

# THE WONDER THAT IS **Avadhānam**



Prof. (Dr.) Sampadananda Mishra

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The Wonder That Is Avadhānam

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## Preface

The year 2000 holds a special place in my heart because that's when I first discovered something truly magical – Avadhāna. It happened during a seminar in Pondicherry, and little did I know that this art form would become a source of inspiration and wonder in my life.

I was part of the team organizing an Avadhāna program, and my job was simple. But what unfolded on that day was anything but ordinary. Avadhāna, which once seemed like a distant and mystical concept, came alive before my eyes, challenging my skepticism and leaving an unforgettable impression.

Watching the Avadhāna performance was like witnessing a breathtaking dance of the mind. The performer's skill, speed, and brilliance pushed the boundaries of what I thought was possible. It was more than just a show; it was a journey into a world where intellect and creativity danced together in perfect harmony.

Since that day, my life has been a journey of exploration into the art of Avadhāna. I felt a deep connection and a need to share its wonders with the world. I realized there was a missing piece—a book that could introduce Avadhāna to those curious about it, a guide for those wanting to understand its essence.

As I delved into the details of Avadhāna, I discovered not just a skill but an endangered art form in need of recognition. It became clear that the survival of Avadhāna depended on creating awareness—helping people see its beauty, challenges, and importance in our cultural heritage.

In my quest to understand Avadhāna, I stumbled upon the remarkable life of Vasishtha Ganapati Muni, a true master of Avadhāna. His ability to

perform Avadhāna was extraordinary, and learning about his life became a fascinating part of my exploration. His anecdotes of composing poetry on the spot and rearranging complex syllabic structures during Avadhāna were awe-inspiring.

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni, a shining star in the world of Avadhāna, became a source of inspiration for me. His journey not only showcased the heights achievable in Avadhāna but also left an everlasting mark on this ancient tradition. His story has become a guiding force, pushing me to unravel the layers of this intricate art form and share its beauty with the world. Ganapati Muni's incredible skills in Avadhāna were truly mind-blowing. In one event in Madras, he was challenged to compose a hundred verses on Nala and Damayanti's story in just an hour. Muni's creative flow was so rapid that he crafted twenty-five verses in just six minutes, leaving everyone in awe. His prowess in rearranging syllables in a challenging verse and even reciting it backward showcased his brilliance. At the end of an Avadhāna, he flawlessly critiqued a famous verse, leaving the audience thunderstruck. These moments from his journey highlight the intricate brilliance and indomitable memory power needed in Avadhāna.

Following in Vasishtha Ganapati Muni's footsteps, I found not just inspiration but a deep connection to the heart of Avadhāna. His extraordinary abilities reminded me that within the realms of memory, creativity, and intellectual agility, there's a universe waiting to be explored—an invitation to witness the wonders of the human mind through Avadhānam.

Continuing my exploration, I discovered two more incredible stories: G N K Ramaswaroop from Enkooor village and Nishchal, a nine-year-old prodigy from Hyderabad. Their stories shed light on Avadhānakalā, the ancient art of multiple concentration.

Ramaswaroop, focused on the Bhagavad Gita, amazed audiences by memorizing all 700 shlokas. His performances weren't just recitations; they were a dance of intellect, responding swiftly to questions in various forms. Whether reciting a shloka given a starting word or number, identifying a shloka when recited in reverse, or engaging in the rhythmic

antyakshari of Gita verses, Ramaswaroop showcased mental agility that set him apart as a true master of Avadhānakalā.

Then there's Nishchal, a nine-year-old maths whiz from Hyderabad. While others focused on poetry, Nishchal channeled his concentration and mind power into solving complex maths problems and memorizing 20-digit numbers effortlessly. His feats proved that Avadhānakalā goes beyond language and subject matter, captivating audiences with the beauty of mathematics.

Colonel H. S. Olcott, an American military officer, journalist, lawyer, and the co-founder and first President of the Theosophical Society, writes in one of his articles published in 'The Theosophist magazine for 1886', about an occasion on which a memory expert of South India simultaneously kept in mind and did the following twelve things and afterward correctly repeated the whole.\*

1. Played a game of chess, without seeing the board.
2. Carried on a conversation about various subjects.
3. Completed a Sanskrit verse from the first line given to him.
4. Multiplied five figures by a multiplier of four figures.
5. Added a sum of three columns, each of eight rows of figures.
6. Committed to memory a Sanskrit verse of sixteen words — the words being given to him out of their order, and at the option of the tester.
7. Completed a 'magic square' in which the individual numbers in separate boxes when summed up add to a total, whether added horizontally or vertically.
8. Completed 'a magic square' in which the separate, sums up the several squares added up to a total name, whether tried horizontally or vertically.

9. Without seeing the chess board, directed the movement of a knight so that it should make the circuit of the board within the outline of a horse traced on it, and enter no other squares than those.
10. Completed a second 'magic square' with a different number from that in the above-named.
11. Kept count of the strokes of a bell rung by a gentleman present.
12. Committed to memory two sentences in Spanish, given on the same system as No 6.

\*[Mind and Memory Training by Ernest E. Wood, pg. 129. (First published in 1936 and reprinted in 1956 by Occult Research Press, New York)]

What connects these amazing people is their mastery of Avadhānakalā—a unique art that calls for a strong memory, sharp mind, broad knowledge, quick creativity, imagination, and unwavering determination. Avadhānakalā, an ancient Indian and Vedic tradition, showcases the peak of cognitive skills and human potential.

Bharat has a rich tradition of Avadhāna, mainly practiced in Sanskrit and, to a lesser extent, in Telugu and Kannada. Unfortunately, this ancient art form hasn't gained widespread popularity beyond certain regions in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in South Bharat. Many parts of the country lack awareness of Avadhāna, calling for attention and efforts for revival and popularization.

The impact of Avadhāna principles extends beyond its performance arena. If applied in various aspects of life, these principles can bring significant positive changes to human endeavors. Despite being kept alive by a dedicated few, Avadhāna remains relatively unknown outside specific cultural pockets.

Recognizing the limited resources available and the need for a broader understanding, it's essential to explore all facets of Avadhāna. Such

an effort would not only popularize this intricate art but also assess its relevance in our modern, technology-driven age. This exploration seeks to unveil the untapped potential within Avadhāna, offering insights that can enrich our contemporary understanding and application of this ancient cognitive art form.

This book, *The Wonder that is Avadhānam*, inspired by the incredible stories related to Avadhāna, aims to bring this rare art form closer to everyday people. It wants to spark curiosity and start conversations about this hidden gem, struggling to find its place in our civilizational narrative.

Let the feelings in these words show how deeply Avadhāna has influenced my life and the hope that it can touch the hearts of many.

- Sampadananda Mishra



## Chapter 1

### A Glimpse into the Age-Old Art of Avadhānakalā

Bharat, a land of wonders, has given us the incredible tradition of Avadhāna. This awe-inspiring practice, rooted in ancient Sanskrit but extending into languages like Telugu and Kannada, is an ode to the extraordinary capabilities of the human mind. Avadhāna is no simple feat—it's a complex performance that requires not just immense memory power but also the ability to handle multiple tasks at the same time.

This art form, with its ancient roots, blends language and literature, challenging individuals to push their intellectual boundaries. Avadhāna involves memory-intensive tasks, from spontaneously creating poems to keeping track of randomly ringing bells. What makes it even more remarkable is that participants can't use any external aids; they have to rely solely on the power of their minds.

The heart of Avadhāna lies in its unique structure. The central figure, the Avadhāni, responds to questions from *pricchakas* (questioners). However, they can't recite the entire poem at once. Instead, they construct it one line at a time, reciting it before moving on to the next questioner. This process repeats in four rounds, creating a captivating spectacle of memory and intellect. Mistakes are unforgiving in Avadhāna, and any misstep disqualifies the participant from becoming an "Avadhāni."

The true test comes in the "*dhāranā*," where the Avadhāni must flawlessly recite the complete poem after successfully constructing all four lines composed line by line during the four rounds of the performance. This final act showcases the culmination of their memory, creativity, and intellectual agility.

As if that's not challenging enough, Avadhāna often adds more complexity. One of the questioners rings a bell at random intervals, forcing the Avadhāni to juggle constructing the poem while keeping count of the bell rings. And there's an additional layer called 'aprastuta-prasanga,' where a questioner introduces distractions and irrelevant topics. The Avadhāni must prioritize responding to these offbeat inquiries, adding wit and spontaneity to the performance.

The interplay between the Avadhāni and the 'aprastuta-prasanga' showcases the Avadhāni's ability to resist distraction and respond with witty rejoinders to seemingly silly questions. This dynamic interaction, meant to entertain the audience, highlights the diverse nature of Avadhāna.

Avadhānis, in addition to their structured performances, engage in a variety of unscripted challenges that showcase their exceptional mental prowess. Some of these feats include playing cards and chess, and, towards the end of a memory feat, accurately recalling all the chess pieces removed during the game. They also demonstrate their memory by counting grains or flowers dropped on their back during a memory feat.

Another feat, known as Sankhyābandha, involves performing arithmetic operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division mentally and then declaring the results after the memory feat. Avadhānis can also observe a person turning beads from a garland and accurately state the count when the person stops.

Multilingual prowess is demonstrated when Avadhānis listen to sentences in different languages in a random order and later recite them fluently. They can also showcase linguistic skills by supplying individual letters randomly in a chart, completing the chart, and then composing a verse using those letters.

Furthermore, Avadhānis display their creativity by preparing problem poems and composing numerous poems in various poetical forms. The range of challenges Avadhānis undertake is vast, and they have the flexibility to create new themes and continually expand the scope of their performances.

The challenge level of Avadhāna significantly depends on the number of questioners, making it a memory-intensive feat. The more questions involved, the higher the complexity. Avadhāna comes in various levels, like ashtāvadhāna with eight questioners lasting two and a half to three hours, shatāvadhāna with one hundred challenges over two days, and sahasrāvadhāna spanning twenty days with over one thousand test questions. Some Avadhānis have even tackled dvisahasrāvadhāna with two thousand questions, and a few have ventured into prapancha-sahasrāvadhāna, surpassing five thousand challenges.

In contemporary terms, the Avadhānis, with their exceptional ability to concentrate on multiple tasks simultaneously, can be likened to state-of-the-art, high-speed computers equipped with ample memory. Their mental operating system enables them to seamlessly execute numerous programs concurrently, creating a parallel with the modern concept of multitasking.

## Chapter 2

# Shedding Light on the Journey to Mastering the Mind

The human mind is a mysterious and powerful entity capable of achieving remarkable feats. However, most of us remain unaware of the full potential of our minds and their ability to concentrate and grasp multiple objects simultaneously. For this, the mind has to be educated properly and raised from its ordinary state to the higher state where it is capable of concentrating the attention intensely. How does one discipline the mind and have mastery over it?

The concept of mastering the restless dualistic mind (*cañcalaà manau*) and cultivating a deeper Self-awareness through the yogic power of concentration (*ekāgratā*) is rooted in various spiritual and philosophical traditions. The understanding is that the human mind tends to be restless (*cañcala*), fluctuating (*vikshipta*) between various thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, often leading to a sense of duality and separation between ourselves and the world around us.

The restless and conditioned mind is often driven by habitual thought patterns, past experiences, cultural influences, societal conditioning, and so on. It tends to create a sense of separation and division, viewing the world as 'us' versus 'them' or 'self' versus 'other'. This being the case, it is essential to develop a deeper understanding and awareness that transcends conditioned thinking. This means going beyond the limitations of the conditioned mind and cultivating a broader perspective that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all things. By developing the power of concentration, one can gradually quiet the restless mind and access deeper states of awareness.

In a world increasingly driven by artificial intelligence, there exists an extraordinary human ability that surpasses the capabilities of even the most advanced technologies—the mind of an Avadhāni. Rooted in ancient practices and deep discipline, the mind of an Avadhāni operates consciously, fueled by the power of concentration, retention, and recollection. It's important to explore the fascinating ways through which an Avadhāni attains such heightened mental prowess, showcasing how their mind transcends the mechanical intelligence of AI.

### **Understanding the Mind of an Avadhāni**

An Avadhāni is an individual who possesses a remarkable talent for conscious multitasking, memory, and creativity. These gifted individuals, dedicated to Avadhānam, are known for performing intricate mental feats, such as composing poetry or solving complex problems, while simultaneously engaging in multiple tasks. Most Avadhāni-s confirm that sixty percent of the talent that they have is gifted and the rest they develop by performing Avadhānam regularly.

The journey towards Avadhāni-level mental capabilities begins with rigorous discipline. The Avadhāni-s follow a systematic approach to hone their minds, incorporating practices like dhāranā or concentration, and dhyāna or meditation. These disciplines lay the groundwork for cultivating a focused and undistracted mind.

At the heart of an Avadhāni's mental power lies dhāranāsāmarthya - the capacity to grasp (grahana), hold (dhārana), remember (smarana), and accurate representation (vivechana). An Avadhāni for developing dhāranāsāmarthya practices intense concentration, fixing their mind on a single point or object (ekāgratā). Through this process, they develop an unwavering focus that allows them to delve into profound levels of awareness.

Avadhāni-s constantly educate their minds to stimulate growth. They engage in regular mental exercises, such as memorizing vast amounts of information, mastering multiple languages, and exploring diverse topics. This continuous learning enhances their cognitive abilities and strengthens their neural connections.

Through consistent mental education and practice, Avadhāni-s attain exceptional powers of retention and recollection. They can recall vast amounts of information with remarkable accuracy, making them walking libraries of knowledge.

The mind of an Avadhāni operates consciously. The creativity, problem-solving skills, and decision-making abilities of the Avadhāni-s stem from their deep understanding of the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas.

Avadhāni-s foster creativity and imagination by pushing the boundaries of their minds. They engage in tasks that require out-of-the-box thinking, such as spontaneously composing poetry, solving puzzles, and crafting intricate stories.

Avadhāni-s possess heightened emotional intelligence, allowing them to connect deeply with others, perceive subtle emotions, and understand complex human interactions. The mind of an Avadhāni represents the extraordinary potential of the human intellect. Through rigorous discipline, the practice of dhāranā, and constant mental education, these remarkable individuals achieve a level of concentration, creativity, and memory retention that surpasses even the most advanced AI systems. In this fast-moving world where one relies much on artificial intelligence, the Avadhāni's mind serves as a reminder of the boundless capabilities that reside within us, waiting to be unlocked through dedication and training.

### **Training the Mind**

There are innumerable ways by which the mind is trained to develop within itself the ability of multiple concentration. In an ancient text, titled Nandi Sutra, available in the Jain tradition, one discovers a process of mental training, which enables practitioners to unlock these hidden powers and attain tremendous spiritual development. Here are the steps for training the mind to understand how it can transform the way the human mind functions:

## **The Alpagrāhi and Bahugrāhi Steps: Grasping the Single Thought Point and Widening the Scope of Concentration**

The first step of this practice begins with the Alpagrāhi step, where the practitioner learns to concentrate on a single thought point or object. At the outset, the focus is on a small object for a brief duration. This step lays the foundation for the subsequent stages and initiates the mind into the art of concentration. As the training progresses, the practitioner enters the Bahugrāhi step. Here, the scope of concentration expands, and the duration of focus increases. The practitioner is encouraged to carry their mind inwards with each inhalation and outwards with each exhalation, encompassing the entire process of breathing from the navel to the lungs.

## **Ekavidhagrāhi and Bahuvidhagrāhi: Concentrating on Single and Multiple Objects**

The next unit of concentration involves Ekavidhagrāhi and Bahuvidhagrāhi. The former involves focusing on a single class of objects, while the latter requires concentration on several classes of objects simultaneously. An example of Bahuvidhagrāhi is the practice of watching and feeling the breath vibrations on the tip of the nose amidst the various bodily sensations.

## **Kshipragrāhi and Ciragrāhi: The Power of Intuitive Flash and Deliberate Grasping**

In the third unit, practitioners learn Kshipragrāhi and Ciragrāhi. Kshipragrāhi allows the mind to grasp an object instantaneously through an intuitive flash. For instance, the practitioner can glance at a room and instantly recall every detail, from the colour of the walls to the furniture arrangement. Ciragrāhi, on the other hand, involves a slower and deliberate grasping of information.

## **Anishrutagrāhi and Nishrutagrāhi: Grasping with partial or complete exposure**

The fourth unit of this practice comprises Anishrutagrāhi and Nishrutagrāhi. Anishrutagrāhi enables the practitioner to perceive and understand with partial exposure of an object but by inference. Conversely,

Nishrutagrāhi allows them to grasp the object when it is completely exposed.

### **Asandigdthagrahī and Sandigdthagrahī: Grasping with or without Doubt**

The fifth unit of this practice comprises Asandigdthagrahī and Sandigdthagrahī. Asandigdthagrahī indicates the confident and decisive acceptance or acquisition of an object. There is no ambiguity or hesitation in the action. Sandigdthagrahī, on the other hand, describes the act of taking something with doubt or uncertainty. The acceptance is accompanied by a sense of hesitation or ambiguity.

### **Dhruvagrāhi Adhruvagrāhi: Stable and Unstable grasping**

The sixth unit of this practice comprises Dhruvagrāhi and Adhruvagrāhi. Dhruvagrāhi denotes a stable and firm grasping of an object and implies a sustained and enduring understanding or possession of something. In contrast to this Adhruvagrāhi suggests an unstable or temporary grasping of an object. In this, the possession is transient or lacks a consistent foundation.

This practice, which exists among the Jain monks even today, serves as a poignant reminder of the vast potential that lies within the human mind, awaiting exploration. With dedicated training and understanding, one can tap into these powers, leading to a deeper connection with our inner selves and the world around us.

### **The Necessary Requirements of an Avadhani for being Successful in an Avadhana**

धारा (dhārā): Flow, often representing the continuous flow of knowledge or consciousness. In the context of Avadhāna, it refers to the spontaneity and uninterrupted flow of poetry.

धारणा (dhāraṇā): Concentration or focus, a foundational practice in yoga involving mindful attention. In the context of Avadhāna, it refers to the ability of attentive reception, retention, and recollection.

धैर्य (dhairya): Patience or steadfastness, denoting the quality of remaining calm and composed in challenging situations. In the context of Avadhāna,

it refers to the undisturbed state of mind of the Avadhāni amid challenging questioners.

धोरणी (dhorāṇi): In usage and the context of Avadhāna it refers to the tradition, trend, attitude, and style.

धिषणा (dhiṣaṇā): Sharp intelligence. In the context of Avadhāna, it refers to the sharp-wittedness of the Avadhāni.

प्रतिभा (pratibhā): Brilliance or talent, representing innate creative and intellectual abilities of the Avadhāni.

शास्त्रज्ञान (śāstrajñāna): Knowledge of scriptures, emphasizing wisdom gained from the Shāstras.

काव्यज्ञान (kāvyajñāna): Literary knowledge, highlighting expertise in poetic and literary arts.

लोकज्ञान (lokaññāna): Worldly knowledge, referring to a broad understanding of various aspects of life and world.

शब्दस्मृति (śabdasmṛti): In the context of Avadhāna, it refers to the grammatical knowledge of the Avadhāni.

कोशज्ञान (kośajñāna): Knowledge of dictionaries or encyclopedias, indicating a vast reservoir of information about the words.

छन्दोज्ञान (chandojñāna): Prosody knowledge, showcasing expertise in the rhythmic and metrical aspects of poetry.

निरन्तर-काव्याध्ययन (nirantara kāvyādhyayana): Continuous literary study, emphasizing the ongoing pursuit of literary excellence.

काव्यरचनाभ्यास (kāvyaracanābhyāsa): Practice of poetic composition, highlighting the importance of honing one's skills in creating literary works.

वृद्धसेवा (vṛddhasevā): Attending to the wise ones, emphasizing the value of gaining knowledge from the experienced ones.

अवेक्षण (शब्दन्यासनिष्णातत्वम्) (avekṣaṇa - śabdanyasaṇiṣṇātātvaṃ):  
Understanding the essence of words and their appropriate placements.

प्रतिभान (pratibhāna): Luminescence or shining, symbolizing the radiance of inherent talent or intelligence. In the context of Avadhāna, it refers to the Avadhāni's unique artistic or creative power.

## Chapter 3

### The Origin and Evolution of the Art of Avadhāna

The roots of Avadhāna, seen in its modern forms, can be traced back to the Vedas. In the Vedic tradition, learners of the Vedas were called Avadhānis, emphasizing their need for immense concentration and exceptional memory. These Avadhanis were responsible for preserving the sacred texts with great accuracy and developing meticulous memorization techniques.

The evolution of Avadhāna led to the emergence of Ashtāvadhāna, Shatāvadhāna, and more. A significant moment in Avadhāna's history is found in Vatsyayana's Kāmasutra (1.3.3.16). In the Nāgaraka Vrittānta, the 64 Arts include 'dhāraṇā mātṛkā,' interpreted as the recollection of what has been studied, heard, or learned. By Vatsyayana's time (1st Century C.E.), Avadhāna had evolved into a scholarly play engaging both creative and retentive faculties of the mind, known as 'dhāraṇā mātṛkā.'

Among the 64 Arts, fourteen are associated with Avadhāna, particularly sahitāvadhāna. These fourteen aspects include:

1. Prahelikā: Solving a riddle.
2. Pratimālā: Comparable to modern antyākshari.
3. Durvācaka Yoga: Tongue twister.
4. Pustakavācana: Reading from books.
5. Kāvyaśamasyā Puurana: Completing a poem following the specifications of a given line.

6. Aksharamushtikākathana: Concealing some sounds (vowels given, and consonants concealed; avadhāni recognizes and tells the full sentence).
7. Dhāranāmātrikā: Remembering and reproducing a verse from memory.
8. Sampāthya: Joining voice with others, singing, or reading by looking at the lip movement of someone.
9. Mānasi: Mind-reading.
10. Kāvyaakriyā: Versification.
11. Abhidhaanakosha: Lexical test.
12. Chandojnāna: Knowledge of prosody.
13. Kriyākālpa: Poetics.
14. Mlecchitavikalpa: Adding a syllable before every syllable in words/sentences (e.g., uttering the name Ganesha like kaga kane kasha).

These skills highlight the multifaceted nature of the ancient Avadhāna tradition and reveal that various aspects of Avadhāna as a literary feat were not only prevalent but also highly regarded in ancient times. The combination of creative prowess, linguistic acumen, and memory mastery in these early forms laid the foundation for Avadhāna's development into the intricate and captivating art form we witness today.

Avadhanam has evolved through centuries, adapting to different cultural and intellectual contexts while retaining its core essence. Rooted in the rich traditions of ancient India, Avadhānam involves the simultaneous performance of multiple cognitive tasks, such as reciting verses, solving puzzles, or answering questions, all while maintaining impeccable accuracy and composure.

Historically, Avadhānam was not merely an entertainment or intellectual exercise but a profound spiritual practice, drawing upon the deep meditative traditions of the Vedas and other sacred texts. It was seen

as a way to cultivate mental discipline, memory, and concentration, qualities essential for scholars, poets, and sages engaged in spiritual and philosophical pursuits.

Over time, Avadhānam expanded beyond its spiritual roots to include various forms of literary and intellectual challenges. It became a platform for scholars and poets to demonstrate their mastery over language, literature, and scriptural knowledge. The art form flourished in royal courts, where kings and patrons would invite Avadhānis to display their skills, thus elevating the status of the practitioners and the art itself.

The practice of Avadhānam also played a significant role in the transmission of knowledge. It encouraged the cultivation of a sharp memory and a keen intellect, both of which were essential for preserving and disseminating the vast corpus of Indian literature, philosophy, and sciences. The Avadhānis were revered not only for their intellectual prowess but also for their ability to inspire others to pursue similar paths of mental and spiritual development.

In contemporary times, Avadhānam has witnessed a revival, with modern practitioners drawing inspiration from ancient traditions while incorporating innovative elements to engage a broader audience. The essence of Avadhānam, however, remains unchanged — celebrating the human mind's extraordinary potential and its capacity for sustained focus, creativity, and intellectual brilliance.

## Chapter 4

### Types of Avadhāna

The Avadhāna tradition, originating in ancient India, is now a diverse and captivating form of expression that demonstrates the complexity and versatility of human thought. Avadhānis, masters of this art, have explored diverse realms, weaving intricate performances that transcend literature, music, medicine, astrology, and more. Let's delve into some fascinating types of Avadhānas that have enriched the cultural landscape:

1. Kavitvāvadhāna (कवित्वावधान - Poetry Avadhāna): A poetic symphony where the Avadhāni engages with eight or more scholars, each presenting different literary items, challenging the performer's poetic prowess and capacity of his mind.
2. Sangitāvadhāna (सङ्गीतावधान - Music Avadhāna): This Avadhāna is dedicated to the art of music. The Avadhāni harmonizes with intricate musical challenges, showcasing a profound understanding of melody, rhythm, and composition.
3. Vaidyāvadhāna (वैद्यावधान - Medical Avadhāna): The world of medicine becomes a stage as the Avadhāni navigates through questions related to medical science, demonstrating a holistic grasp of health and healing. Here too one enjoys the poetic beauty of the Ayurveda Acharyas.
4. Jyotishāvadhāna (ज्योतिषावधान - Astrology Avadhāna): The celestial realm unfolds as the Avadhāni interprets astrological queries, showcasing a profound understanding of the cosmic dance.
5. Trnāvadhāna (तृणावधान - Stick Movements Avadhāna): It seems this was/is something like modern-day Mikado game. Employing

movements of a stick, this Avadhāna challenges the Avadhāni to interpret and articulate messages conveyed through gestures, adding a layer of physical expression.

6. Bhujādvadhāna (भुजावधान - Arm Movements Avadhāna): Here one uses arm movements to convey and interpret messages.
7. Ghantāvdhāna (घण्टावधान - Bell Ringing Avadhāna): A symphony punctuated by irregular bell rings, challenging the Avadhāni to keep track of the count amidst other cognitive feats. The other type is to decode a message conveyed through sounds created using a stick/ spoon and a metal plate.
8. Hastacalāni (हस्तचलनी - Hand Movements Avadhāna): The nimble art of hand movements finds expression, adding a layer of physical dexterity to the intellectual performance.
9. Nayanāsajñā or Netrāvdhāna (नयनसज्ञा/नेत्रावधान - Eye Movements Avadhāna): The Avadhāni showcases mastery over challenges posed through eye movements, blending intellectual acumen with visual precision. Here the message is conveyed through the eye movements and is decoded by observing the eye movements of the Avadhāni conveying the message.
10. Chotikāvdhāna (छोटिकावधान - Thumb Snapping Avadhāna): Involving snapping of the thumb to express ideas, the Avadhāni decodes these messages by carefully listening and observing the snappings.
11. Nrityāvdhāna (नृत्यावधान - Dance Avadhāna): The world of dance takes center stage, as the Avadhāni has to deal with challenges related to various dance forms.
12. Caturāṅgāvdhāna (चतुरङ्गावधान - Chess Avadhāna): A strategic masterpiece where the Avadhāni engages in challenges related to chess, merging intellect with the tactical intricacies of the game.
13. Ganitāvdhāna (गणितावधान - Mathematics Avadhāna): All about showcasing mathematical prowess.

14. Shabdāvadhāna (शब्दावधान - Sound Avadhāna): The Avadhani navigates through challenges posed through various sounds.

The diverse landscape of Avadhānas reflects the richness and depth of this ancient tradition, where intellect meets artistry in a harmonious blend.

In addition to these, there are other Avadhānas known as Shatakalash-vadhana, Gad-vadhana, Chitr-vadhana, Yaksh-vadhana, Nty-vadhna, Tl-vadhna, and Sangit-geyadhra that have found their place in history as well. Human minds offer boundless potential in each type, a grand symphony of intellectual mastery.

1. Shatakalashāvadhāna (शतकलशावधान): In Shatakalashāvadhāna, bells of varying metals and sizes challenge the Avadhani's concentration and memory. Behind a curtain, different-sized bells made of various metals ring out, each assigned a number. The Avadhāni, relying solely on the sense of hearing, must accurately identify the specific bell that rings. This demands an exceptional level of concentration. (Madabhushi Venkatacharya (1835 - 1895), a renowned Avadhāni from Andhra Pradesh, showcased remarkable skill in performing Shatakalashāvadhāna. In one instance, he took 100 identical copper vessels, filled them with water at different levels, and labeled them with numbers ranging from 1 to 100. An accomplice then struck all these vessels simultaneously with a stick, allowing Venkatacharya to register their sounds in his mind. Subsequently, a screen was placed to separate him from the vessels. As they were struck at random, Venkatacharya, relying on his memory, accurately identified each vessel by recalling its corresponding number. This feat demonstrated not only his exceptional auditory memory but also his ability to concentrate amidst a complex auditory environment.)
2. Gadāvadhana (गदावधान): This Avadhāna involves the use of a mace (gadā), adding a physical element to the intellectual performance.
3. Chitrāvadhāna (चित्रावधान): The Avadhani navigates challenges related to visual arts, showcasing a deep understanding of artistic concepts.
4. Yakshāvadhāna (यक्षावधान): This form involves challenges related to the

mythical and supernatural, tapping into the Avadhani's knowledge of folklore and legends.

5. Nātyāvadhāna (नाट्यावधान): Focuses on challenges related to the performing arts, emphasizing the Avadhani's grasp of theatrical elements.
6. Tālāvadhāna (तालावधान): This Avadhāna centers around rhythmic challenges, highlighting the Avadhani's mastery of various talas and beats.
7. Sangitāgeyadhārā (सङ्गीतगेयधारा): Involves challenges related to singing, adding another dimension to the Avadhani's artistic repertoire.

As Avadhāna continues to evolve, it remains a cultural gem, reflecting the profound legacy of Indian intellectual traditions. There are no limitations to the ability of the human mind, as each type demonstrates a unique symphony of intellectual prowess.

## Chapter 5

### Ashtāvadhānam

Among the various forms of Avadhānas, Ashtāvadhāna stands out as the most prevalent and cherished. In this intriguing performance, the Avadhāni faces eight knowledgeable scholars, and each poses questions on different literary themes. The kavītvādhāna (poetic adaptation of Ashtāvadhānam) assigns specific literary tasks to each pricchaka, demanding the Avadhāni's focused concentration. The eight themes, each presenting a unique intellectual challenge, are as follows:

nishidhākshari (निषिद्धाक्षरी): Involves dealing with forbidden or restricted words.

samasyā (समस्या): Challenges related to problem-solving.

dattapadi (दत्तपदी): Focuses on composing verses using a given set of words.

varnanā (वर्णना): Requires detailed and descriptive narration.

ashu (आशु): Involves quick and spontaneous composition.

vyastākshari (व्यस्ताक्षरी): The rearrangement of syllables in a given verse.

ghantā (घण्टा): Deals with counting irregular bell rings.

aprastutaprasanga (अप्रस्तुतप्रसङ्ग): Responding to unexpected and unprepared topics.

These themes add a layer of challenge and diversity to the Ashtāvadhāna, making it a fascinating showcase of the Avadhāni's intellectual agility and creativity.

### Nishidhākshari: Crafting Verses with Prohibitions

Nishidhākshari (निषिद्धाक्षरी) is formed of two words –“nishiddha” (निषिद्ध) and “akshara” (अक्षर). It means the one who prohibits syllables. In this item, the questioner specifies the topic and a particular meter and asks the Avadhāni to compose a poem according to these specifications. The challenge here is that the composition will be checked syllable by syllable. After each syllable is mentioned by the Avadhāni, the questioner will try to anticipate the word the Avadhāni has in his mind and will prohibit the use of the next syllable. The Avadhāni has thus to find at each step an alternative possibility or synonym and compose the verse while keeping in mind the topic and the meter given to him by the questioner. For example, the questioner demands the Avadhāni to compose a Shloka on Bhagavan Ganesha in the anushtubh (अनुष्टुभ) meter and says that the first letter cannot be va(व), thinking that the Avadhāni might say vināyaka (विनायक), which is another name for Bhagavan Ganesha. The Avadhāni then may begin by saying ga (ग). The questioner then anticipates the word to be Ganesha and prohibits the use of the letter na (ण). But the Avadhāni next says ja (ज), making it Gaja (गज), meaning elephant. The questioner, thinking that the Avadhāni might now add mu (मु), to say Gajamukha (गजमुख), the elephant-faced God, prohibits the use of the letter mu. Then as there are so many synonyms in Sanskrit, the Avadhāni might say va (व), for Gajavadana (गजवदन). As the questioner is also a scholar and very well knows the nuances of the language, immediately prohibits the use of the letter da (द). In this way, the Avadhāni ends up in a difficult situation, and if he knows the synonyms well he comes up with a different word, say gajavaktra (गजवक्त्र), which also means elephant-faced.

Now that the word is complete, a new word has to start. In this manner, the performance continues till one pāda (पाद) or one-quarter of the Shloka has been completed. It is obvious that this is not an easy exercise and it demands great skill, creativity and quick thinking from the Avadhāni's side. Perhaps such an exercise can be done only in Sanskrit (or in languages derived from it) as the language provides a large number of possibilities for each word.

## Samasya (समस्या): Unraveling Cryptic Enigmas in Verse

The segment known as samasyā (समस्या) unfolds as an intriguing challenge, akin to unraveling poetic puzzles. In this task, the pricchaka presents a cryptic verse, a riddle in versified form, to the Avadhāni. The twist lies in the Avadhāni's task – to compose the remaining three pādas in the same meter, fashioning a composition where the addition of the fourth pāda unveils a fascinating and coherent meaning.

Termed as "samasyāpurti," this challenge demands not just linguistic dexterity but a creative ingenuity that transcends the apparent enigma presented by the pricchaka. A historical anecdote echoes the essence of this challenge, showcasing the brilliance of the renowned poet Kalidasa.

When confronted with the seemingly meaningless verse: “ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭhaḥ,” Kalidasa ingeniously crafted the following completion:

रामाभिषेके मदविह्वलायाः हस्तच्युतो हेमघटस्तरुण्याः ।

सोपानमासाद्य करोति शब्दं ठ ठं ठं ठं ठं ठं ठं ठं ठं ॥

rāmābhiṣeke madavihvalāyāḥ hastacyuto hemaghaṭastaruṇyāḥ .

sopānamāsādyā karoti śabdaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭhaḥ ..

“During the coronation ceremony of Rama, a lady, overcome with joy, descended with a golden pot in her hand. As she reached the steps, the pot slipped from her grasp, cascading down the staircase with the distinct sound ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭha ṭhaṃ ṭhaḥ.”

In this poetic challenge, Kalidasa has skillfully connected sounds to craft a story. What might seem like a linguistic puzzle transforms into a vibrant and interesting tale during Rama's coronation. Similarly, the Avadhāni-s, using their language and creative flair, not only unravel the mystery hidden in the cryptic lines provided to them but turn those into beautiful poems.

### Dattapadi (दत्तपदी): Weaving Words into Versified Composition

Dattapadi (दत्तपदी) unfolds as a linguistic and poetic challenge where words are bestowed upon the Avadhāni like precious gems waiting to be strung into the necklace of verse. In this poetic challenge, the questioner, akin to a benevolent bestower, presents four unrelated words, specifying a meter and a theme. The Avadhāni's task is to gracefully weave these words into a verse, ensuring their harmonious integration into each pāda.

For instance, imagine the Dattapadi questioner offering words like “marma,” “karma,” “varma,” and “sharma.” The challenge set before the Avadhāni is to compose a prayer in the anustubh meter, seamlessly incorporating each of these distinct words into the verse. In response, the Avadhāni might craft a composition, akin to the following:

“जानासि मम मर्म त्वं जानेऽहं कर्म तेऽखिलम् ।

त्यक्त्वाऽहंरूपकं वर्म लप्स्येऽहं शर्म शाश्वतम् ॥”

“jānāsi mama marma tvam jāneham karma te'khilam

tyaktvāhamrupakam varma lapsye'ham sharmashāshvatam”

Translating to: "You know my secrets, and I know your deeds. Having abandoned the covering of the ego, may I attain eternal happiness."

In this poetic composition, the Avadhāni not only meets the challenge of incorporating disparate words but elevates the composition to a profound expression of meaning and sentiment. Dattapadi exemplifies the fine blending of linguistic prowess and creative finesse within the framework of Ashtāvadhāna.

### Varnanā (वर्णना): Unveiling the Canvas of Descriptive Verse

Imagine Varnanā as a captivating canvas where the Avadhāni, like a skilled artist, is invited to paint pictures with words. In this delightful challenge, the questioner plays the role of a storyteller, describing a specific scene or

subject. The Avadhāni's task is to turn this verbal description into a poetic masterpiece, following a given meter.

In this poetic composition of Varnanā, the questioner becomes a dream weaver, setting the scene for the Avadhāni to bring the narrative to life with their words. The canvas unfolds, and armed with a palette of words, the Avadhāni strives to capture the essence of the depicted scene within the rhythmic constraints of poetry.

For instance, picture a questioner describing a tranquil moonlit night by a riverside. The Avadhāni, tuned in to the descriptive cues, then weaves a verse, carefully crafting each line to reflect the calmness, the shimmering moonlight, and the gentle flow of the river. Through the magic of language, the Avadhāni turns the descriptive prose into a lyrical poem, following the rhythmic beat of the specified meter.

### **Aśu (अशु): A Swift Symphony of Spontaneity**

Aśu unfolds as a showcase of the Avadhāni's quick poetic prowess—demonstrating quick thinking and nimble expression. Imagine it as a rapid-fire challenge where the Avadhāni, like a linguistic acrobat, has to compose an entire verse in the blink of an eye.

Here, the questioner takes on the role of an urgency orchestrator, presenting the meter and subject matter for the Avadhāni to work with. With the speed of thought, the Avadhāni transforms these cues into an instantaneous poetic creation—a dance with spontaneity where the mind becomes a finely tuned instrument.

Aśu happens four times during the grand performance of Ashtāvadhāna, each instance testing Avadhāni's immediate creative abilities. The subject can range from literature to music, astronomy, or any domain. Still, the Avadhāni must not only meet the challenge swiftly but also craft a verse that resonates with the beauty of the specified meter.

As the poetic curtain rises with each call of Aśu, the Avadhāni's mind becomes a playground of linguistic dexterity. It's a celebration of the instantaneous, where creativity knows no delay, and armed with the magic

of words, the Avadhāni conjures verses that transcend the constraints of time.

### **Vyastākshari (व्यस्ताक्षरी): Unravelling the Symphony of Disarray**

In the literary feat of Ashtāvadhāna, Vyastākshari emerges as the maestro of disorder, orchestrating a symphony of scattered syllables. Picture it as a challenging task where the Avadhāni, amidst interruptions, must untangle the intricate threads of a poem.

The Vyastākshari, like a mischievous guardian of linguistic chaos, interrupts the Avadhāni's flow with random syllables from a concealed poem. Undeterred by the disorder, the Avadhāni embarks on a mental journey, recalling and rearranging the fragmented syllables to resurrect the original poem.

This segment tests not only memory but also the Avadhāni's keen sense of linguistic order. As the Avadhāni encounter scattered syllables, they become a literary archaeologist, piecing together poetic artifacts to reconstruct the symphony envisioned by the Vyastākshari.

Vyastākshari's interruptions are not mere obstacles; they are artistic challenges that add complexity to the Ashtāvadhāna performance. As the Vyastākshari weaves the narrative of disordered syllables, the Avadhāni, with poetic resilience, turns the challenge into an expression of linguistic mastery.

### **Ghanta (घण्टा): Echoes of Irregular Chimes in the Ashtāvadhāna Symphony**

In the performance of Ashtāvadhāna, the Ghanta (घण्टा) emerges as the conductor of irregular chimes, adding a rhythmic dimension to the intricate performance. Throughout the wide-ranging literary challenge, the Ghanta combines an auditory interlude with a bell ring with unpredictable cadence.

The Ghanta is sometimes replaced with Pushpagananā, in which one participates in the sensory mosaic by showering the performer with flowers. The Avadhāni, amidst the splendor of poetry, is tasked with not

only unravelling the complexities of literary challenges but also keeping a mental tally of the fleeting bell sounds or the soft petals that grace his back.

### **Aprastutaprasanga: The Artful Distraction in the Avadhāna**

Throughout Ashtāvadhāna, the eighth element, Aprastutaprasanga, unfolds as a masterful distraction. Translating to "irrelevant to the context," this segment introduces a questioner whose role is to weave a web of unrelated queries, challenging an Avadhāni's focus and wit.

The Aprastutaprasanga, akin to a whimsical interlude, introduces a delightful yet challenging diversion. The questioner, equipped with intelligence and wit, steers away from the thematic core, posing questions and topics seemingly incongruent with the ongoing Avadhāna. The Avadhāni, amidst the intellectual jugglery, must gracefully handle this artful distraction, responding with humorous ingenuity to the whimsical queries.

The challenge is to maintain the cognitive equilibrium required for the literary feats as well as seamlessly incorporate the whimsical inquiries into the performance. Through his mental acrobatics, the Avadhāni successfully flits between structured queries and the whimsical whims of the Aprastutaprasanga, proving a truly hilarious performance. The Avadhāni's ability to respond with humor and quick thinking not only defies distraction but elevates the performance, turning each seemingly unrelated question into a stroke of improvisational art.

### **Dhāraṇā (धारणा) The Climax**

During the performance, the Avadhāni cannot recite an entire poem at once. Instead, he constructs the first line of the designated poem after listening to all the questions. The intricate challenge lies in returning to each question, reciting subsequent lines, and remembering the question, the preceding line, and any additional tasks introduced along the way. Any misstep or repetition leads to disqualification.

The Avadhāni revisits each question four times, completing a full pāda or a metrical line in each round. The culmination of this intellectual ballet is called Dhāraṇā, where the Avadhāni seamlessly recites the entire poem, a testament to their mastery over simultaneous tasks.

Avadhāna transcends literary performance; it becomes a celebration of the mind's boundless capabilities. The Avadhāni's gaze sparks associations, a cascade from topic to meter to the entire verse, revealing not just literary prowess but a triumph over the intricacies of simultaneous mastery.

### **Components of Sāhitya Avadhāna**

We see that in Sāhitya Avadhāna, there is a rich array of components that showcase the extraordinary prowess of the Avadhāni in various literary and artistic domains. Beyond the conventional elements like nishiddhākshari and samasya-purana etc., Sāhitya Avadhāna embraces a diverse set of components that reflect the Avadhāni's versatility in creativity, intellect, and artistic expression.

### **Additional Components in Sāhitya Avadhāna:\***

**Nyastākshari:** In this component, the Avadhāni skillfully recites verses in reverse order.

**Kāvya-vācana:** The Avadhāni recites and interprets verses from classical literature, showcasing their deep understanding of literary texts.

**Pāti-ganita/vāra-kathana:** Requires the Avadhāni to calculate the day for any date within a specific range.

**Citra-kavitā (Constrained Poetry):** Challenges the Avadhāni to compose poetry within specific constraints.

**Citra-lekhana (Painting):** Involves the creation of visual art, highlighting a fusion of literary and artistic talents.

**Bhāva-prakāshana:** Demands the composition of a verse inspired by a given painting, emphasizing the connection between visual and literary arts.

Shloka-abhinaya: Requires the Avadhāni to enact a verse, blending the elements of performance and literature.

Uddistākshari: In this component, the Avadhani composes a verse by providing letters in random sequence, showcasing adaptability and creativity.

Nirdistākshari: Involves completing the letters of an incomplete verse, showcasing the Avadhani's ability to fill in the gaps with precision.

Mānasi: Challenges the Avadhani to compose a verse with a specific set of vowels given in a particular order.

Gita-racanā: In this component, the Avadhani composes and tunes a song, highlighting musical and lyrical skills.

Ashu-rupak-anuvāda-vācana: Involves the translation and dramatic rendering of a passage from a classical play, showcasing linguistic and theatrical talents.

Sankhyā-bandha (Solving a Magic Square): In this mathematical challenge, the Avadhāni must solve a magic square, adding a numerical dimension to the literary and artistic repertoire.

Sāhitya Avadhāna, with its established and novel components, emerges as a multifaceted and dynamic tradition that celebrates the convergence of literature, art, and intellectual acumen. The Avadhāni's ability to seamlessly tackle diverse challenges, whether literary, mathematical, or artistic, illustrates the depth and richness of this venerable art form. Sāhitya Avadhānam attests to the enduring legacy of India's cultural and intellectual heritage.

\*Courtesy: The Art and Science of Avadhānam in Sanskrit by Shatavadhani R Ganesh and Shashikiran B N

## Chapter 6

### Exploring Various Other Unique Avadhāna Feats

We have seen above the details of sāhitya or kavitva avadhāna which deals with the creative spontaneity of the Avadhānis. In the chapters to follow, we will discuss specific types of Avadhāna, each revealing its distinct manifestations and showcasing the exceptional skills required for mastery. Our exploration aims not only to unveil the technical intricacies of these Avadhāna types but also to appreciate the profound brilliance and cultural significance that each contributes to this venerable tradition.

#### Overview:

##### Ghaṇṭāvadhānam

In this chapter, we delve into Ghaṇṭāvadhānam, a unique communication feat where practitioners employ a metal plate and a spoon to convey and decipher messages. This intricate form of Avadhāna involves a dynamic interaction between communication and interpretation, highlighting the nuanced skills of the participants.

##### Netrāvadhānam

In Netrāvadhānam performers showcase exceptional visual acuity and focus. Communication occurs through eye movements, and deciphering the message relies on observing the subtleties of these eye gestures. This art form explores the interplay of non-verbal communication in a visually stunning manner.

##### Gītāvadhānam

The Bhagavad Gita becomes the epicenter of exploration in this chapter, as Gītāvadhānam unfolds. Avadhāni faces challenges from pricchakas

or questioners who present various demands related to the verses of the Bhagavad Gita. The chapter illuminates the nuances of performing under the thematic umbrella of this sacred text.

### **Yogasūtrāvdhānam**

Turning to the profound wisdom of Patanjali's Yogasutra, this chapter explores Yogasūtrāvdhānam. The Avadhāni encounters multifaceted challenges posed by pricchakas, providing insights into the depth of understanding required to successfully master the intricate teachings of Yogasutra.

### **Amarakoṣāvdhānam**

Amarakosha takes center stage in this chapter, shaping the theme of Amarakoṣāvdhānam. The Avadhāni faces questions from pricchakas, demonstrating command over the lexicon and the ability to handle the complexities of Amarakosha.

### **Chitrāvdhānam**

Artistry unfolds in Chitrāvdhānam, where visual creativity merges with literary finesse. This unique feat explores the fusion of the visual and the literary, challenging the Avadhāni to translate descriptions into captivating drawings in real time.

### **Saṅgītageyadhārā**

Saṅgītageyadhārā takes the spotlight in this chapter, inviting the audience to witness the Avadhāni's mastery in composing lyrics on the spot, harmonizing them with live musical accompaniment. The seamless integration of poetry and melody unfolds in this enchanting feat.

### **Tāla Avadhāna**

Rhythmic precision becomes the focus in Tāla Avadhāna, where the tālāvdhāni plays different tālas using both hands while simultaneously singing along. This chapter provides insights into the intricate art of synchronizing multiple beats seamlessly.

## **Ganitāvadhānam**

We conclude with Ganitāvadhānam, a marvel where the Avadhāni navigates through intricate mathematical problems with unparalleled speed and accuracy. This chapter unravels the intellectual acumen required for this mathematical feat.

As we go through these chapters, the multifaceted nature of Avadhāna unfolds, offering a glimpse into a tradition that seamlessly intertwines intellectual brilliance, artistic expression, and spiritual insight. Each type of Avadhāna brings its unique charm and challenges, contributing to the rich heritage of this venerable tradition.

The diverse array of Avadhāna performances can be broadly categorized into three distinct groups: smriti, prajñā, and pratibhā. Each category represents a unique focus and set of skills required from the Avadhāni practitioners.

### **Smriti (Memory):**

Avadhāna-s falling under the smriti category, such as Gitāvadhāna, Amarakoshāvdhāna, and Yogasutravadhāna, are characterized by the prime emphasis on memorization. Avadhānis practicing these feats showcase their prowess in memorizing extensive texts, demonstrating a profound commitment to preserving and accurately recalling intricate details from revered scriptures.

### **Prajñā (Intelligence):**

Avadhāna-s like Ghantāvadhāna, Netrāvadhāna, and Tālāvadhāna fall under the prajñā category. In these performances, the Avadhāni's sharp intelligence, intense attention, and prompt responsiveness take center stage. The challenges posed in these avadhāna-s require quick thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to process information swiftly, showcasing the practitioner's intellectual acumen.

### **Pratibhā (Creativity):**

Sāhitya or Kavitva Avadhāna, along with Sangeetageyadhārā, fall under the pratibhā category. Here, an Avadhāni's poetic ability and spontaneity

become central to the performance. Avadhāni-s in this category display their creative flair, crafting verses on the spot, harmonizing lyrics with live music, and engaging in spontaneous literary and artistic expressions that captivate the audience.

These three overarching categories highlight the diverse skill sets and focus encapsulated within the realm of Avadhāna. Whether rooted in memorization, intellectual prowess, or creative spontaneity, each category represents a unique facet of this revered tradition. Avadhāni-s, as practitioners of this multifaceted art, move between these categories with finesse, showcasing a holistic blend of memory, intelligence, and creativity in their performances.

## Chapter 7

### **Ghaṇṭāvadhānam (घण्टावधानम्): A Symphony of Mind and Sound**

Ghaṇṭāvadhānam unfolds as an amazing art form, revealing a unique interplay of concentration, communication, and the boundless capacities of the human mind. This chapter explores the intricacies of Ghaṇṭāvadhānam, shedding light on its challenges, significance, and the current scenario where only a handful of practitioners are preserving this exquisite form.

This art form manifests in different traditions. The most popular form involves the use of bells of various materials and sizes, testing an Avadhani's grasping power, memory, and sound sensitivity. Another variant challenges practitioners to manage distraction by listening to intermittent bell rings while engaged in other tasks.

Another prominent type features two practitioners facing each other. A sentence in any language is provided by the audience, and one practitioner conveys it through sounds using a metal plate and a spoon. The partner Avadhāni listens attentively, decoding the conveyed message through the art of Ghaṇṭāvadhānam.

In a Ghaṇṭāvadhānam program, the talented duo, Bulusu Aparna and Udayachandrika from Andhra Pradesh charmed the audience. The sentence "नमो नमस्ते - namo namaste" was conveyed solely through sounds created using a plate and spoon. Aparna, with acute listening skills, accurately reproduced the sentence based on the sounds she heard. Notably, there is no language barrier, as sentences can be provided in any language, showcasing the immense potential of Ghaṇṭāvadhānam.

Ghaṇṭāvadhānam presents unique challenges, demanding a high level of concentration and auditory acuity. Practitioners must accurately identify and reproduce specific sounds, showcasing exceptional command over their mental faculties. The significance of Ghaṇṭāvadhānam extends beyond its artistic appeal, demonstrating the intricate connection between sound, cognition, and memory.

Despite being an example of human potential, Ghaṇṭāvadhānam faces the challenge of dwindling practitioners. In the contemporary era, only a few dedicated individuals, such as Aparna and Udayachandrika, trained by their Guru Prof. Mahadeva Mani, are keeping this tradition alive. To preserve and revive Ghaṇṭāvadhānam, it is crucial to foster awareness and appreciation for this unique art form. Acknowledging the challenges and celebrating the few torchbearers like Guru Prof. Mahadeva Mani, will contribute to its sustained existence for generations to come.

## Chapter 8

### Netrāvadhānam (नेत्रावधानम्): Unveiling the Marvels of Human Communication

As the human potential is constantly challenged, few feats captivate and astonish as Netrāvadhānam does. This unbelievable art form is an outstanding example of the incredible capabilities of the human intellect and the extraordinary power of the mind.

Envision a stage where language knows no bounds; sentences flow in various languages like Telugu, Sanskrit, Hindi, English, and more. Here, the incredible Netrāvadhānis perform their enchanting magic, leaving spectators in complete awe.

The beauty of Netrāvadhānam lies in its simplicity and complexity. Two remarkable individuals, the "reader" and the "observer," work in perfect harmony. The observer deciphers sentences without hearing or seeing them, relying solely on the subtle eye movements of the reader. It's a graceful dance of non-verbal communication, a symphony of the eyes.

On stage, the Netrāvadhānis receive various sentences or verses collected from the audience. One Netrāvadhāni reads, remembers, and conveys the written message through eye movements to the other, who attentively observes and deciphers the message. It's an amazing process that showcases the profound connection between their minds.

What makes Netrāvadhānam truly unique is its embrace of linguistic diversity. Sentences from various languages seamlessly flow, demonstrating the immense potential of the human mind to adapt, absorb, and comprehend. This not only highlights the Netrāvadhānis' talents but also celebrates the rich linguistic heritage of Bharat.

Witnessing such a performance is a powerful reminder of the incredible potential within the human intellect. It shows that our minds can achieve feats beyond the realm of possibility. Netrāvadhānam encourages us to explore the depths of our cognitive abilities, pushing the boundaries of what we thought we knew about the human mind.

In this age of high-end technology, Netrāvadhānam is a brilliant example of human achievement, emphasizing that the human intellect remains unparalleled amidst algorithms and artificial intelligence. Dr. Lalitha Kameshwari and K Rama Kumari, two Netrāvadhānis from Andhra Pradesh, exemplify this truth. Master Avadhāni Prof. Dhulipala Mahadeva Mani mahodaya keeps training the willing practitioners of this art form.

Netrāvadhānam, indeed, is a celebration of human potential, and a tribute to the power of the human intellect. It demonstrates our ability to communicate, adapt, and innovate in ways that defy logic. It takes us on a mesmerizing journey into uncharted territories of the human mind, leaving us in complete awe of its boundless capabilities.

## Chapter 9

# Gitāvadhānam (गीतावधानम्)- The Spectacle of Intellectual Brilliance

Gitāvadhānam is a unique and highly intellectual performance, a tradition that has been preserved and cherished for centuries in India. In the presentation of this form of avadhānam, the main content is Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Like Aṣṭāvadhānam, this form also uses eight distinct facets where one can experience the remarkable skills of the Gitāvadhāni. The eight facets of Gitāvadhānam are:

### Saṅkhyādarśanam (सङ्ख्यादर्शनम्) or The Chapter and Shloka Revelation

The first pricchaka or questioner challenges the Avadhāni by providing the number of a chapter, a shloka therein, and the Avadhāni responds by flawlessly reciting the shloka. This showcases the Avadhāni's in-depth knowledge of the sacred text and ability to recall verses on the spot.

### Ślokadarśanam (श्लोकदर्शनम्) or Completing a Shloka

In this segment, the pricchaka gives the first pāda or quarter of a shloka, and the Avadhāni's task is to recite the entire shloka.

### Akṣaradarśanam (अक्षरदर्शनम्) or Syllable Precision

Here, the pricchaka challenges the Avadhāni with specific details - chapter, shloka, pāda, and the number of a particular syllable. The Avadhāni responds by revealing the syllable and then recites the whole shloka.

### Vilomapaṭhanam (विलोमपठनम्) or Reverse Recitation

The Avadhāni's skills are truly put to the test as the pricchaka requests the shloka in reverse order. This requires a deep understanding of the text's structure and an impressive ability to manipulate language in real time.

### **Akhaṇḍapathanam (अखण्डपठनम्) or Uninterrupted Recitation**

In this segment, the pricchaka begins a shloka, and the Avadhāni must continue reciting nonstop until interrupted by the pricchaka.

### **Ślokaśākhya (श्लोकसङ्ख्या) or Chapter-specific Inquiry**

The Avadhāni is challenged with questions about the number of shlokas in a particular chapter and the unique qualities of that chapter.

### **Antyākṣarī (अन्त्याक्षरी) or Syllabic Challenge**

In a playful twist, the pricchaka recites a shloka from any text or own composition, and the Avadhāni must respond with a Gita shloka that begins with the syllable with which the verse of the pricchaka ends. This segment adds a fun element to Gītāvadhānam while showcasing the Avadhāni's agility and quick thinking.

### **Aprastutaprasaṅga (अप्रस्तुतप्रसङ्ग) or The Entertainer**

The final pricchaka plays a significant role in entertaining the audience by posing humorous and distracting questions to the Avadhāni. This segment injects a sense of unpredictability into Gītāvadhānam and underscores the Avadhāni's ability to remain composed amidst distractions.

Indeed, Gītāvadhānam is a brilliant showcase of intellectual acumen, memory, linguistic prowess, and quick thinking. Professor Sachitananda Murthy of National Sansrit University, Tirupati is a remarkable Gītāvadhāni of the present time. Also, there are other practitioners and performers of this form of avadhānam. This art form not only preserves the sacred teachings of the Gītā but also brings them to life in a mesmerizing and entertaining manner, engaging audiences and showcasing the power of the human mind.

## Chapter 10

### Yogasūtrāvdhānam (योगसूत्रावधानम्)

In this form of Avadhāna, the content is the Yogasūtra of Patanjali. The Avadhāni has the whole text in his mind and can answer flawlessly any question raised by the pricchakas confined to the realm of Yogasūtrāvdhānam. At present there is one enthusiast who has been practising Yogasūtrāvdhānam where he follows the following five challenges:

#### 1. Sūtradarśanam (सूत्रदर्शनम्)

In Yogasūtrāvdhānam, the Avadhāni is like a Yogic magician. The pricchaka shows a tiny bit of a sūtra, and the Avadhāni makes the whole magical sūtra appear. It's not just about remembering but understanding the deep Yogic teachings and having a full grasp of the text.

#### 2. Saṅkhyādarśanam (सङ्ख्यादर्शनम्):

Here, the pricchaka throws a numbers challenge. He says the number of a particular sūtra, and the Avadhāni effortlessly brings out the full sūtra from the text. Again, it's not just numbers, it's as if the Avadhāni has the keys to the Yogic library.

#### 3. Sūtravilomapaṭhanam (सूत्रविलोमपठनम्):

In this part, it's a bit like a Yogic rewind. The pricchaka says a sūtra and the Avadhāni recites the sūtras which appear before that, but in reverse! It's like rewinding a tape of Yogic wisdom, showcasing the Avadhāni's deep connection with the teachings.

#### 4. Antyākṣarī (अंत्याक्षरी):

This one adds a musical touch. The pricchaka sings a Yogic song or recites a verse, and the Avadhāni responds with a sūtra starting with the last sound of that song. It's a rhythmic exchange, turning Yogic philosophy into a song and dance.

#### 5. Sūtravyākhyānam (सूत्रव्याख्यानम्):

Now, it's time for the Avadhāni to be a Yogic storyteller. The pricchaka gives a sūtra, and the Avadhāni shares deep thoughts about it, like a guide explaining the hidden gems in Yogic teachings.

Yogasūtrāvdhānam is like a Yogic adventure where the Avadhāni doesn't just remember sūtras; he brings the magic of Yogic philosophy to life. It's a way of making the ancient wisdom of Yoga vibrant and alive, inviting everyone to join the journey into the world of Yogic teachings.

The present practitioner has included only these five items in this form of Avadhānam, but one can add many more items to make it even more challenging and interesting.

## Chapter 11

### **Amarakoṣāvadhānam (अमरकोषावधानम्): A Fascinating Display of Mental Acuity**

The Amarakoṣāvadhānam showcases the immense mental prowess and memory capabilities of individuals practicing this form of Avadhānam. Like the other forms of Avadhānam, this too involves a set of pricchaka-s (questioners) and an Avadhāni (the one who displays the feat) engaging in a remarkable display of knowledge and memory. Here the content is Amarakoṣa, a lexicon by Amarasimha. This text is a thesaurus in Sanskrit and is divided into three sections called Kānda-s with 26 varga-s or subsections. The entire text is in the shloka form.

Let's understand the various components of Amarakoṣāvadhāna which involved eight pricchaka-s or questioners posing various challenges to the Avadhāni.

#### **1. श्लोकदर्शनम् (ślokadarśanam):**

In this segment, the pricchaka asks the Avadhāni to identify a specific shloka or verse from Amarakoṣa. The Avadhāni must provide the kānda, sarga, and shloka number where the requested shloka can be found.

#### **श्लोकसङ्ख्याकथनम् (ślokasaṅkhyākathanam):**

Here, the pricchaka challenges the Avadhāni to state the total number of shlokas in a particular varga of a kānda within the text.

#### **अन्त्याक्षरी (antyākṣarī):**

In this intriguing segment, the pricchaka recites a shloka, and the Avadhāni must respond with a verse from Amarakoṣa that begins with the syllable with which the pricchaka's shloka ends.

### संख्यादर्शनम् (sankhyādarśanam):

The pricchaka recites a shloka from the Amarakoṣa, and the Avadhāni must provide the exact reference number of that shloka within the text.

### विलोमपठनम् (vilomapaṭhanam):

In this segment, the pricchaka asks the Avadhāni to recite a shloka in reverse. The Avadhāni's ability to reverse and recite the shloka accurately showcases his/her impressive memory and linguistic skills.

### अखण्डपठनम् (akhaṇḍapaṭhanam):

The pricchaka initiates the recitation of a shloka by uttering a few letters, and the Avadhāni must continue reciting the entire shloka and subsequent shlokas without interruption until instructed to stop.

### अक्षरदर्शनम् (akṣaradarśanam):

In this challenging segment, the pricchaka specifies a kanda, varga, shloka number, and a specific pāda (quarter) within a shloka, and the number of a specific syllable therein. The Avadhāni must precisely pinpoint the syllable within that specified pāda and recite the whole verse.

### अप्रस्तुतप्रसंग (aprastutaprasanga):

In this playful component, an unexpected element is introduced to disrupt the Avadhāni's concentration. The Avadhāni must maintain composure and adapt to the unexpected, adding an element of wit and humor to the performance.

Amarakoṣāvadhānam is an amazing demonstration of memory, knowledge, and linguistic prowess deeply rooted in Indian tradition. It highlights the incredible mental abilities of individuals who have dedicated themselves to the study and memorization of ancient texts. This art form not only showcases the richness of India's cultural heritage but also serves as a testament to the remarkable capabilities of the human mind.

## Chapter 12

# Chitrakalāvadhānam - The Artistic Symphony of Imagination

Chitrakalāvadhānam, a unique form of artistic expression, blends the worlds of literature and visual art. In this intricate performance, the Chitrakalāvadhāni, an accomplished artist, listens to self-composed verses or descriptions from pricchakas and translates those words into vivid, on-the-spot drawings. This art form requires not only exceptional artistic talent but also a deep understanding of literature, mythology, poetry, and the ability to bring words to life through visual interpretation.

### **The Chitrakalāvadhāni's Profile:**

The Chitrakalāvadhāni is a polymath, possessing a diverse skill set that includes proficiency in various artistic styles, in-depth knowledge of sāhitya (literature), purāna (mythology), kathā-s (stories), and kāvyāṅkara (poetics). This dual expertise allows the Chitrakalāvadhāni to create visual representations that not only capture the essence of the descriptions but also reflect the cultural and literary nuances embedded in the verses.

### **The Avadhāna Setting:**

Chitrakalāvadhānam can be presented as a standalone performance or as a part of the Ashtāvadhānam, a broader tradition where an Avadhāni undertakes eight simultaneous challenges. In this context, the pricchakas recite self-composed verses or descriptions, presenting a scene, mood, or character from various literary sources. The Chitrakalāvadhāni must then

listen attentively and transform these verbal cues into compelling visual narratives.

### **Key Components of Chitrāvadhānam :**

#### **Versatility in Artistic Styles:**

The Chitrkalāvadhāni must exhibit proficiency in various artistic styles, adapting their drawings to suit the diverse literary themes presented by the pricchakas. This requires not only technical skill but also an intuitive understanding of the emotions and contexts conveyed through the verses.

#### **Literary Acumen:**

In addition to their artistic prowess, the Chitrkalāvadhāni must possess a deep knowledge of literature, mythology, and poetry. This knowledge serves as the foundation for creating accurate and meaningful visual representations of the spoken descriptions.

#### **Immediacy and Spontaneity:**

One of the most remarkable aspects of Chitrkalāvadhānam is the on-the-spot creation of art. The Chitrkalāvadhāni must respond swiftly to the pricchakas' descriptions, showcasing his/her ability to translate words into images in real-time.

#### **Cultural Sensitivity:**

The drawings produced by the Chitrkalāvadhāni not only reflect the artistic skill but also demonstrate a nuanced understanding of cultural and literary contexts. This sensitivity enhances the audience's appreciation for the connection between visual art and storytelling.

The mesmerizing display of artistic and intellectual prowess in Chitrkalāvadhānam brings together the realms of literature and visual art in a harmonious union. The Chitrkalāvadhāni's ability to listen, interpret, and transform words into appropriate images on the spot showcases his/her extraordinary talent and knowledge. One finds here a seamless integration of creativity and intellect.

## Chapter 13

# Saṅgītageyadhārā: The Spontaneous Symphony of Poetry and Music in Avadhāna Tradition

Saṅgītageyadhārā, another mesmerising form of avadhāna, brings together the realms of poetry, music, and spontaneous composition. In this remarkable performance, Avadhāni, a multi-talented artist, is a poet, lyricist, musician, and vocalist. Accompanied by a skilled band of musicians, the Avadhāni responds to the pricchakas' specifications by composing and singing a song on the spot, seamlessly blending lyrics and music in real-time.

### **The Avadhāni's Profile:**

#### **Multifaceted Artistry:**

The Avadhāni must possess a diverse skill set, seamlessly transitioning between poetry, lyricism, musical composition, and vocal performance. This multifaceted artistry distinguishes the Saṅgītageyadhārā performance.

#### **Real-Time Composition:**

One of the most remarkable aspects of Saṅgītageyadhārā is the Avadhāni's ability to compose lyrics on the spot, synchronized with the ongoing musical composition. This demands not only creative spontaneity but also a profound understanding of musical nuances.

#### **Dynamic Collaboration:**

The collaboration between the Avadhāni and the accompanying musicians is crucial. The musicians, well-versed in various ragas and taalas, adapt to

the Avadhāni's real-time composition, creating a dynamic and harmonious musical ambiance.

**Diverse Subject Matter:**

The subject matter of the song can range from traditional puranic stories to contemporary events. This diversity showcases the Avadhāni's versatility in crafting lyrics that resonate with different themes and periods.

**Audience Interaction:**

Saṅgītagēyadhārā often involves active participation from the audience as pricchakas, adding an element of unpredictability to the performance. The Avadhāni's ability to respond to varied specifications from the audience demonstrates their adaptability and quick thinking.

Saṅgītagēyadhārā is an integral part of the rich tradition of avadhāna, where artistic brilliance, spontaneity, and collaboration converge. The Avadhāni's ability to compose intricate lyrics on the spot, set to live music, creates a magical experience for both the performer and the audience. This unique art form celebrates the fusion of poetry and music, inviting participants and spectators alike to explore the process of creative exploration and artistic expression.

## Chapter 14

### Tāla Avadhāna: The Art of Rhythmic Mastery

Tāla Avadhāna is a unique and intricate form of artistic expression within classical music. Rooted in the broader tradition of Avadhāna, it demands a performer's undivided focus on multiple elements simultaneously. This art form showcases the convergence of mind, cognitive abilities, intellect, memory, and perceptory senses, creating a symphony of rhythmic complexities. Tāla Avadhāna, as particularly emphasized in Karnataka classical music, involves the simultaneous use of both hands to play different sets of tālas, requiring a deep understanding of rhythm, coordination, and musical spontaneity.

#### Key Elements of Taala Avadhāna:

##### Focus on Shruti, Rāga, Tāla, Sāhitya, and Bhāva:

Tāla Avadhāna requires the performer to intricately focus on multiple facets, including the pitch (shruti), melody (rāga), rhythm (tāla), lyrics (sāhitya), and emotional expression (bhāva). This holistic approach underscores the comprehensive nature of the art form.

##### Manodharma in Karnataka Classical Music:

Karnataka classical music places a strong emphasis on manodharma, the creative and spontaneous aspect of performance. Tāla Avadhāna incorporates manodharma by challenging musicians to dynamically respond to the musical environment, exploring new patterns and expressions dynamically.

### **Instrumental Avadhāna:**

Instrumentalists in Karnataka classical music, such as those playing various musical instruments, engage in a form of Avadhāna as both hands work independently. This dual-tasking adds a layer of complexity to the performance.

### **Avadhāna Within Tāla:**

Tālāvadhāna is a specialized aspect of Sangeeta Avadhāna, mainly observed in vocal concerts. It involves using both the left and right hands to play different sets of tālas simultaneously. Strict rules govern Tālāvadhāna, ensuring synchronization, a common total count (Aksharakāla), an Arudi point, and distinct Edupus (starting points) for each hand.

### **Role of Pallavi:**

Pallavi, a significant musical form, is often integrated into Tāla Avadhāna presentations. It typically involves Rāga Alāpana, Tāna, singing one line of Pallavi Sāhitya with Neraval, and Swara Kalpanā. Pallavi serves as a platform for showcasing the performer's creativity and rhythmic prowess.

### **Versatility in Laya and Tāla:**

Tāla Avadhāna allows for the presentation of Pallavi in various layas (speeds) and with different tālas. This versatility adds richness to the performance, with anuloma, Viloma, and pratiloma styles offering distinct rhythmic challenges.

The rhythmic mastery in Tāla Avadhāna, coupled with the creative spontaneity demanded by manodharma, showcases the depth of skill possessed by performers. There are many nuances of this art form which further exemplifies the artistry involved in synchronizing complex rhythmic patterns. To ensure the preservation and growth of this art form, it is imperative to garner support and exposure from the global audience, encouraging the younger generation and music learners to embrace the beauty of Tāla Avadhāna.

## Chapter 15

### Ganitāvadhanam: A Mathematical Marvel

Ganitāvadhānam, as performed by most Ganitāvadhānis, is a stunning display of mathematical brilliance that mirrors the literary marvel of Ashtāvadhānam. In this extraordinary feat, the performer, called Ganitāvadhāni, effortlessly offers solutions to complex numerical problems posed by eight experts simultaneously, showcasing his unparalleled ability to unravel mathematical intricacies within seconds.

#### The Eight Feats of Ganitāshtāvadhānam:

##### Manassankalanam (मनस्सङ्कलनम्) - Fibonacci Series Mastery:

Ganitāvadhāni here displays mathematical calculations by adding numbers up to ten in the Fibonacci series. The pricchaka formulates a sequence of numbers, and the Avadhāni promptly provides the total, demonstrating his swift mental calculations and numerical agility.

##### Samasyā-Chadaram (समस्या-चादरम्) - Box Filling Challenge:

This feat involves a tricky problem of filling a 4x4 square, where the pricchaka asks the Avadhāni to determine his desired total at any end of the square, be it straight or diagonally, without repeating any previously used numbers. Avadhāni's ability to handle this puzzle showcases his strategic thinking and mathematical prowess.

##### Bhujā-puranam (भुजपूरणम्) - Pythagorean Theorem Revelation:

Rooted in the Pythagorean theorem ( $AC^2 = AB^2 + BC^2$ ), the Avadhāni solves Bhujapuranam by revealing the other two sides of a right-angled triangle when the smallest side is provided. This feat demonstrates the Avadhāni's application of mathematical principles to real-world problem-solving.

### **Datta-bhinnankam (दत्त-भिन्नकम्) - Fractional Precision:**

The Avadhāni here impressively delivers the value up to the 18th digit for any fraction between  $1/19$  and  $18/19$ , showcasing his mastery over precision in mathematical calculations.

### **Dattanka-varga (दत्ताङ्क-वर्ग) - Square Number Revelation:**

The Avadhāni here effortlessly provides the square number for any given number up to 99, showcasing his ability to compute squares with remarkable speed and accuracy.

### **Vaara-gananam (वार-गणनम्) - Instantaneous Day Identification:**

This feat involves the identification of the day for any date asked by the seeker from 1800 A.D. to 3000 A.D., showcasing Avadhāni's knowledge of the calendar and his quick mental calculations.

### **Panchama-moolam (पञ्चम-मूलम्) - Fifth Root Precision:**

The Avadhāni swiftly provides the fifth root for any given perfect number up to 1,000 crores, showcasing his ability to handle complex mathematical operations with ease.

### **Adbhuta-gunakaram (अद्भुत-गुणकरम्) - Multiplication Framework Marvel:**

The Avadhāni here displays multiplication complexities, effortlessly multiplying a number by 5 with any given number of digits or with nines of equal digits, showcasing his versatility in handling intricate multiplication frameworks.

Ganitāshtāvadhānam, as performed by most Ganitāvadhānis, is a remarkable display of the fusion of mathematical acumen and mental agility. In this form of art, the Avadhāni's ability to solve complex mathematical problems in real time mesmerizes audiences and highlights the beauty of mathematical precision. An Avadhāni's proficiency here not only showcases his brilliance but also serves as an inspiration for the promotion and appreciation of mathematical feats in the wider community.

## Chapter 16

### Some activities based on Sanskrit Sounds

The art of Avadhānam demands a convergence of several cognitive faculties, including concentration, memory, observation, and promptness. To cultivate these essential skills, especially in the formative years, one can start with various activities regularly. Here are a few engaging activities centered around Sanskrit sounds that can serve as a foundation. The activities provided here are designed to enhance the faculties crucial for practicing Avadhānam. Through exercises with letters, words, and verses, individuals can set out on a journey of holistic cognitive development, laying the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of this revered tradition.

#### Activities with Letters

1. Reciting all the letters from 'a-ha'
2. Reciting all the letters from 'ha-a'
3. 3. 1-3;2-4: for example: if the consonant 'ka' is 1, 'kha' is 2, 'ga' is 3, 'gha' is 4, then one can recite 'ka-ga', 'kha-gha', and so on.
4. 4. 1-46;2-45;3-44 etc. For example, if 'a' is 1 and 'ha' is 46, then one can recite 'a-ha', 'aa-sa', 'i-sha', and so on.
5. 5. From letters a to ha there are 46 letters and one has to remember all in sequence and then several activities like the above can be practised. For example one can find the numbers from a given word like 'kamala' will be (14, 38, 41) or 'bala' will be (36,41) or 'gagana' will be (16,16,33) etc. or one can find the words from a given number like the word 'jala' from (21, 41) or 'capala' from (19, 34, 41).

### Activities with Words

1. Write from memory all three-letter words: man dog cat in English or 'ka-ma-la', in Sanskrit
2. Write those again backward: nam god tac; 'la-ma-ka' etc.
3. Write a three-letter-word on the paper but spell a different three-letter word: write 'c-a-t' spell 'd-o-g' or write 'ka-la-ma' in Sanskrit and spell it as 'ma-la-ka'.
4. Write a three-letter word in reverse sequence and spell it correctly: write 'n-a-m' spell 'man' or write 'ma-la-ka' in Sanskrit and spell 'ka-la-ma'.
5. Write a three-letter word in reverse sequence spell another three-letter word: write: 't-a-h' spell 'c-a-p' or write 'ma-la-ka' in Sanskrit and spell 'ka-la-sha'.

### Activities with a verse

1. While reciting a verse write your name and address.
2. Reciting a verse in 1-3 and 2-4 format: the first and third line together and 2 and the fourth line together
3. Reciting a verse in reverse order, first the 4" line then 3-2-1.
4. Reciting the characters of a verse separately in reverse order: if the line is 'aham vande', then one can try reciting it like 'de', 'vam', 'ham', 'a', and so on.
5. Trying to remember the numerical position of the syllables in a verse: if the verse has 32 syllables then assign the numbers from syllable number 1 to 32 in order and then remember the numerical position of the characters. In this exercise, one can be asked to point out the syllables for the numbers given, like: what is the 17th syllable in the verse, or the 20th and 21st letters.

### Activities with Numbers

1. While counting from 1-100 one keeps writing four-letter words.

2. While counting from 3-99 in threes one keeps writing four-letter words backwards.

### Activity with Names

Step 1: Children can be asked to remember first the numerical position of the letters in a name.

Step 2: If the name has, say, 25 letters then the facilitator draws 25 boxes and numbers them from 1-25. Then the participants of the activity are asked to keep on saying the letters when the facilitator puts his fingers on the boxes. For example, if the facilitator puts his finger on the box number 7, the participants have to tell him the 7th letter of the chosen name. This is how the activity continues until all the boxes are filled. Then it's time to see whether the name has been built rightly or not.

### Activity with Jumbled-up Letters

Pick up the names of ten famous poets of Sanskrit, jumble up the letters, and ask the participants to reassemble and give you the full names. This can be done as a writing exercise. To make it a two-level activity when participants are busy writing a bell can be rung intermittently and the participants are asked to listen to the sounds of a bell and remember and tell at the end of the activity how many times the bell rang.

का वा व्या ज मा भा भ पा प वि लि ल्मी स घ र य णि त ष्णु दा की दे तू नि ज्ञ श रि स व वी ह लि र्मा

The syllables of two famous lines from Sanskrit can be intermingled and the participants can be asked to reassemble the syllables to get the lines. For example, here are the letters of two famous lines in Sanskrit: 'vaudhaiva kutumbakam' and 'sarve bhavantu sukhinah'.

दे खि व स त्व र्णे सु कु न्तु मे व स म धै भ व म्ब सु व म्ब नः व र्व म दे दु

To make it a two-level activity a Sanskrit verse or mantra can be played while the participants are busy finding out the verse and the participants are asked to listen and remember the wordings of the verse played which they have to produce at the end of the activity.

## Chapter 17

### Some of the Famous Avadhānis of the Present Time

The art of Avadhāna has endured across centuries, showcasing the extraordinary capabilities of individuals who master the intricate practice of multitasking, memory retention, and spontaneous creativity. In the present era, Avadhāni-s continue to mesmerize audiences with their unparalleled feats, spanning linguistic expertise, mathematical prowess, and outstanding talent.

This chapter deals with the contemporary Avadhānis, illustrating their backgrounds, accomplishments, and the diverse linguistic and cultural contexts in which they operate. From Sanskrit and Telugu luminaries to those proficient in Kannada and the illustrious Jain Avadhānis, in each section, one will discover the fascinating lives and contributions of these modern-day intellectual giants. These Avadhānis exhibit not only a profound understanding of traditional Indian Knowledge Systems but also an adaptability that allows them to engage with a global audience.

#### 1. Sri Narala Rama Reddy:

- Expertise: Ashtāvadhāni
- Origin: Proddatur, Kadapa district
- Noteworthy Achievements:
  - Initiated Avadhanam at 16 in 1965
  - Over 1000 Avadhānams across prominent cities in Andhra Pradesh, Madras, Bangalore, Delhi, Jamshedpur, and various cities in the USA

- Author of the acclaimed book "Gāthā Trishati"
- Honored with the Hamsa Puraskara (Kala Rathna Award) by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2013

**2. Dr. Garikapati Narasimha Rao:**

- Title: Mahā Sahasrāvadhāni
- Distinctive Features:
  - Subjected himself to a thousand Pricchakas
  - Known for rapid recollection of hundreds of verses
  - Holds the title 'Dhāranā Brahma Rākshasa'
  - Author of the acclaimed literary work 'Sāgara Ghosha'

**3. Dr. Medasani Mohan:**

- Expertise: Ashtāvadhānams, Shatāvadhānams, Sahasrāvadhānam
- Additional Role: Heads the Annamacharya Project at Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam

**4. Dr. Nagaphani Sharma:**

- Accomplishments: Multiple Asttāvadhānams, Shatāvadhānams, and Sahasrāvadhānam
- Versatility: Proficient in both Telugu and Sanskrit Avadhāna-s
- Leadership: Led the Telugu Adhikara Bhasha Sangham

**5. Kadimalla Varaprasad:**

- Expertise: Ashtāvadhānas, Shatāvadhānas, Sahasrāvadhānam
- Influence: Mentor to Shatāvadhānis like Vaddiparti Padmakar and Kota Lakshminarasimham

### 6. Astakala Narasimha Rama Sharma:

- Contributions: Over 150 Ashtāvadhānas
- Unique Initiative: Built a distinctive temple for goddess Saraswati at Ananthasagar, near Siddipet
- Versatility: Proficient in Vastu, Jyothishya vijñanam, and temple vastu

### 7. Dr. Rallabandi Kavita Prasad:

- Role: Former Director, Dept of Culture, Govt of Andhra Pradesh
- Expertise: Over 500 avadhāna-s, including Shatāvadhāna and Dvishatāvadhāna
- Academic Recognition: Awarded a Doctorate by Osmania University for his thesis on avadhāna vidyā
- Literary Contributions: Author of several books, including "Kadambini"

### 8. Amudala Murali:

- Title: "Avadhāna Kalānidhi"
- Notable Achievements: 37 Ashtāvadhāna-s, one Dwigunita ashtāvadhānam (16 pricchakas)
- Geographical Reach: Conducted Avadhāna-s in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

### 9. Gandluri Dattatreya Sarma:

- Expertise: Shatāvadhāni from Dhone (Dronachalam) in Kurnool district
- Contributions: Active pracharaka of Samskrita Bharati

### 10. Surabhi Sankara Sarma:

- Profession: Teacher

- Expertise: Leading Shatāvadhāni from Tripuranthakam Mandal of Prakasam district

### 11. Dorbala Prabhakara Sharma:

- Profession: Teacher, Former principal of Andhra Geervana Vidyapeetha

- Expertise: Excellent Ashtāvadhāni and Shatāvadhāni

- Versatility: Known for simple and elegant compositions and proficiency in singing Sanskrit poems and songs

### 12. Sree Vaddiparti Padmakar:

- Known For a regular orator of Bhagavatam and Ganapati mahima on regional Telugu TV channels

- Expertise: Over 1500 Ashtāvadhāna-s, 15 Shatāvadhāna-s, and 1 Tribhāshā- sahasrāvadhāna in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Telugu

- Unique Feat: Memorized 756 poems in 207 minutes

- Commendable Narration: Renowned for narrating Bhagavatam without referring to the book

## Sanskrit and Kannada Avadhānis:

### 1. Shatavadhani R Ganesh:

- Accomplishments: Over 1000 Ashtāvadhanams and 5 Shatāvadhāna-s
- Multilingual Proficiency: Fluent in more than 18 languages, including Indian and foreign languages
- Milestone: Marked his 1000th feat at NMKRV College on February 16, 2014
- In-depth Details: Refer to section 13.3 for a comprehensive overview of R. Ganesh

## 2. Dr. Shankar Rajaraman:

- Professional Affiliation: Research Scholar at National Institute of Advanced Studies, IISC
- Previous Role: Programme Officer at Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions, Yelahanka
- Innovation: Introduced chittrakāvya into avadhāna, previously deemed impossible
- Diverse Expertise: Has participated as pricchaka in several avadhānas and performed 9 ashtāvadhāna-s
- Additional Role: Practices psychiatry in conjunction with his scholarly pursuits

## 3. Pandit Sudhakar Kallurkar:

- Title: Young Pandit from Uttaradhi Mutt
- Expertise: Performed ashtāvadhāna in Sanskrit under the divine presence of Sri Sathyatma Thirtha Swamiji and eminent Sanskrit scholars
- Audience Impact: More than 2000 people witnessed the Ashtāvadhāna

## 4. Vid. Gundibailu Subrahmanya Bhat:

- Scholarly Background: Hails from Udupi and recognized as a Vedanta scholar
- Performance: Conducted around 20 ashtāvadhānas in Sanskrit and Kannada, primarily in and around Udupi District
- Educational Attainment: Holds a Vidwat degree from Sri Manmadva Sanskrita Mahavidyalayam, Udupi

## **Jaina Avadhānis**

### **1. Muni Manak Maharaj:**

- **Birth and Background:** Born in Sujangarh, Rajasthan, he is a disciple of Acharya Tulsi.
- **Multilingual Proficiency:** Fluent in nine languages with extensive knowledge of Buddhism, Vedas, and Indian philosophical schools, along with expertise in Jainism.
- **Versatility:** Apart from Jainism, he possesses knowledge in astrology, palmistry, and numerology.
- **International Demonstrations:** Showcased Shatāvadhāna-s in various Indian cities and internationally in the UK, the USA, and Canada.

### **2. Muni Mahendra Kumar:**

- **Monastic Journey:** Initiated into monkhood in 1957, associated with Acharya Tulsi and Acharya Mahaprajna.
- **Academic Role:** Professor at Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, Ladnun, Rajasthan, specializing in the Science of Living and Preksha Meditation.
- **Scholarly Expertise:** Versed in Physics, Mathematics, Biology, Philosophy, Psychology, Ancient History, and more.
- **Linguistic Proficiency:** Commands proficiency in languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, English, German, Hindi, Gujarati, and Rajasthani.
- **Literary Contributions:** Authored, translated, and edited over 60 books.
- **Meditation Advocate:** Practitioner and instructor of Preksha Meditation.

- Research Work: Contributions include "The Enigma of the Universe" and "Vishva Prahelika," exploring cosmology in modern science and ancient Jain philosophy.
- International Presence: Demonstrated Shatāvadhāna at various universities and international conferences, earning the nickname "Human Computer."

### 3. Muni Ajitchandra Sagar:

- Self-Taught Avadhāni: Born in 1990, known for self-teaching Shatāvadhāna.
- Multiple Avadhānas: Performed Samyukta Avadhāna and Mahashatavadhana, facing up to 200 questioners.
- Unique Skills: Specializes in "Netrāvadhāna" (Avadhāna using eyes) and "Ganitāvadhāna" (mathematics).
- Demonstrations: Showcased Shatavadhana at a Jain Doctors' Federation conference in Ahmedabad (2009).
- Record Holder: Holds a Guinness record as the world's second-fastest speaker.
- Dvishatāvadhāna Feat: Answered 200 questions with closed eyes, including puzzles, names, shlokas, foreign language words, and complex maths problems.
- Innovative Performance: Recited questions and answers in ascending, descending, and random orders.

### Other Avadhānis of the Present Time

1. Dr. Ramakrishna Pajathaya (Sahityavadhani) - Karnataka
2. Dr. Sachidananda Murthy (Gitavadhani) - Telangana
3. Dr. Surya Hebbar (Sahityavadhani) - Karnataka
4. Dr. Uma Maheshwar (Gitavadhani) - Andhra Pradesh

5. Dr. Kempalli Shivakumar (Amarakoshavadhani) - Telangana
6. Dr. GM Ramakrishna (Sahityavadhani) - Andhra Pradesh
7. Dr. Mahesh Bhat (Sahityavadhani) - Karnataka
8. Dr. Venkatesh Kulkarni - Karnataka (Sahityavadhani)
9. Dr. Ganesh Bhat (Sahityavadhani) - Karnataka
10. Dr. Balachandra Avadhani (Sahityavadhani) - Andhra Pradesh
11. Dr. B Aparna and Smt Chandrika (Ghantavadhani-s) - Andhra Pradesh
12. Shrutiranjani and Shreeranjani (Taalaavadhani-s) - Karnataka
13. Shri Harsha Chakravarthy (Ganitavadhani) - Andhra Pradesh
14. Smt. Lalita Kameshwari and Smt Rama Kumari (Netravadhani-s) - Andhra Pradesh
15. Shri Singampalli Satyanarayana (Chitrakalavadhanam) - Andhra Pradesh
16. Shri Sai Krishna Yachendra (Sangeeta Geyadhara) - Andhra Pradesh
17. Tigulla Srihari Sharma - Telugu & Sanskrit Ashtavadhani - Telangana
18. Amarnath & Gowri Shankar - Yugala Ashtavadhani - Hyderabad
19. Y. Govardhan Reddy - yoga Sutra avadhanam - Andhra Pradesh
20. Dr D Mahadevan Mani - Telugu & Sanskrit - Andhra Pradesh
21. Madugula Naga Phani Sharma - Sahitya - Telugu & Sanskrit - Telangana
22. Tata Sandeep Sharma - Shatavadhani - Sanskrit and Telugu - Andhra Pradesh

23. Brahmasri S Chandrasekhara Sharma - Sanskrit and Telugu -  
Andhra Pradesh

The tradition of Avadhāna in India is rich and diverse, producing extraordinary personalities capable of performing various levels of Avadhāna, from Ashtāvadhāna to panchasahasra avadhāna. The highlighted Jain Avadhānis, Muni Manak Maharaj, Muni Mahendra Kumar, and Muni Ajitchandra Sagar, represent a glimpse of India's Avadhāna tradition. Their multifaceted expertise, linguistic proficiency, and innovative approaches showcase India's true talents, inspiring generations with their contributions. The tradition extends beyond the ones mentioned, especially in Andhra Pradesh, where numerous Avadhāni-s continue to enrich their cultural heritage with their unique styles and contributions.

## Chapter 18

### Conclusion

Avadhāna, indeed, is a rare and challenging accomplishment as it requires a high level of cognitive ability. The Avadhāni must process a vast amount of information and perform tasks rhythmically and continuously. He must also possess exceptional creative and intuitive skills, be knowledgeable in various subjects, and have a command over multiple languages.

The practice of Avadhāna is not only limited to the performance arts but can also be used in modern education to enhance students' cognitive abilities. The principles of Avadhāna can be used in the classroom to help students develop the skills of concentration, memory, creativity, and attention.

Observation of various forms of Avadhāna confirms that it can help improve self-discipline, cognitive abilities, memory retention capacity, critical thinking, power of expression, and linguistic abilities. The practice of Avadhāna can also help decrease stress levels and promote calmness, patience, and better problem-solving skills.

The innovative application of Avadhāna techniques can be a powerful aid to enhance the teaching and learning process. By incorporating Avadhāna teachers can provide students with an engaging and effective learning experience that will help them in their future endeavours. This can be beneficial for students, especially during their formative years as it focuses on developing vital cognitive skills.

At the heart of this ancient practice lies the power of concentration, a faculty that, when harnessed with will and perseverance, can unlock

extraordinary abilities. An Avadhāni, through meticulous training and disciplined practice, attains a level of perfection that seems almost superhuman. Yet, this skill is not beyond the reach of ordinary individuals; it is an inherent capability that can be cultivated and perfected by anyone willing to dedicate themselves to its mastery.

As the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram emphatically states: "Whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of everything – the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, nothing can resist it – whatever it may be, from the most material physical development to the highest spiritual one... You can be the best athlete, you can be the best student, you can be an artistic, literary or scientific genius, you can be the greatest saint with that faculty. And everyone has in himself a tiny little beginning of it - it is given to everybody, but people do not cultivate it." (Complete Works of the Mother, Vol.9, PP. 360-361)

However, the mastery of concentration required for Avadhāna extends beyond mere single-pointed focus. It demands what Sri Aurobindo describes as "multiple concentration." He explains: "Attention is a factor in knowledge, the importance of which has been always recognised. Attention is the first condition of right memory and of accuracy. To attend to what he is doing is the first element of discipline required of the student, and, as I have suggested, this can easily be secured if the object of attention is made interesting. This attention to a single thing is called concentration. One truth is, however, sometimes overlooked, that concentration on several things at a time is often indispensable. When people talk of concentration, they imply centring the mind on one thing at a time; but it is quite possible to develop the power of double concentration, triple concentration, multiple concentration. When a given incident is happening, it may be made up of several simultaneous happenings or a set of simultaneous circumstances, a sight, a sound, a touch or several sights, sounds, touches occurring at the same moment or in the same short space of time. The tendency of the mind is to fasten on one and mark others vaguely, many not at all or, if compelled to attend

to all, to be distracted and mark none perfectly. Yet this can be remedied and the attention equally distributed over a set of circumstances in such a way as to observe and remember each perfectly. It is merely a matter of abhyāsa or steady natural practice." (Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 1, pp 402-3) This capacity for simultaneous focus on multiple points is a natural extension of consciousness higher than the mind and forms the very foundation of Avadhāna.

The secret to the powerful skill and memory exhibited by an Avadhāni is not a mysterious gift bestowed upon a fortunate few. It is the result of unwavering concentration, persistent practice, and the ability to expand one's consciousness to embrace multiple aspects simultaneously. As one reflects on the art of Avadhāna, one must be inspired to cultivate this power within oneself, recognizing that with dedication and perseverance, anyone can achieve extraordinary feats, both in the material and spiritual realms. The journey to mastery begins with a single step – the decision to concentrate.

Indeed, ancient heritage and the treasures of Bharat contained within the art of Avadhāna, and within its rich linguistic tradition, hold immense beauty and wisdom, much of which remains veiled or forgotten. Reclaiming and reimagining these riches would be a magnificent feat, enriching not only Bharat but the entire world.

## Appendix 1

### List of Questions asked during the Sahasravadhāna Performed by Muni Ajitchandra Sagar

1 to 10 Ask any question in 5 to 7 words.

11 to 20 Quotable quotes in 5–7 words.

21 to 30 Name of Jain and non-Jain saints & scriptures.

31 to 40 Names of holy mountains, rivers, and pilgrimage centers.

41 to 61 First stanza of Sanskrit Shlok.

62 to 65 First line of the 16 block (4 x 4) Sarvato Bhadra Yantra.

66 to 70 Name of Jain terminological words.

71 to 80 First line from a Jain Panch Pratikraman Sutra.

81 to 90 Names of philanthropists, patriots, and scientists.

91 to 100 Names of famous monuments in India or the world.

101 to 121 Second stanza of Sanskrit Shlok.

122 to 125 Second line of the 16 block (4 x 4) Sarvato Bhadra Yantra.

126 to 150 Twenty-five photographs of monuments in India or the world selected by the audience.

151 to 175 Total of 25 numbers selected from  $25 \times 25 = 625$  blocks by the audience.

176 to 200 Twenty-five mathematical puzzles solving simultaneously.

201 to 225 Any object selected to be shown (Avdhan of sight).

226 to 250 Twenty-five photographs of great scientists, presidents of nations, and philosophers selected by the audience.

251 to 271 Third stanza of Sanskrit Shlok.

272 to 275 Third line of the 16 block (4 x 4) Sarvato Bhadra Yantra.

276 to 300 Total of 25 numbers selected from  $25 \times 25 = 625$  blocks by the audience.

301 to 330 One-by-one numbers selected by the audience.

331 to 340 Names of holy festivals, public festivals, national holidays, etc.

341 to 350 Names of trees.

351 to 360 Names of fruits.

361 to 375 Collective Avdhan.

376 to 400 Solving mathematical puzzles collectively.

401 to 425 Any object selected to be shown (Avdhan of sight).

426 to 446 Fourth stanza of Sanskrit Shlok.

447 to 450 Fourth line of the 16 block (4 x 4) Sarvato Bhadra Yantra.

451 to 460 Names of gods and their symbols.

461 to 470 Names of months in Gujarati or English.

471 to 475 Any word in any language (5–7 words).

476 to 500 Total of 25 numbers selected from  $25 \times 25 = 625$  blocks by the audience.

501 to 510 Names of famous yoga asanas.

511 to 520 Names of countries of the world.

521 to 530 Names of Indian states and union territories.

531 to 540 Names of famous languages in India or the world.

541 to 550 Names of holy Agamas.

551 to 575 25 photographs of world country flags are shown collectively.

576 to 600 Solving mathematical puzzles collectively.

601 to 625 Twenty-five objects to be shown (Avdhan of sight).

626 to 640 Gujarati words.

641 to 650 Sanskrit words.

651 to 675 Twenty-five photographs of India's famous leaders are shown separately.

676 to 700 Total of 25 numbers selected from  $25 \times 25 = 625$  blocks by the audience.

701 to 925 Filling a  $15 \times 15$  Yantra.

926 to 950 Twenty-five objects to be shown (Avdhan of sight).

951 to 975 Mathematical puzzles solved simultaneously.

976 to 980 Fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Here the audience can say one word from the 15th chapter of the Gita and Avadhani will recite the whole verse.

981 to 989 Filling numbers in the  $3 \times 3$  block Sarvato Bhadra Yantra.

990 Munishri tells the day from a date selected by the audience.

991 to 997 Munishri recites the relevant extract from the Agamas (Sacred Kalpa Sutra).

998 Filling an  $8 \times 8$  Yantra.

999 Munishri tells the time of your birth (Miraculous Avdhan).

1000 Total number of bells rang during the entire event.

## Appendix 2

### Swami Vivekananda on Concentration

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) himself had a great power of concentration and memory. Once, Swami Vivekananda, on the bank of a river, saw some young boys with an air gun trying to shoot at eggshells floating in the river. As the shells rolled up and down on the choppy water, the boys could not hit them. None of the boys hit an eggshell, despite trying many times.

Swami Vivekananda was watching their game with keen interest. Seeing this, the boys called out to Him, "Sir, you have been watching us all this time. Would you like to give it a try?" Swami Vivekananda smiled and said that He would like to try. Taking the air gun in His hand, He aimed at the eggshells and concentrated on the target for some time. Then He fired the gun twelve times and hit an eggshell each time!

The boys were awestruck on seeing Swamiji's skill and asked, "Well, Sir, how could you do this? Have you had a lot of shooting practice?" Swamiji laughed and said, "No, I have never practiced shooting." The boys were confused, "Then how is it that you shot so well?" Swami Vivekananda replied, "Well, let me tell you a secret. Whatever you do, concentrate all your attention on it. Think of nothing else. If you are shooting, keep your mind only on the target. Your aim will not fail. Concentration can work wonders. Even when you are studying, think only of the lesson at hand. Then you will easily remember what you study."

Swami ji had once said: "To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had done my education over again and had my voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 6, Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, 1989, pp. 38-39.) This concentration indeed is the essence of all knowledge and without this nothing at all can be learnt. In Swami ji's words: There is only one method by which to attain knowledge, that which is called concentration; the very essence of education is concentration of the mind. From the lowest man to the highest yogi, all have to use the same method to attain knowledge." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda], Vol.1, p-130.)

## Appendix 3

### Vasishtha Ganapati Muni - An Avadhani Par Excellence

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni (1878–1936) was the foremost disciple of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He was a poet, a patriot, a Tantrika, a visionary, and a Rishi, and in addition he was an अवधानी avadhānī par-excellence. What does the word अवधानी avadhānī mean? The word अवधानी avadhānī is a derivative of the Sanskrit word अवधान avadhāna which means “attention or concentration”. So, a person who concentrates and is attentive is known as अवधानी avadhānī. But the word अवधानी avadhānī was used specifically for the one who could simultaneously concentrate on several topics and answer questions related to various topics by creating extempore poetry. He possesses a very high power of concentration.

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni had performed excellent अष्टावधान-s aṣṭāvadhāna-s at many places in India, and he was highly respected for his ability to perform successfully this type of literary feats. Here are a few examples to illustrate his excellence in this art.

आशुकाव्यरचनम् āśukāvya-racanam or composing poetry extempore is an important part of the अवधान avadhāna activity. The Muni was an unparalleled आशुकवि āśukavi. Once during the performance of an अवधान avadhāna at Madras he was asked to compose a hundred verses in one hour (घण्टाशतकम् ghaṇṭāśatakam). The topic specified for this was the legendary story of Nala and Damayanti. The Muni started at such a speed that he composed twenty-five verses in six minutes. The appointed scribes who were to commit to writing were not able to cope with the speed of the Muni. The entire assembly was wonderstruck. The president of the function was greatly delighted with this and told the Muni to stop going further. He said, with this speed, one could compose two hundred and fifty verses in one hour. So those twenty-five verses were enough to prove the Muni as a great आशुकवि āśukavi. There are many such examples of Muni’s extempore compositions.

व्यस्ताक्षरकथनम् vyastākṣarakathanam is another item in the अवधान avadhāna performance in which the person appointed for this item interrupts the अवधानी avadhānī repeatedly and gives at random the serial numbers of syllables in a poem, which he has in his mind. The अवधानी avadhānī must remember and rearrange the syllables in the right order to find the poem. Normally, the verse chosen for this should be in a metre comprising less number of syllables or it should be one-quarter of a verse. In one performance the व्यस्ताक्षरी vyastākṣarī

examiner chose a very difficult verse for the Muni. The verse was in a meter called स्रग्धरा sragdharā which contains twenty-one syllables in each of its quarters. So, all together there are eighty-four syllables in this meter. The full verse which was composed by the examiner himself was chosen for the Muni for व्यस्ताक्षरकथनम् vyastākṣarakathanam. The Muni had such a sharp memory and high power of concentration that finally, he not only could rearrange the letters of the verse given in a disorderly manner, but he astounded the assembly by saying the entire verse from the end to the beginning syllable by syllable, and also by reciting it in the usual way. The verse was:

अप्सां द्रप्सामलिप्सां चिरतरमचरं क्षीरमद्राक्षमिक्षुम्  
 द्राक्षां साक्षादजक्षे मधुरसमधयं द्रागविन्दं मरन्दम् ।  
 मोचामाचाममन्यो मधुरिमगरिमा शङ्कराचार्यवाचाम्  
 आचान्तो हन्त किं तैरलमपि च सुधासारसीसारसीम्ना ॥

apsāṃ drapsām alipsāṃ cirataramacaram kṣīramadrākṣamikṣum  
 drākṣāṃ sākṣādajakṣaṃ madhurasamadhayaṃ drāgavindaṃ marandaṃ.  
 mocāmācāmamanyo madhurimagarimā śaṅkarācāryavācām  
 ācānto hanta kiṃ tairalamapi ca sudhāsārasīsārasīmṇā..

It was a practice that at the end of the अवधान avadhāna performance the अवधानी avadhānī had to comment critically upon any famous verse. For this occasion, the Muni chose this particular verse and started commenting elegantly upon this. He delighted the assembly with his flawless eloquence and made all thunderstruck by pointing out a series of mistakes in the verse. For details, one can see वासिष्ठवैभवम् vāsiṣṭhavaibhavam by Kapali Sastry, chapter 11.

On one occasion a Sanskrit scholar asked the Muni to express his views on poetry in वसन्ततिलकम् vasantatilakam meter which has fourteen syllables in each of its quarters. He put the condition that the Muni should compose the verse as per specifications made by him. The Sanskrit scholar took a piece of chalk and drew a rectangle having fifty-six squares, since the meter in which the verse had to be composed demands to have fifty-six syllables. Then he started pointing out to the squares at random. On whichever square the scholar put his finger the Muni wrote down a letter there. In this manner all the squares were filled up spontaneously by the Muni. Finally, the complete verse expressing the Muni's views on poetry was:

प्रीतिं ददाति विपुलां श्रियमातनोति

निर्माति नूत्नसमयं दुरितं धुनोति ।

आर्द्रिकरोति हृदयान्यपि देवतानां

कस्मै शुभाय न भवेत् कविता विदोषा ॥

prītiṃ dadāti vipulāṃ śriyamātanoti

nirmāti nūtnasamayaṃ duritaṃ dhunoti.

ārdrikaroti hṛdayānyapi devatānāṃ

kasmai śubhāya na bhavet kavitā vidoṣā ..

Poetry, free from all demerits or blemishes, gives delight, grants enormous prosperity, creates a new era, removes all difficulties, and even melts the hearts of the gods. To whom does it not prove good?

Although the available examples of Muni's अष्टावधान aṣṭāvadhāna performance are very few, these show his exceptional retentive memory, the great power of concentration, ability to compose unblemished extempore poetry, spontaneous creativity, imagination, poetic ability, and quick thinking, and prove him as a consummate scholar and literary genius.

## Appendix 4

### Suggested Readings

The Art and Science of Avadhanam in Sanskrit by Shatavadhani R Ganesh and Shashikiran

Avadhan - Smriti Vikas ki Prakriya (Hindi) by Sardha-sahasravadhani Muni Shrichand 'Kamal', published by Lalchand Ganapatlal Golecha, Jaipur, 1983

Andhramu Avadhanaparakriya (Telugu) by Kambapati Ramagopala Murthy, Gangadhara Pracharana Sanstha, Vijayawada, 1991

Kannadatalli Avadhanakale (Kannada) by Shatavadhani R Ganesh, Lakshmi Mudranalaya, Bengaluru, 2015

#### Benefits of Avadhānakālā

- Enhanced Memory: Sharpen your memory like a finely honed blade.
- Creative Brilliance: Tap into your creative wellspring and unleash your imagination.
- Laser Focus: Develop intense concentration to excel in your pursuits.
- Mental Agility: Navigate life's challenges with clarity and confidence.
- Spiritual Awakening: Connect with your inner self and explore higher consciousness.
- Avadhānakālā is not just an ancient art; it's a timeless path to self-discovery and empowerment.





Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, a distinguished scholar in Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), has dedicated his life to the study, preservation, and propagation of India's rich linguistic and philosophical heritage. He holds a BA and MA in Sanskrit from Utkal University, where he also completed his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the evolution of the Sanskrit language, inspired by Sri Aurobindo's perspectives. Dr. Mishra is renowned for founding the world's first 24-hour Sanskrit radio channel, Divyavani Sanskrit Radio, in 2013, and for his role as Associate Editor of the 'Collected Works of Vasishtha Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni', a landmark twelve-volume publication. His contributions to Sanskrit have earned him several prestigious awards, including the President's Maharshi Badarayana Vyasa Samman and the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar 2024. His career has been marked by a passionate commitment to ensuring that Sanskrit and IKS flourish within both academic and cultural landscapes.

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