

Kitibha Kushtha through the Lens of Shatkriyakala: An Ayurvedic Perspective of Disease Progression of Kitibha Kushtha with Special Reference to Psoriasis

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Abstract: *Kitibha Kushtha is one of the Kshudra Kushthas described in Ayurveda and is characterized by Shyava Varna (blackish discoloration), Kina-Khara Sparsha (rough and hard touch), Parushata (coarseness), and Rukshata (dryness). These classical features closely resemble the clinical manifestations of psoriasis, a chronic immune-mediated inflammatory skin disease characterized by erythematous scaly plaques, itching, and recurrent exacerbations. The Ayurvedic concept of Shatkriyakala, described by Acharya Sushruta, explains the sequential progression of disease through six stages—Sanchaya, Prakopa, Prasara, Sthanamsamshraya, Vyakti, and Bheda. Understanding Kitibha Kushtha through this framework provides insight into its etiopathogenesis, progression, chronicity, and recurrence. This review aims to interpret the disease progression of Kitibha Kushtha according to Shatkriyakala while correlating its clinical features with psoriasis. Such a stage-wise understanding may facilitate early diagnosis, timely intervention, prevention of disease progression, and reduction of recurrence.*

Keywords: Kitibha Kushtha, Shatkriyakala, Ayurveda, Kshudra Kushtha, Twak Vikara, Psoriasis

I. INTRODUCTION

Kushtha comprises a group of skin disorders described extensively in Ayurvedic classics. Among the various types of Kshudra Kushtha, Kitibha Kushtha is characterized by rough, dry, hard, and discoloured skin lesions. Acharya Charaka describes Kitibha Kushtha as:

श्यावंकिणखरस्पर्शपरुषंकिटिभस्मृतम्॥

These features indicate Shyava Varna, Kina-Khara Sparsha, Parushata, and Rukshata, which bear close resemblance to the clinical manifestations of psoriasis.

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory papulosquamous disorder characterized by sharply demarcated erythematous plaques covered with silvery-white scales, accompanied by itching, dryness, and recurrent episodes. Although the exact etiology remains unclear, genetic predisposition, immune dysregulation, environmental triggers, metabolic disturbances, and psychological stress are known contributing factors.

The concept of Kriyakala explains the sequential progression of disease in Ayurveda. Acharya Charaka and Acharya Vagbhata have described the initial stages of Dosha vitiation, namely Chaya (Sanchaya) and Prakopa, highlighting the importance of recognizing early pathological changes.



Acharya Sushruta further elaborated this concept into six distinct stages—
"सञ्चयः प्रकोपश्च प्रसरो स्थानसंश्रयः। व्यक्तिर्भेदश्च रोगाणां षट् क्रियाकाल उच्यते॥"—which collectively constitute the concept of Shatkriyakala. These stages provide a systematic framework for understanding disease progression from Dosha accumulation to clinical manifestation and complications.

1. Acharya Charaka – Chaya and Prakopa

Charaka explains the initial stages of Dosha vitiation (Chaya and Prakopa) in Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 17 (Kiyana Shiraseeya Adhyaya).

चयो वृद्धिहेतुषु।
कोपो विपरीतगुणैः।

Chaya (Sanchaya) – Accumulation of Doshas due to indulgence in causative factors possessing similar qualities.

Prakopa (Kopa) – Aggravation of the accumulated Doshas when the etiological factors continue.

2. Acharya Vagbhata (Ashtanga Hridaya)

Acharya Vagbhata describes the early stages of Dosha vitiation (Chaya and Prakopa) in Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutra Sthana.

चयः कोपश्च दोषाणाम्...

Vagbhata explains that diseases begin with Dosha Chaya followed by Prakopa, emphasizing early recognition and management before further progression.

3. Acharya Sushruta – Shatkriyakala

Acharya Sushruta systematically describes the six stages of disease progression in Sushruta Samhita, Sutra Sthana 21.

सञ्चयः प्रकोपश्च प्रसरो स्थानसंश्रयः।
व्यक्तिर्भेदश्च रोगाणां षट् क्रियाकाल उच्यते॥

Meaning:

The six stages of disease progression are:

- Sanchaya (Accumulation)
- Prakopa (Aggravation)
- Prasara (Spread)
- Sthanasamshraya (Localization)
- Vyakti (Manifestation)
- Bheda (Complication/Differentiation)

These six stages together are known as Shatkriyakala.

The concept of Shatkriyakala, described by Acharya Sushruta, explains the gradual evolution of disease from initial doshic accumulation to manifestation and complications. Applying this concept to Kitibha Kushtha provides a comprehensive understanding of its pathogenesis and highlights opportunities for preventive intervention before the disease becomes fully established.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This narrative review is based on a comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, with special emphasis on Kushtha, Kitibha Kushtha, and Shatkriyakala. Contemporary dermatology literature related to psoriasis was also reviewed to establish clinical correlation. The collected information was analyzed to develop a conceptual understanding of disease progression in Kitibha Kushtha according to Shatkriyakala.



III. RESULTS

Classical Description of Kitibha Kushtha and its correlation with psoriasis.

Kitibha Kushtha is included under Kshudra Kushtha.

Its characteristic features are described as:

श्यावंकिणखरस्पर्शपरुषकिटिभस्मृतम्॥

Ayurvedic Feature	Meaning	Corlation with psoriasis
Shyava varna	Blackish brown discoloration	Hyperpigmented or erythematous plaques
Kina Sparsha	Scar like roughness	Thickened plaque surface
Khara sparsh	Hard and rough touch	Indurated , scaly lesions
Parushata	Coarseness	Dry and coarse skin
Rukshta	Dryness	Dry plaque with scaling
Kandu	Itching	Pruritus in psoriasis

Kitibha Kushtha is predominantly caused by Vata-Kapha Dosha, with involvement of Twak, Rakta, Mamsa, and Lasika.

Disease Progression of Kitibha Kushtha through Shatkriyakala

1. Sanchaya Avastha

तत्रसञ्चितानांखलुदोषाणांस्तथपूर्णकोष्ठतापीतावभासता
मन्दोष्मताचाङ्गानांगौरवमालस्यचयथाकारणविद्वेषश्चेति
लिङ्गानिभवन्ति।तत्रप्रथमःक्रियाकालः॥सु. सू. २१/१८

Repeated exposure to Kitibha-producing causative factors results in the accumulation of Vata, Pitta and Kapha in their respective sites.

In relation to Kitibha Kustha, the following findings were identified:

Vata Sanchaya produces early dryness and roughness of the skin.

Pitta Sanchaya produces Pitavabhasata or mild alteration in skin colour.

Kapha Sanchaya produces Mandagni, Gaurava and Alasya.

Yathakaraṇa Vidveṣa develops as a natural aversion towards the causative factors responsible for Doṣha accumulation.

Characteristic Kitibha lesions are not visible at this stage.

Thus, Sanchaya represents the initial and potentially reversible stage of Kitibha Kustha.

2. Prakopa Avastha

कोपस्तुउन्मार्गगामिता।
विलयनरूपावृद्धिःप्रकोपः॥सु. सू. २१/१८

During this stage, the accumulated Doṣhas become further aggravated and tend to leave their normal sites.

The findings related to Kitibha Kustha include:

Vata Prakopa causes increased dryness, roughness, pain and pricking sensation.

Pitta Prakopa causes mild burning, local warmth and alteration in skin colour.

Kapha Prakopa causes heaviness, itching, thickening and increased Kleda.

Agnimandya and Ama formation further aggravate the pathological process.

The Doṣas become ready for dissemination, although a clearly defined Kitibha lesion is not yet present.



3. Prasara Avastha.

एवंप्रकुपितानांप्रसरतांवायोरविमार्गगमनाटोपौ,
ओषचोषपरिदाहधूमायनानिपित्तस्य,
अरोचकाविपाकाङ्गसादाश्छर्दिश्चेतिश्लेष्मणोलिङ्गानिभवन्ति;
तत्रतृतीयःक्रियाकालः॥सु. सू. २१/३२

The aggravated Doṣhas leave their respective sites and spread throughout the body. Vata serves as the principal force responsible for the dissemination of other Doṣhas.

In Kitibha Kustha:

Vimargagamana of Vata facilitates the spread of vitiated Doṣhas.

Pitta Prasara may produce Oṣa, Choṣa and Paridaha, indicating burning and inflammatory changes.

Kapha Prasara produces Arochaka, Avipaka and Angasada, indicating impaired metabolism.

The Doṣhas circulate through Rasavaha and Raktavaha Srotas.

Tvak, Rakta, Maṃsa and Lasika gradually become susceptible to Doṣhic involvement.

Transient itching, dryness, discolouration or burning may appear without the formation of a definite Kitibha plaque.

4. Sthanasamsraya Avastha.

During this stage, the circulating Doṣhas become localised at the site of Khavaigunya in the skin. Doṣha–Duṣya Sammurchana occurs between predominantly Vata-Kapha Doṣhasand Tvak, Rakta, Maṃsa and Lasika.

The following Puvarupa of Kuṣṭha may appear:

स्पर्शज्ञित्वमतिस्वेदो नवावैवर्ण्यमुन्नतिः।
कोठानांलोमहर्षश्चकण्डूस्तोदःश्रमःक्लमः॥

The findings related to Kitibha include:

Vaivarnya or early skin discolouration.

Asvedana or Atisvedana.

Alteration in cutaneous sensation.

Kandu and Toda.

Localised dryness and roughness.

Mild elevation and thickening of the skin.

Reduced healing of minor skin injuries.

These manifestations indicate the Puvarupa stage of Kitibha Kustha.

5. Vyakti Avastha

During Vyakti Avastha, the characteristic clinical features of Kitibha Kustha become clearly manifested.

श्यावंकिणखरस्पर्शपरुषंकिटिभंस्मृतम्॥

The principal findings are:

shyava Varna—dark, brownish or blackish discolouration.

Kiṇa-Khara Sparsha—rough texture resembling a scar or callosity.

Paruṣata—excessive dryness and hardness.

Kandu—itching due to Kapha involvement.

Thickening and scaling of the skin.

Formation of clearly defined, dry and rough plaques.

Vata is responsible for Ruṣata, Kharata and Paruṣhata, while Kapha produces Ghanata, Sthirata and Kandu. The vitiation of Pitta and Rakta contributes to Vaivarnya and inflammatory changes.



6. Bheda Avastha.

In Bheda Avastha, Kitibha becomes chronic and is clearly differentiated from other varieties of Kuṣṭha.

The findings include:

- Persistent thick and rough plaques.
- Extensive scaling and hyperpigmentation.
- Severe itching.
- Fissuring and cracking of lesions.
- Bleeding or discharge following scratching.
- Spread of lesions to multiple body regions.
- Recurrent exacerbations and remissions.
- Deeper involvement of Tvak, Rakta and Mamsa.
- Reduced response to treatment.
- Psychological and social impairment.

IV. DISCUSSION

Kitibha Kushtha predominantly involves Vata and Kapha Doshas, producing the characteristic manifestations of dryness, roughness, hardness, scaling, and itching. Vata contributes to Rukshata, Parushata, fissuring, and scaling, whereas Kapha is responsible for thickening, chronicity, and plaque formation. The associated vitiation of Rakta explains erythema, inflammation, and recurrence.

The concept of Shatkriyakala provides a sequential understanding of disease progression. During Sanchaya and Prakopa, doshic imbalance remains largely internal and potentially reversible. Prasara marks systemic dissemination of vitiated Doshas, while Sthanasmashraya represents Dosha-Dushya Sammurchana involving Twak, Rakta, Mamsa, and Lasika. Vyakti corresponds to the complete manifestation of Kitibha Kushtha with classical features described in Ayurvedic texts, closely resembling plaque psoriasis. Bheda represents chronicity and complications, including deeper tissue involvement and systemic manifestation. Thus, Shatkriyakala serves as a valuable framework for understanding the natural history of Kitibha Kushtha and its clinical correlation with psoriasis.

V. CONCLUSION

Kitibha Kushtha is a classical Ayurvedic skin disorder that closely resembles psoriasis in its clinical presentation. The concept of Shatkriyakala offers a systematic explanation of its progression from early Dosha accumulation to complete manifestation and complications. Understanding Kitibha Kushtha through this stage-wise Ayurvedic framework facilitates early diagnosis, preventive intervention, rational treatment planning, and recurrence control. Correlating Kitibha Kushtha with psoriasis provides an integrative perspective that bridges classical Ayurvedic principles with modern dermatological understanding, supporting a holistic approach to the management of chronic inflammatory skin diseases.

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