

**ASOKA - SARACA ASOCA (ROXB.) DE WILDE. - DEPICTION IN
AYURVEDIC LITERATURE: A CLASSICAL MEMOIR****Dr. Asha S. Raj^{1*} and Dr. Sara Monsy Oommen²**¹*Asst. Professor, Department of Dravyagunavijnanam, GAVC, TVM.²Professor, Department of Dravyagunavijnanam, GAVC, TVM.Article Received on
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DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20207-17652***Corresponding Author****Dr. Asha S. Raj**Asst. Professor, Department
of Dravyagunavijnanam,
GAVC, TVM.**ABSTRACT**

Asoka is a well-known medicinal plant considered as a sacred plant throughout the Indian Sub-continent. References about *Asoka* can be traced from *puranas* and *vedas*. Usage of *Asoka* in treatment has been mentioned during *Samhita* period. Detailed description of *Asoka* is available from various *Nighantu*'s. In Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia of India; *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) de Wilde. is considered as the source plant of *Asoka*. A thorough literary review has been done about the drug from the available classics.

KEYWORDS: Asoka, Saraca asoca, Drug review.**INTRODUCTION**

Asoka is a well-known medicinal plant. Beyond medicinal importance it is considered as a sacred plant throughout the Indian Sub-continent. References about *Asoka* can be traced from *puranas* and *vedas*. Usage of *Asoka* in treatment has been mentioned during *Samhita* period. *Acharya Charaka* mentioned it as *Vedanasthapanamahakashaya* (group of ten pain alleviating drugs), *Susrutacharya* described *Asoka* in *Vranasya Shashti Upakrama* (60 treatment principles for wounds). Detailed description of *Asoka* is available from various *Nighantu*'s. Nowadays owing to non-availability it's usually adulterated in the drug market. In Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia of India; *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) de Wilde. is considered as the source plant of *Asoka*.

Etymology

The explanation of word *Asoka* is "*naastishokoyasmat*" which means the one which relieves or reduces *soka*(sorrow).^{[1][2][3]}

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Information regarding the drug *Asoka* is collected from the available *Nighantus* in the library of Govt. Ayurveda College, Tripunithura and from online source of E – Nighantus by their thorough screening by the authors.

Classification in Ancient Treatises

Classification of *Asoka* in the classical texts books are summarized as below.

Table 1: Classification of *Asoka* in ancient literature.

Sl No	Text	Varga / Gana
1	<i>CharakaSamhita</i>	<i>Vedanasthapanamahakashaya, Kashaya skandha</i>
2	<i>SusrutaSamhita</i>	<i>Rodhradigana</i>
3	<i>AshtangaHrudaya</i>	<i>Lodhradigana</i>
4	<i>SousrutaNighantu</i>	<i>Lodhradigana</i>
5	<i>AshtangaNighantu</i>	<i>Lodhradigana</i>
6	<i>MadanadiNighantu</i>	<i>Ekavimsagana</i>
7	<i>DhanwantariNighantu</i>	<i>Amradivarga</i>
8	<i>SodhalaNighantu</i>	<i>Amradivarga</i>
9	<i>Abhidhanaratnamala</i>	<i>Kashaya skandha</i>
10	<i>Raja Nighantu</i>	<i>Karaveeradivarga</i>
11	<i>KaiyyadevaNighantu</i>	<i>Oushadhivarga</i>
12	<i>BhavaprakashaNighantu</i>	<i>Pushpavarga</i>
13	<i>SaraswatiNighantu</i>	<i>Mahavrukshavarga</i>
14	<i>Abhidhanamanjari</i>	<i>Lodhradivarga</i>
15	<i>PriyaNighantu</i>	<i>Hareetakyadivarga</i>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morphological identity of *Asoka* is well explained by its synonyms. Synonyms mentioned in various texts are tabulated below.

Table 2: Difference of opinion regarding synonyms of *Asoka*.

Sl. No	Synonyms	SN	AM	AN	DN	SoN	RN	KN	BPN	SaliNi	NR	SaN	PN	MaNi	AONi
1	<i>Asoka</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
2	<i>Anghrighataka</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	<i>Apasoka</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	<i>Chitra</i>	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	<i>Doshahari</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	<i>Gandhapushpa</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
7	<i>Gatasoka</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	<i>Hemapushpa</i>	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+
9	<i>Kamkeli</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+
10	<i>Kamasuhrudi</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
11	<i>Kanakakusumam</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
12	<i>Kelika</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	<i>Karnapura</i>	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
14	<i>Madhupushpa</i>	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	<i>Manjarika</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	<i>Maali</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
17	<i>Nata</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
18	<i>Pallavadruma</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	<i>Pindipushpa</i>	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+
20	<i>Prapallava</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
21	<i>Raagi</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
22	<i>Raagitaru</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
23	<i>Raaji</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24	<i>Raktaka</i>	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25	<i>Raktapallava</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
26	<i>Raamava</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
27	<i>Shadpadamanjari</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28	<i>Smaradhivaaso</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29	<i>Sokanashana</i>	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-
30	<i>Stripadahatidohata</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
31	<i>Subhaga</i>	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-
32	<i>Supushpaka</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
33	<i>Taamrapallava</i>	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
34	<i>Tavakamanjari</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35	<i>Vanjuladruma</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	+
36	<i>Vichitra</i>	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
37	<i>Vishoka</i>	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
38	<i>Veetasoka</i>	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-

Interpretations of synonyms

Interpretation provides better understanding about the identity, properties and mode of action of *Asoka* mentioned by different *Acharyas*. Synonyms with probable interpretations are given below.^{[27][28][29]}

Based on morphology

1. *Chitra* : Flowers possess different colours.
2. *Gandhapushpa* : The one which possess fragrant flowers.
3. *Hemapushpa* : The plant which possess golden yellow coloured flowers.
4. *Kanakakusumam* : The kusuma or flowers are golden coloured.
5. *Karnapura* : Flowers resembles like ear ornament.
6. *Madhupushpa* : Flowers are like madhuvarna.
7. *Manjarika* : Flowers are found in a group.
8. *Maali* : It possess beautiful flowers.
9. *Pindipushpa* : The flowers occur in clusters.
10. *Raagi* : Flowers are bright red in colour.
11. *Raktaka* : Flowers are red in colour
12. *Supushpaka* : Flowers are beautiful.
13. *Taamrapallava* : It possess copper coloured leaves.
14. *Pallavadruma* : Trees are well covered with leaves.
15. *Prapallava* : The tender leaves are special.
16. *Raagitaru* : Its wood has bright colour.
17. *Raktapallava* : Tender leaves are red in colour.

Based on properties and action

1. *Asoka* : The one which relieves soka.
2. *Anghrighataka* : The one which relieves pain.
3. *Apasoka* : The one which removes soka.
4. *Doshahari* : The one which pacifies doshas.
5. *Gatasoka* : The one which removes soka.
6. *Nata* : Flowers are auspicious.
7. *Shadpadamanjari* : Flowers attracts insects.
8. *Sokanashana* : It pacifies soka.
9. *Vishoka* : It removes soka.

10. *Veetasoka* : It removes soka.

Prashasthibodhakajanyanama's

1. *Raamava* : It's mentioned in Ramayana.
2. *Smaradhivaaso* : It is the abode of devatas.
3. *Stripadahatidohata* : It flowers when stricken by women's legs.

Rasa panchaka&Doshakarman analysis

Acharya's explains Rasa of Asoka in a wide array. Madanadi Nighantukara explains Rasa as Tikta, where as in Dhanwantarinighantu, Rasa is said as Madhura and Kaiyyadeva Nighantu explains it as Kashaya. In majority of Nighantu's i.e. Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, Priya Nighantu and Ayurveda Oushadhi Nighantu by Thayyil Kumaran Vaidyar explains the rasa as Tikta- Kashaya. Raja Narahari, Bhavamisra and P V Sharma explains Gunaas Sheeta. Kaiyyadeva Nighantukara added Snigdha guna along with Sheetha, whereas Thayyil Kumaran Vaidyar in Ayurveda Oushadhi Nighantu explained the gunaas Laghu-Ruksha. Veerya is mentioned as Sheeta by Madanadi Nighantu and Ayurveda Oushadhi Nighantu. Its Vipaka is mentioned only by Thayyil Kumaran Vaidyar's Ayurveda Oushadhi Nighantu and said as Katu. Prabhava is not at all explained by Acharya's.

Dosha karma of Asoka is explained as Pittaharam (alleviates pitta dosha) by Abhidhanaratnamala, whereas it is said to possess kaphapittahara (alleviates both pitta and kapha dosha) property by Thayyil Kumaran Vaidyar's Ayurveda Oushadhi Nighantu.

Rasa panchaka and *dosha karmas* of Asoka from all available *nighantus* are tabulated as below.

Table 3: Difference of opinion regarding *Rasa panchaka* of Asoka.

<i>Nighantu</i>	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Guna</i>	<i>Virya</i>	<i>Vipa-ka</i>	<i>Prabha-va</i>	<i>Dosha Karma</i>
<i>Madanadi Nighantu</i>	<i>Tikta</i>	-	<i>Sheeta</i>	-	-	-
<i>Dhanwantari Nighantu</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Sodhala Nighantu</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Abhidhanaratnamala</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Raja Nighantu</i>	-	<i>Sisira</i>	-	-	-	<i>Pittaharam</i>
<i>Kaiyyadeva Nighantu</i>	<i>Kashaya</i>	<i>Sheetala,</i>	-	-	-	-

		<i>Snigdha</i>				
<i>BhavaprakashaNighantu</i>	<i>Tikta, Kashaya</i>	<i>Sheetala</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>A.O.Nighantu</i>	<i>Kashaya, Tikta</i>	<i>Laghu, Ruksha</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Katu</i>	-	<i>Kapha-pittashamanam</i>
<i>PriyaNighantu</i>	<i>Tikta, Tuvra</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	-	-	-	-

Therapeutic indications

Among *Bruhatrayee*'s, CharakaSamhita mentioned *Asokaas Vedanasthapana*. This indicates the ability of the drug to alleviate *vedana*(any unpleasant sensation) and resulting in *prakrutistapana*(replacing normal status of mind and body).^[31]

In *SusrutaSamhita*, *Asoka twak choorna* has been mentioned for *daruneekaranam*(hardening of scar tissue) of *mrudumamsa* (formed scar tissue may be soft and has less tensile strength, easily undergo dehiscence and may delay wound healing), *one among the shahstiupakrama of vranachikitsa*(60 steps to promote wound healing).^[32] *AsokaPushpa* was mentioned in *Mahasugandhiagadaas* remedy for *SarpaVisha*(snake poison)^[33] and it is also a content for *Pushpanjana* which is used for *Timira*(cataract).^[34] *AcharyaSusruta* and *Vagbhata* included *Asoka* among *Lodhradigana*. *Vagbhatacharya* mentions the use of *Asokabeeja* in *kasachikitsa* along with *Kshavaka*, *Vidanga*, *Anjana*, *Padmaka*, *Vida Lavana* and mixed with *Ghruta*.^[35] *Vagbhata* further describes use of *Asokaghrutam* in *Vatavyadhichikitsa*(anomalies caused by de-arranged vatadosha),^[36] *avachooranam*(spreading over) of *Asokatwakchoorna in vrana* and *Asokapushpain timira*(cataract).^[37]

In *Bhavaprakasha*, *Madhyamakhandha*, *Asokarishta* has been mentioned for *raktapradara*(disease condition characterized by excessive blood loss through vagina other than menstruation).^[38] In *Bhaishajyaratnavali*, *Asokaas arishta* or *ghruta* formulation has been mentioned as *Jwarahara*(anti pyretic).^[39] In *Chakradatta*, *Asokavalkalakwatha* along with milk has been mentioned as *teevrusrugdharanaashanam*(excessive blood loss during menstruation associated with pain).^[40] *Vrundamadhakara* added *bala-varnakara*(increasing strength and complexion) property to the *phalasaruti* of above *yoga*.^[41] In *Chikitsamanjari*, usage of *Asokavalkalakwatha* along with *madhu* has been said as *Swarasadaajith*(removes hoarseness of voice).^[42] In *Yogamruta*, *ghruta* prepared out of *Asokavalkalakwatha* and *Yashti*, *Gairika*, *Sahasravedhi*, *Chandana*, *Kataka* and *Laksha* as *kalka* is said to be an ideal *Pradarashaamak* combination.^[43]

Detailed description about therapeutic indication of *Asoka* can be traced from the *Nighantu*'s. As per *MadanapalaNighantu*, *Asoka* is indicated for *Daha* (burning sensation over whole body), *Trushna* (excessive thirst), *Visha* (affliction of poison), *Soka*(grief), *Moha* (vertigo), *Atisara* (diarrhoea) and *Vrana*(wound).^[44] *Dhanwantari Nighantu* explains that *Asoka* possess *Hrudya* (pleasing) and *Sandhaneeya*(con-joining) properties.^[45] In *Shodhala Nighantu*, *Asoka* is indicated for *Raktapradara*.^[46] *Raja Narahari* explains as *Asoka* cures *Daha*, *Srama* (exhaustion), *Gulma* (phantom tumour), *Soola* (pricking pain), *Udara* (ascites), *Adhmana* (abdominal distension) and *Krimi* (worm infestation).^[47] In *Kaiyyadeva Nighantu*, *Asoka* is said to be *Varnya*(improves complexion), *Grahi*(absorbs water)and *Asrajit*(pacifies disorders due to vitiated blood), and is indicated for *Daha*, *Krimi*, *Apachi* (disease pertaining to neck), *Trushna*(excessive thirst), *Sosha*(emaciation)and *Visha*.^[48] *Acharya Bhavamisra* also explains the indication of *Asoka* similar to that of *KaiyyadevaNighantu*. In *PriyaNighantu*, *Asoka* is mentioned as *Varnya* and is indicated for *Raktapradara*(disease condition characterized by excessive blood loss through vagina other than menstruation), *Yoni vyapat*(gynecological disorders)and *Visha*.^[49]

Therapeutic indications of *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) de Wilde mentioned in different *Nighantu*'s are tabulated below.

Table 4: Difference of opinion regarding therapeutic indications in *Nighantus*.

SINo.	Indications	Mad.Ni	DhNi	SoNi	RN	KaNi	BP	PriNi
1	<i>Hrudyam</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
2	<i>Sandhaneeya</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
3	<i>Raktapradarahara</i>	-	-	+	-	-	-	+
4	<i>Daha</i>	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
5	<i>Srama</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
6	<i>Gulma</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
7	<i>Soola</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
8	<i>Udara</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
9	<i>Adhmana</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
10	<i>Krimi</i>	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
11	<i>Varnya</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
12	<i>Grahi</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
13	<i>Apachi</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
14	<i>Trushna</i>	+	-	-	-	+	+	-
15	<i>Sosha</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+	-

16	Visha	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
17	Asrajit	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
18	Yoni vyapat	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
19	Soka	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
20	Moha	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
21	Atisaram	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
22	Vrana	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

Prayojyaanga (Useful part)

Stem bark, Flowers, Seeds.^[50]

Mathra (Dose)

Table 5: Dose of different officinal parts of Asoka.^[51]

Officinal part	Form of medication	Dose
Stem bark	Choorna	20-30g
	Kashaya	50ml
Flower	Choorna	3-6g
Seed	Choorna	3-6g

Amaykaprayoga

1. Avachoorana of Asokatwakchoorna is mentioned for daruneekaranam of mrudumamsa.^[7]
2. Asokabeeja choorna along with Kshavaka, Jantughna, Anjana, Padmaka and Bidalavana mixed with ghruta or ghruta prepared out of it will cureskasa.^[10]
3. Ksheera kashaya prepared with Asokavalkala used assusheetalam is teevrasrugdharanaashanam.^[14]
4. Asokavalkakwatha taken along with madhu cures swarasada.^[17]
5. Ghruta prepared out Asokavalkakwatha and Yashti, Gairika, Sahasravedhi, Chandana, Kataka and Laksha as kalkais said to be an ideal Pradarashaamaka combination.^[16]
6. Seed of Asoka powdered and consumed along with water will cure Mutraghata and Asmari.^[14]

Botanical Identity

Botanical name : *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) de Wilde

Saraca indica Linn

Saraca confusa (Hassk.) Backer

Jonesia asoca Roxb.

Jonesia confusa Hassk.

Jonesia pinnata Willd.

Family : Leguminosae–Caesalpinioideae

Chemical constituents

The phyto-chemical studies shows the presence of following chemical constituents.

Part	Chemical Constituent
Whole plant	Glycosidic principles, non-phenolic, sapogenetic glycoside, sterols and aliphatic alcohols ^[60]
Stem bark	Alkanes, esters and primary alcohols. It gave n-octacosanol, tannin, catechin, (+)-catechol, (–)- epicatechin, (–)-epicatechol, leucocyanidin, leucopelargonidin, procyanidin derivatives, methyl-and ethylcholesterol derivatives, minerals like silica, sodium, potassium, phosphate, magnesium, iron, calcium, strontium and aluminium ^[60]
Wood	Quercetin
Leaves	Quercetin and its 3-O-rhamnoside, kaempferol-3-O- α -L-rhamnoside, amyirin, ceryl alcohol and β -sitosterol
Flowers	Fatty acids and gallic acid; apigenin-7-O-beta-Dglucoside, cyanidin-3, 5-diglucoside, kaempferol 3-O-beta-D-glucoside, pelargonidin-3, 5- diglucoside, quercetin and its 3-O-beta-D-glucoside and sitosterol
Pods	Catechol, (–) epicatechol and leucocyanidin ^[61]

CONCLUSION

The plant whose young leaves are coppery coloured (*taamra varna*) and bears yellow flowers (*hema pushpa*, *kanaka kusuma*, *madhu pushpa*), completely covered with leaves and possessing a bright coloured wood (*raagi taru*) is known as *Asoka* and is equated botanically to *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) de Wilde of family Caesalpinaceae. Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics of *Asoka* unveils that it possesses *Ruksha*, *Sheeta* property and pacifies *Kapha-Pitta dosha*.

Asoka has been indicated for *Daha* (burning sensation over whole body), *Trushna* (excessive thirst), *Visha* (affliction of poison), *Soka*(grief), *Moha* (vertigo), *Atisara* (diarrhoea) and *Vrana*(wound). *Asoka* also possess *Hrudya* (pleasing) and *Sandhaneeya*(con-joining) properties. The drug has been extensively used in *Rakta-pradara*(excessive blood loss associated with menstruation). This review may steer further scientific researches to explore all the pharmacological properties of *Asoka* delineated in various *Nighantus* (lexicons) and may be referred as a revisit of classical description of *Asoka* and its concurrent utility.

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