

Integrating Medicinal and Lifestyle practices in Ayurveda : insights from Acharya Shodhala's Nighantu

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Abstract

Nighantu refers to a collection of Ayurvedic glossaries that include the names, synonyms, and descriptions of medicinal substances, such as plants, animals, and minerals. This literature is essential for understanding the properties, actions, and therapeutic uses of these substances. Its significance was emphasized in the 14th century by Narahari Pandita, who asserted that knowledge of Nighantu is crucial for effective medical practice. The evolution of Nighantu literature spans three main periods: the ancient Vedic era (before the 7th century AD), the medieval period (8th to 15th century AD), and the modern period (16th century AD onwards), reflecting the growing complexity and breadth of Ayurvedic knowledge. Acharya Shodhala, a renowned 12th-century scholar, authored the Shodhala Nighantu, a significant text in Ayurveda. His work integrates medicinal knowledge with daily lifestyle practices (*Vihara*), emphasizing the importance of routines such as *dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) to maintain health and prevent lifestyle disorders. This makes his contributions highly relevant to both traditional and modern contexts. In Ayurveda, *Vihara* refers to the daily regimen or lifestyle practices that promote health and prevent disease. Its importance lies in maintaining balance and harmony in the body through proper routines, which include diet, sleep, exercise, and seasonal adjustments, thus supporting overall well-being and preventing disorders. *Vihara* practices are crucial for promoting equilibrium between physical and mental functions, helping individuals avoid lifestyle-related diseases, and fostering overall wellness through disciplined habits. In today's context, adopting *Vihara* practices based on Ayurvedic principles offers a holistic approach to preventing and managing lifestyle and metabolic disorders such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. By encouraging a balanced daily routine and fostering

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harmony with nature, Vihara tackles the underlying causes of modern health challenges, promoting both physical and mental well-being.

Key words : *Nighantu, Vihara, Dinacharya*, Lifestyle disorders, Disease prevention.

Acharya Shodhala, a distinguished 12th-century scholar, composed the ‘Shodhala Nighantu.’ Born to Vaidya Nandana, a disciple of Sanghadayalu, Shodhala hailed from a traditional brahmana family of the Vatsa gotra in Rayakavala, predominantly in Gujarat. A devoted worshiper of Bhanu (the Sun God), he identified himself as a Jyotisha Shastri (scholar of astrology). His name appears on a copper plate inscription from the reign of Bhimadeva II (1256 AD). The Nighantu begins with a salutation to Lord Ganesha and opens with a prayer (*Suryaradhana*) to the Sun God.¹

Importance, specialities and contribution:

The ‘Shodhala Nighantu’ stands out due to its unique compilation, presentation` and introduction of subjects, topics, and drugs. A distinctive feature of this work is its division into two sections (*khandas*): *Namasangraha* and *Gunasangraha*, which address the nomenclature and pharmacotherapeutic properties of drugs, respectively.¹ This dual approach, adopted by Shodhala, is highly practical as it allows for a clear understanding of both aspects of the drugs. Shodhala’s method of reorienting the knowledge of drugs and reorganizing the subject matter showcases his intent to maintain the originality and uniqueness of the Nighantu. His creation of new groups (Vargas) such as *Anekartha* and *Misraka varga* in *Namasangraha*, along with the 8th to 27th Vargas in

Gunasangraha, further enhances this distinction.¹

Bifurcation of the pharmacological aspects and nomenclatural material containing synonyms of drug and likewise, taxonomic aspect and the facet of medicinal properties of drugs has created a direct way of accessing the information and gaining knowledge without any intermingling in interest of study. To avoid detail enlistment and plural meaning of drug terms, Shodhala followed a precise manner to incorporate multi-synonymous drugs by compiling, collating and selecting them, in a separate chapter (*varga*).¹

The traces of following the path of fundamentals evolved by expounders of Samhitha, for instance the system of ‘*Namarupajnana*’ - developed as most scientific pattern of study of drugs, can also be found in his Nighantu.⁵ Shodhala’s ‘Nighantu’ reflects adherence to the fundamentals established by the expounders of Samhitha, such as the ‘*Namarupajnana*’ system, which represents a scientific approach to the study of drugs. By including regional terminology alongside Sanskrit names, commonly found in Nighantu treatises, Shodhala has made the descriptions of drugs more understandable, practical, and widely useful. This approach, which incorporates local or regional names prevalent in the areas studied by Shodhala, enhances the utility of his work. His straightforward, applied, and accessible style allows laypersons to recognize and procure plants for specific drugs (*ausadha dravya*) and assists physicians in

identifying and verifying the identity of drugs and their plant sources, often known by specific local names.¹

Other notable features of this treatise include the classification of drugs and dietary articles (*Ausadha Khadyaahara*) by their taste, addressing previously unaccounted items or (*Dravyas*), and the correlation of medicinal properties of products (such as gum or latex) with their source plants. It also covers the complications arising from excessive consumption of certain meals (*Ahara*), mentions specific garments (*tanucchada*) in various hygiene practices (*svasthavrta*), and employs both Sanskrit and Prakrit languages with flexible gender usage. Additionally, it includes various aspects of pattern, style, and descriptions etc.¹

Shodhala includes drugs from botanical, geological, and zoological sources, with a predominance of those from the vegetable kingdom. In the first part, named *Namasangraha*, there are nearly 500 *dravyas* classified across seven *vargas*. This number increases when considering additional items like cereals (*dhanyas*) and liquids (*dravas*). While many classified drug groups (*Ausadha Vargas*) have names similar to those in other Nighantu works, the *Laksmanadi varga* stands out as Shodhala's unique contribution, notable for its inclusion of various uncommon drugs.¹

Vihara :

Danta pāvanam :

Kaṣhaya (astringent), *Katu* (pungent) and *Tikta* (bitter) - these three tastes (*rasa*) are ideally suited (*prashasta*) for *danta pāvana* - *danta dhavana* (cleaning of teeth).

In this context, some trees possessing the three tastes (as indicated) are recommended (for instance: *Ashtanga Sangraha*, sutra. 3, 12-14 and various other texts). The fine powder of *trikatu* mixed with honey (*madhu*) or oil (*taila*), along with little bit of *lavana* (salt) is applied for rubbing (*gharsana*) the teeth and also gums, without hurting them; this will remove the dirt, bad taste and smell of the tongue, mouth and teeth. It produces better taste, cleanliness and softness of the mouth, and dispels the diseases of the tongue, mouth and teeth.¹

Sauviranjana :

(Collyrium or eye-salve based on prepared with *sauvira*, source material identified as antimony sulphide after mixing herbs etc.) is wholesome for the eyes (*hitamakchno*) and hence, it should be administered as an ideal collyrium daily as regular practice (*nityam*). By application of this *anjana* properly the eyes become beautiful (*manojña*), unctous or soft (*susnigdha*), capable of seeing even minute objects (*sūkṣma darsana*) and with dense eye-lids or eye-lashes (*ghana pakmani*) with smoothness and firmness. All the three coloured parts of the eyes will become well defined and clearly visible. Eyes (*chakshu*) are the repository of *tejas* (light) and endangered by *sleshma* (*kapha*); hence *rasanjana* (prepared with *daruharidra*, the herbal drug) should be applied to the eyes once a week regularly in order to drain the *sleshma* out from eyes (*sravanarthe*).¹

Nasya :

Persons practicing nasal medication regularly (*nasyasilinah*), in the mode of drops

into nostrils or as inhalation, will have their skin (*tvak*), shoulder (*skandha*), neck (*grīvā*), face (*asya*) and chest (*vaksa*) firm or dense (*ghana*), prominent or raised (*unnata*) and good looking (*prasanna*); their mouth becomes pleasantly smelling (*sugandhivadana*), voice attains fineness or pleasant, sensory organs begin functioning with clarity, cleanliness and efficient and they (persons using *nasya*) become free of wrinkles (*nirvali*), devoid of grey hairs (*palita vihina*) and their black patches on face/skin (*vyanga rahita*) disappear, as a result of regular *nasya vidhāna* followed (as a part of life routine or *dinacarya*).¹

Ganndūsa :

Keeping the mouth filled with oil daily for a few minutes in the mornings will prevent cracking and roughness of the lips, dryness of the mouth, diseases of the teeth and disorders of voice.

The administration of honey in 'madhugandūsa' is suggested for application in mouth (gargling). It is specifically useful in different conditions; it pacifies *trushna* (thirst) and *dāha* (burning sensation), as gargling with honey relieves both of these complaints.

The gargling with sour gruel (*dhānyāmla*) prepared with grains eliminates bad taste (*asyavairasya*), dirt and bad smell (*maladurgandhya*).

The decoction of *Khadira*, *Ksirivrkṣa* and *Irimeda* is applied for administering *kavala* by the person (*kavala* and *gandusa* procedures with difference: for instance, *Astanga Sangraha*, sutra. 31, 9 etc. and other treatises). The application of *kavala* relieves

arocaka, *asyavairasya* (distaste of mouth), *mala* (dirt), *poothi* (bed smell) and *praseka* (salivation in excess)¹.

Vyayama :

Sarirayasajanana (Physical exercise or activities) which produce tiredness to the body known as *vyayama* / *laghavam* (effects to lightness of the body), *karma sāmārthya* (increased capacity to work), *sthairyam* (stability of body organs), *Duhkhasahisnuta* (tolerance for discomfort, (*dosaksaya*) mitigation of morbid humours and *agnivrdhhi* (stimulation of digestive power). *Vyayama* of *asvinna gatra* and *udvartana* of *pada* are recommended for prevention from diseases. The person who are regularly doing the *vyayamam* (exercise), *virudhabhojana* (incompatible food) will not affect them. *Vidagdha*, and *aparipakva* foods are digested without any adverse effects (*nirdosam*) by this regular physical exercise (*vyāyāma*). *Vyayama* prevents ageing, senility, death and fat accumulation. It stabilises musculature (*sthiribhavati māmsam*) if *vyayama* is practiced regularly and the parts of body become distinct and firm (gradually) as the good effects of *vyayama*. The strong persons (*balibhih*) and those who are accustomed to fatty foods, should do exercise to half their capacity (*ardhaśaktyā niṣevyastu*) during the cold season (*Hemanth* and *Sisira*: *Sitakala*) and *vasanta* for other and in other seasons, it should be still less practice of *vyayama*.¹

Samvahana :

Samvahana achieves *priti*, induces sleep (*nidrākaram*) and effects as *vrshya* (aphrodisiac) and alleviates *kapha*, *vata* and

śrama, it promotes musculature (*mamsakara*) and skin complexion (*tvakprasādakaram*)¹

Abhyanga :

(Massaging of body i.e. oil massage) should be practiced daily (*acarennityam*) as regular activity for body care and maintenance (in routine). *Abhyanga* promotes vision (*drstiprasāda*), *pusti* (nourishing), *ayu* (longevity), *swapna* (sleep), and provides *dardhya* (firmness). It should be specially done over *sira* (head), *śravana* (ear), *pada* (leg).¹

Snana :

There are various benefits and good effects of bathing (*snana*). Its major advantages follow:

i. *Dipana* ii. *Vrsya* iii. *Ayuṣya* iv. *Urjaskara* vi. Allaying *kandu*, *mala*, *śrama*, *sveda*, *tandra*, *trt*, *daha* and *papmā*. In this way, the bath (*snāna*) stimulates/improves appetite, sexual vigour, life span, valour, energy and strength; it eliminates itching, dirt, exertion, sweat, stupor, thirst, burning sensation and sinful deed. During the process of bath, pouring of hot water (*ushnambu*) below the head (*adhahkayastha*) is strengthening (*balavaha*).¹

Dharanam :

Gentleman should suitably bear (*dharanam*) clean clothes or garments (*nirmalambara*). White (*sveta*) cloth provides coolness (*Sheethatara*) better and other garments of red (*rakta*) and new (*nava*) effects slightly warmness (*kinciduṣnam*).¹

Usnisa :

Usnisa (head-dress i.e. turban or alike traditional garment covering and wrapping head) is considered to be *medhya* and gives other advantageous effects like *kesya*, *vātā-tapahara* (*kacakrdvātātapara joharam*).¹

Chatra:

Chatra (umbrella) is beneficial to eyes (*netrahitam*) and *varnya* (promoting/preventing skin complexion), it protects from *vata* (air/wind), rains (*varsā*) and heat (*tapa-atapa*) or sunlight (*suryālāpa*).¹

Danda :

Danda (stick) provides *dhairya* and *avastambha*; it allays fear (*bhayaghna*); it is strengthening (*balakrt*) and supporting body with firmness (*sthairyam*). It gives *Vīrya* (potentiality power or competency) and *pusti* (nourishing and supporting whole body).¹

Tanucchada :

(Body covering cloth) eliminates all the dosas of body and provides coolness (*hima*)¹

Padatra :

Bearing of shoes (*padatra*) eliminates diseases of leg and foot-sole (*padatala*); it is *vrsya*, *ayusya*, *cakshusya* (promoting virility, longevity and visionary power). Shoes should always be used for comfort, convenience and other advantages.¹

Jyotsnā :

It is *kasaya* and *madhura*; it alleviates *dāha*, *asrk* and *pitta*. It is wholesome in

rasayana (rejuvenation) therapy and mitigates all the dosas, it allays *tama*.¹

Adhya :

It promotes *bala*, *ayu* and *vahni*; and it is *vatanulomana*.¹

Chankramana :

It reduces *sthoulya* (fatty or obese state of body i.e. obesity), increases *soukumarya* and mitigates *kapha*. It checks *hikka* and *chardi*; it allays *srama* and removes *khudastambha*.¹

Asya :

It gives (promotes) *varna* (complexion), *slesmā* (phlegm), *medha* (fat) and *saukumārya* (tenderness or softness of organs in body as a whole).¹

Agni :

It mitigates *vata* and *kapha*, it eliminates *stambha*, *sita*, *vepathu*, *ama* and *abhisyanda*; it aggravates (vitiates) *raktapitta*.¹

Sheeta :

Increases *kapha* and *vata*. *Avasyāya* (dew) effects similarly.¹

Vrsti :

Is aphrodisiac (*vrsya*), and induces sleep (*nidra*).¹

Vyajanila :

It checks (removes) *śrama*, *sveda*, *daha*, *trcna* and *murccha*.¹

Talavanta (vyajana vayu) :

It mitigates *tridoha*. Other *vyajana*

(Handy fans) *Vastra*, *cāmara*, *kansya*, *mayura* and *vetraka vata*. It mitigates dosha, *snigdha* (unctuous), *hrdya* (cardiac) and *sukhavaha* (pleasing and comfortable).¹

In Ayurveda, longevity is achieved through a balance of body, mind and soul, essential for maintaining happiness and peace. It goes beyond physical health, addressing mental and spiritual needs as well. Ayurveda offers regimens like proper food intake (*Ahara*) and lifestyle practices (*Vihara*) to support healthy digestion, metabolism, and overall well-being. These practices align the body's circadian rhythms with daily and seasonal cycles (*Dinacharya*, *Ratricharya*, *Ritucharya*) to prevent health issues and slow the aging process.

Sodhala Nighantu highlights Ayurveda's all-encompassing approach, which stresses daily routines (*Vihara*) as crucial to preserve general health and wellbeing in addition to medicinal treatments. The importance of routines like dental hygiene (*danta pāvanam*), eye care (*sauviranjana*), nose medication (*nasya*), mouth gargling (*gandūsa*), and physical activity (*vyayama*) is emphasized. These activities aim to balance the body's doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), promoting overall health.

Acharya Shodhala's careful categorization of different methods, such as *samvahana* (soft rubbing), *snana* (bathing), and *abhyanga* (oil massage), indicates his intention to make Ayurveda understandable and applicable to everyday life. A thorough grasp of these activities' therapeutic significance is demonstrated by the various health benefits they are linked to, including the improvement

of digestion, the augmentation of muscle tone, and relaxation.

Sodhala Nighantu also delves into lesser-known customs like wearing headgear (*usnisa*) to guard against the elements and maintain hair health and wearing footwear (*padatra*) to avoid foot problems and lengthen life. This all-encompassing viewpoint on health exemplifies how Ayurveda integrates food, lifestyle, and spirituality for holistic health.

Acharya Shodhala's 'Shodhala Nighantu' provides a profound and structured approach to understanding Ayurveda, emphasizing the importance of both medicinal treatments and lifestyle practices (*Vihara*) for holistic health. His methodical categorization of drugs, daily routines, and health regimens reflects a comprehensive integration of ancient wisdom with practical applications. By incorporating regional terminology and making the descriptions of drugs accessible to both

laypersons and practitioners, Shodhala contributed significantly to the scientific study of pharmacology in Ayurveda. Furthermore, the inclusion of various health-promoting activities, such as *vyayama* (exercise), *nasya* (nasal medication), *abhyanga* (oil massage), and dental hygiene, highlights his foresight in emphasizing the role of preventive care. His work stands as a testament to Ayurveda's all-encompassing approach, which unites physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This understanding not only preserves health but also supports longevity by aligning individuals with the natural rhythms of life, thus maintaining harmony between the body, mind, and soul.

Reference :

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