

A Conceptual Review of *Shiras* as *Pranayatana* in *Charaka Samhita*

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Abstract

Ayurveda is a life science which mainly aims at maintaining the health of an individual and at the same time treating the ailments of a diseased person. “*DashaPranayatana*” is a unique concept of *Ayurveda* mentioned in *Charaka Samhita*. In *Sutrasthana*, we find a whole chapter dedicated to the study of *DashaPranayatana* and highlighted that one who knows these concepts will be known as *Pranabhisara Vaidya*, i.e., one who is confident and having absolute knowledge of the patient and the disease. In *Charaka Samhita*, we find references of ten such entities known as *DashaPranayatana*, which every *Ayurvedic* physician should be aware of, as they are seats of life or vitality. In such instance, it becomes important to understand the concept of *Prana* along with their seats in the context of *Shareera Rachana*. *Shiras* is one such *Pranayatana* mentioned in *Charaka Samhita*. It has been given much importance that it has been mentioned both in the context of *DashaPranayatana* and *Marma*. In this article, an attempt is made to understand and review *Shiras* in the context of *DashaPranayatanas*.

Keywords: *Ayurveda, Prana, DashaPranayatana, Shiras, Shareera Rachana, Swasthya, Aturavastha*

Introduction

Pranayatana is made up of two words, “*Prana*” and “*Ayatana*”. The literal meaning of “*Prana*” is the principle of life,¹ a breath of life or vitality. *Ayatana* refers to abode,^{2,3} support, seat or resting place in different contexts. Hence, *Pranayatana* refers to seats of life or in other words vital parts of our body where factors responsible for maintaining life are situated. The word *Prana* has been used in different contexts contributing different meanings to it. It has been used as a synonym to “*Jeevitham* (life)”^{4,5}, as “*Vaayu* (*Vaata*-one among the *Tridosha*)”⁶⁻⁸, as “*Shonita* (one among the *saptadhatu*)”⁹, as “*Bala* (strength)”^{10,11}, as “*Ayushya* (lifespan)”¹² and as “*Indra* (the lord of *Indriyas*)”¹³ etc. In *Ayurveda*, particular to *Shareera Rachana*, there is a need to know these “*Ayatanas*” as they are the abodes of “*Prana*”.

Literary Review

In *Charaka Samhita*, ten *Pranayatanas* have been mentioned in two different *adhyayas* – once in *Sutrasthana*¹⁴ and second time in *Shareera Sthana*.¹⁵ They are enumerated in Table 1.

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Table 1. Enumeration of *DashaPranayatana* in *Sutrasthana* and *ShaareeraSthana* of *Charaka Samhita*

S. No.	<i>DashaPranayatana</i>	<i>Sutrasthana</i>	<i>Shaareera Sthana</i>
1	<i>Shankha</i>	2	-
2	<i>Shiras</i>	1	1
3	<i>Hrudaya</i>	1	1
4	<i>Basti</i>	1	1
5	<i>Kantha</i>	1	1
6	<i>Shonita</i>	1	1
7	<i>Shukra</i>	1	1
8	<i>Ojus</i>	1	1
9	<i>Guda</i>	1	1
10	<i>Nabhi</i>	-	1
11	<i>Mamsa</i>	-	1

Shiras is considered as one among these *DashaPranayatana*s. In *Charaka Samhita*, many synonyms have been used while describing or mentioning about *Shiras*. Some of these synonyms are *Murdha*, *Uttamanga*, *Pradhanaanga*, *Mastishka*, *Mastulunga*, etc. References of *Shiras* are found in different contexts like:

Shareera Rachana Descriptions of Shiras

- It is one among the *Shadangas* and is considered as a *Uttamanga*¹⁶ or *Pradhana Anga*.¹⁷
- It is one among the six main divisions of the body (*Shadangas*).¹⁸
- It is one among the *DashaPranayatana*s.¹⁹
- Among 107 *Marmas* present in the body, *Shiras*, *Hrudaya*, and *Basti* (*Trimarma*) are the most important.²⁰
- There are seven *Malayanas* or *Chidras* (openings) in *Shiras*.^{21,22}
- *Pramana* (dimensions) of *Shiras* is 16 *angulas* in *Utsedha* (height) and 32 *angulas* in *Parinaha* (circumference).²³
- In *Deerghayulakshanas* (signs of long lifespan), the *Shiras* is described as it should be a little larger but should be proportionate to the body of a baby.²⁴
- It is one of the more prominent structures in people with *Asthi Sara*.²⁵
- There are four *Shira Kapalaasthis* present in *Shiras*.²⁶
- *Nasa* (nose) is the opening for the *Shiras*.²⁷
- *Mastishka*/*Mastulunga* is considered as the *Majja* present inside *Shiras*.²⁸
- The *Pramana* of *Mastishka* is half *Anjali*.²⁹
- It is the main seat of *Pranavaata*.³⁰

Description of Shiras in the Context of Swasthya (Health)

- *Shiras* of a new born baby is cleaned and covered with cotton soaked in oil.³¹
- For *Deha Shodhana*, first *Shirovirechana* should be performed followed by other modes of *Shodhana* procedures like *Vamana* and *Virechana*.³²
- Use of *Murdhni Taila* (*Shiro-basti*, *Shiro-abhyanga*, *Shiro-dhara* and *Shiro-pichu*) is beneficial for strengthening structures of the *Shiras*.³³
- *Dhumapana* is good for *Shiras*.³⁴
- Use of *Nasya* and *Shiro-Abhyanga* over *Shirakapala* helps in the growth of hair and strengthening structures like *Snayu* and *Kandara* present in this region.³⁵
- *Pratimarsha Nasya* is good for strengthening *Shiras*.³⁶
- *Shirovirechana* is helpful in alleviating *Atinidra*.³⁷
- Use of *Purana Ghrita* is beneficial in many *Shirorogas*.³⁸
- *Swedana* is considered good for *Shiras*.³⁹

Description of Shiras in the Context of Aturavastha (Illness)

References of *Shiras* are found in many disorders and in many procedures like:

- Enumeration of *Arishtalakshanas* of a patient starting with *lakshanas* seen in the *shiras*.⁴⁰
- Many diseases affecting *Shiras* exclusively are mentioned like *Ardhavabhedaka*⁴¹, *Apatanaka*⁴², *Suryavarta*⁴³, *AnantaVaata*⁴⁴ etc.
- *Shiras* is affected in many disorders like *Raktaja vyadhi*⁴⁵, *Gulma roga*⁴⁶, *Shosha roga*⁴⁷, *Unmada roga*⁴⁸,

*Apasmara roga*⁴⁹, *Sannipata jwara*⁵⁰, *Yakshmaroga*, *Kshataksheena roga*⁵¹, *Kanthashaluka roga*⁵², *Sahaja arshas*⁵³, *Ajeerna roga*⁵⁴, *Tamaka Shwasa*⁵⁵, *Vatika Kasa*⁵⁶, *Trushna roga*⁵⁷, *Madatyaya*⁵⁸, *Dhvamsaka roga*⁵⁹, *Pratishyaya roga*⁶⁰ etc.

- Use of *teekshnadavyas* like *Kushta*, *Tagara* etc is contraindicated in use for treatments associated with *Murdhni* as they can harm the *Mastishka* or *Mastulunga*.⁶¹
- The factors like *Ucchabhashana* can affect *Shiras* inducing *Lakshanas* like *Shirashula* and *Shirastapa*.⁶²
- Different treatment modalities like
- *Snehana* and *Swedana* on *Shiras* help in *Shirokrimirogachikitsa* and *Vaataja Shiroroga Chikitsa*.^{63,64}
- *Dhumapana* in *Granthi* and *Visarparoga Chikitsa*.⁶⁵
- *Shirovirechana* in *Mukharoga Chikitsa*.⁶⁶
- *Gandushaprayoga* in *Trushnaroga Chikitsa*.⁶⁷
- *Tarpananasya* for strengthening structures of *Shiras*.⁶⁸
- *Avapidananasya* and its procedure and benefits.⁶⁹

Discussion

Shiras is one of the important *Angas* of the body and is considered one among the 10 *Pranayatana*s. In the context of *Shareera Rachana*, *Pranayatana* refers to the abode of life or the structures which are equivalent to life like, *Vaata (Pranavaata)*, as “*Shonita* (one among the *Saptadhatu*)”, as “*Indra* (the lord of *Indriyas*)” as it is the seat for all the *Indriyas*. etc. In particular, *Shiras* can be considered as a *Pranayatana* as it is the seat of *Pranavaata* and also the seat of all the *Indriyas* and hence known as *Uttamanga*.

Looking into the references of *Shiras*, discussion can be broadly classified into three categories, which further strengthens the view playing a very important role and performing the function of a *Pranayatana*:

- As an important structure which is substratum for many important structures
- As an organ connected to preservation of health and signs of diseases
- As a route of administration of medicines to treat many disorders

Shiras acts as a substratum for many entities like for *Prana Vaayu*, for the *Indriyas (Akshi, Ghana, Jihva and Karna)*, for housing seven openings of the body, namely two eyes, two nostrils, two ears and one mouth. It consists of *asthis (shirakapalaasthi)*, *Snayu*, *Kandara* and *Shiroruha* (hair). *Mastishka* and *Mastulunga* are considered as the *Majjadhatu* present inside *Shiras* which has an important role in controlling the bodily functions. It plays an important role in the identification and deciding factor for bodily features like *Prakruti*, *Dhatusaara* and *Deerghayu* of an individual.

Shiras has connections with the health-related practices mentioned in *Ayurveda* and with the signs and symptoms of many diseases as well. *Shodhana* of *Shiras* should be done first before proceeding with the other purification procedures. Many procedures like *Murdhnitaila (Shiroabhyanga, Shiropichu* etc.), *Nasya*, *Dhumapana*, *Swedana* are considered good for maintaining the health of *Shiras*. While enumerating the *Arishtalakshanas* (signs of imminent death), the symptoms begin with those affecting the *Shiras* first. *Shira Shula* (headache) is one of the most common symptoms affecting the head and is found in various disorders which affect the head like *Ardhavabhedaka*, *Anantavata*, *Suryavarta*, *Apatantraka* as well as many other diseases like *Gulma*, *Shosha*, *Ajeerna*, *Jwara*, *Kasa*, *Shwasa*, *Madatyaya*, etc.

Many treatment modalities like *Snehana*, *Swedana*, *Nasya*, *Dhumapana*, etc., are adopted to treat various ailments associated with *Shiras* or other *Vyadhis*. *Snehana* and *Swedana* are done on *Shiras* to treat various *Vataja* disorders. *Dhumapana* is done to treat diseases like *Granthi* and *Visarpa*, *Gandusha* is done to treat diseases like *Trushna*, *Tarpana*, *Avapidana* and *Pratimarshanasya* to strengthen the structures of *Shiras*.

Conclusion

The above discussion brings us to the conclusion that *Shiras* is rightly said as the *Uttamanga* or *Pradhanaanga*. It can be easily considered most important among all the other *Pranayatana* as it plays a very important role of substratum for many structures like *Jnanendriyas*, *Srothas* of *Jnanendriyas* and *Karmendriyas*⁷⁰ like that of the rays coming from sun and spreads all over the body, *Doshas*, *Malayanas* etc. It has connections with many other parts of the body as it is reflected in the form of signs and symptoms whenever there is an occurrence of a disease. It also plays a role of route of administration of many treatment modalities which helps in alleviating the diseases or maintaining the health of an individual. Hence *Shiras* should be protected by all means as it is truly an *Ayatana* of *Prana*.

Conflict of Interest: None

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