

## **APĀMĀRGA (*Achyranthes aspera* Linn. )**

### **A Medico - Historical Review**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Apāmārga* is an important and easily available *Āyurvedic* herb mentioned in *Vedic* literature. *Atharvaveda* considers *Apāmārga* as the Lord of all plants growing on earth. It cures sterility, physical debility and gives life. *Apāmārga* drives out the diseases from the body. According to *Āyurveda* it is best for *Śirovirecana* and also useful in *Karnaroga*, *Krimi*, *Pāndu* and a large number of other diseases. Narahari the author of *Rāja Nighantu* has also described *Apāmārga* in detail and coined as many as twenty one synonyms to it. Details about *Apāmārga* with its history, properties, actions as well as its medicinal value as mentioned in different texts have been presented in this article.

The word *Apāmārga* as mentioned in *Śabdakalpadruma*<sup>12</sup> is formed by *AP* + *Ā* + *Mrj* + *Karane Ghaj*, which wipes. That means it cleanses the body by removing diseases to a distant place. *Apāmārga* is botanically known as *Achyranthes aspera* Linn. and in English, it is called as prickly chaff flower. It is available abundantly. Copious description of *Apāmārga* is available in *Āyurveda*. *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* also contains the information about *Apāmārga* and its qualities as well as medicinal uses.

#### ***Apāmārga* in *Yajurveda***

*Yajurveda* has referred *Apāmārga* by saying “*Apāmārga*, please prevent us from ill actions and bad dreams”. Accordingly *Apāmārga* can enhance the will power and controls the minds of the persons who ever uses it. (*Yajurveda* 35.11)<sup>5,6</sup>

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### **Apāmārga in Atharvaveda**

*Atharvaveda* refers *Apāmārga* at about eleven places. It considers this drug as the Lord of all plants on earth because it can increase life span by wiping away all the diseases. *Apāmārga* is useful to cure diseases caused by thirst and hunger, defects of the organs, speech; sterility, physical debility and all other ailments. (A.V. *Kāṇḍa IV. 17.6-8*)<sup>4,6</sup>

In addition, *Atharvaveda* describes that *Apāmārga* can sweep away chronic diseases, the evil habit of using foul language and also the ailments which cause severe pain as well as decrease in vitality. (A.V. *Kāṇḍa IV.18. 7 & 8 and 19. 4 & 5*)<sup>4,6</sup>

According to Mr.V.W. Karambelker - the son of *Nṛṣad*, was first person to find out the medicinal properties of *Apāmārga*. (*Atharvaveda and Āyurveda, pp.21*)<sup>8</sup>.

About the same plant *Atharvan* at one context mentions that “The life giving one I have brought the famous plant of *Kanva*, the all healing one, may it quench this man’s unseen maladies” (A.V. *Kāṇḍa VI.52.3*)<sup>4</sup>. *Atharvaveda* has all praise to *Apāmārga* that it can remove all the *Doṣas* and cleanses sins from the body. (A.V. *Kāṇḍa VII 65. 1*)<sup>4</sup>. It is also said in *Atharvaveda* that, if people have dined with the cripple whose teeth are black and nails deformed this plant can eliminate all that *Doṣas* away from them (A.V. *Kāṇḍa VII. 65-3*)<sup>4,6</sup>.

### **Apāmārga in Āyurveda :**

*Āyurveda*, the science of life and *Upāṅga* of *Atharvaveda* mainly gives stress on herbal medicine. Its literature which is available now, is the contribution of *Caraka*, *Śusruta* and *Vāgbhata*. These three big compendia are known as *Bṛhathrayi*. viz. *Caraka Samhitā*, *Suśruta Samhitā* and *Astanga Hṛdaya Samhitā*.

*Āchārya Caraka* has classified *Apāmārga* under *Krimighna*, *Vamanopaga* and *Śirovirecanopaga* groups. He has referred *Apāmārga* at about twenty seven places in *Charaka Samhitā* with four synonyms viz. *Apāmārga*, *Pratyakpuṣpi*, *Mayūraka* and *Śikhari* (C.Sū.4/11 & 13)<sup>3,15</sup>. According to him, it is the best for *Śiroviracana* (C.Sū. 25/40)<sup>3,15</sup>.

*Suśruta* has mentioned *Apāmārga* in *Varuṇādigaṇa*, *Vīratarvādigaṇa*, and *Arkādigaṇa*. He mentioned this drug at about twenty nine places with four synonyms viz. *Kharamanjari*, *Pratyakpuṣpi*, *Mayūraka* and *Vāsir* (Su. Su. 38/8,10 & 16)<sup>3,16</sup>

*Vāgbhata*, the author of *Astānga Hr̥daya Samhitā* has followed *Caraka* and mentioned *Apāmārga* with same synonyms about twenty six places. *Apāmārga* has also been referred by him as one of the drugs in *Tiktavarga* (bitter group) (*A.Hr. Sū. 10/29*).<sup>2,3</sup>

*Astānga Samgraha* mentions *Apāmārga* at thirty six places with seven synonyms viz. *Kiṇihi*, *Kharamanjari*, *Nandi*, *Mayūraka*, *Śikhari*, *Vasīr* and *Pratyakpuṣpi*. *Apāmārga* has been classified in *Sodhanādigana* as *Śirovirecana dravya*. (*A.S.Sū.14/5*) and in *Tikta Skanda drugs* (bitter group of drugs). (*A.S.Sū.18/23*)<sup>17,19</sup>

*Bhāvamiśra*, the author of *Bhāvaprakāśa* has mentioned *Apāmārga* with seven synonyms viz. *Śikhari*, *Adhahśalya*, *Mayūraka*, *Markati*, *Durghraha*, *Kiṇihi* and *Kharamanjari*. According to *Bhāvamiśra*, *Apāmārga* has following properties i.e. *Sara* and *Tīkṣṇa gunas*, *Katu rasa* and improves digestion and also useful in *Cardi* (vomiting). Diseases of *Kapha*, *Medas* (fat) and *Vāta*. It is also useful in *Hrdroga*, *Ādhmāna* (flatulence), *Arśa* (piles), *Kandu* (itching), *Udaraśūla* (pain in abdomen), *Udara* (enlargement of abdomen) and *Apaci* (scrofula) (*B.P.Gudūcyādivarga*, 219 & 220)<sup>18</sup>

*Rakta Apāmārga* (*Achyranthes rubrofusca*) with red stem, branches, flowers and fruits has also been mentioned by *Bhāvamiśra* with synonyms like *Vasīra*, *Vṛttaphala*, *Dhāmārgava*, *Pratyakpaṇi*, *Kesāpaṇi* and *Kapipippali*. Regarding properties of this



Fig. 1 : *Apāmārga*  
(*Achyranthes aspera* Linn)



Fig. 2 : Twig of *Apāmārga*  
(*Achyranthes aspera* Linn)

*Apāmārga* it is said that it can cause constipation, mitigates *Kapha*, is cold in *Potency*, causes dryness and known by experts that it is slightly less in qualities than other variety. (*Gudūcyādi varga*, 221 & 222 )<sup>18</sup>. Fruits of *Apāmārga* are said to be sweet both in *Rasa* (taste ) and *Vipāka* (taste after digestion). They are not easily digestible and cause constipation, increases *Vāta*; dryness, mitigate *Rakta* and *Pitta Doṣa* (B.P *Gudūcyādivarga/223*)<sup>18</sup>.

The *Nighaṇṭu* (lexicon ) plays major role in *Āyurvedic* literature to identify and to know the properties, uses of medicinal plants that are mentioned in *Bṛhatrayi*, *Laghutrayi* and some new plants as well. There are number of *Nighaṇṭus* available today, and their authors had coined different synonyms for *Apāmārga* and described properties, actions and uses. For example, *Narahari*, the author of *Rāja Nighaṇṭu* has mentioned it in *Gudūcyādi varga* and gives as many as 21 names of *Apāmārga* Viz, *Śikhari*, *Saikharika*, *Adhahśalya*, *Mayūra*, *Kāndakanta*, *Markati*, *Markatippali*, *Durgraha*, *Kiṇihi*, *Kharamanjari*, *Parakpuṣpi*, *Pratyakpuṣpi*, *Kaṇṭi*, *Vasīrah*, *Durabhigraha*, *Katurmajjarika*, *Nandi*, *Kṣavak*, *Panktikantakah*, *Mālakanta* and *Kubja*. (*Dhanvantari Nighaṇṭu* with *Rāja Nighaṇṭu*; *Gudūcyādivarga*: 386 - 388)<sup>1</sup> *Rakta Apāmārga* has also been mentioned and it is said that, it possesses *Śīta Guna* and *Katu Rasa*. It pacifies *Kapha* and *Vāta Doṣas*. (*Dhanvantari Nighaṇṭu* with *Rāja Nighaṇṭu*, *Gudūcyādivarga/ 390 & 391*)<sup>1</sup>.

Useful parts of *Apāmārga* : *Mūl* (root ), *Tandula* (seeds ), *Patra* (leaf ) and *Pāncanga* (all the five parts of herb ).

#### Names Of *Apāmārga* In Diferent Languages

|           |   |  |
|-----------|---|--|
| Arabic    | : | <i>Atkumah</i>                             |
| Bengali   | : | <i>Apang</i>                               |
| Burmese   | : | <i>Kune-la-mon</i>                         |
| English   | : | <i>Rough Chaff /Prickly Chaff - flower</i> |
| Gujarathi | : | <i>Aghedo</i>                              |
| Hindi     | : | <i>Latjira</i>                             |

|           |   |                                     |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Kannada   | : | <i>Uttatane</i>                     |
| Konkan    | : | <i>Uttatene</i>                     |
| Malayalam | : | <i>Katalati/Kadaladi</i>            |
| Marathi   | : | <i>Aghadha/Pandhara - agada</i>     |
| Persian   | : | <i>Khare - Vazhun</i>               |
| Punjabi   | : | <i>Kutri</i>                        |
| Tamil     | : | <i>Nayurivi/Shiru-kadaladi</i>      |
| Tēlugu    | : | <i>Uttareni/Antisha/Apamargamu</i>  |
| Sānskrit  | : | <i>Apāmārga/Āghata/Kharamanjari</i> |

It is a small herb, 1 - 3 feet high, commonly found as a weed throughout India upto 3000 feet and in Baluchistan, Cylon, tropical Asia, Africa, Australia, America etc.

#### **Properties of Apāmārga as mentioned in Āyurveda**

*Rasa* (taste) - *Katu* (pungent) & *Tīkta* (bitter); *Guna* - *Laghu* (lightness), *Tīksna* (sharpness), *Sara* (moving); *Vīrya* (potency) - *Uṣna* (hotness); *Vipāka* (taste after digestion) - *Katu* (pungent); *Karma* (actions) - Pacify *Kapha* & *Vata Doṣas*; evacuates *Kapha* & *Pitta Doṣas*; *Tandula* (Seeds) have *Śirovirecana* (Sub-errhine) effect, *Sodhahara* (autophlogestic), *Vedaṇā sthāpana* (senostatics), *Lekhan* (emaciating), *Viśaghna* (antipoison), *Tvak Doṣahara* (eradicates skin disorders), *Vraṇa Śodhana* (cleans & promotes wound healing), *Śirovirecana* (sub-errhines)<sup>13</sup>.

#### **Uses/indications**

*Kandu* (itching), *Kuṣṭa* (skin disorders), *Viṣa* (scorpion & snake bites), *Kapha* & *Vāta Doṣa* diseases, *Vraṇa* (Wound), *Kaṛṇa Roga* (ear diseases), *Netra Roga* (eye diseases), *Aruci* (loss of taste in food), *Cardi* (vomiting), *Agnimāndya* (anorexia), *Śūla* (pain), *Udararoga* (abdominal diseases), *Arśa* (piles), *Kṛmi* (worm infestation), *Hṛdroga* (heart disease), *Pāṇdu* (anaemia), *Gandamāla* (lymphadenitis), *Āmavāta* (rheumatoid arthritis), *Kāsa* (cough), *Śvāsa* (*asthma*, breathlessness), *Mūtrāghāta* (urinary obstruction).

*Apāmārga* is used in the form of *Cūrna* (powder ), *Kalka* (paste) and *Svarasa* (fresh juice).

**Table I**

Some important preparations mentioned in *Āyurveda* are as follows,

| S.No. | Name of Preparation          | Disease/Condition   | Reference                                   |
|-------|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1.    | <i>Apāmārga kṣāra taila</i>  | <i>Karna roga</i><br>(Ear diseases)   | <i>Cakradatta Kaṇnaroga<br/>Cikitsa /26</i> |
| 2.    | <i>Apāmārga kṣarādi lepa</i> | Warts of penis  | <i>Cakradatta Arśa Cikitsa /9</i>           |
| 3.    | <i>Apāmārga navanīta</i>     | <i>Sūryavārta</i><br>(Severe migraine)  | <i>Cakradatta Śīroroga Cikitsa/43</i>       |
| 4.    | <i>Apāmārga svarasa</i>      | <i>Raktasrāva</i> in<br><i>Vrana</i><br>(Haemorrhage from<br>accidental wounds)                                     | <i>Cakradatta Vraṇaśoṭha<br/>Cikitsa/54</i> |
| 5.    | <i>Apāmārgādi taila</i>      | <i>Kṛmi</i><br><i>Cikitsa/37</i><br>(Worm infestation)  | <i>Cakradatta Śīroroga</i>                  |
| 6.    | <i>Agasthya Rasāyana</i>     | <i>Rasāyana</i><br>(Rejuvenation),<br><i>Jvara, Kāsa</i> (cough),<br><i>Hṛdroga, Pratisyāya</i><br>(Nasal catarrah) | <i>Aṣṭāṅga Samgraha<br/>Cikitsa 5/78-84</i> |

In addition, the ancient physicians of India have mentioned that caustics are superior to lancet for opening of the abscess. For the preparation of caustic pastes, ashes of many plants containing potash (more or less ) were used and *Apāmārga* is one of them. *Kṣāra* (alkaline ash) is prepared from *Apāmārga* and it is used in different ailments in different forms (*The Materia Medica of Hindus pp:21* )<sup>7</sup>.

**Table II**

Synonyms of *Apāmārga* mentioned in important *Āyurvedic* Texts

| Sl. No. | Synonym             | <i>Caraka Samhitā</i> | <i>Suśruta Samhitā</i> | <i>Astānga Hṛdaya Samhitā</i> | <i>Astānga Samgraha Samhitā</i> | <i>Bhāva Prakāśa</i> |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1.      | <i>Kharamanjari</i> | -                     | +                      | -                             | +                               | +                    |
| 2.      | <i>Durgraha</i>     | -                     | -                      | -                             | -                               | +                    |
| 3.      | <i>Pratyakpuṣpi</i> | +                     | +                      | +                             | +                               | -                    |
| 4.      | <i>Mayūraka</i>     | +                     | +                      | +                             | +                               | +                    |
| 5.      | <i>Kṛṇihi</i>       | -                     | -                      | -                             | +                               | +                    |
| 6.      | <i>Vasīr</i>        | -                     | +                      | -                             | +                               | -                    |
| 7.      | <i>Śikhari</i>      | +                     | -                      | +                             | +                               | +                    |
| 8.      | <i>Adhahśalya</i>   | -                     | -                      | -                             | -                               | +                    |
| 9.      | <i>Nandi</i>        | -                     | -                      | -                             | +                               | -                    |

Table III

Synonyms of *Apāmārga* in some important *Nighaṇṭus*

| Sl. No. | Synonyms               | <i>Raja<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> | <i>Dhanwanthari<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> | <i>Sōdhala<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> | <i>Kaiyyadeva<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> | <i>BhāvaPrākasa<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> | <i>Sāligrāma<br/>Nighaṇṭu</i> |
|---------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1.      | <i>Śikhari</i>         | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | +                                | +                             |
| 2.      | <i>Saikharika</i>      | +                        | +                                | -                           | -                              | -                                | +                             |
| 3.      | <i>Adhahśalya</i>      | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | +                                | +                             |
| 4.      | <i>Mayūraka</i>        | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | +                                | +                             |
| 5.      | <i>Kāndakanta</i>      | +                        | -                                | -                           | -                              | -                                | -                             |
| 6.      | <i>Markati</i>         | +                        | +                                | +                           | -                              | +                                | +                             |
| 7.      | <i>Markati Pippali</i> | +                        | +                                | -                           | -                              | +                                | -                             |
| 8.      | <i>Durgraha</i>        | +                        | +                                | -                           | +                              | +                                | +                             |
| 9.      | <i>Kiṇihi</i>          | +                        | +                                | +                           | -                              | +                                | -                             |
| 10.     | <i>Dhāmārgava</i>      | -                        | -                                | -                           | -                              | -                                | +                             |
| 11.     | <i>Kharamanjari</i>    | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | +                                | +                             |
| 12.     | <i>Parakpuṣpi</i>      | +                        | +                                | -                           | -                              | -                                | -                             |
| 13.     | <i>Ghanta</i>          | -                        | -                                | +                           | -                              | -                                | -                             |
| 14.     | <i>Pratyak Puṣpi</i>   | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | -                                | +                             |
| 15.     | <i>Mārga</i>           | -                        | -                                | -                           | +                              | -                                | -                             |
| 16.     | <i>Kaṇṭi</i>           | +                        | +                                | +                           | -                              | -                                | +                             |
| 17.     | <i>Vasīraha</i>        | +                        | +                                | +                           | -                              | -                                | +                             |
| 18.     | <i>Durabhi Graha</i>   | +                        | +                                | +                           | +                              | -                                | -                             |



|     |                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. | <i>Katurmajjarika</i>  | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| 20. | <i>Nandi</i>           | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| 21. | <i>Kṣavak</i>          | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| 22. | <i>Pankti Kantakah</i> | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| 23. | <i>Mālakanta</i>       | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| 24. | <i>Kubja</i>           | + | - | - | - | - | - |

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## सारांश

### अपामार्ग का चिकित्सा एवं इतिहासिक सम्बन्धित समालोचन

-पी.वी.वी.प्रसाद एवं पी.के.जे.पी.सुभक्ता

अपामार्ग एक महत्वपूर्ण एवं अधिक पाया जानेवाला पौधा है। और इसके उल्लेख वेदों में भी उपलब्ध है। अथर्ववेद अपामार्ग को समस्त पौधों का राजा माना है। यह वंद्यत्व, दौर्बल्य को दूर करता है और जीवन देता है। यह शरीर से रोगों को दूर करदेता है। आयुर्वेद अपामार्ग तण्डुल को शिरोविरेचन के लिए उत्तम माना है। यह कर्णरोग, कृमि, पाण्डु और कई तरह की व्याधियों में उपयोगी है। नरहरी (राजनिघण्टुकार) ने अपामार्ग का भी वर्णन किया है और 21 पर्यायनाम भी दिया है। इस लेख में अपामार्ग का इतिहास, गुण, कर्म एवं चिकित्सा सारता जो कई ग्रंथों से उपलब्ध है वह प्रस्तुत किया गया है।

