

Asatkāryavāda in āyurveda: A Critical Exploration of Its Evidences and Applications..

Dr. Kavya K¹, Dr. Subramanya Puranik*², Dr. Darshini R³, Dr. Baburao Gaddala⁴, Dr. Jeyaprakash M R⁵, Nydile S⁶, Dr. Sathisha A D⁶, Dr. Anil Kumar K M⁷, Chethan Kumar B G⁷

¹Department of Samhita & Siddhanta, JSS Ayurveda Medical College and Hospital, Mysore, Karnataka, India

²Department of Rasashastra Bhaishajya kalpana, JSS Ayurveda Medical College and Hospital, Mysore, Karnataka, India

³Department of Samhita & Siddhanta, Aduchunchanagiri Ayurveda Medical College, Hospital & Research centre, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

⁴Department of Chemical Engineering, School of Studies of Engineering and Technology, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, A Central University, Koni, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh-495009, India.

⁵MB School of Pharmaceutical Science, Mohan babu University, Sree Sainath Nagar, Tirupathi-517102, India

⁶Division of Biochemistry, School of Life Sciences, JSS Academy of Higher Education & Research, SS Nagar, Mysuru-570015, Karnataka, India

⁷Department of Environmental Science, School of Life Sciences, JSS Academy of Higher Education & Research, SS Nagar, Mysuru-570015, Karnataka, India

*Corresponding Authors:

Email ID : subrahmanyapuranim@gmail.com, kavyagowda8792@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In traditional Vedic India medicine was a very well developed physical science, at the same time as philosophical systems like Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, and Vaiśeṣika darśana's which developed basic theories of causation and reality. Āyurveda which was influenced by these darśanas mainly aligns with the Sāṃkhya doctrine of Satkāryavāda which is the view that the effect preexists in its cause. But also we see in āyurveda and in clinical practice ideas which play out as per Asatkāryavāda the Nyāya Vaiśeṣika theory which puts forth that the effect is a new production (I.e. Ārambha) and does not exist in its cause before hand. This study critically examines classical Ayurvedic evidences supporting Asatkāryavāda, particularly within the Bṛhatrayī. Concepts such as garbha formation, vikṛti viśama-samavāya, prabhāva, rasa-utpatti, and transformations through saṃskāra demonstrate emergent effects, indicating the operational relevance of Asatkāryavāda within Ayurvedic practice.

Keywords: Asatkāryavāda, Ārambhavāda, Āyurveda, Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika, Satkāryavāda..

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian philosophical systems emerged from the Vedic knowledge tradition, offering diverse interpretations of causation (kāraṇa) and the nature of existence (sṛṣṭi). Āyurveda, as an upaveda of the Atharva Veda, incorporates these philosophical principles to explain clinical, diagnostic, and therapeutic processes.

Although Āyurveda follows the Sāṃkhya doctrine of Satkāryavāda, several classical descriptions reveal alignment with Asatkāryavāda—the theory upheld by Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika darśana that an effect does not pre-exist in its cause but arises newly (ārambha). These darśanas classify causes (kāraṇa) into samavāyi, asamavāyi, nimitta, and upādāna, emphasising that effects ((kārya) emerge only when these causes act collectively.

Ayurvedic phenomena such as unexpected drug actions (prabhāva), disease emergence, rasa utpatti, and pharmaceutical processing (saṃskāra) often reflect new properties not inherent in the original material. This necessitates a critical examination of how Asatkāryavāda operates within Ayurvedic theory and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kārya - kāraṇa siddhanta is one such fundamental principle which explains about the Kārya (Effect) and kāraṇa (Cause). kāraṇa has been defined as the pre-existing, cause necessary for the production of any kārya. [1]

kāraṇa is of three forms-

Samavayi (Inseparable / Intimate cause),

Asamavayi (Separable / Non-Intimate cause) and

Nimitta (Instrumental cause) [2]

Samavāyi kāraṇa is the one which is having Samavāyi saṁbanda (inseparable relationship) with both kārya & kāraṇa & exist throughout the process. I.e after kārya utpatti & even kārya nāśha. [3] e.g.: Tantu (threads) acts as Samavāyi kāraṇa for vastra (cloth). [4]

Asamavāyi kāraṇa is the one which is having Samavāyi saṁbanda (inseparable relationship) either with kārya or kāraṇa in the process of kārya utpatti (I.e. production of cause) e.g.: Tantu saṁyoga (union of threads) in the process of manufacture of vastra (cloth). [5]

. Any cause apart from Samavāyi & Asamavāyi kāraṇa acts as **Nimitta kāraṇa** (instrumental cause). e.g.: For weaving a cloth, weaver, loom etc acts as nimitta kāraṇa [6] I.e acts as supporting factor for kārya utpatti.

Kārya is the effect / outcome, in which the Karta (Doer) intends to obtain and aims his activities to accomplish through specific kāraṇa [7].

This kārya-kāraṇa vāda has two views: **1. Satkāryavāda** **2. Asatkāryavāda**

Asatkāryavāda, also termed Ārambhavāda, is detailed primarily in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy. These schools proposes that the effect (kārya) does not exist in the cause (kāraṇa) prior to its creation (utpatti); it is newly produced when the required causes interact [8]. Buddhists, Cārvākas, and certain Mīmāṃsā thinkers also support similar views.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika's view directly opposes Sāṁkhya's Satkāryavāda. While Sāṁkhya proposes that the effect (kārya) exists in a potential form within the cause (kāraṇa), Nyāya argues that the effect is distinct and newly created i.e ārambha [9]. Hence, Kārya-utpatti is considered a novel phenomenon, described by the term Ārambhavāda. In this framework, the role of Kartā (the doer) and other Nimitta Kāraṇas (instrumental causes) becomes indispensable for the manifestation of a Kārya. For instance, although the seed possesses potential for sprouting, it cannot give rise to a plant unless it is sown—demonstrating the necessity of external instrumental factors.

To substantiate Asatkāryavāda, five types of distinctions (bhedas) are explained [10]:

1. Buddhi Bheda – Kārya and Kāraṇa are perceived as two distinct entities in cognition.
2. Saṁjñā Bheda – The two are referred to by different names.
3. Kārya Bheda – They possess different utilities or functions.
4. Ākāra Bheda – They are recognized by their differing forms.
5. Saṁkhyā Bheda – They differ in numerical terms.

A closer examination of these two theories (Satkāryavāda & Asatkāryavāda) reveals that both are not contradictory to one another; rather, they complement each other depending on the context of causation. When Samavāyi Kāraṇa (inherent cause) is regarded as the primary determinant of a Kārya, Satkāryavāda becomes applicable. Conversely, when Nimitta Kāraṇa (instrumental cause) is considered the dominant factor in producing a Kārya, Asatkāryavāda holds greater relevance.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Primary Ayurvedic texts—Caraka Saṁhitā, Suśruta Saṁhitā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya—were analysed for concepts reflecting Asatkāryavāda. Commentaries and classical interpretations were also examined. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika texts, particularly the Nyāya Sūtra and Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, were consulted to understand the original dārśhanika theories.

Secondary sources included peer-reviewed articles, textbooks, and commentaries on causation, prabhāva, saṁskāra, and pharmacodynamics in Āyurveda.

Evidences in Āyurveda Through Rogotpatti (Pathogenesis)

New Disease Formation Not Pre-Existing in Dhātus

Āyurveda states that diseases manifest when doṣa, dūṣya, and nidāna interact under suitable conditions; they do not exist as latent entities [11]. Examples include prameha, jvara, and raktapitta, which arise only after specific nidānas act.

Nidanārthakara Roga

When one disease becomes the cause of another (e.g., prameha → pidakā), the resulting disease is a newly produced pathological entity, not inherently present in the earlier disease [12].

Evidences in Chikitsā (Therapeutics)

Combination & processing of drug yields new effect:

Āyurveda emphasises saṃyoga, saṃskāra, and prakriyā. These processes generate new therapeutic properties: [13]

Trikatu enhances bioavailability (yogavāhitva), an effect not present individually.

Fermentation (sandhāna) produces alcohol—an entirely new entity.

Shodhana of dravya

Substances like vatsanābha and hiṅgula become safe only after śodhana, reflecting newly created properties rather than latent ones [14].

Rasaoushadhi Transformations

Procedures such as māraṇa and puta create entirely new physicochemical and therapeutic properties in metals and minerals [15].

Evidences in Dravyaguṇa (Pharmacology)

Vipāka as a Newly Produced Effect

Vipāka (post-digestive effect) arises after metabolism and is not present in the raw substance.

Example: Amla rasa undergoing madhura vipāka [16].

Prabhāva (Special Potency)

Actions that cannot be explained by rasa–vīrya–vipāka (e.g., danti & citraka, both drugs have similar attributes, but danti alone acts as virecaka) suggest emergent effects [17].

Evidences in Rachana Śarīra (Embryology)

Garbha utpatti from the union of śukra and ārtava results in tissues and organs that do not pre-exist in the gametes. Masānumāsika garbha-vṛddhi describes systematic emergence of new structures—consistent with ārambhavāda [18].

Clinical Observations Supporting Asatkāryavāda

Sudden onset of Disease

Conditions like amlapitta, udarda, and vāta-pitta jvara often appear suddenly following specific dietary or lifestyle triggers, showing new pathological emergence.

Āgantuka Vikāra

External injuries creating inflammation, swelling, and ulceration demonstrate newly arising pathological states resulting from specific external causes [19].

4. DISCUSSION

The principle of Asatkāryavāda, originating from the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika darśana, provides an essential philosophical background to understand the emergence of new phenomena, particularly how effects (kārya) happens only when there will be complete association of all necessary kāraṇas. In the practice of Āyurveda, this theory (Asatkāryavāda) puts forth a comprehensive explanation of how diseases originate, evolve, and respond to therapeutic interventions. Although Āyurveda is often aligned with the Sāṃkhya's Satkāryavāda in metaphysical discussions, its practical approach to pathology and pharmacology is deeply align with Asatkāryavāda's doctrine of non-pre-existence of the effect.

Concept of samprāpti, especially the ṣaṭkriyākāla (six stages of disease progression), demonstrates a clear Asatkāryavād in pattern where disease is not merely a manifestation of a pre-existent condition but the outcome of cumulative pathological events. Each stage—sañcaya, prakopa, prasara, sthānasamśraya, vyakti, and bheda—reflects the sequential build-up of causal factors leading to the emergence of a clinically recognisable condition (vyakti) [20]. This aligns with the Nyāya argument that the effect does not exist before the complete manifestation of causative factors. Thus, Āyurveda uses this logic to rationalise how single or multiple nidānas (causes) progressively create an entirely new state called “disease.”

Similarly, the hetu–liṅga–auśadha i.e trisutra (conceptual triad) reinforces the Asatkāryavāda model. Liṅga (clinical features) are nothing but the effect which arises due to involvement of specific hētus. Once the causative chain is interrupted (nidāna parivarjana), the effect ceases or fails to arise—precisely pointing the concept Asatkāryavāda standpoint that effects are dependent on causes and have no independent existence. This model not only supports diagnostic way but also strengthens preventive medicine in Āyurveda by emphasising elimination of causative factors before they manifest new pathological conditions.

In dravyaguṇa (pharmacology), Asatkāryavāda offers a strong interpretative model for understanding dravya karma (action of drug) and pharmaceutical processing (bhaiśajya kalpanā). Ayurvedic drugs give results based on its attributes like rasa, guṇa, vīrya, vipāka, and prabhāva with the patient's internal habitat. These interactions produce a novel physiological state,

substantiating the Asatkāryavāda notion that effects arise anew. Moreover, pharmaceutical transformations such as śodhana, māraṇa, bhāvanā, and pāka generate medicinal qualities that were not present in the original raw materials. This reflects the principle that specific conditions changes dravya, producing new properties—a classical hallmark of Nyāya darśana's āramba vāda.

Clinically, Asatkāryavāda strengthens the logic in therapeutic interventions in Āyurveda. Śodhana, śamana, rasāyana, and vājīkaraṇa therapies work by producing desired outcomes—elimination of doṣas, restoration of balance, or enhancement of vitality—that did not exist prior to the intervention. The transformation of the patient's state following therapy aligns with the Nyāya & Vaiśeṣika's view that the aggregation of appropriate causes (correct drug, dose, timing, route, and patient compliance) culminates in the creation of a new effect, which is improved health. This causation-based logic also supports prognostic decisions (sādhya-asādhya), where curability depends on whether causative chains can be effectively modified.

However, critical evaluation reveals that, though āyurveda seems to adopt Satkāryavāda, many concepts align with Asatkāryavāda principle. The principle not only enriches theoretical understanding but also sheds light on practical aspects of diagnosis, drug action, and therapeutic planning. Asatkāryavāda emerges as a powerful explanatory tool that supports evidence-based reasoning and contributes to the scientific foundation of Ayurvedic clinical practice.

5. CONCLUSION

The exploration of Asatkāryavāda within the Ayurvedic framework reveals that this classical theory of causation continues to hold significant philosophical and practical value. While Āyurveda is traditionally aligned with Sāṃkhya's Satkāryavāda at a metaphysical level, its clinical reasoning, pathological explanations, and pharmacological applications consistently reflect the viewpoint of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika's Asatkāryavāda i.e., that effects (kārya) produced only when complete causes (kāraṇa) are assembled. By adopting this practical thought i.e., kāraṇa tatva (causation model), Āyurveda offers a systematic explanation for the emergence of disease, the progression of samprāpti, and the transformation induced by therapeutic interventions.

Concept of ṣaṭkriyākāla i.e., six-stage model of disease evolution powerfully demonstrates how pathological changes evolve progressively, creating new clinical conditions - which supports Asatkāryavāda principle. Similarly, Trisutra (i.e., hetu-liṅga-auśadha) framework shows how clinical features and treatment outcomes are strictly dependent on the presence or absence of causative factors. This reinforces the Ayurvedic emphasis on nidāna parivarjana, which aligns seamlessly with the Asatkāryavādin stance that eliminating causes prevents the emergence of effects. The theory also provides a robust foundation for understanding the dynamic nature of drug action, pharmaceutical processing (saṃskāra), and therapeutic response, where new medicinal qualities and physiological effects are produced through specific interactions and transformations.

In conclusion, Asatkāryavāda serves not merely as a philosophical doctrine but as a functional, clinically relevant theory that enriches Ayurvedic diagnosis, treatment, preventive strategies, and pharmaceutical science. Its application enhances clarity in causation & strengthens therapeutic rationale

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