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Nyagrodh: The pious Indian medicinal plant

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Abstract

Nyagrodh, Udumber, Ashvath, Paarish and Plaksha are panchkshiri vruksha also known as Panchvalkal. Nyagrodh or Vata is one of the panchkshiri vruksha known as the National tree of India and due to its religious importance it can be easily identified by a common man. It works as anti-inflammatory drug having properties of healing and coagulation. Present review of Nyagrodh includes its importance in Indian Culture, geographical distribution, ecology, ornamental value, morphology, Taxonomical classification and Ayurvedic perspective includes list of various Nighantus along with the Varga in which Nyogrodh is included, vernacular names, synonyms, classification, pharmacological properties, chemical composition, mode of action, parts used, indications and few Ayurvedic formulations containing Nyagrodh as an ingredient.

Keywords: Nyagrodh, banyan tree, vata vriksha, panchvalkal

Introduction

- *Ficus bengalensis* or Nyagrodh (Banyan Tree) is the National tree of India. It is a large and extensive growing tree of the Indian subcontinent. *Ficus bengalensis* produces propagating roots which grow downwards as aerial roots and on reaching the ground, they evolve into woody trunks which are identical to the main trunk. Nyogrodh is a fig that starts its life as an epiphyte (a plant growing on another plant) when its seed germinate in the cracks and crevices on a host tree [1].

Importance in Indian Culture [2]

Rig Veda and *Atharva Veda* set forth that trees should be praised for their inexorable part in human life. In Hinduism the leaf of this tree is said to be the resting place for the Lord Krishna. In *Bhagavat Gita*, Lord Krishna said "there is a Banyan tree, which has its roots upwards and its branches down and the vedic hymns are its leaves. One who knows this tree is the knower of Vedas" (Bhagwat Geeta 15.1).

This tree is often called as "*Kalpavriksha*", a Sanskrit word which means "a divine tree that fulfills wishes". Married hindu woman worship the Banyan tree to have a long and happy married life (Badh Purnima).

God Shiva as Dakshinamurthy nearly always sitting in silence under the Banyan tree with Rishis at his feet. It is notion of as flawlessly symbolizing perpetual life due to its seemingly incessant expansion.

Large Specimen [1]: The giant Banyan trees of India are the largest trees in the world as measured by Canopy coverage.

1. One individual, Thimmamma Marrimanu, in Andhra Pradesh covers 19,107 Sq. meters, making it the largest single tree by two dimensional Canopy coverage area. This tree is the world's largest known tree by a related measure, perimeter length, with a distance of 846 meters required to walk around the edge of the canopy.
2. The great Banyan in the Indian botanic garden, Howrah is considered to be one of the largest trees in the world in terms of area covered.
3. Two other well known trees are found in Varanasi and Karnataka called Dodda Alada Mara.

Ecology: The figs are eaten by birds and mammals. Seeds of fig are disseminated by bird viz. Indian Mynas and researches have reported that seeds which pass through the digestive system of the bird are more likely to generate as well as sprout earlier.

Ornamental Value: Due to complex structure of the roots and extensive branching, *Ficus bengalensis* is extensively used for creating bonsai.

Taiwan's oldest living bonsai is a 240 year old Banyan housed in Tainan.

In Ancient Times: During the ancient period various important Ayurvedic Classics were compiled. Nyagrodh is mentioned in various Samhitas and Nighantus. In Charak Samhita it is included in Ksirivruksha^[3]. Acharya Charak described that it works in keeta visha badha^[4]. Acharya Vagbhata also included Nyagrodh in Ksirivruksha. In Nighantus detailed information of all available herbs are described under the groups called Vargas.

Table 1: List of various Nighantus along with the Varga in which Nyagrodh is included is listed below

Nighantu	Vargas
Bhavprakash Nighantu ^[5]	Vataadi Varga
Nighantu Aadarsha ^[6]	Vataadi Varga
Priya Nighantu ^[7]	Vataadi Varga
Shaaligramma Nighantu ^[8]	Vataadi Varga
Raaj Nighantu ^[9]	Aamradi varga
Dhanvantri Nighantu ^[10]	Aamradi varga
Kaiyadeva Nighantu ^[11]	Vataadi Varga

Table 2: Vernacular names of Vata^[12]

Arabic	Jhatulejaibra
Assam	Bot
Bengal	Bar, Bot, But
Burma	Pyinyaung, Pyinyoung
Canarese	Al, Ala, Alada, Goli, Nyagrodh, Vata
Ceylon	Al
English	Banyan Tree
French	Arbre des banians, Arbre des pagodes, Figuier due bengale
Garo	Rankot
Gujrati	Vad, vadlo, Vor
Hindi	Bar, Bargad, Bargat, Ber, Bor
Kolami	Bai, Boi
Konkani	Vad, Vhad
Malaya	Bor
Malyalam	Ala, Nyagrodhm, Peral, Perala, Vatam
Marathi	Vada, Wad, War
Nepal	Bar, Barakar, Borhar
Northwest Provinces	Kurka, Wora
Persian	Darakhteresha
Portuguese	Arvore de gralha, Figueira de Bengala
Punjab	Bargad, Bera, Bohar, Bohir, Bor
Sanskrit	Avaroha, Bahupada, Bahupadi, Bhandira, Bhiringi, Chira, Dhruva, Jatala, Jatiljati, Karmaja, Kshiri, Mahachhaya, Mana, Mandali, Nandi, Nila, Nyagrodh, Padarohona, Patanga, Raktaphala, Rohina, Shipharvha, Shungi, Skandhajanya, Vaishravanavas, Vaishravanodaya, Vanaspati, Vata, Vitapi, Vrikshanath, Yakshataru, Yakshavas, Yamapriya
Tamil	Al, Ala, Alam, Eguvasam, Koli, Vekurodam, Pali
Telugu	Mari, Matti, Vitapi, Vati
Urdu	Bargoda

Synonyms^[13]

1. Vata, Avarohi, Nyagrodh, Mandali: It sends down aerial roots from branches which entering into the ground from accessory trunk.
2. Mahachhaya : It provides dense shade in a circular area.
3. Kshiri : Tree with latex.
4. Vanaspati : It is a plant of vanaspati type having fruits without manifest flowers.
5. Raktaphala : Fruits of red colour.
6. Skandhaj : Fruits appear on trunk.
7. Shungi : Leaf buds present.
8. Padarohi
9. Bahupada : Having many trunks

Table 3: Classification according to Ayurveda^[14]

Constituents	Chetan Dravya
Morphology	Kaarya Dravya
Mahabhuta	Prithavi, Aap
Use	Aushdhee Dravya
Action	Kaphapittahara, Mutrasangrahaniya, Stambhana, Varnya
Gana	Mutrasangrahaniya (Charak), Nyagrodhdi Gana (Susruta), Nyagrodhdi Gana (Vagbhata)

Table 4: Ayurvedic Phamacology^[14]

Rasa	Kashaya,
Guna	Guru, Ruksha
Virya	Sheeta (In all Nighantus)
Vipaka	Katu (In all Nighantus)

1.3 According to Bio medical Science (Botanical information)^[15]

A) Habitat: It is found throughout India.

B) Morphology: A large, evergreen to deciduous upto 20-25 m. tall with wide leafy crown and branches spreading upto 100 m or more with pillar like prop roots and ascending trunks.

Trunk : Massive, Fluted

Bark : Grey, Smooth, young soft white Puberulous

Leaves : 3-6 inches long, stout, ventrally compressed, hairy petiole, ovate, elliptic, lateral nerves

Fruit : Fruit is round having a diameter of ½ to ¾ inch. It attains a red color when it ripens.

Taxonomy - Ficus bengalensis (Moraceae)

Common Names – Banyan, Banyan Tree, Indian Banyan, Bengal fig, Indian Fig, East Indian Fig, Indian Laurel.

Table 5: Taxonomical Classification of *Ficus bengalensis*

Kingdom	Plantae (Plants)
Sub Kingdom	Tracheobionta (Vascular Plants)
Super Division	Spermatophyta (Seed Plants)
Division	Magnoliophyta (Flowering Plants)
Class	Magnoliopsida (Dicotyledons)
Subclass	Hamamelidae
Order	Urticales
Family	Moraceae (Mulberry Family)
Genus	<i>Ficus</i> L. (Fig)
Species	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i> (Indian Banyan)

Geographical Distribution- Indian Banyan is native to a wide area of Asia, from India through Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Southeast Asia, Southern China and Malaysia. The tree is cultivated in parks and botanical gardens throughout the tropical regions of the world ^[16].

Indigenous Practices: The Indian Banyan tree is planted for soil conservation. The timber is used for furniture and it is suitable for paper pulp. The leaf with a unmilled protein content of 9.63% is employed for fodder. Fruits are traditionally used to prepare Shurbut ^[17].

Chemical Constituents- Its bark contains Leucoanthocyanin, Tiglic acid, β -Sitosterol, a-D glucoside, Ethanolic and petroleum ether extracts.

Parts Used: Bark, Latex, Leaf, Leaf Bud, Hanging Roots, Fruits

Karma (Mode Of Action): Kapha-pitta hara, Mutra Sangrahaniya, *Varnya*, Sthambhana. Bark of Nyagrodh acts as antibacterial and astringent. Topical use of bark reduces burning sensation, helps in healing of wound. Leaf bud of Vata is dissolved in milk and used in Pumsavana Sanskara. Camphor is mixed with latex of Vata and applied in Timira ^[18].

Dose-Decoction: 50-100 ml, Powder: 3-5 gm, Latex: 5-10 Drops

Medical Formulations (Ayurvedic Formulations): Panchvalkal Churna, Panchvalakal Kwath, Nyagrodhdi kashaya, Krishirivriksha Lepa, Nyagrodhadi Churana, Nyagrodhdi ghrut, Rogghantaila ^[14]

Indications: Bandhyatva, Yoniroga, Raktapitta, Visarpa, Vyanga, Trishna, Chardi ^[14]

Discussions

The giant Banyan tree of India is the largest tree in the world as measured by Canopy coverage. This tree is considered sacred in India and often shelter a little or large temple underneath. It is especially worshipped on full moon day in summers (badh purnima). Apart from worship, it is one of the most sheltering trees in the hot summers. The national tree of India, Banyan (Vata; *Ficus Bengalesis*, Nyagrodh) has a huge structure, long and deep roots and branches symbolize the country's unity. Banyan tree is contemplated as the centre point of the panchayats and the conclave place for village councils and meetings.

Conclusion

Nyagrodh included in *Ksirivruksha* (By Charaka and Vagbhata) has been described in various Samhitas and

Nighantus. Acharya Charak described that it works in keeta visha badha.

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