

International Research Journal of Ayurveda & Yoga

An International Peer Reviewed Journal for Ayurveda & Yoga

Understanding the *Rudhita* Synonyms of Plants as Scientific InformationSharavati Goroba Kamble¹

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 7

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Ayurveda is the science of life in which all the details related to health and illness are explained in three categories viz. *Hetu* - causative factors, *Linga* - signs and symptoms and *Aushadha* - medicine. Further, *Aushadha* is explained in detail as treatment or procedure. Plants are one of the major constituents of the treatment part. In various Ayurvedic *Samhitas*, plants were described in brief until specific *Granthas* or texts were written focusing the plants. The texts in which the data about plants is compiled and recorded are classified as *Nighantu*. In *Nighantu* the information about plants is divided into two parts, synonyms and properties. Synonyms are considered as the guide for the identification of the plant in particular. This article aims to unravel the mysterious yet scientific information held by the synonym of certain plants.

Some plants have synonyms based on *Rudhi* (Tradition) or Tale. To understand the *Rudhita* synonyms in detail, four plants viz. *Shami*, *Agasti*, *Bilva* and *Kutaja* are selected and reviewed for their literary meaning and properties.

It is observed that the synonyms of these plants like *Agnigarbha* for *Prosopis cineraria* (*Shami*), *Agasti* for *Sesbania grandiflora* (*Hadga*), *Bilva*, *Shreephala* for *Aegle marmelos* (*Bael*) and *Indravruksha* for *Holarrhena antidysenterica* (*Kutaja*) hold specific properties and different scientific information than mere names.

Keyword: Synonyms, *Prosopis cineria*, *Sesbania grandiflora*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Holarrhena antidysenterica*, *Agnigarbha*, *Agasti*, *Shreephala*, *Indravruksha*



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How to cite this article: Kamble S G, Understanding the *Rudhita* Synonyms of Plants as Scientific Information; IRJAY. [Online] 2021;4(7): 143-147. Available from: <http://irjay.com> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47223/IRJAY.2021.4721>

INTRODUCTION

Nighantus are the texts in which the data related to plants is compiled. *Dhanvantari Nighantu* is considered as the first dedicated compilation of plants. This *Nighantu* is written in 'synonyms followed by properties' format. The similar pattern is followed by *Nighantus* written thereafter. In *Rajanighantu* the basis of nomenclature of plants or drug material is described distinctively for the first time, which is as follows^[1] –

“*Namani Kvachid Iha Rudhitah Swabhawat
Deshoktya Kwachan chaLanchhano
pamabhyam Veeryen Kwachiditara vhayadi
deshat Dravyanam Dhruvamiti Saptadhoditani
||*”

Rajanighantu, Chapter 1 verse 13.

Rudhita – Name given by natives on the basis of some tale like *Agasti* for *Sasbania grandiflora*, *Shreephala* for *Aegle marmelos* (*Bilva*), *Agnigarbha* for *Prosopis cineraria* (*Shami*), *Indravruksha* for *Holarrhena antidysenterica* (*Kutaja*).

Svabhavata – Name given on the basis of nature of action of the plant like *Chhardana* (Emetic) for *Catunaregam spinosa* (*Madanaphala* for its emesis inducing nature).

Deshokti – Name denoted by its habitat or by the name of the place where it is found like *Kashmiraja* (borne in Kashmir) for saffron.

Lanchhana – Name based on specific morphological character like *Chitratandula* (Colorful design on seeds) for *Embelia ribes* (*Vidanga*).

Upama – Name denoted by noting the similarity to some popular substance like *Meshashruni* which means the plant which resembles to the horns of *Mesha* (The Ram).

Veerya – Name based on potency or specific property of the plant like *Agni* for *Plumbago zeylanica* (*Chitraka*).

Itaravhaya – Names related to some bird,

animal or characteristic like *Kakavhaya* for *Solanum nigrum* (*Kakamachi* -Named after Crow), *Hayavhaya* for *Withania somnifera* (*Ashvagandha* – Named after Horse).

All the types of synonyms depict some or the other quality or identifying character of the plant. Therefore, the synonyms are considered as one of the important means for identification of the plant. At the same time, these synonyms contain some very important scientific information as well, which is explored in this article.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To understand the scientific basis of *Rudhita* synonyms of the plants.

To review *Rudhita* (Traditional) or Tale based names or synonyms of *Shami*, *Agasti*, *Bilva* and *Kutaja*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bruhat Trayee, *Laghu Trayee*, Books of *Dravyaguna*, *Ayurved Itihas*, Journals and Sanskrit dictionaries are referred. Meaning of the synonyms are studied and related information is reviewed.

Review of the synonyms:

Shami (*Prosopis cineria*) is one of the important plants in Ayurved. It holds importance in Hinduism. Its various synonyms and properties are described in different *Nighantus*. It is considered as sacred plant and offered to God Shiva and Shree Ganesha. *Agnigarbha* is one of the synonyms of *Shami* which is based on *Rudhi*.

Agnigarbha – It means the plant which holds *Agni* or fire in its womb or wood.^[2]The name is given to the plant on the basis of a story explained in chapter 35 of *Anushasana Parva* of *Mahabharata* in which God of Fire '*Agni*' hid in the trunk of the tree to save himself from getting crushed or cursed. It indicates that the wood of this tree holds the importance in generating fire. Further, it is observed that, this tree was and still is used as firewood by the villagers in India. The most interesting part

is that it is also used as a source of Industrial biofuel. One of the biopower plants in Andhra Pradesh which uses 100% agricultural biomass as fuel of which 40% of the biomass comes from Prosopis wood and contributes 200 megawatts of electricity to the state. The wood of Prosopis gives 3800- 4000Kcal/kg of heat energy when burnt. [3]

Bilva – It is the name given to *Aegle marmelos*, the Bael tree. It means it has the power to break. The word is derived from root ‘Bila’ – ‘Bhedane’, as it works on the *Pureesha Mala* i.e. solid waste material of the body i. e. stools. [4] In Ayurveda, leaves of *Bilva* are used for treating body odour, to alleviate emesis, to enhance the smell of medicinal formulation or to mask the unpleasant smell of any content in the formulation. Unripened fruits are used to treat dysentery and ripe fruits are used in refreshing drinks and for mild laxation. [5]

Bilva is also considered as a sacred plant. Leaves of this plant are used for worshipping God Shiva and fruits are used to worship Goddess Laxmi, ‘Goddess of wealth’.

Shreephala – the fruit which is liked by Shree or Goddess Laxmi. [6] Goddess Laxmi is considered as daughter of ocean as her birth is related with *Samudra Manthan*.

It is observed that *Bilva* fruit acts on the intestinal flora of human beings. It possesses the antimicrobial activity against the bad microbes that try to grow in the large intestine. [7] The *Bhedana karma* is done not only on the *Mala* i. e. stools but it also breaks the colonies of the bad microbes in the large intestine and restores the health of the former. It protects the intestines from damage and helps to maintain good health of the individual.

The fruits are also observed to have the antimicrobial activity against the bacteria which form biofilm on the marine machineries. The bacteria which adhere on the surface of ships in water form biofilm on the parts, reduce

the life of the metal in the water by damaging it. The chemicals derived from the fruits of *Bilva* prevent this degeneration or degradation by removing this biofilm. Thus, the *Bhedana karma* is seen in sea also. [8] It prevents the metallic objects in the ocean from getting damaged and also helps in reducing fuel consumption as well as the maintenance cost. This contributes in monetary benefits.

Agasti – it is the name given to plant *Sesbania grandiflora*. The name belongs to one of the revered sages in ancient India who swallowed the ocean in rage. The story is explained in Ramayana.

Agasti plant is predominantly used to treat night blindness and periodic fever as per Ayurveda. Its roots, flowers, fruits and leaves are usable. It is observed that this plant grows in saline water and absorbs the salinity of the soil like *Agasti Rishi* drank the saline water of the ocean. [9] It is also observed that the plant acts as diuretic agent on kidneys which removes water and salts from the body by the action of diuresis. [10]

Indravruksha – It is the name given to the plant *Holarrhena antidysenterica*. The word ‘Indra’ has different meanings in Sanskrit. It is the name of the post for the ‘King of Gods’- who lives in heaven. It is also used for the place in mount Meru. [11] King of God Indra is known for his strength, vigor, custody of Amrut or elixir of life and responsible for the safety of Gods. The word ‘Indra’ also stands for Meru mountain.

Kutaja is a tree that grows on the mountains and is used as traditional medicine in Himalayas. [12] It is an important medicine useful to treat cancer of various organs in the body like liver, intestine, ovaries, uterus etc. It also used in urolithiasis not only to crush urinary stones but also to protect the Kidney tissue. [13] It is a potent blood coagulant and is used to manage haemorrhagic conditions like intestinal

bleed, uterine bleed etc. It is also used as an antidote in the snake bite. ^[14] The tree is inhabitant to the region of heavy rainfall or it can be said that it is one of the contributors for heavy rainfall. ^[15]

DISCUSSION

Synonyms are considered as one of the means to identify the plant among the triad *Naama*, *Rupa* and *Guna*. Synonyms explain various morphological characteristics as well as the medicinal properties of the plant. When some synonyms are attributed after some historical image or on the basis of some Tale, it becomes necessary to look at the characteristics it bears. It is observed that the meaning of such synonyms explains different medicinal as well as scientific aspects of the plant; than mere literal meaning.

Shami is called as *Agnigarbha* since it's mention in Mahabharata where the story of *Agni* is mentioned. *Agnigarbha* does not stand for plant only because of *Agni* sheltering in it but it also indicates that the plant has the potential to be used as a fuel resource for producing energy. The evidence also shows the use of plant as firewood and biofuel.

The name *Shreephala* along with the meaning of 'fruit liked by Goddess Laxmi' also means that by protecting the materials in sea from bacterial growth or biofilm, reducing the fuel consumption and the maintenance cost, it contributes in monetary benefits which are regarded as Laxmi. Due to its medicinal properties, it is used in treating dysentery in Ayurveda. Its antimicrobial action on large intestine contributes in restoration of health. Health, which is also regarded as Laxmi.

Agasti, as per the name after *Agasti Rishi*, it absorbs the saline water from the soil as well as reduces the water and salts from human body. Hence, name *Agasti* fits better to the plant in a scientific manner.

Indravruksha, as per its meaning, grows in the huge mountains of Himalayas. Being Indra, the King of God, he is responsible for providing security and safety to the Gods. *Kutaja* provides protection to the organs in the body against life threatening disease like cancer. As Indra holds Amruta which is considered as antidote for poison, *Kutaja* is also used as antidote for the *Echis carinatus* (Phurase snake) bites. There are other plants which act as blood coagulant but do not act as an antidote for poison. *Kutaja* is the drug which acts as both, anticoagulant as well as antidote for poison. Indra is also held responsible for the regulation of rain as well as heavy rainfall on earth. He is worshiped for the blessing of rainfall on earth. *Kutaja* grows in region of heavy rainfall and contributes in the rainfall.

In this way, these synonyms uncover the aspects of the plants different from medicinal uses. The review explores the Industrial benefit of *Shami* as it is used as biofuel. It discovers the environmental benefit of *Bilva* by protecting the marine machineries from biofilm. It explores an agricultural benefit of *Agasti*, as it is used to reduce the salinity of the soil, so that, the quality of the soil changes and other crops can be grown. *Kutaja* contributes to the rainfall in that region giving environmental benefit. All of these aspects again contribute to the socio-economic benefits for the civilization. These plants are useful not only as medicines but are beneficial in different aspects of life. Therefore, the cultivation and conservation of all these plants need to be promoted.

CONCLUSION

After going through this literary review, it becomes evident that the synonyms given to the plants based on *Rudhi* are apt and hold enormous scientific information.

Scope of the study: More such synonyms need to be reviewed and assessed for various aspects

and their uses in areas beside medicine.

Acknowledgment: Nil. **Financial Support:**

Nil. **Conflict of Interest:** Nil

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