

BANAFSHA (AN IMPORTANT UNANI DRUG): A REVIEW

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Abstract

Natural products with medicinal value are gradually gaining importance in clinical research due to their well known property of no side effects as compared to drugs. Banafsha (*Viola Odorata* Linn.) is a popular drug and is known for its immense application in the treatment of various diseases and is being used in different system of medicines since very old time. It is species of genus *viola* of family *Violaceae* native to Europe and Asia but also has been introduced to North America and Australia. It is planted in many hill stations. It is commonly known as sweet violet, wood violet, English violet, common violet, florist's violet, garden violet. Vast description of this herb is present in Unani literature regarding its therapeutic uses in various ailments. In Unani system of medicine it is used in *Suda-e-har* (Headache), *Nazla wa zukam* (Coryza), *Sual* (Cough), *Kharashe halq* (Sore throat) etc. A Unani medicine named as *Roghan-e-Banafsha* used in *Sahr*, *Tarteeb-e-Dimag*, *Yaboosate Dimag* etc contain this valuable herb. Phytochemical analyses have also shown presence of different alkaloids and chemicals in this herb proving its medicinal importance. *Viola odorata* has been reported to have various pharmacological activities. Present review is aimed at summarizing the traditional uses, pharmacognosy, phytochemistry, biological activities etc of *Viola odorata* to reveal its therapeutic potentials and offer scope for future researches.

Key words: Banafsha, Unani medicine, Literature, Phytochemistry

Introduction

Roghane Banafsha is a popular drug used in Unani system of medicine. It is prepared from the flower of *Viola odorata*. Flowers of *banafsha* 1 tola are soaked in hot water at night and boil it in the early morning and after filtration of this mixture add 5 tola *Roghane kunjud* in it and again boil it till the water evaporates completely and filter it again¹ or it may also prepared with the help of *kunjad* seeds kept it with *Gule banafsha* and then obtain the oil². It has been used for the number of therapeutic purposes since ancient times and is mostly indicated in *Sahr*, *Suda-e-Har*, *Yabis*, *Yaboosate Dimag*, *Salbate Mafasil* due to its *Murattib*, *Dafe Yabosate Dimag*, *Munawwim*, *Mullayin* and *Musakkin* actions^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}. It is a species of genus *Viola* native to Europe, and Asia but has also been introduced to North America and Australia^{6, 7, 8}. Sweet scent of this flower has proved popular throughout the generations particularly late victorian period and has consequently used in the production of many cosmetics and perfumes. In 1923 Poucher writes that the flower is widely cultivated both in Europe and Asia and the East for their fragrance⁶. It is cultivated only in gardens. Its cultivation is also undertaken in hilly regions of North India. It grows quite satisfactorily in cool and moist climatic conditions. It does not survive on exposure to heavy rains. Its propagation can be done either by cutting or with seeds^{8, 9} or by divisions⁹. The plant is very variable, and several single and double flowered types are grown for ornaments. The old plants are removed once in 4-5 years⁹. Flowering and fruiting take place during April to July¹⁰.

Taxonomical Classification of Banafsha:

Kingdom	Plantae
Order	Malpighiales
Family	Violaceae
Genus	<i>Viola</i>
Species	<i>Odorata</i>

Vernaculars: 4, 5, 9, 11, 12

English	Wild violet, Sweet violet, English violet, Garden violet
Hindi	Banafsha
Arabic	Farfeer, Banfasaj
Urdu	Banafshah
Bangli	Banusa, Banafshah
Persian	Kokash
Kashmiri	Banafsha
Tamil	Vialethoo
Telgu	Vialettu
Punjabi	Banafsha
Sindhi	Banfshu

Description

Viola odorata is used as ethano botanical plant. It is species of genus *viola* of family *Violaceae* native to Europe and Asia but also has been introduced to North America and Australia^{6, 7, 8}. This and several closely allied species are found in Kashmir and the temperate western Himalaya above 5000 feet or 1700 to 2000 meters^{5, 9, 11, 12}. It is planted in many hill stations^{5, 9, 11}. It is commonly known as sweet violet, wood violet, English violet, common violet, florist's violet, garden violet. This plant is known as Banafsa, Banafsha, or Banaksa in India^{9, 11, 12}. Whole plant of *Viola odorata* used for medicinal purpose,⁸ or leaves, flowers and roots, or leaves and flowers^{5, 13} *Banafsha* is Perennial, glabrous or pubescent herb about 15 cm in height^{8, 9}.

Macroscopic:

Root stock:-Very stout and stolons are cylindrical,⁸ vertical, thick, hard, surface corky, upto 5mm thick and 6-8 m long¹¹.

Root:-Thin, wiry, brownish, arising from tapering root stock¹¹.

Stem: - Underground runner attached with root stock¹¹.

Leaves: - Leaves are dark green, tough, broadly, ovate or cordate in shape with crenate margin⁹, Petiole about 20 cm long, leaf about 2cm broad 3cm long^{8, 9, 11}.

Flowers: - Flowers are solitary, axillary, irregular forming central flowering rosettes. Flowers are very beautiful in colour they are deep violet in shade with bluish white base. Flowers are pedicelate, calyx consist of 5 sepals, corolla consist of 5 deep violet petals with a bluish white base. Androecium consists of 5 stamens, Gynaecium consists of 3 carpels. Flowers are sweet scented and for medicinal purposes plant is collected from April to July^{8, 9}.

Mizaj (Temperament):

Gul-e-Banafsha:-Cold (1 degree) and Moist (1 degree)¹¹

Miqdar Khuraq (Doses):

7 gm¹⁵

Afaal (Pharmacological actions) of *Gul-e -Banafsha*:

<i>Nafe Suada-e-Har</i> ⁵
<i>Munawwim</i> (Hypnotic) ⁵
<i>Dafe Nazla wa Zukam</i> ⁴
<i>Nafe Qabz</i> ⁴
<i>Dafe-Humma</i> (Anti pyretic) ⁸
<i>Mullayan</i> (Laxative) ^{11, 12}
<i>Mudir</i> (Diuretic) ¹²
<i>Mulattif</i> (Demulscient) ^{9, 12}
<i>Mukhrij</i> (Expectorant) ⁸
<i>Moarriq</i> (Diaphoretic) ⁸
<i>Munaffis-e-Balgam</i> ¹¹
<i>Mohalil-e-Waram</i> (Anti inflammatory) ¹¹
Anodyne ⁸
Emollient ⁹

Mahalle Istemal (Therapeutic uses) of Gule Banafsha:

<i>Suda-e-Har</i> (Headache) ⁵
<i>Nazla wa Zukam</i> (Coryza) ⁴
<i>Humma</i> (Fever) ⁸
<i>Sahr</i> (Insomnia) ^{4, 5}
<i>Qabz</i> (Constipation) ^{4, 5, 11}
<i>Sual</i> (Cough) ^{9, 11}
<i>Kharashe Halq</i> (Sore throat) ⁹

Afaal (Pharmacological actions) of Roghane Banasha:

<i>Munawwim</i> (Hypnotic) ^{1, 3, 4}
<i>Musakkin</i> (Analgesic) ¹⁵
<i>Murattib-e- Dimag</i> ^{3, 4, 5}
<i>Nafe Suda-e-Har Yabis</i> ^{2, 3}
<i>Mullayane Salabate Mafasil wa Aasab</i> (Laxative for joints and nerves) ²
<i>Muhafize Azfar</i> (Protective for nails) ²
<i>Dafe Yaboosate Sadar</i> (Anti dryness of chest) ¹

Mahalle Istemal (Therapeutic uses) of Roghane Banasha

<i>Sahr</i> (Insomnia) ^{2, 3, 5}
<i>Sual</i> (Cough) ¹⁴
<i>Yaboosate Badan wa Dimagh</i> (Dryness of body and brain) ^{2, 14, 18}
<i>Suda-e-Har wa Yabis</i> ^{2, 15}
<i>Tarteeb-e-Dimag</i> ^{4, 5}
<i>Mirgi wa Ummsibyan</i> (Epilepsy) ¹⁴
<i>Hararat-e-Masana</i> ¹⁴
<i>Hirqat-e-Bol</i> ¹⁴
<i>Suda</i> (Headche) ¹⁴

Badal (Substitutes):*Gauzban*^{13, 16}*Gule gauzban*¹³*Khubbazi*^{5, 16}*Barge Kubbazi*⁴*Mulethi*^{4, 16}*Neelofer*¹⁶**Murakkabat (Compound formulation):***Roghane Banafsha*^{2, 3, 15}*Khamira Banafsha*^{4, 5}*Sharbate Banafsha*^{5, 17}*Habbe-Yaqoot*⁵**Phytochemistry:**

Plant yields saponins, salicyclates, alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, phenols, coumarins, phenolics glycosides, gaultherin, violutoside, odoratine, mucilage, and vitamin-C^{8, 9}.

Flowers:-The flowers contain a colouring matter and traces of a volatile oil, three acids and an emetic principle called violin, quercitrin, or rutin and sugar, glycoside and methyl salicyclic ester^{8, 12}.

Seeds and roots:-Salicyclic acid, Viola-emetin, a glucoside^{8, 9}.

Leaves:-2 crystalline bodies, volatile oil, an alkaloid, coloring matter, fiedelin, beta sitosterol, alcohol^{8,9}.

Essential oil: - alpha and beta irones and alpha and beta ionones⁹.

Pharmacological Activity:

1. Antioxidant activity

The Plant has been reported to possess antioxidant and diuretic activities. The data obtained in the in-vitro models clearly establish the antioxidant potency of all extracts. Flowers of spicy violet, *Viola odorata* (Violaceae) were collected from different locations- The flowers were extracted with water and the suspension filtered and lyophilized for 3 days. Extract showed antioxidant potential using scavenging of 2, 2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl radical⁷.

2. Headache and Insomnia

It can be helpful in the treatment of headache, insomnia, dizziness, and exhaustion⁷.

3. Sedative and Pre anesthetic

The leaf extract has sedation and pre anesthetic effects at dose of 100- 400 mg/kg.⁴⁸ *Viola odorata* extracts has better sedation and pre-anesthetic effects than diazepam but dose dependently⁶.

4. Bronchitis and Cough

The whole aerial part including system, flowers and leaves are used in bronchitis, cough, and sneezing⁷.

5. Kidney and Liver Disorders

Supplementation of the animal diets with sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) blossoms powder SVBP (0.2 to 1.6 gm/100gm) prevented significantly ($p < 0.005$) the rise of mean serum AST, ALT and ALP activities, urea, creatinine and MDA levels⁷.

6. Laxative activity

Laxative activity of different extracts has been studied and it was found that alcoholic extracts at a dose level of 200 mg /kg and aqueous extract at a dose level of 400 mg/kg showed significant effect as laxative⁷.

7. Anti pyretic activity

Viola odorata produced a significant oral antipyretic activity in rabbits using hexane, chloroform and water soluble extracts⁷.

8. Cancer and Antitumor activity

The whole aerial part including stem, flowers, and leaves are used in cancer. *Viola* was reported as pharmacological tools and possibly as leads to antitumor agents. Cycloviolacin O2 (cyo2), a cyclotide from *Viola odorata* (Violaceae) has anti-tumor effects and causes cell deaths by membrane permeabilization. This study documents several cyclotides with robust cytotoxicity that may be promising chemo sensitizing agents against drug resistant breast cancer⁷.

9. Anti-inflammatory activity

An aqueous extract of *viola odorata* showed anti-inflammatory properties as compared with hydrocortisone, *Viola odorata* extract given prophylactically was partially effective in preventing lung damage, equal to the effect of hydrocortisone in aiding the resolution of formalin induced lung damage⁷.

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