Preface

Almost eight years back down the line in the shivering evening of 27 December 1999, I was enjoying a cup of coffee along with my friends while I certainly noticed an astonishing thing which certainly offended me right there. It was a report from the Department of Health and Human Services of United States in which it was mentioned that the United States Food and Drug Administration does not approve even a single Ayurvedic drug to be medically fit for human consumption. Though herbal products made up of extracts from a single source like neem, ginger, etc. were approved. The reason cited there was that Ayurveda does not have any supportive theory to justify its process of mixing up of various herbal products. Even if individual herbal products are safe, they may prove to be counterproductive if taken in combination with some other herbal products. I was shocked to see the pathetic situation where more than 2000 years old branch of knowledge has been sidelined academically just because we believe that it does not satisfy our modern criterion for being a science.

Though that emotional expression of disappointment faded away with the passage of time but therein remained a fundamental question raised in the report for quite a long time in the backdrop of my mind. The question is that how a vaidya does know that so and so ayurvedic drug would have such and such effects on the body? What are the theoretical foundations of Ayurveda and to what extent they are able to justify diagnostic, prognostic and therapeutic practices of an Ayurvedic practitioner. This basic quest forms the backbone of whole of my thesis.

At the same time, it seems to me that we have yet to awaken to recognize the value of our scientific heritage. Our land gave birth not only to artists and mystics but also to great scientists and mathematicians. In a sense their contribution to the intellectual wealth of our nation is far greater than anybody else as they served the practical purposes of the people through their knowledge. Unfortunately, now the situation is that we have uncritically accepted European science to be the paradigm of science and
we look towards the western laboratories for the verification of our own Ayurvedic medical formulations. Such an attitude not only vitiates the process of understanding the sciences grown on this land but also impedes their further development.

The present work is a very small effort in the direction of exploring the scientific heritage of this holy land by creating an understanding regarding its methodology and foundations so that the door can be opened up for more efforts in this direction to create a new paradigm of science. My attempt in this work is to bring forth the philosophical foundations of our indigenous system of medicine, i.e. Ayurveda as well as to address the methodology related issues in context of Ayurveda. Needless to say, being an engineer myself and getting systematic training in the modern scientific tradition, I am reasonably aware of and also influenced by the modern scientific terminology. Therefore, I tried here to search for some common ground on the basis of which a fruitful philosophical discussion using the writings of our forefathers and the modern thinkers esp. in the realm of philosophy of science could be generated. But at the same time, I am aware that the transposition of thought from the technical philosophical Sanskrit to modern intelligible English technical glossary should be safe and there must not be any undue injustice with the texts of our ancients by enforcing an interpretations on them under the over influence of the modern philosophical and scientific tradition.

As a key to the understanding of the Sanskrit part of this thesis, it is important to mention here that I used the commonly acceptable diacritic marks for converting the Sanskrit alphabets to the Roman alphabets with which we are more familiar. The only exceptions are the words which have been unanimously accepted and assimilated into the mainstream English language and which one can easily find in any Standard English Language Dictionary, e.g. Ayurveda, Ramayana, etc.