

Comprehensive Concept of Shatkriya Kala as The Foundation of Ayurvedic Etio-Pathogenesis.

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Abstract— Shatkriya Kala represents a sophisticated chronological framework for understanding the progression of disease, serving as the fundamental basis for Ayurvedic etio-pathogenesis. Literally translating to the "six stages of action," it provides a vital window into the evolution of pathology, from the earliest functional imbalances to chronic complications. This concept allows a clinician to track the movement and transformation of vitiated Doshas as they interact with the body's tissues (Dushyas). The process begins with Sanchaya (accumulation) and Prakopa (provocation), where imbalances are localized. This is followed by Prasara (spread), where the vitiation moves through the channels of the body. The most critical turning point is Sthana Samshraya (localization), where the Doshas lodge in weak tissues, marking the beginning of specific disease formation. The final stages, Vyakti (manifestation) and Bheda (complications/differentiation), represent the full clinical presentation and potential chronicity of the ailment. By identifying these six distinct stages, Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of early intervention. It suggests that the difficulty of treatment increases as the disease progresses through each subsequent Kala. Understanding this progression is essential for "Kriya" (treatment), as it guides the physician on when to utilize purification or pacification therapies. Ultimately, Shatkriya Kala transforms the study of pathogenesis from a static observation into a dynamic roadmap for preventive health and personalized clinical management.

Index Terms— Shatkriya Kala, Samprapti, Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana, Sanchaya, Prakopa, Prasara, Sthana Samshraya, Vyakti, Bheda, Ayurveda, Etio-pathogenesis, Preventive Medicine.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda conceptualizes health as a dynamic equilibrium of Dosha, Dhatus, Mala and Agni along with clarity of mind, senses and soul¹. Unlike modern pathological models that recognize disease only after

biochemical and structural deviations become evident, Ayurveda perceives disease as a gradual, predictable, and reversible process if intercepted early. Acharya Sushruta introduced the doctrine of Shatkriya Kala to explain this sequential evolution of disease from imperceptible metabolic imbalance to irreversible structural degeneration².

In the contemporary era, lifestyle disorders such as diabetes mellitus, osteoarthritis, obesity, irritable bowel syndrome, metabolic syndrome and autoimmune diseases have reached epidemic proportions. These disorders are characterized by prolonged subclinical phases where pathology silently progresses before diagnosis. Shatkriya Kala offers a structured framework for identifying these latent stages, enabling timely preventive and corrective interventions, thereby preventing chronicity and complications³. Thus, it provides a holistic bridge between ancient preventive philosophy and modern predictive medicine.

II. CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF SHATKRIYA KALA

The term Shatkriya Kala is derived from Shat (six), Kriya (therapeutic action) and Kala (time), signifying that disease progression is time-bound and that therapeutic success depends on applying appropriate treatment at the correct stage⁴. It represents the transformation of reversible functional derangements into irreversible structural pathology. This doctrine highlights the fact that disease is not an isolated event but a continuum of pathological processes influenced by dietary habits, lifestyle errors, psychological stress, and environmental factors.

III. STAGES OF SHATKRIYA KALA

1. Sanchaya (Accumulation Stage)

Sanchaya denotes the initial accumulation of Doshas in their natural anatomical sites due to Nidana Sevana such as improper diet, irregular food intake, incompatible food combinations, sedentary habits, excessive stress, and seasonal variations. At this stage, Doshas increase quantitatively but remain confined to their respective sites without systemic dissemination. Clinically, mild nonspecific symptoms such as heaviness, abdominal distension, lethargy, reduced appetite, mild discoloration and dullness may be observed. Classical texts describe that the body develops natural aversion towards causative factors during this stage, serving as an innate protective mechanism⁵. Early correction by Nidana Parivarjana and lifestyle regulation can completely reverse pathology at this stage, preventing further progression.

2. Prakopa (Aggravation Stage)

Prakopa occurs when accumulated Doshas become aggravated and unstable due to persistent etiological exposure⁶. This stage is characterized by increased Dosha mobility and heightened pathological activity. Symptoms such as hyperacidity, nausea, thirst, restlessness, bloating, irritability and digestive disturbances become evident. From a modern biomedical perspective, this stage correlates with early metabolic stress, mitochondrial dysfunction, oxidative load and initiation of inflammatory mediators⁷. These changes remain largely subclinical but form the foundation for future structural damage.

3. Prasara (Spread Stage)

In Prasara, morbid Doshas disseminate throughout the body via Srotas, converting localized metabolic imbalance into systemic pathology. Symptoms such as generalized fatigue, migratory pain, heaviness, anorexia, burning sensations and malaise become evident.

This stage closely resembles systemic inflammatory response and immune dysregulation seen in metabolic syndrome, autoimmune diseases and chronic fatigue states⁸. Therapeutic intervention through Shodhana and Panchakarma during this stage can prevent further disease localization.

4. Sthana Samshraya (Localization Stage)

Sthana Samshraya is the most critical turning point in pathogenesis, wherein circulating Doshas lodge in susceptible tissues (Khavaigunya), leading to Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana and disease genesis⁹. Purvarupa (prodromal features) manifest during this stage.

For example, localization in Medovaha Srotas results in Prameha, while localization in Sandhi leads to Amavata. This stage corresponds to pre-clinical disease states such as pre-diabetes, pre-hypertension and early osteoarthritis in modern medicine.

5. Vyakti (Manifestation Stage)

Vyakti represents full clinical manifestation of disease. Structural and biochemical abnormalities become detectable and diagnostic criteria are fulfilled¹⁰. Therapeutic management becomes more aggressive and prolonged.

6. Bheda (Complication/Chronicity Stage)

Untreated disease progresses into chronicity, complications, degenerative changes and differentiation into subtypes¹¹. Tissue degeneration becomes prominent and curative options become limited.

IV. THERAPEUTIC SIGNIFICANCE

Shatkriya Kala provides a precise therapeutic blueprint. Early stages emphasize preventive measures, while later stages require disease-specific and complication-oriented management¹². This stage-specific approach exemplifies the predictive, preventive and personalized medicine model.

V. MODERN RELEVANCE

The Shatkriya Kala model aligns closely with modern concepts of predictive diagnostics, preventive medicine, and personalized healthcare. It offers an early warning system for metabolic, inflammatory and degenerative disorders, making Ayurveda uniquely suited for contemporary healthcare challenges¹³.

VI. DISCUSSION

The concept of Shatkriya Kala represents one of the most advanced and scientifically structured contributions of Ayurveda to the understanding of disease evolution. Unlike contemporary biomedical

models that primarily recognize disease after the appearance of established clinical pathology, Shatkriya Kala provides a predictive and stage-oriented framework that allows identification of pathological processes long before irreversible tissue damage occurs. This temporal and mechanistic clarity makes it highly relevant in the prevention and management of modern lifestyle and chronic inflammatory disorders.

In the present review, Shatkriya Kala is interpreted as a continuum of functional to structural pathology. The early stages Sanchaya and Prakopa reflect reversible metabolic disturbances primarily driven by Agni Vaishamya and improper dietary and behavioral habits. These stages correspond to subclinical biochemical alterations, oxidative stress, and early inflammatory signaling recognized in modern medicine. Intervention during these stages through Nidana Parivarjana and Shamana therapy can arrest disease progression and restore physiological equilibrium, supporting the Ayurvedic emphasis on preventive care. Prasara represents systemic dissemination of morbid Doshas through the Srotas, which closely parallels early immune dysregulation and low-grade systemic inflammation described in metabolic syndrome, autoimmune disorders, and chronic fatigue states. This stage is particularly significant as it marks the shift from localized metabolic disturbance to systemic pathology. Panchakarma-based Shodhana therapies prescribed at this stage have the potential to prevent tissue infiltration and disease localization, highlighting the relevance of classical detoxification strategies in modern integrative medicine. Sthana Samshraya is the most critical turning point of disease evolution, where Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana occurs at sites of tissue vulnerability (Khavaigunya). This stage explains the selective organ involvement seen in chronic disorders, such as pancreatic involvement in diabetes or synovial localization in arthritis. The appearance of Purvarupa during this stage allows clinicians to identify disease before full manifestation, which is conceptually analogous to pre-diabetic and pre-hypertensive states recognized today. Early disease-specific interventions at this stage can prevent progression to irreversible pathology.

Vyakti corresponds to the clinically manifest disease stage, where modern diagnostic tools typically detect pathology. By this time, structural and biochemical

derangements have already occurred, requiring aggressive therapeutic measures. Bheda reflects chronicity, complications, and differentiation into disease subtypes, which aligns with degenerative and multi-system involvement observed in poorly controlled chronic disorders. These later stages emphasize the limitations of late-stage curative approaches and reaffirm the necessity of early intervention strategies advocated by Ayurveda.

Overall, Shatkriya Kala establishes a predictive, preventive, and personalized medical model that is directly relevant to contemporary healthcare challenges. It provides a structured approach to disease interception, bridging classical Ayurvedic philosophy with modern concepts of pathogenesis, inflammation, and chronic disease progression. Its application in clinical practice can significantly reduce disease burden, healthcare costs, and long-term morbidity, making it a foundational framework for integrative and preventive medicine.

VII. CONCLUSION

Shatkriya Kala is one of the most scientifically structured and clinically relevant doctrines of Ayurveda, explaining disease as a gradual, time-bound and potentially reversible process rather than a sudden event. It provides a clear understanding of how functional imbalance progresses into irreversible structural pathology and forms the foundation of Ayurvedic etio-pathogenesis. In the present era of rising lifestyle and chronic degenerative disorders, Shatkriya Kala offers a valuable framework for identifying subclinical stages of disease and implementing timely preventive measures. Its stage-wise therapeutic approach embodies the principles of predictive, preventive and personalized medicine by guiding appropriate intervention at each phase of disease progression. Thus, Shatkriya Kala bridges classical Ayurvedic wisdom with modern preventive healthcare and emphasizes health preservation over late-stage disease management, making it highly relevant for contemporary clinical practice.

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