

## A REVIEW ON AYURVEDIC PLANT ASHWAGANDHA (*WITHANIA SOMNIFERA*) IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera* (Linn)Dunal), is one of the important medicinal herbs in ancient Ayurveda. It is said that the herb tellsthe strength of a horse, when taken which is known by its name ‘hayahwaya’ (because of providing horse power, it is knownby title of horse). all Ayurvedic classic literature like Charakasamhita, Susruthasamhita and Vagbhattasamhita and all the nighantus has complexly mentioned about theproperties, action and therapeutic uses of ashwagandha intheir workings. Charakacharya, Susruthacharya and Vagbhattacharya does not mention about the shukrala or vajeekarana activities of Ashwagandha. It is later authors like Sharangadhara,

Chakradutta, Vrmdha Madhava andall nighantu’s which stated about the above said activities of Ashwagandha. This article is a review on Ashwagandha fromall the available information in classical literature in Ayurveda.

**KEYWORDS:** *Withania somnifera*, *Ashwagandha*, *nighantus* classicalliterature.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

*Ashwagandha* is well-known plant used in ancient time for the treatment in various diseases. In this article *Ashwagandha* is well elaborated fromVedic period to all classical literatures.

### METHODS

In this article vedas, *samhitas*, *nighantus*, and nearby all Ayurveda Textbooks, are examined and whole information is collected as a review.

## INTRODUCTION

*Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera* (Linn) Dunal) (Solanaceae) is an ayurvedic herb extensively distributed all over India. *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera* (Linn) Dunal) (Solanaceae) is an ayurvedic herb widely distributed throughout India. *Ashwagandha* is important medicinal herbs in Ayurveda used from antiquity. From primitive period onwards, *Ashwagandha* appeared as an aphrodisiac agent and immunomodulatory. The plant is known as 'Winter Cherry' in English belongs to the family Solanaceae. *Ashwagandha* plant also known as "Indian Ginseng" has been used as a remedy (single medicine therapy) by tradition. The *Ashwagandha* root is compared with the Ginseng root for their anti-stress activity and weight gain properties.<sup>[1]</sup> The root of the plant is commonly used in a disparity of Ayurvedic Pharmaceutical formulation. *Ashwagandha* is highly well-regarded as a rasayana drug by Ayurvedacharyas which is capable of conveying long life, strength and good intellectual powers. More recently an alkaloid Visamine USSR had marked sedative, hypnotic and nicotinolytic effects<sup>[2]</sup> It increases physical strength and is prescribed in all cases of general dimness. It is used as single drug or in combination with other drugs. Like *Valiya Narayana tailam*, *Ashwagandharistam*, *ashwagandhathi tailam*, *Ashwagandhavalehyam*, these are some of the important preparations of *Ashwagandha*. *Ashwagandha* is highly esteemed as a rasayana drug by Ayurvedists which is capable of imparting long life, youthful vigour and good intellectual powers. It cures ulcer, fever, cough, dyspnoea, consumption, dropsy, impotence, rheumatism, toxicosis and leucoderma.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Etymology of *Ashwagandha*<sup>[4]</sup>

"*Ashwasyeva gandho asyah*-It has smell similar to horse "*Ashwasyeva gandha utsaaha yasyaah sevanena saa!* -It provides horse's strength.

### History

#### a. Vedas<sup>[5]</sup>

The *Ousadhi Sukta* of *Rig-Veda* (10.97, 1-23) is the authoritative document of the knowledge about. There is no direct mention about *Ashwagandha* in Veda's. But many claims about *Withania somnifera* as an identical to the amazing root *jangida*, whose admiration were sung in the *vedas*. The root *jangida* is frequently stated in *atharva veda*, and is deliberated second in importance to *soma*.

#### b. *Samhithas*

*Ashwagandha* is one of the important drugs of *Ayurveda*.

(1). **Paippalada Samhita**<sup>[6]</sup>: *Ashwagandha* root juice is given as *nasya* to succeed conception. (P.S.1/89/3)

(2) **Charaka Samhita**<sup>[7]</sup>

*Charaka Acharya* included *Ashwagandha* under *Balya* and *Brimhaneeya dasaimani (suthra sthana 4th chapter Shadvirechanashatashritheeya)*. It is counted in in *Moolasava yoni (sutra sthana 25th chapter yajjapurushheeyadhyaya)*. *Charaka Acharya* considered decoction of *Ashwagandha* along with other drugs in *virechana gana (vimana sthana 8th chapter Rogabhishakjitheeya)*, *Ashwagandha* can be used for *udwardhana* in case of *kandu, pidaka* and *koda (suthra sthana 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter Aragwadheeyamadhyaya)*. *Charaka Acharya* also considered it as a part of *Vajeekarana ghrtam (vajeekarana pada 1st chapter Samyogasharamooleeyam)*. The *Siddhi sthana 9<sup>th</sup> chapter Trimarmeeyasiddhi* specified the use of *Ashwagandha* in the management of *Sirakampa*.

(3) **Susrutha Samhita**<sup>[8]</sup>: Revealed it in the treatment of *karshya* in the 25th chapter of *sutra sthana (Doshadhatumala Kshayavrddhi Vijnaniya)*. Oil cooked with *Ashwagandha*, drugs of *jeevaneeya gana* etc is used for massaging that helps growth of the earlobe (*Suthra sthana 16th chapter Karna vyadha bandha vidhi*). It is also used for *Utsaadana in vrana (sutra sthana 37th chapter Mishrakadhyayam)*. In the 39th chapter of *sutra sthana Samsodhana samsamaniya* it is mentioned as *urdhwabhagahara dravya*. and also mentioned in treatment of *Kaphaja visarpa (chikitsa sthana 17<sup>th</sup> chapter)*.

(4) **Ashtangasangrah**<sup>[9,10]</sup>: *Ashwagandha churna* was suggested for *abhyanga* in pediatric diseases. *Acharya* stated it as an ingredient of *Bala taila* in 4th chapter of *shareera sthana, Garbha Vyapath Adhyaya*, which is beneficial for diseases of women in puerperium. It is a component of *sukumaraghrtam (Chikitsa sthana 15th chapter Vidradhi vriddhi chikitsa)*. *Ashwagandha* is stated in *Kalpa sthana* as an part of *Erandamoolaadibasthi* which is *lekhana* and *deepana* (*Kalpa sthana 4th chapter, Basthi Kalpa*). *Acharya* mentioned it as a part of *anuvaasana basthi kalpa* which is used in the treatment of all *vaata* diseases (4th chapter *Kalpa sthana*).

(v) **Ashtanga Hrdaya**<sup>[11,12]</sup>: contained similar descriptions like *Ashtanga sangraha*. *Acharya* revealed it as a component of *Bala taila* in 2nd chapter of *shareera sthana*, it is a component of *sukumaara ghrita* in the management of *Vidradhi* and *Vrddhi (Chikitsa sthana 13<sup>th</sup> chapter Vidradhi-Vrddhi Chikitsa)*. *Ashwagandha* is also mentioned in *Kalpa sthana* in

*Ashtanga Hrdaya* similar to *Ashtanga Samgraha*. Like *Ashtangasangraha Ashwagandha* is mentioned in 2nd chapter of *uttarasthana Balaamaya Pratisheda* as having *srothoshodhana* properties.

(6) *Vrnda Madhava*<sup>[13]</sup>: Milk processed with *ashwagandha* with milk should be taken by women in proper time. It helps conception. (VM.14.10). In *Balashosa* ghee is cooked with one-fourth paste of *Ashwagandha* and add ten times milk in it. It promotes development of body (VM.67.9)

(7). *Chakradutta*<sup>[14]</sup>: *Ashwagandha* is described in *udararoga chikitsa*. *Devadaru*, *apamarg* and *sobhanjana* crushed with cow's urine, if taken then it improves severe *udara roga shopha* and, *krimi* (37<sup>th</sup> chapter *udara chikitsa*). He has stated *grtham* with *Ashwagandha* in *Vatavyadhichikitsa* (22<sup>nd</sup> chapter *Vatavyadhi chikitsa*). In 62<sup>nd</sup> chapter *yoni Vyapath chikitsa* he has revealed *Ashwagandha* in the management of *Vandhyatwa*. Also in 66<sup>th</sup> chapter *rasayanadhikara* he has specified the use of *Ashwagandha* for half a month with *grtha*, *taila*, hot water etc for *dehpushhti*.

(8). *Vangasena Samhitha*<sup>[15]</sup>: Listed it as a substitute of *Jeevaneeyagana* drugs *Ksheera Kakoli* and *Kakoli* in *Maha Kalyana ghrtam Vangasena* in 28<sup>th</sup> chapter *Vatavyadhi* stated to take *Ashwagandha* with *guduchi* and *maricha* crushed with warm water.

(9). *Sharangdhara*<sup>[16]</sup>: *Brihat Trayi* did not give emphasis to *Ashwagandha* as *vrisya* in their works. It is *Sharangdhara* who emphasized the *shukrala* property of *Ashwagandha* along with *shatavari* (*Pradhama Khanda* 4<sup>th</sup> chapter *Dipanapachana Adhyaya*) and *musali*. He mentioned it as ingredient of much *aushadhi yoga* like *Maharasnaadi*, *Ashwagandhadi choornam*, *Kamadeva ghrtam*, *Maha narayana taila*, *Shatavari taila*, *Dhatu taila*, etc.

#### **Nighantu**<sup>[17,18,19,20,21]</sup>

*Ashwagandha* is also stated in other books like *Siddha Bhesaja Manimaala*, *Bhaishajya ratnavali*, *Vaidya Manorama* and *yogaratnakara*. *Ashwagandha* is described in all *Nighantus*. *Kaiyadeva Nighantu* described it under *Oushadi Varga*. *Madanapala Nighantu* stated it under *Abhayaadi varga*. *Raja Nighantu* according it is in *Shatahvadi varga*. According to *Dhanwanthari Nighantu* it is described in *guduchyadi varga*. *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu* also stated it in *Guduchyadi varga*. According to *Nighantu Adarsha* it comes in *Kandakaryadi varga* and *Shodhala Nighantu*, like *Dhanwanthari Nighantu* included it in *Guduchyadi varga*.

In classic literature we do not come across the description regarding two kinds of *Ashwagandha*. But in *Nighantu* observations two types of *Ashwagandha* are stated: *Withania somnifera* and *Withania ashwagandha*. The cultivated variety which is mainly brought from Nagori district of Madhya Pradesh which is named *Nagori Ashwagandha*; (*Withania Ashwagandha*).

**Table no.1: Synonyms according to various Nighantus.**<sup>[1]</sup>

Synonym	<i>Bha.Ni</i> <sup>[21]</sup>	<i>Mad.Ni</i> <sup>[18]</sup>	<i>Dha.Ni</i> <sup>[20]</sup>	<i>Kai.Ni</i> <sup>[17]</sup>	<i>Sho.Ni</i>	<i>Raj.Ni</i> <sup>[19]</sup>
<i>Ashwagandha</i>	-	-	+	+	+	+
<i>Ashwavarohaka</i>	-	+	+	+	+	-
<i>Balada</i>	+	-	-	-		+
<i>Balya</i>	-	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Elaparni</i>	-	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Gokarna</i>	-	+	-	+		-
<i>Gandhapatri</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Hayagandha</i>	-	-	-	+	-	+
<i>Hayapriya</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Varahakarni</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Kamarupini</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+
<i>Kanjuka</i>	-	-	+	-	-	-
<i>Kushtagandhini</i>	+	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Marutaghni</i>	-	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Pivara</i>	-	-	-	-	+	+
<i>Pita</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-
<i>Pushtida</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Thuragi</i>	-	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Vajigandha</i>	-	-	+	-	-	+

**Table no.2: Categorization of *ashwagandha* in different *nighantus*.**<sup>[1]</sup>

Classical Text	Category
<i>Bhavaprakasha Nighantu</i> <sup>[21]</sup>	<i>Hareethakyaadi varga</i>
<i>Madanapala Nighantu</i> <sup>[18]</sup>	<i>Abhayaadi varga</i>
<i>Dhanwanthari Nighantu</i> <sup>[20]</sup>	<i>Guduchyadi varga</i>
<i>Kaiyyadeva Nighantu</i> <sup>[17]</sup>	<i>Oushadi varga</i>
<i>Charaka</i> <sup>[7]</sup>	<i>Balya, Brimhana, Madhuraskandha, Virechanopaga</i>
<i>Raja Nighantu</i> <sup>[19]</sup>	<i>Shatahwadi varga</i>
<i>Susrutha</i> <sup>[8]</sup>	<i>Urdhwabhagahara</i>

**Synonyms according to various Nighantus**<sup>[4]</sup>- *Ashwagandha*, *Hayagandha* – root releases horse`s smell *Ashwavarohaka*, *Vrisha*, - it is *vrishya* by nature *Balada*, *Balya*- encourage strength *Elaparni*- leaves having shape like *ela* *Gandhapatri*- having a smell like a horse *Gokarna*- its leaves resembling shape of cow`s ear *Hayapriya*- favorites of horses *Hayahvaya*- provides horse strength *Kaamaroopini*- it progresses libido *Kancuka*- holds semen

*Kushtagandhini*- smell like a plant *KushtaMarutaghni*- useful in *vata* diseases

*Pita*- looks yellow

*Putrada*- be responsible for male progeny

*Pushtida*- it is nutritious

*Thuragi*- it has smell of a horse

*Vajigandha*- has smell like a hoarse

*Varahakarni* –its leaves resembling pig`s ea

### Part used<sup>[5]</sup>

leaves, Root.

### Dose<sup>[22]</sup>

Root powder- 3 to 6 gm

*Kshara*-1 to 3 gms

**Table no 3: Pharmacological Properties.**<sup>[1]</sup>

<i>Nighantus</i>	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Veerya</i>	<i>Guna</i>	<i>Vipaka</i>
<i>Kai.Ni</i> <sup>[17]</sup>	<i>Kashaya, Tiktha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Laghu, snigdha</i>	-
<i>Mad.Ni</i> <sup>[18]</sup>	<i>Kashaya, Tiktha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Laghu, snigdha</i>	-
<i>Bha.Ni</i> <sup>[21]</sup>	<i>Kashaya, Tiktha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Laghu, snigdha</i>	-
<i>Dha.Ni</i> <sup>[20]</sup>	<i>Kashaya, Tiktha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Laghu, snigdha</i>	-
<i>Ra.Ni</i> <sup>[19]</sup>	<i>Katu Tiktha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	-	-

**Table no. 4: Karma of Ashwgandha according to various nighantus.**<sup>[1]</sup>

<i>Karma</i>	<i>Dha Ni</i> <sup>[20]</sup>	<i>Ra.Ni</i> <sup>[19]</sup>	<i>Bha.Ni</i> <sup>[21]</sup>	<i>Charaka</i> <sup>[7]</sup>	<i>Susruta</i> <sup>[8]</sup>	<i>Kai.Ni</i> <sup>[17]</sup>
<i>DoshaKarma</i>	<i>vatakaphahara</i>	<i>Vatahara</i>	<i>Vatakapha Hara</i>	-	-	<i>Vatakapha hara</i>
<i>Dhatu Karma</i>	<i>Shukrala</i>	<i>Shukrala</i>	<i>Atishukrala</i>	-	-	<i>Vrishya</i>
<i>Sarvadaihika Karma</i>	<i>Vajeekarana</i>	<i>Vajeekara na</i>	<i>Balya, Rasayana</i>	<i>Virechana Upaga</i>	<i>Urdhwabagha hara</i>	<i>Balya, Vajeekara</i>

### INDICATIONS<sup>[6]</sup>

#### External uses

It reduces edema and pain, that is why leaves or root paste is applied on enlarged cervical glands or swelling of other glands.in *vata* diseases And weakness, oil massage is done. the juice of Ashwgandha leaves is used as eardrops in ear discharge.

#### Internal uses

Nervous system-as it is a sedative and nervine tonic, it helps in atonic nerves, fainting,

giddiness and insomnia.

Digestive system-the bark powder is appetizer, carminative and anthelmintic and hence is used in abdominal pain, constipation and worms.

Circulatory system-it has an effect on the heart purifies the blood and reduces edema so it is used for the weakness of heart, blood disorder and edema its decoction is used in rheumatoid arthritis.

Respiratory system-it is an expectorant and has anti-asthmatic property due to which it is useful in cough. *ashwgandha* ash along with ghee and honey is effective in asthma, if phlegm is thin it is used in the form of ash or its alkaline extract is used. Decoction of bark should be given in low dose for cough and asthma. It is also used as tonic in the above conditions.

Reproductive system-*Ashwgandha* is well known for its aphrodisiac property. It is used in semen disorders and leucorrhoea caused due to endometritis. A mixture of 5gms *Ashwgandha* powder, with ghee and milk is a good tonic, nutritious and also aphrodisiac. It completely cures puerperal backache.

Urinary system-it is diuretic and so used in oliguria or anuria. It is used to strengthen *meda dhatu*.

Skin-it is used in vitiligo and other skin diseases other skin diseases; blisters heal when black ashes of the roots are applied on them

*Satmikaran*-it increases weight, immunity and is aphrodisiac. used in debilitating diseases and marasmus

### **Formulation**<sup>[24]</sup>

It is used as an ingredient many formulations such as *Shwagandhadi-churna*, *Ashwagandha-rasayana*, *Ashwagandha-ghrita*, *Ashwagandha-rishta*, *Ashwagandha-taila*, *Madhyamanarayana-taila*, *Brihat Ashwagandha-ghrita*, *Brihachchhagaladya-ghrita*, *Saraswata-churna*, *Pramehamihira-taila*, *Nagabala-ghrita*. *Ashwagandha-taila*, *Ashvagandharishata*, *Madhusnuhi-rasayana*.

**Therapeutic uses**<sup>[22,23]</sup>

1. *Aswagandha* taken with milk or ghee for a fortnight promotes development of body. (AH.U.39.158)<sup>[12]</sup>
2. *sankhapuspi*, *Mandukaparni*, *aswagandha* and *shatavari* should be used in order to promote lifespan, intellect, stability, and strength. (AH.U.39.61)<sup>[12]</sup>
3. who takes *Aswagandha* root powder with honey and ghee along with milk regains youthfulness even if they are old. (RM.33.11).

**For Diseases****1) Sосha**

1. *aswagandha* powder, *tila* and *masa* taken with goat's ghee and honey. (SS.U.41.40)<sup>[8]</sup>
2. *Sharkara*, *pippali* and *ashwagandha* mixed with ghee and honey. (SS.U.41.41)<sup>[8]</sup>
3. Milk cooked with *ashwagandha* which provides nourishment to body. Or ghee obtained from that milk should be taken after with sugar and followed by intake of milk. (SS.U.41.42)<sup>[8]</sup>
4. *Ashwagandha*, *yava*, and *punarnava* should be used for externally applications. (SS.U.41.43)<sup>[8]</sup>
5. Ghee with *Ashwagandha* is cooked with *sharkara*, milk, meat along with the paste of *jeevaniya* drugs used in consumption. (AH.Chi.5.25)<sup>[12]</sup>

**2) Excessive emaciation**

*Ashwagandha* with milk should be given. (SS.SU.15.33)<sup>[8]</sup>

**3) Insomnia**

The *ashwagandha* powder mixed with sugar and taken with ghee alleviates insomnia. (BS. Jaladosha.13)

**4) Cardiac disorder**

The paste of *ashwagandha* and *bibhitaka* mixed with jaggery and taken with lukewarm water alleviates *vata* in heart.

(BS. Vatavyadhi.60)

**5) Bronchial Asthma (Tamaka Shwasa)**

The *Kshara* of *ashwagandha* should be given with honey and ghee. (SS.Ci.17.117;

AH.Ci.4.38)

**6) *Granthivisarpa***

warm paste of *ashwagandha* should be applied externally on the affected part. (CS.Ci.21.123)

**7) *Vatavyadhi***

The *ashwagandha ghrita* mollifies *vata* and promotes semen. (VM.22.73)

**8) Accidental wound**

accidental wound should thrash the powder of *ashwagandha* with jiggery or ghee or should take with milk. (VD.4.2)

**9) Suppression of urine**

Decoction of *ashwagandha* promotes urination. (SB.4.54)

**10) Conception in sterility**

Milk processed with *Ashwagandha* and added with milk should be taken by women in correct time, helps conception. (VM.14.10 also)

**11) *Twaka roga***

in vitiligo and other skin diseases, blisters heal when black ash of roots is applied on them.

**12) Digestive system**

The bark powder is appetizer, carminative and anthelmintic and that's why it is used in abdominal pain, constipation and worms.

**13) *Balashosa***

Ghee is cooked with one-fourth paste of *Ashwagandha* and ten times milk. It promotes growth of body. (VM.67.9)

**14) *Udararoga***

*Devadaru*, *sobhanjana*, and *apamarga* or *ashwagandha* crushed with cow's urine relieves *udararoga*. (CD.37.48)

**SUBSTITUTES AND ADULTERANTS<sup>[24,25,26]</sup>**

According to *Bhaishajya ratnavali*, *Ashwagandha* is used as substitute of *Meda*.

*Yogaratanakara* speak out it as substitute of *Kakoli* and *Ksheera Kakoli*. *Vangasena* has same view like *yogaratanakara*. *Bhavaprakasha* also protest *Ashwagandha* as substitute of *Kakoli* and *Ksheera Kakoli*.

But in Quality standards of Indian medicinal plants, it is stated that *Withania coagulans* (*Stocks*) Dunal and growing *Withania somnifera* (Linn) Dunal are known to be the common substitutes or adulterants.<sup>[26]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

This all relevant background information about *Ashwagandha* was collected from the nearby all classical textbooks of Ayurveda, there is no direct reference about this drug in *Vedas*. But a wide range of use of *Ashwagandha* is revealed during *samhithas* and *nighantus* period. The classical texts and *nighantu's* don't mention about the *vipaka* of drug. But we can consider it as *madhura vipaka* from its *balya*, *brhmana* and *vrshya* activities. Among these all classical literature, only *Charaka Acharya* mentioned *Ashwagandha* in *vargas* like *balya* and *bruhaneeya*, *Susrutha Acharya* and *Ashtanga hrdaya* did not mention it in any group. *Bhaishajya ratnawali*, *Yogaratanakara* and *Vangasena* like Authors have mentioned substitutes for *Ashwagandha*; *Medha*, *Kakoli* and *Ksheera Kakoli* as by *Yogaratanakara* and *Vangasena*.

## CONCLUSION

In this article all the information regarding *Ashwagandha* is being precisely collected from nearby all ancient *samhithas*, *nighantus* and ayurvedic textbooks. Overall In Ayurvedic classics, *Ashwagandha* is indicated for *Murchha* (syncope), *Apasmara* (epilepsy), *Shosha* (cachexia), *Unmada* (mania/psychosis), *Karshya* (emaciation), *Arsha* (piles), *Pramehapidika* (diabetic carbuncle), *Arbuda* (tumour), *Gandamala* (cervical lymphadenitis), *Bhagandara* (fistula-in-ano), *Guhya-vrana* (ulcer in genitalia), *Vatarakta* (gout), *Kushtha* (diseases of skin), *Kilasa* (vitiligo), *Asthibhanga* (bone fracture), *Katigraha* (stiffness in lumbo-sacral region), *Gridhrasi* (sciatica), *Hanugraha* (lockjaw), *Janustabdhatata* (stiffness of the knee), *Hrudgraha* (cardiac failure), *Yonidosha* (disorders of female genital tract) and *Vidradhi* (abscess).

*Samhithas* and *nighantus* are the basic literature for understand of different all medicinal plants. On review of *Ashwagandha* in different *samhithas* and *nighantus* we find the various synonyms and properties along with formulations and their uses in treatment.

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