



A PEDAGOGICAL REVIEW OF ANALOGIES IN CARAKA SAMHITĀ SUTRASTHANA

Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

The Caraka Sa hitā utilizes Nidarśana Tantrayukti—the pedagogical application of illuminating everyday analogies—to translate complex, abstract Ayurvedic principles into actionable medical knowledge. This document reviews thirteen classical metaphors alongside their original Ślokas, analyzing their clinical applications across diagnostics, therapeutics, and medical ethics. By anchoring hidden internal physiology to familiar macrocosmic observations, the text illustrates the inescapable nature of the Tridoṣa through a bird's shadow, metabolic hyperactivity through a forest fire, and tissue elasticity through treated timber. Furthermore, it establishes the ultimate supremacy and heavy responsibility of the physician by drawing parallels to expert archers, potters, generals, and the double-edged nature of volatile poisons. Woven together by the foundational thread of the Sūtrasthāna, these timeless metaphors bridge the gap between external nature and human biology, offering practitioners an intuitive and highly structured blueprint for successful diagnosis, preventive lifestyle management, and urgent emergency care.

KEYWORDS

Caraka Sa hitā; Nidarśana Tantrayukti; Ayurvedic Pedagogy; Tridoṣa; Sūtrasthāna;

INTRODUCTION

The *Caraka Samhitā* is not merely a technical compilation of ancient prescriptions; it is a masterclass in medical pedagogy. To ground abstract biological phenomena, systemic pathways, and clinical principles into actionable human knowledge, the text relies heavily on *Nidarśana Tantrayukti*—the use of illuminating analogies. By linking the hidden workings of the human body to familiar, everyday observations of the external world, these analogies make complex medical philosophies instantly scannable and easy to digest. Below is an analytical exploration of the timeless analogies featured in the classical text, complete with their original *Ślokas* and clinical applications.

1. The Analogy of Tarnished Precious Metals: Ocular Cleansing

यथा हि कनकादीनां मतिनां विविधात्मनाम्।

धौतानां निर्मला शुद्धिस्तैलेतवेतकवादिभिः॥

एवं नेत्रेषु मर्त्यानां मज्जनाश्वेत्येतनादिभिः।

टष्टिर्निश्कुला भ्राति निर्मले नभसीन्दुवत्॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 5/18-19)^[1]

The Metaphor: Gold and other precious ornaments inevitably collect grime, dust, and tarnish over time. To restore their original, brilliant luster, a craftsman must systematically wash, scrub, and polish them using specialized oils, clean cloths, and fine-bristled brushes until every trace of debris is removed.

The Clinical Application: The text utilizes this framework to justify regular ocular maintenance procedures like *Añjana* (herbal collyrium) and *Āscotana* (medicinal eye drops). Just as surface friction and cleaning agents strip away metallic impurities, targeted ocular therapies flush metabolic waste and environmental dust out of the eyes. This process clears visual pathways, leaving a person's eyesight as sharp and luminous as a full moon hanging in a cloudless night sky.

2. The Analogy of the Bird and Its Shadow: The Inescapable Tridoṣa

सर्व एव निजा विकास नान्यत्र वातपित्तकफेभ्यो निर्वर्तन्ते, यथाहि- शकुनिः सर्व दिवसमपि

परिपतन् स्वां छायां नातिवर्तते, तथा स्वधातुवैषम्यनिमिताः सर्वे विकास

वातपित्तकफान्नातिवर्तन्ते॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 19/5)^[2]

The Metaphor: Consider a bird in flight. It can soar at maximum velocity, change altitude, execute complex aerial maneuvers, and travel across the vast horizon all day long, yet it remains fundamentally incapable of outrunning or escaping its own shadow. The shadow is an absolute, immediate extension of its physical presence.

The Clinical Application: This passage outlines an absolute law of Ayurvedic pathology: no endogenous internal disease (*Nija Vikāra*) can exist independently of the three primary bio-elements—*Vāta*,

Pitta, and *Kapha*. No matter how unique, multifaceted, or structurally complex a systemic illness appears, its pathological blueprint will always map back to a homeostatic imbalance within these three *Doṣas*. They are the inescapable "shadow" behind all internal tissue deterioration.

3. The Analogy of the Expert Archer: Clinical Competence

यथा हि योगज्ञोऽभ्यासिनित्य इवासौ धन्वादायेषुमख्यन्नातिविप्रकृष्टे महति काये नापशद्मन्

भवति, सम्पादयति वेषत्कार्यं, तथा भिषक् स्वगुणसम्पन्नो...(Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 10/5)^[3]

The Metaphor: Picture a seasoned, master marksman who possesses a flawless understanding of his bow, calculates wind variables flawlessly, and engages in rigorous, daily target practice. When presented with a substantial target placed at an optimal, reasonable distance, his arrow will never miss the mark; he strikes the bullseye with absolute consistency.

The Clinical Application: This analogy defines the relationship between expert training and successful medical prognosis. A physician who is thoroughly educated, rich in practical experience, and equipped with premium medical resources acts exactly like the master archer. They will systematically identify the root cause of an illness and execute a therapeutic plan that resolves curable disorders cleanly, predictably, and without diagnostic error.

4. The Analogy of the City Officer and Charioteer: Preventive Health

नगरी नगरस्येव स्थस्येव स्थी यथा।

स्वशरीरस्य मेधावी कृत्स्नेष्ववहितो भवेत्॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 5/103)^[4]

The Metaphor: A civic governor appointed to secure a metropolis must remain continually vigilant to protect its borders from external invasion and internal decay. Similarly, a skilled charioteer (*Rathī*) must continuously monitor, lubricate, and adjust his vehicle to keep it operating efficiently.

The Clinical Application: In the *Mātrāsītīyam Adhyāyam*, this text establishes that maintaining health is a proactive, personal obligation. An intelligent person must approach their own body with the same active, preventative maintenance mindset as the governor or driver. Through mindful lifestyle curation and structured daily routines (*Dinacaryā*), you act as the primary guardian of your own physiology, preventing structural failure before it manifests.

5. The Analogy of the Dry Log: Tissue Elasticity Through Oleation and Sweat

शुष्काण्यपि हि काष्ठानि स्नेहास्वेदोपपादनैः।

नमयन्ति यथान्यायं किं पुनर्जीवतो नयन्॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 14/5)^[5]

The Metaphor: A completely dehydrated piece of timber is naturally rigid, brittle, and highly prone to snapping under mechanical stress. However, if that exact same piece of wood is treated with oil and subjected to controlled heat and steam, its structural fibers soften, allowing it to be bent into complex shapes without fracturing.

The Clinical Application: This verse demonstrates the deep therapeutic impact of *Snehana* (oleation) and *Swedana* (fomentation/sweating) on the human musculoskeletal network. If inanimate, rigid timber can be rendered pliable through the combination of oil and heat, living human tissues respond far more dynamically. These preparatory procedures relieve deep-seated structural rigidity, loosen metabolic cross-links, and make the human body remarkably flexible.

6. The Analogy of the Heavy Boulder: Pathognomonic Sensations in Kaphaja Hydroga

हृदयं कफहृदोऽग्रे सुप्तं स्तिमितभारिकम्।

तन्द्रारुचिविपरीतस्य भवत्यश्ममातृत्वं यथा॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 17/35)^[6]

The Metaphor: Imagine a physical state where an organ feels entirely desensitized, locked in stasis as if wrapped tightly in a thick, sodden cloth, and crushed under the immense, downward gravitational pressure of a solid stone boulder.

The Clinical Application: Rather than relying purely on technical parameters, the author uses the word यथा (*Yathā*) to convey the subjective clinical reality of a patient suffering from *Kaphaja Hydroga* (cardiac disorders induced by excess Kapha). The analogy accurately captures the distinct physical sensations associated with the disease: a profound, heavy sensation of tightness or obstruction over the precordium, accompanied by systemic drowsiness (*Tandrā*) and anorexia (*Aruci*).

7. The Analogy of Honeybees: The Biosynthesis of Ojas

अमरैः फलपुष्पेभ्यो यथा सञ्मिश्रयते मधु।

तद्वदोजः स्वकर्मभ्यो गुणैः सञ्मिश्रयते नृणाम्॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 17/75)^[7]

The Metaphor: Honeybees extract tiny, individual droplets of sweet nectar from a vast multitude of fruits and flowers. They perform this extraction delicately without damaging the source, slowly compiling these micro-fractions over time to construct a dense, nutrient-rich honeycomb.

The Clinical Application: This imagery illustrates the systemic synthesis of *Ojas*—the ultimate essence of immunity, metabolic vitality, and life force. *Ojas* is not generated in a single metabolic burst. Instead, much like the collection of honey, it is slowly gathered drop-by-drop from the finest, most refined fractions of thoroughly digested food, optimal tissue metabolism (*Dhātu Pāka*), and the coordinated performance of every organ system.

8. The Analogy of the Forest Fire: Metabolic Hyperactivity in Obesity

एतावदुदवकरो विशेषादग्निमात्रतौ।

एतौ हि दहतः स्थूलं वनदावो वनं यथा॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 21/7)^[8]

The Metaphor: Consider a wildfire (*Vanadāva*) tearing through a dense forest during a drought. If strong, high-velocity winds blow through the area, they fan the flames, superheating the fire and causing it to consume trees, flora, and organic matter at a destructive speed.

The Clinical Application: This analogy details the metabolic imbalance seen in severe obesity (*Atisthūla Sampṛāpti*). When the internal digestive fire (*Agni*) and the cellular movement principle (*Vāyu*) become hyperactive at the same time, they act exactly like a wind-driven forest fire. The overactive *Agni* burns through nutrients rapidly, leaving the patient in a state of constant hunger (*Atikṣudhā*), while the erratic *Vāyu* pathologically accelerates the breakdown and deposition cycle of body fat.

9. The Analogy of the Blind Man on a Sinking Ship: The Uneducated Physician

पाणिचारयथाऽवक्षुर्नावाददौतभीतवत्।

नौमिरुप्तवशेषाङ्गो भिषक् चरति कर्मसु॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 9/16)^[9]

The Metaphor: Imagine a blind person left entirely alone in an unfamiliar, hazardous landscape, forced to navigate by feeling around with his hands in perpetual anxiety. Alternatively, picture an untrained individual trapped aboard a fragile, leaking boat tossed around by a violent storm at sea. Both scenarios are defined by intense internal panic, a lack of stability, and fear.

The Clinical Application: The text uses this powerful imagery to warn against the dangers of an uneducated, unscientific medical practitioner. A charlatan or poorly trained doctor who attempts to treat complex clinical cases without a deep understanding of pathophysiology operates in a state of constant, hidden confusion. Because they lack authentic insight, their medical decisions are erratic, dangerous, and terrifyingly blind, putting the patient's life at extreme risk.

10. The Garland Thread: The Architectonics of the Sūtrasthāna

यथासुमनसां सूत्रं सङ्गृह्यार्थं विधीयते। सङ्गृह्यार्थतथाऽर्थानामुपि सङ्गृह्यः कृतः॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 30/89)^[10]

The Metaphor: Think of a simple, sturdy thread used to assemble a beautiful flower garland. Without that central thread to tie them together, the individual flowers would scatter all over the place and lose their cohesive structure.

The Clinical Application: This verse highlights the structural importance of the *Sūtrasthāna* (the foundational section of the treatise), showing how it neatly organizes the rest of the text. In the exact same way (*yathā... tathā*), the foundational concepts and deep scientific meanings of Ayurveda are held together in the *Sūtrasthāna*. The author has woven all these core medical principles neatly into a single, unified thread of knowledge so that students can easily understand, remember, and navigate the entire medical text.

11. The Potter and His Wheel: The Supremacy of the Physician

मृदण्डवत्कसूत्रायाः कुम्भकारयत्ते यथा। नावदन्ति नुणं वैद्यायत्ते पादत्रयं तथा॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 9/13)^[11]

The Metaphor: Imagine placing mud, a wooden stick, a potter's wheel, and a cutting thread on the ground. Even though all these necessary materials are sitting right there, they can never spontaneously assemble themselves into a clay pot without a skilled potter directing the work.

The Clinical Application: In the chapter *Khuddāka Catu pādamaḍhyāyam*, the text explains the four pillars of medical treatment (*Pāda Catu aya*: physician, drug, attendant, and patient) and highlights why the doctor is the single most important component. Just like (*yathā... tathā*) those inanimate materials need a craftsman, a clinical treatment cannot succeed without an expert doctor. Even if the other three components—high-quality medicines, attentive nurses, and a cooperative patient—are fully available, they are useless without a physician's guidance to manage the healing process.

12. The Cooking and Warfare: The Primary Catalyst of Success

पक्वौ हि कारणं पक्वुर्यथा पात्रेन्यनान्ताः। विजेतुर्विजयेभूमिधम्; प्रहरणानि च॥ आतुरयास्तथासिद्धौ पादाः कारणसंज्ञिताः। वैद्यस्त्वात्मविकित्सायांप्रधानं कारणं भिषक्॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 9/11-12)^[12]

The Metaphor: Think about cooking a meal: you need a pot, dry firewood, and a steady flame, but it is the chef who actually does the cooking. Similarly, to win a battle, a general needs proper terrain, a large army, and strong weapons, but it is the general's strategy that wins the war.

The Clinical Application: Also from the *Khuddāka Catu pādamaḍhyāyam*, this section reinforces that while every asset in a process matters, the primary coordinator determines the outcome. Just as (*yathā... tathā*) the cook and the general are the primary drivers of success in their fields, the physician is the ultimate driving force behind medical recovery. The patient, the medicine, and the nurse are vital contributing factors, but the expert mind of the doctor is what successfully navigates the path to a cure.

13. The Poisons, Weapons, and Fire: The Double-Edged Nature of Medicine

यथाविषं यथा शस्त्रं यथाऽग्निश्च निर्दिष्टम् । तथैषमविज्ञातं विज्ञातममृतं यथा ॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 1/124)^[13]

The Metaphor: Think of highly volatile or dangerous elements like toxic poisons, sharp weapons, burning fire, or a strike of lightning. If these forces are handled recklessly or by someone who doesn't understand them, they bring immediate destruction and harm.

The Clinical Application: Found in the Dīrghaṅjīvitīyamadhyāyam, this principle teaches that the safety and success of a medicine depend completely on knowing how to use it correctly. In the exact same way (yathā... tathā), an unfamiliar or poorly understood drug behaves like a destructive poison inside the body. However, if that exact same substance is thoroughly understood, accurately dosed, and skillfully administered by a trained expert, it transforms into an elixir of life (Amṛta) that cures the patient safely.

14. The Cart Axle and Treated Leather: The Mechanics of Abhyaṅga

रुन्ध्याभ्यङ्गाद्यथाकुम्भमभ्यङ्गे रन्ध्रमिदमनात् । भवत्युपङ्गादक्षयत्नः वतेशसहो यथा ॥

तथाशरीरमभ्यङ्गादुद्धं सुत्वक् च जायते । प्रशान्तमरुताबाधं वतेश्व्यायामसंयमम् ॥

(Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 5/85-86)^[14]

The Metaphor: Imagine treating an earthen pot with oil, kneading rough leather with grease to make it soft yet tough, or applying lubricating oil to a cart's wooden axle. This lubrication reduces friction, prevents wear and tear, and makes these items strong enough to handle heavy workloads without breaking down.

The Clinical Application: This passage explains how Abhyaṅga (daily oil massage) fundamentally transforms the physical strength, skin quality, and resilience of the human body. In the exact same way (yathā... tathā), regular oil massage strengthens the human body. It makes the skin healthy and radiant, calms down excessive biological air (Vāta doṣa), and gives the body the physical stamina to endure tough exercise and hard labor without suffering damage.

15. The Absorbent Objects: How the Body Absorbs Oil

गृह्णात्वम्बुयथा वस्त्रं प्रसवत्यधिकं यथा । यथाग्निर्जीर्णति स्नेहस्तथा श्रवति वायिकः ॥

यथावाऽऽवलेय मृत्पिण्डमासितं त्वरया जलम् । श्रवति संश्रते स्नेहस्तथा

त्वस्तिसेवितः ॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 13/96-97)^[15]

The Metaphor: Think of three simple natural reactions: how a dry piece of cloth quickly drinks up water until it is full and begins to drip; how a fire consumes fuel until it is overloaded; or how a dry lump of clay completely soaks up poured water until it becomes thoroughly saturated and the excess water runs off.

The Clinical Application: This verse explains the science of Sneha (internal consumption of therapeutic oils/ghee) and how the body absorbs, processes, or eliminates it based on dosage and timing. The author uses the yathā... tathā framework to show how the human digestive tract deals with medicinal oil. The body will absorb the therapeutic oil up to its natural capacity; however, if it is consumed too rapidly or in massive excess, the body cannot digest it, and the surplus oil is quickly excreted out.

16. The Sinking Vessel: Urgent Emergency Care

दुर्गेऽम्भसियथा मज्जदभाजनं त्वरया बुधः । गृहीयातलमप्राप्तं तथा

संन्यासपीडितम् ॥ (Caraka Sa hitā, Sūtrasthāna 24/45)^[16]

The Metaphor: Imagine a valuable container or vessel that falls into rough, deep water. A smart observer will not stand by and wait; instead, they will dive in quickly to grab the vessel before it reaches the bottom and sinks completely out of sight.

The Clinical Application: While explaining the clinical progression of comatose states or deep unconsciousness (Sa nyāsa Sa prāpti), the text emphasizes how a physician must act with absolute speed and urgency when treating a patient in critical condition. Just like (yathā... tathā) saving that sinking vessel requires immediate action, a patient suffering from Sa nyāsa requires rapid, life-saving emergency medical care. A wise doctor must intervene immediately before the damage becomes irreversible and the life force slips away completely.

CONCLUSION

At its core, the Caraka Sa hitā Sūtrasthāna uses everyday examples to make complicated medical ideas easy for anyone to understand. By comparing the hidden inner workings of the human body to familiar things in nature—like a bird's shadow, a forest fire, or a potter making a clay pot—the text turns complex science into practical, common-sense knowledge. These classic metaphors do more than just explain how the body works; they clearly highlight the heavy responsibility of the doctor, the importance of daily self-care, and the need for quick action in emergencies. Ultimately, this teaching style serves as a timeless, highly practical guide that helps doctors successfully diagnose illnesses, protect daily health, and confidently save lives.

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