



Review Article

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF DALHANA'S NIBANDHASAMGRAHA COMMENTARY ON SUSHRUTA SAMHITA WITH EMPHASIS ON TERMINOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Sushruta Samhita is one of the major and foundational texts of Ayurveda. Various commentaries have been written in this but Nibandhasamgraha of Dalhana is one of the authoritative commentaries. This commentary is given importance for its clarity and depth. It helps to grasp the difficult terms and complex ideas in Sushruta Samhita. This paper sets on a detailed analysis of Dalhana's unique approach to terminology, emphasizing his methodological approach to defining, contextualizing, and clarifying technical terms. Through this study, twenty primary categories of terms have been identified, including those related to anatomy, diseases, mental health, therapeutic procedures, symptoms, dietetics, medical tools, and spiritual concepts. The majority of terms fall within the realms of specific definitions, sign and symptoms, treatments and procedures, and psychological terms. By the categorization and analysis of these terminologies, this paper reveals the depth of Nibandhasamgraha's scholarly contributions and features its role in linking contemporary text with practical application. Such a study helps in deepening the understanding of Ayurvedic classics and offers perspective relevance to contemporary research and practice. It also offers a backbone for future inter-disciplinary research in Ayurveda, Sanskrit philology, and history of medicine. Further, structured use of terminology also supports standardization of Ayurvedic glossology, which is crucial for translation, teaching, and global integration of Ayurveda.

Keywords: Nibandhasamgraha, Dalhana, Ayurvedic Lexicon, Sushruta Samhita, Ayurvedic Commentaries

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Ayurvedic literatures are full of critical terminologies. These specialized terms are more than mere labels; they embody profound clinical and philosophical insights grounded in ancient Indian traditions. Ayurvedic terminologies are dynamic and can change their meanings depending on the context, while it is not same for the modern counterparts. Modern medical terminologies often have definitions which are fixed. To get the exact meaning of these terminologies, both verbatim knowledge and critical thinking capacity are required. Ayurvedic experts mostly depend on commentaries for overall understanding of these terms. Among these, the Nibandhasamgraha by Dalhana serves as a critical evaluation of the Sushruta Samhita. It was written around the 12th century CE; Sushruta Samhita is one of the foundational texts of Ayurveda. It is particularly renowned for its detailed annotation on surgery. It presents a colossal of knowledge through a specialized vocabulary, composed in Sanskrit. It is both technical and context dependent. It is essential to interpret these terms accurately to know the text accurately. And for this task, classical commentaries, especially NS, became indispensable. Nibandhasamgraha is particularly given importance for its systematic approach to terminology, clarifications of ambiguous concepts, and integration of references from other important Ayurvedic texts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While the Nibandhasamgraha has been acknowledged in various studies, ^{1,2} but there is lack of focused analysis on Dalhana's terminological contribution. Existing literature primarily explores the historical and philological significance of commentaries but does not extensively catalog the lexicon utilized by Dalhana.

Analysis of terminology in Nibandhasamgraha

Precision in Definitions

Dalhana consistently provides precise and context-sensitive definitions of terms such as Angasada³, Kshweda⁴, Bhrama⁵ etc. His explanations often include functional interpretations, thereby enriching the clinical relevance of these concepts.

Philological and Grammatical Commentary

Dalhana's notes often extend to etymology and grammatical structures⁶, offering linguistic clarity. His philological approach helps in understanding not only the literal but also the contextual meanings of medical terms.

Contextual Relevance

Dalhana adapted his terminological explanations based on surgical, therapeutic and diagnostic contexts, ensuring that readers grasp the intended application in varied scenarios within the Sushruta Samhita.

An analysis of terminologies found in the Nibandhasamgraha commentary revealed that they fall into 20 distinct categories. The distribution of these categories by percentage is as follows: Specific definition related (15.92%), Signs and Symptoms related (11.85%), Treatment/ Procedures related (10.37%), Food/ Medicine related (10%), Psychological terms (9.62%), Animals

and spiritual terms (7.4% each), Instruments/Objects related (4.81%), Person related (4.44%), Anatomical terms (3.7%), Clothing related (3.33%), Pathological terms (2.96%), Physiological terms (2.22%), Plants related (1.85%), Place, Language, Etiology (1.11% each) and Measurement-related terms being the least common at 0.37% [Figure 1].

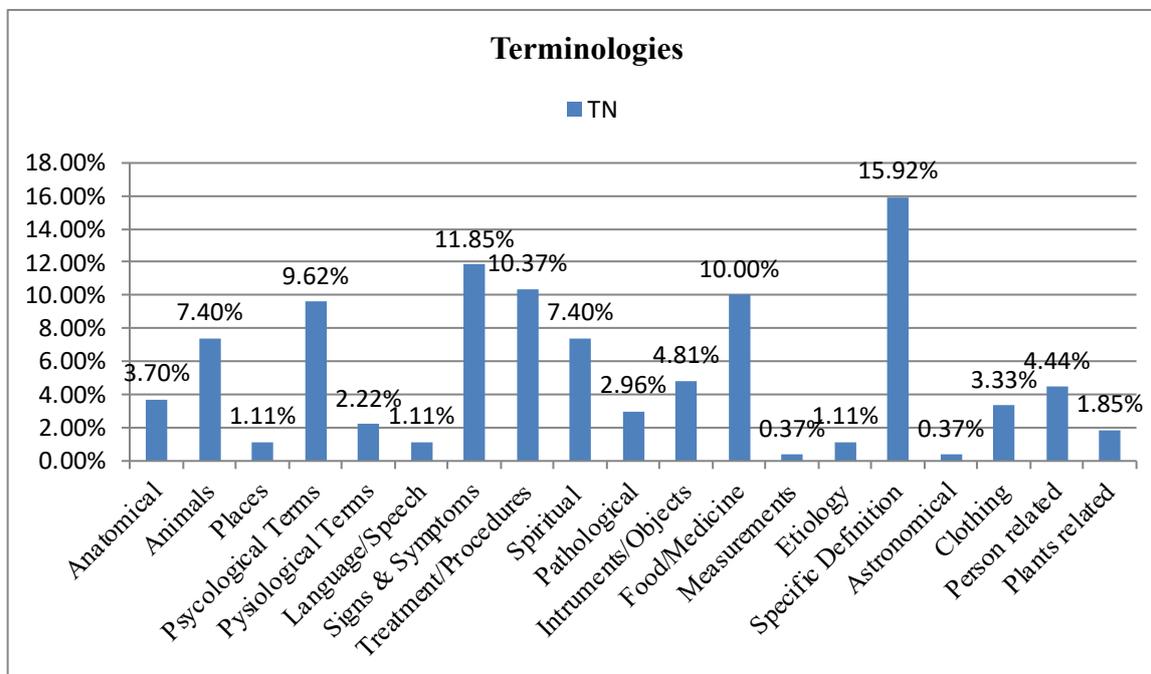


Figure 1: Distribution of Terminologies

DISCUSSION

The quantitative classification of terminologies in Dalhana’s Nibandhasamgraha commentary reveals the depth and diversity of subject matter addressed in classical Ayurvedic literature. A total of 20 distinct categories were identified, underscoring the multidisciplinary scope of Dalhana’s interpretive work.

The largest proportion of terminologies falls under the category of specific definitions (15.92%), indicating Dalhana’s strong emphasis on definitional clarity and semantic precision. This aligns with the commentarial tradition’s pedagogical aim: to equip readers with a functional and contextual understanding of technical terms, especially where primary texts are ambiguous.

Notably, signs and symptoms-related terms (11.8%) and treatment/procedures-related terms (10.37%) also represent significant portions. This suggests that Dalhana not only clarifies conceptual definitions but also bridges theory with clinical application.

A considerable share of terminologies is associated with psychological (9.62%) and spiritual (7.4%) domains, reflecting the holistic overview of Ayurveda.

The presence of animal-related (7.4%), instrument/object-related (4.81%) terminology further supports the notion that Dalhana’s work was grounded in practical knowledge systems, encompassing surgical tools, and biological resources involved in the medical process.

Categories like anatomical (3.7%), food/medicine (10%), and pathological (2.96%) terms appear in moderate frequencies,

affirming the detailed exposition of bodily structures, pharmacological concepts, and disease conditions.

Less represented categories, such as language-related (1.11%), measurement (0.37%), and clothing (3.33%), while minor in frequency, still demonstrate Dalhana’s attention to contextual accuracy, especially in describing ancient procedures, environments or societal norms.

This categorization illustrates that Nibandhasamgraha is not merely a supplementary text- it is comprehensive encyclopedic resource, with terminological diversity extending across anatomical, spiritual, psychological, and procedural dimensions of Ayurveda. Thus, Nibandhasamgraha functions not just as a commentary, but as a lexical and conceptual bridge- preserving the precision of classical Ayurveda while making it accessible for learners.

CONCLUSION

Dalhana’s Nibandhasamgraha is far more than a traditional commentary - it is a comprehensive scholarly work that systematically interprets, clarifies, and preserves the deeper meanings embedded within Sushruta Samhita. One of the most remarkable aspects of his commentary is his methodical approach to terminology. Through careful analysis of over 20 categories of terms, including those related to anatomy, symptoms, psychology, treatment procedures, spirituality, and definitions, this study highlights Dalhana’s meticulous effort to enhance the understanding of complex Ayurvedic concepts.

The finding that the largest share of terminologies falls under categories such as specific definitions (15.92%), signs and

symptoms (11.8%), and treatment-related terms (10.37%) suggests that Dalhana was deeply concerned with ensuring clarity in both theoretical and clinical domains. In today's context, where efforts are being made to modernize and globalize Ayurveda, Dalhana's work remains highly relevant. His terminological precision can aid in the standardization of Ayurvedic vocabulary for research, education, and clinical practice.

The Nibandhasamgraha of Dalhana exemplifies a sophisticated blend of linguistic acumen, clinical insight, and scholarly depth. His work bridges ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with practical application, linguistic insight, and pedagogical clarity. His terminological framework remains essential for comprehending the Sushruta Samhita and serves as a guide for current and future Ayurvedic scholars.

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