

**AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW OF ASHWAGANDHA FROM SAMHITHA  
AND NIGHANTUS****Satya Prakash Chaudhary\***

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Article Received on  
19 Aug 2015,Revised on 09 Sep 2015,  
Accepted on 29 Sep 2015,**\*Correspondence for  
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Varanasi, India.**ABSTRACT**

In the Ayurveda medicinal effect of Ashwagandha is described in the different Samhitas like Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Astangahridaya, Chakaradatta and Nighantus etc. According to Indian Herbal System (Ayurveda), Ashwagandha is considered one of the most important herbs and the best adaptogenic. Ashwagandha has long been considered as an excellent rejuvenator, a general health tonic and a cure for a number of health complaints. It is a sedative, diuretic, anti-inflammatory and generally respected for increasing energy, endurance, and acts as an-adaptogen that exerts a strong immunostimulatory and anti-stress agent. Ashwagandha is taken for treating cold and coughs, ulcers, diabetes, epilepsy, insomnia, leprosy,

Parkinson's disease, nervous disorders, asthma, and impotence patients. The objective of this paper is to review the literature regarding *Withania somnifera* (ashwagandha, WS) a commonly used herb in Ayurvedic medicine.

**KEYWORDS:** Ashwagandha, Charaka Samhita, Immunostimulatory, Health tonic.**INTRODUCTION**

▶ Ayurveda, the science of life has emergence from atharva veda. The Ayurvedic drugs play important role for achievement of this target. Ashwagandha is an important drug of Ayurvedic medicine. It is found throughout the dry part of india in waste places is also cultivated to certain extent and used in folk and traditional medicine. Ayurveda has been practiced for over 5000 years and is based on the Vedic hypothesis that there are common principles underlying the microcosm (individual) and macrocosm (universe) and that man and the universe are composed of the same basic elements, and disease occurs if there is an imbalance. It is used to maintain and promote health in addition to treating acute and

chronic conditions; it views the person as a whole rather than isolating different organ systems. The term Nighantu is based on the term Nigama. The etymology of Nigama is which brings out the extremely concealed or secret meaning of words in systemic way. This tradition was also adopted by the Ayurvedic scholars to clarify the technical words specially in the field of Dravyaguna. Earlier Nighantus were limited to explain the synonyms only. After some time the description of properties, action and indications are also included in the Nighantu along with synonyms. The Nighantu literature is one of the important aspects in the study of Ayurveda and specially in the subject of Dravyaguna Vijnana. The Nighantu literature is also as ancient as Ayurveda. Much importance has not been given to the study of Nighantu. The ancient Nighantus were actually like Kosa, containing the synonyms of Dravya. Later on, the drugs were given the description of properties, actions and their uses. In true sense the Nighantu means collection of words, synonyms and the names of the medicinal substances. Ramavatar Sharma in his introduction to Kalpadru Kosa of Kesava uses the term Nighantu for the glossaries connected with Ayurveda. To understand precisely what is aimed at these glossaries are called as 'Ayurveda Nighantu'.

Natural products are an important source of new structures leading to drugs in all major disease areas. They represent a pool of privileged structures that are optimized by evolution to interact with proteins and other molecules.<sup>[1]</sup> Different samhitas of Ayurveda have described Ashwagandha as a very important plant in the Ayurveda and herbal medicine. In Ayurvedic medicine Ashwagandha is used in different disease like arthritis, anxiety, tumors, tuberculosis, leukoderma, bronchitis, backache, fibromyalgia, menstrual problems, hiccups, and chronic liver disease etc Withania somnifera (Fam. Solanaceae) commonly known as 'ashwagandha' is one of the most important medicinal plants which is used alone or in combination with other medicinal plants in various ayurvedic formulations. It is used by the local practitioners for the treatment of various disorders.

### **In Vedas**

- ▶ Rigveda (6000 B.C.), the oldest repository of human knowledge contains material which shows the rational attitude towards plants kingdom & its exploitation for the benefit of the humanity. It is the oldest extent sources of drugs, which may be called drug stock of Ayurveda. The Ousadhi Sukta of Rig-Veda (10.97, 1-23) is the authoritative document of the knowledge about plant in the age.

**ASHWAGANDHA IN SAMHITA GRANTHAS****Charaka Samhita (1000 BC- 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD).<sup>[1]</sup>**

- ▶ Among the existing old medical treatises of India, Charaka Samita can be considered as the oldest one. This text has been composed by Agnivesh (4<sup>th</sup> Century AD). This Samhita is mainly concerned with Kayachikitsa.
- ▶ In this Samhita the drug Ashwagandha has been described in Kusthadi Lepa (C.S.Su 3/7-8), Brmhaniya Mahakasaya (C.S.Su 4/2), Balya Mahakasaya (C.S.Su 4/7), Madhura Skandha (C.Ks.Vi 8/140-146), Vajikarana Ghrita etc. In Charaka Samhita the drug Ashwagandha is described for Kustha as an ingredient of Kusthadilepa.
- ▶ The preparation & their indications in different diseases which have been mentioned in Charaka Samhita are given below:

S. No.	Preparation	Indication	Reference
1.	Kusthadilepa	Kustha	C.S.Su 3/7-8
2.	Brmhaniya Mahakasaya		C.S.Su 4/2
3.	Errand Basti	Asmari	C.Si. 3/39
4.	Bilva Taila	Vata roga	C.Si. 4/4
5.	Taila	Sirah kampa	C.Si. 9/87
6.	Basti	Vata roga	C.Si. 12/2
7.	Baladya Yapana Basti	Vata roga	C.Si. 12/6
8.	Lepa	Rajayaksma	C.Ci. 8/175
9.	Lepa	Udara Roga	C.Ci. 13/108
10.	Dhuma	Arsa	C.Ci. 14/51
11.	Balya Mahakasaya		C.S.Su 4/7
12.	Mulasava	Dipan, Pachan	C.S.Su 25/49
13.	Madhura Skandha		C.S.Vi. 8/140-146
14.	Vajikarana Ghrita	Bajikarana	C.Ci. 2-1/34
15.	Agurwadi Taila	Jwara	C.Ci. 3/266
16.	Ghrita	Fumigation	C.Ci. 14/5
17.	Lehya	Hiccup	C.Ci. 17/117
18.	IngudiTvagadi Dhuma	Kasa	C.Ci. 18/75
19.	Lepa	Granthi visarpa	C.Ci. 21/ ½ 123
20.	Lepa	Antidote unmada	C.Ci. 23/70
21.	Lepa	Pilla Kanda	C.Ci. 23/80
22.	Amrta Ghrita	Antidote, Udara	C.Ci. 23/244
23.	Kusthadya Taila	Urustambha	C.Ci. 27/43
24.	Lepa	Urustambha,thic Utsadana	C.Ci. 27/50
25.	Rasana Taila	Vataroga	C.Ci. 28/166
26.	Vrsamuladi Taila	Bone Fracture, Osteoporosis	C.Ci. 28/170
27.	Lepa	Vataroga	C.Ci. 29/73

**Susruta Samhita (100 BC- 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD).<sup>[2]</sup>**

- ▶ This Samihita is composed by Vrddha Susruta, Chiefly concerned with Salya Cikitsa. This treatise was redacted by Susruta 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD. Later on probably revised by Nagarjuna, the greatest of Buddhist era, during the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD.
- ▶ In the existing form, it appears to be much later than Charaka Samhita because of the fact that its emendation (Pathasuddhi) was done by Candrata in 10<sup>th</sup> Century. In Susruta Samhita various forms & preparation of Ashwagandha are mentioned as below:

S.No.	Preparation	Indication	References
1.	Churna	Atikrsa	S.S.Su. 14/40
2.	Lepa	Karnapali vriddhi	S.Su. 16/20
3.	Kalka and Taila	Karnapali vriddhi	S.Su. 16/22
4.	Lepa	Kaphaja sopha	S.Su. 36/6
5.	Kalka	Vrana ropaka	S.Su. 36/24
6.	Lepa	Vrana ropaka	S.Su. 36/31
7.	Ami pama	Urdhvabhaga Dosahara	S.Su. 39/3
8.	Anupana (with mamsa rasa)	Balavardhaka pustikaraka	S.Su. 46/432-2
9.	Kalka	Vatarakta	S.Ci. 5/10
10.	Bala Taila	vatavyadhi	S.Ci. 15/33
11.	Lepa	Kaphajavisarpa	S.Ci. 17/14
12.	Lepa	Paripotaka in karnapali Roga	S.Ci. 25/14
13.	Vacadi Taila	Vataroga	S.Ci 37/12
14.	Citrakadi Taila	Vataroga	S.Ci 37/16
15.	Bhutikadi	Vataroga	S.Ci 37/20
16.	Sampakadi Basti	Duodenal roga, increase blood	S.Ci 38/43
17.	Agada (antidote)	Poison of visvambhara	S.Ka. 8/5
18.	Taila	Aroga Timira	S.U. 17/34
19.	Dhum	Karnaroga	S.U. 21/7
20.	Kwatha	Revatigraha	S.U. 31/3
21.	Taila	Rukhamandika roga	S.U. 35/4
22.	Churna	Yaksma	S.U. 41/41
23.	Leha	Yaksma	S.U. 41/42
24.	Churna	Coupha	S.U. 41/43
25.	Dasamuladi Ghrita	Complication	S.U. 41/49
26.	Basti	Guda Rakta Srava	S.U. 45/40
27.	Phala Ghrita	Pregnancy to infertile women	S.U. 62/27

**Astanga Hirdaya (7<sup>th</sup> Century AD).<sup>[3]</sup>**

- ▶ Several Vagbhatas are known in Indian history as authors of works on different branches of learning. Among all these Vagbhatas, two are important who authored Astanga Hirdaya and Astanga Samgraha.
- ▶ Regarding identity of the author of this treatise there is a lot of controversy. Some scholars believe there was only one vagbhata who was the author of both Granthas. While

according to Hon'ble Prof. P.V.Sharma, etc. there are two Vagbhata belonging to different periods having different authorship. Vagbhata second (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) is the author of this book.

- ▶ In this Samhita, the drug Ashwagandha is described at many places in treatment of various diseases. Preparations and their indication in different diseases are mentioned below:

S.No.	Preparation	Indications	References
1.	Bala Taila	Grbha Vyapada	A.H.Sa. 2/50
2.	Ghrits	Balapustikara,kasa ojahksaya	A.H.Ci 3/122-123
3.	Ghrits	Sosanasak	A.H.Ci. 5/25
4.	Lepa	Pusti, Varna,Balaprada	A.H.Ci. 5/79
5.	Dhupana	Arsa	A.H.Ci. 8/19
6.	Sukumarka Taila	Rasayana, Vataja, Roga	A.H.Ci.13/41
7.	Ghrita	Gulma, Apasmara	A.H.Ci. 14/14
8.	Lepa	Kustha, Kandu, Pidika	A.H.Ci.
9.	Syrup	Svasa- Hidhma	A.H.Ci. 4/39
10.	Kalka	Oedema	A.H.Ci. 17/37
11.	Basti	Duodenal roga	A.H.Ka. 4/7
12.	Vata hara Basti	Vataroga	A.H.Ka
13.	Anuvasana Vasti	Vataja Roga	A.H.Ka. 4/54
14.	Laksadi Taila	Unamada,apasmara	A.H.U. 2/52
15.	Lehya	Cure emaciation	A.H.U. 2/49
16.	Kwatha	Cure emaciation	A.H.U. 2/51
17.	Laksadi Taila	Fever ,strength	A.H.U. 2/52
18.	Ghrita	Strength	A.H.U. 3/53
29.	Lepa	Palisoas	A.H.U. 18/39
20.	Churna	Unmantha	A.H.U. 18/45
21.	Kwatha	Karnaroga	A.H.U. 18/56

## ASHWAGANDHA IN CIKITSA GRANTHAS

### Cikitsa kalika(10<sup>th</sup> century AD):

- ▶ In this test, Ashwagandha has been described in Vatasmana Gana. Its various preparations along with indication in different diseases are mentioned below:

S.No.	Preparation	Indication	Raferences
1.	Laksadi Taila	Jwaracikatsa	1/120
2.	Bala Taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/283
3..	Prthusatavari Taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/286-287
4.	Bala Taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/290-291
5.	Dasanga Taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/295-297
6.	Prasarini Taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/298-302
7.	Mahatprasarini taila	Vataja Vyadhi	30/303-304
8.	Phlaghrita	Grahabadha, Vatavyadhi, Bandhyatva etc	367

**Cakradatta (11<sup>th</sup> Century AD).<sup>[4]</sup>**

Cakrapani Datta, son of Narayana Datta has written commentary “Ayurveda Dipika” on caraka samhita, cikitsa sangraha (commonly known as Cakradatta) Dravya Guna Samgraha and Bhanumati commentary on Susruta Samhita.

- ▶ In Cakradatta the drug Ashwagandh is very much appreciated for treatment of various diseases. Their preparations and indications in Cakradatta are given below:

S.No.	Preparation	Indications	References
1.	Kamdeva Ghrita	Raktapitta	9/53-63
2.	Ashwagandhadi Kasaya	Rajayaksma	10/9
3.	Krsnadileha	Rajayaksma	10/14
4.	Srnga-Arjunadya churna	Rajayaksma	10/26
5.	Nagabala Ghrita	Rajayaksma	10/78-82
6.	Churna	Urah ksata	10/93-95
7.	Masabaladi kwatha	Vatavyadhi	22/23-24
8.	Trayodasanga Guggulu	Gradhrasi	22/69-73
9.	Ashwagandha Ghrita	ViryaVardhaka, Mamsavardhaka	22/90
10.	Mahabala Taila	Vatavyadhi	22/101-110
11.	Narayana Taila	Vatavyadhi	22/120-130

**Sarngadhara samhita (13<sup>th</sup> Century AD).<sup>[5]</sup>**

- ▶ This Samhita is described in three Khandas-Purva, Madhya and Utara Khandas. In Purva Khandas, Ashwagandha is mention with Virya Vardhaka Kravyas . In other two Khandas their preparations and indications are given below:

S.No.	Preparation	Indications	References
1.	Maharanadi Kwatha	Sarva-Vartaroga	2/20-96
2.	Ashwagandha churna	Vajikarana	6/157-158
3.	Kamdeva Ghrita	Rakta-Pitta	9/27-37
4.	Laksadi Taila	Visama Jwara	9/94-98
5.	Narahyana Taila	Vataroga	9/101-106
6.	Baladya Taila	Vatavyadhi	9/117-118
7.	Satavari Taila	Vatajaroga	9/133-141
8.	Dhatturadi Taila	-do-	9/200-210
9.	Madankamadeva	Vajikarana	12/259-266
10.	Kandarpa Sundara Rasa	Vajikarana	12/268-274
<b>Uttarkhand</b>			
11.	Mahasalvan Sweda	Vanaja Roga	2/23-27
12.	Madadi Nasya	Pakdaghata	8/36-37
13.	Lapa	Stanyavrdhhi	11/112-113
14.	Lepa	Linga Vrdhhi	11/115

**Bhaisajya Ratnavali (18<sup>th</sup> century AD).<sup>[6]</sup>**

- ▶ References of Ashwagandha are this treaties are described below:

S.No.	Preparations	Indications	References
1.	Jyantivati	Jwara	5/536
2.	Jwarabhairava Rasa	Jwara	5/1375
3.	Sindukadi Dhupa	Arsha	9/153
4.	Kamadeva ghrita	Raktapitta	13/145
5.	Goksuradi Modaka	Rasayana	74/230
6.	Godhumadia Ghrita	Rasayana	74/279
7.	Amritaprash Ghrita	Rasayana	74/299
8.	Ashwagandha Taila	Rasayana	78/355
9.	Yaminyadi Churan	Gadaroga	78/7
10.	Suryavallavha taila	Sanyu Roga	82/20
11.	Adigyapakwa Taila	Khalitya Roga	83/3,4
12.	Shalimali Ghrita	Khalitya Roga	88/32
13.	Madanakamadeva	Dhwajabhanga	92/20
14.	Chandanadi Kwatha	Mastiska Roga	101/2
15.	Laksmivilasa Taila	Mastiska Roga	101/31

### ASHWAGANDHA IN NIGHANTUS

#### Astanga Nighantu.<sup>[7]</sup>

- ▶ This is Nighantu was written by Vahatacarya in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD in this text, Ashwagandha has been described by its synonyms Gayi, Tutagi and Vaji.

#### Dhanvantari Nighantu (10<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> century AD).<sup>[8]</sup>

- ▶ In this Nighantu, Ashwagandha is mentioned under Guduchadi Varga. It has been described by its synonyms Vajigandha, Kanchuka, Ashwavarohaka, Varahkarni, Turagi, Balya and Vajikari. Its properties and action are mentioned as Kasaya, and Katu in Rasa, Usna in Virya, Vata –Kapha Samaka, Balavardhaka, Sukrajanana, Kantivardhaka and useful in Visa, Vrana and Ksaya.

#### Sodhala Nighantu (composed by Sodhala in 12<sup>th</sup> century AD).<sup>[9]</sup>

- ▶ In its text Ashwagandha is described under Guduchadi Varga, with synonyms like Varahakarni, Turagi, Balya, Vajukara, Ashwagandha, Kusthagandha, Ashwarohaka, Punya, Sistagandha, Pivara, Elaparni, Syamala and Kamarupini. It is included among Asthapana and Anuvasana Dravyas and as vatahara and Balya drug. It is beneficial for Kasa, Swasa and Ksaya diseases.

#### Madana Pala Nighantu.<sup>[10]</sup>

- ▶ This Nighantu is written by Madan Vinoda in 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The drug Ashwagandha has been described by its synonyms –Turangahava, Gokarna Ashwarohaka, Varahakarni and Varada. It is used for Vjikanana and Vrsya Karma.



**Kaiyadeva Nighantu.**<sup>[11]</sup>

- ▶ This is composed by Kaiyadeva in 15<sup>th</sup> century AD. Another title of this book is 'Pathyapathyta Vinodhaka'. The drug Ashwagandha is mentioned in Osadhi-Varga. Ashwagandha, Hayahva, Ashwarohaka, varahakarni, Gokarni, Turagi Varada, Vrisha, Balya, Vajikari Pita and Kanchuki are its synonyms. Its properties and actions are Kasaya and Tikta in Rasa, Usna in Virya. It is Sukravardhaka, Rasayana, Balakaraka, Pustikarka and used in the treatment of Vrana, Sopha Kandu, Visa, Krimi, Swasa, Kasa and Kasata etc.

**Bhava Prakasha Nighantu.**<sup>[12]</sup>

- ▶ This text is written by Acharya Bhava Misra in 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. The drug Ashwagandha is mentioned in Gudduchadi Varga. Vajigandha, Hayahandha, Varahakarni, Varada, Balada and Kusthagandhini. It is Kasaya and Tikta in Rasa, Usna in Virya its properties and actions are Bala karaka, Sukravardhaka, Rasayana, Vata-Kapha Samaka and allevateds Sotha and Kasaya etc.

**Raja Nighantu.**<sup>[13]</sup>

- ▶ This is composed by Nirahari Pandita in 17<sup>th</sup> century AD. The drug Ashwagandha is mentioned in Satarvadi Varga. Ashwagandha, Vajigandha, Kambukastha, Varahkarni, Turagi, Vanaja, Vajini, Hayi, Pustida, Balada, Punya, Hayagandha, Pivara, Palasakarni, Vataghni, Symala, Kamarupini, Kalapriyakari, Balya, Gandhapatri, Hayaprya, and Varahapatri are its synonyms.

**Raja Vallabha Nighantu.**

- ▶ This book is composed by Raja Vallabha in 18<sup>th</sup> century AD. In this Nighantu, the drug Ashwagandha has been described by its synonyms- Ashwagandha, Vataghni, Balya, Vrisha and Rasayani.

**Priya Nighantu.**<sup>[15]</sup>

- ▶ This Nighantu is composed by Acharya P.V.Sharma in 1983. The drug Ashwagandha is mentioned in Satapuspadi Varga. Vajigandha and Ashwagandh are its synonyms. It produces Kamasakti like horse in human and its plant bears smell like horse. It is Usna, Tikta, Vatasamaka, Balya, Vrisha and Rasayana.
- ▶ Table showing the pharmodynamic Properties of Ashwagandha in Nighantu Literature:



S.No.	Texts	Rasa	Guna	Virya	Vipaka	Karma
1.	Dhanwantari Nighantu	Kasaya, katu	-	Usna	-	Vata –Kapha Samaka
2.	Sodhala	-	-	-	-	Vatahara
3.	Madanpala Nighantu	Tikta, Kasaya	-	Usna	-	Kapha-Vata Samaka
4.	Raja Nighantu	Katu	-	Usna	-	Vata Samaka
5.	Kaiyadeva Nighantu	Kasaya,Tikta	-	Usna	-	Vata Samaka
6.	Bhavaprakash Nighantu	Kasaya,tikta	-	Usna	-	Vata-pitta Samaka
7.	Nighantu Ratnakara	Kasaya	-	-	-	Balaya
8.	Priya Nighantu	Tikta	-	-	-	-

## DISCUSSION

As outlined above, results from various samhitas and nighantus studies indicate ashwagandha possesses many qualities, including Kustha, Vata roga, Dipan, Pachan, Jwara, Osteoporosis, Pregnancy to infertile women, Strength, anti-inflammatory, antitumor, and immunomodulatory properties, as well as exerting an influence on the endocrine, nervous, and cardiopulmonary systems. According to the samhitas and nighantus ashwagandha used in the various form or medium. The review indicates that WS may be useful in many ailments, To evaluate the antistress effect of WS, an alcohol extract from defatted seeds of WS dissolved in normal saline was given (100 mg/kg intraperitoneally as a single dose) to 20-25g mice in a swimming performance test in water at 28°-30°C<sup>10</sup>. Including arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders, and hypertension. There are a few preliminary studies available on the effects of WS on the immune system, central nervous system, hemopoetic system, and general growth promotion to form a basis for further studies but not enough evidence to provide a firm scientific basis for definitive therapeutic uses.

## CONCLUSION

Samhita and nighantus are the basic literature for understand and identification of different medicinal plants. On review of Ashwagandha in different samhita and nighantus we find the different synonyms and properties along with useful formulations and their medicinal uses.

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