

ASHOKA (SARACA INDICA) IN INDIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ashoka (Saraca Indica) plant has been known from as early as the Vedic period. It has many health benefits and has long been used in traditional Indian medicine as a key ingredient in various therapies and cures. The active constituents of the tree include tannins, sterol, catechol, aluminium, strontium, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphate, potassium, sodium and silica. The article outlines the health benefits of the Ashoka plant in Indian medicinal perspective.

KEYWORDS: Ashoka, Traditional Medicine, Health Benefits

INTRODUCTION

Plants are one of the most important sources of medicines. Among them Ashoka (Saraca Indica) tree belonging to the Caesalpinioideae subfamily of the legume family is very important for their health benefits. This tree has multitude of names in Indian literature. Some of them include Sita-ashoka, anganapriya, ashopalava, asupala, hempushpa, pindpushpa, vishoka and vichitra.

The Ashoka is a rain-forest tree. Its original distribution was in central areas of the Deccan plateau as well as in the middle section of the Western ghats in the Western coastal zone of the Indian subcontinent. The Ashoka is prized for its beautiful foliage and fragrant flowers. It is handsome, small, erect evergreen tree, with dap green leaves growing in dense clusters. Its flowering season is around February to April. The Ashoka flowers comes in heavy, lush bunches. They are bright orange-yellow in color, turning red before wilting.

In Indian Mythology

The Ashoka tree is considered sacred throughout the Indian subcontinent, especially in India, Nepal and Srilanka. In Hinduism the Ashoka is considered a sacred tree and worshipped in Chaitra, the first month of Hindu calendar. It is also associated with Kamdeva, the Hindu God of love, who included its blossom among the five flowers in his quiver, where Ashoka represent seductive hypnosis. In Mahakavya this tree is mentioned in the Ramayana in reference to the Ashoka Vatika (garden of Ashoka trees) where Hanuman first meets Sita.

Nutritional Properties of Ashoka

The useful parts of Aashoka tree are leaves, flowers, stem and bark. Dried bark contains tannins, sterol, catechol and other organic calcium compounds. The powered bark of the tree also contains aluminum, strontium, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphate, potassium, sodium and silica. Ashoka herb should be kept in air tight containers protected from light, moisture and contamination from microbes to maintain its medicinal values and physiochemical properties.

Medicinal Uses

Ashoka has numerous pharmacological activities. It is used in the treatment of menstrual disorders associated with excessive bleeding, congestion and pain and is very effective as a uterine tonic for irregular menstrual cycles and miscarriage. It might potentially regulate the human circulatory system and helps in encouraging urine flow and thus helps in treating conditions that cause painful urination. Oral administration of extract of Ashoka flower can be used to treat hemorrhagic dysentery while its bark extract in the treatment of piles. Its flower are helpful in treating Diabetes. The specific analgesic properties present in Ashoka can be used to calm the nerves when they have been aggravated by the Vata. This herb improves the complexion of skin and can be used to obtain relief from burning sensation of the skin. It purifies the blood naturally and also used for scorpion sting treatment. Seed powder of Ashoka helps to check kidney stones.

Ashoka, as Women Friendly Plant

The evergreen Ashoka is the tree most intimately associated with women in Indian mythology, and is said to remove their 'grief'. The tree increases the fertility among women and very helpful in curing all kinds of reproductive disorders of women. Its bark contains an oestrogenic compound and has a stimulating effect on the endometrium (inner layer of uterus) and ovarian tissue. It is useful in menorrhagia (excessive menstrual bleeding) due to uterine fibroids, leucorrhoea (white discharge) and in internal bleeding. It makes the womb stronger and helps in easy conception. The womenfolk of Chhattisgarh boil the bark of Ashoka in cow's milk, add sugar and consume it once a day for three days and repeat the course after three months to prevent gynecological disorders. The reason behind calling it sorrow-less tree is that the tree prevent the all kinds of fertility disorders among women and enhances the chance of safe motherhood thus remove all the grief's of women.

CONCLUSIONS

Ashoka has been widely used for curing various ailments due to its therapeutic potentials. This versatile plant is the source of various types of compounds and the bark, leaves, flowers and seeds of the plant are of medicinal value. Ashoka is ancient and reliable source of medicine and used in many pharmacological activities like anti cancer, anti-menorrhagic, anti-oxytoxic, anti-microbial activity and have extend uses in Ayurveda, Unani and Homeopathy. It is highly acclaimed for its utility in gynecological problems. This paper will be helpful in establishing a base for therapeutic uses of the Ashoka plant so that it can be emphasized for the control of various diseases. However, much more studies are still required to explore the potential activities of this plant.

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