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Phytochemistry and Biological Activities of *Murraya koenigii*

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ABSTRACT

Murraya koenigii, which belongs to the family *Rutaceae*, is a medicinal plant; commonly known as curry leaves, that is rich in phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are bioactive compounds that can be used as sources for the prevention and treatment of many diseases. It is an aromatic plant commonly found in Southeast Asia. The leaves of the plant are used as a spice in food. Ethnobotanically, it has been used to fight infections, enhance immunity, and treat various diseases. It comprises several phytochemicals such as alkaloids, phenols, essential oils, tocopherol, carotene, terpenoids, and lutein, as well as minerals, proteins, and fats. Different parts of plants possess biological activities like antibacterial properties, antifungal, anti-diabetic, hepatoprotective, immunomodulatory, nephroprotective, and antioxidant properties. This review highlights the phytochemistry and biological activities of *M. koenigii*.

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INTRODUCTION

Murraya koenigii, also known as “curry leaf” or “Kari patta” (Rana and Yamini, 2022), is a commonly used aromatic plant in South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan. It has been used for centuries for its medicinal properties and as a spice in culinary. This plant belongs to the family *Rutaceae* (Abuga *et al.*, 2020) and is a deciduous shrub of about 16–15 inches or a small tree of about 3-5 meters with woody stems and smooth leaves (2-4 cm long) that are strongly aromatic. It also has small white, 5-petaled fragrant flowers (Sharma *et al.*, 2020). It is an edible small, glandular berry clustered closely, enclosing two green seeds and blackens when ripe (Abeyasinghe *et al.*, 2021). According to the “Flora of Pakistan,” the curry leaf plant is commonly found along the foothills of the Himalayas and has spread to other regions due to migration, from the River Ravi toward Tamil Nadu and Assam and to Chittagong in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, respectively (Datta *et al.*, 2023).

M. koenigii has been utilized as a medicinal plant, flavorant, and aromatic with widespread ethnobotanical use for centuries. This plant's dried leaves are often used as a seasoning in Pakistani cuisine. The various parts of the curry leaf plant, including the stems, bark, seeds, fruits, roots, and leaves, play a significant role in fighting infection and boosting immunity. Consuming the leaves raw cure dysentery and the extract of its root is administered to control kidney pain and reduce fever (Azmin *et al.*, 2020). In traditional Ayurveda, curry leaves are used to treat hypertension, hysteria, cough, rheumatism, and hepatitis (Raghu, 2020). *M. koenigii* has a variety of chemical components that interact to produce its pharmacodynamic response. The presence of phytochemicals such as alkaloids, essential oils, phenolics, terpenoids, tocopherol, β -carotene, and lutein, as well as minerals, proteins, and fat, has been suggested as the cause of the bioactivity of curry leaf. Although the curry leaf plant produces a relatively small number of

phytochemicals, it possesses hepatoprotective, anti hypercholesterolemic, anti-diabetic, diabetic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant activities (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2020). The pathogenesis of various conditions involves the participation of reactive oxygen and nitrogen species, which include free radicals. A living organism must maintain an equilibrium between the formation of reactive species and their accumulation in cells and tissues, as well as the biological system's capacity to detoxify them. The absence of this balance results in oxidative stress, which occurs when the concentration of reactive species is too high, leading to harmful effects on humans, plants, and animals. Antioxidants used in medicine and industry can be classified into; natural and synthetic. Synthetic antioxidants, which are commonly used, are believed to have detrimental effects on the human body, prompting a shift toward natural antioxidants derived from plants (Sen and Chakraborty, 2011). One of the most prominent natural antioxidant groups is polyphenolic compounds that possess one or more hydroxyl groups within their chemical structure. These compounds can be grouped into two main classes: phenolic acids and flavonoids (Olszowy, 2019). Different organic bioactive compounds like crystalline glycosides, carbazole alkaloids, koenigii, girinimbin, iso-mahanimbin, koenine, koenidine, and koenimbine have exceptional antioxidant properties (Asema *et al.*, 2021). The mechanism of action of the antioxidant activity of curry leaves involves the ability of these phytochemicals to scavenge free radicals and reactive oxygen species (ROS) in the body by neutralizing free radicals after donating an electron or hydrogen atom to stabilize them and prevent further damage. Curry leaves' antioxidant qualities are attributed to their ability to activate innate antioxidant enzymes such as glutathione peroxidase, catalase, and superoxide dismutase (Gill and Sharma, 2014; Rehana *et al.*, 2017).

It was discovered that the antioxidant effect may be caused by the plant's high total phenol and flavonoid content, as well as its capacity to scavenge free radicals (Aryal *et al.*, 2019).

In both conventional and modern medicine, plants with medicinal characteristics are used to promote wellness, treat specific diseases, or both. Numerous phytochemicals that have either been proven to have biological action or may do so have been found in plants. Terpenes, alkaloids, glycosides, and polyphenols are the four main biochemical subcategories of phytochemicals, which are substances found in plants. In poor nations and non-industrialized communities, medicinal plants are widely employed because they are effective and inexpensive compared to modern medicine and are easily accessible (Ahn, 2017). Since their antiquity, plants have been used as medicines; however, their effectiveness is not always certain. Some of these plants are now used as culinary spices and herbs. Several plant classes contain polyphenols (Tapsell *et al.*, 2006).

Punicalagins, a class of polyphenols found in astringent pomegranate peels, are a popular type of medicine (Jindal and Sharma, 2004). For a long time, gynecological diseases have been treated with the plant Angelica, which contains phytoestrogens (European Food Safety Authority, 2010). Cardiac glycosides such as digitoxin and digoxin are strong medications that improve heart function and have diuretic properties. These flowers are produced from medicinal plants, including the lily of the valley and foxglove (Wang *et al.*, 2013; Chan and Lin, 2009). Many medicinal plants, as well as resinous species like conifers, contain a variety of terpenoids and terpenes, which are highly fragrant and have many medical applications (Wiert, 2014). For instance, thymol, which has antibacterial properties, was previously used as an anthelmintic. Traditional local medicine, such as herbalism, is typically the primary healthcare source for people in developing nations (Awuchi and Godswill, 2019).

Taxonomic classification of *Murraya koenigii*

Taxonomic classification of *Murraya koenigii* is given in Table 1.

Kingdom	<i>Plantae</i>
Division	<i>Magnoliophyta</i>
Class	<i>Magnoliopsida</i>
Order	<i>Sapindales</i>
Family	<i>Rutaceae</i>
Genus	<i>Murraya</i>
Species	<i>Koenigii</i>



Figure 1. Curry leaf plant.

Phytochemicals of *Murraya koenigii*

Curry leaves contain abundant essential phytochemicals and secondary metabolites that impart diverse biological activities. These compounds include alkaloids, flavonoids, triterpenes, tannins, and unsaturated steroids, among others (Abeyasinghe *et al.*, 2021). Rajendran *et al.* (2014) reported that various alkaloids such as mahanine, koenine, koenigine, koenidine, girinimbiol, girinimibine, and koenimbine, as well as O-methyl murrayamine A, isomahanine, bismahanine, and bispyrayafoline, have been isolated from curry leaves. The leaves also contain coumarin, glycosides, scopotin, and murrayanine, as well as minerals and vitamins such as iron, oxalic acid, niacin, calcium, riboflavin, carotene, and vitamin C.

Fresh and young curry plant leaves are rich in yellow volatile oils that are abundant in various essential nutrients, such as vitamin A, vitamin C, minerals, carotene, and carbohydrates. They also contain girinimbin, iso-mahanimbin, koenine, koenigine, koenidine, and koenimbine. In contrast, mature leaves are composed of different components, such as moisture, total nitrogen, fat, total sugar, and starch (Gahlawat *et al.*, 2014). The bark of curry plants contains carbazole alkaloids such as murrayacine and murrayazolidine in the alcoholic extract (Fiebig *et al.*, 1985). According to Mittal *et al.* (2017), the fruit pulp of the blackberries of curry plants is also a source of essential nutrients. The roots of the curry plant contain girinimbine, murrayanol, and murrastifoline-F, as well as bismahanine among others (William *et al.*, 2009). Lastly, the seeds of *M.*

koenigii contain various chemical compounds, including girinimbine, koenimbine, isomahanine, and mahanine, as well as koenimbine and koenine (Gahlawat *et al.*, 2014; Mandal *et al.*, 2010).

Alkaloids and flavonoids derived from plants are essential for various biological activities and have medicinal and physiological importance. Steroids and tannins are other substances with strong antimicrobial properties, and polyphenolic flavonoids interact with the cell walls of bacteria via their mechanism of action (Pietta, 2000). Phenolic compounds are also important phytoconstituents and are believed to be the most well-known aromatic secondary metabolites, as reported by Abeyasinghe *et al.* (2021). A type of phenolic compound known as flavonoids is present in medicinal plants and is responsible for imparting antioxidant activity. Furthermore, the total phenol concentration determines the final antioxidant activity (Aryal *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies have identified terpenes and carbazole alkaloids as the primary compounds responsible for *M. koenigii*'s antioxidant properties (Bisht and Gaurav, 2016).

Advantageous pharmacological properties of *M. koenigii*

There has been growing interest in the use of *M. koenigii* as a conventional medicine and herbal remedy in recent times. However, the extent of research conducted to evaluate the medicinal and pharmacological efficacy of *M. koenigii* for the treatment of diseases is limited (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2018).

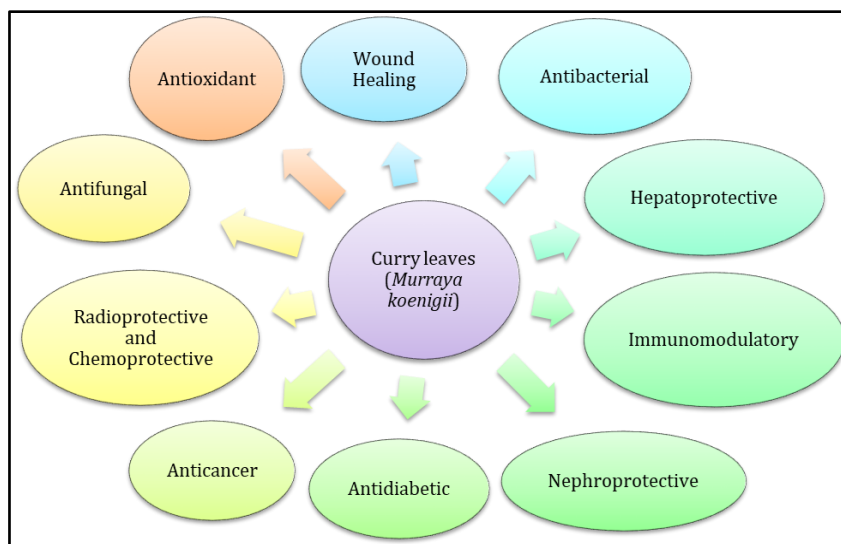


Figure 2. Biological activities of *Murraya koenigii*.

Hepatoprotective effect

One of the organs of the body, the liver, is greatly jeopardized by xenobiotics because it is responsible for the metabolism of drugs and for the detoxification of toxic substances (Manfo *et al.*, 2014). In experimental animal models, *M. koenigii* was found to have hepatoprotective properties, as demonstrated by its ability to protect against ethanol-induced hepatotoxicity. Furthermore, it efficiently maintains the enzymatic oxidant status and ameliorates liver impairment associated with chronic alcoholism (Shah *et al.*, 2015). The water and ethanolic extract of curry leaf were shown to diminish the hepatotoxic effects of CCl_4 in rats, as understood through the notable decrease in the levels of liver markers and maintenance of enzymatic antioxidants (Desai *et al.*, 2012).

Immunomodulatory activity

The immune system plays a crucial role in maintaining an organism's health by preventing the entry of microbes into the body. Disturbance of the immune system can result in various conditions, ranging from chronic inflammation to cancer (Kaufmann and Simon, 2015). This study evaluated the immunomodulatory effects of *M. koenigii* leaves extracted in methanol on antibody-mediated and cellular ovalbumin responses. The results showed a prominent increase in the production of nitric oxide radical (NO), indicating that the activity of macrophages in performing phagocytosis has increased. Therefore, *M. koenigii* extract can modulate the immune system by triggering antibody-mediated immunity and phagocytosis (Shah *et al.*, 2008).

Nephroprotective activity

M. koenigii has been tested in a rat model of diabetes to benefit from its nephroprotective effects (Yankuzo *et al.*, 2011). In that model, *M. koenigii* leaf extract effectively retained constant serum creatinine levels in addition to standard blood urea nitrogen, urinary urea, total urinary protein, serum sodium, creatinine, and urinary sodium levels. Additionally, in a study conducted in a rat model, the histopathology of kidneys revealed that the extract showed protective behavior similar to natural *in vivo* antioxidants, thus demonstrating its potential for treating disorders related to kidneys (Punuru *et al.*, 2014). In diabetic rats, *M. koenigii*'s protective activity dose-dependently decreased serum urea and creatinine levels while increasing plasma antioxidant capacity levels compared with controls. Notably, the aqueous extract induced comparable tissue regeneration in the kidneys and preserved histological integrity (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2018).

Anti-diabetic activity

Diabetes mellitus is a metabolic disorder with serious health-related adverse effects. Various phytochemicals have been isolated from plants that exhibit antidiabetic effects. Alkaloids found in *M. koenigii* leaves have been studied and found to be useful in repressing aldose reductase, other enzyme systems, and glucose utilization, thereby extending their antidiabetic properties (Patel *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, *M. koenigii* has been explored for its capacity to block alpha-glucosidase, which is frequently used for managing patients with type 2 diabetes widely (Gul *et al.*, 2012).

An extract of *M. koenigii* prepared in ethanol has been shown to significantly lower blood glucose levels due to the mimetic effects of insulin and mediation by its antioxidant properties, suggesting that *M. koenigii* has antidiabetic activity and antioxidant effects in rats (Husna *et al.*, 2018).

Anticancer activity

M. koenigii is a potential source of secondary metabolites with anticancer properties. A previous study evaluated the cytotoxic properties of three *M. koenigii* leaf extracts against HeLa cancer cells and found that they were potent in vitro (Amna *et al.*, 2019). Several in vivo cancer models and rodent cancer cell lines have also demonstrated *M. koenigii*'s anticancer potential (Yeap *et al.*, 2015; Das *et al.*, 2014; Chatterjee *et al.*, 2015). In a study of colon neoplasms, histopathological evidence showed that treatment with *M. koenigii* extract repressed tumor growth (Iman *et al.*, 2017). In breast cancer cell lines, an extract of *M. koenigii* in methanol inhibited proliferation, and the total alkaloid derived from the leaves of the curry plant exhibited promising cytotoxic activity (Noolu *et al.*, 2013). These findings suggest that *M. koenigii* contains several anticancer compounds that show potential for further development as cancer treatments.

Antioxidant Activity of *Murraya koenigii*

Kusuma *et al.* (2011) reported that *M. koenigii* leaf extracts possess remarkable antioxidant properties. Rao *et al.* (2017) performed a DPPH free radical scavenging assay to test the antioxidant activity of water and ethanol extracts of *M. koenigii* leaves, with quercetin serving as the positive control. The ethanol extract exhibited a scavenging activity of 80%, comparable to that of quercetin. The DPPH free radical scavenging assay was used by Yogesh *et al.* (2012) to measure the antioxidant activity of *M. koenigii* berry extract. Tomar *et al.* (2017) conducted the H₂O₂ scavenging activity assays using acetone and petroleum ether extracts to determine the total antioxidant activity of younger and older *M. koenigii* leaves. They found that the acetone extract of older leaves had the highest activity at 151.58%, whereas the petroleum ether extract of younger leaves had a value of 72.23%. *M. koenigii* leaf extract may have antioxidant activity and counteract the oxidative stress brought on by diabetes, according to Arulselvan and Subramanian (2007). The aforementioned studies indicate that various *M. koenigii* extracts have different antioxidant activities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, curry leaves are a vital source of medicinal compounds, exhibiting diverse biological activities, such as anti-diabetic, hepatoprotective, immunomodulatory, anti-cancer, and antioxidant effects. Antioxidant properties, in particular, hold promise in combating aging and other diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Future research should investigate how different stressors affect the biological activity of curry leaves to potentially optimize their therapeutic potential. By delving deeper into their mechanisms of action, we can contribute to healthcare and scientific advancement. Curry leaves thus remain a promising resource in traditional and modern medicine, offering significant potential for improving human health.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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