



Comprehensive Review of Kridanaka (Toys for Babies) in Kaumarbhritya and Their Developmental Significance

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Abstract

Kaumarbhritya, one of the eight branches of Ayurveda, deals comprehensively with neonatal and paediatric healthcare. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars emphasized not only nutrition and disease management but also the psychological, emotional, intellectual, and social wellbeing of children. Among the various supportive measures described for proper child growth and development, Kridanaka (toys) hold a significant place. Ayurvedic classics describe ideal toys as attractive, lightweight, colourful, safe, non-toxic, non-frightening, and developmentally stimulating. These toys were intended to enhance sensory perception, motor coordination, cognitive development, emotional stability, and social interaction in infants and children.

The present review explores the classical references, characteristics, classification, developmental significance, therapeutic applications, and modern scientific relevance of *Kridanaka* in Kaumarbhritya. Ancient Ayurvedic descriptions are correlated with contemporary paediatric developmental psychology and modern toy safety standards. The study highlights that toys in Ayurveda were not considered mere play objects but important tools for holistic development and behavioural conditioning. The review further discusses the importance of age-appropriate toys, environmental enrichment, and play therapy in child healthcare. Revisiting the Ayurvedic concept of *Kridanaka* may contribute significantly toward safe, natural, and development-oriented childcare practices in modern society.

Keywords: Kaumarbhritya, *Kridanaka*, Ayurveda, Toys, Paediatric Development, Child Psychology, Kashyapa Samhita, Play Therapy.

Introduction

Childhood is the most crucial period for physical growth, neurological maturation, emotional stability, and intellectual development. Healthy development during infancy and early childhood lays the foundation for future physical and mental wellbeing. Modern paediatrics sciences recognize the importance of sensory stimulation, environmental interaction, and play in achieving developmental milestones. Interestingly, these principles were well understood thousands of years ago in Ayurveda.[1-4]

Kaumarbhritya, the Ayurvedic branch dealing with child healthcare, provides a detailed understanding of neonatal care, nutrition, developmental milestones, disease prevention, psychological wellbeing, and child upbringing. Ancient Acharyas believed that a child's growth depends not only on proper food and medicines but also on emotional comfort, affection, sensory stimulation, and recreational activities.[1,2,5]

The concept of Kridanaka (toys) is one of Ayurveda's important contributions to paediatric developmental science.[1,5] Toys were considered essential tools for stimulating sensory organs, improving motor activities, enhancing intellectual functions, and maintaining psychological happiness in children. Ayurvedic scholars understood that children naturally learn through observation, imitation, touch, hearing, movement, and play.

क्रीडाभूमि एवं क्रीडनक 'क्रीडाभूमिः समाकार्या निश्शस्त्रोपलशर्करा । वेल्लोषणकणाम्भोभिः सिक्ता निम्बोदकेन वा ॥ जातुषं घोषवच्चित्रमत्रासं रमणं बृहत् । अतीक्ष्णाग्रं गवाश्वादिमाङ्गल्यमथ वा फलम्' ॥ [2]

क्रीडनकानि खलु कुमारस्य विचित्राणि घोषवन्त्यभिरामाणि चागुरूणि चातीक्ष्णाग्राणि चानास्यप्रवेशीनि चाप्राणहराणि चावित्रासनानि स्युः । [3]

Acharya Kashyapa, one of the principal authorities of Kaumarbhritya, gave special attention to *Kumaragara* (child care room), *Kridabhumi* (playground), and *Kridanaka* (toys), indicating a holistic understanding of pediatric environmental enrichment. According to Ayurveda, toys should be attractive, safe, pleasant, lightweight, and capable of encouraging curiosity and learning without causing fear or injury.

In the modern era, excessive dependence on electronic gadgets and screen exposure has adversely affected children's physical activity, creativity, social interaction, and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, revisiting the ancient Ayurvedic concept of Kridanaka can provide valuable guidance for healthier and safer developmental practices.[5-10]

Aim and Objectives

Aim

To comprehensively review the Ayurvedic concept of *Kridanaka* and its significance in Kaumarbhritya.

Objectives

1. To study classical Ayurvedic references related to *Kridanaka*.
2. To understand the characteristics of ideal toys described in Ayurveda.
3. To evaluate the role of toys in physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development.
4. To correlate Ayurvedic concepts with modern pediatric developmental sciences.
5. To assess the therapeutic and preventive significance of play and toys in child healthcare.

Historical Background of *Kridanaka*

The concept of toys and play therapy has been indirectly and directly mentioned in several Ayurvedic texts, especially:

- Kashyapa Samhita
- Ashtanga Hridaya
- Harita Samhita
- Charaka Samhita
- Sushruta Samhita

Among these, Kashyapa Samhita is considered the most important text related to Kaumarbhritya. Acharya Kashyapa explained that a child should be raised in an environment that is pleasant, safe, entertaining, and psychologically comforting.

Ancient scholars recognized that:

- Children naturally possess curiosity and exploratory behaviour.
- Sensory stimulation promotes neurological development.
- Play enhances learning capacity and emotional balance.
- Recreational activities reduce fear, irritability, and stress.

The concept of *Kridanaka* reflects the advanced understanding of paediatric psychology in ancient Indian medicine.

Etymology and Definition of *Kridanaka*

The word *Kridanaka* is derived from the Sanskrit root “*Krida*,” meaning:

- Play
- Recreation
- Enjoyment
- Amusement

Thus, *Kridanaka* refers to objects used by children for play and entertainment.

However, in Ayurveda, toys had a broader purpose. They were intended to:

- Stimulate sensory organs
- Promote motor activity
- Improve intelligence
- Encourage social behavior
- Maintain emotional happiness

Hence, *Kridanaka* can be understood as developmental and therapeutic tools rather than mere play objects.

Concept of Play in Ayurveda

Ayurveda considers happiness (*Harsha*) and mental satisfaction important for maintaining health. Childhood is naturally associated with playfulness, curiosity, and learning through sensory experiences.

Play contributes to:

- Mental relaxation
- Emotional expression
- Learning through imitation
- Exploration of surroundings
- Behavioural conditioning

Children deprived of proper play opportunities may develop:

- Irritability
- Fearfulness
- Delayed social skills
- Poor emotional expression
- Reduced creativity

Therefore, Ayurveda indirectly supports the modern concept of play therapy and child-centered learning.

Characteristics of Ideal *Kridanaka*

Ayurvedic classics describe several qualities that ideal toys should possess.

1. *Akarshaka*

Toys should be visually appealing and colourful to attract the attention of children.

Importance

- Stimulates visual perception
- Encourages curiosity
- Improves concentration
- Enhances sensory response

Bright colours and moving objects stimulate retinal and neurological development in infants.

2. *Laghu*

Toys should be light in weight and easy to handle.

Importance

- Prevents injury
- Helps grasping ability
- Encourages independent play
- Improves hand coordination

Heavy toys may harm delicate muscles and bones of infants.

3. *Anagha / Anishtura (Non-injurious)*

Toys should not have sharp edges or dangerous structures.

Importance

- Prevents trauma and accidents
- Ensures child safety
- Avoids fear associated with injury

This resembles modern toy safety regulations emphasizing rounded edges and child-safe materials.

4. *Ashabda Bhishana Rahita*

Toys should not produce frightening sounds.

Importance

- Prevents fear and anxiety
- Maintains emotional stability
- Avoids startling reflexes in infants

Very loud sounds may negatively affect hearing and psychological comfort.

5. *Visha Rahita (Non-toxic)*

Toys should be free from poisonous substances.

Importance

- Prevents poisoning
- Avoids allergic reactions
- Ensures safe oral contact

Infants commonly place objects in the mouth; therefore, safety was emphasized even in ancient times.

6. *Vividhakara (Variety in Shapes)*

Different shapes and structures stimulate imagination and learning.

Importance

- Enhances cognitive development
- Improves recognition skills
- Stimulates creativity

7. *Mridu (Soft)*

Toys should be soft and pleasant to touch.

Importance

- Prevents injury
- Promotes tactile stimulation
- Provides comfort and emotional security

Classification of *Kridanaka*

Though Ayurveda does not provide a direct systematic classification, toys can be broadly categorized based on developmental functions.

1. Sensory Stimulation Toys

These toys stimulate sensory organs such as eyes, ears, and skin.

Examples

- Colourful hanging toys
- Bells
- Rattles
- Soft textured toys

Benefits

- Improves sensory integration
- Enhances auditory and visual response
- Promotes neurological maturation

2. Motor Development Toys

These toys encourage body movement and coordination.

Examples

- Rolling toys
- Pulling toys
- Balls
- Moving objects

Benefits

- Improves muscle coordination
- Encourages crawling and walking
- Enhances gross motor skills

3. Cognitive Development Toys

These toys stimulate memory, reasoning, and intellectual growth.

Examples

- Shape recognition toys
- Counting objects
- Stacking toys
- Puzzle-like structures

Benefits

- Enhances intelligence
- Improves problem-solving skills
- Develops memory and concentration

4. Social and Emotional Toys

These toys encourage interaction and emotional expression.

Examples

- Dolls
- Animal figures
- Group play materials

Benefits

- Promotes social interaction
- Encourages empathy
- Enhances communication skills

Role of Kridanaka in Child Development

1. Physical Development

Play activities involving toys help improve:

- Muscular strength
- Coordination
- Posture
- Reflexes
- Balance

Fine motor skills develop through grasping and manipulating objects, while gross motor skills improve through movement-based play.

2. Sensory Development

Sensory stimulation is essential for brain maturation during infancy.

Toys stimulate:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Touch
- Spatial perception

This enhances neural connectivity and sensory integration.

3. Cognitive Development

Interactive toys improve:

- Curiosity
- Attention span
- Memory
- Logical thinking
- Creativity

Learning through play is a scientifically accepted method of early childhood education.

4. Emotional Development

Toys provide emotional satisfaction and security.

Benefits include:

- Reduction in anxiety
- Emotional expression
- Increased confidence
- Better adaptation to surroundings

Children often use toys to express fears, emotions, and imagination.

5. Social Development

Group play activities teach:

- Sharing
- Cooperation
- Communication
- Leadership
- Team behaviour

These skills are essential for personality development.

Therapeutic Importance of *Kridanaka*

Ayurveda emphasizes holistic child wellbeing. Toys can therefore be considered therapeutic aids.

Therapeutic Applications

- Reducing fear during illness
- Distracting hospitalized children
- Supporting rehabilitation exercises
- Managing behavioral disorders
- Encouraging developmental therapy

Modern play therapy similarly uses toys to improve psychological adjustment and emotional expression.

Modern Scientific Correlation

Modern developmental sciences strongly support Ayurvedic views regarding toys and play.

Modern Toy Safety Guidelines

Modern paediatrics recommends toys that are:

- Non-toxic
- Lightweight
- Age appropriate
- Non-breakable
- Free from sharp edges

These principles closely resemble Ayurvedic descriptions.

Comparison Between Ayurvedic and Modern Concepts

Ayurvedic Concept	Modern Equivalent
<i>Laghu</i>	Lightweight toys
<i>Visha Rahita</i>	Non-toxic materials
<i>Anagha</i>	Injury-free toys
<i>Akarshaka</i>	Attractive educational toys
<i>Ashabda Bhishana Rahita</i>	Safe sound levels
<i>Vividhakara</i>	Creativity-enhancing toys

Discussion

The Ayurvedic concept of *Kridanaka* demonstrates a remarkably advanced understanding of paediatric developmental psychology. Ancient scholars understood that children learn primarily through sensory experiences and interaction with their environment.

Unlike the modern commercialization of toys, Ayurveda focused on:

- Safety
- Simplicity
- Developmental appropriateness
- Sensory stimulation
- Emotional wellbeing

Today, children are increasingly exposed to:

- Excessive screen time
- Electronic gadgets
- Social isolation
- Reduced physical activity

These factors contribute to:

- Delayed speech
- Reduced social interaction
- Obesity
- Attention disorders
- Behavioral problems

The Ayurvedic approach encourages natural play, physical movement, sensory engagement, and emotional interaction, which remain highly relevant today.

Eco-friendly toys made from wood, cloth, and natural materials based on Ayurvedic principles may provide safer alternatives to plastic and chemically treated toys.

Conclusion

Kridanaka is an important concept in Kaumarbhritya that reflects the holistic paediatric wisdom of Ayurveda. Toys were considered essential tools for promoting healthy physical, cognitive, emotional, sensory, and social development in children.

Ancient Ayurvedic scholars described detailed characteristics of ideal toys, emphasizing:

- Safety
- Attractiveness
- Sensory stimulation
- Emotional comfort
- Developmental appropriateness

Modern developmental sciences strongly support these principles, highlighting the scientific relevance of Ayurvedic paediatric concepts even today.

Reintegration of Ayurvedic principles of *Kridanaka* into modern childcare practices may help create healthier developmental environments and reduce the negative effects of excessive gadget dependency among children.

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