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# A REVIEW ON AN ENDANGERED HIMALAYAN MEDICINAL AROMATIC PLANT -CHORAKA (ANGELICA GLAUCA EDGEW)

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# ABSTRACT

*Choraka* is a highly valued aromatic plant endemic to the Himalayan region. *Angelica glauca* is a perennial herb of *Umbelliferae* family. It is very commonly used as a spice and for treating stomach ailments. Its essential oil is highly valued and has broncho-relaxant, antimicrobial, antifungal, anxiolytic and antioxidant activity. Its chemical constituents are mainly (Z)-ligustilide, (Z)-butylidenephthalide, and (E)-butyl idenephthalide. It has been in use since the period of *Arthashastra* and references can also be seen in *Brihatrayi* and various *Nighantus* for *Mukha* and *Nasa roga chikitsa*. Ruthless uprooting of the plant from its natural habitat for its sale in the market has led to a considerable decline in its availability. This article deals with its distribution, its uses in *Ayurveda* with classical references, researches on its extracts, controversies and the threats faced by the plant.

Keywords: aromatic, broncho-relaxant, choraka, endangered, essential oil, himalayas

# INTRODUCTION

The Himalayan Range has always been of utmost importance to India. It is a spiritual abode, a border, a protective cover, reason for rainfall and replenishment of the River system of India. Ayurveda has considered the Himalayas as best among *Aushadha bhoomi*. This article deals with a Himalayan drug, *Choraka* aka *Choru* in the local language. *Choraka* i.e. *Angelica glauca Edgew*. of *Umbelliferae / Apiaceae* family, is a

critically endangered Himalayan perennial herb which has been included in IUCN red list (2013)<sup>1</sup>. Its aromatic and medicinal value is so immense that it is considered as one of the top three prioritized medicinal plants of Western Himalaya.<sup>2</sup> It is usually distributed at altitudes of 2000-4000 meters world-wide<sup>3</sup> with height ranging between 1.2 to 3.6 meters, having tuberous roots (20-50 cm thick and spongy). In the Indian sub-continent, it is an endemic medicinal plant of the Himalaya, which is distributed in Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> As the roots and seeds of Choraka are aromatic, they are used as a condiment and spice in hills and also as a flavoring agent in various food items. Local people use oil extracted from dried roots of Choraka for massage. They utilize its roots for preparation of local alcoholic drink for personal medicinal use. The roots are also used in the preparation of gin and the liqueurs known as bitters.<sup>5</sup> Choraka is collected by inhabitants of Western Himalaya from wild habitat as a source of food and medicine and is sold at the local and national level due to its huge market and medicinal value. The

unsustainable practice of uprooting the whole plant while collecting *Choraka* from its natural habitat has placed it in the list of critically endangered plants of the Himalayas. Researches have been performed for its in situ and ex situ conservation.<sup>6</sup> The aroma of *Choraka* is pungent with a sweet-bitter taste. The roots yield a pale to brownish-yellow essential oil. Roots can be collected and dried during September-October.<sup>7</sup>

#### Uses

The roots are known to be cardioactive and stimulant. Due to their carminative action, these are useful in stomach ailments of adults and children. These are expectorant, diaphoretic; and also used in rheumatism and urinary disorders.<sup>8</sup> The powdered roots mixed with cow's milk are used to treat bronchitis.<sup>9,10</sup> These are also used to cure bilious complaints, menorrhagia, infantile atrophy and rinderpest.<sup>11</sup> Recently, the popularity of *Angelica* has increased much in the United States. It is often acclaimed by herbalists as a treatment for flatulence, stomach pains and as a stimulant to stimulate circulation and warm the body.<sup>12</sup>

Choraka in Classics					
Pre Samhita Kaala					
Kautilya's Arthashastra	• <i>Kautilya</i> has referred <i>Choraka</i> as a type of spice and has included it in <i>Tikta varga</i> in Chapter 15 of <i>Arthashastra</i> dealing with The Superintendent of Storehouse. <sup>13</sup>				
Samhita Kaala					
Susruta Samhita	• Classified <i>Choraka</i> in <i>Eladi gana</i> as <i>Chanda</i> . <i>Dalhana</i> has commented it as <i>Choraka bheda</i> . <sup>14</sup>				
	• Mentioned Choraka as Taskara in making Anuvasana basti. <sup>15</sup>				
	• Mentioned as <i>Tilaparnika</i> (Commented as <i>Choraka</i> by <i>Dalhana</i> ) which is used for making <i>Krtanna</i> . <sup>16</sup>				
Charaka Samhita	<ul> <li>Included Choraka under Sanjnasthapana mahakashaya.<sup>17</sup> Charaka has used Choraka in various external applications for Kushta, Shirashoola<sup>18</sup> and Sheeta nashana. Here word Chanda is used instead of Choraka and is clarified by commentators Chakrapani and Yogendranath Sen.<sup>19</sup></li> </ul>				
	• Mentioned in fumigation of clothes, bedsheets and beds in <i>Kumaragara</i> with ghee. <sup>20</sup>				
	• Content of <i>Maha Paishachika Ghrta</i> in <i>Unmada</i> . <sup>21</sup> <i>Ghrta</i> made with <i>Choraka</i> has been used in <i>Unmada Chikitsa</i> <sup>22</sup> and <i>Vata Sleshmatmaka Apasmara Chikitsa</i> . <sup>23</sup>				
	• It is also being used as a <i>Taila</i> for <i>Abhyanga</i> , as a <i>Dhoopana dravya</i> <sup>24</sup> and also for <i>Utsadana</i> <sup>25</sup> in <i>Apasmara</i> .				
	• An ingredient in Shatyadi Churna in Hikka Shwasa Chikitsa. <sup>26</sup>				
	• Its Kashaya is used for making Utkarika in Madana Kalpa. <sup>27</sup>				

## Choraka in Classics

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	• It is mentioned along with <i>Dhamargava</i> for <i>Vamana</i> in <i>Manovikara</i> . <sup>28</sup>						
	<ul> <li>Mentioned in <i>Snehapana Vyapat</i>.<sup>29</sup></li> <li><i>Ashtanga Hridaya</i> has included <i>Choraka</i> under <i>Eladi Gana</i>. <i>Arunadatta</i> and <i>Hemadri</i> have commented it as <i>Granthiparna</i>.<sup>30</sup></li> <li>It is used for inhalation in <i>Pratishyaya</i> in <i>Nasaroga Pratishedha</i>.<sup>31,32</sup></li> </ul>						
Ashtanga Sangraha & Ashtanga Hridaya							
Kasyapa Samhita	• <i>Choraka</i> is mentioned along with other drugs for <i>Dhoopana</i> in <i>Moha</i> . <sup>33</sup>						
Nighantu Kaala							
Dhanvantri Nighantu <sup>34</sup>	Chandanadi varga						
Madanapala Nighantu	Karpooradi varga						
Sodhala Nighantu <sup>35</sup>	Chandanadi varga						
Raja Nighantu	Chandanadi varga						
Kaiyadeva Nighantu <sup>36</sup>	Aushadhi Varga						
Saligrama Nighantu <sup>37</sup>	Karpuradi varga						
Nighantu Adarsa	Eladi gana						
Bhavaprakasha Nighantu	Karpooradi varga						
Abhidhanamanjarai <sup>38</sup>	<ul> <li>Madanadi gana in Eladi Varga CH 31, As a synonym of Shathi and as synonym of Chanda</li> <li>In Shookadhanyadi varga as Sarvoushadhi varga</li> <li>Shati, Swetha Karpoora and Choraka are known as Ugra in Sankeerna varga in Tryartha Varga.</li> </ul>						
Abhidhanaratnamala <sup>39</sup>	Katu skandha						
Ashtanganighantu <sup>40</sup>	• Eladigana						
Madanadi nighantu <sup>41</sup>	Eladi ganam						
Saraswati Nighantu <sup>42</sup>	Chandanadi Varga						
Sousrutha Nighantu <sup>43</sup>	Eladi gana						

# Rasa panchaka according to different nighantus:

Nighantu	Rasa	Guna	Veerya	Vipaka	Karma
Dhanwantari	Tikta				Visharaktantakaraka, Kushta Kanduhara,
Nighantu					Vranahara, Krimihara, Vatahara
<i>Raja Nighantu</i> <sup>4</sup> 4	Tikta		Ushna		Vata kaphahara, Nasa mukha rogahara, Krimi
					hara, Rujahara, Ajeernahara
Kaiyyadeva	Madhura,	Laghu,		Katu	Hrdya, Kushtahara, Kanduhara, Kaphava-
Nighantu	Tikta, Katu	Tikshna			tahara, Rakshoghna, Swedahara, Medohara,
					Raktaja vikarahara, Jwarahara, Gandhahara,
					Vishahara, Vranahara
Madanapala	Madhura	Laghu	Sheeta		Kushtahara, Vata kaphahara, Asrajith
Nighantu <sup>45</sup>					
Shaligrama	Madhura,	Laghu,		Katu	Hrdya, Vata vikarahara, Kandu Kushtahara,
Nighantu	Tikta	Tikshna			Kaphahara, Swedahara, Twak doshahara,
					Vranahara, Medohara, Rakta doshahara,
					Mukha Nasarujahara, Krmharai, Ajeernaha-
					ra, Daurgandhyahara, Alakshmi nashanam

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# **Controversy:**

*Bhavaprakasha Nighantu* has included *Choraka (Bhateur)* under *Karpooradi Varga*. He mentions it as a controversial drug and as a variety of *Granthiparna*. Some have considered *Sthouneyaka* and *Choraka* as the same plant.<sup>46</sup>

#### Choraka in Ayurveda

Synonyms: Taskarah, Kshemaka, Chanda, Ripu, Kitava, Ganahasa, Kopanaka, Dushpatra, Shankhanika, Phalachoraka, Shukla, Ardrakanda, Granthikeshi, Keshini, Nishachari, Kshemika, Dhanya, Dhanavati, Vernacular name: Choru, Gandrayan (Hindi), Choraka Pullu (Malayalam), Gaddi Davanamu (Telugu). Properties and Action<sup>47</sup> Rasa: Madhura, Katu, Tikta, Guna: Laghu, Ruksha, Tikshna, Virya: Usna Vipaka: Katu, Karma: Vatahara, Kaphahara, Medohara, Hrdya, Samjnasthapana, Dipna, Pachana, Varnaprasadana, Vamaka Dose: 3 – 6 gms

Important Formulations: Guduchyadi modaka, Bala ashwagandhadi lakshadi taila, Maha narayana taila. It has been mentioned as Sheeta veerya in Kaiyyadeva Nighantu and Dhanwantari nighantu, but Ushna veerya in Raja nighantu. API has accepted it as Ushna veerya.

## Chemical constituents:

80% methanol extract of dried roots of plant: (Z)Lingustilide  $C_{12}H_{14}O_2$ , (Z)Butylidinephthalide  $C_{12}$ H12 O2, Methyl Octadecadionate C19 H24 O2, Caryophyllene C<sub>15</sub> H<sub>24</sub>, Caryophyllene Oxide C<sub>15</sub> H<sub>24</sub> O.<sup>48</sup> Essential oil: The essential oil of root is a pale yellow to a deep amber liquid having warm, pungent, and spicy odour with musty/earthy top note and bittersweet flavour. The yield of roots ranges from 0.3-0.4 %<sup>49</sup>. *Whole plant Hydrodistillation*: phellandrene (18.0%), pinene (14.0%), trans-carveol (16.4%), caryophyllene (8.6%), and caryophyllene oxide (8.0%).<sup>50</sup> parts Hydrodistillation;phellandrene Aerial (13.5%), trans-carveol (12.0%), pinene (11.7%), thujene (7.5%), caryophylleneoxide (7.2%), caryophyllene (7.0%), terpinene (6.7%), nerolidol (6.5%), and bisabolene (5.2%)<sup>51</sup>. Root Hydrodistillation; (Z)ligustilide (40.6–53.0%), (Z)-butylidenephthalide (20.7–32.8%), and (E)-butylidenephthalide (2.5– 5.9%)52

#### Pharmacological activities

- 1. Broncho relaxation: On evaluation of bronchorelaxant activity of A. glauca essential oil in histamine and ovalbumin (OVA)-induced broncho constriction in guinea pigs and mice respectively, it was found that its oral treatment (200  $\mu$ L/kg) significantly increased the latency for PCT in histamine-induced guinea pigs suggesting bronchodilating activity of *A. glauca* oil against histamine. Oral treatment of *A. glauca* oil significantly (P < 0.001) decreased absolute blood eosinophil count, serum level of IgE and the number of eosinophils, neutrophils in BALF.<sup>53</sup>
- Antioxidant activity: IC50 value 32.32 μg/mL of *A. glauca* oil exhibited considerable free radical scavenging activity. When DPPH scavenging ac- tivity of the oil was compared with synthetic anti-oxidant BHT, the oil provided weaker activity.
- 3. *Antimicrobial activity:* A sensitivity ordering of Escherichia coli > Staphylococcus aureus > Pasturella multocida > Bacillus subtilis was seen when oil of *A. glauca* was set for testing its antimicrobial activity. Overall, *A. glauca* oil possessed antibacterial activity comparable with the standard drug, Amoxycillin.
- Antifungal activity: Antifungal activity of oil from A. glauca was comparable with the standard drug (flumequinene). The order of sensitivity of selected fungal strains are Microsporum canis > Fusarium solani > Candida albicans > Aspergillus flavus.
- 5. *Phytotoxic activity*: The essential of oil of *A. glauca* shows good in vitro phytotoxic activity against Lemana minor. Six coumarins from *A. glauca* are reported by Saeed and Sabir that possess potential irritant and cytotoxic activities.
- 6. *Anxiolytic activity*: Methanolic extract of *A. glau-ca* was studied at graded doses to evaluate its anxiolytic activity which was assessed by behavioural observations conducted through elevated plus maze, open field and hole-board test and equated with control and standard control. Results showed that *A. glauca* possesses anxiolytic property.

# **Limiting Factors**

Currently, Choraka products are standardized and packaged and are available as crude plant parts (dried roots, stems, and seeds), or as semi-purified preparations (crude extracts, essential oils, and powder). Its dried rhizome is priced around Rs. 1500 per kg; and seeds are sold at a much higher price in Uttarakhand. In Himachal Pradesh, the turnout of A. glauca during was reduced from 9 tons (2002-2003) to 0.2 (2003-2004) ton indicating a rapid loss of this species in the wild. The excessive grazing by heavy body animals (buffalos, cows, and mules) has led to excessive soil erosion, destruction of natural vegetation, and its conversion into artificial grasslands. The peak grazing period of sub-Alpine and Alpine region is from May to September when in addition to local livestock, the migratory community (Gujjar) also goes in the region for grazing. This period corresponds to that of growth and seed maturation period of A. glauca. Therefore, in order to conserve the plant, there should be a balance between grazing in alpine areas and management of MAPs<sup>54</sup>. The economic viability of cultivation of A. glauca has also been assessed by benefit-cost ratio and was found that its cultivation could act as an additional source of income to the farmers, especially if they make their own vermicompost for its growth.55

# DISCUSSION

Choraka is a medicinal, aromatic plant with limited distribution to those of the Himalayas. Though it has many medicinal properties, on close examination, it can be noticed that it works mainly on Pranavaha srotas and Annavaha srotas. Its Ushna veerya and Katu vipaka makes it Vata kaphahara and Medohara. It can also be seen that its Gandhatva (Prithvi mahabhoota) is utilized more in its uses. It is reflected in its Samnjasthapana and Dourgandhyahara property. Its aromatic property also supports its use in Fumigation, Inhalation and Rakshoghna karma. While assessing the Vargeekarana in Nighantus, it can be seen that it is included under aromatic groups like Chandanadi Varga, Karpooradi varga and Eladi varga. Its aroma has led to the utilization of its essential oils with an average yield of 0.3-0.4%. Researches have been done, and much more has to be done in this direction. Its anti-microbial and antifungal activity may be the

reason for its use in fumigation and inhalation. Its Broncho relaxant activity corresponds to its use in Mukha nasa roga. Its anxiolytic activity supports its use in Unmada and Apasmara. Although it is a plant with high medicinal value, the Avurveda community is facing a shortage in its availability. Unscrupulous uprooting, grazing and availability of less suitable time for cultivation due to extremities of climate in the Himalayas have led to its inclusion in the endangered plant list. Studies are being conducted for its conservation and in vitro, in situ cultivation. Cultivation of Choraka by Himalayan farmers may also increase their income as it is highly priced in the market. Promoting agriculture can also help in meeting its increasing demand in Ayurveda medicine manufacturing industry.

## CONCLUSION

*Choraka* is a high-value plant with a variety of uses in medicine and perfumery. A balance between its cultivation and usage has to be maintained to prevent it from being extinct. More researches have to be done in its antipyretic action and its effects in skin disorders which have not been explored much even though it is mentioned in *Nighantus*.

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