



## Short Communication

# Haritaki (*Chebulic myrobalan*) and its varieties

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## Abstract

*Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz., Family: *Combretaceae*) possesses a great therapeutic value and is widely distributed in India, up to an altitude of 1500 m. Though *Terminalia chebula* Retz is the only botanical source of *Haritaki*, the uses of its varieties along with their sources, identifying features and therapeutic uses are described in Ayurvedic classics and other medical literature. In the present study, a detailed review has been carried out on different varieties of *Haritaki*.

**Key words:** *Chebulic myrobalan*, *Haritaki*, *Terminalia chebula*

## Introduction

*Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz) is held in high esteem in Ayurveda for its properties to prevent and cure diseases. It has enjoyed the prime place among medicinal herbs in India since ancient times. It is called the 'King of Medicines' and is always listed first in Ayurveda because of its extraordinary therapeutic benefits.

Data on this medicinal plant is available in all Ayurvedic classics as well as in the *Nighantus* and works on the materia medica of Ayurveda. The details of the plant are also mentioned in Tibetan literature and various floras of medicinal plants. It is found throughout India up to an altitude of 1500 m.<sup>[1]</sup> Fruit rind is used as medicine and is one of the ingredients in *Triphala* (three *myrobalans*). This plant is used externally in wound healing, fungal infections, inflammations of the mucous membrane of the mouth, and internally as a rejuvenative, astringent, purgative, stomachic, and laxative. It is useful in asthma, piles, and cough.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

In Ayurveda seven varieties of *Haritaki* fruits, namely, *Vijaya*, *Rohini*, *Putana*, *Amrita*, *Abhaya*, *Jivanti*, and *Chetaki* has been described.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ancient scholars have described its varieties along with its sources, identity features, and therapeutic uses. Many scholars have studied the pharmacological screening of the drug. However, Vaidya Bhagawan Dash<sup>[5]</sup> has only tried to correlate the variety of the plants in the context of Ayurveda and Tibetan

medical science. Hence, a comprehensive study to discover collective data on the variety of *haritaki* (*Chebulic myrobalan*) mentioned in Ayurvedic as well as other literatures are carried out for botanical standardization.

## Materials and Methods

Information on the varieties of *Haritaki* was collected from all ancient literatures of Ayurveda and the lexicons of Medicinal plants (*Nighantus*), recent literature, journals, and information gathered from the internet. Comprehensive data was prepared after referring with the Herbarium of the Regional Research Institute of Himalayan Flora, Tarikhet, 'Acronym-RKT,' under the guidance of the taxonomist of the institute.

## Results

The following information has been gathered with regards to the variety of *Haritaki* (*Chebulic myrobalan*) on the basis of the review done.

### Variety of *Haritaki* in different classics

In Ayurvedic literature the classification of *Haritaki* varies considerably. A statement providing information regarding the variety of *Haritaki* in different Ayurvedic texts and *Nighantus* is given in Table 1.<sup>[5-8]</sup>

In Tibetan literature, according to Bdud-rtsi- snying-po, *Haritaki* is also classified into seven types. They are; (1) *Rnam par rgyal ba* (*Vijaya*), (2) *Bum gyi mgrin* (*Kalasa Kantha*), (3) *Gso byed* (*Ayuh Vardhak*), (4) *Bdud-rtsi* (*Amrita*), (5) *Jigs med* (*Abhaya*), (6) *Phel Byed* (*Vridhdhikari*), and (7) *Skam Po* (*Suska*)<sup>[5]</sup>

In Hooker's flora of British India, apart from *Terminalia chebula*, six other varieties of *T.chebula* are mentioned:<sup>[9]</sup>

(i) *Terminalia chebula* Retz. (variety *chebula* proper): Fruits,

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**Table 1: Variety of *Haritaki* mentioned in the different classics of Ayurveda**

Name of the variety	Ayurvedic texts and <i>Nighantu</i>				
	Harita Samhita, Saligram Nighantu, Raj Nighantu, Bhava Prakash Nighantu	Raja Ballabh Nighantu	Atreya Samhita	Dhanwantari Nighantu	Nighantu Ratnakar
<i>Vijaya</i>	+	+	-	-	+
<i>Rohini</i>	+	+	-	-	+
<i>Putana</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Amrita</i>	+	+	-	+	+
<i>Abhaya</i>	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Jivanti</i>	+	+	+	-	-
<i>Chetaki</i>	+	-	+	+	+
<i>Kalika</i>	-	+	-	-	-
<i>Pathya</i>	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Jaya</i>	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Haimavati</i>	-	-	-	+	-

one- to one-and-a-half inches, ellipsoidal or obovoid, from a broad base, more or less glabrous, and five-ribbed, are abundant in northern India at 1000 to 3000 ft

- (ii) *Terminalia chebula* (var. *typica*): They have a young ovary and are shaggy without calyx teeth. They are distributed in Deccan, Ceylon, and Burma  
*Terminalia chebula* (Var. *citrina*): They have a young ovary, are quite glabrous, with ovate fruit, and a round base. It is common in northern India, from Kumaon to Bengal and in Chhota Nagpur
- (iii) *Terminalia chebula* (Var.): The fruits of these are much smaller than the other variety. Generally found in Bihar up to an altitude of 1000 ft
- (iv) *Terminalia chebula* (Var. *tomentella* Kurz.): They have a young ovary, are glabrous, fruit is ovoid, and hardly one inch in diameter
- (v) *Terminalia chebula* (Var. *gangetica* Roxb): They have fruits with brown silky hair, which covers the twigs. It may be a very good variety. The fruit is similar to that of *chebula*, distributed in Northwest India
- (vi) *Terminalia chebula* (Var. *parviflora* Thwaites Enum.): They have fruits that are more acutely ribbed.

Two principal varieties recognized by Brandis are;

- (a) Ordinary variety: They are the widely spread form, with young shoots, silky-tomentose, leaves are glabrous when fully grown, and the ovary and calyx outside are glabrous or hairy (described by Kurz *T. chebula* and *T. tomentella* Kurz.
- (b) Tomentose form: Tomentose branchlets, leaves panicle, ovary and calyx densely and softly clothed with long silky hairs (Possibly *T. gangetica*).<sup>[10]</sup>

### Identification of different varieties of *Haritaki*

The physical characteristics and therapeutic attributes of various types of *Haritaki* are described in the classical texts of Ayurveda, with a view to help in their identification.

According to the ancient lexicons of medicinal plants, *Vijaya* has the shape of a gourd, *Rohini* is round in shape, *Putana* contains a proportionately bigger stone, *Amrita* is fleshy, *Abhaya* contains five ridges, *Jivanti* is golden in color, and *Chetaki* has three ridges.<sup>[5]</sup>

In *Brang-ti-pa*, a Tibetan literature as quoted in *Shel phreng*, the variety *Rnam par rgyal ba* (*Vijaya*) is characterized by closed lips

and a fine neck, *Gser mdog* (*Knaka Varna*) is of golden color, round shaped, and contains five or eight ridges (Wrinkles). *Sa Chen* (*Mamsala*) is fleshy. *Bigs byed* (*Vindkya*) is black and stoneless, and *Snung* (*Suksma*) has many wrinkles.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Habitat

Ayurvedic literature has revealed the habitat of *Haritaki* to be the Himalayas (sub-Himalayan tract). This has been considered as the main growing region for the plant (*Haimavati*). Although all the classics are not of unanimous opinion but majority of them have stated that *Vijaya* grows in the Vindhya Mountains, *Chetaki* and *Putana* grow in the Himalayas, *Rohini* grows in Sindh (Jhansi), *Amrita* and *Abhaya* in Champa (Madhya Pradesh), and *Jivanti* in Saurashtra.<sup>[11,12]</sup>

Tibetan literature has stated that the origin of *Vijaya* is only from the Gandhamardana mountain range, whereas, *Abhaya* grows on the eastern side, *Mamsala* on the southern side, *Suska* on the northern side, and *Rohini* on the western side.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Therapeutic attributes

Ayurvedic classics have vividly described the therapeutic effect of the different varieties of *Haritaki*. With regard to the effect, all the classics are not unanimous and the various effects stated are: *Vijaya* is given more importance as it is useful in all kinds of diseases, for both purificatory measures and preparation of malt (*Avaleha*)-based products, *Rohini* is useful in consumption and wounds, *Putana* is useful for external application, the *Amrita* variety is useful as a purgative, *Abhaya* is for eye disease, *Jeevanti* is medicine for oleation therapy, *Kalika* is effective in removing the foul smell of the ulcer, and *Chetaki* for purgation.

In Tibetan literature, the different parts of the *Haritaki* tree has been used for a special therapeutic purpose. The roots clear the diseases of the bone, the stem clears muscle diseases, the bark is useful for skin diseases, the branches are useful in vascular disorders, leaves are useful for visceral diseases, and the fruit for vital organs, including heart diseases.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Discussion

From the detailed review, it can be inferred that *Haritaki* (chebulic myrobalan) is an important plant used in

Ayurveda as well as in other indigenous systems of medicine. It is one of the ingredients of the renowned formulation *Triphala* (Three myrobalans). The mythological origin of the plant represents the immortal nature of therapeutic attributes in the human body. In Ayurvedic and Tibetan literature, the classification of *Haritaki* varies considerably. However, in both systems, the total varieties of *Haritaki* accepted are seven.

In fact only two types (big and small) of *Haritaki* are available. The big variety, available everywhere and used in the preparation of Ayurvedic proprietary medicine, is the *Vijaya* variety, useful for both rejuvenation and purificatory purposes. The small variety (trade name – *Jangi haritaki*) is the *Chetaki* variety mentioned in the classics. These are immature, unripe, small, stoneless fruits used for purgative purpose.

Although the seven varieties of *T.chebula* are described by Hooker; only two varieties are found and the others are their sub-varieties, namely, *Terminalia chebula* var. *chebula*. The leaves and shoots are hairless or only hairy when very young, and in *Terminalia chebula* var. *tomentella* (Kurz) C.B.Clarke, the leaves and shoots are silvery to orange and hairy.

Botanically only two more species have been found, which are, *Terminalia citrina* Roxb in Assam and Bengal and *T. pallida* in South India, which yields another kind of *Haritaki*, used as a substitute and adulterant of *Haritaki*, respectively, in different regions.

In Ayurvedic literature, although the plant is mentioned in *Brihatrayee* (the three main lexicons of Ayurveda Charak-Susruta-Vagbhata), its variety is not described by them. *Nighantus* have only stated the different varieties of *Haritaki* (i.e. *Vijaya*, *Rohini*, *Putana*, *Amrita*, *Abhaya*, *Jivanti*, and *Chetaki*), based on the region where the fruit is harvested, as well as the color and shape of the fruit. Furthermore, two varieties of *Chetaki*, namely, black and white, are described by Bhavamishra in *Bhavaprakashnighantu*. The Black Variety *Chetaki*, '*Krisnaatwekaangulamata*' (Black chebulic myrobalan of only one fingerbreadth size) described by Bhavamishra may be compared with the black small-sized fruit of *Haritaki* (*Jangi Haritaki*/immature fruit of *Haritaki*) of the present time, which is available everywhere. '*Churnarthachetakisasthaa*' told for manufacturing the powder form of medicine for laxative purpose, the *Jangi Haritaki* (*Chetaki*) is mainly used. The other variety (white) the Golden/Big variety, which is six-*angula* (six fingerbreadths) in length may be one of the variations of the large variety of *Haritaki* available in the market, which is used in the manufacture of preparations

like, *Abhayarishtha*, *Agastyaharitakee*, *Vyaghriharitakee* *Avaleha*, etc.

## Conclusions

*Haritaki* is an important and popular drug used by the practitioners of traditional medicine. In this article, an attempt has been made to review the relevant literature.

With regard to the exact botanical standardization of all the varieties of *Haritaki*, it is advisable to explore and collect the samples from all the regions of the country, along with the analysis of their active principles and screening of their pharmacological activities, on the basis of the properties mentioned in the Ayurvedic classics, before giving any conclusive remarks. However the botanical source of different varieties of *Haritaki* includes *Terminalia chebula* var. *chebula*, *Terminalia chebula* var. *tomentella* (Kurz) C.B.Clarke, *Terminalia citrina* Roxb. and *T. pallida*.

## Acknowledgment

The authors are thankful to the Director General, CCRAS, for the constant encouragement and the facilities provided.

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## हिन्दी सारांश

### हरीतकी एवं इसकी विविध प्रजातियों का अध्ययन

क्षिरोड कुमार राड्डा, गिरीशचंद्र जोशी

हरीतकी (टर्मिनेलिया चिबुला रिट्ज) वानस्पतिक कुल कौमब्रेटेसी का वृक्ष भारतवर्ष में सभी स्थानों पर १५०० मीटर तक पाया जाने वाला बहुउपयोगी वृक्ष है। इस वृक्ष के सम्पूर्ण फल का उपयोग विबन्ध, अर्श, कास, चर्मरोग एवं अन्य व्याधियों में किया जाता है। हरीतकी के वानस्पतिक स्रोत के रूप में टर्मिनेलिया चिबुला रिट्ज को ही मुख्य रूप से प्रयोग में लाया जाता है परन्तु इसकी प्रजाति तथा उप-जातियों का उल्लेख प्राचीन आयुर्वेदिय ग्रन्थों में उपलब्ध है। प्रस्तुत आलेख में हरीतकी के फल पर विस्तृत वानस्पतिक अध्ययन एवं प्राचीन ग्रन्थों में वर्णित उप-जातियों का सम्भावित वानस्पतिक स्रोत पर एक विवरणात्मक अध्ययन किया गया है।

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