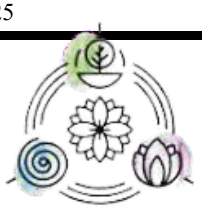
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Review Article

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"NYAYA DARSHANA AND AYURVEDA: A REVIEW OF PRAMANA, HETVABHASA AND TARKA IN THE CHARAKA SAMHITA"

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ABSTRACT

Background: Ayurveda grew in close contact with the Indian philosophical schools, and the Charaka Samhita borrows heavily from the Nyaya school in its account of valid knowledge, debate and reasoning. This borrowing is rarely treated as a coherent methodological framework. **Objective:** To review the concepts of pramana (means of valid knowledge), hetvabhasa (fallacious reasons) and tarka (hypothetical reasoning) as set out in the Nyaya tradition and as applied in the Charaka Samhita, and to consider their relevance for present-day Ayurvedic research. **Methods:** Classical Ayurvedic texts (Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya) and standard works on Indian philosophy were read in translation. PubMed was searched in November 2026 for peer-reviewed literature on Ayurveda, Nyaya, epistemology and Tantrayukti. **Results:** The Nyaya school accepts four pramanas (pratyaksha, anumana, upamana and shabda), whereas Charaka names aptopadesha, pratyaksha, anumana and yukti, and adds a detailed method of debate (vada marga) that closely follows Nyaya categories. Fallacious reasoning is treated under the term ahetu, and hypothetical reasoning supports both diagnosis and drug action inferences. **Conclusion:** The Nyaya framework gives Ayurveda a disciplined logic of inquiry. Recovering it can help in framing research questions, testing causal claims and interpreting classical statements in a way that is faithful to the texts and acceptable to modern scientific readers.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Nyaya, Pramana, Anumana, Hetvabhasa, Tarka, Charaka Samhita

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda describes itself as a science of life that must be known through reliable means. The Charaka Samhita is unusual among early medical texts in spending long passages on how knowledge is acquired, how a physician should reason at the bedside, and how scholars should debate. Much of this vocabulary is shared with Nyaya, the school of Indian philosophy that systematised logic and epistemology around the Nyaya Sutra attributed to Gautama[1,2]. The close alignment of the two traditions, together with the parallel pairing of Vaisheshika and Nyaya as complementary systems, has led several scholars to describe Ayurveda as methodologically Nyaya-Vaisheshika discipline[3,4]. Recent writing on integrative medicine has also stressed that traditional systems carry their own epistemologies, and that translation between these and biomedicine should be done explicitly rather than by silent substitution[5]. A review of the Nyaya elements in Ayurveda therefore has two aims: to document what the classical texts actually say, and to show how the logic they describe can discipline contemporary Ayurvedic research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya were studied in standard English translations with the commentaries of Chakrapani and Dalhana[6-8]. Secondary sources on Indian philosophy and the history of Indian medical literature were used to place the passages in context[4,9]. PubMed was searched in November 2026 using combinations of the terms Ayurveda, Nyaya, pramana, epistemology and Tantrayukti. Because very few indexed papers deal with Nyaya and Ayurveda directly, classical and monograph sources carry most of the weight of the review, and indexed papers were used where they bear on methodology and interpretation[5,10,11].

OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

1. The Nyaya scheme of knowledge

The Nyaya Sutra opens with sixteen categories of discussion: pramana, prameya, samshaya, prayojana, drishtanta, siddhanta, avayava, tarka, nirnaya, vada, jalpa, vitanda, hetvabhasa, chhala, jati and nigrahasthana. Knowledge of these categories is said to lead to the highest good. Four pramanas are accepted: pratyaksha (perception), anumana (inference), upamana (comparison) and shabda (reliable testimony)[1,2]. Inference is analysed through a five-membered argument (pratijna, hetu, udaharana, upanaya, nigamana), and the validity of an inference depends on the invariable association (vyapti) between the reason and the property to be proved.

2. Pramana in the Charaka Samhita

Charaka's account of the means of knowledge is not a copy of the Nyaya list but a clinically adapted one. In the Sutrasthana the sources of knowledge are given as aptopadesha, pratyaksha, anumana and yukti (Ch. Su. 11/17), and in the Vimanasthana the same framework is used to establish the existence of rebirth, the nature of disease and the effect of drugs (Ch. Vi. 4)[6]. Aptopadesha corresponds to Nyaya's shabda, with the difference that Charaka insists the authority be a person free from rajas and tamas and fully knowledgeable. Anumana is illustrated by familiar examples: the presence of fire is inferred from smoke, and the earlier and later stages of a process are inferred from what is seen now (Ch. Su. 11/21-22). Yukti is defined as the reasoning that sees the outcome arising from the joint working of many causes (Ch. Su. 11/25), and Chakrapani explains it as a form of reasoning suited to the three times, covering what Nyaya would treat under tarka and the application of inference to composite situations[6].

Upamana is not listed as a separate pramana by Charaka in the Sutrasthana, but it appears among the terms of debate in the Vimanasthana as aupamya, so the method is present even where the name differs (Ch. Vi. 8/27)[6]. This pattern, in which Nyaya terms are present in Ayurveda but reorganised for the needs of the physician, is typical of the way the Samhitas use philosophy.

3. The three-fold and ten-fold examination

The practical value of pramana is clearest in the clinical examination. The Vimanasthana prescribes a three-fold examination of the patient through aptopadesha, pratyaksha and anumana (Ch. Vi. 4/3), and a ten-fold examination of the patient (Ch. Vi. 8/94)[6]. Each element corresponds to a type of evidence: textual authority, direct observation and inferred findings such as the state of agni from the appetite and digestion. Studies that measure body dimensions in the units described by Charaka show how a classical observational statement can be turned into a testable hypothesis, as in the work on Anguli

Pramana and human height[12].

4. Vada marga and the discipline of debate

Chapter 8 of the Vimanasthana, the Rogabhishagjitiya, presents a manual of debate that lists forty-four terms, including pratijna, sthapana, hetu, drishtanta, upanaya, nigamana, chhala, ahetu, nigrahasthana and the types of friendly and hostile discussion (Ch. Vi. 8/15-28)[6]. Most of these terms have direct counterparts in the Nyaya Sutra, and the chapter also distinguishes sambhasha with a learned peer from vigrihya sambhasha with an opponent. The physician is told to know the strength of the opponent and the assembly before entering a debate, and to prefer discussion with those who wish to learn. For modern authors the passage offers an ethical and procedural basis for peer review.

5. Hetvabhasa and ahetu

In Nyaya, a hetvabhasa is a reason that appears valid but fails one of the conditions of a sound inference. Five types are listed: savyabhichara, viruddha, prakaranasama, sadhyasama and kalatita[1,2]. Charaka uses the term ahetu for a reason that fails to prove the point and warns against it in debate, giving a smaller set of types that overlap in spirit with the Nyaya list (Ch. Vi. 8)[6]. The relevance for research is direct. A reason that is also what needs to be proved (sadhyasama) resembles circular argument, and an inconsistent reason (savyabhichara) resembles an association that does not hold in all conditions, such as a drug effect reported in a narrow group and generalised to everyone.

6. Tarka and the role of hypothesis

Tarka in Nyaya is reasoning by reductio, in which a doubtful point is tested by showing that its denial leads to an unacceptable result. It is not a pramana in itself, but it supports the pramanas and helps to reach a settled conclusion (nirnaya)[2]. In the Ayurvedic texts, the reasoning used to infer the action of a drug from its rasa, guna, virya and vipaka, or the stage of a disease from its signs, follows the same pattern of tested hypothesis (Ch. Su. 26)[6]. The thirty-six methods of interpretation grouped under Tantrayukti also function as rules of reading that remove contradictions in a text, and in this sense they are a hermeneutic form of tarka[10,11].

DISCUSSION

The Nyaya elements in the Charaka Samhita can be read in three ways. They are first a theory of knowledge, which says that no single source is enough and that perception, inference and reliable testimony must support one another. They are second a code of conduct for scholarly argument, and third a toolkit for diagnosing errors of reasoning. All three bear on current attempts to evaluate Ayurveda with whole-systems designs, where the fit between the research method and the therapeutic paradigm is regarded as a condition of validity[13].

Two cautions are needed. First, the Samhitas do not adopt Nyaya wholesale, and the Ayurvedic list of pramanas differs from the Nyaya list; claims of a full identity between the two are therefore overstated. Second, the logical vocabulary should not be used to give classical statements a status they have not earned. A statement may be a well-formed inference and still be empirically untested, which is precisely why the texts themselves ask for pratyaksha as a check on anumana. Future work could map each major diagnostic and pharmacological inference in the Samhitas to its pramana and test the inference using methods that fit its paradigm.

CONCLUSION

Nyaya supplies Ayurveda with a worked-out logic of knowledge, debate and error. The Charaka Samhita applies this logic with adaptations suited to clinical work. Recovering these tools can improve the formulation of research questions, the critical reading of classical claims and the conduct of scholarly debate in Ayurvedic science.

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