



GRAHANI CHIKITSA (CHIKITSA STHANA, CHAPTER 15): AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW ON DIGESTION, METABOLISM, AND GRAHANI DOSHA

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ABSTRACT

Grahani Chikitsa, the fifteenth chapter of *Chikitsa Sthana* in *Charaka Samhita*, presents a comprehensive exposition on digestion, metabolism, and disorders arising from impaired digestive fire (Agni). The chapter is systematically divided into three sections: normal physiology of digestion, pathological digestion, and *grahanidosha*—a spectrum of digestive and metabolic disorders. The concept of Agni as the central regulator of health is elaborated through the functions of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. Disturbance in these leads to the formation of *ama*, *shukta*, and *amavisha*, which act as pathogenic substrates. *Grahani* is identified as the anatomical and functional seat of digestion and absorption. The chapter also provides detailed classification, clinical features, and management strategies for *grahanidosha* based on doshic predominance. This review integrates classical *Ayurvedic* principles with contemporary biomedical correlations, highlighting the relevance of *Grahani Chikitsa* in understanding functional gastrointestinal disorders, malabsorption syndromes, and metabolic dysregulation.

Keywords: *Grahani*, *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, *Dhatvagni*, *Grahanidosha*, Digestion, Metabolism,

1. INTRODUCTION

Grahani Chikitsā is regarded as one of the most important chapters of the *Charaka Samhitā*, as *Ayurveda* considers disorders of digestion and metabolism to be the root cause of the majority of diseases. The strategic placement of this chapter—after *Arśa Roga Chikitsā* (hemorrhoids) and before *Pāṇḍu Roga Chikitsā* (anemia)—reflects the close pathological interrelationship among these

conditions. Disturbance of *agni* plays a crucial role in the pathogenesis of *arśa*, while deranged *grahaṇī* function significantly contributes to the development of *pāṇḍu*.

The initial part of *Grahani Chikitsā* elaborates the physiological processes of digestion, metabolism, and tissue nourishment. *Agni*, being the fundamental determinant of health and disease, is described in detail. The chapter begins with an exposition on the importance of normally functioning *agni* and proceeds to explain digestion (*pāka*), metabolism, and tissue nourishment (*dhātu poṣaṇa*). Classical theories of tissue nourishment described by commentators, along with the concepts of *upadhātu* and *dhātu mala*, are discussed to establish a physiological basis for understanding disease. These principles form the foundation for comprehending the pathogenesis and management of *grahaṇī doṣa*, emphasizing that sound knowledge of physiology is indispensable for rational therapeutics.

Protection and preservation of *agni* are considered essential in the management of all diseases.^[1] *Chakrapāṇi* explains that *arśa*, *atisāra*, and *grahaṇī doṣa* are *paraspara hetu*, meaning that one disease may act as the cause of another.^[2] Clinically, chronic intestinal disorders may coexist or progress sequentially, highlighting their mutual interdependence. Charaka clearly states that these conditions originate from *agnimāndya*, and restoration of *agni* leads to therapeutic success.^[1] Hence, special emphasis is placed on assessing and maintaining *agni bala*.

Charaka emphasizes that correction of impaired *agni* forms the cornerstone of treatment for these disorders.

Vāta is described as *agnisakha*, indicating that the strength of *agni* depends upon *vāta*. Both *vāta kṣaya* and *vāta prakopa* result in *agnimāndya*. Therefore, diet (*anna*), drinks (*pāna*), and medicines (*auśadha*) that promote proper *vāta anulomana* are highly beneficial. *Vāta anulomana* refers to the normalization of *vāta* movement rather than purgation alone. Among the five types of *vāta*, *samāna* and *apāna vāyu* play a pivotal role in *arśa*, *atisāra*, and *grahaṇī doṣa*. Obstructed *vāta* movement leads to constipation and hemorrhoids, whereas excessive movement results in diarrhea, indicating the need for balanced regulation.^[3]

Charaka further expands the scope of this chapter by using the term *grahaṇī doṣa*, encompassing both structural and functional disturbances. An intrinsic relationship exists between *grahaṇī* (organ) and *agni* (function); derangement of either leads to digestive impairment. *Grahani* is described as the seat of *jatharāgni*, which governs longevity, strength, complexion, metabolism, vitality, and *ojas*.^[4] Normal *agni* ensures health, while vitiated *agni* results in disease.^[5]

Finally, *Pāṇḍu roga* arises due to deficient nourishment of blood-forming components. Impaired digestion and absorption in *grahaṇī* lead to poor assimilation of nutrients such as iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12, resulting in anemia. This physiological and pathological linkage explains the placement of *Grahani Chikitsā* between *Arśa* and *Pāṇḍu Roga Chikitsā*, underscoring the central role of digestion in health and disease.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1. Aim

To undertake a comprehensive and critical review of *Grahani Doṣa Chikitsā* as described in *Charaka Samhitā* (*Chikitsā Sthāna*), with special emphasis on the concept of *Agni*, *Āma*, *Grahani*, their pathogenesis, clinical manifestations, and therapeutic approaches, and to correlate these classical Ayurvedic principles with contemporary understanding of digestion, metabolism, malabsorption, and gut physiology.

2.2. Objectives

- To study the concept of *Dehāgni*
- To understand the physiological process of digestion
- To analyze the formation and metabolism of *Dhātus*
- To study the concept of *Āma* and *Annaviṣa*
- To classify, describe *Grahani Doṣa*, diagnostic and therapeutic principles of *Grahani*

3. Material and Method

- Primary source: *Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana, Chapter 15 (Grahani Chikitsa)* with *Chakrapani's Ayurveda Dipika* commentary
- Supplementary references from *Sutra, Vimana*, and other relevant chapters of *Charaka Samhita*
- Contemporary literature on gastrointestinal physiology, metabolism, malabsorption, inflammatory bowel disease, gut microbiome, and endocrine regulation

3.1 Threefold Digestion: *Jatharagni, Bhutagni, and Dhatvagni*

3.1.1 *Jatharagni and Avasthāpāka* ^{[6],[7],[8],[9]}

The first phase of digestion is governed by *jatharagni*, operating in the gastrointestinal tract. Food undergoes three sequential stages known as *avasthāpāka*:

- ***Madhura avasthā* (sweet stage):** occurs immediately after ingestion, leading to *kapha* production characterized by frothy, mucous-like secretions.
- ***Amla avasthā* (sour stage):** takes place during partial digestion, associated with *pitta* release, particularly *accha pitta*.
- ***Kaṭu avasthā* (pungent stage):** occurs in the *pakvāsaya* (colon), where drying and solidification of waste occur, producing *vāta*.

These stages demonstrate that *doṣa* production is physiological, occurring in a predictable sequence during digestion.

3.1.2 *Bhutagni and Panchabhoutika Metabolism* ^{[10],[11]}

Following absorption, digestion proceeds at the level of *bhutagni*, where each of the five *bhutagnis* metabolizes food components homologous to their respective *mahābhūta*. This stage explains selective assimilation and systemic metabolism. *Bhutagni* action ensures that food substances become compatible with bodily tissues before entering tissue-level transformation.

3.1.3 *Dhatvagni and Tissue-Level Metabolism* ^[12]

The final stage of digestion is mediated by seven *dhatvagnis*, each specific to one *dhātu*. Through this process, nutrients are transformed into *prasāda* (nutritive essence) and *kiṭṭa* (waste). This concept reflects continuous cellular metabolism, tissue renewal, and waste generation, emphasizing that *dhātus* are dynamic rather than static structures.

3.2. Formation of *Dhātus, Upadhātus, and Malas* ^{[13],[14],[15]}

Classical literature elaborates a sequential transformation of *dhātus* — *rasa, rakta, māṃsa, meda, asthi, majjā*, and *śukra*. Each *dhātu* produces:

Upadhātus (secondary tissues), such as *stanya* from *rasa*, *sira* and *kandara* from *rakta*, *tvacā* from *māṃsa*.

Malas (waste products), including *kapha* from *rasa*, *pitta* from *rakta*, sweat from *meda*, hair from *asthi*, and sebaceous secretions from *majjā*.

This systematic description establishes that health depends on balanced transformation and elimination, and disease arises when either process is impaired.

3.3. Role of *Vāta* in Digestion and Circulation ^{[16],[17],[18]}

Vāta plays a decisive role in digestion and metabolism. *Prāṇa vāta* transports food to the *koṣṭha*, *samāna vāta* kindles *agni* and separates *sāra* from *kiṭṭa*, *vyāna vāta* circulates *rasa* throughout the body, and *apāna vāta* governs excretion. Disturbance in *vāta* disrupts digestion, absorption, circulation, and elimination, leading to *agnidūṣṭi* and *grahāṇīdoṣa*.

3.4. *Ama, Śukta, and Amaviṣa: Pathological Products of Impaired Agni* ^{[19],[20]}

When *agni* becomes impaired due to improper diet and lifestyle, digestion remains incomplete, producing *ama*. *Ama* undergoes fermentation to form *śukta* and later transforms into *amaviṣa*, a toxic

entity capable of associating with *doṣa* and *dhātu*. *Amaviṣa* is described as antigenic and systemic, producing manifestations ranging from indigestion to multisystem disorders.

3.5. *Kha-Vaiguṇya* and Localization of Disease ^[21]

Charaka introduces the concept of *kha-vaiguṇya*, indicating vulnerability or structural-functional defects in *srotas*. Circulating *rasa* or *doṣa* lodges at these defective sites, initiating disease. This mechanism is compared to rainfall occurring where clouds encounter obstruction, highlighting the importance of tissue susceptibility in disease localization.

3.6. *Grahaṇīdoṣa*: Definition and Classification

Grahaṇīdoṣa is defined as a condition where *grahaṇī* fails to retain food till complete digestion due to *agnidūṣṭi*. ^[22] It is classified into four types: ^[23]

- ***Vātāja Grahaṇī*** – dominated by malabsorption, dryness, pain, bloating, irregular stools. ^[24]
- ***Pittāja Grahaṇī*** – characterized by inflammation, acidity, burning sensation, yellowish loose stools. ^[25]

- ***Kaphāja Grahaṇī*** – marked by heaviness, mucous stools, lethargy, anorexia. ^[26]

- ***Sannipātāja Grahaṇī*** – severe, chronic form involving all three *doṣas*. ^[27]

Each type exhibits distinct etiological factors, clinical features, and therapeutic principles.

3.7. Clinical Features and Premonitory Symptoms

Premonitory symptoms include thirst, heaviness, delayed digestion, fatigue, and burning sensation. ^[28] Fully developed *grahaṇī* presents with altered bowel habits, anorexia, distaste, excessive salivation, weakness, edema, joint pain, fever, eructation with foul or sour taste, and systemic manifestations due to malabsorption. ^[29]

3.8. Therapeutic Principles in *Grahaṇīdoṣa*

Management focuses on:

- ***Agnidīpana*** (enhancing digestive fire)
- ***Āmapācana*** (eliminating toxic metabolites)
- ***Doṣasādhana*** (purificatory therapies)
- ***Vātānulomana*** (normalizing *vāta* movement)

Treatment is individualized based on *doṣa* predominance and stage of disease.

3.9. *Panchakarma* and Internal Medications

Classical texts prescribe *vamana*, *virecana*, *nirūha basti*, and *anuvāsana basti* according to disease presentation. Internal medications include *ghṛta*, *kṣāra*, *āsava*, *ariṣṭa*, and various *cūrṇa* formulations. Fermented preparations and buttermilk (*takra*) are emphasized as cornerstone therapies.

3.10. Role of *Takra* (Buttermilk) in *Grahaṇī* ^[30]

Takra is described as *deepana*, *grahī*, *laghu*, and *doṣa*-balancing, making it ideal for *grahaṇīdoṣa*. It improves digestion, absorbs excess intestinal moisture, balances *vāta*, pacifies *kapha*, and does not aggravate *pitta* due to *madhura vipāka*. Its extensive use anticipates modern probiotic therapy.

3.11. *Samāgni*, *Viśamāgni*, *Mandāgni*, and *Tikṣṇāgni*

Four states of *agni* are described: ^[31]

- ***Samāgni*** – balanced digestion and health
- ***Mandāgni*** – slow digestion and disease predisposition
- ***Viśamāgni*** – irregular digestion
- ***Tikṣṇāgni*** – excessive digestion leading to tissue depletion

Among these, *samāgni* is the goal of therapy.

3.12. *Atyagni* (Hypermetabolism) and Its Management ^[32]

Atyagni arises due to depleted *kapha*, aggravated *pitta*, and associated *vāta*. It results in rapid digestion, tissue depletion, thirst, fainting, and exhaustion. Management includes heavy, unctuous, sweet, cold, and liquid diets, frequent feeding, and *pitta*-pacifying measures.

3.13. Dietary Etiology: *Samāsana*, *Viśamāsana*, and *Adhyāsana* ^[33]

Improper dietary practices are highlighted as major causes of *grahaṇīdoṣa*:

- *Samāsana* – mixing wholesome and unwholesome foods
- *Viśamāsana* – irregular quantity and timing
- *Adhyāsana* – eating before previous food is digested

All three are described as potentially fatal if practiced habitually.

4. Results

The analysis of *Grahani Chikitsā* reveals that disorders of digestion and metabolism originate primarily from deranged *agni*. Normal functioning of *jatharāgni*, *bhūtāgni*, and *dhātvāgni* ensures proper digestion, tissue nourishment, and metabolic balance, whereas their impairment leads to *āma* formation and *grahaṇīdoṣa*. The study establishes that *vāta*, especially *samāna* and *apāna vāyu*, plays a decisive role in regulating digestive and absorptive processes.

Classification of *grahaṇīdoṣa* based on *doṣa* predominance provides clarity in understanding varied clinical presentations such as malabsorption, diarrhea, constipation, and systemic weakness. Therapeutic strategies centered on enhancing *agni*, eliminating *āma*, regulating *vāta* movement, and adopting appropriate dietary measures—particularly the use of *takra*—are found to be fundamental in management. The results confirm that maintenance of *agni* is central to both prevention and treatment of digestive and systemic disorders, validating the clinical relevance of *Grahani Chikitsā*.

5. Discussion

The present review highlights the comprehensive and systematic approach adopted in *Grahani Chikitsā* for understanding digestion, metabolism, and disease causation in Ayurveda. The concept of threefold digestion—*Jatharāgni*, *Bhūtāgni*, and *Dhātvāgni*—provides a multilayered explanation of digestion that extends from gastrointestinal processing to tissue-level metabolism. The description of *avasthāpāka* clearly establishes that *doṣa* formation during digestion is a normal physiological phenomenon and not inherently pathological, emphasizing the importance of balance rather than suppression.

The sequential transformation of *sapta dhātus*, along with the formation of *upadhātus* and malas, reflects an advanced understanding of continuous tissue renewal and metabolic waste elimination. This concept closely aligns with modern views of cellular metabolism and turnover. The pivotal role of *vāta*, particularly *samāna* and *apāna vāyu*, underscores the regulatory importance of movement and coordination in digestion, absorption, circulation, and excretion. Disturbance in *vāta gati* is shown to directly impair *agni*, leading to *agnidūṣṭi* and *grahaṇīdoṣa*.

The discussion on *āma*, *śukta*, and *āmaviṣa* elaborates the pathological consequences of impaired digestion, explaining how metabolic toxins can produce both localized gastrointestinal symptoms and systemic manifestations. The concept of *kha-vaiguṇya* further strengthens the Ayurvedic explanation of disease localization by emphasizing tissue susceptibility.

Classification of *grahaṇīdoṣa* into *vātaja*, *pittaja*, *kaphaja*, and *sannipātaja* types allows for individualized diagnosis and management. Therapeutic principles focusing on *agnidīpana*, *āmapācana*, *doṣaśodhana*, and *vāta anulomana* reflect a holistic and root-cause-oriented treatment approach. The emphasis on *takra* as a therapeutic dietary agent demonstrates Ayurveda's foresight regarding gut health and microbial balance. Overall, *Grahani Chikitsā* presents an integrated framework linking physiology, pathology, diet, and therapeutics.

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