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A study on scientific importance of aśvagandhā plant

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Abstract:

Aśvagandhā is a plant grown in India and tropical areas of Asia. It is useful in poisons, wounds, consumption, improves complexion and gives strength and energy. Chemical composition, ethnotherapeutics, pharmacology, reveal us the importance of Aśvagandhā. Ancient Indian medical texts of Caraka, Suśruta, Vāgbhaṭa also mention about Aśvagandhā and its use in curing different diseases. Every plant is medicinal but we should know its uses for making it beneficial to humans. In this regard Indians played a greater role in understanding and documenting the uses of plants in their texts. An attempt to unearth the importance of Aśvagandhā with Indian perspective, from scientific background is made here.

Keyword: Aśvagandhā, withania somnifera, vājigandhā, aśvāvarohakaḥ, varāhakarṇī, chemical composition, ethnotherapeutics

Introduction

Aśvagandhā is commonly called as chees tree. It is having botanical name Withania somnifera and belongs to family Solanaceae. In Sanskrit it has synonyms ^[1] as Aśvagandhā Vājigandhā Kañcukā Aśvāvarohakaḥ Varāhakarṇī Turagī Balyā Vājīkarī. Aśvagandhā is uṣṇavīrya, astringent, and bitter, pacifies vāta and kapha doṣa's. It is useful in poisons, wounds, consumption, improves complexion and gives strength and energy ^[2]. This plant is found mainly in tropical areas of Asia.

Aśvagandhā plant is a branched stellate hairy erect shrub growing upto 1.5cm hight. The leaves are alternate, simple, ovate or ovate-oblong, entire, acute 12x6 cm. Flowers are in axillary or Supra-axillary clusters. This calyx is tubular, green, 5-toothed, teeth acute, stellate hairy outside. Corolla is 5-lobed, dirty white, lobes reflexed, subangular. It has 5 stamens which are exserted & anthers dorsifixed. Ovary is two-celled, ovules numerous in each cell. style is slender, stigma faintly bifid. Fruit is a globose berry and seeds are flat, testa pitted.

Chemical Composition

Aśvagandhā plant contains withanolides 5-dehydroxy withanolide - R, withasomniferin - A, withanolide E, F, I, K. L. M. S., WS - 1, P, G, H, J. Roots contain alkaloides, glycosides, dulcitol, withanol, acylsteryl glycoside - sitoindoside IX. The leaves contain steroids, alkaloids - Withasomine, vitamine, glycoside. Important alkaloids are cuscohygrine, anahygrine, tropine, pseudotropine, anaferine, isopelletierine, withaferin A.

Ethnotherapeutics

The ash (alkali) of Aśvagandhā should be taken with honey and ghee for bronchial asthma ^[3]. In Granthivisarpa ^[4] the affected part should be sprinkled with hot decoction of leaves of Eranda etc and cow's urine or warm paste of Aśvagandhā is applied externally. Aśvagandhā etc. should be used in case of excessive emaciation ^[5]. In urustambha ^[6] the roots of Aśvagandhā or Arka or Nimba are mixed with honey, Mustard and ant-hill earth should be anointed thickly and applied as a paste.

For promoting development of body ^[7] Aśvagandhā should be taken with milk, ghee oil or tepid water for a fortnight. To promote intellect, life-span, stability and strength ^[8] Mandukaparni, Sankhapuspi, Aśvagandhā and Satavari should be used in order.

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During Consumption the powder of Aśvagandhā, Tila and Māṣa are taken with goat's ghee and honey^[9]. The powder of Śarkara, Aśvagandhā and Pippali mixed with ghee and honey is taken^[10] for Consumption. Milk cooked with Aśvagandhā which provides nourishment to the body^[11]. Aśvagandhā, Yava and Punarnava should be used for rubbing externally^[12] in consumption. In consumption and allied disorders^[13], ghee extracted of the milk boiled with Aśvagandhā is cooked with Śarkara, milk and meat along with the paste of jivaniya drugs is useful.

For conception^[14] in sterility milk processed with Aśvagandhā and added with milk should be taken by the women in proper time.

Vaidyamanorama^[15] mention that an individual affected with accidental wound should lick the powder of Aśvagandhā with jaggery or ghee or should take with milk. It acts as Rasāyana. Siddhabheṣajamaṇimālā^[16] says that decoction of Aśvagandhā removes suppression of urine and promotes urination.

Pharmacology

Bruised leaves and ground roots Aśvagandhā are applied on painful swellingness, carbuncles and ulcers, for its sedative action. The roots and leaves are used internally and the freshly pounded leaves externally, against fever, chills, rheumatism, colic. Plant juice is diuretic, emmenagogue, narcotic and anti-epileptic. Roots are used as a remedy against rheumatism, senile debility, tonic, astringent and aphrodisiac. Root extract decreased morphine tolerance and activate macrophage function in infectious diseases. Myeloprotective in myelosuppression. Withaferine has distinct sedative action and induces sleep and narcosis in high doses.

Conclusion

The plant Aśvagandhā is found used for thousands of years in India. In our traditional medicinal system also Ashwagandha is extensively used. By studying the classical medicinal texts we can observe that scientific significance of Aśvagandhā plant was well understood by ancient Indians and are most relevant even today.

Foot Notes

1. अश्वगन्धा वाजिगन्धा कञ्चुकाऽश्वारोहकः। वराहकर्णी तुरगी बल्या वाजीकरी स्मृता॥ धन्वन्तरि निघण्टु गुडूच्यादि वर्ग - 274
1. अश्वगन्धा कषायोष्णा तिक्ता वातकफापहा। विषप्रणक्षयान् हन्ति कान्तिवीर्यबलप्रदा॥ धन्वन्तरि निघण्टु गुडूच्यादि वर्ग - 275
2. तथैव वाजिगन्धाया लिह्याच्छ्वासी कफोल्बणः। अष्टाङ्गहृदय चिकित्सितस्थानम् 4-39, क्षारं चाप्यश्वगन्धाया लिह्यान्ना क्षौद्रसर्पिषा। चरकसंहिता चिकित्सास्थानम् 17-117
3. गोमूत्रैः पत्रनिर्यूहैरुष्णैर्वा परिषेचयेत्। सुखोष्णया प्रदिह्याद्वा पिष्टया चाश्वगन्धया॥ चरकसंहिता चिकित्सास्थानम् 21-123
4. उत्पन्ने तु पयस्याश्वगन्धाविदारिगन्धा -----। सुश्रुतसंहिता सूत्रस्थानं 15-33
5. मूलैर्वाप्यश्वगन्धाया मूलैरर्कस्य वा भिषक्। क्षौद्रसर्षपवल्मीकमृत्तिकासंयुतैर्भिषक् । गाढमुत्सादनं कुर्याद्गुरुस्तम्भे प्रलेपनम् ॥ चरकसंहिता चिकित्सास्थानम् 27 - 50, 51
6. पीताऽश्वगन्धा पयसाऽर्धमांसं घृतेन तैलेन सुखाम्बुना वा। कृशस्य पुष्टिं वपुषो विधत्ते बालस्य सस्यस्य यथा सुवृष्टिः॥ अष्टाङ्गहृदय उत्तरस्थान 39-157
7. मण्डूकीशङ्खकुसुमावाजिगन्धाशतावरीः। उपयुञ्जीत मेधाधीवयःस्थैर्यबलप्रदाः ॥ अष्टाङ्गहृदय उत्तरस्थान 39-61

8. घृतेन चाजेन समाक्षिकेण तुरङ्गगन्धातिलमाषचूर्णम्॥ सुश्रुतसंहिता उत्तरतन्त्रं 41-40
9. सिताश्वगन्धामगधोद्भवानां चूर्णं घृतक्षौद्रयुतं प्रलिह्यात्। सुश्रुतसंहिता उत्तरतन्त्रं 41-41
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11. उत्सादने चापि तुरङ्गगन्धा योज्या यवाश्चैव पुनर्न वि च॥ सुश्रुतसंहिता उत्तरतन्त्रं 41-43
12. 13. अश्वगन्धाश्रुताक्षीराद्घृतं च ससितापयः। अष्टाङ्गहृदय चिकित्सितस्थानम् 5-25
13. काथेन हयगन्धायाःसाधितं सघृतं पयः। वृन्दमाधव 14.10; अश्वगन्धाकषायेण सिद्धं दुग्धं घृतान्वितम्। ऋतुस्नाताऽङ्गना प्रातः पीत्वा गर्भं दधाति हि॥ भावप्रकाशः चिकित्साप्रकरणम् 70 - 26
14. अश्वगन्धारजो लिह्याद् गुडेन हविषाऽथवा। पयसा वा पिबेच्छस्तक्षतक्षीणो रसायनम्॥ वैद्यमनोरमा 4.2
15. मूत्रं काथोऽश्वगन्धाया द्राक् प्रवर्तयतेतराम्। सेतुभङ्गस्तटाकस्य प्रवाहं पयसामिव॥

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