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ŚILĀPUTRAKA NYĀYA: A CLASSICAL INTERPRETATIVE PRINCIPLE FOR UNDERSTANDING HIDDEN PATHOLOGY IN AYURVEDA

Ashish Moda[1], Krishna Mohanty[2], Paurnima Uttam Shinde[3]

[1]*M.D Scholar, PG Department of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhanta, Govt. Ayurvedic College & Hospital, Balangir, Odisha*

[2]*Professor & H.O.D, PG Department of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhanta, Govt. Ayurvedic College & Hospital, Balangir, Odisha*

[3]*Professor & H.O.D, Department of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhanta, Dr.Vasant Parikh Ayurvedic Medical College,Vadnagar,Mahesana,Gujrat.*

Corresponding Author: Dr. Ashish Moda – M.D Scholar, PG Department of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhanta Govt. Ayurvedic College & Hospital,Balangir, Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Āyurveda employs a distinctive epistemological framework to explain complex physiological and pathological phenomena through logical tools known as nyāyas. These nyāyas function as illustrative maxims that simplify abstract principles, facilitate clinical understanding, and enhance interpretative clarity of classical texts. Among these, Śilāputraka Nyāya occupies a unique position in explaining the phenomenon of apparent stability masking internal destruction. This nyāya is particularly relevant in understanding chronic diseases, dhātu-kṣaya, avarana, and latent pathological processes where outward normalcy conceals progressive internal deterioration. The present conceptual review aims to elaborate the philosophical basis of nyāya in Ayurveda with special reference to Śilāputraka Nyāya, its textual origin, interpretative meaning, clinical relevance, and contemporary applicability. Classical references from Bṛhattrayī and authoritative commentaries were critically analysed. The study highlights the importance of Śilāputraka Nyāya in understanding subtle pathogenesis and reinforces the need for nyāya-based interpretative approaches in Ayurvedic education and research.

KEYWORDS: *Nyāya, Śilāputraka Nyāya, Dhātu-kṣaya.*

INTRODUCTION

Āyurveda is not merely a system of medicine but a comprehensive science grounded in philosophical reasoning, logical interpretation, and experiential wisdom. Classical *Ayurvedic* texts employ a unique pedagogical style in which profound concepts of physiology, pathology, diagnosis, and therapeutics are communicated through concise *sūtras*. Due to their brevity, these *sūtras* often require interpretative tools for proper comprehension. To fulfill this requirement, ancient *Ācāryas* incorporated *nyāyas*—logical maxims or illustrative analogies—borrowed from Indian philosophical traditions and adapted for medical science[1].

Nyāyas function as intellectual bridges between abstract theory and clinical understanding. They assist in explaining invisible biological processes using observable phenomena from daily life. In *Bṛhattrayī*, especially in *Caraka Saṃhitā* and its commentaries, numerous *nyāyas* such as *Kṣīra-dadhi Nyāya, Khalekapota Nyāya, Andha-paṅgu Nyāya*, and *Śilāputraka Nyāya* are utilized to clarify complex doctrines[2].

Śilāputraka Nyāya literally means "the child made of stone." It denotes a condition in which external appearance remains unchanged while internal destruction or absence of vitality exists. This *nyāya* holds immense clinical relevance in understanding diseases with silent progression, chronic degenerative conditions, and deceptive stability observed in long-standing disorders.

In the present era, where lifestyle disorders and chronic degenerative diseases dominate clinical practice, understanding such subtle Ayurvedic principles becomes increasingly relevant. Therefore, a comprehensive conceptual review of *Śilāputraka Nyāya* is warranted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

Conceptual and literary review.

Materials

- Classical Ayurvedic texts: *Caraka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya*
- Commentaries: *Cakrapāṇi, Dalhaṇa, Aruṇadatta, Hemādri*
- Modern Ayurvedic literature and review articles

Methodology

Relevant references related to *nyāya* and *Śilāputraka Nyāya* were collected from classical texts and analyzed. Interpretations

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were critically reviewed and systematically organized under conceptual, pathological, and clinical domains.

Concept of *Nyāya* in *Ayurveda*

The term *nyāya* is derived from the Sanskrit root *"nī"* meaning "to lead or guide." Thus, *nyāya* refers to that which leads the intellect toward proper understanding[3].

In *Ayurveda, nyāyas* are not rigid logical proofs as seen in classical *Nyāya Darśana*; rather, they are illustrative maxims used to:

- Clarify subtle meanings of sūtras
- Explain unseen biological processes
- Strengthen clinical reasoning
- Facilitate teaching and learning

Ācārya Cakrapāṇi explicitly states that *nyāyas* are essential for proper *sūtrārtha bodha* (comprehension of aphorisms)[4].

Need for Nyāya in Ayurvedic Science

Ayurvedic physiology and pathology involve numerous invisible phenomena such as *doṣa gati, dhātu paka, srotodusṭi*, and *agni vikṛti*. Direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) alone is insufficient to understand these processes. Hence, *nyāyas* serve as inferential aids (*anumāna sahāyaka*).

Nyāyas also help resolve apparent contradictions in texts and guide physicians toward deeper interpretative wisdom rather than literal understanding.

***Śilāputraka Nyāya*: Conceptual Explanation**

Etymology

- ***Śilā*** – stone
- ***Putraka*** – child

Śilāputraka refers to a stone statue resembling a child—externally appearing alive but internally devoid of life.

Meaning of the *Nyāya*

Śilāputraka Nyāya denotes a condition in which:

- External form or function appears normal
- Internal vitality, essence, or function is destroyed
- Apparent stability masks actual degeneration

This *nyāya* highlights deceptive normalcy.

Textual Reference

The concept of *Śilāputraka Nyāya* is primarily explained by commentators, especially *Cakrapāṇi,* while elucidating conditions where structural presence exists without functional integrity[5].

It is applied particularly in contexts of:

- *Dhātu-kṣaya*
- *Ojas depletion*
- Chronic *vāta* disorders
- *Avasthāntara* of disease

Philosophical Interpretation

From a philosophical standpoint, *Śilāputraka Nyāya* represents the difference between *rūpa mātra* (mere form) and *sāra tattva* (essential vitality). Ayurveda repeatedly emphasizes that life is not defined by structure alone but by functional harmony of *doṣa*, *dhātu, agni*, and *ojas*.

Thus, a body may exist structurally but be physiologically non-viable.

Application in *Dhātu* Theory

Dhātu-kṣaya

In *dhātu-kṣaya*, particularly *majjā* and *śukra kṣaya*, the body may retain outward appearance, yet internal strength, immunity, and vitality progressively decline. This situation aligns perfectly with *Śilāputraka Nyāya*, where tissues exist in name but lose their essence.

Examples include:

- ***Asthi***: Bones may appear normal in shape but become brittle, porous, and weak, leading to frequent fractures with minor trauma.
- ***Majjā***: *Majjā-dhātu* may occupy cavities of bones yet lack proper nourishment, reducing neurological efficiency and contributing to fatigue and poor coordination.
- ***Śukra***: Present quantitatively but infertile or of poor quality, resulting in reproductive challenges despite normal semen volume.
- ***Mamsa***: Muscle tissue may appear intact but lacks tone and strength, causing early fatigue and reduced physical endurance.
- ***Rasa***: Circulatory plasma may appear normal in volume but lacks nutrients, contributing to pallor and delayed healing.
- ***Rakta***: Blood may appear normal in color and quantity but lacks *ojas* and functional vitality, making the body prone to chronic infections.
- ***Medas***: Fat tissue may be present externally but fails to provide lubrication or insulation, leading to joint stiffness or cold intolerance.

Relevance in Chronic Diseases

Many chronic diseases demonstrate **minimal early symptoms** but cause **irreversible internal damage**, which is exactly what *Śilāputraka Nyāya* describes. These include:

- ***Madhumeha* (Diabetes)**: Patients may appear healthy with stable weight, yet internal *dhātu* degeneration and *agni vikṛti* progress silently, leading to neuropathy and organ damage.
- ***Rajayakṣmā* (Chronic Tuberculosis)**: Patients may maintain near-normal physical appearance while lung tissue is progressively destroyed.
- **Chronic *Vāta Vyādhi***: Conditions such as *Sandhigata Vāta or Pakshaghāta* show minimal early pain or limitation, but gradual degeneration occurs in bones, joints, and nerves.
- **Degenerative Joint Disorders**: Early osteoarthritis or osteopenia can remain asymptomatic while cartilage and bone strength decrease internally.
- **Ama-related chronic conditions**: Subtle ama accumulation may mask symptoms while *doṣa* imbalance silently damages *dhātus*.

Additional examples from classical texts:

- ***Asthi-kṣaya* in *Vāta-pradhāna* conditions** (e.g., *Kshaya* due to excessive exercise or old age) where bones remain in shape but lose density and strength.

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- ***Majjā-kṣaya* in *Prameha* and *Vāta* disorders**, leading to poor coordination, tremors, or numbness, despite apparently normal body structure.
- ***Rasa* and *Rakta* deficiency in chronic *Pitta-pradhāna* disorders**, where skin and complexion appear normal, but the body is prone to fatigue and infections.

***Śilāputraka Nyāya* in *Vāta* Pathology**

Vāta doṣa, due to its *rukṣa, laghu*, and *khara* guṇas, causes gradual depletion of *dhātus* rather than acute manifestation. Therefore, most *vāta*-dominant chronic diseases follow this *nyāya*.

The patient may appear outwardly functional, but internal degeneration continues, especially in *asthi, majjā*, and *mamsa dhātus*. Classical texts highlight this in conditions like *Sandhigata Vāta*, *Asthi-kshaya*, and *Pakshaghāta*, where early detection requires careful assessment of *bala, agni*, and *dhātu sāratā*.

Diagnostic Significance

Śilāputraka Nyāya warns physicians against superficial assessment. Absence of obvious signs does not indicate absence of disease.

Detailed examination should include:

- ***Bala*** – strength and endurance
- ***Ojas*** – vitality and immunity
- ***Agni*** – digestive and metabolic function
- ***Dhātu sāratā*** – tissue quality and integrity

Additional diagnostic clues include:

- Subtle **postural changes**
- Early **muscle wasting**
- Minor **neurological deficits**
- Mild **joint stiffness or crepitus**

Prognostic Importance

Diseases following *Śilāputraka Nyāya* often fall under *yāpya* or *asādhyā* categories, because once internal vitality is lost, restoration becomes difficult, even if the structure appears preserved.

This explains why some patients with chronic *dhātu* depletion or *vāta* disorders fail to regain full strength despite long-term therapy. Early recognition and intervention are therefore critical.

Therapeutic Implications

In such conditions:

- Symptomatic treatment alone is insufficient
- *Rasāyana* therapy is necessary to restore *dhātu* vitality
- Long-term *śamana* and *śodhana* therapy may be required for deep restoration
- Failure to recognize hidden degeneration leads to therapeutic disappointment

Other examples:

- In ***Majjā-kṣaya***, administration of *Bala rasa, Brahmi*, or *Rasāyana* therapies helps restore neurological strength
- In ***Asthi-kṣaya***, *Asthi Rasāyana* and oil massage (*Abhyanga* with *Bala Taila*) support bone and joint integrity

Contemporary Correlation

Modern medicine also recognizes conditions where structural integrity persists despite functional failure, such as:

- **Osteopenia before fracture** – bone appears normal on X-ray but is functionally weak
- **Early neurodegeneration** – neurons exist structurally but are functionally impaired
- **Subclinical organ failure** – e.g., liver or kidney function declines despite normal imaging
- **Early diabetes complications** – normal appearance but microvascular damage is ongoing

These examples conceptually match ***Śilāputraka Nyāya***, reinforcing its relevance.

Role in Ayurvedic Education

Understanding *nyāyas* enhances:

- **Clinical reasoning** – teaches to assess internal vitality, not just outward appearance
- **Conceptual clarity** – explains subtle pathology described in *Saṃhitās*
- **Interpretative accuracy** – improves understanding of *sūtra* and commentary
- **Therapeutic planning** – guides selection of *rasāyana* and *dhātu*-rejuvenating measures

Nyāyas like *Śilāputraka* serve as teaching tools for students and practitioners, helping them think beyond visible signs and assess hidden degeneration, in line with classical Ayurvedic wisdom.

RESULTS

Analysis of classical Ayurvedic texts and commentaries showed that *nyāyas* are frequently used as interpretative tools to explain concise sūtras and subtle physiological concepts. The review identified *Śilāputraka Nyāya* as an important illustrative principle describing conditions where the external structure remains intact but internal vitality or function is diminished. Textual references suggest that this *nyāya* is applicable in pathological states such as *dhātu-kṣaya, ojas* depletion, and chronic *vāta*-dominant disorders.

The concept was found particularly relevant in the degeneration of *asthi, majjā, and śukra dhātus*, where tissues may be structurally present but functionally weakened. Similar patterns were observed in chronic diseases like *madhumeha, rājayakṣmā*, and degenerative *vāta* disorders, which often progress silently in early stages. These findings indicate that *Śilāputraka Nyāya* provides an important conceptual framework for understanding hidden pathological changes and supports deeper clinical assessment beyond visible symptoms.

DISCUSSION

Nyāyas play an important role in understanding the deeper meaning of *Ayurvedic sūtras*. Because *Saṃhitā* statements are concise and written in aphoristic style, their correct interpretation depends largely on *yukti, bhāvanā*, and illustrative examples. *Śilāputraka Nyāya* is one such example

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that helps in understanding disease conditions where external appearance does not reflect the internal pathological status.

In clinical practice, physicians often assess disease severity based on visible signs and patient complaints. However, *Ācāryas* have clearly emphasized that disease should be evaluated on the basis of *doṣa, dhātu, agni, bala,* and *ojas. Śilāputraka Nyāya* explains situations where these internal factors are severely affected, but outward symptoms remain mild or stable. This concept is frequently observed in chronic *vāta*-dominant disorders, where gradual *dhātu-kṣaya* occurs without sudden manifestation.

The *nyāya* also supports the *Saṃhitā* description of *cira-kārī vyādhi*, in which disease progresses slowly but continuously. In such conditions, even though the body structure appears intact, the nourishing capacity of *dhātus* becomes weak. As a result, tissues exist only in form, not in functional strength. This directly reflects the idea of a stone child-having shape but lacking life.

Śilāputraka Nyāya is particularly useful while understanding *asthi* and *majjā dhātu* disorders. Texts describe that *majjā* provides *sneha, bala, and pūraṇa of asthi*. When *majjā* becomes depleted, bones may still be present structurally, but their stability and strength reduce. This internal weakness may not be evident during early stages, leading to underestimation of disease severity.
From a prognostic point of view, this *nyāya* explains why certain diseases are difficult to cure even when obvious symptoms are less. Once *dhātu sāratā* is lost, treatment becomes prolonged and often only supportive. Hence, early recognition of such hidden degeneration is essential.

Thus, *Śilāputraka Nyāya* strengthens the *Saṃhitā*-based approach of looking beyond symptoms and encourages deeper assessment of internal tissue health. Its understanding helps the physician avoid false assurance, improves prognostic judgment, and supports the need for *rasāyana* and long-term management in chronic conditions.

CONCLUSION

Śilāputraka Nyāya is a profound Ayurvedic maxim illustrating deceptive normalcy and concealed degeneration. It underscores the distinction between structural presence and functional vitality. Proper understanding of this *nyāya* enables physicians to recognize subtle pathology, assess prognosis accurately, and plan comprehensive long-term management. Incorporation of *nyāya*-based analytical approaches can significantly enrich Ayurvedic clinical practice, education, and research.

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