



# *Sida cordifolia* (Bala): Bridging Ancient Ayurvedic Wisdom and Modern Scientific Evidence

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## Abstract

*Sida cordifolia* Linn., a highly revered herb in Ayurveda commonly known as Bala, has been used for centuries to treat a wide range of ailments. This review article aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of its traditional uses, phytochemical composition, and the extensive pharmacological activities validated by modern research. The plant's therapeutic efficacy is primarily attributed to a diverse array of bioactive compounds, most notably the ephedrine-type alkaloids and a variety of flavonoids, phytosterols, and fatty acids. This review will systematically explore its traditional applications as a nervine tonic (*Rasayana*), a cardiac tonic, and an anti-inflammatory agent. We will also delve into the modern scientific evidence supporting its neuroprotective, immunomodulatory, anti-diabetic, and wound-healing properties, and will provide an in-depth discussion on its safety, regulatory status, and potential for therapeutic development. The article includes a detailed summary of its phytochemistry, and a tabular presentation of its properties. This synthesis of ancient knowledge and contemporary research highlights *Sida cordifolia* as a promising candidate for further clinical investigation and potential integration into modern medicine.

Keywords - *Sida cordifolia* Linn., neuroprotective, immunomodulatory, wound-healing, Bala

## 1. Introduction

*Sida cordifolia* (Family: Malvaceae) is a small, erect, annual or perennial shrub found in tropical and subtropical regions across India, China, Africa, and Brazil. The Sanskrit name "Bala" translates to "strength," which aptly reflects its traditional use as a tonic for enhancing vitality, endurance, and overall body strength. In Ayurveda, it is one of the four "Balas" (*Sida cordifolia*, *Sida rhombifolia*, *Sida acuta*, and *Sida spinosa*), all of which are highly valued for their rejuvenating properties [1, 2].

The entire plant, including the roots, leaves, seeds, and stem, is used for medicinal purposes. The roots are considered the most potent part and are a key ingredient in numerous classical Ayurvedic formulations, such as *Bala Arishta* and *Maha Bala Taila* [3]. Historically, Bala was not only a part of medicinal preparations but also used in rituals and as a source of fiber. Its use is well-documented in ancient Ayurvedic texts like the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, where it is primarily classified as a *Rasayana* (rejuvenative), *Vajikaran* (aphrodisiac), and *Balya* (strength-promoting) herb [4].

The pharmacological and phytochemical investigation of *Sida cordifolia* began in the early 20th century, with the isolation of ephedrine from the plant. This discovery led to its use as a natural source for stimulating alkaloids, though subsequent regulatory changes have restricted its use due to safety concerns. However, modern research has since uncovered a host of other beneficial compounds and activities that extend far beyond its stimulatory effects, positioning

it as a significant multi-purpose medicinal plant [5]. This review aims to bring together these diverse aspects, providing a comprehensive resource for researchers and practitioners.

## 2. Traditional Ayurvedic Properties and Uses

In Ayurveda, *Sida cordifolia* is described with the following properties:

- **Rasa (Taste):** *Madhura* (sweet)
- **Guna (Qualities):** *Laghu* (light), *Snigdha* (unctuous)
- **Virya (Potency):** *Sheeta* (cold)
- **Vipaka (Post-digestive effect):** *Madhura* (sweet)
- **Karma (Action):** *Vata-Pitta Shamaka* (alleviates Vata and Pitta doshas)

Based on these properties, its traditional uses are extensive and well-documented [6]:

- **Nervous System Disorders:** As a nervine tonic, it is used to treat various neurological conditions, including paralysis, facial palsy, sciatica, and as a remedy for general nervous weakness. It is believed to nourish the nervous tissue and promote its proper function.
- **Rheumatic Conditions:** Due to its anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties, it is used to manage inflammatory joint diseases such as rheumatism, arthritis, and gout.
- **Cardiac Tonic:** It is considered beneficial for heart health and is used to strengthen cardiac muscles. The mild stimulatory effect and tonic properties are believed to support heart function.
- **Respiratory Ailments:** The demulcent and expectorant properties of Bala make it useful in treating respiratory conditions like asthma, bronchitis, and cough.
- **Male Reproductive Health:** Its *Vajikaran* (aphrodisiac) property makes it a key ingredient in formulations for treating male infertility, low libido, and general sexual debility.
- **Wound Healing:** The paste of the leaves and roots is applied topically to wounds, boils, and swellings to promote healing and reduce inflammation.

## 3. Detailed Phytochemical Profile

The therapeutic effects of *Sida cordifolia* are a result of its rich and varied chemical composition. The most studied compounds include:

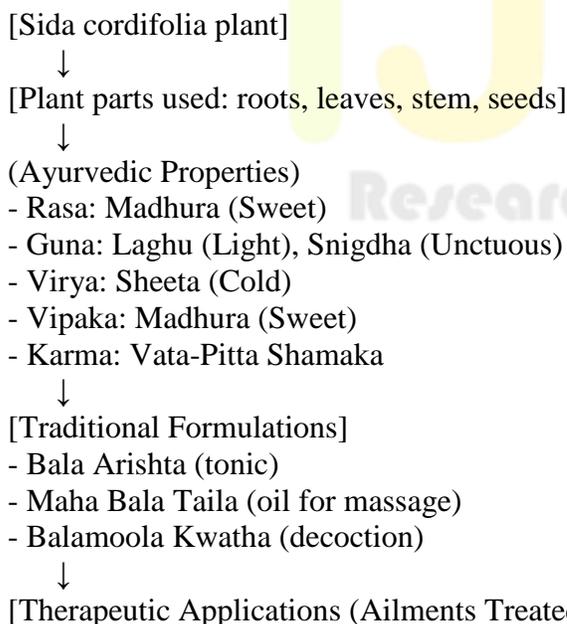
- **Alkaloids:** The most well-known are the **ephedrine-type alkaloids**, including ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, and a small amount of norephedrine. These compounds are structurally similar to catecholamines and exert their effects by stimulating the central nervous system. However, numerous other alkaloids, such as beta-phenethylamine, quinazoline alkaloids (e.g., vasicinone, vasicine), and hypaphorine, are also present and contribute to its broader pharmacological profile [7, 8]. For example, vasicinone and vasicine are known for their bronchodilatory and anti-asthmatic properties.
- **Flavonoids:** The plant is a rich source of flavonoids, including kaempferol, quercetin, hesperidin, and their glycosides. These compounds are potent antioxidants that scavenge free radicals, thus reducing oxidative stress, which is a major contributor to many chronic diseases [9]. Their anti-inflammatory activity is linked to the inhibition of enzymes like lipoxygenase and cyclooxygenase.
- **Phytosterols:** It contains various phytosterols, such as beta-sitosterol and stigmasterol, which have been linked to anti-inflammatory and cholesterol-lowering effects. Beta-sitosterol, in particular, is known for its ability to modulate the immune system and inhibit certain types of cancer cells [10].
- **Fatty Acids:** The seeds are a source of fatty acids, including malvalic acid, sterculic acid, and other cyclopropenoid fatty acids. These fatty acids have been shown to have a variety of biological activities, though more research is needed to fully understand their role in the plant's overall therapeutic effect [11].
- **Other Compounds:** The plant also contains mucins, which are responsible for its demulcent and soothing properties, tannins, and saponins, which contribute to its anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial activities [12].

#### 4. Expanded Pharmacological Activities and Mechanisms of Action

Modern scientific research has provided compelling evidence to support many of the traditional uses of *Sida cordifolia*, often revealing the underlying mechanisms.

- **Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic:** The anti-inflammatory effect of *S. cordifolia* is mediated by multiple pathways. Studies have shown that its extracts inhibit the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as IL-1 $\beta$  and TNF- $\alpha$ . Furthermore, it has been found to suppress the expression of inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) and cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) [13]. Its analgesic activity is thought to be a result of both its anti-inflammatory action and direct effects on pain pathways, which has been demonstrated in various animal models of pain.
- **Neuroprotective and CNS Activities:** Beyond its stimulant effects from ephedrine, *Sida cordifolia* has shown significant neuroprotective potential. Research suggests that it protects neuronal cells from damage caused by oxidative stress and neurotoxins [14]. The plant's extract has also been shown to modulate the activity of neurotransmitters like acetylcholine and serotonin, which may explain its traditional use in managing nervous system disorders and its nootropic (cognition-enhancing) properties [15].
- **Antimicrobial:** The antimicrobial activity of *S. cordifolia* extracts has been demonstrated against a wide range of clinically relevant pathogens, including bacteria like *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*, and fungi such as *Candida albicans*. The activity is likely due to a synergistic effect of its various phytochemicals, including alkaloids and flavonoids [16].
- **Immunomodulatory:** The plant's extracts have been shown to modulate both humoral and cell-mediated immune responses. It has been found to enhance the phagocytic activity of macrophages and increase the production of antibodies, suggesting its potential to boost the body's immune defense system [17].
- **Antidiabetic:** The hypoglycemic effect of *S. cordifolia* is a subject of growing interest. Animal studies have shown that the plant's extracts can significantly lower blood glucose levels and improve glucose tolerance. The proposed mechanisms include enhancing insulin secretion from pancreatic beta cells and increasing glucose uptake in peripheral tissues [18].
- **Wound Healing:** The wound-healing properties of *Sida cordifolia* are attributed to its antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant activities. Topical application of its extracts promotes the proliferation of fibroblasts, enhances collagen synthesis, and accelerates the process of re-epithelialization, leading to faster and more complete wound closure [19].
- **Hepatoprotective:** The plant has been shown to protect the liver from damage caused by various hepatotoxins, such as carbon tetrachloride and paracetamol. This effect is attributed to its potent antioxidant activity, which prevents lipid peroxidation and maintains the integrity of hepatocyte cell membranes [20].

#### Flowchart of Traditional Ayurvedic Application of *Sida cordifolia*



- Nervous Disorders (paralysis, sciatica)
- Rheumatic Conditions (arthritis, gout)
- Respiratory Ailments (asthma, cough)
- Cardiac Weakness
- Male Reproductive Issues
- Wound Healing & Skin Disorders

**Table 1: Key Bioactive Compounds of *Sida cordifolia* and their Pharmacological Actions**

Phytochemical Class	Key Compound(s)	Primary Pharmacological Action(s)
<b>Alkaloids</b>	Ephedrine, Pseudoephedrine	CNS stimulation, bronchodilation, vasodilation [7]
<b>Alkaloids</b>	Vasicine, Vasicinone	Bronchodilation, anti-asthmatic activity [8]
<b>Alkaloids</b>	Hypaphorine	Neuroprotective, modulates neurotransmitters [15]
<b>Flavonoids</b>	Quercetin, Kaempferol	Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial [9]
<b>Phytosterols</b>	$\beta$ -sitosterol, Stigmasterol	Anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory [10]
<b>Fatty Acids</b>	Malvalic acid, Sterculic acid	Antimicrobial, various biological activities [11]
<b>Other</b>	Mucins, Tannins	Demulcent, wound healing, astringent properties [12]

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**Table 2: Classical Ayurvedic Formulations Containing *Sida cordifolia***

Formulation Name	Form of Preparation	Primary Traditional Use(s)
<b>Bala Arishta</b>	Medicated fermented liquid (tonic)	General debility, respiratory diseases, nervous disorders [3]
<b>Maha Bala Taila</b>	Medicated oil for external application	Paralysis, rheumatic pain, neurological disorders [4]
<b>Bala Churna</b>	Herbal powder	To promote strength and vitality, nerve tonic, aphrodisiac
<b>Balamoola Kwatha</b>	Decoction of the root	Vata-Pitta disorders, arthritis, urinary disorders
<b>Ksheerabala Taila</b>	Medicated oil prepared with milk	Neurological disorders, rheumatism, facial palsy

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## 5. Safety, Toxicity, and Regulatory Status

The safety and regulatory status of *Sida cordifolia* are complex and contentious, primarily due to the presence of ephedrine-type alkaloids. Ephedrine is a sympathomimetic amine that can have significant physiological effects, including increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and CNS stimulation.

- **Adverse Effects:** When consumed in high doses, especially in concentrated extracts, ephedrine can cause a range of adverse effects, including palpitations, arrhythmias, hypertension, insomnia, anxiety, and even stroke or heart attack in susceptible individuals [21]. These risks led to its ban as an ingredient in dietary supplements in the United States by the FDA in 2004.
- **Regulatory Landscape:** The regulatory status of *Sida cordifolia* varies globally. While the use of isolated ephedrine and ephedrine-containing supplements is restricted or banned in many countries, the use of the whole plant or its traditional preparations in food and medicine is often subject to different regulations. The challenge lies in the natural variation of ephedrine content in the plant, which can vary based on growing conditions, time of harvest, and processing methods.
- **Differentiating Ephedrine vs. Whole Plant:** It is crucial to distinguish between the isolated alkaloid and the whole plant extract. While ephedrine is associated with significant risks, the other non-ephedrine compounds in *Sida cordifolia* may have a mitigating or synergistic effect that alters the overall safety profile. The plant is still

widely used in traditional medicine without a high frequency of adverse events, suggesting that the context of its use and dosage is critical [22]. More research is needed to determine the safe therapeutic window for whole plant preparations and to clarify the role of its other alkaloids.

## 6. Clinical Studies and Future Directions

While a large body of preclinical research exists, the number of rigorous, large-scale human clinical trials on *Sida cordifolia* is still limited. Most of the available clinical evidence stems from studies on polyherbal formulations where *Sida cordifolia* is a key ingredient, making it difficult to isolate the effects of the plant itself. However, the existing data provides a promising foundation for future research.

- **Clinical Evidence on Anti-inflammatory Effects:** Some studies have investigated the anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties of *Sida cordifolia* in conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. For example, a study on a polyherbal formulation containing *Sida cordifolia* demonstrated significant improvement in pain and joint stiffness in patients with osteoarthritis when compared to a placebo. These findings suggest that the plant's ability to modulate inflammatory pathways is clinically relevant [23].
- **Neuroprotective and Cognitive Enhancement Studies:** Given its traditional use as a nervine tonic, there is a growing interest in its nootropic potential. A few animal studies have shown that extracts of *Sida cordifolia* can improve memory and learning abilities, particularly in models of neurodegenerative diseases. However, these findings need to be validated in human subjects to confirm their clinical relevance [15].
- **Potential in Respiratory Health:** The traditional use of *Sida cordifolia* in asthma and bronchitis is supported by the presence of vasicine, a known bronchodilator. This presents a clear avenue for clinical research to investigate its efficacy as an adjunctive therapy for respiratory conditions, with a focus on standardized extracts to ensure safety and consistent dosing [8].

**Table 3: Summary of Key Clinical and Pre-clinical Studies on *Sida cordifolia***

Study Type	Condition/Focus	Key Findings	Implication & Status
<b>Pre-clinical Model</b>	(Rat Anti-inflammatory Analgesic)	& Significant reduction in pain and inflammation markers.	Supports traditional use; requires human trials.
<b>Pre-clinical Model</b>	(Rat Neuroprotective cerebral ischemia)	against Reduced neuronal damage and oxidative stress.	Promising for neurological disorders; needs clinical validation.
<b>Clinical Study</b>	(Polyherbal Osteoarthritis management)	pain Significant reduction in pain and improved joint function.	Suggests efficacy in complex formulations; needs single-herb trials.
<b>Pre-clinical vitro</b>	(In Antidiabetic activity)	Enhanced insulin secretion and improved glucose uptake.	Strong potential for diabetes management; early stage research.
<b>Pre-clinical Model</b>	(Rat Wound healing activity)	Accelerated wound contraction and increased collagen synthesis.	Confirms traditional topical use; requires human clinical trials.

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### Future Directions in Research:

1. **Standardization and Quality Control:** The most pressing need is to develop standardized extracts with a defined profile of non-ephedrine alkaloids and other key phytochemicals. This would ensure consistent efficacy and safety, crucial for regulatory approval.
2. **Rigorous Clinical Trials:** Large-scale, randomized, placebo-controlled trials are necessary to conclusively prove the efficacy of *Sida cordifolia* for specific conditions like arthritis, respiratory ailments, and neurological disorders.
3. **Investigating Non-Ephedrine Compounds:** Future research should focus on the therapeutic potential of alkaloids like vasicine and hypaphorine, which offer benefits without the significant cardiovascular risks associated with ephedrine.

4. **Drug Interactions:** Comprehensive studies on the herb's potential interactions with modern pharmaceuticals are vital to ensure patient safety, especially given its use in traditional medicine alongside other drugs.

## 7. Conclusion

*Sida cordifolia* (Bala) stands as a powerful testament to the value of traditional medicine, with a vast history of use and a rich phytochemistry that is now being systematically validated by modern science. The plant's therapeutic potential as an anti-inflammatory, neuroprotective, and immunomodulatory agent is well-supported by a growing body of preclinical evidence. While the presence of ephedrine poses a significant regulatory challenge and necessitates careful consideration of safety, it is essential to recognize that the plant's medicinal value extends far beyond this single alkaloid. The collective action of its numerous compounds, including flavonoids and other alkaloids, provides a holistic therapeutic profile that addresses a wide range of ailments.

To fully harness the benefits of this remarkable plant, a balanced approach is required. This involves a commitment to rigorous clinical research to establish safe and effective dosage guidelines, a focus on non-ephedrine compounds for therapeutic development, and the implementation of strict quality control measures. By bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary scientific methodology, *Sida cordifolia* has the potential to move from a revered traditional remedy to a validated and valuable component of modern integrative healthcare.

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