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Exploring *Chhandas*: *Shloka* Recitation Techniques in Ayurveda *Samhita*

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ABSTRACT

Chhandobaddha Pathana refers to the method of reciting or reading texts in a metrical or rhythmic manner. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of traditional Indian literature, including scriptures, hymns, and other poetic compositions, which are often structured in specific metrical patterns known as “*Chhandas*”.

Chhandas, one of the six auxiliary disciplines of Vedanga, plays a crucial role in the correct pronunciation and recitation of mantras. In the realm of Ayurveda, the significance of Chhandas is evident as Ayurvedic texts are structured in poetic and prose forms. The practice of Chhandobaddha Pathana, involving precise pronunciation, rhythmic recitation, and memorization, holds the key to preserving the essence and integrity of ancient wisdom.

Key Words *Chhandas* (Metres), *Chhandobaddha Pathana*, Ayurvedic *Sutras*, Proper pronunciation, Memorization

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INTRODUCTION

Veda has six auxiliary disciplines called as *Vedangas*. They help in study, preservation and protection the *Vedas*. *Vedangas* are

- (i) *Sikshas*, which are texts dealing with phonetics and morphology
- (ii) *Kalpas* are texts focusing on ritual, behavioural pattern and code of conduct
- (iii) *Vyakarana* science of grammar
- (iv) *Nirukta* which is a text on etymology
- (v) *Chhandas* science of metres, prosody or versification and
- (vi) *Jyotis* which is the science of astronomy.

Significance of *Chhandas*

Chhandas can be observed as the study of the structural pattern of hymns in *Vedic* literature and *shlokas* in classical literature. *Chhandas* play an instrumental role in guiding people in reciting verses by denoting the place of pause while enchanting the hymns and *Shlokas*. Additionally, the one who instructs/recites any *Mantra/Sukta* without knowing the *Chhandas/ Rishi/ Devata* is considered to be committing sin¹. One of the primary benefits of knowing *Chhandas* is the ease of reciting mantras and *Shlokas*. Mastery of

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Chhandas facilitates the correct timing of pauses and the proper division of words, thereby

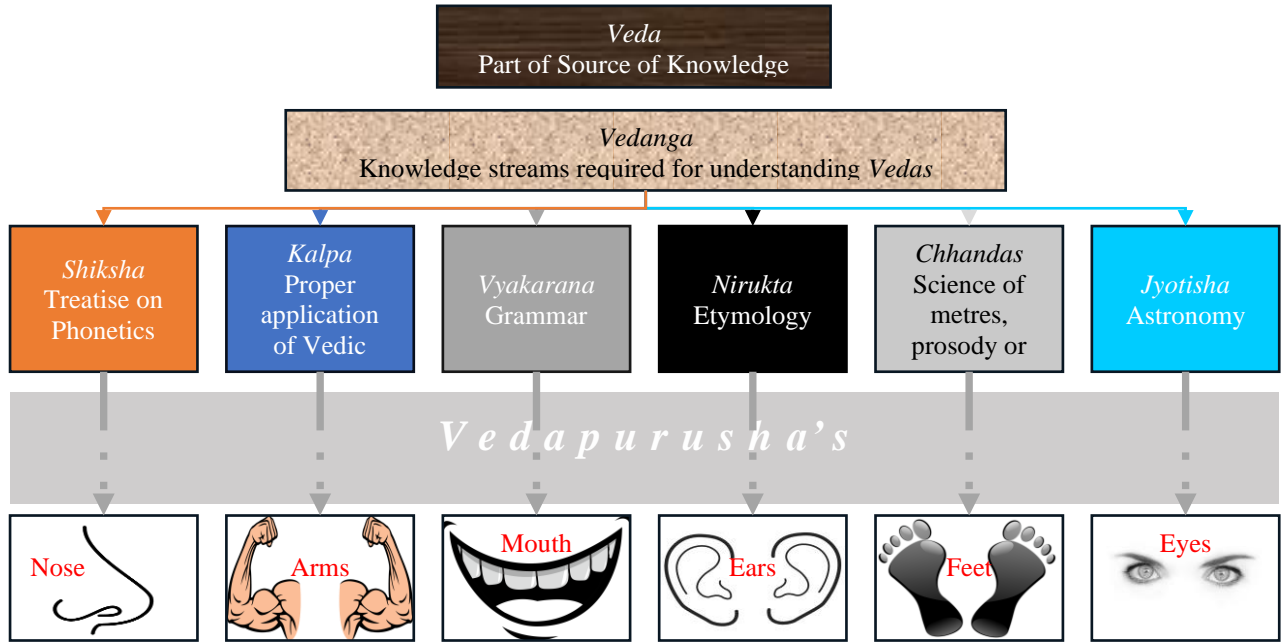


Figure 1 Schematic representation of Vedangas

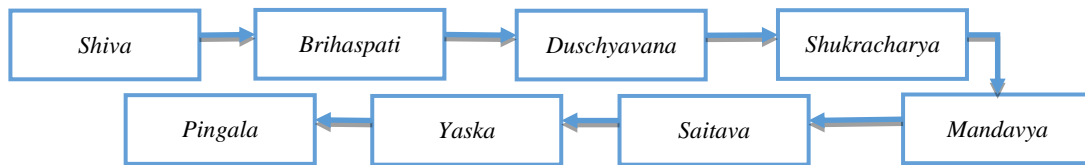


Figure 2 Parampara of Chhandas According to Acharya Yadavaprakasha

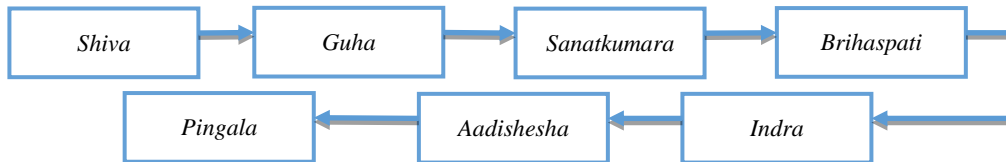


Figure 3 Parampara of Chhandas According to Vaidikachandomimamsa

minimizing the risk of miscommunication regarding the ideas conveyed in the *Mantras*, *Shlokas*, and *Suktas*. In this context, *Chhandas* serves as a guiding framework for the oral tradition of the *Vedas*, which relies heavily on precise pronunciation and rhythm.

Chhandas is the science of metres. *Chhandas* deals with the analysis of the types of meter used in the construction of various Vedic hymns. In Sanskrit, the word “*Paada*” is used as the metrical unit. The measurement is made depending on the

number of syllables used. Syllables are classified into two categories, *Guru* and *Laghu*. A string of *Guru – Laghu* sequence of a particular length is called a meter². The *Chhandas* of a *mantra* determines its usage, such as its purpose and context. But it acts more as an error-correcting mechanism. Since the *Veda* is an oral tradition, any aberration in the *Chhandas* because of error in text or the *Swara*, can be easily identified and corrected.

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Philosophical Comparisons and Broader Implications

Literature often describes *Chhandas* as the “*Paadau*” (feet) of *Vedapurusha*³ (schematically represented in Figure 1), emphasizing its foundational role in Vedic texts. The number of *Chhandas* is likened to the leaves of the *Ashwattha*⁴ tree, signifying their vastness and complexity. Knowledge of *Chhandas* is therefore indispensable for accurate recitation.

The importance of *Chhandas* is echoed in various other scriptures. The *Naatyashastra* asserts that there is no word without *Chhandas*, and conversely, no *Chhandas* exists without a word. Similarly, the *Nirukta* states that no sound or speech is uttered without *Chhandas*, highlighting its integral role in communication⁵.

In summary, *Chhandas* is not merely a technical aspect of Vedic literature but a crucial element for preserving the integrity and meaning of sacred texts through precise oral tradition.

Understanding *Chhandas* enriches the practice of recitation, ensuring that the spiritual and philosophical essence of the hymns is faithfully conveyed.

Parampara of Chhandas

Development of *Chhandah Shaastra* or *Parampara* of *Chhandas* are represented in Figure 2 According to *Acharya Yadavaprakasha*⁶ and Figure 3 According to *Vaidikachandomimamsa*⁶.

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Etymology of Chhandas⁷

Chanda has two kinds of meanings -

Acchaadana - Means by which idea of the poet is covered thereby helping in its protection and preservation.

Ahlaadana - Through which readers get pleasure. By reciting the shloka rhythmically, will get happiness, interest to recite more.

| Commentator/Author | Classification |
|--|--|
| <i>Halayudha on Chhandahsutra of Pingala</i> | a) <i>Laukika</i> b) <i>Vaidika</i> c) <i>Laukikavaidika</i> |
| <i>Bharatamuni</i> | a) <i>Divya</i> b) <i>Divyetara</i> c) <i>Divyamanusa</i> |
| <i>Yudhisthir Mimamsak</i> | a) <i>Matra-Chhandas</i> b) <i>Akshara Chhandas</i> |

Classification

Broadly *Chhandas* have been classified as *Vaidika* and *Laukika*.

They are 8 in number⁸ as shown in Table 1 **Gana** Group of 3 *aksharas* is called *gana*. They are 8 in number⁸ as shown in Table 1.

Other two *Aksharas* include लघुः - |; गुरुः - S

Table 1 *Gana* Classification

| Name | Character | Symbol | Example |
|---------|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|
| ‘म’ गणः | All three letters are <i>Guru</i> | SSS | दोषाणां |

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| | | | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|-------------|-----|-----------|
| ‘य’ गणः | First letter is <i>Laghu</i> | आदिलघुः | SS | समानः |
| ‘र’ गणः | Middle letter is <i>Laghu</i> | मध्यलघुः | S S | आशयः |
| ‘स’ गणः | Last letter is <i>Guru</i> | अन्त्यगुरुः | S | सततं |
| ‘त’ गणः | Last letter is <i>Laghu</i> | अन्त्यलघुः | SS | प्राणादि |
| ‘ज’ गणः | Middle letter is <i>Guru</i> | मध्यगुरुः | S | विशेष |
| ‘भ’ गणः | First letter is <i>Guru</i> | आदिगुरुः | S | बुद्धिहत् |
| ‘न’ गणः | All three letters are <i>Laghu</i> | सर्वलघुः | | स्खलति |

Other two *Aksharas* include लघुः - |; गुरुः - S

Matra⁹

The duration required to pronounce a *Laghu Akshara* (light syllable) is counted as one *Maatra* (unit of time). The *Maatra* for a *Guru Akshara* (heavy syllable) is two units. This system of measurement helps in maintaining the rhythmic pattern in Vedic chanting and other forms of poetic and musical compositions. In relation to

Maatra Chhandas, there are 5 *Ganas* each having 4 *Maatras* irrespective of number of *Aksharas*.

सर्वगुरुः - S S; अन्तगुरुः - | |S; मध्यगुरुः - | S |; आदिगुरुः - S ||; सर्वलघुः - ||||

Paada and Yati¹⁰

In a verse, four quarters are termed as *Paadas* and when a small pause is taken it is called *Yati*.

Lakshana of Laghu and Guru Aksharas¹¹ as shown in Table 2

Table 2 Lakshana of *Laghu* and *Guru Aksharas*

| | गुरुः |
|--|--|
| Aksharas ending with short <i>Hraswa</i> vowel - अ इ उ ऋ | Aksharas ending with <i>Visarga</i> - रुः कः जुः |
| Aksharas ending with short <i>Hraswa</i> consonant - क च ड ब | Aksharas ending <i>Anuswara</i> - कं जं भं |
| | Aksharas ending with long <i>Deergha</i> vowel and consonant - आ ई ऊ ऋ ए ऐ ओ औ, की जू |
| | An <i>Akshara</i> having a युक्त <i>Akshara</i> (mixed consonant) as its next <i>Akshara</i> - वर्णः अन्तः |
| | This rule may not apply if next <i>Paada</i> begins with युक्त <i>Akshara</i> |

The last *Akshara* of a *Paada* has some freedom with respect to *Laghu/Guru*.

Vrtta

The *shlokas*/verses based on *Akshara Chhandas* are known as *Vrttas*¹².

The types of *Vrttas* are¹³

- Sama*: All the 4 *Paadas* have the same number of *Aksharas*.
- Ardhasama*: *Akshara* of 1st & 3rd *Paadas* and 2nd & 4th *Paadas* have same count.
- Vishama*: None of the 4 *Paadas* do not have same count.

Anustubh Chhandas¹⁴

This *Chhandas* has 32 syllables and is equally divided in 4 *Paadas*.

Derivation of Anustubh

According to the *Nirukta*, *Anustubh* is the derivative of *Gayatri*. *Gayatri* has 3 *Paadas* with 8 syllables in each *Paada*. *Anustubh* being derived from *Gayatri* has 4 *Paadas* with 8 syllables in each *Paada*. Hence, this is called *Anustubh*.

Example:

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एकं तुल्याधिकैः षट् च तारतम्यविकल्पनात्।
पञ्चविंशतिमित्येवं वृद्धैः क्षीणैश्च तावतः॥अ.ह.सू.१२।७३॥

Example for *Anushtubh Chhandas* marking is shown in table 3.

Table 3 Example for *Anushtubh Chhandas* marking

| Akṣarāṇi | ए | कं | तु | ल्या | धि | कैः | ष | ट् | च | ता | र | त | म्य | वि | क | ल्प | ना | त् |
|------------|-------------------------|-----|----|------|----|-----|------|----|----|-------|------|----|-----|----|---|-----|----|----|
| Laghu-Guru | S | S | S | S | | S | S | | S | | S | | | S | | S | | S |
| Gaṇa | म | | | र | | | र | | | ज | | | ज | | | S | | |
| Counts | 16 अक्षराणि, 26 मात्राः | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jāti | अष्टिः | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chanda | अनुष्टुम् (पाद 1-2) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Akṣarāṇi | प | ञ्च | वि | श | ति | मि | त्ये | वं | वृ | द्धैः | क्षी | णै | श्च | ता | व | तः | | |
| Laghu-Guru | S | | S | | | S | S | S | S | S | S | S | | S | | S | | S |

Table 4 Variety of *Anushtubh*

| Variety of <i>Anushtubh</i> | Number of Paadas | Number of Aksharas |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Purastajjyoti</i> | 3 | 8+12+12= 32 |
| <i>Madhyejyoti</i> | 3 | 12+8+12=32 |
| <i>Uparistajjyoti</i> | 3 | 12+12+8=32 |
| <i>Kaviraj</i> | 3 | 9+12+9=30 |
| <i>Nastarupa</i> | 3 | 9+10+13= 32 |
| <i>Viraj</i> | 3 | 11+11+11=33 |
| <i>Viraj</i> | 3 | 10+10+10=30 |
| <i>Catuspaada</i> | 4 | 8+8+8+8=32 |
| <i>Paadairanustubh</i> | 4 | 7+7+7+7=28 |
| <i>Mahapaadapankti</i> | 6 | 5+5+5+5+5+6=31 |

Table 5 Major works on *Chhandas*

| Author | Literary work |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Pingala</i> | <i>Chhandahshastra</i> |
| <i>Bharata</i> | <i>Naatyashastra</i> |
| <i>Brahmagupta</i> | <i>Brahmasputasiddhanta</i> |
| <i>Virahaanka</i> | <i>Vrttajatisamucchaya</i> |
| <i>Mahavira</i> | <i>Ganitasarasangraha</i> |
| <i>Halayudha</i> | <i>Mrtasanjivani</i> commentary on <i>Pingala's Chhandahshastra</i> |
| <i>Shrtabodha</i> | <i>Kalidasa</i> |
| <i>Chhandonushaasanam</i> | <i>Hemachandra</i> |
| <i>Suvrttatilakam</i> | <i>Kshemendra</i> |
| <i>Chhandomanjari</i> | <i>Gangadasa</i> |
| <i>Vrttaratnakara</i> | <i>Kedarabhatta</i> |

Table 6 *Chhandas* in *Doshabhedhiya Adhyaya* of *Ashtangahrdya*

| Name of <i>Chhandas</i> | Available in <i>Doshabhedhiya Adhyaya</i> of <i>Ashtangahrdya</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Anushtubh</i> | 1, 2, 3, 4.2, 5-7, 8.1, 9, 10, 12-14, 15.2, 16-18, 19.1, 20.1, 22.2, 23, 25-27, 28.2, 29, 30.2, 31, 32.1, 33.1, 34.1, 36-42, 43.1, 44-48, 49.2, 50, 52, 53.1, 54, 55.2, 56, 57, 58.2, 59, 60, 61.2, 63.2, 64.2, 65, 66.2, 67-69, 70.1, 71, 72, 73.2, 74-76 |
| <i>Vidyunmala</i> | 4.1, 19.2 |
| <i>Naaraachika</i> | 15.1, 21.1, 51.1, 53.2, 77.2 |
| <i>Madanalalita</i> | 24.1 |
| <i>Chitraa</i> | 21.2, 35.2, 49.1, 51.2, 58.1 |
| <i>Panchachamara</i> | 30.1, 61.1, 62.1, 77.1 |
| <i>Manjuhasini</i> | 33.2, 73.1 |
| <i>Vaktra</i> | 34.2 |

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| | |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Hamsamala</i> | 43.2 |
| <i>Bhadrika</i> | 55.1 |
| <i>Maanavaka</i> | 62.2 |
| <i>Chandrakanta</i> | 70.2 |
| <i>Praharshini</i> | 78.2 |
| Not found | 8.2, 11, 20.2, 21.1, 22.1, 24.2, 28.1, 32.2, 35.1, 63.1, 64.1, 66.1, 78.1 |

Varieties of Anustubh

Based on the number of *Paada* and number of *Aksharas*, the types of *Anustubh Chhandas* are given in Table 4.

Major Works on Chhandas is shown in table 5

Example: Chhandas in Doshabhediya Adhyaya of Ashtangahrdaya

Chhandas for each verse was identified using *Chandojñānam*¹⁵ website (Line Mode) is shown in table 6.

Paathaas

The word *Pathanam* (पठनं) is derived from “*Path*”*Dhatu* and *Lyut Pratyaya* (पठ् + भावे ल्युट).

It has the following synonyms: पाठः, वाचनम्, पठनम्, पाठना, पाठनम्, अध्ययनम्, अध्यापनम्, अध्यापना, अभ्यसनम्, शिष्याणामध्यापनम्¹⁶।

The Vedic oral tradition has a sophisticated array of recitation techniques - *Paathaas*, which are deeply rooted in the educational methods of ancient India. *Paathaas* are designed to ensure faultless memorization and accurate articulation of *mantras*, thus preserving the integrity of these sacred texts for generations.

The initial phase of teaching generally starts with the *Samhita Paatha*, where the text is recited with *Sandhi* (grammatical junctions) intact, facilitating straightforward memorization. This is categorized under *Prakrti Paathaas*, which also

include the *Vakya* and *Krama Paathaas*, known for their direct and unaltered recitation styles.

Contrastingly, the more complex *Vikrti Paathaas* involve intricate patterns that include the reversal of word order without altering the meanings of the words, a unique feature of Sanskrit. These include *Vakya*, *Pada*, *Krama*, *Jata*, *Mala*, *Sikha*, *Rekha*, *Dhvaja*, *Danda*, *Ratha*, and *Ghana*. These techniques not only ensure the thorough understanding and mastery of the texts but also enhance the cognitive capabilities of the reciters.

The preservation of these texts through such precise and varied recitational forms has contributed to one of the most stable oral traditions in the world. This meticulous focus on maintaining each syllable's integrity is paramount in the *Vedic* tradition.

Additionally, mnemonic devices and specific scholarly methods historically have boosted the creative and retentive faculties of the mind. Notably, the development of *Avadhaana* around the turn of the millennium illustrates this, where practitioners excel in simultaneous concentration across diverse fields like literature, music, astronomy, astrology, and medical science. This multifaceted concentration aids scholars in achieving a profound mastery of their subjects, showcasing the enduring value and versatility of Vedic educational practices.

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Recitation Techniques and Purpose of

Paathaas: The *Vikrti Paathaas* are specialized forms of Vedic recitation that go beyond straightforward reading to include intricate patterns of repetition and reordering, designed to ensure precision in memorization and pronunciation. Each form serves a specific pedagogical purpose and enhances the mastery of the text through structured complexity. Here are definitions for each of the *Vikrti Paathaas* mentioned:

1. **Samhitapaatha** involves continuous recitation of the text as it is. It helps in understanding the complete syntactical structure of the passages.
2. **Pada Paatha:** In this approach, the text is broken down into individual words, dissolving compound words into simpler forms. This method clarifies the meanings and relationships of individual words.
3. **Krama Paatha:** A step-up from *Pada*, this involves reciting two adjacent words at a time, then moving on to the next word, i.e., if the words are 1, 2, 3, 4, the recitation would be 1-2, 2-3, 3-4. This helps in understanding the linkage and flow between words.
4. **Jataa Paatha:** In *Jataa*, the words are intertwined more complexly. The pattern generally follows: word1 word2, word2 word1, word1 word2; this is then extended to subsequent words. This form strengthens memory and ensures very detailed learning of the text.

5. **Maalaa Paatha:** Like a garland, this pattern links words in a circular manner, creating a continuous loop of recitation that reinforces the cyclical nature of Vedic texts.

6. **Sikhaa Paatha:** Named after a “peak” or “crest”, this method involves climbing up to a certain point in the text and then descending back down, which aids in peak retention points within the memorization process.

7. **Rekhaa Paatha:** Known as the “line” method, it involves reciting the text in a straightforward line or sequence but with specific attention to the Vedic pitch and intonation, emphasizing linear clarity.

8. **Dhvaja Paatha:** Often called the “flag” recitation, this involves pairing the first two words and the last two words in a sequence, forming a flag-like pattern in the structure of chanting.

9. **Danda Paatha:** This style uses the “staff” or “stick” method, where recitation is structured in blocks or segments, often grouped in ways that emphasize structural integrity and alignment.

10. **Ratha Paatha:** Known as the “chariot” path, it involves a complex arrangement of words that mimics the assembling of a chariot, enhancing the structural and mnemonic rhythm.

11. **Ghana Patha:** This is the most complex form, where the words are recited in a specific pattern that involves repeating and reversing words and phrases in a dense, compact form. This pattern might look something like: word1 word2, word2 word1, word1 word2 word3,

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word3 word2 word1, ensuring an intricate and thorough memorization.

These methods are not merely mnemonic devices but also serve to preserve the phonetic and metrical accuracy of the Vedic texts, considered the oldest unbroken oral tradition still practiced today.

Chhandobaddha Pathana

Chhandas is considered as one among six *Vedaangas* which helps pronouncing and reciting *Mantras* correctly. It is the science of metre. *Ayurveda Granthas* are written in the form of *Padya* and *Gadya*. We can see the extensive utility of *Chhandas* in *Ayurveda*. *Chhandas* also serves the purpose of protection of *Veda/Tantra* in its original form. *Chhandobaddha Pathana* includes:

1. Proper pronunciation

During the study of *Ayurveda Sutra*, students should maintain precise recitation of each syllable, avoiding both excessively rapid and overly slow delivery. It is crucial to enunciate clearly, without hesitations or nasal sounds, maintaining a medium pitch. Oral fluency was a key focus of the ancient education system, emphasizing the improvement of pronunciation and speech excellence. According to *Acharya Sushrutha*, achieving excellence in speech is vital for effective practical management.

2. Rhythmic recitation

Padya Sutras will be abided by *Chhandas*. Each *Chhandas* will have specific *Maatras* which should be properly recited in specific *Maatraa*

Kaala. To ease such recitation, specific tune is added to each *Chhandas* and is recited in repeated manner so that it is retained properly.

3. Memorization

Acharya Charaka emphasizes the significance of repeated recitation and precise pronunciation of *Sutras* in the study method. This practice enables students to permanently store the verses in their memory by reciting them rhythmically and methodically. This repeated practice is called the spacing effect in contemporary science. Contrastingly, *Achhandobaddha Pathana* is irrespective of tune/rhythmic recitation. It is just reading the *Sutras* continuously as *Gadya/text*.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of *Chhandas* and its application in *Ayurveda* emphasizes the deep-rooted connection between the metrical science of recitation and the preservation of ancient knowledge. *Chhandas*, through its precise structure and rhythm, plays an important role in the correct recitation and interpretation of Ayurvedic texts, ensuring that their meaning and spiritual essence remain intact across generations. The practice of *Chhandobaddha Pathana*, which involves proper pronunciation, rhythmic recitation, and memorization, is fundamental to preserving the integrity of the texts and facilitating the oral transmission of Ayurvedic wisdom. Additionally, the diverse techniques of *Paathas* and various *Chhandas* used in *Ayurveda* reflect a highly sophisticated method of learning

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and retaining knowledge, rooted in ancient pedagogical traditions. As seen from the analysis of Vedic literature and Ayurvedic texts, the application of *Chhandas* in *Ayurveda* not only aids in accurate *Pathana* but also contributes to the mental discipline and cognitive development of practitioners. Therefore, the study of *Chhandas* in *Ayurveda* not only ensures the transmission of knowledge but also maintains the authenticity and continuity of the knowledge passed down through centuries for future.

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