

Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*): A Rasayana Herb in Ayurveda with Modern Therapeutic Relevance

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ABSTRACT

Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of Ayurvedic medicine, is classified as a *Rasayana* a category of rejuvenative herbs that promote longevity, vitality, and overall well-being. Traditionally valued for its tridosha-balancing nature, Haritaki is known for its efficacy in managing a wide spectrum of ailments, particularly digestive, respiratory, metabolic, and neurodegenerative disorders. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe its versatile actions, including *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Bhedana*, and *Rasayana* properties. Modern pharmacological research has corroborated many of these traditional claims, identifying a range of bioactive compounds such as chebulinic acid, gallic acid, and tannins that contribute to its antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, hepatoprotective, and neuroprotective activities. This convergence of classical knowledge and contemporary science highlights Haritaki's significant potential in integrative medicine. The present review aims to explore the therapeutic relevance of Haritaki from both traditional and modern perspectives, emphasizing its role as a natural and holistic remedy in current health paradigms.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Rasayana, Rejuvenation, Haritaki, *Terminalia chebula*.

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INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda, the ancient system of Indian medicine, has long relied on natural herbs to promote holistic health and prevent diseases. Among these, Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*), belonging to the family Combretaceae, holds a prominent position. It is described in Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu* as a vital *Rasayana* (rejuvenative) drug.¹ Traditionally used for treating gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory conditions, and metabolic issues, Haritaki has now garnered attention for its wide-ranging pharmacological actions demonstrated through various preclinical and clinical studies. Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), commonly referred to as the "king of medicines" in Ayurveda, is a highly esteemed medicinal plant renowned for its wide-ranging therapeutic benefits.² Classified as a *Rasayana* drug in classical Ayurvedic texts, Haritaki is known to promote longevity, enhance immunity, improve intellect, and rejuvenate the body. It is one of the key components of the famous formulation *Triphala* and is extensively used for its digestive, laxative, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties. Ayurveda recognizes seven different varieties of Haritaki based on the region and physical characteristics, each offering specific health benefits. It is believed to balance all three *Doshas* Vata, Pitta, and Kapha and is particularly valued for its *Vatahara* action.³ Its

classical references describe its utility in treating a variety of conditions, including digestive disorders, respiratory ailments, skin diseases, and metabolic imbalances.

In recent decades, Haritaki has drawn significant attention in the field of modern scientific research due to its bioactive constituents, including chebulinic acid, chebulagic acid, gallic acid, and tannins, which exhibit potent antimicrobial, hepatoprotective, anticancer, and neuroprotective activities. Studies have validated many of its traditional uses and further highlighted its role in oxidative stress reduction, immunomodulation, and metabolic regulation. This synergy between ancient Ayurvedic wisdom and modern scientific validation underscores Haritaki's relevance as a promising natural remedy in contemporary healthcare.⁴ As integrative medicine continues to gain prominence, Haritaki stands out as a bridge between tradition and evidence-based therapeutic practice.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE:

to assess the research on Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*) in light of Ayurvedic literature.

Methodology:

Materials pertaining to Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*) were gathered from a variety of books and magazines, Ayurvedic and modern textbooks, reputable works, prestigious reviews, manuscripts, etc.

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Taxonomical classification:⁵

Taxonomical classification of *Terminalia chebula* is as below:

Kingdom-	Plantae
Clade-	Tracheophytes
Clade-	Angiosperms
Clade-	Eudicots
Order-	Caryophyllales
Family-	Combretaceae
Genus-	<i>Terminalia</i>
Species-	<i>T. chebula</i>

Synonyms:⁶

Buceras chebula (Retz.) Lyons, *Myrobalanus chebula* (Retz.) Gaertn., *Combretum argyrophyllum* K.Schum., *Myrobalanifera citrina* Houtt., *Myrobalanifera fertilis* J.F.Gmel., *Myrobalanus gangetica* (Roxb.) Kostel., *Myrobalanus tomentella* Kuntze, *Terminalia acuta* Walp., *Terminalia argyrophylla* King & Prain, *Terminalia aruta* Buch.-Ham. ex G.Don, *Terminalia bengalensis* Roxb. ex DC., *Terminalia chebula* var. *gangetica* (Roxb.) C.B.Clarke in J.D.Hooker, *Terminalia chebula* var. *tomentella* (Kurz) C.B.Clarke, *Terminalia gangetica* Roxb., *Terminalia glandulipetiolata* De Wild., *Terminalia reticulata* B.Heyne ex Roth, *Terminalia rotata* Roxb. ex DC., *Terminalia tomentella* Kurz

Vernacular name:⁷

- ☐ **Sanskrit:** Haritaki, Abhaya, Pathya, Vijaya
- ☐ **Hindi:** Harad (हरद)
- ☐ **English:** Chebulic Myrobalan

- ☐ **Bengali:** Haritaki, Haritaki
- ☐ **Gujarati:** Harade
- ☐ **Kannada:** Alale Kayi
- ☐ **Malayalam:** Kadukka
- ☐ **Marathi:** Hirda
- ☐ **Oriya (Odia):** Harida
- ☐ **Punjabi:** Harar
- ☐ **Tamil:** Kadukkai
- ☐ **Telugu:** Karakkaya
- ☐ **Urdu:** Halela Siyah

Nirukti:⁸

Abhaya – Na bhayenvyadhinamsevnadasya

Pathya – Pathi sadhu itipathyahithaithyrtha

Kayastha – Kaya tishthatianayaiti

Chetki – Chetyatiiti

Shiva – Shivamkarotiiti

Haimavati – Himavatijataiti

Shreyasi – Atiprashstaiti

Classical categorization:⁹

Charak Samhita : Jvaraghna, Arsoghna, Kasaghna, Kusthaghna, Prajasthapana.

Susruta Samhita: Amalakyadi, Parusakadi, Triphala

Vagbhata : Parusakadi.

Paryaya of Haritaki in different Samhitas:¹⁰

Sanskrit name	Dhanvantri N.	Asthang N.	Raj N.	Bhavprakash N.	Kaidev N.
Haritaki	+	+	+	+	+
Vijaya	+	+	+	+	+
Rohini	+	+	+	+	+
Amrita	+	+	+	+	+
Shaklasreshta	-	-	-	-	-
Abhaya	+	+	+	+	+
Airytha	-	-	-	+	-
Pramatha	-	-	+	-	-
Amogha	-	-	-	-	-
Kayastha	+	+	+	+	+
Prapathya	-	-	-	-	-
Divya	-	-	-	-	-
Pranada	+	+	+	+	+
Jiva	-	-	+	-	-
Putana	+	+	+	+	+
Shreyasi	+	+	+	+	+
Chetki	+	+	+	+	+

Balyi	-	-	-	-	+
Pathya	+	+	+	+	+
Jivya Priya	-	-	-	-	+
Bhisak Priya	+	+	+	+	+

Types of Haritaki:¹¹

S.no.	Name	Distribution
1.	Vijaya	Vindhya mountain
2.	Chetki	Himalayan region
3.	Putana	Sindhu region
4.	Rohini	Every where
5.	Amrita	Champaran region
6.	Abhaya	Champaran region
7.	Jivanti	Saurashtra region

Botanical description of Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*):¹²

Habit- *Terminalia chebula* is a medium sized deciduous tree with height of up to 30m wide spreading branches and a broad roundish crown. It grows in altitude of 1500-2000 m in mostly clay as well as shady soils.

Stem- is round shape and dark brown.

Leaves- Leaves are sub-opposites ovate or oblong- ovate 8-20cm long and deciduous during cold season. The species is identified by dark brown bark exfoliating in irregular woody scales and by presence of pair of large gland present at the end of petioles.

Flower- Flowers are somewhat yellowish white and fragrant, borne in large in compound inflorescence. They occur in spike arising from upper axils or in small panicles.

Fruit - Fruit is yellow, elliptical with five longitudinal ridges, and about 2-4 cm long and 1 2.5cm wide. Very large fruit is valuable. Mature fruit is of an ovoid form, from 25 to 38mm long. The unripe fruits are shriveled, black, ovoid, brittle bodies.

Seed- Seed is globose and 2-6 cm long, sometimes tapering towards the lower extremity, obscurely 5 or 6 sided, more or less furrowed longitudinally, covered with a smooth yellowish-brown epidermis, within which is an astringent pulp, enclosing a large rough bony one celled endocarp.

Flowering & fruiting season:

Flower- The flowers appear from April to August most often along with the advent of new foliage.

Fruit- The fruits ripen from October to January.

Habitat- *Terminalia chebula* is found throughout South East Asia like India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh & Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey & Thailand. In India it is found in the Sub Himalayan tracks from Ravi eastwards to West Bengal & Assam ascending up to the altitude of 1500 meter in the Himalayas. This tree is wild in forests of Northern India, Mysore and in the southern part of Bombay presidency. Flowers appear from April to August and fruits ripen from October to January.¹³



Microscopic description: ¹⁴

The outermost tissue of the fruit namely the epidermis is made up of a single row of cubical cells about 15 μ in length and breadth. The epidermis is covered on the outside by a layer of cuticle which is about 6 μ thick. Below the epidermis is a hypodermis composed of 1 or 2 rows of rectangular tangentially elongated thick walled cells intermingled with many stone cells of about the same size and shape. The region of the mesocarp below

this layer consists of thin walled parenchymatous cells with well defined intercellular spaces. The cells towards the periphery are small and avoid or oblong (and then tangentially elongate) while those towards the interior are mostly larger and radially elongate. Almost all the cells of the mesocarp are found fully packed with starch grains. The grains are generally simple and small with a diameter of 2 to 4 μ . Tannin is copiously present in most of the cells. Scattered within the mesocarp are stone cells

occurring either singly or more often as long lines or chains running in various directions and so often appearing as areticulum. These stone cells are of two types namely elongate as well as rounded. The former have a length of 1 to 2 mm and a breadth of 0.1 to 0.3 mm. The spherical ones are 0.01 to 0.01 mm long and 0.01 to 0.06 mm. broad. The stone cells however are comparatively thin walled and have large lumen. Several vascular bundles are present traversing the mesocarp in diverse directions. In most of the bundles the phloem is to the exterior, but in some of them the phloem is seen at the side. The number of xylem vessels varies in different bundles from few to several (10 to 15) and their diameter varies from 5 to 25 μ .

Phytochemistry: ¹⁵

Haritaki is rich in bioactive compounds, especially phenolic compounds and tannins.

• Major Phytoconstituents:

- Chebulagic acid
- Chebulinic acid

- Gallic acid
- Ellagic acid
- Flavonoids (quercetin)
- Tannins (20–40%)

These constituents are mainly responsible for Haritaki's antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and adaptogenic properties.

Pharmacological properties: ¹⁶

Rasa : Pancarasa (except Lavana), Kasaya mainly

Guna : Laghu, Ruksha

Virya : Usna

Vipaka : Madhura

Karma : Tridosahara, Anulomana, Rasayana, Prajasthapana, Caksusya, Hrdya, Lekhana.

Panchrasa description: ¹⁷

1.	Madhur	Majja	Fruit pulp
2.	Amla Amla	Snayu	Fibrous part
3.	Katu	Vrinta	Base of Fruit
4.	Tikta	Twaka	Outer skin
	Kashay Kashaya	Asthi Asthi	Seeds

Varieties, characters & Utility: ¹⁸

S.no.	Name	Lakshna	Prayoga (Utility)
1.	Vijaya	Alabu Vritta (Oval)	Sarva roghar (useful in all disease)
2.	Chetki	Mansala (Five lines on it)	Sodhanarth (For purification)
3.	Putana	Asthimati sukshma (small but with large seed)	Palepnarth (For external application)
4.	Rohini	Panchrekha (Five lines on it)	Akshiroga (Eye disease)
5.	Amrita	Swarna varna (Golden colour)	Sarva roghar (Usefull in all disease)
6.	Abhaya	Trirekha (Three lines on it)	Churnarth (For preparing powder)
7.	Jivanti	Vrtta (Round)	Vran ropak (Wound healing)

Market varieties-

S.no.	Size	Feature
1.	Small	Seed less
2.	Yellow	having seed but immature
3.	Big	Fully matured

Ritu Haritaki ¹⁹

S.no	ऋतु	अनुपान
1.	वर्षा	सैधव
2.	शरद	शर्करा
3.	हेमंत	शुंठी

4.	शिशिर	पिप्पली
5.	बसंत	मधु
6.	ग्रीष्म	गुड़

Therapeutic Uses in Ayurveda ²⁰

- **Anulomana:** Mild laxative action useful in constipation
- **Deepana-Pachana:** Enhances digestion and metabolism
- **Kasa-Shwasa:** Used in cough and respiratory ailments
- **Rakta Shodhana:** Blood purification
- **Medhya Rasayana:** Supports cognitive functions and mental clarity

Dosanusar prayog evam Anupan ²¹

S.no.	दोष	अनुपान
1.	वात	घृत
2.	पित्त	शर्करा
3.	कफ	सैधव लवण
4.	सन्निपातज	गुड़

Useful parts- Fruit

Doses : Powder- 3 – 6 gm

Properties of Haritaki in different forms ²²

चबाकर	अग्निवृद्धिकर
पीसकर	मलशोधनी
स्विन्न	संग्राही
भूनकर	त्रिदोषशामक

Important Formulation -

TriphaladiTaila, Triphalachurna, Abhayarista, Agastya Haritaki Rasayana, ChitrakaHaritaki, DantiHaritaki, DashamulaHaritaki, DantiHaritali, Rasayana, AbhayaLavanaa, Pathyadilepa.

Traditional use of Haritaki ²³

- 1) Haritaki fruit is extensively used in Thai traditional medicine for laxative, carminative, astringer and tonic effect.
- 2) Routinely used in traditional medicine by tribes of Tamilnadu to cure severe disease such as fever, cough, diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, skin diseases candidiasis urinary tract infection, wound infections
- 3) Used commonly in many ayurvedic preparations diuretics and cardiogenic.
- 4) It is Used to prevent aging and impact long immunity.
- 5) It is reported to cure blindness and it is believed to growth malignant tumours.

Modern Pharmacological Activities ^{24,25,26,27}

Antioxidant Activity

The phenolic compounds in Haritaki exhibit strong free-radical scavenging activity, protecting against oxidative stress-related damage, which is linked to aging and chronic diseases.

Antimicrobial Activity

Haritaki extracts have demonstrated antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal activity against a range of pathogens including *E. coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Candida albicans*.

Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic Effects

Flavonoids and triterpenoids in Haritaki suppress pro-inflammatory mediators like COX-2 and TNF- α , making it useful in conditions like arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease.

Gastroprotective Effect

It enhances gastrointestinal motility, supports gut flora balance, and protects the gastric mucosa from ulceration.

Neuroprotective and Cognitive Benefits

Haritaki has been shown to improve memory and reduce neuroinflammation, potentially aiding in neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's disease.

Antidiabetic Potential

Studies show that Haritaki reduces blood glucose levels, improves insulin sensitivity, and inhibits alpha-glucosidase enzyme.

Cardioprotective Action

It helps in reducing cholesterol and LDL levels and may support vascular health through antioxidant and lipid-lowering effects.

Clinical Applications and Formulations

- **Triphala Churna:** A synergistic combination of Haritaki, Amalaki, and Bibhitaki-used as a digestive tonic, detoxifier, and mild laxative.
- **Haritaki Churna:** Used in constipation, flatulence, skin disorders, and as a rejuvenator.
- **Kwath (Decoction):** Often used for oral rinse in dental conditions and sore throat.
- **Topical Paste:** Applied in wounds, ulcers, and skin infections.

7. Safety, Toxicity, and Dosage

Haritaki is generally considered safe when used in traditional dosages. However, high doses may cause dehydration or electrolyte imbalance due to its laxative nature.

- **Common Dose:** 3–6 grams of powder per day with warm water or honey
- **Contraindications:** Pregnancy, dehydration, acute diarrhea
- **Adverse Effects:** Overuse may lead to abdominal discomfort or loose stools

Contraindications- Haritaki possess some side effects, though it is said as pathyakarak in all the seasons along with different vehicles, traditional herbal practitioners are not recommended use during some of the conditions. Reason behind this may be though there are a few nutritive health ts, Haritaki is more of cleansing, moisture absorbing, weight□bene reducing in nature. Hence it is advised to avoid during pregnancy. In most of the contraindications explained above, all have dryness, lack of water supply kind of symptoms. Haritaki, already being astringent, is not advisable because it may further contribute to dryness.

DISCUSSION

Haritaki's role as a *Rasayana* highlights its rejuvenating and adaptogenic properties, aligning well with the goals of preventive and promotive healthcare in Ayurveda. The convergence of traditional wisdom and scientific validation underscores Haritaki's potential in managing chronic diseases like diabetes, neurodegeneration, and metabolic disorders. Its inclusion in widely used Ayurvedic formulations like Triphala and its applicability in modern therapeutics warrant more clinical research and pharmacological exploration. The world health organization (WHO) has estimated that 80% of the earth's inhabitant relied on traditional medicine for their primary health care needs and most of these therapies involved the use of plant extract or their active compounds (Bruneton, 1995). One compound of the Haritaki i.e. Triphala is very famous all over the world for its curative and Rasayan effect. Gandhrav Haritaki is another famous combination to relieve constipation & for laxative action. The Kansa Haritaki is well known for respiratory disorders. Rutu Haritaki is mentioned by BhavPrakash used in all season.

It means Haritaki is mentioned in all season with different Dravyas.

CONCLUSION

Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*) embodies the essence of *Rasayana* therapy, offering a broad spectrum of health benefits. Ancient Ayurvedic texts and modern biomedical research jointly advocate its role in disease prevention, health maintenance, and rejuvenation. With further exploration and clinical validation, Haritaki can bridge traditional medicine and modern healthcare paradigms, making it a truly integrative therapeutic herb. Ekal Dravya Chikitsa has been mentioned in our past Samhitas, and is also being practiced nowadays in present era. Using single Dravya is not as much as efficient, so it has been used with different Anupaans and in different form to give optimum results for a particular pathological condition. Here, Haritaki has been used as single Dravya by all three Acharyas in many diseases either by altering its Anupaan or its form to be effective accordingly. These gives evidence based results that Haritaki is one of the prime medicine used in Ekal form. These studies justify the claim on ancient literatures that haritaki called as amutham (nectar) in tamil is a kayakalpa which balances the three bodily humors or doshas that are the main reasons for illness and stress that herbal medicines treats the cause of the disease rather than suppressing the symptoms.

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