

**THE SANSKRIT DIMINUTIVE SUFFIX ‘-KA’:
A PHILOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL READING**

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The Sanskrit suffix ‘-ka’ is a secondary nominal or pronominal suffix and, as explained in Sanskrit grammar, has several basic meanings. It primarily makes nouns or adjectives of similarity or characteristic, adjectives of appurtenance or relationship, adjectives or substantives of possession and active or verbal words. The suffix ‘-ka’ making nouns and pronouns of the first category has the meaning of diminution, the most primitive meaning thereof. This paper will briefly discuss the philological background of the Sanskrit diminutive suffix ‘-ka’ in comparison to some other diminutive suffixes with ‘-k-’ phoneme found in selected Proto Indo-European (PIE) languages and the philosophical aspect of its meaning of diminution in contrast to that of augmentation.

Sanskrit diminutives can be classified into several subsections such as true diminutives, endearing or hypocoristic diminutives, pitying diminutives, diminutives of inferiority (of contempt, pejection or disparagement and of obscene humor), generic diminutives and diminutives of feminine gender. Diminutive suffixes in most of the PIE languages seem to generally consist of guttural surd ‘-k-’ sound and this sound is thus identified as a common phoneme of diminution. Philologists on the phonology of PIE (reconstructed) language have suggested that the original suffix be ‘*-ko’. Some PIE languages, especially dialects, use double, triple or quadruple diminutives and even suprasegmental allophonic sounds or elongated vowels to connote hyper-diminution. As regards the philosophical background of diminution, it is worthy examining whether ‘diminutiveness’ necessarily and intrinsically connotes both ‘endearment’ and, in particular, ‘disapprobation’ which is a contradiction in terms. The primary meaning of the Sanskrit diminutive suffix ‘-ka’ is the diminutiveness of the object or the person named, while hypocoristic or pejorative meanings are secondary. Moreover, many ‘diminutive’ suffixes like the Sanskrit ‘-ka’ also connote hypocoristic meanings like endearment or intimacy which are ‘augmentative’ in sense. ‘Bigness’ and ‘smallness’ can be introduced as binaries opposed to each other, and this notion further reinforces the classic binary opposition, ‘man-woman’, as certain diminutive suffixes are also used to make some forms of feminine gender names.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study. An examination from a philological standpoint attests that the phoneme ‘-k-’ of the PIE diminutive suffix ‘*-ko’ is preserved in most of the PIE languages and has preserved its primitive sense. Further, the binary dichotomy between augmentatives and diminutives is clearly distinguished. As the Sanskrit diminutive suffix ‘-ka’ carries not only pejorative but also augmentative meaning, the instability of these binary oppositions, just like other distinguished examples of binary opposition, is well perceived.