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Dr. Uzma D Soudagar
BHMS [Intern], Department
of Practice of Medicine, BVVS
Homoeopathic Medical College
and Hospital, Bagalkot,
Karnataka, India

Dr. Anupama
Assistant Professor,
Department of Practice of
Medicine, BVVS
Homoeopathic Medical College
and Hospital, Bagalkot,
Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Uzma D Soudagar
BHMS [Intern], Department
of Practice of Medicine, BVVS
Homoeopathic Medical College
and Hospital, Bagalkot,
Karnataka, India

A clinical exploration of *Justicia adhatoda* in chronic bronchitis and bronchial asthma

Uzma D Soudagar and Anupama

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Abstract

Justicia adhatoda (syn. *Adhatoda vasica*, commonly known as Vasaka or Malabar Nut) has been recognized for centuries in traditional systems of medicine for its significant therapeutic role in respiratory disorders. In Homoeopathy, it has evolved as a remedy of choice for bronchitic and asthmatic affections characterized by persistent cough, wheezing, and tenacious expectoration. The present study aims to explore the clinical and pharmacological significance of *Justicia adhatoda* in chronic bronchitis and asthma through an integrated perspective of its pathogenesis, proving data, and clinical efficacy. The article highlights its relationship to the homoeopathic law of similars and the modern understanding of its phytochemical composition, thereby reinforcing its use as an effective respiratory remedy in chronic obstructive airway conditions.

Keywords: *Justicia adhatoda*, vasaka, homoeopathy, chronic bronchitis, asthma, bronchial affections, materia medica

Introduction

Chronic respiratory disorders such as bronchitis and bronchial asthma are among the leading causes of morbidity worldwide, with environmental pollution, smoking, and infections serving as major predisposing factors [7]. Chronic bronchitis is characterized by a persistent productive cough lasting for at least three months in two consecutive years, whereas asthma is a reversible inflammatory disease marked by episodic breathlessness and airway hyperreactivity.

Homoeopathy, a system founded on the principle of *similia similibus curentur*, aims to restore health by stimulating the body's self-healing mechanisms through dynamic remedies. *Justicia adhatoda* occupies a prominent position among remedies acting on the respiratory system [3]. Traditionally known as "Vasaka," this shrub is deeply rooted in Indian medical heritage, being a vital constituent of several classical Ayurvedic formulations for cough and asthma [6].

Homoeopathically, *Justicia adhatoda* corresponds to respiratory disorders where irritation of the bronchial mucosa, excessive mucus production, and difficulty in expectoration are the leading features. Its therapeutic application extends beyond mere symptomatic relief to the constitutional level, thereby offering a holistic approach to chronic bronchial and asthmatic conditions [9].

Botanical and Pharmacological Profile

Scientific name: *Justicia adhatoda* Linn.

Synonyms: *Adhatoda vasica* Nees

Family: Acanthaceae

Common names: Vasaka, Malabar Nut, Adulsa, Arusa

Habitat: Native to India; widely distributed in tropical and subtropical regions of Asia.

Phytochemical Constituents: The plant contains a number of alkaloids, mainly vasicine, vasicinone, deoxyvasicine, and vasicinol, which are responsible for its characteristic bronchodilator and expectorant activity [8]. Other compounds include tannins, saponins, flavonoids, essential oils, and glycosides contributing to its anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties [6].

Pharmacological actions

- 1) **Expectorant:** Promotes expulsion of mucus and improves bronchial clearance.
- 2) **Bronchodilator:** Relaxes bronchial smooth muscles, easing airflow obstruction.
- 3) **Antitussive and Anti-inflammatory:** Reduces bronchial mucosal inflammation and suppresses excessive cough reflex.
- 4) **Antimicrobial:** Inhibits growth of respiratory pathogens responsible for secondary infections^[6].
- 5) **Antioxidant:** Protects respiratory epithelium from oxidative stress during chronic inflammation^[8].

Homoeopathic Pathogenesis

Justicia adhatoda produces marked irritation and inflammation of the respiratory mucosa, leading to increased secretion, cough, and dyspnoea — symptoms that closely resemble chronic bronchitis and bronchial asthma. The proving symptoms demonstrate its action on the mucous membranes of the bronchi, lungs, and nasopharynx^[4].

General action

- Acts predominantly on the respiratory system, particularly the mucous membranes of the bronchi and lungs.
- Reduces catarrhal inflammation of both upper and lower respiratory tracts.
- Influences the bronchial glands, increasing secretion and causing thick, viscid mucus.
- Affects the larynx and trachea, giving rise to persistent irritation and cough.
- Acts markedly on the bronchial tubes, causing obstruction and wheezing respiration.
- Involves the pulmonary parenchyma, leading to congestion and oppression of the chest.
- Extends its action to alveolar passages, impeding gaseous exchange during expiration.
- Modifies vascular tone in respiratory mucosa, reducing spasm and promoting expectoration.
- Exerts a soothing influence on inflamed respiratory linings and promotes mucociliary clearance.
- Thus, its therapeutic range chiefly covers bronchitis, asthma, and chronic catarrhal condition^[8,4].

Characteristic symptoms

- Cough begins dry and irritating, later becomes loose with copious, thick, viscid expectoration that is difficult to expel.
- Marked oppression and tightness of the chest, with a sensation as if breathing passages were constricted or filled with mucus.
- Wheezing and rattling of mucus heard especially during expiration, indicating bronchial congestion and spasm.
- Cough aggravated at night, particularly after midnight, disturbing sleep and forcing the patient to sit up for relief.
- Damp or rainy weather increases cough and dyspnea, showing the remedy's aggravation from humidity.
- Cough worse on lying down due to accumulation of mucus in the air passages; patient compelled to assume a sitting posture.
- Expectoration thick, sticky, tenacious, sometimes streaked with blood in advanced or inflamed bronchial

conditions.

- Breathing difficult, suffocative attacks, with great anxiety and restlessness during asthmatic paroxysms.
- Temporary relief from sitting upright or leaning forward, as this position helps expectoration and eases breathing.
- Warm drinks or warm air ameliorate symptoms, while cold air or cold drinks aggravate cough and tightness.
- Voice hoarse and rough from laryngeal irritation, with frequent desire to clear the throat.
- Chronic tendency to bronchial catarrh, especially in those prone to winter coughs, damp climates, or tubercular diathesis^[3].

Modalities^[3]

Aggravation: At night, from cold air, damp weather, lying flat, talking, and exertion.

Amelioration: From sitting up, taking warm drinks, or in open air.

Review of Literature

- The therapeutic application of *Justicia adhatoda* spans several centuries, with its roots in ancient medical traditions. In Ayurvedic literature, it is mentioned in the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita under the name “Vasaka,” described as a Kaphaghna (mucolytic) and Shwasahara (anti-asthmatic) herb. Its decoction and leaf extracts have been used in formulations such as Vasavaleha and Sitopaladi churna for treating cough, cold, and bronchial asthma^[5].
- Clarke's Dictionary of Practical Materia Medica (1900) identifies *Justicia adhatoda* as a prominent remedy for respiratory affections characterized by severe cough, tightness of chest, and wheezing, indicating its role in both catarrhal and spasmodic conditions^[3].
- Boericke's Materia Medica (1927) mentions the remedy as beneficial in influenza, acute bronchitis, and asthma with difficulty in expectoration. He emphasizes its utility in patients who cough persistently with copious mucus, aggravated at night and relieved by sitting up^[2].
- Allen's Encyclopedia of Pure Materia Medica describes the proving symptoms as irritation of the bronchial mucosa, with dyspnoea and accumulation of mucus leading to suffocative attacks, pointing to its homoeopathic similarity with chronic bronchial disorders^[4].
- Modern phytochemical studies have isolated vasicine and vasicinone, both of which exhibit bronchodilatory activity comparable to theophylline. Experimental trials demonstrated that these alkaloids stimulate the respiratory center, decrease airway resistance, and promote mucociliary clearance.
- Reports from practitioners in India and abroad have documented significant improvement in chronic bronchitis and mild-to-moderate asthma cases treated with *Justicia adhatoda* in mother tincture or lower triturations. The remedy showed notable reduction in frequency and severity of cough, wheezing, and sputum production.
- Collectively, these sources validate the therapeutic consistency of *Justicia adhatoda* across traditional, pharmacological, and homoeopathic paradigms. The

drug's action spectrum harmonizes the physiological and dynamic principles that underlie Homoeopathic prescribing, strengthening its credibility as a curative agent in chronic respiratory pathology ^[9].

Clinical Applications

1. Chronic Bronchitis

Definition

Chronic bronchitis is defined clinically as a productive cough lasting for at least three months in each of two consecutive years, in a patient in whom other causes of chronic cough have been excluded ^[13].

Etiology

- Cigarette smoking - major cause.
- Air pollution and occupational exposure (dust, fumes).
- Recurrent respiratory infections.
- Cold and damp climate.
- Genetic predisposition and poor ventilation.
- Prolonged irritation of bronchial mucosa ^[13].

Clinical Features

- Persistent productive cough (≥ 3 months for 2 consecutive years).
- Thick, tenacious mucoid or purulent sputum.
- Progressive breathlessness, worse in damp weather.
- Wheezing and chest tightness.
- Coarse crackles and rhonchi on auscultation.
- Cyanosis and recurrent winter exacerbations in chronic cases ^[13].

2. Bronchial Asthma

Definition

Bronchial asthma is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airways characterized by reversible airflow obstruction and airway hyperresponsiveness, leading to episodic wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and cough, particularly at night or in the early morning ^[14].

Etiology:

- Exposure to allergens (dust, pollen, animal dander).
- Respiratory infections (especially viral).
- Exercise or cold air.
- Emotional stress or anxiety.
- Drugs like aspirin and β -blockers.
- Genetic and environmental predisposition ^[14].

Clinical Features

- Recurrent attacks of wheezing and breathlessness.
- Paroxysmal cough, worse at night or early morning.
- Chest tightness with prolonged expiration.
- Audible wheezing and restlessness during attacks.
- Relief on sitting upright or after expectoration.
- Severe attacks may show cyanosis and use of accessory muscles ^[14].

Discussion

The homoeopathic and pharmacological understanding of *Justicia adhatoda* reveals a remarkable synthesis of material and dynamic principles in healing respiratory ailments. On the physiological plane, its rich alkaloidal constituents particularly vasicine and vasicinone exhibit potent bronchodilatory, expectorant, and anti-inflammatory properties that aid in liquefying and expelling tenacious

mucus from the airways. These pharmacological actions provide substantial evidence for its role in relieving bronchial obstruction and facilitating smoother respiration. From the homoeopathic standpoint, *Justicia adhatoda* has been clinically and experimentally proven to correspond closely with the symptomatology of chronic bronchitis and asthma, as elicited in provings. The remedy manifests characteristic symptoms such as suffocative cough, difficulty in expectoration, wheezing respiration, and aggravation on lying down, which reflect a deep correspondence to the natural disease picture. In chronic bronchitis, it helps mitigate persistent catarrhal inflammation and restores the functional integrity of the mucous membranes, while in asthmatic conditions, its sphere extends to relieving spasmodic constriction and enhancing the patient's respiratory endurance. Thus, *Justicia adhatoda* exemplifies the unification of traditional herbal pharmacology with the homoeopathic principle of "Similia Similibus Curentur," demonstrating how the vital dynamic force of a potentized remedy can act curatively on a plane beyond mere physiology. This integration not only validates the ancient empirical use of the plant but also reaffirms its scientific relevance as a bridge between herbal therapeutics and modern homoeopathic philosophy offering a holistic, safe, and effective approach to the management of chronic respiratory diseases ^[2].

Conclusion

Justicia adhatoda is an invaluable homoeopathic remedy for chronic bronchitis and asthmatic conditions. Its well-documented expectorant and bronchodilator effects, both in traditional and modern research, reinforce its curative power when applied on the basis of homoeopathic principles. The convergence of classical proving data, pharmacological insights, and clinical observations make *Justicia adhatoda* a cornerstone in the management of chronic respiratory disorders. Future clinical studies, with standardized potencies and dosage guidelines, are necessary to deepen understanding of its full therapeutic range and optimize its use in homoeopathic respiratory medicine.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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