



Review Article

BHAVAPRAKASHA NIGHANTU: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

BS Indu^{1*}, Arya Prabhu², S Sooraj³

¹PG Scholar, ²Associate Professor, ³Professor and HOD, Department of Dravyaguna Vigyan, Mannam Ayurveda Co-operative Medical College, Pandalam, Kerala, India.

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ABSTRACT

The Bhavaprakasha Nighantu is a significant Ayurvedic text that serves as a bridge between classical and evolving medical traditions. Authored by Bhavamishra in the 16th century, it is a vital part of Bhavaprakasha, one of the *Laghutrayi* (three minor Ayurvedic classics). The text is distinguished by its structured classification of medicinal substances into 23 *Vargas* (groups), covering plant-based, mineral, and animal-derived drugs, as well as dietary articles. Bhavamishra's approach integrates traditional formulations with newly introduced drugs, influenced by Unani medicine and global trade, marking an important advancement in Ayurvedic *Dravyaguna* (pharmacology). A notable feature of Bhavaprakasha Nighantu is its detailed plant descriptions, including regional names, properties, actions, and therapeutic uses. Bhavamishra's work also introduces concepts like *Pratinidhi Dravya* (substitute drugs) and emphasizes drug testing methodologies, ensuring standardization in Ayurvedic practice. His contributions significantly expanded the Ayurvedic Materia Medica, making his work a foundation for future research. The commentary by Dr. K.C. Chunekar further enhances the text's relevance, providing botanical identification, pharmacological insights, and cross-referencing with modern science. Chunekar's work aids in bridging Ayurveda with contemporary research, making Bhavaprakasha Nighantu a timeless reference for scholars, practitioners, and researchers. This review highlights the historical, pharmacological, and therapeutic significance of the text while underscoring its continued relevance in Ayurvedic medicine and modern botanical studies.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhavaprakasha is a cornerstone of Ayurvedic literature, authored by Bhavamishra in the 16th century. It stands as a significant milestone in the development of Indian medicine, existing at the intersection between the medieval and modern eras and marking a turning point in Ayurveda's evolution. Bhavamishra's work is notable for its revival of the *Samhita* style and its comprehensive nature, blending doctrinal and applied aspects of Ayurveda. The text is divided into three *Khandas* (sections), seven *Bhaga* (parts) and 80 *Prakarana* (chapters), making it a vast resource that covers various branches of Ayurvedic knowledge.

Bhavaprakasha is distinguished by its integration of ancient doctrines with contemporary knowledge, introducing new medicinal concepts and treatments. His contributions in drug classification are especially noteworthy, as he includes both traditional formulations from ancient texts and newly discovered medicinal substances. Many of these were introduced to India through external influences like Unani medicine. The Bhavaprakasha not only preserves the wisdom of classical Ayurveda but also expands its scope, incorporating new plants and treatments, making it a foundational text for both traditional and evolving Ayurvedic practices.

The relevance of Bhavaprakasha extends beyond its historical context; it continues to be a vital reference for practitioners and scholars of Ayurveda today. Its detailed descriptions of medicinal plants, formulations, and treatment methodologies provide a rich resource for understanding the intricacies of Ayurvedic healing. Furthermore, the text's emphasis on the therapeutic properties of various substances

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underscores the holistic approach of Ayurveda, which seeks to harmonize the body, mind, and spirit. By integrating traditional wisdom with practical applications, Bhavaprakasha not only serves as a guide for practitioners but also inspires ongoing research and exploration in the field of Ayurvedic medicine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review is primarily based on the Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, with a particular focus on the commentary by K.C. Chunekar. The analysis involves a detailed examination of the text's classification system, which organizes medicinal substances and dietary articles into distinct *Vargas* (groups). Additionally, Chunekar's commentary is critically reviewed to assess its contributions to modern plant identification, pharmacological insights, and the broader scope of Ayurvedic research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bhavaprakasha nighantu forms a part of the larger work Bhavaprakasha, one among the *laghutrayees*.

Bhavaprakasha^[1]

Bhavaprakasha is comprehensive in nature containing all important aspects of Ayurveda- doctrinal and applied – blended together. The author himself has stated at the outset that very important information and efficacious medicinal recipes have been collected from many reputed ancient texts and put in his book. [Bhavaprakasha 2/1]. The book is composed entirely in Sanskrit verses of different metres. It is needless to say that many verses of other texts have been incorporated, sources of many such borrowings mentioned either in the text or in the commentary.

Table 1: Structural Division of Bhavaprakasha

Khanda (Section)	Description
<i>Poorva Khanda</i> (First Section)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains 7 chapters in Part 1, covering foundational Ayurvedic concepts such as <i>Ayurvedavatharana</i> (origin of Ayurveda), <i>Srushti Prakarana</i> (creation theory), <i>Garbha Prakarana</i> (embryology), <i>Bala Prakarana</i> (pediatrics), <i>Dinacharya Prakarana</i> (daily regimen), and <i>Mishra Prakarana</i> (miscellaneous topics). Part 2 consists of 1 chapter with 7 subchapters, focusing on: -<i>Manaparibhasha Prakarana</i> (philosophical definitions) -<i>Bheshajavidhana Prakarana</i> (principles of medicine preparation) -<i>Dhatwadishodhana Maranavidhi Prakarana</i> (purification and incineration of metals and minerals) -<i>Snehapanavidhi Prakarana</i> (rules of oleation therapy) -<i>Panchakarmavidhi Prakarana</i> (procedures of Panchakarma) -<i>Dhumapanavidhi Prakarana</i> (rules of medicated smoking) -<i>Rogipareeksha Prakarana</i> (methods of patient examination).
<i>Madhyama Khanda</i> (Middle Section)	Entirely dedicated to disease diagnosis and treatments.
<i>Uttara Khanda</i> (Final Section)	Focuses on <i>Vajikarana</i> (aphrodisiac therapy) and <i>Rasayana</i> (rejuvenation therapy), discussing formulations and practices to enhance vitality and longevity.

Author: Bhavamishra

Bhavamishra, the author of Bhavaprakasha, provides minimal personal details within his text. However, based on critical analysis of the work and references from other literature, scholars have made the following observations:

1. Identity and Background

- In the invocatory verse, Bhavamishra mentions his name.
- In the colophon of each chapter, he mentions his father's name as Latakanamishra.
- No direct information is available about his birthplace, residence, or professional affiliations in the text.

2. Scholarly Assumptions About Bhavamishra

Based on textual evidence, historians and Ayurveda scholars infer:

- He was an orthodox Brahmin.

- He likely belonged to Magadha (South Bihar), as he mentions regional food varieties known specifically in Magadha.
- His residence is debated:
 - Priyavrat Sharma suggests Gaya.
 - Gananath Sen proposes Kanyakubja (Kanpur region, Uttar Pradesh).
 - Julius Jolly and others believe he lived in Varanasi (Banaras).
 - Further research is needed to confirm the exact location.
- He appears to have been an independent medical practitioner, as he does not mention any royal patronage or affiliation with a king or court.

3. Known Works by Bhavamishra

Bhavamishra is credited with four works, but only one is fully available today:

1. Bhavaprakasha – His most comprehensive work, still widely studied in Ayurveda.
2. Gunaratnamala – A text that remains largely unavailable in print.
3. Madhavanidana Tippani – A commentary on Madhavanidana, details unknown.
4. Vaidya Nighantu – Another unavailable work.

Time Period

The timeline of Bhavamishra is estimated as 16th century AD based on references found in other texts:

- The latest text he cites is Madanapala Nighantu, completed in 1347 AD, meaning he lived after this period.
- His work is cited in 17th century texts such as Yogaratnakara and Vaidyajeevana

(Lolimbarajeeva), indicating he wrote before the late 1600s.

- Bhavaprakasha is the first Ayurvedic text to describe *Phiranga Roga* (Syphilis) and its treatment using *Chopachini* (*Smilax china*). Since syphilis spread widely in India only in the 16th century, this supports the conclusion that Bhavamishra belonged to the 16th century AD.

Bhavaprakasha Nighantu

The *Nighantu* (lexicon) section of Bhavaprakasha is a significant contribution to Ayurvedic *Dravyaguna* (pharmacology). It classifies medicinal substances and dietary articles into 23 *Vargas* (groups), forming part of Chapter 6 of the text. This section has been widely studied and published separately with detailed notes by modern scholars.

Table 2: Classification of Drugs and Dietary Articles in Bhavaprakasha Nighantu

Varga (Group)	Description
<i>Haritakyadi Varga</i>	Includes fruits, roots, and tubers commonly used in medicine
<i>Karpuradi Varga</i>	Describes <i>Sugandhi Dravyas</i> (aromatic substances)
<i>Guduchyadi Varga</i>	Covers plants whose <i>Panchanga</i> (all parts) are used medicinally
<i>Pushpa Varga</i>	Contains descriptions of flowering plants and their medicinal properties
<i>Vatadi Varga</i>	Groups large trees and discusses the medicinal uses of their <i>Valkala</i> (bark)
<i>Amradiphala Varga</i>	Focuses on trees whose fruits are used therapeutically.
<i>Dhatupadhaturasoparasa ratnoparatnavishopavisha Varga</i>	Describes metals, minerals, gemstones, poisons, and antidotes used in Ayurveda
<i>Dhanya Varga</i>	Classifies various grains and cereals used in diet and medicine
<i>Shaka Varga</i>	Lists vegetables and green leafy plants with their therapeutic benefits
<i>Mamsa Varga</i>	Covers different types of meats and their Ayurvedic properties
<i>Kritanna Varga</i>	Describes processed and cooked foods (<i>Kritanna</i> means "prepared food")
<i>Vari Varga</i>	Details various types of water and their medicinal effects
<i>Dugdha Varga</i>	Discusses the medicinal properties of milk from different sources
<i>Dadhi Varga</i>	Focuses specifically on curd (yogurt) and its therapeutic applications
<i>Takra Varga</i>	Covers buttermilk, its varieties, and medicinal benefits
<i>Navaneeta Varga</i>	Describes butter and its uses in Ayurveda
<i>Ghruta Varga</i>	Discusses ghee (clarified butter) and its medicinal significance
<i>Mutra Varga</i>	Explores the uses of urine (animal-based), which has a role in Ayurvedic therapies
<i>Taila Varga</i>	Describes various oils and their medicinal applications
<i>Sandhana Varga</i>	Covers fermented preparations used in medicine, such as <i>Asava</i> and <i>Arishta</i>
<i>Madhu Varga</i>	Discusses honey and its extensive therapeutic properties
<i>Ikshu Varga</i>	Describes sugarcane and its derivatives, including jaggery and sugar
<i>Anekarthanama Varga</i>	Provides a cross-referential compilation of Ayurvedic drugs and their multiple names

Key Features of Bhavaprakasha Nighantu

- The *Nighantu* section provides synonyms, regional names, properties, and actions of each drug.

- It incorporates newly introduced substances, including those from Unani medicine and Western influences.
- Bhavamishra is credited with expanding Ayurveda's *Materia Medica*, adding previously unknown drugs to the Ayurvedic pharmacopeia.

Contribution of Bhavamishra to Dravyaguna²

Bhavamishra played a significant role in expanding the Ayurvedic *Materia Medica* by integrating new medicinal substances and refining classifications. His contributions are evident in the Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, where he documented numerous drugs, including those introduced through external influences like Unani medicine.

1. Integration of Hindu and Muslim Medical Traditions

- The period of Bhavamishra saw a cultural exchange between Hindu and Muslim medicinal systems.
- This is reflected in his use of Persian and Arabic-origin names such as:
 - *Parasika Yavani* (Ajwain - Carom seeds)
 - *Ahiphena* (Opium)
 - *Bhanga* (Cannabis)
 - *Jayapala* (Croton seed)
 - *Kharjura* (Date palm)

2. Introduction of New Drugs into Ayurveda

Bhavamishra documented several new medicinal plants and substances that were either newly identified or introduced to India.

Table 3: Newly Described Drugs by Bhavamishra

Drug Name	Description & uses
<i>Parasikavacha</i>	A plant introduced from Persia, medicinal properties unknown
<i>Dvipantaravacha</i>	Possibly an imported variety of <i>Vacha</i> (<i>Acorus calamus</i>)
<i>Pudina</i>	Recognized as <i>Mentha</i> (mint), widely used in Unani medicine
<i>Markkandika</i>	Likely a medicinal plant used in wound healing
<i>Sauveera</i>	Describes a variety of fermented drink used medicinally
<i>Chhohara</i>	Describes dried dates (<i>Kharjura</i>), emphasizing their nutritional and medicinal value
<i>Darusita</i>	Identified as <i>Cinnamomum</i> species (<i>Darusita</i> - Cinnamon)
<i>Kalambaka</i>	A plant whose details are unclear but possibly related to <i>Acorus calamus</i>
<i>Chandrasura</i>	Identified as <i>Lepidium sativum</i> (<i>Garden cress</i>), used for digestion and metabolism
<i>Kulanjana</i>	Possibly <i>Alpinia galanga</i> (Greater Galangal), used in respiratory ailments
<i>Amragandhiharidra</i>	A turmeric variety with a mango-like aroma, used in skin diseases
<i>Chukra</i>	Details unclear, possibly a regional medicinal plant
<i>Latakasturi</i>	A plant with aromatic seeds used in perfumery and medicine
<i>Gandhakokila/ Gandhamalati</i>	Aromatic plant with potential antimicrobial properties
<i>Chilhaka</i>	Unidentified medicinal plant, possibly used in folk medicine
<i>Charmakaraluka</i>	Likely a plant used for treating skin conditions
<i>Aluka</i>	Could refer to <i>Colocasia</i> or <i>Dioscorea</i> species, used in Ayurveda
<i>Amravarta</i>	Possibly a variety of mango (<i>Amra</i>), valued for its medicinal fruit
<i>Makhanna</i>	Recognized as <i>Euryale ferox</i> (Fox nut), a nutritive and medicinal seed
<i>Kumudabija</i>	Possibly derived from <i>Kumuda</i> (<i>Nymphaea</i> species), used in cooling therapies
<i>Chinaka Karpura</i>	Likely a camphor variety imported from China
<i>Chichinda</i>	Recognized as <i>Trichosanthes dioica</i> (Pointed gourd), used in digestion
<i>Garjara</i>	Identified as <i>Daucus carota</i> (Carrot), noted for its nutritive and digestive benefits
<i>Khakhasatila</i>	Possibly <i>Papaver somniferum</i> (Poppy seeds), used for its sedative properties
<i>Sarjarasataila</i>	A medicinal oil extracted from <i>Shorea robusta</i> (Sal tree)

3. Concept of *Pratinidhi Dravya* (Substitutes for Rare Drugs)

- Recognizing the difficulty in obtaining certain herbs, Bhavamishra suggested substitutes for rare drugs.
- Example:
 - *Ashtavarga* herbs (highly valued rejuvenating plants) were difficult to obtain, so substitutes were recommended:
 - *Meda & Mahameda* → *Shatavari*
 - *Kakoli & Kshirakakoli* → *Ashwagandha*
 - *Jeevaka & Rishabhaka* → *Vidarikanda*
 - *Riddhi & Vriddhi* → *Varahikanda*
 - *Vaishya* (yellow soil)
 - *Shudra* (black soil)
 - (This contrasts with Sushruta's five-type soil classification based on *Panchamahabhuta*).
- *Prayojyanga* (Usable Plant Parts): Described in detail for each drug.
- *Dravyaguna Siddhanta* (Basic Principles of Pharmacology): Explained in depth.

4. Standardization of *Dravya Pariksha Vidhi* (Testing of Genuine Drugs)

- Bhavamishra provided specific tests to ensure the authenticity and quality of drugs.
- Example: *Uttama Haritaki Lakshana* (Characteristics of high-quality *Haritaki*).

5. Classification of *Audbhida Dravyas* (Plant-Based Substances)

- Divided into five types:
 - *Vanaspati* – Trees bearing fruits without flowers.
 - *Vanaspatya* – Trees bearing both flowers and fruits.
 - *Kshupa* – Shrubs.
 - *Valli* – Creepers and climbers.
 - *Aushadhi* – Herbs that complete their life cycle in one season.

6. New Principles in *Dravyaguna*

- *Karma* (Pharmacological Actions): Classified drugs based on properties such as *Deepana* (appetizer), *Pachana* (digestive stimulant), etc.
- *Bhoomi* (Soil Classification): Proposed a four-type soil classification based on *Varna* (caste system):
 - *Brahmana* (white soil)
 - *Kshatriya* (red soil)

7. Compilation of *Anekarthanama Varga* (Multiple Synonyms of Drugs)

- Useful for cross-referencing plant names in Ayurveda.
- Categorized synonyms based on meaning:
 - 114 *Dwiartha Nama* (two-meaning names)
 - 84 *Triartha Nama* (three-meaning names)
 - 3 *Chaturartha Nama* (four-meaning names)
 - 4 *Bahuartha Nama* (multiple meanings)

Commentaries on *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*¹

Unlike many classical Ayurvedic texts, *Bhavaprakasha* does not have traditional Sanskrit commentaries. However, glosses and explanatory notes were provided by Bhavamishra himself within the text. Over time, several scholars have contributed to its interpretation, particularly in Hindi and other local languages.

1. Sanskrit Commentaries

- No fully developed Sanskrit commentary exists on *Bhavaprakasha*.
- However, glosses and explanatory notes were added by Bhavamishra in certain sections where he deemed clarification necessary.

2. Hindi Commentaries

- Several Hindi scholars have written commentaries, making the text more accessible:

Table 4. Hindi Commentaries

Commentator	Title of Commentary	Key Features
Pandit Shivasharma	Shivaprakashika	One of the earliest Hindi commentaries, providing a verse-by-verse explanation.
Dr. Vishwanath Dwivedi	N/A	Focuses on linguistic analysis and the interpretation of plant names.
Dr. Krishna Chand Chunekar	Commentary on <i>Bhavaprakasha Nighantu</i>	The most detailed modern commentary, covering plant identification, properties, uses, and cross-references with other texts.

Commentary by Dr. K.C. Chunekar^[3]

The most significant and widely accepted modern commentary on *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu* is the one written by Dr. Krishna Chand Chunekar. His work provides in-depth explanations and integrates

scientific advancements with traditional Ayurvedic knowledge.

Key Features of Chunekar's Commentary

- Hindi translation of the original Sanskrit verses.

- Plant names in various Indian languages for better identification.
- English and Latin botanical names for scientific reference.
- Place of origin of different medicinal plants.
- Chemical constituents of Ayurvedic substances.
- Pharmacological properties and therapeutic uses of each plant.
- Standardized quantities for medicinal formulations.
- Clarification of ambiguous drugs, identifying multiple sources where a name might refer to different substances.
- Comparative analysis with other Nighantus and Samhitas.
- Research scope-highlighting areas requiring further scientific validation.

Chunekar's Approach to Identifying Ambiguous Drugs

One of Chunekar's major contributions was clarifying plant identities when a single name referred to multiple species.

Example: *Murva* (Clearing Nut/*Tylophora indica*)

- Problem: *Murva* was historically used to refer to multiple plants.
- Chunekar's Solution: He identified six different sources of *Murva* and provided distinct descriptions for each.

Appendices in Chunekar's Commentary

Chunekar's work includes additional reference materials:

Appendix 1- Describes major substances not mentioned in the original text.

Appendix 2- Provides an alphabetical list of Sanskrit synonyms used in the text.

Indian Name Index- Lists plant names in various regional languages.

Latin & English Name Index - For modern scientific reference.

Significance of Commentaries

- The commentaries, especially Chunekar's, bridge ancient Ayurvedic knowledge with modern botanical science.

- They aid in plant identification, standardization, and practical application in contemporary Ayurveda.
- They serve as a vital reference for researchers, scholars, and practitioners exploring Ayurvedic pharmacology.

CONCLUSION

The Bhavaprakasha Nighantu stands as a significant milestone in the evolution of Ayurvedic *Dravyaguna*, bridging ancient knowledge with contemporary insights. Bhavamishra's contributions, particularly in expanding the Materia Medica, integrating new medicinal substances, and standardizing drug classifications, have had a lasting impact on Ayurvedic pharmacology. His documentation of newly introduced herbs and formulations reflects the dynamic nature of Ayurveda, which has continually evolved through cultural and scientific exchanges.

The commentary by Dr. K.C. Chunekar further enhances the relevance of Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, providing a modern scientific perspective on plant identification, therapeutic properties, and standardization. This commentary serves as a crucial resource for scholars, practitioners, and researchers exploring Ayurvedic pharmacology.

By preserving classical wisdom while embracing innovation, Bhavaprakasha Nighantu remains a timeless reference in Ayurveda, offering valuable insights for both traditional practice and modern research in medicinal plant sciences. Its study continues to inspire advancements in Ayurvedic medicine, ensuring its relevance in the present and future healthcare landscape.

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*Address for correspondence

Dr. BS Indu

PG Scholar

Department of Dravyaguna Vigyan,

Mannam Ayurveda Co-operative

Medical College, Pandalam, Kerala.

Email: indusreevkm@gmail.com

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