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CARAKA SAMHITA SARIRASTHANA: A HOLISTIC GLIMPSE

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ABSTRACT

Caraka Samhita, one of the authoritative treatises of Ayurveda, represents the intellectual zenith of ancient Indian medical knowledge. It stands as a scientific, philosophical, and ethical compendium that shaped the foundations of Ayurveda as a rational medical science. Caraka Samhita is described in eight sections. Sarirasthana is one of the unique sections of the Caraka samhita that comprehensively deals with various dimensions of human life. It presents a fusion of physical and metaphysical perspectives. Acarya Caraka defined sarira as the site of manifestation of cetana and the pancamahabhuta in a specific proportion. The term sarira encompasses the physical body, mind, and consciousness. By discussing the components of the body, soul, mind, and mental constitutions, the sarirasthana of the Caraka samhita serves as both a medical guide and a philosophical treatise on human life. It also pioneers the ancient discussion on genetics and genetic abnormalities. Human beings are described as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, reinforcing the Ayurvedic principle of harmony between the universe and the individual. The chapters of Caraka samhita sarirasthana are interwoven with insights from human biology, psychology, ethics, and metaphysics. These chapters illustrate the comprehensive outlook of Ayurveda, where well-being is attained not merely by maintaining physical balance but by achieving harmony with the cosmic and spiritual realms of existence. This article tries to highlight the uniqueness of sarirasthana of Caraka and its utility for a comprehensive understanding of the human body.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Caraka, Sarira, Sarirasthana, Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Caraka samhita is an authoritative text on internal medicine that forms the foundation of health and disease. To achieve a disease-free life, it is important to understand the body and its components. Caraka conceives sarira as not simply a physical body but as an integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions. Sarirasthana of the Caraka samhita not only imparts insights into the human constitution but also broadens the physician's perspective to comprehend the human being in its holistic essence. The knowledge of sarira helps to prevent the disease and treat the disease effectively. It also helps to understand the prognosis of the disease and the probable duration of treatment. Sarirasthana of Carakasamhita includes a layered discussion on embryology, heredity, psychology, and philosophical thoughts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Relevant information was gathered from the Caraka Samhita Ayurveda Dipika commentary, and various online sources. The collected data was then systematically analyzed.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To assess the distinctive features of Caraka Samhita Sarirasthana and to identify its utility in gaining a holistic understanding of the human body.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF CARAKA SAMHITA SARIRASTHANA

The first chapter Katitha purusha sarira elaborates on both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the human entity. It addresses various aspects such as the types, origin, and components of purusha, the nature and attributes of the mind, the process of knowledge acquisition, theories of creation and dissolution, types of diseases and their causative factors, the root of sorrow, methods to alleviate suffering, and the role of yoga in attaining liberation etc [1]. It also outlines the means to achieve salvation. Purusha, representing the element of consciousness, holds a central role in the formulation of treatments aimed at eradicating suffering and guiding one toward liberation. As a vital concept, this chapter addresses twenty-three key questions regarding the various dimensions of Purusha. Recognizing the soul and mind as responsible for all actions, the idea of the mind is also given due significance in this chapter.

In the second chapter of Atulyagotriya, a comprehensive discussion on the characteristics of healthy conception and the genetic disorders linked to consanguinity. This chapter addresses thirty six specific questions that cover a broad spectrum of topics, including the factors contributing to embryogenesis, the process of labor, sex determination of the embryo, twin pregnancy congenital anomalies, and

the transmigration of the atma. It also explores the causes of disease and the impact of past and present actions on disease manifestation [2]. The minor chapter Khuddika garbhavakranti Sarira serves as a prelude to the major chapter mahati garbhavakranti Sarira. It focuses on the initial formation of the embryo and identifies six essential factors responsible for embryogenesis: maternal, paternal, atma, satmya, rasa, and sattva [3].

The next chapter Mahatigarbhavakranti sarira deals with concepts of Ayurvedic embryology. The name 'mahati' indicates big or detailed. The sequential growth and development of the foetus have been explained systematically in the womb from the first month to the tenth month of gestation. Causes of the birth of genetically disordered foetus like putipraja, varta and trinaputrika are discussed. Types of mental constitutions based on the predominance of sattva, rajas and tamas are sub-classified into 16 types under three major categories viz. sattvika, rajasika and tamasika with their distinguishing features are also discussed. At the end of the chapter, auspicious and inauspicious eight factors for the foetus are mentioned [4].

The fifth chapter Purushavichaya sarira deals with the similarities in the components of loka and purusha, cause of bondage of soul and means of attaining moksha [5]. The sixth chapter Sariravichaya sarira deals with factors responsible for the growth of the body, promotion of strength, digestion and metabolism. The chapter is divided into two broad sections the first section deals with all the above-mentioned subjects and the second section deals with embryology, development, and growth of various body parts in the fetus. The chapter ends with a critical discussion of the concepts of timely and untimely death. Samanya vishesha siddhanta which is one of the most fundamental principles of Ayurveda has been well described in this chapter [6]. The chapter sarirasamkhya sarira is dedicated to the numerical classification and quantification of anatomical and physiological components. It offers detailed insights into the structural and functional organization of the human body, both gross and subtle. The final chapter, Jatisutriya, provides a concise overview of the various methods and processes involved in childbirth [7]. It encompasses topics related to obstetrics, neonatology, and parental health.

Table 1: Comparison of Sarirasthana of Caraka Samhita with Susruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya

	Caraka samhita	Susruta Samhita	Ashtangahridaya
No. of chapters	8	10	6
General nature of the text	Descriptive and philosophical	Anatomical and surgical implications	Combined wisdom of earlier treatises
Distinctive Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classification of Puruṣa, emphasis on consciousness as the essence of life Concept of transmigration of the soul and influence of karma Detailed discussion on genetics, genetic abnormalities & consanguinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematic method of dissection Precise anatomical description Comprehensive explanation of marmas and their surgical significance Anatomically focused embryological descriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, concise, and systematically arranged presentation Summarized embryology Practical orientation with minimal metaphysical exposition Brief anatomical descriptions Description of fatal signs

DISCUSSION

The Sarirasthana section of the Caraka samhita comprises 382 sutras organized into eight chapters, each contributing uniquely to the understanding of the human being -physically, psychologically, and spiritually. These chapters not only form the foundation of Ayurvedic anatomy and embryology but also intricately connect the human body to cosmology, philosophy, and ethics, making them exceptional in both depth and scope. Sarirasthana of Caraka Samhita is particularly distinctive in its emphasis on a philosophical perspective, exploring not only how the body is formed but also why it is formed, addressing existential queries and karmic implications of human life. The process of perception, knowledge acquisition, causes of bondage, and the means to attain liberation are discussed in the light of Sankhya and Yoga philosophies, thereby connecting the physical body to higher metaphysical goals. The

transmigration of atma and the role of past karmas in shaping present health are also highlighted. The significance of purusha in both therapeutic application and metaphysical inquiry is emphasized, establishing the soul and mind as central to health and disease.

According to Caraka the health status of foetus depends upon the beeja (sperm and ovum), beejabhaga (genes) and beejabhagavaya (chromosomes). Abnormalities in any of these lead to congenital disorders. The discussion on consanguinity reflects Caraka's profound insight into hereditary disorders. The guidelines for healthy conception, mechanisms of sex determination, and the phenomenon of twin births are also outlined. The description of six factors essential for embryogenesis such as matruja, pitruja, atmaja, satmyaja, rasaja and satvaja indicate that the pregnancy is not merely biological but psychospiritual as well.

The classification of mental constitutions with their psychological traits provides a groundwork for psychosomatic diagnosis. The description of auspicious and inauspicious factors influencing foetal development shows the blending of medical observation with spiritual connotations. According to Caraka, the maintenance of harmony between man and his environment is essential to attain the prime objectives of a human life – blissful life (sukhayu), useful life (hitayu), and salvation (moksha). The doctrine of samanya and visesa, particularly with regard to gunas, is elaborated in the context of digestion and metabolism. Additionally, the numerical classification of bodily components offers a structured framework for comprehending both the gross and subtle aspects of bodily systems. This systematic framework enhances diagnostic accuracy and supports effective therapeutic planning. The cycle of life discussed throughout the sarirasthana is summarized in the last chapter by covering obstetrics, neonatal care, and child development.

CONCLUSION

Caraka Samhita Sarirasthana is a comprehensive guide for understanding the human body encompassing its physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. The human being is not just a physical or anatomical framework but a conscious, ethical, and ever-evolving embodiment of

life. Caraka portrayed a blend of anthropology, ethics, psychology and spirituality in sarirasthana. Therefore it remains a cornerstone for understanding the holistic view of the human being. A comprehensive understanding of every aspect of the body helps to prevent afflictions caused by the dosas.

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