

Exploring Different Styles of Sanskrit Commentary Writing

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Abstract

The realm of Sanskrit literature and commentaries unveils a journey into ancient wisdom preserved in complex texts. This article explores the significance of Sanskrit commentaries in deepening the understanding of Ayurveda, an ancient science. Commentaries serve as guiding torches, dispelling obscurity and misinterpretation, especially in intricate subjects. Various styles of commentaries exist, each tailored to different domains, from philosophical inquiry to practical applications. Ayurveda, being a practical science, might not require extensive commentaries, but understanding diverse methodologies enriches its comprehension. Acknowledging the value of commentaries bridges the gap between antiquity and the present. By studying these methods, the Ayurvedic community can create contemporary commentaries that resonate with younger generations. The adoption of these techniques ensures the relevance of Ayurvedic wisdom across time, uniting ancient insights with modern understanding. Commentaries emerge as essential tools in preserving and disseminating knowledge, serving as bridges connecting the past with the future.

Key words : Sanskrit commentaries, Ayurveda, Methodology, Importance.

Sanskrit literature is a vast treasure trove of knowledge, carefully preserved over centuries. At its heart lies the tradition of commentaries, which serve as guiding lights to unravel the profound wisdom hidden within these ancient texts. These commentaries

clarify intricate concepts, resolve doubts, and prevent misinterpretations, ensuring the continuity of knowledge across generations. The diversity of Sanskrit commentarial styles reflects the unique needs of different disciplines. Philosophical systems like *Nyāya* and *Vedānta*

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rely heavily on exhaustive commentaries to explore complex ideas, while practical fields such as Ayurveda, *Nāṭyaśāstra* (performing arts), and *Gaṇitaśāstra* (mathematics) prioritize functional understanding and application.

In Ayurveda, the primary focus is on practical wisdom—interpreting classical principles to align with modern scientific approaches while preserving the essence of the tradition. To achieve this, a deep understanding of the original Sanskrit commentaries is essential. These works not only explain the foundational texts but also provide the necessary tools for systematic study and application of Ayurvedic principles.

Sanskrit holds a special place in Ayurveda, as the ancient texts and their commentaries are written in this language. Learning Sanskrit alongside Ayurveda enables a deeper grasp of the classical knowledge. This dual understanding is crucial for preserving and advancing Ayurvedic wisdom in contemporary times.

Studying the various commentarial traditions offers valuable insights for modern scholars and students of Ayurveda. These traditions provide techniques and strategies for interpreting texts, enhancing both understanding and presentation. They also highlight the importance of adapting knowledge to meet the needs of the present while respecting the original principles.

By exploring the diversity of Sanskrit commentaries, Ayurvedic scholars can bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern comprehension. This approach not only preserves

the relevance of classical texts but also inspires the younger generation to contribute to the tradition by creating new, comprehensive commentaries on Ayurvedic principles.

In this journey of knowledge, the study of Sanskrit and its commentarial traditions forms the foundation for a richer, more accessible understanding of Ayurveda. Just as a mosaic's beauty lies in the harmony of its pieces, Ayurveda can thrive by drawing from the rich and varied heritage of Sanskrit literature, ensuring that its profound wisdom continues to inspire and benefit humanity.

This study involves an extensive analysis of various commentarial practices in Sanskrit literature. It focuses on different types of commentaries, including *vyākhyā paramparā*, *sūtra pradhāna vyākhyā*, *adhikarāna pradhāna vyākhyā*, and *artha pradhāna vyākhyā* methods, within diverse Sanskrit texts such as *śāstras* and *kāvyas*. The research emphasizes the role of commentaries in resolving interpretational challenges and illuminating the essence of Sanskrit texts. The study employs a systematic review of primary Sanskrit texts, scholarly analyses, and practical examples to highlight the nuances and subtleties of commentary writing, stressing the importance of coherence and relevance throughout the research process.

Necessity of Commentaries in Complex Texts :

Commentaries are essential when engaging with complex Sanskrit texts or literature. They hold particular significance when there is a lack of understanding, and the original meaning (*apratipatti*). Disputes or

oppositions may arise regarding the context (vipratipatti), or if there is a risk of misinterpretation, which could result in a different and incorrect meaning (anyathāpratipatti).

In Sanskrit literature, various styles of commentaries exist for different types of texts. śāstras (scriptural texts) have a distinct style of commentary compared to literary works. Commentaries on poetic works (kavyas) typically explore aspects like padaccheda (breaking down words), padārtha (meaning of words), vīgraha (structure), vākyayojanā (sentence construction), and āksepa (suggestions or clarifications).

In śāstras, a tradition called vyākhyā paramparā is followed, which involves a series of commentaries. For example, in nyāya śāstra, there are series of five commentaries known as pañca granthi: nyāya sūtra, vātsyāyana bhāṣya, nyāya vārttika, nyāyavārttika tātparyā tīkā, and tīkā pariśuddhi. Similarly, vedānta śāstra has a sequence of commentaries like bhāṣya, bhāmāti, kalpataru, and parimala. alankāra śāstra and kāvyaprakāśa (names of commentaries) also have such commentary series.

However, in kāvyāśāstra and other śāstrā like Ayurveda, nāṭyaśāstra, and ganitaśāstra, such extensive commentaries are not common. This could be because these śāstras are more focused on practical knowledge (prayoga pradhāna) and do not require further commentaries to the same extent. On the other hand, śāstras like nyāya and mīmāṃsā, which emphasize philosophical knowledge (jñāna pradhāna), benefit from detailed commentaries to clarify and explain the subject matter.

Accurate explanation of the process of visaya nirdhāraṇa (ascertaining the subject) in nyāya śāstra. Indeed, this systematic approach ensures clarity and precision in the commentary writing. uddeśa (Proposition) refers to the subject or topic that is going to be explained in the commentary. It sets the context and outlines what the commentator intends to discuss. For example, if the subject is prthvī (earth), then the uddeśa would be to explain the concept of earth. Lakṣana (Definition) is the definition of the particular thing or concept being discussed. It serves as a precise explanation that conveys the essential characteristics or features of the subject matter. For instance, the Lakṣana of prthvī could be described as “tatra gandhavatī prthvī” (earth that possesses the quality of smell). Lakṣana is needed to distinguish one from other. parīkṣā (Examination) involves the critical examination of the Lakṣana using appropriate pramāṇas (valid means of knowledge). Through Pareeksha, the commentator verifies the validity and correctness of the given definition using these pramāṇas. By following this systematic approach, the commentator ensures a clear, methodical, and well-organized presentation of the subject matter. It allows for a comprehensive analysis of the concept, making it easier for readers to understand the topic being elucidated. The use of uddeśa, lakṣana, and parīkṣā¹ helps in providing a logical and well-supported commentary that is consistent and coherent in its explanations.

Types of Commentaries :

Commentaries in śāstras can be categorized into three types: sūtra pradhāna vyākhyā (commentaries on the main sutra text), adhikarāṇa pradhāna vyākhyā (commentaries

focusing on specific topics or sections), and artha pradhāna vyākhyā (commentaries centered around the meaning of the subject matter).

In “sūtra pradhāna vyākhyā” the primary focus is on the sutras (aphorisms) themselves. These sutras are concise and often open to multiple interpretations, which can lead to doubts or confusion. To ensure a thorough understanding and interpretation, the commentator employs a method where they analyze the sutra from various angles and address potential omissions, additions, or alternative interpretations that may arise. Using the example of the sutra “upadeśe ac anunāsika it”², the commentator would explore different possibilities: Omission of the word upadeśe The commentator would elaborate on what the sutra means or how it changes its meaning if the word upadeśe is omitted. Addition of another word: The commentator might discuss the impact of adding an extra word to the sutra and how it alters the intended meaning. By exploring all these possibilities and analyzing each pūrvapaksa in detail, the commentator aims to establish the correctness and precision of the original sutra. This thorough examination ensures that any potential ambiguities or doubts are clarified, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the sutra. The sūtra pradhāna vyākhyā method helps preserve the precision and authenticity of the sutras while providing extensive explanations and evidences to support the validity of the given sutra’s interpretation. This approach is an essential aspect of Vyakarana and helps in the accurate comprehension and application of Sanskrit grammar rules.

In various ancient Indian texts, including

Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā, the explanations of the sutras are structured in the form of adhikarana. This is a method adopted in these texts to systematically explain complex concepts. The structure of an adhikarana typically involves five components³. Visaya - The subject of discussion or the main topic under consideration. viśaya: The doubt or confusion that arises in connection with the subject. pūrvapaksa : The opposing viewpoint that presents arguments against the main subject. uttara: The responses or answers to the questions raised by the opposing viewpoint. siddhānta: The conclusion or established doctrine that resolves the doubt and establishes the truth. For example, let’s consider the discussion regarding the cause of the universe (prapañca kāraṇa). Initially, the visaya - is introduced as Brahma being the cause of the universe. Then, the viśaya emerges when doubts or confusion arise, questioning whether Brahma or Prakṛiti is the true cause of the universe. The pūrvapaksa takes the opposing stance, arguing that the cause of the universe is not Brahma but rather prakṛiti. This leads to a series of questions posed by the pūrvapaksa. Finally, the siddhānta is presented, which concludes that the cause of the universe is indeed Brahma itself, thereby resolving the doubt and establishing the truth.

In summary, the adhikarana methodology in ancient Indian texts follows a systematic approach to presenting and resolving various subjects and doubts through the five components: visaya, viśaya, sangati, pūrvapaksa and siddhānta.

artha pradhāna vyākhyā is a type of commentary commonly found in Kavyas. Its primary purpose is to elucidate the meaning of the literary work, without the requirement of establishing any philosophical principles or

theories.

Styles of Commentary in Sanskrit Literature:

In this style of commentary, a context (aphorism) from a particular text is chosen as the central theme. The commentator then engages in a comprehensive discussion on that specific subject, exploring all possible pūrvapakṣās (Counter-arguments) related to the subject's meaning. The commentary thoroughly examines different perspectives and interpretations, considering various viewpoints from different schools of thought. Eventually, the commentary leads to a conclusion that aligns with the grāhaka's abhiprāya (author's intention) or the accepted understanding of the visaya. This approach helps readers to understand the visaya deeply and consider multiple dimensions of its interpretation.

Satakotī is another style of commentary where the commentator presents a comprehensive examination of a particular subject by discussing one hundred different pūrvapakṣās or counter-arguments related to that subject. For each pūrvapakṣa, the commentator provides detailed explanations and addresses the objections raised. By thoroughly analyzing these one hundred different viewpoints, the commentary aims to present a comprehensive understanding of the meaning. This style of commentary ensures that various possible interpretations and doubts are thoroughly explored, leading to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

The krodapātra and śatakotī methods of commentary represent invaluable approaches that facilitate a comprehensive grasp of śāstras

and classical texts. These styles play a pivotal role in unraveling intricate nuances by delving into a spectrum of viewpoints. By embracing diverse perspectives, exploring multiple interpretations, and addressing potential objections, these commentarial approaches contribute significantly to fostering a profound comprehension of the subject matter.

The dynamic interaction with various viewpoints inherent in these commentarial styles promotes a profound exploration that transcends surface-level understanding. This inclusive approach empowers scholars and readers alike to delve deep into the intricacies of śāstras and classical texts, broadening their knowledge horizons and fostering a richer appreciation of the subject matter at hand. As tools of enlightenment, the krodapātra, śatakotī, bindu, paribhāṣā etc are some of the commentarial methods stand as essential vehicles for enhancing scholarly engagement and enabling a holistic interpretation of these timeless texts.

Ayurvedic texts hold a treasure of ancient wisdom, often rich and complex. Sanskrit commentaries act as guiding lights, helping us navigate and understand these profound teachings. They simplify intricate ideas, clarify doubts, and make ancient concepts accessible to modern learners.

Each style of commentary brings a unique perspective. Some focus on the essence of the text, while others explain it step by step with precision. They address differing viewpoints, connect ideas harmoniously, and help us grasp Ayurvedic principles deeply.

These commentaries transform difficult

concepts into clear insights, making the study of Ayurveda more approachable and meaningful. By avoiding errors and focusing on core ideas, they build a strong foundation for learning and practice.

Sanskrit commentaries create a bridge between ancient wisdom and today's learners. They inspire us to explore Ayurvedic texts with clarity and confidence, encouraging scholars to develop new commentaries that preserve and share this timeless knowledge for future generations.

In this way, the light of Ayurvedic wisdom continues to shine, guiding us toward better understanding, health, and harmony.

Conflicts of Interest

On behalf of all authors, the corres-

ponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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