Recent years have seen a sudden surge in an array of mental illnesses such as dementia and other memory related disorders. A decline in memory and cognitive (thinking) function is considered by many authorities as a normal consequence of aging (Craik and Salthouse, 1992, and Smith, Petersen, Parisi, 1996). Environmental toxins, vitamins deficiencies and the process of ageing can alter cognition. Stressful lifestyle in this competitive world may be the root cause. Mental illnesses have always been intriguing for the researchers and their treatment a challenge. Allopathic psychoactive drugs have been the main stay of treating mental illness in India and worldwide. However experiences with these drugs have always not been satisfying. To compound to this, the associated side effects become detrimental to their use (Hanumanthachar, 2006, Kulkarni, Verma, 1965, and Kumar, Sapna and Ravi, 2007). Hence, the need of psychotropic drugs belonging to traditional health care system arose (Kumar, Sapna and Ravi, 2007).

Above discussion shows that memory and cognitive problems have gone quite prevalent. The student in school, colleges and universities are facing the concentration and memory problems. An enhanced competition level in curriculum increased stress levels due to parental and peer pressures have led to enhanced cognitive problems.

In India, the knowledge of herbal medicine is extended from tribal folklore to highly evolved systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani. Shankhapushpi is used in many formulations in Ayurveda. Main formulation containing Shankhapushpi are: Shankhapushpi panaka, Medhya kashay. All the parts of the herb are known to possess therapeutic benefits. It is believed to be the Shankhapushpi is only herb that is capable of enhancing all the aspects related to the brain power, such as learning, memory, and the ability to recall.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 4 billion people of the world population currently use herbal medicines for their primary health in one or the other way (Farnsworth, Akerele, Bingel, Soejarta, and Eno, 2003).
In traditional practices of medicine, numerous plants have been used to treat cognitive dysfunctions such as Ginkgo Biloba, Brahmi, Amalaki, Punarnava, Ashwagandha, Mandukaparni, Galo, Yashti-madhu, Shankhpushpi. Ayurveda claims that several plants, the "Medhya" plants (intellect promoting) herbs such as, Convolvulus microphyllus (C. pluricaulis), Centella asiatica, Bacopa monnieri, Acorus calamus, Zingiber officinale and Celastrus paniculatus are beneficial in cognitive disorders (Joshi and Parle, 2006). Even though Ayurvedic practitioners have used Shankhpushpi for centuries, there is no hard scientific evidence as to the positive effects of this herb, outside of a few Indian studies performed in the 1970s and '80s. In those studies, people suffering from anxiety were given Shankhpushpi for six weeks and claimed to have slept better, have more energy and better concentration. Today this herb is still a preferred method for reducing symptoms associated with anxiety, panic attacks, nervousness and insomnia. Using the whole plant in the form of a decoction with cumin and milk is used to treat fever, debility, memory loss, syphilis, and scrofula. But very little work has been done on this herbal plant. Therefore, it is the need of today to experimentally investigate the effect of Shankhpushpi on cognitive abilities especially by using it directly on human beings.

Shankhpushpi has been claimed best in medhya rasayanas (Charaka Samhita, 1949), to treat anxiety and stress disorders (Kulkarni, 1999; Singh and Mehta, 1977), to improve memory, intelligence (Sharma, 1965; Taranalli, 2000; Adams, 2007; Bala, 1999, MHFW, 2001; Gupta, Tandon, Sharma, 2005, and Nesari, Kapse, 2005), helpful in epilepsy, insomnia, heart disease, hypertension, mental as well as physical fatigue (Chunekar, 1982; Sharma, 1983; Kulkarni, 1999; Singh and Mehta, 1977; Handa, 1994; Singh, Narsimhamurthy and Singh, 2008). However, no much of the scientific studies are available and there is a need to verify these effects or keeping this in mind, it was thought worthwhile to investigate if Shankhpushpi could help in improving the cognitive abilities. So the following problem was formulated.
PROBLEM:

To study the effect of Shankhpushpi (whole plant) on cognitive abilities.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To verify the effect of Shankhpushpi on cognitive tasks.
2. To verify the effect of durations of Shankhpushi (whole plant) on cognitive abilities.

HYPOTHESES:

To achieve these objectives following hypotheses were formulated-

1. Shankhpushpi would enhance performance on Abstract Reasoning
2. Shankhpushpi would enhance performance on Digit Symbol test.
3. Shankhpushpi would enhance performance on Vocabulary test.
4. Shankhpushpi would enhance the performance on Arithmetic Scale.
5. Shankhpushpi would enhance the performance on Intellectual Processing Scale.
6. Longer the duration of administration of Shankhpushpi more the enhancement in cognitive abilities.