

Ashvattha (*Ficus religiosa* Linn.), an Important Medicinal Plant: A Comprehensive Literary Review from Ayurvedic Literature

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda literature is full of valuable information regarding medicinal plants. This information needs to be compiled and presented in systematic format to make it easily available for practical implementation. *Ashvattha*, (*Ficus religiosa* Linn. *Moraceae*), one important medicinal plant has been well documented in Ayurvedic classics which include *Samhita* (Treatise), *Nighantus* (Lexicons), *Chikitsa grantha* (Compendia of Ayurveda), and *dravyaguna texts* (*Herbal Pharmacopeia*), and *Vedas*. This paper provides collective information regarding *Ashvattha* including its synonyms, morphological characters, properties, and actions from the above classics. The literary compilation reveals that the plant *Ashvattha* has about sixty synonyms (*pariyaya*), highlighting its morphological characters and pharmacological properties. It possesses properties like *varnya* (good for skin), *sangrahi* (reduce excessive discharges), *vrushya* (aphrodisiac), etc., indicated in about diseased conditions like *Daha* (burning sensations), *Arati* (pain reliever), *Sarpavisha* (snake-poison), *Bhagna* (fracture), *Meha* (urine diseases), etc. *Ashvattha* is also mentioned in religious books like *Bhagavad Geeta* as well as in Buddhist literature. This review may enrich biography research and may provide collective and detailed information about *Ashvattha* as presented in Ayurvedic classical texts.

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INTRODUCTION

Ashvattha is known as the tree of knowledge and enlightenment as per *Veda*¹, the site of Lord Krishna as per *Bhagawad Geeta*² and a sacred tree to help attain the ultimate knowledge according to Buddhist literature³. A wide description of *Ashwattha* can be cited from classical Ayurveda literature like *Samhitas* and *Sangraha grantha*. Medicinally, *Ashvattha* is used as an integral part of *Panchavalkala* and

Nyagrodhadi Gana both externally as well as internally. Recently, drugs/ formulations of herbal origin have gained great importance and raised consideration worldwide. Systematic reviews of medicinal plants like *Ashvattha* (which are abundantly available, efficacious to manage many diseases, cost effective) can be beneficial for the health care system at large.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Information regarding the medicinal plant

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Ashvattha was collected from nine *Samhitas* and six *Sangraha granthas* as per Table 1 and twenty-eight *Nighantu* as per Table 2 which were available as hard copy books or online sources of E-Nighantu.

Table 1 List of referred *Samhita* and *Samgraha grantha* for collection of literary data regarding *Ashwattha*

Sr. no.	Samhita
1.	<i>Charak Samhita</i> ⁴
2.	<i>Sushrut Samhita</i> ⁵
3.	<i>Astanga hridaya</i> ⁶
4.	<i>Astanga samgraha</i> ⁷
5.	<i>Sharangdhara samhita</i> ⁸
6.	<i>Bhavaprakash samhita</i> ⁹
7.	<i>Bhela Samhita</i> ¹⁰
8.	<i>Harita Samhita</i> ¹¹
9.	<i>Kashyap Samhita</i> ¹²
10.	<i>Vangasena</i> ¹³
11.	<i>Chakradutta</i> ¹⁴
12.	<i>Vrinda madhava</i> ¹⁵
13.	<i>Bhaishajya ratnavali</i> ¹⁶
14.	<i>Yoga ratnakara</i> ¹⁷
15.	<i>Bharatbhaishajya ratnakara</i> ¹⁸

Table 2 List of referred *Nighantus* where *Ashvattha* is described

Sr. no.	Nighantu
1.	<i>Abhidhanamanjiri</i> ¹⁹
2.	<i>Abhidhanaratnamala</i> ²⁰
3.	<i>Amarkosha</i> ²¹
4.	<i>Astanga Nighantu</i> ²²
5.	<i>Bhavaprakasha Nighantu</i> ²³
6.	<i>Dhanavantari Nighantu</i> ²⁴
7.	<i>Dravyaguna samgaha</i> ²⁵
8.	<i>Hrudayadipaka Nighantu</i> ²⁶
9.	<i>Kaiyadeva Nighantu</i> ²⁷
10.	<i>Laghu Nighantu</i> ²⁸
11.	<i>Madanadi Nighantu</i> ²⁹
12.	<i>Madanapala Nighantu</i> ³⁰
13.	<i>Madhavadravyaguna</i> ³¹

Table 3 Classification of *Ashvattha*

Based on first drug of the group	<i>Nyagrodhadi</i> ^{19,22,39} , <i>Haritakyadi</i> ³⁵ , <i>Aamradi</i> ^{24,36,46}
Based on the useful part	<i>Phala Varga</i> ^{25,31}
Based on common <i>guna-karma</i>	<i>Vatadi</i> ^{23,30,32,41}
Based on habit	<i>Vrukshadi</i> ⁴⁰ , <i>Mahavruksha Varga</i> ³⁸ , <i>Vrukshakanda</i> ³³
Based on habitat	<i>Vanaushadhi Varga</i> ²¹
Based on <i>dinacharya</i>	<i>Madhyanhik Parichheda</i> ³⁷
Based on <i>doshakarma</i>	<i>Pittakaphaghna Varga</i> ⁴⁴

14.	<i>Nighantu Adarsha</i> ³²
15.	<i>Nighantushesha</i> ³³
16.	<i>Paryayaratnamala</i> ³⁴
17.	<i>Priya Nighantu</i> ³⁵
18.	<i>Raja Nighantu</i> ³⁶
19.	<i>Rajavallabha nighantu</i> ³⁷
20.	<i>Sarasvati Nighantu</i> ³⁸
21.	<i>Saushruta Nighantu</i> ³⁹
22.	<i>Shabdachandrika</i> ⁴⁰
23.	<i>Shaligrama Nighantu</i> ⁴¹
24.	<i>Shankara Nighantu</i> ⁴²
25.	<i>Shivakosa Nighantu</i> ⁴³
26.	<i>Siddhamantra Nighantu</i> ⁴⁴
27.	<i>Siddhasara Nighantu</i> ⁴⁵
28.	<i>Sodhala Nighantu</i> ⁴⁶

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULT

In Ayurveda classical texts, the medicinal plants have been categorized into various groups and devised formal terms for these groups as *Gana* (class), *Varga* (group of medicinal plants), *Mahakashaya* (Group of ten drugs), and *Skandha* (group). These groups are formed on basis of origin, morphology, property, pharmacodynamics and therapeutic principles. *Ashvattha*, has been placed into various groups/sections, by almost all classical text which is presented in Table 3. While going through these classifications the scientific approach of *Nighantus* behind these classifications seems self explanatory. Out of 25 *Nighantus*, four had described the drug under *Vatadi Varga*.

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Based on drug letter numbers	Trayakshara Tha-Anta Varga ⁴³
Based on the serial no. of the group	Trinsha Gana ²⁹
Based on use	Aushadhi Varga ²⁷
Based on taste	Kashaya Skandha ²⁰
Based on the no. of synonyms described	Aekapada Varga ²⁶

Table 4 Nirukti (Etymology) of synonyms and their interpretation^{47, 48}

Synonyms of <i>Ashvaththa</i> Based on morphological characters	Nirukti and Interpretation
<i>Peepal</i> ^{6,7,8,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,26,27,28,29,30,32,33,34,35,36,38,39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46,47,48}	In the native language, this word is used for leaves and also for its small sweet fruits
<i>Kshiridruma</i> ^{7,18,24,36} , <i>kshiravruksha</i> ^{4,5,6,7,10,12,15,17,18,25,29,30,35,37,38} , <i>kshiri</i> ^{5,18}	<i>kshirapadapa</i> ²⁷ , It is one of the milky trees
<i>Swadubeejaka</i> ^{27,29}	Has sweet fruits
<i>Bahuparni</i> ³⁸	A tree having many leaves.
<i>Guhyapushpa</i> ³⁶	Flowers are invisible
<i>Guhyapatra</i> ²⁴	The leaves' shape is like the female reproductive system
<i>Shirapatra</i> ⁴⁰	Leaves have prominent venation
<i>Charmadala</i> ⁴⁰	Has big and thick bark
<i>Chalapatra</i> ^{22,23,24,28,29,33,36,38,41} , <i>chalapatraka</i> ²⁰ , <i>chalaparna</i> ³⁹ , <i>chaladala</i> ^{20,21,27,30,32}	Leaves are moving most of the times.
<i>Shrungi</i> ³⁹	Have prominent leaf buds.
Related to animals	
<i>Ashvattha</i> ^{1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,38,39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46,47,48}	Has mythological origin from Ashva (horse) and is used as an aphrodisiac
<i>Gajashana</i> ^{20,23,24,29,30,34,38,39,41,46} , <i>gajanana</i> ²⁷ , <i>kunjarashana</i> ^{21,32,40} , <i>gajabhakshaka</i> ³⁶ , <i>gajabhaksha</i> ²⁸ , <i>Viradashana</i> ³³ , <i>Nagabandhu</i> ⁴⁰	Being eaten by elephants or loved by elephants
<i>Hayamaraka</i> ⁴⁰	Bad for horses
Based on pharmacological action or diseases	
<i>Pleehari</i> ⁴⁰	used in splenomegaly
<i>Chandrakara</i> ²⁴	Cold in nature
Based on religion	
<i>Suchidruma</i> ^{24,36,46} , <i>Shyamala</i> ^{20,24,36,27,28,30,33,38} , <i>Shyamalachadda</i> ²⁴ , <i>shreevruksha</i> ³³ , <i>mangalya</i> ^{27,36,30,33,38,46} , <i>devabhavana</i> ⁴⁰ , <i>devahvaya</i> ⁴⁰ , <i>Keshavavasa</i> ^{24,27,32,33,38,46} , <i>harivasa</i> ³⁰ , <i>pavitraka</i> ^{20,24,36,38,46} , <i>vipra</i> ^{24,36} , <i>dharmavruksha</i> ³⁶ , <i>achyutavasa</i> ³⁶ , <i>Shreemana</i> ^{24,36} , <i>shubhada</i> ^{24,36} , <i>lakshmiavana</i> ^{27,29} , <i>Sevya</i> ^{24,36} , <i>satya</i> ^{24,36} , <i>suchi</i> ²⁷ , <i>dharmavruksha</i> ^{24,36} , <i>mangala</i> ²⁸	According to religion, <i>Ashvattha</i> is the residence of Lord Krishna and is also known religious tree for worship.
<i>Chaityadruma</i> ^{24,36} , <i>chaitrapada</i> ²⁰ , <i>chaityadru</i> ²⁰ , <i>chaitya</i> ²⁷ , <i>chaityavruksha</i> ^{29,34,38,39}	It is regarded as a religious tree.
<i>Bodhivruksha</i> ^{3,10,18,20,24,28,36,39,46} , <i>Bodhipadapa</i> ³⁰ , <i>Bodhi</i> ^{22,26,27,29,33,34,38} , <i>bodhidru</i> ^{9,41} , <i>bodhidruma</i> ^{32,40} , <i>bodhisattva</i> ²⁷	Gautama attained enlightenment under this tree.
<i>Yagnika</i> ³⁶	Used in sacrifices and Havana.
Others	
<i>Vanyavruksha</i> ⁴⁸	Growing wild
<i>Mahadruma</i> ²⁴	A big tree
<i>Dirghayu</i> ^{20,39,38}	Long living tree

Saraswatinighantu and *Nighantusesha* have classified drugs according to morphology and quoted *Ashvattha* in *Mahavruksha Varga* and *Vrukshakan* respectively.

Abhidhanaratnamala has classified drugs according to *Rasa* and quoted under *Kashaya*

skandha. *Siddhamantra Nighantu* has classified drugs according to *Doshagnata* and quoted under *Pitta-kaphaghna Varga*. Rest have been mentioned in different *Dravya Vargas* such as *Vatdi*, *Nyagrodhadi*, *Aamradi*, *Aamradi phala*, and *Haritakyadi Varga*, etc. The details of
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classifications of *Ashvattha* have been enumerated in Table 3.

Table 5 *Rasadipanchaka* (Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics properties) and *Doshaghata*

Rasa	<i>Kashaya</i> ^{20,27,29,31,32,35,36,37,41,42} <i>madhura</i> ^{29,32,36,37,42} , <i>amla</i> ^{31,37}
Guna	<i>Guru</i> ^{23,27,31,32,37,41,42} , <i>ruksha</i> ^{32,41} , <i>durjara</i> ^{30,32,41,42}
Virya	<i>Shita</i> ^{23,27,29,30,32,35,36,37,41,42}
Vipaka	<i>Madhura</i> ^{29,37}
Doshakarma	<i>Pitta-kaphahara</i> ^{23,29,30,36,41,44} , <i>natimarutakopana</i> ³⁷
Karma and	<i>Varnya</i> ^{27,29,32,39,41} , <i>sangrahi</i> ^{32,39} , <i>stambhana</i> ³⁵ , <i>vrushya</i> ²⁹ , <i>vajik</i> <i>ara</i> ³⁵
Rogaghata	<i>Yonivishodhana</i> ^{23,27,29,32,39,41,42} , <i>vranastrajita</i> ²³ , <i>vranahitakara</i> ⁴² <i>raktadahashamana</i> ³⁶ , <i>yonidosaharana</i> ³⁶ , <i>kilapava</i> ³⁶ , <i>raktapittaghna</i> ^{24,28,39} , <i>sarvatisaranashana</i> ²⁸ , <i>sarpadivishanashana</i> ²⁸ , <i>bhagnasandhana</i> ³⁹ , <i>vatarakta</i> ³⁵ , <i>mehahara</i> ³⁹ , <i>dahahara</i> ^{39,42}

In ancient time, there was a system to describe the Medicinal plants/ drugs through various synonyms. These synonyms were indicative of different attributes of plants like morphology, properties, actions, mythological importance etc. The synonyms of this plant mainly suggestive of the morphology of its leaves, latex, bark, its actions as well as its mythological importance. The synonyms with their derivation are presented in Table 4.

The properties, actions and indications of *Ashvattha* are depicted in Table 5.

Its *rasa* (Taste) being prominently *kashaya*, *virya* – *shita* and *vipak* – *madhura*. *Ashvattha* has been indicated in the management of different diseased conditions. Among these, main indications are for *Meha* (group of urinary system diseases), *Raktapitta* (bleeding disorders), *Visarpa* (skin disease like erysipelas), *Kustha* (various skin

diseases), *Arsha* (piles), *Vidradhi* (abscess), *Bhagna* (bone fracture), *Visha* (poisoning), *Trushna* (excessive thirst disorder), *Jwara* (fever) *Vrana* (wound), *Yonidosha* (diseases of female genital area), *Grahani* (IBS like disease), *chardi* (Vomiting), *atisara* (Diarrhoea), *upadamsha* (Syphilis like disease), *balagraha* (Paediatric diseases), *masurika* (Pox). The major actions of *Ashvattha* are *Karma* like *varnya* (complexion promotor), *dahahara* (subsiding burning sensation), *yonivishodhana* (cleansing the female genital region), *aratihara* (analgesic), *vishahara* (curing poisoning).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ashvattha has *Kashaya-tikta* rasa that helps to alleviate the *kapha-pitta dosha*. Also, helps to heal the wounds and cuts and thus make it useful to reduce *Daha*, *Raktapitta* roga, *Prameha*.

Ashvattha has 61 synonyms in various *Samhitas* and lexicons. *Ashvattha* and *peepal* are most commonly used in those books. Maximum synonym mentioned in *Raja Nighantu* i.e. 20³⁶.

- *Ashvattha* is majorly included in *Nyagrodhadi*, *Vatadi*, *Amradi*, and *Panchvalkala*, *Kshirivruksha Gana*^{4,5,6,7,19,20,22,39}.
- *Shabdachandrika* and *Saraswati* nighantu started with the *Ashvattha* description^{38,40}.
- *Ashvattha* is mainly used in the treatment of *Vrana*, *Yonidosha*, *Meha*, *Piitaja Visarpa*, *Upadamsha*, *Sotha*, *Piitja Vikaras*, *Mutravidhi*, *And Mutravikara*^{4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,32,35}.

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