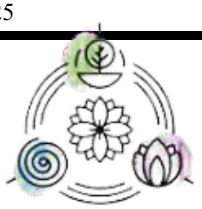
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Review Article

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"SAMKHYA DARSHANA: THE TWENTY-FOUR TATTVAS AND AYURVEDIC CONCEPTS OF PURUSHA, PRAKRITI AND CREATION"

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Samkhya school provides the principal theory of creation used in Ayurvedic texts. The Charaka Samhita and the Sushruta Samhita describe the human being as a product of the evolution of prakriti and the association of purusha with it. **Objective:** To review the Samkhya doctrine of the twenty-four tattvas and the role of purusha, to compare it with the Ayurvedic account of the purusha (rashi purusha), and to discuss the clinical implications of the scheme. **Methods:** The Samkhya Karika and related classical texts were studied in translation with standard secondary sources. Classical Ayurvedic texts and PubMed-indexed literature on Samkhya, manas and Ayurveda were reviewed in November 2026. **Results:** Samkhya describes twenty-five principles including the conscious purusha and the unconscious prakriti. Charaka describes a body-mind-self complex built from twenty-four elements, with the twenty-fifth being purusha. Ayurveda adapts the scheme by treating the mind as the eleventh indriya and the doshas as functional expressions of the gunas and mahabhutas. **Conclusion:** The Samkhya model of evolution gives Ayurveda a theory of the person that connects cosmology, physiology and psychology. It remains useful as a conceptual map for the study of constitution, mind and disease.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Samkhya, Tattva, Purusha, Prakriti, Triguna, Mahat, Ahamkara

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INTRODUCTION

Samkhya is one of the oldest systems of Indian thought and is regarded as the philosophical foundation on which many later schools built[1,2]. The Charaka Samhita does not present a doctrine identical with classical Samkhya, but its account of creation, of the constituents of the person and of liberation draws heavily from Samkhya ideas[3,4]. A recent review of the concept of mind in Ayurveda and the darshanas also notes that Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta together form a treasure house for understanding mind, its structure, functions and disorders[5]. This article reviews the classical Samkhya scheme and its adaptation in Ayurveda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Samkhya Karika of Ishvarakrishna and its commentarial tradition were studied through the standard interpretive work of Larson and the histories of Dasgupta and Radhakrishnan[1,2,6]. The Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya were read in translation[3,7,8]. PubMed was searched in November 2026 with the terms Samkhya, Ayurveda, manas, mind and darshana. One indexed paper dealing with the concept of mind in Ayurveda and the darshanas was found and is used in the discussion[5], along with a paper on manas in Yoga Darshana[9].

OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

1. The Samkhya scheme

Samkhya is dualist. It holds that there are two ultimate realities: purusha, the conscious, inactive witness, and prakriti, the unconscious, active source of the world. Prakriti consists of three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, which are in equilibrium before creation. When purusha comes into proximity with prakriti, the balance is disturbed and evolution begins[1]. The Samkhya Karika lists twenty-five principles (SK 3, 22): prakriti; mahat or buddhi; ahamkara; five jnanendriyas; five karmendriyas; manas; five tanmatras; and five mahabhutas, with purusha as the twenty-fifth. The first is the unmanifest source, the next twenty-three are its modifications, and purusha is neither a producer nor a product[1,2].

2. The Ayurvedic adaptation

Charaka gives a twenty-four-fold scheme for the evolved person, called rashi purusha, composed of the unmanifest (avyakta), mahat, ahamkara, the five mahabhutas, the ten indriyas and manas, with the five sense objects (Ch. Sha. 1)[3]. Purusha as the conscious element is described in the same passage, and the Samhita notes that the twenty-fifth principle is the knower. Sushruta describes the same twenty-five elements and affirms that the body is built from avyakta onward (Su. Sha. 1)[7]. Both Samhitas reject the idea that the self is merely a function of the body, and both give a practical role to the guna theory in explaining the mind and temperament[3,7].

A difference of emphasis should be noted. Classical Samkhya stresses release from suffering through discrimination between purusha and prakriti. Ayurveda is concerned with health and disease, and it uses the Samkhya model to explain the arising and sustenance of the person and the relation of mind and body. Where Samkhya has no use for the physician's treatment of the body, Ayurveda connects the categories with physiology through the tridosha and the dhatus[3,10].

3. Triguna and manas

The three gunas are described in the Samhitas as the mental qualities, and personalities are classified by the dominance of sattva, rajas and tamas (Ch. Sha. 4)[3]. Sattva is clarity and balance, rajas is activity and passion, and tamas is inertia. Disorders of the mind are explained as the vitiation of rajas and tamas, and the treatment includes sattvavajaya, the strengthening of the mind. Studies of manas in Ayurveda and Yoga show that the concept of mind is central to both traditions, and that Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta share much of the same view of its structure[5,9]. A related line of research has proposed a neural model of dosha brain-types linking the physiological regulation of body and mind, although these proposals remain at the level of hypothesis[11].

4. Evolution and the formation of the body

The Samkhya order of evolution is also the Ayurvedic order of the formation of the embryo. The mahabhutas, endowed with the gunas and the subtle impressions of the tanmatras, combine to form body tissues, and the genetic, nutritive and psychological factors of the mother, father, self, ahara and satmya contribute to the person (Ch. Sha. 3)[3]. This idea ties the classical doctrine of creation to the clinical study of constitution, a point also made in discussions of prakriti as the basis of personalised care[12,13].

DISCUSSION

The strength of the Samkhya model lies in its integration of the objective and subjective sides of the person in a single scheme. It explains why Ayurveda treats the mind and body together, why diet and conduct influence temperament, and why liberation is considered a possible but non-clinical goal. Its weakness for contemporary science is that it takes the existence of a conscious principle as a premise, which cannot be tested by ordinary methods. This is why recent commentators argue for translation of the concepts into forms that are explicit about their epistemology, rather than direct equation with biomedical categories[14].

A further point deserves caution. The Ayurvedic texts do not follow Samkhya in every detail. The count of indriyas, the status of manas and the role of the doshas differ in minor ways from classical Samkhya, and the commentators of Charaka and Sushruta sometimes disagree among themselves. Any claim that Ayurveda simply is Samkhya, or that it depends on Samkhya for its clinical claims, is therefore too broad.

CONCLUSION

The Samkhya scheme of twenty-five principles provides Ayurveda with a theory of creation, of the person and of the mind. Ayurveda keeps the structure but adapts it for clinical purposes. Research on constitution and mind will be better served by an exact reading of the Samkhya categories as used in the Samhitas than by loose analogy.

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