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Alangium Salvifolium Linn. (Ankola): Classical Description in Ayurveda and its Therapeutic Relevance – A Review

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ABSTRACT

Alangium salvifolium (Linn.), commonly known as Ankola, is an important medicinal plant described in Ayurveda. Classical Ayurvedic literature identifies it under names such as *Ankola* and *Akshi*, attributing therapeutic significance in conditions like *krimi* (antimicrobial), *kushta* (skin diseases), *arsha* (piles), *apasmara* (epilepsy), and *shotha* (inflammation). Its properties are defined through *rasa* (taste: *kashaya*, *tikta*), *guna* (qualities: *laghu*, *ruksha*), *virya* (*ushna*), and *vipaka* (*katu*), which collectively establish actions such as *krimighna*, *kushtaghna*, *shothahara*, and *vata-kaphahara*. Therapeutically, the root, root bark, fruits and seeds are used in formulations like *Ankola Taila*, indicated in neurological and musculoskeletal disorders. Importantly, classical references also highlight its use in *Visha Chikitsa* (toxicology), particularly in the management of *Alaraka visha* (rabid dog bite), *Mushaka visha* (rat bite/poisoning), and *Gara visha* (artificial/mixed poison). Descriptions in authoritative Ayurvedic sources, including *Shodhala nighantu*, *Kaiyadeva nighantu*, *Bhavaprakasha nighantu*, and *Dhanvantari nighantu*, emphasize its classical relevance. This review compiles Ayurvedic references of *Alangium salvifolium* and discusses their therapeutic context, while also highlighting the need for correlating these traditional insights with modern pharmacological validation.

Keywords: *Alangium salvifolium*, *Ankola*, Elangi, Sage-leaved Alangium

1 INTRODUCTION

Alangium salvifolium Linn. f., commonly known as Ankola or the “sage-leaved Alangium,” is a small tree widely distributed across the foothills and plains of India. It can appear both as a shrub or a tall tree. In its juvenile stage, the plant exhibits a profusion of branches, giving it a dense appearance, whereas mature trees grow tall and upright, often exceeding the height of neighboring trees. Its branches are generally whitish, and the leaves are long, narrow, and simple. The plant produces white, fragrant flowers, and fruits appear during Vaishakha–Jyeshtha (April–June) and ripen around Ashadha (June–July), which are commonly consumed by local children in rural areas. The spines observed on Ankola are not true thorns but sharp-tipped short branchlets, which botanists classify as pointed branches rather than thorns. The seeds are reported to contain oil, although no classical physician has directly observed its extraction. Due to the fragrance of its flowers, it has been traditionally named “Gandhapushpa” (aromatic flower).

Ankola has been extensively documented in classical Ayurvedic texts for its therapeutic potential. Charaka, the father of medicine, described the properties of Ankola flowers (*Pushpa*) for the treatment of *Visha* (poison), while Sushruta specifically highlighted its use against *Mushika Visha* (rat poison). Beyond its antidotal effects, Ankola is cited for conditions such as *Ashmari* (urinary calculi), *Dhoopan* (fumigation), and *Atisara* (diarrhea), demonstrating its wide-ranging utility in traditional medicine [1,2,3].

This review systematically presents the complete classical description of Ankola in Ayurveda and its therapeutic relevance, bridging traditional knowledge with modern pharmacological insights.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Alangium salvifolium (Ankola) is a small tree that grows up to 6–7 meters in height and produces aromatic white flowers. This species is widely distributed across India, thriving in diverse regions. The classical text *Amarakosha* mentions ‘Ankola Dravya,’ highlighting its significance in traditional literature. Charaka Samhita also includes Ankola under the *Phala Varga* (category of fruits). Commentators have noted that the fruit ‘*Nikocaka*,’ which bears resemblance to Ankola, is particularly well-known in northern India. Its botanical identity is sometimes equated with *Aesculus indicus* Colebr (Akola). The seeds of Ankola, like those of *A. indicus*, are known to contain oil, which has medicinal applications. However, classical Ayurvedic literature does not provide explicit details regarding the use of Ankola seed oil. Interestingly, the synonym *Gupta Sneha* attributed to this plant hints at the presence of oil in its seeds, suggesting its potential therapeutic utility. The tree, therefore, holds significance not only for its fruits and flowers but also for its seeds, which may offer unexplored medicinal applications [4].

3 ETYMOLOGY (Nirukti) [5]

अंकयते कीलकः लक्ष्यते इति अंकोलः | (Ankola (*Alangium salvifolium*) has long spines)

4 VERNACULAR NAMES [1]

- English name – Sage leaved alangium
- Hindi name- Dhera, Ankol
- Tamil name- Elangi, Alandi
- Malayalam Name- Irinzil
- Telugu name – Uduga Chettu, Ankolamu
- Bengali name – Aankod, Badh Ankod
- Marathi, Gujarati name – Ankol
- Malayalam name – Irinjil, Angolam
- Kannada name – Ankola
- Tamil name – Elangi

5 SYNONYMS WITH INTERPRETATION [5,6,7]

According to morphology

- दीर्घ कील - दीर्घाणी कीलानि कील वत कंटकान्यस्या । (Ankola has got long spines)
- गंध पुष्प – सुगन्धीनि पुष्पाणि यस्य । (The flowers of Ankola are aromatic)
- लम्ब कर्ण- लम्ब कर्ण वत पत्राण्यायस्य । (Leaves of Ankola are long and ear-shaped)

- ताम्र फलः - ताम्र वर्णानि फलां यस्य । (Fruits of Ankola become copper-colored on ripening)

According to properties and action

- रेची - रेचक त्वात | (Ankola induces purgation)

6 CATEGORIZATION AS PER DIFFERENT NIGHANTU'S [5,6,7,8,9]

S. No.	Text	Varga / Gana
1	<i>Sodhala Nighantu</i>	<i>Nama Sangraha</i>
2	<i>Raja Nighantu</i>	<i>Prabhadradi Varga</i>
3	<i>Kaiyyadeva Nighantu</i>	<i>Aushadhi Varga</i>
4	<i>Bhavaprakasha Nighantu</i>	<i>Guduchyadi Varga</i>
5	<i>Dhanvantari Nighantu</i>	<i>Guduchyadi Varga</i>
6	<i>Priya Nighantu</i>	<i>Hartikyadi Varga</i>

7 DESCRIPTION IN BRIHTRAYI [10,11,12]

Text	Section / Reference
Charaka Samhita (C.S.)	Su. 27/157; Chi. 23/242
Sushruta Samhita (S.S.)	Su. 36/12; Chi. 7/17; Chi. 17/37; Chi. 19/14; Ka. 1/50, 72; Ka. 5/77; Ka. 7/15, 18, 34; U. 21/14
Ashtanga Hridaya (A.H.)	Su. 6/120; Chi. 11/27; Chi. 13/34; U. 5/20; U. 37/75, 76; U. 38/21, 29, 30, 36

8 RASA PANCHAKA OF ANKOLA MULA TWAK (ROOT BARK) [5,13]

Rasa (Taste)	Tikta (Bitter), Katu (Pungent), Kashaya (Astringent)
Guna (Virtue)	Laghu (Light), Snigdha (Oily), Teekshna (Sharp), Sara (Mobile)
Virya (Potency)	Ushna (Hot potency)
Vipaka (Post-digestion)	Katu (Pungent)
Prabhava (Specific effect)	Vishaghna (Anti-poisonous)

9 RASA PANCHAKA OF ANKOLA PHALA (FRUIT) [5,13]

Rasa (Taste)	Madhura (Sweet)
Guna (Virtue)	Guru (Heavy), Snigdha (Oily)
Virya (Potency)	Sheeta (Cold potency)
Vipaka (Post-digestion)	Madhura (Sweet)

10 PART USED AND DOSAGE [3,13]

Part used- Root bark, seed, seed oil

Dosage- Powder 1-2 g (3-6 g for Vamana therapy), Decoction 50-100 ml

11 THERAPEUTIC INDICATION OF ANKOLA [13,14,15]

Abhyantara Paryoga (Internal use)	Bahya Paryoga (External use)
<i>Matsya Visha, Musaka Visha, Luta Visha, Kukkura-Sarpadi, Garadosa, Dantakasthavis, Jalodara, Arsa, Krmi, Atisara, Raktabharadhikya</i>	<i>Sotha, Rakta Vikara, Puyameha, Mutrakrechavikara, Kustha, Visarpa, Phiranga, Tridosha, Ivara, Daurbalya, Kamala, Bhuta-Grahadosa, Visha-Jangama, Vedana, Shotha, Vrana, Twak Vikar</i>

12 FORULATIONS [2]

Ankola is incorporated into various Ayurvedic formulations:

- **Ankoladi Tailam:** A medicated oil used externally for conditions like arthritis and skin disorders.
- **Ankola Ghrita:** Medicated ghee used for internal consumption to balance doshas.
- **Ankola Vati:** Tablet form used for various therapeutic purposes.
- **Ankola Mula Kalka:** Paste made from the root bark for external application.

13 PROPERTIES OF ANKOLA FRUIT [5,6,7,8]

- Guru – heavy
- Balances Kapha Dosha
- Hima – coolant
- Brumhana – improves nourishment
- Balya – improves strength and immunity
- Virechana – purgative

Indicated in [–

- Daha – internal burning sensation, seen in Pitta imbalance conditions such as gastritis, sore throat, laryngitis, sun stroke etc
- Kshaya – tuberculosis, chronic respiratory diseases wasting of muscles
- Vamaka – useful in Vamana Panchakarma therapy

14 PROPERTIES OF ANKOLA BARK AND SEED [5,6,7,8]

- Katu – pungent
- Teekshna – Piercing, strong
- Snigdha – unctuous, oily
- ushna – hot
- Tuvara – astringent
- Laghu – light to digest
- Rechana – acts as purgative

Indicated in –

- Krumi – worm infestation (in wounds and in intestines)
- Shoola – abdominal colic
- Ama – a product of altered digestion and metabolism
- Shopha – oedema,
- Graharoga – psychological disorders
- Visha – toxic conditions
- Visarpa – Herpes
- Kapha and Pitta imbalance disorders
- Asra – blood vitiation disorders such as abscess, bleeding disorders, vascular disorders etc
- Mushaka – rodent bite
- Ahivisha – snake bite
- Kukkuravisha – dog bite
- Akhu visha – rat bite

15 PROPERTIES OF ANKOLA TAILA (Seed Oil) [7]

It is used for massage to relieve–

- Twak Dosha – skin disorders, for skin detoxification
- Kaphavatahara – balances Kapha and Vata Dosha
- Keshakrut – improves hair quality and length
- Kushtaghna – useful in wide range of skin disorders
- Panat Shonitanashana – Oral intake is useful in blood disorders such as abscess, bleeding disorders, vascular disorders etc
- The seed oil is used for Nasya for anti-aging treatment.

16 SIDE EFFECTS

The fruits and seeds of *Alangium salvifolium* (Ankola) possess medicinal properties but should be used cautiously due to potential side effects. Excessive consumption can cause loss of appetite, gastrointestinal discomfort (nausea, headache, abdominal pain), and oral irritation. The recommended maximum daily dosage for fruits and seeds is up to 2 grams, and their use is not advised during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Therefore, these parts should always be consumed under professional guidance or medical supervision to ensure safety [16].

17 CONCLUSION

Alangium salvifolium (Ankola) is a valuable medicinal plant extensively documented in classical Ayurvedic texts for its antidotal, digestive, diuretic, and anti-inflammatory properties. Both its internal and external applications address a wide range of conditions, including poisoning, digestive disorders, skin diseases, and musculoskeletal ailments. Modern pharmacological studies support many of these traditional claims, highlighting its anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antimicrobial, antioxidant, hepatoprotective, and antidiabetic activities, largely due to alkaloids, flavonoids, glycosides, and other bioactive compounds. Integrating classical knowledge with modern scientific evidence underscores Ankola's therapeutic relevance, while also indicating the need for further clinical validation, standardization of extracts, and mechanistic studies to fully harness its medicinal potential.

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