

Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal

(An Open Access, Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal)

(Multidisciplinary, Monthly, Multilanguage)

* Vol-1* *Issue-5* *December 2024*

Exploring The Concept of Abhava In Ayurveda: A Comprehensive Review of Its Practical Applications

Dr. Anil Kumar Sen

MD Scholar, Department of Ayurveda Samhita and Siddhant, Pt. Khushilal Sharma Government (Autonomous) Ayurveda College & Institute, Bhopal Madhya Pradesh, India.

Dr. Sakshi Sen

MD Scholar, Department of Roga Nidan Evam Vikriti Vigyan, All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, India

Dr. Rajesh Kumar Malviya

Associate Professor, Department of Ayurveda Samhita and Siddhant, Pt. Khushilal Sharma Government (Autonomous) Ayurveda College & Institute, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Dr. Pawan Kumar Kirar

Assistant Professor Department of Ayurveda Samhita and Siddhant, Pt. Khushilal Sharma Government (Autonomous) Ayurveda College & Institute, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.

ABSTRACT

The concept of Abhava, meaning absence or non-existence, plays a significant role in both Indian philosophy and Ayurveda. Rooted in Vaisheshika Darshana, Abhava is considered crucial for understanding the balance between existence (Bhava) and non-existence in the universe. While Ayurveda primarily emphasizes the presence of health and balance, Abhava is indirectly acknowledged in its approach to disease, diagnosing imbalances, and treatment methodologies. Abhava is recognized as essential in understanding the absence of vital elements such as Doshas, Dhatus, or digestive fire (Agni), which contribute to various health disorders. Although not explicitly classified as a Padartha in Ayurveda, its practical application is evident in diagnosing and treating diseases like indigestion and insomnia. This review explores the practical utility of Abhava in Ayurveda, its relation to the philosophical framework of Vaisheshika Darshana, and its intriguing connection to modern scientific principles, such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. The study highlights the universal relevance of Abhava in both ancient wisdom and contemporary scientific thought, demonstrating its importance in the holistic understanding of health. Further research can explore deeper connections between Abhava and modern health systems, potentially enriching current medical practices with ancient philosophical insights.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Abhava, Padarth, Practica Application

INTRODUCTION

In Indian philosophy, the concept of Abhava, meaning absence or non-existence, plays an important role in understanding the nature of reality. This idea is a key part of the Vaisheshika Darshana, one of the six classical schools of Indian thought. While

Bhava refers to the existence or presence of something, Abhava deals with the absence or negation of something. Both concepts together help us understand how the world functions. Vaisheshika philosophy, founded by Sage Kanada, describes six main categories (called Padarthas) that make up the world: Dravya, Guna, Karma, Samanya, Vishesha, and Samavaya. Abhava is considered an important category because it explains how things change and how things cease to exist.

In Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine, these philosophical concepts are used to understand health and disease. While Ayurveda focuses on the presence of health and balance (Bhava), it also considers the absence or imbalance of the body's elements, such as the Doshas (body energies), tissues, and waste products, which lead to illness.

This review explores how the concept of Abhava from Vaisheshika Darshana connects with Ayurveda. It also examines the practical utility of Abhava in Ayurveda.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

To explore the concept of Abhava (Non-Existence) in Ayurveda and its practical applications in Ayurveda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Brihatraii along with relevant articles of Ayurveda were searched in PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar using keywords like Ayurveda, Abhava, Bhava, etc.

ETYMOLOGY

A description of Abhava under seven Padartha was first mentioned by Shivaditya in his work Saptapadarthi.^[1]

The Sanskrit word 'Abhava' is made by applying the prefix 'to the word 'Bhava'. The prefix 'a' denotes absence, less, false, or prohibit; Bhava means existence, natural state, condition, thing, substance, or a being.^[2]

SYNOMYMS

Abhava, negation, non-existence, non-entity.

DEFINITION

"Bhava" signifies existence, whereas "Abhava", or non-existence, represents the absence, negation, lack, or want of something. It describes a state where something is not present or does not exist. For instance, statements like 'it is not here' or 'it is not that' exemplify the concept of Abhava, highlighting the absence or lack of a particular entity or condition.

Key Aspects of Abhava

Abhava means the absence or non-existence of something. When we know about something because of its opposite—its ability to exist—that is called Abhava. For example, when we think about a pot (Ghata), we naturally think of it existing. But when we think about the pot not existing, it is based on the idea of the pot existing first. So, to know the pot doesn't exist, we must first have the knowledge that it does exist.

ACCEPTANCE OF ABHAVA AS PADARTHA

Following texts accepted and included Abhava as Padartha.

- Charak Samhita— mentioned Sat and Asata (Abhava).^[3]
- Tarkasangraha^[4]
- Saptapadarthi also considered Abhava as Padartha.^[5]

Characteristics of Padartha^[6]

Prashashtapada, a commentator on Sankhya philosophy describes three main characteristics of Padartha as below:

1. Independent existence (Astittva)

2. Which can be named (Abhidheyatwa)
3. Which can be known or comprehended (Dneyatva)

Reasons for Acceptance of Abhava as a Padartha

For something to be considered a Padartha, it must meet three essential requirements:

1. It must be real, not fictional or virtual: Every natural thing has its existence, which makes it unique and distinct from others.
2. It must be knowable: Anything that cannot be known or understood cannot be regarded as a Padartha.
3. It must be expressible in language: A Padartha can be explained through words, as language is the external expression of thoughts.

The concept of 'Abhava' indirectly fulfills all the three basic requirements of a Padartha. Therefore, Abhava is considered a Padartha.

TYPES OF ABHAVA^[7]

According to Sarvadarshanasangraha and Tarkasangraha Abhava is mainly of two types^{[7],[8]}

1. Absence of something in something else (Samsargabhava).
2. One thing is not another thing or mutual negation (Anyonyabhava).

Abhava is classified into four types^[9]:

1. Antecedent negation (Pragabhava)
2. Non-existence after destruction (Pradhwansabhava)
3. Absolute negation or absolute non-existence in all times (Atyantabhava)
4. Reciprocal or mutual negation (Anyonyabhava)

The first three types are considered under Samsargabhava.

1. Antecedent negation (Pragabhava): The non-existence of a substance before its manifestation is termed Pragabhava.^[10] According to Tarka Sangraha, "Absence of effect before the manifestation of Karya (effect) is called Pragabhava or antecedent non-existence.^[11] There is no beginning. It exists before the production of the effect. The appearance of the effect brings about the end of antecedent non-existence. e.g., before the manifestation of the pot (Ghata), a negation of pot (Ghata) exists for a long time. But when once the pot is created, this negation is destructed. Hence this negation has an end.^[12]

2. Negation after destruction (Pradhwansabhava): The non-existence of an effect (Kaarya) after its destruction is termed Pradhwansabhava.^[13] The non-existence is produced as soon as the effect is destroyed, and it lasts indefinitely. As a result, it has a beginning (Adi) but no end (Anant). So, destruction causes negation. e.g. absence of pot after its destruction. It indicates the non-existence in the future.^[14]

3. Absolute negation or absolute non-existence (Atyantabhava): The absolute non-existence in past, present, and future is Atyantabhava.^[15] It ascertains or reflects counter correlative delimited by relation or connection. It is eternal.^[16] e.g. Vision (Rupa) never exist in Vayu Mahabhuta. As Rupa is the quality of Agni Mahabhuta, not of Vayu. This shows the absolute negation.

4. Reciprocal or mutual negation (Anyonyabhava): The non-existence of a substance in another substance is Anyonyabhava.^[17] It differentiates absolute non-existence from reciprocal non-existence. The relation of identity characterizes it. It has its counter entity characterized by the relation of the identity. Like Atyantabhava, it also has no beginning and no end. e.g., the pot cannot be cloth. Every individual has a

unique identity, and he cannot be another person.^[18]

Ayurveda perspectives

Six factors (Shat-Karanas) are essential for restoring the equilibrium of Dhatus (Dhatu Saamya), which is the primary objective of Charak Samhita. As Abhava is not required to achieve this objective, Charak has not enumerated and further described Abhava. Charak has accepted that there are two types of entities in this universe viz. Sat (entities do have existence), and Asat (entities do not have existence). While explaining the principle of “Svabhavaparamavada” (theory of natural destruction), the Abhava principle has been accepted. The non-existence of causative factors (Hetohavartanam) is considered the cause of the destruction of disequilibrium of Dhatu (Dhatu Vaishamya).^[19]

Practical Utility of Abhava in Ayurveda

While counting the Padartha, Ayurveda has accepted the method of Vaisesika system and only six categories are accepted here and as existence is the primary essentiality of category non-existence cannot be accepted as Padartha.^[20]

- The method and senses responsible for existing materials are also applied for the knowledge of non-existing materials, hence, the separate category of non-existence is not necessary and has not been accepted. For example, the existence of a chair in the room can be known either by seeing by eyes or by touching perception and these means of perception are also required to establish the non-existence of the chair in the room. Thus, the non-existence is neither a category nor a means of knowledge (Pramana) as well. Charaka, clearly indicates that touch together with its absence is perceived by tactile sense organ.^[21]

स्पर्शनेन्द्रियविज्ञेयः स्पर्शो हि सविपर्ययः ॥ (Ch-Sha-1/30)

- Though, Ayurveda has not accepted Abhava as category, but being an applied and practical science, Ayurveda has accepted deficiency or lack of food as a cause of disease. Deficient quality of food will produce the symptoms such as impairment of strength, complexion, plumpness, distension and mis-peristalsis in abdomen, impairment of longevity, virility and Ojas, etc.^[22]

- The presence and absence of knowledge (Gyanasya Abhava or Bhav) are the characteristics feature of mind (Manas).^[23] The presence or absence of mind plays a key role in the perception of knowledge.

- The pathology is manifested by the depletion of increments in Dosha, Dhatu, and Mala. These pathological states lead to the absence of some signs and symptoms. This helps in proper diagnosis and prognosis. So Abhava is also helpful in understanding the normal physiology, pathology, diagnosis, and prognosis. For example, in insomnia (Anidra), sleep is absent and leads to other disorders. The absence of normal digestion in indigestion leads to other signs.

- Treatment that leads to an absence of relapse is called as ‘Apunarbhava Chikitsa’. The concept of Abhava is also applied in such a treatment approach.

- All the objects in this Universe have presence (Bhava) and absence (Abhava) which can be recognized by their proper maintenance (Yoga), non-utilization (Ayoga), excessive utilization (Atiyoga), and improper utilization (Mithyayoga). Bhava needs logical interpretation (Yukti) for recognition. Abhava doesn't depend on Yukti.^[24]

- The excessive use of food may produce some diseases and these can be cured by Langhana or Upavasa (by non-talking of food etc) but in both the conditions Bhava Padartha are prominent, therefore, Charaka has not accepted Abhava as a category. But Abhava has not been neglected as the world has been divided in two groups viz. Sat (having existence) and Asat (having non-existence) and in other many references it

has been described.^[25]

Every research study requires hypothesis testing. The researcher proposes a null hypothesis and highlights the necessity of accepting an alternative hypothesis through statistical tests. The Abhava (absence) of the null hypothesis ultimately leads to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Abhava and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

The concept of Abhava in Vaisheshika Darshana and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics share a fundamental relationship in terms of absence and uncertainty.

Heisenberg's principle states that it is impossible to precisely measure both the position and momentum of a particle at the same time. The more accurately we measure one, the less precisely we can know the other. This reflects an inherent uncertainty in quantum systems.

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is mathematically expressed -

Where:

- Δx is the uncertainty in position.
- Δp is the uncertainty in moment $\Delta x \cdot \Delta p \geq 4\pi\hbar$
- \hbar is Planck's constant

This formula implies that the more precisely one property (like position) is measured, the less precisely the other property (like momentum) can be determined.

Relation between Abhava and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

1. Absence and Knowledge:

- In Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the absence of precise knowledge about a particle's position or momentum is a fundamental aspect of quantum mechanics.
- In Abhava, absence is equally significant. Understanding the absence of something helps us comprehend its existence or presence.

2. Limits of Understanding:

- Both concepts highlight limits in our understanding. Heisenberg's principle shows that we cannot fully know all properties of a quantum system, while Abhava reflects the limits of knowledge regarding the presence and absence of things in the universe.

3. Existence and Non-Existence:

- Just as Abhava (absence) is essential to understanding Bhava (existence), uncertainty in quantum mechanics is necessary for understanding the complete nature of particles.

Both Abhava and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle emphasize that absence or uncertainty plays a key role in shaping our understanding of existence. They show that limitations in knowledge and perception are intrinsic to understanding reality, whether in philosophy or quantum physics.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, the concept of Abhava (non-existence or absence) plays a significant role in understanding health, disease, and the balance of the body's elements. While Ayurveda emphasizes Bhava (existence) as the foundation of health, Abhava offers a complementary perspective by addressing what is absent or lacking in the body, leading to imbalances and diseases. This concept is deeply rooted in Vaisheshika philosophy, which classifies the world into two categories: Sat (existence) and Asat (non-existence).

In Ayurveda, Abhava is acknowledged indirectly, particularly in relation to the deficiencies or absence of vital elements such as Doshas, Dhatus (tissues), or waste products, which contribute to illness.

Although Ayurveda does not explicitly classify Abhava as a Padartha (category of knowledge), it recognizes its practical utility in understanding the causality of disease. For instance, the absence of proper digestion (Agni) leads to disorders like indigestion (Ajeerna), while the absence of sleep (Anidra) results in insomnia, leading to other pathological conditions. Ayurveda also acknowledges the role of Abhava in the diagnostic process, where the lack of certain symptoms or signs helps identify the nature of the disease and its prognosis.

The principle of Abhava is also applied in treatment approaches, particularly in conditions where the absence of relapse is desired. In such cases, therapies like Langhana (fasting) or Upavasa (abstinence from food) are used to restore balance. Additionally, in the context of mental health, the presence or absence of knowledge (Gyanasya Abhava) plays a key role in the functioning of the mind and its ability to perceive reality.

Interestingly, the concept of Abhava also resonates with modern scientific principles, such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics, which suggests the non-existence of a particle before its manifestation. This connection underscores the universal nature of Abhava, bridging ancient philosophical thought with contemporary scientific ideas. Ultimately, while Abhava is not accepted as a category in Ayurveda, its influence is undeniably profound in the understanding of physiological functions, pathology, and treatment methodologies.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Abhava, derived from the Vaisheshika Darshana, provides valuable insights into understanding the balance between existence and non-existence in Ayurveda. While Ayurveda primarily emphasizes the presence (Bhava) of health and balance, it also acknowledges the role of Abhava—non-existence or absence—in contributing to illness and disease. This perspective is crucial in explaining how the absence or lack of key elements, such as Doshas, Dhatus, or Agni (digestive fire), leads to physiological imbalances and, consequently, health disorders.

Although Abhava is not explicitly categorized as a Padartha in Ayurveda, its practical applications are evident in diagnostic processes, treatment approaches, and understanding the pathophysiology of diseases. The concept of Abhava helps in identifying the absence of vital functions, such as digestion or sleep, which are essential for maintaining health. Moreover, Ayurveda's therapeutic interventions, such as Langhana (fasting) or Upavasa (abstinence), underscore the relevance of Abhava in restoring balance and preventing the recurrence of diseases.

The comparison of Abhava with modern scientific principles, such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, further demonstrates the timelessness and universality of the concept. While Ayurveda's approach to Abhava is rooted in ancient wisdom, its relevance continues to align with contemporary scientific thought, bridging the gap between philosophy, medicine, and modern science.

In conclusion, the concept of Abhava, although not classified as a Padartha in Ayurveda, remains integral to understanding the intricacies of health, disease, and the restoration of equilibrium in the body. Its practical utility, particularly in diagnostic and treatment methodologies, reinforces the importance of considering both presence and absence in the holistic view of health. Further research exploring the deeper connections between Abhava in Ayurveda and modern scientific principles could yield valuable insights into the practical application of ancient knowledge in contemporary health systems.

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Cite this Article-

'Dr. Anil Kumar Sen; Dr. Sakshi Sen; Dr. Rajesh Kumar Malviya; Dr. Pawan Kumar Kirar, 'Exploring The Concept of Abhava In Ayurveda: A Comprehensive Review of Its Practical Applications' Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal (RVIMJ), ISSN: 3048-7331 (Online), Volume:1, Issue:05, December 2024.

Journal URL- <https://www.researchvidyapith.com/>

DOI- 10.70650/rvimj.2024v1i50011

Published Date- 13 December 2024