

# A Critical Literary Study of Bhesaja Chatuska in Charaka Samhita

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## ABSTRACT

Charaka Samhita is one of the most authoritative classical texts of Ayurveda. Among its eight Sthanas, Sutrasthana forms the basic conceptual framework. In this section, Acharya Charaka adopts a special structural pattern known as the Chatuska system, where chapters are arranged in groups of four based on a central theme.

Bhesaja Chatuska (Sutrasthana 1–4) is placed at the beginning of the text and serves as the therapeutic foundation of the Samhita. It introduces fundamental principles related to causation of disease (Hetu), clinical presentation (Linga), Shamana and Shodhana therapies, drug grouping through Dasemani classification, and rational treatment planning based on Yukti.

The present study is a critical literary analysis of Bhesaja Chatuska using classical references and commentarial interpretations. The study establishes that Bhesaja Chatuska is not merely an introductory section but a structured clinical framework that supports Chikitsa, Kalpa, and Siddhi Sthana. It also provides strong conceptual support for research in drug classification and formulation development.

**Keywords:** Bhesaja Chatuska, Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, Chikitsa, Dasemani, Literary Research

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is described in classical literature as a complete science of life that deals with preservation of health and management of disease. The knowledge of Ayurveda is systematically compiled in Samhitas. Among them, Charaka Samhita holds a central place in the field of Kayachikitsa.

The text is divided into eight Sthanas. Sutrasthana is considered the foundational section because it introduces the essential principles that are elaborated in the later Sthanas. Within Sutrasthana, the chapters are arranged into seven Chatuskas (groups of four chapters each), followed by two concluding chapters.

The first and most important among them is Bhesaja Chatuska (Su. 1–4). Its placement at the beginning is meaningful. The text opens with the desire for long life, and immediately moves toward the principles of treatment. This shows that Charaka gives priority to practical medicine.

Therefore, a focused literary and critical study of Bhesaja Chatuska is necessary to understand the therapeutic orientation of Charaka Samhita.

यथा सुमनसा सूत्रं संग्रहार्थं विधीयते । संग्रहार्थं तदर्थानां ऋषिणाम् संग्रहः कृतः ॥  
(Ca.Su. 30/86)

Sutra Sthana thus represents the condensed nectar of knowledge, which Acharya Charak has preserved through a distinctive and systematic approach known as the Chatushka methodology. The Chatushkas described in Charak Samhita follow a structured pattern comparable to that of the Vedas. These Chatushkas are referred to as Maha artha, signifying both magnitude and depth of meaning. The term Artha also denotes the heart, symbolically indicating the central position and vital importance of Chatushkas within the Samhita. They function as the heart of the text, providing nourishment to the remaining Sthanas and chapters. Therefore, Chatushkas are not merely a unique literary arrangement but serve as evidence of the practical and therapeutic orientation of Charak Samhita.

S.NO.	CHATUSHKA	CORE THEME	IMPORTANCE & POSITION IN SEQUENCE
1.	Bheshaja Chatushka	Therapeutic tools for Dhatusamyata	Bhesaja is the primary instrument of Cikitsa and essential for a Vaidya, especially in emergencies; hence placed first. <sup>[7]</sup>
2.	Swastha Chatushka	Health maintenance (Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Ahara)	After disease alleviation, preservation of health prevents recurrence; therefore, second in order. <sup>[8]</sup>
3.	Nirdesha Chatushka	Diagnostic principles & Dosha assessment	Provides framework for understanding physician's qualities and Prakruta–Vikruta Doshas; essential before treatment planning. <sup>[9]</sup>
4.	Kalpna Chatushka	Formulations & administration	Drugs act effectively only when properly prepared and administered to specific Doshas; thus, follows diagnosis. <sup>[10]</sup>
5.	Roga Chatushka	Pathogenesis (Samprapti)	Therapeutic decisions depend on clear understanding of disease manifestation; hence fifth position. <sup>[11]</sup>
6.	Yojana Chatushka	Rogabhaishajya Yojana (therapeutic planning)	Explains principles guiding selection and combination of drugs after understanding Samprapti; placed after Roga Chatushka. <sup>[12]</sup>
7.	Annapana Chatushka	Diet & nourishment	Maintenance of Dhatusamyata depends on proper Ahara (“Pranah pranabhutam annam”); therefore, follows Yojana. <sup>[13]</sup>
8.	Samgraha Dwaya	Integration of all Sthanas	Correlates Pranayatana and other Sthanas, summarizing the structural unity of the Samhita. <sup>[14]</sup>

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on classical literary research. The primary source was Sutrasthana (Chapters 1–4) of Charaka Samhita along with Ayurveda Dipika commentary of Chakrapanidatta.

The method adopted includes:

- Textual study
- Contextual analysis
- Comparative reference from Chikitsa, Kalpa, and Siddhi Sthana

- Logical interpretation using Tarka and Yukti

The study remains confined strictly to conceptual and therapeutic aspects of Bhesaja Chatuṣka.

### CRITICAL STUDY OF BHESAJA CHATUSHKA

By the term *critical study*, it is implied that after considering all possible factors and examining the subject from multiple perspectives, an opinion should be formulated on the basis of Tarka (logical reasoning), Yukti (rational application), and Udaharana (illustration). Such an approach aims not only to understand the true nature of the subject under examination but also to determine the appropriate line of action. [15] The concept of critical evaluation has been clearly emphasized by Charak, who cautions against blind acceptance even of authoritative statements:

न चैकान्तेन निर्दिष्टप्यर्थेऽभिनिविशेद्बुधः । स्वयमप्यत्र वैद्येन तर्क बुद्धिमता भवेत् ॥  
(Ca. Si. 2/25)

Through a critical approach, one may reach closer to the truth, though not attain absolute truth, as scientific knowledge is always relative and evolving. Science aims at increasing the accuracy of knowledge rather than establishing finality of opinion. [16] Therefore, in the present study, interpretations are derived through reasoning and judgment, rather than mere adherence to the literal textual statements.

### STRUCTURAL POSITION OF BHESAJA CHATUṢKA

S. No.	Adhyaya (Su.)	Name of Chapter	Core Focus	Clinical Significance
1	Su. 1	Dirghajivitiya	Aim of Ayurveda & foundation of therapy	Establishes objective of life preservation and treatment priority
2	Su. 2	Apamargatanduliya	Agnidipana & Ahara-based measures	Corrects primary metabolic disturbance
3	Su. 3	Aragvadhiam	Shodhana principles	Introduces purification therapy conceptually
4	Su. 4	Shadvirechana Shatashritiya	Enumeration of Vamana–Virechana & Dasemani	Provides drug grouping and purification base

The learned commentator Gangadhara opines that Bhesaja Chatushka is common for both Swastha (healthy individuals) and Atura (patients). [17] Bhesaja constitutes the essential instruments for achieving Dhatusamyata. Without Bhesaja, a Vaidya cannot fulfill his fundamental duty of treatment. Furthermore, the primacy of Bhesaja becomes evident in emergency conditions. Cakrapani, while commenting on Charak Samhita, states:

चिकित्सा च विधेयत्वेनैव प्रधानमतः प्रथममुक्ता  
(Ca. Su. 17/1)

This indicates that treatment is primary in applicability and therefore must be described first. Hence, Bhesaja Chatushka, which deals with medicaments used for the management of manifest diseases, is accorded priority. This Chatushka primarily elaborates the principles related to Hetu (etiology), Linga (symptomatology), and Aushadha (medicaments), which together form the essence of the entire treatise. [18]

From the curative perspective, Bhesaja Chatushka occupies the foremost position, reflecting the immediate need of therapeutic intervention. It serves as the materia medica of all Shamana and Shodhana drugs, while their practical application is further elaborated in Nirdesha and Kalpana Chatushka. According to Vaidya V. J. Thakar, Bhesaja is explained prior to Swastha Chatushka due to the urgency of disease management. The primary necessity of Ayurveda during the time of Charak was the alleviation of severe and life-threatening diseases, as stated by Acharya Charak:

**विघ्नभूता यदा रोगाः प्रादुर्भूताः शरीरिणाम् । तपोपवासाध्ययन ब्रह्मचर्यव्रतायुषाम् ॥**

(Ca. Su. 1/6)

The study of Aushadha enables students to perform OPD duties effectively. Charak has provided an introductory list of drugs, which forms the foundation of Ayurvedic therapeutics. These Aushadhis stimulate interest among students toward the applied aspects of Ayurveda. Based on these drugs, a physician can develop multiple therapeutic formulations, enhancing practical understanding of Chikitsa. [19] Therefore, owing to its therapeutic importance and practical relevance, Bhesaja Chatushka justifiably occupies the first position in Sutrasthana.

### THERAPEUTIC COMPONENTS OF BHESAJA CHATUŞKA

The Chatuşka integrates key elements required for treatment:

Step	Therapeutic Component	Description	Practical Relevance
1	Hetu	Identification of causative factors	Preventive and corrective planning
2	Linga	Recognition of clinical features	Diagnostic clarity
3	Shamana	Pacification therapy	Mild to moderate disease management
4	Shodhana	Elimination therapy	Root-level purification
5	Dasemani	Drug classification	Organized pharmacological grouping
6	Yukti	Rational application	Individualized treatment

This shows that the Chatuşka does not only describe medicines but builds a complete treatment framework.

### APPLICATION TO OTHER STHANAS

Bhesaja Chatuşka supports other Sthanas in the following ways:

Bhesaja Component	Expanded In	Nature of Expansion
Shamana principles	Chikitsa Sthana	Disease-specific therapeutic application
Shodhana enumeration	Kalpa Sthana	Detailed pharmaceutical preparation
Panchakarma concept	Siddhi Sthana	Procedural execution and success
Drug grouping	Entire Samhita	Functional therapeutic application

Thus, Bhesaja Chatuşka acts as a conceptual seed for therapeutic expansion.

### DISCUSSION

The arrangement of Bhesaja Chatuşka at the beginning of Sutrasthana is neither accidental nor merely traditional. It reflects a deliberate academic and clinical vision of Acharya Charaka. When we carefully

observe the flow of the text, it becomes clear that Charaka starts with applied medicine rather than theoretical philosophy. This itself indicates that Ayurveda is essentially a practice-oriented science.

One important observation from this study is that Bhesaja Chatuska presents treatment in a structured and sequential manner. It does not begin directly with drugs. Instead, it first establishes the purpose of life and health. It then explains factors responsible for disease, followed by corrective measures. This progression mirrors the real-life process followed by a physician: understanding cause, observing symptoms, deciding the line of management, and then selecting appropriate drugs.

The inclusion of Agnidipana in the early chapters is also significant. Agni is described as central to metabolism and vitality. By giving early emphasis to Agnidipana, Charaka indirectly points toward correction of basic pathology before disease-specific intervention. In modern clinical understanding, this resembles the idea of restoring systemic balance before targeting localized symptoms. Therefore, Bhesaja Chatuska promotes a root-level therapeutic approach.

Another important aspect is the introduction of Shodhana therapy in conceptual form. Although the procedural details are described later in Kalpa and Siddhi Sthana, their enumeration in Bhesaja Chatuska establishes purification as a major therapeutic pillar. This early introduction ensures that the student understands detoxification principles from the beginning of study.

The Dasemani classification also deserves special attention. Instead of describing drugs randomly, Charaka organizes them into functional groups. This grouping reflects early pharmacological thinking. Drugs are not merely substances; they are organized according to therapeutic action. Such classification provides a rational base for drug screening and formulation design even in contemporary research.

The emphasis on Yukti is perhaps the most clinically relevant feature. Charaka repeatedly indicates that treatment should not be mechanical. The physician must apply reasoning according to condition, season, strength, and pathology. This makes Bhesaja Chatuska dynamic rather than rigid. It allows adaptation and innovation while remaining within classical principles.

From a pedagogical perspective, placing Bhesaja Chatuska at the beginning ensures that students are introduced early to applied therapeutics. It prevents excessive theoretical detachment and keeps clinical relevance at the center of learning.

When examined critically, Bhesaja Chatuska appears to function as the therapeutic blueprint of the entire Samhita. The later Sthanas expand what is conceptually introduced here. Thus, it is not simply the first Chatuska; it is the operational core around which the rest of the text is structured.

In contemporary times, when Ayurveda is being evaluated through research methodology, Bhesaja Chatuska offers a strong conceptual model. Its systematic classification, emphasis on causation, metabolic correction, purification therapy, and rational drug grouping can be correlated with modern biomedical frameworks without distorting classical principles.

Therefore, the importance of Bhesaja Chatuska extends beyond literary interest. It has practical value in education, clinical application, and research development.

## RESULTS

The study reveals that:

- Bhesaja Chatuska forms the therapeutic nucleus of Sutrasthana.
- It systematically integrates etiology, symptomatology, and treatment principles.
- It introduces Shodhana therapy conceptually before procedural elaboration.
- It provides structured drug classification through Dasemani.

- It emphasizes Yukti-based rational clinical practice.

## CONCLUSION

Bhesaja Chatuska is the therapeutic foundation of Charaka Samhita. Its placement at the beginning of Sutrasthana reflects the priority given to disease management and preservation of life.

It presents a structured and clinically meaningful framework integrating causation, diagnosis, drug classification, metabolic correction, purification therapy, and rational treatment planning. The Chatuska supports later Sthanas and acts as a conceptual bridge between theory and practice.

Its relevance continues in modern times, especially in research related to drug classification and formulation science. Thus, Bhesaja Chatuska remains central to both classical understanding and contemporary interpretation of Ayurveda.

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