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REVIEW ARTICLE

Gridhrasi (Sciatica): Mapping *Vata-Kaphaja* Siddhanta to Neuro-inflammation and Management

Randhir Kaushal[1]*, Sudha Sharma[2]

[1]Associate Professor, Department of Panchkarma, Government Ayurveda College, Sikar, Rajasthan, India.
[2]Principal, Shri Vinod Durgadutt Tibrewala Institute of Ayurveda Medical College and Hospital, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

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ABSTRACT

Gridhrasi is a prominent clinical entity within the 80 types of *Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhis*, characterized by radiating pain from the gluteal region to the distal foot. This condition exhibits significant phenomenological overlap with modern Sciatica, primarily caused by lumbar disc herniation and subsequent neuroinflammation. While conventional management often relies on palliative analgesia or invasive decompression, Ayurveda offers a robust framework through the *Vata-Kaphaja Siddhanta*. This paper maps the classical Ayurvedic symptoms of *Tandra* (drowsiness), *Gaurava* (heaviness), and *Stambha* (stiffness) to the biochemical cascades of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha and interleukin-6. Through a comprehensive review of *Panchakarma* (specifically *Basti* and *Swedana*) and para-surgical modalities (*Agnikarma* and *Siravyadha*), this study provides an evidence-based integrative approach to management, emp--hasizing the resolution of "neuro-inflammatory stasis" (*Avarana*).

1. INTRODUCTION

The clinical entity of *Gridhrasi*, described in Ayurvedic literature for over 5,000 years, finds its modern parallel in Sciatica, a syndrome of radiating pain along the distribution of the sciatic nerve (L4-S3). The term *Gridhrasi* is etymologically derived from the root *Gridhra* (vulture), reflecting the characteristic "throwing" or limping gait of the patient, which resembles a vulture's awkward locomotion due to intense, deep-seated pain. Historically, it was suggested that the pain feels as though a vulture is piercing its beak deep into the flesh, representing the lancinating neurogenic pain of nerve root compression.

While Sciatica was only identified by modern medical science two centuries ago, the Ayurvedic corpus meticulously documented its nuances across the *Brihattrayi* and *Laghuttrayi*. In the modern era, Sciatica is a leading cause of disability, with a lifetime prevalence ranging from 11% to 40%. Despite surgical advancements, the incidence of "Failed Back Surgery Syndrome" (FBSS) remains high (up to 40%), necessitating a re-evaluation of non-invasive, systemic approaches. Ayurveda provides a robust dual classification: *Vataja* (purely neurological/degenerative) and *Vata-Kaphaja*[1] (neurological complicated by inflammatory stasis). This study aims to map these ancient bio-principles to modern neuro-immunological markers to establish an evidence-based integrative management protocol.

Corresponding Author:
Randhir Kaushal, Associate Professor, Department of Panchkarma, Government Ayurveda College, Sikar, Rajasthan, India.
Email: santoshrandhir14@gmail.com

2. METHODOLOGY

1. Classical review: Systematic extraction of data from the *Brihattrayi* (*Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*) and *Laghuttrayi* (*Madhava Nidana*, *Sharngadhara Samhita*, *Bhavaprakasha*).[2,3]
2. Modern scoping: A search of Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar was conducted for keywords including "Sciatica neuroinflammation," "TNF-alpha dorsal root ganglion," and "Ayurveda Sciatica clinical trial.[4]
3. Integrative analysis: Comparative mapping of subjective Ayurvedic symptoms (*Lakshanas*) to objective modern biochemical and physiological markers.

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3. ETIOLOGY (*HETU*) AND EPIDEMIOLOGY

3.1. Ayurvedic Etiology (*Nidana*)

Ayurvedic texts do not list specific *Nidanas* for *Gridhrasi* but direct practitioners to general *Vata*-vitiating factors. These are classified into:

- *Aharaja* (dietary): Excessive consumption of *Ruksha* (dry), *Sheeta* (cold), *Alpa* (scanty), and *Laghu* (light) foods, leading to *Dhatukshaya* (tissue depletion) and loss of nerve sheath integrity.
- *Viharaja* (lifestyle): *Ativyayama* (excessive exercise), *Atyadhwa* (long-distance walking), and *Dukha-shayyasana* (improper sitting/sleeping posture). Modern triggers include prolonged driving, office-bound sedentary work, and lifting heavy weights without spinal alignment.
- *Manasika* (psychological): *Chinta* (stress), *Shoka* (grief), and *Bhaya* (fear), which sensitize the HPA axis and lower the pain threshold.
- *Agantuja* (traumatic): *Abhighata* (trauma to the lumbosacral spine) leading to immediate *Margavarodha* (obstruction).

3.2. Prevalence and Gender Distribution[5]

Sciatica affects approximately 1.6% to 43% of the world population, depending on occupational stressors.

- Gender: Studies indicate a slight female predominance in chronic cases (ratio of approx. 1:1.3). Females often show increased prevalence after menopause due to accelerated disc degeneration. However, males often present with symptoms a decade earlier than females due to higher exposure to manual labor and mechanical stress.
- Age: Peak incidence occurs in the 4th to 5th decades of life (30–50 years).

4. CLINICAL FEATURES (*LAKSHANA*)

4.1. Prodromal Signs (*Purva Roopa*)

Specific *Purva Roopa* for *Gridhrasi* are not detailed; however, general *Avyakta Lakshanas* (indistinct signs) of *Vatavyadhi* apply, such as mild low back ache, fatigue in the limbs, and stiffness after rest.[6]

4.2. Clinical Symptoms (*Roopa*)

The cardinal symptoms of *Gridhrasi* are categorized into two variants:

Acharya Sushruta emphasizes *Sakthi-utkshepa-nigrahana* the inability to lift the leg straight – which corresponds precisely to a positive straight leg raise (SLR) test in modern orthopedics [Table 1].

5. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY: MAPPING BIO-PRINCIPLES TO NEURO-INFLAMMATION

5.1. The *Vata-Kaphaja* Siddhanta and "Neuroinflammatory Stasis"

The pathogenesis (*Samprapti*) of *Gridhrasi* involves two primary mechanisms: *Dhatukshaya* (tissue depletion/degeneration) and *Margavarodha* (channel obstruction). In the *Vata-Kaphaja* variant, the vitiated *Vata* (responsible for nerve conduction) is occluded by *Kapha* (representing fluid/inflammatory exudate).

5.2. Cytokine Mapping: The Modern Perspective[8]

Research indicates that mechanical compression alone is insufficient for radicular pain; it is the exposure of the nucleus pulposus to the systemic circulation that triggers a "cytokine storm."[4]

- *Toda* (pricking) and *Spandana* (twitching): Upregulates tetrodotoxin-resistant sodium channels 1.3 and 1.8 in the dorsal root ganglion. This increases neuronal excitability and spontaneous firing, creating the "pricking" sensation described in Ayurveda.
- *Gaurava* (heaviness): The *Kapha* component corresponds to inflammatory edema. Cytokines increase vascular permeability, leading to endoneurial fluid accumulation and localized vascular stasis, which manifests as a sensation of weight in the limb.
- *Tandra* (drowsiness) and *Arochaka* (anorexia): High systemic levels of interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor (TNF)ross the blood-brain barrier, activating sleep centers and appetite-inhibiting centers in the hypothalamus. This represents the "sickness behavior" seen in chronic neuroinflammation, mapped precisely to *Tandra* and *Aruchi* in *Vata-Kaphaja* Gridhrasi [Table 2].[9]

6. THE CONCEPT OF *AVARANA* (OCCLUSION)

In the *Vata-Kaphaja* variant, vitiated *Vata* (nerve conduction) is occluded by *Kapha* (inflammatory exudate). This *Avarana* leads to *Margavarodha* (channel obstruction), where the fluid-like inflammatory stasis physically and chemically "chokes" the neurological function, resulting in chronic *Stambha* (rigidity) and *Gaurava* (heaviness).[10]

6.1. Structural Alignment of Gait

The "vulture gait" (*Gridhra-walk*) described by *Acharya Charaka* represents a compensatory hip-hiking and circumduction to reduce endoneurial pressure on the L5 nerve root.[11]

7. COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT: AYURVEDA AND MODERN INTEGRATION

7.1. *Panchakarma* (Shodhana Therapy)

Panchakarma addresses the systemic metabolic stasis (*Ama*) and localized nerve irritation.

- *Basti* (medicated enema): Considered *Ardha Chikitsa* (half of all treatment). *Erandamuladi Niruha Basti* modulates the gut-brain axis and reduces systemic levels of proinflammatory cytokines.[12,13]
- *Swedana* (sudation): *Patra Pinda Sweda* and *Valuka Sweda* (sand bolus) induce vasodilation, which clears inflammatory exudates and metabolic debris from the channels (*Srotas*).
- *Siravyadha* (bloodletting): Advised between *Kandara* (tendo-achilles) and *Gulpha* (ankle). It reduces localized venous pressure and hydrostatic edema around the nerve root, providing "instant relief."[14]

7.2. *Shamana* (Palliative Therapy)

- *Vatari Guggulu*: Specific for *Vata-Kaphaja* Gridhrasi; improves digestion (*Deepana*) and reduces *Tandra* by 53.48%.
- *Nirgundi Ghana Vati*: Acts as a potent analgesic by inhibiting prostaglandin synthesis, comparable to NSAIDs but without gastrointestinal side effects.[15]

7.3. Integrative Management

1. Acute phase (high pain/*Vata*): *Agnikarma* at *Antara Kandara Gulpha* + *Matra Basti* with *Sahacharadi Taila*
2. Chronic phase (heaviness/*Kapha*): *Siravyadha* + *Valuka Sweda* + *Vatari Guggulu* orally

3. Rehabilitative phase: *Rasayana* therapy (e.g., *Nirgundi Ghana Vati*) + *Yogic* postures (*Bhujangasana*) [Table 3].

7.4. *Pathya-Apathya* (Wholesome vs. Unwholesome)

Mentioned in Table 4.

7.5. Complications

Chronic, unresolved Gridhrasi can lead to *Khanja* (lameness), *Pangu* (paralysis), permanent nerve damage, and loss of bowel/bladder control (*Cauda Equina* Syndrome).

7.6. Limitations of Surgical Procedures

Standard discectomy or laminectomy faces significant challenges:

- Recurrence: 5% to 36% of patients experience recurrent pain within 2 years.
- FBSS: Affects up to 40% of patients post-operation due to epidural adhesions or segmental instability.
- Risks: Surgical complications include dural tears (4%), nerve root damage (3-5%), and infection.

8. DISCUSSION

8.1. Analytical Synthesis and Critical Review

The mapping of *Vata-Kaphaja Siddhanta* to modern neuroimmunology reveals that Ayurvedic symptoms are not merely clinical observations but represent specific stages of biological dysfunction. The "pure Vata" stage represents early nerve root irritation and electrophysiological hyperexcitability, while the "Vata-Kapha" stage signifies the transition to chronic neuro-inflammation characterized by metabolic stasis and "sickness behavior."

8.2. Rationalization of Panchakarma as Bio-Mechanical and Bio-Chemical Intervention

The superiority of *Panchakarma* over conventional palliative care lies in its dual action. *Basti* therapy, for instance, operates through the "Gut-Microbiome-Spine Axis," where colonic administration of medicated oils modulates the enteric nervous system to downregulate systemic levels of TNF-alpha and IL-6. This systemic modulation explains why *Basti* provides a sustainable "radical cure" with a 70.56% non-recurrence rate compared to the 3–18% recurrence often seen after surgery.

Furthermore, *Siravyadha* addresses the *Margavarana* (pathological obstruction) by relieving venous stasis and pressure on the nearby nerves. By letting out vitiated blood, it effectively performing a biological "washout" of the inflammatory microenvironment, which correlates with modern venesection ability to reduce blood viscosity and enhance microcirculation.

8.3. *Agnikarma* and the Thermodynamics of Healing

Agnikarma (thermal cautery) is highlighted as superior for preventing recurrence. From a thermodynamic perspective, the transfer of heat energy increases local internal energy, strengthening the *Dhatwagni* (tissue metabolism) and accelerating the digestion of *Ama* (metabolic toxins). This thermal stimulation activates Heat Shock Proteins (HSPs) that promote cellular repair and stimulate the release of endogenous opioids, effectively modulating the "Gate Control Theory" of pain inhibition. Studies show that *Agnikarma* provides 80% total pain relief and makes the SLR test negative in 95% of cases, making it more efficacious than localized oil pooling (*Katibasti*) in acute phases.

8.4. Addressing the Limitations of Surgical Procedures (FBSS)

Modern microdiscectomy, while offering rapid short-term relief, faces significant long-term failure rates. Approximately 27% to 40% of patients suffer from "Failed Back Surgery Syndrome", often due to epidural fibrosis, segmental instability, or disc height loss (average 25% at 2 years). The biomechanical stress induced by surgery can accelerate degenerative changes in adjacent spinal segments. Ayurveda, by contrast, targets the underlying neuroinflammatory stasis (*Avarana*) and tissue depletion (*Dhatukshaya*) through formulations like *Sahacharadi Taila* and *Vatari Guggulu*, which provide anti-inflammatory and neuro-restorative benefits without structural compromise.

9. CONCLUSION

The integration of *Vata-Kaphaja Siddhanta* with modern neuro-immunology offers a precision-based model for managing Sciatica. Mapping symptoms like *Tandra* and *Gaurava* to TNF-alpha and IL-6 provides a scientific bridge that validates Ayurvedic clinical observations. The multi-modal approach of *Panchakarma* ensures that both the mechanical compression and the biochemical "stasis" are addressed, paving the way for a holistic, evidence-based paradigm in musculoskeletal medicine.

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13. ETHICAL STATEMENT

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14. CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

15. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data analyzed in this review were obtained from publicly available sources, including peer-reviewed articles, observational studies, and surveys accessible through databases.

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Table 1: Differential clinical features of *Gridhrasi* variants[7]

Variant	Cardinal symptoms (*Lakshanas*)	Pathological essence
Vataja Gridhrasi	*Ruk* (pain), *Toda* (pricking), *Stambha* (stiffness), *Muhu Spandana* (twitching) from Sphik to Pada.	*Dhatukshaya* (degeneration)
Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi	All *Vata* symptoms plus *Tandra* (drowsiness), *Gaurava* (heaviness), *Arochaka* (anorexia), and *Mukhapraseka* (excessive salivation).	*Margavarodha* (obstruction/edema)

Table 2: Mapping *Ayurvedic Lakshana* to modern neuro-inflammatory markers

Ayurvedic phenomenon	Subjective manifestation	Modern biochemical correlation
Toda (pricking pain)	Lancinating, sharp pain.	Upregulation of TTX-R 1.8 and 1.3 channels in the DRG.
Spandana (twitching)	Muscular fasciculations.	Epigenetic trafficking of 1.6 via the STAT3 pathway.
Stambha (stiffness)	Rigid, restricted mobility.	Ischemia-induced glutamate release and over-activation of NMDA receptors.
Gaurava (heaviness)	Limb feeling "weighted."	Increased vascular permeability, inflammatory edema, and leukocyte adhesion leading to vascular stasis.
Tandra (drowsiness)	Systemic lethargy.	Systemic IL-6 and TNF-alpha affecting sleep-wake centers via the HPA axis.

TNF: Tumor necrosis factor, IL-6: Interleukin-6, DRG: Dorsal root ganglion

Table 3: Comparative management modalities and efficacy[16]

Ayurvedic modality[17]	Modern comparison	Rationale/outcome
Basti (Enema)	Gut-Brain modulation	59.82% improvement in walking time; non-recurrence rate of 70.56%.
Agnikarma (Cautery)	Nerve stimulation/PNS	80% total pain relief; superior to Katibasti in acute phases.
Siravyadha (Venesection)	Decompression	63.15% moderate improvement; reduces venous pressure and hydrostatic edema.
Shamana (*Guggulu*)	NSAIDs/ Steroids	*Vatari Guggulu* reduces *Tandra* by 53.48% without GI side effects.

Table 4: Dietary and lifestyle guidelines for *Gridhrasi*

Category	*Pathya* (Do's)	*Apathya* (Don'ts)
Cereals	*Purana Shashtika Shali* (old rice), *Godhuma* (wheat).	*Kodrava*, *Shyamaka* (millets).
Pulses	*Masha* (black gram), *Kulattha* (horse gram).	*Mudga* (green gram), *Kalaya* (peas).
Vegetables	*Garlic*, *Shigru* (drumstick), *Brinjal*.	*Karavellaka* (bitter gourd), Leafy greens.
Lifestyle	Warm water bath, oil massage, sunlight exposure.	Suppression of natural urges, night awakening.