

**KAYACHIKITSA AS A FOUNDATIONAL SPECIALTY: A REVIEW OF ITS SCOPE
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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, encompasses eight clinical specialties collectively known as Ashtanga Ayurveda. Among these, Kayachikitsa (internal medicine) holds a position of primary importance as the foundational branch dealing with comprehensive diagnosis and management of diseases affecting the entire human system. This review article explores the scope, historical foundations, and clinical significance of Kayachikitsa within the broader framework of Ashtanga Ayurveda. Drawing from classical texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, this paper examines the etymological meaning of Kaya, the therapeutic principles of Shamana and Shodhana, and the extensive range of conditions managed through this specialty. The review also highlights the contemporary relevance of Kayachikitsa in addressing lifestyle disorders, chronic diseases, and geriatric care, while identifying future directions for research and integration with modern medical science.

KEYWORDS: Kayachikitsa, Ashtanga Ayurveda, Internal Medicine, Charaka Samhita, Ayurvedic specialties.**1. INTRODUCTION**

Ayurveda, derived from the Sanskrit roots Ayu (life) and Veda (knowledge), represents one of the oldest continuously practiced medical systems in human history. Many scholars consider Ayurveda to be the oldest healing science, with its cardinal texts-Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha, and Ashtanga Hridayam-dating back to 400-200 BCE.

The system of Ayurveda evolved through the history of civilization comprising different branches for specific health purposes, with Kayachikitsa being one of the foremost among them. Kayachikitsa is described as the superior branch of Ashtanga Ayurveda and is given prime importance due to its wide field of application in diagnosis and treatment of various diseases affecting human beings.

2. Historical Foundations of Kayachikitsa**2.1 Classical Texts and Kayachikitsa**

The most referenced text on Ayurveda, the Charaka Samhita, contains most of the healing system's theoretical fabric and framework, with a primary focus on Kayachikitsa.

While Charaka Samhita excels in the area of Kayachikitsa, the Sushruta Samhita-though emphasizing surgical description-also contains substantial material related to internal medicine. In Sushruta Samhita, Kayachikitsa-related topics span approximately 46 chapters distributed across various sections: Sutrasthana (5 chapters), Nidanasthana (7 chapters), Sharirasthana (3 chapters), Chikitsasthana (9 chapters), Kalpasthana (2 chapters), and Uttara Tantra (20 chapters). The Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridayam, dating to around 400 CE, also deal predominantly with Kayachikitsa.

2.2 Etymology and Conceptual Understanding

The term "Kayachikitsa" derives from two Sanskrit words: Kaya and Chikitsa. Kaya refers to the human body, while Chikitsa means treatment. However, the conceptual understanding extends beyond the physical body-Kaya encompasses the Sharira (body), Mana (mind), and Antaragni (digestive fire). Thus, Kayachikitsa deals with diseases suffering the entire

body and mind, making it correlate closely with Internal Medicine in modern medical science.

3. Ashtanga Ayurveda: The Eight Branches

Ayurvedic approach to treatment includes the prevention and promotion of health as well as cure of diseases, objectives fulfilled through proper knowledge of eight clinical specialties known as Ashtanga Ayurveda.

These eight branches are:

Sanskrit Name	English Equivalent	Primary Focus
Kayachikitsa	Internal Medicine	Systemic diseases affecting body and mind
Kaumarbhritya	Pediatrics	Child care and childhood disorders
Grahavidya/ Bhutavidya	Demonology / Psychiatry	Psychological and possession-related disorders
Urdhvanga	ENT & Ophthalmology	Diseases above the clavicle
Shalya-Tantra	Surgery	Surgical procedures and instruments
Damshtra/ Agadatantra	Toxicology	Poisons and their management
Jara / Rasayana	Rejuvenation	Geriatric care and anti-aging
Vrisha / Vajikarana	Aphrodisiacs	Reproductive health and virility

Different Ayurvedic Samhitas (authentic classical texts) were composed initially comprising Ashtanga Ayurveda, including Charaka-Samhita, Sushruta-Samhita, Bhela-Samhita, Harita-Samhita, Kashyapa-Samhita, and the Samhitas of Vagbhata. Each of these texts excels in one specialty while covering subject matter of other specialties-Charaka-Samhita excels in Kayachikitsa, Sushruta-Samhita in surgical description, and Kashyapa-Samhita in Kaumarbhritya.

4. Scope of Kayachikitsa

4.1 Conceptual Framework

Kayachikitsa operates on fundamental Ayurvedic principles including the five-element theory (Panchamahabhuta), three bodily constitutions (Tridosha), and the concept of digestive fire (Agni). According to Vedic philosophy, the universe (and everything within it) originates from Divine consciousness, manifesting as ether, air, fire, water, and earth-the five elements that exist in and make up all matter Man is considered a microcosm of nature, so these five basic elements present in all matter also exist within each individual.

Each element plays a specific role in bodily function:

- Space (Ether) exists in the mouth, nose, gastrointestinal tract, respiratory tract, abdomen, thorax, capillaries, lymphatics, tissues, and cells.
- Air creates movement in the body, mobilizing muscles, enabling organ function, and conducting the movement of cells and the central nervous system.
- Fire activates the digestive system, intelligence, and metabolism.
- Water hydrates the body, helping tissues, organs, and other bodily systems to operate.
- Earth gives structure to bones, cartilage, nails, and every physical aspect of the body.

4.2 Therapeutic Approach

The Kayachikitsa approach to patient care encompasses multiple therapeutic modalities:

- ❖ Shamana (Pacification Therapies): Conservative management using internal medications to pacify aggravated doshas without eliminating them from the body.
- ❖ Shodhana (Bio-purification): Elimination therapies, including Panchakarma procedures, designed to remove accumulated toxins and vitiated doshas from the body.
- ❖ Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapies): Immunomodulatory and anti-aging protocols that enhance Ojas (immunity and vitality).
- ❖ Lifestyle Modifications: Dietary regulation (Pathya-Apathya), exercise, and daily routines (Dinacharya) tailored to individual constitution.

4.3 Clinical Foundation

The clinical practice of Kayachikitsa follows a systematic approach including:

- ❖ Nidana (Diagnosis): Comprehensive assessment through questioning, physical examination, observation of tongue and eyes, listening to voice tone, and pulse examination
- ❖ Samprapti (Pathogenesis): Understanding the disease evolution process
- ❖ Sadhyasadyata (Prognosis): Determining curability based on disease factors and patient condition
- ❖ Chikitsa Sutra (Therapeutic Planning): Developing individualized treatment protocols

5. Diseases Managed in Kayachikitsa

Kayachikitsa encompasses a vast spectrum of clinical conditions affecting various body systems:

5.1 Gastrointestinal and Hepatic Disorders

- Amlapitta (Acidity, Gastritis)
- Grahani (IBS, Malabsorption syndromes)

- Yakrit Vikara (Liver disorders including jaundice, fatty liver, cirrhosis)
- Arsha (Hemorrhoids)
- Udara Roga (Ascites, abdominal diseases)

5.2 Metabolic and Lifestyle Disorders

- Prameha (Diabetes Mellitus)
- Amalaki, Gudmar, Shilajatu Managed with herbs including Nisha
- Sthaulya (Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome) Treated with Guggulu preparations and Medohara Yoga
- Madhumeha (Diabetes complications)
- Dyslipidemia and Hypertension Managed using Sarpagandha, Arjuna, Guggulu

5.3 Musculoskeletal and Rheumatological Disorders

- Amavata (Rheumatoid Arthritis) Rasna, Eranda Taila Treated with Simhanada Guggulu,
- Sandhivata (Osteoarthritis) Managed with Yograj Guggulu, Abhyanga, Janu Basti
- Gridhrasi (Sciatica)
- Manyastambha (Cervical Spondylosis)
- Vatarakta (Gout) Treated with Guduchi, Kaishora Guggulu

5.4 Neurological and Psychiatric Disorders

- Pakshaghata (Paralysis, Stroke rehabilitation) Maha Narayan Taila Abhyanga, Basti, Shirodhara
- Ardita (Facial paralysis)
- Chittodvega (Anxiety)
- Anidra (Insomnia)
- Unmada (Psychiatric disorders) - Brahmi, Shankhapushpi, Jatamansi with meditation
- Apasmara (Epilepsy) - Supportive therapy with Brahmi Vati, Vacha

5.5 Respiratory Disorders

- Tamaka Shwasa (Bronchial Asthma) - Kantakari, Haridra, Vasa, Sitopaladi Churna
- Kasa (Chronic Cough, Bronchitis) - Vasavaleha, Talisadi Churna
- Allergic Rhinitis and Sinusitis - Managed with Nasya Karma, Dhoomapana

5.6 Dermatological Disorders

- Kushtha (Psoriasis, Eczema, Vitiligo, Skin allergies)
- Arogyavardhini Vati, Khadirarishta, Neem, Manjishtha with Shodhana and Raktamokshana

5.7 Geriatric Care (Jara Chikitsa)

The aging process and problems related to old age require specialized care, and in this regard Ayurveda mentioned different approaches for geriatric care including use of internal medicine. The use of natural drugs along with general principles of Ayurveda offers health benefits in case of aging or geriatric health issues. Rejuvenation therapies include Chyawanprash, Ashwagandha, Shatavari, and Amalaki, focusing on immunity, memory, joint health, and quality of life.

6. Importance of Kayachikitsa in Ashtanga Ayurveda

6.1 Foundational Status

Kayachikitsa is described as the foremost branch of Astanga Ayurveda and Several factors is considered the backbone of Ayurvedic medicine contribute to its foundational importance:

- ❖ **Comprehensive Scope:** Kayachikitsa deals with diseases affecting the entire body and mind, unlike specialized branches that focus on specific body regions or patient populations.
- ❖ **Integration with Other Branches:** The principles of Kayachikitsa form the basis for understanding and managing conditions that may ultimately require specialized intervention from other branches. For example, the constitutional assessment (Prakriti analysis) and basic treatment principles apply across all specialties.
- ❖ **Educational Foundation:** Kayachikitsa is the subject taught in the final year B.A.M.S. Professional Degree course and is the important basic clinical subject of Ayurveda. The department is essentially concerned with education, research, and patient care in the area of Ayurvedic Internal Medicine and its clinical specialties.

6.2 Clinical Relevance

Kayachikitsa departments run specialized outpatient departments for chronic ailments including diabetes, heart block, spinal disorders, and psoriasis. The department takes active part in prevention of epidemics by participating in vaccination programmes and promoting Ayurvedic medicine. For instance, during the Swine flu epidemic, departments promoted Guduchyadi Kwatha as a preventive measure.

The vision of Kayachikitsa departments includes training undergraduate students to become expert physicians and becoming centers of excellence by providing quality education and practical training in Ayurvedic Medicine.

7. Integration with Modern Medicine

7.1 Complementary Approaches

Ayurveda is not meant to be a substitute for Western allopathic medicine, as drugs and surgery are often the most optimal methods of treating diseases and acute conditions. Following Ayurvedic practices helps rebuild the body after undergoing drugs or surgery, or better yet, makes people stronger so they can be less likely to develop disease in the first place.

If discomfort is present but doctors cannot identify a particular reason, it may indicate an imbalance that has not yet manifested as disease. Recognizing and taking action through Ayurveda to treat such imbalance can prevent disease from taking hold on the body.

7.2 Evidence-Based Practice

Recent research has explored Ayurvedic management in various conditions.

A scoping review of chronic kidney disease (CKD) management through Ayurveda examined 23 case reports published between 2016 and 2023.

Following Ayurvedic treatment, notable improvements were observed in serum creatinine, serum urea, and hemoglobin levels. The review suggested that Ayurvedic management shows potential benefits in CKD, with observed improvements in renal parameters and alleviation of CKD-related symptoms.

The increasing utilization of herbal drugs as alternative treatments in both developed and developing countries is driven by their natural origin, availability, affordability, and accessibility. Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) offers a potential therapeutic option for patients, particularly in cases where conventional treatment options are limited.

7.3 Diagnostic Integration

Modern diagnostic tools including blood sugar levels, lipid profiles, and imaging studies are increasingly integrated with Ayurvedic assessment to provide comprehensive patient care. Evidence-based integrative protocols combining Ayurvedic drugs, Panchakarma, yoga, and dietetics with modern diagnostics aim to improve outcomes and reduce drug dependency in chronic illnesses.

8. CONCLUSION

Kayachikitsa stands as the foundational specialty within Ashtanga Ayurveda, encompassing comprehensive internal medicine that addresses physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of health. Its roots in classical texts like Charaka Samhita, its systematic approach to diagnosis and treatment, and its extensive scope covering diseases from metabolic disorders to geriatric care establish its central importance in Ayurvedic practice.

The continued relevance of Kayachikitsa in addressing contemporary health challenges-particularly lifestyle disorders, chronic diseases, and age-related conditions-demonstrates the enduring wisdom of Ayurvedic principles. As modern healthcare moves toward personalized, integrative, and preventive approaches, the holistic framework of Kayachikitsa offers valuable insights and therapeutic options.

Future development requires rigorous research, standardization of protocols, and thoughtful integration with modern medical science while preserving the authentic principles that have sustained this ancient healing tradition for millennia. Through such balanced evolution, Kayachikitsa can continue to fulfill its mission of promoting health and alleviating suffering for people worldwide.

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