

FOCUS ON YOUR CLASSICAL TEXTS

Literature of *Ayurveda* – Brihatrayi

Literature of *Ayurveda* truly starts from the Vedic era. Its evolution thereafter, up to the final compilation in the form of *Charak samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, etc.

Despite the great changes that have refashioned *Ayurveda* since its inception, the best guides are still ancient texts known as '*samhita*'. Amongst several texts only three authentic texts (*Charak samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *vagbhata* or *astanga hridaya*) have gained more recognition and respect for the past two thousand years. These are known as *Brihatrayi (Major / Great trio)* and are in *sanskrit* language.

These doctrines in the great trio are vast treasures of knowledge of the Indian system of medicine. Although they differ in specific instructions, the basic principles remain same. *Ayurveda* texts are not the compendia of exhaustive details like modern medical texts; rather they are book of *sutras* or aphorisms that encapsulate the essence of the lore. These *sutras* are often expressed in simple poetic way to make their memorization easier.

The *Ayurveda samhita* are divided into different sections. Each section is called as a *sthana*. These sections have chapters which are called as *adhyaya*, arranged in a format of a symposium covering various areas of the topic under consideration. The contents of each chapter are summarized beautifully at the end of the chapter and in turn at the end of each section. This helps to recapitulate the teachings and reaffirm the learning. *Ayurveda* texts are so spare that they are always studied with a commentary written by an expert that elucidates the meanings of its cryptic passages.

Charak samhita

It is considered to be the prime work on the basic concepts of **Ayurveda**. It is a classical textbook of internal medicine i.e. **kayachikitsa**. It is the oldest of the **Brihatrayi** (Great trio) and was probably compiled around the 1st century B.C. This compendium is a commentary on the **sutra** of Maharshri **Atreya** which were collected, compiled and expertly opined by **Agnivesha** which initially was known as **Agnivesha tantra**. In the course of time, sage **Charaka** revised the text by elaborating and simplifying various topics. **Drudabala**, an expert physician from Kashmir, was the final editor and presented the existing **Charaka samhita** in its complete form. The three stages in which **Charaka samhita** was composed can be represented as follows.

Agnivesh tantra	1000 BC
Charaka's addition	2 nd century BC
Drudabala	4 th century AD

Charaka samhita is presented in eight sections i.e. **sthana**. These eight **sthana** contain total 120 chapters as outlined in the table below

No. of <i>sthana</i>	Name of <i>sthana</i>	Number of Chapters	Topic
1.	<i>sutra sthana</i>	30	Basic principles and philosophy
2.	<i>nidana sthana</i>	8	Aetiopathology
3.	<i>vimana sthana</i>	8	Factors affecting drug administration
4.	<i>Sharir sthana</i>	8	Anatomy and embryology
5.	<i>indriya sthana</i>	12	Prognosis
6.	<i>chikitsa sthana</i>	30	Diagnosis and treatment of disease
7.	<i>kalpa sthana</i>	12	Pharmacological preparations
8.	<i>siddhi sthana</i>	12	<i>Panchkarma</i> procedures
Total		120 chapters	

sutra sthana

sutra is the presentation of a vast subject in lesser words, collected and arranged in a beautiful manner like a thread in a beautiful garland. Similarly various basic principles and philosophical concepts are woven in this section.

As a custom in Vedic literature a subject is explained in a group of four chapters. *Charaka samhita* follows the same custom and contains various groups of four chapters known as *Chatushka* (Quadruples).

Thus *sutra sthana* contains seven *Chatushka* which are explained briefly as below:

1. *Bheshaja Chatushka* is group of four chapters on Ayurvedic medicines and their uses.
2. *Swasthya Chatushka* discusses about rules of food consumption, daily regimen, seasonal regimen, etc.
3. *Nirdesha Chatushka* deals with patient, medicine, medical attendant and the doctor which are considered as four important factors of management of any disorder (*chikitsa catushpada*)
4. *Kalpna Chatushka* explains oleation and fomentation which are the preliminary therapies of *paicakarma*.
5. *Roga Chatushka* includes description regarding different classifications of the diseases. It mentions diseases of endogenous as well as exogenous origin.
6. *Yojana Chatushka* gives details of various principles of disease management like *langhana, brihan* etc.
7. *Annapana Chatushka* discusses about various food categories and dietary advice. Detailed information regarding action of food according to its taste, potency and a post digestive effect is mentioned here.

nidana sthana

This section deals with diagnosis (*nidana*) of the disease. Proper treatment of any disease is possible only by proper diagnosis of disease. Directions are given in this section regarding how to diagnose the different types of diseases at various levels of aetiology so that early management can be initiated.

vimana sthana

vimana = *viçeña mäna* (Specific measure)

This is a unique feature of *Charak samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *vagbhata* or *astanga hridaya* do not contain this section in their doctrines. Here special knowledge and useful points (*vimäna* = *viçeña mäna* - specific measure) are mentioned about medicinal substances, their properties, such as taste, potency, post digestive effects and activities (functions).

Sharir sthana

Sharir = Related with body

As the name signifies, this section describes aspects related to **Sharir** i.e. body, for example, basic anatomy, embryology. Additionally, in **Sharir sthana** of **Charaka**, metaphysical aspects and obstetrics are also described.

Indriya sthana

This section deals with prognostic features of various disorders. These are considered as alarm bells in clinical medicine. Various specific symptoms and sign are mentioned which indicate bad prognosis.

Chikitsa sthana

This is the section on therapeutics (**chikitsa**) which describes in details the diagnosis and treatment part which a **vaidya** (Ayurvedic Physician) should know and master before approaching any patient. It includes 30 chapters, of which the first 2 chapters deal with rejuvenation and aphrodisiacs.

Kalpa sthana

In this section various recipes (**kalpa**) are described which are used for various evacuation procedures compiled under **panchakarma**.

Siddhi sthana

Detailed treatment of possible complications occurring during **panchakarma** therapies is described in this section. By mastering the contents of this section, **vaidya's** success (**siddhi**) in his practice is ensured.

Salient features of *caraka saàhitä*

- **Charaka** is the first classical text in which **Ayurveda** is presented as **triskandha** (Three fold) **Ayurveda** viz. **hetu**(causes), **linga** (signs and symptoms) and **aushadha** (management)
- Concept of **rasayana** (Rejuvenation) is explained in a detailed and scientific manner. In the section of medical treatment, **rasayana** (Rejuvenation Treatment) is described as the first and foremost part of any treatment to strengthen the immunity

- Principle of five great elements i.e. ***pancha mahabhuta siddhanta*** and principles of pharmacology in terms of ***rasa, virya*** and ***vipaka***, which can be correlated with taste, potency and post digestive effect respectively, were introduced for the first time in ***Charaka samhita***
- For the first time he quoted that medicine are not merely meant for the cure of disease but they also help to restore sound health
- Also explained in ***Charaka samhita*** is the importance of acquiring clinical and practical skills in addition to the theoretical knowledge to become a successful Ayurvedic physician.
- Seminars and conferences are always useful for the enhancement of knowledge, sharing of views and clarification of the concepts. From the period of ***Charaka***, physicians of ***Ayurveda*** used to participate in such seminars. We do get certain reference of such types of seminars in the ***Charaka*** text.

Commentaries on *Charaka samhita*

Various authors have written commentaries on ***Charaka samhita*** (see table). The famous amongst them is one ***Ayurveda Deepika*** written by ***Chakrapani***.

Name of Author	Commentaries
<i>Chakrapani</i>	<i>Ayurveda Deepika</i>
<i>Gangadhar Roy</i>	<i>Jalpakalpataru</i>
<i>Jejjata</i>	<i>Nirantara Padavyakhya</i>
<i>Yogindranatha Sen</i>	<i>Carakopaskara</i>

Sushruta Samhita

Sushruta belongs to ***Dhanvantari*** school of thought and is believed to be the Father of Surgery in ***Ayurveda***. ***Kashiraj Divodas***, who is believed to be the second incarnation of Lord ***Dhanvantari***, laid the foundation of ***Sushruta Samhita***. Later in 2nd Century BC, ***Sushruta*** reshaped it in a proper text form. ***Nagarjuna*** in 5th century and ***candraöa*** in 10th century revised the compilation, which is the existing form of ***Sushruta Samhita*** available now-a-days.

Sushruta 2nd Century BC

Nagarjuna 5th Century AD

candraöa 10th Century AD

Contents-

Original *Sushruta Samhita* comprises of 120 chapters. First few sections are similar to *Charaka samhita*, but last section is called as *uttaratantra* (Appendix). In addition to main subject of surgery, *uttaratantra* includes description about the topics on ENT disorders, paediatrics and medicine. The original text is in prose form while the last section is in poetic form which suggests that *uttaratantra* is an addendum to the original text. The meaning of the word '*uttaratantra*' (last section) also reveals the same.

No. of <i>sthāna</i>	Name of <i>sthāna</i>	Chapters included
1.	<i>Sutra sthana</i>	46
2.	<i>Nidana sthana</i>	16
3.	<i>Sharir sthana</i>	10
4.	<i>Chikitsa sthana</i>	40
5.	<i>Kalpa sthana</i>	8
Total		120
Added later on (Appendix)		
6.	<i>Uttaratantra</i>	66
Total		186

Sutra sthana -

Sutra sthana includes 46 chapters which deal with surgery.

- First chapter explains the evolution of surgical training, aims and objects of *Ayurveda* and the importance of surgical branch
- Second chapter consists of an index and references to the most important subjects
- The other chapters cover basic principles of surgery, important surgical instruments; different methods of cauterization, application of leeches, wounds and ulcers. Various subjects of internal medicine- like seasonal regimen, *pathyapathya* (Diet regimen), *Nine kriyakala* i.e. Pathogenesis, disease classification, prognosis, various therapies and some principles like *rasa*, *virya* and *vipaka* are also discussed.

Nidana sthana -

It includes 16 chapters which explain the aetiology of mainly surgical diseases like haemorrhoids, urinary calculus, fistula-in-ano, diabetes, ascites, abscess, breast abscess, fractures and hernia.

Sharir sthana -

Sushruta Samhita is said to be the best in **Sharir sthana**, which consists of 10 chapters. This includes human anatomy, embryology and **marma-vijnyana** (knowledge of vital points which is the essential for surgeons)

Chikitsa sthana -

This section includes 40 chapters which comprise the treatment of the diseases mentioned in **nidana sthana**. This section also includes important topics like **rasayana**, **vajikaran** and **pachakarma**.

Kalpa sthana-

This section has 8 chapters. They elaborate various recipes for the evacuation procedures compiled under **panchakarma** and also deal with toxicology.

Uttaratantra -

It contains 66 chapters which cover topics like ENT, paediatrics, internal medicine, preventive medicine and psychiatry.

Salient features of Sushruta Samhita

- Procedure of human body dissection by maceration method was first ever described in **Ayurveda** by **Sushruta**. The sage author also emphasized that the physician or surgeon should not be authorized to treat any patient unless he has gained knowledge of human body by performing dissection under the guidance of his **guru**
- Knowledge of anatomy which includes count and description of bones, joints, nerves is praiseworthy. Anatomy and physiology of heart, blood and circulation, layers of skin are also described in depth
- Its classification of fractures, wounds, abscesses and burns as well as elaboration of procedures have all stood the test of time. These include simple surgical procedures like dressing, bandaging as well as more complex procedures like cataract operation, ano-rectal surgery and plastic surgery

- **Sushruta** is believed to be first plastic surgeon, since he performed operation for cleft lip, cleft palate and rhinoplasty. The same methods are being used till date. Thus **Sushruta** can be considered as father of surgery
- A unique concept of pathogenesis is described by Sage **Sushruta** only. This concept is about tracking the pathogenesis of disease as six successive stages of gradual manifestation or progression of disease. These stages if identified by the physician are six vital opportunities for him to start early measures for prevention and treatment of the disease and also to timely arrest it's worsening
- Beautiful description of arrangement of the hospital and the ideal behavior of the patient, guides us regarding the establishment of various wards in the modern hospitals of today's era
- A portrayal of an ideal operation theatre can also be found in **Sushruta samhita**
- Description of about 100 varieties of blunt instruments and 20 types of sharp instruments is found in **Sushruta samhita**. Various types of sutures are also mentioned. Concept of sterilization was also known during that period and instruments were sterilized by boiling in water. Fumigation is also mentioned in order to avoid post operative wound infections.
- Excellent sixty different methods for wound and ulcer treatment are mentioned.
- Management of emergency cases like burns, drowning, hanging and strangulation has been explained. **Sushruta** has extensively dealt with abdominal sections, setting of fracture and dislocations, removal of haemorrhoids and amputation of limbs.
- Classification of plants according to their action. Single drug therapy like **Haridra** i.e. **Turmeric** (*Curcuma longa*) for diabetes, **tuvaraka** (*Caesalpinia paniculata*) for skin disease was introduced.

Commentaries on *Sushruta samhita*

Author	Commentaries
<i>Chakrapani</i>	<i>Bhanumati</i>
<i>Dalhana</i>	<i>Nibandhasaigraha</i>
<i>Gayadasa</i>	<i>Nyayacandrika</i>

vagbhata samhita (Astanga hridaya)

This is comparatively recent treatise from the ***Brihatrayi***.

vagbhata (seventh century AD) was the author of the text hence the name. This treatise is believed to be a summary of ***Charaka*** and ***Sushruta*** with selected additions from other Ayurvedic writers like ***agnivesha***, ***bhela*** and ***harita*** to make the text up to date. He introduced a number of new herbs and made valuable modification and additions.

Contents - It has six sections containing 120 chapters.

vagbhata had written the text with the verses in a beautiful poetry form which enables the student to memorize important subject in a concise form in an easier manner.

No. of sthāna	Name of sthāna	Number of chapters
1.	<i>sutra sthana</i>	30
2.	<i>Sharir sthana</i>	6
3.	<i>Nidana sthana</i>	16
4.	<i>Chikitsa sthana</i>	22
5.	<i>Kalpa sthana</i>	6
6.	<i>Uttara sthana</i>	40
	Total	120

Salient features of *Astanga hridaya*

- Concise and poetic presentation
- Beautiful well edited compilation of the best concepts from ***Charaka*** and ***sushruta***
- Pharmacology is very well elaborated. Concept of ***vipaka*** i.e. post digestive effect of edible substances is very well defined
- Many plants are mentioned for their specific action on a particular disease for e.g. ***guduchi*** (*Tinispora cordifolia*) for ***vatarakta*** (gout), ***musta*** (*Cyperus rotundus*) for fever.
- Newer formulations were introduced in many diseases for e.g. ***Surana Putapaka*** for haemorrhoids, ***mandur vataka*** for anaemia, etc.
- Instant oleation formulae and 4 new types of fomentation are contribution to ***panchakarma***
- Different surgical instruments like catheters, trochars and canulas are described as ***nāḍéyantra***

Commentaries on *Astanga hridaya*

Authors	Commentaries
<i>Arundatta</i>	<i>sarvanga sundara</i>
<i>Hemadri</i>	<i>Ayurveda sara sangraha</i>
<i>Indu</i>	<i>Sahasilekah</i>

Laghu-trayi (Subordinate trio)

The compendia after the period of *Vagbhata* reflect further developments in contemporary fields of science and incorporation of more drugs in therapeutics. *Madhava nidana*, *Chikitsa sara*, *Bhaishajya-ratnavali*, *Bhavaprakasha*, *Sharangadhara samahita*, *Rasaratna samuccaya*, and *Yoga ratnakara* are few examples of a combination of literature of the ancient and a relatively recent period. Also there are 12 *nighantu* (Pharmacopoeias), which are a source of nomenclature and properties of different drugs.

The following three compendia are collectively known as *laghu-trayi* (Subordinate / Smaller trio)

1. *Madhava nidana*
2. *Shrangadhara samahita*
3. *Bhavaprakasha*

1. *Madhava nidana*

Madhavacharya (12th century) wrote *Madhava nidana* which contains 69 chapters exclusively on diagnosis of the diseases (*nidana*).

Salient features of *madhava nidana*

- It is the first of its kind in Ayurvedic text which exclusively focuses on only one topic which is diagnosis. It is noteworthy that not a single *sutra* mentions anything about treatment of any disease.
- *Amavata* (Rheumatism) and *amlapitta* (Acid-peptic disorders) are described thoroughly for the first time.

- *Vatavyadhi* (Neurological conditions) are elaborated very clearly.

2. Sharangadhara samhita

Sharangadhara (14th century) wrote this treatise which is elaborated in 32 chapters divided in three sections namely:

1. *purva khandha* (Foremost section)
2. *madhya khandha* (Mid section)
3. *uttara khandha* (Last section)

Topics of purva khandha

Basic fundamentals, classification of disease and examination of patient

Topics of madhya khandha

Pharmaceutical preparations e.g. juice, decoctions, tablets, purification of metals.

Topics of uttara khandha

panchakarma procedures

Highlights of Sharangadhara samhita

- Some ideas are incorporated from *Unani system of medicine*
- Systematic description of respiration process
- Purification and detoxification of metals and preparation of *bhasma* (A calcined preparation in which the gem or metal is converted into ash)
- Description of herbomineral compounds using *parada* (Mercury)
- Usage of single herbs for treatment e.g. *kanchanara* in lymphadenitis

3. Bhavaprakasha

This treatise has three sections and is compiled by sage **bhava - mishra** in 16th century.

Topics of *purva khandha*

Basic principles, purification of metals, *panchakarma*

Topics of *madhya khandha*

Diseases and their treatment

Topics of *uttara khandha*

rasayana, vajikaran

Highlights of *bhavaprakasha*

- Introduction of many new drugs in Materia Medica e.g. ***parasika yavani, pudina***
- Introduction of substitute herbs for originally prescribed drugs in ***brihatrayi***
- Three fold and eight fold examination of the patients
- Description and treatment of ***phiranga roga*** (foreigners' disease) – a sexually transmitted disease for the first time in ***ayurvedic*** texts