CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF MEMORY (SMRITI) IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

A characteristic of animals and particularly of humans is their ability to alter their behaviour, actions, and perception on the basis of experience. Learning is acquisition of the facts and information. Memory or Smriti on the other hand is the retention and storage of that information. Memory has two variables viz. Physiological and Psychological. Smriti is derived from both Atma and Sattva which starts manifesting itself in the 5th month of intra-uterine life. The article attempts to explain the Smriti in its various aspects.

KEYWORDS: Smriti, Atma, Sattva, Memory.

INTRODUCTION

The ability of the brain to keep track of many bits of information (facts, figures, stastics, person, behaviour, etc.) simultaneously and to cause recall of this information instantaneously as it is needed for subsequent thoughts is called the memory (smriti) or working memory. By combining all these bits of memory we have the abilities to.

(1) Prognosticate
(2) Plan for the future
(3) Solve complicating problems
(4) Correlating all avenues of information
(5) Control our activities in accord with moral laws and many more aspects.[1]
Smriti is a sanskrit word from the root Smara, which means “remembrance, thinking of or upon”, or simply memory. The word is mentioned in ancient vedic literature such as in section 7.13 of the Chandogya Upanishad.[2]

Definition

- Smr3itiah atitarth vishayagyanam
  The comprehension of previously experienced events and objects is Smriti.[3]

- Anubhavjanya gyanam smritiah
  Recalling of previously experienced events is Smarana

- Swamyashritkriyajanyagyanam
  Anubhav sanskarjanya gyanam
  Smritiah anubhut vishaya gyanam

  Information and knowledge gained by the experience of an object, event or incidence is Smriti. Any action which leaves to an impression and that can be recalled is Smriti.

- Dhrishtashrutanubhutana smaranat smritiruchayate
  Smriti is nothing but rememberance of an object or event which is experienced cognizantly.[4]

- Anubhutartha sampramosha smritiah
  Iti yogasutramapi atranusandhayenam
  Anubhutam priyadinamathana chintanam smritiah
  Itiyujajvalinilmaniah
  Recalling about the previously experienced event is Smriti which leads to state of emotions.[5]

Effects of doshas on Smriti

Vatta, Pitta, and Kapha are the three bodily doshas that affects our physiological, as well as psychological aspects. Vata is primarily the main dosha that is responsible for our minds aspects; it controls, guides, and maintains our Manah or mind.

- Urah sthanmudanasya nasanabhiglashcharet
  Vakkapravitti prayatnorja balavarnasmritikriyiah
  The vayu residing in urah, nasika, nabih, and kantha is udanah. It stimulates the sound production, joy, strength, colour of skin, and Smriti.[6]
Udana vayu (one of the subdivision of Vata) is plays a key role in our memory or Smriti. The process of attaining memory is accomplished by Udana Vayu.

- Niyanta praneta cha manasah
  Pranah Vayu controls or maintains all the the acitivity of manah (niyanta of manah kriyas).[7]

- Buddhimedaubhimanadyerabhipretarhasadhanat
  Sadhankam hridayagatam pittam
  The Sadhak pitta resides in the hridayam which is responsible for proper functioning of the Buddhi, Medha, and Manah. All the other emotions like anger, frustration, joy, elation, sadness, etc. are controlled by Sadhak Pitta.[8]

- Shirahsthnam snehtarpanadhikritattavadiindriyanammatnaviryeeanaugraham karoti
  The Tarpak Kapha resides in the head provides nourishment to the centres of brain primarily involved in sensory inputs.[9]

The stronger the recallation of the past experienced object, the stronger is the memory. Smriti and Grathi are together responsible for the Buddhi.

**Memory and it’s relationship with personality, age, and nature of the individual**

The Twaka Sara Purusha – Highes aspects of intellect are shown[10]

The Sattva Sara Purusha – Best memory[11]

**According to body Prakritis**

Vatta Prakriti Pradhan Purusha - Alpa smriti and Sruta grahi with Chala Smriti[12]

Pittah Prakriti Pradhan Purusha – Medhavi and highly intellectual[13]

Kapha Prakriti Pradhan Purusha – Chiragrahi[14]

Medha and Buddhi shows deterioration as the age increases. As the age progresses it is seen that their Grahanam, Dharanam, and Smaran decreases with progressive signs of diminishing intellect, intelligence, and memory.

**According to Mansik Doshas**

Rajas and Tamas are the two Mansik Doshas that are primarily responsible for most of the psychological disorders. The two doshas are intricately related with the Bodily doshas. Smriti is involved in disorders like Unmada (perverted Smriti)[15] and Apasmara (Smritinasha).[16]
**Physiology of Smriti**

The action of recalling is significant for gaining knowledge since the acquired requires the reproduction of the gained at the right time, place, and event. Acquiring knowledge requires a complex series of mechanisms. The soul intricate with the *Manah*, the *Manah* with the *Indriyas*, and *Indriyas* with the objects. According to *Chakrapani* knowledge can attained via three means viz. *Dhi*, *Dhriti*, and *Smriti*.

The soul is beyond any sensory perceptions and migrates from one body to another with the help of *Manah*. The actions of the past, health of the parents, most dominant desire of the foetus in the past life, are determinant factors responsible for mental nature.

![Diagram of the physiology of Smriti](image)

**DISCUSSION**

*Smriti* means remembrance of any events experienced earlier. Our vision and hearing are most important for knowledge perception. One cannot acquire knowledge wholly without
either of these. Three occipitotemporal areas in the central area of vision pathway have a transient response to stimuli, indicating a major role in perceptual processing. The Acharyas have hence stressed upon these two senses specifically, and modern science concurs.

Smriti can also be treated as mental faculty. Chakrapani, while explaining the proof for the existence of Atma, states that chetana, dhrti, Smriti, and ahamkara are the types of buddhi. For the Atma to get the perception after entering the body, it should have the association of buddhi. This highlights the importance of Smriti to bring about the attachment. He also states, in another context, that uhapohavichara and Smriti can be termed as buddhi. Hence without Smriti, buddhi cannot function. Uhapoha and vichara are also critical for buddhi, and they arise out of Smriti i.e. past experiences.

Acharyas have also explained the methodology to attain knowledge. Contemporary science defines memory as the process by which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. Encoding allows for the outside information to reach or senses via chemical and physical stimuli. In the first stage, information must be changed for the encoding. Storage, the next stage, involves maintaining information over a period of time. Retrieval is the final stage in which we locate and return the information to our consciousness. This whole process is related to the attainment of knowledge or jnana.

Buddhi is an instrument for the Atma for attachment. Modern science has evidence of foetal memory existing within the first and second trimester of pregnancy, as early as 30 weeks after conception. Foetal memory is important for parental recognition and bonding between the infant and the parents, and is thus critical for survival, both as a foetus and an infant. This is termed as the attachment.

We must also consider the interrelationship of Mana, Buddhi, Dhi, Dhriti, and Smriti. Mana associates with Atma for proper cognition. Buddhi dictates out Hita and Ahita. Dhi is the power of retention. Dhriti controls the attitude orientation. Finally, Smriti helps the mind in recollecting the entire percept or experimented objects in the basis of concepts formed by past experiences. If anyone of these is hampered, the ultimate goal of jnana-prapti cannot be attained.

Acharyas have also commented on the relation of Smriti with the foetus; the Mana is formed in the fifth month during formation of Garbha. In contemporary terms, the Central Nervous
System (CNS) and memory in the foetus develop from the ectoderm (outer layer of the embryo) via neurulation. This happens towards the end of the third week of gestation and is followed by the development of the neural tube, crucial to the development of the CNS. Evidence also suggests that memory is responsible for the development of the CNS during neurulation.

The relation between Dosa and Smriti is also of interest. Udana Vata is mainly responsible for Smriti along with all other Doshas. In contemporary terms, the main centre in the brain is the hippocampus, as it processes new memories for long-term storage. Areas of the brain involved in the neuroanatomy of memory such as the hippocampus, the amygdala, the striatum, and the mamillary bodies are thought to be involved in specific types of memory. The Dharana and Smarana are both functions of basal ganglia cells of the hippocampus, and researches support the role of acetylcholine in memory-related functions. The term Vachana may not refer simply to articulated speech, but rather the capacity for the power of expression of mental concepts. It also seems to relate to memory.

CONCLUSION

Smriti is ability to keep track of many bits of information simultaneously and to cause recalls this information as needed or the imprintation of previous events which is recalled when required. At the psychological background it can be understood on basis of Atma, Mana, and Indriyas. At the physical background it can be understood on the basis of Bodily Doshas, Prakriti, progressive degeneration of memory with age, Manah Doshas, and Diseases. The physical background can be related with physiological aspects and the diagnosis of a disease / betterment of memory can be related with Samprapti (pathology).

REFERENCES