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A Review on the Concept of *Hridaya* in Ayurveda

Shivani Arora*

*Department of Kriya Sharir, Ch. Brahm Prakash Ayurved Charak Sansthan, New Delhi

ABSTRACT

The concept of *Hridaya* is found in nearly all the texts of *Ayurveda*. It is well described in “*Arthe Dash Mahamully Adhyaya*” and “*Trimarmiya Adhyaya*” of *Charak Samhita* and in “*Garbh-Vyakarana Shariropkramnitya Adhyaya*” of *Sushrut Sharir Sthana*. The word *Hridaya* itself is expressive of its function, which is *Hr*-taking, *Da*-giving, and *Ya*-moving. In *Ayurveda*, we have certain examples where a single term has multiple meanings to indicate different materials in different concepts. *Hridaya* is one of such examples. A careful study reveals that, at least two organs share almost equal claims to put themselves synonymous with the term *Hridaya*. At one end of the scale, it is the view that *Hridaya* is brain and on the other extremity is the notion that *Hridaya* refers to heart. *Ayurveda* described both brain and heart under one dome i.e., *Hridaya*. As per *Ayurvedic* treatises, *Hridaya* is not an organ that pumps blood, but something with much extensive area of action. *Samhitas* claims that *Hridaya* is that which controls body, mind, and senses and also is a seat of the intellect and vitality. But they had not mentioned the physiology of *Hridaya* especially how intellect, mind, sense of perception works though they are situated in *Hridaya*. In view of this, the entity *Hridaya* attracts the attention. Through this article, an attempt has been made to understand the *Hridaya* in the sense of heart and brain.

KEYWORDS

Hridaya, Heart, Brain, Mind



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INTRODUCTION

Hridaya is described as regards its size, location and relation with surrounding structures in ancient literature. The shape of *Hridaya* is defined like a lotus whose apex or mouth is directed downwards¹. While describing the location, *Acharya Sushruta* says that *Hridaya* is situated in between the two breasts, in the chest at the mouth of the stomach². In the *Garbh Vyakarana Sharir* (embryology), he also mentions that *Pleeha* (spleen) & *Phuphus* (lung) are placed below the left side of the *Hridaya* whereas *Yakrut* (liver) and *Klome* (gall bladder) are situated below the right side of the *Hridaya*³. Likewise *Acharya Sharangdhara* stated in part-1st that *Hridaya* is situated in the thorax between breasts. He further cites that, human body is nourished because of pure blood circulated by *Hridaya* with the help of *Vyana Vayu*⁴. This depiction clearly indicates that *Hridaya* is the muscular heart which is found in thoracic region. There are some other references listed below, which indicates that *Hridaya* is nothing but heart.

❖ *Acharya Charaka* has counted *Hridaya* one among 15 *Koshtang*, which means that it is the organ that is in proximity to the *Koshtha* (alimentary canal)⁵.

❖ In *Trimarmiya Adhyaya*, *Charaka* has described three *Marmas* viz, *Hridaya*, *Shira*

and *Basti*. Here *Shira* is mentioned separately so by *Hridaya* we understand as heart.

❖ *Acharya Sushruta* mentioned *Hridaya* as the *mool* of *Pranavaha Srotasa* (channels or passages of life/air/respiration) and *Rasavaha Srotasa* (channels carrying *rasa*-nutrient tissue) along with *Rasavahini dhamni* (arteries carrying *rasa dhatu*)⁶.

❖ *Acharya Charaka* has numbered *Hridaya* in *Dash Pranayatana*⁷.

❖ *Hridaya* and *Pranavaha Srotasa* attached to it are produced by the essence of *Shonita* (blood) & *Kapha*.

❖ *Vagbhata* has mentioned *Hridaya* as *moola* of *siras*⁸.

❖ *Hridaya* is the centre of *Ojas*.

❖ *Acharya Charaka* considers it in *Dashmahamoola*⁹.

Now coming to other part of the story, where *Hridaya* regards as brain. References which justify *Hridaya* as brain are following:-

❖ The body with six divisions, intellect, sense organs, five sense objects, self together with qualities and mind along with its objects are located in *Hridaya*¹⁰.

❖ If *Hridaya* gets injured, one gets *murcha* and even death on its severe painful conditions¹¹.

❖ *Hridaya* is the seat of excellent *Ojas* and reservoir of consciousness¹².



❖ *Hridaya* is the seat of *Chetana* (conscious principle) in living beings, when this is invaded by *Tamoguna*, person get sleep¹³.

❖ In the fourth month because of clear development of the *Hridaya* of the foetus, *Chetana dhatu* becomes expressive of it (*Hridaya*) being his seat (*Atma*)¹⁴.

❖ While describing pathogenesis of *Apasmara* (epilepsy), *Charaka* says that the vitiated doshas spread over *Hridaya* in those having mind disturbed by *Rajas* and *Tamas* as stay there. While staying there when they gets excited by emotions such as passion, anger, fear, greed, confusion, exhilaration, greed, anxiety, agitation etc... And fill up the *Hridaya* and seats of sense organs suddenly the person is attacked by epilepsy¹⁵.

❖ In those with perverted mind and abundant morbidity due to intake of unwholesome & unclean food. Infliction of mind with *Rajas* and *Tamas*, masking of *Hridaya* with *Doshas* & injury of mind by anxiety, passion, fear, anger, grief, agitation etc... Epilepsy comes forth¹⁶.

❖ While describing pathogenesis of *Unmad* (insane), *Charaka* says that the vitiated *Doshas* affects the *Hridaya*, which is the seat of intellect. In those persons having small proportion of *Sattva* (*guna*).there from, reaching the mind-

carrying channels they derange the mind of the person quickly¹⁷.

❖ *Madya* (wine) having entered into the *Hridaya*, counteracts the ten properties of *Ojas* with its corresponding ten properties and thus upsets the mind¹⁸.

❖ *Hridaya* is the seat of channels of *Rasa*, *Vata*, psyche, intellect, and senses, self and primary *ojas*. Hence by excessive drinking (*madya*) & consequent damage of *Ojas*. Thereby, *Hridaya* as well as the *dhatu*s located there gets affected¹⁹.

❖ *Vayu* vitiated by its own aggravating factors moves upwards from its place reaching *Hridaya* and then head & temples, afflicts them and bends the body like bow, causes convulsions & mental confusions. The patient breathes with difficulty, has stiff and closed eyes, loses consciousness & groans like pigeon. This is known as *Apatantraka* (hysteria)²⁰.

❖ In *Hridaya*, ten *dhamnis*, *prana* & *apana*, mind, intellect, consciousness & *mahabhutas* are established as spokes in the hub. In head senses, channels carrying them & vital breath are located as rays in the sun²¹.

❖ The *pitta* present in the *Hridaya* is *Sadhak pitta* and it is responsible for fulfilling the desires of the mind²².

❖ Desire, aversion, happiness, misery, will, consciousness, control, knowledge,



memory & ego-these are the signs of the self²³.

The above mentioned references clearly indicate that consciousness, mind, intellect, memory, knowledge etc., are seated in the *Hridaya*. It concludes that *Hridaya* is a psychosomatic entity, which influences psyche as well as soma.

DISCUSSION

❖ The shape of *Hridaya* resembles *adhomukha pundrika*, whose apex is directed downwards. Both the organs (heart & brain) also resembles with the shape of *Hridaya*. The heart with aorta & brain with spinal cord come into view like lotus, where the descending aorta & spinal cord resembles the stalk of lotus. Also both the organs have downward direction.

❖ The verses from *Ayurvedic* texts which concerns with apoplexy, insanity, hysteria etc., indicates that these are diseases of nervous system.

❖ *Hridaya* described as the seat of consciousness, mind, intellect, memory, knowledge etc., clearly indicates the functions of brain and not that of heart.

❖ *Yogavashista* suggests that there are two *Hridaya*, one in thoracic & other in head region²⁴.

❖ Taking to a compromise two *Hridaya* have been accepted, namely *urohridaya*

and *shirohridaya*. *Urohridaya* is to be accepted wherever the references is related to the circulation of *Rasa, Rakta* etc. it will be considered *shirohridaya* wherever the reference is related to the seat of *buddhi, manas, chetana & indriya*²⁵.

CONCLUSION

Many researches studying heart shows that it is a sensory organ with a sophisticated centre for receiving & processing information. The nervous system of the heart enables it to learn, remember & make functional decisions independent of the brain's cerebral cortex. Furthermore, many experiments have demonstrated that the signals by heart continuously sends to the brain controls the function of higher brain centre involved in perception, cognition & emotional processing. This clearly indicates that *Hridaya* performs & regulate the functions of circulatory system as well as nervous system²⁶. Finally, from above references we can conclude that *Hridaya* can be as heart for taking & giving impure & pure blood and as brain by its functioning of knowledge, memory, intellect etc... *Hridaya* is used to mean brain & heart as combined & never alone as generally believed. So the physician should keep in mind both as *Hridaya* to diagnose & treat any disease.



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