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Sarphuka (Tephrosia purpurea (L.) Pers.): Pharmacognostical Profile, Therapeutic Uses and Phytoconstituents - A Review



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ABSTRACT

At present, plants are still an important source of medicine in the health care delivery system. Their role is salient in the growth of medicines and served as a design for the development of folklore, nutraceuticals, food supplements, and other chemical molecules for synthetic/semi-synthetic drugs. Medicinal plants are the major component in the Unani System of Medicines. Sarphuka (Tephrosia purpurea L. Pers.) is one of the most important herbs extensively studied for its medicinal properties by modern scientific methods. Various bioactive compounds have been isolated and analyzed from the different parts of the plant. The entire plant is useful in the treatment of various ailments like liver cirrhosis, splenomegaly, inflammation, skin disease, cellulitis, gonorrhea, leprosy, etc. It has a blood purifier, diuretic. anti-bacterial, anti-diabetic. hepatoprotective activities. In the present review, pharmacognostical profile, phytochemical analysis and pharmacological studies Sarphuka (Tephrosia purpurea L. Pers.) have been discussed.





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INTRODUCTION

Unani System of Medicine (USM) is one of the most famous and old traditional systems of medicine. It is based on the concept of *Khilt* (humor) and diseases caused by the imbalance of the *Khilt* and its cure by the evacuation of morbid or excess humor from the body. The USM contains a treasure of medicinal plant, animal, and mineral substances for efficacious, safe, economical, and easily assessable drugs.¹

Sarphuka (Tephrosia purpurea L. Pers.) is one of the efficacious Unani herbs, belonging to the Fabaceae (Papilionaceae) family. It is found throughout the Indian subcontinent. Its genus name Tephrosia derives from the Greek word "tephr (o)" meaning ash grey (color of its leaves), as the color of the stems leaves and fruit of all the species are gray in color ² and purpurea means purple color, as its flower has. The common names tell its history. Goat's Rue was fed to goats to increase milk production. It is no longer used as feed for goats due to it containing rotenone which is now used as a pesticide. It is also used as a fish poison, which is produced by pounding the roots. Another common name, Devil's Shoestring, refers to its long stringy roots. Entire plant and their parts like leaves, root, and stem or whole plant are extensively used for medicinal purposes. It is an important ingredient of drug formulations used to treat liver disorders, infectious diseases and is also used as a remedy for blood disorders, flatulence, chronic diarrhea, anuria, piles, mastitis, carcinoma, poisoning, etc. This review aims to explore the pharmacognostic profile, therapeutic uses, and phytoconstituents of Sarphuka (Tephrosia purpurea L. Pers.) in the view of Unani literature and recent scientific studies.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Various authentic both printed and electronic publications are taken into account for the review of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. therapeutic uses in Unani Medicine, regarding pharmacognostical characteristics, phytochemical constituents, pharmacological studies, etc. All relevant articles up to 2020 were referred including 6 Unani books, 3 English books on Herbals, 21 research papers, 2 websites, and genuine materials published in PubMed, Science Direct Google Scholar, and Research gate. Appropriate Unani Terminologies were taken from Standard Unani Medical Terminology Published by Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine in collaboration with the World Health Organization. Images of various parts of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. is collected from Rajasthan, India.

Botanical description

Sarphuka or Wild Indigo (*Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers.) is a perennial, erect or decumbent herb or undershrub attaining the height of 30-60 cm. Leaves are compound 5-10 cm long, petioles 6-12 cm, stipules is linear-subulate, nerved, erect or sometimes reflexed, imparipinnate divided; leaflets 2-2.8 x 0.8-1.2 cm, oblanceolate or obovate, base cuneate, apex obtuse to emarginated, upper surface is glabrous and hairy beneath. Flowers appear on 5 to 12 cm long axillary or terminal racemes, purplish to white, bisexual, symmetrically, zygomorphic, hypogynous. Sepals are 5 and connate, calyx tube is 4 to 5 mm high. Petals are also 5, obovate-orbicular, pubescent on its back with curved hairs. Corolla is pink to purplish; 4 mm broad, orbicular, and the staminal tube is 4 mm long. Pods are linear, compressed, 2.5 to 4.5 cm across, straw color, dry dehiscent 2.5-4 x 0.3-0.4 cm, 5-7-seeded. Seeds are compressed oval oblong 3.0 to .5 cm across, truncated at one end; hilum is marginal with pithy collar, grayish dark brown mottled with black in color. 4,5

Identification feature: When the leaf is pulled from both ends it breaks into two-part giving a "V" shape (fig. c&d).⁶





Fig. No. 1: Showing a. whole plant, b. Compound leaves of *Tephrosia purpurea*; c. Plant with legumes and flower; d,e. V shape break of leaf (inner and upper portion of leaf)

Distribution: It is widely distributed in the Indian subcontinent, Tropical, and South Asia, West Asia, South China, Malaysia, North Australia. It has a pantropical distribution. It is a weed found commonly in wastelands.⁶

Scientific classification

Kingdom: Plantae

Division : Magnoliophyta

Class : Magnoliopsida

Subclass: Rosidae

Order : Fabales

Family : Fabaceae

Genus : Tephrosia

Species : Purpurea (L.)

Description in Unani Literatures:

Sarphuka (*Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers.) is a shrub that attains height up to about 1 yard. Its leaves are thin, small and opposite to each other. Veins of leaves are prominent and somewhat hard. Its pod is small containing small seeds. It has two types, one has white flowers and the other has red flowers.^{7,8}

Vernacular Names

Bengali: Ban Nil Gachh, Sarphonka⁴

English: Wild Indigo, Purple goat's Rue,⁷ Purple Tephrosia,⁹ Fish Poison⁶, Devil's

Shoestring

Gujrati: Ghodakan, Sharpankha, Unhali O

Hindi: Sarphonka⁷

Indo-China: Houi, Hui, Nha troi⁴

Kannada: Empali, Panki, Kaggi¹⁰

Malayalam: Kolinnil⁴

Marathi: *Inhani*⁷

Oriya: Kolothiyapokha⁴

Persian: Berg-i-Sonalo, Berg-i-Sofar⁸

Punjabi: Bansa, Bansu, ⁴ Jhojharo, Jhamana Booti⁷

Sanskrit: Banapunkha⁴

Urdu:

Saraphuka⁴

Rajasthani:

 $Masa^6$

Mizaj (temperament)

The temperament is hot and wet.⁷ In Ilmul Advia Nafisi book mentioned as hot and dry in

first degree.11

Miqdar Khurak (dose)

The therapeutic dose is 7g per orally.⁷

Af 'al waKhawas (action and uses)

It has Musaffi-i-Dam (blood purifier), Mudirr-i-Bawl (diuretic), Muqawwi-i-Jigar

(hepatoprotective), Nāfi' Dhayabitus Shakari (anti-diabetic), and Dāfi' Humma Sawdawiyya

(antipyretic) properties. It has been used in Buthur (boils), Dubayla (abscess), Hikka

(pruritus), Jarab (scabies), Juzām (leprosy), and Ātashak (syphilis) owing to Musaffí-i-Dam

property. Due to Mudirr-i-Bawl effect, it is used in the poisoning of raw Kushtajat (calcined

products). It is administered orally in the form of decoction, infusion, and *Safuf* (powder)

along with water.⁷

Method of administration

Amrad Fasad-i-Dam

It is indicated in the treatment of boils, abscesses, scabies, pruritus, leprosy, and syphilis. It is

used usually as Naqū' (infusion) and Joshānda (decoction). Sometimes, it is ground with

water and then filter and given to the patient.⁷

Nafakh-i-Shikam (flatulence)

Put a pinch of Hilteet (Ferula foetida Regel) in the decoction of Tephrosia purpurea (L.). and

use this decoction to get relief from Nafakh (flatulence). 12

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Ishal-i-Muzmina (chronic diarrhea)

Put *Piper nigrum* L. in the decoction of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.). Drink this decoction to get relief from chronic diarrhea. ¹²

Hayda (cholera)

Powder of Sarphuka leaves, 2 to 3 g mixed with water taken orally is effective in cholera.8

Kirm-i-Shikam (intestinal worms)

Decoction of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) is used with *Embelia ribes* Burm. F. to kill the intestinal worms in children.¹²

Waram-i-Pistān (mastitis)

Apply paste prepared with *Safūf* of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) 7 g and of Mirch Seyāh (*Piper nigrum* L.) 5 pieces.¹²

Bawāsīr (piles)

Make *Safūf* (powder) of 1.866 *Kg Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) leaves and 0.93310 kg leaves of *Cannabis sativa* L. Mix together and take little bit every day for 40 days.¹²

Ihtibas-i-Bawl (retention of urine)

Prepare *Safūf* of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) 13.5 g with 1 g of *Piper nigrum* L. and take with water to initiate urination.¹²

Sartan (carcinoma)

Make *Safūf* of 9 g of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) with 1 gram of *Piper nigrum* L. and take *Safūf* in minute dose daily. ¹²

Ātashak (syphilis)

Make pills of *Piper nigrum* L. in the freshly prepared $Naq\bar{u}$ (infusion) of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.). Use pills for 14 days for the treatment of syphilis.¹²

Simmiyat-i-Kushtajat (toxicity of calcined products)

In case of toxicity of *Kushta*, drink $Naq\bar{u}$ of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) daily. Toxic remnants will be excreted out of the body through urine.¹²

Mazarrat (toxicity and adverse effects)

Unani physicians have not discussed any toxic effect of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.).⁷

Musleh (correctives)

Sugar and Brahamdandi (Tricholepis glaberrima DC) are mentioned as correctives.⁷

Badal (substitutes)

Neel Kanthi (*Ajuga bracteosa* Wall. Ex Benth) or Gule Mundi (*Sphaeranthus indicus* Linn.) is used as an alternative or substitute.⁷

Compound formulations

Table No. 1: Compound Formulations and Their Therapeutic Action and Dosage

S. No.	Name of compounds	Therapeutic uses	Dose
1	Arq Murakkab Musaffi-i-Khoon	Useful in frost bite and gangrene	50 ml twice a day/orally ¹⁴
2	Habb-i-Musaffi-i- Khoon	Epilepsy	Children: 1 to 2 pills (each 80mg) Adult: 4 pills ¹³
3	Naqūʻ Shahatra	Indicated for Syphilis	As advised ¹⁵
4	Safūf Juzām	Indicated for Leprosy	20 g decoction with 20 g honey ¹⁵
5	Sharbat Murakkab Musaffi-i-Khoon	Used for detoxification of blood in various ailments like, syphilis, pruritus and <i>Tinea cruris</i>	25 ml/orally ¹³
6	Sharbat Unnab Murakkab	Indicated for Itching, sty, and initial stage of leprosy	20-40 ml along with Arq Shahatra ¹⁵

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Scientific Studies

Phytochemistry

Table No. 02: Important Chemical Constituents Found In Various Parts of Plant

PARTS	CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS	
Dried fruits	O-methylpongamol, lanceolatin B, (+) purpurin, maackiain ⁵	
Flowers	Delphinidin chloride, cyaniding, karanjin, kanjon ⁵	
Leaves	Lupeol, ³ Rutin, Rotenoid, triterpenoid and beta-sitosterol ⁹	
	Purpurin, purpuritenin A, B, tephroglabrin, tepurinidiol, purpureamethide,	
Dods and saids	O-methylpongamol, sitosterol, ⁵ Rotenoid, Diketone-pongamol,	
Pods and seeds	isolonchocarpin, furanoflavones karanjin and kanjone, flavanone	
	purpurin. A flavonoid, lanceolarin B, is also present in seeds ⁹ .	
	Purpurenone, purpurin, dehydroisoderricin, maackiain, new	
Root	epoxflavanone; pongamol, flemichapparins B and C, rutin,	
	methylkaranjic acid, sitosterol, spinasterol, lanceolatin A, lanceolatin B ⁵	
Stem	7-O-[beta-D-glucopyranosyl-(1-4)-O-BETA-D-galactopyranoside ¹⁶	
Aerial parts	Tephrosin, pongaglabol, semiglabrin ¹⁷	

Pharmacological studies

Membrane stabilizing potency

A study conducted by Gokhale, *et al.* revealed that ethanolic extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) *in-vitro* possesses mast cell degranulation and erythrocyte membrane integrity in rat. ¹⁸

Anti-allergic activity

The ethanolic extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. exhibits a dose-related inhibition of edema induced by compound 48/80 and egg albumin. It inhibits passive paw anaphylaxis and histamine release induced in passive peritoneal anaphylaxis in animal model.¹⁹

Renal protective activity

Prophylactic treatment of rats with *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. at doses of 5 mg/kg body weight and 10 mg/kg bodyweight prevented N-diethylnitrosamine-initiated and KBrO₃ promoted renal oxidative stress and toxicity.²⁰

Hepatoprotective activity

A study showed that the ethanol extract of leaves and fraction A (isolated from leaves extract) from *Tephrosia purpurea* (*L.*) *possessed* marked hepatoprotective activity against liver damage induced by CCl₄ in an animal model of rats.²¹

Antiulcer activity

A study conducted by Deshpande *et al.* indicated that *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. root extract possesses significant antiulcer property may be due to cytoprotective action or through increasing mucosal membrane defense.²²

Anti-Tumor activity

Kavitha *et al.* showed the ethanolic extract of root significantly reduced the incidence, volume, and burden of the buccal tumor induced by DMBA in hamsters.²²

Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic

The result of the study revealed that ethanolic root extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) Pers. significantly reduces acute and sub-chronic inflammation in Carrageenan-induced paw edema and cotton pellet-induced granuloma in rats as compared with standard drug indomethacin. Also showed the analgesic property by inhibiting the thermal response in the tail immersion method.²⁴

Antioxidant

Shah Rumit, *et al.* (2010) showed that hydroalcoholic extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) possesses *in-vitro* antioxidant properties by inhibiting DPHH, hydroxyl radical, nitric oxide and superoxide anion scavenging, hydrogen peroxide scavenging, and reducing power activities.²⁵

Antibacterial and antiviral:

Rangama, *et al* (2009) concluded that the methanolic extract of the root of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) found to be active against *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, two other *Pseudomonas* strains, and two *coli* form strain. ²⁶A study not only showed the antiviral activity of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) flowers extract against viruses but also potent antibacterial property against both gram (+) and gram (-) strains. ²⁷

Anthelmintic activity

The *in-vitro* study revealed dose-dependent and significant anthelmintic activity of methanolic extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) leaves as compared with standard drug albendazole on earthworm.²⁸

Anticancer

Gulecha Vishal, *et al.* (2011) depicted anticancer potential of fractions of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) and *Ficus religiosa* in MCF cell line.²⁹

Anti-diarrheal

Hussain, *et al.* (2013) showed 40% and 80% anti-diarrheal activity of methanolic extract of whole plant *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) in castor oil-induced diarrhea in mice, at 300 mg/kg and 500 mg/kg dose, respectively.³⁰

Anti-hyperglycemic and antioxidant

A study indicated potent anti-hyperglycemic and antioxidant effects of aqueous seed extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) at a dose of 600 mg/kg/ body weight orally in streptozotocin-induced diabetes in rats.³¹

Anti-epileptic activity

A study showed that ethanolic extract of *Tephrosia purpurea* (L.) has significant improvement in *Status epilepticus* induced by lithium-pilocarpine in rats and also possesses both *in vitro* and *in vivo* antioxidant properties.³²

CONCLUSION

Sarphuka is one of the most important drugs of the Unani system of medicine for the treatment of skin diseases, flatulence, chronic diarrhea, intestinal worms, mastitis, piles, anuria, carcinoma, syphilis, and poisoning. Various scientific studies documented the role of Sarphuka in the treatment of carcinoma, poisoning, intestinal worms, diarrhea, and diabetes. This justifies the Unani literature in the light of scientific studies. However, broad studies are required to determine its phytoconstituents and pharmacological activities.

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