

ABHIDHĀNARATNAMĀLĀ
A WORK WITH A NEW CLASSIFICATION OF DRAVYAS

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The Ayurvedic Samhitas of ancient times, were comprehensive works, dealing with all the branches and special portions or subjects of Ayurveda, like dravyagūṇa, hygiene, fundamental principles, diagnosis etc. The subject of dravyagūṇa, dealing with the qualities or effects of articles of food and drink and therapeutic substances, finds place in the Sūtrasthāna of the Samhitas.

During medieval periods writing of treatises on individual branches or special subjects in Ayurveda gained more importance. With the trend of writing independent works or branches of medicine or special topics of Ayurveda, it is found that only a few subjects like diagnosis and treatment, dravyagūṇa or nighaṇṭu and rasa assumed greater importance.

During the later middle ages, several works of this nature were compiled on dravyagūṇa and rasatantra. In Ayurvedic Samhitas the articles of food and drink are dealt with in Sūtrasthāna, and they are divided on the basis of their physical characters, as waters, oils, milks, wines, curds, fruits, vegetables, meat etc. The therapeutic substances do not find place generally under this portion. However, we find in Suśruta Saṃhitā and Caraka Saṃhitā separate chapters dealing with therapeutic substances, where they are divided into several groups. In the chapters dealing with mahākāṣāyas in Caraka Saṃhitā and in the chapter dravyasangrahaṇīya of Suśruta Saṃhitā, various substances are enumerated in groups, which are classified on the basis of the effects of the constituents on the body, humours and diseases. Here only lists of therapeutical substances are given and generally, the name of the group suggests the effects or qualities of the constituents in health and disease. A single substance may find place in more than one group according to its effects. The same procedure is generally followed by Vāgbhaṭa.

Thus, two types of classification of articles are found in the Ayurvedic classics, one on the basis of the physical characters and the other on the basis of the qualities or effects of the substances with regard to humours. It is difficult to say which of the two classifications, is earlier. But one may well suppose that gradual developments in the social structure and urbanisation of people resulted in the appearance of diseases, which necessitated the study and use of substances for therapeutic pur-

poses. This might have resulted in the classification of therapeutic substances on the basis of their effects in therapeutics. The later study and classification of individual drugs and herbs in further detail might have been responsible for giving importance to the six rasas* known from the ancient times, resulting in the division on the basis of the six rasas, though it appears not to have gained popularity.

The vanaśādhivarga of Amarakośa by Amarasimha (6th c. A.D.,) is supposed to be the first type of a dictionary of medical substances, though it gives only the synonyms. In the later periods, several nighaṇṭus appeared dealing exclusively with herbs and drugs used in medicine and also therapeutic qualities of articles of food and drink. In Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya, after dealing the groups of oils, milks curds etc. in the last, there is one group aśādhivarga - group of therapeutic substances. But Dravyaguṇasaṅgraha of Cakrapāṇidatta does not deal with substances used in medicine. Dhanvantarinighaṇṭu is supposed to be the first medical work to deal with herbs and drugs apart from other articles in ordinary use. Jolly states that "even though Dhanvantarinighaṇṭu is the oldest work of this kind; it can not be very old, for it seems to be familiar with the pharmacological working and therapeutical use of quicksilver and other metals". He also points out that one may well suppose with enumeration of articles of food and therapeutic substances, their grouping in Vargas and the statement of their guṇas in Carakasamhitā, Sūśruta Samhitā, Aṣṭāṅgasāṅgraha and Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya, originated from the medical glossaries but the preserved works of this kind appear throughout to be of a later date than the old medical classics.

The later works of nighaṇṭu followed the classification on the basis of the physical characters adding more groups for therapeutic substances with the increase in their number. But the division of the substances of the six rasas appears so far to have been adopted only in Abhidhānaratnamālā.

We have a copy of the work Abhidhānaratnamālā or śādrasanighaṇṭu a work on the herbs and drugs used in medicine. This work differs in its presentation from other commonly known works of nighaṇṭu. This work is divided into six parts under the names of the six rasas or tastes.

The copy of this work in the Library of Institute of History of medicine is printed in 1939 by Vavilla Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons in Madras. This is a reprint of the work published in 1923. The New Catalogus Catalogorum mentions

* According to the Ayurvedic and Indian tradition there are six rasas or tastes and every substance is supposed to contain one or more rasas. The effects or qualities of substances are decided amongst others, on the basis of the rasa or rasas of that particular drug.

that the work was printed as early as in 1881. The edition of 1923 or 1939 gives no information as to whether it was based on the earlier edition. It does not give even the manuscripts on which it was based.

The New Catalogus Catalogorum calls this a dictionary of materia medica and mentions the location of the manuscripts in the following libraries and catalogues :

Adyar Library, Madras; Asiatic Society, Calcutta; Index to Sanskrit Manuscripts in Palace Library, Tanjore, by Burnell; India Office Library, London; Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras; Catalogue of Manuscripts in Private Libraries of South India by Oppert; Telugu Academy, Kakinada; T. M. S. S.M. Library, Tanjore.

According to the information available to us, several copies of manuscripts of this work are available mostly in South India, in Madras, Thanjavur, Mysore and Hyderabad. We could not trace yet any copies in other parts of the country. Moreover these manuscripts are either in Telugu and Kannada or Nandinagari scripts and almost all of them have, in addition, either or both Telugu and Kannada meanings. This work thus appears to have been very popular, if not in the entire country, at least in South India.*

Arrangement and Opening Verses :

As already stated, the work is divided into the following six skandhas or branches.

Svādu (sweet); amla (acid); lavaṇa (salt); tikta (bitter); kaṭuka (pungent) and kaṣāya (astringent). In this work, first a list of all the substances to be dealt in that group is given. This is followed by the synonyms used for each individual substance in the list in order.

The number of articles in each group is as follows ;

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| 1) Svādu - 118; | 2) Amla - 31; | 3) Lavaṇa - 11; |
| 4) titka - 145; | 5) Kaṭuka - 94; | 6) Kaṣāya - 143. |

* This work appears to be known to the scholars of the other parts of the country, only as the work quoted by Mallinātha. Dr. Tarapada Chowdhury in his introduction to Paryāyaratnamālā (Patna-1946) and Sri C. G. Kashikar in his supplementary notes to the English translation of Indian Medicine by J. Jolly (Poona, 1951) mention this work, but only as quoted by Mallinātha. Though it was published in the last quarter of the last century it could not draw the attention of the scholars of other parts, as it was printed in Telugu script.

The text starts with three verses in praise of God. The first is in obeisance to Gaṇeśa.¹ The second verse is devoted to the Goddess Devi² and the third invokes the blessings of Lord Dhānvantari.³ The verse in praise of Dhānvantari is the verse in popular use. After making obeisance to Gods, the author writes about the nature and purpose of the text.

"After collecting the names used in all the works of medicine and dividing them into 6 groups according to the 6 divisions of rasa, this Nighaṇṭu with six skandhas is compiled⁴".

Author and date :

It is unfortunate that no details about the author-not even the name - are available. There are also no evidences to establish the date of composition of the work. The work is quoted by Mallinātha (15th century) in his commentaries which shows that the work was studied by scholarly circles before the 15th century.

It is not known why the author was satisfied with only giving synonyms of the substances and why he did not deal with the qualities or effects of the substances. It may be that in the course of centuries in different regions a single herb or drug was called by one or more names and a single term was also used to denote more than one article. This was also the case about words in general literature resulting in confusion and the need for compilations of several Kośas or Nighaṇṭu works.

Though the introductory verse calls the work by the common name a nighaṇṭu, the colophon mentions the name of the work as Abhidhānaratnamālā. The work is also known as śadrasanighaṇṭu. This latter name might have been given and came into popular use later to differentiate it from a non-medical literary dictionary also called Abhidhānaratnamālā, but compiled by Halāyudha about 950 A. D.

The work requires further study by Ayurvedic doctors and in view of many manuscripts available, a collation of various manuscripts and a new edition may be useful and rewarding.

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1. Vande sindūrasandohasundarāṅga mumāśutam, mandasmitarasānandam prasannāsyam gajānanam.
 2. Yena kenāpi yadyadvāyasya kasyacidīritam, nāma tattattadīyam syāttām namāmi jagannmayīm.
 3. Śaṅkham cakramuparyadhaśca karayordivyaūśadham dakṣiṇe Vāmenānyakareṇa sambhṛtasudhākūṇḍam jvalatkāpilam, Bibhṛāṇah karuṇākaraśśubhakarassarvāmayadhvaṃsakah, Sarvam me duritam chinattu bhagavān dhānvantarissantatam.
 4. Sarvatantraprayuktāni namānyādāya śaḍvidhā rasabhedena ṣatskandho nighaṇṭurabhirucyate.