

Research Article

Aftīmūn (*Cuscuta Reflexa* Roxb): Identification, Therapeutic Applications and Scientific Exploration - A Review

Mohd Afsahul Kalam¹, Snober Khan², Bisma Ashraf³, Mohammad Uvais⁴, Toyiba Ibrahim⁵, Naureen Naqqash⁶

¹Research Officer Unani, Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Habak, Naseembagh Campus, Hazratbal Srinagar Jammu & Kashmir, India.

^{2,3,4,5,6}PG Scholar, Department of Ilmu Advia, Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Habak, Naseembagh Campus, Hazratbal Srinagar Jammu & Kashmir, India.

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I N F O

Corresponding Author:

Snober Khan, Department of Ilmu Advia, Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Habak, Naseembagh Campus, Hazratbal Srinagar Jammu & Kashmir, India.

E-mail Id:

snoberkhan425@gmail.com

Orcid Id:

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8961-4646>

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A B S T R A C T

Aftīmūn is one of the important Unani medicine. It is a golden yellow parasitic climber. It encompasses several types, including *Aftīmūn Hindi* (*Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb.), *Aftīmūn Vilāyatī* (*Cuscuta europaea* L.), and *Aftīmūn Chīnī* (*Cuscuta chinensis* Lam). *Aftīmūn Hindi* (*Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb.) is locally known as *Akāshbel* or *Amarbel*. In Unani medicine, it is mentioned to have a wide variety of actions to treat various ailments, particularly significant for neurological and psychiatric conditions. Key phytoconstituents of *Cuscuta reflexa* include amarbelin, kaempferol, and beta-sitosterol. Recent research highlights its diverse therapeutic potentials, such as anticonvulsant, anxiolytic, hepatoprotective, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory properties. This paper aims to provide detailed information regarding its therapeutic applications as described in Unani literature and scientific studies done on this plant.

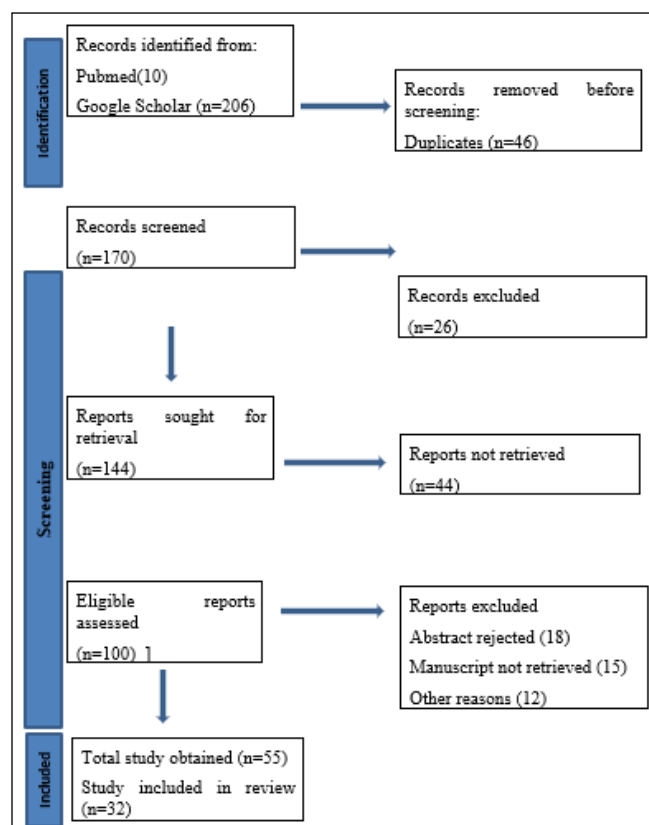
Keywords: *Aftīmūn*, Anti-Anxiety, *Akāshbel*, *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb, *Dāfī'-i-Amrāḍ-i-Sawdāwī*, Unani Medicine

Introduction

Aftimūn is a Unani medicine that is extensively used in various ailments all over the world. It has many types including *Aftimūn Hindi* (*Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb), *Aftimūn Vilāyatī* (*Cuscuta europaea* L.), *Aftimūn Chīnī* (*Cuscuta Chinensis* Lam.), *Cuscuta australis* R. Br., *Cuscuta tinctoria* Mart, and *Cuscuta epithymum* L.¹ *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. is commonly called *Aftimūn* or *Kashūth* and its seeds are called *Tukhm-i-Kashūth*. In subtropical and temperate regions of the world, almost 170 species of *Cuscuta* are distributed.² According to Unani literature, *Aqretishi Aftimūn* found in *Aqretish* is considered the best *Aftimūn* and is known as *Qareti*. Muqadasi *Aftimūn* follows *Qareti Aftimūn*. According to Ibn Sina, *Aftimūn* has good taste and reddish seeds. *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. is a golden yellow thread-like parasitic climber of the Convolvulaceae family.³ It is also known as *Akāshbel*.⁴ It is commonly found throughout India up to 3000 m⁵. It has no roots and leaves but has a thin delicate stem and yields flowers, fruits, and seeds.³ It is found on various bushes and trees covering them completely.⁶ The climber growing on *Mangifera indica* has been found to contain mangiferin.⁵ It grows during rainy seasons on the same plant.⁶ Its actions like *Muḥallil* (anti-inflammatory), *Mufattiḥ* (deobstruent), *Mushil-i-Akhlāt Thalātha* (purgative of three humours), *Musakkīn-i-Alam* (analgesic and sedative) *Muṣaffī-i-Dam* (blood purifier), *Kāsir-i-Riyāḥ* (carminative) are similar but more potent than *Hāsha* (wild mint).⁴ In the Unani System of Medicine (USM), *Cuscuta reflexa* is one of the most important medicines that are used for the management of various diseases and specifically for neurological and psychiatric disorders. It can be used as *Mufrad* (single herb) in the form of powder, decoction, concoction, etc. or as one of the important ingredients in *Murakkab* (compound formulation).³ Various studies on *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. have been done, like anticonvulsant,⁷ anti-anxiety,⁸ hepatoprotective, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory,² due to the presence of various phytoconstituents like flavonoids e.g. amarbelin, kaempferol, luteolin, phytosterols like beta-sitosterol, glycoside like, bergenin, cuscutin and alkaloids like indole, isoquinoline, pyrrolidine.^{1,5,9} This review is compiled to provide the medicinal importance of *Aftimūn* concerning Unani medicine and recent scientific studies.

Material and Methods

All available classical textbooks were searched for the literature review with the keywords *Cuscuta reflexa*, *Aftimūn*, *Dodder*, *Akāshbel* in Unani medicine. Additionally, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and PubMed were also searched for the same. 7 review articles (2015–2024), 11 research articles (2003–2022), 8 books (1992–2014), 4 herbal compendia (2001–2022), one chapter (2015) and 1 website were taken into consideration for data generation and analysis.



Flow diagram of the study selection process. After screening 170 records, 32 studies were included in the final review.

Observation/ Result

Taxonomic Classification

- Kingdom: Plantae¹⁰
- Division: Angiosperms¹⁰
- Class: Eudicots¹⁰
- Order: Solanales¹⁰
- Family: Convolvulaceae³
- Genus: *Cuscuta*¹⁰
- Species: *C. reflexa*¹⁰

Mutarādifāt (Vernacular Names)

- Arabic: *Dawā al-Junūn*, *Sha'r al-Zabīḥa*, *Aftimūn*, *Kashūth*,^{6,11} *Shajar al-Sabagh*¹²
- English: Air creeper, Dodder, Devil's hair, Love vine, Lady's laces, Witch's hair, Wizard's net, Devil's gut, Devil's ringlet, Gold thread, Hailweed, Hairweed, Hellbine, Strangleweed, Strangle tare, Scaldweed^{13–17}
- Gujarati: *Akaswel*¹⁸
- Hindi: *Akāshbel*, *Amarbel*¹⁸
- Kashmiri: *Kokliport*¹⁹
- Marathi: *Nirmuli*⁶
- Persian: *Darakht-i-Pechan*⁶
- Sanskrit: *Amarvila*, *Asparsa*⁶

Wajah Tasmiya (Nomenclature)

The genus name “*Cuscuta*” means covering or clothing and “*reflexa*” means “to bent or turn around”, as the plant completely covers the host tree by whirling around the branches. As it encircles the tree branches (Figure 1(a)), it is known as *Darakht Pechan*. It is called *Akashbel*, *Akaswel*, *Amarbel*, *Amarvila*, and air creeper as the plant grows high on various trees and has no roots. It is also known as *Dawā al-Junūn* due to its beneficial effects on mania (*Junūn*). Its dried branches resemble the hair of a slaughtered animal so, it is called as *Sha'r al-Zabiḥa*. Due to its appearance as tangled hair, it is known as Devil's hair and Witch's hair. The fresh plant looks like a yellow golden thread, so hence called “golden thread” (Figures 1(b), 1(c), and 1(d)). A bunch of dried *Aftīmūn* (Figures 1(e) and 1(f)) in the market resembles Koel's nest so it is known as *Kokiliport* (Kokil: Koel and Port: Nest).

Māhiyat (Description)

The drug *Aftīmūn* is a golden yellow-coloured thread-like climber.⁴ It yields leaves, flowers and seeds. The leaves are small, seed is smaller than that of mustard seed size. Seeds are reddish brown. Petals are thin, and hair-like with a reddish colour. The taste is bitter and astringent.^{4,11}

Botanical Description

Cuscuta reflexa Roxb. is a type of annual parasitic climber without leaves.⁶ It has tall, narrowly twined, branched stems, glabrous, pale greenish-yellow, and frequently has red spots on them.³ Flowers are hermaphrodite, pentamerous either solitary or in clusters with racemose inflorescence. The calyx is divided nearly to the root, corolla is white. Stamens are in the throat of the corolla tube, ovary is ovoid with a simple, very short and thick style. Two distinct stigmas are thick fleshy and large.^{10,12} Seeds are tiny, black and glabrous.¹⁰ Flowering occurs from late October to March.¹



Figure 1 (a).*Aftīmūn* Covering the Tree. Fresh Collection Looking like Golden Threads (b, c & d). Dried Plant Branches with Fruits (e), Sample procured from market (f)

Jā'-i-Waqū' (Distribution)

It is commonly found throughout India up to 3000 m⁵, mainly on Indian plains in the regions of Himachal Pradesh in Bengal.³ It is abundantly found in tropical and subtropical regions and rarely in temperate regions.²

Ajzā-i-Musta'mala (Parts Used)

Tukhm-i-Kashūth (seeds) and whole plant^{3,18}

Mizāj (Temperament)

Its temperament is *Harr Yābis* (hot in 2nd and dry in 3rd degree),²⁰ and *Harr Yābis* (hot in 3rd and dry in 2nd degree)¹⁸.

Afāl (Action)

It has *Muḥallil* (anti-inflammatory), *Mufattiḥ* (deobstruent), *Mushil-i-Akhlāt Thalātha* (purgative of three humours), *Musakkin-i-Alam* (analgesic and sedative), *Mushil-i-Balgham* (purgative of phlegm), *Mushil-i-Sawdā* (purgative of black bile), *Kāsir-i-Riyāḥ* (carminative), *Dafi' Humma* (antipyretic), *Qātil-i-Kirm Shikam* (anthelmintic), *Muṣaffi-i-Dam* (blood purifier), *Mudirr-i-Bawl* (diuretic), *Mudirr-i-Hayḍ* (emmenagogue), *Muqawwī-i-Sha'r* (hair tonic), properties.^{11,20,21}

Nafa' Khās (Main Action)

Mukhrij-i-Sawdā (purgative of black bile).¹⁴

Iste'mālāt (Therapeutic Uses)

It is used especially in *Amrāḍ-i-Sawdāwī* and *Balghamī*, like *Sar'* (epilepsy), *Junūn* (mania), *Mālikhūliyā* (melancholia), *Kābūs* (nightmare), *Tashannuj* (convulsions), *Khafaqān* (palpitations), *Warm-i-Tihāl* (splenomegaly), *Waja'al-Mafāṣil* (rheumatoid arthritis),^{11,20,21} *Fālij* (paralysis), *Laqwa* (facial paralysis), *Khadar* (numbness),¹¹ *Hummayāt-i-Muzmina* (chronic fever), *Yaraqān* (jaundice), *Du'f-i-*

Kabid hepatic insufficiency¹⁴. It is also used to treat *Kalaf* (melasma), *Namash* (nevus), *Barsh* (freckle), *Bahaq Aswad* (pytriasis nigra), *Jarab Aswad* (scabies) and is used in strengthening and blackening hairs also.^{18,20}

Tarkīb Iste'māl (Methods of Administration)

The methods of its administration in various diseases are mentioned in Table 1.

Maḍarrat (Adverse Effects)

It is harmful to the lungs. It causes dryness, syncope, nausea and vomiting.¹² Due to its *Mukarrib-i-Qalb* (restlessness) property, it is contraindicated in a person having a hot temperament.⁴ It is also contraindicated in people with *Mirra-i-Ṣafrā* (serous bile).^{3,4}

Musleh (Corrective/s)

Kāsnī (*Chicorium intybus* L.), *Roghan Bādām Shīrīn* (*Prunus amygdalus* L.), *Katira* (*Sterculia urens* Roxb.), *Sikanjabīn*,^{4,14,20} *Samagh-i-Arabī* (*Acacia arabica* (Lam.) Willd.)¹²

Badal (Substitute)

Ghāriqūn (*Agaricus albus* Schaeff.), *Hāsha* (*Thymus serpyllum* L.),⁴ *Bisfāij* (*Polypodium vulgare* L.),³ *Turbud* (*Ipomea turpethum* (L.) R.Br.¹⁸.

Miqdār (Dose)

The therapeutic dose of *Aftīmūn* is 4–14 g orally.^{11,18}

Murakkabat (Compound Formulations)

Various compounds of *Aftīmūn* are mentioned in Table 2.

Kīmiyāwi Ajzā (Chemical Constituents)

Several phytoconstituents are found in the plant and its seed are mentioned in Table 3.

Table 1. Use of Aftīmūn in Various Diseases with the Method of Administration/ Application

S. No.	Diseases	Method of Administration/ Application
A.	Diseases of Braine and nerves	
1	<i>Mālikhūliyā</i> (melancholia) ⁴	35 g of <i>Aftīmūn</i> is soaked in 210 g of fresh milk and is taken along with 52 g of <i>Sikanjabīn</i> daily orally for one week.
2	<i>Tashannuj Imtilā'ī</i> (convulsion due to excess of blood) ⁴	Same treatment
3	<i>Ṣudā'</i> (headache) ⁴	Same treatment
4	<i>Kābūs</i> (nightmare) ¹¹	<i>Aftīmūn</i> is taken orally along with <i>Mawīz</i> (<i>Vitis vinifera</i>), <i>Gul-i-Banafsha</i> (<i>Viola odorata</i>), <i>Bādranjboya</i> (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>), <i>Ustukhuddus</i> (<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>), <i>Gulqand</i> , <i>Saqmunia</i> (<i>Convolvulus scammonia</i>) or <i>Sham-i-Hanzal</i> (<i>Citrullus colocynthis</i>) or other drugs (according to need).
5	<i>Sar' Sawdāwī</i> (convulsion due to black bile) ¹¹	Same treatment

B.	Cardiac diseases	
1	<i>Khafaqān</i> (palpitation) ⁴	35 g of <i>Aftimūn</i> is soaked in 210 g of fresh milk and is taken along with 52 g of <i>Sikanjabīn</i> daily orally for one week.
2	<i>Wahshat-i-Qalb</i> (anxiety) ⁴	Same treatment
C.	Diseases of Gastro Intestinal Tract	
1	<i>Dīdān-i-Am'ā'</i> (intestinal worms) ⁴	Same treatment
D.	Sexual diseases	
1	<i>Quwwat-i-Bah</i> (aphrodisiac) ¹¹	Drinking a mixture of 3.5g of powdered <i>Aftimūn</i> and <i>Nabīdh</i> orally

Table 2. Some of the compound formulations having *Aftimūn* as one of the important ingredients, their dosage and method of administration and indications

S. No.	Compound Formulation	Dosage and Method of Administration	Indications
1	<i>Itrīfal Aftimūn Mushil</i>	10–15 g, oral ²²	<i>Dawār</i> (vertigo)
2.	<i>Itrīfal Dīdān</i>	10–15 g, oral ²³	<i>Dīdān-i-Am'ā'</i> (anthelmintic)
3.	<i>Itrīfal Ghudādī</i>	10–20 g, oral ²³	<i>Khanāzīr</i> (lymphadenopathy), <i>Warm-i-Ghudad</i> (adenitis)
4.	<i>Itrīfal Ustukhuddus</i>	5–10 g, oral ²³	<i>Şudā'</i> (headache), <i>Fālij</i> (paralysis), <i>Laqwa</i> (Bell's palsy), <i>Sar'</i> (epilepsy)
5.	<i>Itrīfal Zamānī</i>	5–10 g, oral ²³	<i>Mālikhūliyā</i> (melancholy), <i>Zukām</i> (common cold), <i>Qūlanj</i> (colitis), <i>Şudā'</i> (headache), <i>Qabḍ</i> (constipation)
6.	<i>Ma'jūn Chobchini</i>	5–10 g, oral ²³	<i>Fālij</i> (paralysis), <i>Waja'al-Mafāşil</i> (arthritis)
7.	<i>Ma'jūn Najāh</i>	5–10 g, oral ²³	<i>Mālikhūliyā</i> (melancholy), <i>Qūlanj</i> (colitis), <i>Ikhtināq al-Rahim</i> (hysteria)
8.	<i>Ma'jūn Ushba</i>	5–10 g, oral ²³	<i>Jarab</i> (scabies), <i>Waja'al-Mafāşil</i> (arthritis), <i>Hikka</i> (pruritus)
9.	<i>Sharbat-i-Dīnār</i>	20–40 mL, oral ²³	<i>Warm-i-Kabid</i> (hepatitis), <i>Warm-i-Rahim</i> (endometritis), <i>Istisqā</i> (ascites), <i>Qabḍ</i> (constipation), <i>Yaraqān-i-Suddī</i> (obstructive jaundice)
10.	<i>Sharbat-i-Kashūth</i>	50 mL with <i>Arq-i-Bādiyān</i> 125 mL, oral ²²	<i>Du'f-i-Mi'da</i> (gastric weakness), <i>Du'f-i-Jigar</i> (hepatic insufficiency), <i>Hummyāt-i-Murakkaba</i> (compound fever)

Table 3. Different Phytoconstituents of *Cuscuta reflexa*

S. No.	Secondary Metabolites	Phytoconstituents
A.	Whole plant	
	Flavonoids	Kaempferol, quercetin, hydroxycinnamic acid derivatives, flavanone-reflexin, tetrahydrofuran derivatives, coumarin, luteolin, hyperoside, myricetin, chlorogenic acid, azaleatin, melanettin ^{1,10}
	Phytosterols	Beta-sitosterol, campesterol, sesamin, stigmasterol ^{1,5}
	Glycoside	Bergenin, cuscutin, coumaric acid, cuscutoside A, cuscutoside B, arbutin, caffeic acid, thymidine, 21 hydroxy odoroside H, strospeptide ^{1,5}
	Alkaloids	Indole, isoquinoline, pyrrolidine, tropane alkaloids, pyrrolizidine alkaloids, sparteine, cuscutamine, cystisine, methylcystisine ^{1,9}
B.	Seeds	Amarbelin, resin, oil and reducing sugars ⁵

Discussion

Integrating the rich tradition of Unani medicine with contemporary scientific research underscores the therapeutic potential of *Cuscuta reflexa*. This versatile herb exhibits diverse medicinal actions due to its unique chemical composition, making it a valuable component in traditional and modern formulations. In Unani medicine, different varieties of *Aftimūn* are esteemed for their efficacy, particularly the seeds, known as *Tukhm-i-Kashūth*, which offer numerous health benefits. Various studies done for its pharmacological properties are: Methanol fractions of the stem exhibit antibacterial properties, with zones of inhibition ranging from 16 to 24 mm at concentrations between 25–125 µg/mL. The extract is particularly effective against *S. aureus*, *S. boydii*, *P. aeruginosa*, *S. dysenteriae*, and *E. coli*.²⁴

Ethanol extracts effectively lower blood glucose levels and prevent the elevation of glycosylated haemoglobin, demonstrating significant anti-diabetic potential.²⁵ Ethyl acetate fractions of ethanolic extracts show robust antioxidant effects, attributed to tocopherol, rutin, and flavonoids identified during phytochemical screening.²⁶ Protection against paracetamol-induced hepatic damage in albino Wistar rats highlights its hepatoprotective potential.²⁷ Hydroalcoholic extracts (400 mg/kg body weight) exhibit notable anxiolytic effects without side effects. This activity is likely due to the presence of flavonoids, tannins, alkaloids, and phytosterols.⁸ Petroleum ether extracts promote hair growth in androgen-induced alopecia by inhibiting 5 α -reductase enzyme activity.²⁸ Aqueous methanolic extracts reduce paw oedema and inflammation in arthritis models and protect against

gentamicin-induced nephrotoxicity through antioxidant mechanisms.²⁹ Chloroform and ethanolic extracts demonstrate anti-tumour properties, inhibiting Ehrlich ascites carcinoma and prolonging the survival of Swiss albino mice.³⁰ Methanolic and ethyl acetate fractions exhibit significant anti-inflammatory and cytotoxic activities due to flavonoids and polyphenols.³¹ Aqueous and ethanolic extracts reduce yeast-induced fever in rats by inhibiting prostaglandin synthesis, likely due to the presence of flavonoids and saponins.³² Methanolic extracts offer protection against chemo-convulsions in mice, attributed to elevated brain catecholamines, GABA, glutamine, and glutamate levels.⁷

Conclusion

The therapeutic potential of *Cuscuta reflexa* is rooted in its rich chemical composition, which aligns with the holistic principles of Unani medicine while also finds validation in modern scientific research. Its diverse pharmacological properties, including antibacterial, anti-diabetic, antioxidant, hepatoprotective, anxiolytic, hair growth-promoting, anti-inflammatory, cytotoxic, anti-tumour, and antipyretic activities, highlight its multifaceted applications. These findings pave the way for its broader integration into both traditional and contemporary medicinal systems, warranting further exploration to harness its full potential.

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Conflict of Interest: None

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