

# A Critical Analysis Of Ancient Indian Education In The Time Of Panini

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## **Abstract**

*The education during the Sutra period, as revealed in the grammatical Sutras of Panini, along with the works of Katyayana and Patanjali, holds a unique and significant place in the history of education. This period, chronologically situated between Panini and Patanjali, provides valuable insights into the educational system and conditions of the time. The grammatical literature of this era, particularly the works of Panini and his renowned commentators Katyayana and Patanjali, offers rich evidence of the educational landscape. It's important to recognize that a close relationship exists between work of grammar and the language, literature, forms, and usages of speech that it is built upon. Therefore, grammatical works serve as a fruitful source for understanding social, political, and cultural history, often containing references to contemporary institutions, ways of life, and cultural contexts. This unique perspective on education during the Sutra period contributes significantly to our understanding of the past and the educational practices of the time.*

**Keywords :** Panini work, Sutra period, Patanjali, Grammar, Language

## **Literature known to Panini**

Panini's comprehensive work on grammar offers valuable insights into the literary landscape of ancient India, categorizing literature into four distinct classes with reference numbers.

The first class, referred to as "Seen" or Revealed Literature (Drishtam), encompasses texts considered revealed or seen. An example of such literature is the Aama Veda. Panini's grammar also mentions seers associated with the Samaveda, including Vamadeva [iv, 2, 7, and 8], as well as later additions by scholars like Kali, Agni, Usanas, and Aupagava.

The second class, known as "Enounced" Literature (Proktam) [iv, 2, 63; iv, 3, 101], includes works that are enounced or proclaimed. This category covers a wide range of texts, from Vedas and Chhandas denounced by figures like Tittiri, Varatantu, Khandika, and Ukha<sup>1</sup>, to works authored by renowned Rishis such as Kasyapa and Kausika. It also encompasses Chhandas works by scholars like Saunaka and others<sup>2</sup>, along with the literary contributions of figures like Katha, Charaka, Kalapi, Chhagali, and the direct pupils of Kalapi<sup>3</sup> and Vaisampayana.

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The third category highlights Brahmana and Kalpa Works, including texts associated with rituals, ceremonies, and Brahmanas denounced by ancient sages. Panini's classifications, as interpreted by later scholars like Katyayana and Patanjali, aimed to distinguish these works from those authored by later sages such as Yajdavalkya and Sulabha.

Lastly, Panini mentions the Bhikshu-sutras as enounced or originally propounded by Parasarya Karmanda, and the Nata-sutras as propounded by their founders mentioned as Stalin and Krisisva.

These classifications, found within Panini's grammatical sutras, provide a unique window into the literary diversity and intellectual richness of ancient India. They not only help us understand the texts of that era but also shed light on the cultural and intellectual milieu in which these compositions emerged.

Panini's grammatical sutras provide a comprehensive classification of various types of literature and commentaries during his time, offering a glimpse into the rich literary traditions of ancient India.

One of the classes of literature distinguished by Panini is the Bhikshu-sutra, which refers to a collection of rules or precepts for mendicants. On the other hand, the Nafa-sitra pertains to a collection of rules for actors [iv, 3, 101-111]. These categories reflect the diverse subjects and interests covered in ancient Indian literature.

Panini also identifies a third class of literature that is "discovered" and not merely handed down by tradition [ii, 4. 21: iv, 3. 115: vi, 2, 14 (Upajna)]. This class includes works authored by original thinkers and writers like Panini himself, as well as figures such as Kaasakrishna, Apisali, and Vyadi. These authors contributed to the literary landscape by creating new compositions and ideas.

The fourth class of literature, according to Panini [iv, 3. 87 and 116], comprises the ordinary compositions of various writers on a wide range of subjects. Patanjali mentions examples from this class, including books of stories (kydyik) like Vasavadatta, Sumanottard, and Bhaimarathi. The Kasika adds to the list with works like Urvasi and mythological texts such as Saubhadra, Gaurimitra, and Yayata. These examples reflect the diversity of literary genres and topics explored by ancient Indian writers.

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Additionally, Panini mentions the literature of Commentaries [iv, 3, 66 (Vyakhyana)], underscoring the significance of interpretative works during his time. Patanjali provides instances of commentaries on various subjects, including those on Nirukta and Vyakarana, as well as commentaries on Kalpa works such as Agnishtoma, Rajasuya, and Vajapeya. These commentaries aimed to provide explanations and interpretations of important texts, contributing to a deeper understanding of various subjects.

Panini mentions commentaries on the verses or mantras related to Purodasa (sacred cake) as Purodasika and Paurodasika [iv, 3, 703]. These commentaries likely aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the rituals and practices associated with Purodasa.

He also refers to formations like Chhandasya and Chhandasa as commentaries on Chhandas [iv, 3, 703], indicating the importance of understanding the rules and principles of meter and prosody in ancient Indian literature and poetry.

Panini's list of commentaries includes various categories and names, such as Brahmanika, Archika, Prathamika, Adhvarika, Paurascharanika, Namika, Akhyatika, and Namakhyatika [iv, 3, 703]. Each of these commentaries likely had specific purposes and focuses, catering to different aspects of knowledge and learning.

Furthermore, Panini alludes to commentaries on works belonging to the category called Rigayanadi, which included a wide array of subjects, including Chhandobhasha (prosody and meter), Chhandovichiti (metrical compositions), Nyaya (logic and reasoning), Vyakarana (grammar), Nigama (sacred scriptures), Vastuvidya (architecture), Angavidya (limbs of knowledge), Kshatruvidya (military science), Upanishat (philosophical teachings), Siksha (phonetics and pronunciation), and more [iv, 3, 703]. These commentaries would have played a vital role in disseminating knowledge and promoting a deeper understanding of these subjects.

Overall, Regarding the Atharvaveda, there is no explicit evidence of Panini's knowledge, as the word appears primarily in the Ganas to the Satras or in the Varttikas [see iv, 2, 38 and 63; iv, 3.133; etc.]. Similarly, it remains uncertain whether Panini was acquainted with the White Yajurveda, as a Varttika [to iv, 3, 105] mentioned its author Yajnavalkya, potentially indicating that Yajnavalkya was a contemporary of Panini. The existence of Aranyakas during Panini's time is also uncertain due to his omission to refer to them in explaining the formation of "Aranyaka" [iv, 2, 129]. It's possible that the Upanishads, which evolved from the Aranyakas,

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were not known to Panini, as he mentioned the word "Upanishad" only once [i. 4. 79], likely in the sense of a secret or possibly a literary work. The word "Upanishad" appeared twice in the Ganas [iv, 3, 73 (in the sense of a literary work) and iv, 4, 12].

In the realm of secular literature, Panini's knowledge was equally extensive. He discussed grammatical formations related to various subjects, including rules and practices concerning actors and mendicants, the treatment of children's cries, and even the seasons [iv, 2, 64]. His references also extended to fables and stories [ib., 102]. This broad spectrum of secular literature showcases the diverse interests and intellectual pursuits of Panini's time.

Overall, Panini's profound understanding of both religious and secular subjects underscores the depth of knowledge and scholarship prevalent during his era, offering valuable insights into the intellectual landscape of ancient India.

### **Relations between Teacher and Pupil**

In the ancient Indian educational system, there were expressions that reflected the sacred and profound relationship between the teacher and the pupil. This connection was considered as significant as the bonds of blood, as indicated by the use of the same affix to describe their relationships (iv, 3. 77 and vi, 3, 23).

The term "Chhatra" was commonly used to refer to the pupil. Patanjali provides an insightful explanation for this term, suggesting that it symbolizes the role of the teacher as an umbrella, providing shelter and protection to the pupil. Alternatively, it signifies that the pupil, by learning from the teacher, becomes like an umbrella, shielding and preserving the knowledge imparted by the preceptor.

The relationship between the teacher and the pupil was characterized by deep respect, devotion, and a sense of mutual care. The pupil was encouraged to cultivate a strong bond of affection with their teacher, recognizing that this connection was vital for their own wellbeing, both in the present life and in the afterlife (Patanjali on iii, 1, 26 (15)). This emphasis on the teacher-pupil relationship underscored the holistic nature of education in ancient India, where not only knowledge but also values, ethics, and personal growth were imparted and nurtured within this sacred bond.

### **Marks of Pupilage**

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Panini's grammar provides insights into the various aspects of pupilage and the distinctive marks that characterized students during ancient Indian education. Here are some notable marks of pupilage mentioned in Panini's works:

**Living with the Teacher (Antevasi):** Pupils were expected to live with their teachers during their education. This arrangement allowed for close guidance, mentorship, and immersion in the learning process.

**Day-Scholars and Boarders:** While some pupils resided with their teachers as boarders (antevasi), others were day-scholars who received instruction during the day but returned to their homes in the evenings. Both types of students were recognized, and they shared common marks such as carrying a staff (danda) as an identifier (iv, 3, 130).

**Carrying a Bowl (Kamandalu-Panim Chhatram):** Pupils were often depicted as carrying a bowl (kamandalu) in their hand. This symbolized their readiness to seek alms, especially for food, from approved householders.

**Begging Rounds (Bhiksha):** One of the most distinctive features of pupilage was the practice of pupils going on begging rounds (bhiksha) to gather food and other necessities. This practice not only instilled humility but also helped the pupils develop a sense of selfsufficiency.

**Special Vows (Vratas):** Brahmacharin pupils, who were committed to a celibate and ascetic lifestyle during their student years, undertook special vows or vratas. These vows played a significant role in shaping their character and discipline (v, I, 94).

**Ceremony of Anupravachana:** The Anupravachana ceremony marked an important step in the student's education journey, signifying their entry into a new phase of learning and commitment to their teacher's guidance (v, I, III).

### **Not Deserving Students**

In ancient India, the relationship between pupils and teachers was not without its challenges and complexities. Various factors could lead to the unworthiness of both pupils and teachers within the educational system. Here are some instances and associated derogatory terms from that era:

1. **Reluctant or Disobedient Pupils:** Some pupils found the rigors of study too challenging or painful and chose to abstain from their educational responsibilities. In some cases,

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the stern or rough behavior of a teacher might discourage them. Such pupils were labeled negatively, and their attitude was viewed with disapproval (i, 4, 26).

2. **Premature Departure:** Some pupils lacked the patience or commitment to complete their full period of studentship and prematurely left their educational journey to embrace the life of a householder without their teacher's permission or without performing the concluding purificatory bath. These individuals were derogatorily called "Khatvarudha," signifying that they began sleeping on a cot without completing their studentship, indicating their haste to enjoy comforts (ii, 1, 26).
3. **Frequent Changes of Teachers:** Pupils who frequently changed teachers and schools earned the contemptuous epithet "Tirthakaka," likening them to crows that do not stay in one place of pilgrimage for long. This label reflected their fickleness and inconsistency in pursuing their studies (ii, 1, 41).
4. **Unworthy Motives:** Some individuals entered studentship with reprehensible motives, such as pursuing girls or seeking material gains like food, ghee, or blankets. For such students, specific derogatory terms were coined, such as "Kumari-Dakshah" (those who become pupils of Daksha for the sake of girls) and "Bhiksha-manava" (those who enter studentship for the proceeds from begging) (vi, 2, 69).

These derogatory terms and societal opprobrium highlighted the importance placed on pursuing knowledge for its intrinsic value rather than for worldly gains. In contemporary times, motivations for acquiring knowledge may differ, but the historical recognition of such deviations from the ideal emphasizes the enduring significance of true intellectual pursuit.

### **Methods of Study**

The methods of study and instruction in ancient India were deeply influenced by the nature of the curriculum being taught. When the focus was primarily on Vedic texts, rote-learning was the preferred method. Panini references this method in his Sutra "Satra Srotriya ichhandodhite," which essentially means that the Srotriya, or the learner, memorizes the Chhandas or Vedic verses. Patanjali also mentions "reading aloud" and "reading low," indicating different approaches to recitation (i, 2 (7)). Panini's Sutras, iv, 4, 63, and 64, hint at the existence of examinations in the recitation of sacred texts. Patanjali's commentary is missing in this context, but the Kasika provides insights. If an examinee made even a single mistake in pronunciation, they were designated as "Aikanyika," meaning a pupil of one error.

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Various derogatory epithets existed based on the number of mistakes made, indicating different ranks of examinees based on oral examination results.

However, rote-learning was not the sole method of study. Many subjects demanded understanding rather than mere memorization. Panini's grammar, for instance, required a profound exercise of reasoning to comprehend its systematic evolution based on deductive and inductive methods. Both mechanical and critical study methods were explicitly mentioned in Panini's Sutra "Tadadhite tadveda" and Patanjali's commentary. The former referred to memory-dependent studies, where texts needed to be memorized, while the latter referred to understanding-based studies. The term "adhyayana" denoted the repetition of syllables as uttered by the teacher, while "vedanam" implied knowledge of the meaning of the words heard.

The coexistence of these two study methods in ancient times is evident from Panini's Sutra addressing this issue. Yaska, another ancient scholar, strongly protested against the overemphasis on rote-learning, especially in the context of Veda study. He believed that true understanding of the Vedas' meanings was equally vital alongside proper pronunciation. In his view, a person who recited the Vedas without comprehending their meaning was akin to a lifeless post, while one who understood the meanings would attain spiritual benefits. Yaska's reaction against excessive mechanical learning was likely influenced by the intellectual climate of the time, characterized by critical thinking and philosophical exploration, which eventually gave rise to Upanishads and Aranyakas.

### **Many Classes of Educated People**

Panini's work sheds light on different categories of literary figures in his time, revealing a comprehensive understanding of the literary landscape. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy were the Rishis, individuals whose literary works were not created or composed but rather "seen" or revealed through divine inspiration. Panini mentions several Rishis in his writings, including Vamadeva, Kali, Agni, Usanas, and Aupagava, highlighting their prominence in ancient religious literature. Additional Rishis like Praskanva, Mandika, and Harischandra are also acknowledged by Panini, though it's clear from the context that their era had long passed.

Panini also distinguishes between "arsha" and "anarsha" literature, emphasizing the difference between works associated with Rishis and those created by non-Rishis (i, 1, 16). Notably, there

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are Sutras that explain formations specifically applicable to non-Rishi authors, reflecting the linguistic distinctions between these categories (e.g., iv, 1, 104).

The next category comprises authors who promulgated original works, which could encompass religious literature such as Chhandas, Brahmana, and Kalpa works. Some of these authors might have been Rishis, as indicated by Panini (iv, 3, 103), but their era was also in the distant past. Katyayana notes that there were later representatives of this class, including figures like Yajnavalkya and Sulabha.

Panini's framework also includes discoverers of original systems who bring forth new knowledge, distinct from traditional wisdom (iv, 3, 115). Furthermore, there are ordinary authors of commonplace works (krita), highlighting the diversity of literary production in Panini's time.

In addition to these categories, Panini acknowledges commentators, who provided valuable insights into existing works or systems, enriching the understanding of literary and philosophical texts. Panini's comprehensive approach covers the entire spectrum of literary figures associated with inspired literature, traditional and original works, new knowledge, commentaries, and ordinary compositions.

Beyond authors, Panini's writings also recognize thinkers and teachers who may not have authored works themselves but played pivotal roles in the transmission of knowledge. Panini distinguishes between various types of philosophical thinkers, including Astikas (believers in the afterlife), Nastikas (those without such belief), and Daishfikas (rationalists or fatalists). These classifications reveal Panini's awareness of philosophical diversity in his time.

Panini also acknowledges teachers of exceptional merit, such as Kalapa and Vaisampayana, whose teachings led to the establishment of distinct schools of thought. Even though these teachers may not have authored independent works, their profound influence on their pupils was instrumental in the development of various philosophical systems.

Furthermore, Panini mentions the Brahnavadins, who engaged in discourses on sacred texts, despite not being renowned authors themselves. This demonstrates Panini's recognition of the significance of oral transmission and discourse in the dissemination of knowledge and religious teachings.

### **Classes of Ascetics**



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Panini's references indicate that there were various educators and thinkers in ancient India, contributing to the spread of knowledge and diverse philosophical perspectives.

One notable group mentioned by Panini is the Parivrajakas, who were religious mendicants in the final Asrama or stage of life. They were also known as Maskarinah, and their core teaching emphasized inner peace as the highest pursuit, discouraging excessive reliance on external rituals and sacrifices. These wandering preachers, having renounced worldly attachments, traveled throughout the country to impart their teachings, promoting a more contemplative and spiritually-focused way of life (vi, 1, 154).

Panini also acknowledges two classes of ascetics, Aranyakas and Naikatika bhikshus (iv, 4, 73). Aranyakas were ascetics who followed the rules of their order and were required to dwell at least two miles away from human habitations, often seeking solitude in forest areas. In contrast, Naikatika bhikshus were permitted to live in the proximity of society, although some may have done so in violation of the prescribed rules.

### **Women and Education**

Women were not denied education in ancient India. Panini's Varttika on iv, 1, 48 makes it clear that women could be teachers themselves, referred to as Upadhayi, Upadhyaya, or Acharya [iv, 1, 48]. Bhattojidikshita explains these terms as denoting women who were themselves teachers, not just the wives of teachers. Additionally, the Balamonorama quotes an old verse indicating that in earlier times, there were women who were well-versed in Vedic literature and were called Brahmavadinis.

Panini also mentions women students of Vedic Sakhas (recensions). For example, the term "Kathi" refers to a female student of the Katha Sakha, and "Bahurichi" refers to a student who studies many hymns, specifically the Rigveda, according to explanations provided by Balamonorama and Kasika [iv, 1, 63].

There is also evidence that women were allowed to participate in military training. Patanjali mentions the term "Saktiki," which means a female spear-bearer, indicating the involvement of women in military activities [iv, 1, 15 (6)]. In historical accounts, Megasthenes noted the presence of an armed women's bodyguard in the palace of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, further suggesting that women had roles in various aspects of society, including education and defense.

## Conclusion

These references in Panini's work highlight the existence of diverse religious and philosophical movements and the coexistence of different paths to spiritual realization in ancient India. The spread of learning and wisdom was facilitated by these various agencies, encompassing both written texts and the teachings of ascetics, scholars, and educators. This multi-faceted approach contributed to the rich intellectual and spiritual tapestry of ancient Indian society.

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2. Patanjali mentions the works called Kathaka, Kalapaka, Maudaka, and Paippaladaka [iv, 3, 101 (3)].
3. As “others” the Kasika mentions Katha, Satha, Vajasaneya, Singarava, Sarngarava, Sanpeya, Sakheya, Khandayana, Skandha, Skanda, etc. Saunaka of this rule is taken by Goldstucker on the authority of Sayana to be The the Rishi who is supposed be the author of the second Mandala of the Rigveda as we now have it.
4. Accordingly, since this Mandala is classified by Panini under prokta (proclaimed) as distinguished from the drishta, literature, it is to be regarded in Goldstucker’s opinion as being later in Panini’s view than the other Mandalas. Goldstucker further argues that the very first hymn of the second Mandala fully confirms this impression, for, by speaking of Hotri, Potri, Neshtri, Agnidhra, Prasastri, Adhvaryu, and Brahman priests, it certainly betrays a very advanced development of sacrificial and artificial rites. According to the Kasika, Saunaka is the reputed author of the Rik-pratilakya which is thus considered to be anterior to Panini.
5. According to the Kasika, there are four such pupils of Kalapl, viz. Haridru, Chhagall, Tumburu, and Ulapa, while there are nine of Vaisampayana, viz. Alambi, Palanga, Kamala, Richava, Aruni, Tandya, Syamayana, Katha, and Kalipt.
6. E.g., those of Bhallava, Satyayana, and Aitareya [Kasika].
7. Eg. those of Painga and Arunaparaja [ib.]. Patanjali also mentions Asurtya Kalpa [iv, 1, 19 (2)].
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12. *A convenient list of these names is given in Professor D. R. Bhandarkar's Carmichael Lectures, 1918, pp. 89, 90.*
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