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Plant parts substitution based approach as a viable conservation strategy for medicinal plants: A case study of *Premna latifolia* Roxb.Ashish Kumar Jena, Maninder Karan^{*}, Karan Vasisht

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rapid population growth and catastrophic harvesting methods of wild medicinal plants especially trees, result in the exploitation of natural sources and its management is the need of the hour. *Dashamoolarishta* is an amalgam of roots of ten plants of a popular Ayurvedic FDC formulation consisting of the root of *Premna latifolia* Roxb. as one of its ingredients. Presently, their populations like many other trees are under threat due to extensive use of the roots by the herbal drug industry.

Objective: With an aim to conserve the biodiversity, a systematic study based on a rational approach by substituting root/root bark with alternative and renewable parts was conducted.

Materials and methods: The fingerprint profile together with anti-inflammatory and analgesic effect of different parts of the plant was established for comparison.

Results: The results based on chemical and biological study indicated close similarity between the roots and the leaves and suggest the possible use of latter over root/root bark.

Conclusion: The study proposes that the substitution of the root with alternate renewable parts of the same plant shall form the best strategy towards conservation of the trees like *P. latifolia*.

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1. Introduction

Drugs of natural origin are well known for their beneficial role in the health care system and continue to play a significant role in the treatment of many diseases worldwide. Majority of the population believes in traditional herbal medicine because of easy accessibility and lesser side effects. But regardless of their importance, medicinal plants are still misused with no concern of their conservation. Over-exploitation of medicinal plants is a result of speedy population growth and increasing urbanization which affects ecosystem and biodiversity especially for the slow growing plants like trees. Further, the illegal and indiscriminate harvesting methods of the medicinal plants result in the depletion of natural resources [1]. The different possible strategies available to conserve the natural resources are:

- (i) Establishment of more conservation areas and enforcement of laws against bark and root collection.
- (ii) Promoting awareness about plant diversity and its role in sustainable livelihood and healthcare.
- (iii) Large scale cultivation including those of slow growing plants.
- (iv) Wherever possible, use of alternative vegetative renewable plant parts such as leaves, young stems and fruits in place of bark and underground parts like root, rhizome etc.

There are a few reports focussing on the last suggestion of plant or plant parts substitution. To implement this policy, there is a dire need to do more case studies and create awareness about its practical usefulness towards conservation and sustainability of medicinal plants. The most reasonable perspective for carrying out a validated case study is by phyto-pharmacological evaluation of different plant parts and their relation with each other as a pre-requisite of this policy [2]. Very few publications relevant to major thrust of this manuscript have been published during the last fifteen years. The most comprehensive report came in the year 2000 when Zschocke et al. addressed this issue while working on four plants viz. *Eucomis autumnalis* (Mill.) Chitt, *Siphonochilus aethiopicus* (Schweif.) B.L. Burt, *Ocotea bullata* (Burch.) Baill., and *Warburgia salutaris* (G.Bertol.)

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Chiov. of South Africa. The authors demonstrated how the strategy of plant part substitution can be carried out in the laboratory and also showed that the potential for plant part substitution is highly plant specific [2]. Most of the subsequent reports were also from South Africa on *Pelargonium sidoides* DC. (aerial parts in place of underground roots and tubers) [3,4], *Hypoxis hemerocallidea* Fisch., C.A.Mey. & Ave-Lall. (leaf in place of corms) [5], *Curtisia dentata* (Burm.f.) C.A.Sm. (leaf in place of stem bark) [6], and one of the reports on *W. salutaris* (G.Bertol.) Chiov. is published simply on phytochemical basis [7]. The concept of only phytochemical approach has been recently studied in *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Correa (stem in place of root) [8]. Of the two relevant studies from India, Venkatasubramanian et al. reported that *Cyperus rotundus* L. (Musta) can be substituted in place of *Aconitum heterophyllum* Wall. ex Royle (Ativisha) on the concept of both phytochemical and pharmacological approach [9]. The second report provides useful information wherein Ayurvedic practitioners use *Cryptocoryne spiralis* (Retz.) Fisch ex Wydler (Naattu Atividayam) and *Cyperus scariosus* R. Br. (Nagaramusta) as substitutes for *A. heterophyllum* Wall. ex Royle (Ativisha) and *C. rotundus* L. (Musta), respectively [10]. These studies demand an equal awareness coming from other countries as well and strongly emphasize the need of evaluating plant part substitution both chemically and biologically.

Hence, in the present study, an indigenous tree *Premna latifolia* Roxb. (Verbenaceae) was selected which is one of the ten ingredients of an Ayurvedic formulation “*Dashamoolarishta*”. *Dashamoolarishta* is popularly regarded as immune modulator and general restorative tonic in geriatrics and for women having problem with conception and pregnancy [11]. The methanolic extract of leaves is reported to have anti-inflammatory [12], anticarcinogenic [13], and antifeedant activity [14]. An all-encompassing literature survey publicized that a lot of phytochemical work has been done on root bark and leaves from which iridoids [15], sesquiterpenoids [16], diterpenoids [17], furanoid [18], and flavonoids [19], have been reported.

The plant is under threat due to extensive use of its roots in herbal formulations and requires an obvious necessity to re-examine the fixed-dose-combination used in Ayurveda following suitable scientific approach. The roots of the plant are collected by destructive method which reduces the opportunity for rejuvenation and affects plant demography. A number of possible strategies are proposed from time to time for plants under-threat to curtail overharvesting, among which the most promising is the use of renewable plant parts as alternative to bark, roots and rhizomes for medicinal purposes. With an aim to accomplishing this objective and to conserve the biodiversity, a replacement of root/root barks of *P. latifolia* Roxb. with its alternative and renewable vegetative parts (young stems, leaves) was studied chemically and pharmacologically. In this study, we determined how different or close various parts of *P. latifolia* Roxb. are based on the TLC fingerprinting together with anti-inflammatory and analgesic activities. The results are in a definitive direction to promote the use of aerial parts as a suitable initiative towards plant conservation and ensuring sustainable harvesting.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Plant material

The plant material comprising of different parts of *P. latifolia* was collected during the month of July 2009 from Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh, India. The identity of the plant sample was confirmed on the basis of detailed study of taxonomic characters and by comparison with authentic sample available at Medicinal Plants Garden of University Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences,

Panjab University, Chandigarh. The identity of the sample was further confirmed by NISCAIR vide Ref-no. NISCAIR/RHMD/Consult/-2010-11/1456/54. A specimen of the plant has been deposited in the Museum-cum-Herbarium of University Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Centre for Advanced Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, under voucher no 1465.

2.2. Preparation of extracts

All extractions were carried out at room temperature by macerating 100 g of coarsely powdered plant material with 500 ml of methanol till exhaustion. The methanolic extract of whole root (11 g), root bark (8.5 g), root wood (7 g) young stem (9.5 g) and leaf (10 g) was obtained by evaporating the solvent under reduced pressure in rotary vacuum evaporator and used for chemical and pharmacological studies.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using Jandel Sigma Stat statistical software. Significance of difference between two groups was evaluated by two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Bonferroni-test. Results were considered significant if *p* values were ≤ 0.05 .

2.4. Chemical studies

2.4.1. Comparative chemical profiling

The comparative TLC chromatograms and fingerprint profiles were developed using pre-coated silica gel F₂₅₄ plates [E. Merck (India) Ltd., alumina base, and 0.2 mm thickness]. A large number of various combinations of solvent systems were used during the present studies and the best resolution was obtained in a solvent system of toluene:ethyl acetate:acetic acid (7.4:2.4:0.2). Extracts were applied as bands using Camag Linomat 5 available in the laboratory. The running distance was kept at 8 cm and anisaldehyde sulphuric acid reagent was used as derivatizing agent followed by heating at 110 °C for 5 min or till the bands developed colour. TLC fingerprint profiles were recorded as images under UV at 254 and 366 nm before spray and under white light after derivatization on Camag Reprostar fitted with D × A 252 16 mm camera.

2.5. Pharmacological studies

2.5.1. Animals and experimental design

Animals were procured from Central Animal House of Panjab University, Chandigarh, India and kept under controlled environmental conditions with room temperature (22 ± 2 °C) and humidity (50 ± 10%). The studies were approved by Institutional Animal Ethics Committee (IAEC) vide ref no 978 dated 08.02.2010 and animals were used according to the CPCSEA (Committee For the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experimentation on Animals) guidelines. Experiments were performed on male Wistar rats (200–220 g) and LACA mice (20–30 g). Animals were randomized into nine groups each consisting of six animals with free access to food and water *ad libitum*. The 12 h light and dark cycle was maintained throughout the study. Animals were acclimatized for one week prior to the commencement of the experiments. The doses were administered orally with the help of an oral cannula fitted on a tuberculine syringe. Anti-inflammatory activity and analgesic activity were evaluated by carrageenan induced paw oedema model and tail flick method, respectively [20]. The experimental animals were divided into groups of control, standard and test of six animals each. The control group animals received only vehicle, the standard group animals received ibuprofen [21] or

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