

***Ashtavarga*- Rare Medicinal Plants**

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Issued 3 April 2006

ABSTRACT

Ashtavarga is important ingredient of various classical Ayurvedic formulations like *Chavyanprasha*. *Ashtavarga* has been assigned various medicinal properties by ancient Materia Medica dealing with *Ayurveda*. *Ashtavarga* is subject of rigorous botanical research. Although work has been done on identification of medicinal plants mentioned under *Ashtavarga*, still lot is to be done to identify the true representatives. Taking in to consideration the medicinal properties of these medicinal plants, phytochemical and pharmacological investigations are the need of the hour to scientifically validate the claims. The article discusses the properties of the eighth drugs mentioned under *Ashtavarga*.

(Keywords: *Ashtavarga*, Ayurveda, medicinal plants)

INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic Pharmacy is an interdisciplinary subject. Ayurvedic physicians use medicinal plants, minerals, stones and metals in preparing standard formulations. Precisely speaking, Ayurvedic formulations are divided into following categories:

1. Single herb
2. Polyherbal
3. Polymineral
4. Herbo-mineral or minero-herbal.

Ashtavarga come under polyherbal formulations. *Ashta* means eight and *varga* means group. When we talk about pharmacological basis of classification of Ayurvedic drugs, they are classified according to their medicinal properties. As an instance *Ashtavarga* drugs have *Jeevaniya* and *Vayasthapana* properties. Although it is difficult to compare these properties with modern pharmacological terms however these can be roughly compared with nutritive and anti-ageing effects. *

Ingredients of Ashtavarga

1. *Jeevaka*
2. *Rishbhaka*
3. *Meda*
4. *Mahameda*
5. *Kakoli*
6. *Kshira-kakoli*
7. *Riddhi*
8. *Vridddhi*

Jeevaka (Malaxis acuminta D.Don syn. Microstylis wallichii Lindl syn. Malaxis wallichii Deb.)

Synonyms: *Chirnjivi, Dirghayu, Harsanga, Ksveda, Kurchashira, Pranda, Shringaka* and *Svadu*.

Family: Orchideaceae.

Botany: *Malaxis acuminta* is a terrestrial, robust herb, up to 25 cm high. Stem tending to be pseudobulbous at base. Leaves 3-5, elliptic acuminate, sheathing at base. Flower deep pink in crowded, terminal dense to lax racemes, bracts deflexed.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and aggravates *kapha*.

Actions: Cooling, febrifuge and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Bleeding diathesis, burning sensation, fever and phthisis.

Rishbhaka (Microstylis muscifera Ridley)

Synonyms: *Bandhura, Dheera, Durdhara, Gopati, Indraksa, Kakuda, Matrika, Vishani, Vrisha* and *Vrishnabha*,

Family: Orchideaceae.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and aggravates *kapha*.

Actions: Cooling, febrifuge and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Bleeding diathesis, burning sensation, fever and phthisis.

Meda (Polygonatum verticillatum (L.) All. syn. Convallaria verticillata L. syn. Evallaria verticillata Necker)

Synonyms: *Dhara, Manichhidra* and *Shalyaparni*

English name: Whorled Solomon's seal

Family: Liliaceae.

Botany: *Polygonatum verticillatum* is a perennial growing to 1.2m by 0.45m. The leaves four to eight in a whorl; the flowers, two to three in a bunch in the axils of the leaves, are greenish-white. The fruits are red when ripe, and remain hanging after the leaves have fallen. The flowers are hermaphrodite.

Phytochemistry: Work done in Ukraine has reported presence of lectins.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and *pitta*.

Actions: Cooling and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Fever, burning sensation and phthisis.

Mahameda (Polygonatum cirrhifolium (Wall.) Royle)

Synonyms: *Devamani* and *Vasuchhidra*.

English name: King's Solomon's seal

Family: Liliaceae.

Botany: Whorls of delicate leaves and nodding little lilac bells on slender stems to 45cm. Shoots erupt from creeping rhizomes so late in the spring you fear something's wrong, and flower within a fortnight.

Phytochemistry: Steroidal saponins and polysaccharides

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, pacifies *pitta* and aggravates *kapha*.

Actions: Cooling, febrifuge and spermoprotic. James Duke in his work on medicinal plants of China has reported cardio tonic, carminative; sialagogue, stimulant and tonic properties of *Polygonatum verticillatum*. The plant is used in Tibet system of medicine also.

Therapeutics: Burning sensation and fever. In Tibet *Polygonum cirrhifolium* is used for loss of vigor, pain in kidneys and hips, swelling and fullness in the abdominal region, accumulation of fluids in bone joints, skin eruptions, and bronchitis.

Pharmacological investigations: Investigations in China has reported hypoglycemic, hypotensive; antibacterial and antifungal effects of *Polygonum cirrhifolium*.

Kakoli (Roscoea procera Wall. formerly Roscoea purpurea or Fritillaria roylei Hook.f)

Synonyms: *Dhawanksholika, Karnika, Ksheera, Madhura, Shukla, Svadumansi, Vayasoli and Vaysasha*.

Family: Zingiberaceae.

Botany: *Roscoea purpurea* is a much larger and lush plant, forming clumps of thick, fleshy leaves from where arise fat stems topped by one or two two-tone purple hooded flowers in summer.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and *pitta*.

Actions: Cooling and spermoprotic.

Therapeutics: Fever, burning sensation and phthisis.

Fritillaria roylei

Common name: Himalayan fritillary.

Family: Liliaceae.

Botany: Bulb growing to 0.6m. The flowers are hermaphrodite

Phytochemistry: Alkaloids: peimine, peiminine, peimisine, peimiphine, peimidine and peimitidine, neutral principle: propeimin and sterol.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and *pitta*.

Actions: Cooling and spermoprotic. Usher. G. has reported antiasthmatic, antirheumatic, febrifuge, galactagogue, haemostatic, ophthalmic and oxytocic properties of *Fritillaria roylei*.

Therapeutics: Fever, burning sensation and phthisis.

Kshirakakoli (Lilium polphyllum D.Don)

Synonyms: *Kshiramadhura, Kshiravishanika, Kshirshkula, Payasvani, Vayastha* and *Veera*

Family: Liliaceae.

English name: White lily.

Botany: Leaves are scaly. The plant originates from bulbs.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste, cold in potency, pacifies *vata* and *pitta*.

Actions: Cooling and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Fever, burning sensation and phthisis.

Riddhi (Habenaria edgeworthii H.f.)

Synonyms: *Lakshmi, Mangala, Rathanga, Rishisrista, Saravajanpriya, Siddhi, Sukha, Vasu* and *Yuga*.

Family: Orchidaceae.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste and pacifies *vata* and *pitta* but aggravates *kapha*.

Actions: Cooling and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Diseases of the blood.

Vridhhi (Habenaria intermedia D.Don syn. Habenaria arietina H.f.)

Synonyms: *Lakshmi, Mangala, Rathanga, Rishisrista, Saravajanpriya, Siddhi, Sukha, Vasu* and *Yuga*

Family: Orchidaceae.

Ayurvedic dynamics: Sweet in taste and pacifies *vata* and *pitta* but aggravates *kapha*.

Actions: Cooling and spermopiotic.

Therapeutics: Diseases of the blood.

CONCLUSION

Ashtavarga is significant constituent of Ayurvedic pharmacy. The compound formulation and its ingredients alone have various medicinal effects. Based on the properties described in ancient texts, *Ashtavarga* seems to have antioxidant and anti ageing effects. Before pharmacological investigations can be further initiated it is important to conduct botanical and phytochemical investigations.

Note: Ayurvedic properties of drugs have been extracted from *Dhanwantri Nighantu*.

* Views expressed in this article are hypothetical. We do not tend to promote or rebuke other works done on *Ashtavarga*. The authors are not responsible for proposed botanical names of the drugs.

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