

Methodological Mismatch: Diversity in Sanskrit PhD Dissertations

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<https://doi.org/10.3126/haimaprabha.v25i01.96658>

Abstract

This research explores methodological and structural deviations in selected Sanskrit PhD dissertations. Despite the long and incessant rational and academic history of Sanskrit, formal doctoral research in Sanskrit studies is a relatively recent practical phenomenon. Since the institutionalization of Sanskrit PhD programs in India and Nepal, noteworthy variations have emerged in the structural organization, methodological orientation, and stylistic conventions of dissertations. This article examines the nature and extent of such variations by analyzing selected Sanskrit PhD dissertations submitted to universities in India, Nepal, and selected Western institutions. For this the study applies the genre analysis theory of John Swales Vijay Bhatia. The study identifies a profound mismatch between prescribed research methodologies—both traditional Sanskrit research conventions and modern Western academic styles—and their genuine application in doctoral theses. The findings divulge considerable inconsistencies not only across universities but also within the same faculty, discipline, and academic session. This methodological disharmony has generated confusion among emerging researchers and emphasizes the urgent need for a standardized yet discipline-sensitive research framework for Sanskrit doctoral studies.

Keywords: academic standardization, PhD dissertations, research methodology, Sanskrit research, stylistic inconsistency.

Introduction

The research tradition in Sanskrit language and literature is found to have begun academically since 1959 from Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, India with the first PhD dissertation of Swami Sureshananda Bharati (*Gaveṣaṇāviśayasuci*, 1991, p.131). Having felt structural and methodological difficulties in the preparation of this thesis, one of the professors of this university, Bhagirath Prasad Tripathi was urged to prepare a research methodological book, *Anusandhān Paddhati* [Research Methodology]. Following the guidelines prescribed by this book, academic research works in Sanskrit have been

completed in various universities from India. Thus, the journey of formal and academic research for PhD degree in Sanskrit language and literature in India has completed almost six decades.

In Nepal after the establishment of Mahendra Sanskrit University in 2043 B.S., the first PhD dissertation in Sanskrit was prepared by Rameshchandra Adhikari in 2044 B.S. (Chalise, 2070, p.13). PhD theses accomplished during 2050 to 2060 B.S. are somehow guided in approach, method, technique, format and style as of the dissertations of Indian universities. Theses prepared after 2060 B.S. appear to have tried to follow the modern western format laid by APA and MLA or Chicago styles. These theses are to some extent structured to incorporate introduction, theory, analysis/discussion and conclusion as found in western research design and methodological books. There is, however, huge variation in the theses of different disciplines and subjects like in Dharmaśāstra, Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya and Jyotiṣa.

Sanskrit scholars claim that Sanskrit research has its own tradition and its unique way of in-text citation along with footnote and reference making. If it is so, there must be uniformity, at least, in the works accomplished from Research Centre of Nepal Sanskrit University. Such works should have consistency in format and methodology. However, even in the theses within the same area or the subject and in the same year, there is not uniformity in the issues of the introductory and discussion chapters. The referencing style also varies even in the theses of the same subject. Neither they have implemented the guidelines of Sanskrit Research Methodology nor have they maintained consistency while applying the research designs of the modern styles. The variation in research format and style in the research centers of different universities is obviously natural and inevitable phenomenon that can be taken as granted. The variation in research format in different subjects as per their nature is also common. Development and change in research format as per the owing to time and place of research is also taken as granted. But, the deviation and distraction in the researches of the same academic session of the same university is a serious problem. This mismatch has created a confusion to the new researchers to pursue research in different subjects of Sanskrit language and literature. According to Swales (1990), discourse communities maintain recognizable patterns of academic communication; therefore, inconsistency in methodological and stylistic conventions may create confusion for emerging researchers within the same academic field.

A major problem in contemporary Sanskrit doctoral research is the lack of structural and methodological uniformity within dissertations produced by the same faculty of the same university. In several cases, even individual chapters of a single dissertation follow different principles of research writing. If such inconsistencies exist within a single institution, greater divergence across universities is inevitable.

In this background, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What traditional research elements of Sanskrit studies are applied in recent PhD dissertations?
2. How do the Sanskrit PhD dissertations exhibit mismatches in style, structure, and overall organization?

The objectives of this article are:

- To identify conventional Sanskrit research elements employed in contemporary PhD dissertations.
- To analyze structural, methodological, and stylistic disparities in Sanskrit doctoral theses.

The importance of this study lies in fostering awareness among Sanskrit scholars regarding existing inconsistencies in doctoral research. Such awareness encourages scholarly dialogue aimed at developing a standardized, user-friendly, and discipline-sensitive Sanskrit research methodology. The ultimate significance of this study rests in its potential contribution toward the formulation of a comprehensive handbook for Sanskrit research, integrating classical textual traditions with modern academic documentation practices. This contribution to Sanskrit scholars and researchers becomes the significance of this study.

Tripathi (1959) has explained ancient research methodology and format in 50 pages in his Sanskrit text, *Anusandhān Paddhati* [Research Methodology]. Defining research, he has mentioned scientific methods of doing research. He has discussed the role of a researcher, selection of researchable subject, techniques of data collection and format of research. He has responded the question: whether the research is new exploration, science, thought or art. In this way, he has simply paved the way of ancient research methodology.

Sanskrit Sodh Pravidhi [Methodology of Research in Sanskrit] is an introductory research methodology of 77 pages in 5 chapters prepared by Aacharya (2005). In first chapter he has designated nature of research, types and methodology of research. Similarly, in the second chapter selection of research title and data collection are presented. In third chapter, issues of translation and transliteration are explained. The fourth chapter focusses on the critical analysis of text and fifth chapter is concentrated on the preparation of research work.

Dhakal (2069 B.S.) in the journal *Valmikipragyā* elucidates the use of direct quotation while editing Sanskrit manuscripts for research works. He asserts that in ancient writing there was not the tradition of mentioning chapter, section, date and page in in-text citation. They were cited only in footnote. The writer is also in the support of documenting the necessary information only in footnote.

Anusandhānprakāś is a journal published by Research Centre of Nepal Sanskrit University to facilitate the researchers on the methods, techniques and designs of PhD

theses. *Anusandhānprakāś* edited by Chalise (2070 BS.) refers the format of the research as prescribed by MLA Handbook. For the evaluation of the research work, the journal has extended some basic elements: uniformity in the research, correlation in between research problem and objectives, literature review, appropriateness of research methods and tools etc. Likewise, in the appendix section, research proposal's format is offered in which relevance of research, a short literature review, need and limitation, importance and contribution of research are suggested to include. In research work the first chapter incorporates all these and second and third chapters are the discussion sections in which the research problems are analyzed and solved respectively. The last chapter concentrates on the findings, conclusion and recommendation.

Shrestha (2079 BS.) has discussed the useful research principles, methodology and techniques for Nepali and Sanskrit research in *Sāhityako Anusandhān Vyavasthāpan* [*Research Management of Literature*]. The book has highlighted the research philosophy, statement of problem, research questions, objectives, styles of research writing and language of research. The book focuses on the philosophical aspect of research. It has also much discussed on the research gap and the ways of addressing it.

Gharti (2080) in his *Anusandhān Paddhati: Siddhanta ra Prayoga* [*Research Methodology: Principle and Implementation*] has proposed philosophy and paradigms useful for Nepali and Sanskrit literature. He has also extended the methodological and technical elucidations. In his book he has simply discussed about the structure and format, importance, approaches and types of research. Likewise, he has discoursed about research questions and objectives of research.

These books published in Nepal and India on Sanskrit Research Methodology are representative ones. Although the scholars have discussed research methodology, research philosophy, research paradigm and general formats of research writing in Sanskrit language and literature, the existing literature does not systematically observe the actual structural, methodological, and stylistic practices followed in recent Sanskrit PhD theses across universities. In other words, these books have not exactly pinpointed and prescribed exact guideline, structure and accepted technical part of documenting the sources.

Most of the reviewed works—such as those by Tripathi (1959), Acharya (2005), Shrestha (2079 BS), and Gharti (2080 BS)—are prescriptive and theoretical in nature. They explain how Sanskrit research should be conducted and outline ideal research elements, formats, and methodologies. However, they do not empirically analyze completed Sanskrit PhD dissertations to verify whether these prescribed principles are uniformly or consistently applied. On the other hand, the PhD dissertations have not also followed some of the basic guidelines prescribed by these methodological books

Similarly, Dhakal (2069 BS) and *Anusandhānprakāś* (Chalise, 2070 BS) focus on citation practices, evaluation criteria, and recommended formats, largely drawing from

MLA guidelines, but they do not investigate the mismatch between recommended formats and actual thesis practices, nor do they compare intra-university and inter-university deviations. Therefore, there is no study on the use of traditional Sanskrit research elements in contemporary PhD theses. Furthermore, there is no documented study in the inconsistencies and disparity in the overall structure and technicalities of PhD dissertations in Sanskrit produced within the same faculty and across different universities.

Thus, this article attempts to do the research on this clear empirical and contextual gap on the absence of a comparative, practice-based analysis of structural, methodological, and stylistic inconsistencies in recent Sanskrit PhD dissertations, particularly in the Nepalese and Indian university context and some of the western universities. Moreover, no systematic study has examined intra-university and inter-university disparities in dissertation structure and style. This study addresses that empirical gap by analyzing actual doctoral theses.

Methodology

Research Design This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design. Primary data consist of selected eight Sanskrit PhD dissertations submitted between 2015 and 2023 to universities in Nepal, India, and the West. These eight dissertations are from different disciplines of Sanskrit language and literature. These dissertations are purposively sampled to represent diverse disciplines, institutions, and methodological orientations. Each thesis is analyzed for structural components, chapter organization, citation techniques, use of footnotes, presentation of quotations, and reference formatting. Secondary data include published books and journal articles on Sanskrit research methodology. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of consistency and deviation rather than evaluating the intellectual merit of individual dissertations.

Sampling This research is confined to a small, purposively selected sample of Sanskrit PhD dissertations and therefore does not claim wide-ranging representation of all Sanskrit doctoral researches. The analysis emphasizes structural, methodological, and stylistic aspects and does not evaluate the theoretical depth or scholarly quality of the arguments presented in the theses. Additionally, it restricts the inclusion of some unpublished dissertations. Variations arising from institutional regulations and supervisor preferences are not independently verified. The research article adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design. It is qualitative in nature because it focuses on analyzing textual and structural aspects of Sanskrit PhD dissertations rather than numerical data. Purposive sampling method is used. Eight dissertations are selected from different disciplines, institutions, and methodological orientations.

Data Collection Tools and Process The research article uses document analysis as the main data collection tool. The primary data are collected from eight selected Sanskrit PhD dissertations, while the secondary data are gathered from published books and journal articles concerned to Sanskrit research methodology. These documents serve as the main sources of information for examining structural and methodological features. The study follows a qualitative analytical approach. The collected dissertations are carefully examined and compared in terms of their structural components, chapter organization, citation techniques, use of footnotes, presentation of quotations, and reference formatting. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of consistency and deviation across the dissertations rather than evaluating their intellectual content.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically embedded in Genre Theory—the genre analysis perspectives. This perspective is advanced by John Swales and Vijay Bhatia. Swales (1990) clarifies that academic writing functions within identical discourses that should also retain collective communicative purposes, structural agreements, and methodological outlooks. A PhD dissertation should also, therefore, function as a recognized academic genre that requires relative uniformity in chapter organization, citation and documentation style, and presentation of academic arguments. Despite the fact that there are variations in disciplines and institutions, genres must maintain identifiable and common conventions in order to ensure clarity, coherence, and effective academic message. This theoretical perspective is predominantly applicable to the present study because Sanskrit doctoral dissertations are often found with noteworthy deviation in structural organization, citation systems, and methodological claim even within the same university and academic year.

Similarly, Bhatia (1993) claims that academic genres are formed by textual structures, institutional specific patterns, uniformity in disciplines, and specialized potentials. He further argues that if there are interaction and practices of numerous academic traditions with greater variations, it appears to be of hybridity of genres that combines varied academic creations and methodological practices together. This notion of genre hybridity provides a suitable context for examining selected Sanskrit PhD dissertations, as they often amalgamate incoherently modern Western academic styles such as MLA, APA, and Chicago systems together making the hybridity in in-text citations and reference. The continuation of traditional Sanskrit research practices and application of modern research methodology pursuing western documentation styles has generated methodological and stylistic diversity in Sanskrit doctoral dissertations. Thus, the theoretical perspectives of Swales and Bhatia support the present study to observe, analyze and interpret as this study attempts to interpret structural inconsistencies, methodological mismatch, and stylistic variation, and diversity in documentation of data

in selected Sanskrit PhD dissertations. The arguments and claims related to academic genre making of these two theorists are relevant to the issues, conventions and practices of the Sanskrit PhD dissertations. Only the gist concept of these two theorists is presented as the theoretical background in this short study. Thus, the common ground of these two writers is the structural uniformity is the must in academic writing to communicate the message that enhances the creation to be a different genre.

Discussion

The PhD dissertations entitled *Paṇḍitsundarlāśamarāṇ: Chattisgadhipadyakāvyēṣu Sanskritsāhityasya Prabhavḥ* was submitted by Rupendra Kumar Tiwari to the faculty of Sanskrit literature at Central Sanskrit University, Madhyapradesh, Bhopal, India in 2021. In the preliminary part of the thesis the researcher has included the certificate of his supervisor, declaration of the researcher, acknowledgement, content, list of abbreviation, map of Chattisgadhi and photo of the poet, Sundarlāl. The thesis consists of 200 pages including appendices. In the introduction, he has explored the development of the language of Chattisgadhi. In the first chapter, he has introduced the poet and his poetic creations. In the second chapter, the researcher has analyzed the effect of Rasa, use of meter, metaphor and figurative language in Sundarlāl's poetic work. In the concluding chapter, he has examined the figurative language of the poems and concluded the thesis.

Before beginning the first chapter, he has included proposal, subject of research, explanation of the research title and purpose of the research. Footnote is used in the research work; however, in the footnote only book's title is specified in abbreviated form. Slokas are explained in narrative paragraphs; they are not indented. The lines and stanzas from other languages are not translated rather they are paraphrased and analyzed. The references are presented numbering them in a table. At first, sources mainly books are presented. They are followed by writers/editors and publisher's information. The most striking part of this thesis is its placement of references in a table which is deviated from other common theses in Sanskrit. The common feature with other theses is the use of footnote in this thesis.

Another dissertation from the same university from Jayapur, Rajsthan, India is from the pen of Mithalal Mali completed in 2021. The research work is entitled *Paribhāṣenduśekharasya vaidhanāthabhattaviracitakāśitikāyāḥ*. In the beginning of this dissertation, *maṅgalācaraṇ* (invocation/benedictory verse), certificate of the supervisor and declaration letter are presented. The dissertation consists of five chapters in 485 pages. The first chapter deals with the emergence of *vyākaraṇ* (Sanskrit grammar), its types and uses whereas in the second chapter, its structure of the definition and importance are described. The third chapter comprises biography and works of Naagesh Bhatta, Bhattojidsit and Vaidanath Bhatta. The fourth chapter evaluates their works and the fifth

chapter analyzes and interprets the issues raised in research questions. In the footnote the writer's name and book along with the number of *sutra* (formula) of the cited sources are documented. However, long quotation above four lines is not indented but placed as the short quotation in the narrative paragraph. The references start from the titles of books in a table. The books are not arranged in alphabetical order. The publication year of the book is not given.

The researcher, Puja is awarded with her PhD dissertation, *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtrasya Samikṣātmadhyānam* from Shree Lalbahadur Saastrī National Sanskrit University, Delhi in 2021. The cover page of the dissertation is seen with the signatures of the head of the department, supervisor and the researcher's, herself. In the preliminary part of the thesis, declaration, certificate of the supervisor, certificate of pre-conference of PhD course, marksheet of Master's degree, invocation, acknowledgement and content are presented. Before the beginning of the first chapter, introduction of the Buddhism, its evolution, development, differences between hīnyāna and mahāyāna and introduction of *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* are described. Then from the first to sixth chapters, there's interpretation and analysis of the text, conclusion, appendix and references. Direct quotation and slokas are included within the narrative paragraphs and only chapter and number of slokas are briefly placed in footnote. In a single narrative paragraph 10 to 12 slokas are incorporated. At the end of the dissertation, the list of definable terminology with their definition is given. In the reference section, the title of the book is followed by its writer, publication year of the source and its publisher.

Another PhD dissertation from Shree Lalbahadur Shaastri National Sanskrit University, Delhi from the department of Vāstuśāstra awarded in 2021 to Jyotiprasad Gairola is *Puraṇeṣvāgatadevadevīvīgrahāṇām Vāstuśāstradrṣṭyāā Priśīlanam*. This dissertation integrates the certificate of Research Methodology Seminar, other certificates related to the research courses, declaration, invocation, acknowledgement and content. After presenting the introduction of 29 pages, he has started the first chapter. Footnote is used to show the title of the book, chapter and number of slokas and page number. The slokas and direct quotations are attached in narrative paragraphs. In the reference, after the title of the book, author's name, place of publication, publisher and published year are placed.

Rishi Atul Rajput's PhD dissertation, *In Pāṇini We Trust: Discovering the Algorithm for Rule Conflict Resolution in the Astādhyāyī* is from the university of Cambridge completed in 2021. The font size of the letter used in title varies even in the cover page. The title is followed by the researcher's, college's, and University's names. The declaration is in the first page. Then abstract and content are in other pages. The content is followed by acknowledgement. As other Sanskrit research works, it has also

used footnote. APA style is partially followed. The reference section is divided into primary and secondary sources.

Abhinavgupta's Portrait of a Guru: Revelation and Religious Authority in Kashmir is a PhD dissertation presented for reward by Benjamin Luk Williams in Harvard University, USA in 2017. In the preliminary part of the thesis, abstract, content and acknowledgement are presented. It has total six chapters; and the first chapter lays the foundation of the issue and last chapter concludes the thesis. The analysis and interpretation are in second, third, fourth and fifth chapter. Footnote is used for the cited sources. For the documentation of the sources, MLA style is used for the secondary sources whereas conventional style of Sanskrit is followed for the primary sources.

The PhD dissertation, *The Paribhāsā, Yadāgamās Tadguṇībhūtās Tadgrahaṇena Grhyante in the Pāṇinian Tradition* is completed by Yming Shen in 2019 from Oxford University. The right side of every page is justified and subtitles are designed in numbering system that uses dots to separate numbers. The first chapter includes introduction, research questions, methodology and literature review. The reference section is divided into primary and secondary sources. The list of abbreviation is in the appendix. The reference begins from the title of the books in the primary sources whereas the secondary sources follow the MLA style. Digital sources are separately placed.

Tulanātmakṛṣṇā Darśanāntarādvaitadarśanābhīmatamoksatatvavivekḥ is submitted by Umesn Ghimire to Nepal Sanskrit University for PhD award in 2023. In the cover page of the thesis the logo of university, researcher's name and submission year are given. In the preliminary part, there are approval letters of supervisor, co-supervisors, declaration, acknowledgement, abstract, a list of abbreviation and table. The first chapter incorporates introduction, statement of the problem, objective, literature review, limitation and methodology. The sub-headings are placed in numbering system and it is up to four figures separated by dots. While citing sources in in-text citation, books are prioritized. The reference begins from book's title followed by the publication year, writer, place of publication and publisher.

Mahanada Timilsina's PhD dissertation, *Jagadambikāvaibhavamahakāvyaśya Sahittyik Manuśīlanam* is from Nepal Sanskrit University submitted in 2015. The thesis includes approval letters of supervisor and co-supervisors, declaration, acknowledgement, abstract, the list of abbreviated words and content in the preliminary part. The thesis has altogether 9 chapters. The first chapter incorporates introduction, problem, objective, literature review, need of the research and methodology. The footnote is in bold face. The conclusion section is divided into sub-headings. The reference section is divided as per the language and the nature of the sources into Sanskrit, Nepali and Hindi, and into journals and PhD theses. The reference seems to follow MLA style.

An analysis of selected PhD dissertations from Indian, Nepalese, and Western universities, as such reveals substantial variation in preliminary materials, chapter organization, citation practices, and reference formatting. Such variations indicate the absence of stable genre conventions within Sanskrit doctoral research, although academic dissertations conventionally function as structured scholarly genres governed by shared communicative purposes (Swales, 1990).

Some dissertations rely heavily on footnotes with abbreviated citations, while others partially adopt APA or MLA styles. Long Sanskrit quotations are frequently embedded within narrative paragraphs without indentation or translation. Reference lists vary widely in organization, completeness, and bibliographic detail.

Even within the same university and academic year, dissertations differ noticeably in the placement of research proposals, use of tables for references, treatment of primary and secondary sources, and formatting of chapters and subheadings. The considerable variation in dissertation formatting and research organization across universities demonstrates the influence of institutional practices on academic genres, as emphasized by Bhatia (1993).

Western dissertations on Sanskrit topics often employ fusion models, combining conventional Sanskrit citation for primary texts with MLA or APA styles for secondary sources. The simultaneous use of traditional Sanskrit citation methods alongside MLA and APA practices reflects what Bhatia (1993) describes as genre hybridity arising from the interaction of multiple disciplinary and institutional conventions. A notable observation is the limited explicit discussion of theoretical frameworks in several dissertations.

Conclusion

The study finds that contemporary Sanskrit PhD dissertations display noteworthy structural, methodological, and stylistic variations. While diversity across disciplines, institutions, and historical contexts is natural, the absence of internal uniformity within the same university and academic session represents a serious academic concern. Neither traditional Sanskrit research conventions nor modern Western methodologies are applied consistently, resulting in hybrid and often incoherent research designs. This methodological mismatch not only complicates doctoral supervision and evaluation but also creates uncertainty for novice researchers. The findings strongly indicate the need for a standardized yet adaptable Sanskrit research framework that integrates indigenous scholarly practices with globally accepted academic norms. Developing a comprehensive and authoritative Sanskrit research methodology handbook would enhance clarity, academic rigor, and international credibility in Sanskrit doctoral scholarship.

Acknowledgements

This research article has been prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University Grants Commission's Faculty Research Grant (FRG-2078-079-H&S-04) under the research project entitled *Sanskrit Research Methodology*, completed in 2082 B.S. We express our sincere gratitude to the University Grants Commission for granting permission and providing support to carry out this research under the title of the present article. The primary and secondary sources utilized in this article are derived from the above-mentioned research project. We also extend our thanks to all the scholars and researchers whose works have contributed to and supported this study.

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