

Original Research Article

Nutritional and Spectral Characteristics of *Terminalia* Plants

ABSTRACT

Aims: *Terminalia* are medicinal plants belong to family *Combretaceae* widely used in the traditional Ayurvedic medicines. In this work, the nutritional constituents of leaves, seed kernel and seed coat from four *Terminalia* species (*T. arjuna*, *T. bellirica*, *T. catappa* and *T. chebula*) are reported.

Methodology: The polyphenol and flavonoid content of the *Terminalia* species were analyzed spectrophotometrically by using Folin-Ciocalteu and aluminum chloride as reagent, respectively. The mineral contents were quantified by using X-ray fluorescence (XRF) technique by using reference materials. The functional groups of the phytochemicals were assessed by the FTIR technique.

Results: The total concentrations of 20 macro- and micronutrients (viz. P, S, Cl, K, Rb, Mg, Ca, Sr, Ba, Al, Ti, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Cu, Zn, Mo, As and Pb), total polyphenol and flavonoid contents in four seed kernels ranged from 1453 to 65461 mg/kg, from 2150 to 51100 mg/kg and from 63 to 42300 mg/kg, respectively. Similarly, the polyphenol and mineral content for the *Terminalia* seed coats and leaves are described. The enrichment of the nutrient with respect to the soil content in the *Terminalia* plants are discussed. The vibrational spectra from leaves and seed coats agree with a composition rich in

23 lignin, hemicellulose, cutin, pectin and flavonoids, while seed kernels are in accordance
24 with a greater presence of unsaturated oils, protein, and fiber.

25 **Conclusion:** Various parts of all investigated *Terminalia* species (*T. arjuna*, *T.*
26 *bellirica*, *T. catappa* and *T. chebula*) are enriched with high content of nutrients and
27 polyphenols which are needed for biological metabolism and human health. In addition,
28 heavy metals are present in the traces which shows *Terminalia* plants safe for medicinal
29 uses.

30 **Keywords:** *Terminalia*; FTIR; XRF; flavonoid; phenolic; nutrients.

31 **1. Introduction**

32 *Terminalia* genus comprises around 100 species distributed in tropical regions of the
33 world. Trees of this genus, common in plains and low hills in India, are especially
34 known as a source of secondary metabolites, such as tannins, cyclic triterpenes and their
35 derivatives, flavonoids, and other aromatics. Tannin-containing cells occur throughout
36 in the plant body, particularly in the pericarp of the fruit.

37 *Terminalia* species are important medicinal plants: they are administered as astringent
38 and purgative, and are used in dropsy, diarrhea, piles, leprosy, and cough treatments [1].

39 The phytochemical and pharmacological profile of *Terminalia arjuna* (Roxb. ex DC.)
40 Wight & Arn., known as Arjun, has been reported in the review paper by Jain *et al.* [2].

41 *T. bellirica* (Gaertn.) Roxb., known as Bahera or Beleric, and *Terminalia chebula* Retz.,
42 known as Chebulic myrobalan, are two main constituents of Triphala, traditionally used
43 to treat various gastrointestinal disorders [3], and an evaluation of the pharmacological
44 activities of the latter has been covered in a review paper by Bag *et al.* [4]. The

45 phytoconstituents and pharmacological benefits of *Terminalia catappa* L., known as
46 Indian-Almond, have been discussed in the review paper by Anand *et al.* (5).
47 The antioxidant, antifungal and antibacterial properties of some species of *Terminalia*
48 have been reported in the literature [6-10] and there are data on the volatile compounds
49 identified in the fruits and essential oils from *T. arjuna*, *T. catappa* [11-16] and *T.*
50 *chebula* [17], but most nutritional-related information remains unreported. In this work,
51 a comparative study of the nutritional (i.e., polyphenolic and trace elements) content of
52 the leaves, seed kernel and seed coat from the four *Terminalia* species mentioned above
53 (*T. arjuna*, *T. bellirica*, *T. catappa* and *T. chebula*) are presented.

54 **2. METHODS AND MATERIALS**

55 **2.1. Sampling of Plants**

56 The four *Terminalia* species discussed herein (viz. *T. arjuna* (TA), *T. bellirica* (TB), *T.*
57 *catappa* (TC) and *T. chebula* (TCh)) grow massively in the Chhattisgarh region, in the
58 in the center-east of India. They were botanically authenticated with the aid of standard
59 monographs [18]. The leaves and fruits of TA and TB were collected in May 2017 from
60 Raipur city (21.25°N 81.63°E), while the leaves and fruits of TC and TCh were
61 collected in December 2017. The near-surface layer of the soils was also sampled.

62 **2.2. Sample Preparation**

63 The leaves, pericarp, seed coat and seed kernel were manually separated. First, they
64 were cleaned with the de-ionized water and dried with the hot air blower. They were
65 sundried in a glass room for one week, further dried for 24 hr at 50 °C in a hot air oven,
66 and were finally stored in glass containers. The plant and soil samples were crushed into

67 fine powder with a mortar and sieved out particles of mesh size of $\leq 100 \mu\text{m}$. They were
68 preserved at -4°C in the deep freezer.

69 **2.3. Analysis**

70 Sample weights were measured with a Mettler-Toledo (Columbus, OH, USA) electronic
71 balance. The moisture content of the samples was determined by drying at 105°C in an
72 air oven for 6 hr prior to the analysis. All characterization results are presented on a dry
73 weight (dw) basis.

74 The total phenolic content (TPC) and flavonoid content (Fla) were determined as
75 follows: firstly, 100 mg of powdered sample was dispersed in 5 mL of an acetone:water
76 (70:30, v/v) solution, which was sonicated in an ultrasonic bath for 20 min at 20°C .
77 Then, 5 mL of fresh acetone:water (70:30, v/v) solution was added to the mixture and
78 the extraction was repeated for 20 min at 20°C . After centrifugation, the supernatant
79 was collected. The total phenolic content of each extract was determined as tannic acid
80 equivalent (TAE) by using the Folin-Ciocalteu reagent [19]. The flavonoid content was
81 determined by the aluminum chloride method as quercetin equivalents (QE) [20].

82 For macro- and micronutrient analyses, X-ray fluorescence (XRF) technique was
83 chosen, using a Bruker III Tracer SD (T3S2731 (Kennewick, WA, USA) spectrometer
84 equipped with a 4W rhodium anode and Xflash SDD 2028 channels. Standard brown
85 and white cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp.) seeds and soil sample ((NCS DC
86 73382 CRM) were used for calibration.

87 The Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectra were characterized with a Thermo
88 Scientific (Waltham, MA, USA) Nicolet iS50 spectrometer equipped with an in-built

89 diamond attenuated total reflection (ATR) system. Spectra were collected in the 400-
90 4000 cm^{-1} spectral range, with a 1 cm^{-1} spectral resolution and averaging 64 scans.

91 All analyses were carried out in triplicate, and mean values are reported.

92 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

93 **3.1. Plant Characteristics**

94 The physical characteristics of the leaves and seeds from the four *Terminalia* species
95 are shown in **Table 1**. The leaves, seeds and seed kernels were colored, with various
96 shapes, as shown in **Figure 1**. Micrographs of leaves samples are shown in **Figure 2**.
97 The average mass of a single leaf of TA, TB, TC and TCh was 2367 ± 41 , 3700 ± 66 ,
98 7500 ± 142 and 3767 ± 67 mg, respectively. The mass of a single seed on dry weight basis
99 was 3885 ± 75 , 4373 ± 81 , 4762 ± 78 and 5426 ± 102 mg, with a kernel fraction of 3.1, 11.0,
100 8.3 and 2.1%, respectively (i.e., the seed coats are hard and thick and accounted for a
101 remarkably high fraction of the seed weight). The water content in the leaves, seed coat
102 and seed kernel were ranged from 2.8–4.9%.

103 **3.2. Phenolic content**

104 The phenolic content for the four *Terminalia* species is shown in **Table 1**, with TPC
105 values in the leaves, seed coat and seed kernel ranging from 23900 to 33100 **m**/kg, from
106 22400 to 51100 mg/kg and from 2150 to 9530 mg/kg, respectively. Similarly, Fla
107 concentration in the leaves, seed coat and seed kernel varied in the 11200–25900
108 mg/kg, 5300–42300 mg/kg and 63–2150 mg/kg range, respectively. Plant parts from
109 TCh were found to contain the highest contents of TPC and Fla. The Fla/TPC ratio in

110 the leaves, seed coat and seed kernel showed mean values of 0.69, 0.54 and 0.11,
111 respectively.

112 **3.2. Macro- and Micronutrients Content**

113 The mineral element concentrations are presented in **Table 2**. As regards
114 macronutrients, which play a major role in plant physiological processes, P
115 concentration in leaves, seed coat and seed kernel ranged from 51 to 772 mg/kg, from
116 287 to 1109 mg/kg, and from 3842 to 8171 mg/kg, respectively. Relatively higher
117 concentrations of K were detected, which varied in the 288–9364 mg/kg, 3683–16001
118 mg/kg, and 4334–13947 mg/kg range in the leaves, seed coats and kernels, respectively.
119 Rubidium which has chemical properties similar to K^+ in the biological processes [22],
120 showed concentrations in the leaves, seed coats and kernels of 1–16 mg/kg, 9–25
121 mg/kg, and 13–28 mg/kg, respectively.

122 Apropos of the secondary macronutrients (viz. S, Mg and Ca), the concentrations of S
123 in the leaves, seed coat and kernel were in the 71–606 mg/kg, 176–545 mg/kg, and
124 1166–3158 mg/kg intervals, respectively. Magnesium concentrations in the leaves, seed
125 coat and kernel varied from 105 to 1868 mg/kg and 11 to 1316 mg/kg, and from 828 to
126 5440 mg/kg, respectively. Calcium concentrations in the leaves, seed coat and kernel
127 were in the 919–49656 mg/kg, 699–6644 mg/kg and 2031–9443 mg/kg ranges,
128 respectively. Strontium showed concentrations in the range of 3–101, 2–20 and 2–28
129 mg/kg for leaves, seed coat and seed kernel, respectively. Barium was detected in the
130 leaves, seed coat and kernel between 1–39, 1–2 and 1–12 mg/kg, respectively.

131 Chloride was detected only in the leaves and seed coat of all *Terminalia* species,
132 ranging from 46-3346 and 173-3287 mg/kg, respectively.

133 Titanium, which stimulates enzyme activities and uptake of nutrients [23], was detected
134 only in the TA kernel and TCh seed coat at low levels, 15 and 42 mg/kg, respectively.

135 Chromium was identified in the leaves and seed coats of all species between 1-7 and 1-
136 37 mg/kg, respectively.

137 Manganese, necessary in photosynthesis and nitrogen metabolism, was identified in all
138 parts of the *Terminalia* species which varied from 14-66, 3-63 and 17-88 mg/kg for the
139 leaves, seed coats and kernels, respectively.

140 Iron, involved in production of chlorophyll, lignin formation, etc., was detected at
141 moderate to high levels, varying from 127-229, 100-937 and 71-140 for the leaves, seed
142 coats and kernels, respectively.

143 Cobalt, an essential component of several enzymes, was detected at low levels, 1-6
144 mg/kg in all parts of the *Terminalia* species.

145 Copper, necessary for carbohydrate and nitrogen metabolism, was detected in the
146 leaves, seed coats and kernels of all *Terminalia* species, ranging from 1-15, 3-771 and
147 17-38 mg/kg.

148 Zinc –an essential component of various enzyme systems for energy production, protein
149 synthesis, and growth regulation– was identified in the leaves, seed coats and kernels,
150 varying from 3-7, 1-5 and 22-59 mg/kg, respectively.

151 Molybdenum, involved in enzyme systems relating to nitrogen fixation by bacteria, was
152 found at low concentration in the leaves and seed coats, ranging from 1-4 and 2–20

153 mg/kg. It was only detected in the leaves of TA and CA at low levels (2–4 mg/kg).
154 Arsenic was detected in leaves at low levels, 1-2 mg/kg. Whereas, Pb concentration was
155 varied relatively at higher level, 2-10 and 1-11 mg/kg in the leaves and seed coats.
156 The total concentration of 20 elements (i.e. P, S, Cl, K, Rb, Mg, Ca, Sr, Ba, Al, Ti, Cr,
157 Mn, Fe, Co, Cu, Zn, Mo, As and Pb) in the leaves, seed coat and kernel of TA, TB, TC
158 and TCh was 65521, 30832 and 40523; 5733, 6510 and 2493; 1754, 11634 and 12408;
159 and 11009, 10254 and 24189 mg/kg, respectively. Remarkably high concentration of
160 the elements in all parts of the TA was marked.

161 **3.3. Soil Characteristics and Bioaccumulation Factor**

162 In Chhattisgarh region, red laterites or entisols soil cover 19.5% of the cultivated area
163 and yellow clayey inceptisol soil account for 14.8%, but in Raipur district the latter are
164 the most frequent. These soils are slightly alkaline (mean value, 7.7; range 7.3–8.0), and
165 show electrical conductivities (EC) in the range of 465–523 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, with mean value of
166 495 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ (indicating an appreciable accumulation of salts).

167 The concentration in major and minor elements in the surface soil varied in the 114-141
168 mg/kg range for Cl (mean value, 127 mg/kg); 119–162 mg/kg for P (mean value, 138
169 mg/kg); 179–240 mg/kg for S (mean value, 207 mg/kg); 6.0–9.0 mg/kg for As (mean
170 value, 7.5 mg/kg); 1339– 1510 mg/kg for K (mean value, 1438 mg/kg); 5.8–8.0 mg/kg
171 for Rb (mean value, 6.9 mg/kg); 1450-1623 for Mg (mean value, 1545 mg/kg); 5880–
172 6710 for Ca (mean value, 6304 mg/kg); 44–58 for Sr (mean value, 50 mg/kg); 29–45
173 for Ba (mean value, 37 mg/kg); 5460–7050 for Ti (mean value, 6412 mg/kg); 113–150
174 for Cr (mean value, 128 mg/kg); 1370–1660 for Mn (mean value, 1510 mg/kg); 17460–

175 20123 for Fe (mean value, 18818 mg/kg); 29–38 for Co (mean value, 32 mg/kg); 66–82
176 for Cu (mean value, 72 mg/kg); 73–96 for Zn (mean value, 87 mg/kg); 1.0–1.8 for Mo
177 (mean value, 1.4 mg/kg) and 2–29 mg/kg for Pb (mean value, 15.5 mg/kg). They were
178 found to occur in the following increasing order: Mo < Rb < As < Pb < Co < Ba < Sr <
179 Cu < Zn < Cl \approx Cr < P < S < K < Mn < Mg < Ca < Ti < Fe.

180 The K/P ratio (=10.4) was in good agreement with the ratio obtained from potassium
181 and phosphorus values (=10.5) reported by Awanish et al. [21].

182 The bioaccumulation factor (BAF) is a ratio of the concentration of an element in the
183 plant to the concentration of that element in soil, and depends on several factors, such as
184 plant genotype, bioavailability of metals, soil quality, climatic condition, agronomic
185 management, etc. BAFs are reported in **Table 3**. Several nutrients (K, P, Cl, S, Cl, Ca)
186 were hyperaccumulated by the four *Terminalia* species, with the highest
187 hyperaccumulation of K, P, Cl and S for *T. arjuna*.

188 ***Phenolic, macro- and micronutrients contents correlation matrix in seed kernel***

189 The correlation coefficients of the elements for the *Terminalia* seed kernels are
190 presented in **Table 4**. TPC showed a good correlation with the Fla P, S, Mg and Zn
191 contents, exhibited high positive correlations with each other. Strong statistical
192 correlations were found among elements i.e. P, S, K, Mg, Ca, Sr, Mn, Fe and Cu,
193 indicating their accumulation as cofactor elements.

194 3.4. Vibrational characterization

195 The ATR-FTIR spectra for leaves, seed coat and seed kernel samples from the four
196 species of the *Terminalia* genus under study are depicted in **Figure 3**. The
197 corresponding bands are summarized in **Table 5**.

198 Peaks at around 3330 cm^{-1} (OH stretching) corresponded to typical characteristic
199 absorption from cellulose [24]. Peaks at around 2920 cm^{-1} ($-\text{CH}_2$ aldehydic symmetrical
200 stretching) and at 2853 cm^{-1} ($-\text{CH}$ stretching) indicated the presence of cutine and wax.
201 Peaks at *ca.* 1740 and at around 1370 cm^{-1} were indicative of hemicellulose, specifically
202 of $\text{C}=\text{O}$ stretching (1734 cm^{-1}) and $-\text{CH}_3$ symmetric deformation ($1379\text{-}1362\text{ cm}^{-1}$).
203 Prominent bands in the 1340 to 890 cm^{-1} region were also attributed to cellulose: at
204 1336 cm^{-1} (δCH in-plane), at $1321\text{-}1311\text{ cm}^{-1}$ (C-H vibration), at around 1150 cm^{-1} ($\nu\text{C-}$
205 O-C in bridge, asymmetric), at $1031\text{-}1027\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($\nu\text{C-O}$ or $-\text{C-O-C-}$ stretching) and at *ca.*
206 896 cm^{-1} ($\nu\text{C-O-C}$ in bridge, symmetric, characteristic of the glycosidic ring in
207 cellulose). The presence of pectin was indicated by peaks associated with COO-
208 asymmetric and O- CH_3 stretching (at $1457\text{-}1447\text{ cm}^{-1}$) for calcium pectate and with $-\text{CH}_3$
209 CH_3 distortion ($1240\text{-}1229\text{ cm}^{-1}$) for pectic ester. The band that appeared at around 1424
210 cm^{-1} can be attributed either to cellulose (ρCH_2 , sym.) or to symmetric stretching
211 vibration for calcium pectate (25). Bands at around 831 cm^{-1} were due to aromatic C-H
212 out-of-plane bending or to C-O-C deformation and suggested the presence of D-Glc
213 pyranoside configurations. Bands at 780 cm^{-1} , assigned to O-C=O in-plane deformation
214 or to a CH_2 rocking deformation, were attributed to phenolic components.

215 For samples from leaves and seed coat, two bands attributed to lignin could be
216 observed: the band of the aromatic ring stretching of the lignin (1606 cm^{-1}), which
217 appeared at $1618\text{-}1594\text{ cm}^{-1}$; and the band of the aromatic skeletal vibration (C=C
218 aromatic symmetrical stretching), at $1509\text{-}1505\text{ cm}^{-1}$.

219 Seed kernel samples showed strong characteristic bands at around 1744 cm^{-1} , 1636 cm^{-1} ,
220 1540 cm^{-1} . The band at 1744 cm^{-1} , assigned to C=O (non-conjugated moieties
221 vibrations) could be associated to the stretching vibration of the ester carbonyl
222 functional groups of the triglycerides. The peak obtained at around 1636 cm^{-1} could be
223 characteristic of C=C absorption cellulose when it is cross-linked and dehydrated, but it
224 may also be assigned to amide N-H & C=O stretching from mucilage [26] or to an
225 enrichment in unsaturated oils. The presence of this band, typical of the vinyl group,
226 would justify the quantitative presence of unsaturated oils in the kernel of all the seeds
227 under study.

228 *Analysis of band maxima positions.* The absorption bands that occur at 3330 cm^{-1} for
229 seed coat and leaves samples appeared shifted to 3380 cm^{-1} for kernel samples. The
230 absorption band at 1723 cm^{-1} found in seed coats was shifted to 1743 cm^{-1} in seed
231 kernels. As regards the band that occurred at 1053 cm^{-1} for kernel samples, shifts to
232 1031 cm^{-1} for seed coats and to 1027 cm^{-1} for leaves were observed. The band at 558
233 cm^{-1} was absent in seed kernel samples.

234 Results from the FT-IR spectra of leaves and seed coats showed that they are rich in
235 lignin, hemicellulose, cutin, pectin and flavonoids, while unsaturated oils, protein, and
236 fiber would be the main constituents of the seed kernels.

237 **4. CONCLUSIONS**

238 The nutritional potential of four *Terminalia* species (*T. arjuna*, *T. bellirica*, *T. catappa*
239 and *T. chebula*) was investigated with a view to their valorization as a new source of
240 nutrients. All the species examined, especially *T. arjuna*, showed high concentrations of
241 phenols and macro- and micronutrients. The highest TPC and Fla contents occurred in
242 the seed coats and leaves. Elements i.e. P, S, K, and Rb appeared hyperaccumulated in
243 the four *Terminalia* species. The differences in the FTIR spectra for seed kernels, seed
244 coats and leaves have been referred to the different contents in some components
245 (unsaturated oils, lignin and flavonoids).

246 **CONSENT**

247 It is not applicable.

248 **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

249 It is not applicable.

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