

# THE TRUE IDENTITY OF *AMṚTOTTARAM* *KAṢĀYAM*: EARLY MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE ON THE RATIO OF INGREDIENTS

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam* is a widely prescribed polyherbal Ayurvedic recipe with *Nāgara* (*Zingiber officinale*), *Amṛtā* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), and *Harītakī* (*Terminalia chebula*) in the ratio of 2:6:4 or 1:3:2, thus satisfying the meaning of its name as the ‘one with a predominance [in quantity] for *Amṛtā*’. The widely cited reference for this recipe is the *Sahasrayoga*, where most editions describe the recipe titled *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam* as having the specific ratio widely accepted as that of the *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*. The possibility of varied interpretations of the phrase ‘*Nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ*’ has led to controversy over whether the *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam* cited in the *Sahasrayoga* could indeed be considered the *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*. This article uses a critical edition of the verse and a commentary seen in some manuscripts of the *Sahasrayoga* to elicit an alternate method of interpreting the above said phrase to deduce the ratio of ingredients. **Materials and Methods:** Four manuscripts (with sigla O, C<sup>1</sup>, C<sup>2</sup>, and C<sup>3</sup>) from two collections of manuscripts (Oḷāśśa family and Calicut University), along with the vulgate print edition of A S Gopala Pillai (S), were used to prepare the critical edition. **Discussion and Conclusion:** The commentary contained in the manuscripts of *Sahasrayoga* uses three different meanings of the word ‘*Nāga*’ (*Nara*, *Triphaṇisarpa* and *Gaja*) to qualify *Hasta*, *Nayana* and *Āṅghri*. Thus, the number of *Narahasta* (hands of a man) indicates the ratio of *Nāgara* (2), the number of *Triphaṇisarpanayana* (eyes of a three-hooded serpent) indicates the ratio of *Amṛtā* (2x3=6) and the number of *Gajāṅghri* (legs of an elephant) indicates the ratio of *Harītakī* (4). This commentary offers a simple and less convoluted interpretation of the meaning of the word ‘*Nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ*’ to reach the widely accepted ratio of ingredients of the *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*.

**Keywords:** *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*, *Nāgarādi Kaṣāyam*, Critical Edition, Manuscripts, Ratio of ingredients

## 1. Introduction

*Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam* is a widely prescribed polyherbal Ayurvedic recipe. The most common dosage form of this recipe is as a decoction (*Kvātha*), while new dosage forms such as ‘*Kashayam Tablet*’ and ‘*Fine Powder*’ (*Sūkṣmakaṣāyacūrṇa*) are also becoming popular. Its ingredients are *Nāgara* (*Zingiber officinale*), *Amṛtā* (*Tinospora cordifolia*) and *Harītakī* (*Terminalia chebula*) in the corresponding ratios of 2:6:4 (which can be further simplified as 1:3:2). Although most pharmaceutical companies cite the *Sahasrayoga* as a reference for this recipe, the vulgate edition of the *Sahasrayoga* does not contain a recipe titled as *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*. In this text, a certain *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam* with the same ingredients in the ratios corresponding to the number of *Hasta* (hands), *Nayana* (eyes) and *Āṅghri* (legs) of *Nāga* (elephant) is, in turn, interpreted as *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*.<sup>[1]</sup> Varied opinions on the interpretation and number of *Nāga*, *Hasta*, *Nayana* and *Āṅghri* exist. Apart from the *Sahasrayoga*, a few other texts, such as the *Cikitsāmañjarī*<sup>[2]</sup> and the

*Sarvarogacikitsāratna*<sup>[3]</sup> have recipes with the same ingredients in the ratio mentioned above. This article attempts to address the various interpretations of the ingredient ratios in *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*, including ancient manuscript evidence.

### 1.1 Name of the Recipe

Several questions, including the meaning of the name *Amṛtottaram*, are of interest here. According to the Monnier Williams dictionary,<sup>[4]</sup> the word *uttara* can mean ‘the most higher’, ‘superior’, ‘excellent’, or ‘dominant’. This indicates that the recipe in which *Amṛtā* is the most dominant ingredient may be called *Amṛtottaram*. Whether this so-called ‘dominance’ refers to quantity or quality is, however, not specified in the recipe’s textual descriptions. In all texts, *amṛtā* is indeed the most dominant ingredient in terms of quantity.

### 1.2 Recipes Considered as Amṛtottaram Kaṣāyam

In the *Sahasrayogam*, the following recipe, listed as *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam*, set in the *Rathoddhatā* metre, is widely considered as *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*.

*nāgarāmṛtaharītakī kramāt nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ |*  
*sādhūsiddham udakam saśarkaram nāśayaty akhiladoṣajam jvaram ||*

In the *Cikitsāmañjarī*, the following recipe is cited as *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*.

*amṛtāru kaḷaṅcākkī recakī nālkaḷaṅcāy*  
*akhilam irukaḷaṅcāy koṇṭu pakvam kaṣāyam |*  
*guḍalavaṇasametam tad pibed āśu tīrum*  
*paniyoṭu malasaṅgam vīkkavum kāmīlā ca ||*

In the *Sarvarogacikitsāratnam*, a recipe with the same ingredients and ratio is mentioned for inducing purgation in patients with *jvara*.

*amṛtāru kaḷaṅcākkū nāl kaḷaṅcu kaṭukkayum |*  
*cukku raṇṭu kaṣāyattāl vireccicolīyum jvaram ||*

### 1.3 Ratios of Ingredients in amṛtottaram kaṣāyam

Almost all commentaries on the recipe agree on the ratio of 1:3:2 for *Nāgara*, *Amṛtā* and *Harītakī*. An exception is Edakkāṭ Narayanan Vaidyar, who opines that the *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam* described in the *Sahasrayoga* cannot be considered as *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*.<sup>[5]</sup> This ratio is clearly described in the Malayalam and Maṇipravāḷam verses described in the *Sarvarogacikitsāratnam* and the *Cikitsāmañjarī*. However, the literary device used in the Sanskrit verse to describe this ratio in the *Sahasrayogam* has brought forth the varied interpretations that are of interest to us here.

### 1.4 The Meaning of nāga

The term ‘*Nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ*’ is at the source of all varied interpretations. Before attempting to understand the compound, the word *Nāga* and what it implies must be understood. According to Monnier Williams’ Sanskrit dictionary, *Nāga* can refer to either a snake or an elephant. It can also indicate number seven, as the text *Sūryasiddhānta* uses it to denote seven.<sup>[6]</sup>

### 1.5 Interpretation 1 of the Compound word ‘nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ’

This compound word can be interpreted by considering either the first word (*Nāga*) or the last word (*Āṅghribhāgaśaḥ*) as the qualifier for the remaining words. In this case, the word *Nāga* qualifies *Hasta*, *Nayana*, and *Āṅghri*, resulting in the words *Nāgahasta*, *Nāganayana*, and *Nāgāṅghri*, meaning the hand, eyes, and feet of the elephant. If *Nāga* is understood to mean ‘elephant’, then the ratio would correspond to the elephant's trunk, eyes, and legs. The elephant's lone proboscis (*Tumbikkai*) serves the function of a hand (*Hasta*). The elephant has two eyes (*Nayana*) and four legs (*Āṅghri*), being a quadruped. This results in the ratio of 1 (*Hasta*): 2 (*Nayana*): 4 (*Āṅghri*) for *Nāgara*, *Amṛtā*, and *Harītakī*. However, this makes the quantity of *Amṛtā* (2 parts) smaller than that of *Harītakī* (4 parts), and therefore, does not qualify to bear the name *Amṛtottaram*. This is the reason for Eṭakkāṭ Narayanan Vaidyar to opine that the recipe mentioned above cannot be considered as *Amṛtottaram* and should merely be referred to as *Nāgarādi kaṣāyam*.

## 1.6 Interpretation 2

If *Nāga* is considered as an elephant, and the *Aṅghribhāga* (quarter or  $\frac{1}{4}$ ) is taken as qualifying the *Nāga*, [*Nāga*] *Hasta* and [*Nāga*] *Nayana*, the resulting ratio will be  $\frac{1}{4} : \frac{1}{4} : \frac{1}{2}$ , which is essentially 1:1:2, and therefore, does not yield the generally accepted ratio of 2:6:4 (or 1:3:2) for *Nāgara*, *Amṛtā* and *Harītakī*.

## 1.7 Interpretation 3

Most other interpretations of the ratio depend on how *Nāga* and *Nāgahasta* are interpreted. Anekkaleelil S. Gopala Pillai, in his *Sujanapriyā* commentary, does not clearly describe the methods by which he arrived at the specific ratio of 1:3:2 for the respective ingredients. Kaimal,<sup>[8]</sup> Goureesakar<sup>[9]</sup> and Varier<sup>[10]</sup> agree that the ratio is indeed 2:6:4 (or 1:3:2). Each of them also argues that the word *Aṅghribhāga* (a quarter) qualifies the words *Nāga*, *Hasta* and *Nayana*, indicating the ratios of *Nāgara*, *Amṛtā* and *Harītakī*. In this aspect, their method of interpretation is the same as the second interpretation listed above. The major difference in their method is their argument that *Nāga* should be taken to mean the number eight, as in the mythical ‘eight elephants guarding the eight directions’ (*Aṣṭadiggajāḥ* San.). However, this again throws up a problem if the *Hasta* is considered as the lone proboscis of the elephant. The word *Hasta*, naturally, will mean the *Hasta* of *Aṣṭadiggaja* or eight mythical elephants, and the ratio will be the quarter (*Aṅghribhāga*) of eight, i.e., 4 for the ingredient *Amṛtā* (which, originally, should be 6). However, to reach the intended number of 6, they have considered the two frontal legs of the elephant along with its proboscis as *Hasta*, bringing the total number of hasta to three instead of one (i.e., taking the proboscis alone as the elephant's hand). Thus, for the eight mythical elephants (*Aṣṭadiggaja*), the total number of *Hasta* will be twenty-four. Similarly, the count of eyes, two for each elephant, stands at a total of sixteen. The *aṅghribhāga*, or quarter of eight, twenty-four and sixteen, will then stand as 2:6:4, thus satisfying the generally accepted ratios for *Nāgara*, *Amṛtā* and *Harītakī* in *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*.

It is evident from the above three cases that two of the above interpretations do not yield the generally accepted ratio of the *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*. The third one achieves this end by a contorted interpretation of *Nāgahasta* by including the proboscis and two front legs of the elephant as *Hasta* (hands). One naturally wishes that there existed a simpler solution to this problem. It is, therefore, worthwhile to explore alternate interpretations of its ratio of ingredients in ancient manuscript sources of the *Sahasrayogam*.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Manuscript Evidences on the Recipe of *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*

It is valuable to analyse how ancient literary sources of the *Sahasrayogam* describe the ratio of ingredients in the *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*. The various printed editions of the *Sahasrayogam* are curated by their respective editors and differ significantly in the number of recipes and the order in which they are presented. For instance, the vulgate edition with the *sujanapriyā* commentary by Anekkalili S. Gopāla Pillai contains a total of 955 recipes across 10 categories. The *vaidyapriyā* commentary by Kṛṣṇan Vaidyan includes 1198 recipes in 10 categories,<sup>[11]</sup> while Eṭakkāṭu Nārāyaṇan Vaidyar's edition has 1067 recipes. The English translation of the *Sahasrayoga* by Dr K Nishteshwar and Dr R Vidyanath features 626 recipes described in 11 categories.<sup>[12]</sup> The number of recipes in manuscripts also shows considerable variation. This situation suggests that the text of the *Sahasrayogam* has experienced multiple stages of literary development, resulting in the diverse states of its manuscripts and editions.

The *Sahasrayogam* survives in many manuscripts in both large public manuscript repositories and private collections. An exhaustive survey of all such manuscript evidence was not feasible. Therefore, a preliminary survey of the *Sahasrayoga* manuscripts in two collections, a large public collection at the University of Calicut and a smaller private collection at the Olaśśa family in Kottayam was done, with special reference to the recipe of *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*. Four manuscripts from these two collections contain a commentary on the

recipe of *Amṛtottaraṃ kaṣāyam*. These manuscripts are used here to produce a critical edition of the respective verse and its commentary. The physical descriptions and sigla of the manuscripts (given in round brackets) are given below.

### 2.1.1 The Olaśśa Manuscript (O)

This is a part of a manuscript collection deposited at the house of Olaśśa Müss at Kottayam, Kerala. It is a palm leaf manuscript with accession number 199. A copy of this manuscript was manually accessed with the kind permission of Olaśśa Narayanan Müss, the current owner of the collection.

#### Physical Description

This palm-leaf manuscript comprises 38 folios. The accurate dimensions are not known. It is in Old Malayalam script, incomplete, and slightly damaged by worms. There are about nine lines in each folio and about forty-three *akṣaras* in each line. The date of its composition is unknown, as the colophon is missing. It is written in a single hand.

### 2.1.2 Manuscript at the Manuscript Library at Calicut University (C<sup>1</sup>)

This manuscript is part of the collection currently deposited at the Thunchan Memorial Manuscript Library at Calicut University with accession number 3761. The manuscript was manually accessed and transcribed with the library's kind permission for the current article.

#### Physical Description

This palm-leaf manuscript comprises 115 folios. The accurate dimensions are not known. It is in Old Malayalam script, incomplete, and slightly damaged. There are about seven lines in each folio and about twenty-eight *Akṣaras* in each line. The date of its composition is unknown, as the colophon is missing. It is written in a single hand.

### 2.1.3 Manuscript at the Manuscript Library at Calicut University (C<sup>2</sup>)

This manuscript is also part of the collection currently deposited at the Thunchan Memorial Manuscript Library at Calicut University. The current accession number is 3757. The manuscript was manually accessed and transcribed with the library's kind permission for the current article.

#### Physical Description

This palm-leaf manuscript comprises 59 folios. The accurate dimensions are not known. It is in Old Malayalam script, legible, incomplete, and in a much better condition than C<sup>1</sup>. There are about eight lines in each folio and about thirty-five *Akṣaras* in each line. The date of its composition is unknown, as the colophon is missing. It is written in a single hand.

### 2.1.4 Manuscript at the Manuscript Library at Calicut University (C<sup>3</sup>)

This manuscript is also a part of the collection currently deposited at the Thunchan Memorial Manuscript Library at Calicut University with accession number 3537. The manuscript was manually accessed and transcribed with the library's kind permission for the current article.

#### Physical Description

This palm-leaf manuscript comprises 123 folios. The accurate dimensions are not. It is in Old Malayalam script, legible, incomplete, and in a better state of preservation. There are about nine lines in each folio and about thirty-six *Akṣaras* in each line. The date of its composition is unknown, as the colophon is missing. It is written in a single hand.

The Vulgate edition of the *Sahasrayogam* of A. Gopala Pillai is also included in the critical edition of the relevant passages. A brief description of the edition is given below.

### 2.1.5 Sahasrayogam with Sujanapriyāvyākhyāna by A. Gopala Pillai (S)

This edition, published by Vidyarambham Publishers, first came out in the year --. There are 955 number of recipes explained under 10 categories. Additionally, this edition includes the texts *Nidānam*, *Guṇapāṭham*, and *Dhārākālpam*, written in Malayalam. The editor does not give any information on the source manuscripts or other unknown editions used during the edition.

## 2.2 Editorial Policy

The edition provides the constituted text of the verse and commentary of *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*, along with the variants found in the manuscript sources in the lone critical apparatus. Since parallel verses, such as those in the *Cikitsāmañjarī* and *Sarvarogacikitsāratnam*, have been discussed elsewhere in the article, the present critical apparatus has chosen to omit them. The verse is not numbered in any of the manuscript witnesses and therefore has been left without a verse number. The apparatus is positive, with agreeing and disagreeing witnesses fully shown. The relevant constituted text is shown as a lemma and is identified by the number of the verse quarter (e.g., 1a or 1c). The agreeing witnesses are described first, and the disagreeing variant is shown with its respective siglum following a semi-colon. Variants are separated by a bold diamond (♦) sign. In the constituted text, *Danḍas* have been used instead of periods. Variants arising from orthographical peculiarities of the Malayalam script, such as the doubling of consonants and substitutions (e.g., between *va* and *ba*, *la* and *ḷa*, *ra* and *ḷa*, *t* and *ḷ*), are generally ignored.

### Symbols

- ]: lemma sign
- < >: a corrective insertion (interlinear or marginal) made by the same scribe.
- < a >: a correction of alphabet ‘a’ in the manuscript, probably made by the same scribe.
- om.: omission or omitted

## 2.3 Critical edition of the verse

*nāgarāmṛtaharītakī kramāt nāgahastanayanāṅghribhāgaśaḥ |*

*sādhūsiddhamudakaṃ saśarkaraṃ nāśayed akhiladoṣajaṃ jvaram ||*

1a. *nāgarā°*] SOC<sup>12</sup>; *nāgara°* C<sup>3</sup> ♦ 1a. *harītakī*] SC<sup>123</sup>; *h<a>rītakī* O ♦ 1d. *nāśayaed*] OC<sup>13</sup>; *nāśayaty* SC<sup>2</sup>

## 2.4 Critical edition of the commentary

*atra nāgaśabdena naras triphaṇisarpo gajaś ca grhyate | tatra narasya dvau hastau iti nāgarasya dvau bhāgau kalpyau | triphaṇinas sarpasya ṣaḍ nayanāni syuḥ iti ṣaḍbhāgā amṛtā | gajasyāṅghrayaś catvāraḥ iti caturbhāgā harītakī |*

1. *nāga°*] O; *nāgara* C<sup>13</sup>; *nāgarasya* C<sup>2</sup> ♦ *gajaś*] OC<sup>12</sup>; *gajañ* C<sup>3</sup> ♦ 2. *narasya dvau hastau*] OC<sup>13</sup>; *om.* C<sup>2</sup> ♦ *dvau*] OC<sup>13</sup>; *dvau dvau* C<sup>2</sup> ♦ *kalpyau*] C<sup>1</sup>; *kalpau* O; *iti kathyau* C<sup>2</sup>; *om.* C<sup>3</sup> ♦ *nayanāni*] OC<sup>13</sup>; *nayanā* C<sup>2</sup> ♦ *catur°*] C<sup>123</sup>; *catvāra°* O

## 2.5 Translation of the Commentary

Here, by the term *Nāga*, a man, a three-hooded snake and an elephant are meant. Since the man has two hands, the dried ginger (*Nāgara*) must be considered as two parts (of the total). Since there are six eyes for the three-hooded snake, the Heart-leaved moonseed (*Amṛtā*) is six parts. Since the elephant has four legs, the Chebulic myrobalan (*Harītakī*) is [considered as] four parts.

## 3. Discussion and Conclusion

Manuscript evidence shows that early physicians used a different method to determine the ingredient ratios for *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam*. Among the three interpretations discussed earlier, only the last one provides the specific ratio of 2:6:4. However, this requires the elephant's frontal legs to be interpreted as hands. It is interesting to note that the commentary of the verse also considers the elephant as a quadruped and takes this number as indicating the ratio of *Harītakī*. The commentary contained in the manuscripts of *Sahasrayogam* uses three different meanings of the word ‘*Nāga*’ (*Nara*, *Triphaṇisarpa* and *Gaja*) to qualify *Hasta*, *Nayana* and *Āṅghri*. Thus, the number of *Narahasta* (hands of a man) indicates the ratio of *Nāgara* (2), the number of *Triphaṇisarpanayana* (eyes of a three-hooded serpent) indicates the ratio of *Amṛtā* (2x3=6) and the number of *Gajāṅghri* (legs of an elephant) indicates the ratio of *Harītakī* (4). The textual source for these three

interpretations is still unknown. However, this interpretation provides the accepted ratio of the *Amṛtottaram kaṣāyam* in a much simpler and straightforward manner.

The fact that even very early sources of *Sahasrayogam* had unambiguously specified a particular ratio of ingredients points to the fact that the intended clinical effect was well thought out. Giving precedence to a *Pācana* drug (*Amṛtā*) instead of a *Virecana* drug (*Haritakī*) changes the pharmacological profile of the recipe completely. A survey among clinicians regarding their clinical experiences connected with varying ratios of the three ingredients may be worthwhile and will probably shine light on other possible clinical situations where such variations could be brought to use.

In conclusion, it could be said that the interpretation of the verse preserved in old manuscript sources of the *Sahasrayogam* proves superior to the later interpretations seen in the modern commentaries of the *Sahasrayogam*.

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