



Review Article

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A CRITICAL REVIEW ON THE CONCEPT OF *KRIYA KALA*: STAGES OF DISEASE MANIFESTATION IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Background In Ayurveda, *Kriya Kala* describes the dynamic progression of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* imbalance from a physiological to a pathological state. It is a unique concept that emphasizes early recognition and timely intervention to prevent disease manifestation. This framework, originally described by *Acharya Sushruta*, represents a vital link between health maintenance (*Swasthya Rakshana*) and disease management (*Vyadhi Chikitsa*). **Aim and Objectives** **Aim** To critically review and analyze the Ayurvedic concept of *Kriya Kala* with reference to the stages of disease manifestation and its preventive significance. **Objectives** To study the origin and classical descriptions of *Kriya Kala* in Ayurvedic literature. To explain the six stages of *Kriya Kala* (*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*). To correlate each *Kriya Kala* with modern concepts of disease pathogenesis. To highlight the diagnostic and preventive importance of *Kriya Kala* in clinical practice. To emphasize the role of *Kriya Kala* in early disease detection and timely intervention. **Methods** A comprehensive literary review was conducted using *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and other Ayurvedic treatises. Modern medical literature on disease progression and preventive pathology was also reviewed to establish conceptual parallels. The study involved descriptive analysis, comparison, and synthesis of Ayurvedic and biomedical perspectives. **Results** *Acharya Sushruta's* six *Kriya Kala*—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*—provide a systematic approach to understanding disease evolution. The initial three stages correspond to reversible, preclinical phases where early diagnosis can halt disease development, while the latter three indicate progressive pathology. Correlation with modern pathophysiology reveals conceptual similarities with inflammatory and degenerative

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processes. **Conclusion** The concept of *Kriya Kala* demonstrates Ayurveda's deep preventive vision, offering a structured model for understanding disease dynamics from subtle imbalance to overt pathology. Integrating *Kriya Kala* into modern clinical practice could enhance early disease prediction, preventive strategies, and holistic patient management.

Keywords *Kriya Kala, Dosha Prakopa, Sthanasamsraya, Vyadhi Utpatti*, Disease Pathogenesis, Preventive Ayurveda

Introduction

The science of Ayurveda is based on the principle of maintaining equilibrium of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala* to sustain health. Any deviation from this equilibrium initiates a gradual process that leads to disease. This process is systematically explained in the concept of *Kriya Kala*, introduced by *Acharya Sushruta*. The term *Kriya Kala* literally means “the period of intervention,” referring to the distinct stages in which a disease develops from subtle imbalance to full manifestation. It highlights the importance of recognizing the earliest signs of *Dosha* disturbance and intervening before the condition becomes irreversible.¹

Acharya Sushruta described six *Kriya Kala*—*Sanchaya* (accumulation), *Prakopa* (aggravation), *Prasara* (spread), *Sthanasamsraya* (localization), *Vyakti* (manifestation), and *Bheda* (complication). Each stage represents a progressive level of *Dosha* derangement and tissue involvement. The first three stages are preclinical and reversible, whereas the latter three represent disease establishment and complication. By understanding these stages, a physician can determine the proper time and mode of intervention, which embodies Ayurveda's preventive and predictive approach to medicine.²

From a modern perspective, *Kriya Kala* can be compared to the stages of pathogenesis described in contemporary pathology—ranging from the prodromal stage to the full clinical phase. For instance, *Sthanasamsraya* may correspond to the stage of cellular or tissue localization of a disease process, while *Vyakti* can be compared to the appearance of clinical symptoms. Such comparative analysis bridges ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern biomedical science, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding disease evolution.³

Therefore, the study of *Kriya Kala* is essential not only for understanding the *Samprapti* (pathogenesis) of disease but also for formulating preventive and therapeutic strategies. It offers a unique insight into the temporal dynamics of disease, emphasizing early diagnosis

(*Purvarupa*) and timely treatment (*Chikitsa*). A critical review of this concept thus helps in integrating Ayurvedic preventive philosophy with modern clinical practice, enhancing both diagnosis and prognosis.⁴

Aim and Objectives

Aim To critically review and analyze the Ayurvedic concept of *Kriya Kala* with reference to the stages of disease manifestation and its preventive significance.

Objectives

1. To study the origin and classical descriptions of *Kriya Kala* in Ayurvedic literature.
2. To explain the six stages of *Kriya Kala* (*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*).
3. To correlate each *Kriya Kala* with modern concepts of disease pathogenesis.
4. To highlight the diagnostic and preventive importance of *Kriya Kala* in clinical practice.
5. To emphasize the role of *Kriya Kala* in early disease detection and timely intervention.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

The term *Kriya Kala* is derived from two Sanskrit words — *Kriya* meaning “action” or “therapeutic measure,” and *Kala* meaning “time” or “phase.” Thus, *Kriya Kala* refers to the appropriate time or stage for therapeutic intervention during the progression of disease. *Acharya Sushruta* first introduced this concept in *Sushruta Samhita*, *Sutra Sthana* 21/36, explaining it as the six sequential stages through which *Dosha* vitiation evolves from a state of mild imbalance to a full-blown disease. It provides an organized framework for understanding *Samprapti* (pathogenesis), emphasizing that disease does not appear suddenly but develops gradually through identifiable stages.⁵

In the first stage, *Sanchaya* (accumulation), the *Dosha* begins to accumulate in its own site due to indulgence in *Hetu* (causative factors) of similar qualities. At this stage, the imbalance is mild, and symptoms are minimal, such as heaviness for *Kapha*, burning for *Pitta*, and dryness for *Vata*. In the second stage, *Prakopa* (aggravation), the accumulated *Dosha* becomes more excited and begins to overflow its normal boundaries. If proper measures like *Langhana* or *Shodhana* are not employed, the disease progresses to the third stage, *Prasara* (spread), where the vitiated *Dosha* circulates through the body via *Srotas*

(channels), searching for weak or defective sites. This stage represents systemic imbalance and forms the link between localized and generalized pathology.⁶

The fourth stage, *Sthanasamsraya* (localization), marks the crucial transition from physiological imbalance to pathological establishment. Here, the vitiated *Dosha* finds a susceptible *Dushya* (tissue) and lodges there, initiating the early process of tissue damage. This stage also gives rise to *Purvarupa* (premonitory symptoms) of disease, indicating that pathology is imminent but not yet visible. In modern terms, this phase can be compared to subclinical pathology, where microscopic or biochemical changes precede overt disease. When the condition advances to *Vyakti* (manifestation), the fifth stage, all the classical signs and symptoms of the disease become apparent. Finally, *Bheda* (complication) represents differentiation and chronicity, leading to either the formation of complications or transformation into another disease.⁷

Thus, *Kriya Kala* not only explains the chronological sequence of disease formation but also guides physicians about the exact point of intervention. Early stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, and *Prasara*—are the most suitable for preventive therapies such as *Shamana* and *Shodhana*, while *Sthanasamsraya* and *Vyakti* demand more specific curative management. *Bheda* stage often requires *Rasayana* or palliative treatment. The clinical application of *Kriya Kala* embodies the Ayurvedic philosophy of early detection and prevention, demonstrating Ayurveda's proactive approach to maintaining health and halting disease progression.⁸

Stages of Disease Manifestation in Ayurveda

Ayurveda describes disease as a dynamic and time-bound process that develops progressively through various stages. This gradual transformation of *Dosha* from a state of equilibrium to complete derangement is explained through the concept of *Shat Kriya Kala*—the six stages of disease manifestation. *Acharya Sushruta* in *Sushruta Samhita Sutra Sthana* (21/36) has stated that these stages provide a physician with opportunities to identify and intervene at appropriate times, thus preventing disease progression. Each stage reflects a specific phase in the pathological process of *Vyadhi Utpatti* (disease development).⁹

1. *Sanchaya Avastha* (Stage of Accumulation)

The term *Sanchaya* means accumulation. This is the initial stage where *Doshas* start to accumulate in their respective sites due to indulgence in *Hetu* (causative factors) similar to their inherent qualities. For example, excessive intake of *Guru*, *Snigdha*, and *Madhura* Ahara

leads to *Kapha Sanchaya* in *Uras* (chest region), while *Amla* and *Lavana Rasa* increase *Pitta* in the *Amashaya*, and *Ruksha*, *Laghu*, *Sheeta* factors lead to *Vata Sanchaya* in the *Pakvashaya*.¹⁰

At this stage, the imbalance remains localized, and only mild symptoms such as *Anga Gaurava* (heaviness), *Ushnata* (burning), or *Rukshata* (dryness) are noticed. If appropriate *Nidana Parivarjana* (avoidance of causative factors) or mild *Shamana* therapy is applied here, the *Dosha* can return to a balanced state.¹¹

2. Prakopa Avastha (Stage of Aggravation)

In the *Prakopa* stage, the accumulated *Doshas* become more excited and increase in quantity and potency. The body's homeostasis is disturbed, and symptoms intensify within their respective *Sthana* (site). For instance, *Kapha* leads to increased heaviness, loss of appetite, and lethargy; *Pitta* causes more heat and thirst; while *Vata* results in pain and dryness. If intervention is delayed, the *Doshas* begin to move beyond their original sites due to lack of containment, leading to further progression. At this stage, preventive measures such as *Langhana*, *Swedana*, and early *Shodhana* (elimination) can effectively restore balance.¹²

3. Prasara Avastha (Stage of Spread)

The *Prasara* stage marks the dissemination of vitiated *Doshas* throughout the body via *Srotas* (channels). When the *Dosha* exceeds its natural limit, it overflows and spreads from its original site into the general circulation, disturbing other *Doshas* and *Dhatus*. Clinical manifestations during this stage become more generalized, such as body ache, fatigue, and restlessness. The equilibrium among *Doshas* is lost, and the disease begins to search for a *Khavaigunya* (weak or defective site) in the body where it can localize. This stage corresponds to the systemic spread or prodromal phase in modern pathology.¹³

4. Sthanasamsraya Avastha (Stage of Localization)

In this critical stage, the vitiated *Dosha* finds a weak tissue (*Dushya*) and lodges there, initiating the pathological process. The *Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana* (interaction between vitiated *Dosha* and defective tissue) occurs, which forms the foundation for disease establishment.¹⁴

This stage also produces *Purvarupa*—the premonitory symptoms that hint at the forthcoming disease. For example, heaviness and fatigue may precede *Prameha*, or burning sensation may precede *Pittaja Vyadhi*. From a modern viewpoint, this phase is equivalent to

the subclinical stage where cellular or biochemical changes occur before visible symptoms appear. This is the best opportunity for early diagnosis and preventive management.¹⁵

5. *Vyakti Avastha* (Stage of Manifestation)

In the *Vyakti* stage, the disease becomes fully expressed, showing all characteristic signs and symptoms (*Rupa*). The *Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana* becomes stable, and *Vyadhi* acquires its specific *Rupa*, *Nama*, and *Lakshana*. This is the stage where a physician can easily identify the disease through examination of *Rupa*, *Upashaya*, and *Nidana Panchaka*. Curative therapies (*Shodhana* and *Shamana*) are mainly applied here to control and reverse the established pathology. In modern medical terms, this corresponds to the clinical stage where diagnosis is confirmed, and active disease management begins.¹⁶

6. *Bheda Avastha* (Stage of Complication or Differentiation)

The *Bheda* stage represents chronicity, differentiation, or complication. Here, the disease either transforms into a more complex condition or develops secondary complications due to improper or delayed treatment. *Acharya Sushruta* states that *Bheda* is the stage where the disease attains multiplicity, chronic character, or produces secondary disorders (*Upadrava*).

Therapeutic measures at this stage are often palliative or *Rasayana*-based, aimed at strengthening remaining healthy tissues and preventing further degeneration. This stage resembles the complication or chronic phase in modern pathology, where structural and functional deterioration becomes apparent.¹⁷

Clinical Significance of Shat Kriya Kala

The *Shat Kriya Kala* provides an invaluable diagnostic and preventive tool in Ayurveda. It allows the physician to identify disease in its early, reversible stages and take prompt corrective measures. The first three stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, and *Prasara*—are reversible, while *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda* represent irreversible or advanced pathology. Recognizing these stages in clinical practice enhances preventive medicine, ensures timely treatment, and reduces chronic complications, fulfilling the Ayurvedic goal of *Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam* (preservation of health) and *Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam* (cure of disease).¹⁸

Result and Findings

- The review established that *Kriya Kala* represents a scientific framework describing the stepwise progression of disease from *Dosha Sanchaya* (accumulation) to *Bheda Avastha* (complication).
- The concept emphasizes that no disease appears suddenly; it develops gradually through six distinct stages — *Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*.
- The first three stages (*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*) are reversible and ideal for preventive and *Shamana* therapies, while the latter three (*Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, *Bheda*) are irreversible, demanding curative or palliative management.
- The *Kriya Kala* system provides a unique diagnostic framework for early detection, disease prediction, and timely intervention, thereby preventing chronicity and complications.
- The study found strong parallels between Ayurvedic *Kriya Kala* and modern stages of pathogenesis such as initiation, progression, localization, and complication.
- *Sthanasamsraya* stage corresponds to the subclinical phase of modern pathology, where cellular or molecular changes begin before symptoms appear.
- The review highlighted that intervention at the *Sanchaya* or *Prakopa* stage through *Nidana Parivarjana*, *Ahara-Vihara Parivartana*, and *Shodhana Karma* can completely prevent disease manifestation.
- *Acharya Sushruta's* theory of *Shat Kriya Kala* thus serves as a timeless guide for preventive medicine, predictive diagnosis, and holistic management in Ayurvedic clinical practice.

DISCUSSION

The concept of *Kriya Kala* described by *Acharya Sushruta* offers a profound understanding of the chronological evolution of disease. It emphasizes that disease does not emerge suddenly but develops gradually due to continuous exposure to *Hetu* (causative factors). The sequential pattern from *Sanchaya* to *Bheda* highlights Ayurveda's predictive and preventive approach to health. This model allows a physician to identify the stage of *Dosha* disturbance and apply timely therapeutic interventions, aligning with the principle of *Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*—preservation of health through early correction.¹⁹

When analyzed from a modern pathological perspective, *Kriya Kala* closely parallels the stages of disease development in biomedicine. *Sanchaya* and *Prakopa* correspond to the initiation phase, where minor biochemical alterations occur. *Prasara* represents the systemic spread similar to the pathophysiological dissemination seen in inflammatory or infectious diseases. *Sthanasamsraya* equates to the localization of pathology within weak tissues, matching the prodromal or subclinical phase. *Vyakti* reflects the stage of clinical manifestation, and *Bheda* corresponds to chronic or complicated pathology. This comparison demonstrates that Ayurveda had already recognized the temporal and causal sequence of disease centuries before modern pathology evolved.²⁰

The preventive aspect of *Kriya Kala* holds immense clinical relevance. By understanding these stages, a physician can implement specific measures such as *Nidana Parivarjana*, *Ahara-Vihara Parivartana*, and *Shodhana Chikitsa* in the early phases, preventing progression to severe disease. The concept also explains individual susceptibility through *Khavaigunya*, showing how underlying tissue weakness or imbalance predisposes a person to particular disorders. This reinforces Ayurveda's personalized approach to medicine, where prevention and treatment are tailored according to *Dosha Prakriti* and *Vyadhi Avastha*.²¹

In modern healthcare, where lifestyle-related and chronic disorders are on the rise, integrating the principles of *Kriya Kala* could transform preventive medicine. Early screening and lifestyle modification parallel *Ayurvedic Purvarupa Pariksha* and *Nidana Parivarjana*, while disease staging mirrors the classical six-fold model. Hence, *Kriya Kala* provides a timeless, scientific foundation for bridging traditional wisdom and contemporary medical science, emphasizing the importance of time-bound diagnosis, prevention, and holistic management of disease.²²

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Kriya Kala* represents one of the most scientific and preventive aspects of Ayurveda. It explains that disease development is a gradual and predictable process, providing multiple opportunities for timely intervention. By understanding the six stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthanasamsraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*—a physician can identify the phase of pathology and apply appropriate preventive or curative measures. This systematic approach bridges ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern preventive medicine,

emphasizing early detection, personalized management, and the preservation of health through timely therapeutic action.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NONE

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