

A Review on the Concept of Srotomula as Described in Charaka and Sushruta Samhita

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Abstract

Srotas are the structural and functional channels of the body through which substances flow from one part to another. Each srota is said to be associated with two organs, which are termed as srotomula. The srotomula is the most vital part of the srotas — analogous to the root of a tree. The classical texts neither give a detailed description of srotomula nor mention the reason for considering particular organs as the srotomula. This review aims to assess and evaluate the relationship between srotas and their srotomula, and to compare the views of Charaka and Sushruta regarding srotomula. After comparing the views of both authorities, it was found that Charaka has narrated the concept from a physiological point of view, whereas Sushruta has placed greater emphasis on the anatomical aspect of srotomula.

Keywords: Srotas, Srotomula, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ayurveda.

Introduction

Srotas, meaning channels or pores, are present throughout the visible body as well as at the "invisible" or subtle level of the cells, molecules, atoms, and subatomic strata. It is through these channels that nutrients and other substances are transported in and out of our physiology. It is also through these channels that information and intelligence spontaneously flow. When the flow of appropriate nutrients and energies through these channels is unimpeded, there is health; when there is excess, deficiency, or blockage in these channels, disease can take root. Some srotas have obvious correlates with Western concepts (e.g., both Ayurveda and allopathy recognise the annavahasrota, or gastrointestinal channel, and the pranavahasrota, or respiratory passageways). Other srotas have no Western correlate, such as artavavahasrota or udakavahasrota, which carry the monthly menses and the pure water in the body, respectively.

Together with knowledge of the doshic imbalances, the dhatus (tissues) involved, the state of the agni (digestive fire), and other diagnostic means, assessment of the srotas is one of the means in Ayurveda by which diseases can be distinguished. By knowing which srotas are affected and the nature and extent of their disturbance, one can understand a great deal about the disease process.

The Charaka Samhita describes thirteen srotas. Three srotas connect the individual to the external environment by bringing air, food, and water into and out of the body. Seven srotas are associated with the seven bodily tissues (sapta dhatus). Another three srotas direct wastes out of the body. That makes thirteen. However, other ancient authorities recognise three additional srotas relating to lactation, menstruation, and the flow of thoughts through the mind. This brings the total number of srotas to sixteen, which is the accepted description.

The list of the sixteen srotas is as follows:

Three srotas connect the individual to the external world:

- Pranavahasrota
- Annavahasrota
- Udakavahasrota

Seven srotas represent channels to and from the tissues (dhatus):

- Rasavahasrota
- Raktavahasrota
- Mamsavahasrota
- Medavahasrota
- Asthivahasrota

- Majjavahasrota
- Shukravahasrota

Three srotas regulate the elimination of metabolic waste products:

- Purishavahasrota
- Mutravahasrota
- Svedavahasrota

Two srotas are specific to women:

- Artavavahasrota
- Stanyavahasrota

One srota is associated with the mind (manas):

- Manovahasrota — the channel that carries thoughts, ideas, emotions, and impressions.

Discussion

On comparing the views of Acharya Charaka and Acharya Sushruta on srotomula, differences are evident at several places. Acharya Charaka has described the concept of srotas on the basis of vitiation of the srotas, i.e., srotodushti, which is more concerned with medicine and physiology, whereas Acharya Sushruta has described the same concept on the basis of srotoviddhalakshanas, which is primarily concerned with surgical and anatomical aspects. Regarding udakavaha, raktavaha, and purishavahasrotas, Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata hold an almost identical opinion. The major difference between Charaka and Sushruta is that the latter has not described the mulas of asthivaha, majjavaha, and svedavahasrotas, on the grounds that all of these are present throughout the whole body.

Commentator Dalhana gave the reason that injury to such roots is not useful for the knowledge of prognosis of the disease, and also that diseases pertaining to the whole body fall under the purview of the medicinal community, whereas the practitioners of Shalyatantra have to deal mainly with local diseases. While explaining the srotomula, Sushruta has placed greater emphasis on dhamani, as he has described dhamani as the mula of many srotas — viz., rasavahasrotas, raktavahasrotas, mamsavahasrotas, and artavavahasrotas. The probable reason is that he might have considered dhamani as the nutrient-supplying entity to these srotas.

On gross review, the srotomula can be understood in terms of the following functional aspects:

- Regulating centre
- Site of origin / nutrition
- Conduction path
- Storage centre
- Site of symptom manifestation

Table — Comparison of Srotas and their Mula as described by Acharya Charaka and Sushruta

S. No.	Srotas	Mula (Charaka)	Mula (Sushruta)	Comments
1	Pranavaha (channels of respiration)	Hridaya, Mahasrotas	Hridaya, Rasavahidhamani	Hridaya — regulating centre, site of symptom manifestation. Rasavahidhamani — conduction path. Mahasrotas — site of origin / nutrition.
2	Annavaaha (alimentary channels)	Amashaya, Vamaparshwa	Amashaya, Annavahidhamani	Amashaya — site of origin / nutrition, site of symptom manifestation. Annavahidhamani — conduction path. Vamaparshwa — site

				of symptom manifestation.
3	Udakavaha (channels of fluid distribution)	Talu, Kloma	Talu, Kloma	Talu — regulating centre, site of symptom manifestation. Kloma — to be explored.
4	Rasavaha (lymphatic channels)	Hridaya, Dashadhamani	Hridaya, Rasavahidhamani	Hridaya — regulating centre, site of symptom manifestation. Dashadhamani, Rasavahidhamani — conduction path.
5	Raktavaha (vascular system channels)	Yakrit, Pleeha	Yakrit, Pleeha, Raktavahidhamani	Yakrit — site of origin / nutrition, site of symptom manifestation. Pleeha — site of symptom manifestation. Raktavahidhamani — conduction path.
6	Mamsavaha (muscle tissue channels)	Snayu, Twak	Snayu, Twak, Raktavahidhamani	Snayu — site of symptom manifestation. Twak — site of symptom manifestation. Raktavahidhamani — site of origin / nutrition.
7	Medovaha (adipose tissue channels)	Vrikka, Vapavahana	Vrikka, Kati	Vrikka — regulating centre. Vapavahana — site of symptom manifestation. Kati — site of symptom manifestation.
8	Asthivaha (bone tissue channels)	Meda, Jaghan	—	Meda — regulating centre (?). Jaghan — site of symptom manifestation (?).
9	Majjavaha (marrow tissue channels)	Asthi, Sandhi	—	Asthi — regulating centre, storage centre. Sandhi — site of symptom manifestation.
10	Shukravaha (reproductive tissue channels)	Vrishan, Medhra	Vrishan, Stana	Vrishan — site of origin / nutrition, regulating centre, storage centre. Medhra — conduction path. Stana — site of symptom manifestation.
11	Artavavaha (uterine channels)	Garbhashaya, Artavavahidhamani	—	Garbhashaya — site of origin / nutrition, regulating centre. Artavavahidhamani — site of origin / nutrition, conduction path.
12	Purishavaha (faeces-transporting channels)	Pakvashaya, Sthoolaguda	Pakvashaya, Guda (anus)	Pakvashaya — site of origin / nutrition, regulating centre. Sthoolaguda — conduction path, site of symptom manifestation. Guda — conduction path, site of symptom manifestation.
13	Mutravaha (urine-transporting channels)	Basti, Vankshan	Basti, Medhra	Basti — site of origin / nutrition, regulating centre. Vankshan — conduction path, site of symptom

				manifestation. Medhra — conduction path, site of symptom manifestation.
14	Svedovaha (sweat-transporting channels)	Meda, Romakup	—	Meda — site of origin / nutrition, regulating centre. Romakup — conduction path, site of symptom manifestation.

As discussed above, in light of current knowledge of modern medical sciences, most of the srotomula described in the first place by the acharyas are concerned with regulation of the respective dhatu or mala formation, and they also play a vital role in the nutrition of these respective dhatus and malas. The srotomula described in the second place are mainly the path for carrying the dhatu and mala, and are also the sites of symptom manifestation when these srotas are vitiated.

Future Scope

There are srotomula which are still to be explored — such as kloma and jaghan — which may open new vistas in the arena of research in life sciences. There are also relationships of srotomula with the srotas that are yet to be explored in light of modern science, for example, the relation of meda with asthivahasrotas.

Conclusion

The classical descriptions of srotomula by Acharya Charaka and Acharya Sushruta differ in approach: Charaka emphasises the physiological aspect through the lens of srotodushti, while Sushruta emphasises the surgical and anatomical aspect through srotoviddhalakshanas. Despite these differences, both views are complementary and together provide a comprehensive understanding of srotomula. On a gross review, the srotomula can be understood in terms of five functional aspects — regulating centre, site of origin / nutrition, conduction path, storage centre, and site of symptom manifestation — and this functional framework offers a practical bridge between Ayurvedic and modern anatomical thought, opening avenues for further interdisciplinary research.

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