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A Critical Review of Swara (Voice) in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Background: The human voice (*swara*) is extraordinary and it is the mirror of oneself. It represents one's age, gender, health and other traits of human kind. For professional voice users (PVU), *swara* means of livelihood and hence demands utmost care. This review consolidates the scattered vedic and classical explanations of *swara* and its clinical implications.

Methods: A detailed review of *swara* was carried out to explore the untouched explanations of *swara*, from *Ayurvedic samhitas*, *Manusmriti*, *Tarkasangraha* etc.

Results: The present study resulted in the unique understanding of concept of *swara*. **Conclusion:** The current review would be used to widen the existing understanding of *swara* and thereby aid in combatting new health challenges concerning to voice.

KEYWORDS Ayurveda, PVU, *Swara*, Voice, Manusmriti, Tarkasangraha.

PICTORIAL ABSTRACT



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1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient philosophy considers *swara* as speech or voice. It is the means of expressing one's own emotions. Man is considered as an epitome as nature's creation because of this unique ability of communication. Though many theories and research are established on voice and its clinical implications, *Swara Utpatti* or the act of phonation is explained in vedic texts like *Panini Sutra*, *Manusmriti*, *Tarkasangraha*, and *Darshanas* under the title of *Vaak Pravrutti*.^[1,2] According to *Vachaspathi*, *Swara* is the sound that emerges from the *kantha* and which is responsible for singing.^[3] *Swara* can be broadly understood in terms of voice, sound, tone, and accent and can be traced in the vedic texts as *Vaani*, *Dhwani*, *Vaak*, *Shabda*.^[2,4] It can be defined as a fine pleasing sound produced by the systematic union of sound waves and resonance through the vocal cords.^[5]

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The detailed review of *Swara* is compiled by exploring the print and online versions of primary literature of the *Swara* in various ancient vedic texts like *Panini sutra*, *Manusmriti*, *Tarkasangraha*, *Darshanas* and various classical compendium of Ayurveda. The review is critically analysed as per different streams of sciences.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Components for *Swara Utpatti*

Vayu in Tridoshas, specifically *Prana* and *Udaana Vayu*, *Swarayantra*, *Swara* *srotas* are regarded as the prime components for *Swara Utpatti*.

3.1.1 Vayu in Swara Utpatti

Any movement or task initiation in the universe and human body are regulated by the *Vayu Mahabhoota* and *Vata Dosha* respectively. *Charaka* explains the *Prakeruta Karma* of *Vata* as *Pravartana of Vachana (Vaak / voice)*, *Uchwaasa* and *Nishwasa*. *Swara utpatti*, is a *karma* initiated and well carried by *Vata dosha*. Among the five types of *vayu*, *Prana* and *Udana* *vayu* are responsible for voice production. As per *Acharya Sushruta*, *Shareerasthana* and *Uttaratantra*, *Udanavayu* is solely responsible for *Vak-Pravrutti* through the *Swaravaha Srotas*. He explains that by interaction between *Kantha*, *Talu*, *Oshta*, *Danta* and other parts of oral cavity, the *Bhasba*, *Geeta* actions manifest (Table 1 and 2). As per *Ashtanga Hrudaya*, *Nidanasthana*, *Udanavayu* is the *Bala* which initiates the individual to perform various activities physically and mentally.^[6-9]

3.1.2 Swara Yantra

Swara yantra is not mentioned in *Ayurveda* as a separate organ unlike larynx in the modern anatomy. Instead concept of *Swarayantra* is explained in the name of *Swaravaha srotas*.

3.1.3 Swaravaha Srotas

These are the channels for voice production. *Acharya Dalhana* comments that *Swaravaha srotas* are the *Shabdhanabhani Dhamani* responsible for voice production. Among these *Srotas*, two are responsible for the *Bhasba* and two for *Ghosha*.^[7,8]

3.1.4 Swara Utpatti

Swara Utpatti (Voice production) is explained by *Panini Sutra*, *Manusmriti*, *Tarkasangraha*, and *Darshanas* under the title of

Vaak Pravrutti. *Vani* or *Swara* is possible by minute image of voice called *Sukshma Vaani*, which is projected in the form of *Sthula vaani* (speech proper). *Tarka sangraha* explains *Shabdha Utpatti* with the help of *Vichitaranga nyaya*. According to this philosophy, a sound wave is generated like the ripples generate on the surface of water. Just as these ripples interact with each other producing a wave, similarly the sound waves jointogether forming a firm sound. In *Panini Shiksha*, it is described that different sounds and voices are produced by the air that gushes out from the lungs through the voice box. *Rig veda* and *Yogic science* under *Nada yoga* explain the four stages of *Vaani* as *Para*, *Pasyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari*.^[10,11]

Nada yoga, encompasses various practices ranging from chanting in praise of the divine (*Nada Sankirtan*) to purification of energy channels (*Nadi Shuddhi*), which gives a reverential way of approach and response to sound. *Nada* (intonation) can be physical (*Abata*) or in its sublime form in the subtle domains of the mind (*Anabata*). *Na* refers to *prana* and *da* refers to *Agni*. *Nada* also means flow of consciousness. In the *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the vedic Sanskrit scriptures, sound is referred to as '*nada brahma*' sound of the creation. It is said to be the seed of all that is manifest, from the gross to the subtle, from visible to invisible. As per the *Rig Veda*, *Para*, *Pashyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari* are the four manifestations of sound in the human body, that channel upwards from the navel area to actual speech, the actual articulation of the choices one has made in the process of uttering the word (Table 3). *Swara* is

Table 1: Sites of Prana and Udana Vayu

Name of the Acharya	Site of Prana Vayu	Site of Udana Vayu
Charaka	Murdha, uraha, Kantha, Jivha and Nasika	Uraha, Kantha and nabhi
Sushruta	Murdha, Kantha, nasika	Uuraha kantha jivha nabhi
Vridha Vagbhata	Uraha and kantha	nasika - nabhi
Sharangadhara	----	puppusa

Table 2: Functions of Prana and Udana Vayu

Name of the Acharya	Functions of Prana Vayu	Functions of Udana Vayu
Charaka	Stheevana, Kshavathu, Udgara, Nishwasa, Anna Pravesha	Vaakpravrutti, Prayatna, Orja, Bala, Varna
Sushruta	Annapravesha, prana avalambana	Bhashana, gaana, uchwasa
Vridha Vagbhata	Stheevana, Kshavathu, Udgara, Nishwasa, Anna Pravesha	Vaakpravrutti, Prayatna, Orja, Bala, Varna

Table 3: Manifestations of four sounds in the human body

Name of swara	Location	Nature of voice	Chakras
Para	Nabhi	Subtler	Mooladhara, Manipura Swadhisthana
Pashyanti	Hrudaya	Minutely Vibrative	Anahata
Madhyama	Kantha	Completely vibrative	Vishuddha
Vaikhari	Jivha	Fine, clear, voice proper	Vishuddha, Ajna

classified by various acharyas based on various characteristics (Table 4). The different types depict the status of the body in prakriti and *Vikrita Avastha* (Table 5).^{11,12}

Nature of Swara as per individual's *Prakriti*, *Dosha dominance* and *Saara*

The *Prakriti* (phenotypic and genotypic constitution) of an individual very much influences the voice by the virtues of the *gunas* attributed to the constitution of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* (Table 6). In the context of *Shabdha Pareeksha* in *Ashtavidha Pareeksha*, *Yogaratanakara* defines the nature of voice according to different *Dosha* dominant conditions (Table 7). *Sara* is the essence of the bodily tissues (*dhatus*). The nature of voice varies with the type of the *Sara* of the person. Among the 8 *Sara* (*Twak Sara*, *Raktasara*, *Mamsa Sara*, *Medasara*, *Asthisara*, *Majja Sara*, *Shukra* and *Satwa Sara*), the nature of *Swara* is

Table 4: Types of Swara as per different classics

Author	Number	Types of Swara
SushrutaSamhita, Sutrasthana 2/14)	02	<i>Bhashita and geeta</i>
Manusmriti 2/85	02	<i>Upanshu</i> and <i>Japa</i> responsible for the whispering and a low voiced muttering respectively.
Shatapatha Brahmana	04 02	Human speech, animal speech, bird speech and speech related to reptiles. Other types are <i>Daivi</i> and <i>Manushi</i> .
Traka sangraha	02	<i>Dhwanyatmaka shabdha</i> (<i>Ghosharupa shabdha</i>) and <i>Varnatmaka shabdha</i> (<i>Bhasharupa shabdha</i>)

Table 5: Types of Swara based on physiology and pathology

Type of Swara	Nature
<i>Prakruta Swara</i>	It resembles the voice of the birds like <i>the hamsa</i> , <i>krouncha</i> , <i>nemi</i> , <i>dhundhubhi</i> , <i>kalavinka</i> , <i>kaaka</i> , <i>kapota</i> and <i>jarjara</i> which is a musical instrument.
<i>Vikruta Swara</i>	It resembles the voice of birds like <i>Aidaka</i> , <i>Kala</i> , and is <i>Grastha</i> , <i>Avyakta</i> , <i>gadgada</i> , <i>deena</i> and <i>kshaama</i> in nature.

Table 6: Nature of Swara as per individual's prakriti

Prakruti	Nature of Swara
Vata Prakruti	Pratata, (open/free flowing), Ruksha (rough), Kshaama (feeble), Sanna and sakta(breaky/ creaky, Baddha (restricted/ obstructed).
Kapha Prakruti	Prasanna (pleasant), Snigdha (Unctous), gambheera (deep) as mrudanga, jaladha, simha and samudra.

mentioned for *Meda*, *Majja* and *Shukra Sara Purusha* (Table 8).^{13,14}

3.2 Voice care in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic classics explain *Kanthya* and *Swarya* formulations and herbs which aim at promoting voice and improving the voice quality. *Kantha* is a *Shareera Avayava*.¹⁵ *Kanthya dravyas* are those, which are suitable to the throat.¹⁶ *Sambitas* have compiled a specified set of drugs as *Dashemani*, which cause desired action on the target systems. *Kanthya* drugs constitute one such *Dashemani* in the name of *Kanthya Dashemani* which comprise the drugs promoting the voice (Table 9). The word *Swarya* means beneficial to voice.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Hence, use of *Swarya* drugs (Table 10) in daily regimens called *Kavala* and *Gandusha* mentioned under *Dinacharya*, and in the form of medicine aid in promoting the vocal health. Apart from the drugs, Ayurveda also mentions about the *Pathya Ahara* and *Vihara* for voice (Table 11).¹⁸

Thus, on critically exploring the concepts of *Swara* in Ayurveda and other vedic texts, ample explanation is found about *Swara* and its promotion through regimens and specified medicines

4. DISCUSSION

The characteristics of the voice indicate the physiology and the pathology of the body. In the context of *Swara Utpatti*, the *Sthula Vani* is the outward expression of *Suksma Vani*. *Charaka* explains that *Vayu* along with *Akasha* is responsible for *Swara Utpatti*. *Panini* explains that it is the *Atma* along with *buddhi* which decides the production of speech/ voice. Once this decision is affirmed *mana* gets stimulated, induces the *Kayagni* and initiates *Vata*, which produces a mild sound in thorax. Under the influence of *Udaana Vayu*, this sound ascends upwards and interacts with *Uraba*, *Kantha*, *Shira*, *Jivhamoola*, *Danta*, *Nasika*, *Oshtbau*, *Talu* and produces a clear loud sound.

Mode of Action of Nada Yoga

Nada yoga embraces the notion that the primary material of the universe is vibratory, and therefore made up of sound

Table 7: Nature of swara as per dosha predominance in an individual

Dosha	Nature of the Swara
<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Guru</i> (heavy)
<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Sphutavakta</i> or <i>vikasi</i> (sharp)
<i>Vata</i>	<i>Guru</i> and <i>Sphutavakta</i>

Table 8: Nature of swara in meda, majja and shukra sara purusha

Sara	Nature of swara
<i>Meda</i>	<i>Sneha yukta</i>
<i>Majja</i>	<i>Snigdha</i> (unctuous)
<i>Shukra</i>	<i>Prasanna</i> and <i>Snigdha</i>

Table 9: Charakokta Kanthya Dashemani

Dravya	Latin Name	Family	Rasa	Guna	Veerya	Vipaka	Doshagnata
Sariva	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i>	Asclepiadeae	Madhura Tikta	Guru Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Tridosha shamaka
Ikshumoola	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> Linn	Graminaceae	Madhura	Guru, Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Vata pitta shamaka
Madhuka	<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> Linn	Leguminosae	Madhura	Guru Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Vata pitta hara
Pippali	<i>Piper longum</i> Linn	Piperaceae	Katu	Laghu Snigdha Teekshna	Anushna Sheeta	Madhura	Vata kapha nashaka
Draksha	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> Linn	Vitaceae	Madhura, kashaya	Snigdha Guru Mrudu	Sheeta	Madhura	Vata pitta hara
Vidari	<i>Pueraria tuberosa</i> DC	Fabaceae	Madhura	Guru Snigdha	Sheeta	Madhura	Vata pitta hara
Kaitaharya	<i>Myrica esculenta</i> Buch	Myricaceae	Katu, tikta, kashays	Laghu, tikshna	Ushna	Katu	Kaphavata hara
Hamsapaadi	<i>Adiantum lunulatum</i> Burm	Polypodiaceae	Kashaya, tikta	Guru	Sheeta	Katu	Kapha pitta hara
Bruhati	<i>Solanum indium</i> Linn	Solanaceae	Tikta Katu	Laghu Ruksha Teekshna	Ushna	Katu	Kapha vata hara
Kantakari	<i>Solanum surattense</i> Burm	Solanaceae	Tikta Katu	Laghu Ruksha Teekshna	Ushna	Katu	Kapha vata hara

Table 10: List of Swarya formulations as per different classics

Text	Formulations
Chakradatta	Chavyadi churna, Kalyanaka churna, Ajamodadi churna, Badari patryaadi lehya, pippalyadi churna, Bhrungarajyaadi ghruta
Charaka	Amrutaprasha ghruta
Bhaishajya Ratnavali	Rasendra Gutika, Saraswata ghruta,
Bhavaprakasha	Nidhigdika avaleha,
Vangasena	Vyaghri ghruta
Rasakamadhenu	Trayambhaka abhra, Goraksha vati
Rasa Chudamshu	Kinnarakantha Rasa
Rasendra sara sangraha	Bhairava rasa

waves. Law of vibration states, everything in this universe constantly vibrates. The vibrations may be in subtler form or gross form. *Nada yoga* focuses on developing a spontaneous interaction between sound and consciousness. The four levels of consciousness – transcendental, deep sleep, dream-like and wakeful states correspond to four levels of sound *Para*, *Pashyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikbari* respectively. *Nada* yogic exercises address the *chakras* (energy-centers) of the human body by means of natural sound vibrations in the breath.

Critical analysis of the four stage *Swara* manifestation

The manifestation of the *Para* sound in the body, can be understood as a “gut feeling” where one senses what to do or say through the channelling of one’s own cultural context. *Pashyanti* is a form of intellectual consciousness and the clear cognitive textual representation that can be seen with one’s inner sense. *Madhyama* is just the stage before the actual articulation of the word and can be understood in-terms of breathing and phonation. *Vaikbari* is the articulation of the word itself that has risen from nothingness of the soul (*Para*), all the way into existence.

The *Charakokta Kanthya Dashemani*, include *Ushna*, *Katu*, *Teekshna* and *Sheeta Madhura*, *Snigdha Dravyas*, which render voice a clarity by clearing the *Swaravaha Srotas* and by adding pleasantness to the *Swara* respectively. *Pathya Abara* and *vihara* mentioned also contribute to the pleasantness of the voice. *Apathya Abara* possessing *Ati Amla*, *Katu* and *Kashaya Rasa*, should be avoided as they cause *Vata Prakopa* and thereby disturb the vocal health. Various *Pathya* viharas mentioned in the text act by clearing the *Swaravaha Srotas*, thereby rendering the free flow of *Prana* and *Udana Vayu* resulting in a clear, sharp voice.

5. CONCLUSION

Swara or voice is the most important aspect for every human being. For professional voice users, *Swara* is their livelihood.

Table 11: List of Pathya-Apathya Ahara and Karma for Swara

Pathya Ahara	<p><i>Dhanya varga: Rakta shaali, yava</i> <i>Mamsa varga: Hamsa, tamrachooda</i> <i>Madya Varga: Sura</i> <i>Hareeta varga: Lashuna, ardra, balamoolaka</i> <i>Aharaupayogi varga: Maricha, sarpi</i> <i>Lavana varga: saindhava lavana</i> <i>Phala varga: draksha, matulunga</i> <i>Jala varga: Koshna jala pana</i> <i>Shaka varga: Tamboola</i> <i>Dugdha varga: Godugdha (with sheeta jala, Jeevaneeya gana dravya siddha paya),</i> <i>Goghruta (koshna jala pana followed by ghruta pana)</i> <i>Aushadhi: Gokantaka, kakamachi, jeevanti, pathya</i></p>
Pathya Karma	<i>Kavala dharana (Babooladi kavalagraha), Sweda, Basti, Dhumapana, Virechana, Kavalagraha, Nasya, Siravedha.</i>
Apathya Ahara	<i>Kashaya of Ama kapitta bakula, shalooka, jambu, tinduka, amla dadhi, abhishyandi ahara,</i>
Apathya Karma	<i>Vamana, diwaswapna, prajalpa sheeta kriyavega dharana</i>

The voice care explained in contemporary health sciences are challenging to accept in many ways. Ayurveda, mentions easy measures to promote vocal health through various regimens and formulations, which stand comparatively safe in comparison to the other sciences. Hence, critical analysis and acceptance of concept of *Swara*, could render widened horizons in the understanding of vocal disorders and their treatment through Ayurveda.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Amrutha contributed to conceptualisation of the topic, literature survey from various sources and article drafting. Dr. Sanjeev contributed to critical analysis and design of the study. Dr. Jayakumar contributed to Critical analysis and manuscript editing.

ABBREVIATIONS

PVU- Professional Voice users.

SUMMARY

The article highlights about the various dimensions of Swara (Voice) as mentioned in the Ayurvedic Samhitas and other

classical texts. This information can be used in the better understanding of concept of voice and can provide better clinical applicability and cure.

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