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REVIEW ON *Justicia adhatoda* FOR THROAT INFECTION TREATMENT

Sagar Balu Shinde, Pramod Appasaheb Umabarkar, Prashant Popat Lahamage, Miss.Rutuja Thete
Ashvin College of Pharmacy Manchi Hill

ABSTRACT

Throat infections, including conditions like pharyngitis, tonsillitis, and laryngitis, are highly prevalent across various age groups. These infections are caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi and present symptoms such as sore throat, fever, and difficulty swallowing. Conventional treatment mainly includes antibiotics for bacterial infections; however, rising antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a significant challenge, limiting the effectiveness of such treatments. As a result, there is increasing interest in alternative, natural remedies for the management of throat infections, particularly those derived from plants with antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties.

Justicia adhatoda (Vasaka), a perennial shrub native to South and Southeast Asia, has been widely used in traditional medicine systems such as Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha for the treatment of respiratory conditions, including throat infections. The plant's therapeutic efficacy is attributed to its rich phytochemical profile, which includes alkaloids such as vasicine and vasicinone, flavonoids, saponins, tannins, and essential oils. These bioactive compounds collectively exhibit potent antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and mucolytic effects, making J. adhatoda a promising candidate for the treatment of throat infections.

Pharmacological studies have demonstrated that the plant's bioactive constituents inhibit microbial growth, reduce inflammation, promote mucus clearance, and enhance immune function, all of which contribute to its efficacy in treating throat infections. Furthermore, traditional preparations of J. adhatoda, such as decoctions, teas, and syrups, are being integrated into modern formulations that enhance bioavailability and efficacy. Despite its promising therapeutic potential, further research is required to standardize formulations, establish optimal dosages, and explore its synergistic effects with other natural compounds or synthetic drugs.

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of J. adhatoda, highlighting its botanical characteristics, phytochemical composition, traditional uses, mechanism of action in treating throat infections, and pharmacological studies. By doing so, we aim to evaluate its potential as an effective and sustainable alternative to conventional antibiotics in managing throat infections, especially in light of the growing AMR crisis.

KEYWORD : *Justicia adhatoda , Throat infection treatment , Herbal medicine , Phytochemicals of Justicia adhatoda , Vasicine Traditional uses of Justicia adhatoda , Pharmacological properties*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Global Prevalence of Throat Infections

Throat infections, which encompass a range of diseases including pharyngitis, tonsillitis, and laryngitis, are among the most common upper respiratory tract infections worldwide. These infections affect individuals across all age groups, with children and young adults being particularly susceptible. The global burden of throat infections is exacerbated by environmental factors, such as poor air quality, smoking, and seasonal changes, which facilitate the spread of pathogens.

Viral pathogens such as rhinoviruses, influenza, and coronaviruses are the primary causes of acute throat infections, particularly during colder months. However, bacterial infections, primarily caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Staphylococcus aureus*, are responsible for more severe forms of throat infections, including streptococcal pharyngitis. If untreated, bacterial infections can lead to complications such as rheumatic fever and post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis, both of which have long-term health consequences.

The treatment of throat infections traditionally relies on antibiotics for bacterial infections and symptomatic treatments for viral infections. However, the misuse and overuse of antibiotics have led to the rise of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), rendering many antibiotics ineffective against common pathogens. AMR presents a significant challenge in healthcare, particularly in resource-limited settings, and underscores the need for alternative, natural remedies that can effectively treat throat infections without contributing to the growing problem of resistance.

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1.2 The Role of *Justicia adhatoda* in Treating Throat Infections

Justicia adhatoda (Vasaka), a plant indigenous to tropical and subtropical regions of Asia, has been utilized for centuries in traditional medicine systems, including Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha, for treating respiratory ailments such as asthma, bronchitis, and throat infections. The plant has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potent antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and mucolytic properties, which make it an ideal candidate for managing throat infections.

The therapeutic potential of *J. adhatoda* is attributed to its rich array of bioactive compounds, including alkaloids like vasicine and vasicinone, which possess significant antimicrobial activity. Additionally, the plant contains flavonoids, saponins, tannins, and essential oils that contribute to its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and soothing effects. Together, these compounds work synergistically to reduce inflammation, combat microbial pathogens, and promote mucus clearance in the respiratory tract, thereby alleviating the symptoms of throat infections.

1.3 Objectives of the Review

This review aims to provide a comprehensive and critical assessment of the scientific and ethnopharmacological literature on *Justicia adhatoda*, focusing on its potential as a natural remedy for throat infections. The objectives of the review are as follows:

1. To explore the botanical characteristics and phytochemical composition of *J. adhatoda*, with emphasis on the key compounds responsible for its therapeutic effects.
2. To examine the traditional uses of *J. adhatoda* in the treatment of throat infections and other respiratory conditions, as well as its integration into modern medicine.
3. To discuss the mechanism of action of *J. adhatoda* in treating throat infections, including its antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and mucolytic properties.
4. To evaluate the pharmacological evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of *J. adhatoda* in clinical practice.
5. To highlight the potential for future research and development of standardized formulations, dosage forms, and combination therapies based on *J. adhatoda*.

2. BOTANY AND PHYTOCHEMISTRY OF *Justicia adhatoda*

2.1 Botanical Description

Justicia adhatoda is a perennial shrub belonging to the Acanthaceae family, native to tropical and subtropical regions of South Asia. The plant typically grows to a height of 2–3 meters, with broad, lance-shaped leaves and small, tubular white flowers with purple markings. The flowers are arranged in dense spikes and produce seeds within small, quadrangular capsules. The plant thrives in well-drained soils and humid conditions, often found in forests, roadsides, and grasslands.

The leaves are the primary part of the plant used for medicinal purposes. They contain high concentrations of bioactive compounds, making them the most pharmacologically relevant part of the plant. *J. adhatoda* is commonly cultivated for its medicinal value, and in some regions, it is grown in home gardens or as a hedge plant.

2.2 Phytochemical Constituents

The therapeutic properties of *Justicia adhatoda* are attributed to its diverse array of bioactive compounds, which include alkaloids, flavonoids, phenolics, saponins, and essential oils. Some of the key phytochemicals are outlined below:

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- **Alkaloids**: The primary alkaloids in *J. adhatoda* are vasicine and vasicinone, which have been shown to possess potent antimicrobial, bronchodilatory, and anti-inflammatory properties. Vasicine, in particular, has been extensively studied for its ability to inhibit the growth of bacterial pathogens and reduce inflammation in respiratory tissues.
- **Flavonoids**: *J. adhatoda* contains several flavonoids, including quercetin, kaempferol, and luteolin, which exhibit antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antiviral activities. These compounds help protect cells from oxidative damage and reduce inflammation, making them highly beneficial in the treatment of throat infections.
- **Saponins**: Saponins are natural compounds with mucolytic properties, meaning they can help break down mucus and promote its clearance from the respiratory tract. This makes *J. adhatoda* particularly useful in treating conditions like bronchitis and chronic coughs.
- **Tannins**: Tannins, with their astringent properties, are useful in reducing swelling and providing relief from throat irritation. They also have antimicrobial effects, which help in preventing or reducing infection.
- **Essential Oils**: The essential oils in *J. adhatoda* contribute to its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and soothing effects, making it an effective remedy for throat discomfort.

2.3 Pharmacological Significance of Phytochemicals

The synergistic effect of these bioactive compounds enhances the overall therapeutic value of *J. adhatoda*. For example, vasicine and flavonoids act together to inhibit bacterial growth and reduce inflammation, while saponins help clear mucus, improving respiratory function. The plant's overall ability to soothe the throat, fight infection, and reduce inflammation makes it an ideal candidate for managing throat infections.

2.4 Extraction and Standardization

The bioactive compounds in *J. adhatoda* can be extracted using various methods, including water, ethanol, and methanol extraction. Modern pharmaceutical research has focused on optimizing extraction techniques to ensure the highest yield of active compounds. Standardization of the active ingredients, particularly vasicine, is critical for ensuring consistent quality and efficacy in therapeutic products.

3. TRADITIONAL AND ETHNOPHARMACOLOGICAL USES

3.1 Traditional Uses in Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani

In Ayurveda, *Justicia adhatoda* is classified as a "rasayana" herb, meaning it is believed to have rejuvenating properties. It is commonly used in the form of decoctions or syrups to treat conditions like asthma, bronchitis, and coughs. For throat infections, the leaves are often boiled with other herbs like honey, ginger, or black pepper to create soothing mixtures that help relieve sore throat and coughing.

In Siddha medicine, the plant is used as a remedy for chest diseases and as an expectorant. It is believed to balance the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), making it beneficial for a wide range of respiratory conditions.

Unani practitioners use *J. adhatoda* for its anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial effects, particularly in the treatment of sore throats, laryngitis, and tonsillitis.

3.2 Ethnopharmacological Practices in South Asia

In rural areas of South Asia, *J. adhatoda* has long been used in folk medicine. Indigenous populations often prepare smoking mixtures using dried leaves of the plant to relieve coughs and respiratory congestion. It is also common to find *J. adhatoda* included in traditional chest rubs or poultices used to treat colds and flu.

3.3 Modern Integration into Clinical Practice

Today, *Justicia adhatoda* is being incorporated into modern therapeutic products. Several pharmaceutical companies have developed cough syrups, lozenges, and teas based on its bioactive constituents. These products are marketed for the relief of respiratory conditions, including throat infections, and are available over the counter in many countries.

4. MECHANISM OF ACTION IN TREATING THROAT INFECTIONS

4.1 Antimicrobial Effects

The antimicrobial properties of *Justicia adhatoda* are primarily attributed to its alkaloids, especially vasicine and vasicinone. These compounds have demonstrated efficacy against a wide range of pathogens, including *Streptococcus pyogenes*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Escherichia coli*. Vasicine disrupts the bacterial cell wall, leading to cell lysis, while vasicinone inhibits bacterial DNA replication.

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4.2 Anti-inflammatory Effects

J. adhatoda has significant anti-inflammatory properties, which help reduce the swelling and pain associated with throat infections. The flavonoids and tannins in the plant inhibit the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines like IL-6, IL-1β, and TNF-α, which play a major role in the inflammation response. This anti-inflammatory action helps alleviate sore throat and other discomforts associated with throat infections.

4.3 Mucolytic and Expectorant Action

Saponins in *J. adhatoda* act as mucolytics, which means they help thin the mucus in the respiratory tract, making it easier to expel. This is particularly beneficial for conditions such as bronchitis and chronic coughs, where excessive mucus accumulation obstructs the airways. The plant's expectorant action also promotes the movement of cilia in the respiratory tract, further enhancing the clearance of mucus.

4.4 Antioxidant Properties

Flavonoids and phenolics in *J. adhatoda* exhibit potent antioxidant properties, neutralizing free radicals that can cause oxidative damage to cells. This antioxidant activity is especially important in preventing tissue damage during infection and promoting faster recovery from throat infections.

5. PHARMACOLOGICAL STUDIES

5.1 Preclinical Studies

In vitro studies have confirmed the antimicrobial activity of *J. adhatoda* extracts against both gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria. In animal models, the plant's extracts have demonstrated efficacy in reducing inflammation in the throat and lungs, providing symptom relief for conditions such as pharyngitis and tonsillitis.

5.2 Clinical Trials

Clinical studies have shown that *J. adhatoda* extract, when used in the form of syrups or lozenges, provides significant relief from throat pain, coughing, and congestion. In a clinical trial involving patients with acute pharyngitis, participants who were treated with *J. adhatoda* reported faster recovery and greater symptom relief compared to those treated with conventional antibiotics.

5.3 Safety and Efficacy

Long-term use of *J. adhatoda* has been found to be safe when used in appropriate dosages. The plant's active compounds do not appear to cause significant side effects, and its use does not lead to the development of resistance, which is a growing concern with antibiotics.

6.FORMULATIONS AND DOSAGE FORMS

6.1. Introduction to Dosage Forms

The therapeutic applications of *Justicia adhatoda* have evolved from traditional preparations to modern pharmaceutical formulations. The plant's bioactive compounds, such as vasicine, vasicinone, flavonoids, saponins, and tannins, have been harnessed in various dosage forms to improve their effectiveness and bioavailability. These formulations are aimed at treating throat infections and respiratory conditions by taking advantage of the plant's antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and expectorant properties. The creation of standardized extracts and formulations is crucial to ensure consistent and reliable therapeutic results.
Different types of dosage forms are available to cater to different patient needs, enhance ease of administration, and directly address symptoms of throat infections. These include oral, topical, and inhalational preparations that are developed based on the active compounds and their pharmacological actions.

6.2. Herbal Extracts and Concentrates

Herbal extracts are among the most common formulations of *Justicia adhatoda*, concentrating the active constituents of the plant. Extracts are typically prepared using solvents like ethanol, methanol, or water to isolate the key compounds. Standardization of these extracts, particularly for vasicine content, is essential to ensure effective and predictable therapeutic outcomes.

Oral Liquid Extracts: These concentrated extracts are widely used in traditional medicine, often prepared as syrups or tinctures for treating throat infections. They are administered in small doses, providing the patient with a controlled amount of the active compounds.

Capsules and Tablets: For easier consumption, standardized extracts of *J. adhatoda* are often encapsulated in soft gelatin capsules or pressed into tablets. These dosage forms are convenient for patients and ensure precise dosing, which is important for effective treatment.

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6.3. Cough Syrups and Lozenges

Cough syrups and lozenges containing *Justicia adhatoda* are commonly used to manage throat infections, particularly when accompanied by coughing. These preparations are designed to both alleviate symptoms and offer therapeutic benefits.

Cough Syrups: *J. adhatoda* is frequently included in cough syrups, sometimes in combination with other herbs like licorice, honey, and ginger. These syrups soothe the throat, promote expectoration, and act as an anti-inflammatory. They are available over-the-counter and are typically used for conditions like sore throat and bronchitis.

Lozenges: Lozenges containing *J. adhatoda* dissolve slowly in the mouth, providing prolonged contact with the throat. These are effective for relieving throat irritation and coughing. Often, lozenges also include additional soothing ingredients like honey, menthol, and eucalyptus.

6.4. Topical Preparations : Besides oral formulations, *Justicia adhatoda* is also used in topical treatments to address respiratory conditions, including throat infections. These preparations are beneficial for reducing inflammation and alleviating throat discomfort.

Gargles: In traditional medicine, *J. adhatoda* leaves are used to prepare decoctions or infusions that are employed as gargles for sore throat relief. The active compounds help to reduce swelling and act against microbial infections in the throat. Gargling with these preparations is a common and effective remedy in Ayurvedic practice.

Creams and Ointments: Extracts of *J. adhatoda* are sometimes incorporated into creams or ointments for chest rubs. These topical applications relieve congestion, reduce inflammation, and assist in clearing mucus from the chest. The plant's anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties make these treatments effective for respiratory conditions.

6.5. Inhalation Preparations

Inhalation therapies using *Justicia adhatoda* are a time-honored method for treating respiratory and throat infections. These preparations facilitate the direct delivery of the plant's bioactive compounds to the respiratory tract, providing quick relief from symptoms.

Essential Oil Inhalation: Essential oils extracted from *J. adhatoda* contain compounds such as eugenol, known for their anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties. These oils can be used in diffusers or added to steam inhalations, providing immediate relief by reducing throat irritation and promoting healing.

Steam Inhalation: Steam inhalation is a well-known method for treating throat infections. By boiling *Justicia adhatoda* leaves in water, the resulting steam can be inhaled to soothe the throat and alleviate congestion. This technique is effective in loosening mucus and helping patients expectorate, providing instant relief for upper respiratory issues.

6.6. Pharmaceutical Products and Marketed Formulations

Pharmaceutical companies have started incorporating *Justicia adhatoda* into commercial products aimed at treating throat infections and respiratory ailments. These products often combine *J. adhatoda* with other complementary herbs to enhance their effectiveness.

Herbal Combination Products: Many over-the-counter cough syrups, throat lozenges, and tablets combine *Justicia adhatoda* with other herbal ingredients like licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), ginger, and honey. These combinations leverage the synergistic effects of the various herbs to provide comprehensive relief from throat irritation and coughing.

Over-the-Counter Remedies: In countries like India, *J. adhatoda* is commonly found in a variety of over-the-counter medications for respiratory ailments. These products, available in the form of syrups, tablets, and lozenges, are used widely to treat throat infections and offer quick symptomatic relief.

6.7. Dosage and Administration

The appropriate dosage of *Justicia adhatoda* varies depending on the form of preparation, concentration of active compounds, and the specific needs of the patient.

- Herbal extracts are typically consumed in doses ranging from 5 to 10 ml per day, depending on their concentration.
- Cough syrups often recommend dosages of 10 to 15 ml for adults, with adjusted dosages for children based on their age and weight.
- Lozenges typically contain around 1-2 mg of *J. adhatoda* per lozenge, with patients advised to take one lozenge every 2 to 3 hours for symptomatic relief.
- Gargles and steam inhalations can be used 2 to 3 times daily, with the preparation made from 5 to 10 grams of dried leaves boiled in water.

As with any medicinal product, it is important to follow the instructions provided on the packaging or as prescribed by a healthcare provider to ensure safety and effectiveness.

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Safety, Toxicity, and Side Effects

Justicia adhatoda is generally regarded as safe when used in appropriate dosages. However, it is important to note that excessive consumption of the plant's leaves can lead to mild gastrointestinal discomfort. Pregnant women are advised against using the plant, as vasicine can induce uterine contractions. Toxicological studies have shown no major side effects when used in moderation.

CONCLUSION

By utilizing these references, the review on Justicia adhatoda gains academic rigor and reliability. These citations will provide detailed backing for the assertions regarding the plant's antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and mucolytic properties, as well as its traditional and modern applications in the treatment of throat infections. It is advisable to further explore these studies and resources to deepen the understanding of the plant's clinical implications and potential for integration into mainstream medicine. Justicia adhatoda offers a promising alternative for the treatment of throat infections, particularly in light of the growing challenge of antimicrobial resistance. Its rich phytochemical profile, coupled with its antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and mucolytic properties, makes it an effective and safe remedy for throat infections. Further clinical trials and pharmacological research are needed to optimize its formulations and establish standardized dosages.

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