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TANTRAYUKTI: THE CLASSICAL METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING *SAMHITA* TEXTS – A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background: The classical texts of *Ayurveda* are written in a short and packed style, where one verse may hold a full idea and many meanings are only hinted at or spread over other chapters. To read them correctly, the *Acharyas* gave a set of tools called *Tantrayukti*; *Charaka Samhita* describes 36 and *Sushruta Samhita* 32. Today these tools are mostly memorised for examinations and seldom used while reading, which leads to literal and sometimes wrong understanding. **Aim and Objectives: Aim:** To review the concept of *Tantrayukti* and its role in understanding the *Samhita* texts. **Objectives:** To collect and compare the description of *Tantrayukti* from classical *Ayurvedic* and allied texts. To explain the 36 *Tantrayukti* in simple language with examples. To present the step-wise process of text understanding through *Tantrayukti* in flow chart form. To discuss the present-day use of *Tantrayukti* in teaching and research. **Material and Methods:** *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* with their main commentaries, *Tantrayukti Vichara* and the *Arthashastra* were studied. Books on Sanskrit text methodology, journal articles and reliable online sources were also reviewed. The matter was compared, grouped and presented with tables and flow charts. **Result & Discussion:** *Tantrayukti* act as a built-in key to the *Samhita* and guard the reader against literal reading. Their steps closely match the stages of modern scientific writing and research. **Conclusion:** *Tantrayukti* is a complete and practical method for reading the *Samhitas* correctly. It should be taught with live examples so that students can use it in study, clinical work and research.

Keywords: *Tantrayukti*, *Samhita*, *Shastra*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, Methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is not only a system of medicine; it is also a large store of written knowledge kept safe in the *Samhitas*. The *Acharyas* wrote these books in short *Sutra* and *Shloka* form so that they could be easily remembered and passed on from *Guru* to *Shishya*. Because of this short style, one small verse may carry

a complete idea, one word may give different meanings at different places, and the rest of a topic may be found in another chapter. A reader therefore needs a fixed set of reading rules. In the last chapter of *Siddhi Sthana*, *Charaka Samhita* gives 36 such rules and names them *Tantrayukti*, the tools that hold a text together and open its meaning.[1]

Sushruta Samhita gives one full chapter, the 65th chapter of *Uttara Tantra*, to this subject and lists 32 *Tantrayukti*. *Sushruta* explains that these tools have two main jobs: to join the words of a sentence in the right way (*Vakyayojana*) and to join the meanings in the right way (*Arthayojana*). He adds that they help a scholar to prove his own statement and to reject a wrong statement of an opponent in a debate. So, from the very beginning, *Tantrayukti* was seen both as a method of reading and as a tool of logical discussion.[2]

The idea of *Tantrayukti* is older than the present form of the *Ayurvedic* texts and is shared by other Indian sciences. The *Arthashastra* of *Kautilya*, a text on statecraft, also ends with a chapter on 32 *Tantrayukti*, and scholars have shown that similar devices were used in Sanskrit, Tamil and Pali works over many centuries. In today's *Ayurveda* education, however, students often memorise the list for examinations but rarely apply it while reading a *Samhita*. This review tries to bring the topic back into the classroom in plain language and to show how it can make the reading of the *Samhitas* easier and more accurate.[3]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: To review the concept of *Tantrayukti* and its role in understanding the *Samhita* texts.

Objectives

- To collect and compare the description of *Tantrayukti* from classical *Ayurvedic* and allied texts.
- To explain the 36 *Tantrayukti* in simple language with examples.
- To present the step-wise process of text understanding through *Tantrayukti* in flow chart form.
- To discuss the present-day use of *Tantrayukti* in teaching and research.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This is a conceptual (literary) review. The primary sources were *Charaka Samhita* with the *Ayurveda Dipika* commentary of *Chakrapanidatta*, *Sushruta Samhita* with the *Nibandha Sangraha* commentary of *Dalhana*, *Ashtanga Hridaya* with the *Sarvangasundara* and *Ayurveda Rasayana* commentaries, *Tantrayukti Vichara* of *Nilamegha Bhishak* and the *Arthashastra* of *Kautilya*. Secondary sources included books on the method of Sanskrit scientific texts, published review articles and reliable online resources. The collected matter was read, compared across the texts, arranged under suitable headings and explained in simple language. Examples were chosen from the classics, a practical grouping of the 36 *Tantrayukti* was prepared, and the process of reading a text was shown as flow charts.

AYURVEDIC REVIEW

The word *Tantrayukti* has two parts, *Tantra* and *Yukti*. *Tantra* means a *Shastra*, that is, a well-arranged treatise; the commentators connect it with the root *tantri dharane*, which means "to hold", because a good text holds knowledge and, through it, protects the body. *Yukti* comes from the root *yuj*, which means "to join" or "to plan", and it shows the skilful arrangement of things. Thus, *Tantrayukti* means the devices with which an author builds a text and with which a reader correctly opens the same text. *Chakrapanidatta*, while explaining the last chapter of *Siddhi Sthana*, makes it clear that these devices serve both the composition of a treatise and the drawing out of its intended meaning. In simple words, if a *Samhita* is a locked room full of knowledge, *Tantrayukti* is the bunch of keys.[4]

Historical Background

The earliest full list of *Tantrayukti* outside medicine is the fifteenth and last book (*Adhikarana*) of the *Arthashastra*, itself named *Tantrayukti*. *Kautilya* lists 32 devices and says his whole work was composed with their help. Most names match those of *Sushruta*, showing a common and older tradition of writing a *Shastra* that was shared by Indian scholars in many fields.[5]

Tantrayukti in *Charaka Samhita*

In *Charaka Samhita* the topic comes in the twelfth chapter of *Siddhi Sthana*, a portion completed by *Dridhabala* when he restored the incomplete *Agnivesha Tantra*. Here the 36 *Tantrayukti* are listed in four verses (Ch. Si. 12/41–44), followed by verses on their need and benefit. *Charaka* does not define each one; he only names them and leaves the definitions to be understood from tradition and commentary. This brief style is itself an example of how much the *Samhita* expects the reader to supply.[1]

Tantrayukti in *Sushruta Samhita*

Sushruta gives 32 *Tantrayukti* in the 65th chapter of *Uttara Tantra*. Unlike *Charaka*, he defines every one of them and gives an example from his own text, which makes his chapter the most useful starting point for a student. He states the purpose in a short phrase, वाक्ययोजनमर्थयोजनं च, meaning the correct joining of words and of meanings. *Dalhana*, in his *Nibandha Sangraha* commentary, explains each definition further and adds more examples. When the two lists are compared, *Charaka* has four extra names, namely *Prayojana*, *Pratyutsara*, *Uddhara* and *Sambhava*, while some names differ only slightly in form, such as *Niyoga* for *Sanniyoga* and *Anekanta* for *Naikanta*.[6]

Tantrayukti in the *Ashtanga* Texts

Vagbhata did not write a separate chapter on *Tantrayukti* in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, yet the whole work shows their skilled use, since he condensed the older texts into short verses without losing their sense. His commentators *Arunadatta* and *Hemadri* use them repeatedly to explain a word, add a missing part of a sentence or link one verse with another, and also refer to related tools such as *Tachchhilya*, *Arthashraya* and *Kalpana*.[7]

Tantrayukti Vichara of *Nilamegha*

Tantrayukti Vichara of the South Indian scholar-physician *Nilamegha Bhishak* is an independent work devoted only to this subject. It explains each *Tantrayukti* with examples from *Charaka*, *Sushruta* and other works and discusses the difference of opinion on their number, showing that later scholars treated *Tantrayukti* as a separate field of study.[8]

Need and Utility of *Tantrayukti*

Charaka explains the value of *Tantrayukti* in three verses. They act like the sun for a bed of lotuses and a lamp for a house, making the text bloom and bringing light to it. One who has mastered a single *Shastra* through them can quickly understand other *Shastras*, while a physician who reads many texts without them misses their real meaning, just as wealth slips away when good fortune ends. Thus *Tantrayukti* helps to find hidden meaning, fill gaps, join scattered references, remove apparent contradictions and defend statements with reason.[9]

The Thirty-Six *Tantrayukti* in Simple Words

Table 1 gives each of the 36 *Tantrayukti* of *Charaka* with a simple meaning and a short example taken or adapted from the classics.[10]

Table 1: The 36 *Tantrayukti* with simple meaning and example

No.	*Tantrayukti*	Simple meaning	Example
1	*Adhikarana*	Main subject of text	*Rasa* as the subject of a chapter
2	*Yoga*	Joining scattered words	Re-ordering words of a verse
3	*Hetvartha*	Known reason applied elsewhere	Mud softens with water; so does a *Vrana* with poultice
4	*Padartha*	Word meaning by context	*Rasa* as taste, body fluid or mercury
5	*Pradesha*	Part told, rest understood	One case told, others understood
6	*Uddesha*	Brief statement of a topic	*Hetu*, *Linga*, *Aushadha* in one line
7	*Nirdesha*	Detailed explanation	*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha* detailed later
8	*Vakyashesha*	Supplying missing word	"of a person" added to "head, hands"
9	*Prayojana*	Purpose or aim	Protect the healthy, cure the sick
10	*Upadesha*	Direct instruction	Avoid day sleep (except *Grishma*)
11	*Apadesha*	Stating the reason	*Madhura Rasa* increases *Kapha*
12	*Atidesha*	Hint of future event	Upward *Vata* may cause *Udavarta*
13	*Arthapatti*	Implied meaning	No food at night implies food by day
14	*Nirnaya*	Final decision	Final view after a debate
15	*Prasanga*	Repeating a topic	*Mahabhuta* repeated in many chapters
16	*Ekanta*	Rule without exception	*Madanaphala* always causes vomiting
17	*Naikanta*	Rule with variation	A drug may act differently
18	*Apavarga*	Exception to a rule	No *Swedana* in *Visha*, except *Kita Visha*
19	*Viparyaya*	Opposite meaning	Weak hard to cure, so strong easier
20	*Purvapaksha*	Raising objection	Disciple's doubt before the reply
21	*Vidhana*	Ordered description	*Dhatus* from *Rasa* to *Shukra* in order
22	*Anumata*	Silent acceptance	Another school's view kept silently
23	*Vyakhyana*	Detailed elaboration	Detailed account of *Purusha*
24	*Samshaya*	Statement leaving doubt	Injury may or may not kill
25	*Atitavekshana*	Referring back	"As told earlier in *Sutra Sthana*"
26	*Anagatavekshana*	Referring forward	"Will be told in *Chikitsa Sthana*"
27	*Svasamjna*	Author's own term	*Mithuna* for honey and ghee
28	*Uhya*	To be inferred	Unstated points inferred
29	*Samuchchaya*	Grouping equal items	*Shali*, *Shashtika*, *Mudga* daily
30	*Nidarshana*	Worldly example	Wound spreads like wind-fanned fire
31	*Nirvachana*	Word derivation	*Ayurveda*: knowledge of *Ayu*
32	*Sanniyoga*	Fixed, binding rule	Take only wholesome food
33	*Vikalpana*	Giving options	*Mamsa Rasa* or *Yusha* may be given
34	*Pratyutsara*	Rejecting other view	Others' views rejected in a debate
35	*Uddhara*	Re-establishing own view	*Punarvasu Atreya*'s final answer
36	*Sambhava*	Source of origin	*Mukhadushika* arise in youth

Practical Grouping of *Tantrayukti*

A list of 36 names is hard to remember and harder to use, so modern scholars suggest arranging the *Tantrayukti* by the job they do. Following this idea, they are placed here in six groups (Table 2), which a student can use like a checklist while reading a verse, moving from the word to the full argument.[11]

Table 2: Functional grouping of *Tantrayukti*

No.	Group (work done)	*Tantrayukti* included
1	Topic and purpose	*Adhikarana*, *Prayojana*, *Uddesha*, *Nirdesha*, *Vidhana*, *Vyakhyana*
2	Word meaning	*Padartha*, *Svasamjna*, *Nirvachana*, *Yoga*
3	Hidden or implied meaning	*Vakyashesha*, *Arthapatti*, *Viparyaya*, *Uhya*, *Pradesha*
4	Cross-reference	*Atitavekshana*, *Anagatavekshana*, *Atidesha*, *Prasanga*, *Sambhava*
5	Rules, exceptions and options	*Upadesha*, *Sanniyoga*, *Ekanta*, *Naikanta*, *Apavarga*, *Vikalpana*, *Samuchchaya*, *Anumata*
6	Reasoning and debate	*Hetvartha*, *Apadesha*, *Nidarshana*, *Samshaya*, *Purvapaksha*, *Pratyutsara*, *Uddhara*, *Nirnaya*

Tantrayukti and *Vada Marga*

In *Vimana Sthana*, *Charaka* describes 44 terms of debate called *Vada Marga*. Several of them, such as *Prayojana*, *Samshaya* and *Nirnaya*, closely match the *Tantrayukti*. The difference lies in purpose: *Vada Marga* guides a live debate between two persons, while *Tantrayukti* guides the silent debate between the reader and the text. Studied together, they train the student to reason in an orderly way.[12]

Allied Textual Tools

The classical tradition also used some allied tools. *Tantraguna* are the good qualities of a text, such as clear order and proper examples, and *Tantradosha* are its faults, such as contradiction and unclear words. *Tachchhilya*, *Arthashraya*, *Kalpana* and *Vyakhya* deal with style, the way meaning rests on words, the framing of statements and the kinds of commentary. *Tantrayukti* stands at the centre of this group, while the others help to judge and polish the text.[13]

Reading One Verse with *Tantrayukti*

This short verse names the three pillars of *Ayurveda*. *Hetu*, *Linga* and *Aushadha* are only named here, which is *Uddesha*, and they are explained in detail in later sections, which is *Nirdesha* and *Anagatavekshana*. The word *Linga* must be taken here as "signs and symptoms" and not in any other sense, which is *Padartha*. The reader has to add that this knowledge is "the knowledge of *Ayurveda*", which is *Vakyashesha*. The phrase about the healthy and the sick shows the twin aim of the science, which is *Prayojana*. *Chakrapanidatta* reads the verse in this layered way, and thus one line, when opened with five or six *Tantrayukti*, gives the full outline of the science.[4]

Tantrayukti in Research and Scientific Writing

The steps of *Tantrayukti* fit well with a modern research paper. *Adhikarana* is the research topic and *Prayojana* its aim; *Atitavekshana* is the review of earlier work and *Purvapaksha* the question; *Hetvartha* and *Apadesha* give reasons, *Nidarshana* a case or model, *Vyakhyana* the discussion and *Nirnaya* the conclusion. A researcher who knows *Tantrayukti* thus already has a classical frame for planning and writing a study.[10]

SAMPRAPTI

Just as *Samprapti* shows how a disease develops step by step, the process of understanding a *Samhita* can also be shown as a chain of steps. Figure 1 shows the correct path of understanding through *Tantrayukti*, and Figure 2 shows the "*Samprapti*" of misreading when these tools are not used.

Classical text (*Samhita* verse / *Sutra*) – short, packed, with implied meaning
↓
Step 1: Find the topic and purpose – *Adhikarana*, *Prayojana*
↓
Step 2: Arrange the words and fix their meaning – *Yoga*, *Padartha*, *Svasamjna*, *Nirvachana*
↓
Step 3: Complete the sentence and draw implied meaning – *Vakyashesha*, *Arthapatti*, *Viparyaya*, *Uhya*
↓
Step 4: Link with other places in the text – *Pradesha*, *Atidesha*, *Atitavekshana*, *Anagatavekshana*, *Prasanga*
↓
Step 5: Check rules, exceptions and options – *Upadesha*, *Apavarga*, *Ekanta*, *Naikanta*, *Vikalpana*, *Sanniyoga*
↓
Step 6: Test by reasoning – *Hetvartha*, *Apadesha*, *Nidarshana*, *Samshaya*, *Purvapaksha*, *Pratyutsara*, *Uddhara*, *Nirnaya*
↓
Correct and complete meaning (*Arthajnana*)
↓
Use in teaching, clinical practice and research

Figure 1: Step-wise understanding of a *Samhita* through *Tantrayukti*

Tantrayukti (*Nidana*) → Literal, word-by-word reading → Hidden and cross-referred meanings missed → Doubt and apparent contradiction (*Samshaya*) → Wrong or incomplete conclusion → Faulty teaching, practice and research

Figure 2: *Samprapti* of misreading a *Samhita*

RESULT AND FINDINGS

- *Tantrayukti* are textual devices used both for composing a *Shastra* and for drawing out its correct meaning.
- *Charaka Samhita* lists 36 *Tantrayukti* (Ch. Si. 12/41–44); *Sushruta Samhita* (Su. U. 65) and the *Arthashastra* list 32; about 40 names appear in all sources together; *Charaka*'s extra four are *Prayojana*, *Pratyutsara*, *Uddhara* and *Sambhava*.
- *Sushruta* gives a definition and an example for each *Tantrayukti*, while *Charaka* only names them; *Chakrapanidatta*, *Dalhana*, *Arunadatta* and *Nilamegha* supply detailed explanation.
- The main purpose is the correct joining of words (*Vakyayojana*) and of meanings (*Arthayojana*), along with the defence of one's own view.
- The 36 tools work at four levels – word, sentence, cross-reference and argument – and can be placed in six practical groups.
- *Tantrayukti* has a close link with the *Vada Marga* of *Charaka* and with allied tools such as *Tantraguna*, *Tantradosha*, *Tachchhilya*, *Arthashraya* and *Kalpana*.

- A single verse (Ch. Su. 1/24) needed at least five *Tantrayukti* to bring out its full meaning, and the steps of *Tantrayukti* match the structure of a modern research paper.
- Reading without *Tantrayukti* leads to literal reading, missed meaning and wrong application, as shown in Figure 2.

DISCUSSION

The *Samhitas* are compact by design. An author who has to cover the whole of medicine in verse cannot repeat every rule at every place, so he states some things briefly, hints at others and leaves some to be inferred. *Tantrayukti* is the agreement between the author and the reader about how these gaps will be filled. When the reader knows that a brief *Uddesha* will be followed by a *Nirdesha*, or that a missing word is to be supplied by *Vakyashesha*, the text stops looking incomplete or contradictory. Recent work applying *Tantrayukti* to the *Kalpana Chatushka* of *Charaka* shows that even the technical drug-processing sections become clearer and more usable when read in this way.[14]

A second reason for their importance is the layered nature of the texts. *Charaka Samhita* was redacted by *Charaka* and completed by *Dridhabala*, *Sushruta Samhita* also passed through more than one hand, and each text has gathered several commentaries. Commentators often differ because they apply different *Tantrayukti* to the same line, for example reading a statement as *Ekanta* or as *Naikanta*. Knowing these tools helps a student see why a verse is explained in a certain way and to judge the explanations critically instead of accepting any one blindly.[15]

Today the *Samhitas* are often read in English translation, and many students lack strong training in Sanskrit. Here *Tantrayukti* becomes even more useful, as it gives a clear, rule-based route to the intended meaning, much like the rules of interpretation in law or the structure of scientific writing. Instead of memorising the list, students should analyse a few verses with each group of *Tantrayukti*, as in the worked example and flow chart above. Such practice can improve *Samhita* teaching, clinical reasoning and research writing in *Ayurveda*.[16]

CONCLUSION

Tantrayukti is the classical method given by the *Acharyas* for writing and reading a scientific text. *Charaka* lists 36 and *Sushruta* 32 of these tools, and together they help the reader to fix the topic, find the right meaning of words, supply missing parts, connect scattered references, check rules and exceptions, and test statements by reasoning. When these steps are followed, even a very short verse of a *Samhita* opens up into its full meaning, while reading without them leads to literal and incomplete understanding. Therefore, *Tantrayukti* should be taught as a working skill with real examples from the *Samhitas*, so that students and researchers can use it in study, clinical practice and scientific writing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Nil

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