

Ayurveda And the Sanskrit Language: An Interdisciplinary Study of Knowledge, Medicine, And Linguistic Heritage

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Abstract—Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine originating in India, is deeply intertwined with the Sanskrit language. Sanskrit serves not merely as a medium of communication but as the intellectual framework through which Ayurvedic concepts, theories, and therapeutic practices have been preserved and transmitted for centuries. Classical Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya were composed in Sanskrit, making linguistic competence essential for accurate interpretation of Ayurvedic knowledge. This paper explores the historical relationship between Ayurveda and Sanskrit, examines the role of Sanskrit in preserving medical knowledge, and discusses the contemporary relevance of Sanskrit in Ayurvedic education and research. The study highlights that understanding Sanskrit is crucial for maintaining the authenticity and integrity of Ayurvedic science.

Index Terms—Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Traditional Medicine, Indian Knowledge Systems

I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, often translated as the “Science of Life,” is one of the world's oldest holistic healthcare systems. Originating in ancient India, it encompasses preventive healthcare, diagnosis, treatment, nutrition, and lifestyle management. The entire classical literature of Ayurveda was composed in Sanskrit, making the language an inseparable component of Ayurvedic knowledge. Sanskrit not only conveys medical information but also preserves philosophical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of healthcare. The relationship between Ayurveda and Sanskrit is unique because many Ayurvedic concepts possess meanings that cannot be precisely translated into modern languages. Terms such as Dosha, Dhatu, Agni,

Ojas, and Srotas embody complex physiological and philosophical ideas that require understanding of their Sanskrit roots.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ¹

The origins of Ayurveda can be traced to the Vedic period, particularly the Atharva Veda, which contains references to healing practices, medicinal plants, and disease management. Over time, Ayurvedic knowledge was systematically compiled into classical Sanskrit texts.

Major Sanskrit Ayurvedic texts include:

Charaka Samhita

Sushruta Samhita

Ashtanga Hridaya

These texts established the foundations of diagnosis, pharmacology, surgery, anatomy, pathology, and preventive medicine. Sanskrit served as the medium through which this knowledge was organized, codified, and transmitted across generations.

III. IMPORTANCE OF SANSKRIT IN AYURVEDA ²

3.1. Preservation of Original Knowledge

The original Ayurvedic scriptures are written in Sanskrit verses (shlokas). The concise nature of Sanskrit allows extensive medical knowledge to be expressed in a compact and memorable form. This facilitated oral transmission before widespread manuscript culture developed.

3.2. Precision of Terminology

Sanskrit possesses a highly structured grammatical system developed by Pāṇini. This precision enables

accurate description of medical phenomena, disease classifications, and therapeutic procedures. Many Ayurvedic concepts lose nuance when translated into modern languages.

3.3. Understanding of Ayurvedic Philosophy

Ayurveda is based on philosophical systems such as Sankhya and Vaisheshika. Sanskrit terminology provides direct access to these philosophical foundations, helping practitioners understand the theoretical basis of health and disease.

3.4. Interpretation of Medical Texts

Many Sanskrit words have multiple meanings depending on context. Accurate interpretation of Ayurvedic literature requires knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, syntax, and semantics. Without linguistic understanding, important clinical details may be misunderstood.

IV. SANSKRIT AND AYURVEDIC EDUCATION

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Modern Ayurvedic education continues to emphasize Sanskrit because students must study original texts. Research has indicated that familiarity with Sanskrit can improve comprehension of Ayurvedic literature and academic performance in Ayurvedic studies.

In Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) programs, Sanskrit remains an important subject because it enables students to:

- Read original Ayurvedic texts.
- Understand technical terminology.
- Interpret classical commentaries.
- Conduct textual research.

V. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

In recent years, global interest in Ayurveda has increased significantly. However, many translations of Ayurvedic texts simplify or alter original meanings. Scholars argue that preserving Sanskrit competence among researchers and practitioners is essential for maintaining the authenticity of Ayurvedic knowledge. Modern developments in digital humanities, artificial intelligence, and language technology are also facilitating the preservation and analysis of Sanskrit Ayurvedic texts. Specialized language models and

computational tools are being developed to improve access to traditional medical literature.

VI. CHALLENGES

Despite its importance, several challenges exist:

Declining proficiency in Sanskrit among students.

Dependence on translated texts.

Limited interdisciplinary research combining linguistics and Ayurveda.

Difficulty in conveying Sanskrit medical concepts in modern scientific terminology.

These challenges highlight the need for stronger integration of Sanskrit studies into Ayurvedic education and research.

VII. CONCLUSION

The relationship between Ayurveda and Sanskrit is foundational rather than incidental. Sanskrit is not merely the language of Ayurvedic literature; it is the vehicle through which Ayurvedic philosophy, theory, and clinical knowledge have been preserved for millennia. Understanding Sanskrit enables accurate interpretation of classical texts and helps maintain the integrity of Ayurvedic science. As Ayurveda gains international recognition, preserving Sanskrit scholarship will remain essential for authentic research, education, and clinical practice.

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