

THERAPEUTIC USES OF VARAHIKANDA (*DIOSCOREA BULBIFERA* L.): A REVIEW
ARTICLEDr. Manisha¹ and Dr. Naresh Kumar Garg^{*2}¹PG Scholar Deptt of Dravyaguna Vigyan, Sriganaganagar College of Ayurvedic Science & Hospital, Tantia University, Sriganaganagar – 335001, India.²Associate Professor Deptt of Dravyaguna Vigyan, Sriganaganagar College of Ayurvedic Science & Hospital, Tantia University, Sriganaganagar – 335001, India.***Corresponding Author: Dr. Naresh Kumar Garg**

Associate Professor Deptt of Dravyaguna Vigyan, Sriganaganagar College of Ayurvedic Science & Hospital, Tantia University, Sriganaganagar – 335001, India.

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ABSTRACT

Traditional medicine forms an integral part of health care system in many countries. According to WHO statistics, about 25% of the medicines are derived from plants. 80% people still depend upon traditional system of medicine. The practice of traditional medicine is based on hundreds of years of belief and observation, which originated much before the development of the modern medicine. The knowledge of traditional medicine throws light on the discovery of new and potent medicine. Systematic documentation is lacking for many medicinal plants in India. Varahikanda (*Dioscorea bulbifera* L.) possesses profound therapeutically potency, belongs to the family *Dioscoreaceae* which includes 9 genera and 220 species which are distributed in tropical and warm temperate regions. It is attributed with *Vrushya* (Aphrodisiac), *Balya* (Strength promoting), *Rasayana* (Rejuvenative) karmas. Review highlights on all the classical references of *Varahikanda*.

KEYWORDS: *Dioscorea bulbifera*, *Dioscoreaceae*, *Vrushya*, *Balya*, *Rasayana*.**INTRODUCTION**

Plants are one of the main sources of medicine since time immemorial. Ayurveda the science of life emphasizes on use of plants and strongly envisages that each and every dravya in the universe possesses medicinal property. Utilization of nature's wealth for prevention and cure of diseases plays a big role in human civilization, with a dependency of large number of human population on herbs, particularly in developing countries. The amazing journey of Ayurveda from its divine origin to the present day has left us wondering about the enormous potential this science possesses. Its successful existence itself proves the value and the unique basic principles re-main eternal.

Interest in Ayurveda, has increased substantially in both developed and developing countries over the past two decades. Plants have been used as medicine extensively. Its diverse healing modalities for millennia for anything from external to internal infections, mental and emotional imbalances have increased the demand of plant based products. With onset of scientific research in herbals, it is becoming clearer that the medicinal herbs have a potential in today's synthetic era, as number of medicines are becoming resistant. 60% of synthetic medicines owe their origin to plants. Ancient knowledge coupled with scientific principles can come to the

forefront and provide us with powerful remedies to eradicate the diseases. One such less explored drug is *Varahikanda* (*Dioscorea bulbifera* Linn.) which possesses profound therapeutical potency attributed with *Vrushya* (Aphrodisiac), *Balya* (strength promoting), *Rasayana* (Rejuvenative) karmas. *Diosgenin* obtained from *Dioscorea* species is one of the major sources for the commercial production of corticosteroids and steroidal contraceptives. This plant is found in Western ghats, North-Eastern region and Indo-Burma region. It is cultivated in all the states in India and the major yam producing states are Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Tamilnadu, Assam, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra

Classical Review of Varahi-Kanda

The word "varaa" means *sasya* (plant) and "aahanti" is that which destroys whatever comes in its way. Varaha is an animal which destroys the plants in its way. *kanda* means tuber. *Varahakanda* is the tuber which is liked by the pigs.

Samhita Kala

Acharya *Charaka* in the context of *Unmada* (psychological disorder) Chikitsa, mentions *Shukari* as one of the ingredients of Mahapaishacha Ghrita and *Chakrapani* commenting on this says *Shukari* is *Varahikanda*. Acharya *Sushruta* has included *Varahakanda*

in kanda varga and explains the qualities of *Varahakanda*. Dalhana commenting on this says *Varahakanda* is famous by the name *Bakaluka*. It is also called as *Vaarahi* and *Gristika*. Acharya *Sushruta* in *Nivratasantapiya rasayana adhyaya*, includes *Varahi* among the ash-tadasha somasamaveerya aushadha and described it as a tuber having the capacity to regenerate and looks like a black snake. Acharya *Vagbhata* has mentioned *Pindaaluka* in *Annaswarupavijnaniya adhyaya* where *Arunadatta* in his commentary mentions *Pindaalu* as *Varahikanda*. *Vaktraalu*, *Shabarakanda*, *Mulakamulabha*, *Twakchadha* are the synonyms.

Nighantu Kala

Nighantus like *Dhanvatari*, *Shodala*, *Hridayadeepika*, *Madanapala*, *Rajanighantu* and *Kaiyadeva* have mentioned *Varahikanda*. Author of *Siddhamantra* placed *Varahi* in *kaphavatagna pittala varga*. *Kaiyadeva* describes the tuber of *Varahikanda* as that which is similar to the testes of the pig in shape and possesses leaves like *taambula patra*. *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu* has mentioned *Varahikanda* as *prathinidhidravya* of *Ruddhi* and *Vruddhi*. The shape of the kanda resembles the head of the pig. It is also called by the name *Charmakaraluka* and *Gristika*. *Varahikandadi varga* has been mentioned in *Nighantu Adarsha*.

Varieties of Varahikanda

According to *Kaiyadeva nighantu* types of *varahikanda* are.

1. *Shabarakanda*
2. *Kharakanda*
3. *Snukchadopama*
4. *Kiri*
5. *Mulakamulabha*
6. *Shoukara*
7. *Vadavaanala*

Substitutes and Adulteration

Vrinda madhava mentions *Charmakaralu-ka* as substitute for *Varahikanda*.

Controversy

The controversy of *Varahi* might have started with the word *Aaluka*. The word *Aaluka* has been mentioned in *Charaka Samhita* as well as *Sushruta Samhita*. Acharya *Charaka* has told *Aluka* as *ahitatama* among the kanda and Acharya *Sushruta* has mentioned *aluka* in *kanda varga* and has given 6 varieties of *Aluka*. Both the commentators of *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhitas* have given limited information regarding the morphological descriptions about these varieties. Acharya *P.V. Sharma* has correlated the varieties mentioned in *Sushruta* and *Rajanighantu* with different species of *Dioscorea*. The creeper of *Varahi* has leaves similar to *betel-leaves (taambula patra sadrashah)*. Many bulbils are present on its stem. It has flowers like *Sarja* and *Arjuna*. Shape of the tubers resembles the head of *Varaha* and the tubers are covered with hairs. Tubers have bitter and pungent tastes. They are aromatic like *Lotus*. The vines are found

in the forests and mountains. As per *Dr. Bapalal Vaidya* there should not be any controversy in identifying *Dioscorea* species. *Dioscorea bulbifera*, *Dioscorea pentaphylla* either of the two should be fixed as *Varahikanda*. *Dr. V.G Desai* has given *Tacca aspera* *Roxb* as *Varahikanda*.

Identity of Different Species of Dioscorea

The confusion regarding the identity and nomenclature of the Indian species particularly the cultivated species of *Dioscorea* has been largely resolved by the work of *Prain and Burkill*. These authors have classified the genus into 2 broad divisions.

1. Stem twining to the right

- *Dioscorea alata*
- *Dioscorea glabra*
- *Dioscorea oppositifolia*

2. Stem twining to the left

- *Dioscorea esculenta*
- *Dioscorea bulbifera*
- *Dioscorea pentaphylla*
- *Dioscorea hispida*

Amayika Prayoga

- *Varahi choorna* mixed with *taila* is applied externally in *naadi vrana (S.Chi)*.
- *Varahikanda choorna* along with *madhu* is consumed internally every day for one month followed with *ksheera* and *shaali bhojana*, acts as *rasayana (S.U)*.
- *Varahikanda siddha ghrita* with-*Draksha*, *Masha*, *Ashwagandha*, *Kadaliphala* and *Vamsalochana* is indicated in *stree roga* and *Asthi roga (S.Y.)*.
- *Varahyadi Ghrita* along with *sugar* and *honey* given internally relieves *yoni roga (S.Y)*.
- *Varahyadi ghrita* used for *bastikarma* in *yoni rogas (S.Y)*.

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