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Review Article

HRIDROGA AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE: BRIDGING AYURVEDIC CONCEPTS WITH CONTEMPORARY CARDIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are a major health concern throughout the world because of their contribution to illness, disability and premature death. CVDs are included under *Hridroga* in Ayurveda and it includes classical explanations of their causes, clinical features and management. This review discusses the Ayurvedic understanding of *Hridaya* and *Hridroga* and examines their possible relationship with cardiovascular disorders described in contemporary medicine. Acharya Charaka mentioned five types of *Hridroga- Vataja*, *Pittaja, Kaphaja, Sannipataja* and *Krimija-* which are considered in relation to selected modern cardiac conditions, particularly ischemic and inflammatory heart diseases. The review also describes traditional management approaches, including *Nidana Parivarjana*, *Shodhana, Shamana, Rasayana* and dietary regulation. Ayurveda focuses on the avoidance of disease-causing factors, healthy lifestyle habits and the maintenance of overall well-being. However, the Ayurvedic descriptions of heart diseases cannot always be directly correlated with modern cardiac diseases. The lack of strong clinical evidence, the need for standardized treatment methods and insufficient information about possible interactions between Ayurvedic medicines and conventional drugs remain important challenges. Ayurveda treatment cannot replace modern diagnostic procedures or emergency treatment in life threatening heart diseases. Further clinical research is needed to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of Ayurvedic interventions and to identify their appropriate role, where supported by evidence, alongside contemporary cardiovascular care.

INTRODUCTION

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the prime contributor to premature deaths and disability throughout the world. The report of Global Burden of Disease (GBD) estimates, CVDs are responsible for approximately 437 million disability adjusted life years (DALYs) in 2023, representing a significant increase from 320 million DALYs recorded in 1990. Ischemic heart disease, intracerebral haemorrhage, ischemic stroke and hypertensive heart disease are the leading cardiovascular causes of DALYs in 2023 globally. Age related CVD DALY rates are highest in low and lower middle Socio-demographic Index (SDI) settings and lowest in high SDI settings in the year 2023.

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Deaths increased globally from 13.1 million in 1990 to 19.2 million in 2023 due to CVDs. The global burden of cardiovascular disease has increased significantly over the past three decades. The estimated number of people living with CVD rose from 311 million in 1990 to 626 million in 2023. This shows that the burden has more than doubled. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that cardio-vascular diseases are responsible for approximately 17.9 million deaths annually, accounting for nearly 31% of all deaths worldwide. Heart attacks and strokes together contribute to around 85% of these deaths. Projections have also indicated that annual deaths from CVDs could reach 23.3 million by 2030.[1] Cardiovascular diseases cause a considerable proportion of deaths in low- and middle-income countries which together account for more than 75% of CVD related deaths worldwide. Limited access to preventive healthcare and timely treatment contributes to this burden. Ischemic heart disease and

cerebrovascular diseases particularly stroke is among the leading causes of cardiovascular mortality. India bears a considerable share of this burden, with reports indicating that it accounts for approximately one-fifth of cardiovascular deaths worldwide, including deaths among younger individuals. The GBD study estimated that India's age-standardized cardiovascular disease mortality rate was 272 deaths per 100,000 people, exceeding the global average of 235 deaths per 100,000. CVDs contributed to 28.1% of total deaths and 14.1% of total disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) compared with 15.2% and 6·9%, respectively in 1990 in India in 2016.[2]

Concept of *Hridaya*

The word Hridaya consists of– *'Hru', 'Da'* and *'Ya'. Hru* for Harati means to receive, *Da* for *Dadati* means to donate or to give, *Ya* for *Yagati* means controlling these above mentioned two functions.[3] Heart *(Hridaya)* is included in three vital organs *(Trimarma)*- Head *(Shira)* and urinary bladder *(Basti).* According to Acharya Susruta, *Hridaya* is *Sadya pranahara marma,* i.e., an injury to this organ can result in instant death. Acharya Charaka included Hridaya in *Dashavisheshayatana*, also known as *Pranayatana*, the seat of life. Acharya Kashyap mentioned *Hridaya* as *Maha marma*. *Hridaya* supplies *Rasa, Rakta* and *Oja* to the different parts of the human body through *Sira*, that's why *Hridaya* is kept under *Sira marma*.[4] According to Acharya Susruta, heart *(Hridaya)* is located in the thoracic cavity and just above the stomach. In the abdomen, lower down, the *Pleeha* (spleen) remains on the left side while the right side is filled with *Yakrit* (liver) and *Kloma* (pancreas).[5] The dimension of *Hridaya* is about four *Anguli pramana*. The shape of the *Hridaya* as mentioned in Sushruta, is an inverted lotus with a downward facing apex or *Adhomukha pundarika*.[6] Embryologically, *Hridaya* develops from the essence of *Shonita* and *Kapha*.[7] As per Ayurveda, *Hridaya* is a *Matrija bhava* organ.[8] *Hridaya* is also the *Sthana* of *Mana, Atma* and *Para Ojas. Hridaya* is the *Moola* of *Pranavaha srota* and *Rasavaha Srota*. It is also connected to the Ten *Mahadhamani* which provide the entire body with blood and nutrients. *Hridaya* is described as the *Moola* of *Sira*. The classics mention that the predominance of *Vyana vata, Sadhaka Pitta* and *Avalambaka Kapha* is seen in *Hridaya*. *Vyan vata* controls the rhythmic contraction and relaxation of the heart and also the pumping of blood. The cycle of blood circulation to the whole body and acquiring the same blood from the whole body is governed by *Vyana Vata*. *Sadhak pitta* is responsible for various emotional activities. According to Chakrapani, it is responsible for functions like *Bhaya* (fear), *Sourya* (courage), *Krodha* (anger) and *Harsa* (cheerfulness). *Avalambaka Kapha* is responsible for structural support, smooth functioning and nourishment of the heart. It also provides lubrication to the heart and helps to maintain the proper physiological functioning of the heart.[9]

Different Types of *Hridroga*

According to Charaka, *Hridroga* are five types, i.e., *Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja, Sannipataja* and Kriimija.

***Vataja hridroga* [10]**

Acharya Charaka specified the *Nidana* of *Vataja Hridroga* such as *Soka, Upavasa, Vayama, Ruksha Bhojana, Suska bhojana* and *Alpa bhojana*. Due to these etiological factors, *Vata* vitiates and enters the heart to manifest *Vataja hridroga*. The summary of the symptoms of *Vataja Hridroga* is shown in Table 1. Acharya Charaka advocates some of the clinical features of *Vataja Hridroga* like *Shunyata, Vepathu*, *Vestana, Stambha, Jeerna atyrtha vedana, Pramoha, dara* etc. Also, Acharya Susruta emphasizes the features of *Vataja hridroga* in *Susruta Samhita* such as *Aayamyata, Tudyate, Nirmathyate, Diryate* and *Sphotyate. Swas-rodha* manifestation was told by Vagbhat in *Astanga Samgraha*. Charaka does not mention chest pain specifically; he described the associated symptoms. Acharya Sushruta mentioned only about the nature of the pain in *Vataja hridroga*, where Acharya Bagbhat clarified as whole. All the symptoms mentioned in Ayurveda classics can be included under modern terms like precordial chest pain or retrosternal chest pain, palpitation or tachycardia and dyspnea or breathlessness etc. These symptoms can be correlated with ischemic heart disease (IHD) which is also known as coronary artery disease (CAD).

Table 1: Symptoms of *Vataja Hridroga*

Ayurvedic terminologies	Relevant modern terminology	Charaka Samhita	Sushruta Samhita	Astanga Hridaya	Astanga Samgraha
Vepathu	Tremors	+	-	+	+
Vestana	Cardiac cramps	+	-	+	+
Stambha	Heaviness	+	-	+	+
Shunyata	Sensation of void in cardiac region	+	-	+	+
Jeerna atyartha vedana	Post-prandial pain	+	-	-	-

Pramoha	Stupor	+	-	+	+
Dara	Tachycardia	+	-	-	-
Drava	Palpitation	+	-	+	+
Ayamyate	Drawing pain	-	+	-	-
Tudyate	Pricking pain	-	+	+	+
Nirmathyate	Twisting pain	-	+	-	-
Diryate	Cracking pain	-	+	-	-
Sphutyate	Exploding pain	-	+	+	+
Patyate	Splitting pain	-	+	-	-
Shulyate atyartham	Severe pain	-	-	+	+
Bhidyate	Cutting pain	-	-	+	+
Swasa rodha	Dyspnoea	-	-	+	+
Akaswat-dinata	Sudden sense of depression	-	-	+	+
Shoka	Grief	-	-	+	+
Bhaya	Fear	-	-	+	+
Shabda-asahishnuta	Intolerance to sound	-	-	+	+

Ischemic heart disease (IHD) comprises a spectrum of conditions caused by inadequate blood and oxygen supply to the myocardium, most commonly due to atherosclerotic narrowing of the coronary arteries. Clinically, it ranges from chronic coronary syndrome, commonly presenting as stable angina, to acute coronary syndrome (ACS), which includes unstable angina, non-ST-elevation myocardial infarction (NSTEMI) and ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI). Stable angina usually occurs with exertion and improves with rest, whereas ACS may present with new, worsening, or acute chest discomfort, sometimes even at rest. Myocardial infarction is characterized by myocardial injury due to acute myocardial ischemia and is broadly classified into NSTEMI and STEMI. Typical symptoms include chest pressure, heaviness or squeezing, with possible radiation to the arm, shoulder, neck, jaw or back, along with breathlessness, sweating, nausea, vomiting or fatigue.

Pittaja Hridroga **[11]**

The specific causative factors for the *Pittaja hridroga* as told by Charaka are *Ushna, Amla, Lavana, Kshar, Katu bhojana; Ajirna bhojana, Madya sevana, Krodha* etc. The symptoms of *Pittaja hridroga* mentioned in the classics don't indicate any specific cardiac disease related to modern science. But to some extent, some of the features mimic inflammatory cardiac disease. Inflammatory cardiac disease is an umbrella term which covers endocarditis, myocarditis and pericarditis. The symptomatology is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Symptoms of *Pittaja Hridroga*

Ayurvedic terminologies	**Relevant modern terminology**	**Charak Samhita**	**Sushruta Samhita**	**Astanga Hridaya**	**Astanga Samgraha**
Hrid Daha	Heart burn	+	-	-	-
Tiktate Baktre	Bitter taste	+	-	-	-
Tikta-Amla Udgiran	Bitter and sour eructation	+	-	-	-
Trishna	Thirst	+	+	+	+
Kloma	Exhaustion	+	-	+	+
Murcha	Fainting	+	+	+	+
Bhrama	Giddiness	+	-	+	+
Sveda	Perspiration	+	+	+	+
Tamoudayan	Darkness of vision	+	-	-	-
Moha	Stupor	+	-	-	-
Santras	Fear	+	-	-	-
Tapa	Burning sensation	+	-	-	-

Jara	Fever	+	-	+	+
Pitabha	Icteric tinge	+	+	+	+
Daha	Burning sensation	+	+	+	+
Osha	Burning pain	-	+	-	-
Chosa	Sucking pain	-	+	-	-
Sosho Mukhasya	Dryness in mouth	-	+	-	-
Hridaya Kloma	Heaviness in heart	-	+	-	-
Dhumayan	Fumy eructation	-	+	+	+

Kaphaja Hridroga [12]

Excessive intake of *Guru, Snigdha Ahara. Achintanam, Achestanam, Nidrasukham* are the *Nidana* of *Kaphaja hridroga*. *"Ashmavruta bharika"* is the main character of pain in *Kaphaja hridroga*, which means a feeling of heaviness manifested because of *Avarodha* in the heart by *Kapha* and *Meda*. *"Hridaya stimita"* is due to *Margavarana* of *Rasavaha srotas*, leading to deprivation of *Rasadi dhatus. Swasa avarodha* directly involves to *Pranavaha srotas* and can be correlated with exertional dyspnea. The symptomatology is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Symptoms of *Kaphaja Hridroga*

Ayurvedic terminologies	Relevant modern terminology	Charak Samhita	Sushruta Samhita	Astanga Hridaya	Astanga Samgraha
Hridaya suptata	Dullness in cardiac region	+	-	-	-
Hridaya stimita	Stiffness in cardiac region	+	-	-	-
Hridaya bharikata	Heaviness in cardiac region	+	-	+	+
Hridaya ashmavrita	Feeling as if the heart is pressed by a stone	+	-	+	+
Hridaya stabdhata	Heart block/rigidity of heart region	+	+	+	+
Kasa	Cough	+	+	+	+
Kapha praseka	Excessive salivation/expectoration	-	+	+	+
Aruchi	Anorexia/loss of appetite	-	+	+	+
Agnimardava	Indigestion/weak digestion	-	+	-	-
Asaya-madhurya	Sweet taste in mouth	-	+	-	-
Tandra	Torpor / drowsiness	+	-	-	-
Stabdha	Fixity / rigidity	+	+	-	-
Gurutwa	Heaviness	+	+	+	+
Jvara	Fever	+	-	+	+
Nidra	Sleepiness	-	-	+	+
Alasya	Lassitude/lethargy	-	-	+	+

Tridoshaja* and *Krimija Hridroga [13]

In case of *Tridosaja Hridroga*, the *Nidana* of the *Vataja, Pittaja* and *Kaphaja hridroga* act together. All the *Lakshana* of *Tridosha* also appear combinedly. If a *Tridosaja* affected person takes *Tila, Kshira, Guda,* etc then a *Granthi* will be formed where colonisation of *Krimi* would take place. Charaka explained the cutting type and needle pricking pain in *Krimija hridroga*. Susruta advocates symptoms like *Utklesa, Stivana, Toda, Sula, Hrillasa, Aruchi, Shyava netra* and *Sosa*. As per Charaka, *Krimija hridroga* is a complication of *Tridosaja hridroga*, whereas Susruta doesn't even mention the *Tridosaja hridroga. Tridosaja hridroga* can be correlated with acute myocardial infarction and *Krimija hridroga* can be correlated with rheumatic heart disease.

Management of *Hridroga* [14]

Nidana Parivarjana

Nidana Parivarjana or avoidance of causative factors, is the first step in managing *Hridroga*. Excessive or incompatible food intake, irregular

dietary habits, psychological stress, anger, alcohol consumption and lack of physical activity may contribute to cardiovascular disorders. Appropriate dietary regulation, lifestyle modification and stress management are therefore important components of preventive care.

Shodhana Chikitsa

Shodhana procedures described in the classical context of *Hridroga* vary according to the predominant *Dosha*.

- ***Vataja Hridroga:*** *Tila taila* processed with *Sauviraka, Mastu, Takra* and *Saindhava Lavana* is described for internal administration. *Vamana* with *Dashamoola Kwatha, Sneha* and *Saindhava Lavana*, followed by *Snehana*, is also mentioned.
- ***Pittaja Hridroga:*** *Virechana* using *Draksha*, *Madhu, Misri* and *Phalsa Rasa* are described, followed by a *Pitta*-pacifying diet.
- ***Kaphaja Hridroga*****:** *Vamana* using *Vacha* and *Nimba Kashaya,* followed by *Svedana* and *Langhana*, is mentioned.

Shamana Chikitsa

Shamana Chikitsa includes the use of medicinal plants, classical formulations, dietary measures and *Rasayana* preparations.

Single herbs: *Arjuna, Rasona, Pushkarmoola, Kankola, Gojihva, Tulasi, Chakramarda, Shigru, Yavani, Shunthi, Bakuchi, Katuki* and *Pippali* can be used in *Hridroga*. The *Hridya Mahakashaya* group includes *Amra*, *Amrataka, Lakucha, Karamarda, Vrikshamla, Amlavetas, Kuvala, Badara, Dadima* and *Matulunga*.

Churna **preparations:** Classical formulations include *Pippalyadi Churna, Arjuna Twak Churna, Pushkarmoola Churna, Nagabala Churna, Hingwadi Churna, Vidangadi Churna* and *Trivrityadi Churna*.

Kwatha **preparations:** *Pushkarmooladi Kwatha, Katphaladi Kashaya* and *Dashamoola Kwatha* are mentioned for different presentations of *Hridroga*.

Ghrita **and** ***Kshirpaka*****:** *Haritakyadi Ghrita, Tryushnadi Ghrita, Drakshadi Ghrita, Kasherukadi Ghrita, Sthiradi Ghrita* and *Arjuna Ghrita* are described. *Arjuna* bark powder prepared as *Kshirpaka* is another formulation mentioned in the source text.

Rasayana **and** ***Rasaushadhi*****:** *Shilajatu Rasayana*, *Chyavanprasha, Agastya Haritaki Avaleha, Brahma Rasayana* and *Amalaki Rasayana* are listed. The classical herbo-mineral preparations mentioned include *Nagarjunabhraka, Kalyanasundara Rasa*, *Chintamani Rasa, Vishweshvara Rasa, Hridyanava Rasa, Panchanana Rasa* and *Prabhakara Vati*.

DISCUSSION

Chronic cardiac disorders need preventive cardiac measures. Before administering any kind of therapeutic intervention, *Nidana parivarjana* itself is an ancient concept of preventive care. The prime factor that contributes to coronary arterial disorders or hypertensive disorders is atherosclerosis, which is the consequence of hyperlipidemia. The formation of plaque obstructs the vessel, i.e. *Sanga* in Ayurveda. Intake of a large amount of junk food, smoking, sedentary lifestyle etc., are the prime risk factors for coronary arterial disorders. Drugs which are good for *Srotoshodhana* (cleansing of channels) are beneficial in coronary artery obstruction and for chronic hypertensive disorders. *Shodhana (Panchakarma)* removes the *Ama* (toxins) from the body, which plays a vital role in cardiac channel obstruction. Stress management and mental wellbeing are another aspect of maintaining cardiovascular health and can be achieved through *Sadvritta* and *Shirodhara*. Ayurveda drugs can be used adjuvantly with the modern management of mild hypertension and stable angina. All the *Hridya mahakasaya* herbs are *Amla* in taste i.e., a source of vitamin C. Vitamin C is a scientifically proven antioxidant and good for hyperlipidemia management. On the other hand, Ayurveda cannot perform emergency interventions like administering thrombolytics for myocardial infarction. In case of acute myocardial infarction, the intervention of modern medicine is the only choice. Drugs like nitroglycerin, low molecular weight heparin play a major role in the management of acute coronary syndrome. The invasive therapies like PCI and CABG are life-saving. For diagnosing and monitoring cardiac disease, modern diagnostic tools like ECG and Echocardiogram are very accurate for monitoring blockage levels, the part of the heart involved, valvular heart disease, anatomical anomaly of the heart, ejection fraction etc. Lack of proper research on Ayurveda drug and modern cardiac drug interactions.

CONCLUSION

All the symptoms of *Hridroga* are related to the *Rasavaha srotas* and *Pranavaha srotas*. Lack of proper research on Ayurveda drug and modern cardiac drug interactions is the main concern of the Ayurveda physician regarding the Ayurvedic management of cardiac disease. Ayurveda needs more research in this field to develop and standardize treatment protocols. Mainly the accurate disease correlation with modern medicine should be established to use modern diagnostic tools properly. The aim of this article was to highlight the scope and limitations of cardiology in Ayurveda.

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