

Tantrasyasya Sirah Shubham: A Review on Caraka Samhita Sutra Sthana

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical and health sciences. The literature pertaining to it is available in Samhitas. The Caraka Samhita, an ancient and revered text of Ayurveda, comprises 120 chapters, organized into 8 Sthanas (sections). The Sutra Sthana also known as Sloka Sthana,^[1] constitutes the foundational section of this classical Ayurvedic text, comprising thirty chapters organized into seven groups of four chapters each called as Sapta Chatushkas, each addressing a critical aspect of Ayurveda. The Sutra Sthana is considered as the Shiro of the treatise “Tantrasyasya Sirah Shubham”^[2] as it encapsulates the philosophical principles, fundamental definitions, and overarching goals of the science, serving as the theoretical bedrock of Ayurvedic practice. It begins with the core concepts of health, disease, and treatment, emphasizing a rational approach rooted in natural laws and logical inquiry. Each chapter is crafted in a unique prose-poetry format, often illustrated with verse summaries “Tatra slokah” that reinforce learning and retention. This structured framework underscores the Sutra Sthana’s prominence within the Caraka Samhita, reflecting its role as the theoretical and practical cornerstone of the treatise. Its emphasis on logical coherence, systematic presentation, and integrative principles secures its status as an authoritative guide for scholars and practitioners aiming to understand the essence and scope of Ayurvedic wisdom.

KEYWORDS: Caraka Samhita Sutra Sthana, Shloka Sthana, Tantrasyasya sirah Shubham.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the divine gift to mankind. Lord Brahma recalled Ayurveda and taught it to Daksha prajapati. Daksha prajapati taught Ayurveda to Ashwini kumaras. Ashwini kumaras taught Ayurveda to Indra. Sage Bharadwaja learnt Ayurveda from Lord Indra and brought to the earth for the welfare of the mankind. Punarvasu Atreya learnt the science of life i.e Ayurveda from sage Bharadwaja and taught it to his six disciples. Agnivesa, one of the disciples of Atreya compiled the teaching of his Guru into a tantra called “Agnivesa Tantra” which was in Sutra form. Acarya Caraka redacted the Agnivesa Tantra into bhasya form which later become popular as Caraka Samhita.

The Sutra Sthana of the Caraka Samhita is traditionally divided into 30 chapters, which collectively serve as the foundational section of this classical work. These chapters are organized into seven thematic

sections or groups, each with a distinct focus and purpose. The systematic division of the Sutra Sthana reflects a comprehensive philosophy that integrates the principles of life, anatomy, diagnostics, therapeutics, and preventive care. It begins with foundational concepts such as the nature of Ayu (life) and the Prana (vital force), progressing toward the understanding of disease causation, symptomatology, and prognosis. The Sthana also incorporates ethical practice, diagnostic methodologies, and treatment planning, highlighting Ayurveda's holistic approach. The nomenclature of each chapter has a logic, either it describes the main content or the first topic of the chapter. Each chapter ends with a summarizing verse i.e “tatra shloka” and when there is nothing to add to the content, the term “Bhavati Catra” is used. Critical scientific contributions of this Sthana include the objective assessment of health and disease and a rational methodology of clinical examination, which established a scientific foundation for the entire Ayurvedic system.

1. Bhesaja Chatushka – The Therapeutic Quartet.

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
1.	Deerghāñjīvitīya Adhyaya
2	Apāmārga Tandulīya Adhyaya
3	Arāgvadhīya Adhyaya
4	Ṣaḍvirecanāśatāsritīya Adhyaya

The Bhesaja Chatushka derives its name from the term Bhesaja, meaning medicine or therapeutic substance. It lays the philosophical and foundational framework of Ayurveda. It explains the Descent of Ayurveda,^[3] Nityatva (eternality) of the science,^[4] defines Ayu^[5] and Ayurveda^[6] and objective of the science as the means to achieve Dhatu Samyata (equilibrium of bodily constituents). The Trisutra^[7] principle- Hetu (cause), Linga (symptom), and Aushadha (therapy) forms the core component to understanding health and disease. The concept of Trividha hetu^[8] (unwholesome contact of senses, intellectual error, and time), and the role of saririka (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and Manasika (Rajas, Tamas) doshas in the causation of diseases are elaborated. The principles of Samanya–Visheshā^[9] which forms the basis of therapeutics is elaborately explained. Extensive pharmacological content including descriptions of 355 Vamana yogas (emetic formulations), 245 Virecana yogas (purgative formulations), 50 Maha kashayas (major decoctions), and 32 lepas useful in purifactory and pacifying therapies forms the practical ground for therapeutic application. The chatushka emphasizes on the rational use of medications, since indiscriminate use of even good medicines can cause more harm than good. Thus, it is called Bhesaja Chatushka as it focuses primarily on the science of medicines, healing principles, and treatment fundamentals. The chatushka also provides the insights into six padarthas, Nava karana dravyas, Atma Swarūpa^[10], and Manas.

2. Svastha Chatushka – The Health Preservation Quartet

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
5.	Mātrāśītīya Adhyaya
6.	Tāsyāśītīya Adhyaya
7.	Na Vegandharanīya Adhyaya
8.	Indriyopakaranīya Adhyaya

The term Svastha means one who is established in health or equilibrium of body and mind. The Svastha Chatushka centres on prevention of disease and preservation of health. It emphasizes on Matra Ahara ^[11] (balanced food intake) and analyses Atiyoga, Ayoga, and Mithya Yoga of diet as major causes of ailments. It specifies wholesome foods such as rice, barley, milk, ghee, and honey for daily consumption and discusses personal and sensory hygiene. Daily practices (Dinacharya) such as application of collyrium, medicated smoking, nasya, body and foot massage, bathing, dental cleaning, and gargling are advised for maintainance of senses and physical health. Seasonal regimens (Ritucharya) such as appropriate dietary modifications, purifactory therapies according to the aggravation of doshas and the role of Satmya (adaptation) are explained. It elaborates on the regulation of natural urges (Dharaniya and Adharaniya vegas) ^[12] and the practice of Sadvritta—ethical and psychological conduct—all aimed at the sustenance of physical, mental, and spiritual harmony. Hence it is called Svastha Chatushka.

3. Nirdesha Chatushka-The Guideline or Instructional Quartet

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
9.	Khuddaka Catuspāda Adhyaya
10.	Mahā Catuspāda Adhyaya
11.	Triṣṇaiṣaṇīya Adhyaya
12.	Vātakalākālīya Adhyaya

The Nirdesha Chatushka serves as a guide to comprehensive disease management. It primarily deals with diagnostic methodology and provides a systematic framework for understanding, identifying, and classifying diseases. It elaborates on the characteristic features of Prakruta (normal) and Vikruta (abnormal) doshas, establishing the foundation for accurate diagnosis and effective treatment planning. This Chatushka complements the four fundamental components (Chikitsa Chatushpada) ^[13] essential for successful therapy.

Bhisak (physician),

Dravya (medicine),

Upasthata (attendant), and

Rogi (patient)

Each component is endowed with specific ideal qualities that collectively ensure complete disease management. The physician holds a central role as the guiding authority in diagnosis, drug selection, preparatory guidance, and administration of appropriate treatment protocols.

It presents a detailed classification of diseases based on Sadhyasadyata (curability), dividing them into Sadhya (curable), Asadhya (incurable), Sukha-Sadhya (easily curable), Kricchra-Sadhya (difficult to cure), Yapya (palliable), and Pratyakhyeya (fatal) categories, along with their distinguishing features. It elaborates on several foundational clinical concepts such as Trayopasthambha ^[14]—the three pillars of life: Ahara (diet), Nidra (sleep), and Brahmacharya (celibacy or controlled conduct),

Trividha Bala—the three types of strength: Sahaja (natural), Kalaja (seasonal or time-bound), and Yuktikrita (acquired or developed),

Trividha Ayatanani—the threefold bases of disease causation: Atiyoga, Ayoga, and Mithya Yoga of Indriyarth Karma (sensory functions) and Kala (time),

Trividha Rogamarga ^[15]—the three pathways of disease manifestation: Bahya (external), Abhyantara (internal), and Madhyama (intermediate),

Trividha Aushadhi ^[16]—the three types of therapeutics: Daivavyapashraya (divine or spiritual therapy), Yuktivyapashraya (rational or medicinal therapy), and Satvavajaya (psychological therapy).

These elements serve as guiding principles in diagnosis and management of diseases. Special emphasis is given on the normal and abnormal features of Vata Dosha, considered the chief among the three doshas, due to its primary role in physiological regulation and pathological manifestation thus establishing the framework for diagnostic and prognostic accuracy in clinical settings.

4. Kalpana Chatushka – The Procedural or Formulative Quartet.

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
13.	Sneha Adhyaya
14.	Sweda Adhyaya
15.	Upakalpaniya Adhyaya
16.	Chikitsā Prabhṛtiya Adhyaya

The term Kalpana means preparation or formulation. The chatushka emphasizes on procedural protocols for Panchakarma therapies. It discusses preparatory measures (Purva Karma) such as Snehana (oleation) and Swedana (sudation), their types, dosage, indications, contraindications, and complications. The chatushka outlines the infrastructure of a well-equipped therapeutic unit and describes the standardized methods for Vamana and Virechana procedures, including preparation of medicinal formulations ensuring rational and safe administration of purification therapies that prepare the body for further therapeutic interventions. It differentiates between Shodhana (eliminative) and Shamana (palliative) treatments, asserting the superiority of the former in disease eradication. After the Shodhana Karma, the procedural discipline of Sansarjana Karma ^[17]—a graduated dietary regimen restoring digestive strength—is explained, underscoring its clinical importance in the restoration of Agni (digestive fire) and prevention of post-therapy complications. By imparting a detailed understanding of therapeutic purification and pharmaceutical preparation, the Kalpana Chatushka forms a critical foundation for comprehending the subsequent Sthanas of the treatise—particularly the Chikitsa, Kalpa, and Siddhi Sthanas—and their clinical applications.

5. Roga Chatushka – The Disease Quartet

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
17.	Kiyanta Śīraseeya Adhyaya
18.	Triśothīya Adhyaya
19.	Aṣṭodariyā Adhyaya
20.	Mahāroga Adhyaya

Roga denotes disease or disorder. This chatushka focuses on the classification, pathogenesis, and symptomatology of diseases. It gives prominence to Shiro (head) and Hridaya (heart) disorders, considering them vital for life. It elaborates on the dosha dynamics, stages of Vriddhi and Kshaya (increase and depletion), Prakruta (normal) and Vikruta (abnormal) states of doshas. Differentiation between endogenous and exogenous diseases is presented, along with the importance of Ojas ^[18]—its features, depletion signs, and maintenance. Diseases such as the eight types of Udara Roga and various forms of Shotha are detailed along with their causative factors, features, prognosis, and complications. By discussing the pathogenesis and manifestation of numerous diseases and establishing the basis for

understanding pathology, this Chatushka provides fundamental insight into disease comprehension, serving as a foundation for subsequent Nidana and Chikitsa Sthana.

6. Yogana Chatushka – The Therapeutic Planning Quartet.

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
21.	Aṣṭāninditiya Adhyaya
22.	Langhana Brāhmaṇīya Adhyaya
23.	Samtarpanīya Adhyaya
24.	Vidhīsonītiya Adhyaya

Yogana stands for planning, composition, or therapeutic application. This Chatushka deals with the rational planning of treatments according to the patient's prakriti (constitution) and disease condition. The six therapeutic procedures (Shad Upakrama) [19]—Langhana (reduction), Brimhana (nourishing), Rukshana (dryness), Snehana (oleation), Swedana (sudation), and Sthambhana (astringent) therapies are mentioned and elaborates on balancing Brimhana (nourishment) and Langhana (reduction) therapies. The significance of Nidra as one of the three pillars of life (trayoupasthambha) and the consequences of its improper practice (Nidra Viparyaya) are discussed. It describes eight types of undesirable body forms, focusing particularly on Atisthoulya (obesity) and Atikrishna (emaciation), their etiological factors, clinical manifestations, and treatment principles. Diseases arising due to Atisamtarpna (Over nourishment) and Aparatpna (Under nourishment) and their general line of treatment described. Shonita (blood), the basis of life and its formation, its vitiating factors and the diseases arising of its vitiation and its general line of treatment vividly explained. The diseases which are not treatable by the utilization of Shadupkramas are said to be caused by vitiated shonita (vitiating blood) and the therapeutic use of Shonita-Sravana (bloodletting) discussed. The fundamentals of this chatushka lays foundation for subsequent Sthanas like chikitsa Sthana. It provides systematic guidance on planning and application of treatment regimens. Hence it is called Yogana Chatushka.

7. Annāpāna Chatushka – The Food and Drink Quartet

Chapter. No	Name of the Chapter
25.	Yajñapurūṣīya Adhyaya
26.	Ātreya Bhadrakāpyā Adhyaya
27.	Annāpanavidhi Adhyaya
28.	Vividhāśitpītiya Adhyaya

The name Annāpāna refers to Anna (food) and Pana (drink). The Annāpāna Chatushka explains principles of dietetics essential for sustaining Dhatu Samyata and promoting overall health. It enumerates wholesome (Pathya) and unwholesome (Apathya) foods and drinks, lists 155 Agrya Dravyas [20] and correlates food substances with Panchamahabhuta constitution. The six tastes (Shad Rasa) and their 63 permutations are analyzed along with their relation to Guna, Karma, Virya, and Vipaka. The concept of incompatible food combinations (Viruddhahara) [21], their types, effects, and corrective measures is elaborated. The importance of suitable Anupana [22] (postprandial drinks) is emphasized. Food is described as Prāṇa [23] “Pranah Pranabhutam Annam”—the basis of life, the support of bodily strength, complexion, intellect, happiness, and longevity, emphasizing the direct relationship between diet and dhatu nourishment.

Sangraha Adhyayas

The concluding two chapters of Sūtrasthāna are known as the Saṅgraha Adhyāyas,

Daśa Prāṇāyataniya Adhyāya Arthedaśa Mahāmūliya Adhyāya.

The Dasa Pranayataniya Adhyaya elaborates on the ten vital seats of life, i.e Dasa Pranayatana ^[24] (Hridaya, Basti, Siras, Shankhau-2 in number, Kantha, Rakta, Sukra, Ojas and Guda) are explained. These vital seats are to be protected with utmost care during any procedure and from external factors as injury to these vital seats may result in death. Hence these vital seats are to be protected. Two types of vaidyas namely Pranabhisara Vaidya ^[25] and Rogabhisara Vaidya ^[26] and their qualities have been described. Pranabhisara Vaidya who is savior of life is well versed with the subject and well acquainted with the knowledge of etiopathogenesis, symptomology, signs and management of the diseases. The Rogabhisara Vaidya is fraudulent. Hence it is advised to keep away from such vaidyas.

In the last Adhyaya i.e Arthedashamahamooliya Adhyaya Hridaya and ten great vessels have been described. Four types of Ayus ^[27] (Hitayu, Ahitayu, Sukhayu and Dukhayu) and their features also elaborated. The estimation of Lifespan, the Eternity of Ayurveda, Synonyms and scope of Ayurveda and the purpose of the study of Ayurveda elaborated. The six paths (Shad Agra) ^[28] such as Ahimsa for Longevity, Virya/Valor for increasing Strength, Vidya for Nourishment, Indriyajaya for Delightfulness, Tattvabodha for Happiness and Celibacy for Salvation explained. Just as a garland of flowers is prepared with the help of thread the entire summary of the treatise along with the chapters are summarize in the chatushka.

Discussion

The Sutra Sthana of the Caraka Samhita occupies an unparalleled position in Ayurvedic literature as it lays the philosophical, preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic foundations of the entire treatise. Within it, the seven Chatushkas represent thematically organized sections that serve as the structural pillars of the science. The arrangement of these sections reflects both philosophical depth and practical foresight, establishing the Sutra Sthana as the foremost section of the compendium.

The Bhesaja Chatuska, placed at the beginning, signifies that Bhesaja (medicines) are not merely pharmacological agents but integral instruments for restoring Dhātu-sāmyata. Through the exposition of Trisutra—Hetu (cause), Liṅga (symptom), and Aushadha (therapy)—this quartet systematizes the Ayurvedic approach to disease understanding and management. The elaboration on Trividha Hetu and Samanya-Viśeṣa Siddhānta furnishes an epistemological base for etiology and therapeutics. Its inclusion of Vamana and Virechana Yogas (formulations) underscores Ayurveda's detailed pharmaco-therapeutic armamentarium. The chatushka highlights rational use of drugs and cautions against over medication, an insight of timeless clinical relevance, aligning well with the principles of pharmacovigilance and evidence-based medicine in contemporary healthcare.

The Svastha Chatuska serves as Ayurveda's preventive and promotive health framework. By defining Svastha as equilibrium at the physical, mental, and spiritual levels, it lays the foundation for holistic wellness. The Matra Āhāra, Dinacharya, and Ritucharya concepts promote personalized and seasonal adaptability, resonating with modern preventive medicine and chronobiology. The module on Vega-Dharana and Sadvritta bridges physical hygiene with ethical-psychological balance. This chatushka illustrates Ayurveda's preventive orientation and the integral role of daily discipline, nutrition, and behavioural regulation in maintaining health.

The Nirdeśa Chatuṣka functions as a guide for diagnostic reasoning and structured disease management. It consolidates the clinical theory of Cikitsā Catuspāda—physician, drug, attendant, and patient—forming the quadrilateral of successful treatment. The discussions on Trayopasthambha (Ahāra, Nidra, Brahmacharya) emphasize the pillars of vitality, while concepts such as Trividha Bala, Rogamārga, and Aushadhi etc establishes its multidimensional framework for health analysis. The special focus on Vāta exemplifies Ayurveda’s functional physiology, acknowledging its central regulatory role. Thus, this chatushka embodies the diagnostic sophistication and structured clinical reasoning quintessential to Ayurvedic medicine.

The Kalpanā Chatuṣka specializes in therapeutic processing and procedural medicine. Detailing Snehana, Swedana, and Shodhana Karmas, it provides the first systematic exposition of Pañcakarma principles. The logical sequencing from Purva Karma (preparatory) to Pradhāna Karma (main procedure) and Paścāt Karma (post-therapy dietetic regimen) reflects Ayurveda’s precision in procedural conduct. The emphasis on infrastructure, safety, and individualized planning underscores procedural standardization akin to modern clinical protocols. The discussion on Sansarjana Krama highlights the concept of metabolic restoration post-detoxification—a pioneering view of convalescence and gastrointestinal reset. Thus, the Kalpanā Chatuṣka integrates pharmaceutical preparation with therapeutic methodology, ensuring the scientific grounding of Ayurveda’s purification therapies.

The Roga Chatuṣka provides the nosological framework of Ayurveda by elucidating disease classification, pathogenesis, and clinical features. Prioritizing Shiro and Hridaya disorders it reflects Ayurveda’s recognition of neuro and cardiac centrality to life. Through detailed exposition of Dosha Vriddhi and Kṣhaya states and differentiation of Nija and Agantuja diseases, it builds the conceptual basis for pathology. Emphasis on Ojas integrates immunological dimensions, highlighting vitality preservation as the core therapeutic aim. The detailed accounts of Udara Roga and Shotha represent an Ayurvedic prototype of systemic pathology. Thus, the Roga chatushka connects etiopathogenesis with structure-function correlation, forming the bridge between theoretical understanding and clinical manifestation.

The Yogana Chatuṣka is pivotal for constructing individualized treatment regimens. It centers around the Ṣaḍa Upakrama (six therapeutic strategies)—Langhana, Brimhana, Rūkṣaṇa, Snehana, Swedana, and Sthambhana—which parallels modern therapeutic frameworks of depletion and supplementation. The discourse on Nidra and its derangements (Nidra Viparyaya) reflects psychosomatic precision. By outlining the management of Atisthoulya and Atikrsha, the chatushka addresses metabolic and nutritional disorders. The inclusion of Raktadushti (vitiation of blood) and Raktamokshana (bloodletting) establishes foundational understanding of hematological interventions. Thus, the Yogana Chatuṣka refines the art of therapeutic balance—curating interventions as per individual constitution and disease profile.

The Annāpāna Chatushka signifies the ultimate purpose of Ayurveda—maintenance of dhatu balance through proper diet and regimen. It highlights food as the primary source of life, strength, intellect, and longevity. The conceptualization of Pathya and Apathya foods demonstrates Ayurveda’s empirical foundation in dietary pharmacology. The discussion on Viruddhāhāra (dietary incompatibility) prefigures modern understandings of food synergy and intolerance. Emphasis on Anupāna (post-meal drinks) anticipates modern dietetic principles of digestion and absorption modulation.

The Saṅgraha Adhyāyas, comprising Daśa Prāṇāyataniya and Arthadaśa Mahāmūliya, provide a holistic synthesis of Ayurvedic doctrine. The former delineates vital centers (Daśa Prāṇāyatana), emphasizing their preservation—an ancient anatomical safeguard philosophy akin to vital organ protection in modern trauma science. The classification of Vaidyas into Prāṇabhisara and Rogabhisara emphasizes ethical medical

conduct. The concluding chapter integrates metaphysical and physiological concepts—types of Āyus, estimation of lifespan, and the Ṣaḍ Agra Mārga—summarizing the philosophical and clinical wisdom of the Sūtrasthāna.

Conclusion

The Sutra Sthana forms the conceptual and practical foundation of the Caraka Samhita, embodying the holistic vision of Ayurveda. Its structurally progressive and thematically integrated content captures the essence of the science—from the origin and philosophy of life, through health preservation, diagnostic precision, therapeutic preparation, disease understanding, treatment planning, to dietary regulation for longevity. This comprehensive framework not only guides practitioners in clinical application but also affirms the timeless relevance of Ayurveda as a cohesive system of medicine. The supremacy of the Sutra Sthana lies in its ability to synthesize theoretical knowledge and pragmatic therapeutics into a unified, systematic whole, thereby securing its status as the foremost authoritative source within the treatise, “Tantrasyasya Sirah Shubham” The Auspicious Head of the Treatise.

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