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## Ashwagandha: An Ancient Rasayana from Ayurveda

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गन्धान्ता वाजिनामादिश्वगन्धा हयाद्वया वराहकर्णी वरदा बलदा कुष्ठगन्धिनी ॥  
अश्वगन्धाऽनिलश्लेष्मश्वित्रशोधक्षयापहा । बल्या रसायनी तित्ता कपायोष्णाऽतिशुक्ला ॥

~श्लोक - भावप्रकाश निघण्टु

The meaning of the above shloka means *Ashwagandha* destroys inflammation and mucous, and it smells like horseshoe. It is hot, bitter, invigorated, and potent. Due to its *Rasayana* (Rejuvenating) and *Vata* balancing qualities, *Ashwagandha* is recognised to help with stress and anxiety-related issues. Moreover, it possesses the aphrodisiac (*Vajikarana*) quality, which increases stamina. The world has recently experienced the Covid-19 outbreak and in this turmoil time the Indian traditional medicines have seen rise to cure the symptoms of Covid-19. A rise in cases of anxiety and depression were some of the common cases experienced by the experts. One of the most significant herbs in Ayurveda, a historic alternative medicine system founded on Indian theories of natural healing, is *Ashwagandha*. The Sanskrit term "*Ashwagandha*" means "smell of the horse," alluding to the herb's possible capacity to boost strength as well as its aroma. In addition to its botanical name, *Withania somnifera*, it is sometimes referred to as "Indian ginseng" and "winter cherry." There are many research paper and publications that supports the sedative effect of *Ashwagandha* for promoting sound sleep, hence reducing morning cortisol level.

**Scientific Name:** *Withania somnifera*

**Common Name:** Ashwagandha

**Plant Family:** Solanaceae (Nightshade family)

### Historical Significance of Ashwagandha

The Miracle herb has roots of Indian Origin, some literature also suggest that it was also found in Middle east and Africa too. *Ashwagandha* was first mentioned by learned *Punarvasu Atreya* over 4000 years ago. The medicinal properties of this plant were mentioned in Ayurvedic treatises such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya* and *Bhava Prakasha Nighantu*. The word "*Anupama*" in Ayurveda refers to a vehicle or method of administering medication. In Ayurvedic medicine, the appropriate functioning of herbs is contingent upon their *Anupama*, or carrier. In the treatise on Ayurveda, according to the *Charaka Samhita*, milk is the appropriate *anupama* for each of the body's seven tissue systems. It has a pleasant post-digestive impact and a generally relaxing effect on the body and psyche. Given their similar qualities and reputations as rejuvenators, milk and *Ashwagandha* make a great combo. Together, they produced significant contribution in the times of famine, reducing malnutrition, and TB. According to renowned Ayurvedic scholar "*Sushruta*" *Ashwagandha* and milk together work as a medicated cyst in cases of *vata* imbalance and anorectal bleeding.

## The Status of *Ashwagandha* in Rajasthan

In Thar desert of Rajasthan, *Ashwagandha* is commonly known as *asgandh*. In the Nagaur district as well as the border areas of Sikar, Jaipur, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Bikaner, and Churu districts, this "Nagori *Ashwagandha*" grows naturally., it is drought tolerant and is used as a general tonic. *N. Ashwagandha* finds some unique applications on ruminants as well, the Root decoction is drenched once daily to camel and buffaloes to treat cold and cough. The *N. Ashwagandha* is picked as a wild form by the nomads known as (*Ghandhelya*) and tribe of this region, it is then sold to the traders or *pansaris* (local shop owners) (by this channel it is available in the market). Shortly after harvesting, the crop's fresh roots are sold in the local market for a premium price (~10,000–11,000/q). In general, farmers in central to western Rajasthan, particularly those in sandy plains, can cultivate "Nagori *Ashwagandha*" and earn between ~ 2.5 and 3.00 lakhs per hectare in six months. In dry regions, "Nagori *Ashwagandha*" is the best variety of *Ashwagandha*. The government has also taken up steps for its scientific cultivation and under Mission *Ashwagandha* they are encouraging farmers to grow this herb to mint profit. During Pandemic, the Indians opted the use of traditional medicine and then so it attracted the attention of the developed countries to rethink about ayurveda. Last year, a study on *N. Ashwagandha* was started by the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India in three cities of England (London, Birmingham and Leicester) during the Corona pandemic.

## *Ashwagandha*'s Anti-Stress and Anxiolytic Benefits

*Ashwagandha* has been extensively studied for its ability to mitigate the effects of chronic stress. It is considered an adaptogen, a non-toxic substance that helps the body maintain homeostasis in the face of various stressors. (Murthy et al., 2010) A recent clinical trial involving 58 participants with anxiety disorder found that those who received *Ashwagandha* supplementation experienced a significant reduction in anxiety and stress levels compared to the placebo group. Similarly, a study published in the Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine reported that *Ashwagandha* was effective in improving sleep quality and reducing symptoms of insomnia in a group of adults with chronic stress. These studies demonstrate *Ashwagandha*'s potent anti-stress and anxiolytic properties, making it a valuable herb for managing conditions like insomnia, depression, and anxiety. In addition to its stress-relieving and mood-enhancing effects, *Ashwagandha* has also garnered attention for its potential benefits in the management of neurological and neurodegenerative disorders. (Singh et al., 2011) Intriguing research has uncovered promising evidence suggesting that *Ashwagandha* may possess neuroprotective and nootropic potential, indicating its possible therapeutic applications in not only maintaining but also enhancing overall brain health and cognitive function.

## Summary

*Ashwagandha*, scientifically known as *Withania somnifera*, is a versatile Ayurvedic herb with a rich history dating back thousands of years. Traditionally employed to enhance overall well-being, it has gained significant attention in recent years for its potential benefits in managing stress and anxiety. *Ashwagandha* is often referred to as an adaptogen, which helps the body adapt to stress. Studies suggest that it may help reduce cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress. This can lead to a decrease in feelings of anxiety, irritability, and fatigue. Research has indicated that *Ashwagandha* may be effective in alleviating symptoms of anxiety, including excessive worry, nervousness, and difficulty concentrating. By promoting a sense of calm and relaxation, *Ashwagandha* can improve overall quality of life for individuals struggling with anxiety disorders. *Ashwagandha*'s roots can be traced back to ancient Ayurvedic practices in India. It has been extensively mentioned in classic Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. Today, *Ashwagandha* continues to be a popular herbal supplement, often used in conjunction with other Ayurvedic herbs and practices.

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