



Review Article

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ANTICANCER POTENTIAL OF SARVAKARMIKA AGADA: A NARRATIVE REVIEW OF CLASSICAL AYURVEDIC PHARMACOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Cancer is regarded as one of the leading diseases of modern civilization. Although contemporary science has made significant progress in understanding its molecular basis, effective prevention and treatment strategies remain limited. In contrast to the analytical approach of modern medicine, Ayurveda adopts a holistic perspective, offering a comprehensive understanding of life, health, and disease. Ayurvedic principles and therapeutics provide valuable insights and potential alternative approaches for overall health and well-being. In Ayurveda, cancer-like conditions are described under Arbuda (tumor), characterized by deep-seated, slow-growing, and persistent swellings. The branch of Agadatantra deals with toxins (Visha) and their systemic effects, which can be correlated with chronic toxin exposure and disease development. These concepts highlight the possible role of internal toxins in cancer pathogenesis. In this context, Agada Yogas (Antidotal formulations) become important in disease management. Among the various formulations, Sarvakarmika Agada is one such Agada Yogas (Antidotal formulation) described in the Ashtanga Hridaya and traditionally indicated in the management of Vyantara Sarpa Damsha Chikitsa (Cross-breed snake bite). The ingredients of this formulation have been reported to possess significant pharmacological properties, including potential Anticancer activity. This article reviews the Anticancer potential of Sarvakarmika Agada. This review examines classical Ayurvedic texts and available scientific literature to evaluate the Anticancer activity of Sarvakarmika Agada, its individual components, and their relevance in cancer management.

Keywords: Cancer, Agadatantra, Arbuda, Anticancer, Sarvakarmika Agada.

INTRODUCTION

The global burden of cancer continues to rise at an alarming rate, posing a significant challenge to public health systems worldwide. With the world's population surpassing 8 billion, approximately 20 million new cancer cases and 9.7 million cancer-related deaths are reported annually. Projections indicate that by 2040, the incidence may exceed 30 million new cases per year, largely driven by population growth, ageing, and changing lifestyle patterns.^{1,2} The increasing prevalence of cancer has been strongly associated with environmental pollution, unhealthy dietary habits, exposure to radiation, chemical carcinogens, and other lifestyle-related risk factors.

India is also experiencing a rapid increase in cancer burden and currently represents one of the major contributors to global cancer incidence.^{1,3} According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP), India reported approximately 15.33 lakh new cancer cases in 2024, with projections increasing to nearly 15.7 lakh cases in 2025.^{3,4} The lifetime risk of developing cancer in India is estimated to be nearly 1 in 9 individuals.⁵

Table 1: Indian states reporting the highest absolute number of cancer cases.^{3,4}

State	Number of cases
Uttar Pradesh	>2.21 lakh cases
Maharashtra	~1.27 lakh cases
West Bengal	~1.18 lakh cases
Bihar	~1.1 ~1.15 lakh cases
Tamil Nadu	~98,000 cases
Karnataka	~95,000 cases

Higher cancer incidence rates per population are particularly observed in Mizoram Meghalaya Nagaland Assam Kerala Delhi.^{1,4} These increasing trends indicate the urgent need for effective preventive strategies, early diagnosis, public awareness programs, and strengthening of cancer care infrastructure in India and globally.²

From an Ayurvedic perspective, these etiological factors closely resemble the concept of **Visha** (toxins). Ayurveda emphasises that continuous exposure to harmful substances through food (Ahara), air (Vayu), and water (Jala) leads to gradual accumulation of toxins within the body. These toxins may either produce immediate manifestations or remain latent for prolonged periods, ultimately disturbing the equilibrium of Dosha (Biological

regulatory Principle), Dhatu (Body tissue), and Agni (Digestive and metabolic fire).

Agadatantra, one of the eight classical branches (Ashtanga Ayurveda), specifically deals with the identification, classification, and management of toxins. It describes various forms of toxic exposure, including **Dooshivisha** (cumulative, low-grade toxins), **Gara Visha** (artificial or compound poisons), and **Viruddha Ahara** (incompatible diet), which contribute to chronic pathological conditions. These concepts closely parallel the modern understanding of carcinogenesis, where long-term exposure to low-grade toxins and carcinogens leads to oxidative stress, chronic inflammation, cellular mutation and malignant transformation.⁵

In Ayurvedic classics, cancer-like conditions are described under the term Arbuda (tumor), elaborated mainly in the Sushruta Samhita. Arbuda (tumor) is characterized as a Mamsa Pradoshaja Vikara presenting as a deep-seated, firm, slowly growing, and non-suppurative swelling. The pathogenesis involves vitiation of Tridosha (the three biological regulatory principles), predominantly Kapha (the principle of structure, stability, and lubrication) and Vata (the principle of movement), along with derangement of Mamsa (Muscle tissue), Rakta (Blood), and Meda (Adipose tissue) Dhatus. Unlike acute inflammatory swellings, Arbuda (tumor) demonstrates chronicity and resistance to treatment, paralleling the behavior of malignant tumors in modern medicine.⁶

From this perspective, cancer may be interpreted as a manifestation of long-standing internal toxicity and impaired metabolic processes. The principles of Agadatantra provide a unique preventive as well as therapeutic approach through the use of various Agada Yogas such as Dooshivishari Agada, Bilwadi Gulika, Maha Agada, Champaka Agada. These formulations, which are predominantly polyherbal or herbo-mineral in nature, possess potent detoxifying, Anti-toxic, Anti-inflammatory, and Rejuvenative properties. Traditionally, they are indicated for neutralizing toxins, enhancing tissue resistance, and restoring systemic balance.

Among these, Sarvakarmika Agada⁷ is one such formulation described in Ashtanga Hridaya, Uttara Sthana, in the context of Vyanthara dashta chikitsa (Management of cross-breed snake bite). It comprises ingredients like Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill), Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*), Langali (*Gloriosa superba*), Pippali (*Piper longum*), Patha (*Cissampelos pareira* Linn), and Maricha (*Piper nigrum*). These drugs are known to exhibit Anti-inflammatory, Antimicrobial, Antileukemic, antioxidant, and

Anticancerous properties, along with classical actions such as Kushtaghna (Skin disorders), Krimighna (Anti-helminthic action), and Vishaghna (Antitoxic). Given these pharmacological attributes, this formulation shows potential relevance in cancer-related research and may contribute to the development of therapeutic interventions for cancer management.

This literature review was conducted using data collected from classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary scientific literature. Classical references were obtained from Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridayam. Electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and DHARA were searched using keywords such as “Ayurveda and cancer,” “Agadatantra,” “Anticancer activity,” and selected medicinal plant names. Peer-reviewed studies relevant to anticancer activity and Ayurvedic concepts were included. Selected articles were screened and qualitatively analyzed for synthesis of findings.

SARVAKARMIKA AGADA

Ingredients

The formulation consists of 7 ingredients, including 3 Upavisha: Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill), Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*), and Langali (*Gloriosa superba*); other ingredients include Kana (*Piper longum*), Patha (*Cissampelos pareira* Linn), and Maricha (*Piper nigrum*).

Method of preparation

Before preparation, the roots of Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill) and the tubers of Langali (*Gloriosa superba*) undergo Shodhana (Purification) as per Yogaratnakara to ensure safety and efficacy.

Langali is purified by immersing its tubers in cow urine for one day⁸, while Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill) is purified by steaming it with cow's milk in dolayantra (Steaming pot)⁸, Aranala (Sour fermented rice gruel) is prepared according to the procedure described in Sharangdhara Samhita⁹ where 1 part of shastika shali (red rice) is half-boiled with 14 parts of water and then allowed to ferment in mud pot for 7 to 8 days. Subsequently, equal quantities of flowers and roots of Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill) and Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*), tubers of Langali (*Gloriosa superba*), Pippal (*Piper longum*), Patha (*Cissampelos pareira* Linn), and Maricha (*Piper nigrum*) are taken and triturated with Aranala (Sour fermented rice gruel) to prepare a smooth Kalka (paste), which constitutes the final formulation.

Indication

Best for bites of vyantara sarpa (cross-breed snakes).

Table 2: Drug profile of Sarvakarmika Agada¹⁰⁻¹⁵

Drugs	Botanical name	Family	Used parts
Karaveera	<i>Nerium indicum</i> Mill	Apocynaceae	Flowers and Root
Arka	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Apocynaceae	Flowers and Root
Langali	<i>Gloriosa superba</i>	Colchicaceae	Tuber
Pippali (Kana)	<i>Piper longum</i>	Piperaceae	Fruit
Patha	<i>Cissampelos pareira</i> L	Menispermaceae	Root
Maricha	<i>Piper nigrum</i>	Piperaceae	Fruit
Aranala(Kanji)	-	-	-

Table 3: List of Rasapanchaka of ingredients of the Sarvakarmika Agada¹⁰⁻¹⁵

Drugs	Rasa (taste)	Guna (Property)	Virya (Potency)	Vipaka (bio transformed rasa)
Karaveera	Katu (Pungent) Tikta (Bitter)	Laghu (Lightness) Ruksha (Dry) Tiksna (Sharp)	Usna (Warm)	Katu (Spicy)
Arka	Katu (Pungent) Tikta (Bitter)	Laghu (Lightness) Ruksha (Dry)	Usna (Warm)	Katu (Spicy)

	Madhura (Sweet)	Tiksna (Sharp)		
Langali	Katu (Pungent) Tikta (Bitter) Kasaya (Astringent)	Laghu (Lightness) Ruksha (Dry)	Usna (Warm)	Katu (Spicy)
Pippali (Kana)	Katu (Pungent)	Laghu (Lightness) Tiksna (Sharp) Snigdha (Unctuous)	Anusna (Neutral)	Madhura (Sweet)
Patha	Tikta (Bitter)	Laghu (Lightness) Tiksna (Sharp)	Usna (Warm)	Katu (Spicy)
Maricha	Katu (Pungent)	Laghu (Lightness) Tiksna (Sharp)	Usna (Warm)	Katu (Spicy)
Aranala (Kanjji) ²⁵	Amla (Sour)	Laghu (Lightness)	Usna (Warm)	-

Table 4: Drug literary review

Drug	Karma	Doshakarma
Karaveera	Kusthaghna (skin disorders), Kandughna (reduces itching), Krimighna (anti helmeinthic action), Jwaraghna (fever), Vranhara (wound healing), Visphotahara (anti visecant), Twakrogahara (alleviates skin diseases).	Kaphavata hara ¹⁰
Arka	Kuṣṭha (skin disorders), Kandu (itching), Visa (poisonous effects), Vṛṇa (wound), Pliha-vṛddhi (splenomegaly), Gulma (abdominal lump), Arsas (hemorrhoids), Udara (abdominal disorders), Krimi (worm infestations), Sopha (edema), Switra (vitiligo), Raktapitta (hemorrhagic disorder).	Kaphavata samaka ¹¹
Langali	Kusthaghna (skin disorders), Sophahara (Anti edematous), Vranahara (wound healing), Sula nasaka (Analgesic activity), Krimighna (anti helmeinthic action).	Vata kapha samaka ¹²
Pippali	Dipana (Appetite-stimulating), Rasavana (Rejuvenating), Vṛsya (Aphrodisiac), Recaka (Purgative), Swasahara (Anti-asthmatic), Kasahara (Anti-cough), Jwarahara (fever), Kusthaghna (skin disorders), Pramehahara (Antidiabetic), Arsoghna (Anti-hemorrhoidal), Sulanasaka (Analgesic activity).	Kaphavata samaka ¹³
Patha	Visaghna (Antitoxic), Kandughna (reduces itching), Kusthaghna (skin disorders), Sulahara (Analgesic activity), Krimighna (Anti helmeinthic action), Gulmanasaka (Alleviates abdominal masses), vranahara (wound healing).	Vata kapha samaka ¹⁴
Maricha	Dipana (Appetite-stimulating), Swasahara (Anti-asthmatic), Krmighna (Anti helmeinthic), Sulahara (Analgesic activity), Recaka (Purgative), Hrdrogahara (cures cardiac disorders), Chedna (Excising)	Kaphavata samaka ¹⁵
Aranala	Jeeveniya (Life-promoting), daha nashana (Relieves burning sensation), trushnahara (Relieves excessive thirst) etc	Vata kapha haras ¹⁶

Table 5: Chemical constituents and action

Drug	Chemical Constituents	Anticancer Action	Research evidence
Karaveera	Cardiac glycosides (Oleandrin)	Induces apoptosis, Cytotoxic	Studies show tumor cell inhibition ¹⁷
Arka	Calotropin, Uscharin	Anti-proliferative, Apoptosis	Proven cytotoxic Activity ¹⁸
Langali	Colchicine	Mitotic inhibitor	prevents cell division ¹⁹
Pippali (Kana)	Piperine	Enhances bioavailability, Anticancer	Inhibits tumor growth ²⁰
Patha	Alkaloids	Immunomodulatory	Supports anticancer Immunity ^{21,22}
Maricha	Piperine	Antioxidant, anti-metastatic	Reduces oxidative Stress ²³
Aranala (Kanjji)	Organic acids	Enhances absorption,	Improves drug Delivery ²⁴

DISCUSSION

Cancer can be correlated with the Ayurvedic concept of Dooshivisha (chronic toxicity), which leads to a progressive imbalance of Dosha (Biological regulatory Principle), Agni (Digestive and metabolic fire), and Dhatugtha vikaras (Disorders involving the body tissues) ultimately manifesting as Arbuda (tumor). The description of Arbuda (tumor) in the Sushruta Samhita classifies it as a Mamsa Pradoshaja Vikara (Diseases affecting the muscular tissue), characterized by a deep-seated, firm, slowly progressing, and non-suppurative swelling. Its pathogenesis involves the vitiation of Tridosha (The three biological regulatory principles), predominantly Kapha (The principle of structure, stability and lubrication) and Vata (The principle of movement), along with the derangement of Mamsa (Muscle tissue), Rakta (Blood), and Meda (Adipose tissue) Dhatus. These features closely resemble the clinical behaviour of malignant tumors, particularly in terms of chronicity, invasiveness, and resistance to therapy. In this context, Sarvakarmika Agada, a classical formulation from Agadatantra,

though primarily indicated in snakebite management, demonstrates broader therapeutic relevance. Its potential can be attributed to its detoxifying, anti-inflammatory, and disease-modifying properties. The individual ingredients contribute significant pharmacological actions: as the studies show, Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill) exhibits pro-apoptotic activity; Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*) shows cytotoxic effects; Langali (*Gloriosa superba*) is known for mitotic inhibition; Pippali (*Piper longum*) and Maricha (*Piper nigrum*) enhance bioavailability and provide antioxidant effects; Patha (*Cissampelos pareira* Linn), acts as an immunomodulator; and Aranala (Sour fermented rice gruel) facilitates drug absorption and improves therapeutic efficacy.

The combined action of these ingredients suggests a possible synergistic effect through multiple mechanisms including apoptosis induction, inhibition of abnormal cell proliferation, antioxidant activity, immune modulation, and enhanced bioavailability.

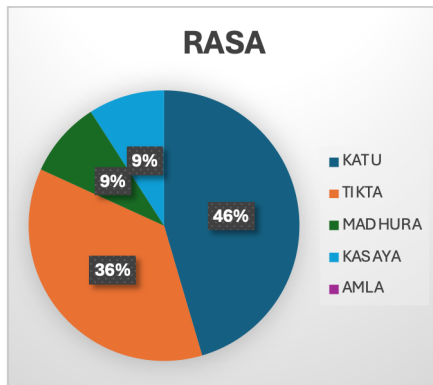


Figure 1: Percentage of Rasa

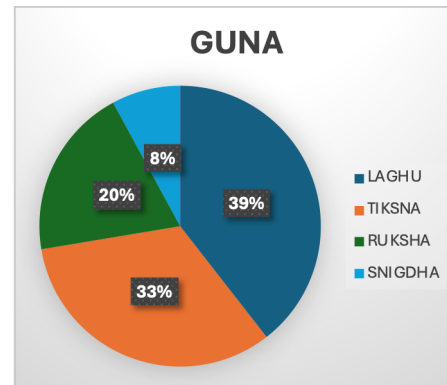


Figure 2: Percentage of Guna

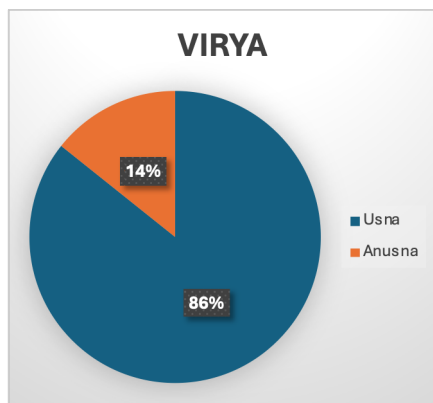


Figure 3: Percentage of Virya

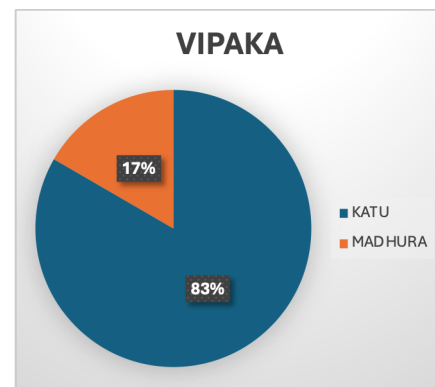


Figure 4: Percentage of Vipaka

From the perspective of Rasapanchaka (Ayurvedic Pharmacodynamic profile), the predominance of Katu (pungent taste) and Tikta (bitter taste) Rasa imparts Vishahara (Antitoxic), Deepana (Appetite-stimulating), Pachana (Metabolic digestive), Lekhana (Scraping), and Raktashodhaka (Blood purifier) properties, along with Kapha-Pitta Shamana (Pacifies Kapha and Pitta doshas). The dominance of Laghu (Lightness), Tikсна (Sharp) and Ruksha (Dry) Guna (Properties) aids in enhancing Jatharagni (Digestive metabolic activity), promoting Kledashoshana (absorption of excess pathological moisture), Shoshana (drying action), Sthambana (styptic action), Srotoshodhana (purification of body channels), and reducing Kapha and Vata (pacifying Kapha and Vata doshas). Considering Virya (Potency), the predominance of Ushna Virya (hot potency) further stimulates Jatharagni (Digestive metabolic activity), and Dhatwagni (tissue metabolic activity), while exerting Vata-Kaphahara (Pacifies Vata and Kapha doshas) effects. With respect to Vipaka (bio-transformed rasa), most of the constituents exhibit Katu Vipaka (spicy), which supports metabolic enhancement and sustains Agni (Digestive fire). From a pharmacological perspective, these Rasapanchaka (Ayurvedic Pharmacodynamic profile) attributes may be interpreted as promoting metabolic regulation, reducing pathological tissue accumulation, supporting detoxification processes, improving tissue homeostasis, and facilitating maintenance of normal physiological function.

However, safety remains an important consideration because Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill), Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*), Langali (*Gloriosa superba*) are classified as Upavisha and contain potentially toxic compounds such as oleandrin, calotropin, and colchicine. Therefore, proper Shodhana (purification), dose standardization, and toxicological evaluation are necessary before considering clinical application. Further

experimental and clinical studies are required to establish both safety and efficacy in cancer management.

CONCLUSION

Cancer, increasingly viewed as a lifestyle disorder rooted in chronic metabolic imbalance and toxic accumulation, finds a close parallel in the Ayurvedic concepts of Dooshivisha (chronic toxicity) and Arbuda (tumor). This correlation provides a holistic framework to understand its gradual onset, progression, and resistance. Sarvakarmika Agada, though primarily indicated in Visha Chikitsa (management of poisoning), shows significant potential in this context because of its detoxifying, digestive-stimulating, and disease-modifying properties. Its ingredients collectively demonstrate cytotoxic, pro-apoptotic, antioxidant, immunomodulatory, and bioavailability-enhancing actions, aligning with modern anticancer approaches. From a Rasapanchaka (Ayurvedic Pharmacodynamic profile) perspective, its Katu-Tikta (pungent, bitter) taste predominance, along with Laghu (Lightness), Tikсна (Sharp) and Ruksha (Dry) Guna (Properties), Ushna Virya (hot potency), and Katu Vipaka (spicy), supports Deepana (Appetite-stimulating), Pachana (Metabolic digestive), Lekhana (Scraping), Srotoshodhana (purification of body channels), and reducing Kapha and vata (pacifying Kapha and Vata doshas), thereby counteracting the pathogenesis of Arbuda (tumor). Therefore, Sarvakarmika Agada not only offers a promising integrative approach in cancer management but also opens new avenues for research. Systematic experimental and clinical studies on this formulation can contribute significantly to developing evidence-based Ayurvedic interventions in oncology.

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