



FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ĀYURVEDA: CANONICAL DEFINITIONS FROM CARAKA SAṂHITĀ

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ABSTRACT The Caraka Samhitā serves as the foundational text of classical Āyurvedic medicine, offering a comprehensive theoretical, diagnostic, and therapeutic framework that continues to inform holistic healthcare. This article systematically examines key canonical definitions (laksanas) across the text's major sections—including the Sūtrasthāna, Nidānasthāna, Vimānasthāna, and Kalpasthāna. By analyzing the original Sanskrit ślokas and their grammatical nuances, the study explores fundamental concepts such as the equilibrium of health (prakṛti) versus pathology (vikāra), the autonomous progression of time (kāla), and the structural integrity of the body (sūta hata śarīra). Furthermore, it categorizes disease origins (trividha roga), maps physiological pathways (roagamārga), and delineates classical diagnostic modalities like etiology (nidāna) and channel roots (prāvaḥ srotomūla). The article also unpacks therapeutic approaches—ranging from faith-based (daivavyapāśraya) and rational (yuktivyapāśraya) treatments to psychotherapy (sattvāvajaya) and targeted cleansing therapies (vamana, avagāha sveda)—alongside epistemological tools such as universal principles (sarvatantra siddhānta) and scholastic debate (vāda). Ultimately, this synthesis highlights how the Caraka Samhitā establishes a timeless, logically rigorous, and clinically adaptable blueprint for health and healing.

KEYWORDS : Caraka Samhitā, Āyurveda, Prakṛti, Vikāra, Trividha Cikitsā, Canonical Definitions, Epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

The Caraka Samhitā stands as one of the most authoritative and comprehensive treatises in classical Indian medicine. Authored by Ācārya Charaka, this monumental text systematically organizes the foundational philosophy, diagnostic methodologies, anatomical understandings, and therapeutic modalities of Āyurveda. Rather than treating illness in isolation, the Caraka Samhitā adopts an integrative approach that connects biological harmony with mental balance, environmental influences, and epistemological clarity. Central to Charaka's teaching is the precise definition of canonical concepts. By establishing unambiguous definitions across its key sections—such as Sūtrasthāna (General Principles), Nidānasthāna (Pathology), Vimānasthāna (Specific Determination), and Kalpasthāna (Pharmaceutics and Cleansing Therapy)—the text creates a rigorous framework for clinical practice and academic discourse.

1. Defining Health (Prakṛti) and Disease (Vikāra)

विकारो धातुवैषम्यं, साम्यं प्रकृतिरुच्यते।

सुखसंज्ञकमारोग्यं, विकारो दुःखमेव च॥ (Cha. Su. 9/4)^[1]

In the chapter Khud dāka Catus pāda, disease is defined as a state of equilibrium loss among the dhātus, whereas normalcy represents their harmony. A state of balance is termed sukha (well-being/health), while imbalance manifests inherently as duḥkha (suffering/disease). Here, the indeclinable particle (avyaya) 'एव' (eva) serves as an emphatic modifier meaning "itself" or "inherently," which Ācārya utilizes to precisely delineate the nature of health (prakṛti) and pathology (vikāra).

2. Expounding the Nature of Time (Kāla) and Natural Destruction

न नाशकारणभावाद्भावानां नाशकारणम्।

ज्ञायते नित्यगस्येव कालस्यात्ययकारणम्॥ (Cha. Su. 16/32)^[2]

While elucidating the mechanisms of destruction in Cikitsāprabhāṭya Adhyāya, Ācārya explains that just as time (Kāla) continuously moves forward without requiring external drivers, all universal substances naturally undergo decay through the progression of time alone. Here, 'एव' (eva) highlights the intrinsic, self-driven quality of temporal change, enabling Ācārya to establish a clear conceptual definition of Kāla.

3. Standardizing Avagāha Sveda (Immersion Fomentation)

वातहरोक्ताथक्षीरतैलघृतपिशितरसोष्णसलिलकोष्ठकावगाहस्तु यथोक्त-
एवावगाहः॥ (Cha. Su. 14/45)^[3]

In Svedādhyāya, Ācārya specifies that immersion sudation—where a patient is seated in a tub filled with warm vāta-alleviating decoctions, milk, oil, ghee, meat broth, or warm water—strictly constitutes Avagāha Sveda. The particle 'एव' (eva) is employed here to definitively

emphasize this exact procedure as the authoritative standard for immersion therapy.

4. Classification of Diseases (Trividha Roga)

तत्र निजः शारीरदोषसमुत्थः, आगन्तुर्भूतविषवाक्त्रिसम्प्रहारदिसमुत्थः;
मानसः पुनरिष्टस्य लाभाल्लाभाच्चा निष्टस्योपजायते॥ (Cha. Su. 11/45)^[4]

In defining the three broad categories of disease (Trividha Roga), Ācārya Charaka categorizes them as follows:

- **Nija Roga (Endogenous Disorders):** Caused by intrinsic pathological imbalances among the bodily dosas.
- **Āgantuja Roga (Exogenous Disorders):** Triggered by external etiologies, such as toxic exposure, trauma, burning, environmental factors, or micro-organisms (bhūta).
- **Mānasa Roga (Psychological Disorders):** Stemming from psychological stress, such as unfulfilled desire, loss of favored objects (ista-alābha), or encounters with adverse circumstances (anista-lābha), leading to emotional disturbances like desire (kāma), grief (śoka), or excessive excitement (harsa).

5. Pathways of Disease Progression (Trayo Rogamārga)

तत्र शाखा रक्तादयो धातवस्त्वक् च, स बाह्यो रोगमार्गः; मर्माणि
पुनर्बस्तिहृदयमूर्धनि, अस्थिसन्धयोऽस्थिसंयोगास्तत्रोपनिबद्धाश्च
सायुकण्डराः, स मध्यमो रोगमार्गः; कोष्ठः पुनरुच्यते महास्रोतः शरीरमध्यं
महानिम्नमपाकाशयेति पर्यायशब्दैस्तन्त्रे, स रोगमार्ग आभ्यन्तरः॥ (Cha. Su. 11/48)^[5]

Ācārya delineates three distinct disease pathways (Trayo Rogamārga) based on anatomical involvement:

- **Bāhya Rogamārga (Peripheral Pathway):** Comprises the skin (tvak) and blood-forming tissues (raktādi dhātu), also referred to as śākhā.
- **Madhyama Rogamārga (Intermediate Pathway):** Involves vital organs (marma—such as the brain, heart, and bladder) along with the skeletal framework, joints, tendons, and ligaments (snāyu and kandarā).
- **Ābhyantara Rogamārga (Internal Pathway):** Encompasses the central body channel (koṣṭha or mahāsrotas), incorporating the entire gastrointestinal tract (āmāśaya and pakvāśaya).

6. Modes of Treatment (Trividha Cikitsā / Auśadha)

तत्र
दैवव्यापाश्रयन्मन्त्रौषधिमणिमङ्गलबल्युपहारहोमनियमप्रायश्चित्तोपवासस्वस्त्य
यनप्रणिपातगमनादि, युक्तिव्यापाश्रयं. पुनराहारौषधद्रव्याणां योजना,
सत्त्वावजयः- पुनरहितभ्योऽर्थभ्यो मनोनिग्रहः॥ (Cha. Su. 11/54)^[6]

Ācārya outlines three fundamental therapeutic modes (Trividha Ausadha):

Daivavyapāśraya Cikitsā (Spiritual/Faith-based Therapy):

Involves subtle or non-rational interventions such as chanting incantations (mantra), wearing protective gems (mañi), performing auspicious rituals (hyama/bali), fasting (upavāsa), and undertaking pilgrimages.

Yuktivyapāśraya Cikitsā (Rational/Logical Therapy): Focuses on structured medical management through calculated dietary regimens (āhāra) and medicinal formulations (auśadha).

Sattvāvajaya Cikitsā (Psychotherapy): Centered on mind control and sensory restraint, guiding the patient to consciously withdraw the mind (manas) from harmful or unwholesome objects (ahita artha).

7. Nidāna (Etiology)

तस्योपलब्धिर्निदानपूर्वरूपलिङ्गोपशयसम्प्राप्तिः।

तत्र निदानं कारणमित्युक्तमत्र॥ (Cha. Ni. 1/6–7)^[7]

Within the diagnostic framework of Nidāna Pañcaka, Nidāna is defined as the primary causative or etiological factor responsible for initiating pathological changes and giving rise to disease (roga).

8. Taila Karma (Therapeutic Action of Sesame Oil on Vāta)

तत्र तैलं स्नेहैष्यगौरवोपपन्नत्वाद्वातं जयति सततमभ्यस्यमानम्॥ (Cha. Vi. 1/14)^[8]

In Āyurvedic pharmacology, Taila (sesame oil) is defined as a potent pacifying agent for aggravated Vāta dosa when used consistently, owing to its opposing inherent qualities—specifically unctuousness (snekha), warming potential (usna), and heaviness (guru).

9. Prāṇavaha Srotomūla (Roots of Vital Respiratory Channels)

तत्र प्राणवहानां स्रोतसं हृदयं मूलं महास्रोतश्च॥ (Cha. Vi. 5/8)^[9]

Prāṇavaha Srotomūla refers to the primary anatomical and physiological roots governing the channels that carry vital life energy (prāṇa), designated by Ācārya Charaka as the heart (Hr dayā) and the primary internal system (Mahāsrotas).

10. Guru Vyādhita (Severely Afflicted Patient)

तत्र- गुरुव्याधित एकः सत्त्वबलशरीरसम्पदुपेतत्वात्त्वयुव्याधित इव दृश्यते। (Cha.vi.7/3)^[10]

Definition: Guru Vyādhita refers to a clinical state in which a patient suffering from a grave or severe disease (guru vyādhī) falsely appears to have a mild illness. This presentation is due to their exceptional psychological resilience (sattva), physical strength (bala), and robust constitutional vitality (śarīra-sampat).

11. Sarvatantra Siddhānta (Universal Postulate)

तत्र सर्वतन्त्रसिद्धान्तो नाम तस्मिंस्तस्मिन् सर्वस्मिंस्तन्त्रे तत्तत् प्रसिद्धं; (Cha.vi.8/37)^[11]

Definition: Sarvatantra Siddhānta is defined in Āyurvedic epistemology as a foundational principle or doctrine that is universally accepted, validated, and established without contradiction across all philosophical schools and authoritative medical treatises.

12. Vāda (Scholarly Debate)

तत्र वादो नाम स यत् परेण सह शास्त्रपूर्वकं विगृह्य कथयति। (Cha.vi.8/28)^[12]

Definition: Vāda refers to a structured, scripturally grounded scholastic debate or hostile discussion carried out with an opponent (pareṇa saha) in strict accordance with canonical methodology and logic.

13. Kāraṇa (Causative Agent / Cause)

तत्र कारणं नाम तद् यत् करोति, स एव हेतुः, स कर्ता॥ (Cha.vi.8/69)^[13]

Definition: Kāraṇa is defined in Āyurvedic logic as the primary agent or driving cause (hetu) that actively initiates, performs, and executes an action (kartā) to bring about an effect.

14. Viśūcikā (Gastroenteritis with Upward & Downward Expulsion)

तत्र विषूचिकामूर्ध्वं चाधश्च प्रवृत्तामदोषां यथोक्तरूपां विद्यात्॥ (Cha.vi.2/11)^[14]

Definition: Viśūcikā is an acute gastrointestinal disorder defined by

the simultaneous upward (emesis) and downward (diarrhea) expulsion of undigested, pathological food matter (pravṛtta-āmadoṣa) through both tracks of the alimentary canal.

15. Susamhata Śarīra (Compact / Well-Proportioned Physique)

तत्र समसुविभक्तास्थि, सुबद्धसन्धि, सुनिविष्टमांसशोणितं, सुसंहतं शरीरमित्युच्यते। (Cha.vi.8/116)^[15]

Definition: Susamhata Śarīra refers to an ideal, highly stable physical constitution characterized by symmetrically structured bones (samasuvibhaktāsthi), firmly consolidated joints (subaddha-sandhi), and well-nourished, proportionately distributed muscle tissue and blood (sunivisa-māmsa-śonita).

16. Vamana (Therapeutic Emesis)

तत्र दोषहरणमूर्ध्वभागं वमनसंज्ञकम्॥ (Cha. Kal. 1/4)^[16]

Definition: In Kalpasthāna (Madana Kalpa), Vamana is defined as the therapeutic procedure aimed at expelling vitiated doṣas through the oral route (ūrdhvaabhāga), primarily targeting toxins residing in the upper gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts of the body.

CONCLUSION

The canonical definitions systematically detailed throughout the Caraka Sa hitā serve as the logical and clinical foundation of Āyurvedic medicine. By establishing explicit parameters for biological balance (prakṛti) versus pathology (vikāra), mapping disease progression through distinct pathways (rogamārga), and categorizing causative factors (nidāna), Ācārya Charaka provides an integrated framework connecting human anatomy, time (kāla), and disease etiology. Furthermore, the standardization of therapeutic modalities (trividha cikitsā), targeted cleansing procedures such as vamaṇa and avagāha sveda, and epistemological tools like universal truths (sarvatantra siddhānta) and structured debate (vāda) ensures that clinical practice remains both deeply holistic and scientifically rigorous. Grounded in these foundational śloka, the Caraka Sa hitā remains a timeless, logically sound, and adaptable master blueprint for diagnostic accuracy and holistic healing.

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