



## Review Article

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### A REVIEW ON SANSKRIT VERSES FROM THE CHARAKA SAMHITA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCES TO EPILEPSY

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#### ABSTRACT

The neurological disease of epilepsy is covered in detail in the ancient Ayurvedic text, Charaka Samhita, compiled more than 2000 years ago. The description of the disease and treatment options mention several essential herbs and plants, which may help identify new medications for epilepsy. This article outlines the English transliteration of a few important Sanskrit verses from the Charaka Samhita and mentions the botanical names of herbs and plants mentioned in the text. Few verses that describe how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and good nutrition to avoid disease are also included.

**Keywords:** Apasmara, Epilepsy, Charaka Samhita, Ayurveda, Botanicals

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Description of Charaka Samhita

Charaka Samhita is an exposition of Ayurveda or “life knowledge.” It is one of two foundational Vedic texts from ancient India.<sup>1</sup> Charaka is the name of a great sage, and Samhita means encyclopaedia or lexicon. Charaka Samhita was written in Sanskrit. Today, Sanskrit scholars act as a bridge between the scholars in modern disciplines and ancient knowledge in the Sanskrit books.

Charaka Samhita was compiled before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and consisted of eight sthanas (parts or books) and one hundred and twenty chapters and contains a description of the human body, causes of diseases, descriptions of diseases with symptoms, prevention, and treatment. The eight sthanas are Sutra sthana (fundamental principles), Nidana sthana (diagnosis), Vimana sthana (training for physicians, diet, and nourishment), Sharira sthana (study of the human body), Indriya sthana (signs of life and death), Chikitsa sthana (therapeutics), Kalpa sthanam (pharmaceuticals), and Siddhi sthana (successful management).<sup>2</sup> The principal teachings of Charaka Samhita were recorded approximately 3000 years ago from the teachings of sage Punarvasu Atreya.<sup>3</sup>

##### Description of Ayurvedic Composition of Body

Three physical Doshas ‘Vata, Pitta, and Kaph’ are essential constituents of the human body. These three-body energetics support healthy bodily functions in the right amount, and their disequilibrium causes diseases. These factors are responsible for physiological functions but capable of causing disorders. They are eternally present in the body of living beings, either normal or abnormal. Improper food and an unhealthy lifestyle are the leading cause of the disequilibrium of Doshas.<sup>4</sup>

The three mind doshas are Rajas, Sattva, and Tamas. Rajas dosha refers to momentum, desire, and action. Sattva dosha refers to a peaceful, clear, balanced, and steady mind. Tamas dosha relates to inertia, dullness, sleep, and darkness. Mental and physical diseases may mutually affect each other.<sup>4</sup>

##### Abnormalities of Doshas Leads to Epilepsy

Chapters VIII of Nidana sthana of Charaka Samhita describes the characteristics and diagnosis of Apasmara (epilepsy).

*iha khalu catvāro'pasmārā bhavanti  
vātapittakaphasannipātanimittāḥ || 3 ||*  
(Ch. Ni. 8/3)

Epilepsy is caused by the disequilibrium between Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Simultaneous disequilibrium of all three doshas is called Sannipata, which leads to an incurable medical condition.<sup>5,6</sup>

##### Description of Epilepsy

*apasmāraṃ punaḥ  
smṛtibuddhisattvasaṃplavādvībhatsaceṣṭamāvasthikaṃ tamaḥ-  
praveśamācakaṣate || 5 ||*  
(Ch. Ni. 8/5)

Epilepsy is defined as the departure of memory associated with entering darkness, a transient appearance of unconsciousness with a loathsome expression like vomiting or froth and abnormal postures of the body due to derangement of memory, intelligence, and mind.<sup>5,6</sup>

- **Premorbid conditions:** Epilepsy may be caused in those with unhealthy minds and abundant morbidity, which may be due to intake of unwholesome food, masking of heart with doshas and injury of mind by anxiety, passion, fear, anger, grief, and agitation causing disequilibrium of rajas and tamas doshas.<sup>5,6</sup>

*tasyemāni pūrvarūpāni bhavanti; tadyathā – bhrūvyudāsah  
satatamakṣṇorvaikṛtamāśabdaśravaṇam  
lālāsīṅghānaprasavaṇamanābhīlaṣaṇamarocakavipākau  
hṛdayagrahaḥ kukṣerāṭopo daurbalyamasthibhedo'ngamardo  
mohastamaso darśanaṃ mūrccā bhramaścābhīkṣṇam svapne  
ca madanartanavyadhanavyathanavepanapatanādīnī || 6 ||  
(Ch. Ni. 8/6)*

*tato'nantaramapasmārābhīnīrvṛttireva || 7 ||  
(Ch. Ni. 8/7)*

- **Pre-ictal event (before Seizure):** Prodromal symptoms may include throwing aside of eyebrows, abnormal eye movements, auditory hallucinations, drooling and runny nose, loss of appetite, poor digestion, tightness of chest, abdominal distension, debility, searing pain in bones, body aches, confusion, blurry vision and fainting, dizziness and abnormal dreams, aching, trembling, and falling.<sup>5,6</sup> Epilepsy arises immediately after the occurrence of the above symptoms.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Ictal event (seizure):** Doshas being carried by vessels to the heart afflict it, and as such, the patient suffers stupefied with a wandering mind. He sees non-existent things (visual hallucinations), falls, twitches in his tongue, eyes and eyebrows, excessive salivation, and convulsions in his hands and feet.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Post-ictal (after seizure):** After the paroxysm is over, the patient awakens as if from sleep.<sup>5,6</sup>

#### Types of Epilepsy (Apsmara)

Four types of apasmara (epilepsy) caused by abnormality of Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and Sannipata are described below.<sup>5,6</sup>

*tatredamapasmāraviśeṣavijñānaṃ bhavati; tadyathā –  
abhīkṣṇamapasmaraṇam, kṣaṇena saṃjñāṃ pratilabhamānam,  
utpīṇḍitākṣam, asāmnā vilapantam, udvamantaṃ phenam,  
atīvādhmātagrīvam, āviddhāśiraskam, viśamavinatāṅgulim,  
anavasthitapānīpādam,  
aruṇaparūṣāśyāvānakhanayanavadanatvacam,  
anavasthitacapalaparūṣarūṣarūpadarśinaṃ, vātālānupaśayam,  
viparītopaśayam ca vātenāpasmaraṇam vidyāt || (1) ||*

*abhīkṣṇamapasmaraṇam, kṣaṇena saṃjñāṃ pratilabhamānam,  
avakījantam, āsphālayantaṃ bhūmim,  
haritahāradritāmranakhanayanavadanatvacam,  
rudhīroṣṭitograbhairavādīptaruṣitarūpadarśinaṃ,  
pittālānupaśayam, viparītopaśayam ca pittēnāpasmaraṇam  
vidyāt || (2) ||*

*cirādapasmaraṇam, cirācca saṃjñāṃ pratilabhamānam,  
patantam, anativikṛtaceṣṭam, lālāmudvamantaṃ,  
śuklanakhanayanavadanatvacam,  
śuklagurusnigdarūpadarśinaṃ, śleṣmalānupaśayam  
viparītopaśayam ca śleṣmaṇā'pasmaraṇam vidyāt || (3) ||*

*samavetasarvalīṅgamapasmāraṃ sānnipātikaṃ vidyāt,  
tamaśādhyaṃcākṣate || (4) ||*

*iti catvāro'pasmārā vyākhyātāḥ || 8 ||  
(Ch. Ni. 8/8)*

- **Vatika Epilepsy:** Specific features of Vatika epilepsy are frequent fits, regaining consciousness instantaneously, protruded eyes, crying recklessly, emitting froth from the

mouth, excessively swollen neck, puncturing pain in the head, irregularly contracted fingers, shaky hands and feet, reddish, rough, and blackish nails, eyes, face, and skin, visual auras of unstable, coarse, and rough objects.<sup>5,6</sup>

- **Paittika Epilepsy:** Frequent fits, regaining consciousness instantaneously, groaning sound, striking against the earth, greenish, yellowish, and coppery nails, eyes, face, and skin. The vision of bloody, agitated, fierce, luminous, and irritating objects. Though fit goes off quickly but is somewhat delayed in comparison to the Vatika type.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Kaphaja Epilepsy:** Delayed fits and delayed recovery, falling, less loathsome expression, frothing saliva, white nails, eyes, face, and skin. The vision of white, heavy, and unctuous objects.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Sannipatika Epilepsy:** The combination of Vatika, Paittika, and Kaphaja epilepsies is incurable and may occur in a wasted and older adult. There are paroxysmal fits of epilepsy at intervals of a fortnight, twelve days, or a month with slight variation.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

#### TREATMENTS

##### Lifestyle modifications

The epileptic person should be kept away from risky situations like water, fire, tree, and hills because having a paroxysm near these may cause immediate death.<sup>5,6</sup>

##### Non-Medicinal

To maintain good health, Charaka Samhita recommends a systematic daily routine and guidelines for taking food.<sup>2</sup>

*tatredamāhāravidhividhānamarogāṅāmāturāṅām cāpi keṣāñcit  
kāle prakṛtyaiva hitatamaṃ bhuñjānānāṃ bhavati - uṣṇam,  
snigdham, mātrāvat, jīrṇe vīryāvīruddham, iṣṭe deṣe,  
iṣṭasarvopakaraṇam, nātidrutam, nātilambitam, ajalpan,  
ahasana, tanmanā bhuñjīta, ātmānamabhisamīkṣya samyak  
|| 24 || (Ch. Vi. 1/24)*

The rule for taking food: Healthy individuals should observe the following: each food in proper quantity which is smooth and hot and after digestion of last meal. Food should be taken at the appropriate place equipped with all accessories, without talking and laughing with a concentration of mind and paying due regard to oneself.<sup>5,6</sup>

*lobhaśokabhayakrodhamānavegān vidhārayet |  
nairlajjyerysātīrāgāṅāmbhidhyāyāśca buddhimān || 27 ||  
(Ch. Su. 7/27)*

To reduce mental disorders, Charaka Samhita recommends that the urges of greed, grief, fear, anger, excessive pride, shamelessness, jealousy, excessive attachment, and desire to take another's property should be avoided.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

*na vegān dhārayeddhīmāñjātān mūtrapurīṣayoḥ | na retaso na  
vātasya na chardīyāḥ kṣavathorna ca || 3 ||*

*nodgārasya na jṛmbhāyā na vegān kṣutpipāśayoḥ | na bāspasya  
na nidrāyā niḥśvāsasya śramaṇa ca || 4 ||  
(Ch. Su. 7/3, 7/4)*

Charaka Samhita further explains that suppression of urges of urine, faeces, semen, flatus, vomiting, sneezing, eructation, yawning, hunger, thirst, tears, sleep, and breathing after exertion causes pathological conditions.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

*lāghavaṃ karmasāmarthyam sthairyam duḥkhasahiṣṇutā |  
doṣakṣayo'gnivṛddhiśca vyāyāmādupajāyate || 32 ||*  
(Ch. Su. 7/32)

Charaka Samhita recommends physical exercise to achieve proper weight, increase capacity to work, firmness, tolerance of

difficulties, balance bodily humours (Vata, Kapha and pitta), and improve digestive ability and metabolism.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

#### Medicinal

Several medicinal plants and herbs have been described for treating epilepsy, outlined in Table 1.<sup>5,6,8</sup>

Several verses describe the preparation of Ayurvedic mixture for the treatment of epilepsy.

**Table 1: Herbs used in the treatment of epilepsy<sup>5,6</sup>**

Name	Botanical name	Part(s) of the plant used
Pañcamūla is a group of plants - 1. Śālaparṇī (salpan) 2. Pṛṣṇiparnī (“pointed-leaved uraria plant”) 3. Bṛhaṭī (“Indian Nightshade”) 4. Kaṇṭakārī (“yellow-berried nightshade”) 5. Gokṣura (“land-caltrops”)	1. <i>Desmodium gangeticum</i> 2. <i>Uraria picta</i> 3. <i>Solanum indicum</i> 4. <i>Solanum xanthocarpum</i> 5. <i>Tribulus terrestris</i>	Roots Pañca = five and Mula = root
Triphalā (“three fruits”): The Sanskrit name for a group of plants - 1. Āmalakī or Dhātrī 2. Vibhītakī or Bibhītaka 3. Harītakī	1. <i>Emblica officinalis</i> 2. <i>Terminalia belerica</i> 3. <i>Terminalia chebula</i>	Fruits Tri = three and phalā = fruits
Haridrā (“yellow”, Haldi, turmeric)	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	Root
Kuṭaja (Kurchi fruit)	<i>Holarrhena antidysenterica</i> / <i>Wrightia antidysenterica</i>	Fruit
Saptaparna (“dita”) (“Devil’s tree”, “ditabark” or “milkwood-pine”)	<i>Alstonia scholaris</i>	Bark, latex, flower, and leaves are used Sapta = seven and Parna = leave
Apāmārga (rough chaff tree) (chaff-flower or devil’s horsewhip)	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>	Roots, Seeds & Leaves
Nīlinī (Nīlapunamavā, desert horsepurslane)	<i>Trianthema portulacastrum</i>	Roots
Kaṭurohiṇī (Katukā)	<i>Picrorhiza kurroa</i>	Certain parts are eaten as vegetables
Āragvadha (“golden shower tree”, “purgin cassia” or “Indian laburnum”)	<i>Cassia fistula</i> (or <i>Cassia rhombifolia</i> )	Fruits
Phalgu (“Redwood fig tree”)	<i>Ficus hispida</i>	
Puṣkaramūla	<i>Costus Speciosus</i>	Root
Durālabhā (“difficult to be handled”, “Indian stinging nettle”)	<i>Tragia involucrata</i>	
Bhārgī (“blue fountain bush”, “beetle killer”)	<i>Rotheca serrata</i>	Bhārgī = effulgence, splendour
Trikaṭu (“three spices”): contains Pippalī (long pepper), Marica (black pepper), and Śrīngavera or Sunṭhī (dried ginger)		Fruits and roots tri = three katu = “pungent” or “spice”
Pāthā (velvetleaf)	<i>Cissampelos pareira</i>	
Trivṛt or Trivṛtā	<i>Operculina turpethum</i>	
Nicula (goat willow)	<i>Salix caprea</i>	Eaten as vegetable
Nicula	<i>Barringtonia acutangula</i> (Indian oak)	
Gajapippalī (“Piper chaba”)	<i>Scindapsus officinalis</i>	Fruits are berries
Ādhakī (“pigeon pea”)	<i>Cajanus cajan</i>	
Mūrvā (Moratā)	<i>Chonemorpha fragrans</i>	
Dantī (“snaketooth”, Nāgavinnā)	<i>Baliospermum solanifolium</i>	
Kirātatikta (“chiretta plant”, Bhūnimba, “Green chiretta”, or “Creat”)	<i>Swertia chirata</i>	
Citraka (“doctorbush”, Dahana)	<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i>	Eaten as a vegetable Citraka = “painter”
Sāriva (“Indian sarsaparilla”, Anantamūla, “Country sarsaparilla”) or Śāriva	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i>	Sāriva = a kind of grain
Rohiṇī (varieties of Harītakī (“yellow myrobalan tree”))	<i>Picrorhiza kurroa</i>	Fruit
Madayantikā (a kind of jasmine)		

**Mahapancagavya ghrta preparation:** Mix 80 grams each of both pancamulas, triphala, both types of haridra, kutaja bark, saptaparna, apamarga, nilini, katurhini, aragvadha, phalgu (root), puskarumula, duralabha with 10.24 litres of water. Boil the mixture till one-fourth of the mixture remains. Add to the above mix 10 grams each of bhargi, patha, trikatu, trivrat, nicula, gajapippali, adhaki, murva, danti, kiratatika, citraka, two types of sariva, rohini, bhutika and madayantika. Cook the above decoction with 640 grams of ghee, cow dung juice, sour curd,

milk, and cow urine. The resulting mixture is called mahapancagavya ghrta. Mahapancagavya ghrta should be taken daily. Mahapancagavya ghrta is like ambrosia and is efficacious in the treatment of epilepsy.<sup>5,6,9</sup>

**Massage oil (Palankasadya taila) to alleviate epilepsy:** Cook palankasa, vaca, haritaki, vrsicali, arka, sarsapa, jatila, putanakesi, hingu, coraka, lasuna, atirasa, citra, kustha, and the stool of carnivorous birds as available with 1 part of sesame oil

and four parts of goat urine. Massage with resulting medicated oil helps alleviate epilepsy. The above medication may also be used as incense or paste.<sup>5,6</sup>

**Treatment of exogenous epilepsy:** In a person habitually taking contaminated food, suppressing natural urges, using a cold-hot unctuous and rough diet in excess, and having soul occluded by rajasa and tamasa or moha, the vitiated dosas afflict the channels carrying the impulses of the mind and intellect and get lodged in the heart. Thus, on making of intelligence and mind by increased rajasa and tamasa and bewilderment of heart by dosas, the patient confused and having little sense interprets eternal-noneternal and wholesome-unwholesome wrongly. This is known as an attachment to unreality or significant disease.

As regards management, the patient should initially be treated with a massage with medicinal oil and fomentation. Then be evacuated with emesis (vomiting). After that proper dietetic regimen should be given consisting of lighter to heavier foods. The pancagavya ghrita combined with Brahmi juice should be taken. In addition, the patient should be given intellect promoting Rasayana such as sankhapuspi. Close and trusted friends and preceptors should instil understanding, patience, memory, and the power of concentration.<sup>5,6</sup>

**Treatment of Chronic epilepsy resistant to conventional modes of treatment:** Chronic epilepsy should be treated with the following elixirs: 1. Garlic with oil; 2. Satavari with milk; 3. Brahmi juice with honey; 4. Kustha juice with honey; 5. Powder of vaca with honey.<sup>5,6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The identification, description, and treatment of epilepsy in Charaka Samhita are very detailed, and the outlined herbal preparations may be used in Ayurvedic treatments. Research on herbs and plants may help identify specific natural products which may be helpful in the treatment of apasmara or epilepsy. The recommendations on a healthy lifestyle to avoid the development of epilepsy may be useful for disease prevention.

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