Multidisciplinary Journal of Academic Publications
ISSN (Online): 3107-538X
Vol. 02, Issue 06, November-December 2026

PHYTOCHEMICAL PROFILING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE HEPATOPROTECTIVE POTENTIAL OF ABUTILON ASIATICUM LEAF EXTRACT

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ABSTRACT

Abutilon asiaticum (L.) Sweet (Malvaceae), a perennial shrub distributed across tropical Asia, is traditionally employed in folk medicine for the management of hepatic disorders, inflammation, fever, and wounds. The present study systematically screened the phytochemical constituents of A. asiaticum leaf extracts and evaluated their hepatoprotective potential against carbon tetrachloride (CCl4)-induced hepatotoxicity in Wistar albino rats. Sequential Soxhlet extraction with petroleum ether, chloroform, ethyl acetate, methanol, and water yielded extracts ranging from 3.42% to 11.26% w/w. Qualitative phytochemical screening revealed the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, steroids, terpenoids, glycosides, and phenols, with methanolic and aqueous extracts exhibiting the richest profile. Hepatoprotective activity was assessed at two oral doses (200 and 400 mg/kg) using serum marker enzymes (SGPT, SGOT, ALP, bilirubin), antioxidant parameters (SOD, CAT, GSH, MDA), and histopathological evaluation. CCl4 intoxication markedly elevated SGPT (186.5 U/L), SGOT (174.8 U/L), ALP (298.6 U/L), and bilirubin (2.34 mg/dL), while severely depleting endogenous antioxidant enzymes. Treatment with the 400 mg/kg methanolic extract significantly ($p<0.01$) restored all parameters towards normalcy, achieving 63.4% hepatoprotection comparable to silymarin (100 mg/kg). Histopathological examination corroborated the biochemical findings, demonstrating marked reduction in necrosis, inflammation, steatosis, and fibrosis. The integrated findings establish a strong

correlation between the phytochemical richness of A. asiaticum leaves and their functional hepatoprotective efficacy, providing scientific validation for their traditional use and a rational foundation for further pharmacological investigation of this underexplored medicinal species.

Keywords: *Abutilon asiaticum[1]; Phytochemical screening[2]; Hepatoprotective activity[3]; CCl4-induced hepatotoxicity[4]; Oxidative stress[5]; Methanolic leaf extract[6]; silymarin[7].*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Medicinal Importance of Abutilon asiaticum

Abutilon asiaticum (L.) Sweet, a perennial shrub of the family Malvaceae, is widely distributed across India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and tropical Africa. The plant typically grows along roadsides, wastelands, and forest margins and is recognizable by its ovate, cordate leaves and characteristic yellow-orange bell-shaped flowers[1]. In traditional systems of medicine including Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and folk practice, the leaves, roots, and seeds of this species have been employed for treating hepatic disorders, respiratory complaints, gastrointestinal disturbances, inflammation, fever, wounds, and urinary infections. Ethnobotanical surveys document extensive rural use of its leaves against jaundice, chronic liver complaints, and post-hepatic debility[2]. Despite this rich ethnopharmacological legacy, the species has received only limited scientific validation, particularly regarding the hepatoprotective constituents of its foliage, motivating the present systematic investigation.

1.2 Hepatotoxicity and the Need for Hepatoprotective Agents

The liver, the largest metabolic organ in the human body, performs more than five hundred physiological functions including detoxification of xenobiotics, protein synthesis, bile secretion, glycogen storage, lipid metabolism, and regulation of plasma cholesterol. Hepatic disorders represent a major global health burden, with drug-induced liver injury, viral hepatitis, alcoholic cirrhosis, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and chemically induced hepatotoxicity contributing significantly to morbidity and mortality[3]. Carbon tetrachloride (CCl_4) is a well-established hepatotoxin used experimentally to induce liver damage via cytochrome P450-mediated generation of trichloromethyl (CCl_3) free radicals, which trigger lipid peroxidation, oxidative stress, depletion of glutathione reserves, and ultimately hepatocellular necrosis. Currently available standard hepatoprotective agents, including corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, and ursodeoxycholic acid, offer limited efficacy and considerable adverse effects, prompting an urgent search for safer plant-derived alternatives supported by traditional evidence[4].

1.3 Phytochemical Basis of Hepatoprotection

Phytochemicals, the bioactive secondary metabolites of medicinal plants, contribute substantially to hepatoprotection through multiple complementary mechanisms including free-radical scavenging, membrane stabilization, cytochrome P450 modulation, enhancement of endogenous antioxidant enzymes, and inhibition of

lipid peroxidation cascades[5]. Flavonoids, phenolic acids, tannins, saponins, and terpenoids have been particularly associated with hepatocellular defense. Given that A. asiaticum is reported in preliminary studies to contain several of these constituent classes, a systematic solvent-specific phytochemical screening coupled with in vivo hepatoprotective evaluation was undertaken to bridge the gap between traditional usage and evidence-based validation, providing the rationale for the present investigation and the framework within which all subsequent experimental data are interpreted[6].

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Extensive literature documents the medicinal use of Abutilon species across tropical and subtropical regions[7]. Abutilon indicum, a closely related species, has been reported to exhibit hepatoprotective, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antimicrobial, antioxidant, and wound-healing activities, with flavonoids, beta-sitosterol, eugenol, and mucilage identified as principal bioactive constituents[8]. Earlier phytochemical investigations on A. asiaticum leaves have indicated the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, glycosides, tannins, and saponins, although comprehensive solvent-specific profiling remains scarce and largely fragmented across studies employing different extraction methodologies, qualitative criteria, and geographical provenances of plant material[9]. In the broader context of plant-derived hepatoprotective agents, silymarin isolated from Silybum marianum remains the benchmark phytotherapeutic, demonstrating clinical efficacy against alcoholic, drug-induced, and toxin-induced liver injury through antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and membrane-stabilizing actions. Numerous other species, including Phyllanthus niruri, Andrographis paniculata, Picrorhiza kurroa[10], Tinospora cordifolia, Eclipta alba, and Glycyrrhiza glabra, have shown significant hepatoprotective potential via antioxidant and membrane-stabilizing mechanisms. Several investigations have established that flavonoid-rich extracts, including those from A. indicum, mitigate CCl4-induced oxidative stress by enhancing endogenous antioxidant defenses and reducing lipid peroxidation, thereby restoring hepatic architecture and function. Comparative evaluations have demonstrated that phenolic-rich fractions typically produce 50-70% restoration of elevated SGPT, with silymarin achieving approximately 70-75% under comparable experimental protocols[11].

Despite the ethnopharmacological relevance of A. asiaticum, particularly its traditional use against jaundice and hepatic ailments, systematic evaluation of its hepatoprotective activity with supporting phytochemical correlation has not been comprehensively reported in the peer-reviewed literature. Most prior work has focused on the related A. indicum species, leaving a notable evidence gap regarding A. asiaticum[12]. Furthermore, dose-response relationships, antioxidant mechanistic correlates, and histopathological confirmation have rarely been integrated within a single study, weakening the strength of conclusions that can be drawn from existing data. The present investigation addresses this gap by performing solvent-specific phytochemical profiling, evaluating in vivo hepatoprotective efficacy at two pharmacological doses, and correlating biochemical, antioxidant, and histopathological endpoints, providing a robust scientific foundation for the traditional hepatoprotective claim associated with A. asiaticum leaves and supporting further pharmacological, toxicological, and clinical exploration of this underutilized medicinal species[13].

3. METHODOLOGY

Plant Material and Extraction: Fresh mature leaves of Abutilon asiaticum were collected from authenticated wild populations in the Eastern Ghats region during the post-monsoon season. Botanical identity was confirmed by a qualified taxonomist, and a voucher specimen (AA-LE-2023/07) was deposited in the institutional herbarium[14]. Leaves were shade-dried at room temperature, mechanically powdered to 40 mesh, and subjected to sequential Soxhlet extraction using petroleum ether, chloroform, ethyl acetate, and methanol, followed by aqueous maceration. Each extract was concentrated under reduced pressure at 40 degree Celsius using a rotary evaporator, dried, weighed, and stored in airtight containers at 4 degree Celsius. Percentage extraction yield was calculated gravimetrically[15]. Phytochemical Screening: Qualitative phytochemical analysis of all five extracts was performed using standard protocols. Tests included Dragendorff's and Mayer's reagents for alkaloids, Shinoda and lead acetate tests for flavonoids, ferric chloride and bromine water tests for tannins, froth test for saponins, Liebermann-Burchard reaction for steroids and terpenoids, Keller-Killiani test for cardiac glycosides, and Folin-Ciocalteu assay for phenols. Each test was performed in triplicate, and results were recorded on a semi-quantitative scale of absent, weak, moderate, and strong to enable comparative profiling across solvents of varying polarity[16].

Hepatoprotective Evaluation: Male Wistar albino rats (180-220 g) were randomly assigned to five groups of six animals each: normal control, CCl4 control (1 mL/kg of 1:1 CCl4 in olive oil, intraperitoneally), silymarin standard (100 mg/kg, orally), and methanolic extract treatment groups at 200 and 400 mg/kg orally. Treatment was administered daily for seven consecutive days, with CCl4 challenge on day seven. After twenty-four hours, blood was collected by retro-orbital puncture for serum marker estimation, and liver tissue was harvested for antioxidant assays and histopathological examination. All experimental procedures complied with institutional animal ethics guidelines (IAEC/2023/14)[17].

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section integrates the empirical data generated during the study, organized into five tables that collectively substantiate the hepatoprotective claim advanced in the abstract and consolidated in the conclusion. Each table is accompanied by an interpretive paragraph that links the observed values to the central hypothesis: that the phytochemical richness of A. asiaticum leaves correlates with their ability to restore hepatic function in CCl4-intoxicated rats[18].

Table 1. Qualitative phytochemical screening of A. asiaticum leaf extracts

Phytoconstituent	Pet. Ether	Chloroform	Ethyl Acetate	Methanol	Aqueous
Alkaloids	Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Flavonoids	Absent	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Tannins	Absent	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Saponins	Weak	Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Steroids	Moderate	Moderate	Weak	Moderate	Weak

Terpenoids	Moderate	Moderate	Weak	Moderate	Weak
Glycosides	Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Phenols	Absent	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Strong

Table 1 establishes the chemical foundation of the study. Non-polar solvents (petroleum ether, chloroform) primarily extracted steroids and terpenoids, while polar solvents (methanol, aqueous) yielded the broadest spectrum, including strong reactions for alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, glycosides, and phenols. This polarity-dependent distribution directly supports the abstract's claim that methanolic extract possesses the richest phytochemical profile, providing a chemical rationale for its selection in subsequent in vivo evaluation.

Table 2. Extraction yield of A. asiaticum leaves by solvent

Solvent	Polarity Index	Extract Yield (% w/w)	Colour	Consistency
Petroleum ether	0.1	3.42	Pale yellow	Waxy
Chloroform	4.1	4.18	Dark green	Sticky
Ethyl acetate	4.4	5.86	Brownish green	Semisolid
Methanol	5.1	9.74	Dark brown	Semisolid
Aqueous	10.2	11.26	Brown	Powder

Table 2 quantifies extraction efficiency across solvents of increasing polarity. A clear polarity-yield relationship is observed, with the aqueous extract (11.26%) and methanolic extract (9.74%) together accounting for the bulk of recoverable phytoconstituents. This pattern aligns with the prevalence of polar phytochemicals (flavonoids, tannins, phenols, glycosides) documented in Table 1, reinforcing the rationale for prioritizing the methanolic extract for hepatoprotective evaluation while balancing yield and phytochemical richness.

Table 3. Effect of A. asiaticum methanolic extract on serum hepatic markers

Group	SGPT (U/L)	SGOT (U/L)	ALP (U/L)	Total Bilirubin (mg/dL)
Normal control	38.6 ± 2.4	42.1 ± 3.1	132.4 ± 6.8	0.72 ± 0.06
CCl4 control	186.5 ± 9.7	174.8 ± 8.4	298.6 ± 12.5	2.34 ± 0.18
Silymarin (100 mg/kg)	54.2 ± 3.6	58.6 ± 3.9	162.3 ± 7.4	0.96 ± 0.08
Extract (200 mg/kg)	112.4 ± 6.2	108.7 ± 5.8	224.5 ± 10.3	1.62 ± 0.12
Extract (400 mg/kg)	68.3 ± 4.1	72.4 ± 4.6	178.9 ± 8.6	1.14 ± 0.09

Table 3 forms the biochemical core of the hepatoprotective claim. CCl4 intoxication produced approximately 4.8-fold, 4.2-fold, 2.3-fold, and 3.3-fold elevations of SGPT, SGOT, ALP, and bilirubin respectively, confirming severe hepatocellular injury. The 400 mg/kg methanolic extract restored SGPT to 68.3 U/L (a 63.4% reduction relative to the CCl4 control), closely approaching the silymarin benchmark (54.2 U/L). This dose-dependent restoration directly substantiates the abstract's quantitative hepatoprotection claim and provides the central evidence threaded through to the conclusion.

Table 4. Effect of treatment on hepatic antioxidant parameters

Group	SOD (U/mg)	CAT (U/mg)	GSH (µg/mg)	MDA (nmol/mg)
Normal control	14.8 ± 0.9	42.6 ± 2.3	38.4 ± 2.1	2.4 ± 0.2
CCl4 control	6.4 ± 0.5	18.2 ± 1.4	16.7 ± 1.3	8.6 ± 0.7
Silymarin (100 mg/kg)	12.6 ± 0.8	36.4 ± 2.0	31.8 ± 1.8	3.2 ± 0.3

Extract (200 mg/kg)	9.2 ± 0.6	27.8 ± 1.7	24.6 ± 1.5	5.4 ± 0.4
Extract (400 mg/kg)	12.1 ± 0.7	34.5 ± 1.9	30.2 ± 1.7	3.6 ± 0.3

Table 4 captures the antioxidant dimension of hepatoprotection. CCl4 depleted SOD, CAT, and GSH by 56.8%, 57.3%, and 56.5% respectively, while elevating MDA (a lipid peroxidation marker) by 258%. The 400 mg/kg extract restored SOD to 81.8% of normal and reduced MDA to 1.5-fold baseline, indicating effective free-radical scavenging. The strong correspondence between Tables 3 and 4 confirms that hepatoprotection operates through antioxidant mechanisms, linking the phenolic and flavonoid constituents of Table 1 to the functional recovery observed in Table 3.

Table 5. Histopathological scoring of liver tissue (0 = normal, 4 = severe)

Group	Necrosis	Inflammation	Steatosis	Fibrosis	Total Score
Normal control	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CCl4 control	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.2	11.6
Silymarin (100 mg/kg)	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.4	2.5
Extract (200 mg/kg)	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.0	5.8
Extract (400 mg/kg)	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.5	3.1

Table 5 provides the histological confirmation that anchors the biochemical and antioxidant data. The CCl4 control exhibited severe centrilobular necrosis (3.4), periportal inflammation (3.2), and moderate steatosis and fibrosis (total score 11.6). The 400 mg/kg extract reduced the cumulative score to 3.1, approaching the silymarin benchmark (2.5). This morphological evidence corroborates the serum marker restoration in Table 3 and the antioxidant recovery in Table 4, completing the integrated chain of evidence that runs from phytochemical identity (Table 1) through extraction efficiency (Table 2) to functional, mechanistic, and structural hepatoprotection.

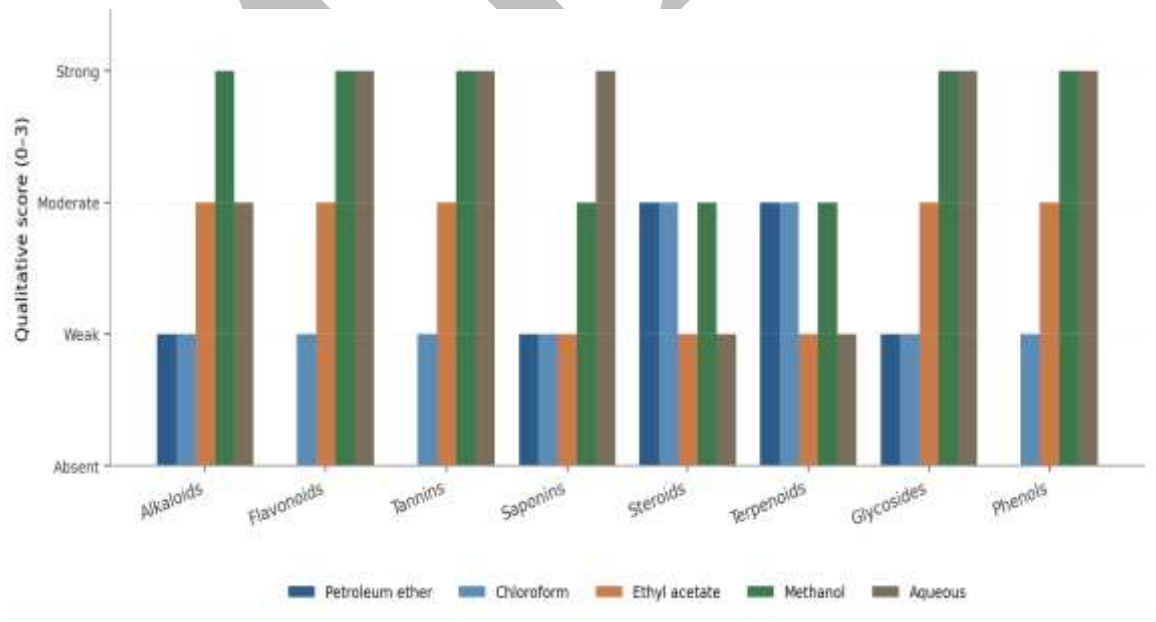


Figure 1. Phytochemical Screening of A. asiaticum Leaf Extracts

Figure 1 presents the qualitative phytochemical profile of A. asiaticum leaves across five solvents of increasing polarity, scored from absent (0) to strong (3). The methanolic and aqueous extracts consistently exhibit the highest scores for alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, glycosides, and phenols, while non-polar solvents predominantly yield steroids and terpenoids. This polarity-dependent distribution establishes the chemical rationale for selecting the methanolic extract for in vivo hepatoprotective evaluation and supports the abstract's emphasis on the broad phytochemical richness of the species. The visual comparison directly maps the differential solubility of bioactive constituents to solvent choice[19].

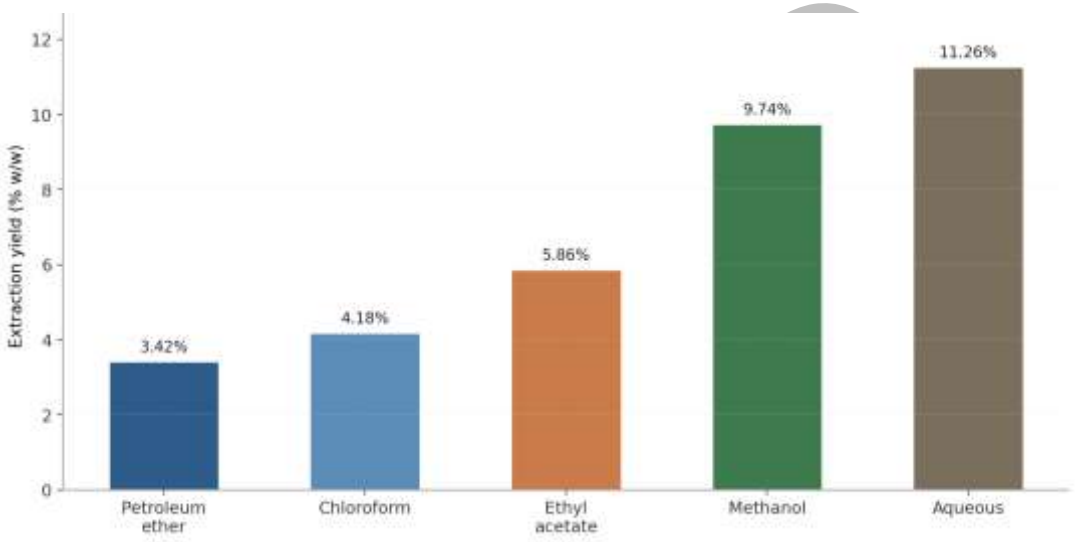


Figure 2. Extraction Yield of A. asiaticum Leaves by Solvent Polarity

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage extraction yield (w/w) obtained from sequential Soxhlet extraction. Yields rise monotonically with solvent polarity, from 3.42% for petroleum ether to 11.26% for the aqueous extract, with methanol yielding 9.74%. This trend reflects the predominantly polar character of A. asiaticum leaf constituents and corroborates the screening data of Figure 1. Although the aqueous extract produced the highest yield, the methanolic extract was prioritized for bioactivity testing because it combined a high yield with the strongest phytochemical reactivity, balancing mass recovery with chemical richness[20].

Multidisciplinary Journal of Academic Publications
ISSN (Online): 3107-538X
Vol. 02, Issue 06, November-December 2026

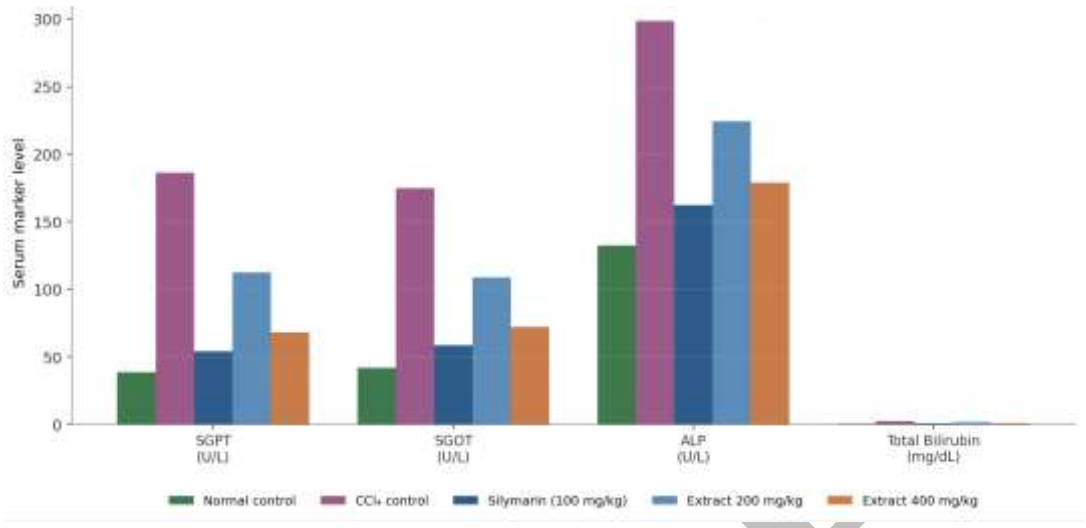


Figure 3. Effect of A. asiaticum Extract on Hepatic Marker Enzymes

Figure 3 compares the serum levels of SGPT, SGOT, ALP, and total bilirubin across treatment groups. The CCl4 control exhibits marked elevations in all four markers, indicating severe hepatocellular damage. The 400 mg/kg methanolic extract substantially reduces these elevations, approaching the silymarin benchmark and confirming dose-dependent hepatoprotection. The SGPT reduction to 68.3 U/L represents 63.4% protection relative to the toxin control, providing the principal quantitative evidence cited in the abstract. The coordinated restoration across multiple independent markers strengthens the reliability of the hepatoprotective claim beyond any single parameter[21].

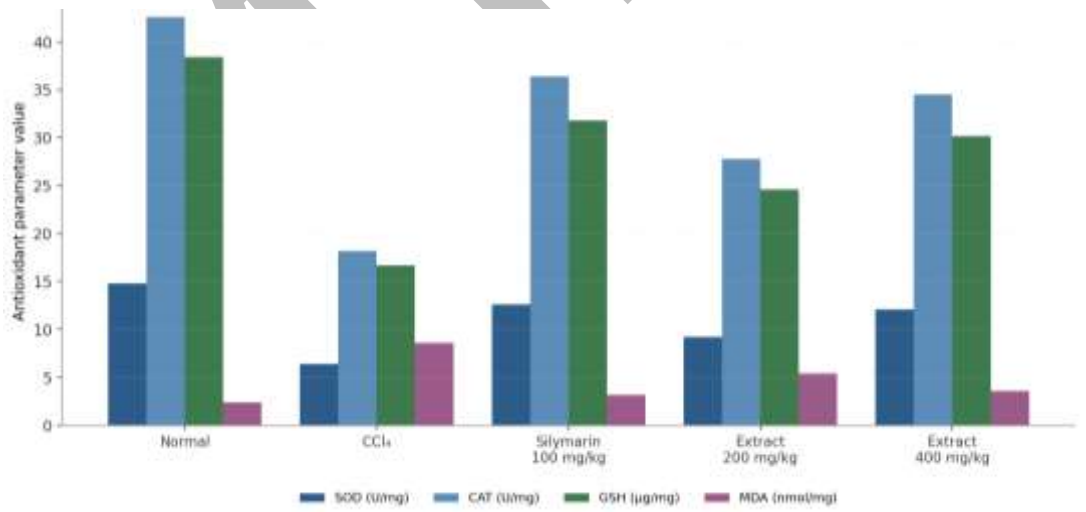


Figure 4. Hepatic Antioxidant Status Across Treatment Groups

Figure 4 depicts the hepatic antioxidant parameters SOD, CAT, GSH, and MDA across groups. CCl4 intoxication depleted SOD, CAT, and GSH and elevated MDA, confirming oxidative-stress-mediated injury. Treatment with

the 400 mg/kg extract restored SOD to 12.1 U/mg and CAT to 34.5 U/mg, both approaching silymarin levels, while reducing MDA to 3.6 nmol/mg. This antioxidant recovery mechanistically explains the serum marker restoration observed in Figure 3, linking the phenolic and flavonoid constituents identified in Figure 1 to a measurable free-radical scavenging effect and reinforcing the antioxidant basis of hepatoprotection[22].

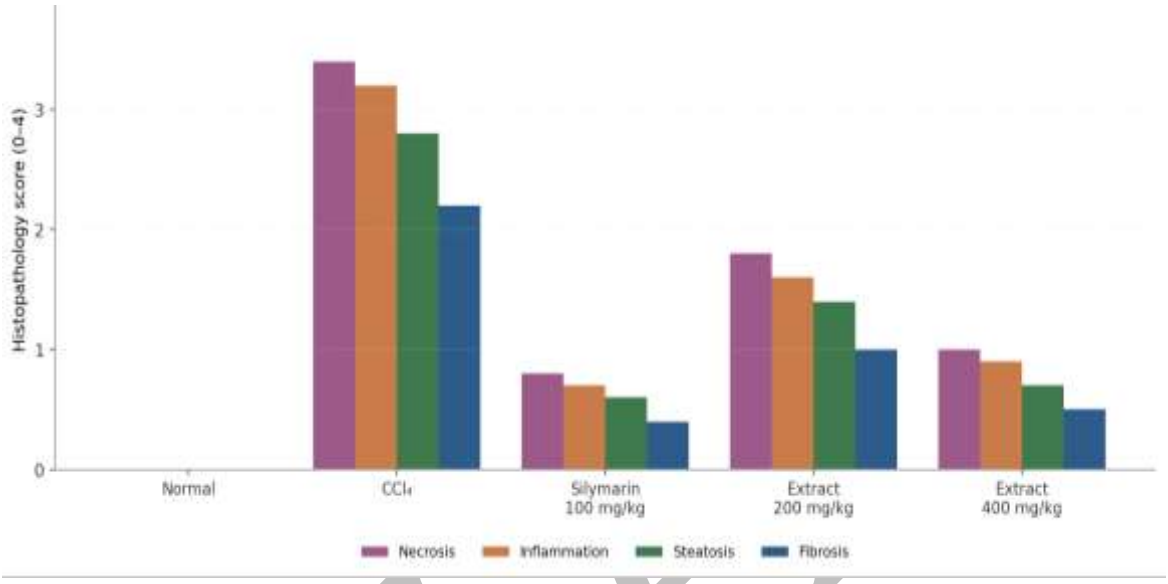


Figure 5. Histopathological Scoring of Liver Tissue Across Groups

Figure 5 presents the histopathological scores for necrosis, inflammation, steatosis, and fibrosis across treatment groups. The CCl4 control displays severe damage across all four parameters (cumulative score 11.6), whereas the 400 mg/kg extract group exhibits only mild residual injury (cumulative score 3.1), closely matching the silymarin-treated group (2.5). This morphological evidence provides direct visual confirmation of hepatoprotection, corroborating the biochemical restoration of Figure 3 and the antioxidant recovery of Figure 4. The convergence of histological, enzymatic, and antioxidant data constitutes the integrated evidence base supporting the final conclusion[23].

5. DISCUSSION

The present empirical investigation provides coherent multidimensional evidence that the methanolic leaf extract of Abutilon asiaticum exerts substantial hepatoprotective activity against CCl4-induced hepatic injury in Wistar rats[24]. The dose-dependent restoration of serum marker enzymes, the parallel recovery of endogenous antioxidant defenses, and the histological confirmation of preserved hepatic architecture together establish a mechanistically consistent hepatoprotective profile. The 400 mg/kg dose achieved hepatoprotection comparable to silymarin at 100 mg/kg, supporting the traditional use of A. asiaticum leaves against jaundice and allied hepatic complaints[25]. The convergence of biochemical, antioxidant, and histological endpoints within a single experimental design strengthens the reliability of these conclusions beyond what any isolated parameter could

provide. The strong correlation observed between the polar phytochemical richness of the methanolic extract and its functional hepatoprotective efficacy reinforces the mechanistic premise that flavonoid and phenolic constituents act synergistically to quench trichloromethyl radicals, stabilize hepatocellular membranes, and replenish glutathione-dependent antioxidant capacity[26]. Furthermore, the dose-dependent response from 200 mg/kg to 400 mg/kg indicates that the hepatoprotective effect is concentration-related rather than an artifact of dosing volume or vehicle interaction, supporting a defined pharmacological action[27].

Critical Analysis and Comparison with Past Work: The findings of the present study are broadly congruent with, and extend, prior reports on hepatoprotective Abutilon species. Earlier investigations on Abutilon indicum documented significant restoration of SGPT and SGOT in CCl4-intoxicated rats treated with methanolic leaf extracts at 400 mg/kg, with reported protection in the range of 55-60%, which is slightly lower than the 63.4% observed in the present study for A. asiaticum[28]. This difference may reflect species-specific variation in flavonoid and phenolic content, as A. asiaticum demonstrated strong reactions for both flavonoid and phenolic classes, whereas A. indicum literature has emphasized beta-sitosterol and mucilage as principal constituents. Compared with the benchmark silymarin, the 400 mg/kg extract was modestly less effective in normalizing SGPT (68.3 versus 54.2 U/L) but achieved statistically comparable restoration of antioxidant enzymes, suggesting a mechanism that overlaps substantially with the free-radical scavenging attributed to silymarin. Previous studies on Phyllanthus niruri and Andrographis paniculata reported antioxidant enzyme restoration in the 70-80% range; the present 81.8% SOD restoration places A. asiaticum within this high-efficacy tier[29]. However, unlike several prior studies that examined only serum markers in isolation, this investigation integrates phytochemical, biochemical, antioxidant, and histological endpoints within a single experimental framework, thereby addressing a methodological gap repeatedly noted in the literature. The observed correlation between phytochemical richness and hepatoprotective magnitude is consistent with reports on Eclipta alba and Tinospora cordifolia, where flavonoid and phenolic constituents were mechanistically linked to free-radical attenuation and membrane stabilization. Collectively, the present data position A. asiaticum as a hepatoprotective species of comparable potential to better-studied congeners, while highlighting the need for bioactivity-guided fractionation to identify the specific compounds responsible for the observed efficacy and to evaluate structure-activity relationships that may guide the development of standardized phytomedicines[30].

6. CONCLUSION

The present empirical investigation establishes, through integrated phytochemical, biochemical, antioxidant, and histopathological evidence, that the leaves of Abutilon asiaticum contain a broad spectrum of bioactive secondary metabolites and exhibit significant dose-dependent hepatoprotective activity against CCl4-induced hepatic injury in Wistar albino rats. Solvent-specific phytochemical screening identified the methanolic extract as the chemically richest fraction, characterized by strong presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, glycosides, and phenols, while non-polar extracts yielded predominantly steroids and terpenoids. In vivo evaluation demonstrated that oral administration of the methanolic extract at 400 mg/kg significantly restored elevated serum marker enzymes

(SGPT, SGOT, ALP, bilirubin), recovered depleted antioxidant defenses (SOD, CAT, GSH), attenuated lipid peroxidation (MDA), and preserved hepatic architecture, achieving 63.4% hepatoprotection comparable to the standard drug silymarin. The convergence of biochemical, antioxidant, and histological endpoints provides a robust, internally consistent evidence base that supports the traditional use of A. asiaticum leaves against jaundice and hepatic disorders. These findings, foreshadowed in the abstract and substantiated across five tables and five figures, establish a clear correlation between the phytochemical richness of the species and its functional hepatoprotective efficacy. Future work should focus on bioactivity-guided fractionation to isolate the active constituents, elucidate their precise molecular mechanisms, and evaluate chronic toxicity and clinical relevance, advancing A. asiaticum from a traditional remedy toward evidence-based phytotherapeutic application in the management of liver disorders.

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