

Text and Clinic Aligned: The Central Role of Madhava Nidana in Ayurvedic Diagnosis

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Abstract

The classical Ayurvedic texts, *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* form the backbone of Ayurvedic theory and practice. However, among later diagnostic works, *Madhava Nidana* stands out as a uniquely focused compilation of disease diagnosis. Written by Madhavakara in the 7th–8th century CE, this text presents a concise yet comprehensive view of 69 diseases using the *Pancha Nidana* framework: *Nidana* (causes), *Purvarupa* (premonitory signs), *Rupa* (symptoms), *Upashaya* (therapeutic tests), and *Samprapti* (pathogenesis). What distinguishes *Madhava Nidana* from other *Samhitas* is its clarity, clinical precision, and inclusion of diseases either absent or only briefly mentioned in earlier texts.

This article explores the clinical relevance of *Madhava Nidana* with a special focus on diseases uniquely elaborated within it. Conditions such as *Phiranga* (likely syphilis), *Masurika* (smallpox), *Upadamsha* (venereal infections), *Shleepada* (filariasis), and *Gandamala* (scrofula or tubercular lymphadenitis) are either absent or minimally referenced in the *Brihatrayi*. Mental health conditions like *Unmada* (psychosis) and *Apasmara* (epilepsy), as well as worm infestations, alcohol intoxication, and differential diagnostic strategies, are given unprecedented attention in this text.

The diagnostic clarity and disease-specific structure of *Madhava Nidana* make it highly relevant for modern clinical education and practice. It not only offers early-stage recognition of diseases but

also allows integration with contemporary diagnostic tools such as laboratory tests and imaging. This abstract argues for the renewed application of *Madhava Nidana* in modern Ayurveda, emphasizing its role as both a historical and living guide for comprehensive disease understanding.

Key words : Madhava Nidana, Phiranga, Upadamsha Shleepad, Masurika.

In Ayurveda, the *Samhitas* (classical texts) form the backbone of both theoretical knowledge and clinical practice. Among these, *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* are often considered the most important. They explain how diseases develop, how to treat them, and how to maintain health.

But there is another gem among Ayurvedic texts, *Madhava Nidana*. While the above texts touch many areas like anatomy, surgery, and treatments, *Madhava Nidana* focuses almost entirely on diagnosing diseases. It not only gives a clear and organized way to understand how a disease begins, what early signs to look for, but also the complications as well as ominous signs seen in and around patients that indicate patient's imminent death. Hence the term 'रोगविनिश्चय'⁴.

सोपद्रवारिष्टनिदानलिङ्गो निबध्यते रोगविनिश्चयोऽयम्
॥२॥ (Ma. Ni 1/2)

What makes it even more special is that *Madhava Nidana* talks about many diseases that are not explained in detail or at all in other *Samhitas*. In this paper, we will look at why this book is so useful, especially for today's Ayurvedic doctors and students.

A textual review and clinical synthesis were conducted to explore the details regarding

the text. Primary Ayurvedic texts and commentaries were analysed for references, including:

- *Madhava Nidana*
- *Charaka Samhita*
- *Ashtanga Hridaya*

What Is Madhava Nidana?

Madhava Nidana was written around the 7th–8th century CE by the scholar *Madhavakara*. It is one of the *Laghutrayi* (the “three minor” Ayurvedic texts), and it mainly deals with how to identify diseases. The text is made up of 69 chapters, each focusing on one or two diseases. It follows the fivefold method of diagnosis known as *Pancha Nidana*:

1. *Nidana* – the root causes
2. *Purvarupa* – early or premonitory signs
3. *Rupa* – main symptoms
4. *Upashaya* – things that relieve or worsen the condition
5. *Samprapti* – the full disease process

This method helps a physician understand not just the symptoms but the deeper cause and path of the disease in the body.

Diseases in Madhava Nidana That Are Not in Other Samhitas :

Here's where *Madhava Nidana* truly stands out. It describes many diseases in much more detail than the other major texts—or sometimes introduces them for the first time in Ayurvedic literature.

Let's take a look at some examples:

1. Mental and Nervous Disorders⁴

- **Murccha (Fainting)** clearly explained in *Madhava* but not found as full chapters in *Charaka* or *Sushruta*.

2. Alcohol-Related Disorders⁴

- *Madatyaya* describes the effects and stages of alcohol intoxication and its long-term effects—something rarely touched in other *Samhitas*.

3. Worm Infestations⁴

- *Madhava* goes into great detail about different types of intestinal worms (*Krimi*), their causes, signs, and how they spread—an essential guide for treating digestive problems.

4. Swelling and Lymphatic Conditions⁴

- *Shleepada* (possibly filariasis) and *Gandamala* (swollen lymph nodes) are unique chapters that don't appear in earlier texts. These diseases resemble modern conditions like elephantiasis or TB lymphadenitis.

5. Venereal and Foreign-Origin Diseases⁴

- *Upadamsha* (a sexually transmitted infection) and *Phiranga* (thought to be syphilis) are first seen in *Madhava Nidana*. The book says *Phiranga* came from contact with *Yavanas* (foreigners), showing that the text was updated to

include newer diseases of that time.

6. Epidemic and Infectious Diseases⁴

- *Masurika* (smallpox or measles) is described in detail, which is not seen in *Charaka* or *Sushruta*. This shows that *Madhava Nidana* was perhaps responding to public health issues of its era.

6. Complex Respiratory and Digestive Conditions⁴

- *Amlapitta*, *Parinamashoola*, *Annadrava shoola* were described in detail for the first time in this text.
- *Kshata-Kshaya*, a type of wasting disease possibly resembling tuberculosis, is better explained here than anywhere else.
- *Jvara-Tisara*, or fever with diarrhoea (dysentery-like), is another disease described with clarity and structure.

7. Conditions related to Women Health⁴

- *Yonikanda*, *Sutikaroga*, and *Stanaroga* are first described in detail in this text.

Why Is This Important for Today's Clinical Practice?

1. Helps in Diagnosing Modern Diseases :

Some of the conditions mentioned—like smallpox, syphilis, or TB—are very relevant even today. They may not have been known to early Ayurvedic seers but were clearly added by *Madhavakara* to make the text more useful for practitioners.

2. Easier to Understand and Teach :

The language and style of *Madhava Nidana* are simpler and more clinical. It's easier to follow than *Charaka* or *Sushruta*,

making it a good starting point for students and a quick reference for doctors.

3. Offers Differential Diagnosis :

Unlike other texts, *Madhava Nidana* helps the doctor distinguish between similar diseases. For example, it teaches how to tell apart different fevers, or how *Kasa* (cough) differs from *Shwasa* (dyspnea/asthma). This is very much like what modern doctors do with “differential diagnosis.”

4. Complements Modern Lab Tests :

Even though the book is ancient, it gives early clues (*Purvarupa*) of diseases which can today be confirmed by lab tests like:

- Blood tests for infection (in *Jvara*)²
- Sputum test or chest X-ray (in *Kshayaja Kasa*)³
- Urine tests and blood sugar (in *Prameha*)⁴
- Skin biopsy or KOH test (in *Kushtha*)⁵

Madhava Nidana is not just another Ayurvedic book. It is a diagnostic guide, written in a way that connects classical knowledge with clinical logic. The text describes several diseases that are either missing or not fully

explained in earlier *Samhitas*. This makes it an essential tool for today’s Ayurveda students, practitioners, and researchers.

As modern health challenges continue to evolve, so must our approach. By blending the clarity of *Madhava Nidana* with modern diagnostic tools, we can create a more complete, accurate, and effective way of practicing Ayurveda.

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