

CONCEPT OF INDRIYA IN ACCORDANCE WITH KRIYA SHARIR: A LITERARY REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background

Indriya is a fundamental concept in Ayurveda and occupies an important position in the study of Kriya Sharir. In Ayurveda, Indriya is not limited to the gross anatomical sense organs but represents a functional faculty responsible for perception and acquisition of knowledge. The process of perception involves coordination among Atma, Mana, Indriya and Indriyartha, followed by appropriate cognition. Ayurveda describes five Jnanendriya—Chakshurendriya, Shrotrendriya, Ghranendriya, Rasanendriya and Sparshanendriya—and explains their respective objects, sites, dominant Mahabhuta and functions.

Objective

The present literary review aims to explore the Ayurvedic concept of Indriya with special reference to Kriya Sharir, including its classification, Panchamahabhuta predominance, Indriya Panchapanchaka, Indriyartha Sannikarsha, perception, functional physiology and its possible correlation with contemporary sensory physiology.

Materials and Methods

A literary review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with contemporary Ayurvedic review articles and modern physiology literature. Relevant publications concerning Indriya, sensory perception, cognition and receptor physiology were identified and critically reviewed.

Results

The review indicates that Ayurveda conceptualizes Indriya as a functional and cognitive apparatus rather than merely a gross organ. The five Jnanendriya perceive their specific

Vishaya through an integrated process involving Indriya, Indriyarth, Mana and Atma. The concept of Indriya Panchapanchaka provides a comprehensive framework consisting of five sense faculties, five sense-related substances, five Adhishtana, five sense objects and five forms of Buddhi. Contemporary sensory physiology explains perception through specialized receptors, sensory pathways and central processing. Although direct equivalence between Ayurvedic Indriya and modern anatomical structures cannot be established, functional parallels can be explored.

Conclusion

The Ayurvedic concept of Indriya represents an integrated model of sensation and perception that includes sensory apparatus, stimulus, cognition and consciousness. Understanding Indriya from the perspective of Kriya Sharir provides a conceptual foundation for studying normal sensory physiology and may contribute to interdisciplinary research integrating classical Ayurvedic physiology with contemporary neuroscience.

KEYWORDS: Indriya, Kriya Sharir, Jnanendriya, Indriya Panchapanchaka, Indriyarth, Mana, Atma, Panchamahabhuta, sensation, perception, cognition, sensory physiology.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda describes the human body as a functional integration of Sharira, Indriya, Mana and Atma. Among these components, Indriya plays an essential role in the acquisition of knowledge and interaction with the external environment. The term Indriya is traditionally derived from Indra and is described as an instrument or faculty through which various activities and perceptions are accomplished. Ayurveda therefore considers Indriya in a broader sense than the anatomical sense organs alone.

In contemporary physiology, sensory organs receive external or internal stimuli through specialized receptors and transmit information through neural pathways to the central nervous system, where sensory information is processed and interpreted. The Ayurvedic concept of Indriya similarly emphasizes that perception is not produced by the sense organ alone. The presence and coordinated interaction of Indriya, Indriyarth, Mana and Atma are necessary for meaningful cognition.

Charaka describes five Jnanendriya: Chakshu, Shrotra, Ghrana, Rasana and Sparshana. Each has a specific Vishaya or object of perception—Rupa, Shabda, Gandha, Rasa and Sparsha respectively. The sense faculties are Panchabhautika, although a particular Mahabhuta predominates in each Indriya.

The study of Indriya is particularly important in Kriya Sharir because Kriya Sharir deals with the normal functioning of the body and its components. Knowledge of normal sensory function forms the basis for understanding sensory impairment, abnormal perception and clinical examination.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work is a literary review based primarily on classical Ayurvedic literature and supported by contemporary Ayurvedic and modern physiology publications.

Sources of Literature

The following sources were reviewed:

Charaka Samhita, particularly Sutra Sthana, Sharira Sthana and Indriya Sthana.

Sushruta Samhita.

Ashtanga Hridaya.

Ashtanga Sangraha.

Sankhya philosophical literature relevant to the evolution of Indriya.

Contemporary Ayurvedic research articles concerning Indriya and sensory physiology.

Modern physiology literature concerning sensation, receptors and sensory perception.

Relevant publications were identified through online scholarly databases and Ayurvedic journal websites. The retrieved literature was analyzed qualitatively, and important concepts were organized under classification, composition, function, perception and contemporary interpretation.

RESULTS

1. Concept and Definition of Indriya

Indriya may broadly be understood as a functional faculty responsible for receiving and processing information and facilitating interaction with the external environment. Ayurvedic literature does not restrict Indriya to the visible anatomical organ. The functional capacity associated with perception is an important component of the concept.

From the Kriya Sharir perspective, an Indriya becomes functionally meaningful when it participates in the process of perception. Thus, the eye as a gross structure and Chakshurendriya as a functional sensory faculty should not necessarily be regarded as identical concepts.

2. Classification of Indriya

Indriya may be classified broadly into:

A. Jnanendriya

These are concerned primarily with acquisition of knowledge:

Chakshurendriya – visual faculty

Shrotrendriya – auditory faculty

Ghranendriya – olfactory faculty

Rasanendriya – gustatory faculty

Sparshanendriya – tactile faculty

B. Karmendriya

These are concerned with action and include:

Vak

Pani

Pada

Payu

Upastha

C. Ubhayendriya

Mana is considered an important internal coordinating faculty because it participates in both sensory and motor activities in the broader philosophical framework. Classical discussions recognize the role of Mana in directing attention toward sensory objects.

3. Panch Jnanendriya and Their Vishaya

Jnanendriya	Predominant Mahabhuta	Adhishthana	Vishaya
Chakshurendriya	Agni/Tejas	Chakshu	Rupa
Shrotrendriya	Akasha	Karna	Shabda
Ghranendriya	Prithvi	Nasa	Gandha
Rasanendriya	Jala	Jihva	Rasa
Sparshanendriya	Vayu	Tvak	Sparsa

All Indriya are described as Panchabhautika, but a particular Mahabhuta is considered predominant in each sensory faculty. This predominance is used to explain the specific sensory quality perceived by that faculty.

4. Concept of Indriya Panchapanchaka

One of the important physiological concepts related to Indriya is Indriya Panchapanchaka. It provides a systematic framework consisting of twenty-five components related to sensory perception.

These five groups are:

Five Jnanendriya

Five Indriya Dravya

Five Indriya Adhishthana

Five Indriya Artha

Five Indriya Buddhi

The five Indriya Artha are:

Shabda

Sparsa

Rupa

Rasa

Gandha

The five corresponding forms of Buddhi represent the knowledge or cognition generated through these sensory interactions. Recent review literature has highlighted Indriya Panchapanchaka as an important framework for understanding sensation and perception in Kriya Sharir.

5. Indriyarth Sannikarsha and Perception

Ayurveda explains perception as an integrated process rather than the simple stimulation of an anatomical organ.

The basic sequence can be represented as:

Indriyarth → Indriya → Mana → Atma → Buddhi/Jnana

For perception to occur, appropriate contact between the sensory faculty and its object is required. Mana must also be appropriately connected with the concerned Indriya. Therefore, although a stimulus may be physically present, meaningful perception may not occur if attention or mental association is absent.

This concept has important similarities at the functional level with contemporary sensory physiology, in which a stimulus activates a receptor, generates neural signals and ultimately undergoes central processing and interpretation. However, the Ayurvedic concepts of Atma, Mana and Buddhi belong to a broader philosophical and epistemological framework and should not be equated directly with specific modern anatomical structures.

6. Role of Panchamahabhuta

According to Ayurveda, the Jnanendriya are Panchabhautika. However, each sensory faculty has a predominance of a particular Mahabhuta:

Ghranendriya – Prithvi predominance

Rasanendriya – Jala predominance

Chakshurendriya – Tejas predominance

Sparshanendriya – Vayu predominance

Shrotrendriya – Akasha predominance

This relationship is used to explain the specific capacity of each Indriya to perceive its respective sensory quality.

For example, Ghranendriya perceives Gandha and is associated with Prithvi predominance, whereas Chakshurendriya perceives Rupa and is associated with Tejas predominance.

7. Sparshanendriya as a Vyapaka Indriya

Charaka gives special importance to Sparshanendriya and describes its pervasive nature. Sparshanendriya is associated with Tvak and is considered present throughout the body. Classical discussion therefore considers touch sensation to be widely distributed rather than restricted to a small anatomical area.

A study investigating Sparshanendriya Vyapaktva reported that Charaka considered Sparshanendriya to be the principal and pervasive Indriya among the sensory faculties.

From a contemporary perspective, the skin contains various sensory receptors capable of detecting mechanical, thermal and painful stimuli. Thus, although the Ayurvedic and contemporary frameworks arise from different conceptual systems, the extensive distribution of tactile sensation provides an interesting area for comparative physiological research.

8. Indriya and Contemporary Sensory Physiology

Modern physiology describes sensory systems through specialized receptors and neural pathways. Receptors convert physical or chemical stimuli into electrical signals that travel through sensory pathways to the central nervous system, where the signals are processed and interpreted.

A conceptual comparison can therefore be made:

Ayurvedic Concept	Contemporary Functional Interpretation
Indriya	Sensory functional system
Indriyarthā	Sensory stimulus
Adhishtana	Principal anatomical site
Indriya Dravya	Functional sensory substrate
Indriyabuddhi	Sensory perception/cognition
Mana	Attention/integration component
Atma	Conscious subject of experience

This table represents a functional comparison only and should not be interpreted as proof that the Ayurvedic concepts are anatomically identical to modern physiological structures.

9. Indriya and Cognition

The Ayurvedic model gives considerable importance to the cognitive component of perception. Sensory information becomes knowledge only after appropriate association of the sensory faculty with its object, Mana and consciousness. The concept of Indriyarthā Sannikarsha therefore extends beyond simple receptor activation.

Recent Ayurvedic literature has examined Indriya in relation to receptors and cognition and proposed that the functional aspect of Indriya may be explored in relation to modern sensory receptor physiology.

10. Indriya and Clinical Examination

Indriya has practical importance in Ayurvedic clinical examination. A physician may obtain information about a patient's condition through observation of Varna, Swara, Gandha, Rasa and Sparsha. Charaka's Indriya Sthana particularly discusses alterations in sensory perception and their diagnostic significance, including signs associated with prognosis.

The appropriate functioning of sensory faculties therefore contributes not only to normal perception but also to clinical assessment.

DISCUSSION

The concept of Indriya represents one of the distinctive features of Ayurvedic physiology. In contemporary anatomy and physiology, sensory organs are generally described in terms of their structures, receptors, neural pathways and central processing mechanisms. Ayurveda, however, uses the term Indriya to describe a broader functional entity involved in the acquisition of knowledge.

The distinction between Indriya and Adhishtana is particularly significant. The gross anatomical structure may provide the physical site of a sensory faculty, but the functional capacity of perception is considered separately. This distinction helps explain why Ayurvedic descriptions cannot always be directly mapped onto individual anatomical structures.

The concept of Indriya Panchapanchaka is especially useful for Kriya Sharir because it combines the sensory faculty, its material basis, anatomical site, object and resulting knowledge. Phule et al. described these twenty-five components as a framework for understanding sensation and perception.

Similarly, the role of Mana emphasizes that sensory perception is not merely a peripheral process. Attention and mental association are necessary for meaningful cognition. This broad conceptualization can be compared, cautiously, with modern understanding of central sensory processing and attentional mechanisms.

The Panchamahabhuta theory provides another distinctive dimension. Modern physiology does not recognize Mahabhuta as anatomical or physiological entities. Therefore, comparisons should remain conceptual rather than attempting to establish direct scientific equivalence. Nevertheless, the Ayurvedic classification provides a systematic way of explaining why different sensory faculties possess different perceptual capacities.

The clinical importance of Indriya is also evident from Charaka's Indriya Sthana, where alterations in sensory perception are described as important clinical observations and prognostic indicators.

Thus, the study of Indriya from the perspective of Kriya Sharir may be understood at three interconnected levels:

1. Structural level: Adhishthana and related physical structures.
2. Functional level: Indriya and its ability to receive sensory information.
3. Cognitive level: Mana, Atma and Buddhi involved in perception and knowledge.

This multidimensional model makes Indriya an important subject for interdisciplinary research involving Ayurveda, physiology, neuroscience and cognitive science.

CONCLUSION

Indriya is a fundamental physiological and philosophical concept in Ayurveda. According to Kriya Sharir, Indriya cannot be understood merely as a gross anatomical sense organ. It represents a functional faculty involved in the reception, processing and perception of sensory information.

The five Jnanendriya—Chakshurendriya, Shrotrendriya, Ghranendriya, Rasanendriya and Sparshanendriya—are associated with their respective Vishaya and predominant Mahabhuta. The concept of Indriya Panchapanchaka provides an organized framework for understanding sensory physiology, while Indriyarth Sannikarsha explains the interaction required for perception.

The Ayurvedic model further emphasizes the roles of Mana, Atma and Buddhi, thereby presenting perception as an integrated psychophysiological process. Contemporary sensory physiology offers useful functional parallels through the study of receptors, neural

transmission and central processing, but direct equivalence between Ayurvedic and modern concepts should be avoided unless supported by scientific evidence.

Further experimental and interdisciplinary studies are required to investigate the physiological dimensions of Indriya and to develop evidence-based interpretations of classical Ayurvedic concepts.

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