

ROLE OF SANSKRIT LANGUAGE IN THE STUDY AND UNDERSTANDING OF AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

***Miss. Arjavi Vikas Deo**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit Samhita Siddhant., Bhojraj Bhondekar Ayurved
Mahavidyalaya, Sirsi Bhandara, Maharashtra, India.

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***Corresponding Author: Miss. Arjavi Vikas Deo**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit Samhita Siddhant., Bhojraj Bhondekar Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Sirsi
Bhandara, Maharashtra, India.

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ABSTRACT:

Both textual and practical knowledge are indispensable for learning and applying any scientific discipline. To comprehensively understand a text, it is essential to attain proficiency in the language in which the original work is composed. The science of *Ayurveda* is documented in *Sanskrit*, a language characterized by a highly systematic and scientific grammatical structure. Through the application of prefixes and suffixes, a single lexical root can convey multiple meanings. Moreover, the same root may express different interpretations when classified under distinct grammatical groups and subjected to varied grammatical processes. Therefore, thorough knowledge of Sanskrit and its grammatical tools is crucial for accurately comprehending and interpreting scientific texts written in this language.

KEYWORDS: *Sanskrit*, *Ayurveda*, Language, Prefixes, Suffixes.

INTRODUCTION:

Sanskrit is a language that preserves and upholds the rich intellectual and cultural legacy of India at a global level. It is traditionally revered as *Devabhasha*, meaning the “language of the divine.” The term *Sanskrit* is derived from the prefix *sam* (denoting *samyak*, i.e., “perfect” or “complete”) and *kṛta* (“done” or “formed”), collectively conveying the sense of refinement and perfection. Accordingly, Sanskrit is understood to signify “refined,” “consecrated,” and “sanctified.”

Sanskrit holds a unique position as one of the earliest languages to systematize its own grammatical framework. In the contemporary context, proficiency in *Sanskrit* is indispensable for comprehending classical *Ayurvedic* texts, which employ a distinctive and sophisticated mode of expression. As an ancient language, *Sanskrit* is the medium in which the *Vedas* were composed. Although *Ayurveda* later emerged as an independent scientific discipline, its foundational concepts are evident throughout the four *Vedas*, the *Śaddarsanas*, *Puraṇas*, and numerous other scientific and literary works.

The structural organization of *Ayurvedic* treatises, including their technical terminology, grammatical constructs, and interpretative tools, is derived from the broader *Sanskrit* literary tradition. The language was systematically codified by the eminent grammarian *Pāṇini* to facilitate the precise, logical, and elegant expression of scientific thought. *Pāṇini's* comprehensive grammatical treatise, consisting of 3,959 rules, laid the foundation for the rigorous and analytical nature of *Sanskrit*.^[1]

Therefore, familiarity with other *Sanskrit* texts becomes pivotal for the accurate comprehension of *Ayurvedic* literature. To attain an in-depth understanding of *Ayurveda*, proficiency in *Sanskrit*—the language in which the *Samhitas* are composed—is essential. Another distinctive feature of *Sanskrit* is its contextual specificity, which enables a single word to convey multiple meanings depending on the context and subject matter. These linguistic attributes play a crucial role in the effective learning and interpretation of *Ayurvedic* textbooks. Hence, the present article aims to review the *Sanskrit* language and highlight its significance in the study and understanding of the *Ayurvedic Samhitas*.

Interrelationship of *Samhitas* and *Sanskrit*

Linguistic Characteristics of *Sanskrit*

Ayurveda, the science of life, encompasses a wide range of concepts extending beyond the domains of disease and treatment to include all aspects related to the maintenance and promotion of health. These concepts are intricately embedded in the *Sanskrit* language. *Sanskrit* is a synthetic and highly inflected language, wherein a single word often represents a synthesis of multiple ideas.

Grammatically, *Sanskrit* words are broadly classified into nouns and verbs. The nominal system comprises twenty-one suffixes, while the verbal system includes nine suffixes. Nouns are declined across seven grammatical cases (*Vibhaktis*), namely *Prathama*, *Dvitiya*, *Trūtiya*, and others, each conveying specific relational meanings comparable to prepositions. Furthermore, nouns are inflected for three numbers—singular (*eka-vachana*), dual (*dvi-vachana*), and plural

(*bahu-vachana*), with the dual number being a distinctive feature that differentiates *Sanskrit* from many other languages.

Sanskrit also exhibits three grammatical genders—masculine (*pulinga*), feminine (*strilinga*), and neuter (*napumsakalinga*). These grammatical genders are not merely structural but often contribute to conveying specific nuances in meaning

For example:

बुक्कं (नपुंसकलिङ्ग) - बुक्कयति बुक्बुक् इत्यव्यक्तशब्दं करोति।

बुक्का (स्त्रीलिङ्ग) - शोणितम्।

बुक्कः (पुल्लिङ्ग) - बुक्कयति शब्दयते हति।^[2]

Linguistic Style of *Sanskrit*:

The *Sanskrit* language is traditionally believed to have evolved through systematic observation of the natural progression of sounds produced by the human vocal apparatus. This phonetic foundation is one of the primary reasons for the richness and precision of *Sanskrit* poetry.^[3] Broadly, *Sanskrit* literature employs two principal styles of composition: *shloka* (metrical) and prose.

The *shloka* style strictly adheres to metrical patterns (*vrutta*), which are determined by the number and arrangement of syllables (*aksharas*) within each *pada* (metrical quarter). Consequently, this style necessitates economy and precision in word usage. In this context, the grammatical devices of *sandhi* (euphonic combination) and *samasa* (compound formation) assume significant importance.

Specific rules governing *sandhi* enable the combination of words without the loss of essential grammatical endings. Various types of *sandhi* permit the substitution of two vowels with a single vowel or consonant, thereby reducing the number of *aksharas* and *matras* (units of pronunciation duration). These linguistic mechanisms facilitate conformity to metrical requirements while preserving semantic accuracy.

Example for *Sandhi* - योऽपूर्ववैधाय = यः + पूर्ववैधाय

In *Sanskrit*, two or more words that share a syntactic and semantic relationship may relinquish their individual case endings and combine to form a single unit. This process of word compounding is known as *samasa* (compound formation).

Example for *Samasa* – अधश्च मध्यश्चोर्ध्वं च - अधोमध्योर्ध्वानि।

In *Ayurveda*, the term *yathabalam* conveys the meaning *balam anatikramya*, that is, “within the limits of the patient’s strength.” In this expression, emphasis is placed not merely on *bala*

(strength) itself, but on the notion of moderation or limitation implied by “within.” Such precise contextual interpretation of terms is achieved through *nirukti*, the etymological derivation of words according to established grammatical principles.

The *nirukti* of *Vata Dosha* is expressed as “*va gati gandhanayoh vayuh*,”^[4] where *gati* denotes movement and *gandhana* signifies penetration or perforation. Through the application of *karmani* and *kartari pratyayas* derived from *krt* and *unadi* suffixes, *Vata* or *Vayu* is understood as that which performs or facilitates movement and penetration. The presence of *gati* and *gandhana* implies inherent qualities such as *laghutva* (lightness) and *rukshata* (dryness). Additionally, the *sukshma guna* (subtlety) and *chalatva* (mobility) of *Vata* can also be inferred. Thus, through *nirukti*, the intrinsic *gunas* of a particular *dosha* can be systematically understood, as described in the Ayurvedic *Samhitas*.^[5]

Certain Sanskrit terms do not have precise or equivalent counterparts in the English language. For example, the word *mantra* is etymologically derived as “*mananat trayate iti mantraḥ*”^[6], meaning “that which protects or liberates through contemplation.” In English, *mantra* is translated in various ways, such as “instrument of thought,” “speech,” “sacred utterance,” “incantation,” “spell,” or “counsel”^[7]. However, none of these translations adequately convey the inherent spiritual and philosophical dimensions encapsulated in the original *Sanskrit* term. Through *nirukti*, the precise and contextual meaning of such terms can be comprehensively understood.

Sanskrit possesses a unique capacity to express nuanced meanings across diverse contexts, often without direct equivalents in other languages. A single word may be derived in multiple ways to yield different shades of meaning depending on the subject and context. For instance, the term *roga* is derived as “*rujyate anena iti rogah*” and “*rujati iti rogah*”^[8]. Although both derivations denote “disease,” the former implies disease as an instrument that produces pain, whereas the latter signifies disease as an independent entity that directly causes pain. These distinctions arise from the specific suffixes applied to the root, highlighting the depth and precision of *Sanskrit* etymology.

Except for a few terms, most *Sanskrit* words possess the capacity to convey complete meaning independently, without reliance on adjoining words. Such words exhibit contextual specificity. *Anekarthapadas* (polysemous or context-dependent words) constitute a distinctive feature of *Sanskrit* literature, wherein the meaning of a single word varies according to the context in which it is employed. *Ayurveda*, as a scientific discipline, often encapsulates profound *shastrika* concepts within concise *shloka* form. Consequently, accurate contextual interpretation of individual terms is essential for a proper understanding of *shastra*.

Additionally, variations in accent and intonation can also alter the meaning of a word, further emphasizing the importance of precise linguistic comprehension.

Ayurveda incorporates numerous concepts and principles derived from various *Darshanas*. Several topics that are only briefly mentioned in Ayurvedic texts are elaborately explained in *Darshana Shastra*, with each philosophical system contributing distinct perspectives to the Ayurvedic corpus. These contributions are evident from the very opening verse of *Ashtanga Hrudaya, Sutrasthana*^[9]. In this context, the *Acharya* does not explicitly enumerate the components of *Ragaadi*. The term *Adi* implicitly encompasses *dvesha*, *mada*, *moha*, *matsarya*, and other allied mental afflictions in addition to *raga*. Such comprehensive interpretation becomes possible through proficiency in *Sanskrit* and familiarity with allied philosophical texts composed in the same language.

The various *Darshanas* have made significant and distinct contributions to the development of *Ayurvedic* thought. Fundamental concepts such as *Tridosha*, *Trigunaa*, *Purusha*, and *Satkaryavada* are derived from *Samkhya Darshana* and have been integrally incorporated into *Ayurveda*. Similarly, the epistemological tools (*Pramanas*)—*Pratyaksha* (perception), *Anumana* (inference), and *Aptopadesha* (authoritative testimony)—propounded in *Samkhya Darshana* are adopted by *Ayurveda* for the acquisition of knowledge and play a crucial role in the diagnosis of diseases.

Nyaya Darshana and *Ayurveda* share common acceptance of the doctrines of *punarjanma* (rebirth) and *moksha* (liberation). The principles and practices of *Yoga Darshana* are assimilated into Ayurveda in the form of *Sattvavajaya* and *Daivavyapshraya Chikitsa*. *Pranayama*, which holds an important role in *Ayurvedic* practice, is also derived from *Darshana Shastra*. Furthermore, *Vaisheshika Darshana* emphasizes the attainment of *moksha* through the knowledge of the six *padarthas*, a philosophical framework that has influenced *Ayurvedic* conceptualization.

Ayurvedic concepts are predominantly presented in the form of *shlokas*, which encompass multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. Hence, an in-depth knowledge of *Sanskrit* is indispensable for the proper understanding of *Ayurvedic Shastra*. To facilitate accurate interpretation, *Ayurveda* has adopted several analytical and interpretative tools from *Sanskrit* literature, including *Tantrayukti*, *Tantraguṇa*, *Arthasraya*, and *Sabdarthabodhaka vritti*.

Among these, *Tantrayukti* plays a pivotal role in the systematic analysis of *Shastra*. Its primary purpose is to ascertain whether a statement contains implicit ideas that can be elucidated through *vakyayojana* (syntactic arrangement) and *arthayojana* (semantic interpretation). Meaningful contemplation (*manana*) and critical analysis (*chintana*) of the *shastra* require

prior knowledge of *Tantrayukti*. *Tantraguna* serves as an auxiliary framework that helps preserve the intrinsic qualities of the *Shastra*. The orderly arrangement of topics (*sthanas*) in the *Samhitas* reflects the application of *Tantrayukti*, particularly through the principle of *kramagatartha*^[10].

Nyayas are also employed as effective tools to simplify complex doctrines and concepts. *Ayurvedic* commentators extensively utilize *Nyayas* to convey precise and contextually appropriate meanings. For instance, while explaining the sequential placement of *chatushkas*, *Kalpana Chatushka* is described after *Nirdesha Chatushka*, as an understanding of disease, body constitution, and *sadhyasadyata* is essential before discussing therapeutic procedures. This logical arrangement can be elucidated through *Suchikhata Nyaya*.

Similarly, *Khadadiṣu mrdadivat Nyaya* is instrumental in explaining the concept of *samavayi sambandha* of *doshas* in the pathogenesis of disease, enabling scholars to comprehend subtle theoretical constructs. *Ayurveda* also emphasizes *Khalekapotha Nyaya* and *Ketara-kulya Nyaya* to explain the fundamental concept of *dhatu parinama*, which describes the sequential formation of *dhatu*s from their preceding constituents. Thus, *Nyayas* provide an essential gateway to uncovering the implicit meanings embedded within the *Ayurvedic Samhitas*.

Upamas (similes) constitute another significant contribution of *Sanskrit* literary tradition to *Ayurvedic* literature. By drawing parallels with commonly observed objects or phenomena, complex concepts can be conveyed in a manner that is easily comprehensible. Accordingly, the *Samhitas* employ numerous *upamas* to elucidate aspects of *chikitsa*, *roga*, *nidana*, and related subjects.

For instance, in *jvara chikitsa*, the *Acharyas* describe the increase of *kapha* during the intake of *peya* as being comparable to the formation of slush on sandy soil following rainfall^[11]. Similarly, the colour of *ojas* is compared to *ghruta* (ghee), while its taste is likened to *madhu* (honey)^[12]. Such *upamas* are employed to provide conceptual clarity regarding otherwise imperceptible or abstract entities like *ojas*. In the same manner, the colour of *Shuddha Rakta* is illustrated using similes such as *tapaniya*, *indragopa*, and *gunjaphala-savarna*.^[13]

Upamas are also utilized to describe anatomical structures, as exemplified by the depiction of the heart resembling a downward-facing lotus^[14]. In diagnostic contexts, similes assist in clinical identification; for example, a patient suffering from *kushtha* is recognized by skin lesions resembling the *udumbara* fruit^[15]. Furthermore, certain disease features and clinical conditions are named based on *upamas*, such as *Urustambha*, *krostukashirsha*, and *padadaha*. Thus, *upamas* serve as an effective pedagogical and interpretative tool in *Ayurveda*, facilitating deeper understanding of both theoretical and clinical concepts.

Sanskrit has also made significant contributions to *Dravyaguna Shastra*, particularly in the identification and understanding of medicinal substances. The synonyms (*paryayas*) attributed to drugs are often derived from their morphological features, *karma* (pharmacological action), *guna* (qualities), or therapeutic properties. Through these synonyms, the morphology and functional attributes of plants can be effectively inferred.

For example, *Jatila* and *Lomasha* are synonyms of *Jatamansi*, indicating the presence of hairy or matted root structures. *Pitadharu* is a synonym of *Devadaru*, reflecting the yellow coloration of its wood. Similarly, the *madhura rasa* of *Draksha* can be inferred from its synonym *Svadhi*, while the toxic nature of the fruit of *Kupeelu* is suggested by the term *Vishatintu*.

Synonyms also aid in understanding the therapeutic actions of drugs. For instance, *Sankhapushpi* is referred to as *medhya*, denoting its role in promoting intellect; *Haridra*, known as *Jvarantika*, indicates its efficacy in alleviating *jvara*; and the synonym *Vishagni* signifies its antidotal action against poisons. Thus, Sanskrit nomenclature serves as an essential tool in conveying comprehensive pharmacogenetic and therapeutic information in *Dravyaguna Shastra*.

Ayurveda adopts the literary style and structural framework prevalent in other classical Sanskrit texts and epics. Renowned Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* employ a systematic organization by dividing the text into *kandas*, each comprising multiple subdivisions. Similarly, the *Charaka Samhita* organizes its chapters into distinct thematic groupings known as *chatushtkas*, such as *Bheshaja Chatushtka*, *Kalpana Chatushtka*, and *Nirdesha Chatushtka*. The *Ashtanga Hrudaya* further classifies the *Sutrasthana* into two broad divisions, namely *Karmakanda* and *Jnanakanda*. Likewise, *Bija Chatushtka* represents the methodological framework adopted by *Sushruta* for systematic exposition of the *Samhita*.

The concise and aphoristic expression of concepts in the *Samhitas* reflects the influence of *Sanskrit* grammatical traditions, particularly the *sutra* methodology propounded by Panini. This grammatical precision facilitates the condensation of extensive scientific ideas into succinct *shlokas*. Furthermore, *Sanskrit* literature emphasizes a strict order in the enumeration of concepts, a feature consistently observed in *Ayurvedic* texts. For instance, the sequence of *shadhrasas* is maintained throughout the *Samhitas*, and similar ordered presentation is evident in descriptions of *doshas*, *dhatu*s, and *malas*. Familiarity with these sequences is essential for *Ayurvedic* scholars for accurate comprehension of *Shastra* and its effective application in clinical practice.

Several concepts elucidated in *Ayurvedic Samhitas* also find parallels in classical epics. The description of *masanumasa garbha vruddhi* in the *Kiskindha Kanda* of the *Ramayana* closely

resembles explanations found in Ayurvedic classics^[16]. The *Mahabharata* also contains references to *svasthyalakshana* and *triguna* theory. Drawing upon foundational ideas from *Vedic* literature and epic texts, *Ayurveda* evolved and emerged as a distinct and systematic scientific discipline.

Pedagogical Approaches in *Ayurvedic* Education:

Adhyayana Vidhi refers to the systematic methodology prescribed for the comprehension of *Shastra*. The *Samhitakaras* employed specific pedagogical strategies to facilitate effective learning, addressing the cognitive capacities of *trividha Shishya buddhi*. According to *Vaidika Acharyas*, the study of the Vedas involves five established methods—*pada*, *patha*, *krama*, *ratha*, and *jata*. Among these, *ratha* and *jata* are particularly utilized by scholars for advanced exposition of subject matter. Since *Ayurveda* is regarded as an *Upaveda*, the *Adhyayana Vidhi* prescribed for the Vedas is also applicable to *Ayurvedic* learning.

In *Ayurveda*, *Tattvavidya*, *patha*, *avabodha*, *svadhyaya*, and *anusthana* are recognized as authentic and well-established methodologies for in-depth study of the *Shastra*. These approaches collectively ensure comprehensive understanding and practical assimilation of *Ayurvedic* knowledge.

Patha (systematic reading) is identified as the foundational *Adhyayana Vidhi* in Ayurvedic literature. Effective reading of the *Samhitas* necessitates fundamental linguistic competence, particularly *pada-Gyana*, which is attainable only through thorough knowledge of *aksharas* (alphabets). Each *akshara* possesses a distinct mode of articulation and accent, and accurate pronunciation is essential for correct comprehension. Even when the letters are known, improper pronunciation may hinder the accurate derivation of meaning, thereby emphasizing the importance of phonetic precision in *Ayurvedic* learning.

Sanskrit pedagogy traditionally follows a systematic progression comprising *pada- Gyana* (knowledge of individual words), *padartha- Gyana* (understanding word meanings), *vakya- Gyana* (comprehension of sentences), *vakyartha- Gyana* (interpretation of sentence meaning), and *anvaya* (syntactic re-arrangement). A word in *Sanskrit* is formed by the combination of a verbal root and appropriate suffixes to convey precise meaning. Hence, a thorough understanding of grammatical tools such as *sandhi*, *samasa*, *pratyaya*, *nirukti*, and *nishpatti* is essential for attaining *padartha- Gyana*.

Ayurveda embodies the essence of Indian philosophical systems such as *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, and *Samkhya*, which form the foundational pillars of Ayurvedic thought and constitute the *Shastrabhaga*. Classical *Acharyas* emphasize that the efficacy of *Shastra* depends upon the

competence of the individual who comprehends and applies it^[18]. Studying the *Samhitas* without understanding their *prayojana* (purpose) is metaphorically compared to *kakadanta-pariksha*—a futile endeavour.

In the contemporary era, the advancement of Ayurvedic *Shastra* relies upon critical analysis of its content and accurate interpretation. Therefore, for a comprehensive appreciation of *Ayurveda*, acquisition of fundamental knowledge of *Sanskrit* is indispensable. Such proficiency inspires and equips emerging *Ayurvedic* scholars to engage deeply with *Sanskrit* texts and derive profound scientific insights.

After the study (*patha*) of the *Samhitas*, *padavabodha*—the interpretative understanding of the text—becomes essential for effective communication of its content. Accurate comprehension requires knowledge of individual words (*padartha*) as well as the contextual meaning of sentences (*vakyartha*). *Avabodha* holds particular significance in *Ayurvedic* literature, as interpretation often varies according to the intellectual grasp and perspective of the reader, a characteristic intrinsic to the *Sanskrit* language.

Since *Ayurveda* is fundamentally a practical science, experiential learning (*anushtana*), interaction with subject experts, and continuous self-study (*svadhyaya*) are indispensable components of the learning process. Thus, a balanced integration of linguistic proficiency, textual understanding, and practical application forms the cornerstone of effective teaching and learning in *Ayurveda*.

Ayurveda is a comprehensive *Shastra* encompassing knowledge across eight specialized branches (*Ashtangas*). These *Ashtangas* are systematically presented in the *Samhitas* of classical *Acharyas* such as *Charaka*, *Sushruta*, and *Vagbhata*, distributed across different *sthanas*. The *Samhitas* often convey complex and profound concepts in concise *Shloka* form, which can be challenging for learners of limited aptitude (*alpabuddhi*) to comprehend. To facilitate both teaching and learning, the *ashtamarga* framework serves as an essential pedagogical and interpretative tool^[17].

CONCLUSION:

Mastery of the *Sanskrit* language is indispensable for reading and comprehending *Ayurvedic* texts. Without a sound knowledge of *Sanskrit*, understanding the essence of foundational Indian philosophies—such as *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, and *Samkhya*, which form the pillars of *Ayurveda* and constitute the *Shastrabhaga*—is not possible. Classical *Acharyas* emphasize that the effectiveness of learning depends on the ability of the individual to properly engage with the

Shastra ^[18]. Studying the *Samhitas* without awareness of their *prayojana* (purpose) is likened to a “*kakadanta-pariksha*,” a futile effort.

In the contemporary context, the advancement of Ayurvedic *Shastra* relies on careful analysis of textual content combined with accurate interpretation. Therefore, for a comprehensive appreciation of *Ayurveda*, acquiring foundational knowledge of *Sanskrit* is essential. This understanding encourages emerging *Ayurvedic* scholars to study *Sanskrit* texts thoroughly, thereby gaining profound and authentic knowledge of the science.

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