

Influences of *Karma* on Health: An Ayurvedic Perspective

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Abstract: Karma is determinant of qualities of life of any individual specifically health by means of Triguna, Tridosha and Panchamahabhuta. Classical texts (Brihat Trayi) have detailed the relationship of Karma with epidemics and number of other diseases like Leprosy, Epilepsy etc. under Karmik diseases. Distinguished texts have classified the Karma and orientation of present (Kriyamana) Karma based on destined (Prarabdha) Karma and stored (Sanchita) Karma. As the soul is only perceptor and it is immortal, so deeds of present life is counted and it reflects the destiny of present and coming lives. The conclusive purpose of Karma lies with knowledge which is only possible through Sattvik approach.

Keywords: Karma, Sanchita, Prarabdha, Kriyamana, Agami, Sattvik, Rajasik, Tamasik, Tridosha, Panchamahabhuta, Triguna, Tridosha

Executed action is *Karma*¹. When it is taken in reference to sum of a person's action², it is called as *Yoga* of *Yogins*³. The purpose of *Karma* is to get free from reaction and that is only possible through knowledge. So, ultimate aim lies with knowledge. *Swami Vivekanand* has taken *Karma* synonymous to work in *Karma-yoga*. No one can abstain from work. Knowingly or unknowingly every moment an individual is involved in work³, *Karma* is also denoted by various types of efforts which include activity transforming the qualities⁸. Even if someone is restraining himself/herself from senses and organs, but mind is involved in sensing the object, it is regarded as *Mithyachara*, but is considered as superior if such control of senses and organs are done by mind. So pleasure is not the goal of *Karma*, but the knowledge³⁻⁴.

Wadia (1965) has referred to the doctrine of *Karma* in relation to morality by stating the reward for good deeds and punishment for evil deeds which is 'as a man sows, so must he reap'^{5,6}.

Srimad Bhagwadgita emphasizes that action is always better than inaction and performing of prescribed duty is mode of that action. A man cannot even maintain his physical body without work³. It means *Karma* is associated with 'cause and effect' philosophy or *Karmik* causation. The nature of *Karma* extensively depends upon three qualities (*Triguna*) i.e., *Sattva*, *Raja* and *Tama* which brings specific psyche for anyone. Even nature is inheriting *Triguna*. It is always moving due to *Raja* guna either from *Sattva* to *Tama* or from *Tama* to *Sattva*⁷.

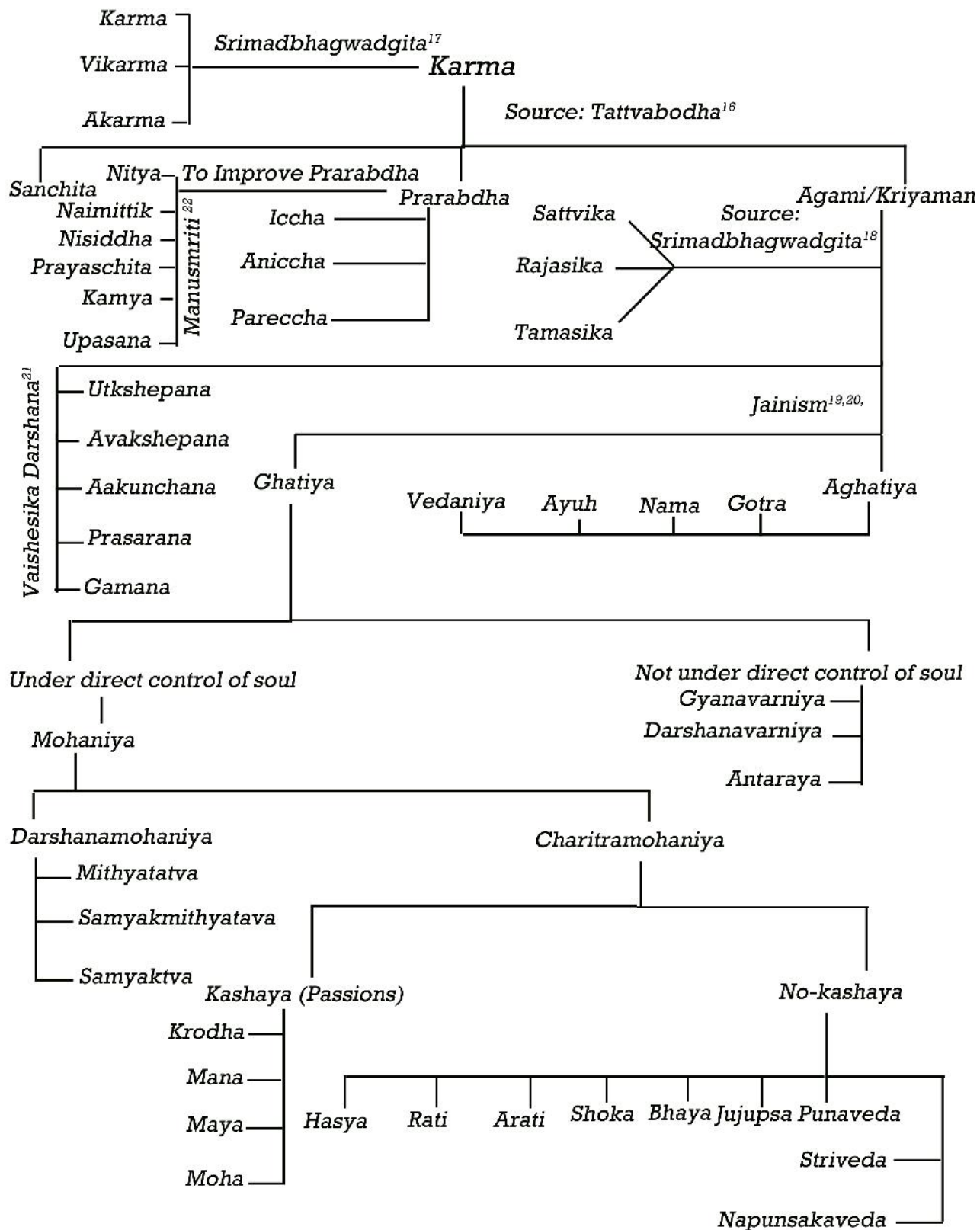
Interrelationship of *Panchabhuta* is explained with reference to *Triguna*. *Panchabhautik* composition of *Tridosha* is also referred. So, an apprehension of association of *Triguna* with *Tridosha* is understood through *Panchabhautik* composition. Further *Tridosha* is linked with *Saptadhatus* (tissue elements) and physiological alterations. So physiological changes are connected with *Panchamahabhuta*. *Charak Sutrasthana* 1/53 cites the equilibrium of tissue elements for a healthy body^{12,13}. Even the *Prakriti* or physical constitution of an individual is determined by nature of *Panchamahabhutas* as mentioned in *Charak Vimanasthana* 8/95¹⁴, so *Triguna* is related with *Prakriti* too. Ultimately it is psyche composed of *Triguna* which directs the nature of human beings for any specific *Karma* and *Karma* ascertains our physical constitution and health. Diseases completely resulted from *Karma* are mentioned as *Karmic* diseases. A proper discernment of *Karma* would better highlight the *Karmic* diseases.

***Karma* and Its Classification**

The *Shuklayajurvedeeya Kanva-samhita* 1/1/1 peps up human beings to move on the path of action (*Karma*). *Karma* is important part of individual's life for every moment. No-one can be away from work, so discernment of different types of *Karma* becomes important for real knowledge. The detailed classification is presented in chart number: 1.

Chart Number: 1

Classification of Karma in Mentioned Texts



Source: The Collected Papers on Jaina Studies and Tattvarthasutra

Among these three main types of Karma noted in Vedanta philosophy, *Sanchita Karma* (stored action) are fruits of actions from previous lives. These actions direct the *Prarabdha Karma* (destined action). These destined actions can be fixed up to certain extent with *Kriyamana/Agami* (Ongoing/future actions) through proce-

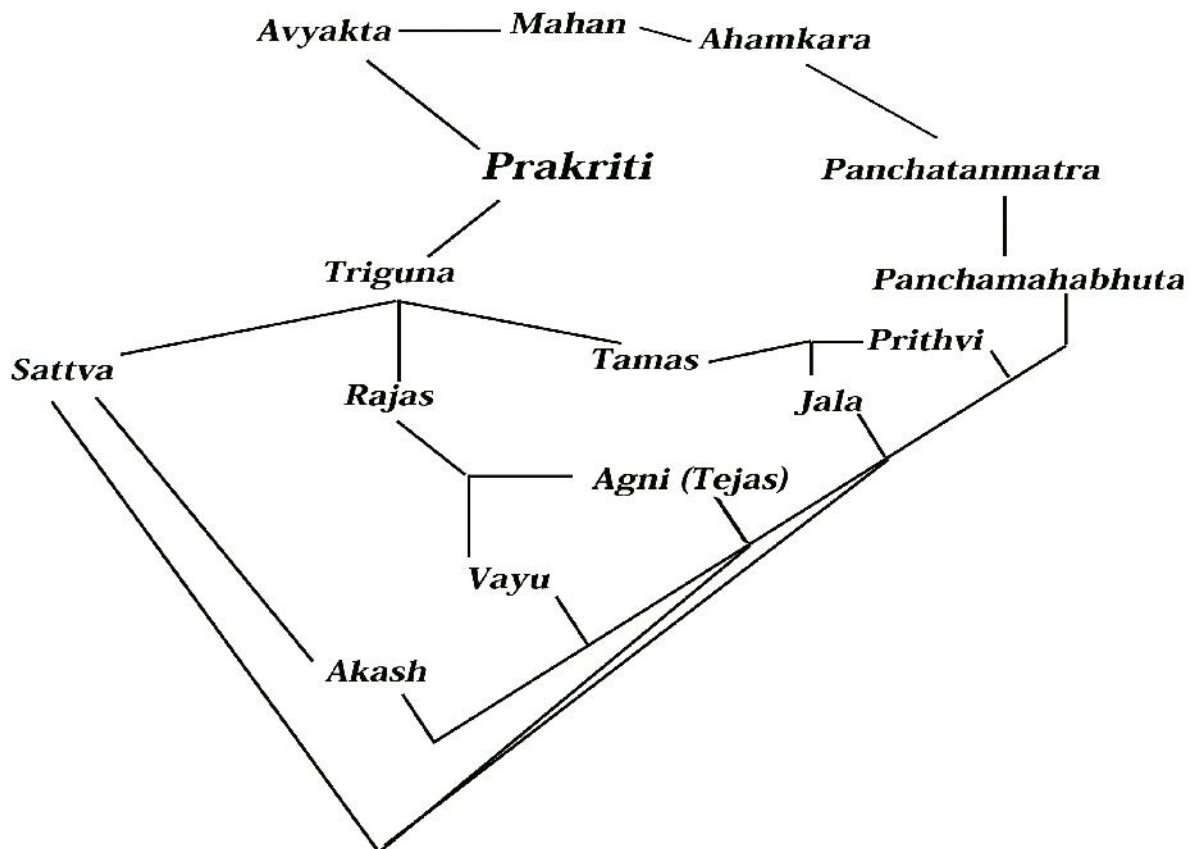
sses depicted in *Manusmriti*. Further improvement of *Karma* with good deeds is stored for next life's *Sanchita*. *Charak Vimanasthana* 3/20 makes reference to sins of present life (*Kriyamana Karma*) and misdeeds of past (*Sanchita Karma*) for the vitiations of *Panchabhautika* balances causes diseases for human beings, it means *Karma* is concomitant with *Panchamahabhuta*.

Karma in Relation to Triguna and Panchamahabhuta

Prakriti has created everything including three fundamental qualities of psyche governing *Sattvik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik Karma*^{9,18}. The fundamental qualities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* are mutually dependent upon the five different forms of matter known as *Panchamahabhuta*. These *Panchmahabhutas* in addition to self-consciousness form the *Karma Purusha*. A perceptive relationship of three fundamental qualities (*Triguna*) is presented in chart number-2.

Chart Number: 2

Relationship of Triguna With Panchmahabhuta as All Are Parts of Prakriti

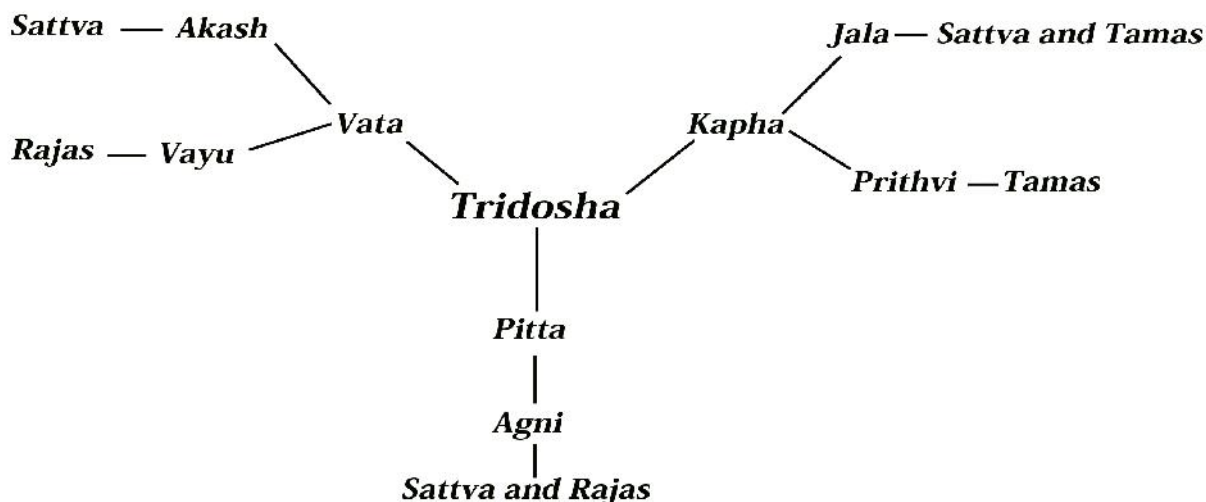


Source: *Sushruta Shareerasthana* 1/1-23

Tridosha in Relation to Triguna and Panchamahabhuta

Dhatus derived from *Panchamahabhutas* constitute the body and their proper quantity maintain the health. Appropriate administration of food maintains the equilibrium of *Dhatus* using *Tridosha*²³. Unusual changes in maintenance of equilibrium of these tissues causes vitiations of *Pitta* and *Vata* resulting in fever etc. So, immediate causes of a disease are imbalance of dosas. The rationality lies with *Prarabdha/Daiva* and *Kriyamana/Purushkara Karma*²⁴. The three fundamental qualities (*Triguna*) determined by *Sanchita* and *Prarabdha* direct the tridoshas via *Panchmahabhutas*¹¹. The interrelationship of *Triguna*, *Tridosha* and *Panchamahabhuta* is shown in chart number-3.

Chart Number: 3

Relationship of Tridosha With Panchamahbhuta and Triguna

Source: Astanga Sangraha Sutrasthana 20/1

Karma and Diseases or Karmik Diseases

The doctrine of *Karma* clearly mentions the effects of sinful acts/actions. *Charak Samhita* apparently cites sins of present life or misdeeds of past life as the root of causes of epidemics¹ through pollution of air, water etc. Such sinful act is also the cause of destruction of a country by armament². Unrighteous acts also invite rakshas or germs to destroy the life. Those who have committed sins by disrespecting to teachers, elders etc. get curse in life. This is more related with different types of debts²⁴.

Charak Vimanasthana 3/24 refers the *Karma* with respect to different *Yuga* and their impacts on life. As in *Satyuga*, due to noble mind, good qualities and good *Karma*, better potencies of food grains kept people healthy except few obese rich people while in *Tretayuga*, anger, dislike, sorrow, grief etc. started to improve ascribed to increasing malice. These wrong deeds affected the qualities of food and resulted in unusual disturbance in equilibrium of tridosha. Verses clearly hint about the deteriorating qualities healthy regime related aspects and increasing disturbances in equilibrium of tridosha and ultimately limiting the life-span of human being to 100 years in *Kaliyuga*. However, it is further absolved that life-span of an individual depends upon *daiva* (destined/prarabdha) and *purusakara* (human effort). Prarabdha is determined by our sanchit karma or karma of previous life while *purusakara* is kriyamana karma or ongoing efforts. Effects are based on the strength of *Karma* viz., *Heena*, *Madhyama* and *Uttama*. *Heena Karma* gives short life-span while *Uttama Karma* helps to attain longer life-span. Chances of improvement is also suggested in *Charak* as effects of destined *Karma* can be subsided by present *Karma*, still proper life-style is considered important for longevity of an individual. Scientific consideration of mentioned *Karma* acknowledges the sinful acts of ours' and ancestors' to create imbalance in nature causing pollution and related effects. Diseases resulted are known as *Karmic* diseases²⁴. *Charak Shareera* 2/16 specifies the *Karma* of previous life for uneven division of sperm or ovum resulting in formation twins²⁵. Disrespect to god, elders, teachers etc., ungratefulness, untruthfulness, misdeeds of past live and contradictory food are referred causative factors for *Kilasa* (leukoderma)²⁶. Insult to god, teachers, elders etc. are marked as one of causes for *Kustha* (leprosy)²⁷. The same disregard or insult is referred reason behind *Unmada* or insanity too²⁸. In case of *Apasmara* (Epilepsy), doshas are aggravated due to *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Rajasik* and *Tamasik Karma* like passion, fear, greed, attachment, excitem-

-ent, grief, anxiety etc. are suggested reasons²⁹. There are many such examples of different diseases cited in *Charak Samhita* with reference to *Karma*.

Discussion: Indian classical texts acknowledge the immortality of soul and *Charak Shareerasthana* 1/52-54 specifies that soul is responsible for ego, enjoyment of fruit of actions, engagement in action, transmigration and memory of individual. The soul perceives the things using mind, intellect and sense faculties. *Tamas/Tamasika Karma* masks the real perception. It means action of one life is setting the destiny (*Prarabdha*) of another life. So, to be healthy in different life including present life, good deeds automatically becomes important as they improve *Kriyamana Karma* and adds to *Sanchita Karma*. *Rajas* and *Tamas* are reasons behind the greed, anger, jealousy and many similar types vitiated psyches which result in physiological changes in bodies through neurochemical and hormonal secretions. Only *Sattva* leads to real knowledge (*Srimadabhadgita* 14/6) which is ultimate goal of *Karma*.

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