

DECODING *KHALITYA* AND *PALITYA* IN *BRĤATTRAYĪ* – A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CLASSICAL AYURVEDIC WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

Khalitya (hair loss) and *Palitya* (premature greying) are two distinctive disorders described within the classical Ayurvedic literature concerning the health and appearance of hair. Although these conditions are frequently correlated with modern alopecia and premature canities, their conceptual foundations in the *BrĤattrayī* remain dispersed across different textual contexts and require systematic comparative interpretation. The present review aims to critically examine the descriptions of *Khalitya* and *Palitya* in the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, and *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*, with emphasis on their terminology, etiological factors, pathogenesis, clinical features, and therapeutic principles. A qualitative literary analysis was undertaken using the *BrĤattrayī* as primary sources, supported by relevant classical commentaries and selected secondary literature. The collected references were comparatively analysed to identify areas of convergence, divergence,

elaboration, and conceptual continuity among the three treatises. Particular attention was given to the role of *doṣa*, *dūṣya*, *srotas*, *agni*, and local tissue processes in the manifestation of these disorders, while avoiding direct equivalence with contemporary disease entities. The analysis indicates that the classical descriptions provide a multidimensional framework in

which hair loss and greying are understood through interacting systemic and local factors rather than as isolated cosmetic abnormalities. Differences in textual emphasis also demonstrate the progressive refinement and synthesis of Ayurvedic knowledge across the *Bṛhatrayī*. A critical reading of these references may therefore provide a more coherent understanding of *Khalitya* and *Palitya* and establish a classical foundation for future interdisciplinary research. Such a synthesis is relevant for preserving textual fidelity while developing clinically meaningful interpretations.

KEYWORDS: *Khalitya*, *Palitya*, *Bṛhatrayī*, *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*.

INTRODUCTION

Hair is an important structure discussed in Ayurvedic literature in relation to bodily appearance and physiological integrity. The classical understanding of hair is not restricted to its external appearance but is connected with the broader processes of tissue nourishment and metabolism. *Caraka Saṃhitā* specifically describes *Keśa* and *Loma* as the *mala* of *Asthi Dhātu*, thereby establishing a classical relationship between hair and tissue-level metabolism. This description provides an important conceptual foundation for understanding pathological changes affecting hair within the Ayurvedic framework. The condition of hair may therefore be considered in relation to the integrity of the underlying physiological processes rather than solely as an isolated external manifestation.^[1]

Among the disorders concerning hair, *Khalitya* and *Palitya* are particularly important in the *Bṛhatrayī*. *Khalitya* is primarily associated with progressive loss of hair, whereas *Palitya* denotes alteration in the natural colour of hair. The classical descriptions of these conditions are distributed across different textual contexts in *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, and *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*. Their descriptions include pathological factors, clinical manifestations, and therapeutic considerations. A comparative examination is therefore necessary to understand whether the three treatises present identical concepts or provide distinctive perspectives on these disorders.^[2]

In *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, the pathology of hair loss is described through the involvement of *Pitta*, *Vāta*, *Kapha*, and *Rakta* at the level of the *Romakūpa*. The text explains that *Pitta* associated with *Vāta* affects the hair follicles and causes falling of hair, followed by obstruction of the follicles by *Śleṣman* and *Śoṇita*, thereby preventing the emergence of new hair. This

description is particularly significant because it provides a sequential explanation of the pathological process and also distinguishes *Khalitya* from related conditions such as *Indralupta*.^[3]

The *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya* presents a closely related description and specifically notes that the falling of hair in *Khalitya* occurs gradually. It further describes variations according to *doṣa* predominance and provides therapeutic measures for *Khalitya* and *Palitya*. The text recommends treatment following appropriate *śodhana*, including *Nasya*, *Śirobhyanga*, and *Pradeha*. These descriptions demonstrate that *Vāgbhaṭa* incorporates both pathological and therapeutic dimensions into a concise clinical presentation.^[4]

Palitya represents another important dimension of classical Ayurvedic hair pathology. The classical descriptions associate it particularly with *Śarīroṣma*, *Pitta*, and factors such as *Śoka*, *Śrama*, and *Krodha*. In the *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*, the text states that increased bodily heat reaching the head, together with associated pathological factors, affects the hair and produces *Palita*. The condition is therefore described through an Ayurvedic pathological framework rather than simply as an age-related cosmetic change.^[5]

Although modern literature frequently attempts to correlate *Khalitya* with alopecia and *Palitya* with premature canities, such correlations should be interpreted cautiously. Ayurvedic disease concepts are constructed within a distinct theoretical framework involving *Doṣa*, *Dūṣya*, *Nidāna*, *Samprāpti*, and *Cikitsā*. Therefore, direct one-to-one equivalence with contemporary diagnostic entities may not adequately represent the original classical concepts. A critical reading of the primary texts is consequently essential before establishing contemporary interpretations.^[6]

Despite the availability of individual discussions on *Khalitya* and *Palitya*, a concise comparative examination of their presentation across the *Bṛhatrayī* remains academically relevant. Differences in textual placement, pathological explanation, clinical description, and therapeutic emphasis may reveal important aspects of the development and synthesis of Ayurvedic knowledge. The present review therefore focuses on the primary descriptions in *Caraka*, *Suśruta*, and *Vāgbhaṭa*, with the objective of identifying their common conceptual foundation as well as their distinctive contributions.^[7]

2. Concept of *Keśa* in Ayurveda

Keśa occupies an important position in the classical Ayurvedic understanding of bodily structure and physiological integrity. Although the *Bṛhatrayī* does not provide a separate chapter exclusively devoted to the physiology of *Keśa*, its origin, nourishment, and pathological alterations can be understood through the broader concepts of *Dhātu Pāka*, *Dhātu Pōṣaṇa*, and *Mala*. This approach indicates that the health of hair was understood in relation to the internal processes of tissue metabolism rather than being regarded merely as an external appendage. Such a perspective becomes particularly relevant while interpreting disorders such as *Khalitya* and *Palitya*.^[8]

Caraka Saṃhitā explicitly states that *Keśa* and *Loma* constitute the *mala* of *Asthi Dhātu*. The text explains that during the process of *Dhātu Pāka*, the *prasāda* and *kiṭṭa* portions of the *Dhātu* are formed, with *Keśa* and *Loma* representing the *kiṭṭa* component of *Asthi*. This description establishes a classical physiological relationship between *Asthi Dhātu* metabolism and the formation of hair. Therefore, alterations in the processes responsible for proper tissue metabolism may be considered relevant while interpreting abnormalities of hair.

The concept may be understood more clearly through the following classical framework.

Classical concept	Description	Relevance to <i>Keśa</i>
<i>Asthi Dhātu</i>	Fifth among the seven <i>Dhātu</i>	Provides the classical tissue association of <i>Keśa</i>
<i>Dhātu Pāka</i>	Metabolic transformation of <i>Dhātu</i>	Explains formation of <i>Dhātu</i> products
<i>Kiṭṭa Bhāga</i>	Non-nourishing/metabolic by-product portion	Gives rise to <i>Keśa</i> and <i>Loma</i> according to <i>Caraka</i>
<i>Keśa and Loma</i>	Hair of scalp and body	Considered <i>Asthi Dhātu mala</i>
<i>Prasāda Bhāga</i>	Nourishing component of tissue metabolism	Represents the nutritive aspect of <i>Dhātu</i> transformation

This textual relationship is significant for the present review because it provides a physiological foundation before discussing pathological changes in *Keśa*. However, it should not be interpreted as establishing a direct biomedical equivalence between hair and bone tissue. Rather, it represents the internal logic of the Ayurvedic theory of *Dhātu Pāka*, in which the products of tissue metabolism are classified according to their functional and physiological significance.^[9]

From the perspective of the present article, the classical understanding of *Keśa* therefore provides an important conceptual bridge between normal physiology and disease manifestation. *Khalitya* involves alteration in the continuity of hair growth, whereas *Palitya* involves alteration in its natural colour. Both conditions can consequently be examined against the background of the classical relationship between *Keśa*, *Dhātu*, and *Doṣa*. This framework also helps in understanding why the classical texts discuss hair disorders through systemic as well as local pathological considerations.^[10]

3. Classical Concept of *Khalitya* in *Bṛhatrayī*

Khalitya is described in the *Bṛhatrayī* as a disorder characterized by loss of hair from the scalp. The classical descriptions explain it through the involvement of *doṣa* and pathological changes occurring in the hair-bearing region. Rather than considering hair loss as an isolated external abnormality, the texts describe a pathological process involving the *keśabhūmi* and *romakūpa*. In *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Khalitya* is discussed under *Trimarmīya Cikitsā*, where the pathological effect of *tejas* associated with *Vāta* and other *doṣa* on the scalp is described.^[11]

Suśruta Saṃhitā provides a more specific description of the pathogenesis. It explains that deranged *Vāta* and *Pitta* affect the roots of the hair and cause their falling. Subsequently, *Kapha* and *Rakta* obstruct the *romakūpa*, preventing the emergence of new hair. The same textual context also mentions *Indralupta*, *Khalitya*, and *Rujya*, indicating their close relationship within the classical description of hair-loss disorders.^[12]

Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya presents the concept in a concise form and describes *Khalitya* in relation to gradual hair loss. Its presentation provides a clinically oriented synthesis of the classical understanding and is useful for comparison with *Caraka* and *Suśruta*.

Comparative Perspective

Classical Text	Description of <i>Khalitya</i>
<i>Caraka Saṃhitā</i>	<i>Khalitya</i> is described in relation to the pathological effect of <i>doṣa</i> on the <i>keśabhūmi</i> , resulting in loss of hair.
<i>Suśruta Saṃhitā</i>	The text describes involvement of <i>Vāta</i> and <i>Pitta</i> at the hair roots, followed by obstruction of the <i>romakūpa</i> by <i>Kapha</i> and <i>Rakta</i> , which prevents further hair growth.
<i>Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya</i>	<i>Khalitya</i> is presented in a concise manner, with emphasis on the gradual loss of hair and its management through measures directed towards disorders of the head.

Thus, the *Bṛhatrayī* demonstrates a broadly consistent understanding of *Khalitya* as a disorder of hair loss associated with *doṣa* involvement, while the emphasis varies among the texts. *Caraka* emphasizes the pathological action on the scalp, *Suśruta* provides a more explicit sequential description involving the *romakūpa*, and *Vāgbhaṭa* presents the concept concisely. These descriptions should therefore be interpreted as complementary classical perspectives rather than forced into a single uniform model.^[13]

4. Classical Concept of *Palitya* in *Bṛhatrayī*

4.1 Classical Description

Palitya refers to the alteration of the natural colour of hair and is described in the classical texts as a condition associated particularly with *Pitta*. In *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Palitya* is discussed along with *Khalitya* in the context of disorders affecting the head. The description indicates that pathological heat associated with *Pitta* can affect the hair and produce change in its natural colour.^[14]

Suśruta Saṃhitā provides a more specific description, stating that *Śarīroṣma* associated with factors such as *Krodha*, *Śoka*, and *Śrama* reaches the head, where *Pitta* acts upon the hair and produces *Palita*. Thus, *Palitya* is presented through a pathological process involving increased internal heat and alteration of hair colour.^[15]

4.2 Comparative View

Classical Text	Classical description of <i>Palitya</i>
<i>Caraka Saṃhitā</i>	Describes <i>Palitya</i> in relation to pathological heat and <i>Pitta</i> affecting the hair.
<i>Suśruta Saṃhitā</i>	Specifically associates <i>Palita</i> with <i>Śarīroṣma</i> , <i>Krodha</i> , <i>Śoka</i> , <i>Śrama</i> , and the action of <i>Pitta</i> on the hair.
<i>Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya</i>	Presents the concept in a concise manner within its discussion of disorders of the head.

The classical descriptions therefore indicate that *Palitya* was not viewed simply as a superficial change in hair colour. Rather, it was interpreted through systemic factors, particularly *Pitta* and increased bodily heat, providing a distinct Ayurvedic explanation for alteration of hair pigmentation.

5. Comparative Analysis of *Khalitya* and *Palitya*

Although both *Khalitya* and *Palitya* involve the hair, their principal manifestations are different. *Khalitya* is primarily concerned with loss of hair, whereas *Palitya* relates to

alteration of the natural colour of hair. The classical descriptions further indicate that their pathological emphasis is not identical: *Khalitya* involves the hair-bearing region and impaired continuation of hair growth, while *Palitya* is predominantly described in relation to *Pitta* and increased bodily heat affecting hair colour.^[16]

Aspect	<i>Khalitya</i>	<i>Palitya</i>
Main manifestation	Loss of hair	Change in natural hair colour
Classical emphasis	Hair root and <i>Romakūpa</i>	<i>Pitta</i> and bodily heat
Important factors	<i>Vāta</i> , <i>Pitta</i> , <i>Kapha</i> , <i>Rakta</i>	Predominantly <i>Pitta</i>
Classical interpretation	Disturbed hair growth and regeneration	Alteration of natural hair colour

A comparative reading of *Caraka*, *Suśruta*, and *Vāgbhaṭa* suggests that the texts share a common conceptual foundation but differ in the manner in which the disorders are presented. *Suśruta* gives a particularly clear account of the involvement of the *Romakūpa* in *Khalitya*, whereas the descriptions of *Palitya* place greater emphasis on *Pitta* and factors associated with increased internal heat. These differences are better understood as variations in textual emphasis rather than as contradictions.^[17]

6. Critical Interpretation

A comparative reading of *Khalitya* and *Palitya* reveals that the *Bṛhatrayī* does not present hair disorders merely as superficial abnormalities. Their descriptions are embedded within the wider Ayurvedic framework of *doṣa* involvement, local pathology, and systemic factors. *Khalitya* is primarily described through disturbance of hair growth and involvement of the *romakūpa*, whereas *Palitya* is more closely associated with *Pitta* and alteration of the natural colour of hair.

An important observation is that the three texts show **conceptual continuity with variation in emphasis**. *Caraka* gives greater importance to the pathological process, *Suśruta* provides a comparatively clearer description of the local sequence involving the hair roots, and *Vāgbhaṭa* presents the concepts in a concise and clinically oriented manner. This may be understood as progressive synthesis rather than contradiction among the classical authorities. From a *Samhita* & *Siddhanta* perspective, it is also important not to equate *Khalitya* directly with every form of modern alopecia or *Palitya* with every case of premature canities. Such correlations may be useful for contemporary interpretation, but the original Ayurvedic concepts should first be understood through their own *nidāna*, *samprāpti*, *lakṣaṇa*, and *cikitsā*.

framework. The classical descriptions therefore provide a conceptual basis for interpretation rather than a direct modern diagnostic classification.^[18]

7. Therapeutic Principles in Bṛhatrayī

The management of *Khalitya* and *Palitya* in the classical texts is directed not only towards the visible hair abnormality but also towards correction of the underlying pathological process. The therapeutic approach includes appropriate *śodhana*, local measures, *Nasya*, *Śirobhyanga*, *Pralepa*, and selected *Rasāyana* or *Keśya* measures. Thus, the classical approach combines systemic correction with local care of the scalp and hair.

For *Khalitya*, *Caraka Saṃhitā* specifically recommends *Nasya*, application of medicated oil over the head and face, and *Pralepa* over the scalp along with appropriate purification measures. The text also describes *Bṛṅgarāja* among the drugs used in the management of *Khalitya* and *Palitya*.^[19]

The therapeutic presentation of *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya* similarly places importance on treatment of the head and incorporates procedures such as *Nasya* and external applications. The overall approach suggests that management should be selected according to the involved *Doṣa* and the stage and nature of the disorder rather than applying a single treatment uniformly.

Classical Text	Major therapeutic emphasis
<i>Caraka Saṃhitā</i>	<i>Nasya</i> , <i>Tailābhyanga</i> , <i>Pralepa</i> and <i>Rasāyana</i> -oriented measures
<i>Suśruta Saṃhitā</i>	Local and systemic measures according to the pathological condition
<i>Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya</i>	<i>Nasya</i> and external measures with appropriate <i>Doṣa</i> -based management

Overall, the therapeutic descriptions of the *Bṛhatrayī* indicate an integrated approach in which correction of the underlying imbalance and care of the hair-bearing region are considered together. This therapeutic principle is an important feature of the classical understanding of *Khalitya* and *Palitya*.^[20]

8. CONCLUSION

The classical descriptions of *Khalitya* and *Palitya* in the *Bṛhatrayi* demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of hair disorders within the Ayurvedic framework. *Khalitya* is primarily described in relation to loss of hair and disturbance at the level of the hair roots, whereas *Palitya* is principally associated with alteration in the natural colour of hair. The involvement of *Dosha*, local structures, and systemic factors indicates that these conditions were not viewed merely as cosmetic abnormalities.

A comparative reading of *Caraka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* reveals considerable conceptual continuity along with differences in textual emphasis. *Caraka* provides an important pathological perspective, *Sushruta* elaborates the process involving the *Romakupa*, and *Vagbhata* presents the concepts in a concise and clinically oriented manner. Thus, the three texts may be regarded as complementary sources for understanding classical hair pathology.

The present exploration also highlights the importance of maintaining textual fidelity while interpreting these disorders in the contemporary context. Although possible correlations with modern hair disorders may be useful, *Khalitya* and *Palitya* should first be understood as distinct Ayurvedic concepts within their own theoretical framework. A systematic reading of the *Brihatrayi* therefore provides a valuable foundation for further textual, clinical, and interdisciplinary research on hair disorders.

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