

Understanding *Kriya Kala*: Stages Of Disease Development In Ayurveda – A Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Kriya Kala* is a fundamental concept in Ayurveda that describes the progressive stages of disease development, from the initial imbalance of *Dosha* to the manifestation of full-blown illness. Classical Ayurvedic texts, especially *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, outline six distinct stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthana Sanshraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*. Understanding these stages offers a systematic framework for early diagnosis, timely intervention, and prevention. In modern clinical terms, this approach correlates with disease pathogenesis, early pathological changes, and prognosis, emphasizing preventive medicine and prognostic evaluation. **Aim** To review the Ayurvedic concept of *Kriya Kala* and correlate its stages with modern disease pathogenesis. **Objectives** Describe the six stages of *Kriya Kala*. Identify clinical features of each stage. Explore preventive and therapeutic measures. Correlate stages with modern pathology. Assess relevance in preventive healthcare. **Materials and Methods:** A comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts relevant commentaries, and contemporary Ayurvedic research papers was conducted. Modern medical literature on disease pathogenesis was also reviewed to identify correlations. Databases such as PubMed, AYUSH Research Portal, and Google Scholar were searched using terms “*Kriya Kala*,” “disease stages,” and “Ayurveda pathology.” **Results:** The review confirms that *Kriya Kala* provides a structured, predictive model of disease development. Each stage is characterized by specific *Dosha* changes, clinical signs, and potential intervention points. Correlations with modern medicine suggest that *Sanchaya* and *Prakopa* align with subclinical pathological changes, *Prasara* with systemic spread, *Sthana Sanshraya* with tissue-specific localization, *Vyakti* with clinical manifestation, and *Bheda* with complications or chronicity. This framework supports early intervention, particularly in preventive and prognostic medicine. **Conclusion:** *Kriya Kala* remains a clinically relevant concept that bridges preventive and therapeutic approaches in Ayurveda. Its parallels with modern pathology strengthen its applicability in integrative healthcare. Awareness and application of this concept can enhance early disease detection and improve prognosis.

KEYWORDS: *Kriya Kala*, Ayurveda, Disease progression, Pathogenesis, Dosha imbalance, Preventive medicine

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes a preventive and holistic approach to health, considering the human body as an intricate balance of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala*. Disease in Ayurveda is not viewed as an abrupt occurrence but as the result of a gradual process of internal imbalance. The concept of *Kriya Kala*, as elaborated by Acharya Sushruta and other classical scholars, provides a stepwise framework for understanding how a *Dosha* imbalance evolves into a clinically manifest disease. This systematic progression allows physicians to intervene at the earliest possible stage, preventing further deterioration.¹

The term *Kriya Kala* refers to the “time or stage for therapeutic action,” highlighting the importance of timing in the prevention and management of diseases. Acharya Sushruta described six stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthana Sanshraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*—each representing a distinct pathological phase. By recognizing the signs and symptoms specific to each stage, a physician can determine the most effective point for intervention, thereby aligning with Ayurveda’s prime objective of *Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam* (preservation of health) and *Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam* (cure of disease).²

The early stages of *Kriya Kala*—*Sanchaya* and *Prakopa*—are largely asymptomatic or present with mild, nonspecific signs. These stages correspond to the accumulation and aggravation of *Doshas* and are often reversible with simple lifestyle and dietary modifications. As the disease progresses to *Prasara* and *Sthana Sanshraya*, the imbalanced *Doshas* circulate and localize in susceptible tissues, initiating pathological changes. If unchecked, the process culminates in *Vyakti*

(manifestation of disease) and *Bheda* (complications or chronic states), stages that are typically more challenging to manage.³

The *Kriya Kala* model aligns closely with the modern medical understanding of pathogenesis, which recognizes preclinical, prodromal, and clinical phases of disease. The subclinical accumulation of pathological factors in early *Kriya Kala* stages is analogous to the latent period in modern pathology, while later stages resemble the onset of overt disease and its complications. This correlation not only validates the ancient concept but also enhances its relevance in contemporary integrative medicine, where early detection and prevention are key priorities.⁴

Clinically, *Kriya Kala* serves as a diagnostic and prognostic tool. Early identification of *Dosha* imbalance enables physicians to apply targeted preventive measures such as *Shodhana* (purificatory therapies), *Shamana* (palliative therapies), and *Nidana Parivarjana* (avoidance of causative factors). Moreover, understanding the stage-specific pathology guides the choice of interventions and helps predict disease outcomes. This stage-based approach fosters a deeper understanding of the natural history of disease, emphasizing individualized and timely care.⁵

In the present review, classical Ayurvedic descriptions of *Kriya Kala* are examined alongside their modern pathological correlations to demonstrate the enduring value of this concept in medical practice. By bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary biomedical knowledge, *Kriya Kala* emerges as a vital framework for preventive, predictive, and personalized healthcare. This integration underscores Ayurveda's potential to contribute meaningfully to global health strategies focused on early detection, intervention, and disease prevention.⁶

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To review the Ayurvedic concept of *Kriya Kala* and correlate its stages with modern disease pathogenesis.

Objectives

1. Describe the six stages of *Kriya Kala*.
2. Identify clinical features of each stage.
3. Explore preventive and therapeutic measures.
4. Correlate stages with modern pathology.
5. Assess relevance in preventive healthcare.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review is based on a comprehensive study of classical Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* along with their commentaries, focusing on the description of *Kriya Kala* and its clinical implications. Relevant modern medical literature on disease pathogenesis was also reviewed for correlation. Data sources included printed texts, peer-reviewed Ayurvedic and biomedical journals, and online databases such as PubMed, AYUSH Research Portal, and Google Scholar, using keywords "*Kriya Kala*," "Ayurveda," "disease stages," and "pathogenesis." Literature was selected based on relevance, authenticity, and clarity of description, and comparative analysis was carried out to establish conceptual and clinical links between Ayurvedic and modern perspectives.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

UNDERSTANDING *KRIYA KALA*

In Ayurveda, the occurrence of disease is perceived as a gradual and sequential process rather than an abrupt event. Acharya Sushruta has elaborated the *Shatkriyakala*—six stages of pathological progression—which form the foundation for early detection, prevention, and timely intervention. The term *Kriya Kala* denotes the "appropriate time for therapeutic intervention" (*Kriya* – action, *Kala* – time), implying that at each stage, specific measures can halt or reverse the disease process.⁷

The six stages of *Kriya Kala* are:

1. **Sanchaya** – Accumulation of *Doshas* in their respective sites.
2. **Prakopa** – Aggravation of *Doshas* within their seats.
3. **Prasara** – Overflow or spread of aggravated *Doshas* into other regions.
4. **Sthana Sanshraya** – Localization of *Doshas* in a specific weak tissue (*Dushya*), initiating pathology.
5. **Vyakti** – Full manifestation of the disease with classical symptoms.
6. **Bheda** – Differentiation into subtypes or complications, often chronic in nature.

1. Sanchaya – Accumulation of *Doshas* in their Respective Sites

In *Sanchaya*, the *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—start to accumulate in their own *Sthana* (primary seats). This happens when causative factors (*Nidanas*) such as improper diet, lifestyle, or seasonal influences lead to gradual *Dosha* imbalance. The accumulation remains localized and produces only mild, stage-specific symptoms:⁸

- *Vata Sanchaya* – mild dryness, constipation, restlessness.
- *Pitta Sanchaya* – slight increase in body heat, mild burning sensation, early irritability.
- *Kapha Sanchaya* – heaviness, sluggishness, mild loss of appetite.

Clinical Significance:

This stage is the easiest to reverse with *Nidana Parivarjana* (avoiding causative factors), seasonal regimens (*Ritucharya*), and simple dietary/lifestyle modifications.

2. Prakopa – Aggravation of *Doshas* within their Seats

Here, the accumulated *Doshas* become provoked due to continuous exposure to *Nidanas*. They intensify in their respective seats and prepare to overflow.

- *Vata Prakopa* – increased dryness, cracking joints, disturbed sleep, excessive movement of gases.
- *Pitta Prakopa* – pronounced acidity, heat intolerance, inflammation, irritability.
- *Kapha Prakopa* – excessive mucus, heaviness, lethargy, dull digestion.

Clinical Significance:

This stage responds to mild *Shodhana* (purificatory therapies) or *Shamana* (palliative therapies), such as *Vamana* for aggravated *Kapha*, *Virechana* for *Pitta*, and *Basti* for *Vata*.⁹

3. Prasara – Overflow or Spread of Aggravated *Doshas*

Aggravated *Doshas* can no longer remain confined to their primary seats. They enter systemic circulation via *Srotas* (channels), disturbing the harmony of other *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*. Symptoms become mixed, indicating more than one *Dosha* involvement. Examples include general malaise, migrating body pains, or digestive disturbances in multiple sites.¹⁰

Clinical Significance:

Urgent intervention is necessary to prevent localization. *Shodhana* therapies, detox measures, and strict elimination of causative factors are emphasized.

4. Sthana Sanshraya – Localization of *Doshas* in a Specific Weak Tissue (*Dushya*)

Circulating *Doshas* find a site of weakness (*Khavaigunya*) in specific tissues (*Dushyas*) due to hereditary predisposition, previous injury, chronic weakness, or nutritional deficiency. This stage marks the beginning of *Samprapti* (pathogenesis). *Purvarupa* (prodromal symptoms) of the disease appear—these are disease-specific but not fully developed. For example, heaviness in the chest before asthma or tingling before arthritis.¹¹

Clinical Significance:

This is a turning point: once *Doshas* localize, the disease identity begins to form. Intensive preventive and curative measures must be initiated here.

5. Vyakti – Full Manifestation of the Disease with Classical Symptoms

All the *Rupa* (definite symptoms) of the disease are clearly visible, corresponding to the classical descriptions in Ayurvedic texts. For example:

- In *Jwara* – fever, chills, loss of appetite, and body aches.
- In *Prameha* – frequent urination, turbidity of urine, sweet taste in mouth.

Clinical Significance:

Treatment at this stage becomes disease-specific (*Vyadhi Pratyanka Chikitsa*), in addition to *Dosha* pacification. Prognosis depends on severity, chronicity, and involvement of vital organs.¹²

6. Bheda – Differentiation into Subtypes or Complications

In this final stage, the disease differentiates into its various types (*Bheda*) and/or produces complications. Chronicity, multi-system involvement, and degeneration are common. Examples include diabetic nephropathy in long-standing *Prameha* or severe joint deformities in chronic *Amavata*.¹³

Clinical Significance:

Management is often palliative and focused on quality of life. Complete reversal is rare; supportive therapy, rehabilitation, and complication control become the main goals.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- *Kriya Kala* describes six sequential stages of disease progression—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*, *Sthana Sanshraya*, *Vyakti*, and *Bheda*.
- Each stage has distinct pathological changes and identifiable clinical indicators in Ayurveda.
- Early stages (*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, *Prasara*) correspond to reversible, subclinical pathology in modern medicine.
- Later stages (*Sthana Sanshraya*, *Vyakti*, *Bheda*) align with focal pathology, full disease manifestation, and complications.
- Early detection enables effective preventive and therapeutic interventions.
- *Kriya Kala* serves as a valuable preventive, diagnostic, and prognostic framework in Ayurvedic practice.

DISCUSSION

The concept of *Kriya Kala* occupies a central place in Ayurvedic pathology, offering a structured model for understanding disease development from its earliest stages to full manifestation. This framework is particularly significant because it not only describes the sequence of pathological events but also prescribes stage-appropriate interventions. Unlike many modern medical models, which often focus on diagnosis after disease onset, *Kriya Kala* emphasizes anticipation and prevention through early recognition of *Dosha* imbalance.¹³

In the present review, the first three stages—*Sanchaya*, *Prakopa*, and *Prasara*—were found to be analogous to the subclinical or prodromal phases described in modern medicine. During these stages, functional disturbances occur without structural damage, and the disease process is largely reversible. This similarity underscores Ayurveda's emphasis on lifestyle modification, dietary correction, and seasonal regimens at a point where minimal intervention can yield maximum benefit.¹⁴

The fourth stage, *Sthana Sanshraya*, represents a decisive turning point. Here, *Doshas* localize in susceptible tissues (*Khavaigunya*), initiating disease-specific pathology. This stage correlates with early structural or biochemical changes in modern pathology, such as preclinical atherosclerosis or latent autoimmune inflammation. The recognition of *Purvarupa* (prodromal symptoms) at this stage allows for targeted preventive measures, potentially halting progression to overt disease.¹⁵

The final two stages—*Vyakti* and *Bheda*—reflect the full expression and diversification of disease. These correspond to clinically manifest and complication phases in modern medicine. Management in these stages often requires disease-specific interventions, long-term therapies, and complication control. The review highlights that while later-stage treatments are essential, they are often more resource-intensive and less likely to achieve complete reversal compared to interventions in earlier stages.¹⁶

The findings reaffirm that *Kriya Kala* is not only an ancient theoretical construct but also a practical clinical tool with enduring relevance. Its parallels with modern concepts of disease progression support its integration into contemporary healthcare, particularly in preventive and predictive medicine. By applying *Kriya Kala* in clinical practice, physicians can enhance early disease detection, optimize treatment timing, and improve overall prognosis.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Kriya Kala* provides a comprehensive, stage-wise understanding of disease progression in Ayurveda, from the earliest *Dosha* imbalances to the development of complications. Its clear parallels with modern pathological stages highlight its relevance in early diagnosis, prevention, and prognosis. By identifying and addressing imbalances during the initial stages, the disease process can often be reversed or halted, reducing the need for intensive interventions in later stages. Integrating *Kriya Kala* into contemporary clinical practice offers a valuable framework for preventive, predictive, and personalized healthcare.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NONE

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