

Varieties of Apâmârga

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Abstract

Apâmârga is a well known drug and has been used widely in Ayurvedic therapeutics. In Brhatrayî, Charak and Susrut have mentioned only one variety of the drug by different names in different references. These names are being considered as synonyms of the same source plant *A. aspera* L. by the Scholars of Âyurveda. Vâgbhatta in *Astâng Hridaya* has mentioned one more variety of Apâmârga by the name of GAURDANDA APÂMÂRGA. Nighantu writers have mentioned two varieties of the drug viz. White and Red. Identity of different varieties of Apamarga has not been established satisfactorily till date. While working on the research project entitled "Studies on Herbal Drugs Used as Ethnomedicine by the Tharu Tribe of Kheri District (U.P., India)" during my post graduation, two distinct varieties of Apâmârga have been noticed being used by the tribal medicine men. A critical discussion regarding the botanical identity of two varieties of the plant drug is being produced here.

Interoduction

The sub-Himâlayan Terâi region of Uttar Pradesh is inhabited by two important Scheduled tribes, namely, the Thârus and Bhoxâs. The Thârus are found in northern districts of this area, viz., Gondâ, Bahrâich, Gorakhpur, Nainitâl and Lakhimpur Kheri. In district Kheri, the tribal people reside in villages situated in the vicinity of Dudhwa National Park and they have immense opportunities towards the interaction with plants occurring in their surrounding vegetation. They make use of many plant species to meet with their day-to-day needs and have a self managed system of medicine by using various plant species in the health care system. Tribal Medicine Men, the "Bharrâ" have got a very respectful position in the society. The 'Bharrâ' is expected to look after the health of the community and in return the community is responsible for his bread and butter. Traditional knowledge is transferred from generation to generation by oral folk.

Ayurvedic classics wsr to Brhatrayî mention two different varieties of Apamarga. Nighantu Classics also have mentioned two varieties of Apamarga. Two distinct varieties of Apamarga by the name of Chirchira and Chirchiri are used by the tribal medicine men in local health traditions. Botanical identities of the different varieties of Apamarga as per Ayurvedic Classics and Tribal Medicine Men are being discussed here.

Materials & Methods

A survey on the folklore of Medicinal Plants was conducted between the Dec. 2006 to Jan. 2007 to study the utilization pattern of herbal drugs by the Tribal people in local health traditions, their comparative study with the indications and utilization patterns in one of the worlds oldest codified system of medicine "the Ayurveda" and a search for scientific ground for therapeutic uses in tribal medicine from pharmacological screenings. During the study, a to-

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tal of 90 plant drugs used by the tribal people were collected and studied. Botanical identity of different varieties of Apamarga as mentioned in classics is being established here.

Area of Study	

As Per Tribal Medicine: Chirchira & Chirchiri.

As per field study: *Achyranthes aspera* L. var. *aspera* L. (Local Name - Chirchira) and *A. aspera* L. var. *porphyristachea* Hook. f. (Chirchiri).

Apamarga: Life form

Sanskrit Names: Apâmârga, Mayûraka, Pratyakpushpâ (CS., SS., AH.); Khar - Manjarî (SS.); Shikharî (CS., AH.); Gaurdanda Apâmârga (AH.Sa.1.39).

Natural Order - Amaranthaceae

Morphological Description

As mentioned earlier, two distinct varieties of *Achyranthes aspera* L. are found in the area of Dudhwa National Park. These are *A. aspera* var. *aspera* and *A. aspera* var. *porphyristachea*. Another variety of Apamarga, *A. bidentata* Blume (Parvatîya Apâmârga) is found in high altitudes. To understand the difference regarding the identity of plant drugs, a brief morphological description is being reproduced here.

A. aspera L. var. aspera L. (Local Name - Chirchira): (Singh 1996) Erect or subscandent, pubescent, annual herbs. Leaves 3-10 cm. long, obovate or sub orbicular, rounded at apex, pubescent. Flowers greenish-white pink in long terminal spikes; bracts ovate, acuminate,

Observations

Varieties of the Apamarga

As Per Brhatrayi: Charak Samhita, Susrut Samhita and Astanga Hridaya collectively known as Brhatrayi have mentioned three different varieties of Apamarga. These are Apamarga, Mayuraka and Shikhari. Astanga Hridaya has mentioned one more descriptive term for the plant drug i.e. Gaur Danda Apamarga.

As Per Nighantu Classics: Nighantu Classics have described two varieties of Apamarga viz. Sweta (White) & Rakta (Red) (BP.Ni); Apamarga & Kshudra Apamarga (R.Ni, MP.Ni., D.Ni.).

reflexed; bracteoles ending in a spine. Stamens three. Utricle oblong enclosed in a perianth.

Flowering and Fruiting - October to March. Distribution: Occurs frequently in wastelands. (Picture 1 & 2).

A. aspera var. porphyristachea Hook. f.
(Local Name - Chirchiri): The other variety of *A. aspera* locally known as Chîrchirî is also found in the area of Dudhwa National Park. This variety differs from the first one in the plant size and may be classified as big herb or under

Distribution: Occurs frequently along the edges of forest and in shady places. (Picture 3& 4).

Achyranthes bidentata Blume - Another species of *Achyranthes* is reported to occur at high altitudes distinguished from *A. aspera* by the blade of ovate leaf being reduced to 2 mm, the base of the leaf being much narrower and glabrous or pubescent. They are said to be in *A. aspera*.



<p>Picture 3 & 4 Achyranthes aspera var. porphyristachea Hook. f. (Local Name - Chirchiri)</p>	<p>Photo (Caulis & Apungga) - Achyranthes aspera L. var. aspera L.. inflorescence & Fruits</p>
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Classical Description of Apamarga: Apâmârga has been widely used in therapeutics in Âyurveda and mentioned in almost all the classical texts of Âyurveda, used as single drug as well as in compound therapeutic formulations. In Brhatrayî, the drug has got various references and has been considered best among errhine drugs. (CS.Su.25).

Charak and Sushrut mentions only one variety of the drug by different names considered as synonyms by the Scholars of Âyurveda. Âchârya Charak has used Apâmârga for Pumsvan Karma (treatment to insure birth of a male child) but has not specified any variety (CS.Sa.8.19). Use of Apâmârga in Pumsvan Karma is not mentioned in Susrut Samhita.

In Brhatrayî, only Vâgbhatta has mentioned two varieties of Apâmârga viz. Apâmârga in various references and GAURDANDA APÂMÂRGA in Pumsvan Prayog (AH.Sa.1.39).

Nigantu classics have described two color varieties of Apamarga viz. Apamarga & Arun Apamarga (Madanpâl Nighantu & Dhanvantari Nighantu), Apamarga & Rakta Apamarga/ Kshudra Apamarga (Râj Nighantu),).

According to the description of Râj Nighantu, Rakta Apâmârga is the smaller variety with smaller leaves and reddish/pinkish appearance and red spots on leaves (Kshudra Apamarga (Tripathi 1982).

Nighantus have described pharmacological

properties of the two varieties. According to Madanpal Nighantu (Pundit, Ram Prasad 1954) Apamarga is Sar (induces mobility in bodily humours), sharp, stomachic and Kaph-Vat pacifying. It destroys Dadru (ring worm), sidhma (Skin disease), piles, itching, colics & anorexia. The Arun (Red) variety is stops the movements of Vat, destroys Kapha, is poor in therapeutic properties as compared to the earlier variety, is non-unctuousness, its leaves are haemostatic. The view is almost accepted by the other Nighantus with slight differences.

View of present day scholars

Dravyaguna Vigyan Vol. II (Sharma, 1995) describes only one variety of the Apamarga. A. bidentata is mentioned without any clear cut view on the red & white varieties of the plant drug. Going through the morphological description reveals it is the description of partially red-variety & partially white variety.

Singh & Chunekar considers Pupalia lappacea Moq. for the white variety of Apâmârga (Thakur). On the other hand "Medicinal Plants of Susrut Samhita" reports Aerva scandens (L.) Wall to be considered as white variety of Apâmârga by Bâpâlâl and Cyathula prostrata Blume being used as Apâmârga in Kerala (Chunekar & Yadav).

Observation & Discussion

Going through the references from Charak and Susrut Samhita, it is evident that either only one variety of Apâmârga was known to them or at that time only one variety was used in therapeutics. Later Vâgbhatta introduced one more variety of the drug and used GAURDANDA APÂMÂRGA for Pumsvan Prayoga.

Nighantu classics followed the pattern of Astanga Hridaya and they clearly described two varieties of APÂMÂRGA. Descriptive terms / synonyms used in Ayurvedic Classics to describe Apamarga can be summed up as -

1. Apamarga (CS, SS, AH, Nighantu Classics).

2. Mayûraka (CS, SS, AH) - The term literally means resembling Mayur. This resemblance may of two types. The plant or its some part may have morphological appearance similar to some

body part of the Mayur i.e. Peacock. Color pattern of spikes of the *A. aspera* L.. *aspera* may be examined. Secondly, resemblance between the plant drug and Mayur is, as stated by Sharma "MAYUR IVE VISHAGHNAHA" i.e. the plant is capable of destroying poison like Peacock. Both the similarities must be kept in mind before reaching to a conclusion.

3. Pratyakpushpâ (CS, SS, AH) - Term describes morphological appearance of flowers.

4. Khar Manjarî (SS.) - Term describes roughness of flowering spike.

5. Shikharî (CS, AH) - The term literally means originating on the Shikhar (Mountain tops) or resembling tops in appearance due to a long protruding inflorescence. If we consider its first inference i.e. originating on mountain tops and resembling in appearance with the top, the term Shikhari certainly indicated towards Parvateeya Apamarga i.e. *Achyranthes bidentata* Blume. The term has two references from Brhatrayi. CS.Vi.7.19 and AH.Su.15.45.

6. Gaurdanda Apamarga - Astang Hridaya (AH.Sa.1.39). Term is self explanatory.

7. Rakta / Arun Apamarga (Nighantu Classics) - Rakta Apâmârga is the smaller variety with smaller leaves and reddish/pinkish appearance and red spots on leaves

8. Kshudra Apamarga - Raj Nighantu. (Smaller variety of apamarga).

Going through the observations of folklore study, two distinct varieties of *Achyranthes aspera* are reported by the tribal people by names of Chirchira (*A. aspera* var. *aspera*) and Chirchiri (*A. aspera* var. *porphyristachea*). As mentioned earlier, Chirchira of the Tharu tribe has pink flowers; it is smaller in size of the plant and leaves compared to the Chirchiri. This plant is botanically *A. aspera* L.. var. *aspera*.

Chirchiri of the tribe has greenish-white flowers and inflorescence. Again on the basis of its morphological characteristics and etymological origin of the word (GAUR -whitish, DANDA - inflorescence), Chirchiri of the Tharu tribe i.e. *A. aspera* L. var. *porphyristachea* Hook. f. should be considered as GAURDANDA APÂMÂRGA i.e. white variety of the plant drug.

Conclusion

In the light of above facts, it may be concluded that -

1. Apamarga of Nighantu Classics and Gaurdanda Apamarga of Astang Hridaya is one and the same and is botanically *Achyranthes aspera* L. var. *porphyristachea* Hook. f.

2. Arun / Rakta / Kshudra Apamarga of Nighantu classics and Apamarga of Brhatrayi is one and the same and is *Achyranthes aspera* L. var. *aspera* L..

3. Shikhari (CS; AH) indicates towards *A. bidentata* Blume occurring in high altitudes.

Submission: Views expressed in the present paper are based on field experiences and textual references. It is my humble submission to the authorities to consider it a little effort towards a great task. Suggestions are always welcomed.

Abbreviations

AH - Astanga Hridaya; AS - Astanga Samgraha; BP.Ni. - Bhav Prakash Nighantu; BS - Banga Sena; Ci. - Chikitsa Sthan; CS.- Charak Samhita; D.Ni. - Dhanvantari Nighantu; K.Ni - Kaiyadeva Nighantu; Ka - Kalpa Sthan; MP.Ni - Madan Pal Nighantu; Pr.Ni - Priya Nighantu; R.Ni. - Raj Nighantu; RRS - Ras Ratna Samucchaya; Sg.S.- Sharangadhra Samhita; S.Ni.- Sodhal Nighantu; SS- Susrut Samhita; U-Uttar Sthan

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