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Review Article

Ashoka (*Saraca Asoca*): A Classical Ayurvedic Drug for Pradara and Women's Health

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A B S T R A C T

Ashoka is a well-known medicinal tree of Ayurveda, particularly valued in the management of Pradara and Yonivyapat. It is botanically identified as *Saraca asoca* Roxb. de Wilde, a synonym of *Saraca indica* Linn., and belongs to the family Fabaceae. The bark is the principal medicinally used part, although seeds and flowers are also utilized. Ashoka possesses Kashaya and Tikta Rasa, Laghu and Ruksha Guna, Katu Vipaka, and Shita Virya. It pacifies Kapha and Pitta and is described as Grahi, Stambhaka, Varnya, Trishnahara, Dahashamaka, Krimighna, Vranaropaka, Hridya, Sandhaniya and Vishaghna. Its main classical indications include Pradara, Yonivyapat, Trishna, Daha, Krimi, Vrana, Apachi, Arshas, Gulma, Udarashula and Adhmana. Classical preparations include Ashokarishta, Ashoka Ghrita, and Ashoka Kashaya. The bark contains tannins, catechin, epicatechin, catechol, saponins, and sterols, while flowers and seeds contain flavonoids and fatty acids. Experimental studies cited in the source indicate anti-arthritic, antimicrobial, larvicidal, and chemopreventive activities. The source also describes Ashoka as an astringent and uterine sedative. This review summarizes its botanical identity, Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics, therapeutic applications, formulations, phytochemistry, authenticity concerns, and available research evidence. Although Ashoka has a strong classical basis in women's health, well-designed clinical studies are required to establish its efficacy in defined gynaecological disorders.

Keywords: Ashoka, *Saraca asoca*, Pradara, Yonivyapat, Ashokarishta, Uterine bleeding, Stambhana, Ayurveda

Introduction

Ashoka is one of the most frequently used medicinal plants in Ayurvedic gynaecology. Its very name signifies the removal of Shoka, pain or suffering. Classical synonyms such as Stripriya emphasize its close association with women's health.

The bark is widely used in Pradara, excessive uterine bleeding and disorders of the female reproductive system. Its therapeutic activity is explained through Kashaya and Tikta Rasa, Shita Virya, Grahi and Stambhaka actions. It is also described as Vranaropaka, Sandhaniya, Hridya, Trishnahara and Dahashamaka. Ashokarishta is one of the best-known classical formulations containing Ashoka bark. However, botanical adulteration, particularly substitution with *Polyalthia longifolia*, remains an important concern. The present article reviews the classical, botanical, phytochemical and research profile of Ashoka based on the supplied material.

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Aim and Objectives

The aim is to present a systematic review of Ashoka as an Ayurvedic medicinal drug.

The objectives are:

- To describe the botanical identity and morphology of Ashoka.
- To explain its Rasapanchaka and Doshakarma.
- To discuss its principal actions and indications.
- To compile its classical therapeutic applications.
- To summarize its phytochemistry and research evidence.
- To discuss adulteration, safety and future research requirements.

Botanical Identity

- **Botanical name:** *Saraca asoca* Roxb. de Wilde
- **Synonym:** *Saraca indica* Linn.
- **Family:** Fabaceae
- **English name:** Ashoka tree
- **Useful parts:** Bark, seeds and flowers

The supplied material relates the genus name *Saraca* to the name Sarasin, while the specific epithet *indica* indicates Indian origin.

Regional Names

Table 1.Vernacular Names of *Saraca asoca* (Ashoka) in Different Languages

Language	Name
Sanskrit	Ashoka, Hemapushpa, Tamrapallava
English	Ashoka tree
Hindi	Ashok
Kannada	Ashoka
Malayalam	Asoka
Marathi	Ashoka

Habitat and Distribution

Ashoka occurs in forest regions of the western peninsula, the central and eastern Himalayan regions and West Bengal. It grows well near streams and riverbanks.

The tree is also cultivated in gardens throughout India because of its attractive and fragrant flowers.

External Morphology

Ashoka is a tree approximately 6–9 m in height, with glabrous branches.

Leaves

The leaves are compound and approximately 15–20 cm long. The rachis is glabrous and the petioles are short. Leaflets occur in four to six pairs and are oblong-lanceolate, glabrous and rounded or cuneate at the base.

Tender leaves are coppery-red, giving rise to the synonym Tamrapallava.

Inflorescence and flowers

The inflorescence is an axillary corymb. Flowers are numerous, fragrant and borne in dense clusters.

The floral colour gradually changes from yellow to orange and finally red. This striking appearance is reflected in names such as Hemapushpa and Pindapushpa.

Fruit

The fruit is a black, compressed, linear-oblong pod measuring approximately 10–25 cm in length.

Seeds

The pod contains approximately four to eight ellipsoid or oblong seeds.

Grahya Lakshana

The genuine bark occurs as curved, channelled or sometimes quilled pieces measuring approximately 5–12 mm in thickness.

The outer surface is rough and greyish-brown, with warty protuberances and circular or transversely elongated lenticels. The inner surface is smooth and reddish-brown and may show fine black mottling.

The bark is tough and becomes fibrous on fracture. It does not possess a characteristic odour.

Adulterant and Substitute

The source identifies:

- *Polyalthia longifolia* as a common adulterant
- Shala, or *Shorea robusta*, as a substitute

The bark of *Polyalthia longifolia* may superficially resemble genuine Ashoka bark. Authentication should therefore include pharmacognostic, anatomical and chromatographic evaluation.

Classical Classification

Charaka

Ashoka is included in Vedanasthapana Varga.

Sushruta

It is included in Rodhradi Gana.

Bhavaprakasha Nighantu

It is described under Pushpa Varga.

Etymology and Synonyms

The word Ashoka means that which removes Shoka or suffering.

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Gandhapushpa

The flowers are aromatic.

Tamrapallava

The tender leaves are coppery-red.

Pindapushpa

The flowers are arranged in dense, globose clusters.

Madhupushpa

The tree flowers during Vasanta Ritu.

Hemapushpa

The flowers possess a golden appearance.

Stripriya

The plant is particularly useful in disorders affecting women.

Kankeli

This name is associated with happiness and delight.

The synonyms reflect both the morphology and the therapeutic importance of Ashoka.

Rasapanchaka

Table 2.Ayurvedic Pharmacodynamic Properties (Rasapanchaka) of *Saraca asoca* (Ashoka)

Parameter	Description
Rasa	Kashaya and Tikta
Guna	Laghu and Ruksha
Vipaka	Katu
Virya	Shita
Doshakarma	Kapha-Pitta Shamaka

Doshakarma

Ashoka reduces Kapha through Kashaya–Tikta Rasa and Katu Vipaka.

It pacifies Pitta through Shita Virya and Kashaya–Tikta Rasa.

This Doshic action explains its use in Pitta-Kapha-associated bleeding, burning sensation, discharge, inflammation and tissue abnormalities.

Principal Actions

Ashoka is described as:

- Grahi
- Stambhaka
- Varnya
- Trishnahara
- Dahashamaka
- Krimighna
- Vranaropaka
- Hridya
- Sandhaniya
- Vishaghna

Among these, Grahi and Stambhaka are especially relevant in Pradara and excessive uterine bleeding.

Grahi and Stambhaka Actions

Grahi refers to the ability to absorb excessive fluidity and improve tissue and channel stability.

Stambhaka refers to the ability to check excessive flow, discharge or bleeding.

The Kashaya Rasa and Shita Virya of Ashoka contribute to these effects. This forms the classical pharmacological basis for its use in Pradara.

However, Stambhana should be applied only after proper assessment. Bleeding due to retained products, pregnancy complications, structural lesions or serious systemic disease requires specific diagnosis and treatment.

Therapeutic Indications

Ashoka is traditionally indicated in:

- Pradara
- Yonivyapat
- Trishna
- Daha
- Krimi
- Vrana
- Visharoga
- Shosha
- Apachi
- Arshas
- Vaivarnya
- Gulma
- Udarashula
- Adhmana
- Vatavyadhi
- Ashmari
- Mutraghata

Its principal field of use remains Striroga, especially Pradara.

Classical Therapeutic Applications

Vatavyadhi

Ashoka Ghrita is described in the management of Vatavyadhi.

Classical reference: Sushruta Chikitsa Sthana 4/27.

Pradara

Ashoka bark decoction prepared with milk and administered cold in the morning is described for severe vaginal or uterine bleeding.

Classical reference: Vrinda Madhava 63/5.

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This use reflects the Kashaya, Shita, Grahi and Stambhaka properties of Ashoka.

Ashmari and Mutraghata

Ashoka seed powder administered with water is recommended in urinary retention and urinary calculus.

Classical reference: Chakradatta 33/12.

Dose

The dose should be selected according to the plant part, formulation, patient strength, disease stage and clinical objective.

Table 3.Recommended Dosage of Classical Ashoka Preparations

Preparation	Dose
Kwatha	40–80 ml
Bija Churna	1–3 g
Pushpa Churna	1–3 g

Phytochemical Constituents

Bark

The bark contains:

- Tannins, approximately 6%
- Catechol
- Epicatechin
- Catechin
- Haematoxylin
- Ketosterol
- Saponins

Pods

The pods contain:

- Catechol
- Epicatechol
- Leucocyanidin

Seeds

The seeds contain:

- Oleic acid
- Linoleic acid
- Palmitic acid
- Stearic acid

Flowers

The flowers contain:

- β-sitosterol
- Quercetin
- Gallic acid
- Palmitic acid
- Stearic acid
- Oleic acid
- Linoleic acid

Wood

The wood contains quercetin.

Tannins and flavonoids may contribute to astringent, antioxidant and tissue-stabilizing activity.

Reported Pharmacological Actions

The supplied material describes Ashoka as:

- Astringent
- Uterine sedative

The cited experimental studies also suggest:

- Anti-arthritic activity
- Chemopreventive activity
- Larvicidal activity
- Antibacterial activity
- Broad antimicrobial potential

Anti-arthritic Activity

Methanolic extract of *Saraca asoca* was evaluated in adjuvant-induced arthritic rats.

The extract reportedly improved alterations in lysosomal enzymes and collagen metabolism. These findings suggest anti-inflammatory potential.

The evidence remains experimental and does not establish effectiveness in human arthritis.

Chemopreventive Activity

Flavonoids derived from Ashoka demonstrated chemopreventive effects in an experimental two-stage skin carcinogenesis model.

This evidence is preclinical and should not be interpreted as proof that Ashoka can prevent or treat cancer in humans.

Larvicidal Activity

Methanolic seed extracts demonstrated activity against selected mosquito vectors.

Phytochemical analysis identified carbohydrates, saponins, terpenoids, tannins and proteins. Such activity may have public-health research relevance but is separate from its classical internal medicinal use.

Antibacterial Activity

Extracts prepared from aerial parts and in-vitro-raised callus cultures showed antibacterial activity.

The cited findings indicate that Ashoka contains constituents with inhibitory effects against selected microorganisms.

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Broad Antimicrobial Potential

Water extracts of Ashoka were screened along with extracts from other medicinal plants against selected bacteria and fungi.

Ashoka showed activity against several tested organisms. However, extract-based laboratory activity does not establish clinical antimicrobial efficacy.

Importance in Striroga

Ashoka is strongly associated with women's disorders because of:

- Kashaya Rasa
- Shita Virya
- Grahi action
- Stambhaka action
- Pitta-Kapha Shamaka effect
- Traditional indication in Pradara and Yonivyapat

These features make it particularly relevant when there is excessive discharge or bleeding associated with Pitta and Kapha.

Nevertheless, Ayurvedic administration should follow examination of Dosha, Dushya, Agni, Bala, age, menstrual history and associated systemic symptoms.

Important Formulations

Ashokarishta is the most widely recognized classical formulation containing Ashoka bark.

Table 4.Classical Ayurvedic Formulations Containing Ashoka and Their Traditional Therapeutic Indications

Formulation	Traditional indication
Ashokarishta	Asrigdara and Raktapitta
Ashoka Ghrita	Pradara, Yonishula and Katishula
Ashoka Kashaya	Swarasada
Madhukadyavaleha	Pradara, Raktatisara and Raktarsha
Mahamarichyadi Taila	Kushtha

Ashokarishta

Ashokarishta is a fermented formulation traditionally prescribed in Pradara and related disorders.

Its action cannot be attributed to Ashoka alone because it is a compound formulation. The therapeutic outcome may depend on:

- The authenticity of Ashoka bark
- Quality of ingredients
- Fermentation process
- Dose and duration
- Patient constitution
- Nature of bleeding
- Associated Dosha and Dushya involvement

Authentication Issues

The substitution of genuine Ashoka with *Polyalthia longifolia* is a major concern.

Differentiation may require:

- Macroscopic evaluation.
- Microscopic examination.
- Anatomical comparison.
- Physicochemical parameters.
- Chromatographic profiling.
- Botanical verification at the source of collection.

Therapeutic conclusions based on incorrectly identified bark may be unreliable.

Clinical Interpretation of Pradara

Pradara is a broad Ayurvedic clinical term involving excessive or abnormal genital tract discharge or bleeding.

It should not always be equated with one modern diagnosis. Possible biomedical causes of abnormal bleeding may include:

- Hormonal dysfunction
- Fibroids
- Adenomyosis
- Endometrial abnormalities
- Pregnancy-related complications
- Coagulation disorders
- Infection
- Malignancy

Therefore, Ashoka should not be used to suppress unexplained bleeding without clinical examination.

Safety Considerations

The following precautions are important:

- Unexplained or severe uterine bleeding requires medical evaluation.
- Pregnancy-related bleeding should not be managed with self-medication.
- The identity of the bark should be confirmed.
- Concentrated extracts should not be assumed to have the same safety as traditional formulations.
- Long-term safety data are limited.
- Dose should be individualized.
- Patients using hormonal or haemostatic medicines require professional supervision.
- The supplied material does not establish safety during pregnancy.

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Limitations of Existing Evidence

The available evidence is limited by:

- Predominance of experimental studies
- Lack of robust clinical trials in Pradara
- Variation in extract type
- Use of different plant parts
- Inadequate standardization
- Limited pharmacokinetic information
- Adulteration and substitution
- Lack of long-term safety studies
- Limited comparison of classical formulations with isolated extracts

The classical basis is strong, but modern disease-specific evidence remains insufficient.

Future Research Directions

Future investigations should focus on:

- Botanical authentication of Ashoka bark.
- Chemical differentiation from Polyalthia longifolia.
- Standardization of Ashokarishta.
- Clinical trials in clearly defined abnormal uterine bleeding.
- Studies in fibroid-associated bleeding.
- Evaluation in perimenopausal bleeding after exclusion of serious pathology.
- Pharmacological study of Grahi and Stambhaka actions.
- Safety during prolonged administration.
- Herb–drug interaction studies.
- Comparison of bark decoction with fermented preparations.
- Correlation of Ayurvedic diagnostic variables with clinical outcomes.
- Sustainable cultivation and harvesting.

Conclusion

Ashoka is one of the most important Ayurvedic drugs used in Pradara and Yonivyapat. It possesses Kashaya–Tikta Rasa, Laghu–Ruksha Guna, Katu Vipaka, and Shita Virya. Its Grahi, Stambhaka, Pitta-Kapha Shamaka, Vranaropaka and Sandhaniya actions form the classical basis for its use in excessive uterine bleeding and related disorders.

The plant contains tannins, catechins, flavonoids, sterols, saponins, and fatty acids. Experimental studies suggest anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, larvicidal, and chemopreventive potential.

Despite its extensive traditional use, the available contemporary evidence does not yet conclusively establish its efficacy in specific gynaecological diseases. Proper diagnosis, botanical authentication, standardized formulations, and carefully designed clinical trials are essential.

Ashoka should be used as an individualized Ayurvedic medicine rather than as an unsupervised remedy for all forms of uterine bleeding.

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