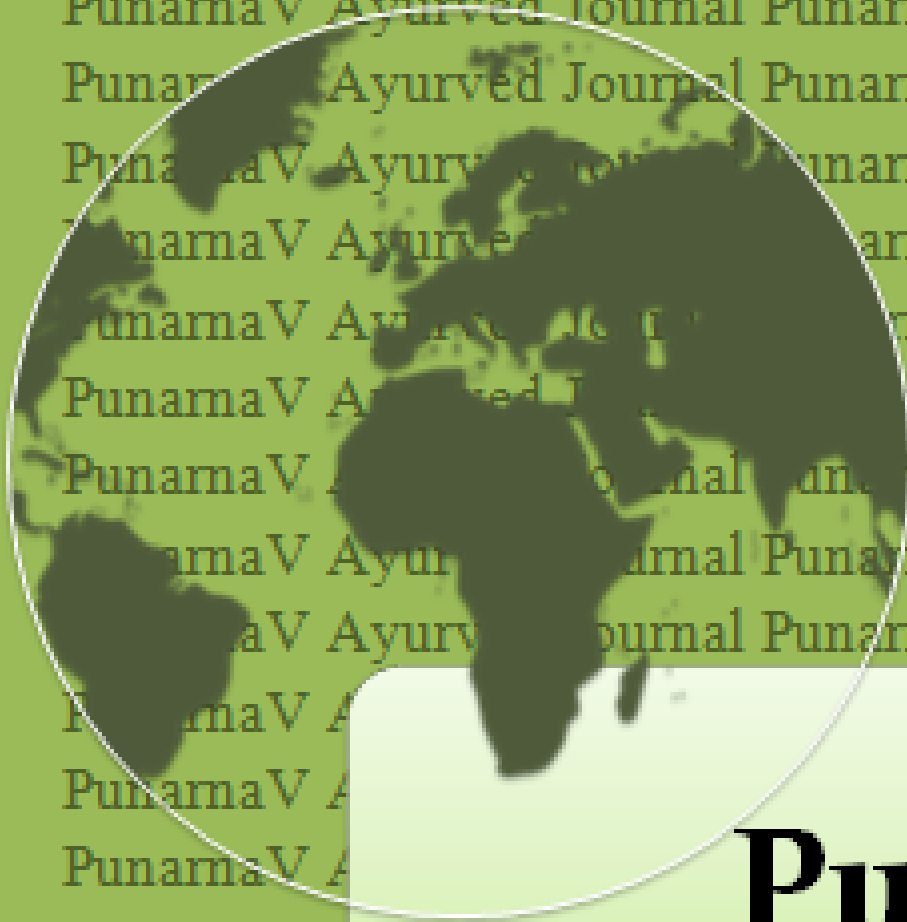


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## AN APPRAISAL ON MAHAGADAS IN SAMHITAS

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**ABSTRACT:**

*Mahagada is a unique concept explained in Ayurveda denoting dreadful disorders having bad prognosis or difficult to treat resulting in extreme morbidity and mortality. The word meaning of “Maha” is great, mighty, strong, abundant etc while “Gada” is defined as poison in Ashtanga hrudaya. Vyadhi(disease) manifests due to various factors like disturbed dosha, dushya, agni etc and produce hazardous effects. Hence vyadhi is termed as Gada. Acharya Sushruta and Sabdakalpadruma define Mahagada as “dreadful, incurable and major diseases in terms of their severe morbidity where the morbidity leads to mortality due to incurability. Even though Acharyas have mentioned Mahagada, still the references regarding this particular topic are very much scattered and quite controversial too. At different places we get different explanations regarding Mahagadas. Here a review is done on the Mahagadas which are mentioned in different Ayurvedic classics at different occasions. The difference in opinion among acharyas and their possible logics are also discussed.*

**Key words:** Arshas, Bhagandara, Mahagada, Udara, Vatavyadhi

## INTRODUCTION

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*Mahagadas* are diseases which are difficult to treat resulting in extreme morbidity and mortality. *Vyadhi* (disease) manifests due to various factors like disturbed *dosha* (humor), *dushya* (Factors which gets vitiated), *agni* (digestive fire) etc and produce hazardous effects like poison. Hence *Vyadhi* is termed as *Gada*.<sup>1</sup> Acharya Sushruta<sup>2</sup> and Sabdakalpadruma<sup>3</sup> define *Mahagada* as “dreadful, incurable and major diseases in terms of their severe morbidity where the morbidity leads to mortality due to incurability.

A survey on *Mahagada* in *Ayurvedic* classics yields few references and it is not very clear about which diseases are to be considered as *Asta-Mahagada* (Eight dreadful diseases). In *Charaka samhita*, at two different contexts, different enumeration of *Mahagada* is evident. In *Sutrasthana*, *Astodhariya* chapter, *Charaka* has mentioned *Athatvabhinivesha* (psychic perversion) as the only *Mahagada* and in *Sareerasthana* he mentions eight diseases as

*Mahagadas*. Later *Acharyas* also have accepted almost same eight diseases as *Mahagada*, with few differences. These differences may be due to the reason that some diseases were more severe than the others at different periods of time with respect to incidence and management.

## REVIEW

While explaining the types and number of diseases in *Ashtodareeya* chapter of *Charaka Samhita Sutra sthana*, *Acharya* has mentioned *Atatwabhinivesha* as the *Mahagada*. In *Maharoga* chapter, he does not mention about *Mahagada*<sup>5</sup>. However in *Indriyasthana*, *Acharya* as explained *Astamahagada*<sup>6</sup> instead of *Eka Mahagada*. On further analysis, one may note the effect of the disease on a person. On one hand, *Eka Mahagada* (*Atatwabhinivesha*) has major effect on person's intellect, orientation and memory, making him incapable of leading a normal life. On the other hand, *Asta Mahagadas* comprising of eight diseases whose characteristic features leads to *Prana* (life), *Mamsa* (muscles) and *Bala* (strength) *Kshaya* (depletion) in an individual.

*Avaraniya* chapter of *Susruta Samhita Sutrasthana* is dedicated to *Mahagadas* explaining its importance<sup>4</sup>. *Varana* means treatment and the diseases where treatments is not fruitful is known as *Avaraniya*. *Vatavyadhi* (musculo-skeletal diseases), *Prameha* (diabetes), *Kushta* (skin diseases),

*Arsa* (hemorrhoids), *Bhagandara* (fistula), *Asmari* (renal calculus), *Mudagarbha* (obstructed labour) and *Udara* (ascites) are the *Mahagadas* mentioned in this chapter and the author quotes them as *Dushchikitsy* (bad prognosis). A closer look shows, *Susrutha* in *Nidana Sthana* has explained eight *Mahagadas* in the first eight chapters in the following order as *Vatavyadhi*, *Arsa*, *Asmari*, *Bhagandara*, *Kushta*, *Prameha*, *Udara*, *Mudagarbha*. Unlike *Astanga hrudaya*, *Susrutha* does not enumerated *Grahani*(irritable bowel syndrome),

instead has mentioned *Mudagarbha*. *Sushruta* has explained *Grahani* in the *Athisara* chapter and complications of *Atisara* in *Avaraniya* chapter. It may be because *Mudagarbha* is a surgically managed disease.

In *Astanga Hrudaya*, *Mahagadas* are mentioned in the last part of *Atisara Grahani nidana*<sup>7</sup> chapter. Unlike *Sushruta*, *Astangahrudaya* has not followed any particular order while explaining the *Mahagada* and the explanations are scattered in different *sthanas*.

**Table No:1 :- Mahagadas according to different Acharyas**

S no.	Su.Sa Sootra 33/4	Ch. Sa. Ind. 9/8	Ch.sa.Ind.9 Gangadhara	A.S.Su.9/ A.H.Ni.8/30	A.S.Sa.11
1	Vatavyadhi	Vatavyadhi	Vatavyadhi	Vatavyadhi	Vatavyadhi
2	Kushta	Kushta	Kushta	Kushta	Kushta
3	Prameha	Madhumeha	Madhumeha	Meha	Meha
4	Udara	Udara	Udara	Udara	Udara
5	Arsha	Gulma	Gulma	Arsha	Gulma
6	Bhagandara	Shopha	Raktapitta	Bhagandara	Rakthapitta
7	Ashmari	Apasmara	Apasmara	Ashmari	Apasmara
8	Mudagarbha	Rajayakshma	Rajayakshma	Grahani	Kshaya

**Analytical reasons to consider diseases as Mahagadas**

Any diseases with the following complications should be rejected; such as diminished strength and musculature, consumption, thirst, vomiting, fever, diarrhea, fainting, hiccup, and dyspnoea<sup>8</sup>. *Mahagada*, in general, are incurable and *Astamahagada* in particular are associated with *balamamsakshaya* (diminished strength and musculature). Similarly other disease with

*balamamsakshaya* should also be avoided by physician<sup>9</sup>.

**Swabhava of mahagada:**

*Marmasrayatwam* (affecting vital points), *vatavaigunyam* (vitiated vata humor), *pachakagni* (digestive fire) vitiating, *chirasanchitha doshotha* (chronic vitiating of humors), *chira kalanubandhi* (chronic in nature), *paraspara dhatwantaravagahitwam*

(involves many tissues), *paramparanubandhi* (genetic predisposition), *upadravayukta* (with associated complaints). Apart from *mahagadas* all other incurable diseases do not show all these features<sup>16</sup>.

### I. *Sadhyasadyath*

The *sukhasadhy* *lakshanas* (features of easily curable diseases) are *sarvaushadakashamedeha* (healthy body), *amarmaga* (not affecting vital parts), *anupadrava* (without any complications) etc<sup>10</sup>. From this we can infer that *asadhyalakshana* (features of incurable diseases) of diseases are *sarvaushadhaakshamodeha* (unhealthy body), *marmaga* (affecting vital parts), and associated with *upadrava* (complications).

### II. *Adhistana for jeevana*

*Jeevithadhama* means *Jeevasthana* (seats of life). The ten *Jeevithadhamas* are *siras* (head), *rasanabandhana* (frenulum of tongue), *kanta* (throat), *asra* (hemorrhoids), *hrudaya* (heart), *nabh i* (umbilicus), *basthi* (bladder), *shukra* (semen), *oja* (essence of tissues), *guda* (rectum). Most of the *Mahagada* affects *Jeevitadhama*<sup>11</sup>.

### III. *Abhyantarosrotas*- these 13 are seats of life (activities essential for life)

One each of *prana* (respiration), the *dhatu* (seven *dhatu*s), *malas* (three), *ambu* (water), *anna* (food). When these get vitiated by indulgence in unwholesome diets and regimen, it gives rise to diseases. Most of the *maharogas* afflicts *marma* and are *upadravayukta*.

*Jeevithadhama* and *abhyantarosrotas* are afflicted by *maharogas*. This is evident from *samprapti* of these diseases as follows. *Vatavyadhi* is *sirasnayupradhana* (it is having relation with *sirohridaya*). *Prameha* and *ashmari* affects *basthi*. *Kushta* occurs due to the vitiation of *rakta*. *Arsha* and *bhagandara* affects *guda*. *Udara* and *grahani* manifest because of *agnivaikalya* (indigestion) in *koshta*.

### IV. Importance of Agni:

*Dehagni* or *jataragni* (digestive fire) bestows longevity, color, strength, health, enthusiasm, plumpness, complexion, *ojus* (essence of tissues), *tejas* (heat of the body) other varieties of *agni* (metabolism) and *prana* (life). Extinction of this *jataragni* leads to death. Its proper maintenance helps a person to live a long life, and its impairment gives rise to diseases. Therefore *jataragni* is considered to be the root or the most important sustaining factor of living being<sup>12</sup>. *Agni* will be vitiated in all *mahagadas*.

### V. Importance of Vata:

Because of all properties like pervading, quick acting, strong, tendency to aggravate others, acting independently and producing many diseases, *Vata* is powerful among the *doshas*<sup>13</sup>. It gets deranged in *mahagadas*.

### VI. *Marmas* :

One hundred and seven *marmas* (vital points) are explained in the classics<sup>14</sup>. Among them *Siro*, *hrudaya*, *basthi*, *guda* (head, heart,



bladder, rectum) is *sadhyopranahara* (highly fatal if injured). *Marmasritharoga* (diseases affecting vital parts) especially which affects *Siro, hrudaya, basthi, guda* are termed as *maharogas*. *Vatavyadhi* (musculo-skeletal diseases) is having relation with *shiras, prameha* (diabetes) and *ashmari* (renal calculus) affects *basthi, arsha* (hemorrhoids) and *bhagandara* (fistula) affects *guda*.

## VII. *Upadrava* :

*Mahagadas* are associated with many *upadravas* and hence incurable. In *Susrutasutrasthana* 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter, it is explained that diseases associated with *upadravas*<sup>15</sup> are incurable.

## DISCUSSION

### *Vatavyadhi*

*Vatavyadhi* in this context implies to *mahavatavyadhi*<sup>17</sup>. *Sushruta* in *mahavatavyadhi chikitsa* explains about diseases like *vataraktha, apatanaka, pakshagata, manyasthambha, apatantraka, ardita, karnashoola, tuni-pratuni, asthila-prathastila* and *urusthambha* (main musculo-skeletal diseases). These diseases occur due to importance of *vata*. *Vayu* is *tantrayantradhara*. *Tantra* means *sareera* (body), how the current is helping in the action of *yantras* (machines), in the same way *vayu* helps in the action of *sareera*. The chief manifestation in *vatavyadhi* is *cheshtavaishamyam* (difficulty in movements or not able to control the movements). The main cause for *vatakopa* (vitiating) is *dhatukshaya* (depletion of tissue) leading to *ojokshaya* (debility). *Ojus* is very less in *vatavyadhi*, which may be considered as reason for *dusthuratha* (difficulty to cure) of *vatavyadhi*. 107 *marmas* are explained in the classics and among them *siro, hrudaya, basthi, guda* is *sadyo pranahara*. *Marmasritha roga* especially the *rogas* which takes *aashraya* in *siro, hrudaya, basthi, guda* are

termed as *maharogas*. Here, predominant types of *vata* influenced are *prana, vyana, and apana* respectively. *Marmagatva* (which is affecting *marma*) is *asadhya lakshana* (sign of incurability) of a disease<sup>18</sup>. Because of *sarvatantra* and *swathantrata* (ever-lasting and independent)<sup>19</sup>, *vatavyadhi* obtains *pradhanyatha* (importance) and *dusthuratha* (difficult to treat).

### *Kushta*

*Dushitadoshas* (vitiating) affects the *tiryaksiras* (channels) and vitiates *twak, lasika, asrik* and *mamsa* (tissues) and makes them flabby and fall out, causing discoloration of the skin<sup>20</sup>. Hence *kushta* becomes a *twakvikara pradhanaroga* (*bahyarogayana*). Allowed the lapse of time, it makes the entire body look ugly by spreading to all the tissues, causing too much of moistness inside them leading to flow to sweat and exudations, putrefaction, formation of minute worms which are very troublesome. These worms eat away the hairs, skin, tendons, arteries, veins and cartilages one after the other<sup>21</sup>.

*Kushta* is caused by the morbidity of seven factors. They are the *tridoshas* which get vitiated by the causative factors and four *dhatu*s of the body (*Twak, mamsa, raktha (jeevaadhana) lasika* ) which get vitiated by the morbid *doshas*. Thus *kushtas* are produced by the seven morbid *dhatu*s (which include the *tridoshas*)<sup>22</sup>. The *kushta* so caused spreads to the entire body after its manifestation. *Raktha*, one among *tenjeevadhama* (seats of life) gets vitiated here. *Bahyarogamarga* is away from *shodhanamarga*. So *kushta* is not *sukhashodhya* (easily curable) rather it is *shodhya*.

### ***Prameha***

Involvement of *tridosha*, *asritha* in one of the *mahamarma* called *basthi (jeevadhana)*, *chirakalanubandhi* (chronic in nature) and incidence of manifestation of *upadravas* is at paramount (like *pidakas*)<sup>23</sup> in *meha*.

*Thridosha* involvement:-Its *nidan*as (causative factors) are almost *kapha vardhaka* but *sthana* in *vatastana*. *Pitta* makes the food particles into *sara* and *kitta*. From that we can consider the role of *pitta* in the formation of *mutra*<sup>24</sup>

*Kaphajaprmeha*:-*Dosha* and *dushya* like *meda* etc have same attributes. Bitter and pungent drugs alleviate both these *doshas* and *dushyas*, hence curable. But in

present. So still we should follow the *pathya*, otherwise it will reoccur.

*Paittikaprameha*:-*Dosha* and *dushya* have different attributes ie. Drugs having pungent etc taste while alleviating the *dushya* aggravates the *dosha*. Hence only palliable and not curable.

*Vatajaprmeha*:- Afflicts deeper *dhatu*s like *majja* etc and is associated with many complications. Materials possessing unctuous etc properties are useful in the cure of aggravated *vata*, but simultaneously aggravates *medas*.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Udara***

Accumulated *doshas* obstructs the channels carrying sweat and water and vitiates *pranavayu*, *agni* (power of digestion and metabolism) and *apanavayu*. As a result of this *udara* is manifested<sup>26</sup>. As explained earlier most important attributes like *agni* and *vata* are vitiated in *udara*.

In *udaranidana* Acharya says that generally all diseases are produced by *mandagni*, especially *udara*<sup>27</sup>. It also arises from indigestion, contaminated food, and accumulation of *malas*. *Mala sancaya* diminishes *agni* and further makes it more *manda*. In *udara*, *mala sancaya* is present. *Sodhana* further results in *agnimandya*. *Shamana* will not yield appropriate result as *agni* is very *manda*. Disease is *koshtaashritha*. *Dhatwagnifunctions*

affect *dhathuagni*. For conversion of *ahara* or *oushada* to *pakwaavastha*, *agni* is facilitated by *agni*, which bestows *arogya* or *rogashamana*. If *agni* is hampered as in case of *udara*, then it affects *pakashakthi*, whereby treatment may not yield adequate result. Hence, *udara* is *dusthura*.

### **Arshas**

*Arshas* will not occur without the aggravation of all tridosha<sup>28</sup>. This is one of the cause of bad prognosis of *arshas*. *Panchavata* (*prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana*, *samaana*), *Pitta* and *Kapha*, all these morbid factors afflicts the three *gudavalis* leading to manifestation of *Arsas*. Therefore *arshas* is very painful and associated with several complications. It afflicts the entire body and is difficult to cure<sup>29</sup>. Its *sthana* is *guda* (one of *mahamarma* and *jeevadhaan*). *Mandagni* increases *dusturatha*. For the *nirmoolana* of *arsha*, *shastra-kshara-agniprayoga* is required. In spite of *shastradi karma*, recurrence rate is high. If it has to be treated with *bheshaja* then *chirakalabheshajaprayoga* is needed (may be till death).

### **Bhagandara**

*Bhagandara* is the condition where openings with tract develops in the area of pelvis, rectum and urinary bladder. When these are not open they are called

*bhagandara* (fistula)<sup>30</sup>. All kinds of fistula-in-ano are dreadful, difficult to treat. Among them those produced by all the three *doshas* together and that formed by injury are incurable<sup>31</sup>. In eight kinds of *bhagandara* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*, *Dwandaja* (3) *Sannipataja* and *kshataja*), first six are difficult to treat and *sannipataja* and *kshataja* should be refused<sup>32</sup>. *Guda* and *basthi* are *sthana* of it, which are *marmas* and one of *jeevadhana*. *Arshas* is *mamsankura* and *bhagandara* is *nadivrana*. *Arshas* is also one of the cause for *bhagandara*. Treatment is *sastrakshara-agnipradhana*. Treatment is difficult if associated with *marmas*.

### **Ashmari**

*Ashmari* is a dreadful disease similar to *antaka* (God of death)<sup>33</sup>. In people who do not undergo purification regularly and who indulge in unhealthy food and activities, *kapha* get aggravated, combines with urine, reaches the *basthi* (*marma*) and on stasis there produces *asmari*<sup>34</sup>. *Basthi* is *sadhyopranaharamarma* and one among seats of life. *Mutrasaya* is the receptacle of mala and an important seat of life. In treatment of *asmari*, surgery is indicated. While performing surgery, vital parts should be avoided. *Basthi* is situated in the midst of umbilicus, scrotum, rectum, groin and penis. So it is *dusthura* (critical). If surgical treatment is not performed, death



Reoccurrence chance is also high. Should follow the regimens for a long period.

### **Grahani**

Weak digestive fire brings about *vidaha*(indigestion and chest burn) of food which moves upward and downwards in gastro intestinal tract. The digested and undigested food moves downwards and this condition is called *grahani gada*<sup>36</sup>, same like that of *udara*, *agni vaishamy*(deranged digestive fire) is associated. So it is *chirakrit*(lasting forever) and *koshtaasrita*. In *grahanidosha* the faeces is mixed up with *ama* and food, eliminated either when the food is undigested during digestion or after it; or there may be no elimination of faeces at all. The faeces is sometimes eliminated solid and other times as loose(liquid). Elimination occurs only after accumulation in the large intestine. The disease will cause death after a long time<sup>37</sup>.

### **Apasmara**

Since in the disease, remembrance (experience of the past) and knowledge of nature of things are lost, it is called *apasmara* (seizures) and it is going to kill the person<sup>38</sup>. Since *apasmara* arises from the vitiation of *dosha* of the body and *manas* together and localised in *shiras* which is one of *mahamarma*<sup>39</sup>, it is a very serious condition. Reoccurrence rate is very

*apasmara* is very high compared to other diseases.

### **Gulma**

Palpable because of its round shape for which it is called a *gulma*<sup>40</sup>. In the pathogenesis of all types of *gulma*, *vayu* invariably plays the primary role. It is *chirakaari*(chronic) and affects *hrudaya*, *nabhibasthi* (*marmas*) and *parswa*.

*Sannipatagulma*: -Excruciating pain, Excessive burning sensation, stone like compactness and elevation of the affected part, quick sloughing, seriousness of the condition, and disappearance of the strength of the mind, body, digestion as well as metabolism. This variety of *Gulma* is incurable<sup>41</sup>.

### **Sopha**

While explaining the *chikitsa* of *sopha*, Acharya Charaka has mentioned *sopha* as *mahagada* in the first verse of *shvayathuchikitsa*<sup>42</sup>. *Sopha* is included in both *abhyantara* and *bahyarogamargas*<sup>43</sup>. *Sopha* is associated with most of the complicated diseases in their advanced stages and in this stage, these diseases will mostly become incurable. Hence *shopha* associated with that

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### **Rakthapitta**

*Rakta pitta* is a serious disease and it afflicts the patient with great speed. Like fire, it manifests itself and affects instantaneously<sup>44</sup>.

Importance of *Raktha (jeevaadhana)*:- Blood is the cause of the body, body is supported or maintained by blood itself, so it should be protected by all efforts; blood itself is life<sup>45</sup>. In *raktapitta*, blood will be having increased heat, liquidity, foul smell, tendency to penetrate the walls of the vessels tissues and cells, flows out continuously, property of clotting being either diminished or lost<sup>46</sup>.

### ***Mooda garbha***

The fetus which has not aborted after getting developed, coming abnormally, unable to come out even after reaching its passage obstructed and faints due to abnormality of *apaana vaayu* is termed as *mooda garbha*<sup>47</sup>. *Madhavanidana*, *Yogaratanakara* and *Bhavaprakasha* have mentioned *vayu* going away from its proper seat and obstructs the fetus. There is no other condition more difficult to treat than removing the foreign body, here the obstructing fetus. Because, treatment is to be done by the hand in the space between the vagina, liver, spleen, intestines and uterus and *utkarshana* (pulling forward), *apakarshana* (pulling down), *sthaanaapavartana* (rotating), *utkartana* (cutting), *bhedana* (dividing), *chedana* (excising), *peedana*

(squeezing/rubbing), *rujaakarana* (straightening), *daarana* (tearing/ splitting) have to be done with one hand only, without hurting the foetus and the mother<sup>48</sup>.

### ***Rajyakshma***

That which is followed by many diseases, which precedes many diseases, difficult to understand/diagnose and difficult to cure, is the disease *shosha* which is very powerful<sup>49</sup>. It is called *shosha* because it dries up *rasa* and other *dhatu*s (tissues).

*Rajyakshma*-affected the king *Chandra*. Some say it is the king of diseases. All varieties are caused by the simultaneous aggravation of the *tridosha* and spreads to all the joints of the body and the *siras* (veins and other channels). *Papakarma* (sins) is one of the cause for this. It persists long time in the body. It is the cause of many other diseases<sup>50</sup>. *Chakarapanidatta* says depletion of unctuousness implies the loss of vital tissue elements like *sukra* and *ojas*. The patient is depleted of all tissue elements and strength. Stool is the only source of strength left with him<sup>51</sup>. The patient of *rajyakshma* should be given exceedingly mild emetic and purgation which should not cause the depletion of the body tissue.

### ***Atavabhinivesha***

In all other *mahagadas* there is mainly *prana*, *mamsa* and *balakshaya*. But when it comes to the explanation of

*Atatvabhinivesha*, there is no *pranamamsabala kshaya* even though Acharya Charaka has mentioned it as *Mahagada*<sup>52</sup>. The reason behind it might be that in *Atatvabhinivesha* we find *budhi-smriti nasha* or *hrasa*. Such a person is unable to lead a life because he loses the

capacity to differentiate between the good and bad and its perception. It is also mentioned in *Bhagavatgeeta* that when in a person *budhi smritihrasa* happens, it leads to the destruction of the individual.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Any disease manifest with morbidity leading to mortality due to incurability should be called as *mahagada*. Words like *dushchikitsa*, *achikitsa*, *dusthura*, *vivarjayet*, *parivarjayet* implies the same. All the *bruhatrays* have accepted *ashtamahagada* with slight changes according to their discipline. *Ashtangahridaya* reflects *susruthasamhita*'s opinion giving importance to surgery. And *Ashtangasangraha* reflects *Carakasamhita*'s opinion giving importance to medicine. Charaka has

explained *eko mahagada* and *asta mahagada* in different contexts. It should not be considered as a controversy but should be considered as afflicting the 2 major components of life, *shareera* and *manas*. Whereas *astamahagada* mainly afflicts the *shareera* and *ekomahagada* afflicts the *manas*. On one hand, *astamahagada* leads to *prana*, *mamsa* and *bala kshaya* and on the other hand, *ekomahagada* leads to *buddhi* and *smruthi nasha*. In general, whether it is *seka* or *asta mahagada*, all are *asadhya*.

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