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## “SHATKRIYAKALA: A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO EARLY DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT IN AYURVEDA”

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### ABSTRACT

*Shatkriyakala* is a fundamental concept in Ayurveda that explains the six sequential stages in the development and progression of disease. Derived from the words *shat*(six) and *kriyakala*(stages of action), it serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding the pathogenesis of disorders and identifying the most effective points for intervention. The six stages—*sanchaya*, *prakopa*, *prasara*, *sthanasamsraya*, *vyakti*, and *bheda*—illustrate how imbalanced *doshas* evolve from subtle disturbance to overt disease. Recognition of these stages enables early diagnosis, preventive care, and timely therapeutic measures, thereby embodying the *Ayurvedic* emphasis on *swasthasya swasthya rakshanam* (maintenance of health) and *aturasya vikara prashamanam* (management of disease). Understanding *Shatkriyakala* thus bridges preventive and curative medicine, offering valuable insights into holistic health management. It provides a systematic framework for recognizing the progression of doshic imbalance from its earliest to the most advanced phase. Clinically, the concept aids physicians in early diagnosis, allowing for preventive and curative measures before the disease becomes fully established. By identifying subtle prodromal symptoms in the initial stages, practitioners can implement dosha-specific therapies such as *shodhana* (purification), *shamana* (pacification), and *nidanaparivarjana* (avoidance of causative factors) to halt disease progression. This preventive approach embodies Ayurveda's emphasis on maintaining *swasthya* (health) rather than merely treating illness. Furthermore, understanding *Shatkriyakala* enhances the clinician's ability to assess disease prognosis, choose appropriate treatment modalities, and prevent chronic complications. Thus, *Shatkriyakala* serves as a vital diagnostic and prognostic tool, bridging the preventive and therapeutic dimensions of Ayurvedic medicine.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of understanding a disease and delineating its sequential stages of pathogenesis was perhaps first articulated in a systematic and comprehensive manner in Ayurveda. For any medical discipline that aspires to achieve both preventive and curative excellence, it is imperative not only to comprehend the nature of the disease and establish an accurate diagnosis but also to meticulously monitor each progressive stage of its pathogenesis. The preventive dimension, in particular, emphasizes the early identification of disease at its incipient or formative stage. Recognition of the subtle physiological alterations that occur in the body upon exposure to causative factors enables timely intervention, thereby preventing the disease from manifesting into its full-blown clinical form. Such an approach minimizes the necessity for unnecessary pharmacological or invasive interventions, reduces the economic and psychological burden on the patient and caregivers, conserves time and healthcare resources, and mitigates the overall impact of morbidity and work-related

absenteeism.<sup>1</sup> In the modern era, the prevalence of various new diseases has increased due to sedentary lifestyles, environmental pollution, and improper dietary habits. When the human body fails to maintain its internal equilibrium, it results in the development of disease. The concept of *Shatkriyakala*, described by *Acharya Sushruta*, outlines six distinct stages that explain the progression of disease and the condition of *Dosha-dushti*. This principle provides a comprehensive understanding of how disease originates and advances within the body. It also serves as a guide for planning appropriate treatment at each stage. Thus, *Shatkriyakala* remains one of the most significant Ayurvedic concepts, offering deep insight into both the pathogenesis and management of diseases.

**Conceptual Study:** It brings considerable reassurance to a patient when a physician recommends dietary regulation and lifestyle modification rather than pharmacological intervention for an ailment that may have initially appeared severe. Equally comforting is the

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physician's assessment that the illness is in its preliminary stage, poses no significant threat, and can be resolved through simple home-based remedies, adequate rest, and appropriate lifestyle adjustments, enabling the patient to resume normal activities within a short duration. Such assurance itself contributes therapeutically, as the realization that the condition is mild and manageable provides psychological relief and alleviates a substantial portion of the perceived discomfort. The present discussion focuses on the diagnostic understanding of disease through its sequential stages of development as described in Ayurveda. These progressive stages, referred to as *Shatkriyakala*—literally denoting the "six stages of therapeutic opportunity"—represent a systematic framework for recognizing the temporal evolution of disease. Comprehension of these stages forms the foundation for timely intervention, thereby facilitating both preventive and curative approaches in clinical practice.<sup>[1]</sup> The etiological factors responsible for the origin and progression of disease are collectively termed *Nidana*. These *Nidana* are broadly categorized into two types: *Bahya Nidana* (external causative factors) and *Abhyantara Nidana* (internal causative factors). The *Bahya Nidana* encompass all exogenous influences that act upon the body from the external environment, such as pathogenic microorganisms, exposure to dust, smoke, or allergens, intake of incompatible or (*Viruddhahara*), and physical trauma or injury. Such external etiological factors lead to disequilibrium among the *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—which are the three fundamental regulatory principles maintaining the body's physiological harmony. The vitiation (*Dosa-Dusti*) of these bio-energies is considered a prerequisite for the initiation of any pathological process. Once vitiated, the *Doshas* interact with and afflict the vulnerable or compromised tissues (*Duṣyas*), thereby initiating disease pathogenesis. Additionally, these aggravated *Doshas* may obstruct the *Srotas* (the body's channels of circulation and transportation), resulting in impaired flow, accumulation, and localized pathology, ultimately culminating in the manifestation of disease at the affected site.

#### Stage of Accumulation (*Chaya* or *Sanchaya*)

**In this stage the disturbed doshas start accumulating in their own sites.**

- In *Vata chaya* the person senses abdominal bulging due to *Vata* accumulation and then becomes lethargic.
- In *Pitta chaya* yellowness of nails, eyes and urine is observed.
- In *Kapha chaya* body temperature is lowered. The person starts developing nausea.
- *Chaya* is increased in its own sites and produces dislike for things which are the causes of increase and liking for things of opposite qualities.

In this stage mild symptoms are seen. Thus it is very beneficial to cure the person in this 1<sup>st</sup> stage itself.<sup>[2]</sup> If we treat the disease at the stage of *sanchaya*, the disease does not spread further. This is the reason why it is said that if we treat this stage correctly we can win over the disease.<sup>[3]</sup> The *doshas* should be vanquished (by effective treatment) in their stage of *chaya*.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### Stage of Aggravation (*Prakopa*)

**In this stage the doshas go on accumulating further in their own sites.**

- In *Vata-prakopa*, hyper peristalsis is observed i.e. food passes very rapidly through the stomach and intestine.
- In *Pitta-prakopa*, water brash, polydipsia (frequency in drinking water) and burning sensation is observed.
- In *Kapha-prakopa* the person feels nauseated about food and heaviness in chest is observed.

Vagbhata has said that in this stage *dosha* spread through out the body; however this is not quite correct.

#### Stage of Spread (*Prasara*)

**In this stage the doshas are hyper activated and they leave their site and start spreading throughout the body.**

- In *Vata-prasara* doshas change their place and move in any part of the body. A person experiences tympanitis.
- In *Pitta-prasara* body temperature is raised and burning sensation is sensed.
- In *Kapha-prasara* the person experiences fatigue, indigestion and tastelessness. Also a felling for nausea is developed.

#### How *prasara* stage is formed ?

If milk is kept for boiling in a vessel, after some time it comes up to the brim and then if not removed spills out. Similarly doshas leave their place and spread through out the body. When water and *kodrava* (type of cereal) are mixed and kept in closed vessel for some time, then fermentation takes place and this mixture spreads rapidly everywhere. Similarly doshas spread rapidly throughout the body. When water starts accumulating in a lake beyond its capacity then the extra water overflows. Similarly doshas spread rapidly throughout the body.

**Stage of Localization (*Sthanasamshraya*):** In this stage the aggravated *doshas* attack the *dushya* or weak tissues or waste products & disease is manifested. In this stage the prodromal symptoms (*Purvarupa*) starts appearing. In this stage the disease starts progressing. The type of disease depends on where the doshas have accumulated. Depending on the type of channel these doshas attack, various diseases like diarrhea, kidney stone, fever etc. occurs. To prevent this stage *rasayana* treatment is very beneficial.

**Stage of Manifestation (*Vyakti*):** In this stage the disease expresses itself. Here the disease can be diagnosed easily. e.g. pyrexia, colitis (diagnosed by type of feces). Sushruta has described this stage as occurrence of disease. In this stage proper symptoms or *Rupa* appears, therefore particular disease expresses particular symptoms.

**Stage of Differentiation (*Bheda*):** This is the last stage of *shatkriyakala*. In this stage the disease can be diagnosed correctly and its doshaja type can be decided. e.g. Pittaja diarrhea (where Pitta dosha is predominant). Stage of complications of disease can be correlates with *Bheda* stage in which chronic or incurable condition may persist if proper treatment options not adopted.<sup>[5]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Each stage of *Shatkriyakala* has its own clinical significance, guiding the physician in understanding the degree of doshic imbalance and the appropriate line of treatment. In the *Sanchaya* stage, the doshas begin to accumulate in their respective sites—*Vata* in the colon, *Pitta* in the small intestine, and *Kapha* in the stomach—leading to mild, nonspecific symptoms such as heaviness, fatigue, or loss of appetite. Early detection at this stage allows correction through *Ahara* and *Vihara*. In the *Prakopa* stage, the accumulated doshas become aggravated and start disturbing their sites, producing more prominent symptoms like acidity, bloating, or restlessness. Simple purification measures such as *Langhana* (light fasting) or *Snehana* are effective here. During the *Prasara* stage, aggravated doshas spread throughout the body via *srotas* giving rise to generalized symptoms like body ache or irritation. Therapeutic procedures like *Swedana* and *Vamana* or *Virechana* are beneficial to prevent further spread. The *Sthanasamsraya* stage marks the localization of vitiated *doshas* in weak or susceptible *Dhatus*, leading to premonitory signs (*Purvarupa*) of disease. Identifying these early signs enables the practitioner to prevent the full manifestation of illness. In the *Vyaktavastha* stage, the disease becomes fully expressed with clear symptoms, making diagnosis easier but treatment more complex. Here, the specific dosha, dhatu, and site involved are treated using *Shamana* (palliative) or *Shodhana* (purificatory) therapies. Finally, in the

Bhedavasthastage, complications or secondary disorders arise due to chronicity or neglect of earlier stages. At this point, curative treatment becomes difficult, and only palliative management is possible. Understanding these six stages empowers the Ayurvedic physician to intervene at the right time, preventing disease progression and ensuring effective, individualized care.

## CONCLUSION

The maxim "Prevention is better than cure" has consistently served as a foundational principle in the field of health and disease management. Maintenance of health requires adherence to several preventive measures, including the consumption of a balanced diet in appropriate quality, quantity, and at regular intervals; adequate and restorative sleep; regulated sexual activity and physical exercise; mental composure through the avoidance of excessive stress and emotional disturbances; and timely attention to the body's natural urges and reflexes. Additionally, observance of *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), which encompasses the adaptation of lifestyle to the diurnal rhythm, and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), which involves the adjustment of habits in accordance with seasonal variations, are integral components in the prevention of disease and the promotion of overall well-being. This constitutes one important aspect of preventive healthcare. The second dimension pertains to the early recognition and diagnosis of disease in its incipient or subclinical stages, enabling timely intervention and thereby preventing its progression to a manifest pathological condition.

The concept of *Shaṭkriyakala* represents one of the most profound and scientifically structured principles in *Ayurveda*, illustrating the dynamic relationship between the *Doṣhas*, *Dhatus*, and the stages of disease progression. By recognizing the gradual transformation from doshic imbalance to full disease manifestation, it provides an invaluable framework for early diagnosis, prevention, and timely intervention.

The clinical relevance of *Shaṭkriyakala* lies in its emphasis on identifying pathological changes before the appearance of overt symptoms, allowing the physician to apply corrective measures at the most effective stage. This approach not only minimizes disease severity but also upholds the Ayurvedic objective of maintaining health (*SwasthasyaSwasthyaRakshanam*) and curing illness (*AturasyaVikaraPrashamanam*). In essence, *Shaṭkriyakala* bridges the gap between theory and practice, highlighting Ayurveda's preventive, predictive, and holistic perspective in clinical medicine.

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