Alstonia Scholaris: A Brief Review

Haritha babu M.M1, Ananya Bhattacharjee2, Karunakar Hegde3, Dr. A.R Shabaraya4
1. Post Graduate Student, Department of Pharmacology, Srinivas College of Pharmacy, Valachili, Farangipete (post), Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Srinivas College of Pharmacy, Valachili, Farangipete(post), Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
3. Professor and Head, Department of Pharmacology, Srinivas College of Pharmacy, Valachili, Farangipete(post), Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
4. Professor and Head, Pharmaceutics Department, Srinivas College of Pharmacy, Valachili, Farangipete (post), Mangalore, Karnataka, India.

*Corresponding author’s E-mail: achusachu22@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
Our nature is surrounded with wide variety of plants and many of them are having medicinal properties. These medicinal plants have been playing an essential role in the development of human being. They contain the substances that provide nourishment essential for maintains of life and for growth. The medicinal plants have achieved very important role in health care system all over the world. Alstonia scholaris is an evergreen tropical tree in the family of apocynaceae, commonly called as devils tree, dita bark and saptaparna. Different parts of it are used as traditional medicine as well as it is proven to have to treat malaria, rheumatism, fever, skin diseases, dysentery etc. They are the rich source of many kind of alkaloids, flavonoids and phenolic compounds.

Keywords: Alstonia scholaris, Saptaparna, Vishaltwak, Chatraparna, Shalmalipatrak.

INTRODUCTION
Herbal medicine has now become an integral part of standard healthcare, as they are used both traditionally as well as in ongoing scientific research. Herbal medicines are rich in natural substances that can promote health and reduce illness. In ayurveda plenty of herbs are enlisted to cure different ailments. The plant Alstonia scholaris also known as Devils tree or Dita Bark tree belonging to Apocynaceae family, has been used in Ayurvedic, Unani and Sidhha/Tamil types of traditional medication for the treatment of diseases and ailments of human being. The plant is grown in the lowland and mountain rainforests of India, the Asia-Pacific, Southern China and Queensland.1

Synonyms: Vishaltwak, Chatraparna, Shalmalipatrak, Gucchapush-pak, Sharada, saptaparna, Saptacchada, Madaganda etc.2

Propagation and Cultivation
It is easily raised through seeds and prefers fairly most conditions. The tree is sometimes planted in gardens for ornamental purpose (Fig 1). It grows in soil including alluvia, basaltic red earth, yellow earth with grey brown top soil, sandy grey earth. The necessary Altitude is 0-900 M. The required mean annual rainfall is 1200-1400 mm.3

Botanical Description4-7
Alstonia scholaris is a large, evergreen tree, approximately 6–10 m in height.

Bark: Its bark is rough, having grayish white to whitish color inside and exuding yellowish bitter latex when injures.

Leaves: The leaves are thick, dark green, arranged in whorls, obovate to oblanceolate, narrow at the base, entire, rounded or bluntly acuminate at apex, petioles 6–12 mm long (Fig 2).

Figure 1: Alstonia scholaris tree

Taxonomical Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Plantae</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Gentianales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Apocynaceae</td>
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<td>Tribe</td>
<td>Plumeriae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subtribe</td>
<td>Alstoniinae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genus</td>
<td>Alstonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Alstonia scholaris</td>
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Phytochemistry

Commonly *A. scholaris* plant contains alkaloids, coumarins, flavonoids, leucoanthocyanins, reducing sugars, simple phenolics, steroids, saponins and tannins. Leaf extract contain the eight elements such as Cu, Zn, Fe, Ca, Cr, Mn and Cd. Ethanolic extract of leaves contain four picrin type monoterpenoids indole alkaloids, 5β-methoxyaspidophylline, picrine, picralinal, 5-methoxystrictamine, methanolic extract of leaves contain the first seco-uleine alkaloids. The hydro alcoholic extract of leaves contain 2, 3 secoferane triterpenoids, alstonic acids A and B, together with an indole alkaloid, N-methoxymethyl picrine.

Traditional and Local Uses

Different parts of *A. scholaris* have been used in medicine of ayurveda, Siddha, Unani in India for the treatment of jaundice, gastrointestinal disease, malaria, cancer etc. The bark of *A. scholaris* is used as laxative, antipyretic, astringent and cardiotonic and also used to treat pruritis, leprosy, skin diseases, bronchitis, asthma and ulcer. Traditionally leaves are used for treatment of malaria, diarrhea and dysentery. Fruits are used as tonic and anthelmintic and also used to treat epilepsy.

PHARMACOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

Antibacterial activity

Methanolic extract of the *A. scholaris* bark was found to be active on Gram positive bacteria i.e. *Bacillus coagulans* and gram negative bacteria i.e. *Escherichia coli*.

Analgesic and anti-inflammatory activity

Leaf of *A. scholaris* contain alkaloids like picrinine, vallesamine and scholaricine are reported to show analgesic and anti-inflammatory activity based on several in vivo assays. The alkaloids inhibited COX-1, COX-2 and 5-LOX mediators of inflammation in invitro tests.

Antidiabetic and antihyperlipidemic activity

Ethanolic extract of *A. scholaris* and glibenclamide were found to significantly reduce the blood glucose level, glycosylated hemoglobin and lipid peroxidation, whereas they increased body weight, liver and muscle glycogen and antioxidant status, whereas histopathology of pancreas revealed that the pancreatic β-cell damage with streptozotocin did not reverse.

Anti-arthritic and antioxidant activity

*A. scholaris* ethanolic extract decreased the arthritis significantly which was apparently visible with arthritis index, body weight and leukocyte infiltration, as well as significant reduction in gastric lesion indices and gastric juice secretion. Significant increase was found in the antioxidant enzymes such as glutathione, glutathione peroxidase and superoxide dismutase, as well as significant reduction in the levels of lipid peroxidation and myeloperoxide in the articular tissue were evident.
Anticancer activity

The bark extract of A. scholaris has been proven anticancer activity against radiation induced biochemical alteration in mice by ameliorating cholesterol and lipid peroxidation. Alcoholic extracts of A. scholaris reportedly reduced the total aberrant cells and it reduced total frequencies of aberration in vivo.  

Antitubercular activity

Methanolic extracts of leaf, stem bark and root bark of A. scholaris has been proven to have anti-tubercular activity. The anti-mycobacterial activity showed that A. scholaris extract has the potential to cure tuberculosis.  

Antifertility activity

Lupeol acetate isolated from benzene extract of A. scholaris has been reported to exhibit antifertility effect.  

Hepatoprotective activity

The methanolic stem bark extract of A. scholaris was effective in bringing the functional improvement of hepatocytes and proven to significantly decrease the biochemical parameters such as SGOT, SGPT, ALP, TP and TB.  

Ameliorating effect

Aqueous bark extract of A. scholaris has been reported to reduce injury in the liver and kidney sections histopathologically compared to viper venom which may be attributed to the complexation of polyphenols with venom enzymes.  

CONCLUSION

The plant Alstonia scholaris is an evergreen tree. Many parts of this plant has been used in traditional systems of medicines for treating various ailments such as antibacterial, antimicrobial, astringent, asthma etc. The plant contains various chemical constituents mostly alkaloids, coumarins, flavonoids, leucoanthocyanins, reducing sugars, simple phenolics, steroids, saponins and tannins. Apart from these many researches has been done on this plant and proven that the plant is having many pharmacological activities.

REFERENCES