

GRIDHRASI (SCIATICA): AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE ON CLASSICAL UNDERSTANDING AND THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES – A REVIEW

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Article Received on 28 May 2026,
Article Revised on 18 June 2026,
Article Published on 01 July 2026,
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21024253>

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How to cite this Article: Abhishek Singh^{*1}, Sanjeev Sood², Ritika Sharma³. (2026). Gridhrasi (Sciatica): An Ayurvedic Perspective On Classical Understanding and Therapeutic Approaches - A Review. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, 15(13), 376-390. This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

ABSTRACT

Gridhrasi is a *Vata*-dominant *Nanatmaja Vyadhi* described extensively in Ayurvedic classics, characterized by radiating pain starting from the *Sphik, Kati, Uru, Janu, Jangha* and extending up to the *Pada*. Clinically, *Gridhrasi* closely resembles Sciatica described in modern medicine. The disease significantly affects mobility and quality of life, making its effective management a major clinical concern. This review aims to critically analyze the concept of *Gridhrasi* with reference to *Brihat Trayi* and *Laghu Trayi*, highlighting its *Nidana, Samprapti, Lakshana, Bheda, and Chikitsa*, and to compile various therapeutic modalities described in classical *Ayurvedic* texts. Classical references from *Brihat Trayi* and *Laghu Trayi* and also some minor *Samhitas* to be systematically reviewed. According to Ayurvedic literature, *Gridhrasi* is primarily caused by *Vata Dosha*, either alone or in

association with *Kapha Dosha*, leading to obstruction and vitiation in the *Snayu, Kandara, and Asthi*. The clinical features include *Ruk, Toda, Stambha, Spandana, and Sakthikshepa Nigraha*. Management principles emphasize *Nidana Parivarjana, Shodhana* and *Shamana*

Chikitsa. Various therapeutic interventions such as *Snehana*, *Swedana*, *Basti* (*Niruha* and *Anuvasana*), *Agnikarma*, *Siravedha*, and internal medications including *Kashaya*, *Churan*, *Ghrita*, and *Taila* are described across classical texts. This review consolidates classical *Ayurvedic* knowledge on *Gridhrasi* and highlights the holistic and multi-modal approach of *Ayurveda* in its management. The study underscores the need for further clinical research to validate classical therapeutic strategies and establish standardized treatment protocols for *Gridhrasi*.

KEYWORDS: *Gridhrasi*, *Brihat trayi*, *Laghu trayi*, *Sciatica*.

INTRODUCTION

In the present era of rapid urbanization and technological advancement, lifestyle-related disorders have emerged as a major public health concern. Sedentary habits, prolonged sitting hours, improper postures during work, excessive use of digital devices, lack of regular physical activity, psychological stress, and unhealthy dietary practices have collectively contributed to a rising incidence of musculoskeletal and neurological disorders. Among these, low back pain with radiating pain to the lower limb, commonly known as sciatica, is one of the most frequently encountered conditions affecting individuals across various age groups. With a lifetime prevalence estimated between 13% and 40%, sciatica is recognized as a significant and common musculoskeletal disorder globally.^[1] It significantly hampers day-to-day activities and reduces work efficiency, thereby affecting the overall quality of life.

In modern medicine, sciatica is described as pain radiating along the course of the sciatic nerve, often caused by lumbar disc herniation, spinal canal stenosis, degenerative changes, or nerve root compression. The conventional management of sciatica primarily includes analgesics, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxants, physiotherapy, and in severe cases, surgical interventions. However, these treatment modalities mainly focus on symptomatic relief and are often associated with limitations such as adverse drug reactions, recurrence of symptoms, high cost, and inconsistent long-term outcomes. As a result, there is a growing demand for safe, effective, and holistic alternatives that address the root cause of the disease rather than merely suppressing symptoms.

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine, offers a comprehensive understanding of disease pathology and emphasizes a personalized and holistic approach to treatment. The condition resembling sciatica is described in *Ayurvedic* literature under the heading of *Gridhrasi*, which

is classified as a *Vata-Pradhana Nanatmaja Vyadhi*.^[2] Classical texts vividly describe the characteristic symptoms of *Gridhrasi*, including radiating pain starting from the *Sphik* (hip region) and extending through *Kati*, *Uru*, *Janu*, *Jangha*, and *Pada*, along with associated features such as *Ruk* (pain), *Toda* (pricking sensation), *Stambha* (stiffness), *Spandana* (twitching)^[3], and *Sakthikshepa Nigraha*^[4] (restricted movement of the lower limb). The resemblance between *Gridhrasi* and sciatica is well acknowledged by both Ayurvedic scholars and contemporary researchers.

The *Brihat Trayi-Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with *Laghu Trayi* texts such as *Madhava Nidana*, *Sharangadhara Samhita*, and *Bhavaprakasha*, provide detailed descriptions of the etiological factors, pathogenesis, clinical features, and management principles of *Gridhrasi*. *Ayurveda* attributes the manifestation of *Gridhrasi* mainly to the vitiation of *Vata Dosha*, either independently or in association with *Kapha Dosha*, leading to derangement of *Snayu*, *Kandara*, *Asthi*, and related structures. The management strategies described are comprehensive and include *Nidana Parivarjana*, *Shodhana* therapies like *Basti*, *Siravedha*, and *Agnikarma*, as well as *Shamana* therapies involving internal medications and external procedures.

Considering the increasing prevalence of sciatica and the limitations of contemporary medical management, it becomes imperative to explore and critically analyze the classical Ayurvedic wisdom related to *Gridhrasi*. Therefore, this review article aims to systematically compile and analyze references from *Brihat Trayi* and *Laghu Trayi* regarding *Gridhrasi* and to highlight various Ayurvedic treatment modalities described for its management. This effort seeks to provide a strong theoretical foundation and encourage further clinical research for integrating Ayurvedic principles into the effective management of sciatica.

REVIEW OF DISEASE IN *BRIHAT TRAYI*

CHARAKA SAMHITA

Acharya Charaka has described *Gridhrasi* for the first time in *Maharoga Adhyaya Sutra Sthana* as *Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhi*.^[2] Its detail description is given in *Chikitsa Sthana Vata Vyadhi Adhyaya* as presence of *Ruka*, *Toda*, *Stambha*, *Spandana* initiating from *Sphik* spreading down towards *Kati*, *Prishtha*, *Uru Janu*, *Jangha*, *Pada*. It is of 2 types *Vata and Vata - Kaphaj*. In *Vata Kaphaj* type along with above symptoms *Tandra*, *Gaurava*, *Aruchi* will also be present.^[3]

In *Chikitsa Sthana* the application of *Siravyadha*, *Basti Karma*, and *Agnikarma* is mentioned for the management of *Gridhrasi*.^[5]

SUSHRUTA SAMHITA

Acharya Sushruta has mentioned the sign and symptoms of *Gridhrasi* in *Nidana Sthana* as ‘*Sakthi Utkshepa Nigrahan*’ due to the affection of *Parshini* and *Pratya Anguli Kandra* with Vitiated *Vata*.^[4] *Sira Vedha* has been mentioned for the treatment of *Gridhrasi* in *Chikitsa Sthana* by *Acharya Sushruta*.^[6]

ASHTANGA SANGRAHA

In *Sutrasthana* 20th chapter *Doshabhediya Adhyaya*, *Gridhrasi* is included under 80 types of *Vata Vikara*.^[7]

In *Nidana Sthana* 15th chapter *Vata Vyadhi Nidana*, pathogenesis and symptomatology of *Gridhrasi* has been described.^[8]

In *Sutra Sthana* 36th chapter, *Siravedha Chikitsa* in *Gridhrasi* has been mentioned.^[9]

ASHTANGA HRIDAYA

Acharya Vagbhata gave the same symptoms of *Gridhrasi* as given by *Acharya Sushruta* in *Nidana Sthana Vata Vyadhi Adhyaya*.^[10]

And described the specific site for *Siravedha* in *Gridhrasi* in the *Sutra Sthana*, *Siravyadha Vidhi Adhyaya*.^[11]

REVIEW OF THE DISEASE IN LAGHU TRAYI

MADHAVA NIDANA

Acharya Madhavkara described *Gridhrasi* under the *Vata Vyadhi* chapter of *Nidana Sthana* and elaborated upon certain distinctive clinical features of the disease, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of its presentation.^[12]

SHARANGDHAR SAMHITA

In the description of various *Vataj Rogas* *Gridhrasi* is mentioned.^[13]

BHAVA PRAKASH

Acharya Bhavmishra mentioned the same sign and symptoms as mentioned in *Madhava Nidana*. In its line of treatment before the *Basti Karma*, *Virechana Karma* is prescribed.^[14]

REVIEW OF THE DISEASE IN OTHER SAMHITA'S**KASHYAPA SAMHITA**

In this *Samhita*, *Gridhrasi* is considered under 80 types of *Vata Vikaras*, but no details are described.^[15]

BHELA SAMHITA

26th chapter of this *Samhita* deals with *Basti* and *Raktamokshana Chikitsa* for *Gridhrasi*.^[16]

CHAKRADATTA

This text deals with treatment part only under the heading of *Vata Vyadhi Chikitsa* Some herbal preparation *Snehana Chikitsa*, *Basti Chikitsa* and *Shastra Chikitsa* are described in detail.^[17]

VANGASENA

In this text, its line of treatment has been more clearly explained by mentioning that *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Basti* and *Siravyadha* should be done in *Gridhrasi*.^[18]

YOGARATNAKARA

In *Yogaratanakara* symptomatology and classification of *Gridhrasi* has been mentioned under *Vata Vyadhi Nidana*. Few preparations have also been described which are useful in *Gridhrasi*.^[19]

In the same chapter there is a description of *Siravyadha*, "In the disease *Gridhrasi* (sciatica), blood should be removed by performing *Sirvyadha* after making an incision four *Angula* breadths below the *Mutraendriya* and *Mutrashaya*. If the disease does not subside even after this procedure, then *Dagdha karma* should be performed on the *Kanistha Anguli*.^[20]

RASA RATNA SAMUCHCHAYA

30th chapter of *Rasa Ratna Samuchchaya* deals with treatment of *Gridhrasi*.^[21]

NIDANA

The *Ayurvedic* classics do not specifically describe the causative factors of *Gridhrasi*. However, as *Gridhrasi* is classified under *Vata Vyadhi*, the general etiological factors responsible for the aggravation of *Vata* are considered relevant. Among the classical texts, detailed descriptions of the causes of *Vata Vyadhi* are available in *Charaka Samhita*^[22] and

Bhava Prakasha^[23], while *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Samgraha*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* mainly describe the factors that provoke *Vata Dosha*.^[24,25] *Gridhrasi* is considered a *Nanatmaja Vata Vyadhi*; therefore, factors that aggravate *Vata Dosha* are regarded as its probable etiological factors.

PURVA ROOPA

The *Ayurvedic* classics do not describe any specific *Purvaroopa* for *Gridhrasi*. However, as *Gridhrasi* is a type of *Vata Vyadhi*, *Acharya Charaka* has stated that “*Avyakta Lakshana*” should be regarded as the *Purvaroopa* of all *Vata* disorders.^[27]

RUPA

The *Ayurvedic* classics do not describe any specific *Purvaroopa* for *Gridhrasi*. However, as *Gridhrasi* is a type of *Vata Vyadhi*, *Acharya Charaka* has stated that “*Avyakta Lakshana*” should be regarded as the *Purvaroopa* of all *Vata* disorders.^[27]

Acharya Charaka described *Gridhrasi* as a condition characterized by *Ruka* (pain), *Stambha* (stiffness), *Toda* (pricking sensation), and *Spandana* (throbbing or fasciculations), originating from the *Sphik* and *Kati* regions and radiating through the *Prishtha*, *Uru*, *Janu*, and *Jangha* up to the *Pada*.^[3]

Symptoms of *Vataj Gridhrasi* given by *Acharya Charak*

- *Ruka* (pain)
- *Toda* (pricking sensation)
- *Muhaspandana* (fasciculation)
- *Stambha* (stiffness)

In *Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi*, the usual clinical manifestations are accompanied by certain additional symptoms attributable to the involvement of *Kapha Dosha*.

- *Tandra* (Torpor)
- *Gaurava* (Heaviness)
- *Arochaka* (Anorexia)^[7]
- *Mukha Praseka*

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, “*Sakthathi Kshepam Nigraharniyat*” denotes restriction in the upward movement of the affected lower limb and is regarded as the cardinal clinical

feature of *Gridhrasi*.^[4]

Madhavkara mentioned the presence of *Deha Vakrata, Janu, Kati, Uru Sandhi, Sphuran and Stabhdhata* in *Vata Gridhrasi and Agnimandhyata, Mukhaprseka, Bhakta Dwesha* in *Vata-Kaphaj* type of *Gridhrasi* in addition to the symptoms given in *Charak Samhita*.^[12]

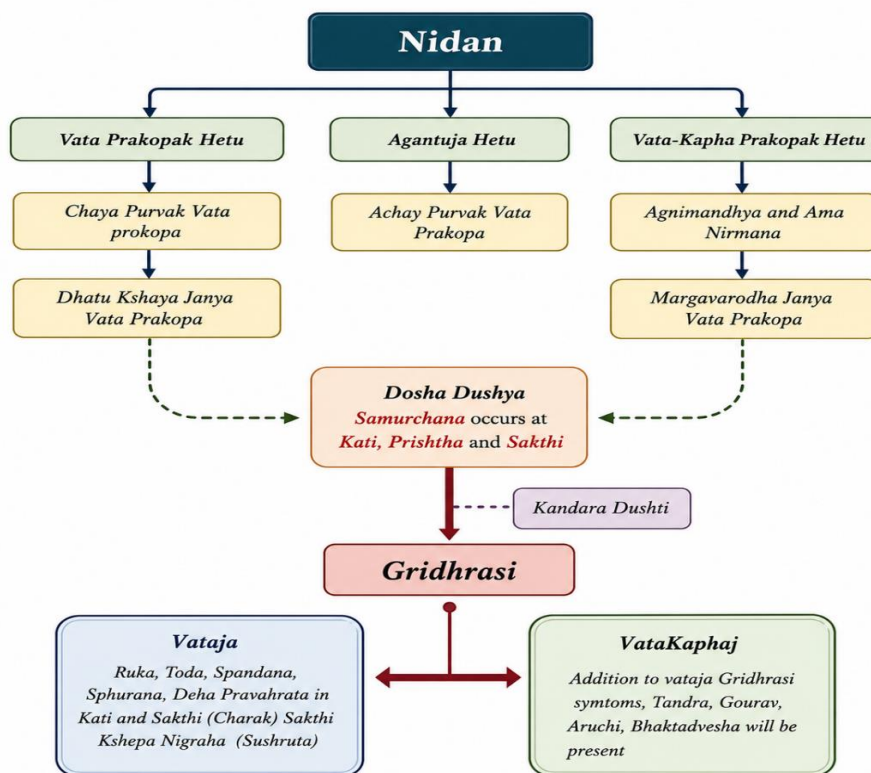
Acharya Yogaratnakara, has described *Suptata*^[28] as one of the clinical manifestations of *Gridhrasi*. It denotes paraesthesia or diminished sensation in the affected limb and may be correlated with the sensory disturbances commonly observed in patients with sciatica.

SAMPRAPTI

Although the classical texts do not provide a detailed description of the *Samprapti* of *Gridhrasi*, its *Samprapti Ghatakas* can be understood from its classification as a *Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhi* and the clinical features described in the literature.

Samprapti Ghatak of Gridhrasi

SAMPRAPTI GHATAK	
Dosha	<i>Vata and Vatanubandhi Kapha</i>
Dushya	<i>Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Sandhi</i>
Srotas	<i>Raktavaha, Mansavaha, Medovaha and Asthivaha</i>
Srotodusti	<i>Sanga, Margavarodha</i>
Rog marga	<i>Madhyam Rog Marga</i>
Adhishthanam	<i>Kandra of Parshini, Pratyanguli, Sphika, Kati, Uru, Jangha, Pada</i>
Agni	<i>Jathar Agni and Dhatu Agni Mandhya</i>



SADHYA-ASADHYATA

Assessment of *Sadhy*-*Asadhyata* is essential before initiating treatment. *Acharya Charaka* emphasized that a physician should distinguish between curable and incurable diseases before commencing therapy.^[29] Due to their grave nature and difficulty in management, *Vata Vyadhis* have been described as *Mahagada* by *Acharya Sushruta* and *Maharoga* by *Acharya Vagbhata*, and are generally considered difficult to treat.^[30]

CHIKITSA

Chikitsa Upkrama for Gridhrasi^[6,17,31,31,33,34,35]

CHIKITSA	C.S.	S.S.	A.H.	B.P.	Y.R.	B.S.	C.D.
<i>Snehana</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
<i>Swedana</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>Vamana</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	+
<i>Virechana</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	+
<i>Niruha basti</i>	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Anuvasana basti</i>	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Siravedha</i>	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
<i>Raktamokshana</i>	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Agnikarma</i>	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
<i>Shashtra karma</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+

1. SNEHANA

Both external and internal *Snehana* are used in *Gridhrasi*. External therapies include *Abhyanga*, *Avagaha*, and *Parisheka*, while medicated oils are used for internal oleation. However, in *Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi*, *Rukshana Chikitsa* is preferred over *Snehana* due to the involvement of *Ama* and aggravated *Kapha*.

2. SWEDANA

Swedana is an important therapeutic modality in *Gridhrasi*, as it helps relieve pain, stiffness, and heaviness while improving local circulation. Therapies such as *Avagaha*, *Pizhichil*, *Nadi Sweda*, *Patra Pinda Sweda*, and *Upanaha Sweda* are commonly employed, whereas *Baluka*, *Churna Pinda*, and *Jambira Pinda Sweda* are preferred in *Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi*.

3. VAMANA & VIRECHANA

According to *Chakrapani* and *Bhavamishra*, *Basti* alone may not yield optimal results in *Gridhrasi* without prior *Shodhana*. Therefore, therapies such as *Vamana* and *Virechana* are recommended, among which *Eranda Sneha* administered with milk is considered effective for inducing *Snigdha Mridu Virechana*.

4. BASTI

Basti Chikitsa is regarded as the foremost therapy for aggravated *Vata Dosha*, as its principal site of action, *Pakwashaya*, is considered the main seat of *Vata*. Hence, it has been described as *Ardha Chikitsa* and even *Purna Chikitsa*. *Acharya Charaka* has specifically advocated *Basti* in the management of *Gridhrasi*, employing both *Niruha* and *Anuvasana Basti* for its treatment.

5. SIRAVEDHA

According to Ayurvedic principles, failure to achieve relief with conventional therapies may indicate the involvement of *Rakta Dhatu*, warranting the use of *Raktamokshana*. In *Gridhrasi*, several classical texts specifically advocate *Siravedha* (venesection) as an effective form of *Raktamokshana*, and different *Acharyas* have described various sites for its application.

Charak : *Gulfagata Antara-Kandara*^[5]

Sushruta & Vagbhata : Four *Anguls* above or below the knee joint.^[6,11]

Harita : Four *Anguls* above the *Gulfa* in *Tiryak Gati*.

6. AGNI KARMA

Agni Karma has been advocated by several *Acharyas* in the management of *Gridhrasi*. *Acharya Charaka* recommends its application at the region between the *Kandara* and *Gulpha*, while *Acharya Sushruta* and *Acharya Vagbhata* have indicated *Agni Karma* in *Snayugata* and *Sandhigata Vata* disorders. Since *Gridhrasi* is considered a *Snayugata Vata Vyadhi*, *Agni Karma* is regarded as beneficial in its management. The recommended site for the procedure is four *Angula* posterior to the *Indrabasti Marma*.

SHAMANA CHIKITSA

The following therapeutic measures are included under *Shamana Chikitsa* for *Gridhrasi*:

- (1) ***Vedanashamaka Chikitsa***: aimed at relieving pain using drugs such as *Guggulu*, *Shallaki*, and *Kupilu*.
- (2) ***Vatahara Chikitsa***: employing *Basti* as *Shodhana* and drugs like *Rasna*, *Eranda*, *Bala*, and *Ashwagandha* for *Shamana*.
- (3) ***Kaphahara, Deepana, and Pachana Chikitsa***: particularly indicated in *Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi*, utilizing *Ushna Virya* drugs such as *Trikatu*, *Yavani*, *Hingu*, and *Panchakola* to pacify *Kapha*, digest *Ama*, and maintain *Samagni*.

PATHYA: *Pathya* in *Gridhrasi* includes *Snigdha*, *Ushna*, and *Vata-shamaka Ahara*, along with *Abhyanga*, *Mardana*, *Bhushayya*, and *Snana*. Foods such as *Navanita*, *Godhuma*, *Draksha*, and *Dugdha*, predominantly having *Madhura*, *Amla*, and *Lavana Rasa*, are considered beneficial.

APATHYA: *Apathya* for *Gridhrasi* includes *Tikshna*, *Sheeta*, *Kshara*, *Katu*, and *Vata-provoking* foods. Activities such as *Chinta* (stress), *Vegadharana* (suppression of natural urges), *Prajagarana* (night awakening), *Shrama* (excessive exertion), *Anashana* (fasting), and *Vyavaya* (excessive sexual activity) should also be avoided.

DISCUSSION

Gridhrasi, one of the important *Vata Nanatmaja Vyadhis*, has been extensively described in the *Ayurvedic* classics, reflecting its clinical significance since ancient times. The present review reveals that although *Charaka Samhita* was the first to provide a detailed description of its symptomatology and management, subsequent texts enriched the understanding of the disease by adding distinctive clinical features, classifications, and therapeutic approaches. The striking similarity between the classical manifestations of *Gridhrasi* and the modern

presentation of sciatica supports their close clinical correlation.

The review also highlights that, despite the absence of a clearly defined *Samprapti* in the classics, the disease process can be reasonably inferred from its symptomatology and its classification under *Vata Vyadhi*. The involvement of *Vata* alone or in association with *Kapha*, along with the participation of structures such as *Kandara*, *Snayu*, *Asthi*, and *Madhyama Roga Marga*, provides a comprehensive *Ayurvedic* understanding of the disease.

The management of *Gridhrasi* involves a multidimensional approach, with *Basti Chikitsa* serving as the principal therapy for aggravated *Vata*. Modalities such as *Siravedha*, *Agnikarma*, *Swedana*, and *Shamana* therapies complement treatment, while adherence to *Pathya-Apathya* supports sustained relief and prevents recurrence.

Thus, the classical *Ayurvedic* literature offers a holistic framework for understanding and managing *Gridhrasi*, which may serve as a valuable foundation for future evidence-based clinical studies and integrative approaches in the management of sciatica.

CONCLUSION

The classical literature advocates a holistic approach for its management, emphasizing *Nidana Parivarjana*, *Pathya-Apathya*, *Shodhana*, and *Shamana* therapies. Among these, *Basti Chikitsa* emerges as the cornerstone of treatment, supported by modalities such as *Siravedha*, *Agnikarma*, *Swedana*, and internal medications. Thus, *Ayurveda* offers a comprehensive and rational framework for the management of *Gridhrasi*, highlighting the need for further well-designed clinical studies to validate and integrate these principles into contemporary healthcare practice.

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