part. The root is typically 5–7 *Angula* in length and approximately 1–1.5 *Angula* in diameter. Externally, it appears dark brown or blackish, while internally it is whitish. The upper portion of the root is thicker than the lower part, giving it a shape resembling the navel of a calf, which is believed to be the origin of the name *Vatsanabha*.

The stem is erect and may bear short, spreading hairs in the upper portion, while the lower part remains smooth. Leaves are scattered along the stem with slender petioles and are often compared to those of *Sindhuvara*. The inflorescence is typically a raceme bearing bluish flowers with characteristic hood-shaped sepals, which give the plant its English name "Monk's Hood." The fruit is a follicle containing obovoid seeds, each winged along the raphe.

Chemical Constituents^[12]

The roots of *Vatsanabha* contain several highly potent alkaloids, which are responsible for its toxic effects. Major constituents include aconitine, pseudoaconitine, bikhaconitine, chasmaconitine, and indaconitine. Among these, aconitine is considered the principal toxic alkaloid affecting the nervous and cardiovascular systems. In addition

³ Eric Nyirigabo, Yanyan Xu, Yubo Li, Yuming Wang, A review on phytochemistry, pharmacology and toxicology studies of Aconitum, January 2021, Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology.

⁴ Cullimore DH. Remark on the therapeutic action of aconitum ferox in India. BMJ. 1884;22:75–7. [Google Scholar][Ref list]

⁵ Shastri K. Rasatarangini. Ch.24 Ver.30. Ed.11. Delhi; Motilala Banarasidas; 1979. 653p.

⁶ Vats SV, Kumar S. 'Queen of Poisons' Aconitum with special reference to Indian Aconite-Vatsanabha. Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences. 2024 May 6;9(3):123-31.

⁷ <https://www.easyayurveda.com/2012/08/24/vatsanabha-benefits-toxic-effects-purification-dosage/>

⁸ Acharya Y T. Charaka Samhita of Agnivesh, edited with chakrapani commentary. Chikitsasthana. Ch. 23 Ver. 4-5 Reprint edition. Varanasi; Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan; 570p.

⁹ Shastri A. Susruta Samhita of Acharya Sushruta. Vol.I Sutrasthana Ch. 46, Ver. 530. Reprint Edition. Varanasi; Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; 2015. 289p.

¹⁰ Misra Brahmasnagar, & Vaisya Rupalalaji. (2010). Bhavaprakasa of Bhavamisra. Dhatvadi varga, Visavarga, verse-192. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit bhawan; p. 629.

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aconitum_ferox

¹² Klásek A, Simánek V, Santavý F. Alkaloids from Aconitum plants. I. Isolation of bikhaconitine, chasmaconitine, indaconitine and pseudoaconitine from Aconitum ferox. Lloydia. 1972 Mar;35(1):55-60. PMID: 5037482.

to these compounds, the plant contains catecholamine alkaloids, quaternary ammonium compounds, and isoquinoline derivatives, all of which contribute to its pharmacological activity.

Due to the presence of these toxic alkaloids, crude *Vatsanabha* exhibits powerful physiological effects such as stimulation followed by depression of the nervous system and disturbances in cardiac function. Classical Ayurvedic literature, therefore, emphasises that the drug must always undergo purification before medicinal use. Modern analytical studies have demonstrated that traditional *Shodhana* procedures convert highly toxic alkaloids, such as aconitine and pseudoaconitine, into less toxic derivatives, thereby enhancing the safety of the drug for therapeutic purposes.

3. Ayurvedic Conceptual Understanding

3.1. Classification of *Visha* ^{[13][14]}

Visha refers to substances capable of producing harmful physiological effects even at low doses. The branch of Ayurveda that deals with poisons and their management is *Agadtantra*. Classical texts classify poisons primarily into two broad categories based on their origin: *Sthavara Visha* (poisons of plant and mineral origin) and *Jangama Visha* (poisons of animal origin). Another important classification divides poisonous substances into *Mahavisha* and *Upavisha*. *Mahavisha* refers to extremely potent poisons that can cause rapid and severe systemic toxicity. At the same time, *Upavisha* includes substances that are comparatively less potent but still capable of producing toxic manifestations when used improperly. These substances often exhibit strong pharmacological activity and are therefore used therapeutically after appropriate purification procedures.

Vatsanabha holds a significant position among the toxic herbs and is generally classified as an *Upavisha*. Its toxicity is considered extremely potent due to the presence of powerful alkaloids. It should never be used in its crude form. Instead, undergo appropriate *Shodhana* procedures before being incorporated into medicinal formulations. This dual nature, both poisonous and medicinal, illustrates the sophisticated toxicological understanding in Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals.

3.2. Properties (*Guna, Rasa, Virya, Vipaka*) ^[15]

Vatsanabha is described as predominantly *Katu, Tikta*, and *Kashaya Rasa*, with some sources also noting a mild *Madhura Rasa*. Its *Virya* is considered *Ushna*. The *Vipaka* of the drug is *Katu*. With respect to *Guna*, *Vatsanabha* is described as *Tikshna, Vyavayi*, and *Vikashi*. The *Tikshna Guna* reflects its penetrating and potent nature, allowing rapid systemic action. The property of *Vyavayi* indicates that the drug spreads quickly throughout the body before undergoing digestion. At the same time, *Vikashi* refers to its ability to loosen the body's tissues and joints. Because of these characteristics, the drug acts rapidly and exerts profound pharmacological effects.

In terms of its effect on *Dosha*, purified *Vatsanabha* is considered *Tridoshaghna*, with a particularly strong effect in

pacifying *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha*. It is *Yogavahi*, meaning that it enhances the efficacy and rapid action of other drugs when used in combination.

3.3. Toxicological Effects

According to *Sushruta Samhita*, ingestion of crude or improperly processed *Vatsanabha* may produce symptoms such as stiffness of the neck, discolouration of the eyes, and disturbances in normal physiological functions. These signs indicate systemic poisoning affecting multiple organs and tissues.^[16]

Rasaratna Samuccaya describe progressive stages of toxicity following ingestion of the poison. The initial stage involves cutaneous manifestations such as skin eruptions or irritation. As the toxicity progresses, symptoms such as tremors, burning sensations throughout the body, and neuromuscular disturbances may occur. Advanced stages may involve frothing from the mouth, weakness and drooping of body parts, generalised debility, and ultimately loss of consciousness. In severe cases, if untreated, the poisoning may lead to death.^[17]

4. *Shodhana* (Detoxification) of *Vatsanabha*

The therapeutic use of toxic substances is strictly governed by the principle of *Shodhana*, which refers to purification or detoxification that removes harmful constituents and enhances the medicinal properties of a drug. In Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals, *Shodhana* does not merely involve the removal of physical impurities; it also involves chemical transformations that reduce toxicity and improve the pharmacological efficacy of the substance. The importance of detoxification is closely related to modern pharmacovigilance principles that aim to minimise drug-related adverse effects and ensure patient safety.

These procedures ensure maximum therapeutic benefit while minimising potential toxic effects.

Detailed descriptions of the *Shodhana* procedures of *Vatsanabha* are provided in *Rasa Tarangini* and *Rasaratna Samuccaya*. One method involves cutting the mature tuberous roots of *Vatsanabha* into small pieces and immersing them in *Gomutra*. The pieces are kept in an earthen vessel filled with cow urine and exposed to sunlight for three consecutive days. The *Gomutra* is replaced daily with fresh liquid during this period. After the process is complete, the roots are removed, their outer skin is peeled off, and they are washed thoroughly and dried. Another method involves small pieces of *Vatsanabha* that are tied in a cloth bundle (*Pottali*) and suspended in a vessel containing *Godugdha* or *Aja Dugdha*. The bundle is heated for several hours using a *Dolayantra*. After the heating process, the drug is removed, washed, and dried. Herbal media such as *Triphala Kashaya* are also used for detoxification. The choice of medium is based on its ability to neutralise toxic components and modify the drug's physicochemical properties.

Modern analytical studies have demonstrated the scientific basis of these traditional purification procedures.

¹³ Harisadasiva Sastri Paradakara Bhisgacharya- Ashtanga Hridaya with commentary of Arunadatta and Hemadri. 2nd ed. Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; Prakashan Varanasi; 2010; Uttarasthana 35/5 p. 902, 956

¹⁴ Vaidya Yadav ji Trikamji Acharya -Chakrapani Datta, Charaka Samhita of Agnivesha elaborated by Charaka and Dridhabala, with the Ayurveda-Dipika Commentary (Chikitsa Sthana 23/4.); Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi; 2006; pp.738

¹⁵ Sharma PV, Dravyagunavigyan, Vol. 2, Delhi: Chaukhamba Bharati Academy; p. 106.

¹⁶ Sushruta; Sushruta Samhita with commentary Ayurved-tattva-Sandipika, edited by Kaviraj Ambika Dutta Shastrii, Published by Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan Varanasi; Reprint-2007, Su 41/4.

¹⁷ Shastri Kashinath. (2014). Rasa tarangini Of Sadanada sharma. 8th Ed. Chapter 24: Vishaupavisha vijinaniya, verse 18. Delhi: Motilal Banrisidas

Investigations using chromatographic techniques have shown that the *Shodhana* process significantly reduces the total alkaloid content of *Vatsanabha*.^[18] For instance, the concentration of toxic alkaloids such as aconitine and pseudoaconitine decreases markedly after purification. These compounds are converted into relatively fewer toxic derivatives such as benzoyleaconine and veratroyl pseudoaconine. Toxicological studies conducted in experimental animals also demonstrate that purified *Vatsanabha* exhibits considerably lower toxicity than the crude drug.

5. Pharmaceutical Preparations Containing *Vatsanabha*

After proper *Shodhana*, *Vatsanabha* becomes an important ingredient in several classical formulations. Due to its potent pharmacological activity and *Yogavahi* property, purified *Vatsanabha* enhances the therapeutic efficacy of formulations in which it is included. It is widely incorporated into medicines used for conditions such as fever, digestive disorders, respiratory diseases, neurological disorders, and pain. Rasa Tarangini and Bhaishajya Ratnavali describe numerous formulations containing *Vatsanabha*, highlighting its significant therapeutic value when used in minute doses.^[19]

Table 1:

Formulation	Key Indications	Main Actions	Role of <i>Vatsanabha</i>
Tribhuvana Kirti Rasa	Jwara (fever), especially the Vata-Kapha type	Jwaraghna, Deepana, Swedajanaka	Enhances rapid action, improves efficacy, reduces fever, body ache, chills, and cough
Mahavata Vidhwamsana Rasa	Vata Vyadhi (neurological & musculoskeletal disorders) like Pakshaghata, Gridhrasi	Analgesic, anti-inflammatory, nerve stimulant	Potentiates drug action, provides quick relief in pain and neurological deficits.
Sanjeevani Vati	Agnimandya, Ama, Grahani, digestive disorders	Deepana, Pachana, Amapachaka	Improves bioavailability, enhances metabolism, accelerates therapeutic response

6. Pharmacological Activities

Table 2:

Activity	Key Mechanism	Therapeutic Relevance
Analgesic (<i>Vedanasthapana</i>)	Modulates sodium channels → reduces nerve impulse transmission	Used in pain disorders like <i>Vata Vyadhi</i> , neuralgia, and musculoskeletal conditions
Anti-inflammatory	Reduces inflammatory mediators and oedema	Effective in <i>Amavata</i> , <i>Sandhivata</i> , and inflammatory disorders
Antipyretic (<i>Jwaraghna</i>)	Acts on thermoregulatory centres and fever mediators	Used in <i>Jwara</i> (fever), especially in formulations like <i>Tribhuvana Kirti Rasa</i>
Neuromodulatory	Alters neuronal excitability and synaptic transmission	Useful in neurological disorders like paralysis, neuralgia, and severe <i>Vata</i> disorders

6.1. Evidence from Experimental Studies

Experimental research comparing untreated *Vatsanabha* with *Shodhana*-processed material demonstrates significant differences in toxicity and pharmacological behaviour. Chromatographic studies, particularly thin-layer chromatography (TLC), have shown that highly toxic alkaloids, such as aconitine and pseudoaconitine, undergo chemical transformations during traditional *Shodhana*. These compounds are converted into relatively less toxic derivatives such as benzoyleaconine and veratroyl pseudoaconine.^[20] Toxicological studies conducted on animal models further support this transformation. Extracts prepared from untreated and chemically processed *Vatsanabha* showed considerable toxicity even at low doses, producing symptoms such as uneasiness, hiccups, and physiological disturbances. In contrast, extracts derived from traditionally purified *Vatsanabha* using cow urine-based *Shodhana* demonstrated markedly reduced toxicity, with animals surviving high doses without significant adverse effects during the observation period.^[21]

Biochemical analyses also indicated that untreated and chemically treated extracts significantly altered lipid profiles and renal function parameters, including urea, creatinine, and blood urea nitrogen. However, the traditionally purified drug showed minimal alteration in these parameters, further supporting the detoxification efficiency of classical *Shodhana* methods.

6.2. Toxic Dose vs Therapeutic Dose

Vatsanabha (*Aconitum ferox*) is regarded as one of the most potent *Mahavishas* in Ayurvedic toxicology. Classical texts clearly emphasise that the drug should never be used without proper *Shodhana* because of its intense toxicity. After appropriate purification, the drug becomes therapeutically useful when administered in very small doses. In Ayurvedic practice, the therapeutic dose of purified *Vatsanabha* is extremely small, generally 15–30 mg,^[22] depending on the formulation and clinical indication. In contrast, ingestion of crude or improperly processed *Vatsanabha*, even in slightly higher quantities, may lead to severe poisoning. This narrow margin between the therapeutic and toxic doses highlights the

¹⁸ Chatuphale, G. D., Chalakh, S., & Anjankar, M. (2021). A Comparative HPLC Quantification of *Vatsanabha* (*Aconitum ferox* Wall ex Seringe.) Root Processed in Cow's Urine and Cow's Milk. International Journal of Ayurvedic Medicine, 12(1), 124–128. <https://doi.org/10.47552/ijam.v12i1.1740>

¹⁹ Rastogi S. A review of aconite (*Vatsanabha*) usage in Ayurvedic formulations: Traditional views and their references. Spatula DD. 2011;1(4):233-44.

²⁰ Rastogi S, Rastogi R, Singh RH. Adverse effects of Ayurvedic drugs: an overview of causes and possibilities in reference to a case of *Vatsanabha*

(*Aconite*) overdosing. International Journal of Risk & Safety in Medicine. 2007 Aug;19(3):117-25.

²¹ Deore SL, Moon KV, Khadabadi SS, Deokate UA, Baviskar BA. Evaluation of toxicity of '*Vatsanabha*' (*Aconitum ferox*, Ranunculaceae) Before and After *Shodhana*. J Young Pharm. 2013 Mar;5(1):3-6. doi: 10.1016/j.jyp.2013.01.001. Epub 2013 Mar 7. PMID: 24023444; PMCID: PMC3758080.

²² Karambelkar Sharadini A, Savrikar Shriram S. VATSANABH (ACONITE)-A REVIEW. WORLD JOURNAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL AND MEDICAL RESEARCH; 2019,5(9), 85-86

importance of proper pharmaceutical processing, dosage regulation, and clinical supervision.

6.3. Symptoms of Vatsanabha Poisoning ^[23]

Classical Ayurvedic literature describes in detail the manifestations of poisoning caused by *Vatsanabha*. These symptoms arise due to the potent neurotoxic and cardiotoxic effects of the alkaloids present in the drug. Early symptoms may include burning sensations in the mouth and throat, numbness, tingling, excessive salivation, nausea, and vomiting. As toxicity progresses, patients may develop giddiness, sweating, muscular weakness, and severe gastrointestinal distress. Advanced stages of poisoning can lead to cardiac arrhythmias, respiratory depression, hypotension, and neurological disturbances, which may ultimately result in fatal outcomes if not managed promptly.

6.4. Management of Poisoning in Agadtantra ^[24]

The branch of Ayurveda known as *Agadtantra* provides specific guidelines for managing *Vatsanabha* poisoning. The initial approach focuses on elimination of the ingested toxin, often through therapeutic procedures such as *Vamana* (induced emesis) to expel the poison from the gastrointestinal tract. Following detoxification, various antidotal formulations described in classical texts are administered to neutralise the toxic effects. Herbal drugs with *Vishaghna* (anti-poison) properties are commonly employed. Supportive measures, including the administration of medicated ghee, milk, and other soothing substances, are recommended to counteract irritation and systemic toxicity. These classical approaches aim to stabilise the patient and restore physiological balance.

6.5. Modern Toxicology Reports

Modern toxicological studies confirm that the toxicity of *Vatsanabha* is primarily attributed to diterpenoid alkaloids, such as aconitine, mesaconitine, and pseudoaconitine. These compounds exert their toxic effects mainly by altering voltage-gated sodium channels in excitable tissues, including nerves and cardiac muscle. Continuous activation of these channels leads to persistent depolarisation, resulting in severe neurological and cardiovascular disturbances. Clinical reports of aconite poisoning describe symptoms such as paresthesia, hypotension, ventricular arrhythmias, and potentially fatal cardiac complications. Modern toxicology, therefore, strongly emphasises the necessity of detoxification and precise dosage when aconite derivatives are used medicinally.

7. Discussion

The therapeutic use of *Vatsanabha* represents a remarkable example of the Ayurvedic principle of transforming a **highly toxic substance into a valuable medicine through appropriate pharmaceutical processing**. In Ayurveda, the concept that a *Visha Dravya* can be converted into a therapeutic agent after proper purification reflects a sophisticated understanding of drug transformation. Classical scholars recognised that toxicity is not an absolute characteristic of a substance but can be modified through processes such as *Shodhana*, appropriate dosage, and suitable

formulation. This principle illustrates the broader Ayurvedic doctrine that even potent poisons may serve therapeutic purposes when handled with precise pharmaceutical knowledge.

The disciplines of *Rasashastra* and *Agadtantra* together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and utilising toxic substances. *Rasashastra* focuses primarily on pharmaceutical processing methods, including *Shodhana*, *Marana*, and formulation techniques that reduce toxicity and enhance therapeutic potential. In contrast, *Agadtantra* deals with the identification, clinical manifestations, and management of poisoning. When applied to *Vatsanabha*, these two branches complement each other effectively. *Rasashastra* ensures that the drug is properly purified and formulated, while *Agadtantra* provides guidelines for recognising toxic symptoms and managing accidental poisoning. This interdisciplinary integration demonstrates the systematic and safety-oriented approach of Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals.

In contemporary Ayurvedic practice, the relevance of such classical knowledge remains significant. With the increasing demand for evidence-based traditional medicine, understanding the pharmacological basis and safety profile of drugs like *Vatsanabha* has become essential. Modern analytical techniques have confirmed several chemical transformations occurring during traditional *Shodhana*, thereby supporting classical descriptions. However, issues such as standardisation of purification methods, quality control, and regulatory compliance require further scientific investigation. Establishing standardised pharmaceutical protocols and conducting well-designed pharmacological and clinical studies can strengthen the credibility and global acceptance of Ayurvedic formulations containing *Vatsanabha*. Thus, integrating classical knowledge with modern scientific methodologies offers promising opportunities to advance Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals.

8. Conclusion

Vatsanabha exemplifies the Ayurvedic concept of transforming a potent poison into a safe and effective medicine through proper *Shodhana*. Its safety and efficacy depend on correct purification, formulation, and dosage. Scientific studies support that *Shodhana* reduces toxicity by modifying harmful alkaloids. Further standardisation and clinical research are essential to ensure safety and enhance global acceptance.

Reference

1. Sharma PV. Dravyaguna Vijnana. Golden Jubilee Edition. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Surabharati Academy; 2008. p. 128.
2. Acharya JT, editor. Agnivesa: Caraka Samhita. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Vidyabhawan; 2011. p. 23.
3. Nyirimigabo E, Xu Y, Li Y, Wang Y, Agyemang K, Zhang Y. A review on phytochemistry, pharmacology and toxicology studies of Aconitum. J Pharm Pharmacol. 2015;67(1):1-19.
4. Cullimore DH. Remark on the therapeutic action of aconitum ferox in India. BMJ. 1884;22:75-7.
5. Shastri K. Rasatarangini. Chapter 24, Verse 30. 11th ed.

²³ Panda AK, Debnath SK. Overdose effect of aconite containing Ayurvedic Medicine ('Mahashankha Vati'). Int J Ayurveda Res. 2010 Jul;1(3):183-6. doi: 10.4103/0974-7788.72493. PMID: 21170213; PMCID: PMC2996579

²⁴ Priyanka, Vanya Gupta, Aditi Yadav, Priyanka Sharma, Exploring the Agada perspective of Vatsanabha. J Ayu Int Med Sci. 2023;8(6):236-239.

- Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas; 1979. p. 653.
6. Vats SV, Kumar S. 'Queen of Poisons' Aconitum with special reference to Indian Aconite-Vatsanabha. *J Ayurveda Integr Med Sci.* 2024 May 6;9(3):123-31.
 7. Vatsanabha benefits, toxic effects, purification, dosage. *Easy Ayurveda*; 2012 Aug 24 [cited 2026 Mar 26]. Available from: <https://www.easyayurveda.com/2012/08/24/vatsanabha-benefits-toxic-effects-purification-dosage/>
 8. Acharya YT, editor. *Charaka Samhita of Agnivesha with Chakrapani commentary.* Chikitsasthana, Chapter 23, Verses 4-5. Reprint ed. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; p. 570.
 9. Shastri A. *Susruta Samhita of Acharya Sushruta.* Vol. I. Sutrasthana, Chapter 46, Verse 530. Reprint ed. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; 2015. p. 289.
 10. Misra B, Vaisya R, editors. *Bhavaprakasa of Bhavamisra.* Dhatvadi varga, Visavarga, verse 192. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Bhawan; 2010. p. 629.
 11. *Aconitum ferox* [Internet]. Wikipedia; [cited 2026 Mar 26]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aconitum_ferox
 12. Klásek A, Simánek V, Santavý F. Alkaloids from *Aconitum* plants. I. Isolation of bikhaconitine, chasmaconitine, indaconitine and pseudoaconitine from *Aconitum ferox*. *Lloydia.* 1972 Mar;35(1):55-60.
 13. Harisadasiva Sastri Paradakara Bhisgacharya, editor. *Ashtanga Hridaya with commentary of Arunadatta and Hemadri.* 2nd ed. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; 2010. Uttarasthana 35/5. p. 902, 956.
 14. Trikamji Acharya Y, editor. *Charaka Samhita of Agnivesha with Ayurveda-Dipika Commentary of Chakrapani Datta.* Chikitsa Sthana 23/4. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan; 2006. pp. 738.
 15. Sharma PV. *Dravyagunavigyan.* Vol. 2. Delhi: Chaukhamba Bharati Academy; p. 106.
 16. Sushruta. *Sushruta Samhita with commentary Ayurved-tattva-Sandipika.* Edited by Shastri KA. Reprint 2007. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan; Sutrasthana 41/4.
 17. Shastri K. *Rasatarangini of Sadananda Sharma.* 8th ed. Chapter 24: Vishaoupavisha vijinaniya, verse 18. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas; 2014.
 18. Chatuphale GD, Chalakh S, Anjankar M. A Comparative HPLC Quantification of Vatsanabha (*Aconitum ferox* Wall ex Seringe.) Root Processed in Cow's Urine and Cow's Milk. *Int J Ayurvedic Med.* 2021;12(1):124-8. doi: 10.47552/ijam.v12i1.1740.
 19. Rastogi S. A review of aconite (Vatsanabha) usage in Ayurvedic formulations: Traditional views and their references. *Spatula DD.* 2011;1(4):233-44.
 20. Rastogi S, Rastogi R, Singh RH. Adverse effects of Ayurvedic drugs: an overview of causes and possibilities in reference to a case of Vatsanabha (Aconite) overdosing. *Int J Risk Saf Med.* 2007 Aug;19(3):117-25.
 21. Deore SL, Moon KV, Khadabadi SS, Deokate UA, Baviskar BA. Evaluation of toxicity of 'Vatsanabha' (*Aconitum ferox*, Ranunculaceae) Before and After Shodhana. *J Young Pharm.* 2013 Mar;5(1):3-6. doi: 10.1016/j.jyp.2013.01.001. Epub 2013 Mar 7.
 22. Karambelkar SA, Savrikar SS. Vatsanabha (Aconite)-A REVIEW. *World J Pharm Med Res.* 2019;5(9):85-6.
 23. Panda AK, Debnath SK. Overdose effect of aconite containing Ayurvedic Medicine ('Mahashankha Vati'). *Int J Ayurveda Res.* 2010 Jul;1(3):183-6. doi: 10.4103/0974-7788.72493.
 24. Priyanka, Gupta V, Yadav A, Sharma P. Exploring the Agada perspective of Vatsanabha. *J Ayu Int Med Sci.* 2023;8(6):236-9.

How to Cite This Article

Markam S, Jaiswal DJ, Wanjari VP. Vatsanabha in Rasashastra: Transformation of a Deadly Poison into a Therapeutic Agent – A Review of Classical Detoxification, Pharmacology, and Toxicology. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval.* 2026 Mar-Apr;7(2):356-361.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.