

Exploring the Use and Relevance of Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ in Ayurveda's Classical Canon

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Abstract: *It is fascinating to observe how the Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ, often regarded as a simple metrical pattern in Sanskrit literature, has silently shaped the way ancient Indian knowledge was preserved and passed on. In my view, its balanced structure—just thirty-two syllables arranged in four neat quarters—offers more than poetic beauty; it provides a practical framework that made memorization and oral transmission both achievable and reliable. This suggests that the sages and scholars who composed monumental works like the Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya and Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha deliberately chose this meter not only for its rhythmic appeal but also for its pedagogical value. What stands out is the adaptability of this meter, which comfortably accommodates scientific descriptions alongside philosophical insights, particularly in Ayurveda. That said, the classical refinement of Anuṣṭup, with its subtle syllabic rules in later literature, reflects an evolving awareness of sound, flow, and learning efficiency. It is evident that this metrical form played a vital role in shaping the literary and scientific legacy of India, turning complex medical theories into verses that could live on in the minds of generations. The practical elegance of Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ remains a testament to how literary art can serve as a vehicle for scientific wisdom.*

Keywords: Anuṣṭup meter, Ayurveda literature, Sanskrit poetry, oral tradition, Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya, Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha

1. Introduction

Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ (अनुष्टुप् छन्दः) is one of the most widely used metrical forms in classical Sanskrit literature. Belonging to the group of Vedic and Classical Sanskrit meters, it is characterized by its simplicity, rhythm, and adaptability, which made it particularly suitable for both literary and scientific texts, including the revered treatises of Āyurveda.

In its classical form, the Anuṣṭup meter consists of four pādas (quarters), each comprising eight syllables, resulting in a total of 32 syllables per verse. This compact and balanced structure makes it highly conducive to memorization, oral recitation, and didactic expression, which were essential features of knowledge transmission in ancient India.

2. Materials and methods

Literature study of ayurvedic classical texts - the Ashtanga Samgraha (अष्टाङ्गसंग्रह) and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya (अष्टाङ्गहृदय)

3. Results and Discussion

Key Features of Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ

Structure:

A verse (śloka) in Anuṣṭup meter consists of 4 pādas (quarters).

Each pāda contains 8 syllables.

Total syllables per verse = $4 \times 8 = 32$ syllables.

Common Usage:

It is the most frequently used meter in Ayurvedic texts (e.g., Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and Ashtanga Samgraha).

Used for its simplicity and ease of memorization.

Example from Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya Sutrasthana in Anuṣṭup Chandaḥ:

"Hitāhitam sukham duḥkham āyustasya hitāhitam |
mānam ca tac ca yatroktam āyurvedaḥ sa ucyaṭe ||" C S Su 1/43

Scansion (syllables per pāda):

- Hi-tā-hi-tam su-kham duh-kham → 8 syllables
- Ā-yus-tas-ya hi-tā-hi-tam → 8 syllables
- Mā-nam ca tac ca ya-tro-ktam → 8 syllables
- Ā-yur-ve-daḥ sa u-cya-te → 8 syllables

Meaning of the Verse:

"This (science) is called Āyurveda, in which are described what is beneficial and harmful for life, what is happy and unhappy life, and the measure of life."

Types of Anuṣṭup

Though "Anuṣṭup" generally refers to a simple 8×4 structure, there are two main types based on subtle rules:

A. Vedic Anuṣṭup: Found in the Ṛgveda.

More flexible and does not follow strict rules of syllabic weight or caesura (breaks).

Examples: Many verses in Ṛgveda, especially hymns.

B. Classical Anuṣṭup (Shloka Meter):

Strict structure used in later literature (e.g., Mahabharata, Ayurveda texts).

Follows specific rules for syllable types and placement, especially in 3rd and 4th pādas.

Rules in Classical Anuṣṭubh

While the first two pādas are relatively flexible, the 3rd and 4th pādas must follow:

6th syllable of pāda 3 is generally guru (long).

5th syllable of pāda 4 is generally laghu (short).

Certain syllable combinations are disallowed to maintain rhythm and aesthetics.

Example of syllable count in each pāda:

Pāda 1: 8 syllables (with 7th syllable long)

Pāda 2: 8 syllables (with 7th syllable short)

Pāda 3: 8 syllables (with 7th syllable long)

Pāda 4: 8 syllables (with 7th syllable short)

4. Summary and Conclusion

Anuṣṭup meter is the metrical form of the majority of verses in Ashtanga Samgraha and hridaya. It facilitates concise yet rhythmic expression. It is ideal for scientific and didactic literature like Ayurveda because of its regular structure and clarity. It is compact and rhythmically balanced, ideal for memorization and oral transmission.

In the realm of classical Ayurveda, especially in texts like the Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya, Aṣṭāṅga Saṅgraha, Caraka Saṃhitā, and Suśruta Saṃhitā, the Anuṣṭup meter plays a foundational role. It serves not only as a poetic medium but also as a structural and pedagogical tool. Verses composed in Anuṣṭup meter allow for the concise encapsulation of complex medical theories, diagnostic criteria, treatment protocols, and philosophical concepts. Its rhythmic flow aids students and practitioners in the retention and application of knowledge.

References

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